A Companion to
Tudor Literature
Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture

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    Edited by Kent Cartwright

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## Contents

**List of Illustrations**  viii  
**Notes on Contributors**  ix  
**Acknowledgments**  xv  

**Chronology**  xvi  
**Kathleen Bossert**

**Map of England, Scotland, and Ireland in the Sixteenth Century**  xxxi  

**Introduction**  1  
**Kent Cartwright**

### Part I  Historical and Cultural Contexts  13

1  The Reformation, Lollardy, and Catholicism  15  
   **Peter Marshall**

2  Witchcraft in Tudor England and Scotland  31  
   **Kathryn A. Edwards**

3  The Tudor Experience of Islam  49  
   **Matthew Dimmock**

4  Protestantism, Profit, and Politics: Tudor Representations of the New World  63  
   **Nancy Bradley Warren**

5  International Influences and Tudor Music  79  
   **Ross W. Duffin**

6  Tudor Technology in Transition  95  
   **Adam Max Cohen**

7  Enclosing the Body: Tudor Conceptions of Skin  111  
   **Tanya Pollard**
Contents

Part II  Manuscript, Print, and Letters  123

8 Manuscripts in Tudor England  125
Steven W. May and Heather Wolfe

9 John Skelton and the State of Letters  140
Seth Lerer

10 The Henrician Courtier Writing in Manuscript and Print: Wyatt, Surrey, Bryan, and Others  151
David R. Carlson

11 Old Authors, Women Writers, and the New Print Technology  178
Helen Smith

12 Printers of Interludes  192
Peter Happé

Part III  Literary Origins, Presences, Absences  211

13 Medievalism in English Renaissance Literature  213
Deanne Williams

14 The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama  228
Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson

15 French Presences in Tudor England  246
A. E. B. Coldiron

16 Italian in Tudor England: Why Couldn’t a Woman Be More Like a Man?  261
Pamela J. Benson

Part IV  Authors, Works, and Modes  277

17 More’s Utopia: Medievalism and Radicalism  279
Anne Lake Prescott

18 The Literary Voices of Katherine Parr and Anne Askew  295
Joan Pong Linton

19 Reformation Satire, Scatology, and Iconoclastic Aesthetics in Gammer Gurton’s Needle  309
Robert Hornback

20 Bad Fun and Tudor Laughter  324
Pamela Allen Brown
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Perspective and Realism in the Renaissance</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Alastair Fowler</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Seeing through Words in Theories of Poetry: Sidney, Puttenham, Lodge</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Gavin Alexander</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Tudor Versification and the Rise of Iambic Pentameter</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Jeff Dolven</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>John Lyly’s <em>Galatea</em>: Politics and Literary Allusion</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mike Pincombe</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sidney’s <em>Arcadia</em>, Romance, and the Responsive Woman Reader</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Clare R. Kinney</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Nature and <em>Technē</em> in Spenser’s <em>Faerie Queene</em></td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Jessica Wolfe</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>“In Poesie the mirrois of our Age”: The Countess of Pembroke’s</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sydnean” Poetics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Suzanne Trill</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>“Conceived of young Horatio his son”: <em>The Spanish Tragedy</em> and the</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychotheology of Revenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Heather Hirschfeld</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>West of England: The Irish Specter in <em>Tamburlaine</em></td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Kimberly Anne Coles</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>The Real and the Unreal in Tudor Travel Writing</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mary C. Fuller</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Jack and the City: <em>The Unfortunate Traveler</em>, Tudor London, and</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literary History</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Steve Mentz</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td>504</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Illustrations


Figure 4.1 “Their dances which they use at high feasts,” Engraving 18, from Thomas Hariot, *A Brief and True Report of the New-found Land of Virginia* (Frankfurt, 1590). Courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC  73

Figure 14.1 John and Mary Towneley family portrait, 1601. Courtesy of Burnley Borough Council, Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museums  238

Figure 14.2 Priest’s chasuble from Whalley Abbey. Courtesy of Burnley Borough Council, Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museums  239

Figure 17.1 Map of Utopia, from Thomas More, *Utopia* (Louvain, 1518; orig. pub. 1516), p. 12. Courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC  281

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My first expression of appreciation goes to my editors at Wiley-Blackwell – Isobel Bainton, Emma Bennett, and Caroline Clamp – for their help, encouragement, and, especially, their forbearance. I am also indebted to Valerie Wayne and to the other reader from Blackwell who offered helpful critiques of my original proposal for this volume. As this project developed, I bent the ears of a number of friends and colleagues, seeking their comments and suggestions, and I am deeply grateful for their gracious and generous help. Those individuals include Kathleen Bossert, Anne Coldiron, Kimberly Coles, Theresa Coletti, Donna Hamilton, and William Sherman. I also wish to express my enormous gratitude and appreciation to my contributors, many of whom I knew before I invited their participation, but many of whom I did not. They have been remarkably good-natured, and they have risen fully to the task: Again and again, as I read their contributions, the same response came to me: “This is the essay about this subject that I want my students to read.” In the editorial process, I have been helped greatly by graduate assistant Katherine Stanutz, solver of bibliographical mysteries and masterful constructor of charts, and by Heidi Scott, my indefatigable and eagle-eyed editorial assistant. I also register here my appreciation, which cannot be sufficiently expressed, to my wife, Pam, who has been a foundation of support as this work proceeded.
Events occurring in the same year have been arranged chronologically. Works grouped in the same year have been arranged alphabetically by author. Dates of dramatic texts are taken from *Annals* (with occasional modification) and indicate the earliest performance unless otherwise noted. Dates of non-dramatic texts refer to the first printing unless otherwise noted. Dates or date ranges preceded by the abbreviation “c.” are approximate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contexts</th>
<th>Authors and Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1485</td>
<td>William Caxton prints Malory’s <em>Le Morte d’Arthur</em>; Richard III dies at Bosworth Field; accession of Henry VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1486</td>
<td>Marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth Plantagenet unites the houses of Lancaster and York; Prince Arthur born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1489</td>
<td>Princess Margaret born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1491</td>
<td>Prince Henry (Henry VIII) born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 1496 Henry Medwall, <em>Nature</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1496 Sir John Mandeville, <em>Travels</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1497 Medwall, <em>Fulgens and Lucrece</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Wynkyn de Worde moves his print shop from Westminster to London in Fleet Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1501</td>
<td>First printed collection of polyphonic music issued in Venice by Ottaviano Petrucci; Arthur marries the Spanish Infanta, Katherine of Aragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1502</td>
<td>Prince Arthur dies without issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1503</td>
<td>Margaret Tudor marries King James IV of Scotland; William Warham made Archbishop of Canterbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1509</td>
<td>Henry VII dies; accession of Henry VIII; Henry VIII marries Arthur’s widow, Katherine of Aragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1511</td>
<td>Desiderius Erasmus, <em>The Praise of Folly</em> (trans. Thomas Chaloner, 1549)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1513</td>
<td>James IV of Scotland dies; accession of James V, son of Margaret Tudor and James IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1513</td>
<td>Niccolò Machiavelli writes <em>The Prince</em> (published 1532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1514</td>
<td>Thomas Wolsey made Archbishop of York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1515</td>
<td>Wolsey made Cardinal and appointed Lord Chancellor of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1515</td>
<td>John Skelton, <em>Magnificence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1516</td>
<td>Princess Mary (Mary I) born to Henry VIII and Katherine; Erasmus’s Greek and Latin New Testament published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1516</td>
<td>Ludovico Ariosto, <em>Orlando furioso</em>; Sir Thomas More, <em>Utopia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1517</td>
<td>Martin Luther issues his Wittenburg Theses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 1519–28 John Heywood, <em>The Play of the Weather</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 1520–2 Heywood, <em>The Four PP</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1521</td>
<td>Henry VIII issues <em>The Assertion of the Seven Sacraments against Luther</em>; Pope Leo V names Henry <em>Fidei Defensor</em> (Defender of the Faith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1522</td>
<td>Luther’s German translation of the New Testament (based on Erasmus's text) published at Wittenberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1523 Skelton, <em>A Garland of Laurel</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1525</td>
<td>William Tyndale’s English translation of the New Testament published at Worms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1527</td>
<td>Henry VIII questions the legitimacy of his marriage to Katherine; Wolsey seeks an annulment from Pope Clement VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1528 Baldassare Castiglione, <em>The Courtier</em> (trans. Sir Thomas Hoby, 1561)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1529</td>
<td>Wolsey falls; Sir Thomas More appointed Lord Chancellor; Reformation Parliament convenes (1529–36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1529 Skelton dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1530</td>
<td>Tyndale’s English translation of the Pentateuch published at Antwerp; Wolsey dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1531</td>
<td>Sir Thomas Elyot, <em>The Book of the Governor</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1531–47</td>
<td>John Redford, <em>Wit and Science</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1532</td>
<td>Convocation approves the Submission of the Clergy, acknowledging Henry VIII as Supreme Head of the Church of England; More resigns the Chancellorship; Warham dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1532</td>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400), <em>Works</em> (ed. William Thynne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1533</td>
<td>Henry VIII marries Anne Boleyn; Act of Restraint of Appeals requires ecclesiastical appeals be made through English, not papal, courts; Thomas Cranmer made Archbishop of Canterbury; Anne crowned; Henry excommunicated; Princess Elizabeth (Elizabeth I) born to Henry and Anne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1534</td>
<td>Act of Submission of the Clergy; Act of Succession; Act of Supremacy; Treason Act makes verbal denial of the Oath of Supremacy punishable by death; More imprisoned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1535</td>
<td>John Redman publishes the Lollard treatise, <em>Lantern of Light</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1535</td>
<td>Carthusian priors executed; Bishop John Fisher executed; More executed; Miles Coverdale publishes the first complete English translation of the Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1534</td>
<td>Polydore Vergil, <em>English History</em> (rev. to include the reign of Henry VIII, 1555)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1536</td>
<td>Katherine of Aragon dies; Act for the Dissolution of the Lesser Monasteries; John Calvin’s <em>Institutes of the Christian Religion</em> first published in Latin (trans. Thomas Norton, 1561); Anne Boleyn executed; Henry VIII marries Jane Seymour; Second Act of Succession illegitimates Elizabeth; Ten Articles; Tyndale executed in Brussels; Pilgrimage of Grace suppressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1536</td>
<td>Sir Thomas Wyatt imprisoned and released at the Tower of London, possibly accused of adultery with Anne Boleyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1537</td>
<td>New outbreaks of the Pilgrimage of Grace; John Rogers pseudonymously publishes the “Matthew” Bible, the first English Bible with royal license; Cranmer issues <em>The Institution of a Christian Man</em> (or, the Bishops’ Book); Prince Edward (Edward VI) born and Jane Seymour dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1538</td>
<td>Royal Injunctions require an English Bible in every parish; shrine of Thomas Beckett destroyed at Canterbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1538–9</td>
<td>John Bale’s <em>King Johan</em> performed at Archbishop Cranmer’s house</td>
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<tr>
<td>1539</td>
<td>Great Bible published; Act for Dissolution of the Greater Monasteries; Act of Six Articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>1540</td>
<td>Henry VIII marries Anne of Cleves; marriage annulled; Henry marries Catherine Howard; Thomas Cromwell executed</td>
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<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1541</td>
<td>Destruction of all shrines ordered</td>
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<tr>
<td>1542</td>
<td>Catherine Howard executed; James V dies and Mary Stuart, aged six days, becomes Queen of Scots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wyatt dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1542</td>
<td>First printed translation of the Qur’an published at Basel; Act for the Advancement of True Religion restricts reading of the English Bible; Henry VIII issues The Necessary Doctrine and Erudition of a Christian Man (or, the King’s Book); Nicolaus Copernicus’s On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres published at Nuremberg; Henry marries Katherine Parr; Andrea Vesalius’s On the Fabric of the Human Body published at Basel, refuting traditional physiological assumptions about the body’s interior</td>
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<tr>
<td>1544</td>
<td>Third Act of Succession specifies that if Edward dies without heirs, the crown should pass to Mary and her heirs and then to Elizabeth and her heirs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1545-63</td>
<td>The Council of Trent defines Roman Catholic doctrine and institutes reform</td>
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<tr>
<td>1545</td>
<td>Katherine Parr, Prayers and Meditations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1546</td>
<td>Anne Askew burned</td>
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<tr>
<td>1546–7</td>
<td>Bale, The First and the Latter Examination of Anne Askew</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>1547</td>
<td>Henry VIII dies; accession of Edward VI; Cranmer issues the Book of Homilies (revised 1563, 1571); reformers Peter Martyr and Martin Bucer arrive in England; Act of the Dissolution of the Chantries</td>
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<tr>
<td>1549</td>
<td>First Act of Uniformity abolishes Latin services and institutes the first Book of Common Prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>1552</td>
<td>Second Act of Uniformity abolishes the traditional Mass and institutes a revised Book of Common Prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>1552</td>
<td>Second Act of Uniformity abolishes the traditional Mass and institutes a revised Book of Common Prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>1553</td>
<td>Forty-two Articles; Edward VI dies; accession of Lady Jane Grey; deposition of Jane and accession of Mary I; First Act of Repeal reverses Edwardian reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td>1554</td>
<td>Wyatt's Rebellion; Second Act of Repeal reverses anti-papal legislation since 1529</td>
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<tr>
<td>1555</td>
<td>John Rogers, the first Protestant martyr under Mary I, burned (300 executed by 1558); Mary marries Philip of Spain (Philip II); Bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley burned</td>
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<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1556</td>
<td>Cranmer burned; Leonard Digges and Thomas Digges publish the first English text on geometrical surveying</td>
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<td>1557 Sir Thomas North (trans.), de Guevara’s <em>The Diall of Princes</em>; Richard Tottel and Nicholas Grimald, <em>Songs and Sonnets</em> (“Tottel’s Miscellany”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1558</td>
<td>French take Calais; Mary I dies; accession of Elizabeth I; Cardinal Reginald Pole, Archbishop of Canterbury, dies one day later</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 1558–69 Thomas Preston, <em>Cambises</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1559</td>
<td>Elizabethan Settlement of Religion (Acts of Repeal reversed; Act of Uniformity reinstates the Book of Common Prayer and institutes fines for refusal to attend services; Act of Supremacy; Royal Injunctions renew mandate for an English Bible in every church); Matthew Parker made Archbishop of Canterbury</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1559 William Baldwin et al., <em>The Mirror for Magistrates</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 1559–68 William Wager, <em>The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1560</td>
<td>Bible published in Geneva (published in London, 1576)</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1562</td>
<td>Final period of the Council of Trent opens; John Jewel’s <em>Apology of the Church of England</em> published in Latin and English (trans. Lady Ann Bacon, 1564); John Hawkins’ first voyage to Guinea and the new world opens the English slave trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>1563</td>
<td>Thirty-nine Articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>1564</td>
<td>Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare born</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Richard Edwards, <em>Damion and Pithias</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1565</td>
<td>Mary, Queen of Scots, marries Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley</td>
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<tr>
<td>1566</td>
<td>James (James VI of Scotland and I of England) born to Mary and Darnley; publication of the first English witchcraft pamphlet</td>
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<tr>
<td>1567</td>
<td>Darnley murdered; Mary abdicates; accession of James VI</td>
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<tr>
<td>1568</td>
<td>Mary, Queen of Scots, flees to England; Bishops’ Bible published</td>
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<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1569 Northern Rebellion</td>
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<tr>
<td>1570 Pope Pius V issues <em>Regnans in Excelesis</em>, excommunicating Elizabeth I; publication of Thomas Vautrollier's <em>Recueil du Mellange</em> marks the beginning of the music publishing trade in England; Billingsley's translation of Euclid's <em>Geometry</em> published, including John Dee's <em>Mathematical Preface</em>; first English handwriting manual published</td>
<td>1570 Roger Ascham, <em>The Schoolmaster</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1571 Royal Exchange opens in London; Ridolfi Plot uncovered; Battle of Lepanto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1572 Thomas Wilcox's controversial Puritan tract <em>An Admonition to the Parliament</em> published; St Bartholomew's Day massacre of Huguenots in Paris</td>
<td>1572 Ben Jonson born</td>
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<tr>
<td>1574 Master of Revels licenses first professional acting troupe under the sponsorship of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and under the direction of James Burbage</td>
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<tr>
<td>1575 Archbishop Parker dies</td>
<td>1575 Last performance of the Chester Mystery Cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td>1576 Burbage's Theater opens in London; first Blackfriars opens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1578</td>
<td>Lyly, <em>Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1579</td>
<td>Thomas Lodge, <em>A Defence of Poetry</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1579</td>
<td>Stephen Gosson, <em>The School of Abuse</em>; North (trans.), Plutarch's <em>Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans</em>; Edmund Spenser, <em>The Shepheardes Calendar</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1580</td>
<td>Sir Philip Sidney begins his <em>Arcadia</em> (1590, 1593) and writes <em>Astrophil and Stella</em> (1591) and <em>The Defense of Poesy</em> (1595)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1580</td>
<td>Jesuits Edmund Campion and Robert Parsons arrive in England</td>
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<tr>
<td>1580</td>
<td>Lyly, <em>Euphues and His England</em>; Michel de Montaigne, <em>Essays</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1581</td>
<td>Campion arrested and executed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1581</td>
<td>Thomas Newton (ed.), <em>Ten Tragedies of Seneca</em>; Torquato Tasso, <em>Jerusalem Delivered</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1582</td>
<td>Gregory Martin's English translation of the New Testament published at Rheims</td>
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<tr>
<td>1582</td>
<td>Thomas Bentley, <em>Monument of Matrones</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Throckmorton Plot uncovered</td>
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<tr>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Sir Thomas Smith, <em>De Republica Anglorum</em>; Philip Stubbes, <em>Anatomy of Abuses</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1583</td>
<td>Lyly, <em>Sappho and Phao</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1583–5</td>
<td>Lyly, <em>Gallathea</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1583–8</td>
<td><em>Famous Victories of Henry V</em></td>
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<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1584</td>
<td>Sir Reginald Scot, <em>The Discoverie of Witchcraft</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1585–9</td>
<td>Thomas Kyd, <em>The Spanish Tragedy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1586</td>
<td>Babington Plot uncovered; Mary, Queen of Scots, arrested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1586</td>
<td>Sidney dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1587</td>
<td>Robert Greene and Thomas Lodge, <em>A Looking Glass for London and England</em>; Christopher Marlowe, <em>Tamburlaine the Great</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1588</td>
<td>Babington Plot uncovered; Mary, Queen of Scots, arrested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1588</td>
<td>Mary, Queen of Scots, executed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1588–9</td>
<td>Marprelate tracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1588–92</td>
<td><em>Arden of Faversham</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1589–90</td>
<td>Greene, <em>Friar Bacon and Friar Bangay</em>; Marlowe, <em>The Jew of Malta</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1590</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>II Henry VI</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1590–1</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>The Life and Death of King John</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1590–3</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>The Comedy of Errors</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1590–1604</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>The Taming of the Shrew</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1591</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>III Henry VI</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1591–2</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>Richard III</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1591–3</td>
<td>Marlowe, <em>Edward II</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1592</td>
<td>Jesuit Robert Southwell arrested and executed</td>
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<td>1592</td>
<td>Samuel Daniel, <em>Delia</em>; Thomas Nashe, <em>Summer's Last Will and Testament</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1592–3</td>
<td>Marlowe, <em>Doctor Faustus</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1592–1603</td>
<td>Philip Henslowe keeps his diary</td>
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<tr>
<td>1593</td>
<td>Act against Popish Recusants; Act to Retain the Queen's Subjects in Obedience (directed toward Puritans); Richard Hooker's <em>Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity</em> published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1593</td>
<td>Marlowe writes <em>Hero and Leander</em> before his death in the same year; Shakespeare, <em>Venus and Adonis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1593–4</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>The Two Gentleman of Verona</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1593–1601</td>
<td>Anthony Munday et al., <em>Sir Thomas More</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1594–1603</td>
<td>Tyrone's Irish Rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1594</td>
<td>Nashe, <em>The Unfortunate Traveller</em>; Shakespeare, <em>The Rape of Lucrece</em> and <em>Titus Andronicus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1594–6</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>Romeo and Juliet</em></td>
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<td>Contexts</td>
<td>Authors and Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1594–9</td>
<td>Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (trans.), <em>Psalmes</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1595</td>
<td>John Donne’s early poetry circulates in manuscript; Shakespeare, <em>Love’s Labour’s Lost</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1595</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>Richard II</em>; Spenser, <em>Amoretti</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1596</td>
<td>Sir Walter Ralegh, <em>Discovery of Guiana</em>; Shakespeare, <em>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</em>; Spenser, <em>View of the Present State of Ireland</em> and <em>The Faerie Queen</em> (complete ed.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1596–7</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>I Henry IV</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1596–8</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>The Merchant of Venice</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1597</td>
<td>James Stuart’s <em>Daemonology</em> published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1597</td>
<td>Francis Bacon, <em>Essays</em> (subsequent eds., 1612 and 1625); Shakespeare, <em>The Merry Wives of Windsor</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1597–8</td>
<td>Ben Jonson, <em>The Case is Altered</em>; Shakespeare, <em>II Henry IV</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1598</td>
<td>Jonson, <em>Every Man in His Humour</em>; Shakespeare, <em>Much Ado About Nothing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1598–9</td>
<td>Shakespeare, <em>As You Like It</em> and <em>Julius Caesar</em></td>
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</tbody>
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### Chronology, 1485–1603

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contexts</th>
<th>Authors and Texts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1599 Essex’s campaign in Ireland; First Globe opens</td>
<td>1599 Spenser dies; Thomas Dekker, <em>The Shoemaker’s Holiday</em>; Jonson, <em>Every Man Out of His Humour</em>; Shakespeare, <em>Henry V</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600 East India Company founded</td>
<td>c. 1600–1 John Marston, <em>Antonio’s Revenge</em>; Shakespeare, <em>Hamlet</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1601 Essex’s Rebellion; Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, executed</td>
<td>1601 Jonson, <em>Poetaster</em></td>
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<td>c. 1601–2 Shakespeare, <em>Twelfth Night</em></td>
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<td>c. 1602–3 Shakespeare, <em>Troilus and Cressida</em></td>
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<td>c. 1602–5 Elizabeth Cary, <em>The Tragedy of Mariam</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1603 Elizabeth I dies on 24 March; accession of James VI of Scotland as James I of England</td>
<td>1603 Heywood, <em>A Woman Killed with Kindness</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Map of England, Scotland, and Ireland in the sixteenth century
Introduction

Kent Cartwright

Religious upheaval; travel and emigration of people and ideas; technological advance; new historical self-consciousness; emergent female voices; layers of cultural perspective; residual medieval and new humanistic values; uncertain centers, shifting borders, and contested margins of all sorts: Such is the sense of Tudor literature and its attendant culture that emerges from the all-new chapters in this volume. They suggest not a master narrative of culture and history so much as a multiplicity of narratives that intertwine, run parallel, or diverge in dynamic relationship. Such a dynamic view seems appropriate, because the Tudor age (1485–1603) – or, as we might term it, the Renaissance or the Early Modern era or simply the sixteenth century – marks perhaps the most significant and dramatic period of cultural change in European history during the millennium that preceded the rise of Modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although literary discussion of this age has long gravitated, not unhappily, toward Shakespeare, we are witnessing at the present moment an increase of interest in other “Tudor” literature. The timing of this volume, for example, roughly coincides with the publication of the substantial Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature (edited by Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank), which explores numerous figures and works of the early Tudor period in depth. Such fresh attention expresses recent critical interests in cultural history, subjectivity, and the alternating “Reformations” of sixteenth-century England – the later being sometimes called the turn toward religion in literary studies. Religious conflict spread, of course, during the rise of print culture, the awakening of nation states, and the incipience of economic capitalism, while increased travel and trade heightened awareness of other nations and cultures and facilitated new movements of people. Indeed, the now-established focus in literary studies on historical and cultural context broadens discussion in a way that encompasses the entire Tudor period, including its boundaries and intersections with other periods. Likewise, a comparative turn in literary studies invites critical explorations that traverse geographical, cultural, and historical borders – including those between the
Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and the Renaissance and its successor periods. We are, that is, at a moment when we can discover the Tudor age anew.

Table of Contents

The following chapters, written by an international and multi-generational group of scholars and aimed at both advanced students and expert readers, give special attention to early Tudor works and influences and thus seek to strike a balance between pre-Elizabethan and Elizabethan phases. Whether feminist, post-colonial, linguistic, psychoanalytic, or formalist, these chapters share an interest in culture and history. Although Shakespeare is often mentioned, no chapters are dedicated exclusively to his works (see *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works*, 4 vols., ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard [Oxford: Blackwell, 2003]). The contributions can be understood by two kinds of grouping: first, the formal “Table of Contents” and, second, an informal set of common topics and interests. The reader will note in the “Contents” a method of arrangement familiar to Blackwell literary *Companions*. The volume begins with an extended section (Part I) on “Historical and Cultural Contexts.” An opening series of chapters discusses religious developments in England in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Peter Marshall offers an incisive look at the vibrancy of late medieval religion, as well as at rapid developments during the subsequent century as England moved erratically toward Protestantism. Kathryn Edwards takes us into the shadow world of religious deviance and witchcraft, represented in pamphlet literature, a domain that not only reflected latent popular beliefs but also helped to fuel conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Matthew Dimmock examines England’s interest in the “Turk,” the figure’s shifting appropriation in oppositional religious polemics, his complicated symbolic and actual status, his potential alliance with Elizabeth, and his burgeoning representations in drama. Nancy Bradley Warren follows these mappings of the religious terrain with a discussion of how religious values intersected with those of profit and politics in English explorations of the Americas. From there, the cultural circle widens and other borders fall. Ross Duffin, noting the movements of religious exiles during the Reformation, shows England receiving new musical values and techniques – sophisticated polyphony, instrumental virtuosity, metrical psalm-singing, keyboard forms, madrigals – from elsewhere in Europe. Adam Max Cohen surveys England’s rise as “one of Europe’s leading producers and users of new technologies,” notes the sixteenth century’s adaptation of medieval inventions, traces the sense of wonder evoked by technology, and explores the way that one piece of technology, the modern mirror, became a literary metaphor. Tanya Pollard, treating a different aspect of scientific thought, outlines in dramatic literature a change in fantasies about human skin, from one of skin’s openness to that of its impenetrability, protective of bodily integrity. Thus, Part I takes us across various borders, from religious, geographic, and cultural ones to those of the human body itself.

The second part, “Manuscript and Print Culture,” takes up one of the central features of the Tudor age, the co-presence of manuscript writing with the rise of printing.
Steven May and Heather Wolfe's exploration of manuscript genres and practices begins with a technological discussion of paper and inscription, and concludes with the suggestion that, to some extent, the existence of print could paradoxically increase the value and significance of hand-written documents. Just as May and Wolfe note that readily available paper made possible the “important Renaissance genre” of letter-writing, Seth Lerer explores the work of John Skelton at the dawn of the print age, and with Skelton the humanist importance of “letters” in both the word’s epistolary and literary senses. Taking a famous verse epistle by Sir Thomas Wyatt as his starting point, David Carlson discusses in detail the manuscript culture of Henrician poetry and the way that the corporate nature of manuscript poems turns towards individualization, and political critique towards eroticization, with the publication of “Tottel’s Miscellany” in 1557. Next, Helen Smith observes that nascent women’s writing often appropriated the male voice in print, and was otherwise mediated by male presence, yet Smith also complicates notions of women as marginalized writers and, like Carlson (and Suzanne Trill), questions prevailing ideas of “authentic” writing. Part II ends with Peter Happé’s analysis of the special, emerging phenomenon of play-printing, with print aiding in the development of the theatrical interlude’s common characteristics and the cultivation of its audience, while also affording drama the opportunity to participate in religious and political culture.

Issues of voice and influence lead to Part III, whose four chapters on “Literary Origins, Presences, and Absences” further illuminate the historical and international contexts of Tudor literature. Deanne Williams discusses the “profound” effect exerted on Tudor literary culture by medieval writers, who became “a persistent and provocative presence.” The chapter gives special attention to Chaucer’s “afterlife,” Renaissance redactions of medieval romances, and medieval history dramatized on the Tudor stage. In “The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama,” Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson, investigating the way that medieval manuscripts of biblical drama survived in the Tudor age, suggest the fluid traversing of the borders between medieval and early modern drama. Here medieval drama emerges as an ongoing site or early modern religious struggle. Next, A.E.B. Coldiron unearths the French presence in Tudor England, which was “pervasive, constitutive, and richly contradictory” and which might even be described in post-colonial terms. The chapters by Coletti and Gibson, and Coldiron share common interests with those earlier on manuscript and print culture. If the French presence turns out to be greater than we might expect, the Italian influence on Tudor culture turns out to be more mixed and complicated. Pamela Benson traces both the “admiration and fear” felt by the English toward Italy as evidenced in language study, travel, reading, and writing, and she closely analyzes the limited interaction of Tudor women with matters Italian. What emerges is “[t]he gendered nature of Tudor engagement with Italian culture.”

The volume’s fourth and longest part, on “Authors, Works, and Modes,” offers specific analysis of selected major works of the English sixteenth century, interspersed with broad discussions of special topics such as perspective, humor, and versification. In “More’s Utopia: Medievalism and Radicalism,” Anne Lake Prescott
picks up the earlier theme of origins, analyzing the “double reading” that *Utopia* invites with its mixed elements of old and new, comic and serious, critical and speculative, hopeful and negative, and exploring *Utopia’s* relationship to medieval travel literature, Edenic fantasies, humanism, mapping, and the new concept of zero. If *Utopia* attends to the early phase of Henry VIII’s reign, Katherine Parr and Anne Askew are figures from the later phase. Joan Pong Linton analyzes the literary “voices” of these two prominent Protestant women, locating Parr and Askew in relation to “the period’s religious and gendered politics,” conceptions of authorship, and pietistic practices. Parr and Askew exercise rhetorical power in early print culture through not only their voices but also their enigmatic silences. Religion continues as an axial topic, with Robert Hornback’s study of the probably Edwardian humanist farce, *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*. Hornback unearths, among other things, the play’s boldly scatological anti-Papal satire, and his richly contextualizing chapter goes far toward establishing this insufficiently recognized play as a Tudor masterpiece. In “Bad Fun and Tudor Laughter,” Pamela Allen Brown picks up the theme of laughter, acknowledges the “early modern proclivity for finding humor in suffering and deformity,” and demonstrates Tudor “bad fun” by means of the late medieval figure of the Fool.

A sub-group of chapters related to sight and sound begins with Alastair Fowler’s “Perspective and Realism in the Renaissance.” Against a background of scientific change, Fowler traces two kinds of mimesis; first, derived from medieval allegory, “spectator realism,” in which “action is shown as it appears to an observer”; and, second, a newer “participative realism,” in which an observer-figure becomes emotionally involved in the action. The Renaissance, in both literature and visual art, Fowler argues, easily moved between these shifting realisms. Next Gavin Alexander explores the relationship between visual images and language, and, more broadly, between humanist rhetorical theory and literary practice, focusing on the Renaissance idea of the speaking picture, and on that powerful but dangerous faculty, the imagination. Alexander mentions George Puttenham’s interest in poetry as music, and that aspect of Tudor literature, specifically versification and the rise of iambic pentameter, offers the subject of Jeff Dolven’s chapter. Taking as a landmark George Gascoigne’s 1575 recognition of the dominance of the iambic foot in English poetry, Dolven explains the meter’s emergence by surveying the history of sixteenth-century verse, from Wyatt to Shakespeare, and tracing the influence of medieval, continental, and classical traditions on the English poetic line.

Mike Pincombe’s “John Lyly’s *Galatea*: Politics and Literary Allusion” takes us deep into the Elizabethan literary and courtly milieu. If women’s writing has been a topic of earlier essays, here Pincombe looks at the representation of women, arguing that Lyly’s comedy critiques the “cult of virginity” that surrounded Elizabeth, and even exploring the possibility in *Galatea* of a “lesbian Utopia.” Pincombe offers a model for allegorical reading as he observes the way that, from moment to moment, certain play-elements stand out or fall away imaginatively. The problem of reading, with its moral treasures and dangerous erotic traps, informs Clare Kinney’s “Sidney’s *Arcadia,*
Romance, and the Responsive Woman Reader.” Of this most important Tudor romance, Kinney argues that Sidney’s efforts to rewrite it only made it more morally self-subverting, thus inviting subsequent women writers – Mary Sidney Herbert, Mary Wroth, and Mrs Stanley – to respond in their own work as readers attempting to negotiate Arcadia’s tensions. A related tension, that between nature and technē, occupies Jessica Wolfe’s chapter on Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene: Is nature insufficient and, if not, can or should its defects be corrected by art or human enterprise? Wolfe probes Spenser’s conception of nature’s beauties and deceptions, and his parallel sense of the promises and dangers of technē. From romance and pastoral, we turn to Suzanne Trill’s chapter on Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. Herbert has become a figure of increasing stature in Tudor literature, and Trill provides a careful exploration of her completion of the translations of the Psalms begun by her brother Philip and also of her relationship to the Arcadia. In the Psalm project, the sacred and the secular intermingle in a way that shows the idea of authorship transformed into something not individual but jointly “Sydnean” – recalling this volume’s earlier discussions of manuscript culture and strategies of female authorship.

An interest in religion persists in Heather Hirschfeld’s psychoanalytic study of the key Elizabethan play, The Spanish Tragedy. Hirschfeld offers the fascinating proposition that Hieronimo’s “efforts to avenge his son’s murder are designed to punish himself as much as the murderers,” and she connects that drive to a revived Protestant sense of original sin, the religious changes in the early part of the century creating psychological effects in the latter. Another kind of psychology haunts the English perception of Christopher Marlowe’s Tamburlaine, argues Kimberly Coles. In the mid-1590s the reappearance of Scythian Tamburlaine on stage might have been seen as a reference to the rebellious “barbaric” Irish, also of Scythian origins, whose country England was attempting to suppress. Coles identifies a complicated “racialist discourse” that distinguished English ethnically from Irish but that also raised the possibility that the English themselves shared roots with the Irish and were thus susceptible to regressing into barbarianism.

On that note of ethnic and geographic encounter, the volume concludes with two chapters related to travel, movement, and change, and to issues of writing itself. Mary Fuller analyzes, in travel writing from Mandeville through Hakluyt, the changing boundaries between truth and fiction, real and unreal. As Fuller notes, despite a trend toward suppressing derivative fantastical narratives and preferring first-hand accounts, the Tudor “I” can be a complicated observer who still tells anecdotes of headless men and other marvels. Finally, Steve Mentz examines The Unfortunate Traveler, Thomas Nashe’s famous parodic and mixed-genre narrative – one combining “chronicle history, jest book, humanist satire, Petrarchan lyric cycle, travelogue, religious polemic, Italianate novella, and classical romance” – as a celebration and mockery of “elite literary modes in late Tudor culture” and an offering of “a new urban literary voice: ironic, caustic, and self-conscious.” Mentz argues that The Unfortunate Traveler’s great subject is the print culture that has come into being in the course of the sixteenth century.
Common Topics

While the “Table of Contents” organizes chapters formally and, for the most part, chronologically, the Companion’s chapters also intersect with each other in various topical ways that provide an additional picture of Tudor literature and its culture. Indeed, from the descriptions in the preceding section, some of the chapters’ affinities may have already begun to emerge. In the following paragraphs, the chapters (indicated parenthetically by the last names of the authors) are arranged according to certain topics; these groupings are meant to be more suggestive than exhaustive. One obvious topic, manuscript and print culture, has been omitted below, since it already constitutes a special section in the “Table of Contents.”

Religion

Almost every chapter in this volume touches upon the religious changes and conflicts of the Tudor age. Not only is religion a central issue of the historical chapters (Marshall, Edwards, Dimmock), its pressures, motives, and effects can be felt in many others. Winning the New World to Protestantism (and away from Catholicism) constituted a colonial motive (Warren). At home, Tudor music, of course, was greatly influenced by religious change (Duffin). Religious upheaval on the continent brought not only musicians but also experts to England who helped to transform its technology, and religious anxiety also formed a backdrop to the wonders of science (Cohen). Protestantism generated female martyrlogies, devotional writers, and poets (Linton, Smith, Trill). Religious conflict permeated medieval-based religious drama with a peculiar Catholic-Protestant hybridity (Coletti and Gibson). The century’s religious politics also helps us to see into the satirical greatness of a sometimes overlooked play (Hornback). Protestantism influenced views of the human epidermis and of the human imagination (Pollard, Alexander). The secular and the sectarian were not necessarily separate realms (Trill), and the Protestant theology of original sin could be imagined as intensifying guilt-feelings of parenthood (Hirschfeld). In these and numerous other ways, religion saturated the Tudor period and its literature.

Medievalism and classicism

One of the inherited ways of defining the Renaissance is by an awakened consciousness of its own historical moment; a rejection of the verities of the Middle Ages; and a longing for the qualities of a lost classical past. Regarding the Tudor perspective toward the Middle Ages, these chapters provide a complex and fascinating picture, one that tends to qualify the sense of a Tudor break from things medieval. It may be that Tudor music had to move away from its medieval insularity (Duffin), or that Renaissance advances in medical knowledge changed perceptions of the human body (Pollard), or that travel writing evinced the empirical gradually displacing the fantastical (Fuller). But the relation of the medieval to Tudor culture is complex. For a
model, one is tempted to invoke the Materialist picture of a culture composed of older residual values, current dominant norms, and newer emergent ideas. Such a model is helpful, as long as it does not imply a lock-step march of cultural evolution. Emerging from these chapters is the sense that the Tudor age remained in many ways deeply and dynamically engaged with residual medieval values, even when they took new forms. Although witchcraft fears abounded in the Middle Ages, for example, they achieved an especially powerful grip on the imagination in the sixteenth century (Edwards). The “Turk” as romantic or threatening Saracen was perceived by the Tudors in quasi-medieval terms (Dimmock), and medieval stereotypes were invoked by Elizabethan writers to understand the New World (Warren). Historically, late medieval Catholicism offered a serious and vibrant sacramental religious culture whose values reached far into the sixteenth century, while certain of the criticisms of the Church leveled by Luther and other reformers had been anticipated by the medieval Lollards (Marshall). In technology, “many late Tudor technological marvels” “were adaptations of medieval inventions” or of medieval advances in knowledge, including fireworks, magnetic sea compasses, magnifying glasses, and those improvements in shipbuilding and navigation that enabled a new age of discovery and exploration (Cohen). In the realm of travel, the sense of the marvelous embodied in the medieval Travels of John Mandeville long influenced ideas about geography and about other races (Prescott, Fuller). In the court, the medieval figure of the Fool persisted as a central object of bad fun (Brown).

Older manuscript culture thrived throughout the sixteenth century, even though print began to emphasize the idea of the individual author and reoriented some literary values (May and Wolfe, Carlson). In poetry, Chaucer’s works were printed and reprinted, and his pentameter versification constituted an important native source for Tudor poets (Williams, Dolven). Likewise, the “spectator realism” of sixteenth-century literature and visual art descended from medieval allegorical dream-vision (Fowler). The history of biblical drama in the sixteenth century suggests, too, the artificiality of identifying “medieval drama as communal, sacred, and Catholic and its early modern counterpart as professional, secular, and Protestant” (Coletti and Gibson). Certain of the radical aspects of a landmark Renaissance work such as Utopia were medieval, and the very fantasy of a Utopia originated in medieval ideas of the Land of Cockaigne and in works such as Mandeville’s Travels (Prescott). From a cross-cultural perspective, furthermore, “the powerful French presences in Tudor England challenge the view of Renaissance-as-rupture, suggesting instead a strong continuity” between the late medieval literary past and sixteenth-century writing (Coldiron; see this chapter for its reflections on the modeling of literary history). Overall, we might turn to the wide-ranging discussion by Deanne Williams for the sense that the medieval had a kind of Janus-face in the sixteenth century. The importance, for so many of the chapters, of medieval elements in sixteenth-century literature and culture argues that this subject deserves continued study.

As with religion, humanism and the classical revival form a subtheme of a great many of the chapters in this volume. Lerer provides an introduction-in-brief to the
humanist movement, and he notes suggestively that the classicizing impulse encouraged “a public sense of Roman literary culture as informing living Tudor politics.” Late classical political satire offered a model for More’s *Utopia* (Prescott), and Roman history and literature provided powerful metaphors and models for Wyatt, Surrey, and other courtier poets in expressing their political antagonisms or ambivalences toward Henry VIII (Carlson). Poetically, Tudor writers experimented unsuccessfully with classically inspired quantitative verse (Dolven), and the Renaissance foundational notion of thoughts as pictures had antecedents in Greek and Roman theory (Alexander). Nonetheless, Tudor attitudes toward Roman literature could also be mixed, as illustrated by the satiric treatment of Roman comedic form in *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* and by the affinities of that satire with recent post-colonial theory (Hornback). Likewise, the satire of humanist figures in *The Unfortunate Traveler* suggests a complicating of attitudes in the course of the century (Mentz).

**International influences**

In the spirit of current interests in comparative literary studies, numerous chapters in this volume engage with the influence of other cultures on Tudor England, suggesting a migration of ideas and practices, a complex awareness of other nations and ethnicities, and even in English letters the penumbra of other cultures and languages. The theme of travel and crossed borders runs through Tudor literature from *Utopia* to *The Unfortunate Traveler* (Prescott, Mentz). Francophone literary culture was deeply ingrained in, and continued to exert a strong influence on, that of the Tudors – as evidenced in dictionaries, translations, verse forms, and printing – even while some English endeavored to disavow it (Coldiron). Italy was both powerfully attractive and repulsive to the English imagination; the new practice of the Grand Tour took many Englishman to Italy; travel and religious emigration brought Italians to England; and Italy’s literature and theories with widely imitated (Benson, Duffin, Mentz). Likewise Tudor representations of other ethnic groups could be complex and shifting. For example, “in Protestant England a Muslim could variously be considered an idolater, a bloodthirsty barbarian, a heretic, a “misbeliever,” an atheist, a harbinger of the apocalypse, a sodomite, a fellow anti-idolatrous monotheist, a political ally, a protector, a valued mercantile partner, or a respected adversary to be emulated” – as England’s view of the “Turk” changed with new information, travel, and shifting religious alliances (Dimmock). England’s perceptions of the New World were deeply colored by its relationship with Spain, as some writers drew on anti-Spanish stereotypes to reveal resemblances between Catholicism and native Indian actions and icons (Warren). Regarding the Irish, England sought to distinguish itself racially from them but also feared its potential recidivism into barbaric commonality (Coles). Collectively, these chapters argue that the borders of Tudor culture exhibited a considerable porosity toward international cultural influences. Likewise, determinations of the “Other” or of the English self in relation to the “Other” were so complex and shifting that they surely complicated nascent ideas of national identity.
Wonder, humanness, technê

An interest in the Tudor sense of wonder threads its way through many of these chapters. The English responded to advances in technology, machinery, and mathematics with a recurrent experience of wonder and magic and an even religious sense of awe – this awe occurring across the religious spectrum (Cohen). Of course, too, marvels and monstrosities long persisted in Tudor travel narratives (Fuller). The possibility of devices, experiences, and beings that violated the norms of reason and knowledge marks an aspect of the sixteenth century that connects it with the Middle Ages and distinguishes it from modernism, and, although these instances of the wondrous were open to unmasking and disenchantment, they never disappeared.

Related to wonder is an anxiety about the nature and borders of the human. Changing images of the skin bespeak Tudor concerns about human vulnerability and about a new desire to protect one’s Protestant interiority (Pollard). Various of the volume’s chapters touch upon a common fear that human nature is vulnerable to transformation and, indeed, that the borders between the human and the monstrous or barbarian or animalistic were weak and permeable. The possibility of humans transformed into witches (Edwards); the image of the reading ape (Lerer); the automaton replicants of humans who wander Fairyland (Wolfe; see also Cohen); the implicitly sub-human court Fool (Brown; see also Hornback); the anxiety that English people could return to a feral barbaric condition if exposed to the savages of the New World or to the Irish (Warren, Coles); the image of the terrible Turk (Dimmock); the headless men and monstrous beings of travel writing (Warren, Fuller); indeed, the all-too-human savagery witnessed by Jack Wilton in his “grand tour” (Mentz) – all these suggest a deep and abiding Tudor distress about the stability and borderlines of humanness. Indeed, what it means to be human, and what it means to be civilized were among the central literary questions of the Renaissance in Tudor England. One of the ways in which the human defined its existence was through invention, not only in technology, but also in technê. Thus, efforts to theorize the works of the human imagination (Alexander); to explore, as Spenser does, the relationship between nature and human art (Wolfe); or even to formalize conceptions of poetic versification (Dolven), suggest the importance of literature and art to the deepest questions of human beingness.

Women

Any reader of these chapters will be struck by how frequently they return to the subjects of women writers and readers (Smith, Linton, Benson, Kinney, Trill). Since those chapters have already been described, it will serve here simply to note that women writers implicitly challenged traditional definitions of authorship and of writing. While even literate women seemed largely excluded from certain activities (studying Italian, for example), our increasing appreciation for women as significant popular devotional writers and for women as poets and even joint authors signals that current critical discussion of women writers
Introduction

has entered an interesting new phase. Likewise illuminating are those chapters that touch on the representation of women, including male views of the Virgin Queen (Benson, Warren, Pincombe). There is still much to learn on these subjects, so central to Tudor literary experience.

Authorship, reading, language

Various chapters undermine the modern celebration of the individualized, named author-figure who produces a finished literary object. Manuscript courtier poetry reveals corporate authorship, distinct from that of print, and it destabilizes the sense of the finished, unchangeable poem (May and Wolfe, Carlson). Women could make themselves present as authors by submerging themselves in male forms and traditional conventions (Smith), and could also speak through their silences and ellipses (Linton). Even in the case of one of the most famous of Elizabethan authors, Sir Philip Sidney, one can think of his sister’s involvement as so integral as to be joint – not “Sidney’s” literary corpus but a “Sydnean” one (Trill).

With England’s rising literacy, the importance of reading developed through the Tudor age. Various chapters touch on issues of readership, revealing a range of models. One apparent purpose of early courtier poetry was to find some kind of release or solace in shared political resentment toward an autocratic monarchy (Carlson) – and in that regard, the experience of reading a manuscript poem might manifest itself as re-writing when the poem is copied, with alterations, into another commonplace book. In that self-conscious spirit, Sir Thomas More expected *Utopia* to be read with a double sense of “salutary food for thought” and of satirical reversals (Prescott).

Certainly a dominant justification for reading was its value in fashioning moral and devout men and women who would be moved to emulate the upright behavior and spiritualism patterned for them in literature (Alexander, Smith). As Smith notes interestingly, one further effect on women of reading was to encourage them to write, that is, to engage further in “the kind of intellectual activity represented by reading” – not unlike the courtier poets. Tudor theorists worried that literature could be used to immoral as well as moral effect through its capacity to imprint on the reader’s imagination “dangerous and misleading phantasms” (Alexander; see also Kinney, Wolfe). This concern reflects the belief that the writer places a vivid, vital, captivating, and realistic image before the inward eye of the reader, a speaking picture conveying the “illusion of presence.” A capacity for wonder and transport seems implicit in this model. Writing is subject to moral abuse, and its impact for good or evil depends, according to Sidney and others, on the reader’s reason, judgment, and will – a position, as Alexander points out, that has difficulty dealing with the more passionate responses of readers.

A model of readership is further complicated by the sense, explored by Fowler, of dual Tudor notions of literary realism, one portraying the reader as detached, the other revealing the reader as so emotionally engaged in the narrative or with the characters as to be a virtual participant. Allegorical reading, too, remains an
important, intellectualized model somewhat at variance with that of the reader for whom a speaking picture assumes vivid presence (Alexander, Pincombe).

The issues outlined above have a test case, argues Kinney, in the women readers of Sidney’s *Arcadia*, a work that provides ample material for the fear that female readers might be seduced by a narrative’s eroticism and moral “errancy” rather than elevated by its “exemplarity.” If women writers of *Arcadia*-inspired romances can be taken as readers, then what they show is a capacity to think seriously about the consequences of love, about female sympathy and agency, and about the values of companionate marriage. As readerly responses, such rewritings validate the hypothesis of the judicious reader – and even recall the penchant of courtier readers early in the century to show their responses in the action of rewriting.

Finally, although language change is not the exclusive subject of any chapter, it comes up notably again and again. England had a historic and ambiguous relationship to French, for example, and French dictionaries were part of the English printing landscape (Coldiron). Likewise, books of instruction in Italian language and grammar appeared (Benson). English also had a deep but complex relationship to Latin, which was still the language of education and of law but was also associated with Papistry; by mid-century the case was being made for English as a literary language (Hornback). Here as elsewhere, England shows a layering of linguistic knowledge, while the Tudor effort to affirm English gives evidence of its permeability by other languages.

Porous borders, layerings of old and new, emigrating values, religious upheavals, new voices, travels and discoveries, technological changes, and the rise of one of the greatest literary cultures in Western history: The Tudor age has much to teach us about how culture changes, appropriates, and persists, and about how it imagines and contemplates itself. Striking among these chapters is the way that certain values and ideas – epitomized by the Protestant Reformation – are formulated in one part of the age and become revived, sublimated, or transformed at later stages. Fascinating historic events have antecedents and repercussions equally fascinating, and such connections reveal themselves only in the endeavour to explore the rich sweep of the Tudor age.
Part I
Historical and Cultural Contexts
English society underwent several transformations over the course of the Tudor century, but none of these was as profound and far-reaching as that of its religious culture. In 1485, English people were Catholic Christians, linked by a set of institutional and hierarchical structures to the pope in Rome, as well as by common customs and a common devotional mindset to fellow Catholics across western and central Europe. In 1603, a small minority continued to revere the pope, but many others now considered him their enemy, and, quite literally, the Antichrist. A few looked back to the late fifteenth century with nostalgia, but others shuddered at a vision of superstition and idolatry, and gave thanks for more enlightened times. In the space of barely three generations, a revolution in religious values had been instigated and completed – almost. For many were convinced there was work still to be done. Some of those born in the year that Henry VII, with papal approbation, seized the English crown from Richard III would live to see a pope denounce Henry's granddaughter as a heretic, and order her deposed from her throne. For many, these were bewildering times. But for others, new crystalline certainties emerged from the years of confusion, and made a permanent mark on the literature and culture of the nation.

Late Medieval Religion

There is a tendency to think of “pre-Reformation religion” as a fixed constant, the point of departure for historical change. Of course, it was not so – late medieval religious culture has its own history, and was in a continuous state of development. Economic change, after the demographic disasters and stagnation of the fourteenth century, meant more wealth could be invested in the fabric of churches and the elaboration of rituals. In the political sphere, Yorkist (Edward IV and Richard III) as well as early Tudor monarchs sought ways of exercising greater practical control over the Church in their territories. Technological change, in the form of the printing press,
brought new possibilities for the circulation, and personal internalization, of religious knowledge. Nonetheless, at the start of the sixteenth century there was little perception among contemporaries that their world was changing, nor expectation that it should. In religion, as in other walks of life, custom and tradition were the watchwords, and novelty was viewed with a suspicious eye. When advocates of Luther’s ideas began to appear in England in the 1520s, their opponents disparaged their teaching by calling it “the new learning.”

This is not to say that everyone was content with the status quo. Before anyone in England had heard of Martin Luther, there were regular demands for reform, in the sense of returning institutions and practices to an imagined pristine state. Humanist clergymen like John Colet castigated priests for their ignorance, and for their greed in collecting tithes and plural fee-paying offices. In the imagined Utopia of Colet’s friend Thomas More, the priests were very holy, and therefore very few, a wry commentary on the English Church of his day. At the apex of that Church stood the bishops, a body of men nominally chosen by the pope, but in fact selected by the king. Like their predecessors, the first Tudor monarchs employed bishops as councilors and administrators (or rather, they rewarded their servants with bishoprics). Nonetheless, the “bench” of bishops inherited by Henry VIII from his father in 1509 was an impressive one, its members typically hard-working graduates from modest backgrounds, rather than the surplus sons of the nobility who dominated episcopal office in Germany at this time. One early Tudor bishop is often seen to epitomize the institutional failings of the Church. Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Archbishop of York, was a political appointee, a notorious pluralist (holder of more than one church office simultaneously), and only theoretically celibate. Yet even Wolsey articulated the case for reform, dissolving almost thirty small monasteries to found a grammar school in Ipswich and a college in Oxford. Monasteries were often the target of humanist criticism, and the familiar stereotype of lazy, overfed monks was at least partly believed at the time: Robin Hood ballads, in which greedy Benedictine abbots frequently get their comeuppance, were popular. But the evidence of bishops’ inspections suggests that lax observance and loose living was the exception rather than the norm in monastic communities. Moreover, some religious orders – the Bridgettines, Carthusians, and Observant Franciscans – were genuine beacons of holiness and learning.

Systematic hostility to the personnel of the Church – anticlericalism – was once thought to be both a precondition and an explanation for the success of the Reformation in England. But the evidence for it is insubstantial. Parish clergy provided occasional cause for discontent, but the regular visitations of the bishops reveal few scandals, or complaints of inadequate pastoral care. Common lawyers sometimes fulminated against the Church’s system of courts. But they had a vested interest in doing so, as the church courts represented, in areas such as breach of contract, a cheaper and more efficient rival. Records suggest that tithe disputes were fairly rare, and though the courts passed sentence on a stream of “fornicators” and bastard-bearers in the early sixteenth century, respectable local opinion probably approved of their doing so. It is hard to believe that the English people were inveterately anticlerical, when so many
of them were anxious to become priests: Levels of ordination were at an all-time high in the first two decades of the sixteenth century.

In any case, without the help of priests, laypeople could not achieve salvation. Pre-reformation Catholicism was a *sacramental* religion. It taught that a share in the life-giving power of God – grace – was channeled through prescribed ritual actions. Seven sacraments were recognized by the Church. Five of these (baptism, confirmation, marriage, ordination, anointing of the dying) were one-off, “life-cycle” events. The other two – penance and the Eucharist – were regularly recurring rituals, closely associated with the power of the clergy. Only a priest, as God’s representative, could guarantee forgiveness of sins when a layperson confessed them, usually once a year, as a prelude to the reception of communion at Easter. Although communion was an annual event, the Eucharist, known colloquially as the Mass, was the cornerstone of late medieval religion, and Christians were obliged by canon law to attend weekly. When a priest recited the words of the Latin Mass, he was opening a conduit between earth and heaven. Through repetition of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, the bread and wine blessed by the priest became the body and blood of Christ (a process that theologians called transubstantiation). When the priest held up the consecrated bread at the solemn moment known as the elevation, members of the congregation could, literally, see and adore their God. At the same time, each Mass was a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people, a re-enactment of the saving sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross.

The Mass was a means of spiritual benefit for the dead as well as the living. Despite tenuous scriptural foundations, the doctrine of purgatory had emerged strongly over the course of the Middle Ages to meet the common-sense perception that the majority of people were insufficiently saintly to expect immediate admission to heaven, and insufficiently wicked to deserve eternal damnation in hell. Instead the soul would be purged for a proportionate period in the fiery prison of purgatory, before, cleansed of its sins, proceeding to eternal bliss. Purgatory was a fearsome prospect, but made less so by the recognition that the prayers of the living eased and shortened the sufferings of the dead. The Mass was the most powerful means of intercession, and countless laypeople left money in their wills for a priest to “sing” for them. Wealthier individuals could endow a chantry, where a specially appointed priest would say masses in perpetuity or for a specified number of years. A common backup strategy was acquisition of an indulgence – a declaration of remission from a certain quantity of the penalties due in purgatory, and the initial trigger for Luther’s protest against the Church.

Fear of the afterlife was not the driving impulse of pre-Reformation religion. Surviving wills suggest little sense of panic about the prospect of purgatory, and Catholicism’s “cult of the dead” was complemented by a vibrant religious culture among the living. Not all religious practices were hierarchically prescribed. Laypeople picked and mixed their devotional preferences, especially when it came to the saints. Their favor was sought at places of pilgrimage where their relics were housed, and in front of the countless images that adorned England’s 9,000 or so parish churches. Their deeds were immortalized in sermon collections, and in the saints’ lives or
hagiographies issuing from England’s newly established presses. The familiar view that printing was an inevitable solvent of the old religious world is contradicted by the sheer quantity of printed traditional devotional materials. Primers (cut-down versions of the monastic cycle of prayer) were particularly popular.

The vibrancy of late medieval religious culture was also sustained by the requirement for laypeople to raise funds to maintain the fabric of their parish church. Parishes hosted “church ales” and “wakes” on saints’ days, arranged May Day and summer games, and Easter Hock-tide celebrations (when the parish’s young men would symbolically kidnap and ransom the young women, and vice versa). The assimilation of popular merry-making to the norms and values of Catholicism was facilitated by the convergence between the Church’s “ritual year” and the annual agricultural cycle. Ploughs were blessed in church on “Plough Monday,” when farmers resumed work after the holiday season of Christmas. At the feast of Christ’s Ascension, processions around the parish prayed for the protection of newly planted crops. Historians now almost universally reject the once-prevalent idea that late medieval religion was “corrupt,” unpopular or oppressive; the “revisionism” of the 1970s and 1980s has become the established orthodoxy.

The Lollard Heresy

Yet there is a fly in the ointment, for some people disliked the sacramental religion and festive culture of their neighbors. They were known to contemporaries as “Lollards,” an obscure term probably meaning “mumbler of prayers.” Lollardy originated with the disciples of John Wyclif, a late fourteenth-century Oxford theologian, whose teachings took from the Church any claim to property or temporal power. In place of established hierarchical structures, he posited an invisible true Church of the elect, and placed all religious authority in the text of Scripture, which his followers duly translated into the vernacular. For good measure, he denounced transubstantiation, the cult of the saints, images and pilgrimage. As Wyclif’s teachings spread outside Oxford at the turn of the fifteenth century, the authorities responded with vigorous persecution. In 1401 an Act of Parliament prescribed the death penalty for those adhering to teachings “contrary to the Catholic faith,” and eight years later Archbishop Arundel issued a set of Constitutions banning discussion of Wyclif’s works and prohibiting the translation of scripture without episcopal permission.

In the middle years of the fifteenth century the evidence for Lollard trials is thin, either because the problem had subsided or (more likely) because bishops took their eyes off the ball during the turbulent decades of the “Wars of the Roses.” But under Henry VII, Lollards were again being apprehended in noticeable numbers. A concerted campaign to root them out culminated in a nationwide anti-Lollard drive in 1511–12. Unless the pattern of evidence of their survival is badly skewed, Lollards were to be found in geographical pockets. The main concentrations were in the Weald of Kent, London, Coventry, and in Buckinghamshire around the market towns of
Amersham and Chesham. There seem to have been few, if any, Lollards in the north. It was once assumed that “late Lollards” were almost invariably ignorant country folk, at the wrong end of an evolutionary development from Wyclif’s sophisticated theology. But detailed research in tax and testamentary records, as well as court proceedings, has repositioned them on the social scale. In Amersham and Coventry, suspects were among the ruling elites of the town. Landed gentry were not represented in the ranks, perhaps because their social position shielded them: The survival of richly produced volumes among 250 surviving manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible suggests some involvement on their part.

Lollards’ beliefs, as represented in recantations drawn up for them to deliver at their trials, seem a largely negative, “rationalistic” protest against the sacramental teachings of the clergy. One might as well confess to a tree as to a priest. The image of Our Lady was no more holy than any block of wood. The priest could no more make God in the Mass than a house could make its carpenter. Trial evidence inevitably accentuates the negative, as prosecutors were interested in the denial of orthodox doctrines. But Lollard writings reveal a more creative and spiritual side. Saints’ images were wicked because offerings to them diverted money from the poor, the real images of Christ.

There are difficulties in conceptualizing early Tudor Lollardy as a sect, a counter-Church, or even as a “movement.” The boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy were often blurred and permeable. Some perfectly orthodox people, including Richard III and the nuns of Syon Abbey, used vernacular Wycliffite scriptures for devotional edification. Lollards themselves were not non-conformists, in the sense of opting out of the requirements of official religion. Accusations that they refused to go to confession or attend mass are very uncommon. Of course, they may have done so from a well-founded fear of persecution, but this would not explain why some served as churchwardens or holy water clerks in their parishes. Few Lollards were prepared to die for their beliefs: A heretic who recanted his erroneous opinions was put to public penance, and between 1485 and 1522 there were around 308 recantations and only 25 burnings (most of the latter were second-time offenders). Lollardy was in some ways an added spiritual dimension, an elitist tendency within the world of parochial Catholicism. Lollards met at each other’s houses to read forbidden books. They did not proselytize openly, but drew adherents from established work and family networks. It has been memorably observed that “if Wyclifism was what you knew, Lollardy was who you knew” (Davies 1991: 212).

Later sixteenth-century Protestants hailed the Lollards as their direct spiritual ancestors. The Elizabethan martyrologist John Foxe called them a “secret multitude of true professors,” Christians who termed themselves “known-men … as now they are called by the name of Protestants” (Dickens and Carr 1967: 27–8). Reformers had to defend themselves from the charge of “novelty”: Where was your Church before Luther? But despite the apparent convergence on topics like saints, or the primacy of scripture, Lollards were not Protestants. In particular, Lollards had not pre-empted the key theological insight of Martin Luther: that humans are “justified” in the eyes
of God solely through their faith and not through their deeds. Lollardy shared an emphasis on good works with the late medieval Catholicism it disparaged.

Lollards and Evangelicals

This complicates the relationship between Lollardy and the new species of heresy appearing in England in the early 1520s. Luther’s ideas appalled Henry VIII, who was dubbed “Defender of the Faith” by the pope for writing a book against them, but they proved seductively attractive to a small number of Oxford and (particularly) Cambridge scholars, and London guildsmen, who initially gained access to them via the resident German merchant community. These people were hardly “Protestants” either, for the term was not widely used in England before the 1550s, and implies a degree of denominational fixity and self-consciousness inappropriate to these years. Many historians think that “evangelical” best describes adherents of this ill-defined movement, for a transforming encounter with the Word of God was the core of their religious experience. For the Cambridge scholar, Thomas Bilney, exposure to the letters of St Paul in Erasmus’s Greek edition of the New Testament led to the conviction that Christ’s work of self-sacrifice was alone sufficient for salvation, and that works of human righteousness – fasting, vows, pilgrimages – were a delusive distraction from the true Christian path.

If knowledge of Greek were a prerequisite, the new movement had a bleak future ahead of it, but the efforts of a Gloucestershire priest, William Tyndale, soon raised the stakes considerably. Like Bilney, Tyndale was inspired by Erasmus’s New Testament of 1516 (and by Luther’s German translation of 1522). He aimed to produce an English version, and in 1523 approached the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, for patronage and permission. The rebuff looks in retrospect like a decisive moment. Haunted by the specter of Lollardy, the bishops dared not allow space for the development of scriptural piety within the Church, and thus forced its redirection into unorthodox channels. Tyndale’s New Testament was printed on the continent in 1525–6, and smuggled back into England. The translation itself was a provocative and political one. The Greek terms usually rendered into English as “do penance,” “Church,” and “priest,” became “repent,” “congregation,” and “elder,” with striking implications for the doctrines of penance and the priesthood.

Whether Lollardy provided a “seed-bed” for the early growth of evangelicalism is a moot point. There were certainly important contacts. A Lollard merchant, Humphrey Monmouth, stepped in to finance Tyndale’s New Testament, and Lollards were among its first and most enthusiastic readers. There is an evident correlation between parts of the realm with a “Lollard problem” at the start of the sixteenth century (London, the Thames Valley, the South-East) and those with sizable Protestant minorities later. But the contribution should not be overstated. No important English reformer emerged from the ranks of the Lollards. Indeed the first evangelicals tended to come from the heart, not the margins, of the late medieval religious estab-
lishment: A striking number of them were friars. In so far as the English authorities were already attuned to the problem of religious dissent, and practiced in persecuting it, the Lollard antecedent may have made life harder for the nascent evangelical movement. The English bishops were certainly alert and vigilant. Wolsey arranged public burnings of Luther’s books in 1521 and 1526, and commissioned theologians to emulate the king in writing against them. The authorities took a softer line with university-educated clergy than with rural Lollards, and some converts, like Thomas Bilney, were persuaded to recant. Yet evangelical ideas were spreading out from London and the universities: A Gloucestershire gentleman, William Tracy, became posthumously notorious in 1530 for composing a will denying the existence of purgatory. Official attitudes began to harden. The appointment of Thomas More to replace Wolsey as Lord Chancellor in October 1530 heralded a small spate of burnings, including Bilney, who had thought better of his earlier recantation. Still, there was no reason to think in the later 1520s that traditional Catholicism in England was facing any kind of threat to its existence. Even in London and the universities, evangelicals were a small minority, and large parts of the realm were effectively untouched by their influence. Crucially, they lacked any kind of credible political support.

Henry VIII’s Reformation

That was soon to change. Henry VIII’s failure to persuade Pope Clement VII to annul his marriage to Katherine of Aragon (and thus allow him to marry his inamorata, Anne Boleyn) transformed the prospects of the evangelical movement. Anne herself was a sympathizer with reform, and offered patronage and protection to evangelical clergy. It was a Boleyn chaplain, Thomas Cranmer, who found himself catapulted into the post of Archbishop of Canterbury when the aged incumbent died in August 1532. Cranmer and other intellectuals had been set the task of drumming up arguments against the Aragonese marriage, which Henry, self-servingly but genuinely, believed to be invalid on the grounds of Katherine’s earlier marriage to his elder brother, Arthur. Their findings, in a dossier entitled the Collectanea satis copiosa (sufficiently large collection) indicated that English kings by right should exercise headship over the English Church, and that the divorce question could be settled at home without reference to the pope. With increasing clarity of purpose, Henry proceeded to act on their suggestions, establishing himself as Supreme Head, under God, of the Church of England. The “royal supremacy,” an institution without precedent in the history of Christianity, was created between 1532 and 1536 by a succession of parliamentary measures orchestrated by Henry’s new chief minister (and evangelical sympathizer) Thomas Cromwell. The key moment was the 1533 Act of Appeals, which trumpeted that “by divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire” (Dickens and Carr 1967: 55). An “empire” recognized no external authority; the pope was merely “Bishop of Rome.”
Henry’s subjects responded variously to the new situation. The evangelicals, bolstered by Boleyn-backed appointments to the bench of bishops, embraced the royal supremacy and its potential for their purposes. The Catholic majority was divided in its reaction. A handful of heroic individuals, including Thomas More and the Bishop of Rochester, John Fisher, openly defied the king and paid with their lives. A few others, including the king’s cousin Reginald Pole, denounced the royal supremacy from continental exile. Most, however, acquiesced. Some may have been persuaded by the increasing volume of anti-papal sermons the king was now requiring from all preachers, some doubtless thought it would all blow over, as quarrels between kings and popes had done in the past. Others, like the Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, persuaded themselves that despite his new-found distaste for the institution of the papacy, Henry was still at heart an orthodox Catholic, would preserve the essentials of the faith and oppose heresy.

In this, events proved them half-right. Although he relied on evangelicals to support his anti-papal policies, and seems to have felt genuine affection for his evangelical archbishop, Cranmer, Henry was not one of them. He showed no sympathy or understanding for the core principle of justification by faith, and retained a visceral attachment to the Latin Mass, which evangelicals were increasingly coming to think of as an abomination. But Henry also saw himself as a religious reformer. If the royal supremacy started as a means of removing obstacles to marrying Anne Boleyn, it soon became something Henry valued for its own sake. (Anne herself was executed, on charges of adultery and witchcraft, in 1536). Henry began to entertain doubts about the doctrine of purgatory, reflected in official statements of doctrine, the Ten Articles of 1536, and the King’s Book of 1543. He was enough of a humanist to look down on popular practices around pilgrimages, imagery and the cult of the saints, criticized in royal injunctions in 1536 and 1538. A rhetoric of hostility to “superstition” accompanied the most dramatic policy measure of the later 1530s, the dissolution of the monasteries. The monasteries’ landed wealth may have been the real reason for their demise, but the process of expropriation was accompanied by public attention to the supposedly immoral life of monasteries, the fake relics they contained, and the pointlessness of the monastic life itself.

While old forms of religious authority were being disparaged, a new principle was emerging. The primacy of Scripture had been implicit in the Henrician Reformation from the outset – Henry based his divorce case on the argument that a prohibition in the Book of Leviticus trumped the dispensing power of the pope. But the injunctions of 1538 signaled a seismic shift in official religious policy by requiring parishes to acquire a copy of the Bible in English. This was a triumph for Cranmer and Cromwell. Henry himself seems to have believed that exposure to Scripture would make for a more disciplined and obedient society. A Holbein woodcut in the frontispiece to the official Great Bible of 1539 depicted the king, seated in majesty like God himself, dispensing copies of the Bible to grateful and deferential subjects.

Reformation under Henry VIII had its limits. A massive rebellion in the north in 1536 – the so-called Pilgrimage of Grace – brought home to the king the dangers of
straying too far from traditional orthodoxy. The rebels were protesting, not so much about the deposition of the pope, as against the closure of monasteries, and the threat to local religious identity posed by the rationalization of saints’ days. A conservative faction, led by Bishop Gardiner and the Duke of Norfolk, played on the king’s fears and prejudices. Cromwell went to the block in 1540, having saddled the king with an undesirable fourth wife, in the person of Anne of Cleves. In 1543, an Act of Parliament radically curtailed rights to read Scripture in English, a pragmatic admission that unrestricted access had fueled controversy, rather than inculcated obedience. Yet the Bible itself was not withdrawn, and other reforms were not reversed in the generally more conservative 1540s. Cromwell’s place as lay patron of the evangelical movement was inherited by Edward Seymour, brother of Henry’s third and favorite wife, Jane, and uncle to the long-awaited heir to the throne, Prince Edward.

**Protestant Revolution**

Edward became king, aged nine, upon his father’s death in January 1547. The new monarch combined precocity with his father’s imperious temperament, and had imbibed strong reforming principles along with his tutors’ instruction. The timing of Henry’s final illness was decisive. The evangelicals at court engineered quarrels between Henry and the conservative leaders Norfolk and Gardiner which led to their removal from the regency council to govern during Edward’s minority. An evangelical majority of councilors proceeded to elect Seymour, now Duke of Somerset, as Lord Protector. Archbishop Cranmer, who had had to tread carefully while the old king lived, began to oversee a full-fledged program of (we can now use the word) Protestant reform. If Reformation under Henry had been sporadic and reversible, under Edward it was unremitting and unidirectional. With the Council of Trent rallying the forces of Catholicism on the continent, Cranmer and his allies envisaged England as a beacon of reform and champion of the Protestant world. An Act of 1547 denounced purgatory and confiscated the lands of the chantries. In 1548 confession was made optional, and the following year priests were allowed to marry. The Latin Mass was abolished in 1549, replaced by an English Book of Common Prayer. Though Somerset fell from power in the autumn, blamed for mishandling both a Catholic rebellion in the southwest, and agrarian disturbances in East Anglia, reform continued apace under the new leader of the Council, the Duke of Northumberland. While the 1549 communion service still looked in some respects like a Catholic mass, a revised 1552 Prayer Book supplied an emphatically Protestant version, approved by leading continental reformers like John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger. Across the country, stone altars were removed, and replaced by wooden communion tables. Edwardian policy was iconoclastic in both general and specific meanings of the term. The Council ordered the removal and destruction of all religious imagery from churches; in their place lime-washed walls and improving biblical texts. Processions, intercessions for the dead, and all that reeked of “superstition” was to be swept away. The chalices, and other parish
treasures associated with the old mass, were to be confiscated and melted down. The impact on the texture of local religious life was dramatic. Surviving churchwardens’ accounts reveal the collapse of the fundraising regimes which had sustained traditional festive culture. Small wonder, perhaps, that one set of local officials dated the “time of schism when this realm was divided from the Catholic Church” not to Henry’s break with Rome, but to the reign of Edward (Duffy 1993: 204).

By the early 1550s, England had experienced real Reformation, and the nation, seemingly, had accepted it. Why? Some, of course, welcomed the changes. But most recent research suggests that even in their strongholds – London, Essex and Kent, East Anglia, Bristol – convinced Protestants were still a fairly small minority. Of course, in a non-democratic society, the commands of the government, not the wishes of the governed, hold sway. Tudor England was, by most contemporary standards, a well-administered and centralized state. But this is hardly a sufficient explanation: the Tudor regime was far from all-powerful – it was very nearly derailed by the Pilgrimage of Grace, for example – and it relied heavily on the cooperation of unpaid local officials. True, unpopular change was imposed piecemeal. Even under Edward, each reforming measure, taken by itself, was just about palatable. But the process of reform may throw into relief some vulnerabilities of the old religious system. While the notion of distinct “elite” and “popular” religious mentalities is difficult to sustain, significant numbers of Henrician landowners and upper clergy shared with their king a distaste for the world of pilgrimages, relics, and holy images – bathwater, they thought, that could be drained off without losing the baby as well. Traditional Catholicism also rested heavily on social consensus and the authority of immemorial custom. Yet when the rules around potentially burdensome religious obligations – confession, fasting, prayer for the dead – were officially relaxed, many were tempted to abandon them, without necessarily subscribing to evangelical doctrine. The very fact of change could look like a persuasive argument. Monasteries were dissolved, chantries abolished, and saints’ statutes mutilated, without a host of avenging angels pouring forth from heaven. Reformers understood this dynamic, and acts of iconoclasm were arranged as public, ritualized demonstrations, to suggest the powerlessness of the “holy” image. Furthermore, some people profited materially from Reformation processes. This is most obvious in the case of monastic lands, most of which, to alleviate the crown’s financial problems, were rapidly sold to local landowners. But more humble people could turn the politics of religion to their benefit: accusing a neighbor of being a “papist” or “traitor,” for example, was a sure-fire way to gain advantage in local disputes.

Mary’s Counter-Reformation

Had Edward VI lived to adulthood, married and produced an heir, reform would have continued apace, and ever more traces of England’s medieval past would have been obliterated. But he did not. When Edward died prematurely in July 1553, the ghost
Peter Marshall

of Katherine of Aragon seemed to have had the last laugh. For it was her daughter, the 37-year-old Princess Mary, who succeeded to the throne, sweeping aside a desperate attempt by Northumberland to set up the Protestant Lady Jane Grey as a puppet queen. Historians have dropped the once mainstream view that Mary’s restoration of Roman Catholicism was an unachievable aspiration, a merely temporary diversion from England’s path to Protestant greatness. Her accession was greeted with considerable popular enthusiasm, and widespread restoration of the Latin mass, even before required by law. Mary’s bishops made large demands on parishes, in terms of furnishings and equipment they were required to purchase, but in most cases they seem to have risen to the challenge. An Elizabethan churchwarden of St Andrew Holborn in London, looking back over the parochial accounts, marveled that the parishioners were ready to spend so much “to erect and set up all manner of superstitious things again in the church … and in so short a space” (Griffith 1831: xviii). Elsewhere, the celerity with which images and stone altars were replaced suggests parishes had disobeyed the orders to destroy them, and were now bringing them out of hiding. Restoration was not complete. Few shrines and chantries were set up; it would take time for the cults of saints, and of the dead, to re-establish themselves. Nor was there much public enthusiasm for the return to papal obedience. Parliament dutifully voted to end the schism in November 1554, but only after guarantees had been given to purchasers of monastic lands, as a result of which only a handful of monasteries were refounded. But the Marian Church was not simply looking to the past. In Reginald Pole, Mary had a reforming archbishop in tune with the first stirrings of the continental Counter-Reformation. Assisted by an able body of bishops, Pole drew up plans for seminaries in every diocese, for a new catechism, and (at last) for an approved Catholic translation of Scripture.

There were problems; some, like an inherited financial crisis, and a virulent epidemic of influenza, not of the government’s making. But Mary’s 1554 marriage to Philip of Spain was unpopular, and drew the country into war with France, and into conflict (a bitter irony) with the fanatically anti-Spanish Pope Paul IV. There was also the question of what to do about heresy. Mary firmly believed that a handful of Protestant leaders had led others astray for political rather than spiritual motives. These could be made to recant, and the rest would fall into line. But the clerical leaders targeted in 1555 after the restoration of heresy laws mainly refused to abjure. Cranmer, and Bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, died heroically at the stake, establishing a template of martyrdom for lesser believers. Thereafter, persecution developed its own logic, and by the end of the reign nearly 300 Protestants had been burned. Not all English people were as horrified as we would like to think – this was a society in which capital punishment was commonplace, and in which virtually all thinking people, of whatever persuasion, supported the death penalty for persistent heresy. But in retrospect, the persecution was the most enduring legacy of the reign. In Basel, John Foxe, one of a thousand or so Protestants who had gone into exile, began collecting materials on the sufferings of his co-religionists, and on his return to England published Acts and Monuments, popularly known as the Book of Martyrs. It would
shape English attitudes to “Bloody Mary,” and to Catholicism more generally, for centuries to come.

**Elizabethan Protestantism**

When Mary died childless in November 1558, it was the turn of a third of Henry VIII’s children to ascend the throne. Anne Boleyn’s daughter, Elizabeth, had kept a sensibly low profile throughout her sister’s reign. But she now came out as a Protestant, and under the guidance of a former Edwardian minister, William Cecil, oversaw a parliamentary restoration of the supreme headship (rechristened supreme governorship) and of Protestant forms of worship. The Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity which constituted the “Elizabethan Settlement” of 1559 did not, as is sometimes supposed, represent a “middle-way” in religion, an innovative synthesis of Protestant and Catholic forms to be known henceforth as “Anglicanism.” In nearly all significant respects the new Church restored the Edwardian Reformation at its most advanced stage. The bishops recognized this, and to a man (bar one) resigned. Their replacements came from the ranks of the Protestant clerical exiles. The *Thirty-Nine Articles* which enshrined the official teaching of the Church in 1563 were largely a reissue of an Edwardian set of 1553, and denounced purgatory and the mass as “repugnant to the Word of God.”

Yet from the outset, there was a misunderstanding at the heart of the Elizabethan Church. Most Protestants, including nearly all the bishops, understood Reformation as an ongoing process, with the legislation of 1559 a milestone along the way. Elizabeth herself, however, saw it as a final and definitive settlement. It was soon apparent that the queen was less unambiguously a Protestant champion than many had hoped. Her royal injunctions of 1559 clarified a loose end in the Uniformity Act by insisting that clergy wear vestments to celebrate services. She only reluctantly sanctioned the return of clerical marriage, and, to the horror of bishops and clergy, insisted on retaining a crucifix and candle-sticks on the communion table in the chapel royal. This was hardly the godly “Deborah” of Protestant encomiasts. The abrupt “freezing” of religious policy at the end of the 1550s produced a distinctly odd ecclesiastical polity. The Elizabethan Church had no doubts about its Protestant credentials, and its theology aligned itself with more advanced regimes on the continent (Calvinist, rather than Lutheran). But at the same time, it preserved nearly all the infrastructure of the medieval Catholic Church: Not only the parish system, but the network of church courts, magnificent cathedrals, and, crucially, the office of bishop. It is anachronistic to talk of “Anglicanism” in Elizabeth’s reign, but the base materials for its later construction were in place, and towards the end of the reign, at least one innovative theologian, Richard Hooker, was starting to articulate a theology to match, emphasizing continuities with the medieval Church, rather than with pockets of Lollards.

Protestants who found the retention of medieval forms unacceptably anomalous are known to posterity (and to hostile contemporaries) as Puritans – they termed
themselves “the godly.” Puritans objected to clerical surplices as uncomfortably redo-
lent of the Catholic mass, and detected other “idolatries” in the Book of Common Prayer, such as the giving of rings in marriage, or the use of the sign of the cross to baptize infants. A 1566 campaign by Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker to enforce the wearing of vestments led to the suspension of dozens of ministers. Parker’s successor Edmund Grindal was more sympathetic to Puritan concerns, but came spectacularly to grief in 1577 over the issue of “prophesying.” These were gatherings of clergy in market towns to assess each other’s preaching – the key instrument of Protestant evangelization. Elizabeth saw a potential for subversion, and when Grindal courageously refused to suppress them, she suspended him from office. In the 1580s, Elizabeth’s third archbishop, John Whitgift, was a more ardent proponent of “con-
formity.” The decade witnessed calls, in Parliament and elsewhere, to replace the bishops with a system of church government, like that of Geneva, based on synods. But the Presbyterian movement was embarrassed by the appearance of the scurrilously anti-episcopal “Marprelate tracts” in 1588–9, and collapsed as a viable political force.

With few exceptions, however, Puritans were a group campaigning for change within the Church, rather than an oppositional party outside it. The trend of recent research has been to emphasize the common ground between Puritans and other Protestants, and to see Puritans as merely “the hotter sort of Protestants” (Collinson 1967: 27). Despite differences over ritual and ceremony, the majority of Elizabethan clergy shared basic doctrinal assumptions, particularly an adherence to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, though Puritans were more prone to intense self-scrutiny about their status as one of the heaven-bound “elect.” Another point of connection was an intense anti-Catholicism, fueled by recent memories of Marian persecution, and by contemporary events such as the massacre of Protestants in Paris in 1572, and the attempt by Catholic Spain to invade England in 1588.

The Catholic Community

Meanwhile English Catholics were coming to terms with their catastrophic political defeat in 1558–9. Catholics, or at least religious conservatives, were almost certainly the majority at the start of Elizabeth’s reign, but without effective leadership, most conformed outwardly to the Church of England, a compromise made easier by Queen Elizabeth’s famous disinclination to “make windows into men’s hearts.” But around the end of the 1560s a number of circumstances conspired to present Catholics with starker choices. The flight into England of Mary Queen of Scots in 1568 supplied a figurehead, a Catholic alternative and potential successor to Elizabeth. A rebellion in the north of England in 1569 aimed to free Mary from captivity, and she remained the focus of Catholic plotting until Elizabeth finally agreed to have her executed in 1587. Also in 1568, Catholic clerical exiles established a seminary at Douai in the Spanish Netherlands to send missionaries secretly back into England, a task in which they were joined from 1580 by English Jesuits ordained in Rome. The consequence
in England was a new phenomenon: Recusancy, a principled refusal by Catholics to attend the services of the established Church. Recusancy was punished with fines, becoming progressively heavier over the course of the reign. But lay Catholics were usually not subjected to the kinds of pressures Protestants had endured under Mary. The priests, by contrast were treated harshly. Between 1577 and 1603, 124 seminarists and Jesuits (around one-quarter of all priests who went on the English mission) were hanged, drawn, and quartered for treason. Despite these heavy losses, their ministry ensured the survival of Catholicism in England, and undermined the Elizabethan ideal of uniform adherence to a national Church. But there was a price to be paid. The missionaries relied heavily on the Catholic gentry, whose manor houses and ingeniously constructed priest holes offered a modicum of protection. As a result, rural Catholic populations in outlying regions were neglected, and some priests ended up de facto domestic chaplains to Catholic landowners, who expected to call the shots. The outcome has been seen as an inward-looking “seigneurial Catholicism.” In the latter part of Elizabeth’s reign, the effectiveness of the mission was hampered by furious quarrels between Jesuits and secular priests over matters of Church organization, and over how much compromise to make with the regime.

By the end of the reign recorded recusants were a small minority of the population, only around 2 percent even in areas where Catholicism was relatively strong, such as Yorkshire. But Catholics were far from an irrelevance, and Catholicism — or popery — remained a burning political question. In part this was because of the continuing threat from hostile Catholic powers such as Spain; in part because of the failure of Reformation in Tudor Ireland; in part because of Catholicism’s disproportionate representation among gentry and nobility. But it was also because no one was quite sure how many Catholics there were. Not just in the 1560s, but throughout the reign, there were many “church papists,” those who combined outward conformity with inward allegiance to Rome, or at least a powerful hankering for the past. Popery was thus not merely an external force, but an insidious internal virus: Puritan clergy in particular were apt to detect its influence in all sorts of places, and were quick to shout “papist” at those of whose behavior or attitudes they disapproved.

**A Protestant Nation?**

Yet, for all the anxieties about residual, or resurgent, Catholicism under Elizabeth, the great majority of people did become Protestants, after a fashion. Most did so without spiritual epiphanies of the kind experienced by the evangelicals of the 1520s, but through steady exposure to sermons, catechisms, and the stately language of the Book of Common Prayer. The process was facilitated by generational handover among the clergy. From the 1580s, parish ministers who had been ordained as Catholic priests under Henry or Mary were dying out, and being replaced by resolute Protestants from the universities. A fundamental cultural shift involved the printed English Bible, a daring novelty in 1525, but ubiquitous three-quarters of a century later, with dozens
of editions entering churches and, increasingly, people’s homes. We can also identify a distinctively Protestant popular religious culture starting to fill the vacuum left by the decimation of the old ritual year. Parishes feasted and rang their bells to celebrate the accession day of Elizabeth (17 November), and congregations welcomed the opportunity to engage in the one godly-approved form of musical activity, the singing of metrical psalms.

Elizabeth reigned for nearly four times as long as her brother and sister combined, and this fortuitous circumstance allowed the Reformation to put down roots and shape the cultural life of the nation. But the concomitants were hardly equilibrium and stability. Confessional identities hardened and clarified in the later Tudor decades, generally in oppositional relationship to each other; yet something that no one was in favor of – religious pluralism – became an ineradicable fact of life. The official Church itself was an unstable religious coalition, with a large and ill-digested medieval inheritance. And, at the local level, the perceived demands of religion regularly inflamed cultural division. Puritan ministers tried to ban maypoles, dancing and Sunday football. Opponents mocked their ambition to banish “cakes and ale.” The ultimate meaning of Reformation was, in 1603, an as yet unresolved question.

References


Further Reading

In July 1563 Elizabeth Lowys gained the dubious honor of being the first person prosecuted under the 1563 Elizabethan “Act against Conjurations, Enchantments, and Witchcrafts.” The wife of a poor farmer, mother of five daughters, and a “cunning woman” (that is, a woman who practiced “white” magic), Elizabeth had faced public censure previously: In 1559 she quarreled with another local woman, Philippa Gaele, who had called her a witch. Nothing further came of that accusation, and over the succeeding years Elizabeth had continued to work with men and women from her area, Great Waltham in Essex, overseeing childbirths and caring for them during various illnesses. She even treated livestock. During this time, however, some individuals died or became worse under her care, and she accumulated enemies; when she was brought before the court in 1564 she was accused of sickening livestock and killing two people through malice and in order to earn extra income by “unwitching” them. Despite her vociferous opposition to the charges, she was condemned to be hung and was executed at the next assize in March 1565 (Gibson 1998).

Lowys’ case seems to conform to modern stereotypes about the early modern witch hunts, but abbreviated recountings can blur their complexities. In fact, there may be no “typical” witchcraft case. Tudor witchcraft was situational, regional, and individual – circumstances which make attempts to generalize difficult. That situation is exacerbated here because this chapter will also consider Scottish witchcraft during the sixteenth century, until the accession of James VI to the English throne as James I in 1604. While Scotland was a separate kingdom during the Tudor era, there are reasons to link the two: Witchcraft pamphlets from James’ early reign circulated to England, and Scottish prosecutions and political concerns involving witchcraft influenced late Tudor and early Stuart policies and literature. Taking into account these complexities, this chapter will attempt to summarize recent research in what has been an extraordinarily active field of inquiry since the mid-1970s. In the process, it will describe the Tudor definitions of and activities against witches, the sources available to modern readers about early modern English witchcraft, the political and social significance of
Witchcraft in Tudor England and Scotland

witchcraft, and the ways belief in witchcraft complements other aspects of religion and folklore. In particular, it will explore the exchange of ideas and practices in what Robin Briggs has so rightly termed the “super-enchanted world” of Tudor England (Briggs 2001: 176). As witchcraft trials help to reveal, witchcraft functioned as an idiom, a means of conceptualizing interpersonal, preternatural, and supernatural relationships.

Although Tudor rule ran from 1485 to 1603, most information about witchcraft comes from the second half of that period. In those records a witch was most commonly seen as someone who practiced evil deeds (*maleficium*), such as killing livestock and causing illness. In fact, willingness and ability to work evil were the qualities that typically distinguished a witch from another powerful local figure: the cunning man or woman. Both cunning folk and witches could remove curses cast by other witches, find treasure or lost items, and provide amulets or other magical talismans. Indeed, England had a long medieval tradition of men and women who could tap into supernatural forces (Davies 2003; Wilby 2005). Such individuals were also prosecuted for witchcraft in the Middle Ages, although more for actions deriving from witchcraft than for being witches. In England and Scotland, as in much of western and central Europe, witchcraft prosecutions declined in the first half of the sixteenth century. By the middle of the century, perhaps because of newly strengthened laws, witchcraft prosecutions were on the rise. In surviving English church court records from this time, there were generally several accusations a year, and in 1559 a Bill against witchcraft was introduced in Parliament. In Scotland there is evidence for sporadic prosecutions in Kirk courts during much of the second half of the sixteenth century, and its first large-scale panic was in 1568 (Jones and Zell 2005). The passage of the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act and a Scottish parliamentary Act in 1563 thus reflected growing activity and prosecution against witches. Approximately 2,000 people were tried and 300 executed for witchcraft between 1560 and 1706 in England, and Scotland’s numbers were higher: Approximately three times as many were tried, even though Scotland’s population was one-quarter that of England (Levack 2001: 219). A sign of the increased prosecutions to come in the seventeenth century, the Jacobean Witchcraft Act of 1604 revised the earlier Elizabethan statute and made injuring people or damaging property a capital offense.

Scholarly Approaches and the Narratives of Witchcraft

Although witchcraft research in the last twenty years has greatly revised past truisms about Tudor and Stuart witchcraft, the classic studies of Alan Macfarlane (*Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 1970) and Keith Thomas (*Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 1971) continue to influence interpretations. Macfarlane’s case study of Essex linked the rise of witchcraft accusations to the subversion of traditional social and economic bonds through population growth, changes in landownership, and an increasingly market economy (Sharpe 1999: xi–xxv). Like Macfarlane, Keith Thomas argued that
social and economic stresses created increased demands for charity but also inclined individuals to deny that charity. As an outgrowth of subsequent guilt, individuals might believe that the person to whom they denied charity caused later misfortunes, essentially transforming the unfortunate into witches (Thomas 1971; Barry et al. 1996). Overall, Thomas depicted medieval England as a world where the supernatural and mundane regularly interacted and saw his project as tracing a Weberian “disenchantment” of that world that extended into the eighteenth century.

In Scottish witchcraft studies Christina Larner occupies much the same position as that held by Thomas and Macfarlane in English analyses (Larner 1981 and 1984). Although indebted to Thomas, Larner advocated the need to see witchcraft trials in their philosophical context, to embed the trials in the legal culture which formed them, and to examine the political currents which influenced the development and passage of statutes against witches. Emphasizing the elites’ role in initiating and perpetuating Scottish witch trials, Larner described witchcraft accusations as arising from a process of Christianization in Scottish society. Larner also contributed to the evaluation of gender’s role in Scottish witchcraft. For Larner, witchcraft was clearly tied to gender; to deny that women were more likely than men to be accused of witchcraft would be disingenuous. On the other hand, witches were not necessarily women, so that witchcraft was not and should not be linked to women automatically. Given the connections between witchcraft studies and modern feminism, this claim has probably been her most controversial.

These three scholars, and more recent ones, have relied on a surprisingly finite but diverse series of documents. Material about witchcraft can be found in archival and manuscript sources, such as secular and ecclesiastical court records, commonplace books, and diaries, and in printed materials like pamphlets, treatises, plays, and even songs. Given that archival materials on witchcraft are relatively rare for both England and Scotland in the sixteenth century and that witchcraft pamphlets published prior to the 1590s tend to reprint legal documents verbatim, many modern editions have concentrated on printed materials. Although the massive online compendia of Early English Books Online (EEBO) and its earlier microfilm version of materials in the English Short Title Catalog are the largest and most widely disseminated collections of Tudor printed materials, witchcraft scholars have also published editions integrating primary and secondary materials that make original witchcraft texts more readily available (Macdonald 1991; Normand and Roberts 2000; Sharpe 2003 vols. 1 and 2; Gibson 2000 and 2007, to name some of the more recent). For Scotland, there is also the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft (2003), a database of everyone accused of witchcraft in Scotland between 1563 and 1736.

The first English witchcraft pamphlet, The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde in the Countie of Essex, follows a standard pattern for early Elizabethan witchcraft pamphlets, both in its archival origins and in its transition to print. Like many Tudor witchcraft pamphlets, The Examination reproduces various legal documents comprising the trial record. These texts often start with the complaint against the person accused of witchcraft (information) and the Justice of the Peace’s
examination of the accused (examination); the latter generally comprises the bulk of the pamphlet. At the end there is a brief note giving the fate of the accused. In the 1590s this structure changed to one based on a third-person narration of the case, and this new pattern would dominate in seventeenth-century England. In these later documents a third-party – presiding judge, physician, or even person afflicted by the witch – often provided this commentary and, not surprisingly, often treated the case more polemically and less procedurally. In both situations, however, witchcraft pamphlets were produced because there was public interest in these stories, an important and sometimes slighted element in the composition and dissemination of published witchcraft cases. Printers appreciated the cases’ commercial potential and were quite willing to enhance it. In fact, printers themselves apparently hired individuals to copy these documents; woodcuts were produced to illustrate the highpoints of the case, frequently the witch’s execution; and distinctive lettering marked key points in the text. The commercial and promotional aspects of later Tudor pamphlets are even more apparent, given that individuals involved in the case may have written them (Gibson 1999: 118–39). The participant’s role in dissemination can be striking, as in that of Richard Galis who wrote A Brief Treatise Conteyning the Most Strange and Horrible Cruelty of Elizabeth Stile (1579) because he could not get his local Berkshire magistrates to believe that witches were attacking him (Gibson 2003: xi). The Mary Glover litigation of 1602–3 inspired a slew of pamphlets arguing for the medical, not magical, roots of her illness and for the efficacy of prayer in ridding her of her demons, all written by, or with the direct input of, someone involved in her bewitchment. Providing shocking accounts of witchcraft used in attempts to kill the king of Scotland, Newes from Scotland found an audience throughout England.

The need to contextualize sources about the sixteenth-century English and Scottish witchcraft trials has led scholars to focus increasingly on the legal structures and processes of these trials themselves. In both England and Scotland witches could be tried before both secular and church courts, but their distinct legal systems and different levels of centralization led to divergent trial processes. In England the secular courts were rarely involved in witchcraft trials until the 1542 witchcraft statute; from this stage, however, they came to dominate the proceedings. Most commonly a witchcraft accusation would be brought before a Justice of the Peace, who would issue a warrant for the accused’s arrest and take pre-trial testimony (Gibson 2000: 3–4). The Justice’s clerk would write down this testimony in a coherent form, even if it had been mangled in the telling. If the evidence was sufficient, the accused would typically be jailed while awaiting trial. In England torture was rarely used and then only extra-judicially in royal prerogative courts, such as the Star Chamber. Generally torture was not an issue because the trials were held before the assize courts, biannual circuits of two judges through one of the six judicial regions into which England was divided. The trials were of necessity often brief, 20–30 minutes. During the trial the accuser and accused confronted each other before the assize judges and a jury of those meeting strict property requirements (Durston 2000: 185–261, 275–85). There were
few formal rules of evidence and generally no legal representation, although in 1563
legislation was passed allowing judges to penalize perjury and compel witnesses to be
present at the trials (Rushton 2001: 25). Judges assessed penalties and guided the
court and jury, sometimes in quite invasive ways, as in the St Osyth trials in 1582
and the Mary Glover case in 1602–3. Convicted witches were most commonly hung
and rarely burned, but the fear of being burned appears among the accused in Tudor
pamphlets.

The Scottish legal system was less structured in the sixteenth century than that of
England, and the venues for prosecution appear to be more diffuse. Often witchcraft
litigation began in the sessions of the Kirk (Scottish Presbyterian Church), where an
accusation would be brought before the presiding church officials and testimony
taken. Confession was central to Scottish witchcraft trials, and torture was an accepted
part of Scottish law, only abandoned in 1708. Trials could also originate in commis-
sions issued from Edinburgh, which authorized officials to search for witches. In these
cases local lords and clergy were frequently the judicial officials, and their standards
of proof could be more flexible than those called for in statute and legal textbooks
(Sharpe 2002: 182–97; Normand and Roberts 2000: 84–91, 105–27). In addition,
local custom and reputation appeared to influence trials in Scotland even more than
in England, in part because of the personnel who administered the trials and in part
because of the lack of a strong, centralized supervisory body. The outbreak of witch-
craft in 1590–1 led to reforms in Scottish legal processes relating to witch trials
that attempted to minimize these inconsistencies and hinder the development of
panics. In 1597 laws were passed giving the Privy Council the right to determine
how far trials could proceed. While these laws did not prevent local witchcraft trials,
they placed them under increased governmental supervision, much like those in
England.

Some recent scholars have emphasized how the legal and political process produced
documents that must be understood as created objects. For these authors, the “authen-
tic speech of the witch” is difficult to find and may even be a scholarly chimera (Sta-
vreva 2000: 319), but witchcraft narratives must be read as layered and polyvalent
texts. In the trials themselves documents were not produced verbatim; testimony was
reorganized and reworded to fit legal requirements. At times it was composed several
days after the fact. Even the process of questioning contained narrative and creative
components, where the accused, accusers, and judges interacted to produce testimony
and processes that satisfied, or attempted to satisfy, the ideologies of those involved.
The transmission of these materials to print adds further narrative layers. When later
Elizabethan pamphlets do not reprint legal texts, comparisons between those accounts
and the legal manuscripts show some striking differences. Often these differences
enhanced the pamphlet’s marketability, reinforcing the need for witchcraft scholars
to recognize that their sources were in part commodities (Gibson 1999: 1–49; Stavreva
2000: 325; Rushton 2001). Witchcraft accounts have plots, and their emplotment
should affect scholars’ interpretations.
Examples and Patterns in England and Scotland

Despite the complexities in analyzing documents about witchcraft, patterns can be found in Tudor prosecutions. In general many English communities had individuals, other than members of the clergy, who believed themselves to be and who were believed to be in touch with supernatural forces. These men and women could cure illness, mitigate the weather, foretell the future, and provide various services to local residents. They also could call on more dangerous powers. There were many terms for these individuals – wise men/women, cunning men/women, witches – and the appellation varied depending on the individual’s activities and the perception of them by the community. For example, witches often worked as cunning folk, but most cunning folk were not witches. Those believed to be witches could come from witch lineages and were known to be such by their community. Witches were commonly women, although they did not have to be. A specific complaint, frequently an argument between neighbors, generally triggered the prosecution. Most frequently the witch was accused of causing this neighbor harm: preventing a cow from giving milk, killing a newborn child, or blighting fields. The process of accusation, refutation, and collection of testimony often involved at least two families and their friends, if not many members of a village or neighborhood. When judges and other individuals with some expertise were involved, something more likely to happen in later rather than earlier Elizabethan cases, questions might direct the witch to tell about her “familiar,” a supernatural creature which served her and she nourished through her own blood or milk. The emphasis on familiars distinguishes English witchcraft trials, although some instances do appear in continental Europe. The link of familiars to the demonic was extensively developed in the seventeenth century. Because of the nature of assize courts, trials were often quick, although the process of gathering information and the delay between accusation and trial could take several months. Rarely did a case last more than a year, but individuals might be accused several times of witchcraft and, therefore, appear repeatedly in the trial records. Pregnant women could plea for a stay of execution until their child was born, and often if this grace was given, the witch would never be executed. In fact, more often than not, the accused witch was acquitted, but suspicions had been raised which could make her susceptible to future accusations.

While many examples of English witch trials could be used to illustrate the points noted above – and almost as many could be found that contradict them – the case of the Chelmsford witches provides a clear and “representative” example of a Tudor witchcraft case. Although records of earlier trials have been found, the Chelmsford witches appear to be the first to merit their own pamphlet (1566). The case was brought to the authority’s attention when Agnes Brown accused Agnes (Mother) Waterhouse of having sent her familiar to disrupt Agnes Brown’s work in the milkhouse. As the justice and Queen’s attorney gathered information, however, the ties of witchcraft grew to encompass other members of their community. According to
Mother Waterhouse, she received her familiar, Sathan, from Elizabeth Frauncis; it first appeared as a cat, but because it had figured in a previous witchcraft trial as a cat, it took the form of a toad or a black dog when working for Mother Waterhouse. When the familiar worked for Elizabeth Frauncis, it arranged her marriages, assisted her with an abortion, killed a child, and lamed her husband—all at Elizabeth's request—for the price of milk, bread, and some of Elizabeth's blood. After approximately fifteen years, Elizabeth became "weary of it" and gave it to Mother Waterhouse, who used it in similar ways: to destroy cattle, murder a man, and vex the Browns who had denied her bread and cheese. Her first point of conflict with the Browns was through their twelve-year-old daughter, Agnes. Agnes Brown accused Mother Waterhouse of sending a misshapen animal ("a thing like a black Dog with a face like an ape, a short tail, a chain and a silver whistle … about his neck, and a pair of horns on his head") to torment her. Agnes Brown could thwart this figure by calling on the name of Jesus, a sure sign of its demonic origins; Agnes Waterhouse's later testimony and confession confirmed this origin when she noted that he demanded to have sex with her and that he could not bear to have prayers such as the Hail Mary and Our Father said, especially in Latin. The Chelmsford case ended with Agnes Waterhouse's hanging. Elizabeth Frauncis was imprisoned for a year, and Joan Waterhouse, who had been brought into the case during her mother's prosecution, was found not guilty. Thirteen years later Elizabeth Frauncis was brought before the court again on a charge of witchcraft. This time she was found guilty and hung (Gibson 2000: 10–24).

Scottish cases, too, followed some general patterns, but they differed from English ones, as is appropriate given their different social and legal context. While the first known Scottish witchcraft trial occurred in 1479, the simultaneous increase in witch prosecutions and the institutionalization of the Scottish Kirk was far from a coincidence. Scholars of Scottish witchcraft stress the Kirk's role in promoting the Scottish Witchcraft Statute of 1563—passed in the same year as the one in England but not inspired by it—and the participation of Presbyterian ministers, such as John Erskine, in regional witch-hunts (Graham 1996: 298–308; Maxwell-Stuart 2001). Moreover, the regions and populations where witch hunts were more likely to occur were those in which the Kirk had made the greatest headway: in the Lowlands and with the more educated populations. As in many witchcraft trials, Scottish ones tended to arise based on local conditions and injuries: damaged livestock, maimed individuals, deceptive fortune-telling, and consorting with various "unnatural," and therefore supernatural, beings. The use of torture in Scottish trials gave them increased potential to escalate, as did the interests of the court and Kirk. The Kirk contributed to popular witchcraft panic by supporting, in 1592, "the establishment of standing commissions for the prosecution of witches in local areas … and the temporary loss of central regulation of witchcraft prosecutions" (Normand and Roberts 2000: 77). Under those conditions Scotland experienced its most extensive sixteenth-century prosecution.

This case, the most famous in sixteenth-century Scotland, was that of the North Berwick witches, and it presaged activities and attitudes found among witchcraft prosecutors in the seventeenth century. News about these trials also spread into
England through the influential pamphlet *Newes from Scotland* and may have also affected perceptions there. The name “North Berwick trials” is often given to one of two blocks of trials: the initial ones which fell between November 1590 and December 1591 or the witch hunts occurring throughout the Lowlands of Scotland between 1590 and 1597. Following the terminology most common among scholars of Scottish witchcraft, this paragraph focuses on the trials of 1590–1. They began with accusations against four individuals of trying to raise storms and destroy shipping in the nearby Firth of Forth, actions which also endangered King James VI and his wife, Queen Anne of Denmark. The fears inspired by the witches accelerated when their actions were linked to a presumed conspiracy by a leading Scottish noble and potential claimant to the throne, Francis Stewart, the Earl of Bothwell, to murder the king by sinking his ship. A feud between Stewart and James’ chancellor, Maitland, may have been behind the charges; James did not initially believe them. Only after several months of testimony and the arrest of dozens of men and women accused of conspiracy and sorcery was the king convinced. As the trials continued, the king and the Privy Council became directly involved, themselves questioning witnesses, using torture, and even sitting as judges at trials. Their participation marked the trials as extraordinary and would occasion legal reforms in 1597 designed to prevent the escalation of accusations that arose here. In the end, six witches were executed; one, Euphame MacCalzean, was burned alive, an exceptionally harsh punishment even at that time. Bothwell was accused of witchcraft and fled, in the process forfeiting four properties. It was not his last foray into Scottish politics. In 1593 Bothwell staged a coup at court, where he gained effective control over James and had himself acquitted of the charges of witchcraft. In 1595 the winds of court politics shifted, and Bothwell the witch was exiled (Normand and Roberts 2000).

The North Berwick trials are one of a series of cases traditionally cited as reinforcing the idea that Scottish and English witchcraft were essentially different. Scottish witchcraft is depicted as more “continental” in its emphasis on pacts and conspiracies, while English witchcraft and its response to witches as more indigenous. While this perspective has been challenged, there is some basis for these distinctions. Certainly English trial records focus far less on assaults by incubi and succubae and on blasphemous and promiscuous sabbats than their continental counterparts and some Scottish demonologies, such as James VI/I’s *Daemonologie* (Sharpe 2002: 190–1). When searching for evidence of witchcraft on witches’ bodies, English examiners tended to look for the witch’s teat, an outgrowth where a familiar would nurse, while Scottish judges sought for the witch’s mark, an insensible area which could be pricked or stabbed without causing a witch pain. Scottish trials apparently became more widespread earlier; under the Tudors there were no mass panics comparable to those against the North Berwick witches. In addition, news about witchcraft was more likely to have circulated in England via print before 1590, although after that date Scottish printers made up for lost time. Differences in witches’ activities and practices also appear, but beyond a certain stage, the itemization of differences becomes pointless. Constant similarities would be even more remarkable, given the folkloric nature of many
witchcraft and related magical beliefs and the relatively limited readership of most witchcraft treatises.

While accepting the influence of cultural and legal context, recent scholars have instead stressed the similarities between Scottish and English witchcraft and between their cases and those on the European continent. Variations are discussed as the product of local folkloric cultures and, as such, were present throughout Europe. Certainly sixteenth-century authors from England, Scotland, and all over continental Europe who grappled with why God allowed witchcraft to exist, a topic called theodicy, came up with similar reasons: "to chasten sinful humankind; to punish sin directly; to punish humankind’s ingratitude in not accepting revealed truth; to shake up the godly who were lapsing into sinfulness; [and] to test Christians to see if, under adversity, they would cleave to God or desert Him for the devil" (Sharpe 1996: 83). Evil in some form always played a key role in witchcraft accusations and trials, whether it was personified evil (Satan) or evil deeds (maleficia). The localized nature of early modern society accounts for many distinctions, but the connection between local beliefs, communal tensions, and spiritual practices pervades most studies of European witchcraft. Witches were, for example, often linked to elements of local folklore the established clergy found somewhat suspect: They might work in cahoots with fairies, interact with human-like beasts (were-bears, wolves, and foxes), and haunt suspicious caves or rivers. The great variety of legal codes and institutions under which witches were tried in early modern Europe affected accusations and trials, but their effects were similar in many European regions. Although English law’s foundation in custom has often been cited as distinguishing its cases from a continental system based on Roman law, in practice continental codes continued to incorporate many customary practices in the sixteenth century. At the local and rural level, moreover, the village headman or the merchants who comprised a town council may have rendered the initial verdict.

**Demonology, Skepticism, and Religious Politics**

As interest in witchcraft soared in the second half of the sixteenth century, texts were newly prepared and old ones reprinted that studied Satan’s characteristics, motivations, and activities. Known as demonologies, these texts reflect the link between witchcraft and demons increasingly made at this time among a literate audience. While many demonologies only appeared in Latin, others were prepared in the vernacular, and some appeared in several languages. These developments would only escalate in the first half of the seventeenth century. Moreover, the trade in demonologies appears to have been international, which led to the circulation of ideas not only between England and Scotland, but between those two countries and the continent. For example, Jean Bodin’s *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers* (1580) and the Calvinist Lambert Daneau’s *A Dialogue of Witches* (English, 1575) both influenced native demonologists in England. Although England produced several extensive
demonologies in the 1590s – Henry Holland’s *A Treatise Against Witchcraft* (1590) and George Gifford’s *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593) – they do not appear to have had the same influence as their continental counterparts. Probably the most significant for later generations was the work of the leading Protestant theologian, William Perkins. He composed *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608) before his death in 1602, and it circulated widely in England and Scotland and on the continent, as did many of his other writings. Based on sermons Perkins gave at Cambridge during the end of Elizabeth’s reign, *A Discourse* depicts witchcraft as one of the most dangerous irreligious practices because it implicitly, and even explicitly, rejected God’s providence. While it is unclear to what extent these books and the witchcraft pamphlets triggered accusations, they certainly coalesced and molded literate thought and increasingly provided a soteriological significance to actions whose consequences may have seemed in the past to be personal and local (Clark 1997).

Of England and Scotland’s demonologists, probably the most famous is James VI/I, whose *Daemonologie* (1597) was once falsely blamed for triggering witch hunting in England and Scotland. The traditional interpretation of *Daemonologie* sees it as the product of James’s active involvement in the North Berwick trials and the terror inspired by the attempt on his life and that of Anne of Denmark; he then brought the patterns and determination of the Scottish prosecutions with him to England and used them to effect the 1604 English Witchcraft Act. This perspective is based on coincidence and exaggeration. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that James was a reluctant participant in the initial stages of the Berwick trials, only escalating his involvement when witchcraft was linked to his dynasty’s destruction. He showed similar moderation in English cases brought to his attention once he ascended to the English throne. James has also been blamed for importing continental demonological ideas into Scotland and eventually England through his contacts with the famous Danish scholar and demonologist, Neils Hemmingsen. As with the first claim, this second has been successfully challenged. Whatever Hemmingsen’s influence on James, the subjects developed in the *Daemonologie* are conventional – its three books are divided into magic in general, sorcery and witchcraft, and spirits and ghosts – as is its dialogic structure. If the *Daemonologie*'s publication inspired demonologists, their traceable production is minimal. Recent scholars have even questioned the reception of James’ work: “When *Daemonologie* appeared in print, public praise for the learned royal author was conspicuous by its absence” (Goodare 2002: 70).

While there are many reasons for this lukewarm response to *Daemonologie*, modern scholars have stressed the presence of influential skeptics within England. The most prominent was Reginald Scot, whose *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) set the tone for English skepticism for several centuries. Scot did not question the existence of witches, rather he discounted the powers attributed to them. For Scot, to believe that witches could cause storms, sicken healthy individuals, and overturn kingdoms was to assign power to witches that only God could rightly hold. He proved his cases through appeal to logic, evidence, common sense, and even philology: He argued that many
of those who thought witches had such powers were basing their ideas on mistranslations of Scripture. Although there is no evidence that Scot himself was involved in a witchcraft case, individuals in many trials exhibited some of his “practical scepticism” (Briggs 1996: 63). George Gifford stressed the influence of personal relationships on trials in his two witchcraft treatises, while his defeat in the Mary Glover case inspired physician Edward Jorden to write *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (1603), which argued for the physiological cause of symptoms ascribed to witchcraft. At the end of Elizabeth’s reign, such doubters held influential posts. During his time as Archbishop of London, Richard Bancroft worked closely with Samuel Harsnett and John Whitgift to undermine the claims of witchcraft. Their debunkings were linked less to a principled skepticism than to the connection they made between religious enthusiasm, as embodied by Presbyterianism and Puritanism, and enthusiasm for witchcraft accusations. In *A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practices of John Darrel* (1599) Samuel Harsnett condemned the Puritan Darrell’s “popish” use of exorcism to cure bewitched individuals as a challenge to God’s providence and true religion as embodied by the English Church. Such opposition from leading English clergy would continue into James I’s reign; Bancroft was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury after Whitgift’s death in 1604.

The activities of Bancroft, James I, and others assert the extent to which witchcraft could be political at both the local and national level. Local cases could revolve around the usurpation of authority by new residents (the trials at Warboys, executions in 1593) or the attempts of a local judge to establish his bona fides (the trials at St Osyth, executions in 1582). The political implications could, however, escalate dramatically when witchcraft was linked to dynastic change, as in the North Berwick trials or the attempts to employ magical dolls to injure Elizabeth. Such episodes readily led elsewhere to the equation of witchcraft and demon worship, and it is surprising how gradually this process developed in both England and Scotland. Despite its political and theological implications, the demonic pact would not affect trials dramatically until well into the Stuart era (Macdonald 2002: 34; Jones and Zell 2005: 49; Goodare 2005: 64). More common in sixteenth-century witchcraft was the presumption of a tacit agreement between witches and demons based on the belief that all those who employ supernatural powers or agents to achieve their goals could as easily be accessing demonic forces as divine forces and that those individuals are aware of this potential. Such implications only became significant when other witchcraft signs were present. While Scottish confessions in the 1590s showed classic aspects of the demonic pact, such as witches’ sabbats, they lacked many of the inverted Christian beliefs and actions that made the sabbat so appalling in later accounts: no trampled Bibles, no signing of the Book of Death, and no cannibalistic sacrifice of infants (Levack 2001: vii). Both skeptical and supportive sixteenth-century texts share a reluctance to ascribe too much power to the demonic, a circumstance some scholars link to the power of providentialism in English and Scottish Protestantism. Sixteenth-century England also saw the beginnings of a change in depictions of the devil, from a comic and limited figure to the challenger of God. The demonic jokester of folklore was too
weak, disorganized, and contradictory to recruit coherent, powerful allies, while the powerful demonic overlord of some seventeenth-century trials sought an army.

The presumed link made by intellectuals and some judges between witchcraft and "superstition" thus carried greater political force. The value given to Latin prayers, the exorcism of objects used in healing practices, and the invocation of spirits and fairies as assistants were all superstitions that Elizabethan theologians, such as Perkins and Holland, equated with Catholicism and, thus, the subversion of Elizabeth's godly kingdom. Such sentiments were also developed in works intended for a wider audience, as in *The Examination of John Walsh* (1566), where the accused witch testifies that he learned his rituals from a Catholic priest. Catholics were not assumed to be witches nor were witchcraft accusations used to prosecute clandestine Catholics; rather superstition and Catholicism were rhetorically linked in sermons and treatises as reflecting resistance to the Elizabethan religious settlement, a resistance that probably existed largely as nostalgia and custom. Witchcraft thus became subversion (Jones and Zell 2005: 60; Sharpe 2002: 194). In Scotland the connection between Catholicism, witchcraft, and political subversion was more explicit and played out as early as 1563 with the Scottish Witchcraft Act; it needs to be seen as part of the expansion of Presbyterianism and its link to Scottish court politics under Queen Mary (Goodare 2005). According to the Scottish opponents of religious compromise, generally Presbyterian, Catholic "superstition" was founded on diabolic power and, as such, denied God. These polemicists never made a direct equation between Catholicism and witchcraft, but it is no coincidence that the first person prosecuted under the new statute was the servant of a Catholic priest (Willis 2002: 136). As in England, "[s]urvivals of Catholic rituals and belief … were easily lumped together with older beliefs and practices, and categorized by the reformers as diabolic. Protestants campaigned against both cunning folk and catholics, though the distinction was often unclear" (Normand and Roberts 2000: 57–8).

Vehement in opposing "popish" remnants, Elizabethan Puritans wrote influential treatises about witchcraft and were at the heart of several key witchcraft cases, performing activities similar to those condemned by more mainstream Protestant authors as superstitious. Puritanism and Presbyterianism in sixteenth-century England and Scotland did not yet enjoy the full strength that they would have in following centuries, but in their Calvinist fervor, unwillingness to compromise, and focus on reform of the ecclesiastical establishment, secular and church authorities could regard them as just as dangerous as Catholics. There were reasons for this attitude: In 1591 a radical Puritan group announced that one of their members was Christ and that Elizabeth had relinquished her throne because of her support for the existing ecclesiastical establishment (Walsham 1988). While Scotland's Presbyterians were focused on the elimination of witches through trials, England’s Puritans produced one of the leading early English authors on witchcraft: George Gifford. Holder of a privately endowed lectureship in Maldon—he had been deprived of his official benefice in 1580 because of nonconformity—he published *A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devills by Witches and Sorcerers* (1587), one of the first English books to make the connection between
witches and demons explicit, and the *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593). Gifford apparently saw his treatise, especially the *Dialogue*, as a guide to other pastors and the literate generally, stating that he was writing to prevent people from believing that witches had the powers they claimed and to dissuade people from consulting cunning men and women. He accepts the existence of witches; he denies the powers that they and the devil claim. Stressing God’s providence, Gifford reveals the extent to which his parishioners, and by implication many rural English, continued to assume that magic was a valuable tool in their affairs.

Puritans themselves were also involved in witchcraft cases as exorcists of the demonically possessed. Possession cases exist from throughout the Tudor period; Sir Thomas More wrote about a dispossession at the shrine of Our Lady at Ipswich. Marked by violent fits and the vomiting of foreign objects (hair, pins, toads), demoniacs embodied the battle all Christians faced between the forces of good and evil; thus, the successful expulsion of demons provided a vivid witness to God’s salvific power. While not all cases of possession in sixteenth-century England involved witches sending demons to possess their victims, some of the more sensational and politically fraught cases in the later Elizabethan era did. Probably the most famous exorcist at that time was the Puritan preacher John Darrell, who first came to widespread attention when he dispossessed a girl named Katherine Wright. Although the case was thrown out and Darrell disappears from the historical record for approximately a decade, he reappeared in 1596 and 1597, exorcizing a series of individuals in York. When these cases led to convictions for witchcraft and an outburst of religious “enthusiasm,” representatives of the Archbishop of York examined him, and Darrell was eventually imprisoned for fraud. Not one to take this situation lying down, Darrell wrote *An Apologie, or Defense of the Possession of William Sommers* (c. 1599), in which he stressed the role of his personal faith and knowledge of Scripture in combating witches and their demonic allies. The Church’s tools were clearly ineffective (Sharpe 2001: 148–53; Holmes 1993: 62–5). Darrell’s activities were part of a series of exorcism cases, both fraudulent and approved, involving witches in the Elizabethan era, and his treatise joins that by George More in stressing the central place of the covenant in all spiritual relationships: those between God and humanity and those between the devil and witches.

**Familiars, Fairies, and Popular Beliefs**

When these authors discussed the close relationships between spirits and witches, one of the figures they most frequently pointed to were the dogs, cats, toads, and other small animals living with a witch. Such “familiars” were a distinctive aspect of English witchcraft both during and after the Tudor period and appear to have grown out of fairy lore; those who had them would describe them as “angels,” “saints,” “sprites,” “imps,” “spirits of the dead,” and even fairies (Wilby 2005: 57). The familiar would do activities for the witch that the witch would find difficult or impossible to do; in
return the familiar would be housed and well-fed with milk, meat, and prime grains. Later witchcraft trials depicted the familiar as demanding the witch’s blood or milk, although the first recorded case of searching for a mark on the witch’s body where a familiar was fed only appears in 1579 (Holmes 1993: 70). In general, however, the familiar’s role was quite variable; in some cases it appeared almost like a pet, while in others, such as the 1566 Chelmsford trial, it assumed threatening aspects, demanded food, and was repulsed by prayers. The response of theologians and demonologists to familiars was far less variable. For figures such as Gifford and Perkins, the familiar was Satan himself. Cloaked in a harmless disguise, the familiar testified to Satan’s deceptiveness and his obsession with damning all God’s creatures (Willis 2002: 139–40).

The familiars found in sixteenth-century Scottish witch trials confirm, as in England, the existence of a middle ground in popular belief between the stark binaries of heaven and hell. In particular Scottish familiars bear strong resemblance to the entities commonly described in Scottish folklore as fairies. These fairy/familiars looked, lived, and experienced emotions like people. They could go anywhere that humans went and also into separate lands of “fairy,” which gave them access to powers beyond human comprehension. Whereas before the Reformation such amoral characters could subsist in a form of theological limbo, the increasingly confessionalized world of the later sixteenth and seventeenth century demanded their classification as heavenly or demonic figures (Bennett 2001). Fairy-like qualities could also be ascribed to the dead, and several extremely solid ghosts returned to assist individuals in activities that led to accusations of witchcraft. The case of Bessie Dunlop and Thom Reid is just one of those that demonstrate the fluidity between the realms of ghosts, spirits, fairies, sprites, familiars, and witches. In 1576 Thom Reid visited Bessie Dunlop. He behaved like a neighbor, but he had been dead since 1547. What followed was a series of visits and voyages between Thom and Bessie where he challenged her faith, took her to the land of fairy, and provided her with supernatural tools to assist her in the art of healing. Bessie gained fame for her medical skills and her gift of prophecy, both of which Thom provided. Bessie’s activities in this area eventually led to her prosecution for witchcraft, and Thom’s involvement, to which Bessie freely testified, provided confirmation for her prosecutors that she consorted with a devil (Wilby 2005: 302).

Figures like familiars were most commonly preoccupied with helping their witch gain the necessities for life: money, food, health, family. In fact, sixteenth-century English and Scottish witch trials were striking in the witch’s focus on the mundane. The prevalence of such circumstances, including denying the witch food or some other form of charity, has led some historians to focus on the denial of charity and ensuing guilt as a paramount reason for witch prosecutions. Finding such arguments “insufficient,” recent work has stressed the other benefits presumed witches received from their magic and supernatural access (Stavreva 2000; Willis 1995). In particular suspected witches often got power. There was a long medieval tradition of powerful ritual cursing, and witches benefited from the power that their very utterance was presumed to have. Witches themselves shared this belief; when Elizabeth Jackson caused a
teenager to suffer, she was pleased and exclaimed, “I thanck my God he hath heard my prayer, and stopped the mouth and tyed the tongue of one of myne enemies” (Walsham 1998: 43 n. 71). Jackson’s success with and reputation for such malefic actions backfired and led to her conviction. There is evidence, however, that some individuals successfully negotiated such perils and enjoyed reputations as witches or at least as individuals with access to supernatural powers, reputations that lasted for decades and allowed them to live comfortable lives.

Such circumstances also emphasized the personal and local nature of witchcraft accusations and trials. An unhappy husband could say his wife lamed him through spells. A brawl at a football match could lead to the death of two men, village feuds, and accusations of possession (Sharpe 2001: 14–42). Children could see bewitchment as a means to challenge authority, and some individuals were just contentious and saw witchcraft whenever their will was thwarted. Poor harvests, bad weather, and outbreaks of plague could also set a scene where accusations of witchcraft might be more readily received, as has been suggested for the major Scottish witch hunt of 1590–7 (Normand and Roberts 2000: 56). In particular trials often revealed the tensions and networks within village communities. They also frequently demonstrate that the accusation and prosecution of witchcraft were not merely the provenance of the poor. Opposed to popular contemporary conceptions that portray witches as poor and repressed, some scholars have argued that many of those involved in both English and Scottish witch cases at this time belong to the more “middling” classes (Sharpe 2001: 108). Some of the more dramatic Elizabethan cases involve the tensions that ensue when new, prosperous families attempt to integrate themselves into existing village society.

Such emphases would seem to challenge the stereotype that depicts witchcraft as a female crime, but there are strong reasons for the connection between witches and women, not the least of which being that it was made at the time. Long misogynistic traditions in late medieval and early modern society depicted women as more susceptible than men to corruption, demonic and otherwise. Early modern judges and commentators complained that female physiology could often lead to a false diagnosis of bewitchment when the bewitched was really suffering from “suffocation of the mother” or a “wandering womb” (Willis 1995: 66, 194–5; Gibson 2007; Hester 1996). Even those pamphlets that depict witches as laughable figures, such as A World of Wonders (1595), used gendered humor and threats to the masculinity or femininity of their assailants. While both men and women could transmit the propensity for witchcraft to their offspring, female transmission was generally considered the most common and powerful means.

Rather than deny such clear connection between women and witches, recent scholarship asks that its analysis be nuanced, especially the involvement of women in witch trials. Certainly women participated in many ways: In England, they could act as both accusers and accused and as court “officers” examining accused women for physical signs of being a witch, but in Scotland women only gained the right to give evidence in witchcraft cases in 1591 (Normand and Roberts 2000: 60). Where records exist
that allow a statistically significant sample for the Tudor era, it has been shown that in Essex from 1596–1602 “38.2 per cent of witnesses against witches whose names were endorsed on the indictments were women” (Holmes 1993: 47–8). This number would increase dramatically during the seventeenth century, and Holmes accounts for that change through the shift in accusations against witches from attacks on livestock, livestock being primarily a male sphere of interest, to attacks on reputation and childbirth, areas in which women were more intensely involved. Estimates for the percentage of women accused in Essex range as high as 93 percent for 1560–1675, but those numbers have been challenged as unrepresentative of all of England, and they rely heavily on seventeenth-century cases. In Scotland, the percentage of women accused appears to be far less, with some scholars speculating that in the fifteenth century witches might be equally male or female, although the evidence is sketchy. As in the case of England, however, scholars have noted that women played an increasingly large role in witchcraft cases during the seventeenth century, with the key transformative period being the 1590s.

Distinguishing male and female participation in witchcraft is made even more complex by the ambiguous terminology used for witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In particular, modern scholars must grapple with the status of cunning men and women, a topic that was debated even in the Elizabethan era. Both England and Scotland had long traditions of individuals, generally known by modern scholars as cunning folk, who were involved in activities that could easily segue into witchcraft: finding objects, curing illnesses, conjuring spirits, telling fortunes, and preparing potions, spells, and charms. Some of these activities could be double-edged: Curing illnesses could become casting illnesses, and thieves could return stolen goods because evil spirits had tormented them into doing it. It has been estimated that several thousand cunning folk may have been practicing at any one time in Elizabethan England; they frequently had status beyond that obtained through their magical skill, and approximately two-thirds were men (Davies 2003: 67–8). Cunning folk could specialize in particular fields, like love potions, and refer clients to cunning colleagues in neighboring villages. Although the 1542 and 1563 witchcraft laws included cunning folk among those subject to prosecution, and their activities may have inspired the 1542 law, many cunning folk avoided punishment (Davies 2003). Moreover, people of all social classes solicited magical aid (Gaskill 2000: 47). For cunning folk, the keys to success appear to have been the openness and benevolence of their practice. Although official theology would challenge such a qualification, claiming that all practitioners of magic were by definition evil and that good witches (such as cunning folk) did not exist, in practice even the Scottish Kirk sessions “usually shared or deferred to their congregations’ distinction” (Goodare 2005: 55).

For those facing bewitchment, sixteenth-century English and Scottish society offered a wide variety of remedies. At the most basic level people generally avoided antagonizing suspected witches and often tolerated their activities for years before bringing formal accusations. Once stricken, people could turn to experts like cunning folk or even take their cure into their own hands. They could scratch the witch’s face
until blood was drawn or force the witch to withdraw the curse. Burning the thatch from the suspected witch’s home or some of the witch’s hair were ways of both lifting a curse and testing to see if someone really was a witch. Specially constructed shoes or bottles, called “bellarmines,” were believed to trap devils and wayward spirits used by witches, and thousands have been found buried in the hearths or foundations of homes; in fact, they were popular enough that they were imported especially from Germany during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Oldridge 2000: 145). Theologians such as Perkins and Holland strongly disapproved of such folkloric—or, as they would say, “superstitious”—remedies and urged prayer or prosecution; among the small Catholic community exorcism and various sacramentals could be employed, depending on the type of bewitchment. Prosecution was generally the last recourse.

While many of the qualities of sixteenth-century English and Scottish witchcraft can be traced to medieval antecedents, the social and spiritual turmoil of the era caused changes in the attitudes towards and prosecution of such magical activities. Scholars frequently point to “tension,” “crises,” or “confession formation” as ways of understanding the transition between societies with relatively few prosecutions to those where prosecutions were escalating and magic was increasingly perceived as threatening. While it has rightly been noted that “change” exists throughout history and is not unique to the Tudor period, the growing preoccupation with witchcraft and the danger witches posed during this time has not been convincingly explained. This chapter can unfortunately offer no conclusive explanation, but it does point to the pivotal role of the sixteenth century, especially the last half, in setting the stage for the dramatic witch hunts of the seventeenth century.

References


3

The Tudor Experience of Islam

Matthew Dimmock

In 1505 Manuel I of Portugal sent Henry VII a “small book of instruction” intended to encourage the English king to commit to a crusade “against the infidels … who hold and occupy the Holy Land” (Tyerman 1988: 306). Exactly 60 years later, Philip II of Spain would send another English ruler, Elizabeth I, a narrative of the widely celebrated relief of the Ottoman siege of Malta, a text similarly preoccupied with Christian–Islamic conflict. On the surface, these two examples of royal correspondence offer a seamless connection that reveals Christian opposition to perceived Muslim depredations, recognition of shared Christian values, and of the binding crusade obligations of the “true Christian prince.”

After all, the continuing advances of the “infidel” – revealed in the shift in focus from recapturing the Holy Land to defending the central Mediterranean – led to fears that the “Turk” was “even at our doores and ready to come into our Houses” (Thomas Newton, “Epistle Dedicatorie,” A Notable Historie of the Saracens [London, 1575], n.p.). Consequently, a vast network of correspondence connected Christian courts and the papacy in an effort to bribe, cajole, and intimidate potentates into financial and military commitments against this Muslim “infidel.” Simultaneously, as the textual nature of these gifts indicate, printing presses throughout the Christian world produced an extraordinary volume of material concerning crusade, Islam, and the “Turk,” placing them at the forefront of common Christians’ concerns as never before.

Yet the 60 years separating the gifts of Manuel I and Philip II mark momentous developments in Tudor England that profoundly complicate notions of Islam and the Ottoman “Turk.” Henry VII had enthusiastically endorsed Papal requests for crusade money (Holmes 1986: 819), and the English had a long and illustrious history of supporting crusade that continued into the sixteenth-century – between 1444 and 1502 there were 12 campaigns in England selling indulgences to raise crusade finance (Tyerman 1988: 315). Amid great celebrations in London in 1488, Henry had been presented with his first Papal cap and sword from Innocent VIII, the cap a symbol of maintenance, the sword an indication of Henry’s status as “Defender of the Faith”
(Legg 1900: 192). Both Alexander VI and Julius II would reaffirm papal affection by later sending the same gifts. The assumption of these symbols of faithful loyalty required that – officially at least – Henry VII’s England subscribed to a papally endorsed view of Islam that anathematized Muslims, demonizing them while insisting upon the necessity of their conversion.

England’s peripheral position meant that, for the illiterate majority, information on Islam and Muslims arrived through official religious channels into their parish churches – commonly through offers of indulgence and papal appeals for finance – although a steady stream of Englishmen continued to go on pilgrimages (Tyerman 1988: 308). All must have individually narrated their experiences when they returned, and those texts purporting to record such voyages became some of the most popular printed in England – most prominently the Travels of Sir John Mandeville (first printed in English in 1496 and reprinted in 1499, 1500, 1503, 1568 and 1582). Others would have gained first-hand experience of Islam by trading or crusading in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, although in the late fifteenth century such voyages were rare, with crusades infrequent and most “eastern” goods arriving through Venice (Inalcik 1994: 364–5). The occasional Muslim merchant or sailor may also have briefly alighted in English ports, or more likely been encountered elsewhere, but such interaction leaves few traces.

Individual engagement with Muslims may have created opinions that challenged a dominant, demonizing perspective, and opposition to crusade taxes or other elements of orthodox doctrine also generated a more conciliatory approach to Islam. Certainly earlier English figures like John Wyclif, William Langland, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe could conceive of a “universal peace” and envisage “Saracen” entry to heaven (Schwoebel 1967: 222), and Mandeville’s Travels has long been considered to represent “the Muslim faith in a relatively favourable light” (Tzanaki 2003: 225). England under its first Tudor king was not, therefore, simply a bastion of anti-Islamic sentiment, constructed in the absence of Muslims – there undoubtedly existed a range of views “intermingling the realistic with the marvelous and the legendary … from the murderous to the empathic” (Cruz 1999: 56). Yet Henry VII’s cultivated role as loyal son of the universal church, and England’s long adherence to that church, subjected any heterodox views beneath a dominant and orthodox view of Islam as a fabricated doctrine propounded by a false prophet, whose anti-Christian adherents were mistaken and gullible at best, demonic and bloodthirsty at worst.

Circumstances in Elizabethan England were different. The continuing reformation of the English church, begun with Henry VIII’s break with Rome in 1534, removed England from the Catholic community and made it a pariah state. From supporting papal projects for crusade against Muslims, England would become the object of a crusade in 1588. One consequence of this shift from English fidelity to infidelity was that Elizabethan culture became awash with references to Islam. This was partly the result of a growing reading public, the increasing amount of material produced by printing presses in response to public demand, and the currency of Islamic characters on the English stage. But the English also found themselves repeatedly characterized
as the “new Turkes” of Europe, whose “Geneva Bible” (a widely read English edition of the Bible produced by Protestants in Geneva during the reign of Mary I) might easily be exchanged for the “Turkish Alcaron” (Dimmock 2005: 59, 166). Alternatively, English polemicists heaped opprobrium on the Spanish for their supposed “Saracen” blood (a legacy of Al-Andalus, the period of Muslim control over large parts of Iberia, between 711 and 1492) and derided Catholics as “Turks” and “worse than Turks.” By the late 1570s escalating hostilities with Spain drove Elizabeth and her court to seek alliance with the Ottoman Empire and later with the kingdom of Morocco, both prominent centers for trade and both Islamic powers in opposition to Spain. Muslims also began to appear on English shores with increasing regularity (Matar 1998).

Attitudes towards Islam had never been simply oppositional, and in Protestant England a Muslim could variously be considered an idolater, a bloodthirsty barbarian, a heretic, a “misbeliever,” an atheist, a harbinger of the apocalypse, a sodomite, a fellow anti-idolatrous monotheist, a political ally, a protector, a valued mercantile partner, or a respected adversary to be emulated. Even, in some cases, an Englishman, since – as English divines and dramatists routinely observed with horror – scores of people converted. This multiplicity did not exist for all, however. Many, especially those in rural England, continued to subscribe to the dominant demonizing perspective of previous generations, and still received most of their information through the pulpit of their local church. Prayers were regularly given across England for the relief of Christians from Muslim oppression, and bells rung for the victory of the Holy League against the Ottoman fleet at Lepanto in 1571 (Duffy 2001: 179; Vaughan 1954: 162). Official commitment of this type was a consequence of Elizabeth’s own necessary adherence to an oppositional view of Islam in her public dealings. Not to do so would undermine the legitimacy of her position as a Christian prince and further jeopardize England’s precarious status as a Christian nation – on more than one occasion the Queen had vigorously to deny accusations that she had sacrilegiously colluded with Muslim powers against Christian princes (accusations that were largely true) (Baumer 1944: 34).

The texts concerning Christian–Islamic conflict sent to England by Manuel I and Philip II arrived in very different circumstances and had different purposes. Manuel’s gift to Henry VII was intended to encourage the English king’s enthusiasm for a crusading venture to which he was already ideologically and politically committed. It affirmed the Holy Land (and its retrieval) as the center of Christian identity, and the legitimate authority of the papacy to lead and validate such an enterprise. Philip II’s gift to Elizabeth served to remind the English queen of her duties as a Christian prince, duties abrogated in her Protestant opposition to both crusade and papacy. Catholic propagandists had already urged military action against the English “Turk,” and Philip’s gift might also be construed as a reminder of Spanish military might – a barely veiled threat. For the English, notions of Islam shift considerably between the first and last Tudor monarchs, and would become a complex combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar, of the contemporary and the traditional.
Neither “Islam” nor “Muslim” would have meant anything to most inhabitants of Tudor England. When writing about Islam, English men and women used variants of “Mahometism” and “Mahometist” – based upon “Mahomet” for the Prophet Muhammad – terms inherited from the earliest Christian scholarship on the subject. As the primary representative of Islam to Christian Europe, “Turk” was also regularly used to denote a Muslim as well as an inhabitant of the Ottoman Empire, replacing another ethno-religious term – “Saracen” – with which it briefly overlapped. “Moor” was also used, but might signal “pagan” sub-Saharan African as well as Muslim North African. None of these terms originated in England, nor did most of the terminology and textual scholarship through which Islam was labeled and understood. Much of the foundational work stemmed from monastic institutions in medieval France, Italy, and Spain and was developed from the work of travelers and converts. It was also closely associated with crusade and conversion (Tolan 2002), particularly when generated in the conflicts of reconquista Spain (the Christian “reconquest” of Muslim Iberia, begun in 1085), with which England was closely connected through the marriage of Henry VIII (and his brother Arthur before him) to Katherine of Aragon. While England adapted to life under a Tudor monarch, attitudes towards Islam remained firmly based upon the translation, circulation and recycling of many key texts that were already centuries old in 1485.

One prominent example was the Qur’an, widely known throughout Christendom as the “Alcoran.” An Englishman, Robert of Ketton, had produced the first translation into Latin in 1143 and, preceded by a series of vigorous refutations, it was titled the Lex Mahumet pseudoprophet. The title – with its assertion that “Mahomet” was a pseudo or false prophet – offers some sense of the character and purpose of the text, which was the central element of a grand project to refute Islam and convert Muslims known as the Cluniac Corpus and overseen by Peter the Venerable. It was also popular, becoming the primary source for Christian perceptions of the revealed law of Islam, and circulated widely in manuscript. Ketton’s text was still the standard source 400 years later, and was used as the basis for the first printed translation, into Latin, of the Qur’an, the Machumetis Sarracenorum principis vita, sponsored by Martin Luther and completed by the reformers Theodorus Bibliander and Philip Melancthon in Basle in 1543. For those in England who could afford it, this was the text to acquire for an advanced knowledge of Islam, and it appears in the libraries of a number of prominent Elizabethan courtiers, English universities and cathedrals. This printed edition – and therefore the twelfth-century Ketton text – formed the basis for subsequent translations into Italian, German and Dutch, a number of which also found their way into English libraries.

So there was clearly an appetite for the Qur’an in Tudor England, and this appetite extended to all material concerning Islam, regardless of its source. Incorporated in the 1543 translation in parallel columns of Latin and Greek is another hugely influential
text on Islam, the *Contra legem Saracenorum* by the Florentine Dominican Riccoldo da Montecroce. Riccoldo, writing in the early fourteenth century, was obsessed with demonstrating conclusively that Islam was not the product of authentic revelation, but was both fictional and fundamentally “irrational” (Tolan 2002: 245–54). Texts reproducing Riccoldo’s work appear to have been widely available in sixteenth-century England, and his confrontational polemic is incorporated into English works well into the seventeenth century (Dimmock 2006: 21–2, 25–6). Perhaps the most important source for information concerning Islam in English has already been mentioned – the *Travels* of the fictional Sir John Mandeville. Mandeville travels through Islamic lands, speaks with Muslims, recognizes the shared religious heritage of Islam and Christianity (and points out that consequently the “Saracens” might be easily converted), and relates the standard Christian narrative of the life of “Mahomet.” For perhaps 200 years following its completion in the late fourteenth century it was the most popular secular text in circulation – it appears in numerous English works, including Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603) and Richard Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations* (1589) – and was cut and adapted to supply English demand for Islamic-related material. Yet the compiler of Mandeville’s *Travels* also borrowed directly from earlier material, quoting at length from an anonymous text, *De statu Saracenorum* (1273), and using the sections on Islam in Vincent of Beauvais’ encyclopedic *Speculum historiale* (c. 1250) which was drawn from Petrus Alfonsi’s “acerbic and derogatory” biography of the Prophet Muhammad in his *Dialogues Against the Jews* of 1110 (Tolan 2002: 149–50).

Tracing texts and their sources like this shows the way in which assertions become fact through repeated transmission, and how notions of Islam were developed and elaborated through Christian pens and presses, largely in the absence of Muslims. It was recognized authorities like the Cluniac corpus, Riccoldo da Montecroce and Petrus Alfonsi that informed the widely endorsed view of Islam as a heresy, a cynically fabricated and monstrous law assembled from elements of Judaism, Christianity, and paganism by a false prophet – “Mahomet” – an epileptic degenerate who staged a series of elaborately faked miracles to dupe the masses (Tolan 2002; Dimmock 2006). Early Tudor England looked chronologically back for information about contemporary Islam to authorities such as this, their constructed mythologies affirmed by implicit papal, and later Lutheran, endorsement. The English were also encouraged to look to the Bible, with commentaries and accompanying illustrations instructing them that Islam and its Prophet corresponded with either the Antichrist or False Prophet of Revelation 13.1–18.

Polemical texts discussing religion or travel were not the only resource the Tudor English “looked back to” when considering Islam. Also influential were romance sources, incorporating crusading histories and Arthurian legends, which offered another perspective. Two of the first works to come from Caxton’s printing press (alongside his highly profitable production of crusade indulgences) were *Godefrey of Boloyne ... the Conquest of the Holy Londe of Iherusalem* (1481) and Malory’s *Morte dartbur* (1485), which ends with an anachronistic commitment to fight the “Turks” in the Holy Land (Tyerman 1988: 304). The early traditions of the *Chanson de geste* (French epic poems
celebrating heroic deeds) also resurface in Tudor England. Not only are romances emulated, edited, and reproduced in English compilations and stage drama, but certain assumptions continue to circulate, such as the figure of the Muslim idolater. In the medieval *Chanson de Roland* the Saracen adversaries are described as worshipping a trinity of idols named Mahound, Tervagent, and Apollo, an erroneous notion that has remarkable longevity. In Robert Greene’s play *Alphonus, King of Aragon* (c. 1590) the “Turks” worship and follow instructions from a “brazen head” that breathes fire, and in Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turn’d Turke* (1612), a “Mahomet’s head” is brought on stage as a crucial prop to assist a Christian’s conversion. Similarly, Italian *novelle* provide important source material, for example in William Painter’s reproduction of tales from Boccaccio and Bandello in his *Palace of Pleasure* (1566). Yet romance also proffered the possibility that a worthy Muslim adversary might be assimilable to chivalric codes of valor and honor, and established the convention of the Saracen bride, wooed, won and converted by the victorious Christian knight. Both are repeated in different forms in Tudor English texts and drama like Barnabe Riche’s *Riche Farewell to Militarie Profession* (1581) and *Soliman and Perseda* (1592), thought to be by Thomas Kyd.

The central importance of medieval source material from a range of genres and locations for perceptions of Islam in Tudor England should not be surprising. A lack of sustained and direct contact before the sixteenth century led the English to accumulate and incorporate any and all relevant material concerning Islam, especially after the momentous conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453. Nearly all writings on the subject by English authors depended upon earlier sources. In response an industry based upon the procurement and translation of texts – particularly from France and Italy – sprang up in tandem with the development of English printing. This accumulation of texts relating to Islam was, furthermore, not necessarily a planned and rational business, but was rather haphazard, with no control taken over the quality or veracity of the material (even if such things could have been judged). Often the more sensationalist and polemical the text, the better it was likely to sell. The consequent co-existence of a range of generic forms and models and their combination would lead, by the late sixteenth century, to hybrid and multiple models of Islam in English culture. However, it would be mistaken to impose this incoherence upon attitudes in the early Tudor period, which are instead underpinned by a body of knowledge established by medieval Christian scholars opposed to Islam and devoted to its refutation and the defeat and conversion of Muslims. The certainty of Muslim infidelity, attested from popular dramatic cycles to the earliest printed material in English, was widespread enough for “Turk” and “Mahomet” to become transferable signifiers of a violent, faithless, absolute adversary.

**Reformation and Conflation**

The Muslim bugbear, embodied in the emblem of the “terrible Turk,” was a familiar one in Tudor England. The turbaned, mustachioed image appeared in textual
illustrations, on archery targets, shop and inn signs, and was supposedly used to frighten naughty children. Widespread recognition of this dominant trope of the Muslim meant it could be used to define an opponent as well as to chastise Christians themselves. In the Travels, Mandeville has a private audience with the Egyptian Sultan, who shames him with a litany of Christian sins: Christians are “so proud, so envious, such great gluttons, so lecherous, and moreover so full of covetousness, that for a little silver they will sell their daughters, their sisters, even their own wives” (Moseley 2005: 107–8). Furthermore, Mandeville is assured that the Christians would easily be able to defeat Muslim armies if only they would serve God devoutly and keep faith with one another. This is of course not the “authentic” voice of a Muslim monarch, but rather a device used by the narrator of the Travels to articulate his own perspective on Christian immorality. The success of such a device depends upon a reader’s assumptions of Christian superiority and Muslim infidelity – the shock value in disrupting those assumptions, in suggesting that the “Saracens” observe their “false law” better than Christians keep the true faith “of Jesus Christ,” is intended to prompt shame and renewed Christian purpose (Moseley 2005: 108).

The use of Islam to reflect upon Christian depravity or disunity did not begin with Mandeville, and was common in earlier material. It was, however, employed with a new sense of urgency in the early sixteenth century, as the Ottomans launched campaigns into eastern and central Europe, culminating in the failed siege of Vienna in 1529. The apparently relentless Ottoman advance, imagined in increasingly apocalyptic terms, was regularly blamed on Christian division and specifically upon a new factor – the simultaneous emergence of Luther and the “Protestants.” Monarchs like Henry VIII and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, through prominent humanists like Erasmus and Thomas More, sought to refute Protestant theology and insisted that the Protestants were as equally opposed to the true Christian faith as the “Turks.” The primacy of the biblical text and the abhorrence of “idolatry” among Protestants led their opponents to highlight incriminating similarities with Islamic devotional practices, and Protestant rejection of crusade led to suggestions that they were willing (even intending) to let the “Turk” take over all of Christendom. For their part, Protestants argued that it was Catholic sin and “unbelief” that had led to the Ottoman successes, and Luther himself placed Muslims and “Papists” alongside Jews and heretics as “antichristian.” In England the dispute was carried out in print – and in English – between the Lord Chancellor Thomas More and the Lutheran translator of the Bible into English, William Tyndale, writing from self-imposed exile in the Low Countries. In a public correspondence each argued that the other was more of a “Turk” – More drew parallels between Luther and Muhammad, arguing that both fabricated their doctrine in order to appeal to the greatest constituency, while Tyndale argued that the “Turks” were more true to God than More, and that the abominable sins of the Pope were worse than those of the “Turks.” Both the papist and the Muslim, Tyndale argued, worship God through a dependence on “bodily service” and good works, not “in the spirit, with faith, hope, and love” (Tyndale quoted in Dimmock 2005: 33).
Following his break from Rome and execution of More, Henry VIII was repeatedly referred to as a second “Turk,” an accusation his predilection for dressing up in “Turkey” robes can only have confirmed. Since Clement VII had excommunicated Henry in July 1533, he had become an infidel and heretic and could now be considered the legitimate object of a papally endorsed crusade. Soon after, the 1536 Pilgrimage of Grace in favor of the old religion had been undertaken under the standard of the Five Wounds of Christ, the traditional crusading symbol. Henry’s response was brutal recrimination, and the suppression of crusading traditions in England, specifically in the form of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, the Knights Hospitaller, who were outlawed in 1540. At a stroke England’s immediate connection with Christian–Islamic conflict in the Mediterranean was severed, as Henry broke “with a familiar and glorious crusading past” (Tyerman 1988: 345). To combat his dangerously isolated position within Christendom, Henry affirmed even more vigorously his commitment to the ideals of the Christian prince and, following an alliance with the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1543 he declared war on the French king, Francis I, asserting that Francis had abrogated his Christian duties and had “for a long time and season ayed the great Turke” (quoted in Dimmock 2005: 42). It was true – Francis’ rivalry with Charles V had forced him to look eastward for a potential ally, and a commercial and military alliance between the French king and the Ottoman sultan had been agreed in 1535. Alongside the break with Rome, this would prove a momentous development for Tudor England’s experience of Islam, since it brought the Ottomans firmly into the balance of power within Christendom and it set a precedent the English would later exploit. But of greater import to English conceptions of Islam at this point is the way in which, as Protestant subjects of an excommunicated monarch, they were now characterized as the “new Turkes” of Europe, an infidel nation.

What emerges in competing diatribes in which Protestant and Catholic categorize each other as Muslim is a new kind of equivalence. For centuries the majority in England had subscribed to a papal definition of Christian–Muslim relations that considered the Christian to be inherently right and true, and Islam, in opposition, to be inassimilable. The eradication of Islam in conversion was the only way in which Muslims might be redeemed, and the Prophet Muhammad was consistently demonized in the most brutal terms. Following the break with Rome and Edward VI’s establishment of a Protestant church in England – with the short-lived exception of Mary I’s return to papal supremacy – England’s position shifted. As the sixteenth century wore on the “papists” came to co-exist, coalesce with, and in many respects replace the Muslim as the primary adversary in the English popular imagination. For Catholic polemicists, particularly in the 1580s and 1590s, the heretic English similarly became equivalent to the infidel “Turk,” with the long established strategies used to demonize the latter used to demonize the former. It would however be mistaken to suggest that the advent of Protestantism provoked an immediate questioning of prior religious assumptions concerning Islam. The dominant traditional perspective did not just disappear, and the English recognized the accusation that they were “Turks” as the insult it was intended to be. Instead this trope would remain potent, particularly
among those excluded, either by illiteracy, status, geography, or penury, from the mercantile and political developments of Elizabeth’s reign, even while it was being supplanted by anti-“papist” sentiment. These developments do nevertheless complicate the picture, as a polemical association would eventually become a political and commercial one, and Muslims — both real and imagined — would take center-stage in the capital.

**New Horizons**

Just as Clement VII had excommunicated her father in 1536, Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth I, the “pretended Queen of England,” in 1570. Just as her father had faced a rebellion that protested under the badges of crusade, so Elizabeth faced the crusading Northern Rebellion in 1569. If these developments had left her in any doubt of her status as heretic and infidel in the eyes of the Catholic Church, the Spanish Armada of 1588 had been explicitly blessed as a crusade in Lisbon cathedral before its departure. Like all the Tudor monarchs that had reigned before her, Elizabeth was acutely aware of her responsibilities as a Christian monarch. Yet the excommunication freed her and her subjects from any obligation to abide by papal restrictions, and they were now “free to reap the harvest offered by the infidel market” in defiance of papal prohibition on the trade of “munitions and foodstuffs from Christendom to the Infidel” (Skilliter 1977: 22–3). The importation of textiles, spices, carpets, ceramics, and other luxury goods, as well as sugar from North Africa, had long been a conduit for English contact with Islamic cultures, even if it was often mediated through Christian commercial centers. English ambitions were not simply to expand this trade, but to open up new markets for English raw materials and woolen goods, particularly since religious conflict in Northern Europe had cut off their traditional markets. More than this, a commercial association with the Ottomans offered the potential to play power politics and undermine Spanish ambitions, as well as to enhance English prestige through association with the only other major power in the region. To this end Elizabeth’s court sent an ambassador, the merchant William Harborne, to Constantinople in July 1578, and the Anglo-Ottoman “Capitulations” were agreed in May 1580 (Skilliter 1977). Harborne sought to agitate anti-Spanish feeling and cement his position as the “Lutheran ambassador,” while aggressively pursuing English trading interests. One hugely symbolic aspect to this trade was the shipment of products of Reformation iconoclasm such as broken bells and smashed images from dissolved religious houses to be cast into Ottoman cannon. The Spanish ambassador to England, Bernardino de Mendoza, was horrified that such materials might then be used to fight and kill Christians, and the implication was clear — this was, as Susan Skilliter has recognized, “the ideal export from one idol-destroyer to another” (Skilliter 1977: 75).

Although many would have been involved in this trade, it is difficult to determine the extent of its public knowledge, or indeed the ways in which it may have tempered the dominant popular stereotype of the Muslim inherited from medieval religious
polemic. A few references filtered into the texts and drama of the 1580s, but it was not until the publication of the full Capitulations in Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations* in 1589, together with a series of letters between Elizabeth and Murad III, the Ottoman ruler, that the association was celebrated. Two years later Thomas Nelson would write that it was a “rare thing” and “the wonderful and undoubted will and providence of almighty God,” but also suggested that the Queen’s true and proper intention was to work “the Turks’ conversion” (Nelson quoted in Dimmock 2005: 147). If English writers’ attitudes towards Islam are indeed tempered in the shifting circumstances of the sixteenth century, such a shift is couched not in terms of inter-faith understanding, but rather in the increasing prominence of conversion and (as we shall see later) in the fictionalized absence of explicit religious belief. In a climate of religious war in which Protestantism and Catholicism (as well as Judaism and Islam) claimed the status of universal truth and defined individual identity and destiny, Islam could not be recognized as a valid religious alternative. Too many Christians, with the English among them, had converted already. Practically, for any immigrant seeking residence in Elizabethan England, a precarious level of toleration could only be gained through conversion to Protestantism. Despite Hakluyt’s celebration of “an English Ligier (ambassador) in the stately porch of the Grand Signor at Constantinople,” popular toleration of the Anglo-Ottoman association similarly required a commitment to the “Turk’s” conversion (Skilliter 1977: 22–7).

One text that makes the connection explicit between converting the individual immigrant and converting all “Turks” and “Saracens” is Meredith Hanmer’s *The Baptizing of a Turke* (1586). This published sermon accompanied the dramatic spectacle of the conversion of one Chinano (thereafter William) from Nigropontus on October 2, 1586, at St Katherine’s Hospital near the Tower of London. In an extended meditation on Matthew 5:16 (“Let your light so shine before men …”), Hanmer describes how this “silly Turk” had been rescued by Sir Francis Drake from captivity under the Spaniards and, declaring that “if there were not a God in England, there was none no where,” had resolved to convert upon his arrival (Hanmer quoted in Dimmock 2005: 105–6). Hanmer skilfully parallels this “Turk’s” discovery of the “true God” in England, and rejection of the “weak” Catholics and their insistence upon the “worshipping of images,” with a vision of England as a guiding religious beacon for all. The Protestant English are sweeping “the Church of God” so that the “Heathens, the Jews, the Turks & Saracens the sooner come in.” The Anglo-Ottoman relationship is, for Hanmer, a crucial element of this divine plan. He quotes from letters to Queen Elizabeth from the secretary of the “Great Turk” which show “the great affection his master the Turk together with himself bear to this land and of our religion he sayeth thus: We know that your sovereign Majesty among all the Christians have the most sound religion.” Taking a great deal of poetic license with the original, Hanmer uses the Ottoman ruler’s apparent enthusiasm to demonstrate the readiness for a wholesale conversion to Protestantism, mirroring Chinano’s own. The text is simultaneously a kind of celebration, demonstrating through this double-validation the superiority of Protestantism over Catholicism and, indeed, over all religions.
Conspicuously absent in such conversion sermons is any account by the convert himself. He is largely spoken for, his life narrated on his behalf. This may be because Chinano/William could only be understood in Spanish, and required interpreters to relate his confession of faith. But it also indicates stage management. These sermons were intrinsically dramatic in this respect, ceremonially enacting England’s religious destiny on a public stage through the careful manipulation of an “alien” individual. The capital’s professional playhouses offered a spectacle similarly preoccupied with national and religious issues – and “alien” individuals – but here the Muslim might directly address an audience, and could do so in English. There are some important distinctions to be drawn here, of course – Hanmer’s text is the record of a religious sacrament, which featured the actual presence of Chinano/William’s body as he was transformed into a “faithful Christian” and promised “newness of life.” Its publication indicates that the presence of an “authentic” Muslim generated a good deal of public interest. Alternatively, Muslim characters on the professional stage were self-consciously constructed and played. However, clear connections exist between the two spheres. Hanmer, before offering any details of the convert, spends a considerable amount of time using medieval authorities to relate a polemical life of “Mahomet” and to refute his “false doctrine and wicked religion.” He constructs the Muslim, without any interest in the convert’s experience or understanding of Islam, in order to celebrate the conversion. Those texts produced by a growing number of English travelers into Islamic lands can offer some insight into specific cultures and into the diversity and divisions within Islam (MacLean 2004). As with Hanmer, however, the creation of Muslims by Tudor playwrights and actors reveals less a sense of Islamic practices than of English perceptions of them, and no sense of individual Muslim identities, but rather of specifically English anxieties about national, religious, imperial and gender issues and about international politics.

There have been over 35 dramatic works identified featuring Islamic characters, themes, or settings between 1579 and 1603 (Burton 2005: 257–8). They indicate a range of traditions, sources and approaches, yet as professional drama such plays invariably reflect popular prejudice, even while responding to Tudor England’s shifting relationship with Islam. Such prejudice – and the anxieties mentioned above – is articulated through the establishment of an instantly recognizable visual and verbal character or type. While it owes something to figures like King Herod in medieval drama cycles, and popular imagery, probably the single most important factor in establishing this stock character of the Muslim “Turk” on the stage is the phenomenal success of the two parts of Christopher Marlowe’s Tamburlaine (1587–8). Marlowe’s “mighty line” and his eastern setting combine to create a relentless narrative of conquest by an eponymous central character apparently unbound by mortal constraints. In Part 1, after gaining the kingdom of Persia with which he is subsequently identified, Tamburlaine moves towards inevitable conflict with the “Turkish Emperor” Bajazeth, who is immediately identified with Islam in opposition to Tamburlaine’s role as “the scourge and wrath of God” (3.3.44). Bajazeth swears by “holy Mahomet” (3.1.54) and “Mahomet[‘s] … sepulchre / And by the holy Alcoran” (3.3.75–76), is
identified as “Mahomet’s kinsman” (3.3.268) and erroneously calls upon the “holy preist of Mahomet, / That, sacrificing, slice and cut your flesh, / Staining his altars with your purple blood” (4.2.2–4). He is also the villain of the piece, drawn away from the siege of Constantinople by Tamburlaine’s advance, and an enslaver of Christians whom Tamburlaine vows to release (3.3.44–54). “Turks,” for Tamburlaine, are “full of brags” (3.3.3) in Part 1, and “hateful” (2.2.149) in Part II, and after a series of battles in which his sword sends “millions of Turks to hell” (5.1.178) his victory is total. But while Islam and the “Turk” are indivisible in the first play, in the second Tamburlaine’s relationship to “Mahomet” is more complicated, and is only resolved in the extraordinary scene before Babylon when he orders the Qur’ān burnt, alongside other “superstitious books” (5.1.172–3). This is a challenge, both to “Mahomet” whom he had once “thought a God” (5.1.173), and to the beliefs of his followers (perhaps identified with the audience). He audaciously rejects anything other than a God “of revenging wrath” (5.1.181), and this is consequently not a moment of celebration, but one of tension and hubris.

As the primary representative of Islam in Tamburlaine, Part 1, the proud, arrogant, powerful braggart Bajazeth, almost certainly attired in luxurious “Turkey robes” and turban (Dimmock 2006: 185), proved influential. Islam on the Tudor stage was thereafter embodied in a procession of violently unstable martial sultans – among them Mahomet in George Peele’s lost play Mahomet and Hiren the Fair Greek (1588); Amurack in Greene’s Alphonsus, King of Aragon (1589) and Ameroth in the anonymous John of Bordeaux (1592); Selimus in Robert Greene’s Selimus (1590); and Soliman in Thomas Kyd’s Soliman and Perseda (1592). All similarly bombastic, all probable responses to the success of Tamburlaine. By the late 1590s the grandiloquent eastern character seems to have become so common that it could be ridiculed by Shakespeare, who places lines from Tamburlaine, Mahomet and Hiren and George Peele’s The Battle of Alcazar (1589) into the absurd mouth of Pistol in Henry IV, Part 2 (2.4.136–55). But this dominant image was not the only one available in Elizabethan culture. Even in these plays – which are concerned only peripherally with conversion or with Muslim women (elements far more prominent in seventeenth-century drama) – there are discernible variations in the representation of Muslim characters. Such examples, paradoxically, tend towards a downplaying of Islam. Both Islam and non-Christian settings enabled some Christian writers to explore “atheism” and non-belief: After all, Islam was repeatedly described as a faith without faith. Yet characters like Selimus’s brother Corcut in Greene’s Selimus, and Selim-Calymath in Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta (1592) appear to offer something different – a non-Muslim Muslim. Both are clearly “Turks” – both of royal blood – and yet neither is defined by his adherence to the law of “Mahomet.” As a scholar and a philosopher, Corcut contrasts starkly with his vicious brothers and, after conferring with an English clown, reveals before his death that he has converted to the “God of Christians.” Selim-Calymath, in contrast, shows no sign of intending to convert (and is contrasted favorably with the rapacious Christians of Malta), but is instead defined by his nobility, a factor which in practice could cut through otherwise over-determined religious boundaries. This is certainly the case in
Elizabeth I’s correspondence with Murad III, which attempts to establish a “religious identity between Protestantism and Islam” with a focus upon mutual anti-idolatrous sentiment. It is also the case in Hakluyt’s reproduction of that material, where all explicit references to Islam are toned down for public consumption (Skilliter 1977: 100–1).

In both Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta* and *Tamburlaine, Part 2* “Turks” are contrasted positively with hypocritical Christians, and it seems clear that anti-Christian – often specifically anti-Catholic – animus leads, as in other spheres, to a reconsideration of anti-Muslim stereotypes. Perhaps inevitably given commercial and political restrictions, the drama could not reflect the full range of approaches to Muslims available in late Tudor England. Yet even those approaches that appear to undermine such stereotypes cannot accommodate Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, who remain demonized and inassimilable in their very absence. Another significant element of the Tudor experience of Islam – trade – similarly removes Islam from the equation. A world of goods originating in Islamic cultures was becoming available to Elizabethans, and was represented on the stage – “Turkey” cushions, tapestry, carpets, silks and a collection of baubles and fripperies (Dimmock 2005: 96–7, 202). Under James I this expanding trade would generate a range of civic dramatic spectacles featuring “Turks” and “Moors” as munificent commercial partners (Burton 2005: 169–80). As elsewhere in late Tudor culture, what are commonly assumed to be intransigent prejudices actually proved far more malleable, particularly when confronted with economic and political necessities.

The very end of the Tudor dynasty is marked by a new development in the English experience of Islam. Not only had Englishmen begun to travel in increasing numbers into North Africa and Ottoman domains and returned to write what they had seen and experienced as Protestants for a Protestant audience, but English scholars were assembling their own histories of Islam and the Ottoman Empire. In 1600 Ralph Carr’s *Mahumetane or Turkish Historie* appeared, only to be eclipsed by Richard Knolles’ endurably influential *Generall Historie of the Turkes* in 1603, the year of Elizabeth’s death. Based upon a careful sifting of earlier scholarship, Knolles sought to consider Ottoman culture and its history from an English perspective and for an English audience in a way that would have been impossible in 1485. Under the Tudors, notions of Islam had taken up a place at the heart of English cultural life.

References


Further Reading


Richard Hakluyt, the English geographer, translator, editor, author and clergyman, recounts his interest in overseas exploration and the literature concerning it as stemming from an episode with his cousin the lawyer also named Richard Hakluyt. The young man observed on his elder cousin’s table “‘certeine books of cosmographie, with a universall mappe’” and expressed his curiosity about them. Hakluyt the lawyer, “pointing to the ‘seas … empires … and territories’ on the map” expounded to Richard the “‘speciall commodities, & particular wants, which by the benefit of traffike, & entercourse of merchants are plentifully supplied.’” He then “directed the young Hakluyt to a Bible and Psalm 107.” The younger Hakluyt reports that he there “read, that they which go downe to the sea in ships, and occupy by the great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and his woonders in the deepe, &c. Which words of the Prophet together with my cousins discourse … tooke in me so deepe an impression, that I constantly resolved, if ever I were preferred to the University … I would by Gods assistance prosecute that knowledge and kinde of literature.” (Payne 2004: par. 3)\(^1\)

While Hakluyt was at Oxford completing just the sort of studies he had expressed a desire to pursue (he received his BA in 1574 and his MA in 1577), the English were beginning their New World ventures in earnest, and publications promoting them accordingly were appearing as well. Between 1576 and 1578 Martin Frobisher undertook three voyages to the North Atlantic, searching for the Northwest Passage to China and in the process discovering what was mistakenly believed to be gold. Thomas Churchyard subsequently wrote a poem entitled *A Praye and Reporte of Maister Martyne Forboisher’s Voyage* (printed in London in 1578) celebrating Frobisher’s travels to the land called “Meta Incognita” (Unknown Limits). Important translations of continental texts on the New World were also already available in England. Indeed, it is possible that among the texts Hakluyt encountered with his cousin was the 1555 translation by Richard Eden of Peter Martyr’s *The Decades of the New World or West
Indies, the text that first made an English version of Columbus’s accounts of his voyages available and one that Hakluyt would later include in his Principal Navigations. Though the English arrived “late and fitfully in the New World,” having made it across the Atlantic only in 1497 during the reign of the first Tudor monarch Henry VII, there was something of an English tradition both of exploring and writing about the New World before Hakluyt arrived on the scene (MacMillan 2006: 1). Hakluyt in fact seems determined to make a virtue of the necessity of English tardiness in his preface to his Divers Voyages of 1582, a text designed to provide information and instruction for prospective colonizers in conjunction with Humphrey Gilbert’s efforts to gain investors for his ventures. In the preface, which is addressed to Philip Sidney, Hakluyt begins by marveling that in the “fourscore and tenne years” since the “first discoverie of America” England “could never have the grace to set fast footing in such fertill and temperate places, as are left as yet unpossessed by” the Spanish and the Portuguese (Hakluyt 1935c: 175). However, he goes on to note that “there is a time for all men,” noting that “the Portingales time” is “out of date” and that the “long hidden secretes” of the Spanish “are now at length espied” (1935c: 175); hence, the moment for the English would seem to have arrived.

The anecdote with which I began this chapter is thus obviously not literally a representation of the first English interest in the New World and writings about it; it does, however, have something of the quality of an originary scene of Tudor representations of the Americas. In it are present important texts that shape portrayals of the Americas in the Tudor era: Cosmographies, accounts of prior voyages, maps, and the (Protestant) Bible. Characteristic emphasis is placed on trade and commodities alongside a concern with territory and empire. And, even more importantly, the religious, the economic, and the political meld into an apparently seamless whole as Hakluyt’s reading of Psalm 107 confirms a divine mandate for English work of discovery, trade, and religious proselytizing in the New World as “the work of the Lord.” In short, the episode contains in microcosm key touchstones for understanding Tudor paradigms of representing the New World: Protestantism, profit, and politics. Significantly, Richard Hakluyt the elder (the lawyer who encourages Richard Hakluyt the younger’s interest in New World enterprises and texts) begins his pamphlet entitled “Inducements to the Liking of the Voyage intended towards Virginia …” with a long list of potential benefits, the first few of which neatly illustrate Tudor interests in Protestantism, politics, and profit:

1. The glory of God by planting of religion among these infidels. 2. The increase of the force of the Christians. 3. The possibilitie of the inlarging of the dominions of the Queenes most excellent Maiestie, and consequently of her honour, revenues, and of her power by this enterprise. 4. An ample vent in time to come of the Woollen clothes of England. … 5. A great possibilitie of further discoveries of other regions from the North part of the same land by sea. … 6. By returne thence, this realme shall receive. … Oade, Oile, Wines, Hops, Salt, and most or all the commodities that we receive from the best parts of Europe, and we shall receive the same better cheape, than now we receive them. (Hakluyt the elder 1935: 327)
One of the English strategies for managing their tardy arrival in the New World was a proliferation of texts like Hakluyt the elder’s pamphlet; as Andrew Hadfield points out, in the 1580s “There were a huge number of works published … designed to persuade Englishmen of the value and necessity of establishing colonies in the Americas” (Hadfield 2003: 173). Because the number of extant texts is so immense, and because the last twenty or so years of Elizabeth’s reign did witness the publication of some of the most important exemplars of Tudor writing on the New World, I have chosen a selection of works published between 1580 and 1600 to discuss as representative in this chapter. In particular, I will primarily consider selections from the works of Richard Hakluyt the younger and Thomas Hariot.

Over the course of his career Hakluyt went on to write, edit, translate and publish a vast corpus of texts designed to encourage New World exploration and colonization. These range from John Florio’s translation of Jacques Cartier’s accounts of French voyages to America, published with Hakluyt’s aid in 1580 and so the earliest text with which he is associated, to the collection for which he is perhaps best known, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation. … This work has been described as “one of the two most significant Elizabethan publications on the Americas” (Hadfield 1998: 311); it is a compendious compilation of texts ranging from fourth-century travel narratives to “the recent exploits of Elizabethan seaman such as Drake and Cavendish” (Payne 2004: par. 2). The Principal Navigations was first published as a single volume in 1589, and a second edition in three volumes was published between 1598 and 1600, with one volume appearing per year.

The other text that Andrew Hadfield cites as one of the two most significant in the Elizabethan period is Thomas Hariot’s Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia … (Frankfurt, 1590). The Briefe and True Report is an account of Sir Richard Grenville’s voyage of 1585 that was published first in 1588. It was then included in Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations and reprinted again in 1590, accompanied by engraved versions of John White’s watercolors, by Theodor de Bry as the first volume of his multi-year, multi-volume America (published between 1590 and 1634). It thus circulated widely not only in England but also in continental Europe, publicizing Tudor representations of the New World to a good portion of the Old World.

Significantly, Hariot and Hakluyt are linked by numerous ties both to each other and to a closely knit group of men involved in traveling to the New World as well as in writing about and promoting such ventures. Thomas Hariot was part of the household of Walter Raleigh, arguably one of the, if not the single, most important English figures in New World exploration in the Elizabethan era.² In Raleigh’s household Hariot served as “a tutor in the ‘mathematical sciences’ – which is likely to have meant astronomy and navigation.” As Paul Hulton indicates, “It is not difficult to imagine that these studies acted as a stimulus to Raleigh’s concern with overseas exploration” (1972: viii). Raleigh was Hakluyt’s “friend and sometime patron” (Sacks 2006: 40), and Hakluyt is also linked with Hariot, since “it was through Hakluyt’s intercession that Theodor de Bry published Thomas Hariot’s Briefe … Report of Raleigh’s Virginia colony … in 1590” (Payne 2004: par. 6). Hakluyt and Hariot were
thus part of a “circle having intellectual interests in common,” a circle that provided “the brains of the early colonizing movement” (Taylor 1935: 6, 21).

“Thinlargement of the gospell of Christe”: Protestantism in the New World

Hadfield observes that most of the promoters of English colonial efforts were “staunchly Protestant” (2003: 174), and this was certainly true of both Richard Hakluyt and Thomas Hariot, both of whom were Protestant clergymen. This shared status does not mean, however, that their religious faith was precisely the same or played exactly the same role in shaping their perceptions and representations of the New World. Elizabethan Protestantism was by no means monolithic; rather, it encompassed, at times uneasily, a spectrum of types of reformed religion. David Sacks has written extensively on the nature of Hakluyt’s faith and his ecclesiastical career. Arguing that Hakluyt “before all else … was a clergyman, and a learned one at that,” Sacks indicates that still Hakluyt was “no conventional Calvinist” and “also … no conventional millenarian”; rather, Hakluyt embraced an “avant garde conformity” of a type later associated with William Laud (2006: 39, 40, 42).

Hariot’s faith was also not in the Elizabethan mainstream, at least in terms of how it was perceived; Hariot’s close association with Raleigh in this respect was not to his advantage. In 1603, when Raleigh “was arrested on suspicion of involvement in a plot to kill the king” Hariot “was mentioned by Lord Chief Justice Popham as an atheist and evil influence when passing a judgment of treason on Raleigh” (Roche 2004: par. 5). Earlier, in 1592, Hariot had been labeled as the leader of a “school of atheism” maintained by Raleigh, and in 1594 he was subject with Raleigh to hearings on atheism by an ecclesiastical commission (Roche 2004: par. 4). This charge of atheism was publicized by the Jesuit and English Catholic political activist Robert Parsons (or Persons) as part of his campaign to “prov[ide] evidence to her Catholic enemies that Elizabeth governed through atheists,” and so the partisan origins of the accusation must be considered. As J. J. Roche notes, “Harriot’s published papers and manuscripts reveal an intelligent piety and contain little which might be interpreted as irreligion; even so, he acquired a damaging reputation for impiety” (2004: par. 4).

Hakluyt’s piety clearly colored his perspective on the place Protestantism should have in the New World. He begins his Discourse of Western Planting (1584), a text explicitly designed “to gain over the Queen, and to provide a textbook on colonization for Sir Francis Walsingham” (Taylor 1935: 33) with a chapter arguing that “this westerne discoverie will be greatlye for thinlargemente of the gospell of Christe, whereunto the Princes of the reforme relligion are chefely bounde, amongst whome her Matie ys principall” (Hakluyt 1935b: 214). Though it was not widely circulated, since it was not printed at the time it was written, the Discourse was an extremely influential text. “Owing to its length, the complexity and nature of its argument, and
the likelihood that it was seen in the highest positions of government, Hakluyt’s *Discourse* has been recognized as the seminal document of Tudor expansion, one that largely defined the potential of the Elizabethan New World empire” (MacMillan 2006: 50). Thus, its religious claims deserve to be taken seriously, though they have a conventional and customary dimension. Hakluyt posits that the “principall and chefe” work of the English monarchs ought to be to send preachers to convert the natives of the New World because “the kinges and Queenes of England have the name of Defenders of the Faithe: By which title I think they are not onely charedged to mayneteyne and patronize the faithe of Christe, but also to inlarge and advaunce the same” (1935b: 215).

Like Hakluyt, Hariot viewed the conversion of the natives as an important aim of English colonization efforts; while he was in Virginia, Hariot himself “did some proselytizing,” and he tends to describe the Algonquians “in terms of their potential for transformation into Christians” (Campbell 1992: 179–81). In De Bry’s edition, a caption to an engraving entitled “Their Idol Kivvasa” claims that the Algonquians, though godless, are ready to “imize us” and are “easeleye … brogt to the knowledge of the gospel.” Hariot also observes that the natives possess a form of religion which, though “it bee farre from the truth,” should be amenable to being “reformed” through the intervention of Protestants. This is a perspective Hakluyt shares; in chapter one of the *Discourse* he writes, basing his opinions on Jacques Cartier’s reports, that the natives “are very easie to be perswaded, and doo all that they sawe the Christians doo in their devine service with like imitation and devotion, and were very desirous to become christians, and woulde faine have been baptized” (1935b: 214). Hakluyt and Hariot present typical European perspectives in representing the Native Americans’ religion as being “other” and inherently inferior yet still having innate qualities that make the natives ripe for conversion to Christianity. Jerry Williams, citing numerous examples from Spanish, Catholic accounts, argues, “Writers contrast the ordered state of religion in the Old World with the inadequate spiritual development of New World inhabitants. Yet no matter how much aboriginal religion is at odds with Christian sensibility, European observers can broach the differences” (2005: 543).

Hakluyt had served as a chaplain and secretary to Elizabeth’s ambassador in Paris, a position that gave him intimate experience of the wars of religion (Sacks 2006: 38). Not surprisingly, this experience colors the view of the New World that he provides in the *Discourse*. He writes in chapter 20 that “Wee shall by plantinge there inlarge the glory of the gospell and from Englande plante sincere relligion, and provide a safe and secure place to receave people from all parts of the worlde that are forced to fl ee for the truthe of gods worde” (1935b: 318). Not only could a New World colony provide a haven for Protestant refugees fleeing persecution of the type Hakluyt had witnessed during his time in France, but he also saw another potential spiritual benefit that might accrue at home from the religious work of converting native populations abroad. In particular, the work of evangelism in the New World could help end domestic sectarian strife. Hakluyt writes:
But also many inconveniences and strifes amongst orselves at home in matters of Cer-
emonies shalbe ended: For those of the Clergye wch by reason of idlenes here at home
are nowe alwayes coyninge of newe opynions, havinge by this voyadge to sett themselves
on worke in reducinge the Savages to the chefe principles of our faithe, will become
lesse contentious, and be contented with the truthe in Relligion alreadie established by
authoritie.” (1935b: 217)

"Godliness is great riches": Doing Well and Doing Good in
the New World

Zeal for spreading the gospel and increasing the “true religion” of Protestantism does
not exist separate from other desires in either Hakluyt’s or Hariot’s texts. In particular,
religious aims are inseparably connected to economic and political ones alike, as
Richard Hakluyt the elder concisely sets out in his “Inducements to the Liking of the
Voyage intended towards Virginia …”: “The ends of this voyage are these: 1. To plant
Christian religion. 2. To traffi  cke. 3. To conquer. Or, to doe all three” (1935: 332).
MacMillan argues that the English “were always more interested in the possession
and exploitation of land than in the subjugation and conversion of native peoples.”
While it may well be true that, as MacMillan says, “subjugation, extending back to
the Norman Conquest of 1066, had historically doubtful legitimacy to the English,”
the ways in which plans for spreading Protestantism and converting the natives inter-
connect with economic hopes and desires in the writings of Hakluyt, Hariot, and De
Bry suggest that religion had a significant place in English efforts to achieve “posses-
sion and exploitation of land” (MacMillan 2006: 9). The mutually reinforcing rela-
tionship of the spiritual and the economic frequently emerges quite powerfully in
Tudor writings promoting colonization efforts. Indeed, an “either / or dichotomy –
either religion or economics – makes no sense” in understanding motives for coloniza-
tion (Breen and Foster 1980: 53).

Witness, for instance, the preface to Florio’s translation of Cartier’s Voyages to
Canada, a text of which it is “permissible to infer that the inspiration … was Hak-
luyt’s” (Taylor 1935: 21). In the closing passage we see the ways in which religious,
economic, and even political aims merge: “Thus beseeching God, that this my travel
may take that effect for the which it is meant, I commende the diligent consideration
to al such Gentlemen, Merchants and Pilots, as seeke Gods glory, the advauncement
of their Countrey, and the happy successe, to the providence of the Almighty”
(Hakluyt 1935a: 168). New World enterprises are the province of gentlemen, mer-
chants, and ship pilots alike; the activities of all three classes of men have the potential
to increase divine glory and England’s glory together, even as they lead to increased
wealth when “happy successe” is achieved.

In his Preface to the Divers Voyagers Hakluyt similarly envisions successful spiritual
and economic achievements as going hand in hand. He writes, “Godliness is great
riches,” adding, “if we first seeke the kingdome of God, al other things will be given
unto us." He continues, "as the light accompanieth the Sunne and the heate the fire, so lasting riches do wait upon them that are jealous for the advancement of the Kingdome of Christ, and the enlargement of his glorious Gospell" (1935b: 178). In listing the topics of the chapters of the Discourse, Hakluyt also tellingly juxtaposes the religious and the economic, interweaving a dollop of politics and anti-Spanish propaganda for good measure (on domestic politics and Anglo-Spanish relations in Tudor representations of the New World, see the section below). The opening overview begins:

1. That his westerne discoverie will be greatly for thinlargement of the gospell of Christe. … 2. That all other englishe Trades are growen beggerly or daungerous, especially in all the kinge of Spayne his Domynions, where our men are dryven to flinge their Bibles and prayer Bokes into the sea, and to forswear and renownce their religion. … 3. That his westerne voyadge will yelde to us all the commodities of Europe, Affrica, and Asia, as far as wee were wonte to travell, and supply the wantes of all our decayed trades. (1935b: 212)

And, as Hadfield points out, in the Discourse Hakluyt "makes the connection between material success and the conversion of the infidels, neatly eliding the spiritual and the economic" (1998: 312).

It is telling that, in reward for his presentation to her of the Discourse, the queen awarded Hakluyt with a prize that itself melds religious and economic benefits. He received the "grant of the first canonry or prebend to fall vacant at Holy Trinity, Bristol." In addition to the professional benefits that the post entailed, including the financial advantages of "all its appertaining emoluments," this position offered the advantages of "a residence and an official status in the seaport which, after London, had the closest connexions with the Atlantic and the New World" (Taylor 1935: 34).

Hariot is equally as straightforward as Hakluyt in combining the economic and spiritual in arguing for colonization. He claims that his motivation for writing the Briefe and True Report is to correct "diuers and variable reportes with some slaunderous and shamefull speches" that "haue not to the honour and benefite of our nation" (Briefe and True Report 1590: 5). The text is composed of three sections, the first of which outlines Virginia's marketable commodities, the second of which describes the territory's "victualls," and the third of which presents "the nature and maners of the people of the country" (6), a section in which the natives' good prospects for conversion enhance the good business prospects of the whole venture.

De Bry also emphasizes the multivalent types of gain available from colonization in his edition of Hariot's Briefe and True Report. The dedication addressed to Sir Walter Raleigh promotes the claim that "your collonye hath been … established to your great honnor and prayse, and noe lesser proffit unto the common welth." The choice of the terms "proffit" and "common welth" invokes a rich tradition of overlapping meanings encompassing the economic, the political, and the religious going back to the fifteenth century (see entries in the Oxford English Dictionary for "commonwealth" and "common weal"). The engraved images with which De Bry illustrates Hariot's text also blend
visions of spiritual and economic gain. De Bry interprets, rather than simply copies, John White's water colors; the engravings transform “scientific images into propagandistic images, projecting and advertising the peaceful tribe, the economic potential of Virginia, and the ethical conduct of the Protestant nations” (Kuhlemann 2007: 92).

The economic benefits available from establishing colonies go beyond possessing and exploiting land. Just as Hakluyt envisions that efforts to convert the Native Americans might have the added benefit of helping to end religious strife at home, so too there are domestic economic gains to be had beyond the simple acquisition of such resources as precious metals, timber, and foodstuffs. Timothy Sweet argues that later sixteenth-century English texts promoting colonization “shared a particular economic narrative regarding New World environments” (1999: 402). These texts remark on the problems of England’s unfavorable balance of trade, the increasing population and the corresponding increasing unemployment at home, and the discord and impoverishment that follow. According to the promotional writers, “Colonization would provide a solution to all these interlinked problems”: The colonies could supply England with commodities currently imported from other countries and so resolve the balance of trade, the native population and colonists alike could provide a market for English cloth and with it increased employment opportunities in the cloth trade at home, and the colonies could provide a place to which the poor could be transported to find employment (Sweet 1999: 402).

Hakluyt’s Discourse embraces this economic narrative enthusiastically, and it informs Hariot’s Briefe and True Report as well. Chapter 3 of the Discourse, for example, provides extensive (one might even say exhaustive) lists of the commodities that might be obtained from a New World colony, and, as we have already seen, a large section of Hariot’s text concerns itself with the commodities available in Virginia. Chapter 4 of the Discourse goes on to make the case for colonization as a means to the “manifolde ymplemployment of nombers of idle men” (1935b: 233); it closes with the claim that

takinge order to cary hence thither our clothes made in hose, coates, clokes, whoodes, &c., and to returne thither hides of their owne beastes tanned and turned into shoes and bootes, and other skynnes … no doubte but wee shall sett on worke in this Realme besides sailers and suche as shalbe seate there in those westerne discovered Contries, at the leaste C. M. subjectes to the greate abatinge of the goodd estates of subjectes of forreine Princes enemyes or doubtfull friends. (1935b: 239)

“A Country that hath yet her maydenhead”: Spanish Catholics, Barbarians, and the Virgin Queen

Given that one of the primary motives of their authors is typically to promote New World colonization and to persuade investors and potential colonists to get involved,
Tudor writings on the Americas naturally tend to have propagandistic qualities. As Hariot makes clear in his statement of purpose addressing the need to overcome slander quoted above, this promotional function was particularly important in the wake of the series of failures that plagued English attempts to create colonies, from Frobisher’s efforts onward through the Virginia attempts of 1584 and 1587. After the fiasco of Frobisher’s purported discovery of gold that turned out to be worthless,

English colonization would never be the same. Elizabeth was understandably wary about investing in overseas ventures. Her successors were rarely bolder. Ever after, English settlement of the New World would be done on the cheap. … The new and thrifty manner of colonization made it necessary for the interested parties to sing the praises of their chosen territories and their schemes for developing them – why else would potential settlers and investors take the plunge? (Chaplin 2007: 54)

However, the propaganda evident in Tudor representations of the New World is not limited to what amounts to advertising. As we have already begun to see, in writing about the New World, inhabitants of Tudor England were inevitably also writing about the Old World, about themselves. In important ways, Tudor writers negotiate Old World politics on the terrain of the New World. In representing the “other place” of the Americas and the native Others who inhabited it, English writers give revealing glimpses of their own society, with all its politicized conflicts, concerns, and contradictions.

Religion in these texts overlaps with overtly political designs even as it helps to reinforce economic aims. In the 1580s, the Elizabethan regime was dealing with interrelated threats posed by Catholic recusants at home and English Catholics abroad. Furthermore, the Catholic monarchs of France and, especially, Spain were a constant menace. As MacMillan points out:

Elizabethan activities in the New World began at a sensitive time in the relations between Protestant England and Catholic Europe, and especially between England and Spain. It was only six years after Pope Pius V excommunicated Queen Elizabeth and called upon all Catholics to rebuke her “pretended” rule that Martin Frobisher began making plans for permanent settlement in the region of Baffin Island. At the same time, Elizabeth was holding prisoner her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, whom domestic and foreign Catholics intrigued to place on the English throne. (MacMillan 2006: 49)

The religio-political threats posed by Spain and Catholicism, and concerted efforts to manage them, resonate strongly through Tudor representations of the New World.

Hakluyt “was driven by a fear that if Protestant England did not establish an empire in the Americas, then Catholic Spain would dominate the known world for the foreseeable future. In short, his goal was to continue the sectarian conflict within Europe in the Americas” (Hadfield 2003: 173). In chapter 1 of the Discourse Hakluyt laments that the Spanish have established “in the West Indies three
Archebiskopricks, to witt, Mexico, Lima, and Cusco, and thirtene other Bisshopricks there named, and have builte above CC. houses of Relligion in the space of fyftie yeres of thereaboutes” (1935b: 216). He also observes that, unfortunately, the “papistes” gain much advantage in asserting the truth of their religion through the claim that they have converted “many millions of Infidells to Christianitie.” This Catholic claim is particularly disturbing because, as Hakluyt points out, he cannot name one infidel converted by “the mynisters wch were sente from Geneva wth Villegagnon into Bresill, and those that wente wth John Ribault into Florida, as also those of our nation that went wth ffrobisher, Sr ffraunces Drake, and ffenton” (1935b: 217). He does manage, though, to turn both of these seemingly negative situations to potential English advantage. He notes that, given the great success of the “superstition” of the Catholics in “plantinge in those partes,” the English may hope for even greater results from “our true and sincere Relligion, proposinge unto ourselves in this action not filthie lucre nor vaine ostentation as they in deed did, but principally the gayninge of the soules of millions of those wretched people” (1935b: 216). Furthermore, though Hakluyt was not as rabidly anti-Catholic as some of his contemporaries (Sacks 2006: 52–3), he does observe that Catholic conversions, numerous though they may be, are more rightly termed perversions: “And as for the boastinge of your conversion of such multitudes of Infidells, yt may justly be coumpted rather a perversion, seeinge you have drawen them as yt were oute of Sylla into Charibdis, that is to say from one error into another” (1935b: 217).

Both Thomas Hariot and Theodor De Bry had personal stakes in the English Protestant cause. As noted above, Hariot was a Protestant clergyman, and De Bry was a Protestant who had fled the Low Countries to escape Spanish Catholic rule. In fact, De Bry met Hakluyt, from whom he would come to acquire Hariot’s text, when he was in London in 1586 and 1587 “to illustrate a work on the funeral procession of Sir Philip Sydney,” that great hero of the international Protestant cause (Bucher 1981: 7). As other scholars have noted, in spite of their clearly pro-Protestant stance, there are tensions inherent in Hariot’s and De Bry’s portrayals of the Native Americans and their religion. The Native Americans emerge as the same as the English but still irreducibly “other,” as potentially dangerous yet inherently peaceable, as inferior yet perhaps equal before God (for perhaps the most influential version of this argument, see Stephen Greenblatt 1985). In particular, if the aim of the Protestant Hariot and De Bry is to depict the natives as non-threatening and readily convertible to Protestant Christianity in order to make colonization seem an attractive, and likely profitable, proposition, the description given of one of the Algonquians’ religious ceremonies is particularly jarring. The caption to an engraving (see Figure 4.1) entitled “Their danses vvich they vse att their highe feastes” states:

At a certayne tyme of the yere they make a great, and solemne feaste whereunto their neighbours of the townes adioninge repayre from all parts, every man attyred in the most strange fashion they can deuise. … The place where they meet is a broade playne, abowt the which are planted in the grownde certayne posts carwed with heads like to the faces
of Nonnes couered with theyr vayles. … Three of the fayrest Virgins, of the companie are in the mydds, which imbrassinge one another doe as yt wear turne abowt in their dancinge. (Hariot: engraving XVIII, emphasis added)

This description, with its comparison of the carved posts to veiled nuns, emphasizes the inferiority of the natives by aligning their celebration with the idolatrous practices of Catholics, an association that is reinforced by the caption accompanying the engraving entitled “The Tombe of their Werovvans” (engraving XXII). This caption states, “By the dead bodies they sett their Idol Kiwasa … : For they are persuaded that the same doth kepe the dead bodyes of their chieefe lords that nothinge may hurt them. Moreover vnder the foresaid scaffoldle some on of their preists hath his lodginge, which Mumbleth his prayers nighte and day.” The passage echoes Protestant ridicule of Catholic veneration of saints’ relics as well as Catholic prayers for the dead, both forms of devotion frequently held up as hallmarks of corrupt papistry. Assigning the title of “preists” to the natives responsible for tending the “idol Kiwasa” and the bodies of the dead chiefs creates an additional link between the foreign, barbarous,
and clearly “other” form of religion practiced by the natives and superstitious, idolatrous Catholic practices.

The captions that suggest parallels between native practices and Catholic devotion do not simply represent English efforts to denigrate the natives, however. They also betray anxieties, resonating with a fear that this native population might become Catholic through Spanish influence, as so many others had done or were believed to have done. As William S. Maltby points out, Francis Drake’s chaplain claimed that “the poisonous infection of Popery” is introduced wherever the Spaniards go, and there is therefore no city, village, or house in the Indies “wherein (amongst the other like Spanish virtues) not only whoredom, but the filthiness of Sodom … is not common without reproof” (1974: 31). If the natives of Virginia already had an affinity for practices that resembled Catholicism in some respects, they might be all the more susceptible to falling under Spanish, Catholic control, a turn of events that would significantly damage English hopes of establishing a profitable, Protestant colony in Virginia.

On the other hand, the anxieties that trouble Hariot’s description of native religious practices go beyond fears about what natives might become. They equally concern what the English might become. If the English feared the Catholicization of New World peoples through Spanish dominance, they feared even more the same fate for themselves. As Hadfield indicates, “[T]he fear was that Europe could become like the New World if Spain were not stopped” (1998: 310). If the natives of the New World were in so many respects similar to the English, as the English accounts are so often at pains to emphasize, and if those natives could be so easily conquered by Catholic Spain, then were not the English themselves distressingly vulnerable?

The conflict between the old Catholic religion and the new Protestant one, and the Anglo-Spanish relations that were so inextricably interwoven with this conflict, were perhaps the most important forces in shaping England’s involvement in the New World. However, they were by no means the only political factors that influenced the ways in which the English perceived and portrayed the New World and its native inhabitants. In the Elizabethan era, the politics surrounding female rule also played a major factor. Indeed, such politicized anxieties, and their negotiations on the stage of the New World, were not confined to the Elizabethan era, or even to England. Columbus had his own struggles in coming to terms with the authority of the powerful queen Isabella, as his writings on his discoveries reveal. Even Richard Eden’s translation of Peter Martyr’s Decades, a text completed during the reign of Mary I, contains hints of discomfort with female rule and the ways in which it affects masculine authority in the Old and New World alike.

Many scholars have read Sir Walter Raleigh’s descriptions of the New World in his text The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Beautifull Empire of Guiana, a text that Hakluyt included in the Principal Navigations, as a classic example of a male explorer’s fraught view of female political authority and of his struggles to fashion an identity under it. Of particular significance is Raleigh’s portrayal of the Amazons. He writes of his desire to “understand the truth of those warlike women,” and continues:
They which are not far from Guiana doe accompany with men but once in a yere, and for the time of one moneth, which I gather by their relation to be in April: and at that time all kings of the borders assemble, and queenes of the Amazones. … If they conceive, and be delivered of a sonne, they returne him to the father; if of a daughter they nourish it and retaine it. … [T]hat they cut off the right dug of the brest, I doe not finde to be true. It was farther tolde me, that if in these warres they tooke any prisoners that they used to accompany with those also at what time soever, but in the end for certime they put them to death: for they are sayd to be very cruell and bloodthirsty, especially to such as offer to invade their territories. (Raleigh 1969: 366–7)

Though Raleigh never actually found the Amazons, the parallels between these armed women and Raleigh’s queen, with whom he had such a difficult relationship, are easy enough to find. As Louis Montrose observes, “Gender and rule, sex and power: these are the concerns that preoccupy Raleigh … ; we might expect such concerns to be of more than incidental interest to a gentleman who is subject to a woman monarch” (1993: 203).

In dealing with Elizabeth and the New World Amazons, Raleigh faced a difficult task, and one he solved only with difficulty. His strategy is first to acknowledge Elizabeth’s likeness to the Amazons (after all, she is described famously as being “habited like an Amazonian Queene, Buskind and plumed, having a golden Truncheon, Gantlet, and Gorget, Arms sufficient to expresse her high and magnanimous spirite” by Thomas Heywood in his account of her Tilbury speech delivered to the troops in 1588); he then turns to her self-representation as the Virgin Queen to praise her as something better still. He describes Elizabeth to the natives as “the great Casique of the north, and a virgine” (Raleigh 1969: 353). Later, in his effort to convince Elizabeth to conquer Guiana, he writes, “And where the South border to Guiana reaches to the Dominion and Empire of the Amazones, those women shall hereby heare the name of a virgin, which is not onely able to defend her owne territories and her neighbours, but also to invade and conquer so great Empires and so far removed” (1969: 431). As Schwarz says of this passage, “In conquering Guiana, Elizabeth will prove something to Amazons, opposing virginity to whatever it is that Amazons do” (2000: 77).

Raleigh does not only suggest the virginal Elizabeth’s similarity, and ultimate superiority, to the Amazons, but he also aligns her with the virginal land of Guiana itself, which he famously calls “a country that hath yet her maydenhead” (1969: 428). Elizabeth named Virginia after her virginity in an act that at once made visible her authority and its symbolic underpinnings. Raleigh’s description of Guiana, with its crucial “yet,” gives his flattery of the Virgin Queen an aggressive edge. It suggests that virginity’s value (the wealth of the land, the symbolic value stemming from physical intactness that guarantees female authority) is contingent; it is something that can, and perhaps he implies, should, be seized by men, with force if necessary. The description of Guiana raises the specter of rape, which, as Montrose notes, is both an act of rage and an act that “must be contextualized within a larger system of gender politics” (1993: 208).
De Bry’s edition of Hariot’s *Briefe and True Report* also contains Amazonian women that attest to anxieties about female authority. Concluding the edition are images of Picts and Britons. Hadfield argues that the reader is intended to see the contrast between the Picts, who are portrayed as being quite violent and savage, and the peaceful Algonquians; the more “civilized” Britons are to be read in continuity with the readily “civilizable” Native Americans. He aligns the figures of Pictish women, whom he argues are “recognizable as Amazons or warrior women” with figures who threaten the English throne: Mary, Queen of Scots, and Arabella Stuart (Hadfield 2003: 175–6). However, matters are somewhat complicated by the fact that the image of a Briton woman, described as a “trve picture of a vvomen nighbor to the Pictes,” is also recognizably Amazonian, bearing as she does a pike and a sword. This British ancestor of Hariot’s queen illustrates that, as Schwarz has argued in *Tough Love*, in Elizabeth’s England Amazons are not simply exotic others who dwell elsewhere; they cannot simply represent a foreign threat, or a curiosity relegated to the annals of history or even the New World. As is the case in the representation of Native American religion in the *Briefe and True Report* discussed above, even representations meant to be reassuring and positive can have troubling implications. This ambiguous image of an Amazonian British woman thus provides a fitting conclusion, since above all it makes clear that, just as colonizing the New World proved more difficult than sanguine promoters hoped, so too representing the New World textually and visually was not as straightforward a process as the creators of such representations might have wished.

**Notes**

1 The passage from Hakluyt describing the episode with his cousin comes from the dedication to Sir Francis Walsingham of the 1589 first edition of the *Principal Navigations*. I would like to express my thanks to Delta Delta Delta for endowing the fellowship I held at the National Humanities Center when I completed this chapter as well as the staff of the National Humanities Center for their support. Additionally, I am grateful to my father, professor of American History *emeritus* Dr Michael R. Bradley, for help with references and for planting the seeds of my interest in colonial America with trips to Jamestown and Williamsburg many years ago.

2 I have adopted the spellings “Hariot” and “Raleigh” throughout; however, when the names appear in variant forms in sources that I quote, I retain the spelling given in the source.

3 “According to an English summary of Persons’s work, Raleigh presided over a ‘school of atheisme’ in which, under Hariot’s direction, ‘both Moyses and our Savior, the olde, and the new Testamente are jested at, and the schollars taughte, among other thinges to spell God backwards’ (R. Persons, *An Advertisement Written to a Secretary of my Lord Treasurers of England, by an English Intelligencer as he Passed through Germany towards Italy, 1592, 18*)” (Nicholls and Williams 2004: par. 36).


By the time Henry Tudor ascended the throne in 1485, England’s two greatest contributions to European music in the Renaissance had long been booked. After the Battle of Agincourt, the English composers John Dunstable and Leonel Power – in the service of English nobles on the continent – carried across the channel the distinctive late-medieval English style of harmony, one including many more sweet harmonic thirds and sixths than had been the norm for continental music up to that time. This style, dubbed “la contenance angloise” (the English guise) by the poet Martin Le Franc, inspired the triadic-based harmonic approach that became the universal standard throughout the Renaissance.

The second contribution was the invention of the cyclic mass, often attributed to Leonel Power with his Missa Alma redemptoris mater, in which a single melody was used as a basis for all of the movements of a polyphonic mass. Previously, polyphonic masses like Machaut’s Messe de Nostre Dame used successive chant mass movements as a basis, and unified the piece only through a general similarity of style. The new cyclic mass used a single pre-existent melody and based each successive mass movement on that one melody, often – at least initially – as a slow-moving cantus firmus. Other techniques for treating the borrowed material were developed over the years, but the initial impulse to unify the disparate movements of a polyphonic mass through a shared musical “idea” may be attributed to Power.

These are huge contributions, and it is a good thing they are on England’s side of the ledger because, throughout most of the Renaissance, England ran a deficit in the international music trade, importing both music and musicians but not sending much abroad. There are a number of reasons for this.

Late Medieval English Insularity

Prominent among them is the use of a parochial liturgy. The Rite of Sarum, certainly the dominant liturgy in England, was used virtually nowhere outside the island, so
no foreigners were composing works that fit in English services, and no English works that used Sarum texts were usable on the continent. That was true for the reign of Henry VII, the first part of the reign of Henry VIII and for the reign of Mary. During the final Protestant years of Henry VIII’s reign, as well as the reigns of Edward and Elizabeth, the liturgy was almost exclusively in English, so continental works were unusable, continental composers had little incentive to try for employment there (unlike the rest of Europe where internationalism was the norm), and English works stayed home. And while English composers eventually developed the anthem as a sophisticated piece of polyphony to rival the motet, it was useless outside England because of its vernacular text. Similarly, the Latin mass and motet, after Mary’s reign, had no liturgical use in England, and those examples that survive by William Byrd and his fellow Catholics were either offered innocently as pious domestic entertainment – “sacred songs” – or as barely disguised clandestine works for the recusant community. But even these Latin works in the Roman Rite by England’s greatest composer found virtually no circulation on the continent. Perhaps Catholic Europe had ceased to expect anything from England.

But that was at the end of the Tudor period. At the beginning, in 1485, English composers were just embarking on this period of introspection. The two prime witnesses to English music of that time are the Fayrfax Manuscript, and the Eton Choirbook, the first a collection of secular works and the latter a volume of sacred polyphony.

It is a remarkable fact that the numerous and sometimes voluminous courtly love chansonniers of continental Europe during the fifteenth century find no English counterpart until the Fayrfax Manuscript (BL Add. 5465), apparently copied at court for Prince Arthur and Katherine of Aragon around 1501–2 (Bowers 1995). Instead of the rondeaux, ballades, and virelais/bergerettes of the Franco-Flemish tradition, however, we find a predominance of the carol – an indigenous strophic form with a refrain. Indeed, to quote the editor of the collection: “To judge from the Fayrfax Manuscript, one would guess that English composers never traveled abroad, heard no foreign music and did not care to look beyond the ends of their noses” (Stevens 1975: xviii). This is not to say that the music is not sophisticated or beautiful. The composers who have been identified as contributing to the manuscript include members of Henry VII’s chapel royal (including the eponymous Robert Fayrfax), and the writing is almost uniformly excellent. Subject matter includes, as we might expect, courtly love, but also melancholic complaint, courtly loyalty (with rose imagery figuring prominently), and religious devotion. In the latter category, William Cornish’s “Woefully arrayed” and Sheryngham’s “Ah, gentle Jesu” are among the most beautiful and powerful vernacular works of the age. There are also some love songs of a more rustic character, and one song, “Hoyda, Jolly Rutterkin,” that makes fun of the manners and drinking habits of Flemish visitors to England, while proving that court entertainment was not all sober reflection.

The other great music manuscript assembled mostly during Henry VII’s reign is the Eton Choirbook, still residing in the library of that college of Henry VI’s founda-
It was probably compiled at Eton in the first decade of the sixteenth century, using music composed throughout Henry VII’s reign (Williamson 1995). It is often said that devotion to Mary was exceptionally strong in pre-Reformation England, and this collection demonstrates that very well, with all but 2 of its 93 works being Marian. One of the exceptions, in fact, is Richard Davy’s *Passio Domini*, the earliest surviving setting of the passion by a named composer, and a work of great dramatic beauty. The musical style throughout the manuscript is one of soaring lines, vigorous syncopations, intricate counterpoint, and vibrant harmonies – though in many ways unlike anything on the continent from the age of the great Franco-Flemish masters like Josquin Desprez and Henricus Isaac. Partly, this is due to the tessitura of most of the Eton works, which make use of a brilliant treble, often sailing an octave or more above the other voices and flaunting the English use of choirboys at a time when the continent used adult males for virtually all polyphony in church. The composers represented in the manuscript worked at various colleges and cathedrals throughout southern England, as well as the chapel royal, and Eton itself, where Robert Wylkynson, the possible copyist, was *informator choristarum* from 1500 to 1515, and whose nine-voice *Salve regina* is one of the gems of the collection. English composers to a man they are, and demonstrate that a high level of compositional skill was being developed domestically, and also that the internationalism that pervaded cathedrals and court chapels on the continent had not yet affected England.

The one documented opportunity the English court had to hear the finest in Franco-Flemish music and musicians came by accident in 1506, when a fleet belonging to Philip the Handsome was wrecked off Portsmouth with Alexander Agricola, Pierre de la Rue, and other renowned musicians on board. Rescued, they were entertained and sang alongside the English chapel royal at Windsor before going on to Spain (Slim 1972).

The main area where foreigners seem to have made significant musical inroads during the reign of Henry VII was instrumental music. By 1503, in the earliest surviving list of instrumentalists at court, most of the names of the players in the loud band – shawms and sackbuts – seem to be of Flemish, rather than English origin: Hans Nagel, Guillaume vander Burgh, Johannes de Peler, etc. (Ashbee 1993; Dumitrescu 2007). Whether or not these were the “rutterkins” of the song, this situation accords with what we know of the “Écoles des Menestrels” of the Low Countries that produced the finest wind minstrels in the world for the courts of France, Burgundy, and subsequently, the Hapsburgs in Flanders and even Spain. These wind players were joined by lute and viol players, such as the van Wilder brothers, Philip and Peter, who eventually became gentlemen of the chamber and served, in fact if not by title, as masters of Henry’s and Edward’s music (and, in Peter’s case, Mary’s and Elizabeth’s as well). It is interesting that courtiers and monarchs felt that English singers and composers held their own against international competition, but realized that home-grown instrumentalists could not compete with the best from the continent. That realization started a tradition of foreign instrumentalists at court that lasted, basically, until the Restoration.
Henry VIII's Music and the Turn toward Italy

With the accession of Henry VIII in 1509, England acquired a monarch with a passion and, reputedly, a talent for music. Although questions have been raised about the extent of his personal musical ability, it seems clear that he played and sang with skill, and that his compositional expertise was good enough to warrant the copying of one attributed work 50 years after his death (Fallows 1993). Again, there are two documents that give a clear picture of the music-making at Henry's court. The first is a manuscript book (BL Add. 31922), named for the monarch himself, that apparently preserves the repertoire of his court entertainment in the second decade of the sixteenth century. There are both vocal and instrumental works, some by the king himself, but mostly by English composers, although there is an occasional French or Flemish work. The musical style is simpler than in the Fayrfax Book, reflecting the newer, more homophonic trend in the French chanson, and the carol is set aside in favor of a simpler, strophic partsong. There are about a dozen continental pieces like La mi la sol by the great Franco-Flemish master, Henricus Isaac – an early indication of English awareness of sophisticated continental polyphony, and probably due to the Flemish connection among Henry's instrumentalists.

Ironically, the Flemish connection figures into another important musical manuscript from early in Henry's reign – BL MS Royal 8.G.vii. It was copied as a gift for Henry and Katherine in the most professional music scriptorium in the world, run by the Hapsburgs in Brussels and Mechelen. The most famous scribe from that scriptorium was Petrus Alamire – a nom de plume made up from the syllables of a note in the musical gamut: A La Mi Re, as would have been apparent to any musician. Alamire visited England in 1516, had friends among the king's minstrels, and even corresponded with the king himself. We also learn that he began spying for Henry on the Flemish-resident, Yorkist counter-claimant to the English throne, Richard de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. This went on for some time until it was learned that Alamire was also spying for Suffolk (Schreurs 1999). But at some point during this period a manuscript was delivered to the English court that contains a fine selection of Franco-Flemish motets composed by Josquin, Isaac, Jean Mouton, Pierre de la Rue and many others.

Another royal musical gift reflects the beginning of an English turn from France and Flanders to Italy during the 1520s. A set of partbooks (Newberry Case VM 1578. M31) containing madrigals and motets was donated by the city of Florence to Henry, probably in either 1526 or 1528 (Slim 1972; Dumitrescu 2007), so English musicians could see the finest in Italian polyphony at that time (although the leading Florentine composers were still Franco-Flemish, like Philippe Verdelot and Adrian Willaert). In spite of the access provided by such manuscripts, in the three great manuscripts of sacred music produced in England during Henry's reign, only two works of continental polyphony were copied by the English scribes (Doe 1968–9).

Henry VIII's most lasting legacy to music in the English court, however, was undoubtedly his hiring of a band of Italian instrumentalists: Members of the Bassano
and Comey families from Venice, the Lupo family from Milan, and the Kellim family from Cremona. While some Italian wind players had been hired in the mid-1520s (Dumitrescu 2007), the earliest harbingers of this new group arrived in 1530, with a large number then receiving appointments in 1540 (Lasocki 1995; Holman 1993). A remarkable discovery about these musical families is that they were Jewish—Ashkenazim for the wind players, and Sephardim for the string players. They were, perhaps, seeking refuge from the Inquisition in Italy and Spain, where the Sephardim had previously lived, while, at the same time Henry was looking for skilled continental musicians he could trust in his household after the break with Rome. These families became dynasties, son or nephew replacing father through talent and faithful service, and some even served after the Restoration. Throughout, they kept ties and property and family in Italy, assimilating enough to satisfy the outward appearance of conformity, though some had burial services in synagogues in the end, even decades after the families arrived in England. It is not surprising, then, to see a grand shift in focus from France and Flanders towards Italy as the model for continental music—a shift that affected English taste and music composition for the rest of the Renaissance.

The string instrumentalists came first as viol players, but because of the continuing connections with Italy, they were aware of the latest trends and, after the middle of the century, began moving towards violin-family performance as well, keeping England in the forefront of what would be a seismic shift in the string world (Holman 1993). On the wind instrument side, the Bassanos in particular were renowned makers and, even today, there exist hundreds of recorders and other instruments in museums all over Europe that bear the family’s distinctive “silkworm” maker’s mark, a vestige of the silk farms run by the Venetian branch of the Bassano family.

Before leaving the reign of Henry VIII, it is necessary to mention one other person whose musical passion affected England for the rest of the Tudor period. Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel, was godson, page, and eventually chamberlain to the king. By 1544, he was a Knight of the Garter and seems to have owned the Royal 8.G.VII manuscript described above: He signed it on the flyleaf above a garter round written in his honor by his resident composer. Arundel’s library, amassed over his lifetime, presumably merged with his son-in-law Lord Lumley’s library when the families moved in together at their newly acquired Nonesuch Palace in 1556. Passing after Arundel’s death in 1580 to Lumley, thence to Prince Henry and ultimately the crown in 1609, it was one of the most important libraries in England. The musical items, both printed and manuscript, catalog the history of music all over Europe in the sixteenth century from almost the very beginning of music printing. Indeed, Arundel’s taste shaped the earliest conception of the discipline since it was his music collection that Charles Burney, working in the late eighteenth century in the newly established British Museum at Montagu House, used as a basis for the first history of music (Milsom 1993). It may also have shaped the taste and the musical knowledge of England’s greatest composers of the sixteenth century, since both Thomas Tallis and William Byrd would have been welcome visitors to the Catholic Arundel and
Lumley households at Nonesuch. That is speculation, of course, although Byrd clearly knew continental motets in the Arundel library that seem otherwise unknown in England, and he dedicated his 1591 *Cantiones sacrae* to Lumley (Harley 1997).

**English Music at Mid-century**

Lumley’s name is also attached to one of the two most important manuscripts of the reign of Edward VI. The Lumley Partbooks (BL Roy.App.74–6), along with the Wanley Partbooks (Bod. Mus.Sch.E.420), preserve the sacred repertoire of that highly Protestant period. In the Wanley books, which seem to be the earlier of the two, the struggle to create music appropriate to the new demands of the church can be seen. Among the earlier works are *contrafacta* – works with substitute words – that include masses by Christopher Tye, John Sheppard, Thomas Tallis, and even John Taverner, who actually died before the end of Henry’s reign in 1545. These are set with English words according to the new Protestant rite and following the edict that any music should set only English words appropriate to the service “with a plain and distinct note for every syllable one,” no more, no less (Le Huray 1967: 9). The most widespread manifestation of this was in the Sternhold and Hopkins metrical psalm singing that began to pervade congregations throughout England, inspired by the Calvinist French versions of Clément Marot and Théodore de Bèze, and by the *Souterliedekens* of the Low Countries. But the newly composed polyphonic music of the Wanley and Lumley books follows the syllabic directive quite closely as well, and uses a thoroughgoing chordal style that serves essentially as a harmonic declamation of the text. The best that can be said of the sacred music of Edward’s reign is that it is well suited to wider musical participation and occasionally produced works of simple eloquence, like Tallis’s “If ye love me.” Not surprisingly, there is not a single identifiable polyphonic sacred work of foreign origin in either the Wanley or the Lumley Partbooks.

During Edward’s reign, the number of minstrels of the royal household declined (Ashbee 1993) and, indeed, it seems that the Calvinist-inspired outlook of Edward and his advisors was not conducive to secular music-making. The Italian instrumentalists were kept on the payroll all through this period, though we have little idea what they were doing. There are some dances copied after the sacred music in the Lumley books, but it seems likely that they were put there only after Mary’s accession in 1553 when the Protestant sacred music was set aside as no longer suitable for church use and the books were acquired by Arundel or Lumley. In fact, two of these instrumental works, “Pavin of Albarti” and “Galliard/Innocients,” seem likely to have been written by Albert Kellim and Innocent Comey, Italians who served together in the royal viol consort and violin band during the 1550s (Holman 1993).

This brings us to the issue of instrumental composition in England, since specialized music for instrumental solo – keyboard and lute – begins to appear about the middle of the century. Certainly, there was activity before that. Philip van Wilder
has already been mentioned as a gentleman of the privy chamber and de facto master of the king’s music, from perhaps as early as 1520 to his death in 1553. While a handful of his sacred compositions survive, of more interest are his works for solo lute (Ward 1992). Since virtually all of the sources are posthumous – indeed, there are no important lute manuscripts until about 1570 – it is difficult to be certain of attribution, but the song arrangements and the single fantasy reflect the output among publishing lutenists and vihuelistas on the continent in the second quarter of the century. And their preservation is evidence of activity even if the sources are late.

The first great keyboard source from England is the Mulliner Book (BL Add. 30513), compiled sometime between about 1550 and 1575. It provides evidence of a flourishing keyboard performance culture, featuring composers like Thomas Tallis, John Redford (author of the interlude, Wyt and Science), and William Blitheman, though it was primarily an organ rather than a harpsichord culture at this point since the majority of the works are based on plainsong, such as hymns and antiphons. They also stretch back into the reign of Henry VIII, since Redford was active at St Paul’s in 1534 and died the same year as the king. Some few works in the Mulliner Book show foreign influence, however. Amid the multiple Eterne rerum and Gloria tibi trinitas settings are few works with secular English titles, and corrupt French titles as well. La doune cella, for example, is evidently a keyboard arrangement of D’ou vient cela, a chanson text set by composers like Claudin de Sermisy, Thomas Crecquillon, and Roland de Lassus. Considering that the Spanish composer and keyboardist, Antonio de Cabezon, visited England as part of the retinue of Philip II in 1554–5, and that among his works is one entitled Duniensela, it is not surprising to see such creative renderings. Perhaps the greater contribution of Cabezon was the introduction of the variation set based on song tunes, which became one of the most important keyboard forms in the Elizabethan period. We do not know for certain that Cabezon introduced the genre through his own variations, or diferencias, but they began to appear in the English keyboard literature about this time and became central to the repertoire of the English virginalist composers like Byrd and Farnaby.

Another visitor in Philip’s chapel choir was Philippe de Monte, although he left early and went back to Flanders, allegedly tired of being the only non-Spaniard in the ensemble. Although a Fleming, de Monte’s early career had been spent in Italy, and it is interesting that the first of his more than 30 books of Italian madrigals was published in Rome in 1554, while de Monte was in England. The madrigal had been introduced into England shortly after its invention with the 1526–8 Florentine gift, and began quietly circulating in manuscripts around this time, but its English heyday would come much later.

What emerged in the sophisticated secular music of Mary’s reign – though, again, the sources are all Elizabethan – is what we now call the “consort song.” This may have originated in the choirboy plays presented under Sebastian Westcote at St Paul’s and, later, under Richard Edwards (author of the play, Damon and Pithias) at the chapel royal, and consists of a song for high voice accompanied by three or four untexted,
instrumental parts, likely intended for viols. There are no obvious continental antecedents for such a texture. The German Tenorlied of the early sixteenth century used a solo voice part with sometimes contrapuntal instrumental accompaniment, but the vocal part was, by custom and by definition, in the tenor rather than the soprano voice. Still, the consort genre took hold and later became a favorite for secular vocal works by William Byrd. By the end of the sixteenth century, the idiom was expanding into sacred vernacular works as the “consort anthem,” with accompanied solo and choral sections, the collected instrumental parts eventually being replaced by organ as the so-called “verse anthem,” which genre then persisted throughout the seventeenth century.

In sacred music, the reign of Mary saw an abrupt return to the Sarum Rite and a mad scramble to provide musical works as well as qualified singers for the restored liturgy (Wulstan c. 1986). Tallis took up his Catholic compositional quill once again, as did John Sheppard, and even Christopher Tye, although Tye’s sympathies clearly remained with the Protestant faction. The Latin music from this period is preserved in the Gyffard Partbooks (BL Add. 17802–5), though these were apparently copied over several decades. Once again, because of the parochial rite, no foreign composers contributed to the Marian sacred repertoire and, indeed, there seem to have been no foreign singers in the chapel royal even though the English shared chapel duties with Philip’s capilla flamenca for part of Mary’s reign. Doubtless, the Spanish chapel’s repertory included works by Franco-Flemish masters from the Hapsburg dominions, however, so the English singer/composers would have heard models of continental polyphony and begun to adapt those techniques to their own uses.

Elizabeth and the Internationalization of Taste

The return to Protestantism at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign harked back more to the end of her father’s reign than to the comparative radicalism of her brother. Latin-texted sacred works, while not common, were allowed when congregants could understand the words. And services could begin and end with “the best sort of melody and music” – a musical extravagance that would never have been allowed under Edward but which gave license to leading chapel royal composers like Tallis, William Mundy, and by 1562, William Byrd, to practice their art to the full extent of their ability (Le Huray 1967).

The members of the royal musical establishments remained remarkably stable through the transition from Mary to Elizabeth and, indeed, throughout Elizabeth’s reign. The Lay Subsidy Rolls (Ashbee 1992) helpfully label “alien” members in the various musical groups and the traditional distinctions continue, with the “musicians,” “violins,” “flutes,” and “sackbutts” being completely dominated by foreigners, and the singers of the chapel royal (and oddly, the “trumpeters”) being exclusively English. There are some new foreign names that appear consistently, however, such as members of the Lanier family of Rouen that begin to arrive in 1561, around the
time of the first French War of Religion. Not surprisingly, the Laniers were Protestant Huguenots.

Nicholas Lanier came to England because the 22-year-old Earl of Hertford heard him as a member of Henry II’s royal band in Paris and recruited him for the English court (Ashbee and Lasocki 1998). Lanier’s recruitment, therefore, we owe to an increasingly popular practice among wealthy young Englishmen – the “Grand Tour” (Price 1981). Under Elizabeth, the “finishing” of young gentlemen often included European travel and, while there, many of them acquired a taste for continental music and made the acquaintance of continental musicians. This internationalization of the taste of individuals with the means to hire their own musicians and demand performances of their favorite music was bound to have an effect on domestic music-making in England. One of the best documented examples of this is the Norfolk gentleman Edward Paston, who traveled in Spain and Italy in the 1570s. Dozens of music manuscripts from his household survive, and he apparently shared their contents with his many friends in Norfolk and Essex, including the Petre family, patrons of the composer William Byrd (Brett 1964).

Some European composers not only had their music circulated in England, but came themselves. One such was Alessandro Striggio who, in spite of the brevity of his English sojourn, nevertheless left a grand and easily documented legacy. In 1566, traveling from his home in Florence, first to Vienna and then to Paris in 1567, he decided to visit London. With him throughout the journey he carried one of his proudest accomplishments: a mass for 40 voices (that even expanded to 60 voices at the end). A commonplace book anecdote in 1611, noted by Thomas Wateridge and ascribed to one Ellis Swayne, tells the story of a song of many voices being sent into England from Italy:

The Duke … bearinge a great love to Musick asked whether none of our Englishmen could sett as good a songe, and Tallice beinge very skilfull was felt to try whether he could undertake ye Matter, wch was songe in the longe gallery at Arundel house wch so farre surpassed ye other that the Duke hearinge of yt songe, took his chayne of Gold from of his necke and putt yt about Tallice his necke and gave yt him. … (Moroney 2007: 30)

Within a short time after Striggio’s visit to England, Thomas Tallis had composed his own 40-voice work, Spem in alium, almost certainly in answer to the challenge. It remains the most glorious choral achievement of the English Renaissance.

Other foreign composers stayed longer and had a more lasting (if less spectacular) impact. Born in Bologna in 1543, Alfonso Ferrabosco was already performing as an adolescent in France with his two brothers as “Les trois Pharabosques.” By the age of 19, he was in England, receiving the highest salary of any musician at the English court. Over the next 16 years, he traveled back and forth between England, France, and Italy, retaining favor with Elizabeth in spite of his absences and even doing some diplomatic work for Cecil. He eventually came under suspicion over the death of one
of Philip Sidney’s servants and his continued association with Catholics, and left England for good in 1578, abandoning his two acknowledged but illegitimate children to the care of Gomer van Osterwick, a Flemish colleague in the royal band. His son, Alfonso, Jr, lived to play a prominent role in the royal musical establishment as a viol player and composer, beginning in 1592. Esteem for the elder Ferrabosco lived on in England, meanwhile, and he was repeatedly lauded as the most admired of all foreign musicians and composers. In fact, it was his prolific activity as a composer that set him apart from most other foreign musicians at the court of Elizabeth, and his conservative approach to text setting and counterpoint in madrigals and motets became an important model for English composers. As composer, singer, and scribe, John Baldwin, rhymed in 1591:

… yet must I speak of moe: even of straingers also: –
and firste I must bringe in: alfonso delasso: – ferabosco: –
a strainger borne hee was: in italie as I heere: –
Italians saie of hime: in skill hee had no peere: – …. 

Note that Baldwin’s enthusiasm was sufficiently distractable that he initially wrote “delasso” rather than “ferabosco.” This excerpt is from a poem Baldwin wrote at the end of a huge manuscript (BL R.M.24.d.2) where he had just copied over 200 pieces of music, not a single one of which is by Roland de Lassus (Owens 1987). Yet Baldwin’s confusion is understandable, for Lassus also had a claim to be called “firste strainger” because of his eminence in English music prints of the period.

Music in Print

England had been slow to adopt print as a means of transmitting music. The first printed collection of polyphonic music was issued in Venice in 1501 by Ottaviano Petrucci. By the 1520s, there was a flourishing music publishing industry in France, using the single-impression system pioneered by Pierre Attaingnant that became a near-universal standard for more than a century afterwards. In Germany, meanwhile, Augsburg and Nuremberg became important music printing centers from the 1520s, and by the 1540s, Antwerp emerged as a very active center as well. England produced a pioneer of music printing in John Rastell (author, playwright, and father-in-law of John Heywood), who was apparently the first ever to use single-impression music printing in about 1523, and the first to print a score (or pseudo-score, at least) of polyphonic music, but this was not the beginning of a commercial music operation. His surviving musical output consists of one complete three-voice song (that appears also in Henry VIII’s Book) and some broadside fragments with music (Milsom 1997). In 1530 appeared an anonymously printed collection entitled XX Songes, which showed a high degree of artistry in using a multiple impression process like that of Petrucci. Imperfectly preserved as a single surviving partbook (out of an original four),
it is again an isolated survivor if, in fact, it ever had fellows or followers. It is not until 1553 that the music printing trade in England began as a commercial venture, and then only to print the popular metrical psalms with their tunes. What really marked the beginning of the music publishing trade in England was the work of the Huguenot immigrant from Troyes, Thomas Vautrollier (Kerman 1962). Settling in London about 1562, he began as an agent for continental printers like Plantin, but by 1570, using music type from the French typographer Pierre Haultin (Krummel 1975), he published Recueil du Mellange, presenting 40 chansons by Lassus. Dedicated to Arundel, this edition made available many of the composer’s best-known works in French, though half of them with lyrics bowdlerized by the pious Vautrollier. It also began a vogue for the music of Lassus and contributed to his stature as the most published foreign composer in Elizabethan England.

Vautrollier was the printer used by Tallis and Byrd, once they obtained their music printing monopoly from Elizabeth in 1575. Mysteriously, however, after their initial Cantiones Sacrae of that year, there were no sanctioned music publications in England until 1588, a year after the death of Vautrollier. Whether the lacuna is due to scruples or calculated absences from London on the part of the printer is not known, but in 1587, the same year Vautrollier died, Thomas East registered a new music publication under license from Byrd (Tallis having died in 1585). This was Byrd’s Psalms, Sonets, & Songs of Sadnes and Pietie (1588), a collection of polyphonic songs in English, basically in the consort song idiom but with words in every part for alternative all-vocal performance. That same year, again under license from Byrd and using Vautrollier’s music type, East printed Musica Transalpina.

The Italian Madrigal in England

It may be that the defeat of the Armada in 1588 made it acceptable to print a collection of music that trumpeted contents from Catholic Europe, or it may be that the pressure of amateur English musical taste finally demanded a more readily available and congenial source than imported editions in a foreign language. Either way, “Music from across the Alps” was an anthology of Italian madrigals – albeit in middling English translation – assembled by Nicholas Yonge, a singer at St Paul’s Cathedral. Belying the popular conception of the madrigal as fully characterizing the Elizabethan era in music, it was really this publication, 30 years into Elizabeth’s reign, that began the flood of editions of Italian and native works in that genre.

Whether a nod to his printing monopoly or to his stature as the country’s greatest composer, the only Englishman represented was William Byrd, with 2 of the 57 madrigals. The best represented composer, with 14 selections, was the sometime resident and perennial English favorite, Alfonso Ferrabosco. His pieces came in part from his 1587 madrigal collection, published in Italy the year he died, and in part from manuscripts left behind in England. Lassus appears with two selections from Vautrollier’s 1570 edition, and Philippe de Monte is represented as another foreign visitor
to England. Palestrina, the eminent Roman, is well represented with five madrigals, including “Sound out my voice” set to his famous *Vestiva i colli*. But the new “star” of the collection, clearly, is Luca Marenzio, with ten madrigals chosen from four collections published in the 1580s.

The reason we know that Marenzio was a rising star is because the next edition of madrigals, *Italian Madrigals Englished*, published by the poet Thomas Watson in 1590, is almost exclusively devoted to Marenzio’s music. Byrd appears again with two settings of “This sweet and merry month of May,” and there are three madrigals by sundry Italians, including another sometime visitor to England, Alessandro Striggio, but 23 of the 28 works in Watson’s collection are by Marenzio.

The choice of madrigals in these first two anthologies seems to show an English prejudice against the bold harmonic experiments so prevalent among Italian madrigalists at this period. Even Marenzio was writing highly chromatic works, like *Dolorosi martir*, in some of his same publications that were mined for these anthologies, but although that work finally made it into the second volume of *Musica Transalpina* in 1597, such works were not chosen for the earlier anthologies, perhaps because of a native conservatism, or because the late arbiter of taste in madrigals in England, Alfonso Ferrabosco, was himself conservative in that regard.

The madrigal proper, as found in these collections, is characterized by through-composition, where music and lyric unfold together from start to finish, allowing characteristic “madrigalisms,” or “word-painting,” by the precise matching of text and music. Such detailed musical depiction of the lyric is not possible where the same music must serve for more than one section or stanza of text. But Italian madrigalists did compose in such repeating forms, generally with lighter subject matter, and the English embraced those as well. Balletts and canzonets were popularized through the musical publications of Thomas Morley in the 1590s. In fact, some of Morley’s most famous “madrigals” – like “Sing we and chant it,” “My bonny lass she smileth,” and “Now is the month of Maying” – are actually Italian *balletti* by Giovanni Gastoldi and Orazio Vecchi, to which Morley has simply applied English words. Morley’s championing of these forms did lead to new balletts and canzonets by later English composers, however, as both the madrigal and its lighter relatives were pursued with even more vigor in the Jacobean period than they were under Elizabeth.

Morley’s other great contribution to the madrigal in England was his editing of *The Triumphs of Oriana* in 1601. It was based on an Italian collected encomium entitled *Il Trionfo di Dori* (1592) that was known in England through Giovanni Croce’s contribution to Yonge’s second volume of *Musica Transalpina* in 1597, *Ove tra l’herbe*. Already, Yonge had substituted “Oriana” for “Dori” in the final “Long live fair” (“Viva la bella”) section, and Morley acknowledged his debt to that inspiration by adapting Croce’s text for his own contribution to *The Triumphs of Oriana*. Ironically, while the collection has been generally regarded as an obvious tribute to Elizabeth, it was not dedicated to her, and recent research has suggested it may originally have been intended to honor Anne of Denmark as Oriana and Penelope Rich as the goddess.
Diana, who, as the sister of the traitorous Earl of Essex, became suddenly ineligible as the publication was about to go to press (Smith 2005).

**English Musicians on the Continent**

Finally, it is necessary to examine the careers of English musicians traveling to the continent. Peter Philips first appears as a St Paul’s choirboy under Sebastian Westcote, and was clearly precocious since by 1580 he had composed a signature pavan for keyboard that became widely popular, even on the continent. Westcote’s Catholicism had been ignored during Elizabeth’s reign because of his success in producing theatrical performances with the boys, but immediately after his protector’s death in 1582, Philips left the country “pour la foy Catholique.” After stopping at Douai, he went on to Rome for a few years, then traveled in Italy, Spain, France, and the Spanish Netherlands with the Catholic exile Thomas Paget. Settling then in Antwerp and, later, Brussels, he achieved renown as a keyboard player and was also active as an editor and composer of madrigals for the Antwerp music printer Pierre Phalèse. He turned later to motets after being widowed and taking holy orders. A 1593 visit to Protestant Amsterdam to hear the keyboard master Sweelinck resulted in his incarceration for plotting against Elizabeth, and he came close to losing his life. It appears, however, that he was actually spying for William Cecil, Elizabeth’s Secretary of State (Taylor 2001).

It may be surprising to find Catholic musicians like Ferrabosco and Philips corresponding with Cecil from the continent to the benefit of the English crown, but this is also true of the most famous English Catholic instrumentalist traveling abroad (and arguably the greatest lutenist who has ever lived), John Dowland. Born about 1563, he was undoubtedly tutored in lute using the method book by the French master, Adrian Le Roy, published in English translation in 1568 and expanded in 1574 to include an anthology of pieces by Lassus. By 1579, Dowland was in Paris himself in the household of Henry Cobham, and afterwards confessed to Cecil that he converted to Catholicism there, even though as a later Oxford graduate, he would have had to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. By the late 1580s his musical stature was being mentioned in glowing terms and his works began to be heard at court. It may therefore have been pique at being passed over as a replacement for the late court lutenist John Johnson in 1594 – a slight that he afterwards attributed to his religion – that caused him to go abroad again. After stops in Wölfenbüttel and Kassel, he went on to Italy intending to study with Marenzio, only to find himself entangled with a party of treasonous expatriates. In a panic, he wrote to Cecil to confess and plead innocence. When still nothing opened up for him at the English court, he went to Elsinore, where he became one of the highest paid individuals at the court of Christian IV of Denmark, at a salary about five times what court musicians were receiving in England. When Christian’s sister, Anne, became Queen Consort of England in 1603, Dowland hoped for preferment at home but continued
to be disappointed until 1612, when an extra place for a lutenist was created for him (Ashbee and Lasocki 1998). Dowland’s fame as a lutenist and composer stretched across Europe, and the technical demands of his works set high standards for players everywhere, and for all time.

England’s involvement in a war was also responsible for musical interaction with the continent. In late 1585, when the Earl of Leicester was leading the English forces against the Spanish in the Netherlands, he brought over a troupe of actors from his theatrical company, presumably to entertain the soldiers and himself. We know that this troupe was led by the comedian Will Kemp, and that they were extremely popular, not just among the soldiers, but in the various towns and courts they visited. Indeed, leaving the army behind, they visited various towns in the Low Countries on their way up into Denmark, where they were well received by the court and stayed for some months. This seems to have been the first of several groups of English “actors” from established companies who traveled to the continent over the next several decades (Gurr 1996; Limon 1985). I say “actors” because, although the individuals with Kemp included people like George Bryan and Thomas Pope – both later with Shakespeare’s company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, and Pope even a sharer in the Globe Theater – they were described variously on the continent as “instrumentalists,” “tumblers,” “jugglers,” or “comedians,” making it clear that they were essentially “variety-show” entertainers. With them, they brought the popular tunes of Elizabethan England, and we know this because, all of a sudden, continental manuscripts and prints begin transmitting such tunes in abundance, whereas from sources before 1585, there are almost none.

The instrumental consort they favored – what has been variously known as the “broken consort,” the “mixed consort” and the “Morley consort” – became recognized on the continent as a distinctive ensemble consisting of violin, flute, lute, bass viol, and two wire-strung plucked instruments: cittern and bandora (Harwood, forthcoming). Michael Praetorius, writing in 1619 in Wölfenbüttel (where English comedians spent a great deal of time), described this ensemble in glowing terms as an “Englisch Consort.” Its origins seem to lie in accompaniments to theatrical entertainments for Elizabeth from the 1570s, and the first published collection of music intended for the group, Morley’s *Consort Lessons* (1599), affirms that it was closely associated with the theater. The significance of the ensemble is that it helped break the monopoly that “closed consorts” – groups consisting of different sizes of the same instrument – had held throughout most of the Renaissance, and pointed the way to “orchestration,” where the choice of instrument and its idiomatic qualities affected the composition of ensemble music in the seventeenth century and beyond.

**References**


FURTHER READING


6

Tudor Technology in Transition

Adam Max Cohen

In the late 1590s the English navigator and explorer John Davis praised England as a leader in the mathematical arts:

What strangers may be compared with M. Thomas Digges Esq. our Country man the great master of Archimastrie [the mathematical arts collectively]: and for Theoricall Speculations and most cunning Calculations M. [John] Dee and M. Thomas Harriott are hardly to be matched: and for mechancall practices drawne from the Arts Mathematic our countrie doth yeelde men of principall excellency as M. Emery Mullinaux for the exquisite making of Globes bodies. (Taylor 1954: 178)

Davis’s pride in England’s expertise in applied mathematics is particularly striking when we consider that England was something of a technological backwater at the beginning of the Tudor period. Lewis Mumford has referred to medieval England as “one of the backward countries of Europe” which “shared in only a limited way in the great industrial and civic development that took place in the South from the tenth century onward” (Mumford 1962: 69). The Crown’s decision to seize English monasteries in the 1530s only exacerbated England’s backwardness because the monasteries possessed some of the country’s most sophisticated milling machinery.

What happened during the Tudor period, then, to transform the city of London and the country as a whole from a technological backwater into one of Europe’s leading producers and users of new technologies? There were many factors which encouraged the transformation of English technology practice, including the rise of print culture, the general mathematical renaissance encouraged by such figures as John Cheke and Robert Recorde, the influx of craftsmen from the Continent, the increase in domestic production of the raw materials needed for instrument manufacture, the threat of foreign invasion, the increase in overseas exploration and trade, and the persistent and often coordinated influence of medieval innovations (Cohen 2006: 23–33). The first section of this chapter will use Davis’s boast as a partial window into the state of the
art in a variety of technical fields, highlighting some of the factors which caused Tudor developments. The second section will shift the focus from material conditions to the emotional, psychological, and even spiritual responses to new and improved technologies. Some mechanical marvels were considered extensions of God’s presence or the divine will, while others were believed to be of diabolic origin. The third and final section of this chapter will turn to a relatively simple tool, the mirror, to show some of the ways in which technological transformations directly influenced the Tudor literary landscape.

The State of the Arts

Davis’s list of the leading lights in English mathematical practice – Thomas Digges, John Dee, Thomas Hariot, and Emery Molyneux – reveals the variety of fields in which important developments were taking place towards the end of the Tudor period. Thomas Digges was the son of Leonard Digges. The elder Digges wrote the frequently reprinted almanac *A Prognostication of Right Good Effect* (1555), which described how to make and use astronomical instruments, surveying tools, and even clocks and watches. Father and son collaborated on *A Boke Named Tectonicon* (1556), which is widely considered the first English text on geometrical surveying. Thomas Digges wrote an important treatise on the drawing of scale maps and military cartography titled *Pantometria* (1571), and he pursued his interests in military subjects further in *An Arithmetical Militarie Treatise, Named Stratioticos* (1579).

John Dee was a controversial figure in part because of his interests in occult studies, but he was also an important champion of applied mathematics in the second half of the sixteenth century. After completing his university training Dee visited Paris, Brussels, and Louvain from 1547 until 1550. In each city he studied the design and manufacture of instruments for surveying, navigation, cartography, gunnery, and dialling. Dialling was the designing and manufacturing of sundials, and it was a popular aristocratic hobby throughout the Tudor period. On the Continent Dee also met some of the leading instrument-makers of the day including Gemma Frisius (1508–55) and Gerard Mercator (1512–94).

Dee’s *Mathematicall Preface* to Billingsley’s translation of Euclid’s *Geometry* (1570) is a key work in understanding the range of studies and practices opening up to the Elizabethan student of applied mathematics. The preface is a mathematical manifesto intended “to stirre the imagination mathematicall” and “to inform the practiser mechanickall.” The work presents a taxonomy of the mathematical arts and emphasizes that each branch produces practical improvements in English culture. The branches include “Geographie,” “Chorographie” (map-making), “Hydrographie” (the charting of coastal waters), “Stratarithmetrie” (the numbering of soldiers in military formations), “Perspective,” “Acoptrike” (the study of mirrors and reflections), “Astronomie,” “Cosmographie” (the “whole and perfect description of the heauenly, and also elementall parte of the world”), “Astrologie” (“the operations and effectes, of the naturall
beames, of light, and secrete influence of the Sterres and Planets: in euer element and elementall body at all times”), “Statike” (“the causes of heavynes, and lightnes of all thynges: and of motions and properties”), “Anthropographie” (“the Number, Measure, Waight, figure, Situation, and colour of euer diuere thing, conteyned in the perfect body of MAN; with certain knowledge of the Symmetrie, figure, waight, Characterization, and due locall motion, of any parcell of the sayd body”), “Trochilike” (“the properties of all Circular motions, Simple and Compounde,” such as clockworks and millworks), “Helicosophie” (“the scrue, used in diverse instrumentes and engines”), “Pneumatithmie” (“the straunge properties … of the Water, Ayre, Smoke, and Fire, in theyr continuite, and as they are ionyed to the Elementes next them”), “Menadrie” (the art by which “Cranes, Gybbettes, & Engines do lift up”), “Hypogeiodie” (the determination of underground property rights for mining purposes) “Hydragogie” (irrigation), “Horometrie” (“the precise usuall denomination of time”) “Zographie” (the art of perspective applied exclusively to painting), “Architecture,” “Nauigation,” and “Thaumaturgike” (displays which evoked awe or wonder). This impressive list indicates the tremendous variety of practices that fell under the rubric of applied mathematics, and it reveals that the practices ranged from the mundane to the marvelous.

Dee was not touting the powers of applied mathematics in a vacuum. A year prior to the publication of his *Mathematicall Preface* Pierre de la Ramé, also known as Petrus Ramus, published his *Scholarum mathematicarum libri unus et triginta*, which emphasized that mathematics had many applications in daily life. This emphasis on the practical usefulness of mathematics served as a direct challenge to Plato, who had argued that mathematics was nothing more than a network of abstractions. Ramus noted that bankers needed mathematics to change money, customs inspectors needed it to impose duties, and exchequers used it to verify royal accounts. Ramus was particularly interested in automatia, or self-moving machines. Poring over the texts of Agrippa and a number of other writers, he generated a long list of ancient and modern automata — moving statues, flying birds and insects, and even talking heads — to show that mathematical knowledge could enable the educated artificer to rival the Creator by bringing inanimate matter to life (Grafton 2002: 38–40).

In his *Preface* Dee noted that different types of mathematical practitioners needed to master different types of tools, inventions, and machines. The ship’s pilot, for instance, needed to be able to make and use “Quadrantes, The Astronomers Ryng, The Astronomers staffe, The Astrolabe uniuersall. An Hydrographical Globe. Charts Hydrographicall … The common Sea Compas: The Compas of variaciion: The Proportionall, and Paradoxall Compasses … clockes with spryng: houre, halfe houre, and three houre Sandglasses; & Sundry other instrumentes.” Many of these tools facilitated the open ocean navigation necessary for trade, warfare, and discovery. Dee was widely criticized for his obsession with prophecy and mirror-scrying (divination through the interpretation of images seen in a reflective surface) later in life, but his published work validated a whole host of mathematical practices, and his library proved a useful resource for scholars interested in mechanical, mathematical, and occult studies.
Thomas Hariot was a distinguished cartographer, astronomer, and mathematician, and a central figure in the circle of scholars around Henry Percy, the ninth earl of Northumberland. Henry Percy’s interest in science, alchemy, and cartography earned him the nickname “The Wizard Earl.” At Percy’s Syon House just north of Richmond-upon-Thames Hariot used a telescope to map the moon and observe sunspots. Hariot is best known for his authorship of *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588), a text which emphasizes the technological superiority of the English. In the midst of a key passage in which he argues that the Algonquins are ripe for conversion to Christianity, Hariot summarizes European technological superiority as material evidence of a more general religious and cultural superiority:

Most thinges they sawe with vs, as Mathematicall instruments, sea compasses, the vertue of the loadstone in drawing yron, a perspectiue glasse whereby was shewed manie strange sightes, burning glasses, wildefire workes, gunnes, bookes, writing and reading, spring clocks that seeme to goe of themselues, and manie other thinges that wee had, were so straunge vnto them, and so farre exceeded their capacities to comprehend the reason and means how they should be made and done, that they thought they were rather the works of gods then of men, or at the leastwise they had bin giuen and taught vs of the gods. (Cohen 2006: 176)

This list nicely summarizes some of the most astounding technologies available to the late Tudor individual of means. It also indicates that many of the most marvelous and awe-inspiring innovations in existence at the end of the Tudor period were adaptations of medieval inventions. The first European description of a magnetic sea compass occurs in 1187, and by the late thirteenth century European sea compasses had become ubiquitous on sailing vessels. The “burning glasses” Hariot mentions were magnifying glasses that could be used to ignite fires, and they trace their legendary heritage back to Archimedes, who supposedly used some version of a magnifying glass to sink enemy ships. The “perspectiue glasse” which Hariot describes could have been a primitive telescope, but it is more likely some sort of distorting lens and mirror arrangement. It could have been a multiplying glass which functioned like a kaleidoscope to scatter an image viewed through it, a unifying glass which brought together disparate portions of a fractured image to create a coherent view, or one of many types of anamorphic fun-house lens and mirror arrangements (Shickman 1978). In short, Hariot’s “perspective glass” was likely a toy which traced its heritage back to the distorting mirrors popular during the medieval period. Fireworks or “wildefire workes” were an ancient Chinese invention that were well established in Europe during the Middle Ages; the printing press was a pre-Tudor innovation (though its full effect was not felt until the Tudor period); and the spring-driven clock was invented in the late fifteenth century.

Many late Tudor technological marvels had medieval origins. After examining the history of technology during the early modern period as a whole, the contemporary historian Carlo Cipolla concluded that technological innovations of the fifteenth century encouraged and facilitated the technological innovations of the sixteenth
For instance, the proliferation of firearms, improvement in shipbuilding, and the refinement of navigational tools in the fifteenth century enabled the Age of Discovery that began with Portuguese sea voyages in search of gold, silver, spices, and slaves in the fifteenth century and gathered steam in the sixteenth century. Exploration and subsequent colonization increased European demand for cannon, cannon balls, anchors, and sophisticated new machines to pump water out of mines and haul minerals. Also, the invention of printing with movable type in the fifteenth century enabled the proliferation of technical literature in the sixteenth century which led to innovation in many fields (Cipolla 1977: 23).

Davis ends his list of the technological masters of his age by praising Emery Molyneux. Molyneux, a gentleman by birth, was an expert in the use of ordnance, and he manufactured compasses and other mathematical instruments in Lambeth. As Davis notes, his claim to fame was his design of the very first pair of globes made in England, completed in 1592. Molyneux designed one celestial globe and one terrestrial globe, which was the standard practice of the time, and the two globes were intended to be displayed as a pair. Molyneux’s celestial globe was not especially noteworthy because it basically reproduced Mercator’s 1551 celestial globe with some additional stars in the southern hemisphere. The terrestrial globe, though, was a sensational boon to England’s self-image as a nascent global empire. The globe used colored lines to show the routes that Cavendish and Drake had taken on their recent circumnavigations of the globe. It also noted Sir Walter Raleigh’s attempts to establish a colony in Virginia and Drake’s discoveries in the northern reaches of North America during his attempts to find a Northwest Passage to the Orient. The globes were reproduced in multiple sizes for seamen, armchair travelers, and students learning geography. Robert Tanner, Thomas Hood, Thomas Blundeville, and Robert Hues wrote technical treatises praising Molyneux’s masterpieces, and Molyneux’s globes also seemed to have had an impact on the literature of the late Tudor and early Stuart periods. In the mid-sixteenth century Tudor politicians, authors, and artists routinely employed the globe for symbolic effect, but with the manufacture and distribution of Molyneux’s globes the literary range and power of the globe symbol intensified. By the mid-1590s the globe was frequently invoked to represent travel, exploration, discovery, the classical past, the potential for empire, learning, the individual, the nation, the earth, the cosmos, and even the stage. As I have argued elsewhere, the ubiquity and popularity of globes in the mid-1590s likely encouraged Shakespeare’s company to choose The Globe for the name of its reconstructed playing space in 1599 (Cohen 2006: 51–64). Davis was happy to sing the praises of Molyneux in part because Davis had personally introduced Molyneux to William Sanderson, the financial backer of Molyneux’s project.

Davis’s praise of English innovators is helpful in understanding the range of tools, devices, and practices which were being developed towards the end of the Tudor period, but it is limited and even misleading in important ways. Davis makes no mention of the instrument-makers who were inventing, refining, and manufacturing devices in London in the 1590s. Beginning around the middle of the sixteenth century
these men began to produce an impressive array of new and improved tools. In the field of navigation the innovations included new types of compasses, quadrants, astrolabes, armillary spheres, globes, staffs, and sea-rings. In the field of gunnery sectors, quadrants, and gunner’s levels helped aim various large ordnance including iron and brass cannon as well as hand-held gunpowder weapons like the arquebus, the caliver, and the musket. In timekeeping spring-driven clocks, weight-driven cathedral and chamber clocks, and even portable sundials equipped with compasses for proper orientation were all in use. In surveying instrument-makers perfected theodolites to measure horizontal and vertical angles, carpenter’s rules, various sorts of squares, and backstaffs to measure the altitude of celestial bodies. Some of these tools were designed and built by professional instrument-makers, some were made by mechanics or mathematicians hired by noble households, and some were built by amateurs who had seen or read of a new technology in an almanac or a Description and Use treatise. Just as some university wits harbored resentment against the dramatic achievements of upstart crows, some university-trained mechanical philosophers turned up their noses at men whom they considered to be rude mechanicals.

Gerard L’E. Turner claims that the year 1600 represented a high-water mark in English technological productivity. English instruments were becoming more sophisticated and more numerous than ever before, competition between and among instrument-makers was spirited, and craftsmen began to develop a certain sense of entrepreneurship. Whereas earlier English instrument-makers had been content to execute designs created on the Continent, by 1600 English artisans had gained the experience and the confidence to develop their own designs (Turner 1983: 96–8).

Davis’s boast is profoundly nationalistic, celebrating English innovators in mathematical and mechanical fields by asserting their superiority to “strangers.” This is a misleading claim because, as noted above, many of the key figures in the late Tudor technology boom were in fact immigrants from the Continent. Indeed the coordinated advance in a variety of technical fields was caused in large part by an influx of highly skilled Continental artisans and craftsmen who had fled their homelands to escape war or religious persecution. The Franco-Spanish wars of 1494–1559 caused a steady migration of skilled craftsmen out of Italy, France was torn apart by feuding religious and political groups after 1560, and during the sixteenth century war and religious persecution caused a flight of Protestant craftsmen and technicians from the Low Countries. As Colin Clair has observed, “there is little doubt that the influx of aliens during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gave a considerable impetus to industry in this country, not only by introducing new crafts but also by improving old ones” (Clair 1965: 6).

One of the more influential immigrants was Thomas Gemini, born Thomas Lambrit in a village near Liége, Flanders. Gemini came to England during the reign of Henry VIII to escape religious persecution, and he established a shop in the Blackfriars. He worked as a printer and engraver; he supplied an astrolabe (a disc and pointer assembly used to find one’s latitude by measuring the altitude of celestial bodies) to an expedition attempting a Northeast Passage to the Orient in 1552; and he made another
astrolabe for Queen Elizabeth in 1559. Gemmí may have trained under the great Continental instrument-makers Gerard Mercator and Walter Arsenius, nephew of Gemma Frisius, and Gemini himself went on to train some of the first English instrument-makers such as Humfrey Cole (c. 1530–91).

The liberties of the Blackfriars and of St Martin le Grand saw the highest concentrations of foreign clockmakers and watchmakers, while English artisans residing in the printing district around St Paul’s Cathedral and St Botolph Aldgate specialized in navigational instruments such as quadrants, astrolabes, staffs, and balances. The strangers and the Englishmen seem to have lived and worked together just outside the western walls of the city between St Clement and St Dunstan’s parish, and in the neighborhood around St Bartholomew’s Hospital. Like Elizabethan acting companies, instrument-makers of every extraction preferred the liberties and suburbs because industry in those areas was less strictly regulated by the city’s guilds.

The Wonders of Tudor Technology

One of the more curious items in John Dee’s taxonomy of applied mathematics is “Thaumaturgicke,” displays or spectacles engineered specifically to evoke awe or wonder. Artists, inventors, and engineers working for European courts attempted to amaze their patrons and their patrons’ guests by designing automata, perpetual motion machines, distorting mirrors, fountains which sprayed unsuspecting visitors, talking human heads, pageant wagons that seemed to move by themselves, and other mechanical marvels (Grafton 2002). At the end of the sixteenth century the Belgian mathematician Adrianus Romanus asserted that “thaumatopoetic” or wonder-producing mathematics included all sorts of self-moving automata from large weight-driven and spring-driven clocks to Archimedes’s spherical model of the universe which moved on its own power (Grafton 2002: 40).

In his On the Vanity of the Arts and Sciences, written in the 1520s, the German theologian, physician, and soldier Henry Cornelius Agrippa described the student of applied mathematics as a “magus” who was capable of creating miraculous effects:

Hence the magus, who is a master of natural philosophy and mathematics, and knows the mixed sciences that consist of both of these, arithmetic, music, geometry, optics, astronomy, and the sciences of weights, measures, proportions and joints, and knows the mechanical arts that derive from these, can also, not surprisingly, work many wonders, which may astonish even the most prudent of men. (Grafton 2002: 32–4)

This statement not only indicates the central role of wonder in applied mathematics, it shows some of the various disciplines in which Tudor engineers excelled.

In her study of mechanical imagery in courtly rhetoric Jessica Wolfe writes that the best term to describe the category of mechanical inventions produced in the early modern period is “natural magic” because the term “signifies procedures that appear supernatural but are in fact produced by natural means” (Wolfe 2004: 7). Early
modern authors also referred to these fields as “artificial magic” or “mathematical magic” (Grafton 2002). The title of John Wilkins’ early modern treatise on mechanics encapsulates the relationship between magic, applied mathematics, and wonder: *Mathematicall Magicks. Or, the Wonders That May Be Performed by Mechanicall Geometry*. Wilkins’ treatise described such marvels as flying machines, horseless carriages, and submarines.

Hariot’s description of the Algonquin response to English technology, noted above, is suspect because it is part of a propagandistic text written by an author unable to speak the language of the indigenous population. The religious sense of awe which Hariot describes, though, is consistent with European assessments of marvelous technologies. The contemplation of a stunning self-moving machine or even a well-crafted mechanical clock is often described in religious terms. The medieval historian Lynn White, Jr, has noted that in the late medieval period “machinery, mechanical power, and salutary devices were taking on an aura of ‘virtuousness’ such as they have never enjoyed in any culture save the Western” (White 1978: 201–2). White believes that Western Europe’s eventual technological superiority over the East and the South derived in part from European Christianity’s embrace of technological innovation: “Beginning as early as the ninth-century and emphatically by the middle of the fifteenth, technological improvement became an aspect of Christian ethics in the Latin West” (White 1978: xix).

By the beginning of the Tudor period the metaphor of God the great universal clockmaker had already become commonplace. Some compared mechanical marvels to the miracles presented in the Bible, while others argued that biblical miracles were superior to the deceiving tricks of man. It is interesting to note that in a time of tremendous religious conflict and upheaval, wonder-producing mechanical marvels appealed to individuals on both ends of the religious spectrum, from radical Calvinists such as Petrus Ramus to Jesuits such as the Italian Antonio Possevino. Indeed when Possevino produced his encyclopedic bibliography of all legitimate disciplines at the end of the sixteenth century he condemned all forms of magic but praised the wonder-inspiring garden machinery of the Roman villas he frequented. In 1591 the Spanish-born Jesuit Benito Pereira, who lived most of his life in Rome while working as a professor of sacred scripture, attempted to insulate mechanical marvels from diabolical suspicion by positing that there were three separate classes of magic: Diabolic magic; natural magic which made licit use of the occult properties of things; and artificial magic which used clockwork and simple machines to create automatic movements (Grafton 2002: 44).

In many instances the religious sense of awe or wonder generated by mechanical marvels was mingled with ludic delight. An example of the type of mechanical toy that could amaze its observers was an automaton that Queen Elizabeth displayed at her palace at Whitehall. It was “a piece of clockwork consisting of an Aethiop riding upon a rhinoceros, with four attendants, who all make their obeisance when it strikes the hour” (Kendal 1892: 64). Elizabeth had other comparable clockwork-driven marvels. Indeed she seems to have had a passion for clocks and clockwork toys. She
was particularly proud of a watch that was so small that it fit around her finger and
gently scratched her finger at set hours to indicate the time.

Elizabeth’s finger-clock amazed observers because of the precision of its tiny inter-
locking gears, but other clocks astonished onlookers because of their immense size
and the stunning automated performances enabled by their clockwork mechanisms.
Perhaps the greatest technological marvel of the early modern period was the second
Strasbourg cathedral clock, which included a crowing cock, figures of the Three Magi
that danced at set times, and gears which drove hands that indicated hours, days, and
even astrological seasons. We know that this particular mechanical marvel was
designed to evoke wonder because of a comment made by Konrad Dasypodius, the
man who designed it between 1571 and 1574. Defending the effort he invested in
the automata driven by the clock’s gears, he wrote that

these pneumatic devices and automata excite great wonder from ordinary people, when
they hear music not made by men, or the crow of a cock. Such things may seem to have
more to do with the fine-tuning of a project like this than with its absolute require-
ments, but it is the architect’s job to see to it that the work is not only elegant and
symmetrical in all parts, but also appropriately attractive, and magnificent. (Grafton
2002: 23)

Mechanical wonders were not frivolous or extraneous ornaments in church clocks, they
were essential in augmenting the faithful Christian’s sense of awe. In secular contexts
these same types of automatic wonders were intended to augment the reputation of
the aristocrats who commissioned them by suggesting their mysterious power.

We know about many secular mechanical marvels thanks to the survival of a liter-
ary and pictorial genre called the theatrum mechanorum, the machine theater. These
illustrated texts enjoyed their heyday from about 1400 until 1620. Often inspired by
classical texts on mechanics by such authors as Hero of Alexandria and Vitruvius, the
authors of these machine theaters presented both real and imaginary mechanical
marvels. Works sometimes placed in this loose generic category include Conrad Kye-
ser’s Bellifortis (1405), which was a treatise on military technology in the mode of
Taccola and Di Giorgio Martini, Vittorio Zonca’s New Theatre of Machines and Build-
ings (1607), and Agostino Ramelli’s The Various and Ingenious Machines (1588). Ram-
elli’s book included images of 110 different types of water pumps, 20 grain mills, 4
military screwjacks to break down doors or force open iron gates, 10 different types
of cranes, and a remarkable book-wheel capable of holding up to a dozen texts open
at a time. Other specialized treatises on innovation included the Théâtre des Instruments
Mathématiques and Méchaniques (c. 1571) by the instrument-maker Besson, the De Re
Metallica (1556) by Georgius Agricola, various new editions of Flavius Vegetius Renatus’s
De Re Militari, and Faustus Verantius’s Machinae Novae (1595). Similar
works in English included George Waymouth’s The Jewell of Artes (1603), which was
a catalog of navigational and other contrivances presented to James I, and Sir Henry
Savile’s Musaeum Mathematicum (1629), which included a “Catalogue of Instruments”
compiled by John Bainbridge. These texts described different types of machines using a variety of discursive techniques, but they shared in common the fascination with the fanciful, the marvelous, and the strange.

Sometimes the mechanical marvels featured in machine theaters generated benevolent wonder, but just as often these monumental wonders engendered suspicion that those who designed, built, or operated them were trafficking with the Devil. Engineers often tried to allay these concerns by insisting on the simple mechanical bases of their creations, but these attempts met with mixed results, and the distinction between the engineer and the magus was often unclear (Grafton 2002). Suspicions about the diabolism of mechanical wonders predate the Tudor period. As early as 1398 the author of the *Nürnberg Chronicle* stated unequivocally that “wheeled engines performing strange tasks and shows and follies come directly from the devil” (Mumford 1962: 38). Some Tudor divines described the mechanical arts as “adulterate,” noting the derivation of the word *mechanical* from the Greek *moicos* and the Latin *moebus*, meaning *adulterer*. Concerns about diabolism exacerbated classist disdain towards the mechanical arts. Not only were activities that involved manual labor “servile” or “vulgar,” but also the mysterious objects produced by these servile mechanics seemed diabolically inspired.

Because of the concerns about the diabolical basis of applied mathematics, Tudor students and teachers in the field often found it necessary to defend themselves from accusations of necromancy. In 1555 Leonard Digges began his aforementioned almanac with a preface entitled “Mathematics arraigned, and defended against the reprovers of Astronomy and the Sciences Mathematical.” In the preface Digges countered claims that mathematical practice was a form of necromancy. John Dee, in his own *Preface*, also felt compelled to defend himself against accusations of necromancy. In his opening “Digression Apologeticall” he asks,

> And for these, and such like marueilous Actes and Feates, Naturally, Mathematically, and Mechanically, wrought and contriued: ought any honest Student, and Modest Christian philosopher, be counted, & called a Coniurer? He that seketh … in the Creatures Properties, and wonderfull vertues, to finde iuste cause, to glorifie the Aeternall, and Almighty Creator by: Shall that man, be (in hugger mugger) condemned, as a Companion of the Helhoundes, and a Caller, and Coniurer of wicked and damned Spirites? (Cohen 2006: 24)

Dee pleaded unsuccessfully with his countrymen to establish the first professorships in mathematics at Cambridge and Oxford even as he defended himself from accusations that he was trafficking with demons.

Suspicions that applied mathematicians were involved in necromancy were nothing new in the Tudor period. As early as 1267 the Oxford philosopher Roger Bacon lamented that mathematics was regularly counted among the seven “Black Arts.” In Robert Recorde’s *Pathway to Knowledge* (1551), Recorde commented on Roger Bacon’s plight in a passage which was intended to chide his own contemporaries.
And when [inventions] be wrought, and the reason thereof not understande, than say the vulgare people, that those thynges are done by negromancy. And hereof came it that Fryer Bakon was accompted so greate a negromancier, whiche neuer used that arte (by any coniecture that I can fynde) but was in geometrie and other mathematicall sciences so experte, that he coulde dooe by them suche thynges as were wonderfull in the syght of most people. (Cohen 2006: 24)

Residual suspicion that mathematical learning was a near relative of diabolical numerology surfaced as late as the seventeenth century. The English antiquary John Aubrey (1626–97) noted that when the first mathematical chairs were finally founded at Oxford some parents opted not to send their children there because they were concerned they would be “smutted with the Black Art.”

All sorts of Tudor technologies that seemed to operate magically or mysteriously became lightning rods of suspicion. Even as mariner’s compasses were becoming essential tools for sea captains on open ocean voyages in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they remained suspect because they seemed to find north magically, as if guided by an invisible hand. When the needles became desensitized they lost their special power to find magnetic north just as mysteriously. The curious methods of sensitizing the compass needles contributed to this stigma. The needles could be sensitized either by rubbing them on a piece of magnetite, which was called a “loadstone” or “leadstone” because it helped lead the ship in the proper direction, or by holding the magnetite close to the needle, spinning the ore around the outside of the bowl, and then pulling the ore away. For much of the medieval and early modern periods magnets were associated with black magic. Early modern pilots invoked religious iconography to defend their navigational tool against accusations of diabolism by asserting that the crucifix-like pattern of the compass card linked it to Christ instead of Satan.

Gunpowder weapons evoked awe and wonder both because of the spectacle involved in their use – they seemed to be earthly reproductions of divine thunder and lightning – and because of the devastating killing power which they eventually came to have in sieges, on battlefields, and at sea. For the first century or so of their use from about 1325 until 1425 cannon were effective primarily as a means of striking terror into the hearts of the enemy. They were so inaccurate, so unwieldy, and so liable to break apart when fired that they were ineffective in battle. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, though, cannon and later handheld firearms such as the harquebus, the caliver, the musket, and the wheel-lock pistol revolutionized battle on land and at sea, stimulating impassioned praise and criticism of these wondrous killing machines (Hall 1997; Murrin 1994).

Generalizations regarding the precise source or sources of technological wonder are difficult to make in part because different types of mechanisms amazed in different ways. Self-moving automata, clocks, and compass needles seemed to defy the distinction between live and dead matter; clocks satisfied the analogical mind by mimicking the motions of the heavens; gunpowder amazed because of its lethality and sensory
intensity; while navigational tools reduced the lethality of open ocean voyages; and printing presses amazed both because they amplified the individual author's voice and because they provided the reader a dizzying cornucopia of vicarious secular and religious experiences. Tudor technologies were wondrous in part because they were simultaneously alien and familiar. They exceeded expectations even as they seemed to return human beings to a sort of primal omnipotence that had vanished with the expulsion from Eden and the passing of the Golden Age.

**Reflections on the Mirror**

Even in a field as apparently mundane as mirror manufacture, Tudor responses to the new technologies were tinged with wonder. Literary historian Herbert Grabes writes that the modern clear glass mirrors which first became available in the sixteenth century exercised an unprecedented fascination by virtue of the material they were made of and its optical characteristics, and not least through the charm of their novelty and their high status as a technological marvel of the age … This sense of wonder revealed itself in numerous areas of everyday culture, and glass mirrors became admired, coveted, and indispensable accessories of popular fashion. (Grabes 1982: 4)

In order to understand the marvel which sixteenth-century glass mirrors generated it behooves us to sketch the history of glass mirror manufacture in Europe. What becomes clear when this history is considered in light of developments in Tudor literature is that Tudor innovation in this field had a significant impact on a variety of literary genres.

In antiquity Roman craftsmen built convex glass hand mirrors with metal backings, but after the fall of Rome glassmaking disappeared from Europe until its rediscovery in Italy and Germany in the twelfth century. In 1224 Venetian glassblowers established their own guild; in 1291 they relocated to the nearby island of Murano; and by 1317 they were producing large quantities of colored and tinted ornamental glass. At the same time that glassmaking was being reestablished in Europe, authors began to describe their devotional texts as mirrors which could stimulate personal reflection and self-improvement. Grabes writes that with the “Renaissance of the twelfth-century” (Haskins 1927) there was not only a

sudden rise in the number of manuscripts but also a remarkable increase in the quantity of mirror-titles; indeed, it was during this time that metaphorical book-titles and Specula established themselves firmly as part of medieval literature … More new Specula appeared between 1200 and 1250 than in the whole of the preceding three centuries, and by 1300 the total number of mirror-titles had increased by more than sixty, of which a majority (two-thirds) are recorded in England, where a whole series of particularly influential items have their origin. (Grabes 1982: 25–6)
In England and on the Continent important religious and secular works were given the title *Speculum*, Latin and vernacular works were described as mirrors, and the first English literary work to bear a mirror title, the English satirist, poet, and monk Nigel de Longchamps’s *Speculum stultorum* (or *Mirror of Fools*), dates from the end of the twelfth century. It is not clear whether a cause-effect relationship existed between the rediscovery of glassmaking in the twelfth century and the rise in mirror-titles in the same period. However, when we move ahead to the Tudor period considerable evidence exists that developments in glass mirror manufacture directly influenced the literary landscape.

In the 1450s the Venetian Beroviero family invented a new type of clear glass called *cristallo*, or crystal glass. *Cristallo* clarified mirror images considerably. Then in 1507 Andrea and Domenico D’Anzolo del Gallo of Venice made the critical discovery needed to produce a true, accurate reflecting surface when they applied a metallic foil made of an amalgam of tin and mercury to a pane of clear crystal glass. These mirrors returned an image of impeccable clarity, and when the family applied for a monopoly on this new technique they were able to boast that they possessed “the secret of making good and perfect mirrors of crystalline glass, a precious and singular thing unknown to the whole world.” The family received a 20-year monopoly from the Venetian Council of Ten on their new mirror foiling process, and by the mid-sixteenth century clear glass mirror manufacture had become a lucrative industry. In 1564 the Murano *specchiai*, or mirror-makers, split off from the glassmakers to form their own company, and in 1569 the *specchiai* were recognized as an independent guild. During the second half of the sixteenth century a wide variety of clear glass mirrors began to reach England, and the objects achieved a special status in the literature of the period. Mirror titles increased markedly, references to mirrors and looking-glasses proliferated, and actual mirrors were used on the stage to represent sincere and accurate self-reflection.

One book of verse which registered the proliferation of glass mirrors and helped to stimulate the vogue for mirror titles in the late Tudor period is William Baldwin’s *Myrroure for Magistrates*, originally published in 1559 (Zocca 1950: 23). The text describes the falls of flawed or tyrannical rulers, and Baldwin notes in his preface that the purpose of the text is to encourage rulers to extirpate their vices if they wish to avoid the terrible fates recounted in his book:

> For here as in a [looking] glass you shall see (if any vice be in you) howe the like hath bene punished in other[s] heretofore, whereby admonished, I trust it will be a good occasion to move you to the [sooner] amendment. This is the chiefe ende, whye it is set forth, which God graunt it may attayne. (Cohen 2006: 158)

It is significant that Baldwin uses the word “glass” and not “mirror” in this preface because “glass” shows that he has the newer, clearer glass mirrors in mind instead of the cloudier medieval mirrors made of steel or stone.

Literary scholar Kent Cartwright has identified the “first known use of a mirror as a significant physical property on the English stage” in John Redford’s *The Play of
Wit and Science, which is usually dated 1540–7. The mirror’s function in the play suggests that the prop was likely one of the new glass mirrors, and Cartwright points out the true mirror’s importance in Tudor drama and in the philosophy of Tudor humanism:

It must be a version of this fashionable Venetian mirror that Wyt lifts from his belt or pocket, since its virtue as a stage property depends on a trueness in the glass when turned to the audience (813). Dramaturgy now shapes the idea of humanist self-recognition: because of new technology, a property can embody that idea graphically, achieving a humorous theatrical moment. Indeed, the mirror will become one of the most important stage properties, visual images, and metaphors of Renaissance drama. The physical property enhances the dramatic argument and identifies the play with the humanist values of reason, clarity, and emotional credibility. (Cartwright 1999: 62–3)

Literary scholar Benjamin Goldberg has also suggested that the invention of the clear glass mirror encouraged the development of the central humanist tenets of self-reflection and self-knowledge: “The invention of the looking glass literally and figuratively contributed to the Age of Humanism. . . . The clear and truthful looking glass literally showed man reality, and this led him to abandon the ‘dark glass’ of Pauline philosophy” (Goldberg 1985: 160).

Nostalgia for the tools of a bygone era characterizes every period of technological transition, and this was certainly true of the Tudor period. There was even nostalgia for the steel mirror, as evidenced by a passage in Gascoigne’s The Steel Glas (1576):

That age is deade, and vanisht long ago,
Which thought that stele, both trusty was & true,
And needed not, a foyle of contraries,
But shewed al things, even as they were in deede.
In steade whereof, our curious yeares can finde
The chrisal glas, which glimseth brave & bright,
And shewes the thing, much better than it is,
Beguylde with foyles, of sundry subtil sights,
So that they see, and covet not to be. (ll. 183–91)

The criticism here is that the glass mirror is not a faithful reflector but instead a dissembler taking advantage of the new mirror foiling technology to produce an image which is superior in brightness or clarity to the object before it. The passage indicates that at least one early modern author was keenly aware of the technical developments which led to the improved optical characteristics of the glass mirror.

While accurate reflection was the new innovation of the sixteenth century, intentional optical distortion persisted in a variety of forms. John Dee once invited Queen Elizabeth, Leicester, and the Queen’s attendants to see a special distorting mirror that he had built at his home and laboratory in Mortlake. The Queen was so surprised by the bizarre reflections she saw in the mirror that she laughed out loud, startling Dee.
Despite humanist encouragement to the contrary some individuals preferred gazing on distorting mirrors instead of true ones to enhance their self-esteem, some used distorting mirrors to view seditious or pornographic images that had been hidden inside drawings or paintings, and some looked into cloudy or imperfect mirrors in an attempt to predict the future.

Around 1590 there was a marked increase in the Venetian manufacture and export of inexpensive glass mirrors, and in 1600 English craftsmen began producing glass mirrors domestically. These shifts led directly to a further increase in literary references to mirrors in English texts. They also led to a relative increase in works bearing the title “Glass” or “Looking-Glass” instead of the traditional “Mirror.” In the early seventeenth century the terms “Glass” or “Looking-glass” were most often adopted by moral satirists or by Puritans urging religious or political reform, while the term “Mirror” was more often used in texts which offered positive religious or political models. Put another way, the decision to use either “Mirror” or “Looking-Glass” in one’s title became a subtle sign of the political or religious orientation of the author. Because the terms “Glass” and “Looking-Glass” were often used on broadsheets, the different terms for the mirror eventually came to signal the physical form of the printed text itself (Grabes 1982: 37).

It seems fitting to conclude a chapter on Tudor technology in transition with some reflections on the mirror because the mirror was a tool which underwent profound changes during the Tudor period, it was used in a wide variety of ways, it was often a source of awe or wonder both as a true reflecting surface and as a vehicle for distortion, and its development had a major impact on both the literature and the culture of the Tudor period. Some literary critics have suggested that the mirror metaphor was so prominent in fields ranging from devotional texts to political treatises to stage plays that it is possible to describe the second half of the Tudor period as The Age of the Mirror (Grabes 1982). Whether or not we agree with this assessment there is little doubt that the Tudor period experienced several technological shifts which played significant roles in the development of Tudor literature and culture.

References


Further Reading


Enclosing the Body: Tudor Conceptions of Skin

Tanya Pollard

What is the human body’s relationship to the outside world? Are its boundaries tightly sealed, or open? For writers of the Tudor period, these questions were important ones, and to a great extent their answers depended on the nature of the body’s primary boundary, the skin. Although it had been understood for the most part as a permeable membrane, the skin took on new meanings and associations at a time of radical upheaval in medical thought. In response to new threats both to medical conceptions of the body and to the body itself, writers began increasingly imagining the body as securely enclosed, protected from external dangers. In both literary and medical writings, fantasies of skin as an impenetrable barrier suggest increasingly powerful desires for bodily integrity.

Changing conceptions of the skin were informed by broader changes in Tudor conceptions of the body. The period’s dominant medical model, inherited from the Greek physician Galen, understood health in terms of the balance of humors, or fluids, passing in and out of the body (Siraisi 1990). The skin, in this tradition, was perceived as inevitably, and for the most part beneficially, open to the outside world. Despite the powerful influence of humoral theory, however, the paradigm was confronted with a number of significant challenges over the course of the sixteenth century. The flourishing new science of anatomy and dissection, driven especially by Andrea Vesalius’s 1543 De humani corporis fabrica, refuted traditional physiological assumptions and stirred new interest in the body’s interior (Sawday 1995). The influential writings of the Swiss physician Paracelsus challenged the Galenic model by redefining disease as an external agent rather than a matter of internal balance (Harris 1998). The growth of international travel and trade, meanwhile, introduced new physical threats, including new diseases, drugs, and poisons (Harris 1998; Pollard 2005). Together, these changes intensified concerns about the vulnerability of the body’s interior, and the threat of dangers from the outside world invading through the skin.

Outside of the medical domain, other developments affected people’s understandings of their bodies. The printing press, and a surge in publication of books about
Enclosing the Body

medicine, broadened the transmission of both knowledge and anxieties about illness. The Protestant Reformation, with its privileging of the inner self as authentic and reliable, placed a new emphasis on the value of privacy and inwardness (Maus 1995). Changes in standards of civilized behavior put new pressures on manners, decorum, and bodily self-control (Elias 2000). The openness associated with the humoral body, linked especially to the lower classes (Bakhtin 1968) and women (Stallybrass 1986), increasingly became a source of awkwardness and embarrassment (Paster 1994). Gradually, people began to conceive of the body as a more closed container, whose inner contents were difficult to see and know (Elias 2000; Hillman 2007).

In response to this escalation of vulnerability, privacy, and decorum, the body’s boundaries came under intense scrutiny. A number of critics have discussed early modern interest in orifices such as eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and genitalia (Stallybrass 1986; Paster 1994; Lobanov-Rostovsky 1997; Harris 1998; Smith 1999; Dugan 2008; Hillman 2007; Bloom 2007). Scholars of the period have paid little attention, however, to the body’s primary boundary, the skin. Recent studies have considered the skin’s association with the sense of touch in the early modern period (Harvey 2002), and have analyzed its meanings more broadly across historical periods (Benthien 2002; Connor 2004). The skin’s changing status in this period, however, deserves more attention. For many early writers, the skin offered a powerful symbol for the security of the body and self. In both medical texts and works of imaginative literature – especially plays, intimately bound up with the real bodies of their actors and audiences – writers confronted the body’s vulnerability through exploring the nature of the skin. Over the course of the period, the notion of healthy permeability gradually gave way to fantasies of the body as an impenetrable fortress, sealed off from the world through a protective and vigilantly guarded cover.

Permeable Skin in Early Tudor Medical Writings

Early Tudor writers, for the most part, emphasized the skin’s porosity, and considered it to be both valuable and necessary. Traditionally, humoral theory held that purging the body of excessive and corrupt humors was crucial to maintaining bodily health (Schoenfeldt 1999; Pomata 2001). By the same token, the body had to be able to absorb elements of the world around it, especially air and moisture, in order to maintain proper functioning. Openness, accordingly, was an ideal condition, if not a default assumption, and the pores of the skin were a crucial site for these necessary interchanges. The physician Christopher Langton, for instance, referred approvingly to the power of exercise to open “the pores or fyne holes of the skynne” so that they could “be cleane purged of all theyr excrementes and filthes, and also the excrementes of the hole body be had awaye” (Langton 1545: lxxiiii). Obstructing these pores was believed to have disastrous consequences. Sir Thomas Elyot, recounting the Emperor Alexander Severus’s construction of hospitals in Rome, described how his men had come to suffer from “the putrifaction of naturall humors”: 
as great abundaunce of superfluouse humours thycke and clammy, be dispersed in the body, therby the pores (whiche are lytrel holes in the skynne throughout all the body, that be inuisible) be stopped, soo that the exhalation or brethe inclosed in the body, maye not issue out by the same pores. (Elyot 1541: 43)

To be trapped within an impermeable skin, then, threatened perpetual self-pollution, and ultimately asphyxiation.

Physiological accounts about the necessary permeability of the skin resonated with beliefs about the implications of its thickness. Elyot identified “hardnes of skynne” as a symptom of melancholy, suggesting both physiological and emotional consequences (Elyot 1539: 3). In a dialogue about gentility, a ploughman’s assertion of the value of self-sufficiency meets with the mocking retort that by this criterion, animals would be nobler than men: “The bestis haue herr & also a thik skin / The fissh skalis or shells to kepe theyr bodyes in / The foulis fethirs & so eueri thing / Bi nature hath his proper couering / Saue man himself which is born all nakyd / And therfore he shuld be than most wrechyd” (Rastell 1525: A5r). As man is in fact the noblest of creatures, the speaker implies, a thick outer skin is an attribute of beastliness. Expanding further on the contrast between animals’ external protections and human’s lack thereof, Erasmus took the softness of the skin as evidence of our uniquely sociable, affectionate, and interdependent nature:

For where as nature hath armed al other bestis with their owne armure, as the violence of the bullis she hath armed with hornes, the ramping lion with clawes, to the bore she hath giuen the gnashing tuskes, she hath armid the elephant with a long trumpet snoute, besyde his great huge body and hardnes of the skynne: she hath fensed the Locodrill with a skynne as harde as a plate: to the Delphin fyshe she hath gyuen fynnes instede of a dart: The Porcopin she defendeth with thornes: the ray and thornebacke with sharpe prickels: to the cocke she hath giuen stronge spurres. Som she fenseth with a shel, some with a harde hyde, as it were thycke lether, or barke of a tree. … Man alone she hath brought forth all naked, weke, tender, and without any armure, with most softest fleche and skynne. (Erasmus 1534: A3v-A4r)

We can learn from this contrast, Erasmus argues, that “this creature alone was borne al to loue and amitie, which specially increaseth and is faste knytte together by good turnses done eftesones of one to an other” (Erasmus 1534: A4r-v). It is precisely the fragility of our skin, then, which gives rise to our higher moral sense.

If for Erasmus our lack of hard outer shell signified the ideal nature of human emotions and interdependence, an Aristotelian tradition lingering through the period identified soft and permeable skin with intellectual gifts: “because they haue soft flesh, they are endued with a sharpe and quick wit: and they whose flesh and skin is thicker and grosser, are dull and slow” (Aristotle 1595: H1v). A later anatomy, echoing this idea, asked rhetorically,
who knowes not that μαλαχότεροισαρχί &c. they that be soft-flesht are more wise, and more apt to conceaue? and Albertus sayes that these are the signes of a wit, as dull as a pig of lead to witt thicke nayles, harsh haire, and a grosse hard skinne: the last whereof, was verified in Polidorus a foole, of whome AElian makes mention, who had such a hard thick skin, that it could not bee pearced through with pricking. (Walkington 1607: 21r–v)

Implicitly raising a metaphor of fertility, Walkington suggests that softness of flesh allows for receptivity necessary to the conception of ideas, while “a grosse hard skinne,” rebuffing any external influences and impressions, makes for dullness and folly. This idea has echoes in Shakespeare’s plays: Puck, describing the mechanicals disparagingly in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, refers to Bottom as “The shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort” (Shakespeare 1997: 3.2.14), and the host in Merry Wives of Windsor snaps at Simple, “What wouldst thou have, boor? what: thick-skin?” (Shakespeare 1997: 4.5.1). Delicate skin, in these writings, reflects both intellectual and emotional sensitivity, while toughness points to the opposite.

Protective Skin in Late Tudor Medical Writings

As the last examples show, writers of the later Tudor period at times continued to celebrate the advantages of soft and open skin. Over the course of the sixteenth century, however, this perspective increasingly gave way to anxieties about the fragility of the skin in a dangerous world, accompanied by a yearning for an outer covering that could seal the body off firmly from external threats. Helkiah Crooke, an anatomist and physician to James I, provides a clear example of this transition in his Mikrocosmographia, an encyclopedic overview of the human body that looked back over the prior century, mixing new anatomical insights with traditional Galenic thought. Although he repeats many traditional Galenic maxims about the functions of the pores, Crooke’s account of the skin is fundamentally defensive, beginning with a firm emphasis on the body’s vulnerability and need for protection. The body, he writes, is

but infirme and weakely defended, so that the soule is truly saide Inhabitare immunitam Ciuitatem; for to death and diseases we lie open on euery side. The world is a Sea, the accidents and diuers occurrences in it are waues, wherein this small Bark is tossed and beaten vp and downe, and there is betwixt vs and our dissolution, not an inch boord, but a tender skinne, which the slenderest violence euuen the cold aire is able to slice through. (Crooke 1615: 60)

Crooke’s metaphors in this passage depict the body as a fragile structure surrounded by dangers. His offhand reference to the soul as “Inhabitare immunitam Ciuitatem,” or living in an unprotected city, imagines the body as a town under siege, open to the hostile invasive forces of death and diseases. In his second metaphor, this unguarded
city becomes a small boat on turbulent seas. The skin is all that keeps the body's contents from dissolving into an undifferentiated union with the violent ocean all around: a precarious defense, liable to collapse on contact from any forceful outside element.

Although he begins by describing the skin as tender and vulnerable, Crooke quickly goes on to depict it as a protective barrier. “The skin it selfe,” he writes, “is the wall of the Castle, so quaintly framed, that the more fiercelie it is besieged by the cold, the more safely it doth defend, and the more strength it doth giue to the inward parts” (Crooke 1615: 61). Skin, he suggests, is a sturdy barricade, containing the body and fending off external dangers. The metaphor of the self as castle suggests grandeur, sovereignty, and autonomy, enforced by stony defenses against the threat of hostile invasions. Despite apparently contradicting his earlier image of the body “open on euery side” and only “weakely defended,” this model of skin as an impenetrable wall grows directly out of the earlier passage's implication that the body's vulnerability to the world's dangers requires a powerful protective force. Continuing in this vein, Crooke goes on to identify the layers of the skin, from outer to inner, as “a muniment to defend the skinne from the violence of outward injuries,” “a Stowage or Magazine of nourishment against a time of dearth,” and “a secret defence to hold out a second assault, if the outward should bee won by the enemy” (Crooke 1615: 61). His pervasively military vocabulary represents each layer of the skin as a form of defense, serving to fortify resistance and ward off the possibility of violent assaults. Skin, in this model, is a fortress, cunningly designed to shut out the enemy at every juncture.

Crooke’s account of skin as fortress is striking not only in the vividness of its metaphors, but in its departure from the long-standing Galenic conceptions of the body described above. Yet despite counter-voices – his own as well as others – this defensiveness and preoccupation with proving the impenetrability of the skin were widespread by the late sixteenth century. Ambroise Paré, a French physician and official royal surgeon to four kings in sixteenth-century France, wrote that “The vse of the skinne is to keepe safe and sound the continuitie of the whole body, and all the parts thereof, from the violent assault of all externall dangers” (Paré 1634: 89). Christopher Wirtzung, a German physician, similarly described the skin as “an ornament and defence” (Wirtzung 1598: 552). Despite long-held assumptions that the skin’s most important role was opening the body to the world, to these and other contemporary writers its primary function was to separate the body from the external world, and to ward off the hazards of the latter.

This emphasis on skin as defensive fortification entailed new conceptions of many of the skin’s essential features. In response to the potential charge that the membrane was too thin and fragile to keep out threats, medical writers suggested that it was precisely this delicacy that allowed the skin to warn the body of danger, through the sense of touch. “[T]hough not so thicke as in other creatures,” writes Crooke, the skin “is soft and of exquisite sense, by which it forewarneth the inward parts of the approaching euill before it ouertake them” (Crooke 1615: 72). Paré similarly notes that the skin “is every where indewed with sense, in some parts more exact, in others
more dull, according to the dignitie and necessitie of the parts which it ingirts, that they might all be admonished of their safetie and preservation” (Paré 1634: 89). The surgeon Thomas Vicary similarly writes that the skin ensures “that there should nothing noy nor hurt the body, but it giueth warning to the common wits thereof” (Vicary 1586: 11). The skin, these accounts argue, is an elaborate alarm system always ready to alert the body to approaching dangers. Its delicacy and slenderness contribute to, rather than detract from, its defensive powers.

Just as the skin’s sensing capacity warns the body of danger, the openings in its protective coat fulfill similarly defensive functions. Eyes, for instance, stand “in the highest and best defensed place of the body,” Crooke writes, “immediately vnder the forehead as Scoutwatches: for as watchmen are placed in high standings and turrets that they may further off discerne whether enemies be approaching or ly in ambush, so the eyes are set aloft to foresee and giue warning of any danger that may be toward vs” (Crooke 1615: 535). This military vocabulary, identifying the eyes as protected and protective guards, echoes among medical writers. Ambroise Paré notes that eyes “overlooke the rest of the body, to perceive and shun such things as might endanger, or endamage the body” (Paré 1634: 181), and Jacques Guillemeau, a friend and former pupil of Paré’s, claims that they “serve as spies and watch-men to defende and guilde all the other partes” (Guillemeau 1622: 3). Ears, similarly, have an elaborate outer structure to “keep the hole that it standeth ouer, from things falling in that might hinder the hearing” (Vicary 1586: 21), and a winding canal to “breake the violence & force of the ayre, which otherwise might haply loosen or break the fine membrane of the Tympane or drumme” (Crooke 1615: 577). Medical writings on vulnerable orifices, then, insist that these apparent openings do not actually constitute breaches in the skin cover, but rather additional forms of protection.

Vulnerable Skin in Early Tudor Drama

If medical descriptions of skin gradually moved from a language of easy openness to a more suspicious vocabulary of attack and defense, the period’s drama mirrors this shift in indirect and sometimes parodic ways. The skin’s conspicuous fragility is a matter of mockery and mirth in early Tudor comedies. In Henry Medwall’s Fulgens and Lucre (c. 1495), the clowns A and B decide to hold a mock duel – “to just [joust] at farthe Pryke in cule” (l. 1169), or stab at each others’ buttocks – to compete for the favor of Lucre’s maid. Their battle-scars, predictably, are ridiculous rather than alarming. In response to Gayus’s concerned question, “haste thou ony dedely wounde?” (l. 1259), A claims that

I have a grete garce [gash] here byhynde
Out of the whiche ther commythe suche a wynde
That yf ye holde a candyll therto
Hyt wyll blowe it oute, that wyll hyt do. (ll. 1262–5)
A describes the “wounde” in his backside in terms of the strong wind it produces, a joke he takes further by telling Gayus that “hyt is so depe within the skyn, / That ye may put youre nose therin / Evyn up to the harde [very] eyes” (1269–71). His complaints are comic both because they are so scatological and because they implicitly suggest that wounds are only extensions of the skin’s many openings. There is no real damage here, but at the same time it is clear that no-one is free from the “wounde” that occasions this mock lament.

The comedy *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* (c. 1559) similarly dramatizes a wound that is more of a jest than a threat. Hodge begins the play complaining of a hole in his trousers: “By the Masse here is a gasshe, a shamefull hole indeade / And one stytche teare furder, a man may thruste in his heade” (1.2.7–8). Although this opening puncture is only in his clothes, by the end of the play his skin is pierced too, by the needle that has fallen in the seat of his trousers: After a hearty slap happens to hit the lost needle, Hodge complains that Diccon “thrust me into the buttocke, with a bodkin or a pin” (5.2.295). Between these opening and closing punctures, the desperate quest for the lost needle brings on other laments over the insufficiency of the body’s coverings. A song between Acts I and II suggests that the failure of outer protections is inevitable: “Backe and syde go bare, go bare” (2.Song,1). The fighting that breaks out over the needle, moreover, results in another threat to the body’s integrity when Doctor Rat, the curate, has his head broken by Dame Chat at the end of Act IV. Doctor Rat complains that his “scalpe is cloven to the braine” (5.1.26), and stage directions depict him “Showing his broken heade” twice (5.1.22 and 5.2.24), as well as simply “Showing his heade” (5.2.29). For all the bawdy humor about the needle, with its patently phallic connotations, the play suggests a comically resigned acceptance that neither skin nor its protective fortification, clothing, is strong enough to be safe from the indignity of being torn open.

To some extent, of course, the nature of comedy requires plays to find humor in the body’s vulnerability. Thomas Preston’s tragedy *Cambises* (c. 1560) presents a darker perspective on the fragility of the body’s protective covering. The tyrant Cambises arranges to have his temporary replacement Sisamnes stabbed to death, punctures the heart of his advisor’s son, hires murderers to stab his brother, and is himself penetrated, first by Cupid’s arrow, and finally by his own sword, which miraculously leaps from its scabbard and plunges into his side. Most dramatically, however, after Sisamnes is stabbed, Cambises pronounces that death and bleeding are not enough; Sisamnes must be flayed. “Pul his skin over his eares to make his death more vile,” he orders, and a stage direction notes, “Flea him with a false skin” (463–4). The punishment carries a symbolic logic: With his corruption and bribery, Sisamnes has figuratively flayed the commoners, so he is literally flayed in response. More importantly, though, this short but striking scene identifies being stripped of skin as the ultimate horror, a display of Cambises’ shocking cruelty that foreshadows his downfall. The play contrasts with early comedies in depicting the skin’s failure to protect the body as terrible and terrifying, but it shares with them a sense that this failure is inevitable.
Enclosing the Body

Impenetrable Skin in Late Tudor Drama

Where early Tudor drama suggests the inevitability of the body’s openness to the world, later plays implicitly recall contemporary medical writings by toying with fantasies of skin as an impenetrable barrier. Christopher Marlowe’s Tamburlaine, perhaps the most exuberantly invulnerable early modern stage hero, claims that his divinely protected skin can never be pierced, or even scratched. “And sooner shall the Sun fall from his Spheare,” Tamburlaine proclaims early in Tamburlaine the Great, Part One (1587),

Than Tamburlaine be slaine or overcome.
Draw forth thy sword, thou mighty man at Armes,
Intending but to rase my charmed skin:
And Jove himselfe will stretch his hand from heaven,
To ward the blow, and shield me safe from harme. (Marlowe 1981: I, 1.2.176–81)

Tamburlaine shares with contemporary medical writings a notion of the skin as defensive barrier, although his colorful boasts differ from their anatomical explanations. Marlowe presents his character’s impenetrable skin as distinguishing him from the rest of the world; it is both symptom and cause of his exceptionalism. Other bodies in the play, by contrast, prove dangerously open to wounds, gashes, and gore. Accordingly, Tamburlaine sees his invulnerability as resulting as much from divine favor as from intrinsic physiology. Where medical writers argue for the skin’s general reliability as a defensive boundary, Marlowe gives us an extravagant fantasy of skin as absolute protection for those graced by fortune.

Throughout the first part of his two-part play, Tamburlaine’s claims are both borne out by his exploits and acknowledged by all around him. His enemies echo his claims in reverse, aspiring to pierce that impermeable skin. His grandest victim, Bajazeth, emperor of the Turks, spends the eve of his losing battle imagining Tamburlaine war-torn and punctured:

Millions of men encompasse thee about,
And gore thy body with as many wounds.
Sharpe forked arrowes light vpon thy horse:
Furies from the blacke Cocitus lake,
Breake up the earth, and with their firebrands,
Enforce thee run upon the banefull pikes.
Volleyes of shot pierce through thy charmed Skin. (Marlowe 1981: I, 5.1.215–21)

Bajazeth’s wishful fantasy offers a catalogue of invasive forces – wounds, arrows, firebrands, pikes, and bullets – all successfully breaking and entering Tamburlaine’s body. Because his “charmed Skin” lies at the heart of his mythology, his enemies cannot imagine anything more triumphant than piercing it.
The fantasy of impenetrable skin is so powerful a fiction in the Tamburlaine plays that in Part Two (also 1587) a clever female captive is able to exploit it towards her own ends. After being captured by Tamburlaine’s underling Theridimas, the beautiful Olympia appeals to his aspirations to invulnerability in order to escape his lust. In response to his threat of rape, she stalls him with an irresistible offer. If he spares her honor, she explains, she will give him an ointment,

Tempered by science metaphisicall,
And Spels of magicke from the mouthes of spirits,
With which if you but noint your tender Skin,
Nor Pistol, Sword, nor Lance can pierce your flesh. (Marlowe 1981: II, 4.2.63–6)

Drawing on science, magic, and alchemy, the balm unites the practical and the supernatural to create a soldier’s fantasy, personal immunity from the violence of war. In response to Theridimas’s understandable skepticism, Olympia offers herself as test-case. “To prooue it,” she offers, “I wil noint my naked throat, / Which when you stab, looke on your weapons point, / And you shall se’t rebated with the blow” (4.2.67–70). When he naively takes her at her word, however, the mysterious ointment fails, and she dies. At a literal level, her death exposes this apparent invulnerability as an impossible fiction. Figuratively, however, Olympia’s ointment succeeds in rendering her impenetrable: Through its use, she is freed from Theridimas’s lustful advances and is reunited, in death, with her husband and son. By maintaining her personal inviolability, she reflects something of the power of Tamburlaine himself: Both figures eventually surrender to death, but never to an enemy.

Other contemporary tragedies flirted with the notion of impenetrable skin as well, even if only to acknowledge its impossibility. In Elizabeth Cary’s The Tragedie of Mariam (written 1602–4), the jealous Herod complains that killing his wife will be impossible, because her virtue has made her skin invulnerable to attack:

Thinke you that swords are miracles like you:
Her skinne will eu’ry Curtlax edge refell,
And then your enterprise you well may rue.
What if the fierce Arabian notice take,
Of this your wretched weaponslesse estate:
They answere when we bid resistance make,
That Mariams skinne their fanchions did rebate. (Cary 1613: 4.7.6–12)

Herod attributes to Mariam’s skin a magical power to resist penetration: Evoking images from medieval saints’ plays, he imagines that swords, curtal-axes, and fanchions alike will bounce helplessly off its surface. As with the chaste Olympia, however, these claims prove true only at a figurative level. Mariam’s virtue succeeds in making her impervious to seduction and possession by other men, despite Herod’s jealous suspicions. His gloomy confidence in her literal resistance to weapons, however,
proves false; to his later regret, Mariam is killed by his orders. As with the ultimately mortal Olympia and Tamburlaine, Mariam’s inviolability extends only to her soul.

While heroic tragedy offers a magnificent vision of impenetrable skin as a metaphor for a certain kind of invulnerability, comic plays evoke the same idea as well towards different ends. In John Marston’s tragicomedy *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* (1600), Mamon is jealous of Pasquil’s success at winning the love of Katherine, and schemes to have his rival killed. “Why this same boy’s as bare as naked Truth,” he mocks; “A lowe ebd gallant, yet sheele match with him: Ile match him, if his skin be ponyard proofe” (Marston 1939: 198). Despite Mamon’s sarcasm, Pasquil’s skin does turn out to be poniard-proof, in a sense. Not only is he lucky in love, but Mamon’s attempt to have him killed fails when his hired murderer gets cold feet, confesses his charge, and accepts money from Pasquil to give up and pretend to have done the deed. After quenching suspicions by playing dead, Pasquil revives to strike down Mamon, and claim Katherine’s love. While Tamburlaine’s charmed skin represents undefeatable heroism, and fantasies of Olympia’s and Mariam’s impenetrable skin point to the power of chastity and spiritual purity, Pasquil’s poniard-proof skin primarily suggests the wit and luck of comedy.

Other comic scenes, meanwhile, mock the idea of protective skin, and its broader implications of immunity from trouble. The malcontent Macilente, in Ben Jonson’s satiric comedy *Every Man Out of his Humor* (1599), complains of the farmer Sordido’s delight in rainy weather: “is’t not strange? Vnlesse his house and skin were thunder-proofe, / I wonder at it” (Jonson 1927: 1.3.70–6). Similarly, a comic subplot of Thomas Kyd’s *Tragedye of Solyman and Perseda* (1585–6) presents a sardonic portrait of a braggart soldier who insists on his invulnerability. Attempting to recover his poise after being startled by an arriving servant, the soldier Basilisco denies his fear, only to panic again at the touch of a pin:

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I had not feard thee, I;
  I tell thee, my skin holds out Pistoll proofe.
Piston. Pistoll proofe? ile trie if it will hold out pin proofe,
  Then he pricks him with a pin.
Basilisco. O shoote no more; great God, I yeeld to thee.
Piston. I see his skin is but pistol profe from the girdle vpward. (Kyd 1955: 4.2.37–41)
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Basilisco’s boast that his skin is “Pistoll proofe” reveals him as a would-be Tamburlaine figure, dreaming of bodily invulnerability and martial greatness. As the skeptical Piston shows, though, he is just the opposite, so thin-skinned that he is not even “pin proofe.” In both of these plays, witty skeptics undermine the would-be heroism associated with impenetrable skin, reminding the audience that the world will eventually, inevitably, make its way in.

Like their contemporary medical writers, late Tudor playwrights repeatedly imagined bodies sealed off from the world with an impenetrable armor of skin. The idea of skin as an impermeable boundary suggests the powers and pleasures of absolute
protection, immunity from pain, mortality, and lesser troubles. Yet both sets of writers also acknowledge the limitations of this fantasy. Along with continuing to repeat conventional wisdom about the necessary openness of the pores, medical writers implicitly acknowledge the fragility of the skin in their defensive emphasis on the body’s vulnerability to external dangers: The very need for a protective covering, ironically, calls attention to its absence. Playwrights, meanwhile, evoke the idea of impenetrable skin as a magnificent fantasy, but repeatedly point out its failures, whether tragically or satirically. Even the most extravagantly invulnerable hero, Tamburlaine, is dead by the end of his drama. Despite its obvious fascination, the enclosed body remains a fiction, and one, oddly enough, that appears more perhaps real in the scientific discourse of medicine than in the imaginative world of the theater.

As these writings show, accounts of skin from throughout this period reflect an important, though by no means complete, change in assumptions about the body’s relationship to the outside world. Over the course of the Tudor period, conceptions of the body move away from the Galenic tradition inherited from the classical and medieval period, but they never leave that tradition entirely behind. Positioned at a moment of flux, between an earlier body understood as necessarily open to the world and a modern, more self-enclosed vessel, the Tudor body does not comfortably fit either model. From celebrations of openness to fantasies of impenetrability, depictions of skin reflect broader changes in imagining the self, and show how much is at stake in the slender membrane separating the body from the world.

References


Part II

Manuscript, Print, and Letters
The Role of Paper and Print in the Production of Manuscripts

Paper was the connective tissue of early modern England. While medieval manuscript culture was confined to centers of wealth by low literacy rates and the high cost of animal skin (vellum or parchment), Tudor England was awash in handwritten documents written on paper, a surface made of old rags boiled to a pulp. Countless amateur scribes and writers in Tudor England contributed to the emerging manuscript genres made possible by the increasing availability of paper, the rise in literacy rates, and perhaps surprisingly, the advent of a new medium of discourse: print. Writing and printing were complementary technologies, each defined on its own terms as well as by the limitations of the other. Beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, printing joined the medieval (professional) and Renaissance (amateur) manuscript traditions as a related and significant means for both ephemeral transactions and permanent information storage. Paper was so much cheaper than parchment that writing finally became practical for classes of English society, as for European society in general, that had been largely excluded from it since the fall of Rome and the virtual disappearance of papyrus from Europe after the fifth century (Diringer 1982: 165; Martin 1994: 223; Burns 1996: 417–19).

Paper was first used in England in 1309; the word itself is recorded for the first time in 1340–1 (Hunter 1943: 320; OED, Paper: sb. 1). It was almost entirely imported from France and the Low Countries because of England’s limited supply of cast-off linen clothing and textiles for making rag pulp, the primary ingredient in paper (England was a wool-based society). Perhaps because the price of paper fell about 40 percent during the fifteenth century while the price of parchment increased (Rosenband 1992: 97; Hills 2006: 73–97), paper gradually became the surface of choice for manuscripts prepared in professional scriptoria, although parchment continued to be used as well for many kinds of legal and official documents as well as presentation-quality manuscript books of all descriptions. England’s first paper mill was
short-lived: John Tate’s mill in Hertford was in operation at least between 1494 and 1507 before disappearing (Hills 2006). Other paper mills cropped up and disappeared during the second half of the sixteenth century, primarily due to the insufficient supply of rags and competition from French imports (Shorter 1971: 16). Customs accounts from the 1450s onwards show increasing quantities of different kinds of papers being imported into England, including “scribable,” for writing, and “spendable,” for wrapping and other expendable purposes. Different types of scribable paper were used for different purposes, whether it be letter writing, keeping accounts, drawing, or musical notation. Indeed, an account book from the Earl of Huntingdon’s household in 1606–7 mentions no less than 12 different types of scribable and spendable paper, which were purchased pre-bound in paper books as well as loose in quires (24 sheets) and reams (20 quires): writing, white, copy, smaller, gilt, Venice, Royal, soft, ordinary, brown, kitchen, and cap (Huntington Library, MSS HA Box 6, folder 4). The names of these different types of paper related, variously, to their dimensions, quality, watermarks, and purpose.

The corresponding influx of printed texts as a result of the paper boom encouraged both reading and writing literacy. For the first time writing manuals could be mass-produced, rather than painstakingly copied out for individual students by professional writing masters. Their popularity in Elizabethan England is attested to by the survival of only a handful of mutilated or otherwise defective copies despite being produced in many editions. The first English writing manual, *A Booke Containing Diuers Sortes of Hands, as well the English as French Secretarie with the Italian, Roman, Chancelry & Court Hands*, was published in 1570, nearly a half-century after the first writing manuals appeared in Rome and Venice. Assembled by John Baildon and the French Huguenot refugee Jean de Beauchesne, the manual included woodcut examples of a wide range of handwriting styles, from medieval-based court hands (Chancery and Common Pleas) to the more modern secretary and italic hands, to a group of decorative French hands (reversée, entrelacée, coupée, frisée). It was followed in 1574 by the anonymous *A New Booke of Copies* and in 1590 by Peter Bales’ *The Writing Schoolemaster*. In addition to engraved alphabets and moralizing examples for copying, these manuals also contained letterpress instructions for making ink, holding the pen correctly, and other skills necessary for mastering one or more of the new scripts: chiefly, the secretary hand, which evolved out of the medieval gothic tradition, and the elegant italic hand, based upon an Italian revival of Carolingian handwriting. Students learned to write these hands by repeatedly tracing, and then copying, strokes, letters, alphabets, and sentences. The development of these more accessible and efficient scripts (some versions linked individual letters with connecting strokes, requiring fewer pen-lifts) ensured that handwriting, and handwritten documents, would play an essential and prominent role in the new information age.

Studies of Tudor manuscripts understandably gravitate toward the creation and circulation of literary (especially poetic) texts. But to understand that culture in the overall context of the paper revolution it is important to remember that literary texts made up a tiny fraction of the total transcriptional output. The advent of amateur
manuscript production on paper neither eclipsed nor displaced the medieval tradition of administrative record-keeping. Professional secretariats continued without interruption to create the most important documents in everyday life: the legal, financial, and other official records of church and state that would be handwritten for centuries to come, on both paper and parchment. The study of Renaissance manuscript culture thus requires an awareness of two concurrent traditions: of amateur scribes restricted almost entirely to paper, and professional copyists working with both paper and parchment. The output of both traditions grew steadily in volume throughout the period, as evidenced by the increasing number of surviving documents. In 1538, for example, Thomas Cromwell issued an injunction requiring every parish church in the country to maintain a register to record “every weddyng christening and burying made within yo[u]r parishe” (Cox 1974: 2). The cost of paper versus parchment books made such a regulation feasible, as the smaller, less wealthy parishes could hardly have afforded to keep such records on expensive skins.

More paper in Tudor England may have ended up under the quill rather than under the platen. While hundreds (eventually thousands) of early presses churned out books, pamphlets, and broadsides, simultaneously, hundreds of thousands (and eventually, millions) of writers were producing the same kinds of documents in addition to letters, receipts, memoranda and account books, copies of printed texts, and the innumerable documents issued by the official secretariats. Many of these manuscripts were written in multiple drafts, and texts were often copied from one manuscript to another in order to maximize their usefulness or permanence. For example, Nicolaus Petri’s *The Pathway to Knowledge* (London: William Barley, 1596) specified that merchants and shopkeepers copy their financial transactions into at least four different types of notebooks: a waste or day book, a ledger or “book of debitors and creditors,” a ledger or book of debts, and a cashbook. Students were encouraged to transfer notes and passages from printed books into their miscellanies, and then to arrange them in a more orderly fashion into commonplace books. Letter writers copied letters received and letters sent into letterbooks. The widespread practice of copying and recopying would not have been practical in a parchment-based society.

This chapter will focus on a few of the most important manuscript genres and practices that developed in the Tudor period as a result of paper and rising literacy rates, while keeping in mind that the surviving handwritten remains of amateur Tudor scribes (and scribblers) are but a small and non-representative example of what was originally created.

**Hybrid Medias: Printing for Writing**

Rather than displacing manuscript books, the earliest printed books needed scribes and owners to enhance their functionality, by adding navigational and decorative aids for reading: red and blue capital letters (rubrication), pagination, and strokes marking the beginnings of paragraphs and sentences. The majority of surviving books printed
Manuscripts in Tudor England

prior to 1501, called incunables or *incunabula* ("things of the cradle"), have been
completed in this manner. Those that had no signs of manuscript intervention would
have been considered incomplete. Additionally, wide margins in printed books, just
as in medieval manuscript texts, allowed reading and note-taking to take place seam-
lessly on the same page.

However, the earliest and most important products of English and Continental
printing presses in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were not books but
printed forms (Stallybrass 2006). Like incunables, printed forms required handwritten
intervention in order to become functional and complete. Even if someone could not
*read* a form, he (or she) could often inscribe the blank spaces with a name, date, and
place. Before he printed the Bible, Gutenberg printed indulgences with blank spaces
for adding handwritten information; likewise, the first English printer, William
Caxton, printed indulgences in 1476 prior to the publication, the *Canterbury Tales,*
and printed tax forms first appeared in England in 1512 (Stallybrass 2006). Printed
blank forms transformed the way in which church and state raised money because
they exponentially increased the numbers of people that could be reached through a
cheap and efficient means. Out of the hundreds of editions and millions of copies of
the indulgences and tax forms that were undoubtedly printed, only a minuscule
portion survives (Stallybrass 2006).

Later in the sixteenth century, more opportunities for “filling in the blanks”
appeared. Almanacs and histories, such as John More’s *A Table from the Beginning of
the World to This Day* (Cambridge, 1593), were published with blank spaces at the
ends of the calendar or timeline. The reader was supposed to fill in these spaces with
events that occurred after the date of printing. Blank books with printed blank shields
were available for purchase so that owners could draw or paste coats of arms into them.
The Elizabethan printer Thomas East published blank ruled music paper with five
and six-line staves. And printed books could be purchased with interleaved blank
leaves for the purpose of extensive note-taking.

Note-taking was a popular activity in Tudor England. More or less permanent
notes were added to the margins and interleaved blanks of printed books, loose sheets
of paper, and blank paper books. Temporary notes were inscribed on “writing tables,”
which had been imported to England since the early fifteenth century. Writing tables
served the same purpose as wax tablets, but were sturdier, longer-lasting, and less
susceptible to damage than their ancient predecessor. They consisted of small bifolia
of parchment or paper coated with a mixture of gesso and varnish instead of wax to
create a stiff surface that could be written on with a metal stylus, quill and ink, or
graphite pencil, and erased with a damp finger or sponge. Writing tables, some with
elaborate embroidered or silver filigree bindings, were popular novelty gifts among
the aristocracy. Beginning in the 1570s, however, Frank Adams began producing such
tables in England for a more general audience. His *Writing Tables with a Kalendar for
xviii. Yeeres* consisted of a printed almanac (the “kalendar”) bound with a set of eras-
able leaves (the “writing tables”). The tables served as a temporary holding tank for
information gathered while one was away from his writing desk, such as financial
transactions, medical recipes, memorable sayings, sermon notes, and legal notes. These notes would be transferred to a more permanent and useful location such as a commonplace book, receipt book, or account book and then erased from the tables so that the writing surface could be used again (Stallybrass et al. 2004). The two greatest virtues of writing tables were their portability and re-usability. While traditional pen-and-ink writing was very much a two-handed operation (quill in one hand, erasing knife or quill knife in the other hand) that required a firm surface to support the paper, writing tables had no such requirements, and the stylus could be stored in a groove in the binding or serve as an integral part of the book clasp when not in use. Just as is the case for Tudor writing manuals and printed blank forms, very few copies of Writing Tables survive, despite the fact that they most likely had huge print runs. They were quite literally used to shreds.

Letters

Personal correspondence in the vernacular is another important Renaissance genre dependent on readily available paper. With each succeeding decade in the second half of the sixteenth century, the number of surviving letters – both personal and political, informal and formulaic, written almost exclusively on paper – increased dramatically.

The first practical letter-writing manual in English preceded the first handwriting manual by two years. Like De Beauchesne’s writing manual, it was adapted and translated from an earlier French version. The Enimie of Idleness: Teaching the Maner and Stile How to Endite, Compose, and Write All Sorts of Epistles and Letters … Set Forth in English by William Fulwood, Merchant (London, 1568) provided sample letters arranged by category as well as rules and examples for salutations, subscriptions, and superscriptions. Angel Day’s The English Secretorie, or, Methode of Writing Epistles and Letters (London, 1586) was the first letter writing manual written by an Englishman. Both manuals were published regularly throughout the last decades of the Tudor period, suggesting that the personal letter, written on paper, was a new enough manuscript genre as to require explicit instructions. While style and content were the primary focus of these manuals, they also dealt with physical layout; chiefly, the location of the signature, or subscription, “which must be don according to the estate of the writer, and the qualitie of the person to whome we write” (Fulwood, sig. a7r). Personal letters were either dictated to a secretary, or, increasingly, written in the hand of the sender.

Alongside the expansion of letter writing occurred the development of an official postal system for government mail. Henry VIII authorized the first recorded payment to a Master of the Posts, Sir Brian Tuke, in 1512. Under Elizabeth I, six main postal routes, called “posts” (as were the people who carried the mail and the mail itself), emanated in all directions from London in order to deliver letters relating to state affairs: the Dover or Kent road to the Continent, the North or Berwick Road to Scotland, the Chester Road to Dublin (via Holyhead), the Western Road to Plymouth, the Bristol Road to the Southwest, and the Yarmouth Road to the East Coast.
Elizabeth I proclaimed in 1584 that every post-house along each route would have fresh horses available within 15 minutes’ time for transporting letters to the next post-house (spaced roughly 10–20 miles apart). Local post-men were required to “keep two faire paper bookes” for registering the names, dates, number of horses, and packets, and supply this information at the end of each month to the Master of the Posts (STC 8144). By the end of the sixteenth century, the Privy Council issued frequent warrants to deliver express mail between government officials (these letters were often superscribed “Post Haste! Post Haste!”). While the system was often unreliable and slow (letters were conveyed at an average rate of 4–8 miles per hour), it transformed the speed in which Elizabeth and her Privy Council were informed of critical events and could issue directives to local authorities or far-flung Privy Councilors. Local post-men were permitted to carry private mail as well, as long as it did not interfere with the delivery of official letters; however, individuals usually relied on friends, relatives, and servants to transmit their personal letters. Between the early fifteenth century and the end of the sixteenth century, the numbers and types of people communicating via letters, and the methods for conveying them, had radically increased (Stewart and Wolfe 2004: 121–2).

**Paper Books: Anthologies, Miscellanies, and Commonplace Books**

One of the most interesting innovations to emerge from the paper-based amateur tradition was the widespread use of blank paper books as repositories for a wide range of material (notes, quotations, extracts, verse), most of it copied from other sources rather than created anew. These paper books were used for both practical and humanistic purposes, helping individuals digest and understand texts they encountered through systematic note-taking, and providing an alternative to the burdensome and complex memory systems of the medieval period. The chief benefits of these books were retrievability, tailorability, and manipulability of information for the purposes of providing matter for writing and speaking. Most blank paper books that do not fit into other more formal categories can be classified as either miscellanies or commonplace books.

If notes and extracts were added to a blank book sequentially as they were encountered, according to no discernable arrangement, the manuscripts are generally known as anthologies or miscellanies. Most personally compiled manuscripts were formed in this haphazard manner. For example, in 1602–3 John Manningham entered in chronological order whatever scraps of news or gossip, good advice, verses, anecdotes, and jests came his way (British Library, Harl. MS 5353). Robert Gregory (d. 1611) apparently set out to record practical information, above all copies of important letters and other documents related to his post as registrar of Weymouth, Dorset (Harvard fMS 757). But along with copies of Privy Council letters, a “Record of free menes names,” and “Laws of the Market,” Gregory filled blank spaces in the book with a series of
riddles in French and 31 poems, including religious verse, political satire, and epitaphs. His miscellany also illustrates another common use for such manuscripts – a later owner used blank space on one page to record births in the Lovell and Roberts families between 1625 and 1634. Later owners routinely added to such miscellanies so long as any blank spaces remained. Many other compilations were assembled in similar random fashion, according to whatever came to hand or mind. A compiler might begin writing in a blank book at one end, flip it over and begin again from the other end, and then add more material in the center of the volume, separated by a few blank leaves on either side.

In an age without lending libraries, friends naturally loaned and borrowed printed books among themselves, just as they exchanged manuscript materials within their social networks (May 2005). Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, for example, was an expensive folio that Robert Commaundre (d. 1613), Sir Henry Sidney’s chaplain, probably did not own. But he gained access to a copy, perhaps through his employer, and copied extensive portions of its narrative into his manuscript miscellany (British Library, MS Egerton 2642), a miscellany which also contained copies of more than 200 poems, a list of ships in the royal navy, and Latin epitaphs. The same motives probably caused the compiler of another miscellany to quote and paraphrase passages from both Holinshed and Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, another large and expensive book (Cardiff Central Library MS 4.88). Edward Pudsey compiled a miscellany (Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. poet. d.3), that consisted of notes on and quotations from dozens of printed books, along with a variety of entries apparently derived from manuscript sources.

If a blank book was organized in advance under preconceived headings (usually in alphabetical order), it was known as a commonplace book. Textbooks such as Erasmus’s *De copia* (1512) instructed students how to extract quotations from their readings and place them under subject headings relating to content, structure, or style, and then how to imitate and adapt their commonplaces in their writing and speech. Schoolchildren copied excerpts from their textbooks as an aid to learning, although nearly all the booklets they produced have vanished. A rare survival is Griffith Price’s grammar school notebook (Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. D.1063; see Schurink 2003: 174–96). Students often continued these practices in later life, copying passages of rhetorical, moral, religious, and sometimes literary value into their private commonplace books. They would first mark selected passages in printed books with marginal pointing fingers (manicules), flowers (to make into a “bouquet” of useful notes or sayings), marginal commas, or other symbols, and then copy them into blank books. Most surviving commonplace books from the Tudor period were compiled by lawyers, who set down legal definitions, references to the statutes, and precedents under headings entered in alphabetical order, such as “Acceptance,” “Action,” “Bastardy,” and so forth (see Harvard Law Library, MS 115). Traditional humanist commonplace books focused on moralistic Latin *sententiae* extracted from classical authors, with headings such as “Ambitio,” “Brevitas,” “Ingratitudo,” “Necessitatis,” “Relaxatio” (see Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.b.199). The burgeoning numbers of literary miscellanies surviving from the early seventeenth century, many
of them compiled by university students, include only a few examples organized as commonplace books.

The Circulation of Texts in Manuscript

A national network of manuscript circulation gradually developed beginning in the fourteenth century as paper encouraged the production and transmission of not only literary texts, but, in greater numbers, religious and political texts as well. To date, however, Renaissance manuscript studies have focused on closed circles of readers and writers known as “coterie” rather than on more porous “scribal communities” as the preeminent means of transmitting handwritten works. Indeed, a coterie sensibility did somewhat limit subversive religious and political texts from circulating widely in order to protect the authors and readers from persecution. Manuscript works such as personal libels, Lollard tracts in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and Catholic propaganda after 1558, were necessarily passed on to recipients who could be trusted not to incriminate their author or distributor. Even so, such works as the verse libel against Edward Bashe, the Elizabethan victualler of the navy, the book-length prose attack on the Earl of Leicester known as “Leicester’s Commonwealth,” and the verse defense of the Catholic martyr Edmund Campion (which begins, “Why do I use my paper, ink, and pen”) saw such widespread dispersal as to belie any relegation of their texts to coteries. Many more copies of “Leicester’s Commonwealth” survive in manuscript, for example, than in the surreptitious 1584 printing (Peck 1985: 225).

Another perceived motive for restrictive coterie circulation was the snobbish concern not to share works with unworthy or undiscriminating readers. Harold Love defines this as a form of “scribal publication” where “a text [is] communicated within a closed circle of readers on the understanding it is not to be allowed to go beyond the circle” (Love 1998: 43). The evidence for effective coterie circulation in Tudor times is, however, questionable. In 1554, for example, seven years after the execution of the poet Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, the printer William Owen complained that those who owned manuscripts of Surrey’s translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (book 4), were “more wyllyng the same should be kept as a priuate treasure in the handes of a fewe, then publyshed to the common profyt and delectacion of many” (A2v). Similarly, Richard Tottel referred accusingly in his preface to the *Songes and Sonettes* (1557) to “the vngentle hoarders vp” of the poetry he now offers his readers in print. Despite their printed complaints, both these London tradesmen gained access to multiple copies of the unprinted works of Surrey (and in Tottel’s case, many other elite texts) within a decade of the earl’s death. Sir Philip Sidney would also seem to be a model participant in exclusive coterie circulation, for he never sent any of his writings to the press and he assured his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, that he wrote the *Arcadia* “only for you, only to you” (Sidney 1973: 3). Yet aside from his psalm translations and the sonnets from *Astrophil and Stella*, all of Sidney’s lyric poetry was readily
available in manuscript before or shortly after his death in 1586. Before its publication in 1590, the *Arcadia* existed in at least eight, and perhaps fifteen or more copies that were dispersed from East Anglia to the borders of Wales (Woudhuysen 1996: 309–10; 2002: 65). Sidney’s verse, in fact, saw more widespread circulation in manuscript than that of any other poet in Elizabethan England.

Several factors have contributed to our exaggerated regard for coteries as the primary social mechanisms of, especially, literary manuscript circulation. First, the occasional nature of much of the poetry in manuscript meant that it was not wholly relevant for circulation beyond the immediate community for which it was written. Rather than some pact to keep these works close, there was simply no reason to distribute them beyond, in some instances, a single household. Thus the Cecil family archive at Hatfield House preserves three memorial poems on the death of Lord Burghley. These are unique texts not because of any “coterie” considerations of exclusivity but because the poems were fashioned for the circumstances of this one family. There was simply no point in sending them about to other readers. Second, the high loss rate of works circulating in manuscript may cause the surviving texts to mimic exclusive circulation. The ratio of extant to total manuscripts is impossible to estimate exactly, but it seems clear that in most cases of multiple copying, the vast majority of the original output has vanished. Chris Goodwin has assessed the survival rate for one genre of paper manuscripts, Renaissance books of lute music. He concludes that only one in 600 such manuscripts have come down to us (Goodwin 2000: 9–10). This seems probably a bit conservative for texts that circulated in single sheets or quires rather than as books. For manuscripts in these smaller formats, the survival rate of printed broadsides is instructive, for it has been estimated that only one in ten thousand survive (Watt 1991: 41). And for writing tables, only 23 copies of editions printed between the 1570s and 1628 survive, from print runs that probably far exceeded a thousand copies each year (Stallybrass et al. 2004: 388 n. 37). Thus, the lack of a single manuscript copy of any of Shakespeare’s sonnets datable before publication of the 1609 quarto need not imply their confinement to a restrictive coterie. Shakespeare’s “sugared sonnets among his private friends” were well enough known to be cited by Francis Meres in 1598, while the printer, William Jaggard, included texts of two of them in his *Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599. Some of the sonnets no doubt circulated in dozens, perhaps scores of copies, or more, by the late 1590s. No early copies survive, however, because the work failed to infiltrate levels of society where ephemeral texts of this kind could be preserved over the centuries. Their disappearance does not suggest an exclusive, coterie circulation of the work.

Accordingly, Love’s description of “scribal communities” (1998: 83) more nearly captures the reality of Renaissance manuscript circulation than does the concept of scribal “coteries.” These informal structures of overlapping social connections functioned not to restrict but to facilitate the transmission of handwritten texts throughout the kingdom. Such texts could be written on unbound quires of paper or on single sheets sent as letters or else folded within them. Recipients could then save, copy, loan, or forward these small textual units to others. Henry Gurney of Norfolk was a
“scribal publisher” who belonged to the most extensive scribal community of identifiable participants yet discovered. Gurney sent collections of his own verse to, and exchanged printed books with, more than a score of named family members, clergymen, and landowners, most of whom lived within a 12-mile radius of his seat at Great Ellingham (May 2005: 197–202). The national network of manuscript circulation was essentially porous and fast-moving for texts that generated any widespread interest in their recopying.

Geographically wide circulation necessarily altered the relevance of authorship. The concept of individual authorship in fact has a very long pedigree in Western culture (Vickers 2002: App. 2) and the collectors and transmitters of Tudor manuscript texts were by no means indifferent to it. Texts by well-known writers generally retained their subscriptions: For example, every known manuscript text of Elizabeth I’s poem beginning “The doubt of future foes” is properly ascribed. Indeed, prestigious ascriptions, even bogus ones, imparted “value added” to manuscript texts: Witness the attribution to Shakespeare of “Shall I die” by one anthologist, and the multiple attributions to Sir Walter Ralegh of works in verse and prose that he did not write. It was quite easy for a writer and his work to go their separate ways, however. As texts radiated out from the original circle, fewer and fewer scribes would recognize the minor courtier or aspiring laureate whose name was subscribed to it, and therefore would not bother to recopy it. Once in the network, just as an oft-forwarded email loses its original context, authors soon lost control over their works and even acknowledgment of their responsibility for them. Above all, texts were preserved for their inherent interest to a particular scribe. The demands of painstaking copying coupled with the likely ignorance of the author’s identity as it passed into increasingly remote circles of transmission, probably explain the relative infrequency of ascribed texts in the manuscript tradition. It explains as well why purposeful alteration of texts transmitted in manuscript, at least during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, rarely occurred: Collectors devoted time, effort, and paper only to the copying of texts they considered worthy of such an investment. A work that required a great deal of editing and rewriting might not seem worth the effort.

**Presentation and Commissioned Manuscripts**

As much as printing expanded the means of creating works in multiple copies, it neither immediately nor completely usurped the work of “book scribes” who produced manuscript books for the luxury and university markets. Of these formally produced volumes, Curt Bühler notes that “every manuscript ascribed to the second half of the fifteenth-century is potentially (and often without question) a copy of some incunable,” and that as many manuscript books survive from the second half of the fifteenth century (after the advent of printing in Europe) as from the first half (Bühler 1960: 16, 25–38). Printed books were regularly copied by scribes from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, largely because of problems with the availability and
distribution of printed books, but also because personalized copies of texts, particularly religious works, were highly valued. Further, in the early days of printing on paper, a manuscript copy of the same text, on parchment, was viewed as a more permanent form of the text. For example, one scribe in particular appealed to the circle of humanists in London in the early sixteenth century: the one-eyed scribe Peter Meghen (1466–1540), amanuensis and courier to Erasmus (who called him “Cyclops” and “Petrus Monoculus”). Meghen’s trips to England on behalf of Erasmus and his commissioned transcriptions for humanists in the court of Henry VIII, including Cardinal Wolsey, John Colet, Dean of St Paul’s, Christopher Urswick, Dean of York and Windsor, and Nicolaus Kratzer, contributed to the increasing popularity of Erasmian thought in early Tudor England. Working as a scribe in England from 1504 until his death, and as “Writer of the King’s Books” from 1530 onwards, Meghen produced at least 31 manuscripts on vellum in a beautiful italic hand. He copied almost exclusively from Latin printed works, including the writings of the early Fathers of the Christian Church, the Psalms, and parallel texts of Erasmus’s and St Jerome’s versions of the New Testament (Trapp 1975).

Perhaps the perceived value, beauty, and permanence of manuscript books can best be illustrated by the fact that Elizabeth I received numerous manuscripts as gifts throughout her reign, carefully written in textbook italic and secretary hands. It was quite fashionable for universities and schools, as well as poet-courtiers and others seeking preferment, employment, or the improvement of relations, to present elaborate manuscripts to the queen as New Year’s Day or Accession Day gifts or as gifts in honor of a royal visit (Bajetta 2001). Before she became queen, Elizabeth herself had created manuscripts for presentation to her father, stepmother, and half-brother. In 1544, the 11-year-old Princess Elizabeth presented her stepmother, Katherine Parr, with a carefully written and beautifully bound translation of the *Mirror or Glass of the Sinful Soul*. In the following year, she presented her father, Henry VIII, with a translation of Katherine Parr’s *Prayers or Meditations* into Latin, French, and Italian, and her stepmother with a translation of Calvin’s *Institution de La Religion Chrestienne* (Lawson 2007: 138–9).

The manuscripts presented to Elizabeth were either devotional, classical, heraldic, poetic, or musical in nature. Many of the 58 manuscripts listed in her surviving New Year’s Gift Rolls include descriptions of expensive bindings decorated with jewels, silk, velvet, needlework, gold, and silver. Elizabeth received the most manuscripts from the heralds Sir Gilbert Dethick (at least 23 illuminated books of arms) and his son William Dethick, and from the Italian calligrapher Petruccio Ubaldini, who made numerous manuscript copies of printed books in Italian (Lawson 2007: 153, 150–1). Some of the presentation manuscripts were original verse or translations, such as Latin verses from Thomas Wilson on Accession Day 1567, George Gascoigne’s translation of “Tale of Hemetes the Heremyte” on New Year’s Day 1575/6 and his translation of “Grief of Joye” on New Year’s Day 1576/7, Jane Seager’s “The Divine Prophesies of the ten Sibills, upon the birthe of our Saviour Christ” in 1589, and Bishop Carleton’s Latin “Carmen panegyricum,” c. 1597 (Bajetta 2001: 162–6). Others were
Manuscripts in Tudor England

copied from printed sources, such as Thomas Blundeville’s manuscript copy of his verse “Plutarchi Commentarium” and Esther Inglis’ *Discours de la Foy* in 1591 and her French translation of the Psalms, dated 27 March 1599 (Bajetta 2001: 172–3).

Inglis, a Scotswoman of Huguenot ancestry, created at least 55 Protestant devotional manuscripts, almost all taken from printed works, which she presented to patrons and royalty in England, Scotland, and France. Her books were known for their virtuoso displays of calligraphic scripts as well as their ornate bindings. She explained to a recipient of a manuscript copy of the Psalms of David, Prince Maurice of Nassau, on April 2, 1599, that “while the variety of handwriting delights the sight, the spirit may similarly be raised” (Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a.93). Calligraphy was an edifying form of art, for both creator and recipient.

**Difficulties in Understanding Tudor Manuscript Culture**

The mechanisms of preservation differed for manuscripts generated by professional scribes and the new class of amateur scribes and writers, with significant implications for our understanding of the surviving texts. The output of the official secretariats of church and state, despite some substantial losses, were originally housed, for example, in permanent repositories such as the Tower of London, the Rolls House in Chancery Lane, or the Archbishop of Canterbury’s library at Lambeth Palace. The surviving evidence from the amateur tradition, however, largely reflects upper-class manuscript production in an age when writers and collectors of the middling sort were increasingly numerous.

Documents produced by amateur scribes have come down to us through three main channels of preservation. Many were absorbed into official archives, such as the State Papers in the National Archives. Enduring noble and upper-class families created their own family archives of both professional (mostly legal) and amateur manuscripts, the latter including educational and literary works as well as personal correspondence. Many of these family collections are now on deposit at local record offices. Extensive manuscript collections were also formed by antiquaries beginning in the sixteenth century. These collectors were intent on saving the nation’s documentary heritage. The manuscripts they assembled come from diverse, often untraceable sources (for example, the Cotton, Stowe, and Harley collections at the British Library and the Tanner and Ashmole collections at the Bodleian Library). Understandably, fewer documents from the lower and middling classes came into their hands than those created by and for upper-class recipients. In aggregate, what has come down to us in the amateur tradition is skewed toward upper-class production, a fact that complicates our efforts accurately to reconstruct the contours of that tradition. The national network of manuscript circulation was by no means restricted to elite social strata, for odd survivals of texts written by scribes of modest wealth and status argue that an extensive circulation network was in place at a range of social levels by the mid-sixteenth century.
Amateur manuscript culture differed from its professional counterpart in another important respect. Professional medieval scribes wrote in uniform prescribed scripts. Accordingly, medieval texts were, at least in theory, relatively easy to transmit accurately because copyists always worked from legible copy. In contrast, the ordinary penmen and women responsible for the bulk of Tudor manuscripts have left us with handwriting that is often difficult to decipher. While most amateur scribes learned to produce a fairly regular “secretary” hand based on models set forth in printed writing manuals and taught by writing masters, even some italic hands, such as Sir Philip Sidney’s and his brother Robert Sidney’s, were so bad that contemporaries found them troublesome to read. In a letter to his brother, Philip Sidney confessed that his own handwriting was “ill enough” and urged Robert to do better. Despite having received formal instruction in writing, however, Robert’s mature hand was extremely sloppy. Rowland Whyte reported to him on March 4, 1597 that Lord Burghley, upon receipt of a letter from Robert, “cast it oft from him” because “he could not read it” (modernized; HMC (1934): 2.243–44).

Amateur handwriting often affected print culture for the worse, for every first edition of a printed book was originally set from manuscript copy. While some authors hired professional scribes to produce fair copies of their works for the press, many supplied the printer with final drafts in their own handwriting. Bad handwriting, coupled with ordinary typesetting mistakes, often caused the resulting text to be riddled with errors unless the author personally corrected the printed proofs (McKerrow 2000). A similar and ongoing process of textual corruption was the norm for works transmitted in manuscript. As handwritten texts circulated in networks largely invisible to modern scholars, many hundreds, perhaps thousands of copies of a popular work might be created over a period of decades by amateur scribes. Poor handwriting and careless errors, of course, led to a steady deterioration of these texts. Sometimes, all surviving copies of a work are highly corrupt versions of what the author intended. The degree of corruption can pose significant challenges for editors of these texts. For example, every known copy of one of the most popular anthologized poems of the early seventeenth century, the satiric complaint “It was a time when silly bees could speak” (sometimes attributed to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex) is significantly corrupt. The accepted version of this poem today is based on an analysis of 27 manuscript copies, none of them exactly the same (May 1980: 109–11). Although thousands of copies of this poem must have circulated in manuscript, a trustworthy version has yet to be discovered.

Much can be learned, of course, from textual variants and revised texts about the nature of manuscript culture, its patterns and habits of transmission, and how contemporary scribes interpreted and reinterpreted the works they copied. And in rare instances before the mid-seventeenth century, intentional revisions in the course of transmission take on an interest of their own. However, the accumulated faulty readings as texts moved from hand to hand in Tudor and early Stuart manuscripts are, overwhelmingly, mere mistakes and misreadings that lack inherent interest or cultural significance (May 2002; see also Marotti 1995: ch. 3). This is in contrast to the late
seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when, as Harold Love has shown, scribal interventions in poetic texts are often creative contributions to the received copies (Love 2004: 46, 122).

Conclusion

The Tudor period consolidated the transition from the medieval tradition of professionally produced vellum manuscripts to a distinctive Renaissance paper-based manuscript culture. In many respects, the significance and value of handwritten texts increased as a result of print, while printed works established themselves as a type of discourse distinct from the older medium. Along with the increasing availability of all kinds of printed material, the volume of transcribed discourse increased exponentially on both the official and informal levels of scribal production. Affordable paper encouraged the many secretariats of church and state to expand their record keeping throughout the age. The crown established a formal postal system to distribute the burgeoning numbers of handwritten letters, warrants, bills, and other official documents to subjects throughout the kingdom. At the same time, an increasingly literate population cultivated a wide variety of unofficial writing genres and forms, including letters, miscellanies, commonplace books, receipt books, accounts, diaries, and original works in prose and verse, from plays and love lyrics to sermons. These manuscripts were transmitted by servants, family, and friends, or passed from hand to hand privately, although a national system of paid carriers also evolved to expedite the informal networks of manuscript circulation. Thus the study of Tudor manuscript culture is the study of two parallel, rapidly expanding traditions of handwritten discourse, traditions that continued to expand in the centuries that followed.

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**Further Reading**

John Skelton and the State of Letters

Seth Lerer

My title has a double edge. On the one hand, it signals the place of the poetry of John Skelton (c. 1460–1529) in early Tudor literary culture. But on the other hand, it signals the place of letters in the making of that culture. The state of letters in the age of Henry VII and VIII is one of politics and patronage, where lines between the public and the private blurred and where vernacular literary expression was beginning to emerge out of the mix of English Chaucerianism, Latin oratory, and French courtiership. John Skelton’s place in English literature from the 1480s to the 1520s has long been understood as lying at the intersections of these various currents. His writings span the range from vivid social satire to moral allegory, from complex reflections on literary fame and authorial identity to biting critiques of the courtly life. Though best known to modern readers for his short lines and pungent rhymes (the familiar Skeltonics of such poems as “Elynour Rummynge” and “Why Come Ye Nat to Court?”), he was also a master of the Chaucerian pentameter, the rhyme royal stanza, and the Latin elegiac (see Carlson 1991; Griffiths 2004; Hadfield 1994; Kinney 1987; Lerer 1993; Meyer-Lee 2007; Scattergood (in Skelton 1983); and Walker 1988).

A university graduate and a scholar of the classics, Skelton was the ideal arbiter of literary usage in the first decades of print. Little wonder that William Caxton, the first English printer, turned to him as he prepared his edition of the Eneydos (a romance version of Virgil’s Aeneid) in 1490.

But I praye mayster John Skelton late created poete laureate in the vnyuersite of oxenforde to ouersee and correcte this sayd booke. And taddresse and expowne where as shall be founde faulte to thym that shall reqyure it. For hym I knowe for suffycyent to expowne and englyshse every dyfyculte that is therin / For he hath late translated the epystlys of Tulle / and the boke of dydoros syculus. And diuerse other werkes oute of latyn in to englysshe not in rude || and olde langage but in polysshed and ornate termes craftily. As he that hath redde vyrgyle / ouyde. Tullye. And all the other poetes and oratours / to me vnkownen. (Caxton 1928: 109)
In his first critical appearance in English print, Skelton comes off as a master of the letter in all senses of that word. For, while he is a learned translator from Latin into English, he is also clearly careful enough with the printed letter to serve as the proofreader and corrector to Caxton’s publication. But more than just a fault-finder to the muses (“I suppose he hath drunken of Elycons [Helicon’s] well,” Caxton avers later), he is a scholar of letters, having translated “the epystlys of Tulle [i.e., Cicero].”

Caxton, in essence, sets the terms for Skelton’s own self-presentation as a scholar-poet and corrector of the public present. For, in this embedded praise of proofreading lies a larger claim for Skelton as the monitor of error. Indeed, we may see the bulk of his social poetry as offering both oversight and correction for the excesses of court and church. And we may see, too, in the vision of his mastery of polished and ornate English the transformer of a literary and linguistic rudeness into terms of art.

Caxton’s prologue to the *Eneydos* limns a larger portrait of the state of letters at the close of the fifteenth-century (see Carlson 1993; Jardine 1993; Lerer 1997). Cicero, Ovid, Virgil, and their classical compatriots were emerging out of the mix of medieval allegories and grammatical commentaries to stand as the canonical authors of humanist pedagogy. The classicizing impulses of the late-fifteenth century schools provoked, as well, a public sense of Roman literary culture as informing living Tudor politics. The very printing of the *Eneydos*, complete with Caxton’s dedication to the young Prince of Wales, Arthur Tudor, reveals the ways in which dynastic power often phrased itself in terms of literary history (there is, of course, little new here; Henry V, it has been long believed, commissioned both a manuscript of Chaucer’s *Troilus* and *Criseyde* and Lydgate’s *Troy Book* as a way of locating dynastic succession in the old tropes of Trojan origin). What is new here, however, is the way in which the university “laureate” plays a role in this political and literary legitimation. Skelton was but one of a rising class of educated men at the close of the fifteenth century whose skill with languages and flair with rhetoric made them the candidates for diplomats and propagandists.

But he was also of a rising class of literary figures who looked back, not just to classical antiquity but to the legacy of European laureates for their authority. Humanist literacy was an epistolary one. Central to the reputation of the Italian poet and early Humanist Francis Petrarch (1304–74) throughout the later fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries is not just the fact of his laureate coronation but the legacy of his letters. Petrarch had made his name, indeed he may well have defined Humanist identity itself, by writing letters – not just to the noble or the knowledgeable, but to the famous and the dead. His literary criticism found its voice in letters: Witness, for example, his famous letter to Giovanni Boccaccio in which he recasts the Italian story of Griselda into Latin and reflects on its aesthetic, social, and moral effects. Witness, too, his own fascination with the letters of the classical past and with Cicero himself as an epistolariest of the literary imagination. Cicero’s letters offered up the template for Petrarchan Humanism (indeed, Petrarch himself discovered a cache of those letters in 1345). And, in good Humanist fashion, they thus provided Caxton
with a model for his praise of Skelton: “For he hath late translated the epystlys of Tulle.” Engaging with the Ciceronian epistle is, quite simply, what laureates do.

The state of letters for the early Tudor age is thus a lettered state: an institutionalized embrace of the learned and literate to give voice to royal policy and to interpret the political present in terms of the poetic past. But such a state of letters worked, too, through ministrations of epistolarity. The medieval teachings of the *ars dictaminis* (the art of letter writing) and the habits of formal correspondence generated a diplomacy that worked through letters. State institutions such as the Privy Seal and Chancery concerned themselves with the production and dissemination of texts, whether they were pleas for favor, judgments of legality, writs of need, or documents of foreign policy. The Tudor court remained, throughout the reigns of the two Henrys, oiled by the ministrations of the letter.

So, too, did the intellectual and amicitial life of the age.

For this ought to be the character of the letter: as if you were whispering in a corner with a dear friend, not shouting in the theater, or otherwise somewhat unrestrainedly. For we commit many things to letters, which it would be shameful to express openly in public. (Erasmus, *Libellus de conscribendis epistolis*, Cambridge, 1521, fol. 1r, quoted from Jardine 1993: 151)

The “character” of the letter is not just its quality of discourse but the mark of the characters in which it had been written. The traces of the hand distinctively represented the inner qualities of the writer (in short, his or her “character”). This double sense of the word “character” distinguishes the rest of Erasmus’s argument. By contrasting the writing of a letter with a theatrical act, he makes clear that epistolary communication is inherently anti-theatrical. Nonetheless, as Lisa Jardine has noted, there remains something “intimately theatrical” about letter writing (1993: 151). It is a performance for an audience of one, acted out not on the stage but in the chamber.

This passage from Erasmus’s *De conscribendis epistolis* did not appear in the final, approved version of the text published in 1522. It survives only in a pirated edition published by Johannes Siberch in 1521, but it may well date from the earliest drafts of the treatise that Erasmus was composing in the final years of the fifteenth century. These sentences may thus respond not so much to the traditions of medieval *dictamen*, or dictates, and Ciceronian forensics as to the social practices of letter writing in the English and the European courts and, in turn, to the nascent culture of surreptition and surveillance that defined the actions of the courtier and diplomat. They distill, almost into aphorism, those powerful tensions in the court of Henry VIII between the king’s apparent need to theatricalize the royal body and the courtier’s need to privatize diplomatic experience. From the early years of Henry’s reign, through the age of minions and favorites, the power of Thomas Wolsey and the later controls of
Thomas Cromwell, letter writing in all its forms remained one of the central means of political self-definition. It enacted the tensions between the theater of the king and the chambers of his power.

Skelton knew all this well. In his great play *Magnyfycence* (now largely understood to center on a critique of Henry VIII’s all-too-intimate relationship with his minions), the central actions hinge on epistolary exchange. The forged letter of introduction at the play’s opening – a letter written by Counterfet Countenaunce for Sad Cyrcymspecyon and presented by Fansy to Magnyfycence – stands at the nexus of what Erasmus would distinguish as the corner and the theater. Fansy brings in the letter, a “wrytynge closed under sele” (312). Its contents are as yet unknown to the monarch, and when he gets the chance to “knowe” what “this letter doethe contayne” (324) he reads it silently. “Hic faciat tanquam legeret litteras tacite,” note the stage directions (“let him act as if he were reading the letter silently”). Though an apparently minor part of the dramatic action, the letter is the nodal point of privacy and power, diplomacy and desire, for the play. It places Fansy in the role of the go-between; gets him accused of being a spy (352); and, in its final revelation as a counterfeit document, presents a powerful critique of courtly epistolarity.

At the play’s end, the masks are stripped away and the forgeries revealed for what they are.

**Magnyfycence:** Sothely to repent me I have grete cause;
    Howe be it, from you I received a letter sent,
    Whiche conteyned in it a specyall clause
    That I sholde use largesse.
**Cyrcumspeccyon:** Nay, syr, there a pause.
**Redresse:** Yet let us se this matter thorowly ingrosed.
**Magnyfycence:** Syr, this letter ye sent to me at Pountes was enclosed.
**Cyrcymspeccyon:** Who brought you that letter? Wote ye what he Hyght?
**Magnyfycence:** Largesse, syr, by his credence was his name.
**Cyrcumspeccyon:** This letter ye speke of never dyd I wryte. (2434–42)

Here, all is clear. The impersonations of the courtier Fansy are pulled aside, and “Largesse” is revealed to be his disguise. The counterfeiting and the cloaking of the play drop away to show not just the truth of this bogus document, but the true nature of kingship and, as a consequence, the heart of the play’s constructive satire.

Letters are everywhere in court as they were, too, in Skelton’s work. Indeed, some of his own poems seem to enact the forms of epistolary exchange dramatized in *Magnyfycence*. In the early 1510s, he got himself involved in a now-famous flying with Sir Christopher Garnesche, one of Henry VIII’s favorites. Garnesche had apparently called Skelton a “knave,” and Skelton’s response took the form of at least five poems of such vigorous vituperation that, even without translation, they compel the modern reader to laugh and gasp (see Skelton 1983: 424). No one could “diss” like Skelton, and his addresses to Garnesche’s “pyllyd garleke hed” (iii.67), his remark that he prates
"lyke prowde Pylate" (ii.28), and his almost manic alliterative vocative, "Garnyseh, gargone, gastyly, gryme, / I have receyvyd your seeconde ryme" (vv. 1–2) reveal the brilliance of his invective. Poem iii of this sequence begins:

I have your lewde letter recyvyd,
And well I have yt perseyved,
And your skrybe I have aspyed,
That your mad mynde conyrved. (iii.1–4)

Not only Garnesche but his scribe come in for abuse here, and Skelton skewers the social pretensions of someone who, for all of his "carpet cousshons" still has "knavyche condycyonns" (iii.11–12). Garnesche does not even write his own letters (either because his social station enables him to have an amanuenses or because he is incapable of doing so). Skelton, however, writes himself: "I wryght ageyne" (iii.8). Indeed, Garnesche comes off as a veritable ape of literacy, and in a complexly layered and allusive rebuke, Skelton chastises:

Gup, marmeset, jast ye morelle!
I am laureat, I am no lorell. (iii.13–14)

Get going, Skelton hollers, as one would to a horse. He calls Garnesche a marmoset, and urges him on. I am the laureat, he avows, not a fool.

In these lines, Skelton, I believe, alludes to one of the most familiar images of false literacy: the reading ape. From practically the Carolingian period on, the image of the ape with a book represented the foolishness of those who might try to find some meaning in the written word without the skills to do so (on this material and its traditions, see Lerer 1983). In the early thirteenth-century poem, The Owl and the Nightingale, this imagery pointedly appears when the Nightingale mocks the Owl's claims for astrological knowledge. She remarks that any creature may look up at the stars without knowing anything about astrology, and she compares the Owl to an ape that may seem to read a book without understanding its contents.

On ape mai a boc bihalde,
An leues wenden & eft folde,
Ah he ne con þe bet þaruore
Of clerkes lore, top ne more. (1325–28)

An ape may look upon a book
And turn and fold its pages,
But he does not know any better than before
About scholarly learning, from top to bottom. (my translation)

This imagery permeated the plastic and the visual arts of medieval and early modern England, to the point that by the early sixteenth century it could be so familiar that
Seth Lerer

Thomas More could deploy it, transparently, in his *Utopia*. Recalling how he brought printed books to the Utopians, More’s narrator, Raphael Hythloday, notes how he packed on board his ship the works of Plato and Aristotle, “as well as Theophrastus on plants, which I regret to say was mutilated in parts. During the voyage an ape (*cercopithecus*) found the book, left lying carelessly about, and in wanton sport tore out and destroyed several pages in various sections” (More 1965: 180–1). The editors of the Yale Edition of *Utopia* compare this episode to one in Francis Bacon’s *Historie of the Reigne of King Henry VII*, where Bacon reports:

> a merie Tale: That his Monkey (set on as it was thought by one of his Chamber) tore his Principall Note-booke all to pieces, when by change it lay forth. Whereat the Court (which liked not those Pensive Accompts) was almost tickled with sport. (quoted in More 1965: 468)

This collocation of images locates Skelton’s critique of Garnesche pointedly within the iconography of illiteracy for medieval and early modern England. It distinguishes between the ill-lettered Garnesche – who communicates through a scribe – and the laureate Skelton: a laureate who, here, takes on not just the honor of a university degree but the very power of human literacy. The difference between a laureate and a lorell is the difference between the learned and the lewd. Indeed, the word “lorel” often connoted specifically a foolish inability to read and understand. In the earliest usage cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the title character in William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* chides the priest: A “Lewed lorel … luite lokestou on the bible” (Passus VII, line 150). And Thomas More is quoted too, from *De quatuor novissimis* of 1522, “While the lorel playth the lord in a stage playe” (*OED*, s.v., *lorel*, def. A).

We return, with this quotation, to the theatricality of courtly life and to the counterfeits, impersonations, and subversions of Skeltonic satire. Just as a simian – be it a monkey or a marmoset, an ape or *cercopithecus* – may play the scholar or abuse the book, so the lorel can only look upon the Bible or play-act as lord. In his complex complaints against Garnesche, Skelton locates himself within the world of letters, and his fierce correction of his enemy’s ineptness recalls his, perhaps, more mild oversight in Caxton’s print shop and his righting of the printer’s faults.

The state of letters between Skelton and Garnesche assumes, in Skelton’s broader political critiques, a condition of overall administrative corruption. By the early 1520s, Cardinal Wolsey’s power had become so great that he seemed, at times, a parallel monarch. Hampton Court, Wolsey’s great palace, rivaled Henry’s. As Skelton apostrophizes in “Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?”

> The kynges courte Shulde have the excellence; But Hampton Court Hath the preeminence! (406–8)
Wolsey was famously inaccessible, jealous of his time with Henry, and controlling of the documents that passed in and out of the King’s purview.

> For he is the kynges derlyng  
> And his swete hart rote,  
> And is governed by this mad kote! (666–8)

In such a court, letters and papers seemed to pass almost without Henry’s notice. He hated writing, resisted even signing his own name. He signed documents, apparently, only when he was in the mood, and there are stories throughout the accounts of his reign of his excuses, moments of impatience, or protests of indisposition which got him out of writing, reading, or signing official documents. Skelton describes the scene in “Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?”

> For what man is the better  
> For the kynges letter?  
> For he wyll tere it asunder!  
> Wherat moche I wonder  
> Now such a hoddy poule  
> So boldly dare controule  
> And so malapertly withstande  
> The kynges owne hande,  
> And settees nat by it a myte!  
> He sayth the kynge doth wryte,  
> And writeth he wortith nat what. (669–79)

Perhaps Henry did not know what was passing under his signature. Whatever was, Wolsey knew. He dared tear up the “kynges letter.” He could defy the king’s own hand – a phrase now that connotes not just the manual controls of power but the very act of handwriting itself. The English state has, in these lines, become a state of letters: one usurped by a “hoddy poule” (an upstart simpleton: Wolsey himself).

But again, just as Skelton would contrast Garnesche’s simian illiteracy with his own laureate learning, so he contrasts here Henry’s indifference to the letter with his scribal attentiveness.

> But what his grace doth thinke  
> I have no pen or inke  
> That therwith can mell. (683–85)

Skelton’s normally fluent pen cannot even express the king’s mind. The invocation of the standard humility topos here – familiar to medieval readers from Dante to Chaucer, Lydgate and beyond – becomes an appeal not simply to the writer’s lack of skill but to the lack of subject matter. And so, in the absence of a knowledge of royal writing or intention, Skelton does what any good laureate would do: he turns to the father of all laureates for insight.
Seth Lerer

But wele I can tell
How Frauncis Petrarke,
That moche noble clerke,
Wryteth how Clarlemayn
Coude nat himselfe refrayne,
But was ravsht with a rage
Of a lyke dotage.
But how that came aboute,
Rede ye the story oute. … (686–94)

Skelton seeks to understand Henry’s subservience to Wolsey through historical precedence. In one of Petrarch’s Familiar Letters, he recounts how Charlemagne had fallen hopelessly in love with an “ordinary woman.” He neglected his royal duties, and when the woman died suddenly, he lost his senses. Charlemagne became obsessed with the dead woman’s body; he would touch it, speak to it, caress it. But soon it was revealed that the dead woman had, inside her mouth, a magically endowed, jeweled ring. Once this was removed, her corpse withered and Charlemagne lost interest in it – only, bizarrely, to develop a similar interest in the bishop who had recovered this ring and now possessed it.

A strange tale for sure, and one that Skelton avers “is no fable nor no lye” (705). Its veracity lies, for Skelton, in the demonstrable authority of Petrarch: “by myne auctor tried it was” (707). More fascinating, however, than this story’s content is the reason for its telling. In Petrarch’s letter to Cardinal Colonna, it forms part of a larger narrative of travel anecdotes. Each place that Petrarch visits has a tale about it, and when he gets to Aix and sees the tomb of Charlemagne, he gets this story from the clerical overseers of the shrine. Petrarch’s rhetorical purpose in recounting the story at such length lies, at first glance, in its local oddity: Can you believe, he seems to say, the kinds of stories you hear these days? But what he mentions at his letter’s end has greater force:

I have taken more time in telling the story than I intended. But my extensive journey depriving me of the consolation of books (librorum solatio), and my constant moving about making it easier to contemplate many things rather than great things, and being unable to fill my letter properly with serious things, I have crammed (confarcio) it as you can see with whatever was ready at hand. (Petrarch [trans. Bernardo] 1975: 28; Petrarch [ed. Fracasetti] 1859: 44)

In this conclusion, Petrarch hearkens back to the great verities of humanist identity: The well-stocked library and solitary leisure make possible the contemplation of great things. They enable a focus on the serious and, in turn, the epistolary communication of that focus. Instead, the letter writer here is moving all around, without his books, his study, and his uninterrupted attentiveness. The letter is crammed full of stuff: confarcio is the word Petrarch uses in Latin, a word that carries with it, as it does in its modern Romance language descendants, the sense of filling a comestible with stuffing.
Skelton’s attraction to this letter, I suggest, may well lie as much in its delectable anecdote as in its larger sense of itself as a confarication of whatever lies at hand. Indeed, a poem such as “Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?” like so many of his long poems, seems more like a hodgepodge of things at hand than a sustained contemplation on great matters. And in this move precisely lies Skelton’s satiric technique. He stuffs his poems full of big and little things: odd anecdotes, great allusions, half-baked narrations. If you want to know how everything happened, he notes, “Rede ye the story oute.” Go back to the original, he enjoins. But that invitation is as wittily disingenuous as the Wife of Bath’s injunction to her audience to go back to Ovid to find the full story of Midas – a story she herself has garbled and truncated.

At moments such as this one, Skelton ironizes his relationship to his laureate forbear. Yes, he asserts his literary and political authority by an appeal to Petrarchan literacy. But that appeal is to a bit of gossip in a letter. “Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?” raises a larger question about Skelton and the state of letters. For the point is not just that his poetry appeals to the learning of the literate, or that it figures forth epistolary exchanges at the heart of social life. It is that, in the broadest sense, Skelton’s poems are letters in themselves. Whether they offer direct, second person addresses, or whether they assume a general readership, the poems stand as missives to a lettered world. The critical relationship of author and audience grounds itself in the relationship of letter writer to recipient. The poet asks to be read and, in some sense, too, to be answered. The flying with Garnesche (of which, of course, we only have Skelton’s side) is really nothing less than an exchange of verse epistles. And in the epitaphs and eulogies for all the dead who populate his verse – from the Earl of Northumberland, to Henry VII, to the great poets of antiquity residing in Fame’s house, to the little bird lamented in “Phyllype Sparrow” – the author seeks an audience to read, react, and respond.

The verse epistle was, of course, not new with Skelton. Many of Chaucer’s shorter lyrics take the form of letters to his friends and patrons, and the satiric letter had been a staple of Latin poetry from the age of Martial and Juvenal. What Skelton does uniquely is take letters as his theme: whether they be the missives going back and forth between friends, courtiers, or lovers; or, by contrast, the epistolae that Cicero and later Petrarch would use as the vehicles for personal expression and literary identity. He sees the Tudor state as one of lettered law and learning, ripe for squib and satire. He takes the Petrarchan model and synthesizes it with the emerging humanist epistolary practice to create a poetics of letters. His poems often come off as missives from exile or exasperation, written to readers in power or, by contrast, readers of the past. His political satires are framed in second person address; his literary reflections invite the famous dead to pick him up and read. Throughout his work, Skelton is blotting on paper; his pen is always moving. It is as if he is filling up the spaces in the letters of the imagination, waiting – whether in court, or church, college – for a return envelope with some response.

Such a response may well have come from later poets working in his wake. From his critiques of courtly life we can see the stage set for Thomas Wyatt and the great
Satires to John Poyntz and Francis Bryan. And we can see, too, the stirrings of literary form and idiom that would be absorbed into the mid-sixteenth-century poets collected in what would become the printer Richard Tottel’s great anthology, *Songes and Sonnetts* (1557). Skelton had been overseeing and correcting letters ever since Caxton first called upon him, and in the range of his own writings we can see the templates for the poses of Renaissance fashioning and fancy.

Notes

1 Material in this and the following paragraph summarizes and recasts the exposition in Lerer (1997: 10–12), for which see references and bibliography.

2 Material in this and the following paragraph summarizes and recasts the exposition in Lerer (1997: 63), for which see references and bibliography.

3 All citations of Skelton’s works are taken from Skelton (1983).

4 *De rebus familiaribus*, Book I, letter iii. In Bernardo’s (1975) translation, it is Book I, letter iv.

References


Further Reading


In the manuscript corpus of the Henrician courtier writing, the most frequently recopied item is the epistolary satire, beginning “Mine own John Poyntz since ye delight to know,” to be attributed securely to Thomas Wyatt (d. 1542). This manuscript corpus, comprising all the verse and prose now surviving that was written out by the courtiers themselves in the court of Henry VIII (r. 1509–47) or directly from the courtier-writers’ own papers, incorporates 467 verse items in 632 copies, at a rate of not quite a copy and a half per poem (1.35), though in the case of “Mine own John Poyntz,” as in a few others, the rate is significantly greater: there are six now or formerly complete copies of this single 103-line item in the manuscripts. The poem’s immediate success is indicative. It is not lyric properly, also not a love poem, but effectively a summa of what most mattered among the courtiers themselves, substantively and formally.

The poem represents itself as the restricted address of one courtly intimate to another (“Mine own John Poyntz”), in a way that is characteristic of this corpus of verse. The verbal gesture does not occur in the Ricardian writers and their fifteenth-century epigones, for example – what Anne Middleton influentially described as “public poetry” – nor in the more nearly contemporary verse of John Skelton or Alexander Barclay or Stephen Hawes (Middleton 1978). Skelton wrote substantively the same poem as Wyatt did (though formally all different), addressing the same inquiry (“Why come ye nat to courte?”) with the same response (“For who can best lye / He is best set by” [858–9]); however, Skelton’s poem was posted publicly, whence it evidently reached a relatively wide, diverse readership. The direct address of the Wyatt poem, recurring frequently in the other courtier poetry, indicates that such poetry was (meant to be, or in the first instance) by courtiers for other courtiers. The courtier Wyatt made the poem and gave copies of it, whence sometimes further copies were made, all still within the restricted circuit. The courtier-poetry was not published in the first instance, in the usual sense of its being made available publicly, impersonally; instead it was held in limited circulation, privately, only among the properly qualified.
By courtiers for courtiers, the poetry also concerns itself with what it meant at the moment to be a courtier, in ways again indicated by Wyatt’s verse epistle: an excoriating anatomy of what was become of the aristocratic good life under the nascent absolutism of Henry VIII. Wyatt professes himself susceptible of that life’s traditional attractions: “I gawnt sumtime that of glorye the fyar / Dothe twyche my hart: me lyst not to report / Blame by honowr and honour to desyar” (14–16).\(^3\) Nonetheless, though the chains be gilded, jail is jail (“Who so ioyes suche kinde of life to holde / In prison ioyes, fettred with cheines of gold” [6–7]);\(^4\) and, by extensive experience not told much in the poem itself, Wyatt knows also to fear “The powar of them, to whom fortune hathe lent / Charge over vs, of right, to strike the stroke” (9–10). The poet Wyatt’s father had been imprisoned and racked in the reign of Richard III; the poet’s son was to be imprisoned, then executed for a rebel in 1554; and the poet himself was imprisoned repeatedly, and possibly once, while under threat of execution himself, made to watch others tortured and killed:

The Bell Towre showid me suche syght  
That in my hed stekys day and nyght:  
Ther dyd I lerne, out of a grate,  
Fo all vauere, glory, or myght,  
That yet circa regna tonat.  

(“Who list his wealth and ease retain,” 16–20)\(^5\)

It is not possible to put a date to “Mine own John Poyntz,” by association of it with one or another of Wyatt’s recorded imprisonments, though it is finally allowed in the poem that Wyatt may not have been free to frequent court at the moment (“a clogg doeth hang yet at my hele” [86]); nonetheless, the assertion is that outrage keeps the poet at home, not obedience, outrage specifically at the immorality and crime of the Henrician regime: drunken lechery, of course (“I cannot honour them that sett their part / With Venus and Baccus all theire lyf long” [22–3]); also, robbery and murder. Wyatt’s indictments are not, or are not only, metaphoric:

I cannot wrest the lawe to fi ll the coffer  
With innocent blode to fede myselff fatt  
And doo most hurt where most hellp I offer. (34–6)

As indicated here, the fundamental objection is not necessarily to crime itself but to the pervasive dishonesty entailed by attendance upon it:

But how may I this honour now attayne  
That cannot dy the colour blake a lyer?  
My Poyntz, I cannot from me tune to fayne,  
To cloke the trothe for praissse without desart,  
Of them that lyst all vice for to retayne.

...
I cannot crowche nor knelle to do so grete a wrong,
To worship them, lyke gode on erthe alone,
That ar as wollfes thes sely lambes among. (17–21, 25–7)

“My wit is nought – I cannot lerne the waye” (57) “With the neryst vertue to cloke
awaye the vise” (61), as for example, “crueltie to name / Zele of Iustice” (68–9) or
“he that sufferth offence withoute blame / Call him pitefull” (70–1). The regime is
tyrannous, simply put, the king “lyke gode on erthe,” though “tirannye” emphatically
is not “the right of a prynces reigne” (74–5). With Lucan’s hero the younger Cato
(Uticensis), Wyatt too finds libertas amissa [“lost liberty”] intolerable – the loss of the
fundamental aristocratic prerogative, obligating the courtier “On othres lust to hang
boeth nyght and daye” (55): 6

I am not he that can alow the state
Off him Cesar and dam Cato to dye,
That with is dethe dyd skape owt off the gate
From Cesares handes (if Lyve donnot lye)
And wollde not lyve whar lyberty was lost. (37–41)

Derivative and Original

Wyatt’s poem is a translation from a contemporary Italian source, whence Wyatt
took even specifics of the difficult though attractive exogenous verse-form he intro-
duces into English here: terza rima, rhyming abba, bcb, cdc, etc. The translation is
often close, though also sometimes the less so, the more emphatically it appears
to advert its own derivation: The Cato-reference is original with Wyatt, for example,
not in the source he is translating, though it cannot in fact come from the source
that Wyatt pretends. 7 Additionally, Wyatt’s poem imitates – directly, translation-
wise, as well as more broadly – the “Third Satire” of Decimus Iunius Juvenalis (d.
c. 127), which represents a friend of the poet forced from Rome, the “mille pericula
saecae / Vrbris” (8–9) [“thousand violent dangers of the city”], into rural retreat at
the Sybil’s desert Cumae (“vacuis … Cumis” 2). “Quid Romae faciam?” [“What
should I do at Rome?”] is the friend’s question: “mentiri nescio” (41) [“I cannot
lie”], no more than Wyatt. Juvenal’s Rome is overrun with flatterers who do know
how to lie, “qui nigrum in candida vertunt” [who turn black into white] (30),
echoed in Wyatt’s “dy the colour blak a lyer” (18); “laudat / sermonem indocti, faciem
deformis amici [he lauds the eloquence of an idiot acquaintance, or the person’s
grace if he is ungainly] (86–7), recalled in “I am not he suche eloquence to boste,
/ To make the crow singing as the swane” (43–4). “[S]i dixeris ‘aestuo,’ sudat” [if
you say, “I’m kind of warm,” he starts dripping sweat] (103), continues the friend;
“rides, maiore cachinno / concutitur; fler, si lacrimas conspexit amici, / nec dolet”
you smile, and he’s convulsed with laughter; he weeps, though he sorrows not, if
he has noticed a friend so much as start to tear up] (100–2), as in Wyatt’s lines:
Grynne when he laugheth that bereth all the swaye,
Frowne when he frowneth and grone when he is pale;
On othres lust to hang boeth nyght and daye. (53–5)

For all the exoticism of it, both current and learned, Wyatt’s poem also fits itself intimately into its own peculiarly English circumstance: superficially, on a more or less purely verbal-literary level, by its Chaucer references (50–1, to the *Canterbury Tales*) and allusions (emphatically, at the poem’s beginning, for example: “fle the presse … / Rathar then to lyve thrall” [3–4]; see Lerer 1997: 194–7); also, by its blunt *idiotisme*, highly characteristic of Wyatt, idiosyncratic even (e.g. 44–6; see Walker 2005: 299, 332–4). But more profoundly too: This translation-imitation is Wyatt’s own poem. Though extensively, manifoldly derivative, it is also original in a strong sense.

The same can be said of the other great, substantive poems of the corpus of Henrician courtier-writing, matching “Mine own John Poyntz” in seriousness and scope: Wyatt’s unfinished cosmographical “Iopas Song,” Vergil-deriving, and the other Lucilian *terza rima* long poems, “A spending hand” and “My mothers maids;” but above all else the paraphrases of the canonical seven penitential psalms, “Love to give law.” Wyatt’s psalms-paraphrases are confected complexly from a variety of exegetical and literary sources – this is learned writing, like Wyatt’s other serious writing, polyglot, worked carefully and long. Aside from the subtleties of the verse itself, Wyatt’s chief accomplishment is the compound-complex product of inset lyrics within the framing narrative he has built around them. To call this singular achievement a paraphrase of the penitential psalms is at least misleading. The seven are rendered into English verse, of course, albeit expansively, but also, of greater moment, adaptively to the narrative context into which Wyatt set them. The psalms, that is, are made the lyric effusions of the psalmist within the course of Wyatt’s retelling of the particular Old Testament episode that he uses to frame the Hebrew king’s lyric penitence, the story of David and Bathsheba, and Uriah and Nathan. Nor the story nor the lyrics nor the combining of the story and the lyrics is original with Wyatt, though the effects he achieved out of the received material are highly original, and chiefly by virtue of his insight into the political charges the received material might be made to bear in his own circumstance. The narrative frame tells of a king (David) who is willing to murder a prominent, loyal subject (Uriah), in order to indulge an illicit lust (for Uriah’s wife Bathsheba), and about what happens when another of the king’s subjects (Nathan), speaking truth to power, decries the king’s wrong-doing in public; the lyrics represent the king’s revulsion when so compelled to acknowledge his own crimes. The point is not subtle. Henry Howard (1517–47), Earl of Surrey, wrote prefatory verse to circulate with Wyatt’s work, confirming its import. Wyatt’s psalms-paraphrase was a denunciation of tyranny, according to Surrey, useful for present time:

The great Macedon that out of Perse chasyd
Darius, of whose huge power all Asy rang,
In the rich arke if Homers rymes he placyd,
Who fayned gestes of hethen prynces sang;
What holly grave, what wororthy sepulture
To Wyates Psalmes shulde Christians then purchase?
Wher he doth paynte the lyvely faythe and pure,
The stedfast hope, the swete returne to grace
Of just Davyd by parfi te penytence,
Where rewlers may se, in a myrrour clere,
The bitter frewte of false concupiscence,
How Jewry bought Uryas deathe full dere.
In prynces harte Goddes scourge ypinted depe
Myght them awake out of their synfull slepe. (31 Jones)⁸

Surrey’s own finst poetic hour is also similar to “Mine own John Poyntz,” in that it too carries unavoidable political weight, despite too being a translation, by consequence most fundamentally of poet-Surrey’s choice to translate what he did when he did: two books of the Aeneid, into two thousand lines of unrhymed, iambic, pentametric English verse. That Surrey knew and used the other current “English” translation, by the Scot Gavin Douglas (c. 1476–1522), confirms that Surrey’s purpose was not pedagogic or practical.⁹ He did not write for the sake of P. Vergilius Maro or for the sake of some needy audience, in order only to propagate Vergil among the illoti. There was no such audience for Surrey, and Vergil was already perfectly well known, not particularly by means of the Gavin Douglas translation. Surrey remade Vergil for himself, and for the courtier-intimates to whom habitually he spoke, who knew Vergil well enough already to recognize Surrey’s point. In this perspective, Surrey’s choices are most telling: to translate Vergil – the poet of Roman imperial power who was also that power’s most mournful, melancholic critic – rather than some such other, as, say, P. Ovidius Naso. And the choice to translate not all, but some only, in place of other. Surrey did not begin at a beginning, nor is there any evidence to the effect that he ever meant to translate more Vergil than he did: the two books only (see Richardson 1976: 215). Aen. 4 may seem an obligatory selection, by virtue of the traditional esteem invested in it: Even Chaucer had used it, albeit via Ovid. On the other hand, Surrey’s decision also to translate Aen. 2 – not at all like Aen. 4 in authority – belies such obligation. Surrey elected to concentrate on both the prototype and the antitype – Troy and Carthage – of Vergil’s Roman imperium sine fine, power without end, built on the ruin of these others. So Surrey’s elections tell his purposes: Aen. 4 counts the costs of erotic fūror, personal and political, and the costs of the pursuit of hegemony, for the absolutist as well as those touched by his ambition. The unexpected Aen. 2 revels in power’s fall: in se magna ruunt, as Lucan, the dark Vergil’s greatest heir, put it (Bellum civile 1.181), concentrating on destruction – “the watching of the spoile” (1013), in Surrey’s stark phrasing: “I saw Troye fall down in burning gledes,” “razed from the soil;” “with ruine it doth fall” (821–2, 828):

The richesse here were set, reft from the brent
Temples of Troy; the tables of the Gods,
The vessells eke that were of massy gold,
And vestures spoild were gatherd all in heap;
The children orderly and mothers pale for fright  
Long ranged on a rowe stode round about. (1013–19)

– and the death of the Trojan hegemon, who had already watched so many of his children killed (“Then first in me entred the grisly feare”):

Of Priamus this was the fatal fine,  
The wofull end that was alotted him:  
When he had seen his palace all on flame,  
With ruine of his Troyan turrets eke,  
That royal prince of Asie, which of late  
Reignd over so many peoples and realmes,  
Like a great stock now lieth on the shore.  
His head and sholders parted ben in twaine:  
A body now without renome and fame. (721–30)

Just a translation, of course; except so thoroughly re-animated for present circumstance in Surrey’s hands as to become vivid, anew. The same qualities pervade the scriptural verse paraphrases that Surrey too wrote, following the example of Wyatt’s biblically derived verse (“Where rewlers may se, in a myrrour clere, / The bitter frewte of false concupiscence” [“The Great Macedon,” 10–11]). Imprisoned, condemned, his father too like-sentenced but to be kept alive long enough to witness his son’s murder, Surrey chose to translate from the Bible selected chapters of Ecclesiastes – the proverbial wisdom of Salomon, framed as advice to his son – and psalms. These poems too comprise a significant body of work, by any of a number of measures: nearly 500 lines of verse, in unusual long-lined iambic meters, difficult (by consequence subsequently abandoned by the tradition, unlike the iambic pentameter blank verse) but indigenous (i.e., not in imitation of contemporary Italians), alternating rhyming alexandrines and septemaries. Translations again, but not all and not always close; Surrey’s discipline again was to elect passages that might speak to an immediate audience of intimates, of his immediate circumstance. Here too, purpose is expressed in the words themselves, as well as the choice of material. The Henrician counselor Thomas Elyot (c. 1490–1546) – “a prose Wyatt,” H.A. Mason called him (1986: 111), though Elyot was not properly a courtier – made something positive out of the same materials, of exhortatory value: “The speciall duetie, and wherunto kynges were wonte to bee sworne, whan thei beganne their reigne, was this, to helpe widowes, to succour the fatherlesse, and to deliver and defende all that are oppressed from iniurie”:

What prescribeth Sapience to kynges? Mercy (saieth she) and Trouthe doe kepe the kynge, and his throne is made stronge with Clemencie. He sheweth Mercie in succouryng the oppressed; Trouthe, in iudgyng truely; Clemencie, in temperyng the seueritee of the lawes with lenitee.10
Representing the same principles but negatively (“In terour of the just thus raignes iniquitye, / Armed with power, laden with gold, and dred for crueltye” [“Through Lord to Israel,” 27–8, from 49 Jones]), the aristocratic critic of absolutism Surrey offers instead a vision of the tyrant’s throne and the huddled immiserates in terror of it:

I saw a roiall throne wheras that Justice should have sitt;  
In stede of whom I saw, with fyrce and crwell mode,  
Wher Wrong was set, that blody beast, that drounke the giltles blode.  
(“Like to the steerless boat” 44–6, from 45 Jones)

I saw wher stoode a heard by power of suche opprest,  
Oute of whose eyes ran fl oods of tears that bayned all ther brest;  
Devoyde of comfort clene, in terroure and distress.  
(“When I bethouht me well” 3–5, from 46 Jones)

“The Quiet of Mind” and Forensic Oratory

The prose production of these same writers has similar properties: Simple translation it can be, and always it is at least broadly imitative of ancient prose models (specifically, the late Julio-Claudian and Flavian period Roman writings of figures who had had to suffer imperial tyranny), but always also tellingly, instructively selected and seriously taken among the courtiers themselves, both in the writing of it and the reading. Here too, Wyatt may be the exemplary figure, though his work is not isolated. His prose remains comprise five things: earliest, The Quiet of Mind translated from a recent (popular) Latin rendition of the Plutarchan moralia, dating from the 1520s, as if in youth Wyatt could announce a program for the Henrician courtier verse to follow for the next 20 years.11

“Quiet of mind” poems in the verse corpus have been assigned to Wyatt (“Stonde who so list upon the slipper whele / Of hye astate, and let me here reioyce; / And use my life in quietnesse eche dele, / Unknowen in court, that hath the wanton toyes”) and to Surrey (“The things for to attayne / The happy life be thers, I finde: / The riches left, not got with payne; / The frutfull grownd; the quyet mynde”; others occur, including the Arundel manuscript poem (sometimes attributed to the elder John Harington) “If right be racked and overrun” (“Amonge good thinges I prove and fynde / The quyet lyfe doth moste abounde”) and the Blage manuscript poem “Sustain, abstain, keep well in your mind” (“For ye shall therby greate quyetnes ffynd”). The anatomy of worldly mutability in Wyatt’s prose treatise — “for so vari-able, dyvers and reboundable is the tune of this worlde, as of a harpe” — anticipates the emphatically stuttered “I cannot” of the “Mine Own John Poyntz” verse epistle (“Say he is rude that cannot lye and fayn / the lecher a lover and tirannye / to be the right of a prynces reigne / I cannot I no no it will not be”) — almost entirely monosyllabic:
It can no wyse be sayde, ‘while I lyve, this I wyll nat suffre;’ lette it be so. But this I may saye, whyle I lyve, this I wyll not do: I wyl nat lye, I wyll use no crafty deceites for to compass men, I wyll nat begyle, I wyll nat disceritfully lye in awayte – this, syns it is in us, it is a great help to them that lyfte themselfe up to the surety of mynde.  

Next, Wyatt’s two “Letters to his Son,” from the 1530s, not translated, strictly, but imitative of the Senecan Epistulae morales, ad Lucilium, Seneca’s junior amicus, in Wyatt’s letters recommended to his son, along with Epictetus: “I wold Senek were your studye and Epictetus, bicaus it is litel to be evir in your bosome;” where the image of the little book held close, constantly – its wisdom portable, and so pervasive, in memorable brief compass – encloses all Wyatt’s advice. “I have nothing to cryn and cal apone you for but honesty, honesty,” wrote father to son, defining this honesty as adherence to “wisdome, gentlenes, sobrenes, desire to do good, frendlines to get the love of manye, and trougth above all the rest,” with “the eschewing of the contraries of thes,” especially “manye and crafty falsed, the verie rote of al shame and dishonestye” – the faults of the Henrician court decried in “Mine own John Poyntz” (letters quoted from Muir 1963: 38–43).

Selections from the same Senecan Epistulae were done into English prose by the slightly senior courtier Henry Parker (1481–1556), Lord Morley, in the same decade that saw Wyatt’s “Letters”; and the epigrammatic platitudinous moralizing that characterizes them too pervades the surviving literary work of the enigmatic Francis Bryan (d. 1550), both the verse and the prose of the Henrician court’s moralizing “vicar of hell.” All that remains in the verse corpus even plausibly attributable to Bryan are 200 lines of sententiae, versified from the Banquet of Sapience of Thomas Elyot, a prose collection of apothegms that Elyot rearranged (alphabetically, by topic) from Seneca in largest part. Bryan’s poem repeats themes of Wyatt’s prose: “Gentille facion makethe the boddy to have quietnes” and “An honorable lyf shewethe honestie” (quoted from Kinsman 1979; 140–1), for example:

What nobylitie, riches or pusance may be stedfast
Sens God may make kings and kingdom to wast? (143–4)

It may be felt that Bryan would have done well to heed his own advice: “Trowthe comonly with meny wordes ys scattered to nothinge, / Lyke as a cyte which falleth for lacke of good governyenge” (127–8). But there was a fantastic contemporary appetite for the epigrammatic Senecan prose and such other antique commonplaces, much of it to be associated with Bryan, one way and another. It was the sententious moralist to whom Wyatt addressed his own versified collection (and critique?) of commonplaces (“I thought forthwith to write, / Brian, to the, who knows how great a grace / In writing is to cownsell man the right:” “these proverbis yet do last”).  The brother of the recipient of the other two terza rima epistles – both “Mine own John Poyntz” and “My mothers maids” (“Alas, my Poyngz, how men do seke the best / And fynde the wourst by errour as they stray”) – Francis Poyntz, was responsible for an English
version of the *Tabula Cebetis*: “This Table of the Theban Cebes, the noble philosopher, and scholer to Socrates, shewynge howe mortal creatures, blynded by Ignorance, wander in this worlde, and can not atteine to very Felicitie, for that they be mysledde by false opinions, and wrong wenynges” (*The Table of Cebes*, London: Berthelet, 1531: sig. A1v). In addition to the Wyatt epistle, Bryan also received the dedication of the bilingual (Latin-English) collection *The Mirror or Glass of Manners and Wisdom* (c. 1535) – “A Frutefull worke of Lucius Anneus Senecae,” “the mayster of honest lyvynge” – by the grammarian and court-figure Robert Whitinton, since, “gentyll maister Bryan, byeide manyfolde vertues,” Whittinton put it, “you have a syngler zeal and delyte in workes that be pytthy and polytike, touchynge moral wysdome” (A3v). The English prose version of the *Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius* (also printed c. 1535) – likewise “ pytthy and polytike,” wherein “is conteyned certayne ryght high and profonde sentences and holysome counselles, and mervaylous devyses ageynst thencumbraunce of Fortune: and right swete consolations for them that are overthrowen” – asserts that it was undertaken, by Surrey’s step-brother, the Morley-like courtier-translator John Bourchier (1467–1533), Lord Berners, “at the instant desyre of his neewe syr Francis Bryan knyghte”; and Bryan’s own work in prose – his most substantive literary remain, though again derivative – is in the same vein: the *Dispraise of the Life of a Courtier* (London: R. Grafton, 1548), an Englishing of a French translation of the Castilian original of the famously Senecan Latinist Antonio Guevara – “not onely pleaasunt and fruitfull, but also full, in every where, of olde auncient stories and wyse saiynges of the noble and notable philosophers and clerkes,” as Bryan the courtier described it (A2v).

Finally, from the next decade come Wyatt’s forensic orations, the brief epistolary *Declaration* and the longer, properly oratorical *Defence*, both from the trial of Wyatt in council in 1541, when the indictment was that, still resenting his imprisonment in 1536 at the time of Ann Boleyn’s execution – the “blodye dayes” that “have broken my hart” – Wyatt on embassy had betrayed his king to a league of papal forces arraying for England’s destruction. “My fooes they bray so lowde, and eke threpe on so fast, / Buckeled to do me scathe, so is their malice bent,” Wyatt might have said, with Surrey; for he too had prominent accusers, “false wolves, with cootes which doo their ravin hyde” (“Give ear to my suit, Lord,” 3–4, 43, from 50 Jones),

Whose glutten cheks slouth feads so fatt as scant their eyes be sene;
Unto whose crewell power most men for dred arayne
To bend and bow with loftye looks, whiles they vawnt in their rayne,
And in their bloody hands.

...  
And they shall fall, their power shall faile.

(“Through Lord to Israel,” 14–17, 42, from 49 Jones)

Wyatt, on his part, characterized the false wolves baying all about him in 1541 as damnably careless about the accusation itself, knowing as they did the damage even
false indictment might do: “These men thynkethe yt inoughe to accuse, and as all
these sclaunderers vse for a generall rule: whome thou lovest not, accuse. For tho he
hele the wounde, yet the scharre shall remayne” (Defence [Muir 1963: 193]). Of
course, the phrase gained greatest currency in verse. Addressing “My Ratclif” (“when
thy rechlesse youth offendes”), Surrey has it that “Wiat said true, the skarre doth aye
endure” (“My Ratclif” 1 and 8, from 34 Jones), as Wyatt himself appears to have put
it in a poem addressing Francis Bryan again:

Syghes ar my foode, drynke are my teares;
Cl cynkinge of fetters suche musycke wolde crave;
Stynke and close ayer away my lyf wears;
Innocencie is all the hope I have.
Rayne, wynde, or wether I iudge by myne eares.
Mallice assaulted that rightiousnes should have.
Sure I am, Brian, this wounde shall heale agayne,
But yet, alas, the scarre shall styll remayne.

To end his own case, “God be thanked,” Wyatt was able to conclude of his king, “he
is no tyrant. He woll no suche thynges agaynst mens consciens: he will but his lawes,
and his lawes with mercie” (Defence [Muir 1963: 208]). The remarks do not contradict
the other evidence Wyatt had long given elsewhere, to opposite effect. Rather,
Wyatt’s Defence constitutes another exhortation of Henry, in effect, to abjure the same
tyranny that elsewhere Wyatt castigated. Wyatt was reprieved, unlike Surrey not
many years later; and again Wyatt was sent out as his king’s ambassador, in which
capacity he died in 1542.

Surrey’s slighter prose remains are most closely related to Wyatt’s forensic orations:
onced by actualities but also artful, self-consciously emulative, and connected to
the other courtier writing. Surrey’s plea in council for relief from hard durance asks
for liberty, or if not liberty a Wyatt-like retirement (“But here I ame in kent and
christendome / emong the muses where I rede and ryme”):

Wherefore, if your good Lordships judge me not a member rather to be clean cut away,
than reformed, it may please you to be suitors to the King’s Majesty on my behalf, as
well for his favour, as for my liberty. Or else, at the least, if his pleasure be to punish
this oversight with the forbearing his presence – which unto every loving subject, spe-
cially unto me, from a prince cannot be less counted than a living death – yet it would
please him to command me into the country, to some place of open air, with like
restraint of liberty, there to abide his Grace’s pleasure. (“Plea” [Nott 1815–16: I.168])

Despite the evidently artful periodicity of these sentences, it may yet be felt that such
writing is strictly factitious, used up in accomplishing (or not) its immediate purpose;
but it is not, nor was it so regarded at the time. The prose writing was collected
and recirculated in manuscript among the courtiers themselves, in company of the
poetry, as if the prose were as consequential, as if it were indistinct from the poetry in interest or literary merit. Wyatt’s “Letters to his Son” were copied into the single most important of the Henrician courtier manuscripts, the Egerton, which is not a collection of verse alone. Likewise, the forensic oratory of both Wyatt and Surrey was copied among verse in the courtier anthology in London, British Library, Harley 78, which survives only in fragmentary condition. “It is a matter for regret,” wrote H. A. Mason, that so little of the collection survives; otherwise, “we might then have learned what an intelligent anthology of Wyatt’s poems made by a contemporary would have looked like” (1972: 35). The “intelligent anthology” would not have been all of poems.

Sameness and Difference in the Erotic Lyrics

The segregation of the Henrician courtiers’ prose from the rest of the corpus of their writings, along with its consequent devaluation, almost to the point of oblivion, was a later development, the product of printing’s intervention. Likewise the segregation and devaluation of the courtiers’ more serious verse: Surrey’s Vergil and biblical versions, Wyatt’s penitential psalms and even the longer epistolary satires that the manuscript tradition among the courtiers themselves would appear to have regarded as most to be recirculated. It is of course perverse to have said so much about the writing of the Henrician courtiers without mention of their erotic-lyric production (see especially Heale 1998: 39–113). Such lyrics do comprise a portion of the corpus even in manuscript circulation. The fact is, however, that printing changed the ratios of valuation attaching to the various parts of the courtiers’ literary production, in the process changing the writing itself: What had looked one way before – to the courtiers themselves, with their manuscript-circulation routines, suffering loss of libertas – became something else, for non-intimate others, who perforce depended on printing, which offered them erotic distraction instead (for an analogous example, see Carlson 1991: 261–81).

In manuscript circulation, the short-form lyric production of the Henrician courtiers, largely though not exclusively amatory or erotic in subject-matter, has baffling qualities. First, rates of attribution to individual authors are disquietingly low in the courtiers’ manuscripts. Of course the picture is complicated. The more serious verse, like the prose, is always attributed, and the better part of the attributions (of whatever verse is attributed) go to the three subsequently canonical figures, Wyatt, Surrey, and Bryan – competitively sometimes, in effect, to more than one of them, when a poem attributed to one turns up elsewhere in the manuscript corpus attributed expressly to another. Others beside these three are named, nevertheless: Edmund Knyvet, George Boleyn, Thomas Vaux, Antony St Leger, George Blage, Antony Lee, Edward and Thomas Seymour, John and Robert Dudley, the elder John Harington, and more, including such elusive figures as the “TH” to whom two poems are attributed in contemporary evidence, and three others may be by (seventeenth- and
eighteenth-century) antiquarian imputation.25 The person in question may well have
been some Thomas Howard or other, though the evidence is exiguous; still, the letters
represent express ascription. Most often, attributions going to writers other than the
chief ones occur with novelty-like or otherwise distinctive items:

All women have vertues noble and excelent.
Who can percyve that they do offend?
Dayly they serve God with good intent;
Seldome they dysplease there husbandes, to theyr lyves end;
Always to plese them they do intend;
Neuer man may fynd in them srewdnnes:
Comonly suche condycyons they have, more and lese.

Innocuous praise for object-women susceptible of re-reading as a misogynist rant: So
clever is the work that it comes with an ascription in the unique copy of it, “fynys
quod Rychard Hattfeld”:

All women have vertues noble and excelent:
Who can percyve that? They do offend
Dayly; they serve God with good intent
Seldome; they dysplease there husbandes, to theyr lyves end,
Always; to plese them they do intend
Neuer; man may fynd in them srewdnnes
Comonly suche condycyons they have, more and lese.
(D 18v, printed in Muir 1947: no. 5)

Analogous in some way with the more serious pieces of writing having consistent
attributions attaching to them, such pieces as this one that stand out somehow have
(or attract) attributions; in the corpus otherwise, circulation without attribution is,
beyond the norm, practically obligatory. The maximally generous calculation – i.e.,
counting all manuscript attributions equally, though many are belated (and so pos-
sibly infected by the printed tradition or otherwise subject to the attractions of a few
prominent names), some are equivocal or contradicting, and a few must be mistaken,
and counting all manuscript items, more serious as well as lighter verse – shows a
rate of attribution running under 20 percent. Out-taking Wyatt’s own Egerton manu-
script – for various reasons having an unusually large number of attributions in it – the
rate is about 8 percent. Maximum or minimum, the fact is that the considerable bulk
of the courtier-poetry was circulated and collected at first, among the courtiers them-
selves, without attribution, as if personal authorship of most individual poems was of
no or only occasional consequence among the people who first wrote and read them.

One troubling consequence of such considerations is the indication they give that
some of the putatively most characteristic Wyatt poems are not his work: “Whoso
list to hunt” (“Noli me tangere, for Cesars I ame”), for example, and “Caesar when
that the traitor of Egypt” (“if I laught, any tyme or season, / It is for because I have
nother way / To cloke my care but under sport and play"). Both are not only unattributed in manuscript, but were repeatedly passed over for attribution, by persons who would have been well informed and did supply ascriptions otherwise. Wyatt’s own Egerton manuscript underwent three chief campaigns of attribution, one probably by Wyatt himself, none of which attributed either of these poems. “Who so list to hunt” was twice more passed over, when copied into two other courtier-manuscripts, belonging to George Blage and the elder John Harington. “Caesar when that the traitor of Egypt” is likewise unattributed in the other manuscript copy of it, in the Devonshire manuscript, a manuscript commonplace-book passed hand to hand among intimates of Wyatt’s that attaches credible Wyatt attributions to other poems, but not to this one. These two poems – like various others, less well known, perhaps, but also occurring unattributed in Egerton and other manuscripts – were only imputed to Wyatt’s authorship with the printed recirculation of the poetry a generation after Wyatt’s death, and then only by means of vague, optimistic blanket attributions.  

A complement to the unascribed condition of the short-form amatory courtier-poetry in its earliest state is its convergence, or, less positively put, its undifferentiated or undifferentiable qualities, manifest in a series of odd particular behaviors on the part of the persons involved (see Mason 1959: 171). For one thing, it is difficult to tell where one poem ends and another begins, nor is this simply a matter of defects of manuscript design. There are never titles, of course, and final ascriptions rarely come in evidence; adjacent writing can be so like, in substance and form, as to defeat discrimination.

Dryven bye desire I dede this dede:  
To daunger mysilf without cause whye,  
To truste the vntrue, not like to spede,  
To speke and promise faithefullie;  
But nowe, the proof dothe verifi e  
That whoso trustithe or he kno  
Dothe hurte himsilf and please his foo.  

The same lines (more or less) occur in another manuscript, though as what appears to be the first stanza of a poem in four stanzas, continuing (riddle-wise still, despite the disavowal of obscurity):

Sens that my language, without eloquence,  
Ys playne, vnpaynted, and not vnknownen,  
Dyspache myn answere with redy vtteraunce:  
The question ys, youres or elles my owne.  

The picture is complicated in the present instance, possibly, by textual evidence for something – in five four-line stanzas, with a refrain-like ending, “Agaynst my will I do in ded / Couet that thing that will not be” – verbally and substantively related, though not quite the same poem, beginning “Dryuen by dissyr to set affection:”
I hopyd well whan I began;
And sens the proue is contrary,
Why shold I any longer than
Couet that thing that wyll not be?  27

Post-print critical editors have found variously: three separate poems here; two; or only one worth distinguishing. Though such discrimination is become obligatory, the manuscript evidence does not oblige; fundamentally, the problem is that the poetry itself does not provide grounds for discrimination. Substantively, contentually, within the writing itself, difference did not matter as much as sameness.

The “Patience” poems (or poem) – “Patience though I have not” (usually though not always the first line of one four-stanza poem or group of stanzas) and, possibly in reply, “Patience for my device” (another such four-stanza poem, or not, if, as some of the manuscript witnesses treat it, it is more of “Patience though I have not”) – have posed this problem of delimitation in an acute form: groups of stanzas verbally connected among themselves and repetitious in such a way as to indicate unity at some level, though also some stanza-groups responding or replying to other groups, different voices offering different perspectives, perhaps (though not necessarily) representing different authors, taking part in a verse conversation; except that the stanza groups occur in such a variety of assortments and relations in the manuscripts – sometimes contiguous, sometimes not – as to indicate several poems (not one), not originally or necessarily to be regarded as related at all (see Daalder 1990: 75–85).

The “Patience” matter raises also this other problem, that these writers appear also to have had a propensity to intervene sometimes in one another’s writings, by replying, or by continuing, or simply by rewriting or revising invasively, as if they lacked proprietary sense about the poetry they were recirculating. In some instances, it is relatively clear that some verse represents only a rewritten variant version of some other, nonetheless remaining still the same poem.

Desire, alas, my master and my foo,
So sore altered, thisellff how mayst thou se?
Sometyme I sowght that dryvys me to and fro;
Sometyme thow ledst thet ledythe the and me.
What reson is to rewle thy subiectes so,
By forcyd law and mutabilite?
For where by the I dowtyd to have blame,
Evyn now by hate agayne I dowt the same.  28

This Egerton manuscript poem (signed with Wyatt’s monogram) was rewritten in the manuscript itself, in Wyatt’s own hand, from another version of the same poem, with alteration of line 3 “Whome I did seke now chaseth me,” 4 “Whome thow didst reule now rewlyth the and me,” and 5 “Tyranie it is to rewle.” The two Egerton manuscript versions (of the same poem, by the same author) appear to be rewritings of another, in a different manuscript, where the poem occurs without attribution, though this
other version may yet be the work of the same author in some sense. The revisions
may have gone in the other direction, however, nor are they linear:

_Cruell_ desire, my master and my foo,
_Thysilf_ so _chaunged, for shame_, how _mayst_ see?
_That_ I have sought _dathe chase_ me to and froo
Whom thou didist rule, _nowe rulith_ the and me.
_What right_ is to rule thy subjectes soo
_And to be ruled_ bye mutabilitye?
_Lo_, where bye the I doubtid to have blame,
Even now bye _dred_ againe I doubte the same. (D: 73rb)

This third version shares features, sometimes with the one Egerton manuscript
version (4 “Whom thou didist rule, nowe rulith” with the first), sometimes with the
other (5 “What right is” with the second “What reson is,” as opposed to the first
Egerton version “Tyranie it is”), sometimes also having distinctive features of its
own (especially “Cruell desire … / Thysilf so chaunged, for shame”): but these appear
all to be versions of the same poem, perhaps, though the authorship matter is
troubling.

Other instances of similar rewriting appear rather more clearly to yield different
poems, rather than different versions of the same poem, though perhaps not, even in
some cases where the authorship appears to remain the same, though the same author
behaves so differently in the different poems (not versions) that sameness loses its
sense. Surrey’s two Frauenleider (unless it be one poem in two versions?) – one begin-
ning “O happy dames, that may embrace / The frute of your delight.” “Good Ladies,
help to fill my moorning voyce” (23.1–2 and 7); and another, “Good ladies, you that
have your pleasure:” “come take a place, and mourn with me awhyle” (24.1–2) – share,
particular terms, evidently, but also substance and conceit, extensively (both
poems quoted from 23, 28 Jones). The other is abroad (“In ship … / He sailes that
hath in governance / My life” [23.8, 10–11] or “My lord and love, alas, in whome
consystes my wealth, / Hath fortune sent to passe the seas” [24.9–10]), and the lover
dreams troubled dreams: “The fearefull dreams I have, oft tymes they greeve me so”
(24.17); “Alas, how oft in dreames I se” (23.15) “Sontyme the roring seas (me seemes
they grow so hye!)” – “Lo, what a mariner love hath made me!” (23.28) – “Hath my
sweete lorde in danger greate, alas” (24.19–20):

And in grene waves when the salt flood
Doth rise by rage of wind,
A thousand fansies in that mood
Assayle my restlesse mind. (23.29–32)

But “Another tyme, the same doth tell me he is comme” (24.21), “Wherwith I wake
with his returne, / Whose absent flame did make me burne” (23.19–20): “Thus everye
wayne you see with absence how I burne” (24.35). The poems (or poem) end (or ends)
with distinctive characterization of the duplicity (represented too in the two poems’ juxtaposition here) of the lover’s “unquyet mynd,” faced with the uncertainties of the waking and the dreaming worlds both, and their interpenetration:

Butt when I me awayke and fynde it but a dreame,
The angwyshe of my former woe beginneth more extreme,
And me tourmentith so that unneth may I fynde
Some hydden wheare, to steale the gryfe of my unquyet mynd.
Thus evere wyse you see with absence how I burne,
And for my wound no cure there is but hope of some retourne,
Save when I feel by sower, how sweete is felt the more,
It doth abate some of my paynes that I abode before. (24.31–8)

My doubtfull hope doth cause me plaine:
So dreade cuts of my joye.
Thus is my wealth mingled with wo,
And of ech thought a dout doth growe. (23.38–41)

So different formally are they, nonetheless, that these products are different poems, despite their being, evidently, both the work of the one poet, though writing the same poem twice. Of course, the same occurs in the corpus in cases where a singular author is not in evidence. One or the other of these may be by Wyatt, or both or neither (they occur in the same manuscript but not adjacent to one another). Attributions are out, but again the two poems are indistinct, even formally in this case, sharing the same final couplet rhyme:

She sat and sowde that hath done me the wrong
Whereof I plain and have done many a daye,
And, whilst she herd my plaint and pitious song,
Wisshed my hert the samplar as it lay.
The blynd maister, whome I have serued so long,
Grudging to here that he did here her saye,
With her owne wepon, did make her fynger blede,
To fele if pricking were so good in dede.29

Who hath herd of suche tyranny before?
That, when my plaint remembred her my woo,
That caused it she, cruell, more and more
Wisshed ech stitche, as she did sit and soo,
Had pricked myn hert, for to encrese my sore.
And, as I thinck, she thought it had ben so;
For, as she thought, ‘this is his hert,’ in dede,
She pricked herd and made her self to blede.30

Such a number of instances occur, regularly, as to confound notions of sameness and difference, between poems and between authors – the terms seem not then to have
operated in senses that match (post-print) expectation. Not only did these poets rewrite their own poems, apparently (sometimes producing only variant versions of the same poem, sometimes producing different poems); also the same poets rewrote the poems of other poets, with results that confound not only sameness and difference of individual poems, but also, fundamentally, the notion of personal, individual authorship.

Comorte thy silf my wofull herte,  
Or shortelye on thy silf the wreke;  
For lengthe redoblith dedelye smarte.  
Why sighys thou herte and will not breke?

Dwerese of paynes and greuus smarte  
Hath brought me low and wunderusse weke,  
That I cannot comfort my hart.  
Why syest thou, hart, and wilt not breke?

To waste in sighis were pitous deth.  
Alas! I find the faint and weake.  
Enforce thye silf to loose thye brethe.  
Why sighis thou herte and will not breke?

Thou knowist right well that no redresse  
Thow clymes to cache where ys noo hold;  
Is thus to pine and for to speke.  
Perdye, yt is remediles.  
Why sighis thou, then, and will not breke?

Thow estrys where strenght ys all to weke;  
Thy carefull lyff cannot be toll.  
Why syest thow, hart, and wyll not breke?

Yt ys to late for to refuse  
The yoke when it is on thy neke:  
To shake yt of waylis not muse.  
Whye sighis thou then?

The faithfuller thow dust endure,  
Les she regarde to here the speke,  
And saith pety will not the sure:  
The faithfuller thow dust endure,  
Why syest thow, hart, and wyll not breke?

To sobb and sigh, it ware but vaine,  
Sins there is none that doth it reke.  
Alas! Thou doth prolong thyge paine.  
Why sighes?

As good thow wart asonder ryve  
As this in thought thy self to breke:  
Better were dethe then this alyve.  
Euer to sighe and never to breke

Then in her sight, to move her herte,  
Seke on thy silf thy silf to wreke:  
Then she maye kno thou suffrid smart.  
Sigh there thy laste and therewith breke.  
(D 74ra–74rb)

The same number of stanzas, with the same refrain and the same pattern of its resolution through variation; the same (difficult for English) rhyme-scheme, even
sometimes the same rhymes ("smart" and "heart" in the first stanzas, e.g., though chiastically); shared phrasing (e.g., "The sighes and plaintes are al in vaine" and "To sobb and sigh, it ware but vaine"): One poem or two? One poet rewriting another, or the same poet rewriting herself? One of the four surviving texts of this poem or poems carries a belated attribution to Wyatt, though it may seem difficult to tell which one would be which; and the likelihood is that one or the other (or both) of these versions or poems rewrites a tertium quid from the corpus of late fifteenth-century song. 31

The manuscripts circulate a poetry for which no-one can be held responsible, in the usual way, as if a personal, individual author were making a poem that could be called her or his own. Various persons participated, in various capacities, in fabricating this corpus of lighter verse, but the point of the literary activity appears often to have been corporate submersion rather than individuation, a corporate-collective authorship, in effect, rather than individual. In large stretches in the manuscripts, the poetry all reads the same. Sometimes in fact it is the same, for there is too the phenomenon of the repetition of the same item more than once in the same manuscript anthology, regularly rather than exceptionally. Despite the expenses motivating avoidance of such repetition in other kinds of manuscripts, in each of the manuscripts of the Henrician courtiers, the same poem can appear written out – in the same hand, in the same stint even – twice, sometimes three times, as if the persons who made and used these manuscripts not only did not care to avoid repetition – any more than they cared about individual authorship – repetition even in this simplest fashion was good, like the proliferations of different versions of the same lines or same poems. 32

Printing eliminated these peculiarities of the Henrician courtier-verse in manuscript, or substituted for them. Briefly, what happened was that this verse, the more serious and the lighter – written by courtiers for courtiers and held in manuscript circulation among courtiers – began to leak into printed circulation probably already before the deaths of Wyatt in 1542 and of Surrey in 1547. The evidence of the earliest printed circulation of the courtier-poetry is in poor condition: a few fragments of two or more editions of possibly fairly the same collections of poems, one title known from the evidence being The Court of Venus, hard to characterize responsibly from the scant remains. None of the more serious verse (or the prose) is in the fragments surviving, however, and the attested title for the collection (or collections) is suggestive of a selection-criterion (evidently not yet an authorship-criterion, however) already in operation: nobility, eroticism.

The case is altered by a 1557 printed publication, attested by a superabundance of evidence. The title-page of the first edition, issued June 5, 1557, reads “Songes and Sonettes, written by the ryght honorable Lorde Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and other.” A second edition (significantly altered and, as the basis for all subsequent reprints, the edition that matters) was issued within weeks – July 31, 1557 – and a third still during 1557 (also the year of the incorporation of the Stationers Company), with ten more to follow before Elizabeth I’s death in 1603. A conservative estimate of 300 copies per edition would have put into circulation about 100,000 copies of
the 271 poems of the first edition (310 in the second and subsequent editions) within its first year of printed publication.\footnote{33}

In the printed books, the poetry is represented as individually authored, by means of attributions of sections of the book to the authorship of Surrey and Wyatt. The inclusion of an explicitly labeled “Uncertain Authors” section – itself a form of attribution, rather different from the absence of attribution regular in the manuscripts – lends credibility to the nominal attributions that are imposed: Individual authorship matters in the printed tradition in a way evidently it did not among the courtiers themselves. The consequence is that, even with the imputed uncertainty, the ratio of personally attributed matter to unattributed nearly reverses: While less than 20 percent of the copies of poems in the manuscript tradition are attributed, the rate rises to just over 65 percent in the first edition of \textit{Songs and Sonnets} – two-thirds of the poems appear there with attributions attached, and the rate would appear to have increased with the second edition.\footnote{34}

The courtiers’ prose is all gone, and the more serious verse is reduced and segregated. Wyatt’s penitential psalms paraphrase was not included here, nor Surrey’s Vergil; Wyatt’s three epistolary satires were segregated from his other work, and were removed to the back of the section. Also, no repetitions of verse items occur: no variant versions of the same poems, nor the same poem being repeated, nor even competitive translations from the same sources. Likewise, no problems of separation or distinction of one poem from others occurs: In addition to the attributions, the poems imprinted have all been given titles, working in part (further) to homogenize the poetry included in the book. In some instances, the printed book supplied titles attaching a general or personal moral point to individual poems: “Of the mutabilitie of the world,” “Of disappointed pupose by negligence,” and so forth. Surrey’s vituperous epigram to Ratclif (“My Ratclif when thy reckless youth offends”), quoting Wyatt’s line “the scar doth aye endure,” is called, blandly, “Exhortacion to learne by others trouble” though in fact it is a castigation of tyranny (\textit{Tottel}, sigs. R2r, L1r, and D3v; Rollins 1965: 180, 120, and 35). The second most frequently recopied poem in the manuscript corpus is among the poems so treated in Tottel:

\begin{quote}
Ven[em]ous thornes, that are so sharp and kene,
Sometyme bere floure, faire and fresh of hue;
Peysen oft tymes is put in medicine,
And to his helthe dothe make the man renue;
Fyre, that all thing consumith so clene,
Mayheale and hurte. And, if this be true,
I trust sometyme my harme maye be my helthe,
Sins everye wo is ioynid with some welthe.
\end{quote}

“That pleasure is mixed with every paine,” the printed miscellany explains.\footnote{35} Another such generalizing morality Tottel attaches to half a dozen different poems: “They of the meane estate are happiest” or “The meane estate is best.”\footnote{36} Whereas in the manuscripts there are no titles (nor attributions, most often) though the poems repeat each
other, in this exemplar of the printed tradition, while the poems do not repeat, they are all given titles (as well as attributions) reducing the poems to similarity within the category or two that the printed titles propose.

Of course, most often by far the printed book gives the poems titles that describe them as love-poems, even in instances where, strikingly, they are not. The notorious examples are the impositions of lover-titles on “Caesar when that the traitor of Egypt,” headed “Of others fained sorrow and the lovers fained mirth”; and, on Surrey’s anti-erotic prison-poem “When Windsor walls,” entitled “How each thing save the lover in spring reviveth to pleasure.” Part of the problem is the tendency of the brief-compass, ostensibly erotic poems to spill over into socio-political issues (Fox 1989: 265). There are notorious examples (“Whoso list to hunt”) but also very many cognate cases. It may be felt that the concluding section of this rondeau disambiguates, referring as it does to “love” of a “mistress”:

What vaileth trouth? Or, by it, to take payne?
To stryve by stedfastnes, for to attayne
To be iuste and true, and flie from dowblenes?
Sythens all alike, where rueloth craftnes,
Rewarded is bothe fals and plaine?
Sonest he spedeth that moste can faine.
True meanyng hert is had in disdayn.
Against deceipte and dowblenes,

What vaileth trouth?
Deceved is he, by crafty trayn,
That meaneth no gile and doeth remayn
Within the trapp, withoute redresse.
But for to love (lo!) suche a maisteres,
Whose crueltie nothing can refrayn,
What vaileth trouth?

It cannot, however, since the cruel object affected may as well be the abstract Veritas, which, with others, circumvallation-like, resting on a scriptural base, encloses Wyatt’s name in the motto-device, heading the poem “Who list his wealth and ease retain” (B: 183r). Such ambiguities are eliminated (or reduced) in the printed tradition by the imposed intitulature: The non-lover titles (moralizing generalities) huddle together towards the backs of the author-sections of the book; otherwise, the lover-titles are all but obligatory: Nearly 80 percent of the titles are lover-titles. Imposing titles was not always enough for the printed tradition, however, to accomplish its work of erotic homogenization. “What vaileth truth?” is one of three poems that circulated in the manuscript

V. Innocentia
Veritas Viat Fides
Circumdederunt me inimici mei
tradition in song-form – popular forms (of medieval domestication, though French-derived), stanzaic, with refrains and burdens – appearing in print as sonnets, as if in an effort to ensure that the poems on which topical uniformity had been imposed, by means of selection and the squinting titles, ought to enjoy formal uniformity as well. The sonnet-making is only part of a more pervasive smoothing of meter (cf., e.g., ms. “To be iuste and true, and flie from doublenes” with the printed text’s “How to be iust: and flee from doublenesse”), modernization of language (“troth” for ms. “trouth”), and regularizing of sense (“both crafty false, and plain” and “by false and crafty trayn” from ms. “bothe fals and plaine” and “by crafty trayn”) in the printed tradition:

Complaint for true loue

vrequited
What vaileth troth? Or by it, to take payn?
To striue by stedfastnesse, for to attayn
How to be iust: and flee from doublenesse?
Since all alyke, where ruleth craftinesse,
Rewarded is both crafty false, and plain.
Soonest he spedes, that most can lye and fayn.
True meaning hart is had in hye disdain.
Against decepent, and cloked doublenesse,
What vaileth troth, or parfit stedfastnesse,
Deceaud is he, by false and crafty trayn,
That meanes no gyle, and faithfull doth remayn
Within the trap, without help or redresse.
But for to loue (lo) such a sterne maistresse,
Where cruelty dwelles, alas it were in vain.

(Tottel, sigs. G2r–G2v; Rollins 1965: 70)

Printing’s interposition of itself within the circuit of the Henrician courtier-writing’s reproduction changed the poetry decisively, irrevocably perhaps. The title on the 1557 books (Songs and Sonettes, Written by the Ryght Honorable Lorde Henry Havard late Earle of Surrey, and Other) tells already a good deal of what happened. The polarities of the writing in the manuscript corpus reverse: The prose disappears, and the serious poetry disappears too or is segregated; briefer erotic lyric production is highlighted, and it is itself handled differently in such ways as to change it; rendered discrete, freed from the disorienting repetitions that characterize the manuscript corpus; as part of imposing discreteness, also consistently supplied titles, titles used also consistently to slant the poetry towards eroticism; personally authored, consistently, by socially elevated persons (who themselves preferred less democratic modes of circulation): some songs and some sonnets, fashionable and entertaining, by noblemen, now in mass-purveyance. The printed books are better called, not Songs and Sonnets, but Tottel’s Miscellany, as is ordinarily done; for in a strong sense the books’ author was its publisher. The writing was reshaped by him, for his benefit: no longer the Henrician courtier-writing, but another’s property.
The manuscripts comporting this corpus of verse are, in the first instance, the five that belonged to the Henrician courtier writers themselves:

- **E** = Egerton (London, British Library, Egerton 2711)
- **D** = Devonshire (London, British Library, Addit. 17492)
- **B** = Blage (Dublin, Trinity College, Ms. D.2.7 (parts 2 and 3))
- **A** = Arundel (in private hands)
- **P** = Park-Hill (London, British Library, Addit. 36529)

In addition, there are six others that share some contents with one or another (or several) of the five chief witnesses listed above, appearing to contain matter copied from the papers of the courtiers themselves, directly or at slight remove:

- **C** = Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Ms. 168
- **F** = Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Ff.v.14
- **G** = London, British Library, Addit. 18752
- **H** = London, British Library, Harley 78
- **O** = Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawl. Poet. 172
- **R** = London, British Library, Royal 17.A.xxii

Of the whole manuscript tradition, there is analysis in Harrier (1975: 1–79), Mason (1972), and Beal (1980: 589–626).


On Blage, see Muir (1960: 368–70; 1961); and Baron (1989: 95–119).


There are problems about what constitutes a poem and what distinguishes one poem from others (see below), and observers have disagreed; the counts offered here are idiosyncratic: Egerton has 111 copies of poems, 13 of them witnessed uniquely in it; Devonshire has 165, 87 unique; Blage has 118, 70 unique; Park-Hill has 62, 35 unique; and Arundel has 176, 64 unique (counting only the pre-Elizabethan stints of “Hand A,” i.e., in Hughley [1960], nos. 1–23, 64, 72–90, 93–145, 154–74, and 245–318), the 632 copies in these five witnessing among them 467 different poems.

Except where indicated, herein quotations of the poems, named by their opening lines or phrases (in modern spelling), are from the manuscripts themselves, as specified, by siglum, folio, and line number of the item in question; for ease of reference are also supplied (where possible) references to the item numbers of the chief editions currently in usus scholarum: Jones (1964) = 1–50; Jones; Muir and Thomson (1969) = 1–268; Muir-Thomson; Daalder (1975) = 1–184; Daalder; and Rebholz (1978) = 1–270 Rebholz.

Citations of early printed editions of the poetry (generally eschewed, for reasons that will emerge below), with reference to Pollard and Redgrave (1976–91) = STC, are from the fragments of the Court of Venus editions, with references to Fraser (1955), or from the first edition of Richard Tottel’s Songs and Sonnets (London: Tottel, 1557 June 5 [STC 13860]), cited by the short-title Tottel with signature and item line-number, supplying also the item-number from the edition of Rollins (1965) = 1–271 Rollins. On relations between the first and subsequent editions, see Marquis (2000: 145–164).

3 “Mine own John Poyntz” (= 105 Muir-Thomson = 105 Daalder = 149 Rebholz) is quoted by line number from E 49r–49v for lines 51–103 and, where E is out (by consequence of damage after copying), from D 85v–87r for lines 1–50.

4 “In court to serve” 6–7 (= 259 Muir-Thomson = 181 Daalder = 71 Rebholz), from Tottel, sig. L1r (119 Rollins); cf. the comments of Mason (1977: 157–60).

5 “Who list his wealth and ease retain” 16–20 (= 176 Muir-Thomson = 143 Daalder = 123 Rebholz), quoted from B 183r. The Latin phrase is L. Annaeus Seneca (d. 65), Phaedra 1140; on it, see Walker (2005: 290–1).

6 The line translates Publilius Syrus, Sententiae 413: “Miserrimum est arbitrio alterius vivere.”

7 The chief source is reprinted and translated, with much instructive comparative information, in Mason (1986: 256–97); see also the annotations of Patricia Thomson in ed. Muir-Thomson (1969: 347–55). The difficulty about the reference to Livius was pointed out by Mason, (1977: 165); a simpler solution than recourse to the sources Mason adduces, ultimately Seneca, De providentia, may be to imagine that reference to M. Annaeus Lucanus (39–65) was what was intended. Akin to Wyatt’s uses of Juvenal adumbrated below is his quotation of Aulus Persius Flaccus (Sat. 3.35–8) elsewhere, discussed by Walker (2005: 312–13).

8 Quoted from 31 Jones. For Surrey’s insight, see Walker (2005: 396–7).

9 Quoted from 41 Jones (Aen. 2) and 42 Jones (Aen. 4) by line-numbers, though the text in Jones is from an inferior source. Collation of all the texts is included in Ridley (1963), whose purpose is to establish Douglas’s influence; for comparative textual analysis, see Hardison (1986: 243–5).

10 The quotations are from Elyot’s translation of Isocrates’ Doctrine of Princes (London: Berthelet, 1550 [orig. pub. 1534]), sigs C3r–C3v.


13 “A Spending Hand” (= 107 Muir-Thomson = 107 Daalder = 151 Rebholz) 8–10 and 4, from E 56r.

14 (= 106 Muir-Thomson = 106 Daalder = 150 Rebholz) 70–71, from E 51v.

15 The Mirror or Glass of Manners (London: W. Middleton, 1547).


17 The Declaration and the Defence are edited in Muir (1963: 178–84; 187–209). The verse quoted is “Who list his wealth and ease retain” 11 and 10 (cf. above, n. 5), from B 183r.

18 Daalder traces the remark to the De ira of the younger Seneca (1986: 354–56).

19 “Sighs are my food” (= 244 Muir-Thomson = 165 Daalder = 52 Rebholz) from H 27r.

20 The two Wyatt “Letters” are E 71r–73r (see Flügel (1897: 413–19); Wyatt’s Declaration and Defence are H 5r–6v and 7r–15r, and Surrey’s “Plea” is H 24r–24v.

21 The figures supplied and other observations following are based on a survey of the five manuscripts only that fit this description, namely, E, D, B, A, and P.

22 “Like as the wind” (245 Muir-Thomson = 166 Daalder = 206 Rebholz) is attributed to Surrey in P (the attribution repeated by Tottel) but to Wyatt in H.

23 The items with express attributions to “TH” are “If reason govern fantasy,” D 45r–46r, and “This rotted grief will not but grow,” D 47v, both printed in Muir (1947: 253–82), as nos. 22 and 24. For the later imputations, see Rollins (1965: II, 278).
24 "Whoso list to hunt" (7 Muir-Thomson = 7 Daalder = 11 Rebholz), quoted from E 7v, occurs also in B (185r) and A (63r); “Caesar when that the traitor of Egypt” (= 3 Muir-Thomson = 3 Daalder = 9 Rebholz), quoted from E 4v–5r, occurs also in D 70r. "Whoso list to hunt" may make up part of a hypothetical “Wyatt section” in the Arundel manuscript. And much later, evidently after the poem had leaked into print, someone wrote “Wyat” by it in Egerton: See Harrier (1975: 104–5), who shows that this ascription must have been entered in the manuscript after it had been worked through by Nicholas Grimald, the probable Tottel editor. “There is ample ground for skepticism as to Wyatt’s authorship of many of the poems in the best manuscript,” Egerton, wrote Southall (1964a: 2–4); “the fact of ownership does not establish the fact of authorship:” “All that one can say of the identity of Wyatt at present is that it is not that of a particular historical figure, but that of a corpus of early Tudor poetry.” Another view of the poetry’s eschewal of personal authorship is in Fowler (1975: 19); see also North (1994: 390–416).

25 D 81v (= 128.1–7 Muir-Thomson = 64 Rebholz = 119 Daalder).

26 B 87r (= 128.8–11 Muir-Thomson = 193 Rebholz).

27 (= 262 Muir-Thomson = 237 Rebholz) 7–8 and 13–16, quoted from Court of Venus (London: Gibson, c. 1538 [STC 24650 = Douce frag.], sig. E1r. (Fraser [1955: 81–2]).

28 E 50r (= 75 Muir-Thomson = 54 Daalder = 58 Rebholz); the revisions are detailed in Harrier (1975: 173). An especially instructive demonstration of what such analysis can yield is Baron (1976: 188–204).

29 E 37r (54 Muir-Thomson = 54 Daalder = 41 Rebholz).

30 E 29v (42 Muir-Thomson = 42 Daalder = 53 Rebholz).

31 “Comfort thyself” (74 Muir-Thomson = 74 Daalder = 112 Rebholz) is D 7.4ra–7.4rb, also occurring in E 48v with a “Tho” attribution; “Duress of Pain” (= 124 Muir-Thomson = 225 Rebholz) is B 85r, and also (though with a rate of variation sufficient perhaps to license regarding it as a third poem) in the Court of Venus (London: Marshé, c. 1563 [STC 24650.5 = Folger frag.]), fol. 7r = sig. A7r: “Dwiring of payne and greuous smart” (ed. Fraser, p. 125). One reason for imagining derivation from song is the recurrence of the refrain-phrase elsewhere in the corpus, also addressing “my heart:” “Sigh then no more” (27.5 Muir-Thomson = 27.5 Daalder = 18.5 Rebholz). Another is the (relative) clarity of the analogous case of the poem (or poems) “I am as I am and so will I be” (140 Muir-Thomson = 141 Daalder = 221 Rebholz) in D 85r and B 107r, and “I must go walk the woods so wild” (141 Muir-Thomson = 261 Rebholz) in B 108r–108v, some portion at least of which derives from a fifteenth-century song, a version of which from a Huntington Library manuscript was printed in Robbins (1955: 14–15, no. 20); see also Greene (1964: 175–80).

32 The Devonshire manuscript examples, including triple repetitions, are relatively well known; the same occurs elsewhere, e.g., “And if an eye” (93 Muir-Thomson = 93 Daalder = 178 Rebholz) twice in Egerton, 62v and 65r; “There was never file” (16 Muir-Thomson = 16 Daalder = 32 Rebholz) twice in the Arundel manuscript (Hughey [1960: nos. 98 and 108]).

33 The first edition is edited in Rollins (1965); for the second and subsequent editions, see now Marquis (2007). The press-run estimate used here derives from Hirsch (1967: 65–8), and the calculations of optimal runs in Gaskell (1972: 160–3).

34 In the first edition, 177 of the 271 poems (65.3 percent) are attributed personally.

35 “Venomous Thorns” (= 76 Muir-Thomson = 76 Daalder = 44 Rebholz) is quoted from D 72vb; the other manuscript copies are E 50r, P 32r, H 23r, and F 5v; the heading is Tottel, sig. 2D2r (Rollins 1965: 267).

36 The examples are quoted from Tottel, sigs. Q2r (Rollins 1965: 170) and T2r (Rollins 1965: 191), repeated at D1v (Rollins 1965: 28), K4v (Rollins 1965: 118), L1v (Rollins 1965: 124), T3v (Rollins 1965: 194).
For texts and editions of “Caesar when that the traitor of Egypt,” see Mason 1959: 171; the heading is Tottel, sig. E2v (45 Rollins). The heading on “When Windsor walls” (= 26 Jones) is quoted from Tottel sig. B1v (Rollins 1965: 11).

References


Further Reading


In a letter to the “Christian Reader” of his *Monument of Matrones* (1582), a 677-page collection of writings by or about women, Thomas Bentley raises a compendium of issues about women as print authors. Bentley explains that he has created his “edition” by gathering together “sundrie verie godlie, learned, and diuine treatises, of meditations and praier, made by sundrie right famous Queenes, noble Ladies, vertuous Virgins, and godlie Gentlewomen” (B1v). These women, who have been careful to

shew themselves woorthie paternes of all pietie, godlinesse, and religion to their sex … haue not ceased, and that with all carefull industrie and earnest indeuour … to spend their time, their wits, their substance, and also their bodies, in the studies of noble and approued sciences, and in compiling and translating out of sundrie most christian and godlie bookes. (B1r)

Sadly, Bentley concludes, these important writings have been at risk of disappearing, being “dispersed into severall pamphlets, and in part some thing obscured and cleane out of print, and so out of practice” (B1r). Substantial folio volumes, like the one he has created, Bentley suggests, are the necessary form for publication if texts are to endure and be reproduced in readers’ devotional exercises. For Bentley, print is a technology that is as relevant to women writers and readers as to their male counterparts. Bentley decided, he reveals, “to publish the same abroad in print, as a booke … not unprofitable to the church: but verie necessarie, and in some respect, more proper and peculiar for the priuate use of women” (B1v).

Primarily concerned to craft a devotional handbook that will “pleasure the simple reader” (B4r), Bentley expresses only admiration for women’s scholarly endeavours.
His concern is that the portable pamphlets of much women’s writing have been lost because of their fragility, a fate which should not befall his own edition, printed, as it is, “in so good paper and faire usuall letter” (B4v). Bentley’s analysis of the ephemeral status of small print is, however, something of an overstatement (for early modern definitions of and attitudes to pamphlet culture see Halasz 1997). Katherine Parr’s Prayers or Medytacions appeared in 13 editions between 1545 and 1640, establishing it as an enduringly popular text. Its small size (the first edition measures 5½ by 4½ inches) contributes to its practicality as an aid to devotion. One edition of Parr’s Prayers was bound with a copy of Elizabeth Tyrwhit’s 1574 Morning and Evenying Praiers and presented to Queen Elizabeth in a tiny, opulent gilt girdle book cover, designed to be worn about the waist (Brace 2003: xi). In contrast to Bentley’s weighty text, the smaller formats of Parr and Tyrwhit’s prayer collections make them easily portable, intimate texts. Moreover, smaller octavo volumes were substantially cheaper than large folios, a fact Bentley acknowledges when he urges his reader to pay heed to the value of the contents, rather than the “bignesse or deerenesse of the volume, which to the willing and desirous in mind are euer best cheape” (B4v). The “pleasure and profit” of the text, he insists, must override the “paines and charges” of owning a book in such an expensive format.

The questions raised by Bentley’s account of his work as a compiler include issues of format, presentation, and preservation – the importance of the book as a material object – of privacy and publication, and of social status as well as gender and sexual activity (Bentley identifies his women writers either as royal or noble or as “vertuous virgins”). It also raises questions of content, genre, and purpose. Bentley’s text is devotional in nature, and it is designed to structure its women readers’ approach not only to religious worship, but to the conduct of their domestic lives. The first “lamp” or book of the volume, for example, should ensure that

the virgine or single woman, through the intercession of Christ, obteineth the gift of puritie, modestie, shamefastnesse, and chastite; the deflowred woman fi  ndeth grace to repent, and to be restored to fauour both with God and men … [and] the wooed woman not to be by anie meanes cossned or abused in marriage. (B1v)

Finally, Bentley’s text challenges us to think freshly about the connections between writing and authorship. Women’s writing, for Bentley, as his choice of texts reveals, includes the activities of translation and of compilation or collection. At the same time, figures from Christian history, like Judith and Deborah, are presented as the authors of the biblical texts which offer their words to the reader.

For the purposes of this chapter, “old authors” means primarily those figures, both biblical and classical, and more recent, who are invoked or appropriated by women to legitimate and inform their own writing. The phrase should also, however, remind us that early modern paradigms of authorship and originality were very different from our own. This chapter explores each of these issues in relation to the impact of print technology, asking how women’s approach to print shaped their writings, and how
the example of women writers can encourage us to think in new ways about the seemingly straightforward categories of authorship and publication, as well as the kinds of writing produced and enjoyed in Tudor England.

**Women in Print**

The history of the Tudors is in some ways also the history of early English print. The first book printed in English was William Caxton's translation of Raoul Le Fèvre's *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, which he printed in Bruges around 1473. Accompanied by an elaborate woodcut frontispiece showing Caxton kneeling to present his book to his patron, Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, the preface establishes Margaret both as the knowledgeable mentor who commissioned and corrected Caxton's "symple and pour" work, and as the generous employer who provided him "with a yearly Fee and other many gooode and greate benefetes" (A2r). Margaret, sister to Kings Edward IV and Richard III of England, was a staunch opponent of Henry VII's accession to the throne but, as patron not only to Caxton but to the printers Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde, an enthusiastic supporter of the new print technology. Her own translation of Jacobus de Gruytrode's *The Mirroure of Golde for the Synfull Soule* was first printed by Pynson in 1506 and went through a further four editions, issued by Pynson, de Worde, and John Scot. Both the print Burgundy favoured and the monarchical dynasty she opposed were to gain a firm footing in England during the 118 years of Tudor rule.

In late 1475, ten years before Henry VII became the first Tudor king of England, Caxton established the first British press at Westminster. Henry's successors learned both to exploit the new possibilities for widespread textual dissemination and to regulate carefully the products and operations of the press. As King's Printer to Henry VIII, Richard Pynson published statutes, proclamations, and legal documents on paper and parchment, sometimes in their thousands (Brooks 2000). Henry was also concerned with print as a technology that could further the interests of the new English Church. In 1538 he decreed that a copy of Tyndale's English translation of the Bible should be placed in every church. In 1543, however, concerned at the increase in vernacular Bible reading stimulated by the Protestant Reformation, the king passed an "Act for the Advancement of True Religion" restricting English Bible reading to the clergy, nobility, gentry and wealthy mercantile classes. Among women, only the nobility and gentry were allowed access to the Englished Bible, and even they were required to read it in private. Social status was crucial in structuring women's access and response to printed texts.

The growth in the number of texts printed during the Tudor period has been described as a "revolution" (Eisenstein 1983). According to the *English Short Title Catalogue* (*ESTC*), only nine British printed books survive from 1485, the year of Henry's accession. Over 432 survive from 1603, the year that saw the end of the Tudor dynasty. If these figures do suggest a revolution, it was one that largely excluded
women writers, at least until the 1640s, when certain radical religious groups, particularly the Quakers, granted significant authority to women’s spiritual testimony. This development, along with women’s engagement in the turbulent politics of the Civil War, led to an increase in women’s printed texts (Nevitt 2005). According to a recent checklist by Patricia Demers, only 25 books written by British women appeared in print between 1522, the publication date of The Mirroure of Golde, and 1603, the year which saw the printing of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross’s Ane Godlie Dreame, as well as the end of the Tudor dynasty (Demers 2005: 246–8). Ten of these texts were translations. This count of women’s writing is, however, incomplete. It cannot take account of any published texts which are no longer extant, and some women’s printed writings have almost certainly been lost, as Bentley predicted. Demers’ list also does not include women’s writing which appears in the pages of compilations and miscellanies or in male-authored texts, though it does include Bentley’s Monument and the pseudonymous, possibly male-authored, Jane Anger Her Protection for Women (1589).

A number of further difficulties dog the project of quantifying women’s printed writings. The problem of pseudonymous or “ventriloquized” texts (Harvey 1992) shadows the attribution of a number of female-voiced writings within larger collections. Three poems, entitled “The complaint of a woman lover,” “The lady beloved exclaymeth of the great untruth of her lover,” and “The lamentacion of a gentilwoman upon the death of her late deceased Frend William Gruffith Gent.,” appeared in miscellanies printed by Richard Jones, the first in A Handefull of Pleasant Delites (1566?), and the latter two in A Gorgious Gallery, of Gallant Inventions (1578). All three have been attributed to Isabella Whitney, whose The Copy of a Letter (1566–7) and A Sweet Nosgay (1573) were both printed by Jones (Fehrenbach 1981). These attributions are, however, uncertain, and the poems could be the work of other, currently unknown, women writers, or of men exercising their poetic talents by writing in a woman’s voice, as John Donne did in his “Sapho to Philaenis.”

Elaine Hobby has also remarked the existence of prefatory texts by women “and the assumption it makes about a widow’s right to her husband’s work, alert[ing] us to the existence of what might turn out to be a huge number of neglected texts by women; those prefacing works by men, especially their husbands” (1988: 204). One short text by a woman, a brief address “to the reader,” appears at the beginning of John Lyly’s Endimion, or The Man in the Moon, and advertises Joan Broome’s possession of “certaine Comedies … which were presented before her Majestie at seuerall times by the children of Paules” (A2r). Broome, a successful and relatively influential publisher, offers to print more of these plays if this “may passe with thy good lyking,” suggesting a degree of accessibility and responsiveness to the demands of the readers who could identify her from the title page. Since Broome went on to publish another three of Lyly’s plays we can assume that her advertising strategy was a successful one. The tone of the advertisement, however, is determinedly impersonal and anonymous, signed with a simple “Farewell” and no name, in contrast to the vigorous prefatory games of many male printers.
Finally, Demers’ count privileges certain forms and genres – namely devotional and literary texts – over others, a topic to which I will return in looking at the relations of women’s manuscript writing to print technology. In Demers’ list, Mary Tudor is not listed as an author, though the ESTC gives her as the author of 51 printed texts, many co-signed by her husband, Philip. Her sister, Elizabeth, is cited only as the translator of two godly books, *Le miroir de l’ame pecheresse* in 1544, and *The Godly Medytacyon of the Christen Sowle* in 1548. The ESTC, however, gives Elizabeth I as the author of 282 printed texts before 1603, including statutes, proclamations, speeches, and religious injunctions.

Shaped by the precepts of the post-enlightenment subject, which teach that it is in private activities that we discover personal commitments, we imagine that it is in devotional or literary texts that we find women’s most authentic and meaningful voices. We also believe that these texts, apparently the product of a single consciousness, can be connected to an author in a way that published proclamations, the products of negotiation and bureaucratic interpretation, cannot (see Foucault 1979). Such a move both removes hundreds of texts from the range of women’s writing available for study, erasing Mary Tudor from the record altogether, and suggests that a figure as powerful as Elizabeth I is more authentically located in two youthful exercises in godly translation than in the statutes and proclamations issued at the apex of her rule.

These two royal authors are, however, exceptional, and, if we exclude texts attributed to them, it remains clear that very little women’s writing was printed in Tudor Britain. Particularly intriguing evidence of the negotiations around, and attitudes toward, one woman’s appearance in print is available in the correspondence regarding the publication of Elizabeth Weston’s neo-Latin poetry collections, *Poëmata* (1602) and *Parthenicon* (1608). Weston was born in Chipping Norton in 1582, but moved to Prague, with her mother and stepfather, at some point after 1583. She was formidably educated, a member of the “significant minority of sixteenth-century girls, including the future Queen Elizabeth I, [who] became, through private tuition, highly educated humanists, a trend which faded out in the seventeenth-century under pressure from increasingly dominant ideals of elegant, ‘feminine’ behaviour” (Clarke and Gibson 2005: 3). When her stepfather died in 1597, Weston drew on her literary skills to produce numerous neo-Latin letters and verses addressed to members of the court and to an international network of influential humanists. Weston was careful in her self-positioning, representing herself both as an orphaned and vulnerable “Virgo Angla,” and as a member of the community of humanist writers who turned to the literature of ancient Rome and Greece as models for their own writing. Identifying herself as “another Lesbia,” Weston placed herself within the pantheon of “old authors” revered and reproduced by the humanists of Northern Europe (Weston 2000: 65). Weston’s correspondents accepted her self-identification as a member of an extended tradition of female authorship. In a commendatory verse, Balthasar Camineus, a Doctor of Law, demanded: “Now let Lesbia give way to her, now Fulvia, and likewise / Praxilla, Aspasia, and Anyte as well as Telesilla” (Weston 2000: 311). The publisher of *Parthenica* added a catalogue of learned ladies to the end of the volume, providing
Helen Smith

The importance of the humanist community to the self-fashioning of Tudor woman writers is further illuminated by Jane, Lady Lumley’s decision to translate Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis* as *The Tragedie of Iphigenia* (c. 1553), a text which circulated only in manuscript until the twentieth century. The play tells the story of Agamemnon’s daughter, who consents to her own sacrifice. At the moment of her execution, Iphigenia is taken up into heaven and replaced with a white hart. Critics have been keen to read Lumley’s choice of this play as a proto-feminist depiction of female powerlessness and an acute critique of the valorization of women’s martyrdom within a patriarchal system. Diane Purkiss, however, points out that Lumley, fluent in both Latin and Greek, is as likely to have chosen the text because it was, in Erasmus’s Latin translation, one of the two “most performed, adapted and read of Euripides’ plays” (1998: xiii). Lumley’s choice, in other words, positioned her as a member of the broader humanist community, and made her part of the project of translating classical authors into the vernacular.

Elizabeth Weston’s correspondence also allows us to see the kind of intellectual and administrative labour that underlay one woman’s decision to enter print. No sooner had her *Poëmata* appeared than her friend and supporter, the Silesian aristocrat Georg Martinius von Baldhoven, began to encourage her to extend and republish the collection. In 1603, Weston wrote to Baldhoven, explaining: “as for the renewed publication of my writings … as you know, I have been working for several months now in collecting and transcribing them, both letters and poems, and have not yet been able to complete the work I have undertaken” (227). Weston’s manuscript poems were dispersed among humanist correspondents in northern Europe, and she did not always possess copies of her own writings, a not uncommon occurrence among authors who participated in the practice of scribal publication. The process of gathering her works together, and producing fair copies was a laborious one, which did not bear quite the fruit she had anticipated. Weston and Baldhoven had hoped that her work would be published by the well-known printer Jean Moretus. Moretus sought advice from his humanist correspondents, and the response of Justus Lipsius was damning. He concluded:

I have read the letter sent from Prague about publishing the verses of that English girl. I quite agree with you that they will not sell in the thousands, as they claim, but more likely in the dozens … Anyway, do as seems best, but as for me, please make my excuses and say frankly that I am indisposed and cannot carry on any further correspondence … The sex is not to be trusted, they’re more surface than substance. (cited in Weston 2000: xx)

Lipsius’s letter provides an intriguing commentary on the disjunction between Weston’s self-presentation as an urbane, educated humanist, entitled to particular consideration thanks to her status as an exiled orphan, and the scorn of the older, male
humanist, who reduced her privileged status of neo-Latin “virgo” to the vulgar identity of “that English girl.”

Part of Lipsius’s objection to Weston’s writing may have been the fact that she wished to publish her original compositions rather than a translation of a classical or religious text. Dedicating Margaret More Roper’s translation of Erasmus’s *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (1525) to “the moost studyous and vertuous yonge mayde fraunces. S.” (probably Staverton), Richard Hyrde addresses the question of women’s education, explaining “I haue herde many man put great douts whether it shulde be expedyent and requisite or nat / a woman to haue lernyng in bokes of latyn and greke” (A2r). Hyrde musters a string of learned biblical exemplars to prove the utility of female education, and crowns it with the example of oure owne countre and tyme / that is : this gentylwoman / whiche translated this lytell boke herafter folowyng ; whose vertuous conuersaction / luyng / and sadde demeanoure / maye be profe euydente ynough / what good lernynge dothe / where it is surely roted. (A4v)

**Women’s Religious Writing and Male Mediation**

A number of critics have commented on the prevalence of religious writing and translation among the printed works of early modern English women writers, suggesting that religious texts were understood to provide an appropriately circumscribed sphere in which women could express themselves while posing no challenge to the patriarchy. Massimiliano Morini, for example, asserts that: “translation, particularly if exercised within a devout sphere, could be the only activity permitted to women, for in their case it could be seen as a mechanical exercise, one that would occupy the mind and body much as embroidery did” (2006: 24). This sense of what was permissible maps neatly against Hyrde’s justification of women’s learning: Roper’s translation is legitimated by her devout life, her attention to useful devotional material, and her involvement in translation rather than original composition.

Assuming that women wrote or translated religious texts only because they were not allowed access to more literary genres is, however, anachronistic. It ignores the intensity of religious debate in early modern England, as well as the extent to which women’s religious writing might possess a larger political significance. It also ignores the popularity of religious texts. H. S. Bennett estimates that roughly half of all books published in this period were religious in content (1965: 112). Women writers thus participated in the production and translation of some of the most popular genres of the period. Their attention to biblical precedent also introduces another set of “old authors” to stand alongside the classical writers who influenced Elizabeth Weston and Jane, Lady Lumley.

Weston’s identification of herself with Lesbia “and those women who revere the goddesses of Helicon” comes in a poem that muses on the birth of Jesus, asking that “the goal of my Muses and their labour” be the praise of Christ (65). The overlap of
classical and biblical tradition is also evident in Lumley’s *Iphigenia*, in which divine intervention substitutes an animal for a sacrificial child. To the Tudor reader, the parallel with Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac would have been clear, as would the larger significance of Iphigenia’s self-sacrifice as a pattern of the martyrdom of Christ. One particularly influential “old author” for women writers was King David, the putative author of the Psalms, which were translated by Mary (Sidney) Herbert, and used as a model by others including Anne Locke who published her *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner upon the 51st Psalm* in 1560. Elizabeth Tudor’s *Godly Medytacyon* closes with a translation of the 23rd Psalm, “touched afore of my lady Elizabeth,” along with a woodcut of the princess clutching a book and keeling before a beneficent Christ (F7v–F8r).

In Bentley’s *Monument of Matrones* the women of the Bible themselves become “old authors.” His “first *Lampe of Virginitie*” contains “the diuine PRAIERS, HYMNES, or SONGS, made by sundrie holie women in the *Scripture*” (C1r). Though some of these texts are distinctly martial in nature, including “The song of the women of Israël, in the praise of Dauids victorie ouer Goliah [sic]” (C4v), others, like “The praier or blessing of Naomy for hir two daughters in lawe, Ruth and Orpah” (C3v), set forth a pattern for the appropriate management of kinship ties. Bentley’s reproduction of “The praier or vow of Hanna, for a sonne” and “The song and thanksgiuing of Hanna, after she by praier had obtaine a sonne called Samuel” (C3v–C4r) seems designed as both a prayer and a promise for women who struggled to conceive a male child. The voices of these “old authors” lent a particular legitimacy to women’s concerns, establishing them as central to the events of biblical history, privileging domestic and marital issues, asserting women’s right to limited participation in the political life of the nation, and celebrating triumphs over the enemies of the Christian state.

Even these compelling forebears did not stop Tudor women from being conscious of the bold step they were taking in entering print, especially in the later years of the period. Anne Prowse (previously Locke), who translated Jean Taffin’s *Of the Markes of the Children of God* in 1590, explained in her dedication to the Countess of Warwick that “great things by reason of my sex, I may not doo, and that which I may, I ought to doo, I haue according to my duetie brought my poore basket of stones to the strengthening of the walles of … Ierusalem” (A4r). As in previous examples, social status is important to Prowse’s modest self-presentation. Firmly rooted by birth and three marriages in the expanding mercantile classes of Elizabethan England, Prowse was socially at some distance from the educated women who were her peers in print. In contrast, monarchs and noblewomen seem to have felt little need to justify print publication. The concern for propriety, and the associated invocation of women’s inferiority, is also not unique to print. In Lumley’s manuscript translation of *Iphigienia* Clytemnestra complains to Achilles: “I alone beinge a woman can not perswade Agamemnon” (560–1). The trope of the inadequate female voice both licensed and excused women’s writerly endeavours.

Prowse is unusual in prefacing her work with a dedication. No earlier woman translator had provided any prefatory materials for her work. Instead, a number of
women’s translations are prefaced with dedications by men, and offer a different insight into the ways in which women’s texts reached print. In the epistle to Anne, Lady Bacon which opens her translation of John Jewel’s *An Apologie or Answere in Defence of the Churche of Englane* (1564), “M. C.” informs Bacon that both he and Jewel have read her manuscript, stating “ye haue done pleasure to the Author of the Latine boke, in deliueringe him by your cleare translation from the perrils of ambiguous and doubtful constructions: and in makinge his good woorke more publikely benefi  ciall” (¶ 3r). He goes on to inform Bacon: “where your Ladishippe hathe sent me your boke writen, I haue with most hearty thankes returned it to you (as you see) printed” (¶ 4v). In contrast to Weston’s determined pursuit of print publication, Bacon’s appearance in print is framed as a gift from the man who has tested and examined her abilities as a translator.

Bacon’s was not an unusual pattern. In Richard Hyrde’s dedication to Margaret Roper’s *Treatise upon the Pater Noster* he informs the Lady Fraunces: “the laboure that I haue had with it about the printing / I yelde holly and frely gyue unto you” (B2v–B3r). Here, the open-ended nature of the circuit described by “M. C.” is made more explicit. Where Bacon’s work originated in manuscript and returned to her, as well as to a wider vernacular “publike,” in print, Roper’s text passed to Hyrde, probably as a scholarly exercise, since Hyrde was a tutor in her father’s household. He then recreated the *Treatise* in print and passed it on to another noblewoman reader, both as an exemplary text, and as an example of appropriate womanly work. Other printed books followed a similar trajectory. In his *Monument of Matrones*, Bentley recalls that “the godlie and learned treatise called *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, written long since by the vertuous Ladie Queene Katherin … for the excellencie thereof was first published in print by Sir William Cicill, now the right honourable Lord Treasurer of England, as by his verie godlie, learned and eloquent Epistle thereunto prefixed” (B1r).

Dedicating the printed text of Elizabeth Tudor’s translation of Marguerite de Navarre’s *The Godly Medytacyon of the Christen Soule* to the princess, John Bale recalled: “I receuyed your noble boke [and] also your golden sentences out of the sacred scriptures with nolesse grace than lernynge in foure noble languages” (A7r). Having circulated the princess’ texts among “the lerned men of our cytie, Murseus, Buscoducius, Bomelius, Lithodius & Imannus,” Bale discovered that they were so impressed with the royal translator’s “faythe, scyence, & experyence of languages & letters” that they could not “witholde their lerned handes from the publyshynge therof, to the high prayse of God the geuer” (B1r–v).

All of these examples testify to the convoluted processes by which much Tudor women’s writing reached print. The women discussed above, who ranked among the most powerful figures in the country, produced their texts as manuscript exercises and circulated them among male tutors or humanist correspondents. Those men, having analysed and “approved” the translator’s work, were the ones who decided it should enter print, both as a courtly compliment to their students or correspondents, and as a useful tool in the wider dissemination of godly texts.
The mediation of women’s writing did not end there. Publishers and print shop workers also had the opportunity to alter the texts that passed through their hands. Elizabeth Tyrwhit’s *Morning and Evening Prayers*, for example, were substantially altered upon their inclusion in the *Monument of Matrones*. Bentley cut the “briefe exhortation to prayer” with which Tyrwhit opened the volume, and reordered the text to fit a Protestant liturgical structure, shifting the focus away from Tyrwhit’s didactic concentration on the necessity of reformist self-scrutiny and worldly action (Brace 2003: xiii–xvi). Weston too was subject to editorial interventions, to which she strenuously objected. Two copies of *Parthenica* contain additional manuscript verses attributed to Weston, though in different hands, suggesting that she circulated manuscript poems and letters to supplement her printed volume. Weston addresses the reader directly, claiming authorship of the poems, but stating that she is “unwill- ing that they should have been published” (306). The verses, she complains, “abound everywhere in typographical errors,” and, worse:

… another has filled up my pages willfully and senselessly,
trusting to some friendship or other.
To this has been added a list of learned poetesses,
in which welcome and less welcome items appear together.
Furthermore, you should know that many of my works are missing,
and you see many others’ verses mixed in with my own.

“A time will come,” the verse concludes, “(if only Fate is willing) when / Weston herself can fill her pages with poems” (307).

Weston’s objection to the inserted catalogue of learned women is particularly intriguing given her self-presentation as a member of the classical pantheon. It may be that it was the inclusion of more recent figures, including Costanza Sforza (1428–60), Cassandra Fedele (c. 1465–1558), and “Helena Maria Wacker von Wackenfels, a maiden who died in Prague” (1598–1607), in the text’s catalogue of female “old authors,” reminding readers that Weston was not unique, that angered her (282–303). Alternatively, she may have disliked the inclusion of such potentially scandalous figures as “Mycale, a female centaur [who] taught Thessalian women the remedies of love,” Lucea, a Roman actress, and Pope Joan. Despite her evident desire to see her verses and letters in print, and her careful labour in collecting her works, Weston was, apparently, an unwitting participant in the print house practice of rearranging and altering materials, to the extent that she refused to recognize the resulting volume as “Weston’s book” (306). Given her evident skill in self-presentation, we should be wary of taking this verse as fact. Nonetheless, her narrative ties in with what we know of print-house practice in the period, and suggests the degree to which women’s texts could be mediated and altered in the process of publication.

To suggest that women’s writing was mediated is not, however, to deny the power of that writing, nor to denigrate the talents of the women who wrote. While Germaine
Greer sees male intervention in the texts of Katherine Philips, the seventeenth-century’s “matchless Orinda,” as evidence of the impossibility of discovering “texts attributed to women that actually represent what women wrote and the way they wrote it” (1995: 172), recent scholarship on early modern writing practice suggests that mediation was the norm for both male and female writers. As Jeffrey Masten observes,

In a way that has not been fully recognized or conceptualized by scholars trained to organize material within post-Enlightenment paradigms of individuality, authorship, and textual property, collaboration was a prevalent mode of textual production in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, only eventually displaced by the mode of singular authorship with which we are more familiar. (1997: 4)

For Greer, a woman’s text edited and altered by one or more male collaborators or correspondents ceases to be “in any sense authentic,” a statement that valorizes the quest for an originary voice freed from any of the contributory traces that go to construct the book. A careful attention to the ways in which women’s texts reached print can, however, do much to illuminate the social and intellectual contexts of their production. Collaboration is the rule of textual production, not a disappointing exception, as a glance at Greer’s own Acknowledgements reminds us.

**Voice, Print, and Manuscript**

The critical fetish for authentic voices has another consequence, as Margaret Ezell points out: Our anachronistic conceptions of authorship and textual authority lead us to assume that print was the end goal for any woman who wished to write:

Having a “voice” is equated with being in print, with the obvious implication that “work” is equated with print texts and anything else, manuscript copy in particular is only “silence.” The sole criterion of the success of these generations of women is the amount they published, with no mention of the amount they wrote. (Ezell 1999: 43)

As we have already seen, even those Tudor women writers whose texts were printed did not always produce their texts and translations with that end in mind. A number of women’s printed texts continue to invoke the intimacy and immediacy of manuscript. Mary (Sidney) Herbert’s translations of Phillipe de Mornay’s *A Discourse of Life and Death* and Robert Garnier’s French tragedy *Antonius*, published in one volume in 1592, both close with a note of the date and place of their translation, locating them firmly within Herbert’s familial dwellings and the particular time of writing. Many more women wrote than had their texts printed, choosing manuscript circulation as a desirable forum in which to disseminate their work.

This is not to suggest that women writers shunned print, or chose the privacy of manuscript writing over the publicity of print dissemination. In the early modern
period men as well as women circulated their texts in handwritten copies. However hard Thomas Bentley may have worked to convince his readers that print was a lasting and necessary mode of publication, to enter print, at least in the first part of the period, was an additional decision rather than an obviously superior alternative to manuscript. Women who wrote in manuscript did not have an oppositional relationship to print technology: It was an important element in their reading, educational, and devotional practice. Refusing to accede to the modern mindset that privileges print over manuscript allows us to open up numerous other examples of women’s writing, including Jane, Lady Lumley’s, _Iphigenia_.

Much Tudor women’s writing is doubly foreign to modern readers. Even the editors of an anthology designed to bring attention to women’s manuscript writing contain only two Tudor texts: Jane Seager’s translations of the ten sibyl’s prophecies of the birth of Christ and selections from Mary (Sidney) Herbert’s paraphrases of the Psalms. As the authors of the “Introduction” acknowledge, the editors’ choices privilege “literary” texts over other genres:

> The woman who developed any kind of poetic facility was bound to be a rarity in the early modern period; the unevenness of women’s education, even amongst the aristocracy, and the generally pervasive, if usually unspecified, discouragement from more literary writing, entailed that a more widespread women’s writing practice was more likely to be found in non-poetic texts: recipe books, many of which survive from this period, or possibly sermon notes. (Clarke and Gibson 2005: 7)

The modern conception of certain genres, particularly drama and lyric verse, as peculiarly “literary” – a conception that is itself part of the history of the standardization of the printed book – is another reason that much Tudor women’s manuscript writing remains unexplored, while their slightly later contemporaries, who participated in the fashion for manuscript verse miscellanies in the 1630s and 40s, are slowly being reclaimed for study.

The variety of women’s manuscript writing is hinted at in the diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, which survives for the years 1599–1605. Like a number of her female predecessors Hoby was well educated, though, born closer to the end of the sixteenth century, she does not seem to have learned Greek and Latin. In her diary, Hoby recorded the details of her daily life, almost always within the terms of religious self-scrutiny and devotional duty established as the correct mode of Puritan practice. A typical entry, for July 5, 1600, reads:

> After I had praied I went about the house, then I hard Mr Rhodes Read, took a lecture, praied, wrought, and went to diner : after diner I went a walkinge and, after I Came home, I was busie about diuers thinges, and then I went to priuat examination and praiyer : after I sett an order for diuers thinges, and so went to supper : after, I walked, then went to the lecture and, after a whill, to priuat praiyer, and lastly to bed. … (1998: 96)
This short, factual statement is difficult of access to the modern reader, missing, as it does, all the emotional and subjective detail we expect in self- and diary-writing.

Hoby gives no sense of when she is writing, presenting each day as a past occasion, albeit one which is minutely remembered. There is no anticipation of future events, establishing a sense of time as static and endlessly repeatable. The fact of her spiritual exercises and the ways in which they structure her daily routine, even as that routine structures her self, seem more important than her household labors or participation in the life of her parish, though evidence for both appears elsewhere in the diary. Hoby’s writing is doubly difficult of access: Because it is a manuscript text we assume it is both less important and less self-consciously writerly than contemporary printed texts. At the same time, as a document of self-scrutiny that repeats and hence constructs the patterns of a devout life, Hoby’s text disappoints an “anachronistic desire for a body of texts from the Renaissance with which modern readers can identify and from which they might trace their own cultural genealogy” (Clarke 2003: 188). It is easier to exclude Hoby from our list of old authors than to accept that Renaissance conceptions of both the self and the uses of writing differed from our own.

In her diary, Hoby records herself writing in numerous other books and genres, including her Bible, sermon book, table book, testament, commonplace book, and household book. She describes herself as having written out sermons heard in Church, framed spiritual exercises for herself, based both on the instructions of her chaplain, Mr Rhodes and on the printed texts of other divines, and noted key passages from her reading. This is the writing not of a woman opposed to the new world of print technology but of “a life saturated by print” (Lamb 2000: 17). Hoby records reading as well as writing, engaging frequently with printed texts which include the Bible and the works of the divines Richard Greenham, Thomas Cartwright, George Gifford, and an unspecified “arball.” Such texts structured her approach to devotional and domestic life: a life to which writing was central.

Not all women, of course, had access to printed, or even manuscript texts. Where the Lumley library contained 2,600 volumes by 1609 (Purkiss 1998: xiii), lower status readers might need to rely on the “homely or domestical librarie” of Bentley’s Monument (B1v). Still others could not read at all (for a nuanced assessment of women’s literacy see Dolan 1996). It was, however, more than anything else, the reading activity encouraged by the proliferation of printed texts that encouraged more and more women to write. As Margaret Tyler put it, justifying her decision to translate a Spanish romance, The Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knighthood (1578):

Many haue dedicated their labours, some stories, some of warre, some Phisicke, some Lawe, some as concerning gouvemment, some diuine matters, unto diuerse Ladyes and Gentlewoman. And if men may and do bestow such of their trauailes upon Gentlewomen, then may we women read such of their workes as they dedicate unto us, and if wee may read them, why not farther wade in them to the search of a truth. … [I]t is all one for a woman to pen a storie, as for a man to address his storie to a woman. (A4r–v)
According to Tyler, women who can read are already engaged in the kind of intellectual activity that is required to write. Printed texts increasingly structured women’s experiences as readers, and hence as writers, even as print remained only one of the possible destinations for their own writing. The cultural work of women writers, old authors, and the new print technology shaped and informed each other, but it is perhaps in the gaps and discrepancies between these three categories that the conditions of writing in early modern England come most clearly into view.

References


This study of printers of the interludes in the sixteenth century creates a narrative which addresses the innovation by which these plays came to be printed. Following the development of printing by movable type in the fifteenth century, the production of interludes as books may be considered partly as an economic development, as the printers and booksellers integrated the printing of plays with their newly founded businesses. The creation of these interlude books was an important innovation because a new way of working and meeting public demand could be developed. This change involves the tradesmen who undertook the work of printing as well as the stationers who sold the plays. Often these were one and the same – and some booksellers acquired printing presses as time went on – but some stationers not having printing presses sold copies prepared by others. The process under observation ought to be seen alongside the development of the genre of interludes itself. One might consider this a development by which actors and writers invented this particular dramatic form, and yet it must also be the case that the printing allowed such texts to be disseminated and so contributed towards the development of performance characteristics. Moreover, the decision to print was not purely economic: It quickly became apparent that there were religious, political, and polemical objectives which might be the motives for seeking a readership beyond those who actually saw the plays in performance. However, the relationship of the printers to their product might vary considerably, and the depth of commitment to polemical objectives was not always the same.

In order to facilitate the discussion, information has been accumulated and arranged in the Appendix to this chapter, which comprises a list of printers or booksellers together with the plays for which they were responsible. It is arranged to bring out some chronological features. Individual editions have been consulted for this chart but the bulk of the details incorporated are not new: They derive chiefly from the second edition of the Short Title Catalogue (STC; Pollard 1926), from W. W. Greg’s Bibliography (1939–43), and more recently from Darryl Grantley’s catalogue of interludes (2004), which takes account of work since Greg’s. The arrangement of the
Appendix enables several observations to be made at a glance, so to speak, but it also sets up a number of wider issues in the history of the interludes. In the first section of this chapter I shall attempt to interpret the Appendix, and in the second section I shall look more closely at the work of printers whose extant work shows them to have been the major figures in the development of printing plays.

Printers and Booksellers of Plays

The arrangement of the Appendix needs some explanation. The interludes are set out in order under the names of the individual printers or the booksellers. The years when they are known to have been active are given to the right of each name. Titles listed in brackets indicate plays printed by someone else. This makes it clear that some individual stationers were printers themselves as well as sellers of the work of others producing for them. Thus John Rastell printed a number of interludes for himself, but one was printed for him by P. Treveris, whereas we find that all the plays attributed to John Waley are bracketed because he himself was not a printer. The play entries under each name are in chronological order; titles of more than one printing are followed by numerals indicating first or second printing and the like. The order in which the printers appear is established by the date of the first play for which it is now known or conjectured that they were responsible. This reveals several moments of initiative. For example, the first extant printed interlude text is John Rastell’s edition of Fulgens and Lucre. However, some caution is advisable about the varying exactness of the dates: Some of them are conjectural, but it does appear that John Rastell was a significant and innovative figure. We can add that plays printed by both Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde have survived from the same time as Rastell’s work. But we can see from the dates of their activity that these two had been printing many other sorts of texts for 20 years or more and that the businesses of both were already well established when they came to print plays.

There is another significant indicator in the list. Where the STC records more than 100 extant publications for an individual printer the name is marked here with the symbol (++). It is thus possible to see that for several printers the output of interludes was but a minute part of their output. Pynson and De Worde came to print plays late in their careers, most likely because they saw in them a commercial opportunity. There may even have been a business rivalry here. The four printings of Everyman raise a further question about the motivation of the two printers involved, Pynson and Skot. This work, though a play in concept, was originally a Dutch rhetorician’s composition and it conforms to the typically rhetoricians’ theme of how to make a good death, the ars moriendi. It is possible therefore that the two English printers of the translation were aiming at a devotional market.

On the other hand John Rastell, a man of wide interests within and outside the drama, may appear more innovative than De Worde in respect of the printing of plays. His publications by the time he printed Fulgens and Lucre were far fewer, and from
the limited data available it is likely that he was rather more committed to the printing of plays as such. His particular interest in drama can be further supported by the fact that he had a stage in his own house during the 1520s (Dillon 1996: 15–45). Special circumstances may also have occurred over the printing of Skelton’s Magnyfycence soon after the author’s death. It was printed for John Rastell by Treveris and its appearance at a critical moment in the controversy over Henry VIII’s divorce from Katherine of Aragon may well have been polemical, the play being at least ten years old at this point. Skelton’s pre-existing criticism of royal authority and his ultimate endorsement of it in Magnyfycence might now be turned to new purposes. This polemical context is further enriched shortly afterwards by the work of Rastell’s son William, particularly in relation to the printing of the Catholic plays written by John Heywood, also a relative, as we shall see.

In spite of the prompting to Henry’s chief minister Thomas Cromwell by royal propagandist Richard Morison that drama was a useful tool in the proliferation of official Protestant ideas, the chronological chart shows that there were not many playwrights who responded. The printing of Protestant polemical plays by John Bale, which were written during the crisis years of 1530s, was delayed until the last years of Henry VIII’s reign when Bale, in exile in the Low Countries, may have been preparing for his return to a Protestant England under the incoming Edward VI. He had four plays printed by Dirk van der Straten, a Dutch printer with Protestant sympathies who worked in the safe German city of Wesel. This printing was the culmination of a program of publication of his non-dramatic polemical writings, which were intended to comment upon and influence the political scene in England. At this time of exile Bale was seeking to encourage and cajole the English authorities, who were in a more conservative frame of mind than they had been earlier, to move towards a thoroughgoing Protestant ideology. Unfortunately we do not know whether Bale modified the drama texts for their printing, as no earlier version is extant.

If Magnyfycence was given new life by John Rastell in 1530 for polemical purposes, we should also notice that in the 1540s the re-use of plays began to show itself in reprints. William Middleton reprinted John Heywood’s Weather 2 and he also printed Four PP. At this time Heywood, a Catholic, had a very uncomfortable encounter with the authorities by getting himself involved in a plot against Reformation Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. He was sentenced to death but this was commuted to an act of contrition. His position was indeed ambiguous: He had been critical of Henry over the divorce and yet he remained a committed Catholic, and as such he might now have attracted some sympathy from the king who was seeking to restrain the spread of Protestant ideas after the fall of Cromwell. Thus Weather 2 might have been pertinent for its support of royal authority. The case of Four PP is more complex because it is not certain that it had been printed earlier, but its appearance now, with its support for Catholic sentiment, might have helped Heywood’s cause. After this the reprinting of plays became more common. Commercial advantages could be a factor, but taken otherwise there was always the possibility of intervening in a dangerous or
divided situation by reprinting a play that reflected a different light upon public events.

After the accession of Edward VI in 1547, the commercial drive for the printing of interludes increased rapidly, a development that may have been sustained in part by government policy. An increasing uneasiness about the seditious nature of plays begins in the 1540s in line with Henry VIII’s now conservative policies, but the Act for the Advancement of True Religion (1543) allowed moral plays that did not meddle with doctrine. Even though censorship tended to increase subsequently, and masterless players were threatened with punishment, the fact that the authorities were monitoring plays also provided a corridor for performance. This situation may be perceived in the Proclamation of 1559 requiring that performance of interludes be licensed by a town council or two Justices of the Peace. Thus there may have been an increase in the number of interludes, especially in London, and this goes alongside the greater enterprise by the printers, so that it is hard to see the one without the other. Small acting companies had been active for many years, as Bale’s itinerant activities reveal, and the royal chapels had long generated interludes for entertainment in and around the court, but after 1550 both fronts seem to have become more active. In fact the interludes now became a prominent feature of English dramatic culture, especially as they could be written about many subjects, in a variety of modes, for a variety of audiences. If we consider information available for about 30 years after 1550, the interludes were one of the most important and prolific dramatic activities. They had a method; they had actors to carry them through performance; and, pertinent to our purposes here, printers and booksellers became increasingly active in their dissemination.

The commercial target, the readership, is open to speculation, but the title pages, which were presumably invented by the printers, give valuable clues about objectives. Often there are suggestions about the moral quality of the play, as in “A Myrrour very necessarie for youth, and especially for such as are like to come to dignitie and promotion” (The Longer Thou Livest). But the ethical value was matched by the desire to entertain in a play “very frutefull godly and ful of pleasant mirth” (Enough is as Good as a Feast). The sellers wanted to appear up to date and authentic. Hence there are the references to how new the play was: “neuer before this tyme imprinted” (Trial of Treasure); and to recent performances by reputable companies: “As it hath bene sundry times Acted by her Maiesties Players” (Clyomon and Clamydes). The printers had their eye upon performance, and, though this might have become rather a conventional routine, it is remarkable that they came to point to features which might make the following text performable. This tendency includes the custom of designating on title pages “The Vice,” who was the star part in many interludes. The insertion of doubling schemes showing how small a number of actors might perform the play might have been a further attraction, and those schemes are sometimes accompanied with encouraging observations, such as “Fowre persons may easily play it” (Tide Tarrieth No Man). It is hard to see how such frequent encouragement could be aimed
except at potential directors and performers, and the implication is that the public was free to undertake performances.

One striking feature apparent in the chronological list after 1550 is the frequency of reprints. These might have been occasioned when the printer underestimated the number of copies the market would require. This would seem to be the case where the same printer undertook a reprint soon after the first edition as with Jack Juggler (Colwell, 1562, 1565), The Life and Repentance of Mary Magdalene (Charlewood, 1566 and 1577), Cambises 2 and 3 (Edward Allde, 1584, 1584–8). For Like Will to Like (John Allde, 1568 twice), the second printing follows very closely in the footsteps of the first. In other instances, however, plays were reprinted after a considerable time. This happened for some plays by Bale and Heywood. The former’s Three Laws was reprinted by William Copland in 1562 when Bale himself was seeking to restore his position in the new reign of Elizabeth I during his retirement at Canterbury. The second printing of Bale’s God’s Promises by John Charlewood (1577) was posthumous, and it may well indicate that the printer still saw a market for this old play. As for Heywood, three of his plays were reprinted, most of the known editions appearing during his lifetime. All the reprints were in quarto, whereas William Rastell’s original editions were in folio (“folio” and “quarto” designate a broadsheet divided into halves or fourths). Copland printed Love 2 in about 1550 and Four PP 2 about 5 years later. These reprintings might well have occurred when Heywood’s long career at court was reaching its apogee on the accession of Queen Mary. If this is true, Copland may have been exploiting Heywood’s success. However Middleton’s printing of Weather 2 in about 1544 occurred very close to his first printing of the first extant text of Four PP at a time of some personal danger for Heywood, as we have seen. The reasons for the three remaining later reprints are open to further speculation. Four PP 2 was issued by Copland in 1560 at a time when the accession of Elizabeth I had put Heywood’s position in some doubt, even though to begin with he seems to have held his own. By the time John Allde printed the play once more in 1569 Heywood had gone into voluntary exile. John Tisdale’s edition of Weather 3 comes close in time to Copland’s Four PP early in the reign of Elizabeth I. Lastly we know that Awdley printed Weather 4 in about 1573 at roughly the time when Heywood showed that he remained unwilling to return from exile, and so this republication may well have been an enterprise with no bearing on Heywood’s personal circumstances.

The narrative of reprinting and the way it was used for plays is further illuminated by Jocasta and Supposes, the first written by George Gascoigne in collaboration with Francis Kinwelmershe, and the second solely by Gascoigne (both 1566). However, neither bears many of the characteristics of an interlude – itself rather an imprecise genre – and perhaps they should both be regarded as academic drama instead, one a tragedy and the other a comedy. They were both performed at Gray’s Inn. Jocasta 1 was printed by Henry Binneman in 1572 (possibly in collaboration with Henry Middleton). This was followed by Binneman’s reprint of 1575 (twice) both for the bookseller Richard Smith. There were then two further reprints (1587) by Abel Jeffes working independently. Alongside these Binneman also printed Supposes 1 in 1572
(again possibly with Henry Middleton). Similarly there were two reprints by Binneman for Richard Smith in 1575; and Abel Jeffes followed with two independent reprints in 1587. Binneman had a large output of books but as far as dramatic texts are concerned the only others he is known to have printed are Jacob and Esau 2 (1568) and two Entertainments from East Anglia (1578).

Five Major Printers of Plays

Bearing in mind the chronological list, I now turn to the work of five individuals who seem to have contributed most to the printing of interludes: John and William Rastell; William Copland; Thomas Colwell; and John Allde. We shall be concerned here with the development of conventions by the printers, including title pages, speech headings and other features of the layout for plays.

John Rastell (1475–1536) and his son William (1508–65) were together responsible for 13 titles, there being 6 and 7 attributed respectively. As we have seen, the first play printed by John was at roughly the same time as De Worde’s Hick Scorner 1 and Richard Pynson’s Everyman 1. The record then goes silent until a period of activity in the late 1520s when John Rastell brought out the rest of his known plays.

In some ways the work of the Rastells copies that of other active printers, but there are individual features which became current later and which may have influenced William Copland’s substantial output (1545–68). Though De Worde had developed impressive title pages as we shall see below for Hick Scorner 1, John Rastell’s examples are rather more restrained. For his Calisto and Gentleness there are no separate title pages, the text beginning on the same page as the main title. For the quarto of Fulgens and Lucres there is a woodcut, and Four Elements has a page of descriptive material as a title page before the text begins on A1v. The limits of this last arrangement may be determined by the small page size: This is one of the very few early interludes printed in the small octavo size.

Certain features occur in John Rastell’s texts, some of them being in common with De Worde’s and Pynson’s. They usually have the first speech head centered, often with a pilcrow (a typographical mark for a paragraph), as happens with some of De Worde’s texts. Subsequent speech heads are put into the outer margin, and uniquely in four of his texts these are reduced to one initial almost universally. There is very little punctuation in most of John’s texts, the chief exception being the occasional use of a forward slash (virgule) for a comma. Even ends of speeches do not attract full stops. Pilcrows are used extensively, especially to begin speeches. They are inserted before stanzas in passages in rhyme royal in Four Elements and Calisto. Stage directions are usually centered and preceded by a pilcrow. Colophons (information about the printer, usually at the foot of the title pages or at the end), where they have survived, have an “Amen” and give John Rastell’s name, and they usually also include “cum privilegio regali” [“with royal license”].
Skelton’s *Magnyfycence* printed for John Rastell in about 1530 is rather a special case. Its appearance goes with a change in the latter’s circumstances. Within a very short time he converted to Protestantism and ceased to be active as a printer. Treveris achieved a very neat and well-presented volume. Like Rastell’s *Calisto* and *Gentleness* it is in folio, and it follows some of the conventions we have noted about punctuation, pilcrows, and the arrangement for stage directions. However, the speech heads are not abbreviated as radically as in Rastell’s other books. The volume has a decorated title page with a large rectangular border showing a procession with a triumphal car above, a bear hunt below, and armour arranged decoratively on the sides. This is clearly meant to be a prestigious product and we may cite sigs. G2v and H1v as examples of visually impressive typesetting and layout.

Possibly this volume gave a lead to William Rastell who was working for his father by 1525. He had his own press by 1529, and his printing achievements included being the principal publisher of Sir Thomas More’s polemical treatises as he resisted the king’s reformation. He also printed some important law books, as well as making a sizable contribution to the printing of early interludes, in respect of the plays of his brother-in-law, John Heywood.

As with Treveris’s *Magnyfycence*, all of William Rastell’s volumes are in folio. Another consistent and characteristic feature is his treatment of speech heads which are always on the left side of the page and are abbreviated only slightly. Sometimes these are in smaller font, which is consistent with an intention to make them as complete as possible and to avoid abbreviation. In many characteristics William follows the model of his father, especially with regard to stage directions, which are centered and marked with pilcrows. The texts are consistent in marking the first line of speeches with pilcrows, but there is also a departure from other plays, as this device is used in *John John* and *Pardoner and the Friar* to mark paragraph divisions in long speeches without consideration of meter. Though the punctuation is not as thorough as might be expected today, there is rather more of it in William’s books than his father’s. The colophons of five of his books are dated, as well giving his name.

The title pages are a special case because of their disparity. They are by no means consistent, and some of them do not match the rather impressive mise-en-page we have noted for the texts of plays printed by John. It looks as though each of them was decided upon without much reference to the others. For *John John* and *The Pardoner and the Friar* there is no separate page and the first speech follows on immediately beneath the title. It may be that these two plays were printed in tandem because the layout of the two colophons is closely similar and, as Greg noted, they are printed in bastard black letter (a rather “showy” type based on original manuscript letters) with a very noticeable flourish for upper and lowercase letter “w.” For *Nature* a different arrangement is adopted. The title page is entirely blank except for the few words of the title and a brief description centered in the upper middle of the page. This rather austere but well-balanced presentation matches the layout of the text. The title page for *Weather* 1 seems to have been made up from handy bits and pieces. Under the title there is a rather ad hoc decorative horizontal block across the page, and below the
prominent names of the players there are three printer’s flowers: The whole lacks a sense of proportion. On the other hand for Love 1 the title page features a large frame of two classical columns with shields and figures and the initials W and R in upper case. The formality is in marked contrast to the arrangement for Weather 1.

The twelve surviving interludes or fragments of interludes, all in quarto, printed by William Copland comprise the largest number attributable to any single printer. He succeeded Robert Copland, who was probably his father, in about 1548 and continued printing until his death in 1567. Robert had been in service with De Worde and was left some books by him and probably some type. It is clear that William was an active printer, there being more than 150 books now recognized as his. At first he printed for John Waley, but later he put his own name on many interludes. He printed at three addresses: at the sign of the Rose Garland in Fleet Street (1548–57); at the Three Cranes Wharf in the Vintry in Thames Street (1557–c. 1565); and in Lothbury near St Margaret’s church (c. 1565–9). At the first of these he printed Love 2, John the Evangelist, and Hick Scornor – these three being printed for Waley who had an address in Foster Lane – and probably Somebody. Robin Hood 1 and Jack Juggler 1 are named as coming from the Vintry, and probably Wealth and Health and Four PP 2 and Impatient Poverty were made there as well. In the last period Jack Juggler 2, Youth 3 and Lusty Juventus 3 are designated as being from Lothbury, and we should presumably also place Robin Hood 2 there. It will be noted that his output included what are apparently the first printing of several of these texts. It is striking, however, that all the plays printed in the last years of his life were reprints: Jack Juggler 2, Youth 3, Lusty Juventus 3, and Robin Hood and the Potter 2.

Though there is some variation, we can make some descriptive observations which suggest preferences for particular practices in Copland’s interludes. The following features recur in a number of the 11 extant texts from his printing houses. In each case I give the number of extant texts in which these occur. He uses printer’s flowers decoratively on title pages (5) and at the end of text (1). A variation is the use of a hand pointing the index finger (3). The number of players required to perform the play appears on title pages (6): Three of these specify four actors. The text itself of the plays usually begins with an ornamented capital letter (7). Speech heads are centered (6), usually preceded by a printer’s flower of the same type as appears on the title pages but smaller, and followed by a full stop. Variations include pilcrows instead of flowers. In three plays, however, the speech heads are placed in the outer margins. Pilcrows are used to mark the beginning of speeches (6) and regular indentation of the first word also occurs (3). Punctuation is used sparingly in most of the plays. There is virtually none in Hick Scornor 3, Robin Hood and the Potter, Jack Juggler 1 and 2, Love 2, and Four PP 2. The only slight exception is that in some of these full stops appear at the end of some speeches. Commas are very rare, but they are sometimes represented by a forward slash, as in John the Evangelist. None of the texts has running heads.

Another distinctive feature is Copland’s preference for decorative woodcuts. Though these are never on a grand scale, he probably thought his text would benefit by including such material: As his printed interludes comprise work by different authors, these
decisions must be printing-house rather than authorial ones. For example, we note that the title page of *John the Evangelist* has a cut showing a haloed figure with one hand raised in blessing, and vessel, possibly a pyx, in the other. One cut reminiscent of a *Miserere* seat appears in three plays. But by far the most impressive design feature is the use of several factotums showing full-length figures, usually in groups of three on title pages or their versos. In doing this Copland was most likely following the lead given by De Worde with whom we have already noted a link.

It appears that factotum figures of this type were originally developed by the French printer Antoine Vérand for his *Therence en Francois* (Paris, 1500). These woodcuts were copied and some of them appeared in Pynson’s printing of the *Kalendar of Shepherdes* (London, 1506). From these origins they were clearly not meant to be representations of actors even though they have since been treated as such. They became popular and were passed from printer to printer. For example De Worde’s *Hick Scorner* 1 (1515) showed six of them with the panels over their heads named for characters in that play, and he incorporated three at the beginning of the fragmentary *Youth* 1. John Skot similarly used six of them for *Everyman* 4 on the verso of the title page (A1v) also with appropriate labels. In his turn Copland appears to have been keen to use them. He incorporated sets of three figures in six of his plays: *Hick Scorner* 3, *Four PP* 2, *Impatient Poverty* 2, *Jack Juggler* 1 and 2, and *Youth* 3. Three of the figures in these plays were reproduced in more than one play. The central figure designated M. Boung-race in *Jack Juggler* 1 appears again in *Jack Juggler* 2, in *Impatient Poverty* 2 unlabeled, and labeled as Youth in *Youth* 3; the unlabeled gowned figure pointing to the right in *Impatient Poverty* 2 reappears in *Youth* 3 named as Charity; and the gowned figure pointing to the left on the title page of *Four PP* 2 is the same as the unlabeled figure in *Youth* 3. The presence of these factotums and indeed of other decorative material strongly suggests that Copland was not aiming his play texts simply towards providing performable texts: He must have had a reading audience in mind.

If William Copland’s was the major output in the middle years of the century, we owe much to the substantial achievements of Thomas Colwell and John Alld who in printing ten and seven plays respectively contributed to the busiest years in the history of interludes. In conclusion I shall look at a sample of the work of each in order to illustrate how the style of the earlier printers was imitated and developed in the first half of the reign of Elizabeth.

Many of the characteristics noticed in Copland are found in Colwell’s editions of Thomas Ingelend’s *Disobedient Child* and John Bale’s *Three Laws* 2, especially speech heads and stage directions and the use of pilcrows for new speeches. In *Disobedient Child* he uses paragraph signs (¶) of different sizes for decoration and to mark stage directions, which are in smaller type. The title page has a much decorated border with an encompassing floral wreath and two putti (baby angels) and a central panel for the title words and author’s name and Colwell’s imprint at the foot. The players’ names are listed on the verso. At the end of the text there is a woodcut showing the Evangelist with the eagle on Patmos with the words *S. John / Evangelist* on either side. Internally the punctuation is much fuller than in Copland’s plays, showing a greater
sense of its importance and using (,) :, (?) and (.). There are also running heads, a characteristic of all Colwell’s extant editions.

His reprinting of John Bale’s *Three Laws* raises some further considerations about the presentation and decoration of texts. Bale’s plays were printed abroad in 1547–8 by a Dutch printer. Almost all Bale’s works were issued with some kind of decoration and a variety of visual effects (Happé 2001: 81–118; and Happé 2009). Presumably Bale was personally much interested in these. For *Three Laws* 2 Colwell was able to follow Bale’s precedent. But there are some notable changes. Colwell has to manage the title page and ancillary matter differently, presumably because he did not have the beautiful woodcut of the Fall used by van der Straten. Instead he introduces a large printer’s flower and, in large type, the false claim “A Newe Comedy or Enterlude …” followed by a list of the players’ names. These were not strictly necessary because he moved the doubling scheme showing the parts distributed for five actors and the costume notes from the end of the play (G1v in Van der Straten) to the verso of the title page. The earlier text is carefully and, one might say, fully punctuated. This probably reflects Bale’s own concerns, as we might deduce from his careful marking up of the *King Johan* manuscript. Colwell dispenses with most of the in-text punctuation. He also changes the roman type for speech heads into black letter. He adds a pilcrow to the incipits and explicits (first and last words) of each Act, and to the list of players. He does follow the older text in centering the speech heads.

John Allde, who printed interludes between 1565 and 1570, was clearly interested in reprints, as he produced three. His revival of Heywood’s *Four PP* is particularly interesting since the play was at least 25 years old and possibly going back to a lost folio by William Rastell. A comparison of the title pages of three quartos of *Four PP* shows each printer designing his own. Middleton uses three of the factotums we have noted for De Worde and Copland. For the second quarto Colwell introduces elaborate floral cuts as a framework on all four sides of the central matter. Allde has a different woodcut showing two skeletal figures playing the bagpipes and a portable organ, and he adds his imprint at the foot of the page. Apart from the latter we note that the wording of all three title pages is the same.

For *Nice Wanton* 2 and *Like Will to Like* Allde was much concerned to produce interesting, informative and decorative title pages. The former has a well-filled page with decorative pilcrows and paragraph marks in a pattern. It contains a poem, a Latin motto, and a list of player’s names arranged in two columns followed by details of the printer’s name centered and tapered at the foot. However, all the words on the title page except for Allde’s imprint are found in John King’s *Nice Wanton* 1. The spelling in the poem is modernized by Allde. The decorative approach continues on A1v which contains the Prologue with six double-flower devices beneath it. Later in the text the decoration is used again for the songs on A4v and C2v.

*Like Will to Like* shows similar attention to detail, and interest in a well-filled title page. The survival of Allde’s two quartos reveals that the title page for the second is based upon the first with mostly the same type and layout. For this play a great deal of moral observation is appended to the title itself, enjoining the virtuous life. This
is arranged in a centered layout with a tapering conclusion embodying the author’s name. Below is a list of players arranged in a doubling scheme justifying the assertion that “Fiue may easely play this enterlude.” The list isolates the name of the Vice. Underneath are the imprint and the date. Except for Cambises Allde’s title pages all have this information. The printer’s versatility shows itself in the varieties of types and type sizes. In many ways Allde follows his predecessors but we note that he always lists the players on title pages, four of the seven having a doubling scheme. There are usually large pilcrows before the first line of large-type headings on title pages. Stage directions are centered or placed to the right, usually in small roman type. Speech heads are in outer margins (4) or centered (3) and usually in small type. There are spectacular woodcuts: the Return of the Prodigal Son in Jack Juggler 3 and the Dance of Death in Four PP 3.

This account suggests that within the book trade there were many links and affinities which gave rise to the publication of interludes. It provides a different perspective for the interludes, one separated from other cultural and political objectives which have recently been studied. It suggests that conventions of layout for plays were developed with some consistency. The motivation for this may have been aesthetic, but there are also clear indications that marketing and a perception of the potential readership must have been influential. One further point might be relevant to this. Even though some of the practices discussed here suggest that the printed plays were being made available for performers, this part of the market must have been very small and hardly a strong commercial target. It is much more likely that the majority of purchasers would have constituted a more general readership.

References


Further Reading

Appendix 12.1: Printers, Booksellers, and Plays

Note: a) numbers in parenthesis refer to successive printings of a play; b) titles in brackets designate plays printed by a printer other than the bookseller in question; c) double plus signs (++) identify a printer with more than 100 known publications.

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<td>1572</td>
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<td>++ Edward White, 1577–1613</td>
<td>[Robin Hood and the Friar (2)]</td>
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<td>1590</td>
<td>Printed by William Copland</td>
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<td>Robin Hood and the Potter (2)</td>
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<td>1590</td>
<td>Printed by ?William Copland for Edward White</td>
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<td>John Perrin, 1580–1592</td>
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<td>Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville</td>
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<td>Printed by Edward Allde</td>
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<td>++ Thomas Creede, 1593–1617</td>
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<td>Clymon and Clamydes</td>
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Part III

Literary Origins,
Presences, Absences
Medievalism and the idea of the Middle Ages are retrospective inventions, having less to do with the qualities of the period itself than with the agendas of those who seek to describe it. According to Brian Stock’s oft-quoted formulation:

The Renaissance invented the Middle Ages in order to define itself; the Enlightenment perpetuated them in order to admire itself; and the Romantics revived them in order to escape from themselves. In their widest ramifications “the Middle Ages” thus constitute one of the most prevalent cultural myths of the modern world. (Stock 1990: 69)

Whether we regard the period through the nostalgic eyes of a Ruskin or Rossetti or, following Foxe, as a primitive time, our views of the Middle Ages are conditioned by certain value judgments. In Reform and Cultural Revolution, 1350–1547 (2002), James Simpson argues that prevailing definitions of the Middle Ages are the result of Reformist institutions and policies of Henry VIII that enacted a contraction and simplification of the medieval literary culture that preceded it, producing a specific notion of the period and establishing strict boundaries between it and the Renaissance.
This chapter describes the culture of medievalism, *avant-la-lettre*. At a time when the idea of the Middle Ages itself was developing into a cultural myth, authors, texts, and histories that we now think of as medieval were exerting a profound influence upon Tudor literary culture. Illustrating the scope and range of Tudor responses to the Middle Ages, this chapter offers three major examples of Tudor medievalism (the better term is “medievalisms”). They include: The literary afterlife of Geoffrey Chaucer; Tudor editions and redactions of medieval romance; and Elizabethan dramatizations of medieval history. Illustrating acts of literary reception, contexts of reading, and forms of dramatic representation, these examples show how Tudor authors respond to the Middle Ages as a persistent and provocative presence, taking part in an ongoing dialogue with the past that is shaped by a variety of contexts and literary agendas that have little in common with subsequent impulses to idealize or demonize.

As England’s first celebrated author, Chaucer was first described by John Dryden as “the Father of English poetry” in his Preface to *Fables, Ancient and Modern* (1700). His reception by Tudor authors displays his evolving association with history, genealogy, and authority. Chaucer gives Tudor readers and writers a past, but the genre of romance exists in a kind of ongoing present. The name “romance” itself signals its vernacularity, and the popularity of romance in the Tudor period illustrates not only the cosmopolitanism of its reading public, who especially enjoyed translations from the French, but also the continuity in literary tastes between medieval and Renaissance. Finally, as the Tudor period saw the birth of a popular, secular stage, English history – much of it medieval – replaced biblical and allegorical narrative as a dramatic subject. As they engage with medieval dramatic genres as well as histories, Elizabethan dramatists also address evolving notions of pastness. Looking back while moving forward, the Janus face of Tudor medievalism is predicated upon a strong sense of continuity with the past, either using the past to understand itself, or else proceeding blithely, as if nothing had been lost to begin with.

**A Dead Poet**

Medievalism in England hinges on the memory of Chaucer, and most Tudor authors regard him as a distinguished ancestor whom they must emulate, rather than distance themselves from or repudiate. Tudor responses to Chaucer are divided between those majority, who honor him for endowing England with a literary history and identity, and those who treat him more like a colleague or poetic contemporary.

Chaucer was revered as a poetic trailblazer in the fifteenth century. John Lydgate dubbed him “Floure of Poetës / thorghout al breteyne” (*Siege of Thebes*, l. 40) and praised him for transforming the English language, once “rude and boystous” (*Siege of Troy* l. 43), into a viable poetic language, by importing French and Italian, as well as classical, terms and literary models. The sixteenth century, however, celebrates his antiquity. In the epilogue to his edition of Chaucer’s *Boece* (1478), William Caxton
describes Chaucer as an author who “ought eternally to be remembrid,” endowing England with a literary history, as well as a mandate. Thus, for early Tudor poets such as Stephen Hawes, the practice of writing poetry is inseparable from the tradition of remembering Chaucer (Lerer 1993). In The Example of Vertu (1504), the poet Stephen Hawes praises Chaucer, as Lydgate did, for his contributions to the English language: “O noble Chauser euer moost sure / Of frutfull sentence ryght delycyous” (ll. 24–5). But he also places Chaucer as an author of books “to be remembred without Impedyment … This was the custume of antyquyte” (ll. 5–7). Defining Chaucer as “antique” and as a moral example, Hawes establishes an English literary history that mirrors the classics.¹

However, Hawes also expresses the problem Tudor poets faced when confronted by this evolving mythos of Chaucer as a founding poetic father: He makes them feel “naked in depured eloquence” (l. 9), unable to reach the heights of pure poetry. Hawes responds to this problem by writing as much like Chaucer as he possibly can. Compare these lines from Hawes:

In Septembre in fallynge of the lefe  
Whan phebus made his declynacyon  
And all the whete gadred was in the shefe  
By radyaunt hete and operacyon  
Whan the vyrgyn had full domynacyon  
And Dyane entred was one degre  
Into the sygne of Gemyne. … (ll. 29–35)

with the opening lines of the Canterbury Tales:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote  
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne. … (ll. 1–8)

Hawes borrows the opening “Whan,” the emblematic month; its astrological significance; the agricultural point of reference; and the classical god (or goddess). He even adopts the Chaucerian “vertu” in the title of his poem, highlighting the poet’s exemplary status. However, the sense of fresh and exuberant inspiration conveyed by Chaucer’s breath, the bathing, and the image of the young ram running becomes, in Hawes, a sense of bathos, of defeated expectations, and of decline and domination. The leaves have fallen, the wheat is gathered, and the virgin Diana is in charge: A goddess who turns men back into beasts. Hawes thus experiences Chaucer through the sense of uncouth belatedness, and, like the sign of Gemini, duplication.
Whereas Chaucer’s antique authority diminishes Hawes, his colleague and rival John Skelton uses him, instead, as a stepping-stone for his own brilliant career. In A Garlande of Laurell (1523), Skelton is hailed by the troika of medieval poets, Chaucer, John Gower, and Lydgate, who presents him with a laurel crown to mark his success as a poet. Skelton’s use of the Janus face highlights a clear distinction between past and present as a means of furthering his goal of succession:

Where I saw Ianus, with his double chere,
Makynge his almanak for the new yere;
He turnyd his tirikkis, his roluell ran fast: [tricks; astronomical device]
Good luk this new yere! the olde yere is past. (ll. 1515–18)

As a meditation on the relationship between history and literary authority, Skelton’s poem revisits the concerns of Chaucer’s unfinished House of Fame. Chaucer’s poem undermines the past, suggesting the extent to which all history is fiction, and concluding, tantalizingly, just at the moment a “man of gret auctorite” (l. 2158) arrives. Skelton picks up where Chaucer ends, cannily taking on this authoritative role for himself, and using the past to his own advantage. With its multiple endings in a variety of tongues and styles, A Garlande of Laurell announces Skelton as Britain’s “Poet Laureate,” a position occupied by Petrarch, in Rome, and first associated, in England, with Chaucer. (Although the office of poet laureate was not created until the seventeenth century, Chaucer’s name was attached to this distinction with his gift of a daily pitcher of wine from Edward III.)

As early Tudor poets promote Chaucer’s antiquity, its printers construct Chaucer as a contemporary. In 1526, Richard Pynson, printer to Henry VIII, first bound together three separate collections of Chaucer’s texts to make an edition of Chaucer’s works. Following Lydgate, Pynson’s Proheme praises Chaucer for achieving “ornate writynge in oure tonge,” and his edition reflects the need to present Chaucer as a learned, cosmopolitan contemporary, suitable for the king’s library. His additions of non-Chaucerian texts include La Belle Dame sans Merci, a translation of a well-known work by the French poet Alain Chartier, and the Letter of Dido to Aeneas, based on a French translation of Ovid by Octavien de St Gelais. These texts, respectively, reinforce Chaucer’s reputation for bringing French language and poetic forms to England and reflect the humanist interests of the Henrician court.

William Thynne’s 1532 Workes of Geffray Chaucer similarly treats Chaucer as a Tudor author, although in this case the emphasis is on his Reformist, rather than humanist, credentials (Walker 2005). Appearing in the year of the English Reformation, Thynne’s edition aligns Chaucer with Henry VIII, printing “cum privilegio” (that is, with royal license) in large type on the title page, and dedicating the work “to the kynges highnesse.” His addition of over twenty apocryphal works to the Chaucer canon, such as the proto-Protestant Plouman’s Tale and the Pilgrim’s Tale, expresses the king’s Reformist agenda, as well as his doctrine of increase: This was the king, after all, who first declared England to be an empire.
Thynne and Pynson’s representations of Chaucer as a royal poet inform Chaucer’s appearance in manuscript compilations of poetry produced by members of the court. Alongside fresh compositions by contemporary poets such as Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, poems copied by hand from Thynne’s 1532 edition of Chaucer appear in the Devonshire manuscript: London, British Library MS Additional 17492. Produced by members of Anne Boleyn’s household, it is a major example of women’s literary activity in the Tudor period (Remley 1994; Heale 1995). Scholars conjecture that as many as twenty-three people had (quite literally) a hand in its creation.

Through the processes of copying, compiling, and circulating, an anthology’s makers and readers define themselves as members of a select group, with shared knowledge and frames of reference. The pleasure of compiling and reading this kind of anthology derives from identifying the work of the poet in its original context, and then comparing its position in the new set of poems. The Devonshire anthology also includes centos: Poems made up of lines drawn from other poems, for example, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. Supplying the same literary pleasures of quotation and identification, centos offer miniature versions of the anthology experience, allowing the creators to voice amorous pains and pleasures and to comment on their current experiences. As the Devonshire manuscript arranges and re-arranges its poems as an ongoing, playful discussion of the specific trials faced by lovers within the environment of the royal court, in this context Chaucer serves as both court poet and contemporary, valued not for his antiquity, but for his insights on love (Lerer 1993; Carlson 2004).

The success of Thynne’s efforts to construct Chaucer as a proto-Protestant may be confirmed by the absence of new Chaucer editions during the reign of the Catholic Mary I. Three years after the coronation of Queen Elizabeth I, however, John Stow’s 1561 edition of *The Workes of Geffrey Chaucer* heralds England’s return to Protestant hands. Yet where Thynne sought to highlight Chaucer’s contemporary values, Stow preserves the memory of England’s first Protestant king by retaining Thynne’s preface and dedication to Henry VIII (his daughter, Queen Elizabeth, gets no mention). Thomas Tyrwhitt, the pioneering eighteenth-century editor of Chaucer, describes Stow’s Chaucer as a “heap of rubbish” for its inclusion of many non-Chaucerian works. Ann Hudson explains how Stow actually distinguishes between authentically Chaucerian texts, apocryphal Chaucerian texts, and texts in the Chaucerian tradition (Hudson 1984). Indeed, his criteria for inclusion are not determined by current notions of authority and authenticity, which tie a text and its author together inextricably. Instead, they have more in common with Henry VIII’s notion of England as an empire, with the metropolitan centre represented by texts such as the *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the provinces by Chaucerian apocrypha and Chaucerian imitators. If Stow’s edition reflects a kind of Chaucerian empire, it also envisions a Chaucerian family, with the non-Chaucerian texts retaining a kind of family resemblance to their original “father” Chaucer. The couplet that appears on Stow’s title page, “Virtue flourisheth in Chaucer still / Though death of hym, hath wrought his will,” returns us to the Hawesian notion of Chaucer as an example of virtue, and
reminds us of the continuing, enabling power of the dynamic of death and remembrance enshrined by Caxton three generations before.

Edmund Spenser’s poetic self-definition thus hinges upon constructing himself as Chaucer’s rightful heir. As Dryden observes in his Preface, Spenser “more than once insinuates, that the Soul of Chaucer was transfus’d into his Body; and that he was begotten by him Two hundred years after his Decease.” In Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey his epitaph reads: “Hic prope Chaucerum situs est Spenserus, illi / Proximus ingenio, proximus ut tumulo” [“Here, buried next to Chaucer, lies Spenser, close to him in wit, and as close in his tomb”].

Chaucer’s ancestral significance to Spenser, the precise architect of a poetic world that seems so far away from Chaucer’s tolerant vision of a flawed but fundamentally congenial humanity, illustrates the genealogical as well as memorial impulse that informs the Tudor relationship to Chaucer. From the recollection of Chaucer’s Knight in the opening lines of *The Faerie Queene*, to the consistent invocations of Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* in *Daphnaïda*, to the elegiac presentations of Chaucer as Tityrus in the *Shepheardes Calendar*, and to the continuation of Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale* in Book Four of the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser infuses his work with references to Chaucer. When, in Spenser’s *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, the narrator pauses ceremoniously to salute “old Dan Geffrey (in whose gentle spright / The pure well head of Poesie did dwell)” (VII.Ix.3–4), he preserves and historicizes the foundational terms of Chaucerian reception as articulated by Lydgate. Spenser thus derives his own poetic self-conception not only through Chaucer’s language and poetic narratives but also through the traditions of Chaucerian reception.

With a genealogical table, a glossary that identifies his vocabulary as archaic, and even an invented coat of arms, Thomas Speght’s 1598 *Workes* offers a visual emblem of the Tudor Chaucer as *pater familias*. Derek Pearsall observes that Speght presents “Chaucer as a ‘classic,’ a writer of established reputation, a man of learning” (Pearsall 1984: 75). Speght also connects this image of Chaucer directly to the history of the Reformation, by embellishing a story from Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* that Chaucer was a friend of the religious reformer, John Wycliffe. In Speght, Chaucer is fined for beating a Franciscan friar. As a classic author, a royal poet, a father, and a Protestant, Speght’s representation of Chaucer replaces the necessity of marking his death with an interest in the details of his life.

The Prologue to Shakespeare and Fletcher’s 1613 *Two Noble Kinsmen* constitutes the apotheosis of the Tudor Chaucer:

> We pray our play may be so, for I am sure  
> It has a noble breeder and a pure,  
> A learned and a poet never went  
> More famous yet ‘twixt Po and silver Trent.  
> Chaucer, of all admired, the story gives:  
> There constant to eternity it lives. (Prologue II. 9–14)

The image of Chaucer as fatherly, scholarly, and gentle prefaces the play’s reworking of Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*. Careful to distinguish Chaucer from Homer and Virgil
(both whom hailed from south of the river Po that bisects Italy), Shakespeare and Fletcher use the image of the dauntingly virtuous “breeder” Chaucer to confer prestige on their play and underscore its historicity. While the play’s use of Chaucer signals its investments in notions of lineage and the past, its addition of the Jailer’s Daughter to the Chaucerian narrative reveals the Janus face of Tudor medievalism at work: the codification of the fatherly Chaucer serves as a foil to the play’s addition of an entirely up-to-date girlish character whose edgy emotionalism displays contemporary notions of melancholy and madness, reflecting the evolving tastes of the Jacobean stage.

The Matter of Romance

Tudor readers loved medieval romance, that quintessentially medieval genre. Set long ago, if not always far away, medieval romances count among the first and most popular texts that were printed in Tudor England. Their popularity reflected the ongoing appeal of romance narratives that circulated, promiscuously, between England and France through the Middle Ages, and perpetuates a longstanding English interest in French romance and other literary forms (Williams 2004). However, during the Tudor period, the evolving discourses of humanism and antiquarianism made the act of reading medieval romance newly self-conscious. The Reformation heightened awareness of the genre’s Catholic history and affiliations, associating them more directly with the contexts of their composition and dissemination. As the Elizabethan period drew to a close, a renewed interest in the genre was fed by Spenser’s attempts to mitigate the genre’s Catholic associations by recalling its classical and biblical origins, and by aligning it with the discourses of Protestantism and English nationalism.

The versions of the Robert the Devil romance that circulated in Tudor England illustrate the fortunes of the genre in the sixteenth century, allowing us to chart the different ways Tudor readers viewed medieval romance. Concerning the reform of a wayward duke, the Robert the Devil romance originates in the twelfth-century French Roman de Robert le diable and Etienne Bourbon’s Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus, completed around 1250. In most versions, the hero is Robert the Magnificent, Duke of Normandy, the father of William the Conqueror. Born to a long-childless duke and duchess, the hero is conceived when his mother is seduced by the same devil that sired Merlin. As an infant, he suckles wet nurses to death; as a young man, he enjoys rape, murder, and the destruction of churches. When he finally converts, he channels his destructive energies into defeating Saracens, marries an emperor’s daughter and ultimately focuses his attention on good deeds. Presenting both the outer reaches of depravity and the human capacity for redemption, the narrative explores the appropriate channeling of violence, and the norms of courtly behavior that evolved during the Middle Ages.

The Middle English version of the romance, entitled Sir Gawther, relocates the hero’s birthplace to Austria (“Estryke”), deflecting the awkward questions concerning
civility and barbarism raised, in post-Conquest England, by a hero who is the Duke
of Normandy. The two manuscripts in which Sir Gowther now exists illustrate the
romance’s fundamentally religious contexts and affiliations. In the first, British Library
Royal MS 17.b.43, it is collected with other texts concerning questions of damnation,
redemption and the afterlife: St Patrick’s Purgatory and The Vision of Tundale. This
version of Sir Gowther concludes, explicit vita sancti [thus ends the saint’s life]. In the
second, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1, Sir Gowther is collected
with Lydgate’s Life of our Lady, the ever-popular romance Sir Isumbras (a story of faith
in the face of adversity), as well as Stans Puer ad Mensam, a treatise on table manners.
Many details explain Sir Gowther’s association with saints’ lives, hagiographical
romances and religious visionary writing, not to mention concepts of civility. The
story of his birth, classified by folklorists as the Wish-Child motif, derives from
accounts of the life of St Anne, the mother of the Virgin, and ultimately leads back
to the biblical story of the Annunciation. The hairy demon that impregnates Gowther’s
mother, and the hero’s transformation into a greyhound, dramatize themes of original
sin and human abjection that recall the biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar, who is
transformed into a beast for his sins and regains human form only when he repents.

In 1502 and 1518, Wynken de Worde printed the prose Robert Deuyll: A transla-
tion of the contemporary French romance Vie du terrible Robert le diable, based on the
medieval Dit de Robert le Diable. Tudor editions of the romance may have inspired
the theme for a disguising of Robert the Devil during the reign of Henry VIII (Crane
1919: 10) and allow us to consider how the story would have resonated with the
Henrician court. Beginning with a couple longing for an heir, and continuing
with the wife paying the price for her infidelity by producing a demon-child, the
romance raises Tudor anxieties about lineage, paternity, and the past. It also evokes
the sense of being haunted by a diabolical history that motivated the early Tudor
disavowal and destruction of Catholic relics. With its combination of megalomania
and heartfelt piety, not to mention unhindered attacks on the clergy, the romance
indulges in the excesses that defined the king’s character: His equal devotion to God
and to warfare.

As the century progressed, the romance genre in England came to be associated
more directly with its Catholic history. Humanists had long complained about the
genre, but the Reformation sought to eradicate it altogether. A different metrical
version of Robert Deuyll, printed around 1519, illustrates this part of the history. The
only complete form of it that now survives may be found in a manuscript, British
Library MS Egerton 3132A, copied by the recusant Edward Banyster in 1564 (the
print original now exists only as a fragment, Bodleian Library, MS Douce fragment
f.4). Illustrating, like the Devonshire manuscript, the ongoing relevance and produc-
tion of manuscripts during the age of print, Banyster’s labors may have been prompted
by the suppression and destruction of medieval romances in the decades following the
Reformation. The other romances he copied in Bodleian Library MS Douce 261, such
as Syr Degore and Syr Eglamore, are similarly hagiographic and penitential in nature. The
hero’s family of origin in Syr Degore is unhappy, as he is abandoned by his mother,
left as a foundling, and ultimately forced to fight his maternal grandfather to regain his patrimony. And Sir Eglamour, in which the hero must slay a series of increasingly threatening mythical beasts, shares Robert Deyll’s interest in Christian revelation and the intervention of divine providence. As Banyster copied Robert Deyll, preserving its accounts of the destruction of monasteries, the burning alive of nuns, and other acts of violence against members of the church, all of which are heartily repented, he must have thought about their relation to his own, immediate, lived reality.

In the Elizabethan period, medieval romances were overshadowed by more contemporary continental romances by Cervantes, Ariosto and Boiardo: texts that were not burdened by association with pre-Reformation England. However, by the 1590s, Elizabethan readers revisited the medieval romances that had been vilified by humanists and suppressed by reformers. Thomas Lodge’s prose romance, The Famous true and historiackall life of Robert second Duke of Normandy, surnamed for his monstrous birth and behavour, Robin the Diuell (1591), charts the hero’s dramatic swing from sinner to saint, reflecting Lodge’s fascination with and eventual conversion to Catholicism. Lodge is keen to highlight the antiquity of his text, describing it, in his address to the reader, as “drawn out of the old and ancient antiquaries.” The term “antiquaries” aligns his work not only with that of “antique” medieval authors, but also with the work of antiquarians such as John Leland, who was commissioned by Henry VIII to comb the English landscape, recovering texts and other artifacts of Catholic Britain (see below). These words situate his romance within the proximate processes of destruction and salvation that shape English medievalism. Lodge is, throughout, highly conscious of the past: He offers an explicit date for his events “the year of our Lord 750,” and often calls attention to differences as well as continuities between that time and his own, as well as to the moments in which he follows or departs from his sources or as he puts it, “historiographers.”

As his tale invokes history, it also seeks to evoke the genre of the medieval dream vision and specifically, the dit amoureux [“lyrical love vision”]. The passages concerning his parents’ dalliance in the grove are suffused with its conventions, such as the May morning and the lover’s complaint to Fortune. Reinforcing the sense that Robin is conceived in an act of love and mutual pleasure, these poetic conventions highlight Lodge’s most important deviation from the Robert romance tradition. Whereas Robert’s paternity is typically ascribed to the devil, Robin’s conception takes place under ideal, blissful, circumstances. Here Lodge runs contrary to longstanding beliefs that deformities – including spiritual ones – bore some relation to the experiences of conception and pregnancy. Whereas his sources are concerned with showing how even the devil’s child can be converted, following a medieval system which attributes evil to Satan, Lodge gives Robin’s evil an endogenous quality, one which highlights the rootlessness of human sin and the miracle of human perfectibility.

Although Lodge’s change most obviously addresses theological questions, it speaks, as well, to the association of his romance with a discredited period in England’s past. Lodge resists the attribution of evil to a discrete event in history, and frames Robin’s violence toward fat friars and materialistic monks, typical objects of antifratal satire
and Reformist critique, by an overarching and heartfelt repentance. As *Robin the Diuell* revisits medieval romance, complete with hermits, talking lions, and spirited didactic virgins, it reflects a confidence in the transformative capacity of redemption, which can make a saint out of a demon, consciously choosing the leap of faith and act of grace.

By the 1590s, however, the medieval is no longer irretrievably linked to Catholicism. The jousting and tournaments of Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1590) do not so much recall medieval romance as reflect the performative, chivalric courtliness in vogue during the heyday of the Elizabethan court. Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590 and 96) revisits the medieval romances that were popular in the early Tudor period, transforming them into nationalist, Protestant allegory. The appearance of the dragon from *Bewis of Hampton* in Book One is a well-known example, and Spenser also draws heavily from French romances such as *Huon of Burdeaux, Arthur of Little Britain*, and *Valentine and Orson*. His frequent reference to Redcrosse Knight’s status as an “Elfins sonne” in Book One aligns his hero with Sir Gowther and Robert the Devil, underscoring the book’s close connection to medieval penitential romances.

With its narrative roots in medieval romances such as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum britanniae* and Layamon’s *Brut*, Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (1605?) illustrates a renewal of interest in romance on the Jacobean and Stuart stages. From the humbling of a high-born sinner to the juxtaposition of a pair of half-brothers, one demonic and one saintly, to its representations of wretchedness and abjection, *King Lear* reflects the major themes of the Robert the Devil romance. The Fool’s curious visionary reference to “this prophesy Merlin shall make” (III.ii.95) gestures toward the play’s medieval romance sources, and takes place within a passage that recalls Reformation and counter-Reformation violence, “no heretics burn’d” (84), and conjures images of reformed sinners, “and bawds and whores do churches build” (90). The Fool’s point, that overarching rectitude will bring “The realm of Albion to great confusion” (91–2), suggests that what is most important in the Robert romance, and in the fortunes of medieval romance in the Tudor period generally, is its faith in the ultimately redemptive capacity of sin.

**The Explosion of History**

John Bale’s *Kynge Johan* (1538) is probably the first English history play. During the Middle Ages, Corpus Christi plays performed biblical history, from Creation to the Crucifixion, while allegorical Morality plays performed concepts such as *Wit and Wisdom*, or *Magnyfycence*. A former Carmelite friar turned radical Protestant, Bale uses the allegorical structure of the Morality plays, and the eschatological preoccupations of the Corpus Christi plays, to dramatize the stridently Protestant theology and policies that characterize the final years of Henry VIII’s reign. Performed at the house of Archbishop Cranmer at Christmas, 1538–9 – at a time when England was expecting a Catholic invasion and/or Civil War any day – *Kynge Johan* renders England’s
medieval history as propaganda for a present cause. Medieval plays continued to be performed in Tudor England, and the Corpus Christi cycles were not officially suppressed until 1559. Their religious concerns and allegorical structures maintained a hold on English drama, even as national history began to overtake biblical history as a major topic of interest.

The historical King John entered into a dispute with Pope Innocent III over the succession to the Archbishop of Canterbury. This led to a papal interdiction (a suspension of church services) and ultimately to the king’s excommunication. In the face of a threatened Crusade, King John capitulated, using his submission to the pope to build support in another dispute with the English barons. But for Bale, who highlights the first part of the story, King John is a hero for resisting the pope. He grafts medieval history onto the larger, biblical narrative, popular with Protestant polemists, of the war between Christ and Antichrist. The play remains fundamentally allegorical, with figures such as England, portrayed as a vulnerable widow, and Sedition, in the Pope’s employ, who represents the new, papally supported, Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton. While Bale is looking back to medieval history, his attitude to his medieval material is not that of the antiquarian. The play’s events do not take place as history, but instead within the timeless spiritual and religious unfolding facilitated by allegory. This is why it is unproblematic for Bale to use the medieval history of a Catholic monarch in a Catholic age as a paradigm for Protestant reform. Filtering history through biblical typology, which functions outside of time, Bale constructs King John as a type of Henry VIII, his actions anticipating Henry’s ultimate salvation of the English church.

Curiously, the playwright who prioritizes allegory over history was one of England’s first antiquarians. Bale authored the first literary history of Britain: *Illustrium majoris Britanniae scriptorum, hoc est, Angliae, Cambriae, ac Scotiae Summarium* (1548). One of the most valuable and extensive documents concerning medieval English writers, it was published during Bale’s exile in Germany following the execution of Cromwell, and reprinted in a revised and expanded version in 1557, during the reign of Mary I. Bale’s work continues an antiquarian project started by his friend, John Leland: Namely, his *De uiris illustribus*, later published as *Commentarii de scriptoribus Brittannicis* (1709). A poet and antiquary, Leland was commissioned by Henry VIII in 1533 to search the libraries of English monasteries, and compile lists of books by British authors. This eventually became an initiative to preserve the books that were being dispersed as the monasteries were dissolved, which were ultimately deposited in the Royal collection.

Bale’s career illustrates the close, even symbiotic, relationship between the Reformation, with its forward-thinking, past-despising apocalypticism, and the Tudor passion for antiquarianism. In the same way that we may connect Bale and Leland’s preservation of England’s medieval literary history to the destruction of its medieval Church, we may link the birth of English historical drama to the demise of the Corpus Christi plays. As *King Johan* illustrates, national history is consolation for the end of biblical history. Yet long after Bale, the eschatological and allegorical frameworks of
the medieval stage continued to shape English drama. Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (late 1580s/early 1590s) preserves the Morality play structure of a neutral hero, Faustus, who falls under the sway of a diabolical figure, and receives counsel from competing good and bad angels. The play’s investment in medieval morality structures fosters its meditation on the seismic shift created by the Reformation.

The morality play reached its heyday, with *Magnificence* and *Everyman*, in the years immediately preceding the Reformation. *Doctor Faustus* is inspired by a figure who dates from this transitional time: The semi-historical, semi-legendary Georgius Helmstetter, who adopted the name of Dr Faustus. A student enrolled at the University of Heidelberg in 1483, he would have been a contemporary of Erasmus and More. Figures associated with Heidelberg, such as Johannes Trithemius and Conrad Mutianus Rufus, comment on Helmstetter’s adopted name, Faustus, on his involvement in divination and other occult arts, and on his braggadocio. However, as his reputation evolved to include sodomy and necromancy, the historical elements of Doctor Faustus’s story began to merge with an old legend, dating from the bible’s Simon Magus, of a scholar who makes a pact with a devil. Marlowe’s primary source is the English Faust-book (1592, although Marlowe probably used an earlier edition, now lost), which collects the stories and legends associated with this figure.

Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* stages a confrontation between the old forms and the new religion, using an old medieval dramatic form, with its structures of sin and redemption, while locating its figure in Wittenberg, the city associated with Luther, and the birthplace of the Reformation (Marcus 1989). As David Riggs has shown, the Reformers’ rigorous questioning of church doctrine opens up the possibility, not only of believing differently, but also of believing nothing at all, a crime for which Marlowe was accused in the famous Baines Note (Riggs 2004). In this respect, *Doctor Faustus* dramatizes the Faustian bargain made by the Reformation itself.

He also embodies the Reformers’ temporal division between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Faustus is educated in the medieval traditions of scholastic disputatio: “The fruitful plot of scholarism graced / That shortly he was graced with doctor’s name, / Excelling all, whose sweet delight disputes / In heavenly matters of theology” (Chorus, 17–20). But he leaves it all for the seductions of courtly display, using his magic, which he thinks will bring “a world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honour, of omnipotence” (52–3) to entertain and to refresh an Emperor, a Duke, and his Duchess. Through its hero the play charts the movement from the medieval monastic and scholarly contexts that produced the morality play to the new secular stage, patronized by the court, and seeking to emulate its tastes.

The famous climax of *Doctor Faustus*, the apparition of Helen of Troy, juxtaposes a classical vision with Faustus’s acknowledgement of the certitude of damnation. As it allegorizes the Renaissance revival of classical humanism, the play reinforces the theological and institutional structures which produced the morality play. Yet as it allegorizes the movement from medieval scholasticism to the sixteenth-century trinity of humanism, reform, and the court, *Doctor Faustus* refuses to confirm whether it is
advocating the old structures, or using them, with irony, to tell the story of a new man.

Robert Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (late 1580s) looks back not to medi-

eval structures, but to medieval history. Neither overtly concerned with questions of

eschatology, nor invested in allegory, it occupies a space within the efflorescence, in

the late 1580s and early 1590s, of historical drama specifically concerned with medi-

eval England. Marlowe’s *Edward II*, for example, literalizes fears of foreign penetration

as it charts its protagonist’s downfall. Shakespeare’s first tetralogy places England’s

loss of French territories in the fifteenth century within a structure of sin and damnation

that recalls the Corpus Christi plays, while his second tetralogy, written in the

late 1590s, maps England’s return to control onto a larger biblical pattern of redemp-

tion. Medieval history allows dramatists to articulate contemporary national anxieties

concerning invasion and cultural taint raised not only by England’s ongoing involve-

ment in the religious wars but also the long-unsettled question of Queen Elizabeth’s

marriage and succession.

Some critics have seen *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* as a somewhat derivative sequel

to Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, others as a source. Either way, it is the first comic dra-

matic engagement with England’s medieval past. It uses the medieval past differently

as well, addressing not only issues of nationalism but also current conceptions of the

past. Dramatizing the romantic attachment of Edward, Prince of Wales, to a country

damsel, Margaret, the play situates itself within England’s thirteenth-century history

and the reign of the Plantagenet king, Henry III. The play’s Friar Bacon is a highly

fictionalized version of Roger Bacon (1214–92), the immensely learned Oxford scholar

whose advocacy of classical philosophy made him unpopular with papal powers. The

play makes startlingly little use of Roger Bacon’s intellectual reputation (although

Friar Bacon’s “glass prospective” does invoke Bacon’s contributions to the field of

optics). Instead, Greene’s major source is the sixteenth-century prose narrative, *The

Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon* (c. 1555), which depicts Bacon as a magician, a lesser,

comic version of Doctor Faustus. It is in his role as a flighty buffoon, rather than as

medieval polymath, Doctor Mirabilis, that Friar Bacon constructs his magical brazen

head, a plan which falls apart when the head explodes due to the negligence of Friar

Bacon’s bumbling student, Miles.

The play’s characterization of Friar Bacon as foolish, wrong-headed, and credulous

caricatures evolving English Protestant conceptions of the Middle Ages and of its

Catholic church (cf. Sidney’s “mistie time”). Friar Bacon’s grandiose ambition, to

build a brass wall around England, is similarly suspect: The play undermines it at a

symbolic level when Edward casts off his English girlfriend in order to make his

strategic marriage with Elinor of Castile. However, the play’s treatment of Friar Bacon

is at odds with Greene’s exposure, during his time at Oxford and Cambridge, to the

learned medieval culture that the historical Bacon represents. The popular myth of

Bacon, which promoted a simple Reformist misrepresentation of the medieval, must

itself have seemed foolish and wrong-headed. The play requires us to look beyond
what it offers at face value in order to locate its critique of an Elizabethan attitude toward the medieval that is as trivial as Friar Bacon himself. When Friar Bacon’s brazen head splutters, “Time is, time was, time is past,” it explodes the notion that the Middle Ages can be contained by simple Reformist orthodoxy. Whenever we think we really know what the past is, it explodes in our faces.

I began this chapter with the image of the Janus face, which looks backwards as well as forwards, and end with the image of an exploding head. When Tudor medievalism looks backwards, it seeks to reproduce, recover, or emulate the quality of a medieval text. When it looks forwards, it uses or adapts medieval material with the intention of making it new. The Janus face of Tudor medievalism thus gazes in two directions at once, sometimes highlighting distance and difference from the medieval past, and other times emphasizing continuity. As the Roman god Janus presides over the liminal spaces of gates, doorways, and other portals, as well as over New Year’s celebrations, the Janus-face of Tudor medievalism watches over an equally transitional time in England’s history. This chapter has shown how the Middle Ages are the active begetter and enabler of Tudor literary culture, illustrating the continuities that exist between the periods of Medieval and Renaissance. Yet the concluding image of the exploding head requires us to acknowledge that the harder we try to codify and define the medieval, the more easily it slips away.

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NOTES

1 Cf. Dryden’s Preface: “As he is the father of English poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil.”
2 Spenser often uses aquatic metaphors for Chaucer, whom he calls the “well of English undefiled” (Faerie Queene, IV.ii.32). In The Shepheardes Calendar, Colin Clout wishes that “on me some little drops would flowe, / Of that the spring was in his learned hedde.” (June, ll. 93–4).
3 Sir Philip Sidney’s Defense of Poesie offers a rare dissenting voice: “Chawcer undoubtedly did excellently in his Troilus and Creseid: of whome trulie I knowe not whether to mervaine more, either that hee in that mistie time could see so clearly, or that wee in this cleare age, goe so stumblingly after him. Yet had hee great wants, fi  t to be forgiven in so reverent an Antiquitie.” Note that Sidney retains Chaucer’s identification with antiquity.
4 Dit literally means “spoken,” as opposed to sung, denoting a romance that places heavy emphasis on allegory, and on the emotional experience of romantic love.
5 Banyster’s personal collection of manuscripts, now in the Royal collection at the British Library, also contains the kind of religious material, such as Lydgate’s Life of our Lady and St. Patrick’s Purgatory, associated with Sir Gowther manuscripts.


Much medieval English drama survives today because Tudor and Stuart antiquarians and recusants compiled, collected, and preserved these play texts from an imperiled past. More important, these same antiquarians and recusants defined and structured and, in some sense, made what we now consider the medieval English dramatic corpus. Kenelm Digby, Cox Macro, and Robert Bruce Cotton are only the best known among a cohort that also included the Towneley family and the scholar/scribes who produced five copies of the Chester plays between 1591 and 1607. The early modernism of these individuals merits attention for many reasons, not the least of which are still prevalent assumptions regarding radical distinctions between medieval and early modern dramatic traditions, distinctions often articulated through binary categories that characterize medieval drama as communal, sacred, and Catholic and its early modern counterpart as professional, secular, and Protestant. Crucial early modern encounters with medieval dramatic texts, however, tell a more complex story, illustrating how the borders between medieval and early modern cultural performances were fluidly traversed. Indeed, these encounters point to the very artificiality of the border itself as a salient critical category for the history of early English theater (see Clopper 2001; Coletti 2007; Dillon 2006; Emmerson 1999 and 2005; Parker 2007; Watkins 2003; White 1999 and 2008).

The “Mankind to Marlowe” narrative of English drama’s evolution from morality play to Elizabethan tragedy has long provided one model for thinking about continuities between the medieval and the early modern (Bevington 1962). But it is the recognized corpus of medieval biblical theater that particularly vexes early drama scholarship’s familiar critical terms. Biblical history-of-the-world dramas – from Chester, Coventry, and Lancashire – confound historical categories of analysis because they achieved the form in which we have come to know them only through active sixteenth-century processes of revision and transmission. Belated recognition of these historical and cultural dislocations now enlivens early English drama studies, and the persistence as well as the transformation of medieval dramatic traditions in the Tudor
period invites analysis of these sixteenth-century acts of cultural production. What does medieval drama’s straddling of the early modern divide mean for English literary and cultural history? Do these processes of revision and transmission bear witness to survival and revival, or to more deliberate rereading, reworking, and recycling? Are these acts simply nostalgic gestures, or do they look forward from, as well as back upon, the religious dramatic traditions that they engage?

We focus here on biblical drama because these plays’ primary source and subject matter – the scriptural text – constitutes a central site of religious and political struggle across the late medieval and Tudor periods. Like other scripturally based writing, the biblical plays of late medieval cities and towns represent an important cultural witness to the long process of “Englishing the Bible” (Lawton 1999) and, accordingly, to the rhetorical and political challenges that accompanied the larger, controversial project of making sacred texts accessible in the vernacular. The paradox of a vernacular biblical theater openly accepted, even authorized, by the very ecclesiastical institutions and communities that otherwise sought to regulate non-clerical encounters with scripture underscores the ideological tensions that structure many expressions of late medieval piety. By the mid-sixteenth century, official, widespread embrace of an English Bible both encouraged theatricalization of scripture for reformed purposes and exposed the risks of such representation (White 1999). Religious theater, as Peter Womack has put it, uneasily remained a “Catholic kind of thing in its suspect reassigning of substance: A brown paper effigy is a dragon; some base fellow is Christ; wine is blood” (1999: 177).

In the roughly 200-year performance run of medieval scriptural drama in England, playing biblical narratives involved contested meanings and uses of sacred history as they were adjudicated on the ground by the cultural institutions – clerical and lay communities in cathedral and guildhall, monastic foundations, parishes, and gentry households – that both shared and vied for control over that central cultural resource (Clopper 2001; Barrett 2009). Indeed, the sheer persistence of late medieval scripturally based drama and the creation of new biblical dramas through much of the Tudor period suggest that sixteenth-century performances of biblical theater did not so much reflect the negotiation of religious conflicts in the period as provide a newly prominent venue for articulating both common and competing ideological investments of their authors, producers, and performers. Understood in these terms, medieval biblical drama’s Tudor incarnations constitute not simply the afterlife of medieval dramatic traditions but a central, defining episode in their literary and cultural history.

Our chapter focuses on two of the most important examples of England’s historically dislocated medieval dramatic traditions, the biblical play cycles that go by the names of Chester and Towneley. Revisionary readings of archival dramatic records have established that the Chester Cycle only achieved its extant form some time after 1521, when the plays were expanded for a three-day performance at Whitsun; they were then staged intermittently until 1575 (Clopper 1978). Even more disorienting for early drama scholars has been the recent discovery that the Towneley plays are not an urban cycle from Wakefield, as was long assumed, but a Lancashire and Yorkshire
The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama
dramatic anthology whose preservation, and possible compilation, we owe to the sponsorship of the recusant family that lent its name to the plays’ unique, mid-sixteenth-century manuscript (Palmer 2002; Happé 2007). Viewed through a critical lens that privileges such shifts in historical perspective, these mobile dramatic texts demonstrate the variable cultural motives responsible for the endurance of medieval dramatic traditions through the Tudor period. Although the Chester and Towneley cycles owe their incarnation as Tudor drama to distinct impulses and occasions, they mutually illuminate important questions about early English drama’s mediation of the medieval/early modern border.

The Chester Cycle

Biblical plays were performed in Chester as early as 1422, but evidence for their fifteenth-century production is scant; the scriptural dramas comprising the extant Chester Cycle, in text and performance, are manifestly mid- to late-Tudor phenomena. Chester survives in five complete manuscripts, written between 1591 and 1607 by recognized Chester churchwardens, clerks, and rectors with antiquarian leanings. Sixteenth-century revision and reception of the Chester plays are documented in two compelling descriptions of the cycle known as the Early (1505–40) and Late (1548–72) Banns. Records of civic and guild activity further detail the mounting of the Chester plays in the mid-sixteenth century and the political struggles that attended the cycle’s last performances in 1572 and 1575. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antiquarian documents in substantial numbers attest to the city’s enduring preoccupation with its heritage of festive performance at Corpus Christi, Whitsun, and Midsummer (Clopper 1978; Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills 2007; Lumiansky and Mills 1983; Mills 1998a).

Lumiansky, Mills, and Clopper have sorted through a complex documentary record to paint a detailed portrait of biblical drama in the Tudor city. Civic records and multiple cyclic texts bear witness to efforts by city officials and antiquarians to situate Chester’s creation, performance, and preservation of scriptural plays within an idealized narrative of the city’s past. We probably owe the Chester Cycle’s multiple early modern copies to the determination to keep this complex image of urban identity alive long after the city’s performance of sacred subjects had yielded to staging of secular ones at Midsummer (Mills 1998a: 223). Such a sophisticated approach to using the past, as Rob Barrett has recently argued, is in fact a signature of cultural production in early modern Chester and Cheshire as a whole.

Still, urban ideology never eclipsed the plays’ fundamental religious rationale. Indeed, it is the crucial intersection of devotion, spiritual instruction, festivity, commerce, and local politics that gives civic-sponsored biblical drama its unique place in early English traditions of cultural performance. Within that corpus, the Chester Cycle as a religious and devotional artifact stands out because its confessional allegiances emerge as an important theme of the civic mythology that grew up around
the plays’ performance. Thus the Late Banns retrospectively emend dramatic signs of the “tyme of Ignorance” in which the plays originated, yet applaud the prescient work of the cycle’s putative author, “Rondoll Moncke of Chester Abbaye,” who uncannily anticipated a reformed religious climate in which “storyes of the testamente” would circulate “[i]n a common englishe tonge” (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills 2007: I.332–3). Chester’s documentary record invites us to consider how the city’s Whitsun biblical plays – both in performance from the 1530s to 1570s and in their antiquarian afterlife – inscribe central complexities and instabilities of Tudor religious culture.

Any effort to align the Chester Cycle with specific religious ideologies confronts an immediate obstacle: Dramatic texts preserved in the cycle’s five complete manuscripts are contemporaneous neither with the plays’ Tudor performances nor with many civic and documentary accounts of them (Coletti 2007: 532–3). Recognizing the sheer difficulty of aligning manuscript versions of the Chester plays with any single religious and ideological agenda, an emergent critical consensus now embraces the notion that Chester is an “unevenly reformed cycle,” capable not only of sustaining but perhaps even of encouraging divergent readings that speak directly to different religious orientations (White 1999: 135; see also Clopper 2001: 181–5; Emmerson 1999; Vasquez 2007; Mills 2007).

Historical analyses of the past several decades have established the hybridity of religious beliefs and practices through much of the sixteenth century, stressing the inadequacy of terms such as “Protestant” and “Catholic” to signify pluralities on both sides of the confessional divide as well as the common ground between them. In this revisionary religious history, impulses to reform characterize not only the new Church of England but also the one that still bore allegiance to Rome (Miola 2007; Questier 1996 and 2000; Lake and Questier 2000; Wooding 2000). The Chester Cycle should be considered a genuine artifact of this hybrid religious climate, drawing some of its most distinctive features from the “creative bricolage” that Peter Lake (1999: 79) invokes to characterize that culture’s religious pluralities.

The Chester plays’ engagement with scriptural authority and the biblical text illustrates the “intensely glossable” treatment of cultural materials that Lake associates with habits of ideological mediation and accommodation in this period. Chester’s biblical preoccupations have been recognized ever since scholars erroneously posited that the plays’ fidelity to the scriptural text signaled that Chester was the earliest example of English biblical cycle drama. Paradoxically, that very fidelity is now construed as evidence of Protestant intervention in the final decades of the plays’ performance (Mills 2007; Vasquez 2007). The Chester plays commandingly reflect on their rhetorical and historical foundations in scripture: They observe the status of biblical knowledge, enact and interpret figural meanings, and pronounce biblical authority’s relevance to the present time. The scriptural preeminence of the cycle’s religious and theatrical design is also reinforced by idiosyncratic manuscript evidence, such as the biblical quotations that appear in the margins of James Miller’s 1607 presentation copy of the cycle, BL Harley MS 2124 (Mills 1984), where the presence of the Latin Vulgate may be a sign of learnedness as well as Catholic sympathies.
Lumiansky and Mills have extensively documented the Chester plays’ repeated notice of the Bible as their “explicit source” (1983: 99–103). In The Three Kings Herod demonstrates his expertise in Old Testament prophecy, rattling off a catalog of scriptural texts which his counselors must search for clues that will identify his anticipated usurper (Lumiansky and Mills 1974 and 1986: 167.260–8; subsequent citations of the Chester Cycle, by page and line numbers, refer to this edition). The Prophets of Antichrist formally expounds scriptural eschatology; then The Coming of Antichrist play stages the arch deceiver’s comedic self-identification as historical fulfillment: “Of me was spoken in prophecy,” Antichrist proclaims (408.17). In the multi-episodic Play 4, Chester’s Expositor interprets Old Testament prophetic figures such as Melchysedek’s offering of bread and wine and Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in light of New Testament events that constituted their fulfillment; in Emmaus Christ becomes his own expositor, declaring his experience and presence as proof that “Moyses lawe … / ys fulfilled in good manere / of that was sayd of mee” (365.204–8). In the Purification, Chester’s unique inclusion of the legend relating Simeon’s attempt to emend the written prophecy, “Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium,” seems designed to further the cycle’s collective emphasis on scripture’s unassailable truth. Despite Simeon’s best efforts to replace “virgin” with “good woman,” an angel appears to restore the text’s original writing (205.24, 36–40).

The final moments of Chester’s Last Judgement play underscore these emphases. Here the four Evangelists take center stage to exhort the truth of what has been played, declaring the biblical text as crosscheck: “[A]ll that ever my lord sayth here,” John avers, “I wrote yt in my manner. / Therefor, excuse you … / I may not well, iwyssse” (463.705–8). When Mark asserts that the damned souls were “warned … by mayne a waye / theire lyvinge how the[y] should araye” (463.686–7), he both assumes the availability of the Evangelists’ written words and implies that the drama just concluded is itself one of those “many” ways to salvific knowledge.

Perhaps the Evangelists make such confident declarations because the plays preceding their closing speeches insist on the clarity and accessibility of the cycle’s communication about scripture. Especially from the ministry plays forward, the claim to represent biblical events and scriptural truths “apertly” (openly, clearly) and “express” (plainly) emerges as an important trope and implicit guide to the cycle’s reception (see plays 13:237–8; 14:197; 16:129, 297; 20:140; 22:78, 215; 23:527–8, 589–90; 24:4, 380, 397–401, 421). When Expositor proclaims of Melchysedeck’s gifts, “what may this signifie / I will expound … apertly” (62.113–14), he sums up the Chester plays’ rhetorical and pedagogical concern for clear apprehension of the biblical story that they tell. The Chester plays both figure and implicitly continue the work of Jesus himself in Emmaus: “With us he was a longe fytt / and undyd his holy wrytt, “ says Luke, “and yett our wyttes were so knytt / that him we might not knowe” (363.152–5).

Luke’s frustrated admission about the difficulty of recognizing sacred presence, even with the help of Jesus’ scriptural interpretation, encodes the Chester plays’ complex relationship to sixteenth-century religious culture. “Undoing” Holy Writ to make
biblical story and biblical truth available “apertly” through plain communication was a challenge embraced across a spectrum of religious allegiances. Efforts to link Chester’s biblical preoccupations with a single confessional stance thus fail to take into account both the changing nature of sixteenth-century Catholicism and the broad support, across the reigns of Tudor monarchs, for a scriptural revival allied to the humanists’ belief that promoting the Gospel to the “simple and unlearned’ in their own tongue” would sweep away “ignorance and error” (Wooding 2000: 22). Viewed from this perspective, the critical commonplace that medieval English drama brought the Bible to people who would not otherwise have access to it takes on a far different historical orientation. From this new position, the Chester plays’ specific interest in clear dramatic communication about scripture, and their continued performance into Elizabeth’s reign, demonstrates the cycle’s consistency with Tudor educational initiatives for vernacular religious instruction. Chester’s focus on correct interpretation of sign and prophecy is also part of this picture, as are the expositor figures whose labors seem designed to leave little room for the speculative biblical reading that Tudor theologians feared open access to scripture would encourage (Wooding 2000: 56; Lumiansky and Mills 1983: 105; White 1999: 134). The shaping of the Tudor Chester plays in the 1530s to 1570s offers the certitude of biblical story to the “turbulent and confusing” decades in which the cycle came of age (Wooding 2000: 3).

If Chester’s dramatic texts and documentary history demonstrate the “mixing and matching” of religious “values and attitudes” that Lake locates in this sixteenth-century cultural terrain (1999: 79), so too does the broader social environment for both the plays’ final performances and their preservation in manuscript. Recent work on the cultural “provinces” of early modern England sheds light on that environment, pointing out how national sources of power and patronage were locally distributed within cultural neighborhoods formed across county borders and between competing ideological alliances. These neighborhoods fostered networks of association that brought together civic dignitaries, clergy, the court, and gentry in communities constellated around aristocratic provincial households. Located in a cultural neighborhood that reached across Cheshire to nearby Lancashire, Chester found a congenial community for its civic and religious interests in the household and social networks of the Stanleys, Earls of Derby (Blackstone 2003). The Stanley household attracted individuals of competing religious persuasions, simultaneously hosting openly Catholic sympathizers and less-open conformists, Anglicans, and Puritans. On one unusual weekend of entertainment in December 1587, for example, dramatic performances by traveling players alternated with preaching by William Chaderton, Bishop of Chester, and two of the area’s most zealous Puritans, all before an audience of primarily religious conservatives (Blackstone 2003: 195–9).

The Stanley family possessed strong ties to Chester’s traditions of dramatic performance. The Mayors List for 1489–90 records the playing of the Virgin’s Assumption “at the high Crosse befor the lord strange,” George Stanley. In 1577–8, Henry Earl of Derby and son Ferdinando, Lord Strange, resided with the mayor for two days; during their stay, they were entertained by a performance of the “Shepeards playe …
The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama

at the hie Crosse” and by local scholars performing a “Commodie … of Terence.” The citizens of Chester fêted Henry Stanley again in 1588–9, when they played for him the “storey of Kinge Ebrouk” (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills 2007: I, 62, 182, 223, 202–3; King Ebrouk was the mythical founder of York).

Stanley enthusiasm for dramatic performance and the family’s ties to Chester’s civic religious theater furnish a context for awareness of other dramatic traditions confirmed by the Chester Cycle’s Late Banns. Possibly written as late as the 1570s, the Banns admit that the biblical plays they introduce fall short of the “cunninge” that “good players and fine wittes” can now devise. They apologize for the Chester plays’ “grosse” diction; the plays are to be excused because they represent the work of “common and contrye players” rather than “better men and finer heades” (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills 2007: I.340). Yet, even as the Late Banns depict the Chester plays as a quaint survival from a different “time of ignorance,” they nonetheless manage to recuperate Chester’s biblical drama under the rhetorical guise of criticizing it, demonstrating at the same time a present awareness of dramatic and linguistic issues that connect the city and its plays to a wider world (Mills 1998c: 111–12).

Peter Womack accurately points to the Banns’ reflexive awareness of Chester’s cultural provinciality from the perspective of a gaze turned toward the metropole (1992: 107). The Late Banns astutely display the provincial’s ability to participate in a larger, national conversation. The Banns’ reinvention of Ralph Higden (“Rondoll Moncke”) as proto-Protestant and of his putative creation, the Chester plays, as prophetically in step with the English embrace of scripture construct a provincial city with unwitting aspirations to be part of a national community. The Late Banns’ focus on linguistic decorum and linguistic change similarly discloses an awareness of sixteenth-century concern for the viability of English as a national language capable of stable communication across regions and generations (Shrank 2004). Negotiating local cultural performance and a larger, national scene, the Late Banns reveal a consciousness of dramatic traditions worthy of the city’s Stanley connections.

Chester’s medieval modes of cultural performance intersect with the Stanleys in still more intriguing ways. For Ferdinando Stanley – the Lord Strange whose pleasure was solicited by the city’s 1577 performances of Terentian comedy and the Shepherds’ play – would become associated with Anthony Munday, who c. 1590 probably wrote his play *John a Kent and John a Cumber* for Lord Strange’s Men. Set in Chester’s distant past, *John a Kent* dramatizes the efforts of two Welsh magicians to bring about and, alternately, subvert the marriages of the Earl of Chester’s daughter Marian and her friend Sidanen to bridegrooms they have freely chosen for “true love” rather than the suitors to whom they have been promised by their fathers. Along the way, the play pays homage to the city’s heritage of festive and ritual performance: The Earl of Chester announces that the bridegrooms shall walk from his house at Plessye “to the Castell,” then on to “St Johns,” where the marriages “shall be solemnized” (Munday 1980: 67), a path that follows the route of Chester’s fifteenth-century Corpus Christi procession (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills 2007: I, xxxiii, lv; Mills 1998a: 26, 120). Other elements in Munday’s play – John a Kent’s disguise as a hermit in grey friar
Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson

robes; John a Cumber’s playing the fool in the local Morris dance; the prospective brides’ visit to St Winifred’s holy well; and their eventual marriage in a closely guarded Chester Abbey – underscore the play’s association of Chester with traditional religious culture and festive practices (Hamilton 2005: 116–19).

In his long and varied writing career (1560–1633), Munday typifies the crossing of social and ideological boundaries that also characterizes sixteenth-century production of the Chester cycle. Capable of being taken for a “rabid Protestant,” Munday nonetheless wrote from a complex position of conformity and Catholic loyalism (Hamilton, 2005: xvi). With its emphasis on disguise versus true, open identity; substance versus shadow; forced attachment versus love freely chosen, *John a Kent* speaks to the difficult negotiation of religious affiliation that was inevitably at issue in late sixteenth-century reception of the Chester cycle, a negotiation for which marriage to the beloved bridegroom serves as a scarcely veiled allegory. The play’s governing tropes also resonate with the complex religious allegiances of Ferdinando Stanley, of whom Jesuit Robert Parsons wrote: “[His] religion is held to be … doubtful, so as some do thinke him to be of all three religions [i.e. Protestant, Puritan, and Catholic], and others of none, and these agayne are deuided in iudgements” (Robert Parsons, *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of Ingland* (Antwerp, 1594), 253; quoted in Manley 2003: 278).

Perhaps it was the Stanleys’ familiarity with Chester’s ritual dramatic past, or simply the family’s connections to performance in the city that Munday salutes in *John a Kent*. If such is the case, Munday’s work for Lord Strange’s company implicitly confirms the message about Chester’s revered traditions of ritual performance that city dignitaries and antiquarians labored to preserve. In Munday’s play the image of Chester as a cultural space symbolic of a traditional, Catholic, religious culture approvingly circulates in a manner consistent with Munday’s own equivocating Catholicism. Munday would write, and Lord Strange’s men play, beyond the provinces for the court and London. Thanks to Munday’s homage, Chester’s medieval dramatic traditions implicitly enter this larger social and theatrical register as well. In Munday’s dramatic vision, then, memories of Chester’s medieval ritual performance, and perhaps even of the already-Tudor biblical plays themselves, momentarily brush elbows with far better known traditions of Tudor drama, traditions that, as English literary history once erroneously taught us, have always held the medieval at arm’s length.

**The Towneley Plays**

The complex history of preserving the Chester Cycle thus helps us understand some of the motives for appropriating and re-forming the medieval dramatic past. Yet, long before the Chester plays made their way into manuscript, the impulse to preserve and re-shape fragments of passing show into readerly manuscript compilations was already a fact of late-medieval literary history. The East Anglian N-Town cycle of plays (from *n, nomen*, fill-in-the name) preserved in British Library manuscript Cotton Vespasian
A.viii, for example, does not represent a cycle for performance in a theatrical sense at all. It seems to be an anthology of plays from diverse sources in Suffolk and Norfolk brought together by an anonymous scribe-compiler, probably a cleric, no earlier than the last decade of the fifteenth century (Clopper 2001: 186). Stage directions, when they occur, are sometimes in Latin and sometimes in English, sometimes laconic and sometimes fulsome; but, like the theological glosses inscribed in the margins of the manuscript, they seem more intent on helping a reader visualize and meditate upon the dramatic scene than on offering practical stagecraft instructions. On the vexed question of the N-Town play manuscript’s provenance, Alexandra Johnston observes: “Whether the surviving text ever belonged somewhere, it seems to me unlikely. It is more likely to have belonged to someone” (1987: 5).

The case for “belonging to someone” is even clearer for the luxury presentation manuscript of biblical plays formerly called the Wakefield Cycle, now cautiously and more accurately known as the Towneley Cycle, after the Towneley family of Towneley Hall, on the outskirts of Burnley, Lancashire, who are the only known owners of the manuscript until the nineteenth century. Because two inscriptions in the manuscript name the town of Wakefield in Yorkshire, because some plays contain local place names near Wakefield, because we know that Wakefield did have Corpus Christi plays of one kind or another, and especially because of the decades-long tendency for scholars to generalize medieval performance history from the example of York’s elaborate vernacular Corpus Christi cycle productions, this manuscript until very recently was assumed to preserve a medieval cycle of plays performed at Wakefield in Yorkshire. This assumption has doggedly persevered despite David Mills’s suggestion 20 years ago that “the manuscript could almost be an idiosyncratic assemblage of material from a variety of sources into a sort of presentation volume, using a creation-doomsday framework of organization” (1986: 95).

In fact, the Towneley manuscript presents inconclusive evidence that it contains plays ever performed as a cycle of pageants (Happé 2007: 88). Although the apparent insertion of newly written stage directions into the texts of plays borrowed or adapted from York reveals an obvious concern with production, it is unclear whether these staging directions were “created before or after actual performances” (Happé 2007: 91). More vexing, we now know, thanks to Barbara Palmer, that medieval archival references to a Corpus Christi play at Wakefield were forged by an over-zealous local historian, leaving no certain evidence of dramatic performance at Wakefield at all until the 1550s (Palmer 1988: 325–8). Especially since it is also now clear that, whatever the original provenance and date of its individual plays, the Towneley manuscript is a Tudor creation (a Tudor rose even appears prominently within the elaborate initial “H” that begins the Thomas of India play [Cawley and Stevens 1976: folio 111v and frontispiece]), we must acknowledge that the Towneley Cycle as we know it is not a fact of medieval but of Tudor cultural history. The distinguished paleographer Malcolm Parkes has recently concluded that the manuscript was “written and decorated in the Marian period (1553–8) by a single scribe who was a trained legal scrivener” (quoted in Palmer 2002: 96). The Towneley manuscript’s compilation
of biblical plays once presented all over Lancashire and Yorkshire — including Wakefield — into a chronological sequence seems, then, a response to the short-lived return to official Catholicism under Mary Tudor.

What is certain is only that the manuscript belonged to the prominent Catholic Towneley family at least by the time of Christopher Towneley (1604–74), the bibliophile and family historian whose pressmark appears on the manuscript’s present first page (Cawley and Stevens 1976: folio 10). (The first quire is missing and with it whatever additional clues of provenance and date that it might have provided [Happé 2007: 19]). Peter Happé has recently tried to connect the manuscript to the “pagyantes of Corpus Christi daye” mentioned in a Wakefield burgess Court Roll of 1556 (Happé 2007: 6). What may be a more suggestive possibility, we think, is that the Marian year 1556 was also the year that Mary Towneley, the 15-year-old heiress of Towneley Hall, married her first cousin, the prosperous lawyer John Towneley “of Gray’s Inn,” in a marriage that brought the considerable Towneley northern English estates to triumphant union. The inner doors to the Tudor domestic chapel of Towneley Hall commemorate this important marriage of Towneley kin in ornately carved wooden panels (Smith and Smith 2004: 64, fig. 60), apparently recycled pew ends or panels from a late-medieval chancel screen on which were inscribed the couple’s initials (Smith and Smith 2004: 26). Given its congruence with the presumed date of the Towneley manuscript’s scribal hand (1556–9), the 1556 wedding of John and Mary Towneley offers intriguing possibility for understanding a motive for the elaborate compilation of plays known as the Towneley Cycle. Such unifying homage to sacred history of both biblical and Catholic past would have been a fitting symbol of that occasion and of both Marys — Mary Towneley and Mary Tudor — whose very names celebrated the Mary invoked in the opening inscription of the Towneley manuscript: “Assit principio Sancta Maria meo” (Be with me from my beginning, Holy Mary). The year 1556 would have provided a newly topical relevance and urgency to the words of still another Mary, the St Mary Magdalene in the Towneley Thomas of India play, who urges apostles Peter and Paul, skeptical of “womans saw,” to “Putt away … [their] heresy” and trust steadfastly in her joyful, triumphant news of a resurrected body of Christ (Stevens and Cawley 1994: 368.30, 23). We should remember that adherents to the Anglican Church were not called Protestants by the resisting Catholic faithful, but heretics; Mary Tudor enforced her notorious persecutions and public executions with the 1554 “Act for the Punishment of Heresies” (Miola 2007: 16).

But hypothesizing the origin of the Towneley manuscript compilation in a time of hopeful dynastic celebration and resolute national restoration of Catholicism does not go far enough in explaining how the preservation of the Towneley Cycle would have functioned to restore the lost body — of the resurrected Christ but also of the scattered remnants of believers of the old faith. As Barbara Palmer has pointed out, Queen Elizabeth’s chief minister William Cecil, Lord Burghley, labeled Mary Towneley’s husband a most “obstinate” Catholic; Burghley’s c. 1590 surveillance map of Lancashire non-conformity marks the roof of Towneley Hall with double crosses, and the name “John Towneley” written above the house is marked with yet a third cross
By 1564, John Towneley had been imprisoned for recusancy, as he would be, repeatedly, over the next 30 years, while his wife, their 14 children and extensive household of relatives, domestic servants, and retainers, remained resolutely Catholic at Towneley Hall (see Figure 14.1). For generations, the Towneleys paid heavy fines for refusing to attend Church of England services, continued to harbor priests who celebrated Mass illicitly in the private family chapel that functioned as a recusant church for a far-flung Lancashire neighborhood, and held “doggedly to the family motto of ‘Tenez le Vray’” (Palmer 2002: 104).

The Towneleys did keep the faith. They held on faithfully, for example, to splendid early fifteenth-century liturgical vestments from Whalley Abbey, the Lancashire Cistercian house with which the Towneley family had been closely connected since its foundation stone had been laid in 1308 (Palmer 2002: 97). The lavish Whalley vestments — two dalmatics for deacon and subdeacon, a maniple, and a priest’s chasuble (see Figure 14.2) — constitute one of only two complete sets of surviving medieval vestments for the celebration of High Mass in England (Vaughan 2002: 306). These vestments were apparently saved by Mary and John Towneley’s grandfather, the Sir John Towneley who not only founded St Mary’s chantry in Burnley parish church and built the family chapel at Towneley Hall, but who in 1536 at the time of the
dissolution of Whalley Abbey was sheriff of Lancashire. Embroidered in the distinctive opus anglicanum style, the Towneley deacon vestments are adorned with scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary; images of Christ’s Incarnation are fittingly reserved for the chasuble of the celebrant at the altar. As the priest faced the altar to elevate the transubstantiated Host in the ritual performance of the Mass, the family congregation could contemplate the Eucharist mystery in the chasuble’s images of the Nativity and of the Virgin and Child enthroned (Monnas 1994: 13–14). It is useful to imagine just such a vestment, designed for symbolic interaction with the bread and body of Christ (Raguin 2006: 65), being donned by Symeon of the Towneley Purification play as he follows the angel’s instruction to go to the temple, where he will see the long-awaited
body of the infant Messiah: “Therfor will I with intent / Putt on me my vestment, / In worship of that kyng” (Stevens and Cawley 1994: 207.94–6). Clear evidence that the Whalley Abbey vestments were carefully repaired and re-lined in the seventeenth century (Monnas 1994: 17) argues that the Towneley family must not only have preserved these liturgical garments but also provided their priests continuing opportunities to use them.

But if the iconography of the Whalley vestments invites comparison with stage actions in the Towneley manuscript, the vestments themselves connect with the plays in other, more direct ways. In 1822, when the Towneley manuscript was first sold at auction, Francis Douce reported the tradition that it had “been retrieved by the family from the library of Whalley Abbey” (Vaughan 2002: 303). Although the Towneley cycle manuscript attributes the Creation and Noah plays to “Wakefeld,” where John Towneley possessed Yorkshire lands and Nowel and Pilkington relatives, and although nearly a third of the surviving plays seem to adapt dramas performed at York, it is entirely possible that at least some of the Towneley play texts came from the library of Whalley Abbey (Wann 1928: 151; Palmer 2002: 95–102). Manuscript evidence from the East Anglian monastery of Bury St Edmunds has established that late-medieval monasteries could be major repositories of vernacular religious dramatic texts (Gibson 1989: 107–35). Traditions of religious drama were strong in Lancashire and endured for a long time; archival evidence indicates that Preston, Lancaster, Kendal, and Westmorland were still performing plays of Corpus Christi as late as 1603. Indeed, the final English attempt to compose a sequence of vernacular religious mystery plays occurred in Lancashire: The Old Testament cycle known as The Stony-burst Pageants contains Jacobean recusant plays that may have been written as late as 1625 (Brown 1920: 19). Even later there are suggestive archival connections with medieval performance traditions; for example, in 1634 two players from the Towneley’s parish of Burnley performed at Christmas in the household of the Lancashire recusant Thomas Walmesley – as did, in 1635, what the Walmesley household accounts call “the players of whaley,” a few months after performances by “my lorde strange players” (George 1991: 206–7).

As A. C. Cawley and Martin Stevens observe, the Towneley manuscript, at some point in its history, has undergone censorship: A stanza about the Mass has been cancelled on folio 67, the word “pope” erased on 57 verso, and the annotation “correctyd and not playd” inserted on folio 66 next to a reference to the seven sacraments (Cawley and Stevens 1976: xii; Meredith 1994: 136). In all-too-typical scholarly default, however, these marginal notations have been indiscriminately explained as evidence of censorship and “Marian hostility.” We need not automatically suppose this censorship was by hostile hands. Phebe Jensen has recently shown, for example, that a group of Lancashire players was performing a Catholic play of St Christopher at Gowthwaite Hall, Yorkshire among the recusant faithful at Christmas, 1609 – but they also performed the same play in Protestant households, with simple modifications and omissions of popish speeches (Jensen 2003: 110). Inscriptions in the Towneley manuscript attest at the very least to its continuing use by Tudor and Stuart readers in the
northern county that the Privy Council described in 1574 as “the very sincke of Poperie” (Palmer 2002: 106). In the Annunciation play text of a manuscript owned by a stubbornly Catholic Lancashire family, a marginal “note this very” (i.e. note this truth [verity]) occurring next to the underlined words “She [Mary] hase consauyved the holy gast” (Cawley and Stevens 1976: xii) is much more likely to inscribe devotional comment than objection. Drama historians like Jensen have tended to see the continuing performance of “medieval” theater in Lancashire as a nostalgic form of early seventeenth-century “medievalism” (Jensen 2003: 112), a view that Robert Miola has insistently refuted. Early modern English Catholicism, he has argued, was not a dying institution, but a “vital, dynamic, pluralistic, and learned confession” (Miola 2007: 9).

Whatever the original provenance of the plays in the Towneley manuscript, their performance history surely did not stop with the return, in 1558, to compulsory Protestantism under Elizabeth. We can best understand the preservation of these plays if we think of “performance” of these texts as encompassing a range of possible recusant devotional activities that might have involved an intimate audience of self as well as of other participants and spectators (see, for example, Bell 1998). “Performance” might include, for example, not only occasional staged production of a play, but also family or extended household devotional readings in the Towneley Hall chapel or even private reading and meditation. Even before the Reformation made public performance suspect, the line between a physical, material theater and the theater of the imagination was blurred. Both types of theatrical experience are indicated, for example, by plays of Christ’s Burial and Resurrection, surviving in Bodleian Library manuscript E Museo 160, a compilation of historical chronicle and meditative prayers of about 1520 from a Yorkshire Carthusian monastery. A rubric identifies the plays as a “treyte or meditation off the buryalle of Christ and mowrynge therat,” although a subsequent note by the same scribal hand observes on the very next page: “This is a play to be played, on part on Gud Friday afternone, and the other part opon Ester Day after the resurrection in the morowe …” (Baker, Murphy, and Hall 1982: 141–2).

Public performances of religious drama were increasingly under attack during the years after Mary’s reign. Even after much correcting and censoring, the Chester Cycle was finally, and probably not coincidentally, last performed in 1575, the very year when paranoia about recusancy was fueled by arrivals from the English College in Rome of Jesuit priests committed to the illicit task of rekindling Catholic belief and practice (Matchinske 1998: 57). So it was to the familial religion of household that the mission of re-Catholicizing England necessarily fell. Leaders of the Jesuit English Mission were themselves from the gentry class, and it was to the gentry that they returned – to the rural manor houses and London town houses that, as the Jesuit priest Robert Parsons observed, functioned not only as safe houses but as house churches “after the old example of the Apostles in their days” (Haigh 1981: 136). The English Mission’s principal strategy was to supply private chaplains for houses of gentry that had tended to take over the functions of the region’s looted, ruined, and dispersed monastic institutions.
The transition from monastic house to recusant gentry house was an obvious one, especially in an age when gentry houses were as much headquarters for organizing and preserving economic power and administering lands and property as domicile. In pre-Reformation England, gentry families had participated in a household religious culture that in many ways paralleled that of a monastic community. The family was the corporation, a corporation that preserved an ideal of permanence and stability and provided intercession for its members, living and dead, in much the same way as a monastic brotherhood (Hughes 1988: 12). In the context of an illegal Catholicism, recusant religion turned even more toward that familial religion of household, to the private chapels and domestic rooms in which the practice of devotion was often shouldered by wives and mothers while husbands and sons either paid huge fines or outwardly conformed to the state religion rather than be imprisoned for refusal to do so. Public display of loyalty in early modern England often masked the secret Catholicism of domestic space and hiding place. The priest’s hole is a kind of metaphor not only for the conspiratorial and illicit performance of Catholicism at the household level in Tudor and Stuart England, but also for the way that the cultural implications of English recusancy have so long been an absent presence in studies of early English dramatic texts.

Until very recently, recusant secrecy, as well as the prejudices of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians, have obscured the evidence that not only the Towneley Plays but also a number of other late-medieval religious drama manuscripts were collected, compiled, read, and so performed in recusant halls and libraries and chapels. The preservation of English biblical dramatic texts in recusant houses like Towneley Hall must mean that those texts were sometimes less antiquarian curiosities saved by Tudor and Stuart bookish collectors than continually re-imagined performances, performances in which not only the crucified body of Christ but the lost body of the faithful Catholic community were resurrected. As Jesus in the Towneley manuscript’s oddly placed final play of Lazarus pronounces:

I warne you, both man and wife,
That I am rysyng and I am life;
And whoso truly trowys in me,
That I was euer and ay shall be
Oone thing I shall him gif:
Though he be ded, yit shall he lif.

(Stevens and Cawley 1994: 426–7, 51–6)

Against the fraught backdrop of Tudor political and religious conflict, the scribe-compiler of the Towneley plays gathered late-medieval drama fragments into a compilation of sacred biblical history that “ever and ay shall be” and, in this prayerful gesture of re-connection to origins, asks the Virgin Mary’s patronage and blessing on the project. Then, after human history is played out in the Last Judgement, Lazarus, restored from the grave, offers the last word, re-membering doctrine and the broken
body of the Catholic faithful from dissolution and ruin and exhorting to steadfastness even in the face of danger and death.

References


**Further Reading**


Rooted in the Norman Conquest and nourished for centuries by the mutual desires and antagonisms between England and France, the French presence in Tudor England is pervasive, constitutive, and richly contradictory. Yet the story of this presence is not as well known as its importance would warrant. Because of the excellent, extensive scholarship on the Italian presence in Renaissance England, the French presence has too often been understood as minor or as simply intermediate. That is, the power of the old *translatio studii* (or transfer of learning) as an explanatory paradigm for cultural and literary change, combined with the century and a half of Italianist scholarship following Jacob Burckhardt’s landmark *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, have placed France as an intermediate stop on a *telos* that runs from Rome to London. Certainly French versions of Italian literary and cultural materials were important in Renaissance England; that is a familiar narrative of linear change. This chapter, however, tells another side of the story, and in another way, understanding French literary works not merely as intermediate versions in a line of Italian influence. Rather, we can read the French presence in Tudor England as operating prior to and independently of the usual *telos*, in a dynamic postcolonial relationship of contact and change. The French presence was a chief irritant and stimulant to Tudor England, an essential factor in the development of English literary culture.

The French presence, first of all, was not strictly “French” as we usually imagine the *hexagone*, for that six-sided land and the political unity its boundaries now imply are in fact relatively recent historical developments. Instead, in this chapter, “French” means francophone, and “presence” is more properly called presences, so many and varied were the activities in England of francophone people, ideas, cultural practices, and texts. The language-based definition of “French,” like the plural “presences,” permits a focus on literary matters without forgetting the localized complexity of their contexts. We would now identify many of these French presences as Burgundian, Belgian, South-Flemish, Luxembourgeois, Swiss, or Alsatian (Barron and Saul 1995; Belozerskaya 2002). Were we to register fully the localized and variable nature of the
French presences in Tudor England, we might further call them Breton, Norman, Poitevine, or post-Provençal, or for best precision, even Calaisien, Toulousien, Rouennais, or Lyonnais. Two recent books, for instance, *Premodern Places* (Wallace 2004, especially in a chapter on Calais) and *Cultural Capitals* (Newman 2007), locate early modern French–English encounters in specific cities, and trace the changes we now identify with modernity to these very sites of local engagement. This localized francophone variety permeated the forms and habits of the Tudor world, not only in high-culture art and architecture (Thurley 1993), but also in daily material culture, in folklore and song, in trade and economic life (Lee 1910: ch. 1; Richardson 2004; Goose and Luu 2005). Things French came to the English by way of their closest, most vexed, continuing relationship of alterity; French presences were bound up in England’s deep past as an invaded colony, and yet were immediately useful to English aims at colonizing power and cultural status.

Only relatively recently have scholars begun to treat French literature as a central, dynamic element in English literary culture. In literary studies, Anne Lake Prescott has done the most to explain in depth England’s long, complicated engagements with France; among other things, her work establishes the Rabelaisian presence in England, demonstrates the multifaceted importance of Marot as psalmist and as courtier, illustrates the significant use made of Du Bellay and Du Bartas, and reveals the connections among French and English literary men and women (Prescott 1978, 1985, 1998, 2004). French women writers and matters relating to women were strongly present in Elizabeth Tudor’s reign, and Elizabeth herself translated Marguerite de Navarre. Anne Dowriche, Anne Lock, Mary Sidney Herbert, and other Tudor women writers imported French prose and poetry directly to England (see, e.g., Beilin 2000; Bornstein 1985; Prescott 1985; White 1999, 2007); French discourses on gender were also important in the Henrician era (Coldiron 2009). One specific French presence was powerful in letters at the very beginning of the Tudor period: Henry VII’s poet laureate – his royal poet, that is, before the title of laureate was official – was Frenchman Bernard André. André also became tutor to the young Henry VIII, just as Pierre de Ronsard was tutor to the Scottish court; not only Mary Stuart’s but Mary Tudor’s tutors were French (Carlson 1991, 1998; Williams 2000). One fine recent study, *The French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Williams 2005) explores selected French–English literary relations across the medieval-early-modern divide. The writers in *Vernacular Literature and Current Affairs* (Britnell and Britnell 2000) detail French connections sustaining early Tudor literature; those writers focus on the royal courts, the printing press, and current events in general as salient contexts for the French–English engagement. This sample of the growing body of work on early modern French–English literary relations indicates that there is no lack of current interest in this slippery, sometimes difficult, yet extremely promising area of scholarship.

The present chapter, then, is a necessarily partial and selective rather than a comprehensive account of French presences in Tudor England. The chapter first discusses some examples of the processes of appropriation, transformation, stimulation, and disengagement through which we see these French presences become activated in
French Presences as Stimuli: Appropriation, Transformation, Disengagement

Although the ancient military colonization of England by France in 1066 was gradually replaced or reversed after the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453) by English invasions of France, the separate nationhood that we now imagine for the two cultures was constructed in ongoing processes of colonization and re-colonization, conducted mainly through mutual warfare, and through the surrogates of warfare: diplomacy, trade, and marriage. Intermarriages at the highest levels of state complicate and parallel the processes of colonization and re-colonization. From the marriage of Margaret of York (sister of Edward IV and of the future Richard III) to Charles le Hardi in 1468, to the marriage of Henry VIII’s sister Mary to Louis XII of France in 1513–14, to the Duc d’Alençon’s courtship of Elizabeth I, the English and French personal and diplomatic connections were inextricably instrumental, involving not only Plantagenets and Tudors but the houses of Bourgogne, Anjou, Valois, and Bourbon— not to mention maneuverings around various Habsburgs and Medici. A persistent pressure on English courts also came from the steady connections between Scotland and France (one thinks first of the regency of Marie de Guise); meanwhile, throughout the period, Scottish authors like Urquhart, Buchanan, and James VI/I translated French works. Specific events like the Field of the Cloth of Gold (1520) and more general ongoing practices at the court of Henry VIII connect royal and national politics to patterns of cultural desire and competition. Henry directly imitated both the clothing styles of the court of François I and practices such as the lit de justice, the French king’s habit of rendering judicial and political opinions to a select crowd while reclining in a splendidly draped inner bedchamber. Henry clearly understood, in other words, that the monarch’s personal style was an important part of nation-building; French royal style was what he chose to imitate. Alongside the complex historical backgrounds that lie largely outside the scope of this chapter, we can understand Renaissance English nation-formation as the story of a post-colony of Normandy that then actively seeks to re-colonize French cultural and literal territory, not only during the Hundred Years Wars but also in the century following. England held Calais until 1558, and nominal claims to France by English monarchs persisted into the Stuart period. The taking of, retreats from, and re-invasions of French territory continued throughout the
The gradual separation of the two cultures and the emergence of distinctive French and English nations involve the raiding not only of lands but of cultural territory—the seizure of forms, the capture of tropes, the appropriation of practices and aesthetics. And the cultural raiding, like its historical backgrounds, takes place in fits and starts and in varied and localized sites. The localized varieties of Franco-bilia made themselves felt in England in various spheres, high and low, early and late: Norman architecture in the post-Conquest phase, Burgundian art in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Parisian fashion in the sixteenth century and after. Huguenot religious discourses were printed alongside Catholic horae (books of hours), ordinaries, and primers in the sixteenth century. French nobles resided at Tudor courts just as francophone apprentices worked in the English trades (and of special concern here, in the printing trades in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries).

Alongside the many active English appropriations of French cultural material, and alongside a mixture of French and native elements that resembles a postcolonial hybridization or métissage, I also see an ongoing disengagement or disarticulation of literary-cultural material—a process of disavowal by which the “English” (even as that idea is in formation, and even as it insistently draws on the “French”) comes to define itself apart from and against the French. The processes of ongoing appropriation and subsequent disarticulation occur at all levels and in multiple sites—sometimes in the space of the same poem, where the acceptance of one element of French presence accompanies the resistance to others. In these processes, much of what had been previously appropriated, that is, much of what had become similar or mixed in the two literary cultures, is subsequently excised, dropped, absorbed, or transformed in its process of becoming ever more distinctively English.

One specific literary example of this process that I have not seen discussed elsewhere is that of the French sixain form in English poetry. The seizure of the sixain happens early, with the early Tudor translations of Marot (or possibly before this; manuscripts keep yielding more and earlier examples). In France two of the main forms of sixain were aabcbc and ababcc. This flexible stanza, usually in decasyllables, could stand alone, could work in threes as a short lyric, or could serve in longer stanzaic narratives. Yet it only requires three rhymes, which makes it especially attractive for poets working in rhyme-poor English. The French sixain offers a fresher form than the high-medieval rhyme royal stanza, and without its considerable baggage. Rhyme royal had been a default English stanza form for several centuries in the narrative, allegorical, didactic, and epideictic or laudatory genres, and while by the late fifteenth century it had lost its “royal” implications of high seriousness, having come to be used even in satires, it was still a dominant verse form, if a tired and over-elastic one. English poets take to the form: Before 1558, there are at least twelve English variations of the ababcc form recorded in print (Ringler 1988: 417–18), and between 1559 and 1603, there is a veritable sixain explosion, with at least 57 variants of English sixain in print,
the ababcc form dominating by far (May 2004: III.2143–51). The sixain proves a flexible building block in England, equally useful for short lyrics like Wyatt’s, or poems as long and elaborate as Raleigh’s “Cynthia” poems or some of Spenser’s eclogues, or for dedicatory verse and epigrams. Thomas Watson even tries them out in sets of threes in his very sturdy if rather odd English sonnets; the resulting experimental sequence, his Hekatompathia (1581), predates Sidney’sAstrophil and Stella in print and circulates in manuscript at around the same time. The ababcc sixain allows interlaced elaboration followed by couplet closure, which turns out to be the same motion that many late-Elizabethan sonneteers settle on (Shakespeare, Spenser, Daniel, and others). Thus instead of staying with the bipartite Petrarchan pattern of octave and sestet used at mid-century, late-Elizabethan sonneteers can draw on the strong presence of the Frenchsixain as a resource for developing the more mobile pattern of three-quatrains-plus-closural-couplet. (In a sense, the English sonnet is also a couple of quatrains leading up to a final sixain.) The widespread experience of poets and readers with the sixain supports the development of the English sonnet. This habit of turning and interlacement that move toward a more or less epigrammatic couplet closure, in other words, is a French presence that persists, altered, in the most accepted forms of the Elizabethan sonnet.

I hope to provide elsewhere a more thorough account of the sixain as an essential resource in the development of Renaissance English lyric; here, its brief story illustrates how a French literary presence is taken up, transformed, used in various ways, and then disentangled from the newly distinctive, independent English forms (here, the sonnet, but also the anti-court critique, the pastoral eclogue, and others). The French verse form clearly helped build the new English ways of writing verse, especially lyric verse, and it lives a kind of deracinated, strangely generative life in the new literary system. The sixain exemplifies an appropriated-yet-disarticulated French presence that proved useful, for a while, in constructing the emerging “English.”

We can also observe the motion of French presences in such basic elements of English literary culture as dictionaries and translations. No dictionaries are made between languages that have no points of contact, and no dictionaries are made between languages where all people speaking one language are fully bilingual in the other (a theoretical state of affairs, but less so in a pre-modern world where literacy largely meant polyglot literacy, as was the case in much of late-medieval Europe). French continued as a dominant language in segments of the Tudor world: at court, despite royal calls since Henry V’s in 1422 for English to be used as an official language; and at law, since French was used throughout the period, with Les Tenures de la Loi (“Tenures of Law”) still appearing in French in the late-Elizabethan period. French cognates persist in the language even today, and medievalists now largely accept the idea of England as an always-already-polyglot – and since 1066, a notably francophone – land (Wogan-Browne and Watson 2004; Rothwell 2001; Kibbee 1991). In general, Tudor England finds itself in a medial position between the two extremes of all-French and no-French, emerging from a state of largely polyglot yet
class-restricted literacy; that is, readers in England had tended to be well-off and also to be bilingual French-English and often trilingual French-English-Latin (on early modern literacies see Ferguson 2003 and the essays in Ferguson and Sanders 2002). With broadening but increasingly monolingual literacy, there came a need for dictionaries, for language instruction, for translations. (And the relationship here is reciprocal: Surely dictionaries, language instruction, and translations improved the capacities and range of many monoglot Tudor readers, bringing French presences into their ken.) To put it another way, the increased number of dictionaries in the early Tudor period, like the explosion in the number of translations, indicates and also serves an increasing number of readers who have the desire to encounter French but not the linguistic means to do so. One of Caxton’s first publications is a French–English word list; more popular was Claude Holyband’s language instruction book, the *French Schoolmaster* (1573). Such instructive works mark the whole Tudor period as one in which French is an absence for a marketable segment of the literate population; a growing number of Tudor printers’ prospective readers needed word books to satisfy their desire to read French materials. Such intermediaries as dictionaries and books of instruction (Williams 2000) substitute a textual French presence for the living knowledge of French formerly present in readers.

Something similar is true for translations, which likewise, signal a desire for French presence without an ability to satisfy it. The presence of a translation is simply a substitute presence, a *supplément*, if you will, based most pragmatically on a printer’s and/or author-translator’s calculations that their prospective readers’ desires for French material will exceed their capacities to read it (and further, that even francophone readers may prefer to read in English). Additional aims for building English culture and letters coexist with this basic pragmatism, of course.

The resulting translations may or may not reveal their French presences. Many Tudor translations make themselves known as such. In some cases the Frenchness of the text is not only visible but is foregrounded, almost as if it conferred a marketing advantage. In early titles, the phrase “translated from French” often appears, and in the works themselves, French names, places, and even French phrases are left untranslated (details in Coldiron 2009). Other texts omit any mention of translation and render all French-related words with English equivalents, as if the French presences must be suppressed entirely. Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti (1986) reads the invisibility of translation in a text as an important signal about the low status of translators and translation. I also read visibility and invisibility in Tudor translations as broader potential indicators of cultural distance, readerly desire, and pragmatic marketing strategies. Highly visible translations parade their Frenchness as part of what makes them desirable, authoritative, or special. Invisible translations conceal their Frenchness, perhaps revealing an ambivalence of printers and translators toward their French material, or an uncertainty about how French material would be received by English readers, and thus some doubt about how the French presences should be handled. When Tudor translations are invisible – that is, as the markers of their difference fade – their Frenchness becomes silently absorbed into English culture, and
they are no longer announced as strange or foreign. An invisible translation can perform a sleight of hand in which the French presence passes itself off slyly as English; it can also signal a kind of success: the full engagement and assimilation of the French material within English culture.

Surveys of Tudor translations indicate that this sort of French presence, visible or not, was extremely important in England; Cummings (2007) reviews the field thoroughly. Each translation from French – and there were thousands in Renaissance England – is the footprint or trace of a specific literary-cultural contact involving selection, appropriation, imitation, or rejection and sometimes revealing admiration or loathing. Each translation is thus an individuated illustration of the kinds of uses one literary culture made of the other. Julia Boffey (2000), however, explains that the French–English literary relationship went almost exclusively one way, with English writers appropriating French material but not vice versa – another reminder of Tudor England’s lower status and aspirations to cultural prominence. Translations take on a tremendous power in any literary culture, especially in the hungrily aspiring early print culture of Tudor England. Perhaps the most direct and least well-acknowledged French literary presences appear in early printed poetry.

**French Presences as Constitutive of Early Tudor Print Culture**

Early printing in England was directly founded on French printing (“French” in the broad sense of “francophone” explained above). In the first century of printing, and most strongly in the fifty or sixty years after Caxton, French materials, techniques, book aesthetics, and printers and their apprentices came together to create in English the new printed literature that was to reach an ever-widening public readership and develop what we now call an English literary “Renaissance.”

Especially at first, the early-Tudor and pre-Tudor regulatory climate fosters this large French presence in the printing trades. The Act of 1484 encouraged alien printers and their workers to operate freely in England. Over the course of the Henrician era, however, this began gradually to change, indicating further ambivalence toward foreign presences. Under Henry VIII, beginning in 1515, certain foreigners had to pay double taxes and subsidies. In 1523 aliens were prohibited from having any but English apprentices and were not allowed to employ more than two foreign journeymen per printing house. The Act of 1529 prohibited the establishment of a press by any alien (foreign printers currently operating were grandfathered). Finally, the Act of 1534 repealed the Act of 1484, and further stated that aliens could only sell wholesale wares to English-born printers or stationers, and that no bound books were to be imported at all. (This allowed the extensive importation of French paper to continue, but in a more protectionist setting, and it removed foreigners farther from decisions about what texts were to be printed and in what forms and ways.) Just as the existence of sumptuary laws indicates the presence of enough ostentation to have drawn
regulatory attention, these increasing restrictions may be taken as a sign of foreigners’ successes in the book trades and/or of an increasing xenophobia. England at once needed the French printers and needed a fully native printing industry. Like most regulations, these were part ideological and part economic – certainly related to the issues surrounding the Reformation in England – and were promulgated alongside book burnings, investigations of particular texts, and prohibitions on heretical imports. By 1557, the Charter of the Company of Stationers does not mention foreign printers, so the increasing restrictions seem to have worked to neutralize or naturalize the foreigners working in the trades. But although foreigners were gradually phased out in favor of natives and fully naturalized transplants, the French presences so dominant in the early years had effectively established the material, textual, and literary habits of English print culture. In this favorable early regulatory climate, French people, French materials, French techniques, and French texts dominated in early English print.

At first, many printers in Henrician England were francophone if not actually French, and usually bicultural in some formative way: Julien le Notaire or Le Notary; William Machlinia, from Mechlin, in Belgium; Jean Lettou, of mysterious (perhaps Lithuanian) origins, but French-speaking; Wynkyn de Worde, from the Alsace, but French-speaking and a translator of texts from French; Ingelebert Haghe, from Rouen; Simon Vostre; François Regnault. (Not all the early printers creating English books had French connections: Theodoric Rood, Thomas Hunt, and the St Albans printer were non-francophone exceptions.) Later, Thomas Berthelet, of probable French ancestry (Olsen 1996), established an enterprise, as did Robert Copland and Robert Wyer, both English but both francophone, using many French imprints as sources from which they made extensive poetic translations (Copland 1993; Driver 1997; Boffey 2000). The first two King’s Printers, William Faques and Richard Pynson, were both from Normandy.

England’s first printer, William Caxton, who was born in Kent, would seem a grand exception, but he was virtually bicultural, having lived for years in Bruges. After bringing the press to England, Caxton continued to work with Burgundian printer Colard Mansion and with Paris printer Guillaume Maynyal. About sixty of the eighty or so works Caxton produced were translations, mostly derived from French texts; many of these he translated himself. His polyglot printing practice relied heavily on French contacts both textual and personal (see essays in Kuskin 2006).

Caxton is the first example of a continuing trend: Not only the printers in England but the gear and techniques they used were heavily foreign and most heavily French. Because Caxton was so comfortably bilingual and bicultural, and because he learned to print in Bruges, using Burgundian styles, texts, and machines, the earliest English books have a Burgundian feel, most evident in typefaces, layouts, and colophons. And after Antoine Vérand’s successes of 1500 and 1503 importing French books into the English market in notably unskilled impressions and translations, many English books – much more skillful ones – began to appear in the styles of Paris, Lyon, and
French Presences in Tudor England

Rouen, often directly copying woodcuts, page layouts, and initial styles (Winn 1997; Hellinga 1999). For example, King’s Printer William Faques put a distinctively French zoomorphic initial at the head of the Proclamation to Coinage (1505) and the elaborate and stylized anthropomorphic title L typical of Lyon imprints finds a reduced imitation in some initial Ts in England that show a simple facial sketch; Wynkyn de Worde’s books contain typical examples. French and Dutch type formed the basis of much English type founding throughout the sixteenth century (Barker 2002). In another vein, the English blackletter, or gothic typeface, is a French typographical fashion that takes hold so well in England in Bibles, proclamations, and other authoritative imprints, that it retains associations with authority for nearly a century after it is completely passé in France. Furthermore, as Mirjam Foot points out, “foreign influences on binding and book design continued” throughout the century, and French bookbinding and production methods in England were also important (Foot 2002: 620, see also 630). There would be no English-made paper until the mid-sixteenth century, and most books printed in England were printed on French paper – more than on the papers of Italy, Germany, Holland, and other exporting countries combined. In fact, as John Bidwell explains, “printers consumed so much French paper that they could name different types by the place of origin, like varieties of cheese” (2002: 583). So in any early Tudor book printed in England, the French presences were in open view, from the typefaces, to the paper itself, to the strategies of page layout and book design.

With French materials, techniques, and people developing England’s early print culture so rapidly, it should be no surprise that many Tudor texts also come from French, nor that major French writers of the time and of the preceding century were actively brought into English print. This is certainly true of figures well known on the continent, such as Alain Chartier, Pierre Gringoire, Clément Marot, Guillaume Alexis, and Christine de Pizan. Naturally such figures take on afterlives in Tudor England that are sometimes strikingly different: Chartier’s works, for instance, were published very early in sixteenth-century France in “complete works” volumes, but the concept of the single-author, complete-works volume, and the paying readership to support it, would take some decades to develop in England. Thus Chartier’s presence is relatively fragmented in Tudor England. Likewise, Christine de Pizan had been well known in France for a century as a major author and proto-feminist initiator of the querelle des femmes, a long-running French literary dispute about the problem of how a male-authored canon inscribed the status of women. In England, too, Christine was known as an authoritative writer, but because the early printers in England translated certain selections of her oeuvre, she was read less as a protofeminist and more as a political writer (The Boke {of} the Body of Polycye, 1521), a military historian (The Fayttes of Armes & of Chyualrye, 1489), a mythographer (The {Hundred} Hystories of Troye, c. 1549), and a moralist (Morale Prouerbes, 1478 and 1526). Thus the French presences in England are not simple appropriations or equations; any translated work and its author will necessarily be altered in the crossing and will occupy new and different positions in the receiving literary system.
That major French authors were actively brought into Tudor culture makes good sense, given the intensively francophone world of early print. Whether anonymous or by known authors, many kinds of literature popular in France (allegory, romance, hagiography, religious and didactic prose, and more) were present as well. In poetry the French presence seems especially prominent: More than 100,000 lines of French-derived verse were printed in England between 1476 and 1557. What is the nature of this extensive body of early verse? Contrary to what we might expect if we assume that a line of influence from Rome to London is what forms English verse, the French presences here are remarkably un-Petrarchan in character. Instead of love lyrics, sonnets, or canzoniere (Italian poetic forms popular since d’Arezzo and made famous by Petrarch), the verses translated from French bring a wide range of genres, forms, and themes to English readers. Romances, allegories, complaints, dialogues, satires, a verse farce, epigrams, historiographic verses, religious verses of praise, instruction, or lament, and more are translated from French into early English print. The considerable variety of this corpus suggests that French presences probably fostered experiments in early Tudor poetry. As widely as they range in genre and form, the translations fall fairly easily under several main thematic groupings: verses about women and gender relations; religious verse; moral verse containing exemplary and anti-exemplary critiques of court or of power; and what I am calling “low-georgic” or practical verses (these works appear to be distant versified ancestors of our how-to and self-help genres). The early Tudor translations about gender relations illustrate nicely the complexity of the appropriation of, the transformation of, and eventually the disenagement from some specific French presences. Here we can identify a strand of early poetry in print that offers to English readers – and to English writers – a distinctive set of alternative discourses. Standing apart from the many French romances present in Tudor England, these early printed poems feature working-class protagonists, sexual economics, bodily discomforts, and a focus on female speech (detailed in Coldiron 2009).

Like the translations about gender relations, religious poems and critiques of court bring strong opinions from France. Some of these signal cultural tensions on specific topics; others are revised apparently for specific moments of interest in Tudor England. For example, Alain Chartier’s Curial is a critique of court that raises questions about the ethics of the nobility; court life is dangerous, full of spies and liars ready to betray a person. Courtiers “buy and sell” each other, and the speaker advises his brother to stay in moral and physical safety, that is, away from court. This work is translated twice in specific moments of English political strife, once in 1484 and once in 1549. In 1484, this French presence arrives at a key moment of pre-Tudor political strife, the facts of its printing pointing not only to its Frenchness but its Yorkist sympathies (Caxton, the printer, had been previously granted patronage by Margaret of Burgundy, and worked closely with Anthony Woodville on printings and translations from French; Woodville, brother-in-law to Edward IV, was betrayed and executed at Pomfret in June 1483 by the party of Richard III). “Thou shalt vse thy lyfe in perylle” (ii[r]), as the Curial cautions, was not an idle concern for Woodville.
and the Yorkists. Then in 1549, the year of Kett’s Rebellion, the French-born critique of nobility is translated and printed again, this time with implied relevance for current Edwardian affairs. “All you [that] are called, vtto any hygh place” warns the new translator Francis Segar in his new prefatory poem, “Be true vtto your anoynted kyng, / and call vtto God, to geue you the grace / So to contynu, to your lyves endynge. AMEN” (Title verso, ll. 18–20). Segar sounds like a Somerset partisan here, since, as Lord Protector to Edward VI, Somerset’s answer to the greed of nobles was to suppress the Norfolk rebellion against excess levies and enclosures (among other things), and to enforce loyalty to the king. However, in the context of the long Tudor momentum toward centralization of power at court – and the resistance to it that bred such different outlying rebellions as Kett’s rebellions in Norfolk and the Cornwall rebellions of 1548 and 1549 against the Book of Common Prayer – the Curial’s general accusations against the corrupt and powerful at court form a useful template. In this way, French presences often find different topical relevance at different times in the period.

Likewise, the frequent early Tudor translations of French religious material are quite different from French religious discourses that appear later in the period. The Wynkyn de Worde imprints and translations by Andrew Chertsey are of conventional material heavily illustrated with religious imagery that one would think would be transnational or easily understood on both sides of the channel (for example, the Ordinaire des Chretiens/Ordinary of Christian Men [English versions in 1502 and 1506], or the French-born Crafte to Lyue Well and to Dye Well [1505]). But later in the Tudor period, religious translations from France take on other meanings, including a range of materials from Huguenot Protestant to papal to Calvinist content. One telling French absence should be noted here: Many dozens of primers and books of hours printed in English include verses and texts translated from French, but the one owned by Henry VIII apparently contains no French-born poems. This striking French absence deserves further investigation, especially in light of Henry’s intensive emulations of the French court and in the context of his break with Rome after 1534.

Another striking near-absence of an important French literary mode in Henry’s era is that of French farce at the Henrician court. Ragingly popular with all classes in France, farces and simple, sexual comedies apparently never found their burlesque analogues in early Tudor England. John Heywood did translate one such farce, Johan Johan, but despite Heywood’s skillful reshaping of the text, and John Rastell’s printing of it in 1533, this most typically French of popular theatrical genres seems not to have caught hold in England.

On the other hand, French folklore, proverbs, fables, and commonplaces were steadily, seamlessly present in early English print. That poetry was thought to be the right vehicle for such works is a point of interest for literary historians. To import French works, even those about counting Saints’ days and keeping livestock healthy, apparently was supposed to involve versification, meter, and a literary presentation that we now usually reserve for other topics. Poems of common wisdom, mnemonics, ballades, epigrams, and other short verses found in almanacs, shepherd’s calendars, and books
of husbandry seem to have needed less reshaping in translation, perhaps signaling a lingering French-English biculturalism. Agricultural advice and calendrical notes, for instance, work in both languages with little modification beyond the basic lexical level, and in such popular genres the French presences seem to have been quite comfortable.

Overall, however, any discomfort the translators and printers felt about the widely varying French presences they were importing shows up in the paratextual material: the prefaces, epilogues, titles, chapter headings, colophons, running heads, woodcuts and their captions, printed marginalia, and other material not strictly part of the work itself. Most of the paratexts in early translated works bear marks of friction, traces of English culture resisting or modifying French materials even while appropriating them. Paratexts often contain specific and topical content that has to be suppressed and replaced; dedications to French patrons, for instance, tend to be dropped and/or replaced with dedications to English patrons. Sometimes the paratexts reveal a translator’s complex relationship to the two nations: Translator Peter Derendel’s weirdly irenic preface to the *Hystoryke Purtreatures of the Woll Bible* (Lyon, 1553), for instance, explains that he felt grateful to England, where he was raised, and did not want the English language to be a “bastard brother” all alone among languages. On the other hand, a sense of national rivalry may have led the translator of the *Fyftene Joyes of Maryage* (1509) to retain a long, involved account of the development of the French nation as the origin of true liberty; the pun on “franchise” would not sufficiently account for this remarkable preface (Coldiron 2009 has details). Paratexts also tend to be where the translators and printers explain their purposes and methods, that is, most conventionally to be faithful to the French work, sometimes to “augment” the work, sometimes to abbreviate it or even quote it in parts, sometimes to explain a change of versification. We can thus understand the paratexts in French-born editions as proto-critical sites of engagement, early stimulants to the eventual development of high-Renaissance literary-critical prefaces. Unlike what we usually think of as literary “influence,” such sites of friction around French presences hint at what Mary Louise Pratt describes as the mutual resistances and subversions that take place in colonial and postcolonial contact zones. When Caxton translates Christine de Pizan’s *Fayttes of Armes*, for instance, he silently drops her references to how scurrilously the English conducted themselves in battle; for Caxton and his higher patrons, this would not be welcome content. In fact, Pratt’s concept lets us understand the French presences in Tudor England as a matter of hybridity or *métissage* between cultural systems coming out of a long, struggling, embrace.

Clearly, the francophone and French-connected early printers of England found it easy to obtain French materials and profitable to translate and print them. Practical factors like the availability of texts and the ease of “Englishing” them help explain why nearly half the poetry printed in England before 1557 was translated, and why a majority of that half was from French; French lines outnumbered Italian lines by a ratio of six-to-one (Ringler 1988: 5–6 and index; May 2004 presents post-1558 evidence).
Conclusion: Implications of French Presences for Canonicity, Criticism, and Literary History

As I have argued elsewhere, the presence of the foreign in a literary system tends to challenge the critical narratives and categories of literary history. Accounts of the formation of English literary nationhood may look new when we consider what Karlheinz Stierle sees as “perhaps the most important aspect of what we call ‘Renaissance’”: the “co-presence of cultures” (1996: 64). French presences remain in England in various ways over the long term; once deracinated, they develop new meanings as a function of new contexts, and they stimulate specific changes in the literary polysystem, as we have seen. The French presences in Tudor England – and especially the heavy French presences in early printed verse – challenge our dominant critical narratives. First, they invite us to attend to influences on English Renaissance poetry other than Petrarchism. They also enrich our understanding of specific authors and works, in particular drawing our attention to how a given work differs in its new English context. Next, French presences reveal new, dynamic processes of literary change at work; we see here not only linear models of author-to-author influence, but models of friction, hybridity, and mixture; of simultaneous appropriation and disarticulation; of transformation and stimulation. Furthermore, the powerful French presences in Tudor England challenge the view of Renaissance-as-rupture, suggesting instead a strong continuity with the immediate literary past (that is, the past usually marked as “late-medieval”). French presences, too often absent presences in criticism, now promise to complicate and enrich our understanding of English literary history.

References


Further Reading


Tudor England’s attitude toward Italy was divided between admiration and fear. Englishmen traveled to Italy for study and commerce, and, impressed by the manners, literature, and learning they encountered, they brought Italian books home, translated them, published them, imitated them, and admonished others to read them. But many of their compatriots responded to the travelers, their tales, and their books with anxiety; they asserted that Italy corrupted both the travelers themselves and those who heard their tales or read their imported books and translations – the moralists’ theme ever was, “Englese italianato, e un diabolo incarnato” [sic] (“An Englishman Italianated is a devil incarnated”) (Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, 1570: 26).

Despite this resistance and criticism (perhaps even stimulated by it), Italian literature and culture played a crucial formative role in the literary and intellectual development of Reformation England. Works of the most famous Elizabethan writers and those now relatively obscure were inspired by Italian texts and advertised their Italian connections, as can be seen in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590 and 1596), which conspicuously attempts to “overgo” Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (1516 and 1532), and in Riche’s *Farewell to the Militarie Profession* (1581), which is a flamboyant pastiche of Italian sources. Above all, of course, the “long deceased woes” (Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, 1662: 15) of Petrarch’s sonnets stimulated countless authors from Wyatt and Surrey in *Tottel’s Miscellany* (1557) to Spenser, Shakespeare, Daniel, and Donne, from the earnest schoolboy honing his style to Queen Elizabeth herself. She made Petrarchan tropes part of her strategy for handling the difficulties her sex posed for her government by representing herself as a chaste object of love, Laura-like, loving but inaccessible, and she encouraged her courtiers to use Petrarch’s language of love in works addressed to her.

In many ways, Tudor women were full participants in this Italianate Renaissance. They, too, were the explicitly addressed audience of many love poems and narratives written in imitation of Italian texts. As patrons of translations, singers of Italian songs, and audience members at plays derived from Italian sources, they helped to shape
Elizabethan culture to an Italian model. But, as writers, women hardly participated at all. Only five Tudor women are definitely known to have translated, imitated, or employed the style of Italian texts and authors in English, and none of these five produced original work in the major Italian-influenced genres of prose fiction, chivalric epic, romance, and pastoral drama or translated any works in these genres from Italian. Rather, they engaged almost entirely with marginal and minor genres – sermons, prayers, and Petrarch’s *Triumphs* (*Trionfi*), six allegorical poems that recount the successive victories of love, chastity, death, fame, time, and eternity); although one translated two of Petrarch’s sonnets and one (in addition to Elizabeth) wrote a small number of original Petrarchist lyrics, none of their poems drew women writers into the mainstream, since they only circulated in the narrowest of circles, if they circulated at all.

The lack of women in the busy foreground of the literary scene has led scholars working on Tudor England’s interactions with Italy to overlook women so entirely that their very absence has almost never been noted nor have its causes and literary consequences been explored. This chapter puts women back on the stage. My goals are, first, to provide a useful overview both of the Tudor excitement about Italy, evidenced in language study, travel, reading, and writing, and of the moralists’ backlash against Italian culture; second, to describe women’s interaction with that culture and explore the limitations placed on it by bringing together details that, until now, have been scattered in the various editions and essays produced by scholars researching women’s history; and, third, to argue that, with regard to Italy, the information presented in this chapter answers Joan Kelly’s famous question, “Did women have a Renaissance?” (1977) in the negative: Tudor women did not have an Italian Renaissance. Restrictions on their interactions with Italy, its language, and its culture resulted in women writers’ disappearance from literary history until their discovery by scholars interested in the marginalized genres in which Tudor women worked.

**English Students of Italian**

The gendered nature of the Tudor engagement with Italian culture is immediately apparent in the area of language study. Knowledge of Italian could advance a man in his career and, thus, many men studied it; university and legal records in England and Italy make it relatively easy to discover who they were (Bartlett 1991; Woolfson 1998). Women did not prepare for careers; thus, they had no practical reason to study the language and, without university and school records, it is difficult to establish how many of them studied it and who they were. Middle-class women are especially hard to find, though tantalizing clues exist. “A plate of brass in the south aisle of the parish church of St. Michael in Crooked Lane, London” (Ballard 1985: 83) placed by Emanuel Lucar, a member of the Merchant Taylor’s Company, informs us that Elizabeth, his wife (1510–37) knew Italian. A chance reference in her son’s sixteenth-century biography tells us that Catherine Tishem did (160). No more information about either of these women’s linguistic skill has been found.
Records do remain of the proficiency in Italian of female claimants to the throne, who unlike most women, prepared for a career. Lady Jane Grey studied the language with Michelangelo Florio; he inscribed a manuscript of his *Regole et Institutioni della Lingua Toscan* to her and praised her Italian in his biography of her. Lord Burghley admired Arabella Stuart’s expertise in Italian when she visited the English court in 1587, and John Harington, famed translator of Ariosto, said that at the age of thirteen "she did read French out of Italian, and English out of both, much better then I could" (Steen 1994: 24). Elizabeth’s extensive work with Italian when still a princess can be seen in her translations and original work to be discussed below.

Some Italian-literate women can be discovered by examining the family records of a man known to have known Italian. This is the case with the family of the poet Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, famed for his translations of Petrarch. Elizabeth Arundel, his great-grand-daughter through the male line, knew Italian (Hervey 1921: 14), and the female line was especially productive of students of Italian. Howard’s daughter, Katherine, wife of Henry Berkeley, was “perfect in the Italian tongue, wherein she most desired her daughters to bee instructed,” according to her contemporary John Smyth, who wrote a history of the Berkeley family (Smyth 1883–5: 2.383). That her plan for her daughters was fulfilled is demonstrated by Henry Grantham’s dedication of *An Italian Grammer Written in Latin by Scipio Lentulo a Neapolitaine and Turned in Englishe* (1575 and 1587) to his tutees “the right vertuous Mystres Mary, and Mystres Francys Berkeley daughters to the Right honorable Henry Lorde Berkeley”; in his dedicatory epistle he credits the girls (17, 14 in 1575) with “great endevours … towards th’atteining of the Italian tonge” (Aii), but nothing showing how these ladies made use of their Italian skill is extant. Mary and Francys’s brother Thomas brought another Italian-literate woman into the circle when he married Elizabeth Carey (Carew) in 1595. Elizabeth’s knowledge of Italian is shown by the author’s inscription to “Elisabeta Bartley” (Berkeley) in a Folger Library copy of Florio’s dictionary, *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598, STC 11098, copy 1; Lievsay 1969: 34 n. 2) and by an Italian language sonnet written to her in praise of her religious devotion by Giovanni Battista Castiglione; the poem appears in *Una esortatione al timor di Dio. Con alcune rime italiane* (after 1595); the other rime are dedicated to Castiglione’s former pupil, Queen Elizabeth. Carey came by her interest in Italian by way of her mother, Elizabeth Spencer Carey; in dedicating his *The Terrors of the Night* (1594) to the daughter, Thomas Nashe praised the mother saying that “Into the Muses’ society herself she hath lately adopted, and purchased divine Petrarch another monument in England” (quoted from Beilin 2004: par. 2); whether this is a “reference to her patronage or her own writing” is unclear (Beilin 2004: par. 2), but it is certainly an indication of her interest in Petrarchism.

**Italian Language Instruction**

Part of the cause of the discrepancy between male and female proficiency in Italian lay in the conformity of textbooks to the gendered structure of Elizabethan society.
Like their modern counterparts, *Campo di Fior or Else The Flourie Field of Foure Languages of M. Claudius Desainliens, aliás Holiband: for the Furtherance of the Learners of the Latine, French, English, but Chieflie of the Italian Tongue* (1583) and John Florio’s *Firste Fruites* (1578) and *Second Fruites* (1591) provide dialogues that model the way to speak in situations students might encounter in real life; however, these do not seem to have the goal of teaching girls to speak, as almost all occur in public spaces in which sixteenth-century girls and women would not have been present and very few include female interlocutors. Holiband’s book was dedicated to 2-year-old Lucy Harington (later Countess of Bedford), but she and other girls would never have conversed with the kind of dubious characters that boys in his dialogues encounter on their way to school nor would they have anticipated ever needing to ask directions in an Italian city or to book a room at an Italian inn, as men in Florio’s scenes do. In those rare instances where the dialogue presents an activity appropriate to a woman (perfecting her penmanship or getting dressed in the morning, for example), a female student desirous of speaking what she had learned would have had to do the work of changing all personal adjectives to their feminine form and would have had to turn from her textbook to her dictionary or tutor to learn names for items of female clothing, hair-dressing, and so forth.

Even when female speakers do appear, their speech would not have been very useful to a female student. Holiband’s hand-maiden who directs two boys to wash and dress and eat their breakfasts does not offer a useful model for prosperous women students, and it is very unlikely that a woman of the station of a maid would have had the literacy or leisure to study Italian. Florio’s scenes of courtship, in which the male speaker persuades a woman to yield to love and the virtuous female speaker resists his advances, do seem to give the woman student the opportunity to move directly from lesson to life, since they do not demand that she translate the male voice into a female one or to imagine herself into the position of a man. But, even here, it is clear that the author is not really thinking of the needs of his female student, since, despite Shakespeare’s representation of risqué interactions between tutor and female student in *Taming of the Shrew*, the applicability of the dialogue to an Englishwoman’s life would have been very limited. There may have been some anxiety about the potential for tutors to abuse the privilege of the schoolroom, but how many English women really would have found themselves in the situation of needing the Italian vocabulary useful for fending off their tutor’s sexual advances? Rather, the dialogue’s purpose was to prepare the male student for a situation that he might encounter in Italy, and the imagined woman speaker is an Italian; for the female English student the value of the conversation lay not in its practical application as a phrase library but rather in the possibility it offered her to perform the part of a woman speaking Italian for moral purposes.

Of course, despite their limitations as models for speech, these textbooks would have been useful and interesting to women. Florio’s interlocutors discuss intellectual topics, cite the opinions of the most highly regarded Italian poets, and quote selections from their works; from them a student could learn what to talk about and whom
to read and could become familiar with the sound of Italian verse. The final dialogue in *Second Frutes* might have been of particular interest to women readers because in it “proverbially and pleasantly discourse is held of love, and of women” (Florio 1591: 165). Both the pro-woman and the anti-woman speakers are male, but a female reader could have found in it a model of how to use her newly acquired Italian language skills to conduct a learned dispute on the nature of womankind of the type found in *The Courtier* and countless other works of popular moral philosophy. (On Florio, see Wyatt 2005; Lawrence 2005; on debates about women, see Benson 1992.)

**Travel**

In addition to his language instruction texts, John Florio produced an Italian–English dictionary, *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598), dedicated to Henry Wriothesly, Earl of Southampton (briefly Shakespeare’s patron); Roger Manners, Earl of Rutland; and Lucy (Harington) Russell, Countess of Bedford, to whom Holiband had earlier dedicated his *Fior*. Florio devotes a few lines to each patron. With regard to Southampton, Florio doubts “least I or mine be not now of any further use to your selfe-suffiencie, being at home so instructed for Italian, as teaching or learning could supplie, that there seemed no need of travell: and nowe by travell so accomplished, as what wants to perfection?” To Rutland he also mentions travel, but to Russell he speaks only of the “conceited industrie” that makes her able to “understand what you reade, write as you reade, and speake as you write” (A3v). This is because she, equal to the two men in rank, intelligence, and education, was unequal in her opportunities to put her language study to practical use; she never went to Italy.

This difference between Bedford and her co-dedicatees was the rule not the exception. After the Reformation, English women did not go to Italy, whereas many men went there for formal study, for educational tourism, and for commercial, diplomatic, and religious business. The University of Padua “was the most favoured foreign destination for English students in the period between 1485 and 1603” (Woolfson 1998: 5). Rutland matriculated there in 1596. Protestants as well as Catholics either formally enrolled or attended lectures there, and these men were an important conduit of Italian thought and Italian language books into England. Padua’s “dozens of English alumni included statesmen, soldiers and ambassadors such as Francis Walsingham, Robert Bertie, and Henry Wotton; churchmen such as Cuthbert Tunstall and Reginald Pole; humanists such as Richard Pace, Thomas Starkey, Richard Morison, and Thomas Wilson; and physicians such as Thomas Linacre, John Caius, and William Harvey” (Woolfson 1998: 4).

Tours of the Continent began to be popular as an element of the education of the male elite during this period, but, pace Ben Jonson’s Lady Would-be, it was not until 10 years after the Tudor period that the first English woman tourist, the remarkably independent, Catholic, art collector Lady Aletheia Arundel, went to Italy with her husband, Thomas Howard. The goals of the Elizabethan travelers were those of
Thomas Hoby; he “was encouraged to travel by his elder half-brother Sir Philip [also a traveler and student at Padua] in order to complete his education and gain experience of foreign courts, manners and languages so as to equip himself for a career in the diplomatic service” (Chaney 1998: 62–3). The literary and intellectual influence of many of these tourists was great. Hoby translated Castiglione’s *Il cortegiano* (*The Courtier*, 1561) and one of his traveling companions, Peter Whitehorne, translated Machiavelli’s *Arte delle guerra* (*The Arte of Warre*, 1562; Chaney 1998: 63–4). Perhaps the most famous example of such a tourist and writer is Sir Philip Sidney, who toured in 1572–4; his pastoral romance, *The Arcadia*, and his sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella* are among the Tudor period’s most skillful integrations of Italian literature and thought with the English tradition. His traveling companion, Ludowick Bryskett, born in England of Italian Protestant merchant parents, translated a section of Giraldi Cinthio’s *Hecatommitbi* in the 1580s (*A Discourse of Civill Life*, 1606) and contributed two imitations of Tasso to *Astrophel* (1595), Spenser’s anthology of elegies for Sidney.

In addition to traveling for education, Catholic English men of noble and ordinary rank traveled to Rome on pilgrimage and other church-related business. During pre-Reformation Tudor times, English women pilgrims also went to Rome, but in the entire post-Reformation Tudor period, only three Catholic English women are known to have traveled to Italy: Agnes Hyde married Michael Throckmorton, Cardinal Pole’s former secretary, in Mantua where he had established permanent residence (Bartlett 1991: 80), and, after mid-century, the names of two English women, both in company with their husbands, appear in the records of the English Hospice in Rome (restructured as the English College, a seminary and hostel in 1579). These women received financial assistance but were not guests at the Hospice, and “we know for certain that no women pilgrims [stayed there] during Elizabeth’s reign, though a room was still set apart for them” (Foley 1875–83: 6.550, 553; *English Hospice* 2005: 225; Bartlett 1991: 80–3, whereas, in the same period, the names of many male guests are recorded in the College’s Pilgrim Book, though in numbers lower than in earlier centuries. Also, after 1579, English men preparing for the priesthood could study at the English College, but no institution catering to English women was founded anywhere in Italy until 1622, when followers of Mary Ward established a house in Rome.

Even though English women did not travel to Italy, they were affected by the travels of their male relatives and compatriots. Sometimes their lives were shaped by returning travelers: Sir Anthony Cooke’s exposure to Italian ideas about the education of women benefited his daughters, and their fame for learning and for morality stimulated other parents to imitate Cooke’s educational model. Sometimes women learned about Italy from letters sent by absent family members or reports given on their return. Sir John Cheke’s wife would not have gained a good impression of the country when she read that “the misery and beastliness of this country … [makes it unpleasant] for the English and especially those who knoweth what good bringing up meaneth” and that, on preparing to depart for Venice, her husband thought of himself as going “as Paul, warned, went to Jerusalem” (Bartlett 1991: 147–8). One of the most powerful examples of the effects of conversation occurred at the end of the Tudor
period or just after it. According to her biographer (her daughter, a nun in France), the 20-year-old Elizabeth Tanfield Cary, Lady Falkland (1585–1639), author of The Tragedy of Mariam (c. 1604–8), was moved forward toward conversion to Catholicism by “a brother of her husbands [Adolphus Cary, d. 1609] returning out of Italy, with a good opinion of catholic religion” (Wolfe 2002: 111).

The Stigma of Italy

Cary’s corruption by her brother-in-law’s positive report about Catholicism would have realized the deepest fears of Protestant moralists who had been inveighing against Italy since the mid-sixteenth century. As the home of the Pope and administrative center of the Catholic church, Rome and most Italian states were assumed to be sources of conspiracies to restore Catholicism to England and recruiting grounds for converts to the faith. In addition, Italy was famed for immorality and, even worse, for infecting foreigners who traveled there with a taste for immoral conduct. Cheke’s protests in his letter to his wife confirm the country’s bad reputation; he seems anxious to demonstrate his pure indifference to its fleshpots. Even Italy’s literature, imported and translated, was considered to be dangerous, especially to women, whose weaker wills and reasoning powers (as it was believed) made them particularly vulnerable.

Roger Ascham expressed the danger Italy posed to the traveler and to those he encountered on his return in his book The Scholemaster:

If some yet doe not well understand, what is an English man Italianated, I will playnly tell him. He, that by living, & traueling in Italie, bringeth home into England out of Italie, the Religion, the learning, the policie, the experience, the maners of Italie. That is to say, for Religion, Papistrye or worse: for learnyng, lesse commonly than they caried out with them: for pollicy, a factious hart, a discoursing head, a minde to medle in all mens matters: for experience, plentye of new mischiefes never knowne in England before: for maners, variety of vanities, and chaunge of filthy lyving. These bee the inchantements of Circes, brought out of Italye, to marre mens maners in england: much by example of ill life, but more by preceptes of fonde bookees, of late translated out of Italian into English, solde in every shop in London, commended by honest titles the soner to corrupt honest maners: dedicated over boldly to vertuous and honorable personages, the easiery to begyle simple and innocent wittes. (1570: 26v)

Cary’s conversion was surely an event that would have made Ascham feel justified in his warnings against exposure to Italy, had he still been alive.

Ascham’s picture of Italy as an unmitigated threat to English religion and morals was a bugbear, of course – the peninsula was not unified and many Northern territories, such as Padua and Venice, were sympathetic to Protestantism. In England itself, a well-established Protestant Italian community offered post-Reformation English people an opportunity for theologically pure engagement with Italian culture, and the negative impression of Italy and Italians was by no means universal. Students at
Oxford encountered the former Augustian friar Pietro Martire Vermigli, the second Regius Chair of Theology at Christ Church, who had been invited to England by Cranmer and was part of the team that created *The Book of Common Prayer* (Wyatt 2005: 97). In London, English students of Italian could attend the Italian Church, established as part of a system of Protestant vernacular language “stranger churches” under Edward VI, and hear sermons by the former Cappucin monk and famed preacher Bernardino Ochino, also in England at Cranmer’s invitation. Italian-born Michelangelo Florio, the church’s first pastor, became a teacher of Italian, wrote an English language Italian grammar book, and handed his linguistic mission on to his son, John (Wyatt 2005: 98–100).

Despite the opportunities available to meet “good” Italians, attacks like Ascham’s appeared throughout the century and forced those interested in Italian culture to be on the defensive, to find ways to engage with it without espousing the values of those who created it. This problem was particularly acute for women, since what was bad for men was worse for women. What I have called elsewhere the “stigma of Italy” (Benson 2005) affected women more negatively than it did men because a reputation for sexual morality was more important for them than it was for men. In publicly demonstrating knowledge of Italian and things Italian, being “Italianated,” a woman risked charges of immorality and Catholic leanings.

**Readers**

Of course, despite the warnings of Ascham and others, many men and women read Italian books, though it is impossible to assess how many read them in the original. Shakespeare, to take the most obvious example, borrowed any number of plots from Italian stories, and, although almost all of these had been translated and published in English or French by the time he wrote, a few, such as the source of *Othello*, had not; this fact, along with Shakespeare’s borrowings from Florio’s conversation manuals has persuaded scholars that Shakespeare studied Italian on his own, even though there is no documentary proof that he did so (Lawrence 2005: 118–76; Benson 1996: xxxi–ii).

It would not have been difficult for an Elizabethan reader to find Italian books to read. Library inventories and purchase records show that Italian language materials were available to Elizabethans in substantial numbers. From these inventories and other records, we can discover people who were literate in Italian and get a sense of what they were reading.

One of the most famous libraries of the period is the multi-lingual Lumley library, built up by three men who traveled in Italy. Started by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, it came into the possession of Henry Fitzalan, twelfth Earl of Arundel, who made substantial additions to it and left it to John, Lord Lumley, his daughter Jane’s husband. The 1609 catalogue of the collection lists 68 works of literature, history, and philosophy in Italian (Lievsay 1969: 63); these include Dante’s *Commedia,*
Boccaccio’s _Decameron_, Machiavelli’s _Discorsi_, and editions of Italian histories by Paolo Giovio and Lodovico Guicciardini (Jayne and Johnson 1956). The catalogue clearly states that these last two items were owned by Jane (d. 1578), celebrated now as the translator of _Iphigenia in Aulis_. Jane’s ownership of these books not only adds another woman to the list of those literate in Italian but also suggests that a reformulation of the image of Lumley as safely buried in classical studies might be in order; her intellectual life seems to have been wide-ranging, up-to-date, and marked by a disregard for educators’ frequent recommendation that women not read history (Jayne and Johnson 1956: 149, item 1181b; 170, item 1385).

The presence in the Lumley library of a book by the dangerous Machiavelli is not unusual; English travelers often bought his works. In 1563, Sir Edward Unton acquired his _Istorie Fiorentine_ (Woolfson 1998: 279). This purchase leads me to speculate about a possible female reader: his wife, Anne Seymour, was the author, with her sisters Margaret and Jane, of the _Hecatodistichon_ (Paris, 1550), 103 Latin distichs for the tomb of Marguerite de Navarre; might her knowledge of Latin enabled her to work her way through Machiavelli’s Italian? Ownership of texts by Machiavelli by people such as the Lumleys and Untons suggests that, among Italian-literate English people, knowledge of his political philosophy was more profound than the popular diabolical caricature would suggest.

Books in Italian were printed in England (or in foreign locations for the English market). John Charlewood of Oxford published the works of the philosopher and scientist Giordano Bruno, who spent time in Oxford. John Windet printed a facing page edition of the first five cantos of Tasso’s _Godfrey of Bulloigne_ translated by Richard Carew (1594). The most famous of these printers was John Wolfe (Giovanni Volfeo), who spent a number of years in Italy learning his trade; he published all-Italian editions of Aretino’s often scurrilous works, and Machiavelli’s _Il Principe_, _I Discorsi_, and _L’Arte della guerra_, the first of which had been suppressed in Italy in 1559. Wolfe also published less risky works, such as Tasso’s _Aminta_ and Guarini’s _Pastor Fido_ (1591).

**Writers**

Translations of all kinds of Italian books – the latest literary sensations, devotional texts, courtesy books, fencing manuals – introduced Italian ideas, style, and manners to a large mixed-sex English public and stimulated writers to imitation and competition. (See Scott 1916 for a comprehensive annotated list.) Among the most influential were: Painter’s mid-century tales from Boccaccio and Bandello and others in his _Palace of Pleasure_ (1566), which provided plots for countless plays; Hoby’s _Courtier_ (1561), which shaped English people’s notion of the best of Italian style for generations; Gascoigne’s _Supposes_ (1566 and 1567), which brought Ariosto’s Italian erudite comedy to the English stage; and Harington’s _Orlando Furioso_ (1591) and Fairfax’s _Godfrey of Bulloigne, or, The Recoverie of Jerusalem_ (1600), which allowed English readers to
measure their native Spenser against Ariosto and Tasso. The number of poets who translated or imitated Petrarch’s sonnets is impossible to count.

All these translations were adapted to their English audience so that they simultaneously opened Italy up to English readers and closed off certain risky aspects of the country and its culture, theoretically permitting the reading of the text without exposure to the stigma of having done so. Sometimes the adjustment for the English reader was simple: Painter did not print tales that “in [his] judgement” were “worthy to be condemned to perpetual prison” (1566: par. 3r). Sometimes the adjustment was more complex: In his epistle “To the Reader,” Hoby urges his reader to “imbbrace and welcome [The Courtier] out of Italy and into Englande” (A.iv.r), and his translation, largely faithful to the spirit and language of the original dialogue, attempts to stimulate his reader to become a lively, thoughtful, independent-minded gentleman or gentlewoman, but the publisher who issued the work after Hoby’s death turned Castiglione’s and Hoby’s open dialogue into a prescriptive one when he appended two lists, “A brev rehearsal of the chiefe conditions and qualities in a Courtier” and “Of the chief conditions and qualityes in a waytyng gentylwoman,” at the end of the volume (366–74). These lists focus attention on outward appearance and suggest to the English reader that behaving like one of the elite is simply a matter of following a few rules.

Even more complex was Harington’s adjustment of the Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*: In his Preface he defends many aspects of Ariosto’s work against anticipated critiques that it was frivolous, immoral, and modern but also explains that he has cut out portions of the poem of little interest to English readers and in his extensive notes, he glosses Italian cultural items and supplements Ariosto’s Italian examples with local, English ones that, he asserts, demonstrate the superiority of English culture and people to Italian. (Javitch 1991: 134–57; Benson 1997). Often, demonstrating this superiority demanded some clever rhetorical strategies on Harington’s part. This was particularly true when he confronted Ariosto’s praise of accomplished women in Canto 37, where the Italian singled out as exemplary of women’s capacities the then-living, highly regarded, Petrarchist Vittoria Colonna (Benson 1997; Cox 2005). The challenge for Harington was to celebrate the superiority of English women writers without exposing them to criticism for the public circulation of their writing and, above all, given the Italian context of the praise, without exposing them to the stigma of Italy. Harington solved this problem by misrepresenting the accomplishments of both Colonna and the “learned” ladies he chose to trump her, “The four daughters of Sir Anthonie Cooke. Ladie Burlie [Mildred]. Ladie Russell [Elizabeth, formerly Lady Hoby]. Ladie Bacon [Anne]. Mistres Killygrew [Katherine].” Harington’s annotation explains:

[Colonna] wrate some verses in manner of an Epitaph upon her husband after his decease. In which kynde that honorable Ladie (widow of the late Lord John Russell) deserveth no lesse commendation, having done as much for two husbands. And whereas my author maketh so great boast onely of one learned woman in Italie, I may compare ... the sisters of that learned lady.
Harington supports his boast with a Latin epigram sent by “the meanest of the foure” to her sister, Lady Burghley, “to send a kinsman of hers into Cornwall” (314).

By focusing on the wifely use to which Colonna put her poetry rather than on her skill as a poet and by emphasizing the domestic purposes to which Lady Russell and Mistres Killygrew put theirs as well as on the bookishness of Killygrew’s verse (the universities “cannot mend it” [314]), Harington simultaneously creates categories in which the English writers can (seem to) overgo the Italian and diminishes the accomplishments of both by ignoring their most significant works. Just as Colonna did far more than write “some verses in manner of an epitaph,” so the Cooke sisters did far more than write epitaphs for spouses and enclose Latin verses on domestic matters in letters to each other. Although one would never guess it from Harington’s note, they actively engaged with contemporary Italian culture (and French, though discussion of that is not appropriate here). All four contributed dedicatory verses, some in Greek, some in Latin, to Il Giardino Cosmographico by Bartholo Sylva (1572); as Louise Schleiner explains, this was an Italian language manuscript compendium of scientific information that included poetry on scientific and philosophical topics by Petrarch, Ariosto, and others (1994: 40–5; Demers 2005: 88). Anne translated 19 Italian language sermons by Bernardino Ochino, the former Cappucin monk who preached at the Italian Church in London. By representing the Cookes’ writing as domestic (about husbands and kinsmen), unconnected to Italy, and, unpublished, Harington is able to make his point about English women’s superiority to Italians while at the same time sheltering the exemplary Cooke sisters from the stigma of Italy.

That this stigma was something to be feared can be clearly seen in the volumes of Anne Cooke’s translations of Ochino. These eloquent, colloquial, but close, translations were published and republished during the sixteenth century, but the translator’s modesty was protected by the use of only her initials on the title pages (1551?, 1570) or no reference to her at all (1548, 1551). Her chastity and propriety are affirmed when, in “To the Christen Reader,” the publisher reassures us that the “maiden” translator “never gadded farder then hir fathers house to learne the language” (Cooke 1551: A2v). From this we learn that Cooke was taught Italian by a private tutor and, of course, that she never traveled to Italy, unlike her father, who spent some years studying there. Cooke’s own dedicatory epistle, “To the right worshipful and worthyly beloved Mother, the Lady F.,” confirms that Italian was not generally considered a language to be studied by young Protestant women. She reminds this lady that “it hath pleased you, ofte, to reprove my vaine studye in the Italyan tonge, accompting the sede thereof, to have bene sowen in barayne, unfruitful grounde (syns God thereby is no whytte magnifyed).” Cooke defends her study of Italian, not by reference to literary art, but on the grounds of the content of Ochino’s sermons; knowing Italian has permitted her to partake of the “excellent fruit” “proceeding from the happy spirit of the santified [sic] Barnardyne” and, thus, to put her knowledge of Italian to a use that does “magnify” God (A3).

The contrast between John Harington’s activities as translator and Anne Cooke Bacon’s is illustrative of the fundamental difference in the relationship of English
male and female writers to the Italian language and its literary tradition. He is one of many, many men from diverse social classes who translated and imitated all manner of Italian genres and authors and published and became well known in their day, whereas, she is one of only five Tudor women, all of the elite, who are definitely known to have translated or imitated Italian texts: The others were Queen Elizabeth, Lady Mary Sidney, Lady Elizabeth (Berkeley) Carey, and Lucy (Harington) Russell, Countess of Bedford. Among them, they translated only two authors, Ochino and Petrarch, none became well known because of her translations from Italian or her works in the Italian tradition. Only the queen’s original prayers and Bacon’s translation were published in print.

In Italian, as in so many things, Queen Elizabeth was *sui generis* among women. Others translated Ochino or Petrarch, she translated both. Others translated from Italian into English; she also translated from English into Italian and from Italian into Latin. She used her Italian to demonstrate her Protestant piety when she gave her father her Italian (and Latin and French) translation of *Prayers or Meditations* (c. 1545) by her stepmother, Katherine Parr (British Library, MS Royal 7 D.X) and her Latin translation of Ochino’s sermon “Che cosa è Cristo e perché venne al mondo” to her brother, Edward VI (Gabrielli 1983: 165–74). Evidently, Ochino was persuaded that her interest in his theology was genuine because he dedicated *Prediche ... nomato Laberinti ...* (1561) to her in gratitude, he says, for her having read his sermons and asked intelligent questions about them. Elizabeth may also have written the series of original Italian prayers, published by John Day in *Christian Prayers and Meditations in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Greeke, and Latine* (1569). These create an image of her as a learned and pious governor of her country; one is titled “Oratione ... come Cristiana, e Regina” and another in the voice of the queen prays for God’s guidance in her administration of justice (Day 1569: sigs. Ll.4v – Mm.2v).

Elizabeth engaged with two of Petrarch’s works in her writing: She translated the first 90 lines of his “Trionfo dell’eternità” into English verse (before 1600) in what seems to have been primarily a language exercise, and she wrote an original poem “On Monsieur’s Departure” in which she described her female experience of love in the oxymorons of the poet’s *Canzoniere*. In the context of Tudor literature, her choice to translate the *Trionfi* was unusual, while her choice to write in the Petrarchist tradition was unsurprising; during the entire sixteenth century, only six people tried their hands at translating the *Trionfi* in whole or in part, whereas the *Canzoniere* stimulated one of the major literary movements of the century, in part because English men used sonnet writing as a means of self-display for the purposes of political advancement. In the narrow context of writing by women, however, the situation is reversed: Two of the six translators of the *Trionfi* were women, whereas very, very few women translated or imitated the sonnets. It seems that, in a culture that valued reputation for chastity as the primary female virtue and was so anxious about publication, women did not think the imitation of an Italian form dedicated to the display of oneself as suffering love longing, especially sexual desire, was wise. None of the many published Elizabethan anthologies of verse includes Petrarchist verse that can be definitively
identified as written by a woman nor do any of the many extant Tudor manuscript miscellanies. Thus, the queen’s poem is a drop in the sea of Petrarchist verse but stands out among the works of women.

Still, it is possible that more women than we realize attempted to translate or imitate Petrarch’s sonnets. Katherine Duncan-Jones recently identified the schoolgirl Elizabeth Carey (Berkeley) as the author of two manuscript translations from the Canzoniere (Duncan-Jones 1999). This suggests that tutors set exercises from Petrarch’s book for girls as well as for boys; perhaps, more women writers’ experiments with Petrarch’s sonnets and style will be discovered. Claims have been made for Anne (Cecil) Vere, Countess of Oxford as author of “six poems … in John Soowthern’s Pandora” (1584) in which the writer “directly translates” a line from Petrarch, though her authorship is not generally accepted (Schleiner 1994: 85–92). That Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, was the author of an elegy for Cecilia Bulstrode (d. 1609) is more generally acknowledged; in this poem, which just postdates the Tudor period, Bedford did not work directly with an Italian model, despite her first-hand knowledge of Italian; rather, she demonstrated her fluency in the Petrarchist idiom by imitating Donne’s metaphysical style so skillfully that the poem was formerly attributed to Donne (Lewalski 1993: 120–2). Harington’s authorship of this elegy demonstrates that the circulation of compositions in manuscript offered women an opportunity not just to appreciate Italianate culture but also to contribute to its development without the exposure to the public eye consequent upon publishing.

Given that writing poems in the mode of the Canzoniere exposed women to censure, the relative unpopularity of the Trionfi among male authors may have added to their appeal for their second female translator, Mary Sidney; she could translate the great poet but avoid the erotic. She also may have been attracted to the Trionfi because, in England, they were read as proto-Protestant texts (John King, quoted by Hannay et al. 1998: 262, 265). Sidney’s close and sensitive translation of the “Triumph of Death” is far more finished than Elizabeth’s. Its triplets imitate the Italian’s terza rima, and it has the same number of lines. It was not published, but it was much admired. The single surviving copy of Sidney’s poem was enclosed in a letter from John Harington to his distant relation Lucy Harington Russell, the Countess of Bedford. This provides rare concrete evidence that one Italian-literate woman author read a work by another who was not a member of her family.

Conclusion

In paying special attention to women’s engagement with the Italian Renaissance, this chapter has not attempted to insert them into the canon of major authors. No adjustment of the lens can turn these translations of sermons and Trionfi and the authorship of a few lyrics into important and influential contributions to the English literary tradition. Rather, my goal has been to call attention to a distortion or flaw in the standard picture of the English Renaissance. Italy and its literature did indeed
stimulate a great flowering of creativity in far away England, but the stigma of Italy and the lack of public careers prevented women from fully participating. We are fortunate that Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser, and Donne did not heed Ascham’s advice and close their Italian books, but, perhaps, recognizing the gap that resulted from the limiting of women’s literary interaction with Italy makes it possible to imagine what sixteenth-century English literature would have been like had Mary Sidney and other women been as uninhibited in their use of their skill in Italian as their male contemporaries.

References


Further Reading


Also see entries in the 2008 online edition of *The Dictionary of National Biography* for all authors mentioned in this chapter.
Part IV
Authors, Works, and Modes
More’s *Utopia*: Medievalism and Radicalism

Anne Lake Prescott

Thomas More published his Latin bestseller *Utopia* (Louvain, 1516) at a time when, according to our perhaps debatable timetable, English elite culture was leaving the Middle Ages for the Renaissance. Granted the text’s liminal moment, then, we can wonder what in More’s imaginative and disturbing work is new or radical (digging to examine the roots of institutions or assumptions or planting ideas that will take root and grow into the future) and what remains traditional or medieval. This is not the place to interrogate the concept of “medieval,” but we should remember that, despite the sometimes smug if often beleaguered claims of Renaissance humanists, much classical culture survived the collapse of Rome’s empire and lived on through the Middle Ages. Augustine’s *The City of God*, moreover, on which More lectured and which doubts that even the best City of Man can approach that of God, straddles the late classical and the early medieval. Closer to More’s time, late medieval Scholastic thinking did not disappear in the culture wars between conservatives and advocates of the “new learning.” Nor would More’s belief in the arbitrariness of verbal signs, the names of things, startle any Nominalist philosopher – or any postmodernist in our own era. Finally, what seems radical can be very old. Communism and equality hardly characterize medieval Europe, but they are ancient dreams and even, up to a point, monastic realities.

*Utopia*’s historical moment nevertheless saw much that was new: the discovery of the Americas, the start of print culture, gunpowder, tensions that would shortly lead to the Reformation, an increased sense of nationality in parts of Europe, the more rapid stirrings and accumulations of what would become modern capitalism, and newly available Greek writings, including Plato’s *Laws* and *Republic* and the popular if controversial satirist Lucian, some of whose late classical seriocomic dialogues Erasmus and More translated (Branham 1986). I would add – for although no longer new in Europe it had not finished its journey north into full cultural acceptance – zero, that circle that means nothing but can suggest everything, that puts a whole in things, that can multiply into nonentity or, when rightly placed, can increase by tens, and can also, in many a joke, mean a woman’s “nothing,” her nether absence.
Much in his world was dramatically new, then, when in 1515 More began writing *Utopia*, apparently starting with Book II while in Antwerp on a diplomatic and economic mission and completing Book I when back home (More 1965: xv–xxiii). Much of that novelty is also in his wittily challenging book. The bearded and sunburned visitor to Utopia with whom the narrator “Morus” chats in a Flemish garden, Raphael Hythloday (the name combines the biblical angel of healing and the Greek for nonsense-speaker), has sailed to the Americas with Vespucci himself. Having with limited success told one (imaginary) culture about the compass, he more successfully introduces printing to the Utopians, who, despite what seems to many readers their culture’s stasis, in fact welcome new Greek texts, new technology, and even – with what eventual results we do not know – Christianity. The early editions of *Utopia*, furthermore, provide prefatory material, something possible to do with manuscript but easier to do with print, that plays along with the joke that Utopia (“Noplace” and, in a bleak pun, “Eutopia” or “Goodplace”) is truly somewhere. A map of Utopia (see Figure 17.1) helps prove its reality, although what Hythloday says is a crescent-shaped moon-like (lunatic?) island is here pictured as something that both suggests the void of nowhere and in its near-circularity outdoes England’s mere geographical triangle (which has as many counties, plus London, as Utopia has city-states). The self-abolishing Greek names that give us, for example, the waterless river “Anhydrous,” also signal that this work requires for its full understanding a knowledge of Greek, while a poem in Utopian with Utopian letters suits the Humanist fascination with the rapidly expanding array of known languages but also shows that this island, founded long ago by King Utopus and now a quasi-republic, must be real if it has an alphabet and a tongue of its own.

In considering what More may have hoped to accomplish in *Utopia* it helps to pay attention to the title pages of the early editions (Sylvester 1968; Hutchinson 1987). Here, we read, is “A truly golden handbook, no less salutary than festive, concerning the best state of a commonwealth and concerning the new island Utopia.” That “and concerning” – “deque” in the original Latin – shows that for More *Utopia* was about political speculation *and* about Utopia, and that it is convivial, carnivalesque, not just useful, let alone just idealizing (“best,” after all, need not mean “perfect”). Discussion of the “best state,” moreover, applies as much to Book I’s dialogue as it does to the description of Utopia in Book II, for Utopia is not the only society that Hythloday describes. The 1551 translation by Ralph Robinson likewise calls this a “fruteful and pleasant worke of the beste state of a publyque weale and of the newe yle called Utopia,” but by 1624 the title-page says this “wittie” and “learned” book is on “the best state of a publike weale, as it is found in the government of the new ile called Utopia,” and we are on the way to the too common modern assumption that Utopia is not “best” but ideal. Investigative dialogue becomes dream as “Eutopia” (“Goodplace”) simply replaces “Utopia” (“Noplace”) and More’s provocative pun vanishes. In 1516 More invites us to dialogic thinking, to read with one eye on satire, comic reversal, and comedy (even the marginal notes, some perhaps by Erasmus, add irony) and the other eye on matter for serious thought about how a society, including its
Figure 17.1 Map of Utopia, from Thomas More, *Utopia* (Louvain, 1518; orig. pub. 1516)
More’s Utopia: Medievalism and Radicalism

economy, functions and might function better – but not perfectly, as witness Utopia’s wars, work, slavery, crime, and practices no Christian such as More could countenance. Utopians themselves do not claim perfection. We do not often think of More as a Machiavellian, and he cannot have read The Prince before writing Utopia, but the societies that Hythloday has seen do not have a better breed of human beings than those Machiavelli knew, and his Utopians share the Italian writer’s understanding that any commonwealth, here or in nowhere, needs both force and fraud.

More’s Utopia is, then, a thought-experiment (Logan 1983). Granted that Utopians privilege general happiness (rather than, say wealth, ease, or justice), predicated it upon the suppression of grief-producing pride and greed, then what follows? Be relentless: What follows whether we like it or not? You prefer individual liberty and the development of individual selves as the highest good? Again, what follows? Remember that you cannot have equality for all and liberty for individuals as your highest good – they will conflict. So what now? Let’s discuss – that would be salutaris. But jostling against this aim is a festivity that makes Utopia comically unlike England. Are there no lawyers? Then there is no place for Thomas More. Are wives respectful and children silent at meals? How unlike, we may suppose that More wanted his friends to think, his own good but snappish wife Dame Alice and his four young intelligent children. Do slaves wear golden chains? So do the highly placed courtiers/slaves of Henry VIII, no? And, more seriously but still satirically, do you find Utopian methods of making war – cheating, assassinating, bribing – offensive? How unlike European methods, for Europeans value an honor based on lineage, reputation, and keeping one’s word. Yet kings in Europe fight wars to help advance their own power and to do so largely by killing the poor. Sometimes they lose, honorably. Utopians prefer victory. For them, as for Shakespeare’s Falstaff, honor is a mere “scutcheon” – a coat of arms with nothing behind it (1 Henry IV 5.1.138). Utopians prefer the nothing to family pride. Slavery was common in ancient times, of course, but if you are surprised to see it in Utopia, where it is used primarily for criminals, consider the English alternative: hanging. Here too, Utopia invites a double reading as we look for both salutary food for thought and for the satirical reversals and turnabouts that link the book to Saturnalia, carnival, and perhaps therefore to Menippean satire (Elliott 1970; Blaim 1983).

However titled, is More’s festive-cum-salutary and ambiguously playful/serious Utopia still medieval? Much that seems new in Utopia, as text or place, has quasi-precedent, so that More’s – or Hythloday’s – relation to the Middle Ages has been vigorously disputed. Duhamel (1955) convincingly finds Hythloday’s rhetoric – and his analytic logic – more Scholastic than Ciceronian, noting also the similarity of Utopian costume to that of Carthusian monks. Bejczy (1994) just as convincingly counters such arguments by pointing to Hythloday’s detestation of anything medieval and his erasure from Utopian history of the centuries between antiquity and the Renaissance. Bejczy even provides a chart (p. 36) showing that Hythloday likes Greek, good letters, printing, humanist handwriting, pure texts, man, stability, and eternal
ideality and is less admiring of Latin, scholasticism, manuscript (implicitly in a Gothic hand), corrupt texts, monkeys, movement, and decadence.

Old Fantasy Worlds Made New

In any case, whether exploring, if with some pessimism, a way to apply monastic virtues to the lay commonwealth (Fenlon 1975) or whether remembering the Scholastic taste for arguing both pro and contra, More makes new what he borrows from the more immediate past. To appreciate his wit indeed almost requires us to remember older not-really-Utopias and almost-nowheres that make Utopia seem so radical. Let me take three topics as examples of the old-made-new, for the moment omitting the elite classical learning so crucial to this text, so as to focus rather on fantasy worlds born of desire: the Land of Cockaigne, travelers’ tales, and the philosophically disturbing but entertaining concepts of Nothing, Nowhere, Nobody. A longer discussion of medieval traces would include More’s carnival reversals, but although Utopia is “festive,” Utopia itself has no carnival – and no need, in an egalitarian world, for upending. Nor does it have much folly, even if it gives natural fools space to live without institutionalization. Erasmus had recently published his punningly entitled Encomium Moriae – the praise of folly/More – and it is possible to read Utopia as a companion to the Encomium. What happens in a world too rational for the destructive and stupid folly of pride and greed but also too rational to welcome suffering (More himself wore a secret hair shirt) or to know the ecstatic folly of visionary rapture and self-sacrifice? When Utopia becomes Christian will it acquire folly – both foolish and wise?

Cockaigne, Mandeville, and Zero

Although the word “utopia” has edged toward something closer to a dream set in a distant space, a distant time, and nowadays a distant planet, even those “utopias” usually lack magic or changes in the laws of nature. Utopia may be “Nowhere,” but it is an earthly nowhere. It is not usually unreachable like the Blessed Isles or Fairyland or lost like Eden or the Golden Age but on an island somewhere in a world now both more imaginably global and newly horizontal, mappable: beyond what we know but not beyond what we could know. Utopia is also more realistic than Cockaigne, that medieval work-free fantasy with some classical ancestry and comedy to relieve the moralizing. There birds fly pre-cooked, roasted pigs roam around, the pebbles are candy, the walls are sausages, the rivers are beer, horses lay eggs, the plates are of gold, everyone dances, farmers grow on trees and drop into ready-made boots, fountains of youth flow, it is always May although there are four Christmases per year, and women are deliciously compliant (Pleij 2001). Cockaigne is for the hungry and
the overworked, not for those speculating on the best state of a commonwealth. Its focus is food itself, whereas Hythloday is impressed by how Utopians—who work 6 hours a day (less than in Europe but more than in Cockaigne)—arrange and behave at their communal mealtimes. In Utopia engaged couples see each other naked before marrying, but theirs is a world of sexual restraint, and whatever the stress Utopians place on pleasure, they direct their energy into something more socially useful than pigging out or romping with girls on the banks of bubbling beerstreams.

Can tales about Cockaigne or descriptions by Hesiod, Ovid, or Virgil of the Age of Gold—before we drew property lines, before we killed or sailed, before we worked (and before coins clinked in the pockets of lawyers or of wool-merchants in London or Antwerp)—or even speculations about Eden before the Fall still be precedents as well as backdrops against which Utopia seems “new,” just as the title says? Yes, for such dreams spring from desire, the conviction or hope that the world we live in, with its pain, injustice, and folly, cannot be all there is, was, or could be. “Will be,” of course, must usually await that shift in European mentality from nostalgia and sense of loss to a belief in progress rather than in mere reform or restoration—at which point some who imagine utopias start to lay them in the future and both “nowhere” and “used to be somewhere” become “someday.”

More likely to be imagined in the here and now, even when in fact fantasy, are travelers’ tales, hard to be believed because impossible of proof; that Hythloday is a traveler is another reason to fear he is lying. In More’s day some of the most famous tales—soon to be supplemented by reports concerning the Americas that at times rivaled the wonders described by ancient and Medieval travelers—were those published under the name Sir John Mandeville but probably based on the work of Jean d’Outremeuse and with a history of hoax (Campbell 1988: 122–61). Editions of these popular reports, crudely illustrated, were printed in England not too long before More wrote Utopia. Indeed, near the start of Utopia we find a send-up of reports like Mandeville’s tales of such traditional monstrous races as the hermaphrodites, men with heads in their chests, dogheaded men, Amazons, and so forth. “Morus” says that “about stale travelers’ wonders we were not curious,” for although “well and wisely trained citizens are not everywhere to be found,” monsters and so forth “are common enough” (More 1965: 53). The Latin, however, plays paradoxically with “nowhere”—nusquam fere non invenias, “you will not find [monsters] nowhere,” a little nothing of a joke that most translations, unfortunately, let slip by. More, that is, distinguishes between fantasy and good commonwealths, although if monsters are found in nowhere, we later learn that good citizens are found in Nowhere.

Among Mandeville’s “wonders,” however, are two quasi-utopian places with good and happy people of the normal sort. These societies would make fine utopias were it not for the fantasy that might preclude serious thought about commonwealths. One is “Mancy” (N3–N4), here located in India, which for Mandeville seems to mean anything east of Greece. It is “moost delectable & plente of goodes of all the worlde,” where Christians and “sarasyms” dwell in peace in its 2000 great cities. There “is no
poore man,” which sounds like Utopia – until we read that the men have beards as thin as cat-whiskers and are so white of skin that many call their nation “albany” (a confusion with Albania?). There is plenty of food, as in Utopia and Cockaigne, but the chickens have white fur instead of feathers. Even more Utopian is the land of the Bragamen (R3v–R4v; a vague memory of India’s Brahmin caste?). This Bragamen “ylond” is a land of plenty with a great river, the Thebe, where live “good men and true & of goodly lyfe after theyr fayth,” who although not Christian are, like the Utopians, “of kynde” [i.e., by nature], “full of good vertues,” and flee all vices and all sin and malice. Neither envious nor proud, they are void of covetousness, lechery, or gluttony, and they do as they would be done by. They keep the Ten Commandments, set no store by “rychesse” or “havyng,” and do not take oaths but say simply yea or nay. In this “londe of fayth” people are more just (“ryghtwyser”) than elsewhere, so there are no thieves, murderers, prostitutes, or beggars. At this point it is hard not to think of More’s Utopia, but More himself is careful to avoid giving his Nowhere any advantage other than the protection of being an island. Because the Bragamen are so good, however, there are no thunderstorms, war, hunger, “ne other trybulacyons,” for it seems that God “loved them well” and thus rewards them. They worship God, the creator of all things, and they live so temperately that they survive to old age, often dying without first becoming sick.

The Bragamen seem good thanks to their inherent nature, whereas Utopia is based on social engineering, on the assumption that we have flawed natures and would not be good if merely left to our own devices (More is closer to Hobbes than to Rousseau in this respect, if in few others). The Bragamen have no residual mess, moreover, whereas Utopians, being fully of More’s own fallen species, can lapse into crime, adultery, and zealotry. Nor is God particularly good to the Utopians – the soil is thin and neighbors can be a problem. We do not hear that He spares them lightning, some are mentally deficient, and some get sick. Utopians, unlike More himself, do not seek out the joy of suffering, but they do suffer. And then we read something that does anticipate Utopia, and specifically the scene in which visiting Anemolian ambassadors, magnificent in gold and jewels, suffer embarrassment when Utopian youngsters deride them as overgrown children who have not yet abandoned such trash (More 1965: 153–9). In a moment that might do well in Utopia, Alexander the Great decides to conquer the land of the Bragamen and sends some envoys (R3v–R4). What is wrong with Alexander, the Bragamen ask his agents, that he who has all the world wants yet more? Alexander wants their treasure, the envoys reply. But, say the Bragamen, they have no gold or treasure for him to take, for they hold all things in common and have plenty to eat. They speak of themselves as might the Utopians:

*And in stede of tresoure of golde & sylver we make our treasoure peas & accordre of love, and we have nought but a cloth upon our bodyes, our wyves are not arrayed richely too pleasyng, for we holde it a grete fooly a man to dyghte [array] his bodye to make it to seme fayer than god made it. We have ben ever more in peas tyll now that thou wylte dysheryte us. We have a kynge amonge us not for neede of thelawe ne to deme [i.e.,*
judge] no man, for ther are no trespassers among us but all onely is [to teach us] to be obedient to hym, and soo mayste thou not take from us but our good peas.

When he hears his envoys' reports, a deeply impressed Alexander decides that he would do more harm than good if he invaded, and so writes again to say that they should continue "theyr good maners & have no drede of hym." Utopians, of course, do have treasure, for they live in a dangerous world where it is useful for manipulating or defending against their more degraded neighbors.

The late-medieval Bragamen, then, seem poised between Cockaigne/Eden and Utopia. Too numerous, sexual, and pagan for a European monastery, although dressing without fashion or accessorizing, they are happy because loving, peaceful, virtuous, and communist, not because they can lie around all day while fast food flies or trots by. There is even a little consideration of the best state of a commonwealth in that the Bragamen are self-aware enough to explain why they are a monarchy, being in this more Platonist than Ciceronian, although their reasoning — that men need someone to obey — seems to counter the claim that they are virtuous by nature. Utopia, too, has contradictions, and the Bragamen's self-congratulatory and vigorous reply to Alexander would please Hythloday, but there is in this mini-utopia no trace of Utopia's paradox, severe political logic, carnival reversal of anything specific, or taste for playfully self-abolishing names. Bragamen's treasure is peace, not gold, and gold is no temptation for them. Utopia has more gold than peace, but it knows that to keep the gold in its place (on slaves, as bribes, beneath Utopian bottoms) it must be made educational, not simply waved away. Nor, of course, is the Bragamen's land nowhere but rather in "Ynd," for "Mandeville" is not playing with concepts certainly available in the Middle Ages even if more urgent in 1516: nothing and negation, the liar paradox, and even — slowly winning acceptance after making its landfall in Europe in the thirteenth century — zero, often called "cipher" or simply "naught."

Zero was still fairly new in More's England. Some opposed it because more comfortable with Roman numerals: Kaplan reports that as late as 1494 the mayor of Frankfurt told his calculators to avoid using "digits" (1999: 102). Wedded to Aristotelian thinking, moreover, most Scholastic philosophers and theologians hesitated to believe that nothing might exist or have ever existed, that the universe could, so to speak, have holes. Genesis has a different story, of course, which produced some cognitive dissonance, but the clever could work around that. As I have noted, early maps of Utopia give it a shape close to zero, making a naught of Nowhere. But this is not merely a naught joke: Arabic numerals, including zero, had been replacing Roman ones in the later Middle Ages in large part because they made the complexities of early capitalism and even the economics of running a convent, for example, easier to handle. It is most unlikely that the merchants with whom More was negotiating in Antwerp were ignorant of zero's utility and ambiguities. Both the shape itself and the very concept of a sign that is both place holder (a null set between sets of numbers) and a way to indicate nothing can compel attention: Here is a nothing that can make regular numerals expand to … infinity, to an All that can also be
imagined as a circle. Its Renaissance cousin, the vanishing point, is likewise able to create something while being itself nothing, and one can argue that More’s Utopia is the nowhere that makes the new Somewheres then being “discovered,” explored, and colonized more solidly mappable in the mind and on the page. Richard Helgerson (1982), who notes that in mathematical theory negative and positive numbers have the same value, suggests that More relocated the negative from its older place in divine mysteries on high to a more secular place down here on earth. He thus reoriented that vertical line (the positive end planted here below and the negative end found above in God’s unknowable mysteries) so that it now works horizontally, with both positive and negative ends here on earth. Utopia, Helgerson remarks, requires no miracles (1982: 103), and this shift from remembering a Golden Age communism to imagining one for our Iron Age shows a “radically new orientation of negative thought” (1982: 105). Nowhere is in the here, if not yet in the now, and those who wish to can look forward, not up.

Unsurprisingly, maps of Utopia and that island’s relation to spatiality have drawn modern and postmodern attention. The island has been read, perhaps not very plausibly, as a sign of nostalgic return to the comfort of the round womb, even as Utopia’s culture is sometimes read, not always fairly, as rocketing phallically toward a future of increased patriarchy, exploration, and the penetration of others’ lands (Ferns 1999; Wegner 2002). Utopia, says Louis Marin is the figure of the “horizon” when thanks to the Americas, even the word “horizon” was changing its meaning from “limit” to “frontier” and eventually to “the infinity of space” and futurity (1993: 406; the real shape of Utopia, one may conclude after reading much scholarship on the topic, may be a splotch of Rorschach’s ink). The maps themselves are old-fashioned, lacking perspective and visually even incoherent. It is amusing to note, moreover, that in the 1518 edition’s map the little human figure to the right listening as Hythloday speaks, presumably to Morus, has a decoration on his back that looks, intentionally or not, very much like a reversed medieval T-O map (so named because in such a map the earth is a circle containing three continents divided by the oceans linked in the configuration of a T). Indeed, although zero was still a little new in Northern Europe, and although good Aristotelians might wince, nothingness itself was an old story – and literally a story when concerning Nobody.

Nobody himself does not figure in Utopia, but there can be little doubt that More was familiar with him, for he was popular in northern Europe, even if not so elite a figure as the traveler in Homer’s Odyssey who was just becoming better known in the West and who told the giant Polyphemus that he was “Outis” – Nemo, Nobody. He was lying, but then Greeks were famed for sophistry (yet another reason to beware of the Greek-loving Hythloday). Nobody is the creation of denial, and there had long been, particularly in Northern Europe, notes Gerta Calmann (1960), a largely satirical tradition starring him in sermons, poems, and pictures, some of the Nobody who was to blame for blunders and crimes. There was even a “Saint Nobody,“ and in the thirteenth century a monk, Radulphus the Angevin, included among his devotions a search of the Bible for sentences containing the word “nemo.” As Calmann says, “Nega-
tive words in general held a poetic fascination for the humanists, who could challenge “what is” with “what is not” and hence imagine “what ought to be”: words such as ounis, Utopia, and nihil “meant liberation” (1960: 78). Ulrich von Hutten, author of the satirical Letters of Obscure Men, did a poem about him for which the publisher, Froben, tried in 1518, to get More to do a letter. More said no, but Froben dedicated the Nobody poem to him anyway (1960: 79). Nobody may have been popular with Renaissance humanists, but he had medieval ancestors – who in turn had classical ones.

Similarly descended was Nobody’s dubious relative the Liar who claims always to lie and hence creates the infamous and still unresolved “liar paradox.” This conundrum, closely related to the paradox of self-reference (Folly praises folly, a bottle in Wonderland says “drink me”) was not new in the Renaissance, for late Scholastics, like the ancients, were fascinated by the ancient paradoxes, as was More himself: The many jests that he slipped into even his darkest works often exploit them, as do humanist jestbooks. Medieval arguments over the liar paradox sometimes edged the debate into the dangerous world of nonentity. “The liar says he is a liar” ran one sequence, to which the reply is “you say nothing” (“Nihil dicis”) – and one counter-retort was that there is no such thing as nothing because when you say “nothing” you say breath. Words are not nothing (Prescott 1987).

By 1516 Humanists such as More were more at ease with nothing, and Utopia reworks these paradoxes, as so often turning Scholastic logic into rhetorical narrative. Hythloday is probably a Greek-loving nonsense-talking liar, but Greek nonsense can hide wisdom (Nelson 2001), as can paradox. The language itself in Utopia plays with self-abolition by using, even more than did most writers of Latin, the figure of litotes: denying the contrary, as in “not nowhere” for “somewhere” (McCutcheon 1971). And just as monsters may be found “not [in] Nusquam,” and just as sometimes Utopia’s marginal notes can conflict with the text on which they comment (Perlette 1987), so too such names as Anydrous (Nowater) for a river are sign-denying signs. Such semiotics would surge into importance as the Reformation unfolded and arguments over the how to define the sacraments and how to read the Bible proliferated. Throughout his career, whether mulling over the value of gold as solid thing (useful for making Utopian chains or chamberpots) or the sign of thing (empty to Utopians, meaning wealth to their neighbors) or explaining the arbitrariness of language to opponents such as William Tyndale, guilty in More’s view of fetishizing written texts, More would continue to care for words – and refuse to misuse them in a dishonest vow would cost him his life.

**Utopia as Old and New**

I have suggested some Utopian elements, often with classical origins or parallels, that would not have astonished readers in 1416, even if displeasing some, but that because of later history can seem radical to us. Communism? Early Christians sometimes
practiced it, although it has been rightly said (Wootton 1998) that not until the Diggers in seventeenth-century England did anyone introduce it to secular life, and the belief that everyone should work took even longer to spread. Religious toleration? For a pre-Christian society, why not? After all, educated Christians had long known of virtuous pagans, many allowing them a partial or pre-biblical revelation from reason and nature alone. Cultural relativism? Ferns (1999) suggests this, but such thinking was familiar from antiquity and also from early speculation about the monstrous races; “Mandeville” is a fine multiculturalist, unfazed by hermaphrodites and amazons. Utopian euthanasia and divorce would not offend an ancient Roman. Equality? That is indeed radical, for biblical prophetic tradition stresses reversal – the mountains made low and the valleys exalted – rather than a leveling equality, and yet Hythloday’s thunderous conviction that the world as we know it is a conspiracy of the rich against the poor, his anger at lords who turn common ground to pasture so as to get even richer, and the Utopian belief that we should all serve the community would not amaze those familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, it has been argued (White 1944; Glimp 2008) that Hythloday’s disgust in Book I with an economic system in which, as he says, sheep now eat men, connects him less to a Marxist future than to the poetry of William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* and (I would add) to the revolutionary question of rebellious Medieval peasants: “When Adam delved and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?” Nor was political analysis new: Much of what we now take for granted, from English common law to a contract theory of political organization, is medieval.

But 1516 is not 1416, and in addition to so much else that was new (not least a Tudor dynasty less wedded to the ancient aristocracy and more apt to hire the likes of Thomas More), Humanists such as Erasmus thought they were living in a time of recovery. Indeed it is in the *Adages* of Erasmus, argues David Wootton (1998), that More found a Renaissance precedent for a communism based less on economic theory or class resentment than on the sayings – Greek but for which Erasmus gives Christian parallels – that “Between friends all is common” and “Friendship is equality.” Perhaps, though, More goes even further than Erasmus (or the *Republic*), to be sure, for *Utopia*’s most radical speculation is that the *summum bonum* for a society could be the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Not order, not service to God, not power and empire, not wealth, not justice, not liberty, not equality of rights, not happiness not for the philosophical few, but happiness for the many – indeed for all, if they behave.

The precedent that Wootton finds in Erasmus comes in turn from a revived interest in and knowledge about Greek thought. Exactly what was old and what new in the Humanist turn to antiquity can be debated, in part because Humanists were not of one mind and had contradictory sources, some that had survived through the Middle Ages, on which to base their arguments. As Quentin Skinner (1987) has shown, in discussions of the commonwealth some preferred a Platonic stress on a single governor while, especially in the north, a growing republican civic humanism, with Ciceronian roots, valued participation by more people – although Cicero also denounced
communism as likely to bring disorder. Were the learned and thoughtful morally obliged to serve the commonweal by advising the prince, as “Morus” believes, or should they agree with Hythloday that they would serve themselves and others better by using their leisure to philosophize? Is the basis for the “best” commonweal a Ciceroonian *jus civilis*, giving to each citizen the appropriate justice and rights, or is the best commonweal the Utopian one that, even more than Plato’s, values harmony and community? This “dialogue of counsel” in Book I had analogues both in humanist circles and in More’s mind, as did the tension, one very much alive in the twenty-first century, between a more individual and a more communitarian conception of what makes a good society.

Whatever its Greek or biblical analogues, that is, Utopian preference for community over a competitive and self-examining, self-cultivating individuality feels presciently radical to modern readers, particularly those who forget or who shudder at some subcultures in what is called “the West” or those found elsewhere. As Robert Shephard puts it, *Utopia* has long been a “magic mirror” in which readers have seen what they most desired – and most feared (1995: 843). What may be most radically fearsome to many nowadays is less Utopia’s elevation of harmony than the relentlessness with which Utopians pursue it, and in ways that can seem to us repressive. No wonder that some years ago a graduate student of the present author, a visitor from the People’s Republic of China, wrote an ironic paper for a course on the Renaissance called “Notes on Utopia by one who has been there.” We should be careful, though, before reading *Utopia* as modern collectivism. If individual freedom there must logically yield to community, if Utopians have only as much liberty as is consonant with their ideals of equality and fraternity, that is not from a crushing ideological fervor but from the logic of cultural preferences. Some of this flatness that many sense, this unpleasant sense of Utopian groupthink, is moreover an artifact of the genre that More himself in large part created. This is fiction, but not a play or novel with characters or an epic with heroes, and so almost inherently will not give us an individual perspective, a literary limitation with which later utopia-makers from William Morris to Ursula Le Guin were to struggle.

The generic issue is not unimportant. The shock of Utopia, Jameson suggests, came with “the unaccustomed combination of hitherto unrelated connotations” (2003: 431). *Utopia* is, in other words, a synergy of genres, of old and the new, and it is also that rarity – a text that becomes more radical with time, not less so, in part thanks to the great shift from nostalgia for a Golden Age or Eden to a non-millennial, non-apocalyptic belief that the best times are or might be ahead of us. It is in retrospect that Utopia looks not only prophetic but, to many, dismayingly so. Utopians, for example, colonize territory that they think unused. This looks like the start of the rush of Europeans into the Americas. Or is their colonizing more (also?) like that of the many Greek colonies in the ancient world? Utopians are willing to send their own citizens to help govern their neighbors, but Shephard (1995: 849) rightly remarks that they do not try to export their own culture, a reluctance that hardly characterizes
European imperialism. Unlike the American and French revolutionaries, Utopia keeps its universalizing tendencies to itself.

Within its own borders, though, that universalizing can disturb readers. The Utopian treatment of population imbalance by moving one household’s overflow to another household might not shock those who, like More’s parents, sent their son away to be a page, and one purpose is to minimize pride in ancestry. It often distresses readers with a modern fondness for the affective and close-knit nuclear family, however, and conservatives from Jonathan Swift or Edmund Burke on have complained of social reformers who put abstract calculation before tradition and concrete, organic human complexity. In that regard Utopia seems anticipatory of later revolutionary movements that also start from zero, homogenize cultural or individual difference, and put the community far ahead of the individual self. Even in America, the straight lines that bound the western states and ignore rivers or ancient roads have a Utopian look.

So too, to take another example, does the official demand by the authorities in Cambridge, Massachusetts that all public schools have the same income and the unofficial one that they have the same racial mix. No wonder that Jameson can claim that by cutting Utopia off from the mainland Utopus also severs it from “the world of empirical or historical reality” and thereby creates a “totalization” (2003: 447). Accompanying such “totalized” thinking lie other assumptions that are also worrisome and yet also more like our own, if more relentlessly pursued, than it is comfortable for us to admit. These assumptions are related to Hythloday’s faith, radical for its time, in the power of social engineering. Utopians believe in shaping the environment so as to shape the person, in changing the economics or even the subculture of those likely to turn to crime from illness, desperation, or ignorance. Such engineering, Hythloday seems to agree, is more likely to succeed than is preaching virtue to people or terrifying them with the threat of execution. You have to be carefully taught to be good — Utopia is social sculpture on a large scale, not a Rousseauist world of “Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains” or a world of “society made me do it.” Quite the opposite.

Perhaps this deeper assumption, that we are sinful stuff and hence need to be licked or whipped or loved into moral shape, is not in itself truly radical because it is in fact Christian, but no society in More’s world had taken the results of this thinking so far — virtually all had preferred to preach to all and to encourage the many by hanging the few, but Hythloday’s stress on social causation and the need for a social cure is a stress with a future, as is, Travis DeCook points out, the Utopian authorities’ consequent “chilling” practice of “almost constant surveillance” (2008: 11). And Utopians did not even have video-cameras and wiretaps. Utopians do think their “totalization” is pleasure-giving harmony, however, and their surveillance a way to preserve it. The Utopians are, after all, happy, and if they are brainwashed into being so, then those of us who would not live in Utopia even if given a free one-way ticket to go there might ask ourselves to what extent our own preferences are likewise shaped by our upbringing, by a cultural chiseling that Utopians might in their turn find “chilling.”
And questions like that are precisely what Renaissance dialogues, in particular those asking about the best state of a commonwealth, are meant to provoke.

Where does Utopia’s interplay of old and new, speculation and reversal, hope and negation leave us? Nowhere? Surely not. Perhaps we can talk further? And then can we talk about stopping the talk, going home to solid corrupt England as Hythloday disappears back into the desire of his fiction and then begin advising the king, hoping to improve matters a little? From the refuge of that fiction Hythloday might point out that by rejecting his advice More merely found the scaffold, but More, now likewise snatched from the world, would doubtless have a reply.

**Notes**

1. Raitiere (1973) and Wegemer (1996) stress Augustine’s importance. In this chapter I assume a reader who has read Utopia and omit much of the massive scholarship on it and on utopias; Geritz (1992, 1998, 2005) and Lakowski (1995) provide bibliographies. I capitalize “Humanist” to indicate those who stressed the political and moral value of classical texts even for Christians. I ignore the debate, quiescent but not dead, over whether pagan but virtuous Utopia is meant to put Christians to shame, as the 1965 Yale edition suggests, or whether such a reading stresses morality and ignores the theological (Bradshaw 1981).

2. Utopia’s circle with its inner emptiness (more apparent in the text than on the map) is incomplete, and the dimensions that Hythloday gives do not work mathematically (e.g., Nagel 1973: 176). Perhaps More thought a full circle would look implausible; or perhaps we are to reflect that Utopia is there to help us think about the “best” and not itself perfect.

3. In the title of his essay, Helleiner (1959) calls a letter from “Prester John” a “Medieval Utopia,” but this world, with the usual monsters, a mirror in which the king can keep an eye on his whole kingdom (cf. that of Ozma of Oz), and poisons that do no harm, is more magical than utopian.

4. Barrow (2001) and Seife (2000) describe the resistance, and Barrow sees no full acceptance until well into the sixteenth century (2001: 48–9). More must have been familiar with zero but also aware that many disliked it, just as many resented Greek and Hebrew learning.


6. Helgerson remarks with some irony that “Keeping Utopia outside the bounds of the known world has been a major political enterprise for the last four and a half centuries” (1982: 109).


8. McCutcheon (1985) describes the classical paradoxes; see also Prescott (1987) (in one of Rastell’s A Hundred Mery Tales a wife, her husband distraught because unable to find some “nothing” after he has agreed to pay “right naught or else 40 shillings” for a knife, hangs an empty basket near the door, tells the seller that the fee is in it, and when he exclaims that he can find “right naught” tells him he is now paid). On More’s jests see Prescott (2003).

**References**

ages: the purging of history.) Moreana, 118/119, 29–42.


The Literary Voices of Katherine Parr and Anne Askew

Joan Pong Linton

Katherine Parr and Anne Askew are prominent figures from the English Reformation, both having converted from Catholicism to the reformist faith and having to negotiate the complicated religious politics during the final years of Henry VIII’s reign. While Parr was able to wield influence as Henry’s regent and surviving queen, Askew was burned as a heretic in Smithfield, becoming a martyr for the reformist cause. Askew may have been connected with the queen’s reformist circle, and she served as a pawn in the power struggle between reformist and conservative factions in Henry’s court. Twice tried for heresy, she was, following her condemnation, secretly tortured for information that would implicate Katherine in heretical activities. Within this shared context, Parr and Askew have the distinction of being the first two English women to have their writings in print, and to enjoy a broad early modern public readership. Parr’s *Prayers and Meditations*, first published in 1545 in octavo, numbered twelve editions by 1556, with five more editions appearing during the reign of Elizabeth I (Mueller 1990: 175). Her *Lamentation of a Sinner*, first appearing in 1547, numbered four editions during the same period. The First and the Latre Examination of Anne Askew were first published in octavo in 1546 and 1547 by John Bale along with his commentary. Five subsequent editions of the *Examinations* appeared in 1547, 1548, c. 1550, 1560 (?), and 1585, the last two omitting Bale’s commentary. From 1563 onwards, the *Examinations* were included in the multiple editions of John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* (Askew 1996: xlv–lvii). Public access to the *Examinations* was further guaranteed by the 1571 Convocation of the English Church, which ordered copies of the *Acts and Monuments* distributed to and displayed at every cathedral (King 1982: 435).

The emergence of Parr’s and Askew’s texts in recent scholarship owes much to the rise of feminist criticism. Since the 1970s, scholars have worked to recover, edit, anthologize, and digitize early women writings (Hannay 1985: 3). In the 1980s, the groundbreaking work of Janelle Mueller on Parr and Elaine Beilin on Askew opened up critical inquiries into questions of authorship and voice in the works of these and
other early modern women writers. The field has, over time, been enriched by contributions from diverse critical perspectives, including (often in combination) historical studies, feminist critiques, textual and intertextual analyses, and readings that bring early modern practices into conversation with recent literary theory. The present chapter recapitulates important aspects of this scholarship, locating the texts of Parr and Askew in relation to the period’s religious and gender politics, its understandings of authorship and its practices of popular piety. This contextualized approach to the writings of Parr and Askew will, I hope, deepen our sense of the power not only of the words but also of the silences in early modern discourse.

**Authorship and Appropriations**

In approaching Parr’s and Askew’s texts, it is important to note the achievement their authorship represented in a society where most women were illiterate. Among those who received an education, most were taught to read printed texts but not to write (Hannay 1985: 8). For Parr and Askew, literacy was both a privilege of their gentle birth and the basis of their conversion to a Bible-centered faith, which in turn opened them to the dangers of the period’s religious politics. Literacy enabled Askew actively to engage in the Reformist practice of “gospelling.” Gospelling had been made illegal by the 1542–3 Act for the Advancement of True Religion, which prohibited “women and men of the degrees of yeomen or under” from reading the English Bible “privatlie or openlie,” but allowed that “every noble woman and gentlewoman mai reade to themselves alone and not to others” (quoted in Askew 1996: xxvi). Askew’s gospelling – reading the Bible aloud publicly – antagonized the religious authorities in Lincoln, led to her expulsion from her home by an illiterate Catholic husband, and provided a pretext for her arrest and examinations. She was condemned for rejecting the Catholic belief in transubstantiation, chief among the Six Articles of faith enforced during the religious conservatism of the Henrician Reformation.

Even among educated women like Parr who remained within the bounds of religious orthodoxy, having their writings published meant risking their reputations. To be published meant transgressing the prevailing discourse and attitudes that defined the virtuous woman as one who was not only chaste and obedient to masculine authority but also silent in public, public life being considered the masculine preserve of politics and power. As Gary Waller observes,

> above all, what power seeks to control is discourse since it is there that “reality” is defined by the society; further it is only through discourse that a society’s speaking subjects may enter and participate in it. (1985: 245)

Aristocratic women were encouraged, of course, to serve as literary patrons and translators of religious writings. Parr had, among other things, supported the work of reformers like Thomas Cranmer, organized vernacular translations of Erasmus’s
Paraphrases upon the New Testament and of the gospels, and possibly undertaken translation of the gospel of Matthew (James 1999: 223–8, 233; Hiscock 2002: 191). To go beyond these sanctioned roles, however, and to author their own texts would entail for Parr and Askew a struggle that male authors did not have to undergo.

In the process both writers adopted well-established textual practices that are likely to jar our modern sense of authorship, “which foregrounds ‘original’ creativity as the defining characteristic of authorship” (Hiscock 2002: 185). In particular, the texts evidence a range of appropriative practices – from redactions and citations to editorial intrusions and emendations – with which early modern writers and readers were familiar (Hiscock 2002; Hickerson 2006). Attending to these appropriative practices will enable us to appreciate the textual strategies each writer employs in negotiating the particular circumstances that motivated her writing. This analysis in turn allows us to see how each writer shapes an ethics and a way of responding to the demands of her situation, from which her literary voice emerges in a work amid other intertextual voices.

Readers of Parr have commented on the extent to which she makes other texts her own, a practice amply evident in her Prayers and Meditations. As Susan James explains, the first part of Prayers “is a paraphrase of portions of Chapter three of Thomas à Kempis’ work [Imitatio Christi], filtered through an English translation by Richard Whitford, published in 1530” under the title of The Folowinge of Christ (James 1999: 215). For Mueller, this

deliberate, bold, and sustained act of intertextual appropriation … constitutes a genuine claim to authorship. As her controlling aim, Parr undertakes to foster reformed devotion among the literate laity of the late Henrician church of England by performing a generic reorientation on the masterpiece of late medieval Catholic spirituality. (1990: 175)

Parr effects such a reorientation through “systematic selections and alterations” (Mueller 1990: 191). She omits the lengthy didactic passages dealing with such Catholic themes as the contempt of the world and “the soul’s self-abnegation” (1990: 179). She turns Whitford’s dialogue between the soul and Christ into a monologue of “the soul’s personal addresses to Christ” spoken by “a generically human, undifferentiated ‘I’ or ‘me’” (1990: 180). Her emphasis throughout is on “grace,” identifying it with “the unmerited gift of salvation” (1990: 180). Departing from Whitford’s “harsh medieval dualism with regard to life and the self,” Parr’s redaction advocates “a clergy busy among the people” instead of “the cloistered reclusiveness of catholic clergy” (1990: 182). In advocating faith over works, the redaction rejects “any possible calculus of the soul’s progress,” presenting the soul’s journey as a “constant inward struggle” (1990: 183).

Like Prayer and Meditations, Parr’s Lamentation of a Sinner owes its “literary foundations” to a work of continental Catholicism, of which a Catholic English translation by Lady Margaret Beaufort appeared in 1522, and a Protestant French translation by Marguerite of Navarre in 1531 (James 1999: 235–8). Parr also draws from influential
reformist models, especially the writings of William Tyndale, Thomas Cranmer, and Hugh Latimer (Mueller 1988: 122–33). These influences suggest that the Lamentation is yet another reorientation of traditional devotion into an “open testament to her reformed faith.” Indeed,

Parr would appear to be working both stylistically and doctrinally within … a Lutheran discursive space in which a dynamic faith places the desperately unworthy believer on the right footing to receive the grace of God. (Hiscock 2002: 189)

Parr presents the reorientation of faith as a “confession and open declaration” that both frames an individual conversion experience and implies a rejection of the Catholic practice of auricular confession. Instead of confessing to particular sins, the speaker recounts an experience in which

it pleased God of his mere grace, mercy, and pitie, to open mine iyes, makyng me to see, and beholde with the iye of lively fayth, Christ crucifi ed to be myne onely savior & redeemer. For than I beganne (and not before) to perceive & see myne owne ignoraunce & blyndnes. … (Parr 1547: sigs 2A8v, B6v–B7r)

Both the emphasis on grace as an undeserved gift to humanity made available through “Christ crucified” and the exemplary status of the speaker as sinner reflect “the universalism and personalism of early English Protestantism” (Mueller 1988: 35). Twice citing the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican from Luke 18, the speaker finds scriptural warrant for her personal conversion in the parable’s universal application (sigs. F2v, F4r). This is one of numerous instances of scriptural citation in the Lamentation, revealing Parr’s wide familiarity with the Bible. Thus “the Reformist writer in the early Tudor period sought cultural legitimation through the explicit and sustained referencing of Scripture,” especially since “Protestant subjectivity had grave misgivings about textual creativity” (Hiscock 2002: 183).

Although the Lamentation was probably written in the winter of 1545–6, it was not published until November 1547, a year after Henry’s death. Scholars attribute the delay in publication to the religious politics of the time. Late in 1545 the queen had narrowly escaped a plot to bring her to trial for heresy; in the following year Askew was burned as a heretic amid an upsurge of heresy trials (James 1999: 259–63). Under these circumstances, publishing the Lamentation would be disastrous because the text is not only doctrinally progressive but also politically subversive, dealing with such themes as

the impotency of worldly princes when compared with the Prince of princes, the worthlessness of human law and the willingness of evil men to subvert, the paucity of charity to be found among the mighty. (James 1999: 245)

By 1547, however, the danger had passed with the accession of Edward VI supported by a Protestant lord protector. In his preface to the Lamentation, William Cecil, then
secretary to the Protector Somerset, “configures Parr as a universal model for her readership,” urging readers to “fede by this gracious Quenes example” (Hiscock 2002: 187; Parr 1547: sig. A6v).

Whereas Parr uses intertextual appropriations as a means of doctrinal advocacy, Askew does so as a means of evasion, in the process revealing the rhetorical possibilities of the device in the face of a heresy trial. “At issue here,” Beilin explains, “is the controversy over transubstantiation, for which Reformers were already being burned at the stake” (Beilin 1991: 317). Especially where doctrinal questions are concerned, appropriating scripture allows her to avoid implicating herself in her own words. Such evasion is necessary because the examination, which follows an established format, is itself an “appropriative procedure, one designed to induce the respondent to adopt the language of the questioners. Whether undertaken in the spirit of pastoral care or persecution, the goal is to produce a representation for religious orthodoxy” (Linton 2006: 6). Askew is clearly aware of the stakes of the game: Her use of scriptural appropriation as an evasive strategy is evident from her first response to her first examiner, Christopher Dare. When he asked if I did not beleve that the sacrament hanginge over the aultar was the very body of Christ really. Then I demaunded this question of him. Wherefore S. Steven was stoned to death. And he sayde, he coulde not tell. Then I aunswered, that no more would I assoyle his vain question. (Askew 1996: 165)

In this brief exchange, Askew’s reference to Steven, cited from Acts 7, both deflects Dare’s question and incorporates into the examination procedure her reformist practice of bible reading. “In this way,” Beilin writes,

Askew implies her own Reformist faith in the authority of the biblical text before that of church dogma; more, she established a pattern of invalidating her questioners’ authority by not agreeing to accept their questions, but, in fact, by getting them to validate her questions with answers, which she then uses against them. (1991: 318)

Similar uses of evasive citation abound in the Examinations, and the result is a text notable for “its lack of sustained theological debate,” one that “announces itself as a non-text, as a negative piece of writing motivated on the one side by questions it does not construct as valid and on the other by a truth that has already, and definitively, been said” (Betteridge 1999: 105). Her strategy is so effective it leads an exasperated Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, to complain that she both “spake in parables” and “was a Parate” (Askew 1996: 180).

Beyond Askew’s scriptural citations, the Examinations also evidences extensive appropriation by her editors Bale and Foxe. Modern readers are familiar with editorial and prefatory comments (such as Cecil’s above) that frame a text and insert it into specific discourses and contexts. In the case of Askew’s text, however, editorial appropriations constitute a kind of collaborative authorship. The Examinations was a posthumous publication, and since we have no extant copies of the originals, “it is entirely
possible that Bale made quite radical, although almost entirely undetectable changes to Askew’s autobiographical accounts” (Watt 1991: 94). Furthermore, editorial comments and emendations are so fully integrated into Foxe’s and Bale’s editions of the text that they would be impossible to filter out in the reading process. Bale’s approach is to break up Askew’s text into passages, inserting his polemically charged “elucidaciones” in between, many of them far lengthier than the passages they purport to gloss. The result is a composite text in which Bale uses Askew’s account as a “platform” to engage his opponents (Matchinske 1998: 51). From his perspective as a “magisterial Protestant” – whose “active historical reading … penetrates the surface corruptions of the papists in order to find the nugget of truth in the past” – “Bale had to make Askewe ‘other,’ in need of explication. In textual terms he needed to make her the past of his history” (Betteridge 1999: 85, 98). Specifically, he locates her within an imagined “lost history of learned women that would form a shadowy legacy of dissent against the official church.” In her text, this lost literary history converges with the history of “England’s ‘true’ martyrs to redefine the historiographer’s goal of recovery by creating a history of absences” (Summit 2002: 150, 151). For his part, Foxe restores the physical integrity of Askew’s text. Even so, with each new edition of the Actes and Monuments, his marginal comments and silent emendations serve to advance Askew as an exemplar for his evolving vision of the reformist cause in England. While the 1563 edition defends the martyr as exceptional in her virtues, subsequent editions during his lifetime present her martyrdom as “the key-stone for a series of incidents” that serve to emphasize “religious reform and the monarch’s imperative duty to implement it” (Freeman and Wall 2001: 1188).

Regardless of their agendas, Bale and Foxe were clearly sympathetic defenders of Askew against civil and ecclesiastical authorities who sought to portray her as a “recalcitrant heretic who denied the central tenets of the established faith” (Kemp 1999: 1022). Two issues were in contention here, the first regarding Askew’s recantation of her reformist faith at her first trial. A signed confession was entered into “the official diocesan record, the Bishops’ Register” shortly before her execution. The second issue concerned the torture secretly administered by members of the Privy Council to extract information from Askew on the queen’s inner circle. By her own account, Askew had insisted on adding a sentence to her signed confession of faith indicating that she had not recanted, but there was no such language in the signed confession (Askew 1996: xxxi, 175). It thus fell on Foxe and Bale to dispute the integrity of the evidence and to assert Askew’s truth against her lying persecutors, extolling the constancy of her faith. At the same time, Askew’s reticence about her torture also impelled her editors to take pains in describing and condemning it. Their efforts make for “powerful counter-propaganda that shapes both Askew’s account and her image as martyr. What is striking about these descriptions is their anatomical focus on her torture. The effect is to produce a bestilled and silent body as the object of violence” (Linton 2006: 15). The dominant images of Askew thus emerging are those of, from Bale, “a stereotypical weak female made strong by God” (Beilin 1985: 79), and, from Foxe, a figure of “heroic suffering” typical of Protestant discourses of
martyrdom (Knott 1993: 34–5). In defending their martyr, both Foxe and Bale overlook her acute sense of herself as a legal subject (McQuade 1994), her verbal wit, and, especially after her condemnation, her outspoken and contentious exchanges with the authorities (Kemp 1999: 1030; Coles 2002: 520). They also downplay the sense of agency she invests in her reticence and her deliberate silences in response to her examiners (of which more later).

Voice: Gender and/or Religious Differences

The practices of appropriation, intertextual and editorial, along with the authors’ negotiations of religious and gender politics, condition the voices that speak to readers in the texts of Parr and Askew. While critics take diverse approaches to the issue of voicing, they share an interest in the gendering of voice in the texts in question. For Mueller in particular, attention to intertextual negotiations provides a corrective to criticism that relies too heavily on autobiographical elements for the gendering of textual voices. With respect to *Prayers and Meditations*, Parr’s redaction of Whitford’s text entails a “degendering from explicit masculine norms” motivated by a reformist impulse towards “universalizing of the Christian gospel.” Given Parr’s consistent mode of personal expression, however, the degendering “ultimately results not just in universalizing but in articulations that are identifiably feminine” (Mueller 1990: 177–8). These fi ndings prompt the more basic question of how gender fi gures in Parr’s making of a voice within the period’s emergent reformist discourse.

In her study of Parr’s *Lamentation*, Meuller fi nds “gender to be a variable: a difference that may or may not fi gure within the universalism and personalism of early English Protestantism” (1988: 35). Her argument builds on three observations: First, in drawing from the doctrinal voice of Tyndale and the liturgical voice of Cranmer, Parr produces “polyphony” in her text, a quality that is “fostered rather than hindered by her close association with two authoritative and authoring males” (1988: 27). Second, Parr finds in the sermons of Hugh Latimer a Pauline model and reformist vocabulary available to both men and women, even though she was constrained by “manifest gender and social differences” from assuming his voice of “pastoral authority” (1988: 33). In this case, gender evidently operates in Parr’s reluctance to infringe on masculine authority but not in her imitation of Latimer. Third, the differences between Parr – a compliant female who “somehow sustained voice” – and Askew – a “defiant female” who was silenced – illustrate the variation that exists within the same gender (1988: 34). Not only is gender a variable in defining Parr’s voice, but as Mueller further argues in “Complications of Intertextuality,” religious difference may in fact be “a more primary determinant” (1997: 36). To this end Mueller identifi es a device, the metaphor of “the boke of the Crosse,” that appears in both the *Lamentation* and a sermon written c. 1531–4 by John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, who was beheaded in 1535 for refusing to swear the Oath of Supremacy. Her analysis shows that for Fisher and Parr the same metaphor plays out differently along doctrinal lines.

In cautioning against gender determinism as unnecessarily limiting, Mueller’s privileging of religious difference may likewise be problematic. Certainly such privileging works well for texts with a strong didactic or polemical purpose like the Lamentation, but it would not account for the speculative playfulness of, say, Donne’s religious poetry. Nor would it explain why the period’s popular print “blended the new ideas with older attitudes to religion and morality” (Watt 1991: 8). Indeed, one wonders whether a focus on religious or gender differences fully addresses the diverse factors that go into making a voice. In reformulating Mueller’s claim, therefore, one might say that the role religion or gender plays in the production of voice varies from one text to another, depending on a range of factors – textual, personal, and situational – that are often interdependent. For this reason, the same criteria used in analyzing one author may not do justice to another. If in the Lamentation, Parr’s advocacy of Protestant doctrine produces a polyphonic text through her use of monologue and her “meager use of individuating touches” (Mueller 1988: 17), in the Examinations, Askew’s defense against the charge of heresy requires her to make different choices with different effects.

Specifically, in Askew’s dialogue with her examiners, rendered as a first-person account, gender sometimes becomes an overt site of religious contest and Protestant subjectivity. Thus both sides resort to Paul’s injunction against women preaching in public for authority in accusation and self-defense (Askew 1996: 167). In another instance, Askew answers a question with a counter-question, provoking the response that it is “against the order of scoles that he which asked the question should answere it. I told him I was but a woman and knew not the course of scoles.” Again, when asked “why I had so few wordes,” Askew replies that “God hath given me the gift of knowledge, but not of utterance. And Salomon sayeth that a woman of few wordes is a gift of God. Pro. xix” (1996: 168, 172). To be sure, “the discretion exercised by Askew when faced with persecution was far from unique to her, nor was it a symptom of her gender” (Hickerson 2006: 61). Indeed, “her behavior conforms to patterns familiar from the Bible, accounts of martyrs from the primitive church, and such recent examples as the well-known cases of Oldcastle and Thorpe” (Knott 1993: 56).

But similarities between men and women need not obviate consideration of gender-coded differences, especially those arising from one’s education and one’s position with respect to institutions and discourses. Rather, understanding the self as positional allows us to treat voice as performative and subject to contingencies, avoiding the extremes of gender determinism.

In this relation, Kimberly Coles analyzes Askew’s “female position” in the Examinations by comparing her voice with those of male dissidents, notably John Frith (a
book by whom she had in possession), John Lascelles (her fellow martyr at Smithfield), and her editors (2002: 523). While influenced by Frith’s use of “vernacular” and his “paradigm” for understanding the Communion as spiritual fellowship rather than physical presence, Askew makes no learned references to the early Church fathers, relying instead on the individual conscience as “sole interpreter of the Word” (Coles 2002: 525–6). Unlike Lascelles, who aims to persuade through an “erudite, tightly argued thesis” substantiated by citation and analysis of scripture, she cites without analyzing (2002: 529). Her voice is “unadorned,” lacking the syllogistic reasoning typical of university practice. In addressing a community she “makes no communal assertions” (2002: 524). Although she shares the “persecutory imagination” of male martyrs, her account avoids the rhetoric of embodiment typical of theirs (2002: 537). Her “profound understatement” and “rhetorical self-enclosure” signal not only her isolation but an “inward self-construction” that does not readily assimilate to editorial intentions (2002: 535). This does not mean Askew has few resources for shaping a voice, however. We have already seen her rhetorical skill in deflecting and refusing to answer questions from her examiners. From a psychoanalytic perspective, as Elizabeth Mazzola further argues, Askew’s inwardness indicates an epistemological reorientation of the self from object to subject of knowledge, “a subject who cannot be told, a self that remains a secret” (1995: 159). Following her condemnation, she declares in a letter to Henry Wriothesley, one of her tormenters, that only God can judge her “seacreates” (Askew 1996: 185). For Matchinske, Askew’s sense of her “singularity” in asserting her “freedom to ‘read’ the Bible as she chooses” shapes a “resistant interiority … that will, in fact, become synonymous with later Reformation paradigms for both men and women.” It is in this sense that Askew’s text was “multiply appropriated, first by Bale, then by Foxe, and finally by something as epic and inclusive as the English Reformation” (Matchinske 1998: 43, 51).

Askew’s construction of singularity and interiority extends to her use of silence as an integral part of her voice – her means of signifying beyond words. Her silences come through in at least three ways. First, in citing scripture without analysis, Askew invites into her narration a host of scriptural voices, including those of Steven, Paul, David, Moses, the prophets Daniel, Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, as well as Christ and the evangelists. Taken together, these citations locate her truth-speaking within the emerging Protestant prophetic tradition (Watt 1997: 85–6). Despite her religious isolation, Askew enacts through these citations a textual community of faith that authorizes her practice. For readers familiar with the Bible, her silence can be said to speak through the scriptural voices, “voices that signify on her personal struggle and give it a place in history” (Linton 2001: 140). In interweaving first-person narration with silences through which scriptural voices can be heard, Askew’s voice becomes both plural and fluidly gendered.

Second, through her strategic silences Askew figures for her readers a voice that is withheld from her examiners. “Marked by verbal cues, these scripted silences, as I will call them, are written into the agonistic exchanges of her heresy trials; they stage the presence of her voice withheld, even as they gesture toward the larger political
area in which the martyr was silenced” (Linton 2006: 4). Within the examination itself, however, the scripting of silences allows Askew to mean without speaking. It signals her refusal to participate in a language game through which her examiners would appropriate her voice in recantation or self-condemnation. A crucial moment in Askew’s narrative is her silence under torture, which frustrates her tormenters’ desire for information about the queen and her reformist circle. Significantly, her silence “renders sensible what is unpresentible: the body’s capacity to withhold the voice” (Linton 2006: 13). As Elaine Scarry has shown, torture is a way of appropriating the voice through the body, in view of the “world-making function” of language which underlies a person’s ethical relation to the world. The pain of torture destroys this ethical relation by reducing the victim’s voice into inarticulate cries in assenting to the “truth” of an oppressive regime (1985: 13). In refusing to implicate herself and others through her speech, Askew’s scripted silences constitute the ethical dimension in her voice and a powerful appeal to the ethical judgment of readers.

Askew’s torture points to a third kind of silence: Her reticence about her bodily suffering which “infuses her text with silences that are neither scripted nor localized, but sensed in their effect of withholding her body from representation” (Linton 2006: 5). Even in referring to “patient Job” and her “weary and painfull bones,” one of two brief comments she makes about her torture, Askew points readers to Job’s suffering, thereby deflecting attention from her own (1996: 187–8). This reticence is the quality that most effectively differentiates her voice from those of her editors in their graphic portrayal of, and vociferous protests against, the torture. The graphic representation of bodies as objects of violence is common to both traditional and Protestant discourses of martyrdom, with the former emphasizing, and the latter suppressing, the affective dimension of the victims’ suffering. In their efforts to present her as model for the reformist cause, both Bale and Fox contribute to Protestant representational strategies. In contrast, Askew’s reticence can be said to disrupt such representational strategies by figuring her body and voice as a withheld presence in the text. It is through her scripted silences and reticence that “Askew’s voice and body, at once fictive and historical, can be textually figured as the site of ethical and political struggle, but never fully appropriated by any discourse or for any cause” (Linton 2006: 6).

The complexity of Askew’s voice makes for a speaking subject that is both similar to, and radically different from, Parr’s. Like Parr, Askew in her speech and her scripting of silences figures forth a self who appeals to the sympathy of her readers and invites them to identify with her triumphs of wit and her postures of defiance. However singular, the self Askew presents can be said to have an exemplary dimension, although it is never quite the exemplary “I” that Parr achieves, at once personal and universal. In her reticence about her suffering, Askew turns from an appeal to readers to an inward, exclusive relationship with the divine. Through this inward turn Askew attempts to reconcile her suffering and impending execution to the divine will. In her letter to the king, who refused to stay her sentence, she appeals to a higher justice, invoking in the process the divine voice: “But loke what he hathe charged me with his mouth, that have I shut up in my harte, and thus briefly I ende, for lack of
learning Anne Askew” (Askew 1996: 185–6). With the divine charge “shut up” in her heart, Askew shuts out her earthly ruler in the same breath. The invocation resurfaces in her public confession in Newgate prison:

Therefore looke what he hathe sayde unto me with his owne mouthe, in his holy Gospell, that have I with Gods grace closed up in my harte. And my full trust is (as David sayth) that it shalbe a lanterne to my footesteppes. Psalm. xxviii. (Askew 1996: 190)

Askew here addresses an audience she both includes in her faith and excludes from her sacrifice. God’s voice is a universal call to salvation to be found “in his holy Gospell,” even though it requires her to embrace sacrifice. Significantly, the body withheld from representation turns out to be also a body withheld from torture. Even as the real Askew was so physically broken she was carried to Smithfield and held up by chains at the stake, the textual Askew conjures, in the voice of David, an intact figure walking in God’s guiding light. In the final analysis, it is this sense of something held in reserve that allows Askew to reach beyond an inescapable present to address the future in her readers, to reach an imagined community of the faithful (Linton 2006: 24).

**Parr and Askew in Popular Print and Devotion**

In negotiating the religious and gender politics of their time, Parr and Askew shape distinctive literary voices in their texts in response to their personal, textual, and situational differences. The contemporary popularity of their texts also suggests that they have found a place within the period’s popular piety. While we may never know the full extent of their impact on early modern culture, we might perhaps infer something about the nature of that impact. To do so would require an approach to reading as not simply a mental process but also an integral part of devotional practice. A case in point is the metaphor of the book of the cross earlier mentioned, with its dual capacity as both written text and performed meditation. Locating their works in the context of popular devotional practice also allows us to see how fully the exemplary self in their texts speaks to contemporary popular Protestant beliefs. A shared belief informing their texts is the Christian’s ongoing struggle with the devil as the source of temptation. According to Nathan Johnstone, “the Devil pervaded the written culture of early modern England, in tracts, sermons, devotional and conduct literature, plays and ballads, as well as diaries and commonplace books.” Distinct from academic demonology, which focused on texts on witchcraft, this popular demonism testifies to “the existence of a characteristically Protestant concept of the Devil that was centered around the notion of temptation” (2004: 175).

Within this context, Parr’s exemplary “I” gives voice to both the sinner’s anguish and the convert’s faith in redemption through Christ. The verbal actions that her titles announce – praying, meditating, lamenting, complaining – frame a powerful
rhetoric of embodiment in which the speaker’s references to her stony heart, blindness, travail, wayward wandering, function to present a self with whom readers can identify. In *Prayers and Meditations*, the sinner pleads insistently with God to behold, visit, hear, assist, preserve, and strengthen her in her ongoing struggle against temptation: “For one trouble or temptacion over passed, an ther commeth by and by, and the first conflict yet durynge, a newe battaile sodenly ariseth” (Parr 1545: sig. A6v). The outlook brightens for the convert in the *Lamentation*, who sees temptation as a test of her newfound faith:

> although the devil temte us, yet if by fayth we be planted in Christ. we shal not perishe: but rather by his temptacion, take great force and might. So it is evident … that whereas he was prince and Lorde of the worlde, holdyng all creatures in captivitie, now Christ useth him as an instrumente to punishe the wicked, and to exercise and make strong the elect of God, in christian warfare. (sigs. C8r–C8v)

Parr here voices Protestant views of her day: That within the framework of salvation, “temptation could be taken as a sign of election” (since “only ungodly men would deny the validity of internal temptation”), and that “the most important weapon against the Devil was prayer” (Johnstone 2004: 192, 193). Indeed, meditation is itself a personal kind of prayer, and in *Prayers and Meditations* it finds broader social application when Parr turns, in the latter part of the text, to pray for the king, for soldiers going into war, and for the purpose of everyday devotion. This social dimension of prayer likewise materializes in the *Lamentation*, when Parr envisions personal piety as the basis of proper relations that constitute a Christian community in which preachers, husbands, fathers, wives, children, martyrs, and servants fulfill their social relations to one another (Parr 1547: sigs. G6v–G7v).

In Askew’s case, engagement with the devil likewise connects her with a public readership familiar with the rigors of religious struggle. Her Job reference locates her personal suffering in the cosmic wager between God and Satan on the faith of humanity. The effect is both to underscore the spiritual stakes of her struggle and to redefine it, through Job’s story, as a question of justice for the martyr as innocent sufferer. The devil resurfaces in an exchange with a priest regarding the Eucharist: “he asked me, if the host should fall, and a beast did eate it whether the beast did receive God or no?” In refusing to answer, Askew explains: “bycause I perceive ye come to tempt me” (Askew 1996: 168). Like Parr, Askew here expresses a Protestant sense of “a hidden, unwitting apostasy at the heart of Catholicism” in the priest’s insistence on the real presence of the host (Johnstone 2004: 181). Unlike Parr, of course, Askew cannot voice her religious position – her Sacramentarian understanding of the host as commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice – without exposing herself to the charge of heresy. Even so, in accusing the priest of doing the devil’s work, of facilitating “direct satanic intrusion into [her] mind” (2004: 185), Askew makes clear that at stake in the struggle that makes a martyr is nothing more – or less – than a test of her faith.
Whether through the voice of an advocate or the stance of a dissenter, Parr’s and Askew’s connections to an emerging popular Protestant spirituality locate their texts among diverse kinds of private writing and popular print. Parr’s inward sense of Satan’s workings finds parallels not only in Protestant divines from Latimer, Tyndale, and Cramer onwards well into the seventeenth century, but also in the period’s drama and popular literature such as *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Witches of Edmonton*, and in the genre of “the godly life” or spiritual accountings by ministers such as Philip Stubbes and by the literate godly, notably Lady Margaret Hoby (Johnstone 2004: 194–205). As for Askew, besides editions of her *Examinations*, several popular verses were attributed to her, namely, a paraphrase of Psalm 54, and two ballads entitled “Lyke as the armed knyght” and “I am a Woman poore and Blind” (for an account of their publication and circulation, see Linton 2001: 137). While their authorship has never been ascertained, the psalm and ballads locate Askew as speaker within a tradition of story-telling, both oral and written, in which the narrative voice is always already plural and authorship is participatory. In each performance of these verse stories, Askew is both writer and written, singer and sung. Whether the “Askew” in these stories thanks the Lord for “savying my sowle, from cruelnesse,” or struggles with “Sathan in hys excesse,” or recounts her conversion as “Christ caus[ing] the Divell to depart” from her “woefull heart” (Askew 1996: 72, 159, 197), the audience becomes her community.

**Notes**

1  Susan James has argued that the 1544 translation of *Psalms or Prayers*, attributed to John Fisher, is Parr’s (1999: 139, 200–7). Since original copies of the first and latter *Examinations* have not survived, it would be impossible to ascertain whether Askew had written them. Scholars agree that Askew had the requisite literacy, and the style of writing suggests one familiar with the Bible, rhetorically gifted, yet without university learning. See also Beilin in Askew (1996: xxii); Kemp (1999: 1035).


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Reformation Satire, Scatology, and Iconoclastic Aesthetics in *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*

Robert Hornback

The critical tradition has underestimated few literary works so much as *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* (Christmas-Shrovetide 1551–2 [Nelson 1989: 1209]). As editor William Tydeman recognizes, among the “[m]any misconceptions cling[ing]” yet to this mid-century work by anonymous Cambridge University scholar and dramatist “Mr. S., M[aste]r of Art,” is the belief that “it is … mere scatological farce” (1984: 28). Such dismissal has a distinguished history: The comedy’s first modern editor, the late-Victorian Henry Bradley, famously disapproved of “this poor stuff” as the “very rudimentary kind of humour which turns on physically disgusting suggestions … no longer amusing to educated people” (1903: 202). Even a noted recent defender of the play all but apologized for the “primitive content” as he conceded, “One must grant that all this was presumably funnier then than now” (Duncan 1987: 177, 188), while another rationalized the “excrementiousness” as “crude to be sure, as boarding school humour still is” (Whitworth 1997: xxii). Many critics, then, still share Bradley’s condescension to “this poor stuff” as no longer all that funny, for the tradition too often continues to sniff at the scatological comedy as crudely primitive.

Happily, a notable revaluing of the play is presently gaining momentum, and recent scholarship now makes it possible to appreciate its contributions to English literary history, its intrinsic artistic merit, and even its political import. This innovative comedy is not only the most famous Cambridge play, the earliest extant drama in England to be published boasting that it was “played on stage” (Whitworth 1997: xi), or just the first to use a nocturnal setting throughout an English drama (Maguin 1980: 174–80), but, according to Alan Nelson’s dating, this landmark Tudor work, not Nicholas Udall’s months-later *Ralph Roister Doister*, is likely the inaugural adaptation of Roman five-act or “regular” dramatic form into English. (William Edgerton argues persuasively that *Roister Doister* was probably performed before Edward during a royal visit in September 1552 at Windsor, shortly after Udall’s appointment there [1966: 90–4].) *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* thus offers a novel and, we shall see, jarring juxtaposition of elevated Roman form and the earliest use – over half a century before
Ben Jonson – of provincial stage dialect throughout an English play (Blank 1996: 94, 186 n. 68). Like its novel form and idiom, the scatology of this “most excremental of all Tudor plays” (Velz 1984: 8) reflects innovation in that its unprecedented degree of crudity was likely shocking in its own day. I wish, then, to reexamine such shock tactics in their own milieu in order to show that this groundbreaking comedy functions not as primitive scatological farce but as witty, iconoclastic satire from a revolutionary era.

“Down … on thy knees I say!”: Mid-Century Iconoclasm and Scatological Mock-Ritual

Because the play has typically been isolated from the academic and religious culture that animates so much of its humor, the sometimes iconoclastic tenor of Mr. S.’s scatological comedy has gone unrecognized. I take issue with the late Frederick Boas’s influential view that *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* is “a play which has an atmosphere of orthodox Roman Catholicism, un-tinged by controversy” (1914: 81). Rather, its auspices appear to be both controversial and Protestant. To begin with, the one extant edition was printed by a likely Protestant-leaning press “at the signe of S. John Evangelist” in 1575, and the title page boasts that it was “Played on Stage, not longe ago in Christes Colledge in Cambridge,” one of the university’s most Protestant colleges. Most scholars further agree that the anonymous “Mr. S.” was the future Protestant churchman William Stevenson, deceased that very year. Edwardian accounts of drama at Christ’s buttress attribution to him in recording payments to “sir stephenson” annually from 1550 to 1553, and again under Elizabeth in 1559–60 (Nelson 1989: 167, 173, 177, 207). Nelson notes the likelihood of the 1551–2 season entry referring to an award for *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*, since the production uniquely required constructing the stage houses conventional in Roman comedy (for Gammer and Chat) and fabricating a “fooles coate” (1989: 173, 1209), likely for “Diccon the bedlam” fool (3.2.9).

Other biographical details also point to an evangelical influence on the play. After his drama was favored at Christ’s under Edward, Charles Whitworth notes, Stevenson “disappears from the dramatic records” and “the list of Fellows” under Mary. His absence, Whitworth concludes, coincides with “a time of persecution of Protestant Reformers under Queen Mary, [when] a number of Cambridge men were among the ‘Marian exiles’ in Europe during her reign[,] … returning in 1559” only after Elizabeth’s accession (1984: xxv). Perhaps Stevenson’s plays had offended. After all, far from being imbued with an atmosphere of orthodox Catholicism as Boas assumed, Christ’s College was instead zealously “Edwardian (and later positively Puritan) in its sympathies” (Whitworth 1984: xiii). And, as Paul White has demonstrated, “an unusually large and energetic group of Protestant educators” and academics, recognizing that “England’s future as a Protestant nation largely depended on … [the] education [of] its young people,” engaged in promoting Reformation via drama (1993:
When Stevenson was attending Cambridge, the celebrated Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer was there advocating that evangelicals, “schooled in the knowledge of Christ’s kingdom,” write for “schoolboys and others undergoing instruction” in such a way as “to create and increase” opposition to “impiety” – “in either kind of poetry, [whether] comic or tragic,” whether “in the vernacular [or] in Latin [or] Greek.” When Bucer further defined comedy as dealing with the “actions and fortunes … of everyday, ordinary people” (Wickham 1963: 329–31), he effectively condoned evangelical comedy that might deal with outwardly secular matter. The likelihood that Stevenson was doing just that is underscored in the fact that his Master at Christ’s was ejected in 1553, evidently for anti-papist sentiment (Whitworth 1984: xxv, 127–8).

The history of anti-papist theatrical misrule at Cambridge affords additional context for Gammer Gurton’s Needle’s carnivalesque comedy. In 1544–5, shortly before Stevenson’s matriculation at Christ’s in 1546, German evangelical Thomas Kirchmayer’s Pammachius, the iconoclastic story of a pope who worships Satan, takes his place as Antichrist, and invents idolatrous rituals, appeared there with the blessing of Vice Chancellor Matthew Parker, part of a group later known as the “Cambridge Reformers” (Nelson 1989: 133; Stephen and Lee 1959–60: 254). At Trinity, novel costume chests are first recorded in “An Inuention off all vestymentes … & altar clothis” (1547), which included a number of clerical vestments “brokin att plais for players garments” likely used in satirical entertainments (Nelson 1989: 152–3). In the St. John’s College Register of Inventories in 1548, in addition to “A miter,” “[2] stiple capp[s],” “[2] black develles cootes with hornes,” “[2] draggones,” etc. (pairs suggest the mock-papal procession of Reformation propaganda), we find that the Lord of Misrule was “Mr Thomas Lever,” an avowed opponent of “Antichrist and all his Romish rags” (Collinson 1990: 48) and “a leader of the extreme party of Protestant reformers in the university” (Stephen and Lee 1959–60: 1021).

At court, Revels Accounts of the same season likewise reveal that the young Edward VI himself performed as a cleric in an anti-papal farce that required props and costumes “for the poope in playe” (Feuillerat 1914: 5–6, 20, 22, 26, 194, 255–8), and Edward also favored a Lord of Misrule, George Ferrers, who participated in equally iconoclastic revels. For Edward’s final Christmas season (1552–3) Ferrers would, for instance, require a coat of arms featuring “[T]he serpente with sevin heddes” (White 1993: 54), an Apocalyptic emblem associated in Reformation propaganda with the Catholic church, and attendants including “Iuglers … fooles / friers and suche other,” one being King’s Players’ clown John Smith in a “vices coote … figured with goulde churche worke” (Feuillerat 1914: 89–90, 97). An ambassador confirms that Ferrers led “a religious procession of priests and bishops” who “paraded through the Court, and carried, under an infamous tabernacle, a representation of the holy sacrament in its monstrance, which they wetted and perfumed in most strange fashion, with great ridicule.” As the ambassador reports, “Not a few … were highly scandalized,” and Catholic ambassadors found “the spectacle … repugnant” (Tyler 1914: 444).
When taken out of this iconoclastic context, much of *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* seems destined to strike a modern reader as no more than a harmless, if crude, farce in the tempest-in-a-teapot mode. The seemingly innocuous plot recounts the story of the confusion and conflict that ensue after Gammer Gurton has lost her precious needle (“mine only treasure” [1.4.5]) while mending her servant Hodge’s ragged breeches. As Gammer’s clan crawls about searching for the tiny object, the trickster Diccon, overhearing lamentations, first takes the opportunity to steal bacon and, thereafter, to play a series of pranks.

But if, as it seems, the humanist Stevenson knew of the fourth-century commentator Donatus’s conception of dramatic action in Terentian comedy as driven by error (Cartwright 1999: 78), his Terentian-style play frequently puts a polemical spin on the source of error. Indeed, Stevenson establishes a tone of anti-papist mockery through the figure of a superstitious Hodge, who believes in “felon sprite[s]” (1.3.3) and the like. The superstition of Hodge and his fellows most often appears simply via an extraordinary repertoire of stereotypically Catholic oaths: “By the cross” (2.1.73), “By our Lady” (1.3.19, 5.2.106), “Saint Charity!” (4.2.38), “Saint Dunstan and Saint Donnick” (2.2.35), “God and good Saint Sith” (1.4.22), and, above all, the Eucharistic oaths “God’s sacrament” (1.3.27, 5.2.180), “Gog’s blessed body” (5.2.94), “God’s bread” – eight times – (1.3.11, 2.1.24, 2.2.35, etc.), and most prominently – a remarkable twenty-one times – “By the Mass” (1.2.7, 1.2.21, 1.3.1, etc.). The quest for the needle, similarly, suggests a burlesque of the Old Faith; the search for the precious object, referred to by Gammer’s household in elided country dialect as “nee’le,” evokes erring worship of an image, relic, or idol:

GAMMER: Down, Tib, on thy knees I say! Down, Cock, to the ground!

[They kneel]

To God I make a vow, and so to good Saint Anne,

A candle shall they have apiece, get it where I can,

If I may my nee’le find. … (1.5.40–44)

In the wake of a recent ban on holy candles as idolatrous (Duffy 1992: 451; Thomas 1971: 32 and passim), the spectacle of clowns kneeling, essentially, to a tiny needle by candlelight (“Set me a candle” [1.4.37]; “Light it …” [1.4.43]; “Our candle is at an end” [1.5.56]) cleverly enacted mid-century reformers’ charges of papist superstition, idolatry, and ignorance, the latter via the conventional symbolism of darkness throughout. Just as when, in 1549, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer bluntly maintained that Catholics “give unto the ignorant occasion to worship bread” (Messenger 1936: 428), it is ignorance that induces Hodge to kneel and kiss Diccon’s breeches and to soil himself in fear. An ignorantly abject, superstitiously unreformed, childishly incontinent, arse-kissing clown thus becomes an exemplar of specifically Catholic error.

Scatology turns out to be a meaningful symbol in the play’s anti-papist sub-text, something which sheds light on the fact that the “shitten knaue” (2.2.1) Hodge’s primary sign, Kent Cartwright explains, is excrement (Cartwright 1999: 82). Not
only does this scatological oaf kiss Diccon’s backside and soil himself, but Hodge also handles Gyb the cat’s turd and repeatedly calls attention to the hole in his breeches (and thus his own “shameful hole”): “By the mass, here is a gash, a shameful hole indeed” (1.2.7); “And ch’ cannot somewhat to stop this gap, cham utterly undone. Pointing behind to his torn breeches” (2.1.60); “Seest not what is here? Pointing behind to his torn breeches” (2.3.29). The scatological pattern suggests purpose.

Scatology is linked not just with Hodge but also Diccon. The association first occurs during this trickster’s bogus conjuring, the very episode that prompts the superstitious Hodge to soil his breech, cueing Diccon to say, “[B]e thine arse-strings bursten? … The devil – I smell him – will be here anon!” (2.1.108–10). In his reading of this scene, John Velz clarifies that the moral “meanings of turds … in medieval literature and art … had not been forgotten,” since scatological and cloacal “language and … behavior in medieval religious literature are,” frequently, “marks of alienation from God,” so that all “God’s enemies, from Satan through Cain and Christ’s torturers to the Vices” in moralities employ scatology in medieval drama (1984: 4–5, 6). The “themes of defecation and the demonic” were likewise “linked in Reformation propaganda” (Scribner 1981: 84). Diccon is further rendered as diabolical through his name, whose variant spellings (i.e., d-i-c-k-o-n and d-i-k-k-o-n) the Oxford English Dictionary lists as alternatives for dickens or devil (Cartwright 1999: 92). Rather than being what Joel Altman assumes to be a “secularized” version of “the morality Vice” in a “morally neutral atmosphere” (1978: 155), Diccon thus functions as the so-called “juggler” of Reformation polemic, a Catholic Vice and figure of the Mass-priest as diabolically foolish conjurer-performer. That is, Diccon’s feigning participation in black magic reflects an era in which Protestants attacked Catholic ritual as both theatrical and intrinsically magical. As for the latter, evangelical polemicists denounced the Eucharistic consecration as a devilish conjuration and Mass-priests as black magicians; in fact, attacks on the Mass often employed the scatology and arse-kissing of the Black Mass (Clark 1997: 85, 533, 534).

The scatology that Diccon initiates draws equally upon a broader Reformation tradition employing scatology as anti-papist emblem. Examples of crude, anti-Catholic iconoclasm appear among mid-century continental prints, as when peasants use the papal tiara as a privy or bare their backsides to fart at the pope in Luther’s infamous Depiction of the Papacy (1545 [Scribner 1981: 81–4]). In other prints, a devil defecates a pile of monks, a mock-religious procession features candles whose flames are spirals of excrement, and the Devil defecates into the mouth of a Lutheran opponent who, in turn, issues books from his anus (Scribner 1981: 84–5, 96–7). Excremental iconoclasm was also an element of a tradition of Protestant polemic in which a shocking trope of the Catholic Host as turd-idol emerged. In one print the pope tempts a sow with a steaming turd in the palm of his hand (1545 [Scribner 1981: 83]), while another by Reformation Nuremberg propagandist Peter Flötn (d. 1546; see Grossinger 2002: 173) features a stooping ancient fool (representing the supposed fool-priest of the Old Faith), propped up by crutches and holding aloft, in mock consecration, a swirled pile of excrement on a tasseled pillow.
Significantly, Stevenson also had internationally noted mid-century literary models for his scato-religious satire. One famous contemporary work, the condemned *Quart Livre* (1547), from the humanist Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, had notoriously mocked inhabitants of “Papimania” for worship of their earthly god, the Pope, which included a determination to “kiss his bare bum” (Rabelias 1955: 551). More directly, many elements of *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*, including Diccon’s otherwise superfluous theft of bacon (1.1.22, 2.1.28–30), betray some awareness of renowned German Protestant propagandist Hans Sachs’s recent, shocking fastnachtspiel or carnival farce *The Stolen Bacon* (Shrovetide Season 1550–1, a year before *Gammer*). In Sachs’s satire, a superstitious farmer is gulled by a fraudulent priest who promises to solve the mystery of the farmer’s stolen bacon. Consistent with Protestant attacks on the Mass as a conjuration, the farmer begs the priest to “do some of [his] black magic” and to “[u] se some of [his] hocus-pocus,” prompting the priest to boast of his “magic prowess” and to claim the power to employ an “imploring … blessing” and a “magic procedure.” After warning that the guilty one will be unable to eat what he offers, the priest serves the dupe ginger covered in dog excrement and blessed – via bogus Latin (Sachs 1990: 43–4) – in a conjuring burlesque of the Mass. In short, then, at mid-century, the insistent scatology of *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* is unlikely to have been without some satirical meaning.

This surprisingly cosmopolitan work’s primary anti-papist trope is indeed, following continental models, its scatological representation of Catholic ritual. If Edwardian satire “above all … derided the Catholic Mass” (Devereux 2001: xi, xx), those familiar with evangelical tropes would have recognized that the play offers a crude parody of the Mass enacted by clowns:

HODGE: Break it, fool, with thy hand, and see and thou canst find it.

TIB: Nay, break it you, Hodge, according to your word.

HODGE: Gog’s sides! Fie, it stinks! It is a cat’s turd!

It were well done to make thee eat it, by the Mass! (2.1.51–4)

When Hodge breaks the turd in search of the needle, the staging self-consciously reenacts the breaking of the bread in the Mass. Having just entered to Tib searching on the ground, a standing Hodge completes the debased ritual of the then-conventional turd-as-Host in offering to make the kneeling Tib eat it. In case we had missed the iconoclasm, Hodge’s timely Catholic oath (“by the Mass!”) drives home the point.

Other scatological mock-rituals portray Catholicism as overtly idolatrous and magical. Prior to the conjuring, in order to make an oath of secrecy, Hodge kneels to kiss Diccon’s breeches and swears, “By the cross that I shall kiss” (2.1.73). Starting with the idolatrous arse-kissing of a Black Mass and ending – following Diccon’s feigned “conjur[ing] up” of “master devil” with a “pretty charm” from within a “circle” (2.1.82, 93, 85, 90) – in Hodge’s production of excrement (“By the mass, cham able no longer to hold it! … ich must beray the hall!” [2.1.105–6]), this mock ritual begins and ends at the buttocks. Also indicative of a conflation of Catholic ritual
and scatology is the concluding mock-“confession” (5.2.255) in which Diccon is said to be “clean shrive[n]” (l. 255) and required to perform “penance” (l. 257). Here, Diccon must “kneel down” (l. 270) to “take an oath” of contrition on the backside of “Hodge's leather breech” (l. 271) before, upon receiving “a good blow on the breeches” from Diccon (s.d., l. 290), Hodge miraculously pulls the needle out of his buttock: “Chave it, by the mass …!” (l. 298).

Each of the scatological mock rituals – in 1.5, 2.1, and 5.2 – coincides not simply with the well-timed oath of “by the Mass” but with the kneeling that appears throughout the play. Ubiquitous ritualistic kneeling takes on new significance in light of R. W. Ingram’s insight that, curiously, characters also “come and go crawling” (1967: 264): Gammer enters crawling (“see where she cometh crawling” [1.3.42]); Tib exits obeying Gammer’s command to “stoop and look down to the ground” (1.4.14); and, “creeping upon [his] knees” (5.2.190), the priest Rat crawls off through a scatological-sounding “back hole” (5.2.189), before reentering, likely backside first (Ingram 1967: 264), with a bloody coxcomb. Though the fraudulent “glozer” Rat (4.1.15) has attempted to fool others in the past, this “whoreson priest” (5.2.214) is disrobed in 4.4 and subjected to the carnivalesque inversion of cleric and layman that R. W. Scribner has found throughout evangelical propaganda (1981: 168). Thus, though others have knelt before him, this “olde foole” (5.2.229) is conned into crawling like an animal in a barnyard and into inadvertently sacrificing his own blood; finally, he is reduced to ridiculously impious swearing: “God’s sacrament … that dirty shitten lout!” (5.2.180–1). In the end, whether appearing in the fool’s long-coat, recalling the robed priest-as-fool familiar in evangelical polemic, or even in Rat’s own gown, possibly filched at 4.4.30, Diccon usurps the priest’s role utterly in his final entrance: “God bless you, and you may be blessed, so many all at once” (5.2.210).

If I am right that the insistent conjunction of error, darkness, scatology, stereotypically Catholic oaths, superstition, candles, mock-ritual, kneeling, crawling, unreformed clergyman, and conjuring juggler constitutes a satirical subtext, then in performance some priestly gestures of consecration and/or self-crossing may well have been employed during the mock-rituals. Yet, what makes this work remarkable is that, in contrast to the comedy of an evangelical like John Bale, the satire here never shifts into preaching or railing and, from a modern perspective, never denies what Tom Stoppard has called “the sub-text’s right to be sub” (Stoppard and Delaney 1994: 207). Equally striking is that David Bevington’s insight that Edwardian school plays tend to be “polemical, giving contemporary bias to an academic tradition of Plautus and Terence” (1968: 108), actually extends throughout Gammer Gurton’s Needle to formal and stylistic elements.

Terence “in the Myer”: “Vulgar[izing] Eloquence” and the Aesthetics of Roman Burlesque

The sub-texts of iconoclastic scatology suggest a new interpretation of Stevenson’s revolutionary handling of Terentian aesthetics, the depth and significance of which
Reformation Satire, Scatology, and Iconoclastic Aesthetics

has yet to be appreciated fully in its mid-century context. To begin with, the satire in this first five-act English comedy operates subtly on the level of dramatic form; here, too, Stevenson’s comedy is neither primitive nor merely farcical. T. W. Baldwin, for instance, found: “In structure, it really represents a … more advanced [work] than Ralph Roister Doister” (1947: 409). More recently, Douglas Duncan demonstrated that this erudite comedy’s use of Roman dramatic structure self-consciously mimics and exaggerates technical aspects of Roman drama as the humanist Stevenson closely adheres to descriptions of classical theatre by such critics as Donatus and Willichius. Thus, after a prologue consistent with the form Donatus defined as prologus argumentativus (a summary), Acts I and II fulfill the continued explicatory requirements of the protasis, consistent with Willichius’s up-to-date commentary in his edition of Terence, just published in 1550. Also as in Willichius, the conflict of the epitasis occurs in Act III, Act IV comprises a failed attempt to solve the near-tragedy, and Act V offers a suitable catastrophe, a reversal/resolution with the conventional rediscovery of something precious that has been lost (Duncan 1987: 180–2); here, not a foundling child, however, but a mere petty needle found in Hodge’s buttock – a Terentian ending literally and figuratively pulled out of one’s back-end. In short, in “applying strict Roman form to absurd English matter” and “sink[ing] Terence to the level of barnyard farce” and scatology, Stevenson offered up an irreverent spoof of more orthodox humanists’ exemplary, iconic “Terence” (Duncan 1987: 178, 189).

But where Duncan imaginatively concludes that such a humanist parody may “plausibly be traced to a common-room wager” (1987: 188), and where Joel Altman suggests that the “recreation ad absurdum” of Roman comedy simply reflects pedagogues’ quest to ferret out in Terence the deliberative rhetoric of “formal legal inquiry” or reductive ethicae for “moral edification” (1978: 156, 153, 143, 145), Stevenson’s parody of the authority of fellow humanists’ Roman dramatic idol may actually complement his iconoclastic burlesque of the authority of Roman Catholic ritual – or even “Protestant derogation of the Mass [itself] as play” (Axton 1982: 19). Of course, juxtaposed to the exaggerated high form of Terence, representations of rusticated folk and mock elements in the play (i.e., a barnyard setting, drinking songs, a flying that devolves into a mock-epic battle between old women in 3.3, the mock trial of Diccon in 5.2, etc.) might seem merely to emphasize incongruity, a regular tactic of the burlesque mode. Yet Stevenson’s ironic emulation of Roman comedy aesthetics also potentially adumbrates increasingly negative English attitudes toward the very idea of “Rome.” By mid-century, Reformation-era antiquaries had already discovered that ancient Rome was not the inevitable sire of Britain via Brutus but instead a foreign conqueror, occupier, and colonizer. Notably, Polydore Vergil’s Anglica Historica (1534) was among the more famous of early “skeptical attacks” against Geoffrey’s celebratory account of the Roman presence in Britain (Keilen 2006: 2, 176 n. 4). In Gammer, then, it is possible that we are seeing one of the first appearances of anti-Rome reactions that would become much more systematic decades later. Even as they continued to imitate Roman poets, English writers subsequently recast themselves as subjugated victims of Roman conquest and tradition (Keilen 2006: 4).
But before England’s poets began in the 1580s and 1590s to articulate the kind of simultaneously native and classically inspired “vulgar eloquence” recently identified by Sean Keilen, early evangelical writers – not unlike post-colonial authors of subsequent centuries – were both drawn to, and ambivalent toward, the literary traditions of a foreign empire that became subject to contemporary religious bias as the prestige of Rome suffered in the wake of the Reformation. I would suggest therefore that a pre-condition for the vernacular eloquence given voice at the end of the sixteenth century was an ambivalent and ironic aesthetic stance that first undertook a kind of self-consciously irreverent, even explicitly vulgar leveling of the celebrated Terentian Latin eloquence studied in schools.

A reassessment of Stevenson’s burlesque of Terence must recognize that his follows in a line of international evangelicals of the era expressing a range of reactions toward the Terentian ideal of Latin and dramatic form, that is, to “the reverence accorded to Terence in the humanist curriculum” (Duncan 1987: 183). At one end of the spectrum was the Lutheran-inspired humanist scholar Melancthon who, accepting the virtual literary idolatry of a period in which some frontispieces depicted Terence in a “temple-like setting” (Duncan 1987: 195 n. 25), had insisted, “For since the prime virtue of speech is to speak properly and we do not have a better craftsman of proper speech than Terence, … I earnestly require even a superstitious diligence in the explaining of this author” (Altman 1978: 131).

Actually considerably less unquestioning and in fact more suspicious of such nearly idolatrous veneration of Terentian drama were the participants in the so-called Christian Terence movement, which was “principally a Protestant drama” (Herrick 1955: 20). It was indeed authors associated with the Reformation that first sought to master Terentian style and form, and throughout the sixteenth century northern European evangelicals produced neo-Latin drama aimed at adapting the wit, style, and structure of pagan Terentian comedy to evangelizing via works that were scriptural, doctrinal, and, significantly for our examination here, often polemical – including martyrlogist John Foxe’s militant Christus Triumphans (1556). Furthermore, when we speak of the drama of the “Christian Terence” we are not just usually talking about an international Evangelical Terence movement but we are also frequently dealing with one whose participants made it clear that they were producing something new and different (e.g., Terentian-style works the authors boldly referred to as commedia nova, drama comicotragnicum, or even tragedia nova).

Whether we characterize the diverse resulting drama as playful, subversive, or iconoclastic, such works regularly feature traces of irreverence towards their revered Roman model, something in fact surprisingly either anti- or un-Terentian. German reformer Cornelius Crocus, for instance, testily distinguished his work from Roman comedy when he observed in his celebrated neo-Latin Joseph (1535), “I do not bring you … Terence, all of whose plays are fictions, untrue, profane, ludicrous, and deceitful; but I bring one that is true, scared, serious, chaste, and modest” (Herrick 1955: 22). The Lutheran convert Gnaphaeus similarly underscores that his Acolastus (1529), the most admired and widely imitated of all Christian Terence plays, “transgresses
the laws of comedy” (Atkinson 1964: 85). Such “deliberate violation,” Marvin Herrick reports, was thus common among the writers of the Christian Terence (1955: 57). Kirchmeyer’s famed neo-Terentian play *Pammachius* (1538) actually ends, therefore, after the fourth act, when the conventional Roman comedy figure of the slave Dromo warns Satan and Pammachius that the Reformation has begun before the epilogue reports that the happy ending will be delayed until Christ’s second coming, while cheekily referring to the final technical division in Roman comedy: “That will be the catastrophe of the whole play” (Herrick 1955: 57). Even when Christian Terence plays end happily in the most familiar Christian Terence paradigm, that of Prodigal-Son plays (some of which do end unhappily), they nonetheless self-consciously flout the signature Roman comic paradigm of youth winning out over old age — *adulescens triumphans* — by ending instead with *senes triumphans*, “a precise inversion” that is “diametrically opposed” to the original tradition (Beck 1973: 110–11).

If Gnaphaeus, Kirchmayer, and their imitators hardly idolized Terence, at the opposite end of the spectrum from traditional veneration, subsequent Elizabethan Protestants were remarkably antagonistic toward him. Staunch Protestant educator Roger Ascham wrote in *The Scholemaster* (1570) that the Roman playwrights Terence and Plautus were like “meane painters, … cunning onelie, in making the worst part of the picture, as if one were skillfull in painting the bodie of a naked person, from the navel downward, but nothing else” (McPherson 1981: 22). The nonconformist Henry Barrow would simply attack the classical curriculum generally as “profane, curious, [and] unfit for a Christian” due to its inclusion of the “curious and heathen artes, prophane and vaine babblings … wherewith they … corrupt al[!] the youth of the land” (Barrow 1962: 58). As Wendy Wall finds, the Reformation ultimately marked “a rejection of Latin, increasingly associated with demonized Papistry” (Wall 2002: 73). While not yet utterly embracing such radical rejection, Protestant polemists of the 1530s and 1540s such as Bale and Luke Shepherd nonetheless mocked Latin logolatry in Catholic ritual, and some English reformers in the 1530s, including Nicholas Udall, Ralph Radcliffe, and John Rastell, did feel the need to eschew Latin by adapting neo-Latin works by reformer Ravisius Textor and, soon after, by translating and adapting Terence into unexpectedly idiomatic vernacular.

Indeed, early Terentian translation by the noted Henrician and Edwardian evangelical polemicist Udall — who railed in his *Discourse … Concernynge the Sacrament of the Lordes Supper* (1550) against the Catholic Eucharistic sacrament as “entricked or darkened” (*ii r*) due to “the malice of the peruerse Papyisticaall leaueners of Chrystes doctrine” (*iii v*) — seems to have inspired the approach to Terence we see in Steven-son. Likewise a humanist, Udall had demonstrated an interest in less-than-reverent translation in his famed *Floures for Latine Spekyenge, Selected and Gathered out of Terence* … (1533), so much so that the work, as Gustave Scheurweghs was surprised to find, had not initially “enjoyed the favour of [Oxford] University,” where traditionalist authorities actually “wanted him to promise not to translate any more Latin books into English” (1939: xv–xvi). The vaunted eloquent rhetorical constructions available in Terence end up here being not cultivated flowers, but instead the linguistic equiva-
lents of homely briers. In fact, Udall does not translate Terence’s dramas line for line but rather plucks out ordinary, idiomatic, conversational phrases that he can translate into the most uncultivated English analogues; Udall actually prefers slang and the proverbial to eloquent English equivalents, searching especially for that of which we might say: “It is used … commonly, or it is a common sayinge” (10v). Udall’s low English translation of selected everyday Latin phrases thus has a peculiar leveling effect, suggesting that his motive is unlikely to have been the “superstitious diligence” urged by Melancthon, for in Udall’s hands Terence’s celebrated Latin becomes common, as familiar as a garrulous rustic’s colloquial speech: “I have stered the cooles” (17r); “bande and foote, or with tothe and nayle” (3r); “be we not in the bryers” (16r); “I wol tumble thee in the myer” (26v). Belying the promised fawning of the title, Udall sometimes makes the Roman poet a font of hackneyed expressions; no longer simply elevated or to be revered, this ambivalent evangelical polemicist domesticated Terence through “vulgar eloquence” that downplayed the aureate Latin. Terence ends up being anything but intimidating, seeming instead almost rusticated and down “in the myer,” just where Stevenson would emphatically put him at mid-century.

In the wake of Church Latin first being abolished under Edward, there must have been pointed irony in a saturnalian, scatological performance of Terentian drama, that is, the form of the famously eloquent Terence played out in this first native regular comedy not in “pure” language but mired in such decidedly vulgar English as “shitten knave” (2.2.1, 5.2.96), “dirty shitten lout” (5.2.181), “beshitten” (5.2.251), “beshite” (5.2.290), “kiss my tail” (3.3.24), “I wouldst thou hadst kissed me I wot where” (2.4.31), “ich wold she had the squirt” (1.2.46), “thou slut, thou cut [slang for female genitalia], thou rakes, thou jakes” (3.3.25), “needy bitch” (2.2.49), “crafty cullion” (5.2.51), “strong-stewed whore” (3.3.35), “whoreson priest” (5.2.214), and so on. Part of the point of this carnivalesque joking was that crude English was being presented as the equivalent of cultivated Terentian Latin otherwise famous for avoiding linguistic vulgarisms and colloquialisms (vitiosa locutio) in favor of an ideal of urbanitas (Karakasis 2005: 15, 31). Indeed, this elaborate joke was self-consciously presented in print, where the play includes “scrupulous division into acts and scenes, and the names of characters massed at the head of each scene they appear in” to make the text look unmistakably like a printing of Terence (Duncan 1987: 181). The staging itself likewise featured a wry wink at Terence, for Christ’s College accounts now thought to coincide with Stevenson’s play record payments for “setting vp … ye [stage] houses” (Nelson 1989: 173) – here, squalid ones; because stage houses were required for all Terence’s comedies, a university audience would undoubtedly have recognized an ironic allusion to Roman convention in the staging as well.

What might the effect of such elaborate parody initially have been? Christ’s College audience members, including its share of traditionalists, must have admired the play’s extraordinary wit, whether or not they decoded the satire elsewhere. Yet, they would surely have recognized that, in sharp contrast to the conventional reverence afforded to Terence among orthodox humanists, this iconoclastic humanist’s elaborate juxtaposition of elevated Roman elements and low idiom served a leveling effect by offering
in lieu of the aureate Roman/Latin original an ironic surrogate. Here we should consider that Stevenson, apparently from Hunwick, Durham, in the north himself (Bradley 1903: 199, 204), was not simply the first author to adapt Roman comic form to English, but also the first in fact “to compose theatrical roles entirely ... in [southern or southwestern] rustic dialect” (Tydeman 1984: 427–8). As has long been noted, the “play’s most memorable style,” that of “Gurton and her household,” is “the guttural first person singular” (Duncan 1987: 183), ich, derived from southern shires such as Cornwall, Somerset, and Devon. *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* is thus noteworthy as the first among a mere handful of works from this period in which “provincial English is systematically employed throughout” (Blank 1996: 94, 186 n. 68). Stevenson, then, was a pioneer not just in mastering and parodying Roman form but in representing stage rustics with all the signatures of a non-standard literary southern Mummerset dialect “reserved for the exclusive use of ‘clownish’ characters” as, suitably for the Shrovetide season at Cambridge, one of the “languages of ‘misrule’” (Blank 1996: 80). Stereotypical features include “the voicing of the consonants f and s to v and z, respectively; the southern form of the first person pronoun, ich (I) and the contractions icham, chill, chwas” (Blank 1996: 81), as in “See, so cham arrayed with dabbling in the dirt — / She that set me to ditching, ich would she had the squirt! / ... Gog’s bones, this vilthy glay has dressed me too bad!” (1.2.1–4) and “Cham aghast, by the mass, ich wot not what to do — / Chad need bless me well before ich go them to!” (1.3.1–3). Throughout the play, an unreformed Hodge’s oaths and scatology, conventional markers of superstition, appear in provincial dialect.

Beyond the representation of Catholics as ignorant, the substitution of a stereotypically low English dialect for a traditionally high Latin idiom had significant implications for the future of both Latin and English. Because the innovative use of a rustic stage dialect for Gammer’s household throughout Stevenson’s Terentian comedy effectively rendered non-standard English as both religiously and linguistically unreformed, the work may now take its place as both a masterpiece in English satire and as a landmark in “Renaissance efforts to promote the status – social, political, religious, literary – of English as against Latin” (Blank 1996: 1). As Paula Blank has argued, “the triumph of the King’s English” over Latin in literature “would depend, in part, on the defeat of alternative versions of the [English] language,” which were constructed as non-standardized “antiquities” (1996: 2, 30, 7–8, 18, 25, 81). By the time of Stevenson’s writing, southern English was being typed as an antiquated, indeed primitive dialect in works such as John Redford’s *Play of Wit and Science* (1534), Andrew Borde’s *Jests of Scogin* (c. 1540), Thomas Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), and Udall’s *Respublica* (1553) (Blank 1996: 81–5). The northerner Stevenson was not simply updating Terence, then; on the contrary, whereas Terence had only very rarely used archaisms (to characterize the talk of old men [Karakasis 2005: 14, 44]), Stevenson’s pointed choice of archaic southern English served as a shocking stand-in for now-antiquated Latin. One result was an opposing construction of standard, pure English. Yet another was that, just as Plautus’s *Menaechmi* was said in 1526 to be *una cosa morta* (“a dead thing”) when staged in competition with Machiavelli’s vernacular
Mandragola in Venice (Cope 1996: 15), the publication of Gammer Gurton’s Needle in 1575 demonstrated how vital native drama could be just before the proliferation of London theaters beginning in 1576.

In conclusion, the tendency to misread Stevenson’s self-consciously anachronistic juxtapositions and clever use of linguistic and emblematic vulgarism as unwitting rather than intentional and satirical rests upon tenuous preconceptions about Catholics, evangelicals, and the Tudor period alike. I want to suggest in particular that earlier readings of the scatology as primitive are the product of a critical habit of stereotyping by which many Renaissance scholars have linked “medieval” and “Catholic” with primitivism as well—a view the play itself promotes. Consequently, with rare exception, the early stereotypical supposition that the representation of a Catholic Hodge as a “superstitious … yokel” gives “the impression of having been drawn from life” (Boas 1914: 72, 73; also Bradley 1903: 203) has been tacitly accepted. Paradoxically, the play has also suffered in being viewed anachronistically in contrast to a dour, anti-theatrical, proto-puritan stereotype of the Edwardian period that, we have seen, does not fit its iconoclastic anti-papist entertainments. In fact, Gammer Gurton’s Needle demonstrates that the stubborn view bemoaned by John King that “the Reformation exerted … a negative influence on the development of pre-Shakespearean drama,” thereby “retarda[ng] movement toward a Renaissance in drama” (1982: 271), is not sustainable, for this shockingly clever, groundbreaking, and ultimately cosmopolitan work can no longer be “used as a touchstone of unsophistication” (Duncan 1987: 177). It would be more just to concede that, taken out of context, much of the play’s satire and aesthetics have long proved too sophisticated for moderns to appreciate. It seems, then, that we are still finding Gammer Gurton’s Needle.

Notes

1 In addition to works cited throughout, see Paster (1993), Perry (2002), Neely, (2004), White (2008) and Marsalek (forthcoming).

2 On Catholic typology of the juggler, see Axton (1982: 19–20), and White (1993: 36, 126).

3 For discussion of Calvinist uses of scatology in propaganda versus the Mass, see Persels 2004.

4 For a reading of such details in terms of Rat’s role as a hypocritical, unformed clergyman, see Bryant (1984: 85–8, 154). For examination of the play in the context of oath-swearing and the “Breeches Bible” of 1560, perhaps as revised at such time, see Kozikowski (1977).

5 As with Gammer, “[p]arody of Catholic ritual appears in [a number of] places” in Christus Triumphans (Smith 1973: 40, 337, 341).

6 One wonders if the joking also worked at the expense of monastic “schoolmaster-scribes” of previous centuries who “sometimes refuse[d] to gloss certain Latin words in English, perhaps indicating their sense of decorum or shame” (Ross 1984: 154, 140) – likely in part about the supposed purity of Latin itself. Such scribes were particularly reluctant, Thomas Ross finds, to gloss scatological words for “schit,” “torde,” and “urine” such as stercora auferre, mordula, parue merda, vrino, and vrinam facere, leading them to provide only Latin equivalents.

7 Wendy Wall reads the “linguistic naughtiness” of vernacular Roman comedy here in relation to anxieties about the transition from the unlearned “mother tongue” to that of elite masculinity via the “male puberty ritual of Latin learning” (Wall 2002: 60–1).
REFERENCES


Further Reading


Laughter may be uniquely human, but it is often inhumane. Early moderns high and
low reveled in seeing blind bears whipped, fighting dogs disemboweled, and bags full
of cats clubbed to death (Cartmill 1993). Everyday tasks might be enlivened by
torture: In one excruciating recipe the cook is to tenderize a live goose by pounding
it vigorously, then bind the maimed bird over hot coals to roast it while still alive.
The death agonies will prove “very pleasant to behold” (Fumerton and Hunt 1999:
2). Callousness toward animals was recreational, but delight in human suffering was
often heightened by the joy of feeling morally edified. People laughed at executions,
jeered at women stripped and carted for suspected witchcraft or adultery, giggled
nervously at deformed children exhibited as monsters, and taunted madmen howling
in their cages.

The early modern proclivity for finding humor in suffering and deformity, or what
I call Bad Fun, has been played down in most discussions of Renaissance laughter.
The bald effrontery of my term is meant to evoke the enigmatic, frightening, and
uncontrollable powers of aggressive merriment that ignores all decorum linked to
moderation, pity, or shame. Writers on rhetoric and courtesy from Cicero and Quin-
tilian to Della Casa and Puttenham acknowledge its dangers, repeatedly warning
speakers away from hostile practical jokes and bitter taunts that seek violent laughter
and respect no occasion, person, or place. As hard to delimit as evil itself, which it
strongly resembles, Bad Fun may be had at any period and in any culture; what varies
is who suffers, who enjoys, and who condemns. The tense and unequal dynamic among
these players might change slowly or rapidly over time, varying most significantly
with changing notions of proper behavior (and suitable abjection) for a given social
group. To attempt a foray into what passed for Bad Fun among the Tudors, I have
chosen the familiar figure of the Fool as my guide and I will begin at the social summit.¹

### Dark Play at Court

From the late medieval period to the Enlightenment, every court in Europe and England kept fools, some of them naturals whose wits were deranged or deficient, and others artificial or witty fools, adept at quips and mad tricks. Many fools of both types were dwarfs or hunchbacks, making them naturals in a second sense – (de)formed “by nature” to be laughable, as many Tudors believed. While literary scholarship on fools and jesters has lingered long over the license of the “allowed fool,” the many instances of fools being beaten as chastisement for impertinence, or simply as entertainment, complicate the stereotype of the jolly figure in motley who can speak his mind without fear. As if to confirm St Chrysostom’s dictum that the fool is “he who gets slapped,”² John Heywood paints the Tudor fool as a human drum in *A Dialogue Concerning Witty and Witless*, performed for Henry and his court.

Speakers named John and James wrangle over who has the better life, “the witty worker” or “the witless wretch.” John builds his case for the superior happiness of the intelligent laborer by arguing that even a beloved court jester, though pampered and cosseted, is vulnerable to sadistic pranks and outright violence. His lot is to bear the blows, as a schoolboy’s is to submit to his master:

Some beat him, some bob him
Some joll him, some job him,
Some tug him by the arse,
Some lug him by the ears,
Some spit at him, some spurn him,
Some toss him, some turn him,
Some snap him, some scratch him,
Some cramp him, some cratch him,
Some cuff, some clout him,
Some lash him, some lout him,
Some whisse him, some whip him,
With sharp nails some nip him,
Not even Master Somer, the king’s grace’s fool,
But tasteth some time some nips of new school. (Heywood 1905: 194)

Saying John is dead wrong, James argues that fools have it far better than the witty worker, who suffers endless torments from hard masters, economic anxiety, and the pains of labor. John comes back by reminding him that the witless who are not kept fools are often worked like beasts, carrying heavy loads or set to endless digging. A third disputant named Jerome enters, invoking biblical teaching to argue for the truly wise as distinct from the merely witty; the wise man’s reason governs his wit, which
left unchecked may grow wild and wicked. Jerome’s victory casts wit as a valued servant when curbed by lordly reason. The witless innocent, on the other hand, is left to his fate.

As a court wit who miraculously survived the Henrician Reformation despite his risky penchant for writing and staging satire, Heywood had intimate knowledge of the treatment of fools and the sound of heartless laughter (Walker 2005). Perhaps that is why this debate, and especially its focus on labor and suffering, seems radically distinct from the safer mirth-making of the more familiar and resilient figures – from Folly to Falstaff, Tarlton to Touchstone – who have dominated the literature on folly, carnival, laughter, and stage fools. For Witty and Witless, pain and shame are fundamental and inevitable conditions of their lives; the difference is that for the worker, pain is the Adamic curse of humble labor, whereas for the court fool, pain is the necessary spur to the luxury of courtly mirth. This one-sided laughter is closer to Hobbesian “sudden glory” than to the free and open hilarity of Bakhtinian festivity, in which all classes mingle (and share the risk of degradation) during holiday; indeed for the fool, it is a routine form of labor written on his body in black and blue.

The special labor of the witless wretch is enforced and painful performance, with a social and economic value based on the Bad Fun that results. Even the favorite fool of a powerful king might be “schooled” from time to time. In a jest-book about the life of Henry’s kindly hunchback Will Summers, Cardinal Wolsey taunts him with this rhyme: “A rod in the school / And a whip for the fool / Are always in season” (Welsford 1935: 167). While we need not read this as a factual account, it is certain that many a court fool was roughly corrected in jest and in earnest, despite the fact that most were innocents whose lack of control over their actions was their reason for being in the household. No matter his age, deformity, or mental condition, the fool was forced into the role of permanent class idiot and wayward child in need of the rod, getting learning beaten into his head through his backside. The learning was a theatrical fiction; the beating was not.

If this is all a game, it is strangely one-sided. Richard Schechner uses the concept of “dark play” to describe gamelike social dramas which abandon ground rules common to most games, such as fair play, consensus, and chance (Schechner 2002: 106). The outcome is preordained because the power is overwhelming on one side, with the weaker forced to play rather than choosing to, like a mouse in the paws of a playful cat. Some forms of dark play, such as the ritualized violence of charivari, may leave the loser severely injured or even dead. Competing for custom with the bearpits, brothels and executions, the theater was a prime spot for indulging in simulations of dark play. Whether you call it “horrid laughter” (Brooke 1979) or “grotesque laughter” (Remshardt 2004), the sound of tastelessly sadistic delight echoes everywhere in drama, from the eviscerations of Cambises, to the grisly pranks in The Jew of Malta, to the cannibal cookery of Titus Andronicus. The latter play is especially sardonic because it refuses to segregate good violence from evil violence. While Aaron is painted as a fiendish Vice, and Titus as a desperately mad Innocent, both are also bloody clowns who kill under the flag of Folly. In this bleak universe, those who can’t fight back are
sitting ducks, and like Beckett’s Lucky, their tragic fates are ridiculous. Epileptic Othello writhes on the floor under Iago’s taunts, eminently mockable; blind Gloucester falls over a nonexistent cliff; and the clueless Clown in Titus is hanged for nothing, an easy laugh. The fall of the self-glorying hero did not always call for pity and terror but sometimes for harsh judgment and even contempt, especially when the hero is forced to play the fool in the tragicomedy of uncrowning (Brooke 1979: 6–8). The supreme example is arguably King Lear, who becomes the helpless boy-fool, “schooled” by his own Fool. The Fool speaks for the status quo in the guise of common sense; but the gods who kill for sport are moved by a far more powerful force, resembling a divinely inscrutable form of Bad Fun. For this tragedy anatomizing the escalation of “dark play,” Shakespeare exploits a medieval topos: “The king his own fool.” The tale-type is starkly set out in Kyng Robert of Cicyle, an anonymous fourteenth-century metrical romance (Walsh 1996). Full of his own magnificence, the King of Sicily angers God by stating that no one, not even God, can depose him. An avenging angel takes the king’s shape and assumes his role. The court fails to recognize Robert, and obeys his counterfeit instead. Furiously insisting he is the true king, Robert is treated as a raving madman. Stripped, beaten, kicked, and tonsured by the palace porter, he is put to use as “King Robert’s fool.” After many years being starved and abused at court, groveling for scraps among the dogs, he approaches true madness and grows gaunt and wild. On a royal progress with the pseudo-king, fool-Robert sees his own brothers, the Pope and the Roman Emperor, who do not recognize him. His humiliation total, he nears despair and admits to the Angel he is a fool in fact. Only then is he forgiven and restored to his throne, though he has been weakened by his trials and dies soon afterward (Walsh 1996: 34–46).

In this homiletic romance the king sins like the biblical fool who “says in his heart there is no God,” so his pride must be crushed. Robert’s own court performs the deed with a savage callousness treated with matter-of-fact verisimilitude, providing a horrifying glimpse of the abjection of at least some medieval court fools. The tale struck a chord, surviving into the early modern period in the form of plays (all lost) performed in Lincoln (1481–2), Chester (1531) and the Jesuit college in St Omer (1623). Walsh bemoans the loss, saying that the plays would have presented scholars with a far more complex stage fool — and a fuller picture of Shakespeare’s fools — than “the capering vices of fifteenth-century moralities (fool as sinner, pure and simple) or than the witty, often musical jester reflecting the humanist topos of ‘all are Fools in the great theatrum mundi.’” Because of his tragic potential, this proud fool-king would lead not to “marginal grotesques and entertainers” in early modern drama, but to “title roles [at] the heart of the English dramatic achievement, to Richard II, Hamlet, and Lear” (Walsh 1996: 44). The complexity comes in large part from the tale’s inventively sadistic God and his terrifying henchmen at court. By stressing Robert’s years of agonized suffering more than his blasphemous sin of pride, the anonymous poet uses the Fool’s misery to signal the crushing inequity of a force that can play havoc with sinning monarchs and upright men alike, reducing them to Job-like suffering innocents or bestial madmen.
Homely Sadism aboard the Ship of Fools

The ambivalence of the Fool as emblem, equated with vice and sin on the one hand and clueless innocence on the other, marks the wildly popular and deeply influential *Narrenschiff*, first published in 1494 with sententious verses by Sebastian Brant and dozens of powerfully distinctive woodcuts; Alexander Barclay’s expanded adaptation was published in England in 1509 and reissued in 1570 (Evans 1996: 49). Word and image attracted readers of all sorts through their folksy plainness, but while the texts are full of stern finger-wagging relieved by earthy humor and authorial humility, most of the woodcuts are engagingly comic and cruelly violent. That they fascinate and amuse is largely due to the mayhem visited on surprised-looking sots. Fools in hoods and jerkins are flayed alive, drown, or suffer plagues of frogs and locusts, while their brethren are shown getting kicked by donkeys, sat on by pigs, or trampled by horses. *Stultorem omnes est*, but not one is idle: Some groan under huge packs, while their mates tumble out of trees, vanish headfirst into wells, and get stung by angry bees. Some of their sins are laughably minor and hurt only the fools themselves (worrying too much; owning too many books) and their thin, guileless faces show the same homely emotions portrayed in modern times by an expert simpleton like Stan Laurel. In short, most of the *Narren* seem not vices but innocents – an impression reinforced by the fact that the German term refers both to the insane or mentally defective, and to court fools.

This brief summary does not exhaust the roster of vile and violent acts that give pleasure in Brant’s masterpiece, and it covers only one subgroup of the pictured fools. Others are kings, court ladies, whores, scholars, mothers, and priests, most marked as fools by their eared hoods above their normal garb. In several images children run riot in topsy-turvy households, driving home the lesson that “good” violence drives out the bad. Sparing the rod, whether applied to fool or child, is sure to lead to evil and sedition, even homicide; and in these cases the lenient parent plays the fool. The spoiled child who gets his legacy too soon ends by trying to kill his aged father, and the parent-fools who neglect their children produce little monsters who attack each other with knives (Brant 1944: chs. 6, 90).

Only a handful of woodcuts show generic flop-eared Narren (as opposed to social types) performing deeply evil acts, and these stand out for their shockingly literal attacks on spiritual authority. To illustrate “Contempt of Holy Writ” a fool stands near a grave with Bibles strapped to his feet in place of shoes. For “Blaspheming God” a fool with a blank expression stabs the crucified Christ in the groin and legs with a razor-sharp trident, while “Of Contempt of God” shows a fool pulling Christ’s beard (1944: chs. 84, 87, 86). In the latter Christ gazes on his tormentor mildly, but the heavens thunder down stones on the oblivious dolt. Here is a fitting emblem for the allure of Bad Fun: Those who indulge in it stubbornly ignore all efforts to control, discipline, and civilize, like wayward children. And it is this quality that makes them irresistible. Despite the admonitions of the text and Brant’s undoubtedly sincere quest
to turn people from sin, Bad Fun is catching. Defenses of comedy harp unpersuasively on its prophylactic function, which inoculates against further folly. As Thomas Elyot’s *The Governor* (1531) put it, spectators “thereby warned may prepare them selfe to resist or prevene occasion” (quoted in Sidney 1970: 44, n. 223). Yet the cumulative effect of the woodcuts is to breed the sinful desire to see more sots do even more outrageous and violent things, while the fools’ garb positions them as jesters whose job is to make us laugh, as if we were kings or great ones. As cartoon characters they feel no pain, and they do not inspire that closeness, pity, and shame which might operate to destroy comfortable laughter. It is disturbing to realize that the graphic sufferings of these paper fools had their parallels in the world of flesh and blood, but it is a fact that the highest elites of the Tudor world inflicted humiliating and cruel trials on their own fools, and though they knew the violence was as real as the bodies on the receiving end, they still laughed.

### Brutal Menageries

According to Norbert Elias, in the early modern period many pastimes that once furnished great enjoyment were banished from polite company. Prime among them was the medieval “pleasure in torturing and killing others,” which was “a socially permitted pleasure” that did not generally cause social exclusion (Holcomb 2001: 115). When the medieval warlord mutated into the noble courtier with time on his hands social restrictions mounted up, and began to be codified in works on conduct by Castiglione, Guazzo, and Della Casa, and others. Bad Fun did not vanish, of course. For those with pretensions to gentility, the theory runs, this pleasure was channeled into hostile jesting that was a thinly disguised version of medieval mayhem. In general the courtesy writers treat violent mirth as a real and present danger and a serious impediment to grace and courtiership. Castiglione, who creates an eloquent party of noblemen and noblewomen discoursing brilliantly on grace and civility, becomes cranky when he describes the rich lay-abouts who actually infest the court:

> Many times they shoulder one another down the stayers, and hurle billets and brickes at one anothers head. They hurle handfulles of dust in mens eyes. Thei cast horse and man into ditches, or down the side of some hill. Then at table, potage, sauce, gelies, and what ever commeth to hande, into the face it goith. And afterwarde laugh, and whoso can doe most of these trickes, he counteth himself the best and galantest Courtyer, and supposeoth that he hath wonne great glorye. (Hoby 1528 in Holcomb 2001: 117)

Such japes breed explosive, hostile laughter that Castiglione and other writers on manners characterized as dangerous throwbacks: anarchic, antisocial, and destructive of hierarchy. It is not only inglorious and graceless for the wellborn to throw food or toss dirt in their friends’ faces for a laugh; it could lead to fisticuffs, drawn swords, feuding, and even death. Over time, such behavior came to seem vulgar, partly because
the kinds of do-it-yourself laugh-getting held fitting for early modern elites became more and more constrained, and obnoxious pranks breeding violent laughter became the province of yahoos and fools.

Most of these fools had their trade thrust on them, simply by being born with bodies and minds considered laughable. Mentally and physically deformed children, both male and female, were brought from “all parts of the globe” to the courts, sometimes as gifts from one aristocrat to another, but more often as a result of cash payments to their families (Tietze-Conrat 1957: 91). If they were lucky, wealthy patrons (or rather owners) would be pleased and lavish expensive clothes and gifts on them. Their lives might be vastly improved in material comfort and security, but they were never considered fully human. Like slaves, they were often stripped of their given names and known only by nicknames such as “Monarcho” or “Ippolyta the Tartarian,” two fools in Elizabeth’s large human menagerie. Treated as dress-up puppets, made to do tricks and even to marry each other for amusement, jesters, naturals, dwarves, and hunchbacks served as status symbols and amusing pets whose subhuman ontological status was emphasized by their frequent proximity to apes, dogs and parrots in paintings.

Like gladiators, court fools had to take on all comers, including other fools and servants as well as courtiers. Most of their time was spent with other fools, watched by servant-guardians who could taunt or discipline them at will. Violent play could erupt at any time, and what once had been the roughhousing of social equals was now directed at the far more helpless, socially abject body of the fool. Some were forced to perform “grisly practical jokes” involving mutilating animals and feeding each other repulsive food and filth (McVan 1942: 104; Welsford 1935: 150). Bored courtiers and servants might dunk fools in water, make them serve as footstools, toss them in blankets, or throw them around like balls. Even James’s arrogant fool Archy had to endure being tossed in a blanket by Prince Henry and his friends. Tempers flared easily during these rough bouts, sometimes leading to severe injury and even death (Zijderveld 1982: 92).5

Clever fools could fight back with more efficacy than the naturals. One of the cleverest, satirist Frances Zuñiga, was a dwarf at the Spanish court and author of the scathing Cronica Burlesca. He left a portrait of a violent and corrupt court given to pummeling fools on a whim. Living dangerously, mocking bishops and seducing court ladies, Zuñiga died from a stab wound. With grim humor he shrugged off the beatings, saying they came with the territory: “It is for their hands to give and my body to receive” (Adelson 2005: 14–15). In England, Richard Tarlton, a Master of Fence, invited verbal and physical attacks to show his skill at parrying and besting all comers, often risking violence and severe injury (Maslen 2006: 30). Both Archy Armstrong and the dwarf Jeffrey Hudson, fools of James I and Henrietta Maria respectively, fought duels with their enemies; Hudson killed his man. In France, “Mad Mathurine the Amazonian,” a flamboyant zany who rose to fame under the protection of Louis XIII and Henri IV, wore a sword when she paraded as an Amazon through the streets of Paris. Mathurine wheeled and dealt her way to a small fortune and a pension
through her satiric tongue and her political influence, which nonetheless did not exempt her from “swipes of the cudgel” (Mathorez 1922: 6, 11).

Some of this seems transhistorical – the Three Stooges still slap each other silly, and strange as it may seem, dwarf-entertainers still get tossed for a laugh, albeit in pubs and bars rather than royal courts (Adelson 2005: 363–5). Yet some degree of historical specificity can be achieved by examining opposition, however ineffective, against the basic inequities at work. A handful of thinkers raised their voices in the period against laughing at deformity and abusing the weak. Comic theory inherited from Aristotle identified the deformed and ugly as the pre-eminent comic matter, yet some writers strongly advised against it as a matter of everyday practice. More’s fabulous Utopians laugh loudly at bejeweled ambassadors, believing them to be jesters; but they see it as dishonorable and shameful to hurt or injure a fool or to mock anyone for a deformity or loss of limb (More 1999: 73, 93). Simon Robson, following Della Casa, directs readers never to scoff at anyone “deformed, ill-shapen, lean, little or a dwarf,” a dictate with little effect on elites, given the great value that courts placed on maintaining crowds of fools and dwarfs to amuse them (Holcomb 2001: 120–1, Thomas 1977: 80). Other writers, including Thomas Wilson, assured readers that deformity was properly ridiculous. Wilson sided with Aristotle by providing an escape clause from the necessity of pity: Those who make a spectacle of themselves, such as court fools and uppity madmen, are fair game: “for wretched souls and poor bodies, none can bear to have them mocked, but think rather they should be pitied, except they foolishly vaunt themselves” (Holcomb 2001: 118, italics added). Apparently the fool’s regalia was used to discipline adults who “vaunted themselves” or otherwise displeased others. In the fifteenth-century Book of Margery Kempe, called the first autobiography in English, Kempe joins a group of pilgrims in Geneva on the way to Jerusalem. She so annoys them with her loud crying and praying that they dress her as a fool, cutting her gown short and forcing her to wear sackcloth, in an attempt to degrade and silence her (Kempe 1995: 63). Again, the fool is no carefree jester here, but a target of humiliation, like a schoolboy in a dunce’s cap.

Whipping Cheer

The value of educational chastisement, visited on both the boy and the fool so frequently and painfully, was questioned by some thinkers. In Praise of Folly Erasmus mocks the whip-happy instructor as a fool in scholar’s robes. Despite the squallor and din of the schoolroom, the masters revel in the joys of meting out punishment:

They consider themselves the happiest of men, particularly when they can terrify their flock of trembling schoolboys with glowering expressions and thunderous voices. Yet when they savage the wretched infants with canings, floggings, and the strap, they are simply emulating the ass of Cumae described by Aesop. (Erasmus 1985: 51)
Holbein’s illustration shows a maniacal-looking fool beating a naked child, over the sardonic title “The Happy Tutor.” In Tudor England, the playwright and educator Nicholas Udall was known to be a severe flogger. Writing about what he knew best, Udall created a scene in his interlude *Jacke Jugeler* in which the young Careaway receives a severe whipping by Jacke, the Vice (Udall 1982: 96). Also heavy with the whip-hand was Richard Mulcaster, the famous head of the Merchant Taylor’s School. Equally prominent voices argued in favor of removing terror from the curriculum. Roger Ascham, Elizabeth’s tutor, favored leading youth to knowledge through initiation into the delights of literature helped by constant encouragement; Henry Peacham and Richard Brinsley later followed suit. More relevant to the lives of fools, however, were the concerted efforts made by conduct writers and religious advisors to limit the acceptable level of violence in the domestic sphere. During the sixteenth century, heads of household were frequently instructed to regulate and moderate the use of force on wives, children and servants. Well-run households were supposed to mete out chastisement in controlled ways, and masters, husbands and parents were not to strike servants in anger and in response to a particular fault (Dolan 1999: 213). There is little evidence that this humanitarian ideal was followed by the servants who bore chief responsibility for the care of fools. When the mad fool found himself in the custody of a hospital he could expect regular doses of “whipping cheer,” as one ballad put it. In Robert Armin’s *Two Maids of Moreclacke* the famous clown impersonates the celebrated madman Blue John, a drooling fool living in Christ’s Hospital. Though well on in years, Blue John requires a nurse to keep him in line and clean up after him. When Nurse orders him to untruss for a whipping, Blue John whimpers that he cannot untie his point because he has lost it in a child’s game:

Nurse. Gods me your point, where is it Iohn?  
Iohn. The crow has it, and did win it at counter hole.  
Nurse. Ile whip ye for it, take him up, loose your point lambe, fie, up with him sirrah.  
Iohn. Good Nurse now, no more truly. O, O. (Felver 1961: 18)

At times the theatrical fool-target is doubly subordinated by being a female natural. Despite the admonitions of Robson and Della Casa against jesting at the expense of women and the weak-minded because they are unworthy opponents (Holcomb 2001: 119) the stage offered up female naturals whose vulnerability ensures a laugh. Some, like Audrey in *As You Like It*, are born witless, but others are driven mad by passion or forced into the role of tragic fool by extreme violence. When Lavinia names her rapists with a stick held in her stumps, or carries her father’s just-severed hand in her mouth, we should be moved to pity – but we may find ourselves giggling irrepressibly, horrified at ourselves and irritating others (Brooke 1979: 3). As her mad father’s suicidal sidekick, Lavinia becomes a deformed jester reduced to miming her thoughts, like a trained animal or a fairground freak. The grotesque folly at play would have been far more obvious to Tudor audiences, who in every likelihood would have been less hampered by shame.
In *Two Noble Kinsmen* the audience is invited to enjoy the mad passion of a character known only as “The Jailer’s Daughter,” a naive maid who falls desperately in love with Palamon. Freeing Palamon from her father’s jail and hiding him in the forest, the Jailer’s Daughter becomes deranged by her unsatisfied virginal lust. Sexual heat burns through her maidenly sense of shame: “I love him beyond love / Or beyond wit, or safety … Let him do / What he will with me, so he use me kindly, / For use me so he shall” (2.6.28–30). But no one wants a woman who loves too much, so Palamon promptly abandons her. Despair ensues and she fights off lunacy: “Alas, dissolve, my life, let not my sense unsettle / Lest I should drown, or stab, or hang myself” (3.1.28–9). This suicidal maid is a laughingstock, however pitiful she may seem today, because soon she is dancing as an antic Bessy in that supreme emblem of festive Folly, the Morris. The movement from tragicomic grotesque to farce begins with a Morris troupe rehearsing, consisting of Gerrold the schoolmaster, four couples and a man dressed as an ape, along with a drummer. Gerrold berates them as dunces who cannot do the dance properly. Worse, they are missing one woman to make up their set. When the Jailer’s Daughter wanders in, singing distractedly, the performers treat it as a tremendous stroke of luck – as if Will Kemp himself had fallen into their laps. Says one: “There’s a dainty mad woman, master, / Comes I’th’ nick, mad as a March hare. / If we can get her dance, we are made again. / I warrant her, she’ll do the rarest gambols.” His friend replies, “A mad-woman? We are made, boys!” (3.4.72–6). She is pressed into service, just like a natural taken in to a new household, and promptly starts telling fortunes and cracking bawdy jokes: “Sirrah tinker, stop no more holes but what you should” (3.5.83). Like any cap-and-bells jester she mocks her betters, telling off Gerrold: “You are a fool” (79). They all dance out, bells and scarves flying, the Jailer’s Daughter cutting lewd capers with her ape-man, every inch the fool.

Only a true professional could pull off playing a natural, as this technically demanding sequence suggests. Author-clown Robert Armin, who succeeded Kemp in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, carved a unique niche for himself by writing books and plays about contemporary real-life fools, in addition to performing a virtuosic array of fools and comic characters. In *Foole upon Foole* (1600) Armin described “six sortes of sots,” all of whom he had met or heard about from those who knew them. The book leaves the distinct impression that the clever fool, à la Touchstone and Feste, appeals precisely because he doles out the Bad Fun visited on the real-life natural. In *Twelfth Night*, dour Malvolio plays the capering fool, and Maria, Toby and Feste “cure” him of his folly by shutting him in a dark cell. Feste, the professional, visits in disguise to berate and lecture him, and Malvolio suffers like a real madman-fool. In *Foole upon Foole* a scenario with a twist on these elements occurs as Armin turns to the celebrated Jack Miller, who lived in Esom in Worcestershire. Jack loved to “speake a Players part” in household entertainments, so when Lord Chandos’ Players come to town Jack befriends the stage clown, gets into the act and enjoys himself so much that he begs to join them as a player. The townspeople, who are loath to lose their fool, lock him in an inn. Jack escapes through a window and rushes across the thin ice of a frozen
he entreated Grumball the Clowne, whom he so dearely loved, to whip him; but with Rosemary, for that he thought would not smart. But the Players in jest breecht him, till the bloud came, which he took laughing: for it was ever his maner to weep in kindesses and laugh in extremes. That this is true, mine eyes were witnesses, being then by. (Armin, sig. D4r)

Armin’s account is full of pity for the fool – his “heart aked” to hear the ice crack – but he leaves us with the grotesque spectacle of a professional fool who whips a stage-struck natural bloody “in jest” while the simple victim laughs “in extremes,” an equivocal reaction that might be seen as defiant or simply mad.

The rougher kinds of folly and laughter familiar to the Tudors did not end abruptly with Elizabeth’s death and the succession of James. New kinds of grotesque amusements were soon introduced at court, shadowed by the supremely dangerous pastime of mocking the new regime. James arrived with a crowd of Scots whose manners and accents were thought crude and strange. The English soon noted that the king’s body was deformed, with infirmities resembling those of naturals such as Blue John. The king slobbered, slouched, and stammered, and when he rode at the hunt, he had to be strapped to the saddle. Accounts of his hunting parties are redolent with excrement, gore, and vicious hilarity. At the site of the kill, James would slash the throat of a fallen deer, then plunge his hands in its entrails, smearing blood over the faces of his companions. While riding, he refused to dismount to relieve himself. During one smelly day of hunting, one jest had it, a courtier saw royal turds leaking from James’s collar and exclaimed, “Is this the lord Salamon ye talke on? If ever old Salaman in all his Reyaltie was [arrayed] like ours, Ile be hangd” (Le Strange 1974: jest 316). Despite the risks, playwrights and satirists took aim at the newcomers and painted them as idiots and fools, though this satiric onslaught landed the keener wits in prison. James brought with him his own ammunition, including the foul-mouthed Archy Armstrong, who feared no one and attacked the English courtiers with vicious glee, causing many to conceive a lifelong hatred for him. The fool grew politic and became incredibly influential despite his many enemies. When Prince Charles and Buckingham departed for Spain to woo the Infanta and seal the peace, Archy went with them. There he infuriated the Infanta and her courtiers with taunts about the Armada. The Scottish fool finally went too far in attacking Archbishop Laud, and he was cashiered in the customary fashion, “carried to the Porter’s Lodge, his Coat pulled over his Ears, and kicked out of the Court” (Southworth 2003: 187).

This mention of kicking aside, the accounts of Archy’s life contain few instances of violence at his expense. Despite being deprived of royal livery, he managed to retire a wealthy family man in Cumberland, having enriched himself in his salad days; he also owned 1,000 acres in Ireland, a gift from Charles. The position of the affable by landless Will Summers, as Theodore Leinwand has suggested, was altogether more
circumscribed by aristocratic values of service under Henry (Leinwand 1987: 223). Loved as a child, he could be beaten as a child; and if driven from court, he might spend all the money he had been given and become a vagrant. While it is laughable to try to draw a clear demarcation between the late Tudor sense of humor and the Stuart, I would suggest that Archy’s life was comparatively free from such fear because he managed to school rather than be schooled, accruing political leverage through his access to the king. He famously told a furious Buckingham, who was threatening to have him hanged, that fools had license to speak, “but many Dukes in England have been beheaded for their insolence” (Southworth 2003: 182). Clever fools had come to claim the license of the allowed fool with occasional success, while naturals knew their lot was to bend over and untie their points, crying O, O while others laughed.

This little tour of Bad Fun was intended to explore just one dark facet of the Tudor sense of humor. Kept fools have had their day, and the delight in abusing them has found other outlets. This chapter does not intend to show, however, that horrid laughter is strictly Tudor, or even a thing of the past. The shameless laughter of abuse blasts through the soundtrack of the twenty-first century and wrecks the pretension of our period to have a deadlock, or even a firm hold, on civilized behavior. The merrymaking at Abu Ghraib has ended that. Could some of this “dark play” simply be a continuation of the early modern by other means? It is well known that many people in sixteenth-century England delighted in plays, jests, and rituals mocking or exhibiting Jews, Moors, Africans, Catholics, mental defectives, deformed children, hunchbacks, and dwarves; what is less remarked is that some oddly familiar early pastimes seem to be reviving and prospering right now, with some media updating and the additional callus of impermeable irony. Think of the artificial fools in the Jackass films, seeking new ways to harm, burn, mutilate, and nauseate themselves for our viewing pleasure; or “Papa Lazarou,” the insane wife-stealing clown in golliwog-blackface on the BBC’s League of Gentlemen; or the idiotic Borat, an anti-Semitic Kazakhian natural played by an English Jew, who bares his body to the world for degradation. They all recruit precisely this sort of laughter, which is explosive and extreme because it employs the fool’s body to catapult past the discomforts of pity and shame into Folly’s boundless domain.

“Getting” Borat means happily sharing his ironic buffoonery, which permits hostile mirth to be directed at the unwary – that is, anyone clueless and so not ourselves. Borat attacks shame and pity while flattering us as insiders, hence its enormous success. What is more mysterious are the ways societies manage to limit such careless laughter, to mute it or at least to make it apologize for itself. Bad Fun is most malevolent when it is least ironic. Even the mangling and castration of black men aroused a carnival of hilarity during lynchings that took place a short time ago. Nooses are reappearing on trees and doors throughout America, a threatening expression of dark play meant to mock and demean. As I have tried to suggest, shame at indulging in such play, and such laughter, is an acquired response, fitfully dependent on such restraining forces as genre, codes of manners, and ethics that bind together and delimit the social nexus and performance occasion. In the age of the Tudors, the
uncomfortable fact is that the deformed and mad fool was a plaything, player, pet, slave, zany, and dunce, whose hilarious degradation helped the elite to pass the time. Perhaps it is this brand of laughter that lends Tudor humor, wit, and comedy its peculiar bitterness: the afterglow of dark play, the aftertaste of Bad Fun.

Notes

1 While some scholars have been addressing xenophobic laughter and the topic of enforced performances by (and caricatures of) racial others such as Moors, Jews, Turks, and Africans, little attention has been paid to theatrical displays of “the extraordinary body” (Thomson 1997), the deformed body that early moderns called monstrous and our age calls disabled or freakish. See Adelson’s important work on the comic “minstrelization” of dwarfs (2005), Burnett’s work on fairbooth monsters (2002), and Bogdan’s on the freak show (1996, 1997). Since all court fools were figured as exotic pets who were actually or theatrically mentally deficient, and many were also physically disabled, I have drawn on this varied body of work in developing my arguments.

2 Welsford (1935: 314). While Chrysostom’s is the most “comprehensive and fundamental definition” on record, a few fools manage to switch sides and do the slapping; and some can make the slapper feel a fool (314–15).

3 “Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those Graces called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves” (Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, London, 1651: 27).

4 If one adds tragic generals to this list, then Othello should be included. On the laughter of degradation in this play see Michael Bristol’s brilliant essay on charivari and abjection in Othello (1990).

5 In one extreme case Ivan the Terrible, annoyed by the japes of a dwarf-fool, burned his naked back with boiling soup and then had his throat cut (Zijderveld 1982: 96).

6 In Aesop an ass dresses himself in a lion’s skin to terrify others until he is unmasked.

References


Further Reading


Perspective and Realism in the Renaissance

Alastair Fowler

Those wishing to follow the movements of sensibility accompanying the shift from the Ptolemaic to the modern world (through the medieval, Copernican, and eventually Newtonian universes) naturally have recourse to comparing contemporary literary representations of the world. But in this they meet a great difficulty: namely that methods of mimesis, or representation of life, did not meanwhile stand still. These too suffered, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, a series of radical metamorphoses. In particular, ideas of realism changed almost beyond recognition.

Spectator Realism

Many will think the development of realism a familiar story – so familiar that it can almost be taken for granted. But this seems to me a misconception. Of the true story of realism, less than half has ever been told. For there are at least two, distinct realisms, of which only one has been much discussed. The familiar realism is the one that became “classic realism,” the realism of Samuel Richardson or Anthony Trollope or Graham Greene – and of William Congreve, Arthur Pinero, and Terence Rattigan. In this realism action is shown as it appears to an observer. I shall lump together the variants of classic realism, calling them all “spectator realism.”

Spectators of the action were indeed often enough portrayed in pre-novelistic fiction and in drama before the dramatists named in the last paragraph. Think of the stage audiences of Jacobean drama: Andrea’s ghost in The Spanish Tragedy, for example, sitting down with Revenge to watch the play that follows: “Here sit we down to see the mystery, / And serve for Chorus in this tragedy” (1.1.90–1). Or Christopher Sly and a lord’s hunting party watching a company of travelling players acting The Taming of the Shrew. Or, a more striking example still, Claudius and his court watching The Murder of Gonzago, themselves watched by young Hamlet and Horatio, who in turn are watched by the “real” audience in the Globe. In drama dominated by the Renaissance “idea of the play” (Righter 1967), watching and deliberating spectator-gods were common enough. Shakespeare’s characters often refer to such gods: “Look down,
you gods” (The Tempest 5.1.201); “you gods, look down” (The Winter’s Tale 5.3.121); “sit, gods, upon your thrones, and smile at Troy” (Troilus and Cressida 5.10.13); “The gods look down, and this unnatural scene / They laugh at” (Coriolanus 5.3.184–5); “eyes of heaven” (Hamlet 2.2.518); “You see me here, you gods” (King Lear 2.4.274).

Such deities, like Bishop Berkeley’s observing God, were omnipresent, keeping things under their moral judgment – keeping them, almost, in existence.

In a somewhat earlier period (but lingering on in Shakespeare’s) the medieval dream-vision genre typically depended on a spectator who was a dreamer – sometimes a naïve one like the Chaucer of The House of Fame – who (conveniently for the reader) needed to have everything explained to him by a guide or presenter. Great differences, however, separate these medieval or early Renaissance observers from those our own spectator realism implies. One obvious difference is that in Renaissance plays and narratives the spectators (Chaucer; Christopher Sly in The Taming of the Shrew) may themselves be represented as actually engaged in spectating. They exist visibly, if only at the edge of the reader’s attention. Secondly, and less obviously, the early spectators are not always entirely passive. They participate. At the very least they may ask questions – sometimes very frequent questions – and receive answers from a guide or presenter. Occasionally they even involve themselves in the action, perhaps joining in conversation with other characters, as in The Assembly of Ladies (anon., c. 1470–80) or Thomas Clanvowe’s The Cuckoo and the Nightingale (late fourteenth century) (Spearling 1976: 179). This is hardly surprising, since it is the spectator’s experience, and the spectator’s emotions, that the dream-vision usually portrays. Its narrative is after all the dreamer’s own vision.

In the accepted model, medieval dream-vision figures as the anticipation or fore-shadowing of later, more sophisticated, forms of fiction. This model is thoroughly teleological, with classic realism as its telos: The naïve dreamers of dream-vision are determined by the primitive character of the form itself. When literature becomes less uncouth, when the realistic illusion is achieved, dreamers and their allegories can be eliminated – dismantled like scaffolding no longer needed. With the advent of Ian Watt’s “formal realism” (Watt 1957), in other words, the spectator-god becomes an invisible deus absconditus. This model has appeared to work reasonably well for much fiction and drama of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – for much of William Thackeray and Henry James, as for Pinero and Rattigan. But it has serious defects, among them the patronizing assumption that medieval and Renaissance mimesis was no more than fumbling experimentation. Besides, it gives no account of the dreamer’s or spectator’s participation in the action of medieval and Renaissance works. What about the substance of those sophisticated allegories? What of all their emotional content?

**Participative Realism**

In short, one may think of realism as composed of two distinct strands. The first, as we saw, developed from medieval allegory into spectator realism and has been much
discussed. But another strand (let us call it participatory or empathic realism) is largely ignored and little understood. It is nevertheless a vital component in Victorian literature, and still more so in modernist and more recent fiction and drama. The novels of Henry Fielding, Trollope, and George Meredith, the dramas of Henrik Ibsen, James Barrie, and Luigi Pirandello – to say nothing of absurdist drama – are obviously not cast in the mould of spectator realism.

A Spenserian passage on the border between the two narrative modes may exemplify how they interacted during the Renaissance. In *The Faerie Queene* 2.4.3–15 the knight Sir Guyon "saw from far, or seemed for to see" an affray which he hoped to "agree" (settle). A madman was dragging a youth by the hair and cruelly mistreating him. At first Guyon and his guide, the Palmer, are simply spectators viewing a scene of violence described in emblematic detail: the youth in the grip of a madman encouraged by a lame hag. But Guyon is no passive, apathetic spectator: "moved with great remorse" (Stanza 6) he intervenes, grappling with the madman, only to be himself overcome. Now enraged – "emboyling in his haughtie hart" (Stanza 9) – he draws his sword. But the Palmer, offering an explicatio of the complex emblems of Furor and Occasion, tells him the madman cannot be subdued by main force (so to say, will-power). Guyon must first restrain Furor’s mother, the hag “Occasion, the root of all wrath and despight” (Stanza 10). As in the traditional emblem of Occasio, she must be seized by the forelock: Once things have gone too far, there is no holding the smooth back of her head, since “all behind was bald, and worn away, / That none thereof could ever taken hold” (Stanza 4). The passage is generalizing, allegorical and emblematic, but Guyon and the Palmer are real spectators, not mere fictiones. All the same, the mode is not that of our spectator realism: It is more participatory. For Guyon, too, is in the grip of passion: He is involved in the struggle, which becomes in some sense his own. And the Palmer interprets Guyon’s own experience, rather than expounding universal generalities the youth’s suffering exemplifies.

The narrative now turns to the youth Phedon, who has taken no part in Guyon’s encounter with Furor. And for Phedon’s story, Spenser shifts into a different narrative mode. As if illustrating the preceding discourse, or unfolding its emblems, Phedon’s tale is not allegorical, but a simple exemplum. It is even in a tragic genre: the most realistic form then available.

In Phedon’s tale (Stanzas 17–33), his false friend Philemon deceives him by getting the maid Pryene to impersonate her mistress Claribell, Phedon’s love. As Phedon puts it, he himself is made “the sad spectatour of my Tragedie” (Stanza 27). He sees what he takes to be Claribell betraying him with a "groom of base degree." Although a spectator, Phedon is passionately involved: so passionately that he kills the supposedly unfaithful Claribell. The tale continues in this tragic mode, quite as realistically as Ariosto’s or François de Belleforest’s treatments of the story. That is, up to the point when Phedon, having poisoned Philemon, pursues Pryene to kill her too. But now Phedon finds himself totally possessed by rage. In a characteristically Spenserian peripeteia (or sudden reversal), the figure who meets and overcomes him is “this madman” (Stanza 32): the personification of his own furor. And here the narrative returns
to internalized experience and to Guyon’s adventure, the tempering of passion. Having heard Phedon’s terrible story, the temperate Guyon didactically comments, “Squire, sore have ye beene diseasd; / But all your hurts may soone through temperance be easd” (Stanza 33). Readers and critics understandably take against this advice as priggish. It implies superiority to Phedon’s suffering or at least a disagreeable overconfidence. Temperance will not bring back Philemon or Claribell. Taking the passage as reversion to allegory hardly improves matters: The overconfidence is then authorial, and Guyon’s later downfall at the Cave of Mammon becomes problematic.

Just as Phedon, although at first a spectator of Claribell’s supposed unfaithfulness, is aroused to jealous rage and becomes intensely involved, so with Guyon. He too is at first a compassionate spectator of Phedon’s suffering at the hands of the madman. And when Guyon himself participates – struggling with the same madman – he too fails to subdue Furor until he follows the Palmer’s advice. Occasion of fury must be dealt with first: “first her restrain” (2.4.11); “the sparke soone quench” (2.4.35). Phedon’s tale illustrates this by negative example: Instead of quenching jealousy’s sparks he embraces the occasion of wrath by arranging with Philemon to witness what he takes to be Claribell’s disloyalty. Similarly Guyon accepts Mammon’s invitation to see over the Cave, and in doing so embraces its occasion of worldliness and avarice. Thus, Guyon’s glib advice to Phedon, far from showing the triteness of Spenser’s morality, is actually a shrewd touch of realism. Guyon, not Spenser, is overconfidently didactic. The reader is surely meant to receive Guyon’s advice much as Phedon may be supposed to do; feeling that Guyon makes temperance sound much too easy. As often, Spenser is blamed for his success.

One has to accept that Renaissance readers felt no incompatibility between naturalistic representation of shaded characters and allegorical representation of black-and-white ones. And in visual art similarly, from Jan van Eyck to Jan Steen, it was not thought incongruous that genre scenes or realistic portraits like *The Great Picture of Lady Anne Clifford* should have emblematic details or attributes (Fowler 2003: 32–6). This became more difficult with the advent of formal realism and the gradual development of consistent perspective construction. From the eighteenth century, objects in pictures tended to be plausibly naturalistic – or else the whole picture had to be visionary or symbolic. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, it was different, partly because the real world was then itself allegorical and emblematic (even house- and shop-signs were emblems). In literary realism, characters like the human Phedon, the heroic Guyon, and the personification Furor all belong to the same fictive world, part naturalistic and part allegorical.

Realistic effects of such a sort are by no means peculiar to Spenser: Sidney’s *Arcadia* and Shakespeare’s tragedies are full of them, and so is Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. All continue to explore and develop representational devices common in medieval fiction: for example, the dispersal of character among objects, places, and animals (Ginsberg 1983). After all, each allegorical *factio* in a dream-vision is dreamt by the protagonist–dreamer, and so generated as an identification of subjective experience. The medieval allegorist does not narrate events in the external world as if viewed by a notional
spectator, but rather presents aspects of subjective experience, encountered when the “character” (as we say) of an emotion is recognized. In dream-visions of the Middle Ages the dreamer’s participation was not often explored in much detail: For the readers or audience to be edified it was only necessary that they should identify broadly with the dreamer’s encounters. In general, they were to apply the vision to themselves, appropriating all the fictiones.

Viewpoints

Unlike Renaissance fiction, where perspectives perpetually change, medieval allegory shifted viewpoint less often. Exceptions include a few devotional works like the Arca Noe of Hugh of St Victor (Carruthers 1990) and – far greater exceptions – certain bold narratives of genius. In Piers Plowman (c. 1360–87), William Langland constructs multiple perspectives on a grand scale, switching the eye-point (and I-point) of his mimesis again and again. When the action is imagined from a supernal viewpoint, in the debate of the Four Daughters of God (B, passus 18), no creature can truly have a spectatorial role, since the arguments are between fictiones of God. Then, abruptly, Langland turns to Piers’s joust: to action performed, at least on one level, by human agencies. In such passages of Piers Plowman, in Dante’s exchanges with his guides Virgil and Beatrice in the Commedia Divina (?1307–20), in the kaleidoscopic narrative of Francesco Colonna’s Hypnerotomachia (1499), and in late medieval allegorical fiction and drama generally, we may find models for the shifting viewpoints of Renaissance realism.

That this stage of realism had a basis in perception, or in the configuration of the imagination, is strongly suggested by the fact that visual art presents analogous forms. There, too, in manuscript illuminations, biblical dreamers like Jacob and Joseph are often pictured together with the contents of their vision. This motif, termed Assistenzporträt, continued into the seventeenth century, and can be seen again in the Rückenfigur (or “back figure”) of the nineteenth. Today, spectators in fiction are discussed in terms of the “male gaze” or the “female gaze”; but in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch art theory, an altogether different range of types of beholders were distinguished. There was the beschouwer, for example, who by mime or action interpreted the action; the sprecher, who explained the work, much like the presenter of a masque; and the gesturing maidservant eavesdropping through the open door of a doorkijkje. The beschouwer was often physically involved in the action, as in countless realizations of the myth of Actaeon’s discovery of Diana (Fowler 2003: 66–76).

Literary historians have been accustomed to think of Renaissance realism as anticipating later forms. Looking forward rather than back, they have eagerly shown how, after Spenser, the conventions of spectator realism displaced those of allegory and participatory realism in a decisive, almost inexorable way. This did not happen, however, so rapidly as has been assumed. So far as Elizabethan and Jacobean drama
is concerned, Shakespeare is almost unique in presenting more or less consistent characters, capable of developing through the action of an entire play — through phases imaginable by modern audiences as a single, continuous, organic process. And even so, even in Shakespeare, there are many disconcerting interruptions of the almost modern, illusionistic mode. Inconsistencies and departures from our sort of realism break in more often than we pretend — whole scenes, sometimes, like *I Henry VI* 2.4, the Temple Garden scene. Some characters (Cordelia; Hermione) disappear altogether for long stretches of a play; others, like the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, act unaccountably, without obvious motivation: without, even, motivation subsequently explained.

Here and there, of course, Jacobean tragedy made great “advances” towards consistent spectator realism. And a similarly modern mode appears in short non-dramatic passages, for example in Donne’s satiric monologues. There is no question that Thomas Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*, say, seems to belong to a different literary world altogether from Spenser’s. Throughout the scene of Isabella’s seduction by Livia, Middleton sustains an unbroken sequence of naturalistic, psychologically realized details that can be taken as spectator realism; although early audiences may have referred them to stages of temptation: to schemes in the moral theology of the time. Still, modern audiences have no difficulty in understanding most of the scene in terms of classic realism. But that cannot be said of Middleton’s play as a whole — least of all its conclusion. It ends with an inset masque of revenge that now seems improbably contrived to maximize the spectacular carnage. In fact, one might describe much Jacobean and Caroline drama as characterized by discontinuous realism — or realism at most continuous throughout an individual scene (the unit of organization).

This is strikingly true of Beaumont and Fletcher’s tragedies and tragicomedies. *The Maid’s Tragedy*, for example, has been treated as a realistic play with protean characters — that is, as defective spectator realism. But the play is more coherent than that suggests. It consists of a structured sequence of scenes during which characters consistently alter according to the requirements of a now unfamiliar mimesis: namely, participatory realism. Thus, the scene of Evadne’s prenuptial undressing (2.1) may be regarded as consistently realistic within its perspective. It imitates the world shared by the servant Dula (Greek δουλη, bondwoman) and the ladies in waiting. The Evadne known to them is proper, even severe. But when the ladies have exited (2.1.126) and Evadne is alone with Amintor, in the passage beginning with the shock of “A maidenhead Amintor / At my years?” (2.1.193–4), she expresses a cynicism that reveals the perspective of Dula and the ladies to be seriously incomplete. This discovery, of which there has been no previous hint, is a sensational coup de théâtre. It suddenly puts the audience in a state something like that of the bridegroom Amintor. Such is the surprise that they participate in his experience rather than merely view it: They see things from his viewpoint. Incorrigible spectators as we are, however, we expect to be able to read the new “reality” back into earlier scenes of the play. And when we fail to find earlier signs of Evadne’s hypocrisy, we fault the play for its inconsistent or “protean” characters.
The realism of Shakespeare and Jonson is sometimes closer than this to classic realism. But it is sometimes further from it than we suppose. Critics are prone to pass over Shakespearean passages that do not accord with the assumptions of spectator realism. They treat these as inset “spectacles”, or interludes, or even (as with the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*) as interpolations. Yet scenes like the triumph in *Pericles* 2.2, a procession of knights bearing shields with *imprese* that are presented to Thaisa and described by her, surely have a claim to be considered as valid perspectives in a different mimetic mode from ours. As King Simonides says of Pericles’ rusty armour, “Opinion’s but a fool, that makes us scan / The outward habit by the inward man” (2.2.55–6). Even in Shakespeare’s tragedies, spectator realism is quite often interrupted, notably in the soliloquies. These do not merely express moments of “stream of consciousness” (which would be interruption enough). For they constitute summarizing, stocktaking retrospects and prospects over mental events, emotions, and realizations that belong to a much longer lapse of time than that of the scene they interrupt. Thus they let an audience share the protagonist’s inward viewpoint and even in part the dramatist’s.

In many other ways, too, Shakespeare’s spectator realism is discontinuous. Some of the most recalcitrant problems his interpreter encounters, indeed, have arisen from inappropriate attempts to discover unbroken spectator realism. Hamlet’s character, for example, has often been described as “protean” in the same way as Evadne’s. The godlike spectator-critic pronounces on how far the clouding of Hamlet’s intellect has progressed in this scene and in that, as if Shakespeare were a modern novelist. But the nunnery scene, to take only one instance, may not contain information on that point at all. Its perspective may be constructed from Ophelia’s viewpoint: meant, perhaps, to involve audiences in her pain and bewilderment at the alteration she meets in her lover. Again, Hamlet seems mad from the viewpoint of certain characters and not from others – not, for example, from Horatio’s, or the players’. Until recently, however, such distinctions of viewpoint have largely been ignored. With few exceptions critics have taken for granted the large anachronism of Shakespeare’s instant creation of continuous spectator realism (Fowler 1995).

**Scenery**

As with “legitimate perspective” in visual art, so with realism in literature. It is difficult to escape the dominant conventions of one’s own time: difficult, even, to suspend belief in them temporarily. The conventions of spectator realism pervade our culture. But in the seventeenth century they were being newly formulated – as we can occasionally glimpse. At first even the coherent perspective of the acting area was grasped only tentatively. It called for a new act of imagination to view the stage and stage sets as part of a unified fictive space. A stage direction in John Shirley’s *The Triumph of Peace*, performed at Court on February 3, 1634 at the Banqueting House suggests how far the realistic illusion was from being taken for granted. The scene changes at
line 300 to “a tavern, with a flaming red lattice, several drinking-rooms, and a back
door, but especially a conceited sign and an eminent bush” (Spencer and Wells 1967:
290). Far from there being an immediate illusionistic effect, the scene – almost the
stage direction itself – is puzzled over by the characters: “ADMIRATION: Wonderful,
here was none within two minutes.” Scenery could not yet be tacitly accepted as part
of a continuous illusion; it was still a novelty worth remarking. It was gradually
introduced in masques and at private venues such as Christ Church, Oxford (William
Strode’s The Floating Island, 1636); but a realistic illusion was by no means
immediate.

Similar adjustments were called for when the proscenium arch was introduced. To
begin with, the space beyond the proscenium plane was not consistently ordered.
(Even today sets implying inconsistent perspectives are not unknown.) Andrea Pal-
ladio’s and Vincenzo Scamozzi’s Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza (1580–5), with its five
portae (openings) showing glimpses of fictive streets in perspectival recession, did
much to establish the idea of a realistic acting space (Fowler 2003: 14–16). But its
incompatible perspectives still implied multiple viewpoints. Not until the tragic
scene of Sebastiano Serlio (1475–1554) had exerted a century of influence was the
unified stage perspective assimilated. Even then, the sight lines and perspectives of
the English masques continued to be related to the viewpoint of the noblest persons
present. Only they were the godlike spectators of a more or less consistently realistic
spatial illusion (Fowler 2001). A long, slow development in theory and practice was
required before the spectator realism of the Edwardian, three-walled stage was
achieved.

Survivals of Renaissance Realism

In fiction, elements of Renaissance realism persisted long after the emergence of the
novel. At first, however, this was disguised by the dominance of the epistolary genre.
In epistolary novels such as Richardson’s the perspective of each letter has usually a
single viewpoint, that of the letter writer; so that by a curious ambiguity modern
readers can receive each letter – and so the entire novel – as if all were spectator
realism. The reader becomes an alter deus transcending the viewpoints of the novel’s
various correspondents, except when sympathizing with this character or that. The
ambiguity may pass unnoticed because each correspondent is uncontested creator of
his own epistolary world, and may have no occasion to become much involved with
the other perspectives. So Richardson’s fictive mode, although it entailed many nar-
rators, paradoxically promoted single-perspective realism.

Even so, Richardson’s formal realism, astonishingly modern as it often seems, is
not always entirely consistent with spectator realism. His novels often lack, for
example, a coherent topography of outdoor locations. Nor are they always compatible
with any single temporal sequence. The amount of time Pamela and Clarissa spend
in letter writing is hardly plausible realistically – as can be seen from the strenuous
efforts made to account for it. This has been criticized as a failure of Richardson’s art.
But in terms of participatory realism it is justifiable to represent Pamela as largely occupied in letter writing. In her reduced life, correspondence actually is her principal emotional outlet. Moreover, its perspective is one the reader can share.

Spectator realism so dominated Victorian novels that it became the norm it has since remained. Yet the alternative fictive mode was never eliminated altogether. Indeed, some of the finest novels of the period – one thinks of Our Mutual Friend and Vanity Fair – make extensive use of the older, participatory mode. And whenever critics speak of “identifying” with a character, or classify a narrator as “unreliable,” they tacitly acknowledge the existence of a mimesis other than spectator realism. Today, both fictive modes remain viable, so that in theorizing narrative the double origin of modern realism needs to be kept in mind. Theorists tend to link the classic realist novel and its presumptuously godlike author with the social class system at a specific stage of political development; but in doing so they perhaps fail to take sufficient account of long-term interactions with the older, sibling mode.

Interplay of spectator and participatory realisms extended over several centuries, and long antedated nineteenth-century class structures. If political connections are desired, the two modes are probably better linked with older polarities such as that of centralized monarchy and feudal decentralization of power. Or, more broadly still, they may be associated with competing cosmologies. Is it reaching too far to suggest a connection between the profound changes in the Renaissance world picture and the transition from participatory to spectator realism? Copernicanism, the conscious basis of the emergent world picture, was certainly linked in manifold ways with the theory of single-point perspective. It is not a matter, simply, of the obvious analogy between the single viewpoint of “legitimate perspective” on the one hand, on the other the undivided centrality of the heliocentric universe. Crucial to the Copernican hypothesis were advances in optics that went back to Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon – to medieval approaches to natural science “that sought explanations of natural species and phenomena in perspective and the mathematics of light rays” (North 1994: 331). In the Renaissance, moreover, new technological and artisan traditions emerged, bringing revaluation of older mechanical doctrines: “developments in painting and the fine arts led to renewed interest in optics or perspectiva, and Copernicus’ proposal of a Pythagorean as opposed to a Ptolemaic, universe gave new life to astronomy” (Wallace 1991: 204).

The Copernican, Keplerian, and other planetary systems of the Renaissance were bound up with a new consciousness already thought of as modern: consciousness of the Cartesian subject confronting a universe without predetermined meaning. The virtuous cosmos of medieval Aristotelianism was gradually laid aside, not without regrets and controversies. Thus, Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757) makes his mechanistic Molière say to Paracelsus:

If most people saw the order of the universe as it really is, so that they noticed neither characteristic virtues in numbers, nor influences of planets, nor fates that are attached to certain times or certain revolutions [periods], they would not be able to prevent themselves from saying, about this admirable order, “What! Is it nothing more than that?” (Dialogues of the Dead, cit. Blumenberg 1987: 39)
Literary protagonists were now often portrayed as making sense of their worlds – endowing the disappointing “admirable order” with meaning, emotion, and mystery. Some were naturalized narrators, even novelists within the novel. And in putting their fictive worlds together the causes they traced were efficient rather than final – like the fateful window that determines the shape of Tristram Shandy’s biography. Significantly, too, that window is a sash window: a modern, even a recent, item of technology. Tristram’s composing of material causes into a consistent narrative represents a stage of mimesis that was by no means arrived at (still less generated) all at once. It emerged piecemeal, tentatively and gradually, in much the same way as time and effort over a long period were required before perspective was assimilated to the western mental set. In 1754, Hogarth’s frontispiece to “Kirby’s Perspective” still had to ridicule common absurdities resulting from false extrapolation of perspective constructions (Fowler 2003: 10). Participatory realism, too, came to seem absurd at times. In Sidney’s *Arcadia*, Zelmane’s bathing in the river Ladon and empathizing with every object in contact with his lover now seems to belong to a former age – shrouded, even, in quaint alterity. As a spectator, Zelmane is so involved as to be comically unable to think of the material world objectively. What was once the river’s participatory arousal at the touch of Philoclea and Pamela – “when cold Ladon had once fully embraced them, himself was no more so cold to those ladies; but as if his cold complexion had been heated with love, so seemed he to play about every part he could touch” (Fowler 2003: 73–80) – has shrunk to Ruskin’s “pathetic fallacy.”

Spectatorial empathy did not quickly disappear from fiction. It lingered long, and indeed made partial returns in genres out of the mainstream. One such was gothic romance. The many landscape vistas in Mrs Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) cannot be adequately characterized as descriptive. Journeying towards Rousillon, for example, Emily finds the precipitous terrain so frightening that she is “terrified almost to fainting” (Radcliffe 1966: 30). And later the veiled picture engages her feelings until she is “somewhat agitated”: Even the discussion of it “excited a faint degree of terror. But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object, from which we appear to shrink” (1966: 248). Nevertheless, her feelings towards the picture are so strong that she cannot look at it (1966: 278). Throughout the novel, nature – wild, desolate or sublime – is never merely viewed as in spectator realism, but demands emotional, sometimes even physical, engagement. Thus, Emily stops at a neglected avenue where “the road was yet broken, and the trees overloaded with their own luxuriance … she stood surveying it, and remembering the emotions, which she had formerly suffered there” (1966: 501).

In science fiction, too, objects sometimes compel emotional engagement, whether by their strangeness to a space- or time-traveller, or through their nightmare horror. Alfred Bester’s *The Demolished Man* (1953) opens with Ben Reich’s nightmare of “the Man with No Face,” from which he is awakened by his own screams. One might consider this nightmarish image, too, as crossing the boundary of spectator realism.
REFERENCES


Further Reading


The Conceipts of the minde are pictures of things and the Tongue is Interpreter of those pictures

John Hoskyns, Directions for Speech and Style (c. 1599)

These are the opening words of a treatise on rhetoric illustrated exclusively with examples from a literary text: the Arcadia of Sir Philip Sidney. The relations between rhetorical theory and literary practice will be a theme of this chapter, but to get us started I want just to ponder what Hoskyns might mean here. A “conceit” is a thought (our word “concept” is cognate, as Hoskyns’s spelling suggests), and Hoskyns (Osborn 1937: 116) is following a broad tradition when he identifies thoughts with pictures or images: “The soul never thinks without a mental image,” Aristotle had said (De Anima 431a). If we wish to communicate with each other we must translate images into words: The tongue must act as an “interpreter.” It follows that this must be met with a reverse process, whereby the ear captures what is said and a corresponding mental image is formed in the mind of the hearer. The part of the mind that deals with such images (phantasma in Aristotle’s Greek) – that gathers them from the senses or produces them from the other parts of the mind – is of course the imagination or fancy (Greek phantasia), and it is the imagination that is the real subject of this chapter and of the Elizabethan treatises on literature that I shall be discussing. For an Elizabethan theory of poetry is a theory of how images are translated by words from the imagination of the author to the imagination of the reader. As we shall see, such a theory is part of a larger concern with the moral effects of literary art – are the pictures painted on the reader’s imagination dangerous and misleading phantasms, as Plato argues, or inspiring representations of ideal values and conduct?
The first printed work of literary criticism in English had been George Gascoigne's *Certain Notes of Instruction* (1575), a brief but powerful account of versification. But it is likely that, before this date, George Puttenham had already begun the lengthy treatment of the theory of genre, versification, and literary rhetoric that was to be printed in 1589 as *The Art of English Poesy*. Other Englishmen – like Henry Dethick and Richard Wills, both in the early 1570s – had written in Latin on the subject of poetry in general, but the vernacular treatises of Gascoigne and Puttenham – discussions in English of poetry in English – were signs of a growing post-Reformation confidence: It was finally time to believe that English literature could be the equal of classical and continental literature. Around 1580 Sir Philip Sidney, fresh from writing his verse-and-prose romance *Arcadia*, produced what remains one of the greatest works on literature written in English or any language, *The Defence of Poesy*. The work was first printed in 1595 in two competing editions, one that was not authorized and one that was (the work is often known by the title of the former, *An Apology for Poetry*). Our third text represents a different angle of approach, since it comes directly out of the controversy over the social value of the arts, and the theatre in particular, associated with the Puritans. Thomas Lodge wrote his short treatise in reply to Stephen Gosson's *The School of Abuse* (1579); his work survives in only two copies, neither with a title page, and so we do not know what it was originally called: *A Defence of Poetry* serves as well as any other title.

Before we can start to compare what Sidney, Puttenham, and Lodge wrote, we need to look at why they wrote, since each saw his job differently. Sidney imagines himself as a sort of defense counsel, pleading the case for poetry against its accusers. Lodge has a similar job, offering his thoughts as a more direct dialogue with Gosson. Puttenham writes, more exclusively, for and about the Elizabethan court, and so does not need to justify the writing of poetry in the first place. The most important consequence of this is that ethics is far less to the fore than it is in Sidney. Whereas Sidney and Lodge are primarily concerned with *why* we should read and write, Puttenham's treatise is an account of *how* to write, a question Sidney only turns to in a digression on the current state of English writing towards the end of *The Defence of Poesy*.

The sixteenth century saw the invention of “a distinctive category of literature … and a distinctive way of talking about it” and can with justice be called “the first great age of literary criticism” (Hulse 2000: 29). This “distinctive way of talking,” however, was firmly grounded in ancient rhetoric and poetics. Writers like Spenser and Shakespeare were taught rhetoric at school, and the study of literature was only a subsidiary part of that tuition, with literary texts being used as rhetorical exemplars: The goal was the production of useful members of society and not of poets or critics. The civic emphasis of humanist education is one reason why Renaissance literary criticism takes as its first question the social utility of literature, but this discourse
can seem to us rather disconnected from practice, where the first and often the only aim seems to be enjoyment (Hunter 1999: 248).

The role of delight was not ignored by criticism, but it was framed as part of the so-called “affective triad” of teaching, delighting, and moving – the three traditional aims of rhetoric. Sidney sees literature as rhetorical, its central objective the manipulation of the minds and hearts of its readers. And The Defence of Poesy is a defence not of versifying but of the making of fictions, which is what Sidney takes “poesy” (from the Greek for “making”) to mean. His central aim, therefore, is to show how fiction can be a force for good. Sidney offers this core definition, and the visual imagination is at its heart: “Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word mimēsis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end: To teach and delight” (Alexander 2004: 10). By “imitation” Sidney means the representation of things both real and imagined, as we shall see. The comparison of the poet to a painter which is implied in the metaphor of the “speaking picture” is one Sidney returns to again and again. What he calls “right poets” – those who make fictions rather than merely basing their writing on the world as they find it – are like the better sort of painters, who don’t merely copy what they see but “bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see – as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia … wherein he painteth not Lucretia, whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue” (2004: 11). For Sidney, painting represents a direct presentation of the subject of a sort that the verbal art of poetry must aspire to if it is to achieve its moral aim.

It had been a classical commonplace that painting offers silent poetry whereas poetry offers a speaking picture, but Sidney’s use of the “speaking picture” metaphor is far from idle. In what follows I will be trying to tease out its implications, since these take us to the heart of the relations between literature, ethics, and the imagination in Elizabethan literary criticism. We can start by examining the origins of Sidney’s ideas in earlier rhetorical and literary theory.

Rhetoric works by offering argument (logos) delivered by a speaker with a plausible character (ethos) and by stirring the passions of the audience (pathos) so that they are persuaded to share the speaker’s point of view. That lazy metaphor – the point of view – is realised more intensely when the speaker supplements his account with visual description. Now this traditional account of rhetoric also runs on similar tracks to classical and Renaissance accounts of poetry, and small wonder since in both cases the key influence is Aristotle. In the Poetics – just as in the Rhetoric – Aristotle is again concerned with how the emotions of the audience will be moved (pathos) by a display of ethos, though this time the characters are those in a play, and instead of argument (logos) we have plot and the various other means required to flesh it out – the representation of thought and dialogue, visual spectacle, and so forth. In the Rhetoric, Aristotle discusses the need to use words that “set things before the eyes” of the audience (1410b, 1411b); in the Poetics, in order to create a convincing illusion on the stage, the poet must first of all “put things before his eyes, as he then sees the events
most vividly as if he were actually present” (1455a). Successful communication between poet/speaker and auditor thus begins and ends with a kind of sight. This concern with seeing is a concern with representation itself, and is a corner of tremendous vitality within rhetorical and literary theory, a vitality that terminology struggles to control. As Terence Cave observes, “The reduplication of rhetorical terms for the representation of reality – mimesis, hypotyposis, ekphrasis, enargeia, evidentia, illustratio, demonstratio, descriptio – echoes both the fascination and the futility of the attempt to display the world in language” (Cave 1976: 5). Representation “necessarily entails the absence of that which it purports to represent” (1976: 5), but it is the conviction of the theorists that well-chosen words can create an illusion of presence, can make an audience think they are seeing something.

This “rhetoric of presence” (Rigolot 1999) is most often treated in discussion of the rhetorical figure of enargeia (Greek “vividness,” “clearness”). Erasmus describes this as when “instead of setting out the subject in bare simplicity, we fill in the colours and set it up like a picture to look at, so that we seem to have painted the scene rather than described it, and the reader seems to have seen rather than read” (Erasmus 1978: 577). Again, when we offer a vivid description “our hearer or reader is carried away and seems to be in the audience at a theatre” (1978: 577). For the English rhetorician Henry Peacham, this operation (which he describes under another Greek name – hypotyposis, a “sketch”) enables us to describe things so that they seem “rather paynted in tables, then expressed with wordes, and the hearer shall rather thincke he see it, then heare it” (Peacham 1577: sig. O2r). Successful rhetoric produces an effect in the auditor similar to watching a play or looking at a picture. Sidney is speaking this language when he says that in poetry we are given “all virtues, vices, and passions so in their own natural seats laid to the view, that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them” (Alexander 2004: 17).

In this tradition, writers and speakers have the power not only to describe something but to seem to be seeing it, to be present, and to transport their audience with them (cf. Skinner 1996: 182–8). This power depends on an ability to handle images, which should be “kept clearly before our eyes,” as one of Erasmus’s key sources, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian, puts it (Institutio oratoria, 10.7.15). Which eyes? An image in this sense is not actually seen, because it is already the imprint of a thing on what Quintilian calls the mind’s eyes (mentis oculi). In this discourse there is no practical distinction between the image summoned up from the memory, the image presented here and now by our senses, by seeing something with our own eyes, and the image formed on the mind’s eye of the reader or auditor by powerful language: Each is seen in the same way by what Sidney calls “the eyes of the mind” (Alexander 2004: 7). As Heninger observes, in a useful discussion of the Renaissance understanding of the mind (Heninger 1988: 262–6), the mind’s eye is identical with the imagination, “the faculty by which poets conceive images, but also that by which we the readers perceive them” (1988: 262).

Enargeia – the figure that creates vivid mental sights with words – enters Renaissance theory as an umbrella term for a group of rhetorical figures which, gathered
Seeing through Words in Theories of Poetry

together, seem to offer the building blocks of literary fiction. Erasmus starts this process and the grouping is followed by other major theorists in Latin and English. The figures include *pragmatographia* (the description of actions or events), *prosopopoeia* (the representation of speaking characters), *topographia* (the description of places), and *chronographia* (the description of particular times). A complete description, Erasmus argues, will contain all of these figures. When Peacham offers a similar, extended grouping of these descriptive or mimetic figures, he adds to it first *pathopoeia*, “when the Oratoure mooveth the mindes of his hearers” (Peacham 1577: sig. P3r) and in his second edition (1593) the interesting figure *icon*. This is painting by simile, as in the blazon poem popular with Sidney, Puttenham, and their contemporaries, with its itemization of the beloved’s anatomy, coyly seen through similes:

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What toong can her perfection tell
In whose each part all pens may dwell?
Her haire fine threeds of finest gould
In curled knots man’s thought to hold:
But that her fore-head says in me
A whiter beautie you may see.
Whiter indeed; more white then snow,
Which on cold winter’s face doth grow. (Sidney 1962: OA 62.1–8)
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And so on down for 146 lines in which we see and yet do not see every detail of this beautiful woman’s body. The figure of *icon* – also included in Puttenham’s grouping of the mimetic figures (Alexander 2004: 182–7) – goes to the heart of the paradox of painting with words, since it offers not the thing itself, nor even words that paint that thing, but a verbal image of a similar thing.

The theory of poetic representation, of speaking pictures, takes much of its charge from this gathering together of the rhetorical figures of description and the premium placed on them. But before we return to Sidney, we should notice another way in which poetry can make an impression on our imaginations, one treated at length by Puttenham. Sidney had likened verse form to the structured mental space of the theatre of memory (Alexander 2004: 32) and this sense of the visible architecture of poetic form underpins Puttenham’s treatment of versification or “proportion poetical” in Book II of *The Art of English Poesy*. Here, poetry is not fiction-making, but rather a species of music that deals in the proportioned organization of sound. It is interesting that, having set out this essentially musical account of versification, Puttenham then returns with new energy to things that we can see. For each verse form he offers a diagrammatic representation of metre and rhyme scheme, an “ocular example” so that the reader “may the better conceive it. Likewise, it so falleth out most times your ocular proportion doth declare the nature of the audible, for if it please the ear well, the same represented by delineation to the view pleaseth the eye well, and è converso; and this is by a natural sympathy between the ear and the eye” (Alexander 2004: 126). In order that we might “better conceive” we need something for our eye, or mind’s
eye, and not our ears alone. Puttenham concludes his discussion by looking at a category of poem that literalizes the connection between the pattern seen by the eye and the meaning formed in the mind – the shape poem.

The interweaving of the verbal and the visual continues in Puttenham’s final book, “Of Ornament,” taking its cue from the senses of external decoration and dress already present in the vocabulary of rhetorical ornament (e.g. Latin *ornamentum*: dress, equipment, rhetorical figure). Words themselves are to be understood as visible texture:

> This ornament we speak of is given to it by figures and figurative speeches, which be the flowers, as it were, and colours that a poet setteeth upon his language by art, as the embroiderer doth his stone and pearl or passements of gold upon the stuff of a princely garment, or as the excellent painter bestoweth the rich orient colours upon his table of portrait. … (Alexander 2004: 134)

Puttenham then brings to the fore two terms which had never before been given such prominence, explaining all rhetorical ornament in terms of different balances of *enargeia* and a term often confused with it: *energeia* (Greek “activity,” “operation,” “vigour”). For Puttenham *enargeia* is not verisimilitude of description – he has other terms for that – but rather a superficial quality of ornament that can best be understood through visual metaphors. The simpler figures do not change the substance of the sense they decorate; they just glitter. This Puttenham calls *enargeia*. The more complex figures, which shape not only style but also meaning, exhibit *energeia*. In a third category come figures which combine the two. *Enargeia*, he explains, works “by a goodly outward show” and is so called because of “lustre and light”; it is designed “to satisfy and delight the ear only,” where *energeia* acts directly on the mind (Alexander 2004: 135). The equivalence Puttenham implies between sound and sight is striking. More of the glittering quality of *enargeia* for Puttenham means the rhetoric is “more tuneable and melodious” (2004: 150). Sounds “appear” to the ear and are described as “evident” (2004: 150–1; *evidentia* was the Latin word for *enargeia*). Puttenham is less interested in the ability of words to paint a picture than in thinking about the arrangement of words – metrical or figurative – as a picture in itself, as something to be looked at and understood by analogy to material objects and forms.

Sidney’s theory of the speaking picture, therefore, is bound up with a rich tradition of ways of thinking about the relations between language and the visual imagination: representation and the rhetoric of presence; the mind’s eye; *enargeia*; the visual qualities of linguistic and poetic forms. At its vaguest “speaking picture” can just mean a fiction communicated through words, but the term seems to coincide with Sidney’s theory of the representation of characters as embodiments or “images” of virtues or vices, and so “speaking picture” can also mean a vividly realized representation of a person: a portrait in words. Sidney describes how in his fictionalized biography of Cyrus the Great, Xenophon “did imitate so excellently as to give us *effigies iusti imperii* – the portraiture of a just empire – under the name of Cyrus, as Cicero saith of him” (Alexander 2004: 12). The word *effigies*, meaning imitation, portrait, image, is, as
Sidney clearly knows, related etymologically to “fiction,” and it gives us another network of connected terms – as with images and imagination – that equate the making of fictions with the making of images. Sidney points the way later in the same paragraph: “It is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet … but it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by” (Alexander 2004: 12). Feigning (also etymologically related to “fiction”) and image-making are one and the same.

Sidney later talks of “painting men” (Alexander 2004: 35) to describe this process of making a human image of a virtue or vice. Sidney’s student John Hoskyns offers this gloss: “Hee that will truely set downe a man in a figured storie, must first learne truely to set downe an humor, a passion, a virtue, a vice, and therein keeping decent proporcion add but names …” (Osborn 1937: 155). The poet, Hoskyns tells us, should study Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Rhetoric* to understand moral behavior and Theophrastus’s *Characters* (with its exemplary depictions of negative character types, such as the flatterer, the coward, the officious man); interestingly, Hoskyns refers to Theophrastus’s work by a title it never had – *Imagines* (“images”). “Wise Sir Phillip Sidney’s course,” he goes on, “was (besides reading Aristotle and Theophrastus) to imagine the thinge presente in his owne brayne, that [h]is pen might the better presente it to yow” (Osborn 1937: 156). This imagining – or image-making – takes us back to Quintilian and Aristotle, but adds a twist: Is it the imagining in the brain of something present, or the imagining of something that is only present within the brain itself? The rhetoric of presence has been necessarily internalized, since literary fiction requires author and reader to inhabit together a world that can only ever be imagined. It is this detachment from reference to the real world that, as we shall see, creates a theoretical difficulty for literary representation.

**Problems with Representation**

Later Elizabethan literature is full of brilliant visual descriptions and vivid character portraits, evidence of the commitment to painting with words. The words of Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare can indeed persuade us that we have seen what they describe, and we may be content to wonder at their exhilarating creation of speaking pictures. But both in practice – in the deceptive and false surfaces of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, for example – and in theory especially, representation comes under suspicion, a suspicion energized by Protestant distrust of images, but that goes back ultimately to the problem of Plato and his critique of mimesis. Puttenham, with his helpful naiveté, sets out the claims that Plato found problematic:

It is therefore of poets thus to be conceived, that if they be able to devise and make all these things of themselves, without any subject of verity, that they be (by manner of speech) as creating gods; if they do it by instinct divine or natural, then surely much favoured from above; if by their experience, then no doubt very wise men; if by any
Plato believed that artists either copied things in the visible world or created fantastic, monstrous, hybrids. They might be inspired from above (“instinct divine”) – but this is hardly a claim to knowledge or authority since they are thereby merely a mouthpiece. And, indeed, this argument is only allowed in preference to the suggestion that they might be “very wise men,” that because Homer wrote about battles that would make him a good general: Clearly, a poet is not expert in many things of which he writes, and he gets away with it because he is presenting mere copies and not the thing itself. When poets copy, Plato argued, they do so badly, and are far from being “the most excellent imitators.” This is because, for Plato, what exists in the world is already a mere copy of an eternal and immutable idea on the model of which it is formed. The divine creator has made a form or “idea” of a chair, which comprehends not only the look but the function and dynamics of the thing. The craftsman who truly understands what it is to make a chair makes something that expresses that perfect idea, that is a copy of it. The painter creates something one could not sit on, copying only one small aspect of what a chair really is – its appearance from one point of view. He is not imitating the idea, but a shadow of that idea. Just so, the poet imitates not ideas but things in the world, offering imperfect copies of copies instead of substance; when he creates something that, in Puttenham’s words, is “without any subject of verity,” he only offers phantasms and monstrosities, and is far from being godlike. To translate this into the terms with which we have been concerned, there is a categorical difference between the mental image produced by a perception or memory of reality and the mental image produced by literary (or any other) representation.

There are Platonic ideas not only of things like chairs but of virtues and vices too. So if Sidney claims that Xenophon gives us an image of the idea of justice in Cyrus, Plato will reply that Xenophon has no such access, and can only give us a composite of just men he has known, which is neither Cyrus nor anything in the world, and certainly not an expression of an idea. The theory of Platonic ideas was set aside by Aristotle, but survived in part because Neoplatonists were able to adapt it to provide Sidney with a Platonic theory of art that seems to capture something fundamental about representation that Plato wilfully misses. Aristotle had argued in the Poetics, in a passage that Sidney paraphrases in detail (Alexander 2004: 18–19), that poetry is preferable to history because

poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars. By “universals” I mean the kinds of things a certain type of person will probably or necessarily say or do in a given situation; and this is the aim of poetry, although it gives individual names to characters. “Particulars” are what, say, Alcibiades did, or what happened to him. (Aristotle, Poetics, 1451b)
The universal is not so far from the idea, and Sidney has no difficulty reconciling the two, following the Neoplatonic adaptation of Plato offered by Cicero, Seneca, and Plotinus. In this version of the theory of art, the artist creates with reference not to the visible world but to the ideas themselves. A sculpture of a beautiful woman is accomplished not by finding a beautiful model but by reaching for the idea of beauty itself—perhaps aided by a study of many beautiful women, as a master craftsman might study many different chairs. Art delivers to the mind something closer to the ideal than is anything in reality.

The Aristotelian or Neoplatonic account enables defenders of poetry to claim a greater utility for poetry in comparison to history or philosophy. Sidney elaborates this claim in the *Defence*: “If the poet do his part aright,” Sidney says, “he will show you in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned, in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses each thing to be followed” (Alexander 2004: 19). The reader is offered “pictures what should be and not stories [histories] what have been” (2004: 34). In the most celebrated passage in the *Defence* Sidney argues that poetry alone of all forms of human knowledge is not bound to the study of nature but can create its own worlds:

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demigods, cyclopes, chimeras, furies, and such like. So as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely: her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. (Alexander 2004: 8–9)

To the objection that the poet thus conceived creates not in actuality as nature does, but only in words, on paper (“the works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction”), Sidney has this to say:

Any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that idea or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that idea is manifest by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them; which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air, but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him. (Alexander 2004: 9)

It is the creation or finding of the Platonic idea (a pre-existing idea in Plato’s strict sense, to be found rather than created, but also an idea “of the work” in a looser Neoplatonic sense—something that the poet himself creates) that is the principal
creative act of the poet. Nevertheless, having formed the idea, the poet still needs to put it in some visible form in order that it can be seen by the mental eyes of the reader. The reader is thus given virtue embodied in the “feigned image of poetry” (Alexander 2004: 17); the virtues of the heroes of epic have an “apparent shining” (2004: 17); readers are led on by their delight in the poet’s fiction “and so steal to see the form of goodness (which seen, they cannot but love) ere themselves be aware, as if they took a medicine of cherries” (2004: 24). But Sidney is not content for this connection between author and reader to be only mental, imaginative, a matter of words and images and the ideas that lie behind them. The poet creates a Cyrus, and the reader who understands, who has the imaginative capacity to apprehend the idea behind the story, imitates that idea and becomes one of “many Cyruses” in reality.

Neither Puttenham nor Lodge sees the usefulness of Platonism to a theory of poetry. As Derek Attridge has shown, Puttenham oscillates fruitfully between thinking of art in opposition to nature and thinking of art as governed by nature (Attridge 1986). His poet veers from ex nihilo creator (“God … made all the world of nought, nor also by any pattern or mould, as the Platonics with their ideas do fantastically suppose – even so the very poet makes and contrives out of his own brain both the verse and matter of his poem,” [Alexander 2004: 57]) to the imitative copyist of reality. In Sidney, the idea is ambiguously both the object of philosophical contemplation created by the deity (so that Aeneas’s virtues are those we all aspire to and not the different moral code of a parallel fictitious universe) and something created by the poet. Art and nature are held in equipoise where Puttenham flits from one to the other.

Lodge escapes this confusion by bringing divine inspiration to the fore. Like Puttenham he ridicules Plato’s theory of ideas (Smith 1904: 1.67), but he still, like Sidney, needs to argue that there is in poetry more than the mere delightful surface, that the message may be more than the plot. Lodge is therefore drawn towards a system Sidney has little time for: allegory. Gosson had objected to the depiction of classical deities (unwittingly following Plato, who believed that stories of sex-crazed gods had to be lies, and hardly contributed to a properly religious view of the world). Lodge offers the allegorical explanation: “For wot thou that in the person of Saturne our decaying yeares are signifi ed; in the picture of angry Juno our affections are dis-siphered … So that, what so they wrot, it was to this purpose, in the way of pleasure to draw men to wisedome” (Smith 1904: 1.66). We see one thing and must work our way by interpretation to something utterly different – “not onely the name but the matter beareth a show of that it is not” (1904: 1.73). Sidney wants the moral force of poetry to be more straightforward, not dependent on elaborate systems of interpretation. In his account, what you see is what you get, and it is the poet’s responsibility to ensure that this is morally edifying. The problem with allegory is that it can absolve poets of any responsibility and leave everything to the reader. Lodge does not want to argue that a poet who chooses to write about oversexed gods does not care about morality, nor that a moral poet would necessarily choose to write so obliquely that he could be misread by ignorant critics. So he shifts the responsibility onto God. Poetry “procedeth from above” (1904: 1.70); poets write through “heavenly
inspiration” (1904: 1.72): “I reson not that al poets are holy, but I affirme that poetry is a heavenly gift” (1904: 1.75). As in Spenser, the idea of inspiration, of the poet as visionary or prophet, is a refuge for the Protestant writer distrustful of the imagination. As Arthur Kinney observes: “By transferring the act of writing poetry to holy inspiration, Lodge finds an early means to preserve a humanist poetics that is at once literary, philosophical, and religious” (Kinney 1986: 366).

Lodge is replying to a critic who shares much ground with the defenders of poetry. All agree that literature teaches and that moral teaching is vital. For Gosson, though, literature teaches us to be bad. Erasmus had said that through the enargeia of vivid descriptions readers are able to see things as if they were in a theatre. But it does seem only to be in similes and metaphors that theatres have much value in the currency of Renaissance poetics. The theory that poetry puts ideal forms of virtues before our mind’s eye tends to collapse when we turn to actual theatres and to a kind of seeing which is real and not mental. Sidney can theorize quite safely about the edifying images offered in epic, where “the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind” and the virtuous hero Aeneas can be “worn in the tablet of your memory” (Alexander 2004: 29). But it is a simple task for Gosson to go to a play and see scores of people failing to learn good lessons (Plays Confuted [1582] in Gosson 1974: 164–5). As much as both Sidney and Lodge find fault not with the art but with the artificer, it remains a powerful objection from Gosson that we are best discussing theatre as it is and not as it might be. Gosson does not have an answer to Sidney’s powerful Neoplatonism because he has not read the Defence; his remains a literal argument: “Playes are no Images of trueth, because sometime they handle such thinges as never were, sometime they runne upon truethes, but make them seeme longer, or shorter, or greater, or lesse then they were” (1974: 169). Whereas Sidney believes that poetry can sugar-coat the bitter pill of moral instruction with its ability to delight (Alexander 2004: 23, 24), for Gosson such delight merely sweetens and makes palatable the poison that drama pours into our souls (1974: 172).

**Good Imaginations**

No moral theory of art can stand without allowing for the free will of the reader, auditor, or viewer. Readers can misunderstand what they see, can learn good lessons or bad lessons, and no author can exert total control on that process of learning. And unless characters are morally simplistic – purely good, wholly evil – such learning will demand the judicious weighing up of the good and the bad in people. One of Sidney’s key classical sources – Plutarch’s essay on how the young should be taught to read poetry (De audiendis poetis) – puts such a view at its centre, and so does one of the most important responses to Sidney’s theory and practice – Fulke Greville’s discussion of the “judicious” reader’s task in learning from Sidney’s own complex practice and morally flawed characters in the Arcadia (A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney, in Greville 1986). The emphasis on morality, though, will always marginalize the more
passionate kinds of response to fiction that Aristotle theorized from the start with his emphasis on *pathos*. One key sixteenth-century response to Aristotle – a commentary by Lodovico Castelvetro (1571) – revived this emphasis, preferring to theorize tragedy as stirring (passive) passions rather than as stimulating active moral emotions: Pleasure was all (Gilbert 1940: esp. 307–8). Erasmus had drawn the distinction between poetry dealing with serious issues – which required a sparing use of *enargeia* – and poetry for pleasure – where it could be used more freely (Erasmus 1978: 580). Yet in Sidney’s theory, with the exception of the “golden world” passage, we rarely hear about the sheer enjoyment of poetic mimesis – of painting pictures with words – that is so evident in the descriptive passages of his *Arcadia*: Imagining must always be morally purposive.

In the Erasmian account, the stimulation of the visual imagination is a way of embellishing or adding force to verbal argument, but also runs the risk of distracting from the job in hand. This account has already made a concession to the view of Gosson and his ilk that delight is dangerous, that representation is mendacious and inherently sinful. In Sidney’s opposing account, effective teaching requires the engagement of the imagination. Readers will only learn if they are captivated by what they see in their mind’s eyes; it is the imagination that can see beyond appearances to the ideal forms that govern them. Borrowing a term from Quintilian (6.2.30), Puttenham tells us that the poet should be *euphantasiōtos* – a good imaginer (Alexander 2004: 71). For Puttenham, a good imagination will produce images of the truth of things as they are, rather than images of things that are only imagined. His position is the opposite of Sidney’s, for whom imitation is the representing of something that may well (and ideally should) be created in the mind, imagined. Sidney borrows a pair of terms from Plato:

> For I will not deny but that man’s wit may make poesy, which should be *eikastikē*, which some learned have defined figuring forth good things, to be *phantastikē*, which doth contrariwise infect the fancy with unworthy objects. (Alexander 2004: 35–6)

In Plato’s *Sophist*, icastic or “likeness-making” art is the accurate copying of reality (Plato 1921: 333–5 [235d–e]) and fantastic art is either the representation of things which do not exist or the inaccurate representation of those which do (1921: 335–7 [236c]). Sidney has cleverly and quietly changed Plato’s meaning, reversing its direction and adding a moral texture to it. We now have good or bad imitation not in the sense of mimetic accuracy but in the sense of moral purpose; and the greater the moral purpose, the less the representation will refer to reality, for poets should “borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be, but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be” (Alexander 2004: 11). Sidney’s sleight of hand in transforming *eikastikē* into the morally purposive representation of imaginary “good things” creates a problem, however. For where do we put the morally responsible, edifying imitation of evil – the creation of an image of vice for the reader to shun as vivid as the image of virtue they learn to follow?
Though such a thing belongs in Sidney’s practice as well as his theory, as he elsewhere allows (“notable images of virtues, vices, or what else” [2004: 12]), here his terms leave no room for it. Sidney paints himself into a corner under the pressure of Plato and Gosson by not wishing to talk about the imitation of bad things.

Even if we can accommodate the idealized image of evil into the Sidneian theory of speaking pictures, we are still left with a gap between that theory and Sidney’s – and everyone else’s – practice. Poetry does not deliver a golden world to the imaginations of its readers, however vivid and brilliant its descriptions. Sidney and all other great writers write – as Aristotle would have them write – of characters neither wholly good nor wholly bad (Poetics, 1452b–1453a). Sidney himself had learned to read by reading Plutarch’s essay on active and well-trained readers, and Plutarch offers a way out of the impasse. For Sidney’s imagined readers are ultimately less passive than they can appear. Moral lessons will “lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy” (Alexander 2004: 16, my emphasis). A Cyrus imagined by the poet will only make the reader into another Cyrus if he “will learn aright why and how that maker made him” (9). The theory of the moral uses of the poetic imagination depends in the end on the deliberate, conscious engaging of reason and judgement. Only then can we as readers really see what the author is getting at.

References


Further Reading


The iamb might be said to have attained the maximum of its authority over English verse sometime in the 1570s. At this, the poet George Gascoigne was mildly abashed. "[W]e use none other but a foot of two sillables," he sighs,

whereof the first is depressed or made short, and the second is elevate and made long. And surely I can lament that wee are fallen into suche a playne and simple manner of wryting, that there is none other foote used but one … But since it is so, let us take the forde as we finde it, and lette me set downe unto you suche rules or precepts that even in this playne foote of two sillables you wreste no woorde from his natural and usuall sounde. (Smith 1967: 1.50)

Gascoigne’s pragmatic resolve to take the forde as he found it secured his place in the history of criticism, for his “Certayne Notes of Instruction” – a treatise published with his Posies in 1575 – is the first systematic discussion of English versifying. That fact might seem surprising, since poets had been writing English verse for centuries. Why had there been no such manual before? Or, contrarily, why was one suddenly necessary in 1575, if there had been such a long tradition of verse composition? Why is Gascoigne embarrassed about the plainness and simplicity of his native tongue; to what standard of ornament or complexity was he comparing it? And that forde: From what historical bank or shoal was Gascoigne launching himself? And what was waiting for English poetry on the other side?

Answering these questions will require a survey of the relations between poetic theory and practice over the full sixteenth century, the century during which, it is often and justly said, the terms were set for the next four hundred years of English prosody. Such a survey is the project of this chapter, from Wyatt’s experiments to the impassioned utterance of Shakespeare’s plays. Nonetheless it will be useful to begin in the middle, with Gascoigne, a poet who aspired not to experiment but to establish and exemplify a norm of rhythmic regularity. Consider the opening lines of “Gascoigne’s Woodmanship”:

23
Tudor Versification and the Rise of Iambic Pentameter

Jeff Dolven
To review some of the most commonly used terms in modern metrics: The scansion marks above these lines pick out the stressed (') and the unstressed (˘) syllables. The alternations of stress define the poem’s rhythm, how it keeps time; by listening for that rhythm as we read, we can recognize the poem’s meter, the abstract pattern of stress that the rhythm of actual lines will fulfill, temper, or balk. In Gascoigne’s case, the operative word is almost always “fulfill.” All of the lines above are made up of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables, the repeating rhythmic unit, or “foot,” called an iamb (˘). Each line has five iambs in succession: Hence, iambic pentameter. That label is not one that Gascoigne or anyone else of his time uses; even the word “scansion” does not enter the language for another hundred years. But in his “Notes,” Gascoigne gives verse examples where he uses “/” to mark what we readily hear as a stressed syllable, and “\” to mark an unstressed syllable. His word is “accent,” grave and light.

**Metrical Contract and Poetic License**

Linguists and prosodists today generally agree that syllable stress is produced by a combination of elevated pitch, increased volume and duration, and sharper articulation. All polysyllabic words have native stress patterns (carpenter, not carpenter), and the syntax and meaning of sentences affect how stress is deployed among their words, including monosyllables (I wouldn’t dream of it; I wouldn’t dream of it, but she would). A stress-based meter organizes words and sentences so that the stresses they carry have some rhythmic regularity. Gascoigne declares his “accent” to be a matter of “length or shortnesse, elevation or depression of sillables,” which is to say, duration and pitch. To the controversial nature of this account, and the submerged conflict between the claims for duration and pitch, we will return shortly. For immediate purposes what is important is that he considers them both to be functions of the “natural emphasis” of language.

For example of th’emphasis or natural sound of words, this word **Treasure** hath the grave accent upon the first sillable; whereas if it shoulde be written in this sorte **Treasure**, nowe were the second sillable long, and that were cleane contrarie to the common use wherewith it is pronounced. (Smith 1967: 1.50)

Gascoigne’s instructions are intended to save the poet from conflicts between that natural emphasis – stress, as we know it from ordinary use – and metrical expectation. The poet’s craft consists in so ordering his sentences that word-stress and metrical
stress coincide. The first four lines of “Gascoigne’s Woodmanship” accomplish this
alignment unimpeachably, and in so doing, they make what the modern poet John
Hollander would call a clear, and especially stringent, “metrical contract” (Hollander

That concept of a metrical contract deserves brief elaboration. It is a way of talking
about the poem’s implicit commitment, secured primarily by the example of its
opening lines, to conform its rhythms to particular metrical expectations. The contract
is a local phenomenon, redrawn with each new poem, though it depends heavily on
our recognition of such pre-established arrangements as iambic pentameter. Like a
legal contract, it is written in the language of its historical moment, so a poem that
sounds like the 1570s – when, as we are beginning to see, most of the verse written
in England was strictly regular – carries an additional expectation of conformity. And
of course, also like a legal contract, the metrical contract involves two parties, the
poem and the reader. The opening of “Woodmanship” instructs us to expect the poem
to unfold as a chain of iambs. We carry out our side of the bargain when we try to
hear subsequent lines as realizations of that pattern.

The question of how and why a reader might try to hear a line as, say, iambic pen-
tameter – try to establish its conformity with a local, an authorial, a period contract
– goes to the practical challenge of historical metrics, the balancing act between
expectation and local innovation. Gascoigne’s regularity depends upon a particular
set of devices for adjusting the syllable count in his favor, devices whose frequency
and accessibility shifted over time. In order to collaborate with him, we have to know
them too. The final line of “Woodmanship” poses an exemplary problem: “A tedious
tale in rhyme, but little reason” (Jones 2002: 200). There seems to be an extra syllable,
making for an anapest (“-ious”) where the second iamb should be. But we have already
seen how the poem has struck a metrical contract unfriendly to anapests; moreover,
an experienced reader will come to know the rarity of so-called “anapestic substitu-
tion” (an anapest for an iamb) in the pentameter of the period. Fortunately for the
integrity of the contract, the anomalous foot can be brought back into line if “-ious”
is pronounced as one syllable rather than two. The dropping of an unstressed vowel
is called “syncope”; linguists call this particular variety of syncopation a y-slide (since
the word is pronounced teed-yus). It is a tactic Gascoigne uses freely in the poem,
dropping a syllable from “experience” and “courtiers” and even “Mayor’s” (pronounced
“mairs”). He can do the same to -tion when he wants to, sounding it as one syllable
in “That vain presumption makes my heart to swell,” but expanding it to two when
the regularity of the line demands it: “My mind is rapt in contemplation” (Jones
2002: 198). Such shifts suggest why Gascoigne thinks of “poetical license” as “a
shrewd fellow” (Smith 1967: 53).

Other common kinds of license abound in his lines. What rhetoricians call “syna-
loepha” allows for dropping one vowel when two are adjacent across a word boundary:
So “the emphasis” becomes “th’emphasis.” Consonants between two vowels may some-
times be dropped by “synaeresis”: The line “Mays shoot amiss, even as your woodman
doth” becomes regular if we hear “even” as the single syllable “e’en.” These techniques
exploit elisions and contractions that were consistent features of the spoken language
of the time, but linguistic change could be turned to good account as well. The past-tense marker -ed was less and less frequently sounded as a separate syllable, yet it remained a resource for poetry. Gascoigne counts it when needed (“But when his bonnet buttoned with gold”), and not when not (“Uneathered there his first affection” [Jones 2002: 197]). Other, more obviously outdated word-forms find their way into verse too: “ydone for done, adowne for downe” (Smith 1967: 1.54), as he says in the “Notes,” or the already old-fashioned-sounding third person singular ending -eth. (It is not least for such reasons of metrical expediency that archaic forms tend to last longer in poetry than they do in prose.) Poetic license, then, amounts to a set of resources for “makin[g] words longer, shorter, of more syllables, of fewer, newer, older, truer, falser,” and Gascoigne promises the attentive student that “your owne judgement and readyng will soone make you espie such advauntages” (Smith 1967: 1.53–4).

Spying these advantages does take practice. Hearing verse historically is a dialectical business, in which reading a great many lines gradually shapes your expectations, even as your evolving expectations shape your reading of any particular line. Theory plays a part too – Gascoigne is at pains to tell us how regular he thinks poetry should be, and the modern scholar Eleanor Berry wisely observes that “among Elizabethan theorists … a view of meter as a pattern artificially imposed on the words, rather than as one realized by, and to be abstracted from, the natural pronunciation of the lines, was prevalent” (1981: 117) – but scansion will always be a practical art. With that practicality in mind, one of the reasons to master the repertory of devices by which a poem like “Woodmanship” can be reduced to regularity is so that you can recognize the rare moments when it cannot. Susanne Woods’ excellent study of Renaissance prosody identifies one such, “And Tully taught me somewhat to discern, / Between sweet speech and barbarous rudeness” (Woods 1984: 123). “Tully” is Cicero, the Roman rhetorician, and Gascoigne records a conventional gratitude for tuition in classical eloquence. The twist is the special contempt for barbarism in the wrenching of “rudenes.” Barbarians, apparently, botch their accents. Another such disruption is occasioned by a vision of Gascoigne’s misspent youth: “Wherein my dazzled eyes only behold / The black hour of my constellation” (Jones 2002: 198). There is a slight perturbation in “only,” perhaps an iamb, more apt to be pronounced as a trochee (“ ”). But the real shock is the heavy stress on “hour,” which overwhelms the modest preposition “of” that follows. One could call it a trochaic substitution in the second foot, though that description hardly does justice to the sudden congestion at such a harrowing moment. Woods calls such effects “mimetic,” because they try to find some rhythmic equivalent for what the line is about, or the feeling it is filled with. They register with proper force only when we have a sense of the local, authorial, and historical contract that they break. There is no license for such a line, only the excuse its meaning makes for it.

The rarity of such excuses and the clarity of the contract are what make Gascoigne such a good school for versifying, for us and for his successors. We have to look backward, however, to understand what an important, complex, and perhaps unforeseeable cultural achievement that regularity was. Sir Thomas Wyatt is the man traditionally
accorded the honor of being the first poet of England’s late-blooming Renaissance, and his verse sounds quite different from Gascoigne’s:

They flee from me that sometime did me seek
With naked foot stalking in my chamber.
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek
That now are wild and do not remember. (Jones 2002: 80)

The opening line of the lyric we know as “They flee from me” scans as good iambic pentameter; the second is more awkward, but still seems to have five stresses; the third wants an unstressed syllable at the start (such lines are often called “headless”), but is otherwise regular. What about the fourth? It is hard to hear more than four stresses there, and by the time we get to the end of the poem (“But since that I so kindly am served / I would fain know what she hath deserved”) our faith in the meter is likely to be as precarious as Wyatt’s in the woman who serves him so “kindly.” Such lines have led generations of readers to wonder if he can be accounted a competent versifier at all: As a reviewer in the TLS put it in 1929, “The mystery of Wyatt is simply whether he knew what he was doing or whether he did not.”

That skepticism has sometimes extended to Wyatt’s ability to hear, let alone reliably manage, metrical stress. But his expert and elegant songs put the lie to that hypothesis:

Forget not yet the great assays,
The cruel wrong, the scornful ways,
The painful patience in denays.
Forget not yet. (Jones 2002: 77)

The four-stress line had been a mainstay of English poetry from its beginnings, and ballad stanzas like this one were the great resource of popular song as well as of courtly poetry. (In Anglo Saxon verse and in the so-called “alliterative revival” of the later fourteenth century, alliteration points up the stresses; one still hears that influence in “painful patience.”) Wyatt handles the form well enough that his fluency with iambics is beyond question. What changes, then, when his line lengthens? The metrical theorist Derek Attridge has suggested that the five-stress line in English developed precisely as a kind of resistance to song, in pursuit of registers high or low, heroic or conversational or meditative, that song cannot easily accommodate (Attridge 1982: 124). So perhaps Wyatt just wants something closer to speech, or closer to thinking, than to singing. But there is a more specific literary historical story to tell, too.

Native, Continental, and Classical Verse Traditions

Wyatt was a prominent courtier in the court of Henry VIII, with a career that carried him in and out of royal favor, and in and out of prison, more than once; he received
from his father the sort of humanist education that was still unusual for young men of the time, and his service as a diplomat introduced him to poets from France and Italy. This meant that Wyatt stood at a confluence of the three major tributaries of sixteenth-century English verse, the native, continental, and classical traditions. The first two were most important to his prosody. The dominant figure in the native tradition was Geoffrey Chaucer, who wrote a ten-syllable or decasyllabic line in *The Book of Troilus* and (with somewhat greater liberties) in *The Canterbury Tales*. Most modern scholars agree that his line usually carries five stresses, but the persistence even today of respectable dispute suggests how tricky the question can be. Take these lines from the opening of the *Tales*:

Whan Žephirus eek with hǐ sweēte breēth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The têndre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his half cours y-ronne. (Chaucer 1987: 23)

The scansion above treats the lines as though they were regular iambic pentameter, but it will be obvious that keeping that meter – and the syllable count – requires some licenses we did not see in Gascoigne. Most important is the optional sounding of that final -e in words like “swete” and “yonge.” What would be the relatively heavy one-two of “young sun” becomes the sprightliness of “younge sone” if you hear the grace syllable in between, and the brisk movement that results is a hallmark of Chaucer’s verse. By Wyatt’s time, however, the final -e was no longer pronounced in ordinary speech, and that meant that sixteenth-century readers heard the line differently. Without those e’s, it is much easier to fall into a loose four-stress pattern, like that of the old Middle English half-lines: “The têndre croppes, and the yonge sönne.” The fact that one of the five stresses in a Chaucerian line is typically much weaker – if we do count five stresses – makes the shift to four easier still: “Whan Žephirus eek with hǐ sweēte breēth.” Such lines do not suggest a poet thinking about metrical feet, which is to say, about a sequence of roughly equivalent units of rhythm; Chaucer is more likely to have had the principles of French prosody in mind (about which more shortly). Gascoigne, for his part, thought “Chaucer hath used the same libertie in feete and measures that the Latinists do use” (Smith 1967: 1.50). Such confusion suggests that his verse is at best an equivocal model for what would become iambic pentameter.

There were other native muses of the ten-syllable line, the most important of whom was probably Chaucer’s self-proclaimed student John Lydgate. Lydgate’s meter is notoriously ungainly, and he seems to have had an ear for some of the more rare and eccentric of his master’s rhythms – for example, what has come to be called a broken-backed line, which wants an unstressed syllable in the middle (“Ŝo ās ſe sat floŤing in the sea” [Lydgate 1966: 68]). Many of Wyatt’s lines have precedent in Lydgate’s gallery of awkward innovations. Wyatt, however, was also a translator – most of his poems in longer lines imitate Italian originals, more or less closely – and the influence
upon him of the continental languages was considerable too. French prosody of the
period was much more explicitly codified than English, and it was defined by strict
syllable count and a rhythm of phrases rather than stress-based feet. The canonical
twelve-syllable line or *alexandrine* falls into two halves (hemistichs), with a strong
pause or caesura in the middle; the crucial accents fall before the caesura and at the
line’s end. English lines that particularly privilege those positions often betray a
French influence, and Wyatt can be shown to have drawn on works by Jean Marot
and others. His deeper engagement, however, was with Italian poetry. He seems to
have been the first Englishman to translate Petrarch, and he borrowed heavily from
Serafino D’Aquilano and the psalms of Pietro Aretino. Italian prosody is syllabic, like
French, though with a greater regard for accentual regularity. Perhaps the most
important lesson there for Wyatt was what George Wright identifies as “frequent use
of elisions, of lengthenings and shortenings of syllables within the line,” which he
used “in order to render in an English equivalent the Italian manner of racing over
some syllables and pausing importantly on others” (Wright 1988: 32). Petrarch’s
rhythms are what Wright calls “expressive,” and in this regard particularly Wyatt
was his attentive student.

What does it mean to read Wyatt with this confluence of traditions in mind, native
and continental? The final stanza of “They flee from me” makes for a good proof text.
The speaker who began the poem by recounting his fall from courtly favor has, in the
second stanza, a kind of memory-vision of one lover in particular. Now he reassures
himself that she was real:

\[
\text{It was no dream: I lay broad waking.}
\]
\[
\text{But all is turned thorough my gentleness}
\]
\[
\text{Into a strange fashion of forsaking.}
\]
\[
\text{And I have leave to go of her goodness. (Jones 2002: 80)}
\]

The first line has a strong hemistich feeling to it, with that stark caesura in the middle;
maybe French, or maybe the old Anglo Saxon and Middle English half line. Its sym-
metry insists on the speaker’s need to tell himself the same thing twice. The next
line, if we count the *-ed* in “turned” and elide “thorough,” is a chain of iambs – perhaps
their evenness figures the very ease with which he finds he has been persuaded to let
her go? Next is the broken-backed line from Lydgate, which sticks appropriately on
“strange fashion.” The fourth seems to stumble at the end, with what has become, in
this poem, the uncanny word “goodness” – though then again, perhaps we are to hear
a French stress pattern, as in “*finesse.*” (Germanic disyllables tend to be trochees,
French disyllables iambs; and though the influence of French on English pronuncia-
tion is waning in the period, its inflections are still available and can carry with them
a hint of courtly refinement.) There is no metrical contract to which we can hold
Wyatt, except perhaps the promise to stay within hailing distance of ten syllables.
But the range of resources he draws upon is remarkably broad, and they are all at the
service of a voice that is rhetorically urgent and torqued by strong feeling. The meter
is expressive, usually more expressive than it is metrical. The line of five iambs is available, but it is not yet a norm.

The Standard Line

The job of establishing iambic pentameter as a standard line in English poetry – the standard Gascoigne so effectively consolidates – would fall instead to Wyatt’s successor Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey. Later generations looked back at the two of them as the “courtly makers” who “greatly pollished our rude & homely maner of vulgar Poesie” (Smith 1967: 62–3). Surrey had a standing at court that Wyatt never had, as heir to a great family (his father was Duke of Norfolk) and a commander in the king’s armies. Still, most of his poems circulated as Wyatt’s did, passed around on loose sheets and copied into commonplace books among coteries of like-minded aristocrats: Sonnets from the Italian, as well as sixaines (six lined stanzas rhymed ABABCC), songs, and what came to be called “poulter’s measure” (rhyming couplets built from alternating lines of 12 and 14 syllables). His five-stress line sounds very different from Wyatt’s, as a quatrain from one of his epitaphs for his great predecessor will make clear:

Á visage stern and mild, | where both did grow
Vice to contemn, | in virtue to rejoice;
Amid great storms | whom grace assured so
To live upright | and smile at fortune’s choice. (Jones 2002: 111)

The pattern of five iambs is unmistakable, and the fundamentals of the contract upon which Gascoigne would insist 30 years later are well established here for the first time. There are hints of what would become the conventional range of variation, too. For example, the trochaic substitution at the beginning of the second line, the most common departure from strict iambic movement (sometimes called an inversion, “˘” to “˘”). The lines are mostly end-stopped, closing either with a full period or a significant syntactic break. Relatively modest variations of word order are adopted to assure regularity (“in virtue to rejóice”). And perhaps most importantly, the position of the caesura – the pause that happens in almost all long lines – has stabilized. In Wyatt, it roams wherever his rhetorical intensities require it; in Surrey, as marked above (|), it is to be found usually after the fourth syllable, occasionally after the sixth, and infrequently elsewhere. The foot that follows that caesura becomes another licit site for inversion, and keeping that pause near the middle makes end-stopping easier, for the second part of the line can harbor a complete phrase and avoid the spilling over of syntax prosodists call “enjambment.” In all this, an ear for French verse, and for the strong, line-defining caesura of the alexandrine (and the decasyllable, as well), has an important part to play.

Surrey’s real departure from Wyatt, however, is a result of his classicism, the third of the traditions that converged upon the courtly makers. Wyatt translated bits of
Seneca and Horace, and his ethical postures have Stoic lineaments, but his prosody mostly tangles native and romance strands. Surrey’s greatest poetic labor was his translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and the heroic line he forged for the task aspires to be an English equivalent to the Latin hexameter. The following passage is from his rendering of Book IV, where Dido begins her steep descent into lovesickness, taking Aeneas’s son as a momentary surrogate for his father:

```
Alone she mourns | within her palace void,
And sets her down | on her forsaken bed;
And absent him she hears, | when he is gone,
And seeth eke. | oft in her lap she holds
Ascanius, | trapped by his father’s form.
So to beguile | the love cannot be told. (Jones 2002: 108–9)
```

Many of the marks of mid-century pentameter are here, the caesura after the fourth or sixth syllables, the occasional trochaic substitution (at the beginning of the last line, and after the caesura in the fourth and fifth). There are also effects that might transgress Gascoigne’s stricter proprieties, like the painfully sharp enjambment of “holds / Ascanius.” Still it is impressively regular, and most strikingly, there is no rhyme. Without rhyme as a herald, the line requires greater rhythmic assurance to declare its boundaries, and Surrey supplies that assurance. There was some Continental precedent for unrhymed verse, but in English Surrey’s innovation was unprecedented, and it was above all a tactic for drawing nearer to Virgil. Perhaps for drawing nearer to Aeneas, too: Surrey’s idea of Englishness was vested in the ancient prerogatives of the nobility, and his biographer William Sessions suggests that as his fortunes at court waned he may have come to identify himself with Virgil’s outcast hero. He was executed by Henry VIII in the paranoia of the bloat king’s final year, but he left the heroic potential of blank verse as his legacy (Sessions 2003).

The story of English verse between Surrey and Gascoigne is mostly a story of the consolidation, even stiffening, of this new regularity. As Gerald Spiegel (1980) observes, the principal charge against vernacular poetry was that it was rude and rough-hewn. Roger Ascham’s judgment was both typical and influential: In his *School-master* (1570) he disparages “barbarous and rude Ryming” (Smith 1967: 1.30), and tells the much-repeated story of how the custom of rhyme had been founded by the Goths in the ruins of the late, lamented Roman Empire. (*Rhthmi* was used in medieval Latin to mean accentual verse, but the word entered English, via Old French, as “rime; hence a deep connection, not to say confusion, between rhyme and stress-based rhythm: See Attridge 1974: 94.) As if in answer to such criticisms, poets like George Turberville and Thomas Churchyard tick like a metronome. Even Wyatt became regular when his poems were printed in Richard Tottel’s *Songs and Sonnettes* (1557), where they were revised to sound like Surrey. (Tottel supplies the new ending, “But since that I so kindly thus am served, / How like you this, what hath she now deserved?” [Rollins 1965: 1.52]) One practical objective of these mid-century writers, and editors, seems to have been to equalize stress across the line as much as possible.
There is a reluctance to use polysyllables, and a discomfort with the idea of secondary stress – the stress that falls on the *a* of “*s*econd*á*y” itself – as though a word should not be expected to carry more than one accent. (This tendency conspires with a general preference for nativist English diction, even in a classicist like Surrey; English words of three or more syllables tend to be Latinate.) Poulter’s measure and fourteeners, couplets of fourteen syllables, also prosper during this period as fleeting but potent rivals to blank verse. Such lines were ultimately too close to song to become enduring answers to the Latin hexameter, as a couplet from Thomas Phaer’s *Aeneid* will suggest: “A wood with bushes broad there was, begrown with bigtree boughs, / Whom thick entangling thorns and briery bramble filled with browes” (Jones 2002: 135). Add line breaks after syllable eight and you end up with a ballad stanza. That effect may have doomed such lines in the long term, but c. 1560, the very strength of the caesura and the authority of the four-stress line ensured a formidable regularity.

Quantitative Verse

It is important to observe, however, that such accentual regularity in practice did not imply correspondingly clear statements in theory. The modern recognition that these English meters are accentual-syllabic – that is, that they honor imperatives both of syllable count and stress pattern – was not decisively articulated until the eighteenth century. Discussions of meter were much more likely to default to the “measure” of simple syllable count. And if Gascoigne was the first Englishman to think systematically about “natural emphasis,” his equivocation between pitch and duration (“depressed or made short … elevate and made long”) betrays an uneasy relationship to another raging controversy: the debate over English quantity, and the authority of Latin (and, to a lesser extent, Greek) prosody over English poetry. Terms like “iamb” and “trochee” and the apparatus of foot scansion itself are classical in origin, but in Latin what they measure is not stress, but syllable length, or quantity. Humanist scholars trained to admire and imitate the eloquence of Virgil saw great promise in the idea that English verse too might be counted in longs and shorts. Such a prosody – with its variety of feet and ancient fluency – would liberate the language from the tyranny of the iamb, a tyranny even Gascoigne had allowed himself to regret, as we have seen. The only difficulty was deciding how to assess the duration of vernacular syllables. The dispute over whether and how to do so is an intricate business, but history has tended to conclude that the rules of Latin quantity – based not only on the tenseness or laxness of vowels, but on their position in words and sentences – have no native purchase on the English language. What counts as “long” or “short” on any of the quantitative schemes devised by Englishmen is nearly arbitrary with respect to natural emphasis, and lines that follow those schemes are effectively impossible to hear as verse. As Derek Attridge puts it, quantitative meter is “an intellectual apprehension, not an aural one” (Attridge 1974: 76). The smoothness it achieves is a smoothness of the eye.
These difficulties did not stop the experiments, however. In his translation of the *Aeneid*, Richard Stanyhurst is driven to desperate extremes of diction by his commitment to strict principles of Latin quantity: “And a seabelch grouting on rough rocks rapfulye frapping” (Jones 2002: 327, l. 8). Of perhaps more durable interest to literary history is the fact that two of the century’s best poets, Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, both tried their hands at quantitative verse. There are several such poems in the eclogues of Sidney’s first *Arcadia*, and Spenser was at least briefly taken with the idea, even after writing his *summa* of English accentual experiments, *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579). In a 1580 letter to his friend Gabriel Harvey he extols the new prosody of Sidney and Edward Dyer, who “have proclaimed … a generall surceasing and silence of balde Rymers” (Smith 1967: 1.89). The subsequent exchange is partly taken up with trying to get the rules of the new school straight. Spenser seems to be prepared to adopt an alternative pronunciation for quantitative verse, which would allow the emphasis on a word like “carpenter,” normally stressed on the first syllable with an optional, secondary stress on the third, to fall on the second (because, applying one of the most important quantitative rules, the *e* precedes two consonants). Harvey revolts: He will not countenance making the word “an inche longer or bigger than God and his Englishe people have made him” (Smith 1967: 1.117). The dispute would not turn out to mean much for the future of English prosody, but the modern scholar Richard Helgerson has shown how much its language reveals about the politics of verse. Spenser writes with enthusiasm about how Sidney and Dyer have “prescribed certaine Lawes and rules of Quantities”; Harvey accuses his friend of “tyranny,” insisting that whatever rules might be introduced they should not contravene the “common allowed and received PROSODYE, taken up by an universall consent of all, and continued by a generall use and Custome of all” (Smith 1967: 1.89, 121). It is not clear how Harvey could ever achieve the reconciliation of quantity and native accent that he recommends; Spenser may have consistency on his side. But Harvey’s recourse to a language of commonwealth and common law, bridling at his friend’s autocratic idiom, reminds us that the making of English verse was part of the challenge of making an English nation.

**Sidney and Spenser**

Of course neither Sidney nor Spenser is best remembered for his quantitative experiments: What abides are their contributions to the resources of an English versification that had become in practice, if not yet in theory, definitively accentual-syllabic. The first eclogue of Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calender* is squarely in iambic pentameter:

```
All as the ſheepe, | such was the ſepeheards looke,
For pale and wanne he was, | (alas the while,)
May seeme he lovd, | or els some care he tooke:
Well couth he tune his pipe, | and frame his stile.
```
Tho to a hill | his fáynting flócke he leddé,
And thus him playnd, | the while his shepe there fédde. (Spenser 1999: 36)

The caesura here falls after the fourth or sixth syllables; there is, as usual with Spenser, frequent syntactic inversion in the service both of rhythm and of rhyme. The first line, however, requires some consideration: Are there trochaic substitutions (as marked here) in the first and third feet? The line could be read as straight iambics, and Spenser inclines strongly toward regularity; but trochees would reinforce the parallelism “all as” / “such was.” Here we fall back upon the metrical contract again, which in this case (and to this reader’s ear) allows such variations where there is evidence that they are rhetorically motivated. Elsewhere in theCalendar, however, the contract is very different, as in the rollicking, syllabically liberal songs (“There it ranckleth ay more and more, / hey ho the arrowe” [Spenser 1999: 111]). There are also passages that fall somewhere in-between pentameter and four-stress song, as in the “February” eclogue:

For Age and Winter accord full nie,
This chill, that cold, this crooked, that wrye.
And as the lowring Wether lookes downe,
So semest thou like good fryday to frowne. (Spenser 1999: 41)

How to describe the rhythm here? The lines have nine or ten syllables each; there seem to be four strong stresses, harkening back to Middle English and to the ballad tradition. One could speak in terms of anapestic substitutions, but it seems more in the spirit of the experiment to say that the lines are accentual without being syllabic. As a matter of decorum, they fall tendentiously between the humble style of the shepherds’ singing contests and Colin Clout’s tragically or mock-tragically ennobled pentameter. Along with the elaborate stanzas of “April,” Spenser seems to be using his calendrical scheme to explore a wide spectrum of vernacular possibility. Surrey’s heroic line stands at one end, the shepherd boy Willy’s jigs on the other.

The whole spectrum might, however, be compassed in the category Susanne Woods labels “aesthetic”: metrical styles whose appeal rests primarily in their total effect, rather than in local rhythmic responses to the meaning of the lines. Spenser is relatively unlikely to ruffle his iambics for passing emphasis, and when he does the variations are highly conventional. It is Sidney who is the great master of such perturbations, the effects Woods calls “mimetic” and Wright “expressive.” He too uses pastoral as a space of experiment in hisArcadia, where quantitative poems are to be found alongside sonnets, sixaines, sestinas, and still rarer specimens. His expressive legacy, however, is transmitted principally through the sonnet sequenceAstrophil and Stella. The vigorous speech rhythms and emotional turmoil of Astrophil are constantly putting the iambic line in jeopardy:

Fly, fly, my friends, I have my death wound, fly;
See there that boy, that murd’ring boy I say,
Who like a thief hid in dark bush doth lie,
Till bloody bullet get him wrongful prey. (Jones 2002: 306)

You need a great deal of confidence in the iambic line, and in your own virtuosity, to start a poem with a phrase as rhythmically equivocal as “Fly, fly”; particularly where the line also offers, in addition to the authorized caesura after the fourth syllable, as many as three other possible pauses. The second line reins things in rhythmically, without losing the feel of spontaneous speech, but the third may be even more adventurous than the first. It is easy to hear “hid in” as a trochaic substitution, and the near-spondee that follows, “dark bush,” keeps the line angrily off-balance. Then the fourth line is perfectly even: Sidney also knows when to reaffirm his fundamental contract. Such acrobatics occur throughout the sequence, and more important than any particular figuration of such effects – the claim, for example, that that spondee or spondaic iamb “dark bush” carries a contemptuous emphasis – is the sheer fact that they keep tempting readers to guess at their significance. The actual range of variation remains relatively small, for there are no anapests, and notwithstanding a few startling enjambments the lines are mostly end-stopped. Searching out differences from his peers and predecessors, it could be said that Sidney is more comfortable with varying levels of stress than Gascoigne; though that would be true of Spenser, too. The signal difference is perhaps the way that conventional variations are made responsive to the vagaries of an urgent speaking voice, even as the fundamental contract of five iambics is preserved.

Sidney never wrote a heroic poem. His revisions of *Arcadia* move toward epic, but the skeleton and most of the flesh of that work are prose, while *Astrophil* stays within the courtly territory staked out by Wyatt’s reading of Petrarch and its development in Tottel’s *Miscellany*. But Spenser did, and *The Faerie Queene* (1590 and 1596) is a benchmark in the history of the pentameter line as a medium for high style and noble purpose. The poem’s most remarkable achievement may be the form of the stanza where that line is housed, that intricate, double-thinking, nine-line perpetual motion machine, with its mix of cross-rhymes and couplets:

For round about, the walls yclothed were
With goodly arras of great majesty,
Woven with gold and silke so close and nere,
That the rich metall lurked privily,
As faining to be hid from envious eye;
Yet here, and there, and every where unwares
It shewed it selfe, and shone unwillingly;
Like a discoulourd Snake, whose hidden snares
Through the greene gras his long bright burnisht backe declares. (Jones 2002: 255)

Some of Gascoigne’s poetical licenses are evident here, the syncope of “envious,” the metrical convenience of the old form “yclothed” (which also depends on that sounded -*ed*), and – more than Gascoigne would have liked – syntactic inversions (like
“yclothed were”). The fourth line might just be read as beginning with a pyrrhic and a spondee, to avoid stressing the article; the caesura moves around with greater freedom than it tended to 15 years before. Altogether, however, the stanza is still impressively regular. Then there is that last line, the alexandrine. The end of the stanza is partly Spenser’s nod to the classical hexameter and its epic lineage. But like all six- or seven-foot lines in English, it is at risk of breaking in half and lapsing into the sing-song of ballad meter. Sometimes Spenser keeps control by varying the position of the caesura (“The utmost rowme, | abounding with all precious store” [Jones 2002: 255]); sometimes he allows the even split in the service of rhetorical balance (“Yet was thy love her death, | and her death was thy smart” [Jones 2002: 257]). In the stanza above, the line is so full of stress that the iambic expectation barely subdues it to patterned accents. The reader can decide whether to think of this excess as an expressive effect, say, the snake raising its back above the level of the line. It certainly suggests how Spenser – to be sure, less dramatic than Sidney – nonetheless can put his own kind of pressure on the line that *The Faerie Queene* did so much to canonize.

### Verse on Stage

That word “dramatic” brings us belatedly to a tradition parallel to all this poetry of the page, the verse of the theater. Surrey’s unrhymed iambic pentameter was destined to become the great English heroic line, but it was little used for that purpose before Milton took it up in *Paradise Lost*. Where blank verse flourished was on the stage, and there the line’s developing norms were tested and extended by the passionate utterances of performance. The history play *Gorbuduc* (1561) – written by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville – is the first to exploit this new resource. Its five acts feature more strenuous speechifying than banter, and its verse is as regular as Sackville’s contemporaneous contributions to the *Mirror for Magistrates*, which was one of most popular verse collections of the moment and a great consolidator of the mid-century style. Still, it was a fundamental departure from what George Saintsbury called the “doggerel alexandrines” (Saintsbury 1923: 1.342) of much contemporaneous dramatic poetry. And it prepared the way for the strong line of Christopher Marlowe, as spoken here by his Scythian conqueror Tamburlaine:

\[
\text{Nature, that framd us of four elements} \\
\text{Warring within our breasts for regiment,} \\
\text{Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds. (Marlowe 1986: 132–3)}
\]

These lines are mostly regular, with conventional if emphatic first-position inversions in the two lines preceding. The alliteration of “framd” and “four” – that old technique for reinforcing stress – might incline toward the pyrrhic and spondee combination suggested in the scansion above. But Marlowe is clearly thinking in
terms of disyllabic feet, and his syllable counts are strict, two cardinal characteristics of his “strong line.”

It is Shakespeare, however, who was the great multiplier of the resources of dramatic prosody. That cannot be said yet of his early plays, where the instance of rhyme is much higher and the iambs are relatively stiff. Even Mercutio’s flight of fancy about Queen Mab does not stray too far from Gascoigne’s precepts:

She is the fairies’ midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman. (Shakespeare 1988: 342)

An inverted first foot again, to start; and perhaps that pyrrhic-spondee combination in the third line. But as his career proceeds, Shakespeare gives himself greater latitudes. George Wright emphasizes an increase in what he calls the playwright’s “syllabic ambiguity” (Wright 1988: 157), a recurring uncertainty about just how many syllables the line contains, and just when to use licenses that were contractually obligatory in the 1570s. With this ambiguity, potential anapests begin to slip into the line, especially in the middle (with what the French would call an “epic caesura”: the opposite of a broken-backed line, with a weak syllable both before and after the pause). There are also more feminine endings, and freer enjambment, with less obligation to craft the phrases of four or six syllables that occupy the two halves of a standard line. The resulting contract is in many ways more liberal than English poets would draft again until the later nineteenth century.

One more example, from a late play, will show how far Shakespeare is willing to go. Here is Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale*, as his passion pushes the verse almost to the breaking point:

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o’er head and ears a forked one!
Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I
Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour
Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. There have been,
Or I am much deceiv’d, cuckold ere now. (Shakespeare 1988: 1105)

The surfeit of stress on the monosyllables at the beginnings of the first two lines makes it difficult for them to recover their balance, and the sharp enjambment “I / Play” does not help steady the lurching. The fifth line is tricky, too, with the disruption moved now to the middle, and two strong caesuras to break the utterance into pieces. But it may be that the fragile presumption of iambs is nonetheless a shrewd pointer to the king’s rhetorical emphasis. Leontes reassures himself that “there have been” cuckolds before him; he is not the first! Or, then again, perhaps “There have been” is an anapest? Or are there perhaps even six stresses in the line? Jealousy is hard on the pentameter, and so, by the end of his career, is Shakespeare.
Conclusion

If we are looking for further late-century departures from Gascoigne’s regularity, we could turn to John Donne. But Donne’s rough line is a singular phenomenon, and Woods is probably right to say that its power lies in its barely contained demotic vigor rather than in its dialectical play with verse norms. Other poets – Drayton, the early Raleigh, Greville – stay closer to the conventions as Gascoigne defines them, and are better representatives of the state of verse at the end of Elizabeth’s reign. There is a late, powerful defense of quantitative meter in Thomas Campion’s *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* in 1602, and his songs are uniquely artful in finding rhythms that reconcile quantity and stress. But Samuel Daniel’s *Defense of Rhyme* (1603) makes clear which way the wind is blowing: Though English “doth not strictly observe long and short sillables,” he says, “yet it most religiously respects the accent” (Smith 1967: 2.360). He also voices a new century’s impatience with the whole debate: “Number, Measure, and Ryme, is but as the ground or seate, whereupon is raised the work that commends it” (Smith 1967: 2.381). This insistence that the real stuff of poetry is its “concepts” and “inventions” (Smith 1967: 2.359, 364) harks back to Gascoigne, the first champion of accent, who insists that without “some depth of devise in the Invention” a poem will be “but a tale of a tubbe” (Smith 1967: 1.48). The limitations of metrical theory in the sixteenth century may simply reflect the extent to which the making of English verse was a pragmatic enterprise, with poets exploring the language’s rhythmic resources as they went along, bending it to their inventions. We learn a great deal looking back with the systematic apparatus of modern metrics to help us, but we do well to remember that the Tudor poets – influenced though they were by the well-developed prosodies of other languages – nonetheless took the ford as they found it.

References


Further Reading


The plays of John Lyly have always been regarded as a treasure trove of covert allusion to contemporary political figures and events. Two in particular have caught the literary-historical imagination: *Sappho and Phao* (1584) and — especially — *Endymion* (1591). It is now generally agreed that the former alludes to the failed dynastic courtship of Elizabeth I by the French Duke of Alençon, with Elizabeth represented by the heroine of the play, Sappho. The political allegory of *Endymion* has given rise to a great deal of speculation since N. J. Halpin’s essay on *Oberon’s Vision in the Midsummer Night’s Dream Illustrated by a Comparison with Lylie’s Endymion* — published as long ago as 1843. The court is still out on the exact details of the allegory, but all are agreed that the heroine Cynthia, like Sappho, is a representation of Elizabeth. This unanimity over the interpretation of the characters of Sappho and Cynthia is facilitated by the fact that they are both cast from the very familiar mould labeled by Elizabethan poets as “the virgin queen” — a title still much beloved of modern critics and historians alike. One can find this phrase applied to Elizabeth as early as 1575, and, during the 1580s, the theme became very popular with poets, and with other writers, as it became clear that the queen would never marry (the Alençon courtship proved to be the final episode in the long sequence of marriage proposals). Lyly himself made a crucial contribution to the formation of the theme in his novel *Euphues and his England* in 1580, in which the virgin queen was elevated to the superior level of an “earthly goddess” (Lyly 2003: 336–7); and he continued to use this specialized figuration of the virgin queen in his plays, all of which were probably written between 1583 and 1589. Yet he was never entirely convinced of the political virtues of his own variation on this figure, for, as he knew full well, this sort of praise came perilously close to flattery.

In this chapter, I wish to argue that Lyly presents a provocatively critical account of the cult of virginity he himself had done so much to create in the play which is now — thanks to its frank interest in female same-sex love — his most well-known work: *Galatea* (1592). This play comes third in the sequence of his dramatic
compositions, just after *Sappho and Phao* and just before *Endymion*, so it has seemed natural to play *cherchez la reine* in *Galatea*, too. There is one very obvious candidate: Diana. The goddess plays an important role in the play, and is described by one of her devotees, Haebe, as “sovereign of all virtue and goddess of all virgins” (Lyly 2000: 5.2.42–3). But despite what seems to be a very clear hint as to the allegorical identity of Diana in this passage, critics have generally baulked at the idea that the goddess might be an allusion to Elizabeth, because they find her too unappealing. Jacqueline Vanhoutte, for example, notes of Diana and her adversary in this play, Venus, that they are “too unattractive to allow for an identification between them and the Virgin Queen” (Vanhoutte 1996: 1).

But that identification is exactly what I shall propose in the first part of this chapter. To put it in the form of an equation: “Diana = Elizabeth.” In order to make this identification plausible, we need to recognize that there is a necessary ambiguity about the representation of the goddess in *Galatea*, which allows for a negotiation between the world of the play and the real world in which it is performed, particularly, the world of the Elizabethan court. From time to time, the words spoken by the characters of the play allow the shadowy figure of the queen to advance while the figure of Diana, as represented on the stage in the form of a boy-actor dressed, no doubt, in a white peplum or tunic with bow and arrows, temporarily recedes. What is being represented – the mythological figure of Diana or the panegyrical figure of Elizabeth – is thus not always clear, and there is a strategic element of vagueness about this allegorical dramaturgy.

In the second part of this chapter, I want to explore the issue of political allusion in *Galatea* in the light of this vagueness, with special reference to the speech in which Haebe seems to make such an unmistakable allusion to Elizabeth under the cover of her devotion to Diana. I shall try to show how Lyly opens up the temporary imaginative space of a “lesbian Utopia,” in which the English court is ruled neither by Diana, not Elizabeth, but by a shadowy and almost impossibly idealized prince. But in both parts of this chapter, I shall be pursuing the same basic argument that Lyly offers in this play an enigmatic but nonetheless committed critique of the Elizabethan cult of virginity.

**Diana as Elizabeth**

Let us begin with a brief résumé of the play’s action. *Galatea* is set on the Lincolnshire shore of the river Humber, and in the woods nearby. Every 5 years, the shepherds of Humber bank must pay to Neptune the sacrifice of their fairest virgin, in compensation for the destruction of his temple, many years ago, not by the shepherds themselves, but by the invading Danes. Two shepherds, each believing his daughter to be the fairest, disguise their girls – Galatea and Phyllida – as boys, and send them off into the woods until the day of sacrifice is past. Meanwhile, Cupid, wandering through the woods, is slighted by one of Diana’s nymphs, and vows revenge. The girl-boys
meet and even before they have plucked up the courage to speak to one another, they seem to have fallen for each other; then they are caught up in the train of Diana and her nymphs and join the hunt as beaters. Cupid, now himself disguised as a nymph, insinuates himself into their company and makes the true nymphs all fall in love with either Galatea or Phyllida. Finally, Diana captures and punishes him – and his spell is broken. Meanwhile, the two girl-boys continue to meet inconclusively in the woods, each more or less convinced that the other may really be just as much a girl as she is herself. Back among the shepherds, the day of sacrifice comes, and a virgin called Haebe is tied to the tree; but she is not fair enough and Neptune's monster does not come to fetch her away. Instead, Neptune himself bellows for revenge, not only on the shepherds, but also on Diana and her nymphs. At this point, Diana enters and challenges the sea-god, followed swiftly by Venus, demanding the return of Cupid; and after a lengthy altercation, Neptune negotiates a truce between the two goddesses, so that Diana surrenders Cupid and he abolishes the sacrifice. Finally, Galatea and Phyllida are revealed for what they are – and Venus promises to reward their true love by turning one of them into a man so that they marry.

Where, then, shall we find the figure of the virgin queen in Galatea in all this? Here we have a play which abounds in virgins: three mortal girls, at least four nymphs, and Diana herself. Even this enumeration should immediately point to Diana as the prime suspect for a representation of Elizabeth, for how is one to choose between the three girls or the four nymphs? As it happens, Galatea has emerged as the favorite candidate in recent criticism. Ellen Caldwell argues that Galatea and Phyllida jointly constitute a figure of androgyny, but at the end of this essay, Galatea finally takes priority when Caldwell analyses her provocative epilogue, in which the queen is supposed to see herself reflected as "the image of a woman as union of opposites and controller of her destiny" (Caldwell 1987: 40). Likewise, Vanhoutte also proposes an androgynous reading of the play, and at one point argues (rather oddly) for Lyly's "representing the queen in his two protagonists, Gallathea and Phyllida"; but she later plumps for Galatea, with such decision, in fact, that the order of signifier and signified are reversed, so that she can say that "Elizabeth functions … as a type of Gallathea" (Vanhoutte 1996: 8, 11).

However, Galatea is surely debarred as a representation of Elizabeth because she urges the ladies of the court to give into their amorous inclinations. It is Galatea who speaks the epilogue, where she says: "Yield, ladies, yield to love, ladies." We know these words were spoken at court, because the text of the play as we have it is "[a]s it was played before the Queen's Majesty at Greenwich, on New Year's day at night" (title-page of the 1592 edition). The ladies whom Galatea here addresses, then, must be the ladies in the audience at this court performance: Elizabeth's ladies-in-waiting. But this is exactly what the queen told her ladies not to do. Elizabeth wished her ladies to pay tribute at the altars of the virginity in the same way that she did herself, and was often mightily vexed when they wavered in their devotions. Lyly knew this well enough, since the queen had actually imprisoned Anne Vavasour for having an affair with his master, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (Bennett 1942). The
androgynous argument is ingenious, then, but it is too complicated and it does not solve this basic historico-hermeneutical problem.

Nor can any – or all – of the nymphs be put forward as possible alternatives, because they are quite unequivocally intended as representations of Elizabeth’s ladies. When Cupid comes on in disguise and announces his plans to make Diana’s nymphs fall in love, he suddenly turns to the audience and says: “and then, ladies, if you see these dainty dames entrapped in love, say softly to yourselves, we may all love” (2.2.15–16). These “ladies” must refer to the ladies of the court, and the plain inference is that they should see themselves somehow reflected in the nymphs of Diana’s train. This suspicion is confirmed by a detail from the amusing scene in which Diana’s nymphs come on one by one to confess that they have fallen in love and thus defected from Diana to Venus. Ramia explicitly rejects her former devotion: “Vain art thou, virtue, and thou, chastity, but a byword, when you both are subject to love, of all things the most abject” (3.1.75–7). Nor is Ramia alone in this crisis of allegiance; Telusa, Eurota, and Servia also love, and “Clymene, whose stately looks seemed to amaze the greatest lords, stoopeth, yieldeth, and fawneth on the strange boy in the woods” (3.1.93–4). Diana’s nymphs are consistently referred to as “ladies” (especially by Diana herself); but this is the only time we hear of “lords” in the play, and Lyly is clearly blurring the boundaries between the play-world and the real world here. Clymene is both a woodland nymph and a lady of the court. Thus Cupid’s call to arms is confirmed: Clymene has defected from the virgin goddess – and the ladies in the audience are urged to defect from the virgin queen. Naturally, the exhortation is not quite so bluntly stated as I have put it here. Cupid’s words are: “say softly to yourselves, we may all love.” The ladies are to whisper among themselves so their royal mistress may not hear what they say. But Cupid’s message is clear, and Elizabeth is obviously meant to “overhear” what he says to them.

This explicit identification “Diana’s nymphs = Elizabeth’s ladies” surely prompts the implicit identification “Diana = Elizabeth.” But critics have not wished to pursue this line of inquiry because they are wedded to the idea that Lyly was a courtly flatterer. Since G. K. Hunter, in his seminal study *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (1962), told us that Lyly was a courtly flatterer “par excellence,” while assuring us that flattery was “an activity that is compatible with self-respect” (Hunter 1962: 12), critics have come to assume that Lyly’s plays are built on a foundation of royal flattery. So, for example, Theodora M. Jankowski can make the following statement on the general character of Lylian drama in a recent discussion of *Galatea*: “Written for performance at court and, consequently, to flatter the queen, Lyly uses Classical icons of virginity to ‘represent’ the Virgin Queen” (Jankowski 2000: 13). But the idea that court performance implies flattery of the queen is surely too simple, especially in view of the tradition of topical interpretation of court plays and entertainments set in motion by Marie Axton’s landmark study of *The Queen’s Two Bodies* (1978). Besides, *Galatea* is not only a courtly play, but has strong elements of academic revelry and popular theatre as well (Cartwright 1998). We need to look much more closely – and
with an open mind – at the claim for Diana as a critical representation of Elizabeth.

The reasons why Diana seems “unattractive” to modern critics are not far to seek. A particular problem is her treatment of Cupid, which causes Venus to describe her as a “goddess of hate” (5.3.39). Diana anticipates this title when she first finds her nymphs have fallen in love: “O Venus, if this by thy spite I will requite it with more than hate” (3.4.4–5). And once she has Cupid in her power, she spitefully threatens him with enslavement and mutilation: “I will break thy bow and burn thy arrows, bind thy hands, clip thy wings, and fetter thy feet” (3.4.85–6). All this she does, for when she surrenders Cupid to Venus in the final act, the latter exclaims: “Alas, poor boy, thy wings clipped, thy brands quenched, thy bow burnt, and thy arrows broke?” (5.3.100–1). Cupid is in a visibly sorry state, then, but this is the sort of thing that one would expect from Diana as a mythological figure rather than as a panegyrical – or anti-panegyrical – representation of Elizabeth. It is the sort of device which works well on stage, but does not necessarily have any point as a political allusion.

More important in this respect is Diana’s treatment of her nymphs, whom we have seen to be unequivocal representations of Elizabeth’s ladies. In truth, she does not treat them badly: She tells them off after they have all fallen in love, but only in the “not angry but disappointed” tone of the headmistress of a school for young ladies (whom she uncannily resembles). But look at how Venus describes this slightly prigish attitude:

This is she that hateth sweet delights, envieth loving desires, masketh wanton eyes, stoppeth amorous ears, bridleth youthful mouths, and, under cover of a name or word “constancy,” entertaineth all kind of cruelty. (5.3.31–5)

This is a very highly charged description of what we have actually witnessed. We have not seen Diana lay a finger on her nymphs, far less mask their eyes, stop their ears, or – worst of all – bridle their mouths. In fact, though they have to sit through a long and uncomfortable lecture on sexual continence, the nymphs seem to be glad to have escaped from the confusions and humiliations imposed on them by Cupid. As far as we can see, they do not – in their unaltered state – wish to be wanton. Venus’s accusation, then, is one of those moments where the nymphs recede and the ladies advance, as with the earlier allusion to Clymene. It is not so much that Venus is mistaken here, or that she maliciously misrepresents her adversary, but rather that her remarks broaden the scope of allusion to cover not simply the nymphs but all young virgins – including the ladies of Elizabeth’s court.

On the other hand, there is an element of strategic vagueness in this speech. An allusion to Elizabeth may be indicated by Venus’s choice of the word “constancy” as the one which Diana uses to mask her cruelty. But Diana never uses this word. It is Venus who speaks it for the first time in the play in this passage, after which it is also used by Neptune and, in the epilogue, by Galatea – but not by Diana. On each
occasion, the word is used in the context of love and desire, so that it is really a word that should be associated with Venus rather than with Diana. One is tempted to think Lyly must have written some other word – “chastity,” for example – and then changed his mind. But “constancy” makes excellent sense when we recall that one of Elizabeth’s Latin mottos was “Semper eadem”: “Always the same woman.” Here, then, Diana recedes from our view and Elizabeth advances, or, more precisely, since there is no transformation in Diana’s visible shape, “Diana as the mythological figure Diana” is blurred and “Diana as a panegyrical representation of Elizabeth” comes into focus. A court audience is thus reminded of the queen’s persistent commitment to celibacy, and also of the trials suffered by some of her ladies who found the imposition of the Elizabethan code of chastity too much to endure, such as Anne Vavasour.

However, the allegory is not transparent at this point, for there is more than this momentary allusion to the sexual regime at court. Somewhere behind all this lurks the figure of the courtly flatterer which has so often been imposed on Lyly himself. Venus accuses Diana of a vice of speech which ancient rhetoric named *paradiastole*. Here is George Puttenham on the term in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589):

… if … moderation of words tend to flattery, or soothing, or excusing, it is by the figure *paradiastole*, which therefore nothing improperly we call the “Curry-favel,” as when we make the best of a bad thing, or turn a signification to the more plausible sense; as to call an unthrifty “a liberal gentleman,” the foolish-hardy “valiant” or “courageous,” the niggard “thrifty,” a great riot or outrage “an youthful prank,” and such like terms, moderating and abating the force of the matter by craft, and for a pleasing purpose, as appeareth by these verses of ours teaching in what cases it may commendably be used by courtiers. (Puttenham 1936: 184–5)

Sadly, these verses did not find their way into the printed version of the treatise, but the link between *paradiastole* and flattery is made very clear here. Indeed, one might suppose from Puttenham’s account that *paradiastole* was not merely a figure of speech but the life and soul of a particularly courtly species of flattery.

Venus accuses Diana of trying to pass off a vice – “cruelty” – as a virtue – “constancy.” In the context of Puttenham’s uncontroversial understanding of *paradiastole*, and bearing in mind the political allusiveness of this and other similar passages in *Galatea*, we might say that Venus accuses Diana of rehearsing the tropes of a vicious art of flattery that could otherwise be described in terms of the cult of the virgin queen. This could hardly be relevant to Diana, but it does make sense in the context of the kind of courtly flattery which Elizabeth may not have actually initiated but certainly enjoyed. As I noted above, Lyly had played an important part in the development of this cult in the early 1580s, and here I want to return to that key passage in *Euphues and his England* already mentioned, where Euphues describes Elizabeth as an “earthly goddess.”

In his eulogy of the queen, Euphues follows the rules set out for the praise of a person by the rhetoricians, for example, by praising his or her cardinal virtues one by
one, and he pays special attention to a virtue which is especially – perhaps uniquely – relevant to Elizabeth of England:

such is the grace bestowed upon this earthly goddess that, having the beauty that might allure all princes, she hath the chastity also to refuse all, accounting it no less praise to be called a virgin than to be esteemed a Venus, thinking it as great honour to be found chaste as thought amiable. (Lyly 2003: 336–7)

Beauty and chastity are conventional themes in the praise of women, as is the comparison with female deities, such as Venus. Euphues, however, goes one step further by stating that Elizabeth is a goddess, too. The idea here is that God has bestowed his grace on Elizabeth to such an extent that it has elevated her above the common run of humanity to the level of an “earthly goddess.”

Euphues also insists on Elizabeth’s power to protect not only herself but also her people from the effects of fortune. He gives several examples of famous virgins of antiquity who were possessed of marvellous powers by virtue of their virginity and continues:

If virginity have such force, then what hath this chaste virgin Elizabeth done, who by the space of twenty and odd years with continual peace against all policies, with sundry miracles contrary to all hope, hath governed this island, against whom neither foreign force nor civil fraud, neither discord at home nor conspiracies abroad could prevail? (Lyly 2003: 337)

Elizabeth’s talismanic virginity thus provides miraculous protection to her subjects in a dangerous world of enemies: “this is the only miracle that virginity ever wrought.”

However, Euphues is also uncomfortably aware that Elizabeth’s virginity could be (and had been) perceived as a threat to national security, because it prevented her from producing an heir of the body, and thus perpetuated and exacerbated the problem of succession. Euphues thus must piously wish that the age of miracles is not yet past and that Elizabeth will marry and bear children (still just possible in 1580):

I began thus to pray: that as she hath lived forty years a virgin in great majesty, so she may live fourscore years a mother with great joy … that either the world may end before she die or she live to see her children’s children in the world; otherwise how tickle their state is that now triumph, … they that live shall see, which I to think on sigh. (Lyly 2003: 339)

Here we may see where Lyly himself might have thought a charge of flattery could be leveled against him, if he were to be accused of having praised Elizabeth’s apparently perpetual virginity as a blessing when in fact it might be a curse – an example, in fact, of paradiaustole.

Lyly understood flattery as the dark side of the Elizabethan cult of the virgin queen which he helped to establish during the 1580s. He was all too aware that this cult
was a carefully constructed denial of the political threat posed to the nation by the queen’s perpetual virginity; and he must surely have read in one of his favorite authors, Plutarch, in his famous essay “How a Man May Discern a Flatterer from a Friend,” how flattery could be a danger to the state if it fastened on the mind of the sovereign:

commonly it is the ruin and decay of great houses, and a malady incident to mighty states; which oftentimes undoeth and overthroweth whole monarchies, realms, and great seignories. (Plutarch 1912: 39)

Flattery was thus a tragic theme, and, while Lyly probably did not believe that England would come to ruin as a result of his own contribution to the more dubious reaches of royal panegyric, nevertheless, he was uneasy about what he was doing and this gave rise to a modest degree of rassentiment. For Lyly, flattery was not (pace Hunter) “an activity that [was] compatible with self-respect.”

The ferocity of the verbal contention in this exchange between Venus and Diana in Galatea is a measure, I suggest, of the unresolved conflict in Lyly’s own conscience with regard to his participation in the cult of the virgin queen. On the whole, Lyly seems to have sided with Venus in this and most – if not all – of his other plays. He is not exactly, as G. Wilson Knight once urged us to believe, the founder of “the whole sex-cult of the modern world” (Knight 1939: 155), but Lyly did have a profound and relatively liberal interest in natural love which was bound to militate against the Elizabethan cult of virginity, which he really did help to found. In Euphues and his England, Lyly was able to commit himself more fully to the praise of Elizabeth’s virginity because he also praises her ladies in exactly the same way. The eulogy of Elizabeth is part of a broader encomium of England called “Euphues’ Glass for Europe,” which also contains an extended comparison between the vicious ladies of Italy and the virtuous ladies of England, who are “so … chaste and beautiful,” that, the first time he sees them, Euphues thinks they are beautiful deceptions conjured up by “some odd necromancer” (Lyly 2003: 329). Here we see that the ladies no less than Elizabeth have a magical or miraculous quality. But drama is very different from eulogy, and Lyly was, as many critics have observed, especially attracted to its generic potential for exploring diametrical oppositions (Best 1968); and this in turn allowed him to give expression, howbeit vexed and confused, to his own conflicted attitude towards the cult of the virgin queen.

But this is only one reason why Venus and Diana attack each other so fiercely. In fact, this is how Lyly always portrays his gods, who are endlessly locked in a violent conflict of numina – their “divine powers.” Hence, in them, cruelty and constancy really are intimately linked, since they can never change their essential divine being but must always attempt to impose it on others. This is as true of Neptune as of Diana, and even little Cupid announces that he will “use some tyranny” against Diana’s nymphs (2.2.10–11). The accusations of hate which Diana and Venus level at each other during the play are thus not without ground: The two deities cannot
be reconciled and must eternally play out their cosmic enmity at the level of plot. The awkward truce at the end of *Galatea* is therefore not a cessation of conflict, as is clear from their exchange over the scope of Cupid’s powers:

\[
\text{Venus. … Diana cannot forbid him to wound.} \\
\text{Diana. Yes, chastity is not within the level of his bow.} \\
\text{Venus. But beauty is a fair mark to hit. (5.3.86–8)}
\]

The conflict seems set to flare up again and is hardly resolved by Neptune’s hasty intervention: “Well, I am glad you are agreed, and say that Neptune hath dealt well with beauty and chastity.” But the goddesses are clearly not “agreed.”

The violent world of internuminal conflict that is figured forth in Lyly’s mythological plays to some extent absolves him from the charge of flattery. With the notable exception of Sappho, for Cynthia really is a semi-deity, mortals are vulnerable and powerless in the face of divine *numen*, and this allows an allegorical reading of Lylian drama which argues that the artist is inevitably subordinated to royal authority. Indeed, this idea is played out explicitly in the relationship between the artist Apelles and Alexander the Great in Lyly’s first play, *Campaspe* (1584). Read Lyly for Apelles, and *Campaspe* can be seen as a critical commentary on the problems of writing plays for the Elizabethan court (Pincombe 1996: 24–51). But there is no explicit ambiguity in the figure of Apelles, as there is in the case of Diana’s nymphs in *Galatea*. Lyly works here by a principle of vague allusiveness rather than pointed allusion; and vagueness is the key to understanding Haebe’s complex and tantalizing speech.

**Haebe and the Lesbian Utopia**

Haebe’s speech is another example of the shift of focus which allows the play-world to recede and the real courtly world shadowed in it to advance for a moment. Haebe is a shepherdess, but she talks as if she has some experience of court-life. Her long speech of valediction, recited as she waits for Agar to fetch her away, includes the following rather startling statement:

\[
\text{Farewell the pomp of princes’ courts, whose roofs are embossed with gold, and whose pavements are decked with fair ladies; where the days are spent in sweet delights, the nights in pleasant dreams; where chastity honoureth affections and commandeth, yiel-}
\text{deth to desire and conquereth. (5.2.36–41)}
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Has Haebe visited the court? It is not impossible; pastoral has a place for the shepherd who has been to the city or court and returns to tell the tale to friends who have stayed behind. And if she has indeed visited the court, it is surely the English court she means, since the location of the play is very carefully specified as England rather than the usual realm of pastoral myth.
This reference teases us with the possibility that here we have an allusion to Elizabeth as “chastity,” to complement the richly allusive reference to the “ladies” – a term which we have seen to be a codeword for “Elizabeth’s ladies-in-waiting.” The opening of the next paragraph, which follows immediately after these words, would seem to put this interpretation beyond doubt: “Farewell, the sovereign of all virtue and goddess of all virgins, Diana, whose perfections are impossible to be numbered and therefore infinite, never to be matched and therefore immortal.” This reference to Diana has often been seen as a complimentary allusion to Elizabeth, but a closer examination of these two passages argues the opposite. Diana is not the prince who rules at the court described by Haebe, despite the fact that this prince can be identified as Diana’s traditional attribute of chastity.

As Diana’s head-girl, Telusa, has told the captive Cupid two scenes earlier: “Diana cannot yield; she conquers affection” (4.3.91). Cupid replies: “Diana shall yield; she cannot conquer destiny.” In fact, Diana does yield – but only in the sense that she yields – gives up – Cupid to Venus as her part in the deal brokered by Neptune: “I yield. Larissa, bring out Cupid” (5.3.82). But Telusa means that Diana cannot yield to – give in to – affection, in the sense that affection cannot conquer her. She is impervious to desire and implacably opposed to it. That is why Diana cannot be read as the princely figure identified as “chastity” in Haebe’s description of the – probably English – court. Haebe imagines the court as a society based on compromise between chastity and desire, but such a compromise is impossible for the goddesses Diana and Venus to reach. They may lapse into a state of truce for a while, but the nature of their beings ensures that this truce will only be an episode of peace within a never-ending sequence of conflicts. It can never be the basis for a new and permanent dispensation of “political” relations between the two deities and their partisans.

To put it another way, Haebe’s expression of devotion to Diana, for all that it seems incidentally to praise Elizabeth, belongs firmly to the play-world rather than the real world shadowed behind it. Thus, next on her list of farewells come her “sweet parents,” whom we know to be shepherds, not courtiers. The paragraph break between the description of the court and the paean to Diana, then, represents a break between these two worlds. The figure of chastity who seems to rule at the court is not Diana, but she may well be a humanized equivalent, who “honoureth affections” by allowing them their due place in the life of the ladies of the court. This chastity “yieldeth to desire” in the same sense that Diana yields Cupid to Venus, that is, by surrendering any claim to sovereignty over desire rather than by surrendering to the sovereignty of desire itself – by falling in love. The situation is marked as paradoxical, since yielding is equated with conquering; but this notion is made less difficult to entertain by the two senses of the word yield noted above, and by the more easily negotiable reconciliation between “honour” and “command,” as applied to the relation between chastity and affection. Probably, however, a slight air of mystery is indeed intended. Haebe’s speech may be a fantasy rather than a memory of a visit to the royal court in London. It is a vision of how things might be otherwise than in the violent world of the god-infested realm of the play – a hidden glimpse of a possible Utopia.
The Utopian dimension of *Galatea* has been noted by Denise Walen, who lists the play as the earliest example of what she calls “Utopian lesbian erotics,” namely a female homoeroticism in which “playwrights effectively align female characters to other female figures in open and often idealized relationships” (Walen 2005: 121). The idea of a “lesbian Utopia” works quite well for *Galatea*, not only in the sense of an ideal place, but also in that of a “no-place” (*ou-topos*). This space, however, is not located where we might most obviously expect to find it “in” the play, that is, in the woods where the girls and nymphs fall in love with other. The woods are probably not visible on stage, but they are mentioned very insistently throughout the play; the phrases “the woods” and “these woods” are used no fewer than 17 times by almost as many characters. The greenwood is, of course, a traditional location for erotic transformation, as we know from Shakespearean comedy, especially *As You Like It*. But the woods in *Galatea* are primarily associated not with *eros* but with sexual continence: They are “Diana’s woods,” as even Cupid must concede at the end of the play (5.3.95). The woods are, in fact, a chase, and thus a preserve of Diana, goddess of hunting. They are also a sylvan shrine to chastity, at least in terms of the dominant ideology of the play, because they are given over to an all-female community, where, it is supposed, sexual desire can have no place. Neptune calls the two girls’ love for each other an “idle choice, strange and foolish, for one virgin to dote on another and to imagine a constant faith where there can be no cause of affection” (5.3.139–41). This is a negative view of chastity, however, for it suggests that women in an all-female community remain chaste because there is no scope for the excitement or expression of sexual desire. Cupid knows better, and the force of *eros* invades Diana’s woods and turns them into a lesbian Utopia.

But this transformation is unsatisfactory and short-lived. The idealization of female homoeroticism is somewhat compromised by the fact that it produces confusion and frustration until the very final moments of the play, when Galatea and Phyllida “come out” of the woods and out of disguise – and are immediately promised union so long as one is turned into a man. Recent criticism has tended to read this transformation in markedly lesbian-Utopian terms by emphasizing the fact that we are not told which girl will be transformed – and that it does not really seem to matter. Walen, for example, lists examples of critics who stress the “insignificance” of the sex-change (Walen 2005: 137). But the fact is that the homosexual relationship has to be reformulated as a heterosexual one, and this spells the end to the lesbian Utopia that has been hinted at during the rest of the play. Diana’s woods are back where they were – and the girl-boys are out of them for good.

Lyly allows Galatea and Phyllida a *lesbian interlude* before they grow up – they are both described as young (Galatea at 1.1.93 and Phyllida at 4.2.55) – and get married. They leave the woods and rejoin the pastoral community where their love will now be consummated in the socially sanctioned heterosexual way through penetrative intercourse. This is exactly what awaits Haebe as she waits for Agar. Unlike Galatea and Phyllida, Haebe does not enter the mysterious woods where Cupid playfully disrupts the rules of normative sexuality; she remains firmly surrounded by the forces
of patriarchy, and enters “accompanied only with men, because it is a sight unseemly (as all virgins say) to see the misfortune of a maiden, and terrible to behold the fierceness of Agar that monster” (5.2.4–7). As critics have noted, Lyly seems to want us to read Agar as nightmare vision of the bridegroom approaching the bride to consummate their marriage through sexual intercourse; Caldwell calls it a “brutal rape” (1987: 33). Marriage may be all very well, then, but, “as all virgins say,” defloration is “the misfortune of a maiden.”

Here another space opens up to accommodate the lesbian Utopia, for Haebe’s words imply an ideal world in which virgins escape the rule of patriarchy and remain virgins indefinitely, thus forming a community of perpetual virgins which might well be aligned with the sort of entourage of ladies that Elizabeth wished for her own court. This would be a world in which affection between women could be called “love” and honored as such by “chastity.” Lyly had played with this idea in Sappho and Phao, which is actually set on the island of Lesbos; and it is possible that the same notion lies behind Haebe’s idealized image of the presumably English court in Galatea. No mention is made of any male members of this court, unlike in Euphues and His England, where much is made of the exemplary virtues of the “lords and gentlemen in [Elizabeth’s] court” (Lyly 2003: 331), or in Sappho and Phao, where male courtiers have a part to play until the final act, when Sappho gains control over eros by suborning Cupid to hand over his bow and arrows, so that love can be redefined as more or less lesbian: “It is a toy made for ladies, and I will keep it only for ladies” (5.3.104–5). Given the emphasis on all-female communities in Galatea, it seems likely that Haebe, too, is idealizing the court as a place of perpetual virginity where love may still be allowed a place as a toy with which ladies may play among themselves (Pincombe 1996: 52–78).

However, though Haebe’s speech may be read as conjuring up an image of the English court as a paradise for young ladies, a less idealistic reading might well accuse this Utopian vision of paradiastolic deception. Is this paradise really an unhealthy condition of arrested sexual and social development? Sappho infantilizes her own ladies by making love a “toy” – a plaything for children. But the point of the play seems to be that virgins must sacrifice their virginity in order to grow up and take their place in society. Agar is indeed terrifying, for Galatea’s father speaks of his stupendous “coming,” at which “the waters roar, the fowls do fly away, and the cattle in the field for terror shun the banks” (1.1.54–6). Agar does not merely symbolize a young virgin’s fear of sex, then, but is part of the violent and mysterious cosmic world fought over by the deities of Galatea, which is in turn a dramatic representation of what otherwise might be called “the forces of nature.” Likewise, Venus’s promised transformation of one of the girls into a boy is not merely a generous gift from the goddess of love to a favored mortal, but a reassertion of numen by the goddess of generation. The return of the phallus here is a modified substitute for the visitation of Agar, one in which the anticipation of pleasure has taken the place of the expectation of pain. The sacrifice turns out to be its own reward.
I said earlier that Lyly was relatively liberal in his attitude to female sexuality, compared with some of his contemporaries, at least; but he was not, as it were, "pro-lesbian." It is not that, like Neptune, he considers the love between the two girls as "unnatural," for there is no indication that their love is caused by Cupid's mischief, as is the passion he inspires in the nymphs, and which is quickly dispelled when Diana, literally, "chastens" them in her long harangue. But the plot will not allow their relationship to proceed indefinitely; indeed, it is not sure that this relationship ever "proceeds" in the first place, for the sequence of scenes in which they flirt with each other is remarkably inconsequential. The plot only allows them to develop on its own heterosexual terms by changing one of them into a man. Similarly, although Haebé's speech opens up a space in which the court can accommodate both love and chastity, thereby banishing the specter of the sinister virgin queen intermittently represented by Diana, this Utopian space is contaminated by mauvaise foi on Lyly's part. I would suggest that Lyly found his sovereign's enigmatic gender irreducibly distasteful and disturbing, an object he could never truly praise and admire, even when he tried his best at panegyrical representation. It is a sad note to end on, especially since so much recent criticism has found so much to celebrate in the play; but I think there is still a case to be made for the usual patriarchal agenda in Galatea—however unusually it may be handled.

References


Sidney’s *Arcadia*, Romance, and the Responsive Woman Reader

*Clare R. Kinney*

In 1650 Anne Bradstreet included in the first edition of her own poetry “An Elegie upon that Honourable and renowned Knight, Sir Philip Sidney.” Celebrating Sidney as a “pattern” of “Armes and Arts,” and claiming that his *Arcadia* exhausts all the resources of the Muses, Bradstreet nevertheless qualifies her praise for the romance – “This was thy shame, O miracle of wit” (Bradstreet 1981: 20) – and ponders its potentially dangerous charms:

> Who knowes the Spels that in thy Rethorick lurks?  
> But some infatuate fooles soone caught therein,  
> Found Cupids Dame, had never such a Gin;  
> Which makes severer eyes but scorn thy Story,  
> And modest Maids, and Wives, blush at thy glory;  
> Yet, he’s a beetle head, that can’t discry  
> A world of treasure, in that rubbish lye:  
> And doth thy self, thy worke, and honour wrong,  
> (O brave Refiner of our Brittish Tongue;)  
> That sees not learning, valour, and morality,  
> Justice, friendship, and kind hospitality;  
> Yea, and Divinity within the Book,  
> Such were prejudice, and did not look. … (1981: 32–44)

I quote Bradstreet at length because her remarks nicely encapsulate the contradictory reception of Sidney’s work, its construction by its reader-critics as both exemplary and errant. A “world of treasure” lies among “rubbish”; notable images of valor, morality, and even theology (Bradstreet perhaps recalls Pamela’s passionate response to Cecropia’s defense of atheism in Book III) adorn a work that is also an erotic trap for the unwary; a work, indeed, whose narratives of desire may deceive the rigid moralist into thinking that no instruction is to be found there. At one extreme of the critical divide, Sidney’s friend and biographer Fulke Greville declares that Sidney’s
Sidney’s Arcadia

goal was to offer “morall Images, and Examples, (as directing threads) to guide every man through the confused Labyrinth of his own desires, and life” (Greville 1652: 244–5). His catalogue of the exemplars to be found in the Arcadia emphasizes its encyclopedic representation of every aspect of government (good or bad) and of both public and private civic life; his account barely hints that the work contains any kind of love story. Gabriel Harvey is more willing to concede that it encompasses “amorous courting” and “delightfull pastime by way of Pastorall exercises,” as well as “valorous fighting” and “sage counselling,” but is equally insistent that the romance will furnish its reader with “many pithy and effectuall instructions” (Garrett 1996: 131). At the other critical extreme, the cleric John King castigates Arcadia as one of the “frivolous stories” that his flock are reading instead of holy scripture (Garrett 1996: 139); John Milton dismisses it as a “vain amatorious Poem” (Garrett 1996: 248); and Wye Saltonstall imagines a maidservant who reads the Arcadia and “courts the shaddow of love till she know the substaunce” (Saltonstall 1631: E6v).

Echoing that critical divide, Bradstreet’s reference to the blushing woman reader gestures towards a gendered split in the work’s reception history. Mary Ellen Lamb has argued persuasively that early modern male commentators will discuss the Arcadia as a serious work, celebrate its moral seriousness and reconstitute it as a kind of mirror for princes, even as they suggest that women readers will be dangerously beguiled by its erotic content (Lamb 1990: 112–14). The work that Greville praises as a highly didactic conduct book for princes and governors is the same work that Thomas Powell wants to remove from the library of a “Gentlemans Daughter” (so that she may instead read texts instructing her in “good huswifery”) (Garrett 1996: 225). There is, to be sure, a delicate irony in Bradstreet’s setting out to defend Sidney’s reputation by proceeding to imagine a male reader who cannot see the work’s virtues. Insisting upon the Arcadia’s complexity and multifariousness, this female reader emphasizes that its ethical teachings are coterminous with and ultimately more important than its seductive rhetorical spells.

Exemplarity versus Errancy in the Old and New Arcadias

Bearing in mind the mixed messages produced by the Arcadia’s readers, it is instructive to contemplate its author’s own engagement with the beguilements and dangers of romance. Sidney’s original Arcadia, divided into five books, was probably composed between 1577 and 1580; a few years later, the author returned to his work, rewriting and expanding the first two books of the original before moving into completely new narrative territory in an exfoliating third book left unfinished at his death in 1586. As a consequence, the first 600 pages of the 1593 Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia (or “new” Arcadia [NA] – which would go into 11 more editions in the next 80 years) offer an ambitious but teasingly incomplete revision of Sidney’s tidier (but often morally question-begging) first run at prose romance and position him as the strongest critic of his own work. The “old” Arcadia (OA) restricts itself in large part to the
imaginative space of pastoral romance, although one feels that it is already enlarging the possibilities of the genre: Even as it offers us bucolic singing-matches and erotic entanglements, it is starting to interrogate romance’s emphasis upon “the wandering hero, the erotic interlude, or the dangerous delay” (Fuchs 2004: 66). We hear something of the martial and heroic exploits of Pyrocles and Musidorus before their arrival in Arcadia, but these are left in the margins, narrated briefly by the minor character Histor in the Eclogues that follow Book II (OA 134–9). We have a popular rising that is quelled by both the valor and the canny rhetoric of the disguised princes, but it is the product of no more sinister agent provocateur than drunken discontent. With even more ambivalence, the work’s tone divides in its treatment of the complications unleashed when Pyrocles’ Amazon disguise provokes the desire not only of princess Philoclea but also her mother and father: Duke Basilius is allowed no dignity as senex amans, but the inner turmoil of the Duchess Gynecia is treated with more gravity by the narrator. That same narrator recounts the disguises and deceits of his heroes with sympathetic nonchalance – but he also pays tribute to the shepherd Lalus, who had used no “painted words” in winning his beloved Kala (OA 212). Even as various major characters are seeking to consummate their variously transgressive desires, the marriage eclogues for Lalus and Kala that follow Book III offer tributes to a union achieved when “justest love doth vanquish Cupid’s powers” without “hurtful art” or “charming skill” (OA 213; 215), implicitly criticizing the machinations of the work’s official protagonists.

In the later stages of the Old Arcadia, its playful comedy of disguise, mistaken identity and youthful ingenuity takes on a darker note: Pyrocles and Philoclea consummate their love outside wedlock, Musidorus comes close to raping Pamela, and Gynecia’s guilty conscience leads her to take responsibility for the apparent murder of her husband. Pyrocles and Musidorus are charged with various crimes against the state and dissension begins to simmer within the riven body politic of the province once remarkable for the “moderate and well tempered minds of [its] people” (OA 3). Book V climaxes with the trial scene that marks an absolute division between the value system articulated by the virtuous ruler Euarchus of Macedon – temporarily invested with magisterial power in Arcadia – and the passionate rhetoric deployed by his own son and nephew to defend the “venial trespass[es]” committed under the influence of “love’s force” and their “honourable desires” (OA 348). When Euarchus declares “That sweet and heavenly uniting of the minds, which properly is called love, hath no other knot but virtue; and therefore if it be a right love, it can never slide into any action that is not virtuous” (OA 352), we see discursive universes collide: The ideals that have organized and impelled the whole narrative are rigorously called into question. The ostensible exemplarity of a certain kind of romance informed by both Petrarchan and courtly ideals is interrogated by a very different kind of exemplarity in Euarchus’s sententious passing of sentence, and the crisis this produces – a father condemning his own kinsmen to execution – can only be resolved by the narrative sleight of hand represented by the timely resurrection of the comatose Basilius. Fortune trumps didacticism.
Sidney’s unfinished revisions emphatically testify to his desire to produce a work that is at once more “heroic,” more morally elevated, and more interested in offering a capacious geo-political context for its action than its predecessor. Pyrocles and Musidorus’s chivalric adventures and political interventions in various badly governed states in Greece and Asia Minor are lengthily narrated by the princes themselves; we learn, indeed, that they sought out “exercises of their virtue, thinking it not so worthy to be brought to heroic effects by fortune or necessity, like Ulysses and Aeneas, as by one’s own choice and working” (NA 275). (They seek, in effect, to overgo epic.) Political events in troubled neighboring Laconia intersect with those in Arcadia, and interlaced narratives explore multiplying instances of good and bad governance, by women as well as men – as, for example, in the tellingly “Elizabethan” tribute to the virtues of Queen Helen of Corinth who makes her “people by peace, warlike; her courtiers by sports, learned; her ladies by love, chaste” (NA 352). By Book III we have moved out of the imaginative space of pastoral and beyond merely retrospective accounts of martial action as Sidney’s new narrative addresses the brutal siege warfare that follows Amphialus’s revolt. The revision also multiplies exemplary narratives of ideal or heroic love, introducing an episode with a strongly neo-Platonizing thrust at the work’s beginning celebrating the absent presence of Urania, and also recounting the history of the noble, long suffering and mutually self-sacrificing lovers Parthenia and Argalus.

Yet the attempt to “heroicize” the romance paradoxically creates yet more errancy: Even as it becomes more monumental, The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia becomes more morally and aesthetically self-subverting. This is largely the result of its increased emphasis upon the socially and politically disruptive power of transforming desire, brought into particular focus by the new characters Cecropia and her son, Amphialus. Amphialus, Basilius’s nephew, is an officially exemplary knight whose love for Philoclea mirrors that of Pyrocles – but his passion also impels him to support the fait accompli of his scheming mother’s abduction of the Arcadian princesses and to become an accessory in her plots to overthrow his uncle’s throne. (It is now a servant of Cecropia who provokes the initial uprising of Basilius’s rustic subjects.) Cecropia kidnaps her nieces by sending female agents disguised as Arcadian shepherdesses to invite them to a bucolic entertainment: Recreative pastoral has been reduced to a masque covering darker political designs. Chivalric romance is equally exploded in the entirely new matter of the New Arcadia’s third book when Amphialus appropriates its protocols (and Sidney reminds us of the Elizabethan court’s interest in neo-medieval spectacle) in the single combats he stages against representatives of the Basilian forces to valorize his problematic desires and actions. His masques of chivalry eventually and catastrophically result in the deaths of both Argalus and Parthenia, the romance’s exemplary representatives of noble love. That fragmenting of the heroic romance ideal, as well as the besotted lover’s assault upon the very body politic of Arcadia, will be reinscribed upon Amphialus’s own wounded body when he attempts suicide with a knife belonging to the woman he worships (NA 564–5). Such extremes of violence and suffering explored by the new Book III inevitably render the
suture (or rather the lacuna) in the 1593 composite edition between the end of the revision and the intermittently farcical events of Book III of the *Old Arcadia* particularly unsatisfying.

Sidney’s revisions are everywhere double-edged. On the one hand, he seems to have intended to revise out of his text the most sexually transgressive episodes of the original romance; on the other, he is quite prepared to explore even more expansively than in the *Old Arcadia* Philoclea’s feverish meditations about her impossible desires for the supposed Amazon Zelmane (NA 237–40) – or to create a new episode representing the cross-dressed Pyrocles’ heated and illicit contemplation of Philoclea and Pamela bathing naked in the river Ladon, deploying the very same rapturous lyric blazon he had previously used to figure the lovemaking of Pyrocles (NA 286–91; OA 207–11). He gives us lengthy new accounts (in their own voices) of Pyrocles’ and Musidorus’s virtuous interventions into the affairs of dysfunctional kingdoms, but the narrative voice is equally approving (in its own person) as it offers the reader an extended analysis of Amphialus’s preparations for siege warfare and of the strategies he uses to win support for his rebellion against his monarch (NA 452–5): In making exemplary the errancy of this insubordinate “prince,” the would-be epic-romance strays into territory generally associated with Machiavelli. The very capaciousness of the revision undercuts any kind of unified didactic agenda; at the same time, the *Arcadia* is strikingly self-conscious of the way in which its own characters employ culturally constructed modes of organizing experience (pastoral Petrarchism, chivalric romance). In representing their self-serving use of these literary kinds, Sidney offers a new critique of the morally questionable instrumentality of certain discourses. At the same time, his own heroic project battles the structural and thematic entropy encouraged by the narrative wandering and “multiplicity” that Barbara Fuchs has associated with romance’s resistance to teleology (Fuchs 2004: 72).

### The Female Reader in the *Arcadia*, the Female Reader of the *Arcadia*

Ironically enough, the female reader who might (supposedly) have her imagination tainted by perusing the *Arcadia* is removed as a textual presence from the body of Sidney’s revision. The dedicatory letter to his sister that prefaced manuscripts of the *Old Arcadia* and was reprinted in Fulke Greville’s edition of the incomplete revision in 1590 and in Mary Sidney Herbert’s composite edition of 1593 emphasizes that the work is indeed the *Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* – it was written at her desire and some of it came into being in her presence; her brother commends it to his first and best reader for her “idle times” and compares it to the trifling accessories, the “glasses or feathers,” she might buy in a “haberdasher’s shop” (NA 57). At times, the original version imitates an oral performance – its narrator directly addresses an imaginary coterie of “fair ladies” who “vouchsafe to read” his work, soliciting their sympathy or empathy for his protagonists. When Sidney revises the *Old Arcadia*, however, he erases
that gendered audience. This is to some degree a result of his significantly reducing the role of the Old Arcadia’s urbane and playful narrator and dividing up passages of exposition among several of the work’s characters. The revision’s much more thoroughly articulated interest in problems of good governance and martial daring-do seems also to “unfeminize” his notion of his audience: A mirror for princes has replaced the lady’s “glass.” At the same time, the “exemplary” narrative stratagems of the revised Arcadia are always subject to re-complication, and Sidney’s creation and exploration of powerful models of female heroic action in his new Book III are potentially hospitable to the imagination of the female reader (although apparently invisible to the commentators who suggest that the romance only feeds transgressive female fantasies).

The revised text offers a divided focus. Outside Amphialus’s fortress we have martial action – initially, a rather darkly painted epic battle; later on, the elaborately neo-medieval chivalric performances of Amphialus’s ongoing and ethically dubious tourney (in which it is very unclear whether right is might, or might is right). Within the fortress, the trials of desire are very different: Cecropia, intent on making one of the captive princesses her son’s wife and thus securing the throne of Arcadia, first attempts to beguile each one into marriage and later subjects the ladies to vicious physical abuse. The heroines exhibit a stoic patience and quiet resistance that contrasts strikingly with the performances we see in Amphialus’s theater of chivalry and also with the text’s subtle critique of the disastrous power of “the tyranny of honour” (NA 503) that obliges Argalus to leave Parthenia and ride to his death at Amphialus’s hands. If the revised romance is anatomizing and taxonomizing exemplary action (as Greville’s summary would suggest), some exemplary actions end up looking rather more exemplary than others.

Notwithstanding Sidney’s radical rewriting and “heroicizing” of the original Arcadia, all of the early published versions of the New Arcadia are prefaced with the intimate dedicatory letter to his sister that speaks to its earlier avatar and insists upon the project’s errancy rather than its exemplarity. The work is a “trifle, triflingly handled,” whose deformities will not be permitted to “walk abroad”: It is for one female reader’s private pleasure (NA 57). Sidney is of course being disingenuous here; as H. R. Woudhuysen has demonstrated, the Old Arcadia circulated quite widely in manuscript (Woudhuysen 1996: 300–55). But the reproduction of this preface in the printed versions caused the revised romance to be framed by a suggestion that, despite its exfoliating narratives of governance and civic action, it belonged to the late sixteenth century’s growing number of prose fictions ostensibly written for the intimate pleasure of female readers. Helen Hackett has persuasively argued that when authors like John Lyly, Barnabe Riche, and Robert Greene make a point of attaching gallant or teasing epistles to “gentlewomen readers” to their works, they are by no means restricting the work to a female readership or even speaking to real women. She suggests that an address to female readers announces to all and sundry that a male author is disporting himself in the gendered territory of romance: It labels the work as recreational, accessible, vernacular, erotic, without quite seeming to suppose that a male
reader would be an aficionado of an unedifying genre (Hackett 2000: 11). Sidney invites a very specific female reader to liken his words to the feathers and “glasses” she might purchase in a haberdashery, but he deploys the same lexicon as Lyly, who instructs the “gentlewomen readers” of Euphues His England (1580) to think of his work as a stylish accessory to keep about their persons (Lyly 2003: 162). The appearance of Sidney’s letter in the printed text of the revised Arcadia creates certain expectations that may explain some of the cognitive dissonance that characterizes the work’s early reception history and the admonitions of the critics who fear the corruption of female minds.

The surviving record of early modern women’s responses to reading the Arcadia (as opposed to male speculations about what reading the Arcadia might do to women) is very meager. We do have Lady Anne Clifford’s “Great Picture,” one panel of which depicts the Arcadia alongside much more serious and devotional volumes in its representation of her library (Lewalski 1993: 137) – and perhaps even more interestingly, a marginal note in her personal copy of the fifth edition of 1605 recording her re-reading of the romance over the course of two months in 1651 (Juel-Jensen 1987: 294–5). Clifford, like Anne Bradstreet, seems to have realized that a romance could be the vehicle for serious as well as recreational agendas (and the lady herself, in the course of a difficult life, had need of the stoic endurance displayed by Sidney’s heroines). But our most direct evidence of women’s reading of the work comes from those who, like Bradstreet, responded to it through their own literary productions, and it is their creative re-making of Sidney that I propose to address here.

Sidney initially represents his sister as his ideal reader: indulgent, engaged, sympathetic. But she becomes much more than this. When Fulke Greville sponsored the 1590 publication of the unfinished three-book revision, adding to it his own chapter divisions and explanatory rubrics, the Countess responded by reclaiming authority over her brother’s literary remains. In her 1593 edition, a prefatory letter by Hugh Sanford (secretary to the Earl of Pembroke), which follows Sidney’s own epistle, insists upon her authorial role. She has wiped away the disfigurements that afflicted Greville’s earlier, unauthorized edition and the augmentations to the text are “most by her doing, all by her directing” – although her stitching together of the revised work with the concluding books of the original romance offers “the conclusion not the perfection of Arcadia” (NA 59). Sanford’s last careful qualification might be compared with Mary Sidney Herbert’s own words in the dedicatory poem “To the Angell spirit of the most excellent Sir Phillip Sidney,” attached to the Tixall Manuscript of the Sidneian Psalms, where, addressing her completion of this other unfinished project of her brother’s “matchlesse Muse” (23), she notes that the supplement is necessarily “but peec’t, as left by thee undone” (24). Nevertheless, her “piecing out” of the Arcadia allows Sanford to remark that “it is now by more than one interest The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia – done, as it was, for her; as it is, by her” (60).

The question of how many of the local revisions in the concluding material from the original Arcadia were the Countess’s own has been much discussed. Older scholarship tends to assume that the erasure of Philoclea and Pyrocles’ pre-marital sex and
Musidorus’s near-rape of Pamela from the earlier narrative is her work (twentieth-century male scholars, unlike seventeenth-century male commentators, assumed that the female reader would be a prudish censor of the romance’s errancy, not a victim of it). More recently, critical opinion has tended to suggest that the Countess was working within guidelines already sketched out by her brother (Margaret Hannay offers a succinct account of the controversy in her biography of Mary Sidney Herbert [Hannay 1990: 74–6]). We will probably never know for sure what Pembroke did or did not add locally to the text; what is important, perhaps, is that she wanted it “completed”: As a reader and literary executor she was responding aggressively to the arrest of all narrative in the middle of a furious single combat in Greville’s edition. In some sense she attempted to recontain the violence unleashed in Book III of the revision within the imaginative universe of the Old Arcadia, where deaths and death sentences are equally reversible and the only catastrophe is a nuptial.

Nevertheless, her circumspect creation of the composite Arcadia was provocative of additional creative responses to the work. William Alexander and James Johnstoun both wrote bridging passages to link the revised matter more seamlessly to the romantic intrigues of the Old Arcadia (Alexander’s was inserted into the edition of 1621 and appears in subsequent editions; Johnstoun’s first appears as an appendix in that of 1638). More ambitious continuations of the romance were produced by Gervase Markham and Richard Beling. Markham’s English Arcadia of 1607 picks up on some hints in the closing sentences of Book V to re-enter the Arcadian universe a generation later; Beling’s Sixth Booke, to the Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia, which offers conclusions to the Helen/Amphialus and Plangus/Erona sub-plots, is added to the 1627 edition of Sidney’s work. And some gentlewomen readers insisted on offering their own supplements to Sidney’s remains.

Women Writers as Readers of Arcadia

In the prefatory epistle to her translation of the Spanish romance A Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knighthood (1578), Margaret Tyler writes, “if men may & doe bestow such of their travailes upon gentlewomen, then may we women read such of their works as they dedicate unto us, and if we may read them, why not farther wade in them to the serch of a truth?” (Travitsky 1989: 145). In context, Tyler is defending her own translation of a chivalric fiction, but her words speak suggestively to the rather different kinds of “wading” that the Arcadia provokes in three women writers (four, if we include Anne Bradstreet). The first of these is Lady Mary Wroth, the title page of whose labyrinthine Countess of Montgomery’s Urania (1621) emphasizes that it is in every way a family romance, reminding the reader that she is niece to “the ever famous and renouned Sir Philip Sidney.” The Urania’s plot, like that of the Arcadia, traverses large geopolitical expanses and mingles erotic and state politics; Wroth’s work is also, like the Arcadia, teasingly incomplete (as is its manuscript continuation). It intermittently offers reminders of Sidney’s matter. The Urania’s eponymous (although not, as
it turns out, primary) heroine shares a name with a woman celebrated at the beginning of the revised Arcadia; its third book offers us a pastoral episode reminiscent of the Pyrocles/Philoclea plot-line (a prince cross-dresses to woo a royal shepherdess); elsewhere, the lover of a captive princess is forced to witness the bloody results of her apparent decapitation in a manner that recalls one of the spectacles in Cecropia’s theater of cruelty. Wroth follows her uncle in exploiting romance’s generic capaciousness: The Urania offers its readers tormented courtly lovers, excursions into recreational pastoral, stylized chivalric encounters, a few battles on an epic scale; it also enfolds a good deal of lyric complaint (although with much more emphasis on the composition of poetry by women characters).

Wroth is from the outset a creative and revisionary reader of Sidney’s “exemplary” text. Even in her appropriation of Sidney’s Urania she maps new ground for herself. In the revised Arcadia, Urania is an idealized, absent presence, lauded in the work’s opening pages in an elaborate neo-Platonic dialogue between the two courtly shepherds who are friendly rivals for her affections (61–4). Wroth’s Urania, by contrast, is fully present on the first pages of her text as a woman in crisis, a pseudo-shepherdess who has just learned that she is a fosterling of unknown identity and who immediately addresses her vexed situation in verse (1–2). Maureen Quilligan has offered a powerful account of the way in which Urania’s lyric lament to Echo echoes Sidney with a difference; her discussion foregrounds Wroth’s interest in Urania’s emphatically gendered struggle to find a language in which to articulate a state of self-loss that is not precipitated by desire for another (Quilligan 1990: 310–12). This is only the beginning of Wroth’s reshaping of Arcadian romance. Sidney, for example, emphasizes the transforming initiation into love experienced by his princely heroes, a metamorphosis that is made quite visible by the disguises they assume – as Amazon and shepherd – to insinuate themselves into Basilius’s retreat and pursue their suits. By contrast, when we eventually meet Pamphilia, the primary heroine of the Urania, she is already a woman in love, not in the least hopeful that her feelings are reciprocated, but comforting herself that she has “vertuously and worthily chosen” (92; emphasis mine). Wroth never narrates the moment at which Pamphilia chose, nor does she offer anything remotely comparable to Pyrocles’ and Musidorus’s radical reinvention of themselves as Zelmane and Dorus. After her first appearance in Wroth’s work – in context, an uneasy encounter with her errant but beloved Amphilanthus – Pamphilia, left alone with her thoughts, reflects that the pain she suffers is undeserved, since she has “ever been a most true servant” to Love (62). The suggestion of duration here implies that her affections were awakened in some unnarrated past. Wroth’s narrative interest is not focused upon what Pyrocles, versifying the consequences of transforming desire, calls the “wretched state of man in self-division” (188): She concentrates, instead, upon the emotional fallout of the constant female subject’s self-definition as one who has (always, already) made her choice.

Although Pamphilia’s Amphilanthus eventually returns her love, he subsequently proves unfaithful, and a good deal of the Urania celebrates an emphatically gendered “heroics of constancy” (Lamb 1990: 163–7), presenting passionately articulated, lyric
and narrative rehearsals (by Pamphilia and others) of the suffering endured by loyal, virtuous, and usually aristocratic female lovers. In effect, Wroth offers a riposte to those commentators who suggest that merely the perusal of a romance like the Arcadia will arouse the inherently labile desire of a female reader. In her imaginative universe, the emphasis is on a woman’s considered agency, and also her unmediated agency (none of Wroth’s ladies falls in love by simply contemplating a work of art, as does Sidney’s Pyrocles upon viewing Philoclea’s portrait) – as well as on her vulnerability to the faithlessness of another. Although Wroth’s romance is full of warring dynasties and mustering armies, and although its battlegrounds cover large swathes of Europe and beyond, its most compelling narratives center upon female characters who do not enjoy the mobility of her warriors; it perpetually returns its reader to the frustrations and pain of the women who can only endure. When Pamphilia ventures upon a mysterious ship in Book III, she does not embark upon a romance adventure in her own right, but ends up voiceless and frozen in place in an enchanted “Theater” where she must eventually suffer the arrival of Amphilanthus in the company of a new lover (372–4; 442). The Urania’s divided attentions are reminiscent of the split action in Book III of the revised Arcadia, but we have something rather different from Sidney’s representation of his captive princesses’ stoicism in the face of extraordinary torments. Wroth concentrates upon the weary quotidian pains of uncertainty and loss (and also upon the translation of that experience into poetry). Her many embedded narrators speak from the little hells created by others’ errancy and their stories take on an exemplary force.

Sidney’s princes use personal narrative to affirm their own achievements or to authenticate their princely identity: Their histories become part of the act of courtship. Things work rather differently within Wroth’s romance; her female storytellers do not solicit love but a more general understanding and sympathy, demanding a “right reading” of their experience. To invoke just one example, the lady Pellarina narrates at some length the tale of her betrayal to the sympathetic Perselina and concludes her sad history by revealing the response of her false lover to some poems she had written in her misery. After Pellarina’s lover has perused her manuscript, she finds that “in some places he had turnd downe leaves, and onely at such as he might if hee would dislike, and were those I thought hee would take notice of, yet he neither did by word nor writing, nor honouring me so much, who was his slave, as to finde fault, or to seeme pleas’d” (534). The beloved’s withholding of empathy or engagement is strikingly contrasted to the concerned and sympathetic questioning of Perselina throughout their conversation.

Wroth’s interest in presenting scenes in which “right reading” is displaced from an inadequate beloved on to one or more sympathetic strangers may speak to another agenda of her work that differentiates it sharply from Sidney’s. In relating Pamphilia’s vicissitudes as the constant lover of the dashing and unreliable Amphilanthus (and in representing refracted versions of Pamphilia’s woes in the shadow histories narrated by other women and in Pamphilia’s own rehearsal of the tale of the ill-used Lindamira [499–505]), Wroth emplots a version of her own extra-marital
relations with her cousin, the equally charismatic and equally philandering William Herbert. Unlike Sidney, who can rely on the absolute interest and engagement of the sister to whom he offers his first *Arcadia*, Wroth is a writer in search of a sympathetic audience. (What she ended up with, alas, was the vitriol of Lord Edward Denny, of whom more anon.)

If Wroth exploits the protocols of romance to speak to her own experience and also, perhaps, to imagine a different outcome to that experience – an undertaking which puts a very different spin on the notion of “exemplary” narrative – her project, like Sidney’s, is sufficiently self-conscious to encompass some suggestive criticisms of the genre in which she works. The “heroics of constancy” are interrogated in a dialogue between Urania and Pamphilia, in which the former insists that constant love is a “fruitlesse thing” when it is directed towards one who is himself inconstant (470). Urania politicizes her critique, furthermore, by noting that Pamphilia (who rules a kingdom in her own right) has jeopardized her “good government” by subjugating her affections to the actions of an unworthy lover: “How can you command others, that cannot master yourself?” (468). Here, the absolute values of Wroth’s romance universe are challenged by a character whom the romance itself has always invited us to admire. Many pages later, Wroth slyly offers an ironic aside to her text’s concluding reunion between Pamphilia and a newly repentant Amphilanthus. As Pamphilia passionately embraces her lover, “forgetting all injuries,” Wroth’s narrator reports that Amphilanthus “with all unfaine affection embraced her, and well might hee joyfully doe it, love thus exprest, beside a labour saved of asking pardon” (660).

This moment of acerbic commentary suggests an intermittent authorial distance on the “romancing” of Wroth’s own experience, and it is complemented by the text’s willingness to interrogate the gendered protocols of genre. In a telling episode in Book II of the romance, the princess Nereana, separated from her attendants, encounters the love-crazed Alanius, who first mistakes her for his lost lady and then decides she is the goddess Diana. He determines to worship her “whether she would or noe,” ties her to a tree, and reorganizes her clothing to fit her to his fancies. He pulls down her hair, bares her arms, and “her greene silke stockins he turn’d, or rowl’d a little downe, making them serve for buskins” (197–8). Having thus redesigned her, he kneels down and worships her, but Nereana flees, “almost hating herself in this estate,” and casts herself “downe by a cleere spring (into it she was about) but the picture of her owne selfe did so amaze her, as she would not goe so neere unto her metamorphos’d figure” (198). Alanius’s construction of his captive as his personal goddess and cynosure is followed by a shift of focus which underlines Nereana’s alienation from her “metamorphosed figure”; turning away from the “self” he has created for her, she refuses to look in the mirror. Alanius’s fetishistic re-dressing of Nereana is, in effect, an *undressing* – and as Nereana almost stumbles into the stream, she is on the verge of becoming Diana at her bath.

The episode offers a telling gloss upon that not very edifying scene in the revised (and ostensibly chastened) *Arcadia* in which Pyrocles, disguised as the Amazon Zelmane, watches Philoclea and Pamela bathe in the river Ladon. In this striking
revision of the Actaeon myth, a man masking as a follower of Diana watches his naked goddess with impunity, displacing his desire into the delivery of a lengthy blazon in which he comprehensively anatomizes and controls (and even penetrates) Philoclea’s body “in whose each part all pens may dwell” (291). Nereana’s unsolicited metamorphosis and partial unclothing constitutes a serio-comic spin on the mechanics of an authorial gaze that – even in the midst of an admired and morally ambitious romance – may suggest a distinctly errant agenda. Wroth’s unfortunate princess is not, as it happens, presented very sympathetically in the larger design of the *Urania*, but the author nevertheless obliges us to respect Nereana’s distress and her resistance to being reduced to the object of someone else’s fantasies: The lady refuses to be “romanced” against her will.

Although the 1621 *Urania* reunites Pamphilia and Amphilanthus, it swerves away from closure at the very last moment: “Pamphilia is the Queen of all content; Amphilanthus joying worthily in her; And” (661). There is no full stop. Sidney reopened his *Old Arcadia*, attempted a revision that would ennoble romance, and never completed the project. Wroth’s unpublished manuscript continuation of the *Urania* revisits her own work, but in readdressing Pamphilia and Amphilanthus’s relations and in relating the adventures of a second generation of characters, the author reveals a growing impatience with the protocols of romance. The mode seems inadequate to deal with the qualitatively different kinds of pain that ensue after both Pamphilia and Amphilanthus marry others, despite having entered into a form of marriage *de praesenti* (*Urania* II 45–6). More conventional narratives of enchantments, captivities, and rescues involving the offspring of *Urania* I’s main characters unfold murkyly and repetitively: Wroth’s real narrative interest seems to reside in the losses and disappointments (and even deaths) that afflict the aging older generation. Threaded through the business-as-usual of enchantments and knightly quests, counterpointing the hyperbolic praise lavished on promising young princes and princesses, we have unidealizing testimonies to mortality, contingency and decline – and an absolute inability to bring the history of Pamphilia and Amphilanthus to an ending within the lexicon of any available literary discourse. Where Sidney ended up enfolding an anatomy of the abuses of romance within an attempt to write the most exemplary of all romances, Wroth ends up undoing romance, as if disenchanted with her attempts to relate yet again the exemplary history which – being in some sense her story – is something rather more than a fiction. In the final sonnet of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, the lyric sequence appended to the 1621 *Urania*, Pamphilia bids her Muse to fall silent and leave “the discource of Venus” to others: “now lett your constancy your honor prove” (Wroth 1983: P103). But the very existence and open-endedness of Wroth’s manuscript continuation suggests that her own Muse found no such rest and that she was no more capable than Philip Sidney of terminating the return to romance.

Thirty years after the publication of *Urania* I, another of Sidney’s female readers responds to his work, but Anna Weamys’s *Continuation of Sir Philip Sidney’s Arcadia* (first published in 1651 and reprinted in 1690) is a very different project from Wroth’s
vexed labyrinth. We know almost nothing about the author – even her full name, as her editor points out, is to some extent conjectural (she appears on the book’s title page simply as Mistress A. W. [xviii– xix]). It is clear, however, that Weamys was provoked to write by the narrative lacunae in the composite Arcadia. Focusing in particular upon plot-lines left dangling in that work, she tidies them up far more thoroughly than do Beling and Markham in their earlier continuations. Amphialus is healed, reformed, and married off to Helen of Corinth (who suffers unrequited love for him in Sidney’s text); the melancholy Plangus, who wanders into the Arcadia attempting to solicit the aid of Sidney’s heroes to rescue his much abused Erona, is helped by Pyrocles and Musidorus to save his lady from death and to win her hand. We are also given a resolution to the rivalry between the shepherds Strephon and Claius over Urania, learn the final fate of the lovelorn shepherd-knight Philisides (who figures Sidney himself), and even enjoy the long-deferred completion of a fiction within Sidney’s fiction: The rustic Mopsa’s rambling tale of eloping lovers.

Weamys’s emphatically orthodox “feminine ending,” domesticates desire with its concluding triumphant quintuple marriage: Her narrative defuses and contains the socially and politically disruptive power of unbridled Eros which had so preoccupied Sidney in the last third of the revised Arcadia. Indeed, in some sense, she re-contains Philip Sidney: the shepherd knight Philisides (who is introduced into the revised Arcadia as the hopeless lover of a lady he calls his “Star”) dies of love and is buried before the concluding multiple marriages. (This is another “feminine ending”: In the bridging passages by Johnstoun and Alexander that appeared in later editions of the composite Arcadia, both writers have Philisides aid Musidorus in his storming of Amphialus’s stronghold and perish of a thigh wound obviously intended to recall Sidney’s own death at Zutphen.)

Weamys is a scrupulously attentive reader-rewriter who generally works within the parameters of material supplied by the composite Arcadia; her most radical expansion of it is particularly interesting because it offers a variation upon the starting point of Wroth’s own undertaking. Both women give life to Urania, the woman who is only a lamented absence at the start of Sidney’s revision, where she has quitted Arcadia for Cithera before the romance begins. Sidney’s narrative emphasis falls less upon the woman than upon the desire for which she is in every sense the pre-text. Her shepherd lovers, Strephon and Claius, proclaim themselves (and are described by others) as extraordinarily refined, educated, and elevated by their feelings for her; on the margins of an intermittently much darker romance, Sidney erects a neo-Platonizing model of an ennobling love striving towards a Good that transcends earthly consummation. Wroth’s appropriation of Urania (minus her swains) signals the translation of a silenced, idealized love-object into a woman with a voice and concerns of her own – it is a translation that rewrites the plot of masculine desire. Weamys proceeds rather differently, working with Sidney’s triangle of characters but rendering them significantly more earthbound. The Arcadia’s missing Aphrodite Ouranos (Duncan-Jones 1966) becomes a distinctly harassed lady who turns over the final disposition of her
hand to her social superiors. The noble and youthful Strephon and Claius are translated, respectively, into an attractive but not especially refined young swain and a pitiful old man. The likely outcome of their rivalry is obvious from the start, and Weamys rather ruthlessly disposes of Claius when he fails to win Urania’s hand: She is punctilious about exorcizing uncontained desire from her text. Weamys’s appropriation of the Sidneian narrative is shaped by a generic shift: The liminal ideal of love that contrasts so markedly with the sleights later employed by Sidney’s heroes (and their darker double, Amphialus) is metamorphosed into something more like romantic comedy.

The prefatory material to the Continuation includes a preface by Thomas Heath, its bookseller, and five witty poetic encomia in several hands. Weamys is variously (if somewhat problematically) lauded as a version of Minerva, Pamela, Philoclea, Zelmane, and a receptacle for Sidney’s spirit. This is a far cry from the furious verses denouncing Lady Mary Wroth as a monstrous hermaphrodite and a wanton slanderer with which Edward Denny responded to the appearance of the Urania (Wroth 1983: Introduction, 31–4). Denny considered himself to have been defamed in the person of one of Wroth’s characters, the outrageously violent father of an adulterous young wife, and while his lines offer a wholesale indictment of the author’s “idle book” (and chastise her unwomanly writing of it), it is the topicality of her romance that inflames him. The Urania does indeed regularly “shadow” (as Josephine Roberts has it) and fictionalize the lives of its author’s family and of other Jacobean courtiers, as well as offering variations upon Wroth’s own personal history (Urania I, Introduction lxx). Weamys’s respectful domestication of Sidney, with its moral emphasis upon the social containment of Eros within marriage, is apparently an acceptable and even exemplary gendered rewriting of the troubled wanderings of romance; Wroth’s less orthodox domestication of the Sidneian model, at once excessively and insufficiently a product of the imagination, strikes too close to home.

An even later response by a woman writer to Sidney’s provoking “spells” offers a new variation on Weamys’s disciplining of romance. The otherwise unknown Mrs Stanley publishes her Sir Philip Sidney’s Arcadia Moderniz’d in 1725. Stanley “translates” the work into decorous Augustan prose, omitting its eclogues and embedded verses, flattening out Sidney’s highly wrought sentences and rhetorical figures, and simplifying his periodic sentences. But even as she renders the romance more “correct,” Stanley does not restrict herself to stylistic revision. She strikingly re-inflects, for example, one of her author’s most powerful episodes, the separation scene between the exemplary married couple Argalus and Parthenia. Describing their doomed domestic bliss, Sidney offers us:

A happy couple: he joying in her, she joying in herself, but in herself, because she enjoyed him: both increasing their riches by giving to each other; each making one life double, because they made a double life one; where desire never wanted satisfaction, nor satisfaction ever bred satiety: he ruling, because she would obey, or rather because she would obey, she therein ruling. (501)
Stanley substitutes:

No Age, no History, cou’d e’er produce a happier Pair; his every Joy in her were center’d and hers were fix’d in him; Obedience and Command were things unknown to them; one cou’d not will but what the other pleas’d; their Passion for each other still was new, still fierce and eager, as on their Wedding-Day, and if at all it vary’d ’twas by increasing; Possession, which makes the Generality of Lovers grow pall’d and satiated, only serv’d to heighten their Desires. (315)

Stanley gives a much clearer symmetry to the joys the lovers experience in one another, cancelling the rhetoric that gives Parthenia sovereignty through submission. Significantly, her redaction transforms a description of their sexual pleasure from the Sidneian general (“desire never wanted satisfaction, nor satisfaction ever bred satiety”) to the highly personal (“Their passion for each other still was new, still fierce and eager, as on their Wedding day”). The rewriter also foregrounds her own investment in an ideal of rapturous and passionate mutuality, in a vision of heterosexual relations liberated from an erotic economy conventionally based on lack (in which the lady is only desirable before she is possessed). Sidney’s celebration of the couple slides towards sententious exemplarity and elegantly reinforces orthodox power relations; Stanley, taking the woman’s part, imagines a fully “companionate” ideal with fierce and gendered particularity.

Stanley also noticeably alters the conclusion of the composite Arcadia. Once Basilius and Euarchus have approved the marriages of the heroes and heroines, Sidney’s narrative begins to exfoliate:

But the solemnities of these marriages, with the Arcadian pastorals, full of many comical adventures happening to those rural lovers; the strange stories of Artaxia and Plexirtus, Erona and Plangus, Helen and Amphialus, with the wonderful chances that befell them; the shepherdish loves of Menalcas with Kalodulus’s daughter; the poor hopes of the poor Philisides in the pursuit of his affections; the strange continuance of Claius and Strepphon’s desire; lastly, the son of Pyrocles, named Pyrophilus, and Melidora, the fair daughter of Pamela by Musidorus (who even at their birth entered into admirable fortunes) may awake some other spirit to exercise his pen in that wherewith mine is already dulled. (847–8)

Stanley is much more concise:

Thus on all sides their late Misfortunes turned to Blessings: The Royal Lovers received the Recompense of their past Cares; and found the Truth of what has been so long asserted, that Time and Assiduity (at least in Love) will conquer every Difficulty and pay us double Interest for every Disappointment which we have or can endure. (510)

Sidney never quite offers us closure – the anticipated double nuptial dissolves into a catalogue of incomplete or entirely new narrative threads, and responsibility for this
Sidney’s Arcadia

garden of infinitely forking romance paths is given over to some hypothetical future scribbler. The “strange continuance of desire” trumps marriage. Stanley, however, offers both a firm conclusion and a moral of her own, albeit one that does not seem entirely applicable to Sidney’s narrative. “Time” indeed saves and reunites Pyrocles and Philoclea, Pamela and Musidorus, in the sense that (just in time) Basilius’s recovery from the effects of a misidentified sleeping potion nullifies all of Euarchus’s draconian judgements. But the “Assiduity” recently displayed by the accused princes in defending their actions, their passion, and their right to enjoy their beloveds does not stop the imposition of those sentences. What is perhaps most important here is Stanley’s arrest of Sidney’s errant romance (an arrest even more egregious than the Countess of Pembroke’s reattaching the conclusion of the Old Arcadia to her brother’s incomplete revision). She halts the Arcadia’s envisioning of interminable new generations of wandering princes and lovelorn shepherds: Time has sufficiently tried the truth of her characters. Given her insistence that “Assiduity (at least in Love)” can vanquish every “Difficulty,” and given her interpolated celebration of the companionate ideal, it is not perhaps surprising that Stanley’s own assiduous retelling of Sidney concludes by tidying up his incontinent final sentence and by refiguring errancy as exemplarity.

References


**Further Reading**


Spenser’s Paradoxes of Nature

Many of the central questions raised by Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596) concern the relationship between nature and *technê* – between those objects, skills, and qualities endowed by natural means and those acquired through learning or habit. By *technê*, I mean any human art or technique – painting or embroidery, rhetoric, medicine, or magic, dueling or horsemanship – that requires skill or labor. The problem of whether nature is sufficient – and, if not, whether nature’s defects can or should be corrected by art – shapes Spenser’s treatment of theological problems as well as his understanding of rhetoric and poetry. Like many of his contemporaries, Spenser mediates between the positions maintained, respectively, by Plato and Aristotle. While Plato regards the poet’s art as twice removed from the world of forms, since nature copies ideal forms and the poet, in turn, only copies nature, Aristotle argues that the poet may improve upon nature, a position echoed by Philip Sidney’s *A Defence of Poetry* (c. 1585), which claims that the poet creates things “either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature” (Sidney 1966: 23). Spenser’s contribution to this debate varies from episode to episode in *The Faerie Queene* in accordance with the motives of each fictional artist and the purposes to which his art is put. In other words, Spenser views art and *technê* as morally neutral or *instrumental*, capable of cultivating virtue when directed towards a virtuous end but also capable of provoking temptation and sin when exploited for immoral ends. As such, Spenser’s instrumental conception of artifice participates in the poem’s bipartite, “*in bono et in malo*” [for good and for bad] moral structure traced by Carol Kaske’s *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (1999). Throughout *The Faerie Queene*, we meet up with magicians, poets, and artificers both good and bad, and it falls to the poem’s heroes, as well as to its readers, to distinguish between the right use and the abuse of artifice.

*The Faerie Queene*’s vision of nature owes much to the ancient Greek concept of nature as *physis* (Greek: growth or becoming). For Spenser, nature is organic, copious,
and fecund but also subject to change, decay, and death. From his epic catalogues of trees and flowers to the sundry creatures set in “meet order” by Nature’s sergeant in *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, Spenser’s representations of the “daedale earth” emphasize its variety as well as its decorum or moderation (Spenser 1992: 7.vi.5; 4.x.45). When Guyon, the hero of Spenser’s legend of Temperance, is confronted by the material excesses of Mammon’s cave, he resists its “superfluities” by reasoning that nature exemplifies the temperance to which he himself aspires: “how small allowaunce / Untroubled Nature doth her selfe suffi se” (2.vii.15). According to Guyon, the perfection of the antique world is sullied when men, stirred up by pride and lust, “gan exceed / The measure of her [Nature’s] meane, and naturall first need” (2.vii.16). In Book 6, Melibœ instructs Calidore in a similar fashion, arguing that “nature” may be “satisfyde” with very little and “doth little need / Of forreine helpes to lifes due nourishment” (6.ix.17; 20). Accordingly, Spenser imagines the Golden Age as an era when humanity fulfilled the virtue of moderation by living in accordance with the laws of nature, “[j]n simple truth” and without recourse to “guile” or “fraud” (4.viii.30–1).

Yet Spenser also acknowledges that nature offers limited and uncertain guidance. When Guyon embarks upon his solo journey to the cave of Mammon, Spenser likens him to a “pilot” adrift in the fog who, unable to depend on his sight, relies upon his “card and compas” (2.vii.1). Yet without the assistance of his Palmer, the “trusty guide” who symbolizes his natural faculty of reason, Guyon is so physically and spiritually debilitated by his experiences in canto 7 that he faints upon emerging from Mammon’s cave (2.vii.2). The limits of nature are also evident in Spenser’s acute awareness of the insurmountable distance between the lost golden age, in which virtue and tranquility were attainable simply by living according to nature, and the fallen world inhabited by his heroes. Through its depiction of various wild or “salvage” men, including Satyrane and his band of satyrs and the “salvage man” of Book 6, *The Faerie Queene* demonstrates how certain virtues are accorded to humanity by nature even as it also illustrates the inadequacy of nature as a moral and spiritual guide. While these wild men possess an instinctive sense of honor, courage, and compassion, Spenser is only guardedly optimistic about whether their natural virtue may lead to Christian truth or to salvation. Satyrane fails to worship Una properly, and both he and the savage man are vulnerable to passions such as wrath. As Harry Berger has pointed out, Spenser understands “natural or primitive experience” as having “positive as well as negative features,” but critics disagree over the extent to which the former may outweigh the latter (1988: 202).

Despite the beauty, courage, and simplicity of nature as embodied in these figures, Spenser’s natural world is always imperfect, in process, or incomplete. Nature’s imperfection has the capacity to reveal truth – as is the case with the “rosie marke” (6.xii.15) on Pastorella’s chest that identifies her noble lineage – but the defects of nature can also prove deceptive, either through the errancy of natural faculties such as the senses or the imagination or through the monstrous formations of an aberrant nature that does, on occasion, make mistakes. When Guyon and the Palmer encounter
a pack of hideous sea monsters in the final canto of Book 2, Spenser’s narrator comments that “Dame Nature” herself is ashamed of the “fowle defects [that] / From her most cunning hand escaped bee” (2.xii.23). Howsoever disturbing – even to herself – nature’s capacity to produce such “dreadfull pourtraicts of deformitee” (2.xii.23) may be, the conception of Nature as prone to error proves central to Spenser’s theology of grace as well as to his moral purpose as an artist.

The poem’s most overt challenge to the moral and cosmic decorum of nature appears in the guise of Mutabilitie, who claims for herself the power to “pervert” all that “Nature had establisht first / In good estate, and in meet order ranged” (7.vi.5). In the second of the two Cantos of Mutabilitie, which were first printed in the posthumous 1609 edition of Spenser’s works, Dame Nature refutes Mutabilitie’s claims by asserting that nature will ultimately “raigne over change” and thus “worke [its] owne perfection” (7.vii.58). The physical appearance of Dame Nature suggests that nature’s mystery resides in its capacity to reconcile opposites: Her face is hidden by a veil such that her audience cannot tell whether “she man or woman inly were” or whether her “hew” is “uncouth” or “beauteous” (7.vii.5–6). Spenser’s description of Dame Nature is punctuated by a series of paradoxes: She is “ever young yet full of eld, / Still moving, yet unmoved from her sted; / Unseen of any, yet of all beheld” (7.vii.13). Inasmuch as she represents the traces of God, Dame Nature offers a visible testament of divine grace, one as legible as the book of Scripture and yet still partially concealed from mortal sight. Spenser imagines her as clothed in a garment both so unrevealing and so resplendent that his “fraile wit cannot devize to what / It to compare” (7.vii.7). If Nature resists the poet’s descriptive tools of metaphor, it is partly because she embodies the spontaneity of creation rather than the labors and constraints of art. Spenser thus contrasts the pavilion in which Dame Nature sits, a structure edified by “th’earth her self of her owne motion,” to the buildings constructed by the “idle skill” of “Craftes-men” (7.vii.8), since her majesty is enhanced not by artifice but rather by the flowers that “voluntary grew” on the ground beneath her feet (7.vii.10).

Despite this unrestrained power which appears to confirm the boundless nature of her authority, Dame Nature’s triumph over her adversary is ambivalent. Although she claims the ability to circumscribe Mutabilitie’s ability to effect change and decay, she also acknowledges the rebellious goddess as her own daughter, thus suggesting that vicissitude is the product of nature as well as its enemy. In the mutable, sublunary world of Spenser’s Faerie Land, Mutabilitie’s power is everywhere in evidence, from the cyclic processes of generation and corruption that govern the Garden of Adonis to the “dissolution” of cosmic order lamented in the Proem to Book 5. Despite the striking resemblances between Dame Nature and Spenser’s Venus, neither the Garden of Adonis (3.vi) nor the Temple of Concord (4.x) is able to resist the flux to which mortal life, and mortal love, are subject. Although its gatekeepers (Doubt, Delay, and Daunger) certainly make it a somewhat less than idyllic spot, the Temple of Concord creates a “second paradise” (4.x.23) by supplementing nature’s defects with art: “all that nature did omit, / Art playing second natures part, supplyed it” (4.x.21). Unlike the Bower of Bliss (2.xii), in which art and nature prove bitter rivals, the Temple of
Concord fosters a mutually supportive relationship between nature and art just as Concord’s two sons, Love and Hate, are “forced hand to joyne in hand” by their mother—a reconciliation, but a precarious one indeed (4.x.33).

The Trials of Art

In the Temple of Concord, art complements nature and helps it “worke [its] owne perfection.” Yet elsewhere in the Faerie Queene, art and technê threaten to pervert, corrupt, or rival nature. Although Spenser never uses the term technê, he does use related words, including “engine,” “device,” “counterfeisance,” “cunning,” and “subtle,” which like the term “art,” often carry an ambivalent or pejorative sense, denoting the use of artifice for ignoble or wicked ends. The “vile Enchaunter” Busirane uses the “strange characters of his art,” drawn from “wicked books,” to bewitch and entrap Amoret (3.xii.30–1), while Duessa and the false Florimell, experts in the feminine arts of disguise and deceit, are each dubbed the “maistresse of her art” (1.vii.1). Those forms of artifice which conceal, rather than correct, the imperfections of nature are especially malevolent in The Faerie Queene. Philotime’s beauty, “wrought by art and counterfetted shew,” hides her “native hew” rather than displaying her natural assets (2.vii.45), while Lucifera’s palace, though “bravely garnished” with “golden foile,” conceals a flimsy and ugly foundation: “all the hinder parts, that few could spie, / Were ruinous and old, but painted cunningly” (1.iv.2–5). Even when not explicitly addressing the deceptions wrought by arts such as painting, architecture, or cosmetics, Spenser uses an idiom drawn from artistic and technical practices to condemn deceit and dissimulation. The arch-magician Archimago frames a “craftie engin” (2.i.23) – that is, a clever plot – to stir up enmity between Guyon and Redcrosse Knight. Malecasta employs the “craftie engins” (3.i.57) of amorous persuasion to seduce Britomart with “malengine and fine forgerie” (3.i.53), while Paridell woos Hellenore with the “false engins” of courtly love, namely sighs, tears, and “verses vaine” (3.x.7–8).

As the above passages suggest, The Faerie Queene voices persistent concerns about the illusions and deceptions of artifice. The poem’s villains are, for the most part, agents of duplicity and cunning rather than brute force, and they often resort to violence only when trickery fails. The aged and hoary Archimago is no warrior, and when he attempts to rape Una, he tries “flatt’ring arts” and “subtile engines” before finally turning to “greedy force” (1.vi.3–5). Dolon, whose name (Greek: fraud) is synonymous with treachery and guile, is likewise “nothing valorous,” instead relying on “sli shifts and wiles” to “undermine / All noble knights” (5.vii.32). Yet rather than condemn such guile wholesale, Spenser circumscribes it and at times even defends its more benevolent applications. This is especially true in Book 5: Although its Proem glances back nostalgically to a Golden Age in which “no man was affrayd / Of force, ne fraud,” the book itself is set in a technologically sophisticated age in which heroes and villains alike use – and misuse – various engines and devices (5 Proem 9). When
used rightly, technological objects and practices often symbolize prudence, as when Ar
tegall, battling Grantorto, is likened to the “skillful Marriner” who lets down his sails
when he sees a storm approaching (5.xii.18). But elsewhere in Book 5, technolog-
ical objects signal the threat that “forgèd guile” may pose to the virtue of Justice
(5.vii.7). Both MalengINE (5.ix.1—13) and the Souldan are equipped with military
technologies of dazzling complexity, yet the Souldan’s iron-wheeled chariot backfires
against its user, tearing him to rags after it overturns in the heat of battle (5.viii.
28–41). Although Arthur, the Souldan’s adversary, is also heavily armed, the two men
“goe both together to their geare, / With like fierce minds, but meanings different,”
a remark that helps to explain why Book 5’s defenders of Justice are permitted recourse
to the same instruments and tactics as their enemies (5.viii.30). Yet even in the hands
of the virtuous, some instruments nonetheless prove untrustworthy, a problem illus-
trated by Talus, the “immoueable” man “of yron mould” who serves as Artegall’s

groom and who must be called off from his intermittent bursts of excessive violence
(5.i.12).

In addition to demonstrating the unreliability of art and technè as instruments of
moral virtue, Spenser often provides his readers with contrasting pairs of artificers
who serve to underscore the distinction between beneficial and depraved uses of art.
The abuse of magic by characters such as Archimago and the Witch is corrected by
the salutary enchantments of Arthur, Cambina, and Canacee. The demonic motives
of skilled rhetoricians such as Despair, with his “subtil tongue like dropping honny”
(1.ix.30), or MalengINE, “smooth of tongue, and subtile in his tale” (5.ix.5), are
required by the “well guided speech” (1.vii.42) of Arthur, the “unfained sweet” words
of Reverence (1.x.7), the eloquence of Belphoebe, whose voice also resembles “drop-
ning honny” (2.iii.24), and the rhetorical force of Zele, who could “charm his tongue,
and time his speech / To all assayes” (5.ix.39). The eloquence of these and other
characters demonstrates precisely why rhetorical artifice is especially vulnerable to
abuse: “pleasing words are like to Magick art” (3.ii.15), as Redcrosse remarks to the
love-sick Britomart, and Spenser cautions us repeatedly that the magic of words can
provoke dangerous passions as easily as it can incite virtuous action. Art can certainly
tempt – witness the erotic tapestries that decorate the walls of Malecasta’s and
Busirane’s palaces, or the “table plaine” (1.ix.49) in which Despair shows Redcrosse
the torments of Hell – but it can also offer resistance to temptation and sin.

Artifice and dissimulation are thus put to virtuous as well as vicious ends through-
out The Faerie Queene. When the disguised Britomart deceives Amoret in what the
narrator calls a “fine abusion” (4.i.7), Spenser adopts Tasso’s paradox of the “greath-
earted lie” (Tasso 2000: 40) in order to redeem certain forms of deceit for morally
constructive uses, above all to create the fictional “golden” world of the poet’s art
(Sidney 1966: 24). If dissimulation has its uses in The Faerie Queene, so too do
magnificence and courtly splendor: While Lucifera, Philotime, and Malecasta boast
gaudy palaces, lush bowers, and gorgeous robes, so too do Mercilla, Belphoebe, and
even Dame Nature, whose court, “richer … then any tapestry, / That Princes bowres
adorne with painted imagery” (CM.vii.10), provides a persuasive defense of courtly
magnificence as rooted in natural law. Conversely, seemingly “artless” qualities such as humility and modesty are easily feigned or misused by Spenser’s villains: Archimago first appears dressed as a “sober” hermit, “simple in shew,” while Duessa cultivates the illusion of “humblenesse low” even while dressed in “ritch weedes” (1.i.29; 1.ii.21). The simplest and most transparent surfaces often prove the most deceptive: a “Christall streame” trickles by Archimago’s hermitage in the opening canto of the poem, as if mirroring the “pleasing words” of a magician who “could file his tongue as smooth as glas” (1.i.34–5), and Redcrosse Knight is enervated when he rests next to a similarly translucent stream, “as cleare as cristall glass” despite its hidden, toxic qualities (1.vii.6). While gleaming or shimmering surfaces aren’t always ominous – Arthur boasts “glitterand armour” (1.vii.27) and the waves of the glorious Thames “glitte[r] like Christall glass” (4.xi.27) – most of the objects made of glass, crystal, and metal in The Faerie Queene should probably be accompanied by the warning, “all that glisters is not gold.”

Spenser puts his characters and his readers alike through various trials that demand distinguishing between nature and artifice as well as between the salutary and dangerous applications of artifice. The difficulty of these trials is compounded by the remarkable similarity between the products of nature and those of art, a likeness born out of the mutual emulation and rivalry that inheres between them. In the Bower of Bliss, “art striv[es] to compaire / With nature” (2.xii.29) by reproducing ivy and vines in metal, presumably the reason why the Bower’s “tender buds [and] leaves” remain “stedfast” and unaffected by seasonal change (2.xii.51). Differentiating between the natural and the artificial is also challenging because Spenser’s nature is herself a virtuoso artist who crafts gardens in the shape of labyrinths, fields that resemble “silken curtens and gold coverlets” (2.vi.16), and groves that look like theaters. The gardens in Book 4’s Temple of Concord, for instance, are shaped like “False Labyrinthes, fond runners eyes to daze, / All which by nature made did nature selfe amaze” (4.x.24). The variety and delicacy of nature’s works prove a challenge for Spenser’s descriptive powers, since nature’s copia and its grandeur are too vast to be represented in the “small compasse” of his art (4.xi.17). When endeavoring to recount all the rivers in attendance at the marriage of Thames and Medway, Spenser laments that “the seas abundant progeny” (4.xii.1) will never fit in “so narrow verse” (4.xi.17). If Nature is the superior artist, it is because she has a larger canvas and better materials: This is why even the most “daedale,” or cunning, craftsman cannot portray in “any living art” a virtue such as chastity, which is “form’d so lively in each perfect part” by nature herself, who has chosen the “Soverain[e] brest” of Queene Elizabeth as her ideal medium (3 Proem 1–2).

When Redcrosse and Una stumble into a forest shaped like a “labyrinth” (1.i.11), or when Guyon sails by a bay whose crescent shape resembles a “halfe Theatre” (2.xii.30), Spenser’s metaphors self-consciously highlight the difficulty of discerning the products of nature from those of human artifice. For instance, Spenser uses the blason – a poetic convention in which the physical attributes of a woman are catalogued and compared to various objects – to argue for the superior artifice of nature and the failure
of human technê to duplicate it. When the Witch creates the false Florimell to assuage her love-sick son, the narrator describes how she uses her “devilish arts” (3.vii.21) and the assistance of a Hyena to create a woman out of snow, mercury, and other materials. The false Florimell’s hair is fashioned out of “golden wyre” and her eyes made from “burning lampes” (3.viii.7), objects that travesty the conventions of the blason as represented by Spenser’s own, earlier description of Belphoebe, whose “faire eyes” are likened to “living lamps,” her lips to “perles and rubins” (2.iii.24), and her “yellow lockes crisped” to “golden wyre” (2.iii.30). Unlike the false Florimell, Belphoebe’s hair is not, of course, made of wire; instead, her beauty is the result of a perfect union between nature and artifice, so much so that the narrator cannot tell whether Belphoebe’s charmingly disheveled hair is the effect of art or of “heedless hap” (2.iii.30).

Art and Nature in Contest

Throughout The Faerie Queene, metaphors and similes often signal art’s failure to replicate the beauty of nature. When confronted with the task of describing Britomart’s golden locks as they cascade out of her helmet during the Tournament of Maidenhead, Spenser first likens them to the golden wires “[f]ramed in goldsmiths forge with cunning hand” but then qualifies his comparison, since “goldsmiths cunning could not understand / To frame such subtile wire, so shinie cleare” (4.vi.20). Britomart cannot be reproduced in a smithy because she is the “peerelesse paterne of Dame natures pride,” an epithet which suggests that nature’s superior artifice resides in its capacity for uniqueness (4.vi.24). By contrast, the products of art, based as they are on nature’s original pattern, are derivative and thus often interchangeable with each other. Yet at times, Spenser’s nature delights in copying, an attribute that reflects her playful sense of humor. In Book 4, both Aemylia and Arthur are dumbfounded by the “great likenenesse” between Amyas and Placidas, who though friends, and not twins, are nonetheless identical in appearance (4.ix.10). When Arthur sees the two men side by side, he is “mazd how nature had so well disguised / Her worke, and counterfeit her selfe so nere” but also worries that their uncanny resemblance might be a sign of nature’s “error” rather than her “skill” (4.ix.11). Nature’s tendency to make “paragon[s]” and reproductions of her own “patterne” reflects Book 4’s larger concern over whether the likeness upon which both concord and friendship depend is inherent in nature or whether virtues dependent upon similarity need to be fostered through human intervention in the form of magic, poetry, or law. Although the idea that nature might “counterfeit her selfe” is clearly disturbing in a poem containing so many false or deceitful doubles, nature’s ability to enforce likeness and resemblance also guarantees that the bonds of “naturall affection” (4 Proem 2) are truly and fully grounded in nature.

Even so, most of the likenesses and doubles in The Faerie Queene are forged by art or magic, not by nature, and they are designed for depraved rather than virtuous ends.
Archimago enlists the help of spirits to create an *Ersatz* version of Una “fram’d of liquid ayre,” so “lively” that it beguiles even “[t]he maker selfe for all his wondrous witt” (1.i.45). Duessa can “d’on so manie shapes in sight, / As ever could Cameleon colours new” (4.i.18), and Proteus and Malengine possess similar powers of metamorphosis. Spenser’s most extended treatment of counterfeit likeness occurs in the episodes relating the adventures of the true and false Florimell in Books 3, 4, and 5. The story is based loosely on the classical myth of the two Helens, in which Paris is held to have absconded with a phantasm resembling Helen while the real Spartan queen stays behind with her husband Menelaus. Spenser turns the myth into a cautionary tale about the abuses of artifice in the service of insincere or lascivious love. When the Witch creates a “snowy lady” for her son as a substitute for the real Florimell, who has fled his advances, the result is so exquisite that “Nature selfe … / … grudg’d to see the counterfeit should shame / The thing it selfe” (3.viii.5). But the false Florimell also realizes a nightmarish vision of Spenser’s own feminine ideals of modesty and shamefastness, since the “wicked Spright” placed inside of her excels in “counterfei-sance” and “all the wyles of wemens wits knew passing well” (3.viii.8). With an ironic nod to the perversity of male desire, Spenser shows how the Witch’s creation backfires, since the false Florimell, “the more to seeme such as she hight” (3.viii.10), rebuts the advancements of the witch’s son just as the real Florimell has done.

In Books 4 and 5, the false Florimell reappears in several episodes concerned with trials of judgment, where her role is to challenge the characters around her to distinguish between true and fake beauty, sincere and insincere friendship, genuine and false courtesy, and rightful and unrightful ownership. In keeping with her status as an exact replica of the real Florimell, “[or] fairer than her selfe, if ought algate / Might fairer be,” the false Florimell falls into the hands of Paridell, Blandamour, and finally Braggadochio, each of whom represents a different aspect of deceit or pretense (3.viii.9). When the false Florimell is displayed during the Tournament of Maidenhead, all the other contestants look ugly by comparison, a phenomenon that Spenser compares to the art of gold-plating:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{As guilefull Goldsmith that by secret skill,} \\
\text{With golden foyle doth finely over spred} \\
\text{Some baser metal, which commend he will} \\
\text{Unto the vulgar for good gold insted,} \\
\text{How much more goodly glosse thereon doth shed,} \\
\text{To hide his falshood, then if it were trew.} \quad \cdots (4.v.15)
\end{align*}
\]

Spenser’s contempt for the “vulgar” who fail to comprehend that “forged things do fairest shew” informs his treatment of all the episodes concerning the true and false Florimell, and that contempt has sociopolitical as well as aesthetic implications. When the false Florimell, now in the possession of Braggadochio, is trotted out once again at the wedding of Marinell and (the true) Florimell, all the spectators except Artegall are convinced that the false Florimell is in fact the true one, “Or if it were not Florimell
so tride, / That Florimell her selue she then did pas. / So feeble skill of perfect things the vulgar has” (5.iii.17). Artegall’s ability to distinguish between the two women reflects his status as the knight of Justice – a virtue exercised through acts of distinction and distribution – but it also reveals Spenser’s persistent concern in the latter books of *The Faerie Queene* with the “raskall rout” (5.ii.54) which threatens to upend social hierarchies by conflating the natural and the artificial. For Spenser, both the preservation of social rank and the continuance of political and cosmic order depend upon the capacity to distinguish between nature and art. Only the gentleman of “virtuous and gentle discipline” (Letter, 737) is able to see beneath the “goodly glosse” of the false Florimell’s superficial beauty or the courtly pretense of the phony Braggadocio, who, made of “baser metal,” will never prove a true courtly knight no matter how many trappings he steals from *The Faerie Queene*’s titular heroes. Spenser’s insistence upon the naturalness of social distinctions helps to account for the gusto with which Artegall and Guyon each expose the “borrowed plumes” and “leasings” of the counterfeit knight, a “losell base” who cannot even manage to command Guyon’s horse to open his mouth without getting his ribs kicked in (5.iii.20; 33). The horse-shoe-shaped “blacke spot” inside Brigadore’s mouth, which Guyon alone is permitted to examine, not only confirms the horse’s rightful owner but also establishes how virtue itself is marked by nature’s peculiar and inimitable stamp.

When the two Florimells are finally placed side by side “to make paragone, / And trial,” the snowy Florimell immediately “vanish[es] into nought,” leaving nothing but an empty girdle in a process that the narrator compares to the sudden appearance and disappearance of a rainbow (5.iii.24). In a reversal of the commonplace *ars longa, vita brevis* [art is long, life is short], Spenser demonstrates the transitoriness of art by contrast to the “stedfastnes” of a Nature that rests “[u]pon the pillours of Eternity,” a moral also espoused by the conclusion to Book 3, where all the magnificent decorations of Busirane’s palace “vanish utterly” after its inhabitant is enchained by Britomart and his spells overthrown (7.vii.58; 7.viii.2; 3.xii.42). Yet the difficulty of distinguishing between the true and false Florimell also testifies to the ease with which the pristine yet frail beauty of nature may be obscured or eradicated by sin in the fallen world. This lesson is repeated often throughout the poem: In order to seduce Fradubio in Book 1, Duessa conceals Fraelissa’s beauty by creating a “foggy mist” that dims her face and “with foule ugly forme did her disgrace” (1.ii.38). In Book 4, Spenser’s narrator defends the lovely Aemylia and Amoret against charges of impropriety by arguing that beauty, which in former times used to “represent / The great Creatures owne resemblance bright, / Unto abuse of lawlesse lust was lent, / And made the baite of bestiall delight: / Then faire grew foule, and foule grew faire in sight” (4.viii.32). The challenge of distinguishing between “faire” and “foule” is one of the symptoms of the world’s “contrarie constitution,” in which virtue and vice, and right and wrong, are confused and “all things else … are chaunged quight” (5 Proem 4). After the Fall – or, the flight of Astraea – moral, legal, and aesthetic judgments all become more difficult to make, a condition that profoundly shapes the moral design of *The Faerie Queene* as well as its conflicted attitude towards artistry.
Nature Adulterated: Spenser’s Art of Love

In the middle books of *The Faerie Queene*, the false Florimell also offers Spenser numerous opportunities to critique the artifice and cunning associated with courtly love or with the perversion of its ideals. The wicked spirit placed inside of her possesses extraordinary powers of feminine coyness and flirtation that wreak havoc on her suitors. Along with Hellenore and Mirabella, the false Florimell reflects Spenser’s deep distrust for the arts of amorous beguilement, from cosmetics, sumptuous costumes, and false modesty to the abuse of poetry in the service of lust. Duessa, who is such a master of disguise that her own grandmother, Night, fails to recognize her (1.v.26), falsifies feminine modesty with her “coy looks” (1.ii.27), prompting the narrator to issue repeated warnings about the “crafty cunning traine, / By which deceipt doth maske in visour faire” (1.vii.1). Although Duessa’s “counterfesaunce” and her hideous physique are laid bare two-thirds of the way through Book 1, she insinuates herself into a new disguise by the end of the opening book, suggesting that the perils associated with feminine artifice have not yet been “laid away” at all (1.viii.49). Sexual desire motivates many of the most pernicious abuses of art (and especially of poetry) in *The Faerie Queene*: Lechery, who is described as “false” and “fraught with ficklenesse,” relies on books, songs, dances, “secret looks … / And thousand other ways, to bait his fleshly hookes,” while Paridell employs “Bransles, Ballads, virelayes, and verses vaine” to seduce Hellenore (1.iv.25; 3.x.8).

In Book 3, the enemies of chastity construct entire edifices, such as Malecasta’s Castle and the House of Busirane, for the purpose of misusing art in the service of sensual pleasure. In the latter of these episodes, the “vile Enchaunter” Busirane relies on the marvelous verisimilitude of art to entrap his victims and torture them with literalizations of the conventions and clichés contained in his “wicked books” of love (3.xii.31–2). Although Britomart ultimately proves immune to this form of deception, she is initially entranced by the tapestries, altarpieces, and theatrical spectacles on display in his palace. The décor hints at the cunning deception practiced by desperate lovers: The metallic threads of the tapestries “shone unwillingly; / Like a discolourd Snake, whose hidden snares / Through the greene gras his long bright burnish backe declares,” while the image of Cupid depicted on Busirane’s idolatrous altar of sexual love is similarly multihued, consisting of “More sundry colours, then the proud Pavone / Beares in his boasted fan, or Iris bright, / When her discoloured bow she spreds through heaven bright” (3.xi.28; 47). As Britomart penetrates the inmost recesses of the palace, she meets with artworks of greater and greater lifelikeness until she finally encounters a theatrical troupe which dramatizes, in its “lively actions,” the ever-changing emotional state of the lover (3.xii.4). Led onto the “ready flore / Of some Theatre” by a chorus, the actors’ performance shows all lovers to be actors, and love itself a theatrical illusion sustained by virtuoso thespians such as Dissemblaunce, who though “seeming debonaire” is “all but painted, and purloyned, / And her bright browes … deckt with borrowed haire” (3.xii.3; 14). Yet for all the energy that Spenser
expends throughout Book 3 in denouncing courtly artifice and cautioning against the misuse of poetry, theater, and the visual arts for lascivious ends, the Proem to Book 4 staunchly defends "naturall affection" as "faultless," even if some have "abusd the same" through "vaine poems" and other "false allurement of that pleasing baite" (4 Proem 1–2). The virtue of love only becomes a vice when corrupted from its natural foundations by the deceptions and snares of art.

**Nature Adulterated: The Bower of Bliss**

Yet one of the most enticing and treacherous locales in *The Faerie Queene*, the Bower of Bliss, is also one of its most seemingly natural. The Bower is one of several false or imperfect paradises, including the Garden of Adonis and the Temple of Concord, through which Spenser explores the extent to which nature and artifice can or should be in harmony with each other. Although the Bower of Bliss purports to be an unadulterated natural landscape redolent of Eden and the classical Golden Age, its capacity to induce sensual indolence is in fact a function of the extreme artfulness of the place. When Atin arrives to rescue Cymochles from the bucolic torpor produced by Phaedria in Book 2, canto 6, the landscape he encounters is a masterful counterfeit of the *locus amoenus* [perfect place], "As if it had by Natures cunning hand / Bene choisely picked out from all the rest" (2.vi.12). It is art, Spenser reminds us, and not nature, which fosters the impracticable fantasy of a world without labor or pain, and he demonstrates with ironic flair how both Phaedria and Acrasia rely on artifice in order to argue for the superiority of a life lived according to nature. As Cymochles lounges beneath an arbor "[f]ramed of wanton Yvie" that shows "art striving to compaire / With nature" (2.v.29), an image suggesting there is more tension and antagonism in the landscape than at first meets the eye, Phaedria’s song urges him to heed the example of "nothing envious nature" and to abandon the "fruitless labors" of knighthood for a life of effortless leisure (2.vi.15–16). Echoing Matthew 6.28–9 and Armida’s song to Rinaldo (Tasso 2000: 282), Phaedria argues – much as Spenser himself does in the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* – that the quality of nature is not strained: She "neither spinnes nor cardes, ne cares nor frets, / But to her mother Nature all her care she lets" (2.vi.16). Yet by conflating the inherent facility and moderation of nature with "careless ease" and an indifference to one’s spiritual well-being, Phaedria’s song distorts Guyon’s claim that "[u]ntroubled Nature doth her selfe suffise" as well as Belphoebe’s defense of "labours" and "painfull toile" (2.iii.40) as the best means of cultivating virtue. Despite her advocacy of a life lived in accordance with the instinctive promptings of nature, Phaedria subverts nature’s example by crafting her flora out of metal and by competing in song with the birds, "striv[ing] to passe (as she could well enough) / Their native musicke by her skilfull art" (2.vi.25). Like the ambitious courtiers who inhabit Philotimie’s court, each one “striv[ing] his fellow downe to throw,” Phaedria’s competitiveness threatens to undermine the natural order, an order predicated on communality and reciprocity rather than rivalry and enmity (2.vii.47).
The extended description of Acrasia’s Bower of Bliss in the final canto of Book 2 likewise demonstrates how the literary tradition of the *locus amoenus* may be perverted for morally depraved ends. In the Bower, art disguises itself as nature and sensual indolence masquerades as Epicurean *ataraxia*, or tranquility. Yet while critics agree that the Bower erodes the distinction between nature and artifice, they disagree on the allegory’s underlying motives: Stephen Greenblatt argues that it is fueled by Spenser’s Protestant iconoclasm and his distrust of courtly *sprezzatura*, by which art conceals itself as art, while Harry Berger maintains that in the Bower, “all nature and art are directed toward intercourse” such that they are “denied any other meaning” (Greenblatt 1980: 169–92; Berger 1957: 226). As if specially designed to provoke Spenser’s knight of Temperance, the Bower is characterized by immoderation: A cup-bearer named *Excesse* offers Guyon some sweet wine (2.xii.57), “[i]nfinit streames” overflow into the “ample laver” of a fountain (2.xii.62), and grapevines made of “burnisht gold” are so “over-burdened” with their “rich load” (2.xii.55) that they bow down, mirroring the drowsy languor of the Bower’s human inhabitants. In an effort to prove that its surfeit of pleasures is created and licensed by nature, the Bower tries to conceal its own artifice: “The art, which all that wrought, appeared in no place” (2.xii.58). Yet this pretense of naturalness does not fool the narrator, who repeats the word “seemd” four times in as many stanzas in describing the surroundings (2.xii.60–3). The allure of the Bower of Bliss resides largely in the illusion of harmony it sustains, yet upon closer inspection, its landscape is permeated by the kind of aggressive rivalry that Guyon already encountered in Philotime’s court:

One would have thought, (so cunningly, the rude,
And scorned parts were mingled with the fine,)
That nature had for wantonesse ensude
Art, and that Art at nature did repine;
So striving each th’other to undermine,
Each did the others worke more beautifie;
So diff’ring in both in wills, agreed in fine. (2.xii.59)

In the Bower, art and nature are locked in a contest for supremacy that mirrors Acrasia’s Arachnean skills of weaving: Punished for challenging Minerva at the loom, Arachne symbolizes the antagonism inherent in artistic imitation and the threat posed by the competitive impulse of the artist, threats also evident in the Bower’s attempt to “undermine” the nature it apes and in Spenser’s heuristic imitation of the *locus amoenus* tradition handed down from Ovid, Lucretius, Ariosto, and Tasso. When Guyon and the Palmer discover a field covered with flowers, it is described as decorated with “all the ornaments of Floraes pride, / Wherewith her mother Art, as halfe in scourne / Of niggard Nature, like a pompous bride / Did decke her, and too lavishly adorne” (2.xii.50). In an effort to rival the aesthetic economy of “niggard” or miserly Nature, Art overcompensates with tasteless excess, indulging in the same “pride and lavishnesse” for which Guyon faults Mammon (2.vii.16). Although the Bower attempts
to correct the defects of nature through art — it is a “place pickt out by choice of best alive, / That natures worke by art can imitate” — Acrasia’s “subtile” art fails to replicate the simplicity and modesty of a nature that needs no embellishment (2.xii.42; xii.77). As if we needed another reminder that the Bower’s design perverts rather than perfects nature, Guyon discovers a fountain “over-wrought” with images of naked boys cavorting and playing with their “wanton toyes” (2.xii.60). Even more powerfully than the statue of the “faire Hermaphrodite” to which Amoret and Scudamour are compared in the final stanzas of the 1590 Faerie Queene, the dissolutely queer eroticism of the fountain’s figures, “embay[ed] in liquid ioyes,” censures those works of art which lure their beholders to indulge in false rather than true pleasures (3.xii.46 [1590]; 2.xii.60).

If the Bower of Bliss, founded upon an adversarial relationship between art and nature, cultivates a false sense of harmony, Book 3’s Garden of Adonis provides a limited corrective to the Bower by illustrating the bittersweet concordia discors of an imperfect and mortal nature. Spenser describes the Garden as an “earthly Paradise” (3.v.40), a phrase whose oxymoronic implications are evident in the landscape’s vulnerability to change and decay. Although critics have disagreed over the extent to which the “logical inconsistencies” in Spenser’s depiction of the Garden of Adonis disrupt or support the larger allegorical framework of his poem, readers of Faerie Queene III.vi frequently note its “discontinuity” and “ambiguity,” interpreting the Garden in terms of “the narrator’s conflicting attitudes towards nature” (Cheney 1966: 126; 118–20). Here, nature is truly physis, engaged in the constant and self-regulating processes of generation and corruption. Its flowers and herbs need no “Gardiner to set, or sow, / To plant or prune: for of their owne accord / All things, as they created were, doe grow” (3.vi.34). Fashioned by natural “inclination” rather than by the deliberate craft of the metalsmith, its arbors are the product not of “art” but rather of trees voluntarily “knitting their rancke braunches part to part” (3.vi.44). Yet as in the Cantos of Mutabilitie, nature in the Garden is fraught with paradox: It is “continuall spring, and harvest there,” and Spenser’s epic catalogue of flowers culminates with “Sad Amarantus,” a specimen whose etymology (Greek: unfading) symbolizes the partial triumph of poetic fame over mortal decay (3.vi.42; 45). Eulogizing the late Philip Sidney as Amintas, “[t]o whom sweet Poets verse hath given endlesse date,” Spenser enlists poetry in the paradoxes of nature (3.vi.45). Mortal and yet eternal, the poet’s art serves “for short time an endlesse moniment,” as he puts it in the final line of his “Epithalamion,” both a testimony to decay and a limited means of transcending it (Spenser 1999: 449).

Spenser’s Pastoral Courtesy: Reconciling Nature and Art

An idyllic yet vulnerable paradise, the Garden of Adonis is one of several pastoral scenes in The Faerie Queene which provides an alternative to, or a temporary escape from, the active, heroic world of Spenser’s epic. Like many Renaissance writers,
Spenser finds the pastoral genre especially valuable for probing the relationship between nature and art – between the qualities conferred by birth or lineage and those acquired by art or learning. Although pastoral traditionally depicts the austere and uncomplicated life of shepherds, the genre nonetheless employs sophisticated poetic artifice in order to sustain its vision of honest simplicity. In this respect, pastoral celebrates the union of nature and art rather than valorizing the former over the latter. This attitude is reflected in Calidore’s vision of the Three Graces, who embody “all that ever was by natures skill / Devizéd to worke delight” (6.x.5) but also symbolize the power of the shepherd’s pipes – that is, of poetry – to improve upon and perfect nature. Throughout Book 6, the Legend of Courtesie, Spenser cleaves to a rather traditional definition of courtesy, defining it largely (though not entirely) as the product of nature rather than culture. Upon introducing Calidore, Spenser tells us that his “gentlenesse of spright / And manners mylde were planted naturall,” although those native virtues are complemented by “comely guize” and “gracious speech,” attributes perhaps acquired rather than inherited (6.i.2). Calidore’s courtesy is the combined product of nature and art, a synthesis suggested by his name, which may derive from *callidus* (Latin: skillful or experienced). In the Proem to Book 6, Spenser proposes a complex formula for the cultivation of courtesy when he asks the Muses to reveal “the sacred noursery / Of virtue” whose “heavenly seedes” are first planted by God but then brought to “ripenesse” with “carefull labour” (6 Proem 3). As with the gardens in Book 4’s Temple of Concord, it is difficult to tell whether the virtue of courtesy is “planted, or grew naturall” in Calidore; as the gardening metaphor suggests, the cultivation of virtue depends on advantageous natural conditions as well as on human intervention (4.x.22). For the most part, however, Spenser’s reverence for aristocratic privilege and for the naturalness of social rank prompts him to argue that Calidore’s courtesy is innate rather than learned: “For seldom seene, a trotting Stalion get / An ambling Colt, that is his proper owne: / So seldom seene, that one in base-
ness e set / Doth noble courage shew, with courteous manners met” (6.iii.1).

In keeping with the aesthetic and social doctrines of works such as *The Book of the Courtier*, which urges the courtier to “practice in all things a certain *sprezzatura* [non-chalance], so as to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort,” Spenser’s allegory demonstrates how those aspects of courtesy derived from labor or skill must nonetheless appear to derive from nature so as to produce the illusion of effortlessness known as *sprezzatura* (Castiglione 2002: 32). His courtesy and rhetorical skill enable Calidore to “steale mens hearts away” and to effect “enchantment,” phrases suggesting that, no matter what artifice lurks beneath, Calidore’s assets appear spontaneous, even magical, in their origins (6.i.2; 6.ii.3). After Calidore defeats Crudor, Spenser’s narrator qualifies their equal skill as swordsmen by arguing that although the ability to fight well is a sign of courtesy for those who enjoy the “great helpe [of] dame Nature selfe,” the same skill no longer smacks of courtesy if it requires exertion: Those “that have greater skill in mind, / Though they enforce themselves, cannot attaine” (6.ii.2). Yet such courtly *sprezzatura* comes perilously close to deception, and Spenser goes to great pains to point out that Calidore “loved simple truth
and stedfast honesty,” thus differentiating him from all those sham courtiers who practice “nought but forgerie” (6.i.13; 6 Proem 5). In order to alleviate Spenser’s persistent concern that courtesy is so easily falsified, Calidore devotes a considerable amount of energy in Book 6 to exposing bogus courtiers and detecting true ones such as Tristram, who is “surely borne of some Heroicke sead” even though he lives in the woods (6.ii.25). For Calidore, as for Spenser, it is “an easie thing … to descry / The gentle bloud” even when that gentility is concealed by rudeness or misfortune, since the courteous man brought up in savage surroundings still “shew[es] some sparkes of gentle mynd” and eventually cleaves to “his owne proper kind,” principles which reflect Spenser’s belief in the natural foundations of the social order (6.v.1).

Yet like many of Book 6’s exemplars of true courtesy, Tristram is raised in the forest, an upbringning that exposes the ethical shortcomings of actual courts in cultivating courtesy. From the wild civility of the “salvage man” to the rustic courtesy exhibited by Meliboe and Pastorella, true courtesy thrives outside the court more than inside it in The Faerie Queene. According to Donald Cheney, the central cantos of Book 6 show how “man must maintain contact with the natural world, with its rigors and its unadorned simplicities, if he is to defend his civilization against the forces [of] chaos that take nourishment from this same natural world” (Cheney 1966: 195). At once civilizing and wild, nature is, by virtue of its very imperfections, more perfect than art. Like the “dischorde in Musick [that] maketh a comely concordaunce” or the “blemish in the ioynt of a wel shaped body” to which Spenser appeals in the dedicatory epistle of The Shepheardes Calendar, nature achieves a “disorderly order” to which the poet aspires – but of which he ultimately falls short (Spenser 1999: 26–7).

References


“In Poesie the mirrois of our Age”: The Countess of Pembroke’s “Sydnean” Poetics

Suzanne Trill

I haue sent you herre the diuine, and truly deuine translation of three of Dauid's psalms, Donne by that Excellent Countesse, and in Poesie the mirrois of our Age.

(Sir John Harington, letter to Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford, 19 December 1600)

Sir John Harington’s assessment of the Countess of Pembroke’s poetic skill was first brought to modern critical attention by Margaret P. Hannay in her influential biography *Philip’s Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (1990: 107). Somewhat curiously, it is cited near the beginning of a chapter on Pembroke as “Patronesse of the Muses,” yet, in its original context, Harington is clearly focusing on Pembroke as a poet. Offering Pembroke’s “diuine, and truly deuine” Psalm translations to his daughter as the epitome of exemplary poetic discourse, Harington, through this comment, could be read as both reinforcing the image of Pembroke as “a dour religious figure” (Hannay 2004: par. 10) and the idea that translating religious texts was the most acceptable discourse for early modern women writers. However, this picture is far from complete. For, as Hannay herself notes, Harington also enclosed a copy of Pembroke’s translation of Petrarch’s “Triumph of Death.” Thus, Pembroke is explicitly connected with two of the most important models for the development of English Renaissance poetry: the poems of Petrarch and the Psalms. Furthermore, these copies of Pembroke’s texts were also “attended” by some of Harington’s own “shallow meditations” which he positions as mere “sack-cloth” in comparison to Pembroke’s superior “satin.” In so doing, Harington is, of course, deploying the all-too-common humility topos, but his choice of metaphor here echoes the use of “Cloth” and “liverie robe” in Pembroke’s dedicatory poem to Elizabeth I, “Even Now that Care” (Herbert 1998: I.103, ll. 33, 34). Harington continues with a strikingly sexualized metaphor, in which he suggests his “pieces ‘both of meainer sort and meainer manner … maie waite as a wanton page is admitted to beare a torche to a chaste matrone’” (Hannay 1990: 107). The potential significance of the contrast between the “wanton page” and the
“chaste matrone” is underlined by Harington’s further inclusion of “the obscene poem ‘The Choosing of Valenties’ by Thomas Nashe” (Hannay 1990: 107). Given Pembroke’s well-known quarrels with Nashe, the circulation of some of her psalms alongside this poem might initially seem rather perverse (Hannay 1990: 139–42). But, as I argue below, this potential “perversity” is highly significant insofar as it challenges the modern predilection for separating the “sacred” from the “secular.”

Instead, for Harington and his contemporaries, it would seem that the sacred and the secular sat side-by-side, jostling for the reader’s attention. While this jostling should alert us to the co-existence of these two discourses in the early modern period generally, it is of particular significance for critical studies of the Countess of Pembroke’s literary productivity. For whereas Frances Berkley Young was able to assert confidently that “any survey of Lady Pembroke’s literary work should naturally begin with her brother’s novel Arcadia” (1912: 123), recent critical accounts demonstrate a decided preference for her Psalms. While in many ways this shift is to be welcomed, the current lack of reference to Pembroke’s involvement with the Arcadia is a worrying trend. While Pembroke’s re-entry into the literary canon, prompted by feminist research into “lost” women’s writing of the past, is understandably founded upon an increasing recognition of her quite astonishing poetic talent, this recognition has had the unfortunate side-effect of facilitating the erasure of her crucial role in the promotion of the legend of her brother, Sir Philip Sidney. The desire to extricate Pembroke from the overpowering shadow of her brother was a reaction to the then-current critical tendency which “dismissed her writing as derivative, as though it was motivated solely by blind devotion to her brother” (Herbert 1998: I.11). Sadly, this presumption prevented many critics from recognising the agency and “self-assertion” embodied in Pembroke’s “self-identification as Sidney’s sister” (Herbert 1998: I.11). It has also occluded the historical impact of Pembroke’s self-appointed position as her brother’s literary executor, as editor of both the 1593 and the 1598 Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia. In separating brother from sister and the sacred from the secular, modern criticism has produced an image of Pembroke which she herself would be unlikely to recognize. In what follows, I contend that in order to understand the full significance of Harington’s appraisal of Pembroke’s achievements we need to revise our understanding of her literary relationship with her brother, and take the intersection of the sacred and secular in early modern England more seriously.

Sidney, Pembroke and the “Sydnean Psalms”

By the time of his death in 1586, among other uncompleted works, Philip Sidney had translated the first 43 of the Psalms of David. Between then and 1599, Pembroke translated the other 107 and prepared a presentation copy of the entire collection, apparently intending to give it to Elizabeth I at her planned visit to Wilton (Brennan 2002). Admired by both contemporary poets and modern critics, the most striking aspect of these translations is their metrical diversity. In contrast to the enormously
popular *Sternbold and Hopkins Psalter* which monotonously used the “fourteener,” Sidney and Pembroke’s *Psalmes* aimed at artistic “varietie.” Pembroke’s proposed title page declares the contents to be:

> The Psalmes of Dauid, translated into diuers & sundry Kindes of verse, more rare & excellent for the method & varietie then euer yet hath bene don in English: begun by the Noble & learned gent. Sr P: Sidney Kt., & Finished by the R: honorable The Countesse of Pembroke, his Sister, & by her direction & appointment. (Rathmell 1963: xxxiii)

In addition to heralding the volume’s “excellent … varietie,” this title page clearly identifies the project as a joint venture. Reinforcing this, Pembroke’s dedicatory poems state that it is a “coupled worke,” which “hee did warpe, I weav’d this webb to end.” The title alone of John Donne’s often cited, commendatory poem “Upon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countess of Pembroke his Sister” demonstrates that their contemporaries recognized their dual authorship (Rathmell 1963: ix–x). While Donne obviously recognized their sexual difference, both in his title and in describing the authors as “this *Moses* and this *Miriam,*” toward the end of the poem it is precisely their collaborative composition which is emphasized: “So though some have, some may some Psalmes translate / We thy Sydnean *Psalmes* shall celebrate” (ll. 49–50, my emphasis).

Despite this, by the mid-twentieth century, revived critical interest in Philip Sidney meant that if the “Sydnean Psalmes” were discussed at all, Pembroke’s contribution was sidelined. Although it is now common for the “Sydnean Psalmes” to “be regarded as a School of English Versification,” Hallett Smith’s original accolade was confined to Sidney’s first 43 poems (1946: 269). The focus on Sidney, although arguably founded upon misogynist assumptions about literary “genius,” was influenced in part by his identification of David as a “*Vates*” in his *Defence of Poesie*. As many critics have noted, there Sidney identified David’s psalms as both a “divine poem” and “heavenly poesy.” One of the most recent to do so, Michael G. Brennan suggests that “given the sheer metrical versatility of the ‘Sidney Psalms,’ it seems that the problem over ‘the rules … not yet fully found’ for the psalms had especially intrigued Philip” (2002: 38). However, as his most recent biographer succinctly states, while Sidney “planned to write each psalm in a different stanzaic form … it was his sister Mary who completed the translation” (Stewart 2000: 255).

Pembroke’s re-entry into the literary canon was facilitated by the recuperative aims of early modern feminist research in the 1980s. While much early criticism recognized her contribution to the creation of a “Protestant Poetics,” discussion of her writing was often founded upon the notion that, as her poems were “translations,” she remained within the confines of “acceptable” early modern female expression. At this time translation was usually represented as a “secondary,” reproductive activity; consequently, even one feminist critic lamented the “fact” that Pembroke did not write her “own meditations” (Bornstein 1985: 134). It was responses such as this which provoked Donald Davie to complain that his inclusion of a selection of Pembroke’s
psalms in his anthology of Christian verse published 15 years earlier and intended as
"a gift to feminist literary criticism," had been “spurned” because “women no more
than men were prepared to recognize a poet whose greatest achievement was in ver-
sifying the psalms” (Davie 1996: xlviii). In his later anthology, Davie reiterated his
assertion that Pembroke “was ‘the first woman-poet of genius in the history of English
poetry’ ” (1996: xlviii). Retrospectively, it is ironic to note that my essay challenging
the “derivative” nature of the art of translation which argued that Pembroke should
be taken seriously as a poet was published in the same year (Trill 1996a). Davie would
perhaps be comforted to know that Pembroke’s Collected Works are now preserved in
a two volume edition published by Oxford University Press and that she is now widely
praised for her poetic skill (Clarke 2007; Hannay 2006; Larson 2006; Rienstra 2005).

Despite spurning Davie’s “gift,” much feminist research related to Pembroke has
focused upon her as a “woman-poet.” In its earliest form this concern was manifested
in a desire to locate a specifically “feminine” voice within Pembroke’s writing. Han-
nay’s and my own work also reveals a broader, cultural connection between women
However, while it is true that the restrictions upon women’s speech made the psalms
a relatively privileged form of discourse for their use, the language of the psalms was
commonly used in the period by both men and women, Protestants and Catholics.
While Pembroke undoubtedly was a female poet, another recurring critical debate
concerns the extent to which she infl uenced – and was infl uenced by – her contem-
poraries, the overwhelming majority of whom were, of course, men. Pembroke is most
frequently compared with Wyatt, Spenser and her brother.

Of particular interest for my argument here is Hannay’s recent essay, “Joining the
correspondence: David, Astrophil and the Countess of Pembroke.” There, Hannay argues
that along with the well-established primary sources for her translations, Pembroke
“also enters into dialogue with others who composed English metrical Psalms; fur-
thermore, given her translation of the ‘Triumph of Death’, another interlocutor is Petrarch” (2006: 113). Although Hannay identifies Pembroke as “one of the first
Spenserian poets,” she maintains that “her most important literary conversation is
with her brother Philip’s works, both secular and sacred” (2006: 114). Significantly,
Hannay proposes that this is not “merely an act of homage, but a strategy to position
herself in the mainstream of the English poetic tradition” (2006: 114). Hannay’s
argument is based upon a detailed analysis of Pembroke’s version of Psalms 73 and
53. In the first instance Hannay observes that:

Pembroke’s decision to use language from Astrophil 5, with its struggle between Reason
and Desire, may well have been inspired by Theodore de Beza’s Argument for Psalm
73 on “the strife betwixt reason and the affections,” which is also a concise summary of
the Astrophil sequence in general and this sonnet in particular. (Hannay 2006: 123)

In recognizing the intersection between the secular and the sacred in the siblings’
writing, Hannay’s analysis points to the significance of the articulation of desire made
possible within the discourses of both the Psalms and Petrarchanism.
While Hannay notes the thorny, early modern debate about biblical translation in general and poetic form in particular she suggests the Psalms solved “one persistent problem for English women writers”; for, “by making God’s praise the subject of her verse instead of some male lover … [Pembroke] could circumvent gender restrictions on women’s speech while winning accolades for godly virtue” (2006: 116). However, while the Psalms were commonly represented as the “anatomy of the Christian’s soul,” David’s life (and poetry) also offered a pattern for exploring more earthly passions. For example, when discussing Wyatt’s prologues to his translation of the Penitential Psalms, Smith points out that they highlight the subject of David’s adultery. From this he argues that: “the Psalms are therefore romantic: they form a series of complaints, not so much for sin in general as for the traps and trammels of the flesh from a courtly point of view. David is made the author of a kind of de remedia amoris” [“of the remedy of love”] (1946: 262). As Greg Walker has recently argued, this connection has particular resonance to Wyatt’s personal and political situation (2005: 351–76); furthermore, the widespread association of David (and the Psalms) with early modern representations of sexuality is attested to by the existence of sumptuous tapestries devoted to the David, Bathsheba, and Nathan narrative at Henry VIII’s court (Campbell 2007). 2 The intersection between the sacred and the secular in early modern deployments of the Psalms is given further force when Davie traces Pembroke’s “playfulness” (1996: xiix) in her translations to the influence of the Marot–de Beze Psalter. Davie reminds us that in the Dauphin’s court that Psalter, despite its metrical variation, was set to music and that the Dauphin loved to play them (1996: xlvi–vii). Furthermore, Davie informs us that the Dauphin’s “courtiers adopted their special psalms, just as they adopted their special arms, mottoes or liveries”; and that “their choice of psalm often alluded deliberately to their amorous or conjugal predicaments” (1996: xlix). While I am not suggesting the “Sydnean Psalms” should simply be read as amorous verse, it is worth remembering that such a sacred text could be put to decidedly secular uses.

In this context, Hannay’s observation that “Pembroke’s direct allusions to English lyric poets – notably Wyatt, Spenser and Sidney – signal that her work is also a deliberate effort to enter the lyric tradition” (2006: 113) is potentially highly significant. The self-consciousness of Pembroke’s “strategy” is evident in the variety of forms deployed in her translations: As Davie put it, “that variety did not merely come about ‘organically’; plainly it was imposed by deliberate design” (1996: 1). Such “deliberate design” and strategic deployment of her literary and familial connections militate against any notion that Pembroke was confined to the margins of discourse: Rather, it signals a desire to be recognized as her brother’s true literary heir. To further this claim, it is instructive to examine an overlooked feature of the “Sydnean Psalms”; the precise form of Psalm 150. In concluding “Sixteenth-century women’s writing: Mary Sidney and the ‘femininity’ of translation,” following R. E. Pritchard (1992), I identified it as “a Petrarchan sonnet.” This, I argued, enabled Pembroke to “self-consciously conclude not only this psalm but her Psalms as she sums up the purpose of the psalter and her own poetic endeavour in a rhyming couplet” (1996: 154); that
Suzanne Trill

is, “conclud: by all that aire, or life enfold, / lett high Jehova highly be extold” (Herbert 1998: II.253). The editors of Pembroke’s Collected Works identify it simply as a “sonnet, 14 lines of iambic pentameter, rhymed abbaabbaabccdde” (Herbert 1998: II.480). More recently, Brennan notes that Pembroke uses two sonnet forms “(Psalms 100, Spenserian; and 150, a variant Italian form)” (2002: 38). But the reference to the latter’s “Italianate” aspects does not account for the final rhyming couplet which is a definitively English invention. More significantly, this occludes the fact that Pembroke chooses to translate the final Psalm in the specific sonnet form predominantly favoured by her brother in Astrophel and Stella.

While Sidney used a variety of sonnet forms by 1921 R. G. Whigam had established that “Sidney’s favourite rime scheme in the sonnets is abba abba cdcd e” (Whigam and Emerson 1921: 347). Given Pembroke’s obvious poetic dexterity, I suggest that concluding the “Sydnean Psalmes” with a “Sydnean Sonnet” is another “deliberate design” on her part. The fact that she precisely imitates her brother’s favored form suggests to me that she self-consciously concluded their “coupled worke” with another; that is, a truly “Sydnean Sonnet” in which the form may be her brother’s but the content is her own. While Pembroke is generally lauded for her lyric diversity, the closure of that collection with a form most famously associated with her brother’s secular sonnet sequence simultaneously signals the inseparability of the Sidney siblings and difficulty of distinguishing between the sacred and the secular in sixteenth-century poetics.

Although Hannay notes Pembroke’s apparent desire to occupy the critical mainstream, the description of this as a “deliberate effort” rather than an accomplished act is perhaps informed by the difficulty of establishing what influence the “Sydnean Psalmes” had upon their contemporaries. While Seth Weiner was skeptical about the poetic influence of Sidney’s psalms (1986: 214), Roland Greene lamented the fact that we do not have “an entire Psalter by Philip Sidney” which “if we had it, would stand – in generic orientation as in chronological fact – halfway between a working ritual Psalter such as Sternhold-Hopkins and a devotional fiction such as George Herbert’s The Temple” (1990: 27). It has, of course, been pointed out that the “Sydnean Psalmes” do exactly this. Most recently, Hannibal Hamlin has argued that the Sidney Psalms had “a transformative impact on the prominent seventeenth-century genre of metrical psalms” (2005: 157). A major issue in the debate about this text’s influence is the lack of a published edition during the authors’ lifetimes. This absence is usually ascribed to Pembroke’s desire to restrict readership either because she abjured the “stigma” associated with the printing of aristocrat’s poetry or as a “protective measure” which was “motivated by a sense that the theological implications of her artistic method would not be widely appreciated” (Rienstra and Kinnamon 2002: 52). However, Hannay argues that “[t]he eighteen extant Psalms manuscripts indicate considerable circulation” and lists 13 “contemporaries who read Pembroke’s work in manuscript, or claimed to” (2002: 38).

Recent studies concerning the continuing influence of manuscript circulation during this period should make us hesitate to equate manuscripts with “privacy”
(Marotti 1995; Justice and Tinker 2002). However, if Brennan’s “hypothesis that in 1599 the Countess of Pembroke might have been mindful of the possibility of publishing in print the ‘Sidney Psalms’” (2002: 49) is correct, then it seems the lack of a printed volume may be more an historical accident than specific design. If Pembroke was indeed contemplating the publication of the “Sydnean Psalmes” in 1599, this sets up the intriguing possibility that they would have been the final instalment in Pembroke’s involvement with the publication of her and her brother’s works. Whether she intended to publish the psalms or not, it seems significant that Pembroke did not finally complete them until 1599; that is, only one year after the publication of her brother’s “complete works” in *The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (1598). As that volume includes *Astrophel and Stella*, and other songs and sonnets by Sidney it is perhaps no wonder that Pembroke’s translations bear traces of her brother’s secular poetry.

Having alluded to Pembroke’s own role as editor of her and her brother’s writing, it seems appropriate to comment on the historical effects of editing practices on modern readings of the “Sydnean Psalmes.” While Donne apparently had access to one of the complete manuscripts, they were not published in this form until 1823: Singer’s edition can also be properly called the “Sydnean Psalmes” insofar as it includes all 150 psalms, with the first 43 being the versions revised by the Countess of Pembroke. It was, therefore, the “Sydnean Psalmes” upon which John Ruskin lavished praise in 1877 (Hamlin 2005: 133). However, W. A. Ringler’s “indispensable” 1962 edition of *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* rejoiced in being the “first … to present Sidney’s own version freed from the revisions later made by his sister” (Ringler 1962: 500). In liberating “Sidney’s” psalms from what he infamously referred to as Pembroke’s “inveterate” tinkering (1962: 502), Ringler sought to recover “the words that Sidney himself wrote” (1962: 503). Despite acknowledging the difficulties of such a project, Ringler’s edition of Sidney’s psalms remains standard. Only a year later, J. C. A. Rathmell published *The Psalms of Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke* in which he self-consciously aimed “to present the finally revised form of the text” (1963: xxii). Rathmell’s edition remains the only modern version to reproduce the complete “Sydnean Psalmes.”

For, in parallel with Ringler, the editors of *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke* chose to begin *Volume II: The Psalms of David* with number 44, the “first” psalm which can be attributed solely to Pembroke. Despite dogged attempts on the part of modern critics to separate brother from sister, however, critical discussion of the *Psalms* demonstrate how difficult this is to achieve. For example, while the editors of the *Collected Works* specifically refer to “Pembroke’s Psalms” (Herbert 1998: II.30), they also make reference to “the Sidneian Psalms” (I.56, II.26). Furthermore, references to her brother abound throughout the two volumes. As Hannay herself has argued, the connection with Sidney need not be intrinsically derogatory to Pembroke. Indeed, this could in fact enable a fuller appreciation of her artistic skill. For example, although Rathmell positions Pembroke as “understandably cautious” in her revisions of her brother’s translations, he also points out that “she
Suzanne Trill

modified the final stanzas of seven of Sidney’s versions (Psalms 1, 16, 22, 23, 26, 29, 31)” (xxvi). In all these cases, Pembroke’s interventions provide a more succinct conclusion to each psalm. Importantly, the concision of Pembroke’s revisions is driven by formal concerns: for her alterations aim to ensure that the final stanzas comply with the metrics and rhyme scheme her brother had attempted to adhere to when translating the earlier verses.

Pembroke’s practice is nicely illustrated by comparing her and her brother’s versions of Psalm 26, 10–12. In Sidney’s version this reads:

[10] Whose hands do handle nought,
But led by wicked thought
That hand whose strength should helpe of bribes is full.
My stepps shall guided be,
Then me redeem Lord then be mercifull.
[12] Even truth that for me sayes
My foot on justice stayes,
And tongue is prest to publish out thy prayse.

(Ringler 1962: 306, ll. 31–9)

In Pembroke’s revision, this becomes:

[10] With handes of wicked shifts,
With right hands stain’d with gifts.
[11] But while I walk in my unspotted waies,
Redeeme and show me grace,
[12] So I in publique place,
Set on plaine ground, will thee Jehovah praise.

(Rathmell 1963: 56, ll. 31–6)

In Sidney’s version the first nine verses are translated into a specific sexain form; that of the Spanish Sextilla. Sidney establishes a metrical pattern of two iambic tetrameters followed by one iambic pentameter, which is then repeated, and maintains an aabccba rhyme scheme. As is evident above, however, Sidney’s version ends with an incomplete half stanza. Pembroke’s compression eliminates this and thereby perfects the poem. In a formal sense, therefore, Pembroke manifestly improves her brother’s poetics.

While it is now indisputable that Pembroke was responsible for “the major part of the collection – major not only in bulk but in quality” (Rathmell 1963: 11), to persist in examining the “Sidney” and “Pembroke” Psalms in isolation from each other is expressly to ignore the collaborative nature of the project. As has already been noted, Pembroke’s choice of title for their work emphasizes its joint authorship. Following this, the collection is perhaps most properly described as the “Sidney-Pembroke Psalmes.” Alternatively, John Donne’s description of them as “thy Sydnean Psalmes” suggests another kind of “coupled worke” to that envisaged by Pembroke. For here
the Psalms belong to both the earthly translators and God. In this appellation the Sidneys (plural) constitute the divinely inspired “Vates” poet. The dual authorship of the “Sydnean Psalms” is also alluded to by Aemilia Lanyer. However, while Lanyer does mention both Sidney and Pembroke in “The Authors Dreame, to the Ladie Marie, the Countesse Dowager of Pembrooke,” ultimately – as in her own dedicatory poem “To the Angell spirit” – Pembroke displaces her brother. It could, therefore, be argued that it is Pembroke alone who self-consciously positions herself as the ideal, “Vates” poet. The checkered history of the circulation and reception of the “Sydnean Psalms” bears witness to the difficulties associated with Pembroke’s assumption of that poetic mantle. Despite the “worke” being “coupled,” the attribution of the authorship of each of the “Sydnean Psalms” is generally agreed upon. Yet, whereas Pembroke has been increasingly written into critical accounts of the “Sydnean Psalms,” it seems she is being increasingly written out of the textual history of The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia.

“Done, as it was for her, as it is by her”: The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia

As the organization of this chapter indicates, it is now decidedly unnatural to open a discussion of Pembroke’s “literary work” with reference to The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia. Indeed, the trajectory of late twentieth-century criticism and onwards is apparently moving inexorably toward reclaiming the “Arcadia” for Sidney. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to rehearse the complicated textual history of the “Arcadia” in detail. Here it is necessary to explain that it exists in three different versions, which are most commonly referred to as the Old Arcadia, the New Arcadia, and the “complete” version which was first published in 1593 as The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia. As Joel Davis has recently argued, the existence of such “Multiple Arcadias” forms part of a battle between Fulke Greville and Pembroke for control of Sidney’s literary legacy (2004). For, while Sidney’s dedicatory letter to his sister states that his romance was “done onely for you, onely to you” (1593: sig. 3r), he had also left a manuscript of the New Arcadia with his friend Greville, which the latter edited and published in 1590. Hugh Sanford’s preface to the “complete” Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia (1593), which combines the beginning of the “New” version with the end of the “Old,” was designed to make it clear that Pembroke, rather than Greville, is Sidney’s authorized literary executor (Davis 2004: 425–30). The title page of the 1593 edition asserts that it is “now since the first edition augmented and ended” and Sanford makes it clear that this was achieved “most by her doing, all, by her directing” (1593: sig. 4r). Furthermore, Sanford’s preface echoes Sidney’s own phraseology when he asserts that “done, as it was for her, as it is by her” (1593: sig. 4v). Yet, despite overwhelming evidence that Pembroke was the clear winner of this contest at the time, more recent criticism questions that result.
Sidney’s dedicatory letter to Pembroke, which prefaces all sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editions of the text, famously refers to its “deformities” (1593: sig. 3r) and positions it as a kind of literary monstrous birth. Of all the versions of the “Arcadia,” it is the 1593 Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia which has been most excoriated by modern critics. Victor Skretkowicz sums up responses to this edition which variously describe it “as a bleeding hybrid hermaphrodite centaur” (2000: 43). Skretkowicz aims to challenge these negative assumptions by arguing that it “represents in its entirety the nearest text we shall ever get to Sidney’s final concept of his romance” (2000: 69). This argument has the advantage of undermining “the lengthy modern history of the denunciation of the Countess of Pembroke” (2000: 39); however, the claim that “this is the state of the text in which the author [Sidney] finally left it” reduces Sanford and Pembroke’s editorial role to the standardization of names and the selection of poems (2000: 38). Thus they are denied any inventive contribution to this project and instead perform merely mechanical corrections. Unfortunately, Skretkowicz is not alone in seeking to erase Pembroke from any significant intervention in the textual history of the “Arcadia.” In Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works, including Astophil and Stella, Katherine Duncan-Jones does not mention Pembroke in the introduction and she is further erased from the process in the “chronology” of the “Arcadia’s” publication history (1989, rpt. 2002: xxiii). That Pembroke is not mentioned in the 2002 reprint is also odd given that in Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet, Duncan-Jones argued that Pembroke was “of incalculable importance to him as a writer” (1991: 16). Indeed, the final paragraph of that biography reiterates that Pembroke’s significance is precisely because of her connection to the “Arcadia”: “To his sister he presented his portrait and, most precious of all, his Arcadia, ‘done only for you’” (1991: 306). However, Pembroke’s involvement in the creation of her brother’s legendary status is explicitly acknowledged in Alan Stewart’s Philip Sidney: A Double Life, which ends with an “Epilogue” describing Pembroke as having “completed” some of Philip’s unfinished writings and coordinated the publication of his work. His Arcadia thus became known for all time as The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia’ (Stewart 2000: 321).

This seems to me to be a crucial point which is perversely resisted by scholars whose research focuses on Sidney. For, as Danielle Clarke has recently observed, Pembroke’s position as her brother’s “literary executor” and her use of his writing to authorize her own “is without precedent in this period” (2007: 184). One of the many ironies of her perceived subordination to her brother is that “[w]hen he died in 1586 he was famous neither for his knightly success nor for his poetry” (Mazzola 1999: 513). Instead, it was “his self-proclaimed heirs, poets like Spenser or Jonson for example, to whom we are indebted for our sense of Sidney’s literary importance. They advance their careers by praising him” (Mazzola 1999: 513). Pembroke should no doubt be included in this list: for, in positioning herself as her brother’s literary executor, completing the psalms and compiling his canon, she proclaimed herself his heir and created a literary career for herself. As others have noted, not only did the
1593 *Countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia* establish the text which was most widely read until the twentieth century but the “1598 edition established the most significant part of her brother’s canon: his *Arcadia, Lady of May, Astrophil and Stella, Certain Sonnets*, and *The Defense of Poesy*” (Davis 2004: 430). Once again, this collection circulated under the title of *The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia*.

The extraordinary influence of this text upon generations of readers is testified to by both the number of editions it went into and the astonishing number of copies which remain extant across the world’s libraries. Many years ago Skretkowicz pointed out that Pembroke’s “efforts to promote Sidney’s image culminated in 1598 with the first literary collection in English to rival that of the by then old-fashioned Chaucer” (1986: 122). In so doing Pembroke engages in one of the earliest attempts to stabilize an individual author’s literary canon. While this might suggest a nascent concept of “authorship” in its modern sense, “authorship” here remains collaborative, as the text circulated under Pembroke’s name. Despite modern attempts to erase Pembroke from this process, the joint production of the “Arcadia” is attested to in Sidney’s dedicatory letter: “Your deare self can best witnes the manner, / being done in loose sheetes of paper, most of it in your presence, the rest, by sheetes, sent vnto you, as fast as they were done” (1593: sig. 3r–3v). The attempt to excise Pembroke’s role in the production of her brother’s romance is also at odds with the conclusions reached by recent explorations of the workings of salon culture. As Julie Campbell reminds us, in such a culture “composing poetry and stories for group entertainment, with group input into the composition, was … as much a part of salon entertainment as the use of characters that reflect those in the group, barely disguised with pseudonyms” (2006: 147). Crucially, Campbell argues that “the Sidney circle members clearly partook of both practices” (2006: 147).

While it is admittedly difficult to trace the exact nature of Pembroke’s influence on the form and content of her brother’s romance, this should not preclude the attempt to do so. After all, much has been learned from recent studies of Shakespeare’s collaborative projects. Perhaps a serious study of Sidney and Pembroke’s stylistics would be of assistance here. Pembroke was not only actively engaged in the original production of the narrative, but she and Sanford acknowledge their intervention in the published editions. As Skretkowicz notes, an “expanded note preceding the appendix in 1613” emphasizes the fact that the work was unfinished, and had survived in various “loose sheets” which were unrevised by Sidney himself and not in any definite order. “Therefore with much labour,” the editors’ compiled

the best coherencies that could be gathered out of those scattered papers made and afterwards printed, as now is, only by her noble care to whose dear hand they were first committed, and for whose delight and entertainment only undertaken. (cited in Skretkowicz 1986: 123)

Here it is worth noting that Sanford’s assessment of the authorship of the romance echoes not only Sidney’s phraseology but Pembroke’s poetry as well: “But howsoever
it is, it is now by more then one interest The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia: done, as it was, for her: as it is, by her” (1598: sig. 4v, my emphasis). This suggests that Sanford had seen at least a draft of “To the Angell spirit” which describes the “Sydnean Psalms” as “this coupled worke, by double int’rest thine” (Herbert 1998: I.111, I. 2, my emphasis). Once again it seems the “sacred” and the “secular” are not as separate as might at first appear. Indeed, it is important to remember that Pembroke was, apparently simultaneously, translating and revising the Psalms while editing her brother’s secular writing.

“In Poesie the mirrois of our Age”: Sidney, Pembroke and “Sydnean” Poetics

It seems that the modern predilection for separating brother from sister and the “sacred” from the “secular” has distorted our reading of both the “Sydnean Psalms” and The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia. Pembroke’s decision to conclude the “Sydnean Psalms” with a “Sydnean sonnet” resists both forms of separation. Furthermore, her active engagement with the publication of her brother’s secular works challenges the perception of her as predominantly pious. Commenting on how some early modern women could act “scandalously” and yet receive “mainly praise and adulation,” Julie Campbell reminds us that Pembroke “is believed to have taken a lover in later years, yet [her] literary reputation remained spotless” (2006: 3). Hannay also points out that her niece, Lady Mary Wroth, “shadows her in Urania and Love’s Victory as a lover and as a writer of secular verse” (Hannay 2004). While it is certainly the case that the Psalms played a significant role in Pembroke’s self-definition as a poet, this is only one facet of her embodiment of “Poesie”; for, in early modern usage “poesie” was not limited to poetry but could refer to any form of imaginative writing. It is therefore important to consider that while among her contemporary literary elite Pembroke was primarily associated with the Psalms, in broader social and literary terms she was undoubtedly better known for The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia.

In the light of this observation it is worth reconsidering the iconography of the famous Simon Van de Passe portrait of Pembroke, in which she is clearly depicted holding a copy of “Davids Psalms.” While this does seem to allude to Pembroke’s own translations, it is, I think, significant that it is not the “Sydnean Psalms” but specifically “Davids Psalms” which she holds. As with Donne’s phrase “thy Sydnean Psalms,” this imagery also invokes divine inspiration. This is further reinforced by the fact that Pembroke’s proposed title page ends as follows: “Verbum Dei manet in æternum” [‘God’s Word lives[remains] eternally [forever]] While this phrase might suggest Pembroke’s hesitancy in claiming authorship of “God’s Word,” the portrait’s iconography also emphasizes her “Sydnean” connections, as Hannay has argued. Furthermore, at the top of the engraving, there is a crown of laurel: Pembroke thus invokes both her “Sydnean” heritage and the Petrarchan position of poet-lauareate. By merging the sacred with the secular and emphasizing her familial connections,
Pembroke establishes herself as her brother’s true literary heir. In so doing, Pembroke presents a significant challenge to Helgerson’s analysis of the all-male literary system expounded in *Self-Crowned Laureates*.

As Donne and Lanyer’s comments (cited above) indicate, the “Sydnean Psalms” influenced both male and female contemporary writers. This is also the case for *The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia* as a number of male and female writers attempted to “complete” it. Currently the best known of these texts is Lady Mary Wroth’s *The Countesse of Montgomeries Urania*. Famously, Wroth withdrew her volume from circulation after complaints about its “scandalous topicality” (Lamb 2008: par. 9). One of the complainants, Sir Edward Denny, wrote to Wroth suggesting that she should “Re Redeeme the tym” she had spent writing secular works by turning her attention to “heavenly layes” instead; specifically, he instructed her to “follow the rare, and pious example of your virtuous and learned Aunt, who translated so many godly books and especially the holy psalms of David” (cited in Lamb 1990: 30). While we have no direct evidence that Wroth followed this advice, it is interesting that an early dedication associates her with “Urania,” otherwise known as the muse of Christian poetry. More immediately comprehensible is Pembroke’s identification with the figure of “Urania.” Significantly, however, these connections suggest that there may be more overlap between the “secular” and the “sacred” in Wroth’s romance than has so far been recognized.

The importance of “Sydnean” poetics in Wroth’s writing is also attested to by the fact that her sonnets – both in *The Countesse of Montgomeries Urania* and *Pamphillia to Amphilanthus* – all imitate forms used by her uncle. Like her uncle, Wroth uses a variety of forms but not once does she employ the most well-known “Spenserian” or “Shakespearian” forms. While it has often been noted that Wroth’s generic choices seem rather anachronistic for the 1620s, less has been said about her apparently conscious decision to deploy a “Sydnean” poetics. Like Pembroke, Wroth capitalizes on her familial connections. The romance’s title page identifies her as: first, “daughter to the right Noble Robert, Earle of Leicester”; secondly, “Neece to the ever famous, and renowned Sr Philip Sidney”; and finally niece also “to the most excellent Lady Mary Countesse of Pembroke late deceased.” As many critics have noted, the character of the Queen of Naples seems to be modeled on Pembroke. Josephine A. Roberts suggests that one of the *Urania’s* poems, on a “Nightingale most sweetly singing,” is “ascribed to the Queen of Naples [and] may well be based on an original text by the Countess of Pembroke” (2005: lxxxv). Roberts also points out that the Queen of Naples “serves as a confidante to Pamphillia” (2005: lxxxv). Given this, and the nature of salon culture, it is quite possible that Pembroke contributed further than we know to Wroth’s composition. Indeed, somewhat ironically, it could be argued that in publishing her romance Wroth actually was following her aunt’s example.

Perhaps we, as modern critics, have been too willing to accept the divisions implied in Denny’s censure of Wroth and praise of Pembroke. His arguments – like those expressed by Harington in the epigraph to this chapter – seemingly reinforce the idea that early modern women should be “restricted” to writing about religion. However,
this can only be achieved by conveniently ignoring Pembroke’s manifestly secular interests. Unfortunately, the modern critical tendency both to study early modern male and female writers separately and to divide the “sacred” from the “secular” has worked to occlude the significant ways in which, perhaps especially within the Sidney family, these spheres coincide. In editing her brother’s work and completing the “Sydnean Psalms,” Pembroke indeed became “a principall ornament to the family of the Sidneis” (1593: sig. 3v). In so doing, Pembroke contributed “incalculably” not only to her brother’s legend but to early modern poesie in its broadest sense. It is in establishing a specifically “Sydnean” poetics that Pembroke truly is “in Poesie the mirrois of our Age.”

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NOTES

1 “To the Angell spirit,” Herbert (1998: I.110, l. 2); “Even now that Care,” Herbert (1998: I. 102, l. 27). It is perhaps significant that the variant “To the Angell spirit” describes the text as “this joint worke” (Herbert 1998: I.113, l. 12). See also Demers (2006).

2 Here I am very grateful to Greg Walker for drawing my attention to T. Campbell’s work.

3 Margaret P. Hannay mentions in passing that “Psalm 100 uses Spenser’s form and Psalm 150 uses Sidney’s” (2000: 143).

4 That is, with one exception: The version of Psalm 1 in Singer’s edition is Sidney’s rather than Pembroke’s.

5 I use the term “Arcadia” here to refer to any and all versions of the text to emphasize the difference between the search for an hypothetical “Arcadia” (in whatever form) and its historical, material existence as The Countesse of Pembroke’s Arcadia.

6 In general terms the texts can be distinguished as follows: The Old Arcadia refers to the version of the text that Sidney wrote for and sent to his sister; the New Arcadia refers to the version of the text published by Fulke Greville in 1590; and the “complete” version is comprised of the opening of the Old Arcadia and the ending of the New Arcadia.

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“Conceived of young Horatio his son”: *The Spanish Tragedy* and the Psychotheology of Revenge

Heather Hirschfeld

In the frantic minutes leading up to the discovery of his slaughtered son, Hieronimo, the protagonist of Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, stumbles from his “naked bed” to pursue a female voice crying for help. What Hieronimo finds in his garden is not a woman, however, but a “murderous spectacle”: “A man hanged up and all the murderers gone, / And in my bower to lay the guilt on me” (Kyd 1989: 2.5.9–10). Editors such as J. R. Mulryne have concentrated on the “deeply poignant” sequence of recognitions that follow this moment, as Hieronimo, having cut down the corpse from the arbor, recognizes the body as that of “Horatio, my sweet son!” (2.5.14). But the lines leading up to this recognition require equal notice, since they are essential not only to the unfolding of the scene but also to our understanding of *The Spanish Tragedy*’s place in the late Tudor fascination with the revenge plot. For Hieronimo’s initial reaction to the hanging body – that he might somehow be, or seem to be, responsible for it – hints at a deep, inchoate connection between the avenger’s quest to right a wrong done to him or his family and his own abiding sense of guilt and shame. The dramatic presentation of this sense of personal sinfulness (inculcated by centuries of religious teaching and freshly re-imagined in the wake of sixteenth-century Reformation doctrinal change) in terms of a dynamic, honor-bound struggle to restore oppressed justice, was part of the revenge drama’s great appeal to Elizabethan playgoers and part of its great contribution to the development of the Elizabethan stage. Kyd’s tragedy sustains the connection through a protagonist whose efforts to avenge his son’s murder are designed to punish himself as much as the murderers.

Elizabethan revenge plays, both before and after Kyd’s, associate the protagonist’s sense of guilt and shame with either the criminal activities to which revenge prompts him or his failure to achieve swift, appropriate retaliation (Hamlet’s lament that he is “a rogue and peasant slave” because he has failed to kill Claudius promptly is a perfect example). But Kyd, with special insight into the structure of revenge, makes Hieronimo’s comment anticipate his later difficulties. Hieronimo, albeit obliquely,
Heather Hirschfeld

assumes blame for the hanging body from the moment he sees it, and such an assumption is only augmented when he recognizes the body as his son’s. Of course, Hieronimo, following the lead of his wife Isabella, quickly turns his attention to finding the criminals and penalizing them: “To know the author were some ease of grief, / For in revenge my heart would find relief” he says (2.5.40–1). But this attention, and the fierce pursuit of vengeance it generates, is fueled by a sense of paternal guilt that makes Hieronimo as much the “author of this endless woe” as the real murderers, the Machiavellian Lorenzo and his partner-in-crime, the Portuguese prince Balthazar (2.5.39). Such guilt, which Hieronimo shoulders and tries to expiate over the course of the play, may be understood as an effect of the doctrine of original sin, a doctrine that, based on Christian interpretations of Genesis 2 and 3, linked parents and children together in a chain of inherited transgression. For Hieronimo, then, what appears to be a timeless instinct to revenge – to right a wrong by executing on the criminal the same crime that he has executed – is shaped by the psychological pressure of a theological doctrine which, though a staple of Christian teaching since Augustine, was given new purchase and power by the religious debates that characterized the sixteenth century.

Revenge Tragedy and the Reformation

Revenge tragedy, with its fixation on scenes of crime and sin, has long been studied in relation to the religious convictions as well as the legal infrastructure of the Tudor-Stuart polity. The bulk of religiously inflected scholarship looks to a wide range of sources to answer a limited question: Did sixteenth- and seventeenth-century biblical exegesis – and, by extension, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century audiences – endorse or condemn revenge? Answers take shape according to the critics’ interpretations of the divine injunction, repeated in both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, of “vindicta mihi”: “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will reward” (Deuteronomy 32.35; Romans 12.19). Thus Fredson Bowers, who saw a place for revenge in the Tudor world-view, nevertheless confirms that English moralists, decisively forbidding the very idea of vengeance, painted “a gloomy picture of the mind of the man tormented by the lust for revenge, and of the tortures that awaited the successful revenger” (1940: 14). And Eleanor Prosser writes of “the almost unanimous condemnation of revenge in the Elizabethan period” (1971: 23). Other scholars, on the contrary, find in English homiletic literature permission for revenge, as long as it was enacted by a minister serving as an officer of God. S. F. Johnson cites the Elizabethan Homily on Order – one of the officially authorized sermons in Elizabeth’s reign – to insist that revenge, under certain circumstances, was a legitimate pursuit in Tudor England:

Wee reade in the booke of Deuteronomie, that all punishment pertaineth to God, by this sentence, Vengeance is mine, and I will reward. But this sentence wee must understand to pertaine also unto the Magistrates which doe exercise Gods roome in judgement
Despite their different conclusions, all these early approaches explain revenge tragedy as a problem to be solved in terms of a homogeneous Christian morality. More recent scholarship, in contrast, has begun to consider revenge drama – as well as the Tudor stage more broadly – in relation to the seismic cultural, political and doctrinal shifts associated with the English Reformation and the development of distinct strands of Reformed theology within the fundamentally Protestant Church of England. With its radical realignment of principles of human and divine agency, its elimination of saints as mediators in the process of human redemption, and its fresh emphasis on the role of the scriptural word over church-sanctioned iconography, the English Reformation had a profound influence on the drama of Tudor England. Its effects on revenge tragedy, a genre ceaselessly concerned with the revelation and punishment of crime and sin, was deep and varied. Such effects have been traced to specific features of Reformed doctrine: Martha Tuck Rozett, for instance, suggests that the specifically Protestant doctrine of election colored the presentation of the revenger as “God’s chosen agent, whose duty it was to restore order to a fallen world” who nevertheless risked damnation as the result of the “inscrutable and arbitrary will of God who was Himself the supreme revenger” (1984: 180). The effects have also been traced, in ways that do not circumscribe the plays or characters to rigid denominational positions, to the broader implications of theological upheaval. Michael Neill, for instance, sees in the focus on a lost relative or love necessitated by revenge a memorializing activity designed to compensate for lost Catholic rituals of remembering the dead. Revenge tragedy, according to Neill, was “a response to a particularly painful aspect of the early modern reimagining of death – the wholesale displacement of the dead from their familiar place in the order of things by the Protestant abolition of purgatory and ritual intercession” (1997: 46). And in his fascinating study of early modern sacrificial economies, David Lee Miller suggests that “for Elizabethan England, the dilemmas of filial piety and revenge … are transvalued by the aftershocks of the Reformation” so that enacting vengeance on behalf of a dead father serves as one of the only available means, in a society robbed of shared Eucharistic rituals of witnessing, for “display[ing] filial truth in visible form” (2003: 99). For Miller, in other words, revenge is the way a son – in particular, Hamlet – confirms, at the cost of his own life, his father’s paternal claims.

For Hieronimo, the father of a slain child, revenge serves different, if allied, motives and functions that take shape in relation to the intensified religious debate associated with the Reformation in England. Revenge becomes, that is, a response to Reformed articulations of original sin which put fresh pressure on the guilt-laden connections between parent and offspring. Of course, the precept of original sin was not a monopoly of the Reformers; essential to the gospel’s articulation of Christ’s redemption of mankind and fully worked through for the early church by Augustine, the
concept of an initial human wrongdoing and its necessary persistence and punishment in all future generations was reinforced for the Catholic Church in the Council of Trent (Fifth Session, 1546). But the concept of irreparable human sinfulness was so central to Lutheran and Calvinist soteriology that the theology of the Fall took on a fresh, urgent role in Reformation thinking. As Jean Delumeau writes suggestively,

It was therefore in the sixteenth century, and specifically in Protestant theology, that the accusation of man and the world reached its climax in western civilization. Never before had they been so totally condemned, and never had this condemnation reached such a large audience. (1990: 27, emphasis mine)

The Reformers’ special fixation on radical human depravity, a depravity that not only defaced but effectively effaced the image of God in man’s soul and was only partially healed in baptism, made the precept both more pressing and more oppressive in early modern England.

Luther’s “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper” articulates the gravity of the Reformed perspective: “For I confess and am able to prove from Scripture that all men have descended from one man, Adam; and from this man, through their birth, they acquire and inherit the fall, guilt and sin, which the same Adam, through the wickedness of the devil, committed in paradise; and thus all men along with him are born, live, and die altogether in sin” (1989: 52). He is echoed in England by Protestant theologians such as William Perkins, who writes, “All men are wholly corrupted with sin through Adam’s fall, and so are become slaves of Satan, and guiltie of eternall damnation” (1612: 1.A3r). At its most intense, Perkins’ formula endorses an understanding of sin not only as something conceived but as something that conceives, a present inheritance and future bequest. Reformed insistence on the irreparability of original sin – absolutely central to the dominant concerns of justification by faith and double predestination (that is, predestination to either salvation or damnation) – made not only existence but conception and gestation defiled and deadly; parental generativity was configured as both the consequence and the cause of sin and death, which in turn become the fundamental legacy of parents to children. Perkins stresses the sheer scope of this inheritance when he writes that “all men are thus defiled with sin … by Adam’s infidelity and disobedience, in eating the forbidden fruit: Even as we see great personages by treason do not only hurt themselves, but also staine their blood, and disgrace their posterity” (1612: 1.A3v). As the historian David Cressy explains, although Reformation preachers resisted the idea that “childbirth inherently involved pollution,”

some of the sterner sort drew attention to the fundamental corruption in which all human beings were conceived and born. This sinful state … was a consequence of humankind’s post-lapsarian condition and had nothing directly to do with the processes of reproduction. But some godly writers were so overwhelmed by the discourse of sin and salvation that they could not mention childbirth without reference to defilement and the “spot of child-bed taint.” (Cressy 1997: 19)
As Horatio’s parents, Hieronimo and Isabella bear the most immediate responsibility for bequeathing this “spot” to their son, a spot painfully literalized in or on his dead, bloody body. The experience and effects of this guilt are played out in both characters’ pursuits of revenge, so that Hieronimo’s program for avenging his son’s death becomes an effort to comprehend and compensate — and, finally, to atone — for a powerful, embedded belief that fathers bequeath to their children the taint of sexualized sin. Of course, Hieronimo’s story, particularly because he is Knight Marshal — the chief legal officer at the Spanish court — can be explained in social or legal rather than doctrinal terms. Ronald Broude, for instance, traces the Tudor fascination with revenge to the “divided loyalties, ambivalence, and ethical groping” occasioned by the “confused state of socio-legal institutions circa 1600” (1975: 52). But given the power of doctrinal positions in this period to shape the individual and communal experiences of crime and punishment,6 Hieronimo’s approach to revenge is both intimately and imaginatively tied to contemporary understandings of sin and death as inheritances bequeathed to children by parents. Such a reading need not make Hieronimo the figurehead for either militant Protestantism or Catholicism, although the drama clearly plays into the anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic biases of late Elizabethan England.7 Rather, it suggests that Hieronimo’s response to the murder of his son — the ultimate violation of self and family — takes shape on a Tudor stage deeply influenced by Reformation understandings of original sin and the demands it made on the sinner. Read in this way, Hieronimo’s vengeful schemes, and particularly his use of and fascination with hell, are directed at himself as much as they are at Horatio’s killers, as a way of repenting for the stain he bequeathed to his son.

**Hieronimo in Hell**

Kyd stages a garden — the emblem *par excellence* of both the paradise and death associated with the biblical Eden — as the scene of Horatio’s amorous encounter with Bel-imperia as well as his murder. This move anchors original sin at the heart of the play. The staging begins when Bel-imperia suggests, in a phrase that deliberately links garden and father together, “thys father’s pleasant bower” as the meeting place for the couple’s third interview. Kyd is dramaturgically coy when he has Bel-imperia, concerned for their safety, suggest that “The court were dangerous, that place is safe”; dramatic convention insists that such an invocation will spell disaster. But Kyd’s irony becomes the occasion for a full paean by Bel-imperia to the spot, and her language is deliberately paradisal:

Our hour shall be when Vesper ’gins to rise,  
That summons home distressful travelers.  
There none shall hear us but the harmless birds;  
Happily the gentley nightingale  
Shall carol us asleep ere we be ware,
And singing with the prickle at her breast,
Tell our delight and mirthful dalliance. (2.2.45–51)

By the time they meet in the garden a scene later Bel-imperia is once again anxious, but Horatio convinces her that “fair fortune is our friend, / And heavens have shut up day to pleasure us” (2.4.16–17). Just as this pleasure – realized in the couple’s stichomythic exchange – reaches its climax in Horatio’s plea for Bel-imperia to “stay a while and I will die with thee, / So shalt thou yield and yet have conquered me” (2.4.48–9), he is slain by Lorenzo and Balthazar. The murder literalizes the famous Renaissance pun on orgasm (“to die”), demonstrating with terrifying dramatic concreteness the pun’s roots in the doctrinal proximity of pleasure and death.

This proximity is forced on Hieronimo when he discovers the dead body in his garden. Although he insists that “This place was made for pleasure not for death,” his disavowal only re-articulates, and reinforces, the doctrinal connection: The garden is precisely the place where, biblically and culturally, pleasure and mortality come together. The recognition is only made more poignant and painful when Hieronimo discovers that the dead body is that of his child:

Alas, it is Horatio, my sweet son!
Oh no, but he that whilom was my son.
O was it thou that calledst me from my bed?
O speak, if any spark of life remain:
I am thy father. Who hath slain my son?

O heavens, why made you night to cover sin?
By day this deed of darkness had not been.
O earth, why didst thou not in time devour
The vile profaner of this sacred bower?
O poor Horatio, what hadst thou misdone,
To leese thy life ere life was new begun?
O wicked butcher, whatsoe’ver thou wert,
How could thou strangle virtue and desert?
Ay me most wretched, that have lost my joy,
In leesing my Horatio, my sweet boy! (2.5.14–34)

Hieronimo’s highly stylized lament brings together father, son and the father’s garden in the scene of filial death.

Much of the work of this mournful passage is designed to assert the connection between father and son, a connection meant to support what will become Hieronimo’s increasingly fragile identity. Critics have suggested that the lament, like the pursuit of vengeance to which it will give way, is a memorializing activity, a way of keeping Horatio alive with “sweepingly explicit rhetoric [that] publish[es] Hieronimo’s bond with Horatio” (Kerrigan 1996: 173). That bond has already been underscored by several other characters. At the start of the play, the Ghost of Don Andrea, whose
death in battle and sojourn to the underworld are the catalyst for all the events that follow, refers to Horatio as “our Knight Marshal’s son” (1.1.25). Soon after, the appellation is used at court specifically in Hieronimo’s presence: The Spanish General, reporting to the King about the progress of battle between Spanish and Portuguese forces, adds it to his tale when he recounts Horatio’s defeat of the enemy leader Baltazar. Lorenzo, the Machiavellian schemer who plans Horatio’s murder when he learns that Horatio is Bel-imperia’s new lover, later repeats the epithet (2.1.79). And the King, when apportioning the spoils of Baltazar’s capture, mentions him in this way: “The prince’s ransom must not be forgot; / That’s none of mine, but his that took him prisoner, / And well his forwardness deserves reward: / It was Horatio, our Knight Marshal’s son” (2.3.33–6).

These assertions emphasize, publicly, the link between son and father in both the father and son’s official capacities. After Horatio’s death, as Kerrigan suggests, Hieronimo will voice such assertions in private, recognizing the link not in terms of official position but in the emotive terms of familial intimacy: “My joy,” “my sweet boy.” But in a world in which such familial links were understood as the guarantors of death as well as life, such assertions foster a complex range of feelings and responses in the father. It is, ironically, the evil Lorenzo, when he tries to cover up his own role in the vicious murder, who hints at the emotional density and range of Hieronimo’s ties to Horatio. “My gracious lord,” he addresses his uncle the king as he tries to account, without revealing the death of Horatio, for Hieronimo’s lunacy:

He is with extreme pride,
Conceived of young Horatio his son,
And covetous of having to himself
The ransom of the young prince Balthazar,
Distract, and in a manner lunatic. (3.12.85–9)

Lorenzo incorrectly attributes Hieronimo’s behavior to jealousy and greed, but his diction and syntax correctly highlight other dynamics of the paternal connection: Hieronimo, as Lorenzo suggests, is “conceived of” his son. The vicious Lorenzo means that Hieronimo, inspired by his son, imagines himself in his son’s place and desires his son’s rewards. But his language also implies that Hieronimo, engendered with his son, is responsible for his son’s mortal frailties. Those frailties include not only his vulnerability to Lorenzo’s dagger but the attraction to Bel-imperia that drove him into the garden in the first place. Ultimately, Lorenzo’s deeply ambiguous phrase makes Hieronimo and Horatio begetters of each other – the father of the son, the son of the father – in a circuit of deadly taint. Other characters later mock this collapsing of father and son, even jesting that Hieronimo is attracted to Bel-imperia: “How now, Hieronimo? / What, courting Bel-imperia?” Balthazar laughs when he sees them together (4.1.52–3). But such mockery only heightens the serious ways in which Hieronimo understands his relation to his son and their doctrinally overdetermined roles in a tragic scene of sex and death.
Those serious ways take shape in his meditations on and pursuit of revenge. Alongside his wife Isabella, Hieronimo commits himself to vengeance:

See'st thou this handkercher besmeared with blood?
It shall not from me till I take revenge.
See'st thou those wounds that yet are bleeding fresh?
I'll not entomb them till I have revenged.
Then will I joy amidst my discontent,
Till then my sorrow never shall be spent. (2.5.51–6)

Critics have been especially concerned to determine Hieronimo's moral status as a result of this pursuit. Lukas Erne has defended Hieronimo's oath by arguing that it does not commit him to illicit violence but rather asks for legal punishment by institutions of the state (2001b: 17–34). Arthur Freeman's *Thomas Kyd* offers the standard validation of Hieronimo as a man forced to revenge by the failure of those institutions: "Revenge dramaturgically is the prime mover of the action, but in perspective it is more Hieronimo's creature than his creator; he is driven to revenge by injustice, not to injustice by revenge" (1967: 84). The justice Hieronimo seeks, however, is not only the strict juridical comeuppance to which Freeman refers, although certainly the punishment of Lorenzo and Balthazar is where his thoughts are consciously trained. But his syntax hints at another source of injustice:

O sacred heavens! If this unhallowed deed,
If this inhuman and barbarous attempt,
*If this incomparable murder thus*
*Of mine, but now no more my son,*
Shall unrevealed and unrevenged pass,
How should we term your dealings to be just,
If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust? (3.2.5–11, my italics)

The injustice of which Hieronimo accuses the heavens is informed by his perception of his place at the font of his child's mortality. "This incomparable murder thus / Of mine," in other words, suggests the death is one he, Hieronimo, committed. The play provides a straightforward double for this tormented apprehension of Hieronimo in the figure of the Viceroy of Portugal, who bemoans his role in sending his son Balthazar into deadly combat:

My late ambition hath distained my faith,
My breach of faith occasioned bloody wars,
Those bloody wars have spent my treasure,
And with my treasure my people's blood,
And with their blood, my joy and best beloved,
My best beloved, my sweet and only son. (1.3.33–9)
That the Viceroy considers the (misreported) death of his son as an act of revenge against him (1.3.48) seals the connection between a father’s sinfulness and an act of vengeance. Of course, Hieronimo does not see Horatio’s death as a form of revenge; he sees revenge as a response to Horatio’s death. But the revenge he seeks is revenge on himself as well as on Lorenzo and Balthazar, and not only because revenge returns to haunt the revenger. Rather, the revenge Hieronimo seeks is a means to atone for the sin he has bequeathed to his son.

Revenge serves an apotropaic function for Hieronimo, directing his mental and emotional energy into a variety of retributive stratagems. His dissembling, spying, acting mad, encountering ghosts, plotting plays – all of which have been inventoried by Fredson Bowers under the heading of the “Kydian formula” – serve not only to keep Horatio’s memory alive but to keep Hieronimo’s focus outside, rather than inside, himself (1940: 71). Indeed, one can imagine an account of the play’s – even the genre’s – revenge devices as diversions from the special guilt clinging to the inheritance of original sin which is raised with the death of a family member. But such diversions always bear the trace of what they are meant to repress, and Hieronimo’s pursuit comes to look like a form of self-punitive suffering that admits, if implicitly, to his own role in Horatio’s death. Of course, the aftermath of a son’s murder, and the impossibility of prosecuting the villains, is an obvious, and passive, source of pain for Hieronimo. But Hieronimo seeks actively to offer up his own paternal suffering: His Latin dirge at the end of 2.5, in which he promises to “endure all things” (perpetiar omnis), makes his need for expiatory activity particularly clear. And it is revenge that provides just such a self-initiated means of suffering, a suffering that is made most dramatically visible in Hieronimo’s invocations of the underworld.

The Ghost of Don Andrea has already provided a glimpse into Hades in the play’s opening scene: He reports his own travels to the court of Pluto after his death on the battlefield. Kerrigan notes how Hieronimo’s discussion of the underworld brings the two characters together to “travel the same moral territory” (1996: 177). But what Andrea narrates with the strange detachment of a ghost, Hieronimo approaches as a living man eager to inflict upon himself physical and emotional pain. As opposed to Andrea’s descriptive tone about a place from which he has escaped, Hieronimo is imaginatively engaged with Hell: “The ugly fiends do dally forth of hell, / And frame my steps to unfrequented paths, / And fear my heart with fierce inflamed thoughts” (3.2.16–18). In a paean to the power of the pathetic fallacy, Hieronimo imagines that:

The blustering winds, conspiring with my words,
At my lament have moved the leafless trees,
Made mountains marsh with spring-tides of my tears,
And broken through the brazen gates of hell.
Yet still tormented is my tortured soul. … (3.7.6–10)

Hieronimo’s account, ostensibly meant to end his soul’s torment, depicts the winds breaking though the gates of hell. But in the course of his revenge Hieronimo does
not leave such work to the winds: He deliberately seeks out the underworld himself. Contemplating suicide with the very weapons – rope and poniard – that destroyed his son, Hieronimo proposes to go:

    Down by the dale that flows with purple gore
    Standeth a fiery tower; there sits a judge
    Upon a seat of steel and molten brass,
    And ’twixt his teeth he holds a fire-brand,
    That leads unto the lake where hell doth stand.
    Away, Hieronimo, to him be gone. (3.12.7–12)

Hieronimo’s goal is to extract from Pluto, just as did Don Andrea, the means to revenge. Later he promises that he will:

    Down to hell, and in this passion
    Knock at the dismal gates of Pluto’s court,
    Getting by force, as once Alcides did,
    A troop of Furies and tormenting hags
    To torture Don Lorenzo and the rest.

    …
    Come on, old father, be my Orpheus,
    And if thou canst no notes upon the harp,
    Then sound the burden of thy sore heart’s grief,
    Till we do gain that Proserpine may grant
    Revenge on them that murdered my son. (3.13.109–21)

Hieronimo’s vivid rendering here is part of the play’s use of the classical underworld as a source of vengeful energy to be unleashed on criminals on earth. Hieronimo’s proposed journey is meant to meet that pain halfway, and to have it unleashed on him as well as the murderers of his son. Indeed, his undiminished desire to travel underground suggests that he seeks not only to be with his son – even to be his son, to take his place in the afterlife – but to experience the torment and pain associated with a place specifically designed to render divine punishment for worldly crimes. Lukas Erne suggests that the underworld Kyd paints is a “pagan netherworld” dressed “in vestments … of Catholic theology” (2001a: 54). But we do not need to see Hieronimo as Catholic to account for the way he plunges himself into the depths of the underworld. Rather, his efforts stem from two convictions forged by the Reformation emphasis on original sin: that he is responsible for the death of his son and that he needs to suffer a penalty not unlike the one he would wreak on the murderers. Such an expectation of punishment is figured in his allusions to Hercules and Orpheus: The former emerges from Hell only to face further, devastating trials, and the latter loses his beloved Eurydice before becoming the object of avenging women. Indeed, Hieronimo imagines that the Furies he summons from below will eventually turn on him. He sees them come after him in the shape of the old man Bazulto:
… thou, then, a Fury art,
Sent from the empty kingdom of black night
To summon me to make appearance
Before grim Minos and just Rhadamanth,
To plague Hieronimo that is remiss,
And seeks not vengeance for Horatio’s death. (3.14.153–8)

Hieronimo believes that he is being punished for his failure to take concrete revenge on Lorenzo and Balthazar. But the logic of the play suggests that Hieronimo’s vision of the Furies, and the plagues which they will set on him, comes from a different, deeper element of his relation to Horatio. And that element – the bequest of original sin – demands that Hieronimo himself experience the vengeful suffering he wants to inflict on Lorenzo and Balthazar. Hieronimo’s experience of revenge, aimed at others but recoiling on him, is deeply congruent with early modern penitential programs that linked repentance with revenge on the self. As Lancelot Andrewes, the renowned Anglican divine, preached in a sermon for Ash Wednesday: “The apostle [in 2 Cor. 7.11] puts into his repentance, indignation and revenge, no lesse than he doth sorrow” (1629: 112).

The psychological and theological density of Hieronimo’s experience is heightened by Kyd’s portrayal of the play’s other revengers, Don Andrea and his allegorical companion Revenge as well as Bel-imperia. Part of the play’s choral structure, Don Andrea opens the drama with an account of his death and subsequent experience in the underworld, including Proserpina’s role in setting him, along with the personified accomplice Revenge, along the path of retribution. As Revenge reminds the confused and increasingly frustrated Andrea as they oversee the close of every act, all the activities at the Spanish court – including the Horatio’s murder and Hieronimo’s schemes – are part of a greater revenge scheme. Bel-imperia, the sister and fiancée, respectively, of the murderous Lorenzo and Balthazar, looks for vindication as a proto-feminist and a bereft lover. As Frank Whigham has noted, Bel-imperia’s initial relationship with Don Andrea was a form of vengeance leveled against the aristocratic match-making values of her father and brother (1996: 22–62). Her attachment to Horatio, as she herself says, furthers that goal even as it focuses her desire to avenge the loss of Andrea: “Yes, second love shall further my revenge. / I’ll love Horatio, my Andrea’s friend, / The more to spite the prince that wrought his end” (1.4.66–8). Bel-imperia is single-minded in this pursuit, so that when Horatio is murdered in front of her eyes it is she who urges on Hieronimo in a bloody letter:

For want of ink, receive this bloody writ.
Me hath my hapless brother hid from thee:
Revenge thyself on Balthazar and him,
For these were they that murdered thy son.
Hieronimo, revenge Horatio’s death,
And better fare than Bel-imperia doth. (3.2.26–31)
Don Andrea represents an almost unwitting embrace of revenge; his personified companion its fated, otherworldly quality; and Bel-imperia a willful devotion to the cause. These three characters, in their one-dimensional pursuits of vengeance, reinforce the complexity of Hieronimo’s quest to avenge his son, a quest that trammels up his desire to get back at the murderers as well as himself.

The quest reaches its apogee in Hieronimo’s sensationially violent playlet, which becomes the means of his ultimate revenge on the entire Spanish court. Employed by Balthazar as the master of revels for the prince’s upcoming nuptials, Hieronimo casts his mind back to his days as a student in Toledo: “When I was young I gave my mind / And plied myself to fruitless poetry” (4.1.71–2). He explains the plot of his tragedia cothurnata (“fitting kings”), drawn from “the chronicles of Spain” about the love of a Rhodesian knight, Erastus, for the Italian lady Perseda, that is foiled by the Turkish emperor Soliman and his bashaw, all of whom meet untimely deaths (4.1.108). Against the better judgment of Balthazar, he convinces the royals – Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-imperia – to join him in enacting the tragedy, with each of them speaking in different languages: Greek, Latin, Italian, and French. Johnson has connected this scene and its multiple languages to the biblical story of Babel, suggesting that Hieronimo’s orchestration of the play – which involves the actual deaths of the characters – marks him as a Calvinist, avenging God: “Like the Lord, Hieronimo has arranged to confound language and dull the perceptions of the villains to his … real purposes” (1962: 27). These purposes involve the same kinds of self-violation that he has been following all along, enacted here as he severs his tongue and finally kills himself. But in the playlet the self-punishment is finally paired with the violence against the others which he has sought for so long.

This violence is as verbal as it is physical. Of course, much of it is real: As the plot of the Soliman and Perseda story dictates, Hieronimo kills Lorenzo and Bel-imperia kills Balthazar – and then, unexpectedly, herself. Her suicide, like Isabella’s in the previous scene, can be seen as a form of revenge against a system that cannot accommodate female desire. Hieronimo apologizes for it; it was not his intent: “I … / Did otherwise determine of her end” (4.4.141–3). But the rest of the play he claims proudly, celebrating his power to orchestrate its ends in homage to his dead son. Displaying Horatio’s dead body, Hieronimo explains the originating crime that prompted his revenge:

They murdered me that made these fatal marks.
The cause was love, whence grew this mortal hate,
The hate, Lorenzo and young Balthazar,
The love, my son to Bel-imperia.
But night, the coverer of accursèd crimes,
With pitchy silence hushed these traitors’ harms
And lent them leave, for they had sorted leisure
To take advantage in my garden-plot
Upon my son, my dear Horatio. (4.4.97–106)
But he reaches his highest pitch when he turns to the fathers of both Lorenzo and Balthazar:

Speak, Portuguese, whose loss resembles mine:
If thou canst weep upon thy Balthazar,
’Tis like I wailed for my Horatio.
And you, my lord, whose reconciled son
Marched in a net, and thought himself unseen
And rated me for brainsick lunacy
...
How can you brook our play’s catastrophe? (4.4.114–21)

It is at this point that Hieronimo can claim that, having fulfilled his vow of vengeance, “my heart is satisfied” (4.4.129).

Hieronimo’s use of the term “satisfied” here has juridical underpinnings that go back to the use of the term in Roman law: Enough (“satis”) has been done to right the wrong done to him and his son (Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique 1939: 14.1135). But the term has a theological resonance as well: Hieronimo is satisfied because he himself has “made enough” – *satisfacere* – to expiate his own wrongdoing. Satisfaction, as the third stage in the sacrament of penance, was a highly contested term during the Reformation, as Protestants objected vociferously to the possibility that any human could ever “make enough” to atone for his or her own sin. But Hieronimo’s use of the term suggests that he is attached to the possibility that revenge, when taken on the self as well as on others, can indeed wipe out responsibility for the murderous taint of original sin, a responsibility signaled by his reference to the “garden-plot” as the site of Horatio’s undoing. And the final focus of such expiation involves other fathers. He devised the elaborate play-within-a-play to kill Lorenzo and Balthazar, but the true objects of his fury are those characters’ fathers, whom he forces to confront their own children’s mortality. His revenge is incomplete until he reinforces for them, and thus for himself, his central insight: that fathers are at the origin of the deaths of their sons.

The play itself does not treat Hieronimo’s work as complete: The final scene returns to the Andrea and Revenge frame, with the two characters celebrating and then finishing off the work they have witnessed and that Revenge claims to have arranged. Indeed, much criticism of the play has focused on the issue of agency in the play, on whom or what can be identified as the ultimate source of the revenge. Does Hieronimo operate of his own accord? Is he a conscious minister of God’s justice, or an unknowing agent of His providential design? Or has he merely been a figure of Proserpina’s larger designs? These questions are crucial to critics because they help to establish the moral status of Hieronimo’s revenge; they are further relevant to the play’s religious moment and its extraordinary attentiveness to issues of free will and predestination. The reading that I have offered here, however, has been less concerned with these questions of “who willed what” and rather with “what willed whom”: What types of
human responses to what types of doctrinal exigencies would produce *The Spanish Tragedy*'s particular obsession with revenge. My goal has been to suggest that the play, for all its topical connections to anti-Spanish feeling and all its associations with dogmatic statements against revenge, is uniquely motivated by a father's sense of original sin.

**Notes**

1. For the guilty burden of the avenger see Rozett (1984: 176).
2. For revenge drama as “a form of response to the basic questions of crime and punishment posed by these transformations in socio-legal thought and practice” in the sixteenth century, see Broude (1975: 39).
3. Christopher Semenza has recently paraphrased the point: “Christians differentiated private … and public revenge. This distinction allowed Christians to heed the general message of the New Testament … while upholding the Old Testament laws by shifting the burden of revenge onto the state or legal system” (2005: 53).
5. Thomas Anderson echoes this notion in his discussion of revenge tragedy as the dramatization of a “frustrated cultural desire in the period for the dead to remain part of the living community in a post-Reformation society experiencing a shift in the meaning of death” (2006: 126).
6. For the role of theology in shaping early modern thought, see Shuger (1990).
8. For a recent discussion of the play-within-the play and its polyglot delivery as a “revenge on language, on representation,” see Mazzio (1998).
9. For Luther’s seminal statement of this position, see *Babylonian Captivity of the Church, in Luther’s Works* (1959: 36.81–91).

**References**

“Conceived of young Horatio his son”

In 1594, Richard Beacon proposes curative measures for the humorous body politic of Ireland. In *Solon His Follie*, Beacon writes that

Reformation of a declined commonweale, is nothing els but an happy restitution unto his first perfection: this worde Reformation being thus described, may in like sorte be devided into two parts and members: the one may bee termed an absolute and a thorough reformation of the whole bodye of the common-weale, namely of the manners of the people: the other way may be termed a reformation of particular mischiefes and inconveniences onely, which like unto evill and superfluous humors dailie arise to the annoyance and disturbance of this politicke body. (Beacon 1594: A3r)

Beacon’s prescription for the commonwealth, however, changes radically one year after the publication of his treatise. On January 20, 1595, he wrote to Lord Puckering, the Keeper of the Great Seal, arguing that the government should

Leave … noe matter in the bodye of this common welthe for soe pestelent humors, or the Spanishe phesicion to work vppon: but with sword and famen remove the same: for so shall her majestie vphould the bodye of this her kingedome in safetye. (PRO SP 63/178/28, 28v; quoted in Beacon 1996: xxviii)

In his later diagnosis, Beacon asserts that Ireland must be entirely purged, so that corruption cannot spread by foreign agents. There were two prevailing treatments for Irish political disorder, as the anonymous author of “A treatise of Irlande” (c. 1588) describes, “One which vundertake[s] to procure it by Conqueste and by peoplinge of Contres with english inhabitantes,” another, “wherein is vndertaken to make reformacion by publique establishment of Iustice” (N.L.I, MS 669, fol. 55; quoted in Quinn 1947a: 303). The Old English of the Pale argued for the legal reform that would retain their control and secure their property (Quinn 1947: 303; see also, Quinn 1966). But as New English settlers competed for positions and land, a
discourse emerged that advocated conquest and colonization as English policy. Beacon’s *Solon* was an English tract that notably steered a course between these options—favoring legal solutions, and only resorting to martial enforcement. But *Solon* was written before the Nine Years War in Ireland (1594–1603) posed a significant threat to the English colonial project. By 1595, Beacon’s policy suggestions begin to sound remarkably similar to the extreme solutions proposed by Edmund Spenser in his *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596).

Beacon’s reversal suggests a context in which we can understand the revival of the two parts of Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* at the Rose Theater in 1594–5. In attempting to appraise the impact of *Tamburlaine I* and *II* upon contemporary audiences, critics have often looked eastward toward the threatening figure of the Turk; I want to evaluate the perspective that looking west of England provides. No dramatist can control the energies that his play releases—or the cultural economy in which it is produced. Spenser’s discursive account of the Scythian descent of the Irish in the *View of the Present State of Ireland* was, for the most part, received information. However much his interpretation of materials is partial and polemical, Spenser provides an overview of standard theories of Irish origins. These theories, harvested from sources such as Strabo’s *Geographica* and the *Topographica Hibernica* of Giraldus Cambrensis, are posited in the early modern histories of Richard Grafton (1569), Edmund Campion (1571), and Meredith Hamner (1571), and reproduced in Richard Stanyhurst’s “A plain and perfect description of Ireland” (culled from Campion) in Holinshed’s widely read *Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (1577). The representation of a “savage/Scythian” point of origin for the Irish is repeated and enlarged in later discourses by John Davies, John Derrick, Fynes Moryson, and Barnabe Riche “as an explanation of Irish recalcitrance as the English state sought to bend its new subjects to its will” (Hadfield 1993: 407). Both parts of *Tamburlaine* were published in octavo form in 1590, and performances were first recorded in Henslowe’s diary in 1594–5 (performances that we assume to be a repertory run). A discourse concerning Ireland that can be credibly qualified as racialist also becomes legible in England around this time. I want to discover how these racially marked representations of the Irish might have animated Marlowe’s warring Scythian shepherd when he reclaims the stage at the Rose.

**Ethnographic Discourse(s)**

Mary Floyd-Wilson has recently maintained that understanding “how Marlowe’s ethnographic theatre may have played a dynamic role in the construction of English identity … demands that we also understand England’s intimate though fraught affiliation with the Scythians” (Floyd-Wilson 2003: 89). She proceeds to study the possible operation of *Tamburlaine I* and *II* upon an English audience that had an “ethnographic interest” in the Scythian identification of the title character (2003: 91). The label designated him a northern European, and as such, an image of former
English barbarity (Shuger 1997). Floyd-Wilson goes on to question the historicist practice of critics such as Lisa Hopkins who have recognized associations between Tamburlaine’s ethnicity and the “Scythian” Irish (Hopkins 1996: 1–23; Sales 1991: 51–9), asserting instead that contemporary attitudes would have been unavoidably inflected by the recent publication of William Camden’s 1586 Britannia (Floyd-Wilson 2003: 216 n. 4). Given that Camden’s history went into six editions before it was translated into English in 1610, her claim is hard to deny. But we can widen or narrow the focus of historicism, and change the historical picture depending upon the application of the lens. Emerging both before and after the publication of Britannia – many concurrent with the repertory performances of Tamburlaine I and II – is a significant number of New English tracts, in both print and manuscript, which emphasize the difference between the “civilized” English and the Irish-Scythian “barbarians.” Surely this material would have provided added inflection to English attitudes, as would the occasion for its composition, recent rebellion in Ireland. Cultural association is never stable; it is therefore useful to explore the historical accidents that throw a particular interpretation into relief. In the lapse of time between the initial performances of the two parts of Tamburlaine and their revival, the figure of the Scythian underwent significant cultural revision. An incipient racialist discourse became operational in tracts that pressed for the immediate escalation of English military activities in Ireland. One can glimpse the production of this discourse as early as 1581 in John Derricke’s Image of Ireland, but the number of treatises that argue in these terms increases correspondingly with English–Irish tensions.

Ethnographic meanings that attached to “Scythian” as a figure of distinctly “northern” virtues of discipline and martial courage, however, were also alive and in play. Arguments appear in the histories of Campion, Hamner, and Stanyhurst – not to mention the earlier histories from which they draw – that justify the current English possession of Ireland either through prior conquest or some form of past tenancy (Hadfield 1993: 390–400). Camden, in particular, is unambiguous in his declaration that both islands were co-habited by ancient Britons:

it is evident, that the first inhabitantes [of Ireland] passed thither out of our Britaine: For (to say nothing of an infinit number of British words in the Irish tongue, together with the ancient names which favour of a British originall), The Natures of the people and their fashions, as Tacitus saith, differ not much from Britaine: for all ancient writers it is called A British Island: Diodorus Siculus termed Irin a part of Britaine: and Ptolomee named the same, BRITANNIA PARVA, that is, Little Britaine ... And ... Strabo calleth the Inhabitants in plaine worde, BRITANS. (“Ireland,” 1610: 64–5)

Debora Shuger asserts that the Britannia advances “a radically different model of English prehistory” from the prior legitimating legends of a Trojan descent (Shuger 1997: 496; quoted in Floyd-Wilson 2003: 50). Considering “religion, maners, and language,” Camden instead attributes the first habitation of Britain to the “ancient Gaules.” Camden’s narrative describes a “nation, very greedy of slaughter” – and very
evocative of the prevailing descriptions of the Irish ("Britaine," Camden 1610: 30). The ancient Britons "for the most part sow no corne, but live of milke and fleshe; and clad themselves in skins ... [they] all in generall depaint themselves with ... blew colour, and hereby they are more terrible to their enemies in fight" (1610: 29). They are itinerant, barbarous, superstitious, and communal in their living, sharing wives and fostering children (see Camden 1610: 29–30). Camden’s radical revision, which sets northern European peoples – Gauls, Scythians, Germans, and Britons – in close relation conflicts with New English tracts that stress a racial separation between Britons and Scythians.8

The revival of Tamburlaine I and II, then, potentially staged a collision of two ethnographic discourses operating concurrently. Although circulated a year after performances of the Tamburlaine plays were retired, Spenser’s View provides a useful index of the anxieties that such a confrontation might have provoked. Spenser is at pains to scrub the contemporary Irish of English heredity. While he admits that the “Gaules ancientlye possesse and people all the Southerne Costes of our Brytaine” and of Ireland, he maintains that of “the Brittanes themselues ... theare be little footinge now remayninge” (Spenser 1949: 94). The back-and-forth gesture in which Spenser argues that relics of language retain a kinship with “the verye Brittish the which was generallye vsed heare ... before the Comminge in of the Saxons” while the Irish themselves are in no way akin to ancient Britons, is itself revealing of the cost of association (93; see McCabe 2002: 150). It shows the anxiety that proximity produces. Spenser eschews the claim by Camden that “all nations in the North” were nominated “Scythian” by classical historians (“Britaine,” 1610: 122) and he refuses any suggestion that “The Natures of the [ancient Irish] people and their fashions ... differ not much from Britaine.” Instead, he presses Camden into the service of his own narrative of difference. Spenser emphasizes the history of “Diodorus Siculus, and also [of] Strabo” who, as Camden records, “compare[d] the first Britans inhabiting Ireland ... with the Scythians for their savage nature” (1610: 121).9 Spenser, however, elides the comparison altogether, and defines the Irish exclusively in terms of the Scythians that he claims “firste ... inhabited [Ireland],” in spite of later migrations of Spanish, Gauls, and Britons (Spenser 1949: 82; see Hadfield 1993: 401).

The assertion of a Scythian origin for the Irish is not unique to Spenser; rather, his history is surprising in the context of its very dependence upon Camden’s Britannia.10 Spenser employs the methodology of Herodotus when exhuming Irish origins, identifying race by the study of cultural practices (McCabe 2002: 148). He insists that the Irish practice of seasonal migration for the purpose of grazing their animals “appeareth plaine to be the manner of the Scithians”; their manner of dress, style of hair is a “Custome from the Scythians”; their arms “are verye Scythian”; their battle cries “Scithyanlike”; their funeral rites “vncivile and Scithianlike” – all which lead Spenser “by the same reasone [as Herodotus]” to “Conclude that the Irishe are descended from the Scythians for that they vse even to this daie some of the same ceremo- nies which the Scythians aunciently vsed” (Spenser 1949: 97, 99, 106, 103, 105, 107).

François Hartog has shown how pliant and metaphorical such a method can be when
deployed for an ideological purpose (Hartog 1988). In analyzing Herodotus’s representation of the Scythian, Hartog claims that one can “treat the proper noun Scythians as a simple signifier and track the range of this signifier within the space of the narrative”; then “we may read the text with the assumption that this or that Scythian practice may be interpreted in relation to its homologue in the Greek world” (1988: 8). In other words, through “systematic differentiation,” the alien is imagined in the context of the self “each [one] reflecting the other” (1988: 10–11). This construction can extend to Spenser’s text, where the Irish-Scythians are similarly encoded. But the definition of the self in terms of the other is inevitably destabilized by the resemblances that underlie an oppositional discourse (ibid.; see Greenblatt 1991: 124–8). In much the same way, the ethnic distinctions that Spenser labors to construct—and that ground his colonial aspirations—were challenged by the “degeneration” of the assimilated Old English families in Ireland (McCabe 2002).

In the environment of the fragile ethnic identity that Spenser’s strategy betrays, Marlowe’s “tragic glass” presents a revised picture (I Tam, Prologue).11 If Floyd-Wilson is correct that part of the excitement of English spectators witnessing Tamburlaine I and II would rest on the understanding that they themselves descend from northern barbarians, that awareness surely would have provoked an equally exhilarating anxiety in light of the Irish rebellion in 1594. For it is the English in Ireland that “for the most part … are degenerated and grown allmoste meare Irishe yea and more malitious to the Englishe then the verye Irishe themselves” (Spenser 1949: 96). This is to complicate notions of the barbarian within. Spenser resists any suggestion of similarity to the Irish precisely because it seems possible for the English to deviate from their origins and “grow” Irish. In the context of this convergence of insurrection and ethnic instability, the specter of Marlowe’s conquering Scythian could potentially carry real bogeys.

Certainly there was actual physical proximity and danger. Only a day’s journey away, Ireland presented the most looming threat as a staging area for the invasion of a Catholic confederacy. Beacon warns Puckering that the English must

remember … the wynde which landeth oure enemye euen inoure bosomes … We maye not be ignorant that both factions of the auncient Englishe and meare Irishe, will marche vnder the cullers of the Poope and Spaniarde: for bothe remayne discontented with the State. (PRO SP 63/178/28, 28r)

The fleeing Spanish Armada made landfall in Ireland in September 1588, quite possibly during the initial stagings of the Tamburlaine plays. It was with the later rebellion, however, that an invasion from Ireland congealed as a present threat (as Beacon’s turnabout makes clear). Certainly Tamburlaine’s “scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword” (I Tam, Prologue) – and his repeated identification of himself as “the scourge and wrath of God” (I Tam 3.3.4412) – would play upon such fears. Spenser cites an invasion of England in precisely these terms: “that [Allmighty god] reserueth [Ireland] in this vnquiet state still, for some secrete scourge, which shall by her
The Nomadic Sign

I am suggesting, however, that the ability of the Tamburlaine plays to disturb a contemporary English audience rested on far more insidious concerns. If the English understood the Scythian as part of their barbarous past, a primitive reflection of themselves, then the “degeneration” of the English in Ireland suggested that this barbarism was latent within them. This proximity was far more unsettling than geographical closeness, as is evidenced by the denial of any ethnic or cultural affiliation in contemporary tracts that treat the Irish-Scythians as racially inferior.

That Tamburlaine physically resembles the Irish is absolutely clear:

Pale of complexion, wrought in him with passion,
Thirsting with sovereignty, with love of arms.
His lofty brows in folds do figure death,
And in their smoothness amity and life.
About them hangs a knot of amber hair.

(I Tam 2.1.19–23)

Indeed, Marlowe chose these distinctly northern looks, for only one of his three primary sources for the story of Timur Khan, or “Tamberlaine,” designates a Scythian origin for the conqueror. Tamburlaine’s fiery hair denotes the heat that extreme of cold has trapped within his body – producing the caloric excess that accounts for his martial temperament. The frozen landscapes of his memory remind us that he campaigns far from his native place (I Tam 1.2.88–9, 98–100). He is “barbarous and bloody,” and “bloody and insatiate” (I Tam 2.6.41; 51), just as the Irish-Scythians are described as warlike and bloodthirsty (Spenser 1949: 103, 106, 108, 112; see also, Maley 1995: 60–1). Campion reports how the ancient Irish “(because it would seeme terrible and martaill) [would] embrewe theire faces in the bloodd of theire enemes slayne,” and Spenser claims a corollary in contemporary Irish practice (Campion 1963: 21; Spenser 1949: 112). Stanyhurst asserts (after Campion) that the Irish leave “the right armes of their infants vnchristened … to the intent it might giue a more vngracious & deadly blowe” (Holinshed 1577: “The description of Ireland,” D4v; cf. Campion 1963: 21). Even Tamburlaine’s perceived atheism and his martial challenge of the gods (II Tam 5.3.42–53) cohere with contemporary representations of the Irish: Their religious practices are so “blindelye and brutishly enformed” as to be labeled atheism (Spenser 1949: 136); and their religion is understood in terms of the source and spread of sedition in New English tracts. The anonymous author of “The Supplication of the Blood of the English” claims that the “malice of their Idolotrie … boyleth out at all tymes, in all corners, in all places” and that they “mayntaine
amonge them the seminaries of sedition; the contrivers of all treachery” (Maley 1995: 31, 43). Irish “Idolotrie” is therefore yoked to rebellion – against queen, country, and God. The Irish, Barnabe Riche declares, “are trayned uppe in treason in rebellion … in superstytton. in Idolatry. and nusseled from ther cradeles in the very puddell of popery” (Riche 1940: 83).

It is Tamburlaine’s ascent from shepherd’s status and his nomadism that particularly casts him in terms that a contemporary English audience could read as Irish-Scythian. As Hartog (1988) notes, nomadism marked the Scythian as the quintessential other in Herodotus, always outside of the civilizing processes of the city. The Irish practice of moving livestock is interpreted in much the same terms, where the custom itself is criminalized by Spenser because it sets the Irish outside of civic control (Spenser 1949: 97–8). The distinction between the characterizations of Herodotus and Spenser lies in Spenser’s focus upon the “mischiefs and villanies” practiced “againste the gouernement” (1949: 98). His contemporary Scythian, then, is a dissident, undermining the commonwealth from within: “Theire former course hath ever beene and their delight is still…to live without all subiection” (Maley 1995: 62). Marlowe’s Scythian also seems to draw a parallel between nomadism and rebellion when he models his aspirations, and those of his fellows, after Jupiter:

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Jove sometimes maskèd in a shepherd’s weed,
And by those steps that he hath scaled the heavens
May we become immortal like the gods.
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(I Tam 1.2.199–201)

The god’s disguise only coincidentally signals the former occupation of Tamburlaine and his followers, but (as Jupiter “scaled the heavens” by insurrection) the analogy frames their ambitions in terms of a revolt against authority (cf. I Tam 2.6.53–7). Tamburlaine similarly unmarks himself when he strips off his shepherd’s cloak in favor of “armour and … curtle-axe / … adjuncts more beseeming Tamburlaine” (I Tam 1.2.42–3). The compound image of the warrior disguised as a shepherd attaches the untethered life of the herdsman to a restless ambition that disdains restriction or control. Tamburlaine’s desire for earthly power is itself famously expressed in restive metaphors:

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Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world
And measuring every wand’ring planet’s course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
The perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.
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(I Tam 2.6.61–9)
The nature of Tamburlaine’s “aspiring mind” (60) – measuring, wandering climbing, moving, restless – equates his military conquest with nomadism. The structure of the first part of Tamburlaine itself highlights this sense of motion as each act stages a new conquest in the hero’s inexorable rise. “Tamburlaine almost ceaselessly traverses the stage,” Stephen Greenblatt writes, “and when he is not actually on the move, he is imagining campaigns or hearing reports of grueling marches” (1980: 194). In selecting the origins of Tamburlaine, Marlowe opts for an ethnic group characterized by mobility because it serves his image of an unstoppable force.

The Tamburlaine plays, as Roger Sales has observed, permit “Elizabethan anxieties about [Irish] rebellion to be articulated around the figure of the Scythian” (Sales 1991: 56). Indeed, the terms used to describe the Irish-Scythians in the New English tracts mirror those that depict Tamburlaine and his followers:

Loyaltie lyes as heavy on [the Irish] as a mountaine … They will never lye still, tyll they have roled themselves from under it. What hope is there of these … monsters, of [these] Englishe-blood thirsters. (Maley 1995: 61)\(^{18}\)

Surely Marlowe intended his Scythian to signal both martial prowess and relentless motion. But the staging of the Tamburlaine plays is coincident with a wealth of material that literally repositions the ethnic sign in the cultural imaginary – and relocates it in Ireland. In the context of the New English tracts, it becomes difficult to see how the Scythian Tamburlaine’s acquisitive power that converts “provinces, cities and towns” (I Tam 4.4.82) to his own name and likeness can be viewed in innocuous terms. Indeed, Tamburlaine’s designs to “extend his puissant arm” westward, even to the “British shore” (I Tam 3.3.247, 259) are not thwarted by any military intervention, but by his own death (II Tam 5.3.144–6).\(^{19}\) Even if the English did not expect to be overrun by the Irish (except as part of a Catholic confederacy), Ireland was nonetheless a country that they seemed unable to overwhelm. The provinces of England might have felt reasonably secure, but those in Ireland appeared to be outside of English authority and control: “In this time of their rebellious raigne, they have their full swinge, in feild, in towne, in Cuntry, in Cittie” (Maley 1995: 31).

Tamburlaine’s multitude of worldly conquests, however, are enacted on the compressed space of the theatrical stage. His, as several critics have pointed out, is a war of words. When Tamburlaine confronts Bajazeth, the climactic encounter of Part I, it is in the field of speech. Tamburlaine takes his terms from Bajazeth. Bajazeth is rankled by the audacity of the “Scythian slave” who “dar’st bluntly call [him] Bajazeth” (I Tam 3.3.68–71), and Tamburlaine counters that the “Turk” should not “bluntly call [him] Tamburlaine” (Bartels 1993: 64; Floyd-Wilson 2003: 101). When Bajazeth swears to emasculate Tamburlaine, Tamburlaine vows unspeakable humiliation; when Bajazeth promises to force Tamburlaine’s captains to draw “the chariot of my empress” (I Tam 3.3.79–80), Tamburlaine enacts his promise. During the battle itself, Zabina and Zenocrate are left alone onstage to “manage words” (I Tam 3.3.131) against each other. What becomes clear is that Tamburlaine’s conquest is not over land, but over
the real estate of the imagination. His occupation is achieved, as Emily Bartels has shown, by a mimetic strategy (Bartels 1993: 62–6). Theridamas is sent to Tamburlaine because his “words are swords / And with [his] looks [he] conqu’rest all [his] foes” (I Tam. 1.1.74–5). It is Tamburlaine, however, who turns the Persian from both king and country through the transforming power of his “working words” (I Tam, 2.3.25). Zenocrate, perceives nobility in his behavior, and Tamburlaine claims nobility, although “a shepherd by [his] parentage” (I Tam 1.2.35). He is the “scourge and wrath of God” only after he has been “termed” so by others (I Tam 3.3.44). Tamburlaine is, in fact, a refracted image: “what determines the shape of his ‘outward habit’ is, to a significant degree, his audience” (Bartels 1993: 62). The promiscuous terms of Tamburlaine’s image-making replicate the vagrancy of his figure in an English interpretive landscape. Precisely what is dangerous about Tamburlaine is his cultural nomadism – his ability to convey more than one ethnic signature at the same time.

Floyd-Wilson asserts that Marlowe’s Scythian hero might well have been invented to aggravate English anxieties about their own ethnic heritage (2003: 96). She argues that the Tamburlaine plays tap into opposed concerns about barbarous English origins and the excessive civilization that has softened their warlike nature. Stephen Gosson’s School of Abuse (1579), for example, cites the erosion of ancient “Scythian” virtues as the effect of the effeminate practices of poetry, playing, piping and dancing:

Consider … the olde discipline of Englande, mark what we were before, & what we are now … english men could suffer watching and labor, hunger & thirst, and beare of al stormes with hed and shoulders, they vsed slender weapons, went naked, and were good soldiours, they fed vpon rootes and barks of trees, they would stand vp to the chin many dayes in marishes without victualles: and they had a kind of sustenaunce in time of neede, of which if they had taken but the quantitie of a beane … they did neyther gape after meate, nor long for the cuppe, a great while after. (Gosson 1974: 90–1; quoted in Floyd-Wilson 2003: 97)

Most of this account is repeated in Camden who, while drawing from a range of different sources, lists these martial qualities on the same page:

But principally, [the ancient Britons] can endure hunger, cold, and any labour whatsoever. For, sticking fast in the bogs up to the head many dayes together, they will live without food; and within the woods they feed upon the barks and roots of trees … their very bare bodies they mark with sundry pictures … they are a most warlike nation … content to bee armed onely with a narrow shield and a speare. (“Britaine,” Camden 1610: 30)

The description of “the olde [English] discipline” that both Gosson and Camden report, sounds remarkably similar to how Tamburlaine intends to educate his sons:

List to me
That mean to teach you the rudiments of war.
I’ll have you learn to sleep upon the ground,
March in your armour through watery fens,
Sustain the scorching heat and freezing cold,
Hunger and thirst – right adjuncts of the war.

(II Tam 3.2.53–8)

These resemblances, Floyd-Wilson observes, are not accidental. Tamburlaine is invoked as the ideal example in programs that seek to address the effect of idleness upon the perceived ethnic strengths of the English. Thomas Elyot’s plot for the education of young gentlemen in The Boke Named the Gouernour (1531), Sir Humphrey Gilbert’s proposed reform of English education in “Queen Elizabethes Achardey” (1570), and Thomas Procter’s military curriculum in The Knowledge and Conduct of Warrres (1578) all outline plans “designed to provide England with young Tamburlaines” (Pearce 1954: 22).20 The exercise of arms is perceived in all of these educational programs as an antidote to idle and effeminate behaviors that undermine the martial virtues original to the English. In fashioning the “compleat virtue” (II Tam 1.3.51) of the English gentlemen, these texts follow the logic of Tamburlaine, and arm Englishmen with “horse, helm and curtle-axe” (II Tam 1.3.44) because these are the instruments that are natural to them.21 Like Tamburlaine too, these tracts each suggest a decline in sons whose humoral complexion argues “their want of courage” (II Tam 1.3.24).22

Mimesis

But Tamburlaine as an image of England’s ethnic origins is complicated by contemporary colonial discourse that is increasingly racialized. A simulacrum of England’s warrior past is a troubling presence in a cultural environment that wants to eradicate its ethnic memory. If the English recognized Marlowe’s hero as a representation of England’s ethnic roots, this would only serve to enforce an ethnic kinship with the Irish-Scythians. At the time when New English tracts are writing the Irish as a race apart, the Tamburlaine plays offer a challenge to these distinctions through a mimetic image. This reflection, however dimly perceived, could not have been a comfortable likeness at a time when the Irish-Scythians are being characterized as naturally “Maltious, hatefull, bloody: a fitter broode to fill hell, then to people a Country” (Maley 1995: 63).23 Tamburlaine, then, disturbs the cultural construction of a cohesive English national ethnic identity at the point of production. Marlowe’s “tragic glass” transmits a different image in the context of the renewed attempt to subdue Ireland: It reminds an English audience of the barbarism upon which their civilization is founded, and that the “degeneration” of the English in Ireland might well be a return to first principles.

The emergent racialism of sixteenth-century England drew from the prevailing medical discourse that understood the body as a humoral entity. Western European medical establishments that adopted and adapted classical medical philosophy believed
that the balance of humors (yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood) would change in the body, depending on diet, climate, and activity. This forms the basis of the “geohumoral theory” (to borrow Floyd-Wilson’s terminology) that grounds early modern English ethological discourse. As Procter claims in the preface to his military exposition, “The climate, or Region of the firmament, under which every Country is planted & setled, hath great force and influence, for the temperature & complexion of mens bodies.” The tempering, or mixing, of the humors determined bodily constitution, or complexion, and this inward proportion “worketh sundrie effectes & motyons in the myndes and disposityons of [men]” (1578: ¶ 3r). Procter’s consideration of climate’s effect upon humoral balances concludes in a recitation of ethnic difference, dividing men according to country and temperament, or “nature.” The racialist logic brought to bear upon the Irish question transferred the humoral qualities associated with geography onto a population inscribed as “Scythian.” A discourse on the humors – susceptible as they are to the influence of external forces – seems inconsistent with the essentialist logic of race; but as Jean Feerick observes, “such malleability is the defining hallmark of racialism at this early modern moment” (2002: 94).

It is the very permeability of the body that has caused Floyd-Wilson to declare that “early modern ethnology is not racialism” for it “neither delineates the boundaries of the body nor ensures the hereditary transmission of traits” (2003: 106–7). But the emergent racialist discourse in England inhabits the contradiction of inscribing essential difference upon bodies that are inherently, humorally, unstable – and, as Feerick points out, the incongruity in no way diminishes the political force of these accounts (2002: 95). Nor does it inhibit the positive assertion of difference between raced subjects. This paradox is visible in some proposals to remove the Irish from their country:

Neuerthelesse [would] I persuade in no wise anie more to mixe English with the Irish in replanting [Ireland] with English inhabitants, which must be a course necessary to be helde yet I would not the bloud of [the Irish] should be extinct, but all the race of them to be translated out of Ireland … The removing of the Irish maye happily alter their disposition when they Shall be planted in another Soyle. (Quinn 1942: 164)

The susceptibility of the temperament to climate renders such programs possible. But while the author of “A Discourse of Ireland” attributes physical difference to entire populations – asserting that “some Flemmings” might be “planted in [the] Roomes” of the Irish because they are “of more propinquity to our Nature” – he nonetheless assumes that the humorous Irish body will respond, and indeed reform, in a different habitat over successive generations (ibid.). What he eschews, however, and tellingly so, is how English bodies will resist the degenerating effects of the Irish climate.

The New English tracts are all the more anxious to police the borders that they inscribe because of the very vulnerability of the humoral body. The Old English in Ireland, after all, “were in the former tymes, as wee are now, meere Englishe in habite,
in name, in nature. They now retaine nothinge of that they were but the bare name” (Maley 1995: 33). The account provided in “The Supplication of the Blood of the English” of why the Old English settlers are as alien as the Irish natives smacks of racial contamination: The English themselves have Irish blood (through their Irish mothers), or they have exchanged bodily fluids with the Irish through the practice of wet-nursing (ibid.). Spenser offers a similar account of English “degeneration” (Spenser 1949: 119). Of course, this merely summons an available discourse on the humors. But as Michael Schoenfeldt has demonstrated, by “[l]ocating and explaining human passion amid a taxonomy of internal organs, and manipulating their fluid economies for the desired physiological, psychological, and ethical outcome, Galenic physiology issues in a discourse in which … the spirit is a bone” (1999: 10). Nature – in both the physical and spiritual senses of the word – was a unified subject, and however alterable the humorous nature of the Irish might be, the New English tracts try to assure the fixed quality of the Irish constitution: “thys savage maner of incevylyte amongst the Iryshe, it is bred in the bone” (Riche 1940: 83). If racial identities structured around blood collapse under the pressure of dislocation and colonial contact – precisely because blood as material substance becomes unstable in such contexts – these tracts try to express bodily integrity through the language of difference.

The logic that governs conquest and colonization turns upon divisions that New English tracts try to calcify. However, the “systematic differentiation” that these discourses construct is always in peril of breaking down. The assimilation of the Old English in Ireland threatens to expose these differences as a production of the relations between groups of peoples rather than as inherent constituents of them. Spenser’s careful partition of ethnic origins reveals the anxious construction – or reconstruction – of Irish and English ethnic identity in the New English tracts. His narrative of the habitation of the British Isles is careful to exclude any cross-cultural germination in British-Irish relations, and any suggestion that the contemporary Irish are closely akin to ancient Britons is starkly resisted throughout his View. Tamburlaine’s promiscuity as a cultural sign, then, makes him a particularly threatening presence in the field of meaning produced by the clash of Camden’s history and the emergent discourse of English colonization.

The cultural confusion that clusters around the figure of Tamburlaine at this moment is perhaps visible in his appearance at the margins of the Dutch church libel. A poem that threatens the general removal of aliens in England in the most violent terms, the libel was affixed to the Dutch churchyard, Broadstreet Ward in May 1593. Its composition did not happen in isolation: The Privy Council noted that “there have bin of late diver[s] lewd and malicious libells set up within the citie of London, among the which there is some set uppon the wal of the Dutch churchyard that doth exceed the rest in lewdness” (Freeman 1973: 45). Rumblings of Irish rebellion, rumors of Spanish invasion, increased prosecution of recusants, and growing unemployment left an environment ripe for anti-immigrant feeling (1973: 44). The libel is a warning to “strangers yt doe inhabite in this land” that they must “Flye, Flye, & never returne” or else English “swords are whet, to shedd their blood.” The marginal gloss reads “per
Tamburlaine” (1973: 50–1). On some level, this is merely a warning that invokes Tamburlaine’s deadly inexorability. But it is, on another level, a cultural record of unstable identity. In a fantasy of foreign expulsion, Marlowe’s Scythian barbarian becomes the evicting force of English nationalism – the alien simultaneously without and within (Hopkins 1996: 7).

The source of this disturbance of English ethnic identity is the radical revision of the figure of the Scythian. Marlowe’s stage animal was surely meant to roam the landscape of the English cultural imagination; Tamburlaine is an image-maker, able to create what his audience wants to see. But his embodiment on stage encounters a cultural moment when two ethnographic discourses, both equally available in his pliant figure, converge. As the English colonial project encounters persistent opposition in Ireland (until it breaks out into rebellion in 159425), Camden’s reconsideration of English origins presses against an emergent racialism that reconfigures the Irish. Tamburlaine steps into the breach between these discourses – an image of what the English have been, and of what, in Ireland, they were becoming again.

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NOTES

1 The English Pale was the part of Ireland under the direct control of the English crown. This had reduced by the sixteenth century to an area along the east coast stretching from Dalkey, south of Dublin, to the town of Dundalk, north of Drogheda. The inland border went to Kilcullen at the south, and extended north through Kells.

2 Sir William Herbert’s “Croftus sive de Hibernia Liber” (1588) similarly advances a position more consistent with the Old English. Old English tracts include: “Edward Walsh’s ‘Conjectures’ Concerning the State of Ireland (1552)”; “Rowland White’s ‘Discourse touching Ireland,’ (c. 1569)”; “Rowland White’s ‘The Dysorders of the Iriishery’ (1571)”; and Richard Stanyhurst, “Description of Ireland” (Holinshed 1577). See Beacon (1996: xxvi).

3 The Nine Years War began as a series of rebellions. While its inception is usually dated 1594, the conflict became a serious contest in 1595 when Hugh O’Neill, the second Earl of Tyrone, joined the rebellion.

4 While Beacon does not advocate, as Spenser does, the sword as the tool of Irish “reformation” in Satire, he was not above making use of “publike calamities, as famine, plague, pestilence, povertie” if calamity could advance the cause of English control (G4v).
While there are no recorded performances of *Tamburlaine I* and *II* prior to 1594, Robert Greene’s address “To the Gentlemen readers” in *Perimedes the Blacksmith* suggests performances of *Tamburlaine II* by 1588. There is no scene in the available sources that would cause Greene to describe Tamburlaine “daring God out of heaven” (A3r).

Britannia sive florentissimorum regnorum, Anglice, Sotiae, Hiberniae chorographica descriptio (STC 4503–4508).

7 New English tracts that advanced the project of conquest and colonization of Ireland include: Sir John Davies, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued* (1612); John Derrick, *The Image of Ireland with a Discoverie of Woodkarne* (1581); Thomas Lee, “A brief declaration of the government of Ireland (1594)”; Barnabe Riche, *Allarme to England* (1578), “Anatomy of Ireland” (c. 1591), *A Short Survey of Ireland* (1609), *A New Description of Ireland* (1610); and Spenser’s *View of the Present State of Ireland*. (While Riche’s 1578 *Allarme to England* obviously precedes Derrick’s work, it does not construct the Irish as a racially inferior group.) There are also a very high number of anonymous New English manuscript texts, too many to reproduce here, that struck a tone of racial and cultural intolerance, and that circulated between 1590 and the turn of the century (see Maley 1995: 4 n. 1, for an extensive list).

It should be noted that identifying the Scythians as “northern European” incorrectly situates them. As François Hartog observes: “even if Scythia is in Europe, the Scythians are not necessarily Europeans. In fact, in the version of origins that Herodotus was inclined to favor, it was said that the nomad Scythians lived in Asia and that they moved to Cimmeria under pressure from the Massagetae, and so to Europe” (1988: 32). Cf. Boemus (1555: M5v–N2r).

Strabo is one ancient historian who does draw a separation between the “Britons” and the early inhabitants of Ireland, asserting that the Irish “are more savage than the Britons” and claiming that they engage in cannibalism and incest (Jones and Sterrett 1917–32: vol. 2, 258–61). Strabo does link these practices to Scythian customs. However, as Andrew Hadfield points out, Spenser may well have received Strabo only in a mediated form through Camden (Hadfield 1993: 399–401).

Giraldus Cambrensis claims Scythian conquerors for Ireland in his *Topographica Hibernia*; Edmund Campion modeled his *Two bokes of the Histories of Ireland* upon Cambrensis, and he too makes the final settlers of Ireland (and Scotland) Scythian. Even Richard Grafton in his *Chronicle at large and more History of the affayres of Englane* makes reference to the same history when the “Pictes of Scithia” that settled Ireland settle in Scotland as well. See Grafton (1569: 62); and Campion (1963: 39).

All quotations are taken from the edition of Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (Marlowe 2003).

While this is the first time that he applies the title, Tamburlaine frequently refers to himself in this way.

Both George Whetstone’s *The English Myrror* and Pedro Mexía’s *The forste*, translated by Thomas Fortescue in 1571, claim that Tamburlaine is “descended from the Part[h]ians” (Whetstone 1586: 79; Mexía 1571: 83).

As Spenser writes: “the minde followeth muche the Temparature of the bodye” (1949: 119). For an extensive discussion of the humoral theory – or what she terms “geohumoral” theory – that governed early modern English ethnology, see Floyd-Wilson (2003, particularly chs. 1 and 2).

Floyd-Wilson points out the “blindingly white” images that organize Tamburlaine’s aesthetic imagination (2003: 91).

Cf. Robert Greene’s well-known attack against poet’s blasphemies on the stage “daring God out of heauen with that Atheist Tamburlan” (see n. 5, above). Greene was likely referring to Act 5, scene 3 in *II Tamburlaine*, where Tamburlaine offers to march against the gods; however, he could also have been referring to Tamburlaine’s blasphemy in burning the Koran because he asserts a single God if any god (II Tam 5.1.200–1).
Indeed, in "The Supplication of the Blood of the English," the author claims that among the Irish, the "inwarde armor none wantes," but that the Irish shepherds are already outfitted for battle and only lacking their "outwarde" show (Maley 1995: 64).

Cf. the description of Tamburlaine and his army by the Sultan of Egypt: "A monster of five hundred thousand heads, / Compact of rapine, piracy, and spoil, / The scum of men, the hate and scourge of god" (I Tamb 4.3.7–10).

This is noted by Hopkins (1996: 4).


See, for example, The Boke Named the Gouvernour, where Elyot recommends that an English gentleman must learn to employ "sondry waypons,“ the “sword and the bataile axe” in particular, and to “ryde surely and cleane, on a greate horse and a roughe” (1537: 62v [actually 63v]).


The author of "The Supplication of the Blood of the English," asserts that this “is a nature engraffed” in the Irish (63).

Elyot, for example, cautions that the selection of a nurse for noble children must be done with care, that she “shoulde be of no seruile condicion” but that “her complection” must be “of the ryghte and pure sanguine” (1537: 15v). Elyot is arguing that a diet of milk from a nurse of the wrong complexion, or humoral disposition, might result in the corruption of noble blood. The problems that Elyot identifies with regard to noble blood in England, Feerick (2006) argues, are exacerbated under the pressures of colonization. Nourishment (particularly infant’s milk) and climate unfamiliar to Englishmen force a change in the qualities of blood according to the early modern humoral/medical paradigm. Feerick charts work that explores the transformation of blood under the pressure of transplantation.

See n. 3.

**References**


Over the course of the Tudor period – from 1485 to 1603 – English travel writing changed a great deal, as the conditions of travel itself changed. Accounts of travel to the Americas register these changes in the most striking form. John Cabot’s American landfall of 1497 generated no surviving narrative, and few documents of any kind; voyages west from Bristol during the reign of Henry VII similarly left almost no written traces. By 1624 (to take the example of a single book), John Smith’s *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Iles* amounted to 248 pages, and it was issued 6 times between 1624 and 1632. Smith’s was of course only one of his numerous publications on North America, Smith only one of many writers publishing on Virginia, and Virginia only one of the many distant sites of English contact and presence which, by 1624, were generating an ever-growing literature.

As the incidence of travel to distant places (not only the Americas) rose, travel narratives were enlisted to practical ends; readers were more likely to become *users*, expecting written accounts not only (for instance) to document what had happened on a particular voyage, but also to provide replicable data about the hows and whys of a given itinerary. Surviving instructions to travelers indicate that the sponsors of commercial or exploratory voyages often expected particular questions to be answered or measurements to be made. At the same time, the increasing availability of travel writing in print meant that narratives were more likely to be compared both with other narratives and against experience. These conditions led to heightened expectations that travel writing would, or at least should, offer accurate observations of the physical and cultural environment encountered by the writer.
Yet not every narrative available even to the late Tudor reader appeared to meet these expectations of eye-witness testimony and referential veracity. Some reported things which did not exist: griffins, dragons, men without heads. Some reported things which did indeed exist, but not as or where they were reported: gold, a northwest passage, fertile and temperate land. Some reported personally witnessing things accurately represented in all but the reporter’s presence. Given the growing expectation that travel narratives would offer a first-hand account of what an author had actually seen, what happened when narratives appeared to disappoint such expectations, and how did such narratives come to be produced? What circumstances surrounded their continued production?

Editing Practices

“Tudor travel writing” encompasses a vast and heterogeneous body of material, and one thing that certainly changed between 1485 and 1603 was the degree to which this material was seen as fit to print. Richard Hakluyt’s magisterial second edition of _The Principal Navigations … of the English Nation_ (1598–1600) included an important number of documents which had never before been printed, some contemporary, some decades or even centuries old, and many (though not all) accounts of travel. One obvious point of departure for an argument about the changing place of the real in Tudor travel writing is Hakluyt’s treatment of the apocryphal “Book of Sir John Mandeville,” a highly popular late medieval narrative of partly fictional, partly plagiarized travels whose author has never been identified. Mandeville was named in the opening pages of Hakluyt’s first collection, _Divers Voyages_ (1582), among “late writers of Geographie” as well as among “trauaylers … which … for the most part haue written of their owne trauayles and voyages”; others on the second list included Columbus, Magellan, Cartier, Drake, and Frobisher. Hakluyt was not unusual in trusting the Mandeville text; a copy of “Sir John Mandevylle, englishe” was among supplies purchased for Sir Martin Frobisher’s 1576 voyage in search of a passage to Cathay by the northwest (Quinn 1979: 4.197); Trusting “Mandeville” as a guide to navigating the Arctic in a small wooden ship surely testifies to an even greater degree of trust than deciding to include his text in a print collection.

In 1589, Hakluyt included the Vulgate Latin text of “The Book of John Mandeville” in the first edition of _Principall Navigations_. His treatment of the text in 1589 was already anomalous in several ways. Hakluyt both overlooked existing English translations, and departed from his usual practice of providing Latin sources with accompanying translations into English. Even more unusually, he appended an “admonition to the reader” (also in Latin):

If in purging from the countless errors of copyists and printers the work of our countrymen John Mandeville … by the correlation of many, and those the best copies, I have achieved success, let them be the judges who are learned men … as for the accounts he
gives about men of monstrous shapes in chapters 30, 31, 33 and here and there in the following chapters of his travels, though I do not deny that certain of them were possibly observed by him somewhere, yet they are, for the most part, clearly drawn from Caius Plinius Secundus – as will soon appear to anyone who will compare them with the chapters of Pliny which I have appended for this purpose – and all of these Pliny himself refers to their various authors, loth to put his trust in the majority of them. (Taylor 1935: 2.396–97)

The chapters mentioned contained Mandeville’s description of men with dogs’ heads, giants with only one eye, men without heads, hermaphrodites, and other wonders. Hakluyt’s explicit reservations concerning the narrative bore on two different kinds of problems: first, the possibility of errors in the transmission of the text; second, its exact echo of a well-known classical source.

The first problem Hakluyt had largely resolved, or so he felt, through diligent editing (as in the case of his earlier edition of Peter Martyr’s De orbe novo … decades, “restored … to its original splendor” with correction of an “infinity of errors”; Taylor 1935: 2.365). Further improvement, moreover, was always possible: Hakluyt closed his admonition by inviting the community of (Latinate) readers to “use this text with me – or produce a better!” (Taylor 1935: 2.397). On the silent citation of Pliny, he comments simply that it does not validate Mandeville’s claims, since Pliny did not commit himself on the reliability of his information. The possibility that Mandeville also simply reported what he had observed remains explicitly in play. Hakluyt seemed to care most about Mandeville’s claims to have seen the monstrous races “with his own eyes”; the extravagant nature of the information in and of itself drew no explicit comment or censure. In short, his admonition characterizes neither problem as disabling.

Nonetheless, Mandeville was dropped from the second edition of Principal Navigations along with (among other materials) the narrative of David Ingram, a sailor shipwrecked in the Caribbean, transcribed from an interview in which Ingram described North American kings as wearing rubies of “4 inches long, and two Inches broad.” Thus, David Quinn suggests that in revising, Hakluyt systematically eliminated “material he no longer regarded as trustworthy” (Hakluyt 1965). The absence of Mandeville’s travels from the 1598–1600 collection, although not remarked upon by Hakluyt, suggests that the editor has responded to the “new pressure of veracity on the traveler” (Campbell 1988: 218). To this negative evidence of a text excised from the collection we might add positive evidence of the materials Hakluyt added, more or less in its place (that is, among medieval travels through Asia): Among these were first-hand accounts by the Franciscan friars Odoric de Pordenone and John de Piano Carpini now recognized as among Mandeville’s sources. (The Carpini account had its own list of marvelous races, reported by “clergymen of Russia” at the Mongol court).

A third and different example – of a potential source rejected by Hakluyt – is that of the French cosmographer royal André Thevet, who like Mandeville was listed by
Hakluyt in *Divers Voyages* among noteworthy geographers and travelers, but whose work was not included in either edition of *Principal Navigations*. An English edition of Thevet’s *Singularitez de la France Antarctique* had appeared in 1568 (as *The New Found Worlde*). Hakluyt came to know Thevet personally in the years intervening between *Divers Voyages* and *Principall Navigations* (1589), when he served as chaplain to the English ambassador in Paris; there, he also became acquainted with the cosmographer’s reputation for plagiarism, which Frank Lestringant notes had not yet crossed the English Channel (Lestringant 2004: 215). Here, the problem was not with the informational value of Thevet’s writing – often quite important, even from a modern perspective – but with his appropriation of others’ work and testimony as his own. Thevet had secured a manuscript account of the French colony in Florida by René de Laudonnière and had been publishing material from it as his own; Hakluyt borrowed the manuscript, and without Thevet’s consent published it in French and English under Laudonnière’s name (Lestringant 2004). Hakluyt’s collaborator, Martin Basanier, described their efforts in issuing a complete text, reappropriated for its original author, as drawing forth the work “as if from the grave” (Taylor 1935: 2.352; my translation). Hakluyt himself was perhaps taking a swipe at Thevet in the preface to volume 1 of the second edition of *Principal Navigations*, when he undertook to refer “every voyage to his Author, which both in person hath performed, and in writing hath left the same,” in order that “every man might answere for himselfe, justifie his reports, and stand accountable for his owne doings”; such collections of travel narratives were far more valuable than “weary volumes … of universall Cosmographie … most untruly and unprofitable ramassed [gathered] and hurled together” (Hakluyt 1903–5: 1.xxiii–iv).

Hakluyt did not name the sources he excluded or dropped, however, nor did he make explicit his reasons for doing so (although we may infer them). A more explicit indictment of bad geographical information was offered by another text in the second edition, an account of Iceland written by the Icelander Arngrímur Jónsson, reprinted and translated by Hakluyt from Jónsson’s *Brevis commentarius de Islandia* (Copenhagen, 1593). The “Briefe commendarie of the true State of Island” is prefaced with a letter from Bishop Guðbrandur Thorláksson, who had procured Jónsson to review and correct the continental literature on Iceland – a literature characterized as produced by men who “shamelesly filch out of other mens labours, deluding their readers w[ith] feined descriptions, & a new rehearsal of monsters” (Hakluyt 1903–5: 4.94–5). Jónsson’s commentary reminded his readers that while continental geographers like Sebastian Münster and Gemma Frisius had described Iceland in the imaginative vocabulary belonging to distant, barbarous others, as a land of supernatural wonders and repellent customs, it was in fact a literate and Protestant country populated by Scandinavian colonists. Frisius and Münster claimed, for instance, that in Iceland, the souls of the dead were tormented both in the ice offshore and in the local volcano, which also provided a gateway to the underworld. Jónsson assured his readers that Iceland’s topography was no more supernatural than that of Mexico. Citing a list of old world volcanoes described by authors like Pliny and Aristotle, he suggested that
geographers had not attached similar marvels to the mountains of Ephesus, of Tenerife, of Sicily, or indeed to Mt Vesuvius, because

men would yeeld no credite to those things as being too wel knowne … but they thought the burning of Hecla (the rumor whereof came more slowly to their eares) to be fitter for the establishing of this fond fable. But get ye packing, your fraud is found out … nature hath taught both us & others (maugre your opinion) to acknowledge her operations in these fireworkes, not the fury of hell. (Hakluyt 1903–5: 4.118–19)

Common sense and reformed theology combined to explode the claim (perhaps influenced by older beliefs about the North) that Mount Hecla was the gateway to Hell.

The “Briefe commentarie” was primarily an attack on false knowledge; although its patron, Bishop Thorláksson, had produced an important map of Iceland which served as the basis for the later map of Iceland by Ortelius, Jónsson himself was “not … an Historiographer, or Geographer, but onely a Disputer” (Hakluyt 1903–5: 4.98). Accordingly, topics like the geographical location of Iceland were introduced not in order actually to describe Iceland’s location through more accurate means, but rather to show the conflicting opinions of different cosmographers, and thus to destabilize their authority. If Münster, Mercator, and Frisius each locate Iceland at a different longitude and latitude, “the friendly reader … may thereby also easily judge what credit is to be given unto them in other matters” (4.98). Jónsson himself could say only that Iceland was not “severed from other countreys an infinite distance” (an opinion he attributes to Münster), since “it is but seven dayes sailing from Island to Hamburgh,” or four to Nidaros and Bergen in Norway (4.100), adding that he hoped someday to have a better answer.

Jónsson’s polemic against cosmographers like Münster invites comparison between Hakluyt’s anthology of 1598–1600 and Richard Eden’s anthology of 1553, titled A Treatise of the Newe India, with Other New Founde Landes and Ilanades, … After the Descripcion of Sebastian Munster (my emphasis). Eden’s Treatise translated Book V of Münster’s Cosmographiae universalis from a Latin edition of 1550, itself a translation of a 1544 edition in German. As this multiply translated reprint would indicate, Eden’s work as an editor of travel writing does not suggest that he shared Hakluyt’s express concern with seeking out complete and corrected original texts. Hakluyt’s Paris edition of Martyr’s De orbe novo (1587) made no mention of Eden’s partial translation of the same text in Decades of the Newe Worldes (1555), but noted that certain “eminent men” had “bitterly mourned” the parts of the text missing from earlier editions, Eden’s included (namely, Decades 4–8).

Nor, on the evidence of the Treatise and Decades, did Eden share Hakluyt’s preference for accounts by authors “which both in person [have] performed, and in writing … left the same.” In the two collections of 1553 and 1555, Eden printed only two first-hand accounts, both of English voyages to West Africa in 1553–4; he indicated that they were added to Decades as an afterthought, after the bulk of the manuscript preceding it had been delivered to the printers (Eden 1885: 373). The second of these
two narratives, in particular, evidenced a sharp contrast with Hakluyt’s editorial practices. Eden wrote that the narrator of the 1554 voyage account was an “experte pylon,” who “wrote a briefe declaration of the same, as he found and tryed all things, not by conjecture, but by the art of saylinge, and instrumentes perteyninge to the mariners facultie” (1885: 379). He wished neither to appropriate praise due to the writer, nor “to change or otherwise dispose the order of this voyage so well observed by art and experience,” and thus offered it in “sucche sorte and phrase of speache … commonly used amonge them, and as I receaved it of the said pylon” (1885: 379). These remarks are wholly misleading as an introduction to the complicated, composite text which follows.

The narrative begins in the rudimentary form of a dated log. Within a page or so, however, it veers from a workmanlike description of the seamarks by which to recognize Cape Three Points (Ghana), to the elephant’s head brought back from this voyage, which “dyvers have sene in the house of the woorthy marchant syr Andrewe Judde, where also I sawe it, and behelde it, not onely with my bodely eyes, but much more with the eyes of my mynde and spirite” (1885: 383). A general discussion of the elephant follows, ranging from West Africa to Libya, Ethiopia, and India, covering its antipathy to dragons among other features, and finally inviting those who wish to know more about the “properties and conditions of the elephant” to read Pliny, “in the viii. booke of his natural hystorie” (1885: 384). In other words, the narrative begins in practical observation and first-hand testimony about a part of the West African coast visited in 1554, moves to testimony about African artifacts from the voyage seen in England, and then to a general description of the continent of Africa based on (largely classical) written sources. The narrative concludes with a return from “the woonders and monstrous thynges that are engendred in Afrike” – the land of Prester John, people of beastly living, anthropophagi, men without heads – to first-hand testimony concerning “such things as our men partly sawe, and partly brought with them” (1885: 387). Within the text, Eden did not discriminate between his diverse kinds of evidence, neither valuing testimony above classical geography, nor – in practice – differentiating his own voice from that of the pilot described as its author. At the narratives’ close, he reiterated the late and accidental entry of these relations into the collection, in language which again blurred the distinction enunciated earlier between editor and traveler/writer: “I had not thought to have wrytten any thyng of these vyages but that the liberalitie of master Toy [the printer] encouraged me to attempt the same” (1885: 388; italics mine).

If, several decades later, Hakluyt seemed to adhere to different and more rigorous standards than Eden in preferring the testimony of first-hand observers and largely confining his own hand to the margins and framing of the text, these higher standards did not prevent him from including Eden’s two African narratives, without change or comment, in both editions of Principal Navigations. The example of Hakluyt’s permissiveness here is a small one, though it should be noted both that by 1598, Eden’s materials were already available in three print incarnations, and that Hakluyt had no shortage of materials on the West African trading coast. It is certainly possible
that a relative lack of interest in African trade and geography offers the best explanation for the persistence of Eden’s relation in unaltered form (Fuller 2006).

The second edition of *Principal Navigations* contains a more prominent counterexample, however, to David Quinn’s observation that Hakluyt eliminated untrustworthy material as he reworked his anthology, and that example is Hakluyt’s treatment of King Arthur. Hakluyt not only reprinted some entirely dubious materials on Arthur, taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth, but put them in a place of greater prominence in the second edition. As C. R. Beazley noted long ago, these materials had already been the subject of considerable skepticism from some readers:

> It is curious that Hak.[luyt] should have begun his great collection with Geoffrey’s and Lambarde’s collections, when we remember that he attempted rigorously to exclude from the final edition of the *Principal Navigations* anything that seemed … to be even in part untrustworthy and exaggerated. From the first Geoffrey’s fabrications had been denounced (as by William of Newbury), but Hak [luyt] swallows the whole. (Beazley 1903: 235 n. 3)

Perhaps Hakluyt’s standards for history differed from those he applied to geographical writing; in any case, the interest in reproducing a nationalist origin myth – one, moreover, being advanced by John Dee and others in support of English claims to the North Atlantic – appears to have supervened here over considerations of accuracy (Kendrick 1950; Sherman 1995).

Nor was Hakluyt’s excision of Mandeville quite definitive, in a broader chronological frame. In *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625), Samuel Purchas restored a part of Mandeville’s travels – reprinted from Hakluyt’s Latin text of 1589 – to their place among accounts of Asia, alongside two of Mandeville’s source texts (Odoric and Haiton, in particular). Purchas characterized the Mandeville narrative as a “treasure” subject to textual corruption beyond his power to restore; nonetheless, he offered excerpts both for the sake of “his merit, and for his nation,” and “that thou maist see, from what Fountayne I suppose this corruption flowed” (Purchas 1905: 11.363). In fact, Purchas mistook the relation of source to copy, and suggested that the “fables” of Mandeville’s account were due to Odoric’s intervention: “I smell a Friars (Lyars) hand in this businesse” (1905: 11.364). The problems of the Mandeville text, over all, were ascribed not to its (supposed) English author but to other, foreign and Popish hands, and in general to the culture of a “mistie age” before print and the vernacular Bible – (in other words, before the Reformation, and here we hear Purchas the Protestant polemicist) – when men accepted as true such “monstrous changeling-births of Historie” as “Arthurs, Orlandos, Bevises, Guyes, Robin Hoods, [and] Palm-erins” (1905: 11.364). Of course, at least one of these monsters had been represented by the Anglican minister Hakluyt as real.

At the end of the sixteenth century, men like Hakluyt and Purchas seem to have been optimistic about the contribution to knowledge made by eyewitness accounts of distant places, and about the possibility (at least theoretically) of recovering such
accounts even from corrupted texts. Recent thinking has been more hesitant on both points:

Hastily drawing a straight line between travel and narrative, that is, between eyewitness observer ... and recorder ... is precarious. Not only is the contact zone fraught with "enormous" problems of communication, but also the records of what occurred at contact are deeply conflicted. (MacLaren 2007: 91)

In the second half of this chapter, we will look more closely at two eyewitness accounts of the same region, one printed, and one that remained in manuscript until modern times.

Eye-witness Reports

Perhaps more than any other single Tudor travel narrative, Sir Walter Raleigh's *Discoverie of Guiana* has brought to the fore questions of credibility and truth production: In other words, the relation of travel writing to the real. Raleigh's text has been identified as a pivot point between medieval and early modern travel writing, negotiating between a discourse of wonder and a discourse of empiricism (Campbell 1988: 211–54). Printed first as a freestanding text in 1596, and then again as part of *Principal Navigations* in 1600, the *Discoverie* described Raleigh's personal travel up the lower Orinoco and its tributaries in search of what he believed to be the rich inland kingdom of El Dorado; it proposed that the Queen fund a return expedition with sufficient men and resources to subject this empire to the English crown. Raleigh's argument for the viability of such an undertaking rested on claims about the existence in Guiana of gold and of a golden empire, and about the understandings he had established with indigenous leaders living between the coast and the supposed inland kingdom. Among the incidentals of the narrative were also the supposed existence in Guiana of both Amazons and men without heads, neither of which Raleigh claimed directly to have seen himself but both reported to him by native interlocutors.

Raleigh's personal observations and experiences occasion the narrative. Yet its governing intention was not simply to be believed about what he saw, but to be believed about things which he did not quite see and yet believed to be present. Famously, he maintained that he could have uncovered substantial amounts of gold in Guiana, in the form both of mines and of grave goods, but refrained from doing so in order not to forestall subsequent larger projects to be undertaken by the Queen. One of Raleigh's strategies for persuading belief was appeal to his own authority as an eyewitness ("these Amazones have likewise great store of these plates of gold, which they recouer by exchange chiefly for a kinde of greene stones ... of these I saw diuers in Guiana"; Raleigh 2006: 65, my italics). Another strategy was to weave into the text every conceivable kind of corroborative evidence. Such evidence included written sources of various kinds: references to the texts of Mandeville, Pliny, and Thevet,
chiefly on natural phenomena, and citations from Spanish printed texts (Pedro de Cieza de León’s *Parte primera de la chronica del Peru* and Francisco López de Gómara’s *Historia general de las Indias*) describing the riches of the Incas, “of whome this Emperor [of Guiana] now liuing is descended” (Raleigh 2006: 43). Raleigh’s evidence also included a range of oral testimony: From the Spanish, (“the Empyre of Guiana … hath more abundance of Golde then any part of Peru … as I haue beene assured by such of the Spanyardes as have seen … the emperiall Citie of Guiana” [2006: 37]); from named and unnamed indigenous interlocutors (“I sought out al the aged men, & such as were greatest trauelers, and by the one & the other I came to vnderstand the situations” [2006: 73]); from other European merchants on the coast; and from Raleigh’s own men, as well as from other Englishmen who were in some sense competitors (Sir Robert Dudley, George Popham). An addendum abstracted evidence from Spanish letters taken at sea by Popham in 1594. (The text indicates that Raleigh’s book itself supplemented and was supplemented by actual samples of supposed ore.)

This dense interlacing of other material makes Raleigh more the orchestrator of the narrative than its main soloist. His letters indicate that his efforts at controlling the presentation of information about Guiana extended beyond composition of the narrative: He sought to restrict the circulation of narrative and cartographic material by the ship’s master William Downe as well as of unauthorized ore samples brought back by members of his expedition (Raleigh 2006: 286, 11–13). Yet as any reader of the *Discoverie* knows, Raleigh was not particularly successful in his project of persuasion. He was able neither to produce sufficiently convincing gold ore, nor to dispel skepticism about even the most basic claims: Namely, that he had been to Guiana at all. Letters to Sir Robert Cecil in the closing months of 1595 were filled with concern that his reports on Guiana not “pass for a history or a fable” (2006: 279). Raleigh had made fantastic claims, repeating as credible some of the extravagant rumors about El Dorado current in the Spanish Caribbean, but he also seems personally to have been subject to extreme skepticism: “I am assured, that whatsoever shall be done, or written by me, shall need a double protection and defense” (2006: 3–4). Indeed, the *Discoverie* was written in part because the stones he brought back from Guiana had not testified sufficiently, on their own, either to the gold-rich empire whose existence he wanted to claim or to his own personal travel.

As far as the existence of gold – his most readily verifiable claim – Raleigh had gone beyond what he knew or could prove. There was gold in Guiana, both in the ground and circulating in worked form; Raleigh noted in a draft of the *Discoverie* that he had sent home “some halfe a dozen” examples of gold artifacts from Guiana (Raleigh 2006: 178). It seems unlikely, however, that Raleigh had truly seen actual or potential mines himself, and certainly he was unable to locate them later even under penalty of death (Lorimer 2007). And while there were indigenous elites who traded in gold, there was not an empire of the kind he claimed, a “better Indies for her majestie” comparable in wealth and political power to those of the Incas in Peru or the Aztecs in Mexico (Whitehead 1997: 75–91; Raleigh 2006: 9).
Despite both official and popular skepticism the *Discoverie* attracted some believers, willing to take the book as concrete evidence upon which to plan voyages to the regions it described; one such follower in Raleigh’s wake will be discussed below. And if the *Discoverie* did not succeed in persuading its intended audience, it was still enormously successful simply as a publication, issued three times in 1596 alone as well as quickly appearing in German and Latin translations; a Dutch translation would follow in 1617. Raleigh’s audience displayed a range of commitments with respect to his claims: The Queen was not willing to stake money and men, some were willing to fund private ventures on the chance that some of the reports were true, and many were willing to purchase the book, without any necessary commitment to the truth of its representations.

In modern times, Raleigh’s claims – of a fabulous golden empire, of a virgin land populated by Amazons and Achephali, and fluent, well-disposed indigenous allies who provided key evidence of both – have been skeptically read as a mapping of colonial fantasy onto the American landscape. The appearance in 1997 of an important edition of the *Discoverie* by the anthropologist Neil Whitehead has begun a reassessment of how Raleigh’s text and others like it might indeed give access to a particular “real,” not of gold or golden empires but of indigenous history and culture. Raleigh’s text was not purely self-referential, Whitehead argues, but had “very firm connections with the particular circumstances of the Orinoco at the end of the sixteenth century” (Whitehead 1997: 3); these included not only relatively stable cultural practices, but also the demographic movements, transformations in political structure, and shifts in trading practices which responded to Spanish presence in the region. Raleigh’s very substantial reliance on indigenous informants, in the presence of a competent interpreter – “my Indian interpreter, which I carried out of England,” who “spake many languages, & that of Guiana naturally” – seems to have registered meanings traceable elsewhere in other forms of evidence (Raleigh 2006: 31, 73). Thus, even through apparently fabulous descriptions of Amazons and men without heads, attentive and well-informed reading may distinguish the voices and meanings of the lower Orinoco in the late sixteenth century, however imperfectly understood by their original auditor (Whitehead 1997: 91–101).

Assessment of how credibly Raleigh’s text represented the real must attend to additional evidence about the actual terrain his narrative describes. Another recent edition of the *Discoverie* has brought into focus other forms of mediation between the writer’s experience and the text readers eventually saw. Joyce Lorimer’s edition of *Discoverie* (2006) prints Raleigh’s manuscript draft facing the corresponding pages of the 1596 text; this draft was annotated and corrected by another hand, probably that of Sir Robert Cecil. Some, but not all of the annotator’s revisions appear in the final text; other changes imply a further round of revision, possibly by a third person (Lorimer 2006: xl). The net effect of the revisions urged by Cecil may have been to move the narrative from claims about a golden empire and towards the provision of facts about mines, or away from an adventure story and towards a practical proposal which might attract the attention of investors (xlvii–l). These revisions to the 1596
Discoverie of Guiana make evident that the observing “I” of Raleigh’s text was already a complex construct.

Print publication of the Discoverie was thus preceded by negotiations with those who had a stake, financial or otherwise, in the larger enterprise of which publication was part – not surprisingly, since Raleigh’s text involved communal, even potentially national interests and commitments. The same was true of many English travel narratives in the period (for instance, accounts of the circumnavigations by Sir Francis Drake and Sir Thomas Cavendish). Yet it was not uniformly true. John Ley’s manuscript account of his three voyages to Guiana in the second half of the 1590s provides one example of a comparable account – of travel to the same region, around the same time, and with similar intentions – with very different circumstances of production and reception.

Ley’s was a fairly typical Elizabethan biography. He had been to Baffin Island with Frobisher in the 1570s, served in the Low Countries and in Ireland, and commanded a ship in the Earl of Cumberland’s squadron off the Azores. He appears to have been one of several adventurers following Raleigh to Guiana in the late 1590s for private profit, voyages which generated no printed narratives or official reports (Lorimer 2006: xcii). His narrative was copied into a manuscript family history from the first decade of the seventeenth century, assembled by his brother James. It opens with a letter addressed to his brothers, and dated December 21, 1601, while Ley was outbound on the third voyage to Guiana. The first section, beginning with the letter, consists of an account of the outbound voyage in 1601; an account of the first voyage in 1597; a list of fauna; an account of the second voyage in 1598; lists of rivers and the nations living on them, an inventory of the “strange shapes and matters of man” in Guiana, “The Indians observacion of the Starrs,” and the “manners and Customes of the people”; and a concluding letter, again addressed to Ley’s brothers, again dated December 21, 1601. The second part consists of two additional sections, headed “certain observations concerning the habitation of the several nations” and “a description of the several rivers and people inhabiting upon them” (Raleigh 2006: 308–31).

Both parts of the material are written in the same secretary hand, presumably that of James Ley’s amanuensis (Lorimer 1994: 193). Information in the last two documents reappears in abbreviated form within the material framed by John Ley’s letters, and it is possible that they reproduce his own working notes (Lorimer 1994: 203). Ley had not yet completed his narrative of the 1601 voyage at the time of his death several years later.

John Ley wrote in the introductory letter that his narrative was addressed to his brothers because “my brother James hath so often importuned me to give some remembrance of my former travels” (Raleigh 2006: 313). His account was thus produced for an intimate, private readership. This is not to say that it was necessarily a more immediate representation of Ley’s experience. Ley described the narrative as a partial and brief abstract, “imperfect for haste,” and reconstructed to some degree from unaided memory since his papers were “blurred and torn” (2006: 313, 326). Nor had time permitted him to review and correct the narrative after he had it copied by
his servant. (We can thus infer that at least two different hands intervened between Ley’s own words and the text recorded in James Ley’s family history, those of his own servant and of the manuscript’s eventual inscriber; for scribal errors, see Raleigh 2006: 318, nn. 3, 9.) These constraints make for a different kind of mediation than was the case for Raleigh’s text.

Lorimer has pointed out one of the most intriguing features of Ley’s materials: the presence in the section addressed to his brothers, of information about Guiana’s marvelous races (“the women called the Amazones … Esparicur: A kinde of people without heads … Turrowpy: A people with greate eies” [Raleigh 2006: 322–3]), in contrast to the more detailed, sober, and practical account of Guiana’s political and cultural geography contained in the documents that follow his closing letter (“the next River is Apurwack Enhabited by the Parawgos who Captaine is Maniarowma, they speake the language of the Iyayos” [2006: 330]). Like Raleigh, Ley cited native testimony as evidence for the probable existence of Amazons in Guiana. He echoed Raleigh’s information on the difference of American Amazons from those reported in Asia. Even while his declarative grammar of description invites the reader, at times, into an illusion of firsthand witness, his accounts of marvels are each, at some point, carefully sourced in indigenous oral testimony. The Amazons, for instance, are “of a meane and little Stature, with black and longe heare hangeinge downe behinde from their heads, for belowe their wastes, The Indians speake much of … those women” but “farther I leave to speak of them, until I shall have better experience of the truth” (323). Like Raleigh, Ley also included strongly affirmative testimony from native sources regarding men without heads, with a great deal of circumstantial detail; Ley writes that “my Indian [interpreter] affirmeth still that when he was a boie, They … brought one of them from the Highe Countrie: And he dwelt with him in one howse, almost fower yeres” (2006: 323). The confidence Ley’s readers felt in the existence of Acephali or Amazons in Guiana would surely depend on their own criteria for belief – but those who wanted to believe clearly could.

In both of the case studies which make up this chapter, the races “written of by Maundeville” figure as a kind of litmus test for the commitment of a narrator or an editor to the accurate recording of information about distant lands. In Guiana as in Asia, matters are complicated by the strong possibility that travelers might indeed hear of such strange peoples from local sources, possessing their own imaginative vocabularies for describing “the other” (Whitehead 1997: 91–101; Wittkower 1942). Including this information, however, represents a particular narrative choice. Travelers to Guiana had reason to hope (and report) that there was gold there, and Raleigh may have had excellent personal reasons for highlighting reports of Amazons in America (Montrose 1993: 201–5). Yet concerning reports of men without heads, Raleigh was probably correct in noting that “whether it be true or no the matter is not great, neither can there be any profit in the imagination” (Raleigh 2006: 157). Why were such profitless details included in the text?

Characterizing the “other” as barbarous or monstrous might offer a kind of broader cultural profit, the sense of one’s own culture as normative, superior (Lorimer 1994).
The mechanics of such characterizations are visible not only in accounts of the Americas, but also (as we have seen) in accounts of Iceland; examples could be multiplied from the pages of *Principal Navigations* alone. Nor would the complex problem of cultural description be tamed with the advent of more “scientific” instructions for travel writers in the later seventeenth century. On the contrary, some would say: The rise of print amplified the profit to be made from readers’ pleasure in sensational information, as the rise of empire gave practical point to pejorative descriptions of cultural difference (MacLaren 2007 provides an illuminating case study).

The privacy of the Ley family manuscript makes such explanations less than wholly satisfactory for his case, however. Ley’s narrative never entered the marketplace of print, where continental printers like Levinus Hulsius would illustrate (and implicitly represent as fact) the marvels Raleigh carefully specified that he had not himself seen. Ley had none of the particular motives Raleigh did – to attract interest and thus investment in a colonial enterprise, to regain standing with the Queen, or to bolster his credibility in the face of skeptics. Indeed, Lorimer characterizes Ley as a “reluctant” writer. Yet once having gone to the trouble of writing, he still hoped, presumably, to please or at least satisfy his brothers. (He was, himself, “verie Inquisitive of the Indians” for information about a race “with longe and Large eares hangeing uppon their showlders” [Raleigh 2006: 322]).

Judgments about the kind of information a reader might find engaging (that is, useful for the purpose of reading) led to omission and elision as well as expansion and emphasis. Ley told his brothers about the Amazons, the Acephali, people with ears hanging down to their shoulders or with two faces and eight limbs; he seems not to have cared about telling them that the Kourou River was inhabited by Caribs whose chief was a short fellow named Marracayay (2006: 330), reducing the corresponding information in the first section of his materials to a bare list of rivers and peoples. In the same vein, perhaps, Raleigh simply noted that the Orinoco had many tributaries “which I forbeare to name for tediousness” (2006: 71). The category of what is identified by travel writers as “tedious” (and hence to be omitted) might merit study all on its own.

This play of emphasis and suppression inescapably characterizes experiential narrative, in a process of selection which continued to operate (if by other hands) as narratives were prepared for print, and given into the hands of generations of readers. We can say with some confidence that, unlike “John Mandeville,” John Ley was a real person, who went to a real place and reported what he was told by real people there. Yet his narrative reminds us that even travelers with real and detailed experience of a particular place, and nothing material to gain, might respond to the desires of their audience, real or imagined, in writing down what they had seen.
References


Further Reading


To the polypragmaticall, parasitupocriticall, and pantophainoudendeonticall Puppie Thomas Nashe … that he want not the want of health, wealth, and libertie.

_The Trimming of Thomas Nashe_ (1597)

Thomas Nashe's prose narrative _The Unfortunate Traveler_ (1594) sits uneasily within the golden world of Elizabethan literary culture. Written by a writer of notoriously varied style, whose pen produced both one of Elizabethan literature’s most poignant anthology lyrics (“Adieu, farewell, earth’s bliss / … Brightness falls from the air”) and a spirited pornographic poem (“Nashe’s Dildo, or The Choice of Valentines”), _The Unfortunate Traveler_ combines chronicle history, jest book, humanist satire, Petrarchan lyric cycle, travelogue, religious polemic, Italianate novella, and classical romance. Nashe mixes his genres with abandon. He celebrates and mocks an assortment of elite literary modes in late Tudor culture, from Sidney’s lyricism to Spenser’s epic to Marlowe’s bombast, while simultaneously developing a new urban literary voice: ironic, caustic, and self-conscious. Perfectly adapted to the new medium of print, Nashe remained ambivalent about his relationship to established literary culture, leading him to write _The Unfortunate Traveler_ as an antagonistic summary and critique of literary London in the 1590s. Nashe’s rollicking street-level revision of Elizabethan literature provides a much-needed supplement to our familiar notions of late sixteenth-century England as a Golden Age.

Nashe has been variously characterized as a journalist _avant la lettre_, a proto-modernist (or post-modernist), or a scribbling hack steps away from jail or the poor house (see Nicholl 1984; Hutson 1989; Hilliard 1986; Kinney 1986; and Mentz 2006). For a long time, his claim to fame was as an Elizabethan oddity, a man of the street whose writing captures the strangeness of late sixteenth-century London. The most famous pronouncement about him remains C. S. Lewis’s somewhat bizarre
formulation, “In a certain sense of the word, ‘say,’ if asked what Nashe, ‘says,’ we
should have to reply, ‘nothing’” (Lewis 1954: 416). Recent critics have corrected
Lewis by showing that Nashe says quite a lot about Elizabethan literary, religious,
academic, and print cultures. But the sense of what another critic calls the “singularity” (Hilliard 1986) of Thomas Nashe has not quite (to adapt Nashe’s poetic phrase) fallen from the air.

This chapter suggests that Nashe and his most well-known work are not mysteri-
ous. *The Unfortunate Traveler*, published mid-way through Nashe’s prolific decade
(1589–99), provides a summa of literary culture in late Elizabethan London. Explor-
ing various literary modes and creating in his narrator Jack Wilton a new kind of
hero, Nashe celebrates and represents urban print culture’s challenge to mainstream
Elizabethan literature. Despite its geographic variety, which takes its hero from Henry
VIII’s camp in France across Europe before returning to France, *The Unfortunate Trave-
ler*’s great subject is London’s print culture. During the 1590s, a decade of uncertain
succession, plague, and literary proliferation, Nashe’s work (along with that of fellow pamphleteers like Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Dekker) demonstrates
the accommodation of literary culture to the changing conditions of production and
consumption of urban print. Jack Wilton’s adventures parallel the experiences of
English readers in late sixteenth-century London: amused by jest books, frightened
yet titillated by Italianate villains, allured yet comforted by courtesans, and eager to
return to a recognizable (and English) narrative in the end.

This chapter unpacks *The Unfortunate Traveler*’s narrative cornucopia in a somewhat
schematic fashion; I examine seven major narrative models (print paratext, jest book,
tragedy, lyric, satire, novella, and romance) and explore how Nashe uses (and parodies)
each to describe the literary culture of his London. This structured approach, while I
hope it will be valuable, should not overshadow the disorienting experience that is
reading Nashe for the first (or twentieth) time. Lewis’s maxim seems flatly wrong,
but it captures Nashe’s radicalism, his fascination with verbal surfaces, coining of new
words, and deforming of old coinages. Nashe’s writing luxuriates in relentless inven-
tion. Critics have often compared him with Shakespeare, and while that is the sort of
comparison that seldom works out well for minor Elizabethans, Nashe’s prose antici-
pates (and arguably influences) Shakespeare’s radical stylistic play. Walter Raleigh’s
nineteenth-century observation still holds true: Nashe and Shakespeare share “[t]he
same irrepresible, inexhaustible wit, the same overpowering and often careless wealth
of vocabulary, the same delight in humorous aberrations of logic” (quoted in Nashe
1972: 38). Nashe lacks Shakespeare’s range, especially of tenderness and pathos, but
he nonetheless should be appreciated as perhaps the greatest prose stylist of Eliza-
bethan print culture. (Sidney, Nashe’s mirror opposite, was manuscript culture’s
greatest prose stylist, and his works came into print, perhaps with Nashe’s help, only
after his death.) *The Unfortunate Traveler* begins by pronouncing its narrator the “King
of Pages” and insisting that readers do him homage. Leaping into the king’s seat
becomes a narrative habit in the pages that follow, as Nashe creates an unlikely ruler
for his version of Tudor literary history.
Like many Elizabethan printed books, *The Unfortunate Traveler* contains multiple prefatory paratexts: a letter of dedication (in this case to the Earl of Southampton) and a letter to the book’s readers. Paratextual letters like these provided a forum for print authors to frame how they wanted readers to react to their works (see Mentz 2006: 33–45). By 1594, when *The Unfortunate Traveler* appeared, standard formulae existed: The work’s patron sheltered the text with his or her virtuous name, and sympathetic “gentle readers” were also asked for their support. Nashe’s first foray into print, a prefatory letter written for his friend Robert Greene’s romance *Menaphon* (1589), had (to some extent) followed this model. But the letters prefixed to *The Unfortunate Traveler* break the mold. Nashe mocks Southampton while appealing for protection. “Ingenuous honourable lord,” the letter begins, “I know not what blind custom methodical antiquity hath thrust upon us, to dedicate such books as we publish to one great man or other” (Nashe 1972: 251; further citations in the text by page number only). The contrast between the author who publishes books and the “great man” whose name is put forward by “methodical antiquity” seems clear: Patronage matters less than authorial power. Nashe later employs protective language – “Your Lordship is the large-spreading branch of renown, from whence these idle leaves seek to derive their whole nourishing” (252) – but the humility rings false. This print author celebrates himself and his book.

The second letter, “The Introduction to the Dapper Monsieur Pages of the Court,” makes the egotism explicit. Nashe introduces his hero and narrator, “A proper fellow page of your, called Jack Wilton” (252). Consistently expanding the pun on pages in the court and pages of a book, Nashe introduces Jack as “King of Pages” (253) and the center of an alternate court. The letter claims that Jack and his pages will assault anyone who does not recognize his worth. The scene is literary London, the players are the writers and stationers with whom Nashe lived, and their actions present the triumph of print culture. Nashe insists that the readers defend Jack’s honor: “Every one of you after the perusing of this pamphlet is to provide him a case of poniards, that if you come in company with any man which shall dispraise it or speak against it, you may straight cry, ‘Sic respondeo’, and give him the stockado” (253). The dueling terms locate Jack and his readers in a slightly higher social class than some may have occupied, and the violence highlights Nashe’s aggression (see Suzuki 1984). The passage emphasizes the deference the page-readers owe the page-hero: “Every stationer’s stall they pass by, whether by day or night, they shall put off their hats to and make a low leg in regard their grand printed Capitano is there entombed” (253). Two things stand out: first, Nashe’s insistence that his book command respect, and second (at least as important) that it be in every bookstall in town.

These prefatory letters establish Nashe’s aims for *The Unfortunate Traveler*: He wants to make his name in literary London. Nashe introduces Jack Wilton as a competitive gamester issuing a general challenge: “Gallant squires, have amongst you! At
mumchance I mean not ... but at novus, nova, novum, which is in English, 'news of the maker'" (252). The "news of the maker" game evokes a famous etymology of the word poet (from poein, or maker) and also the "news" of the city streets (see Ferguson 1981). The main narrative quickly moves from stationers' shops in Elizabethan London to Henry VIII's camp in France, but the cityscape lingers. The book Nashe calls "some little summer fruit" (252) in the first letter and Jack Wilton's "own tale" (254) in the second allows this ambitious, restless writer to describe his urban literary world.

King of Cans and Black-Jacks: Jest Books

The opening episodes of the narrative find Jack, "a certain kind of appendix or page, belonging to or appertaining in or unto the confines of the English court" (254), seeking to rival his king. The comparison is almost explicit: Henry VIII is the "terror of the world" and "the only true subject of chronicles" (254), but Jack has titles too:

There did I (soft, let me drink before I go any further) reign sole King of the Cans and Black-Jacks, Prince of the Pigmies, County Palatine of Clean Straw and Provant, and, to conclude, Lord High Regent of Rashers of the Coals and Red-herring Cobs. (254)

Jack's titles take up more space than Henry's, and their sheer inventiveness shifts the reader's attention from king to page. The list displays several of Nashe's stylistic mainstays: An expanding and increasingly outrageous catalog, a yoking-together of things high (kings, princes) and low (cans, straw), and an emphatic writerly self-consciousness (he drinks before performing). The narrative's next words mark another high-low shift; Jack quotes Virgil – "Paulo maiora canamus" ("let us sing of slightly more important things") – to display erudition and ambition. Jack is simultaneously King of Cans and faux-Virgilian author. Continuing, he contrasts the service the army owes the king to the "liquid allegiance" it freely gives him: "The Prince could but command men to spend their blood in his service; I could make them spend all the money they had for my pleasure" (255). Money over blood, pleasure over service, the page over the king: Nashe's urban underworld trumps the court.

Jack's expectations of triumph go unfulfilled; he rivals Henry but cannot displace him. Jack's rule instead creates a brief holiday. By tricking a cider seller he produces drink in excess – "a deal of cider, cider in bowls, in scuppets, in helmets" (261) – but when Henry exposes the theft, he is "pitifully whipped for my holiday lie" (261). (On Jack as trickster, see Linton 2007.) Subsequent adventures that include dressing as a "half-crown wench" to inveigle money from a "Switzer Captain" (270) also end with punishment. These adventures employ the jest-book tradition, updated in Elizabethan period by popular figures like the clown Will Kemp, but Nashe's literary ambition chafes within its episodic, unstructured form. Rather than creating a performance,
like Kemp’s famous Morris dance from London to Norwich in 1600, Jack wants to expose hypocrisy, from the Switzer Captain’s lechery to his own drunkenness. Nashe’s text even celebrates Jack’s whipping; the joke may be worth the cost, but the cost must be borne. Jack hopes to be “ordained God’s scourge from above” (271); that is, he wants his abrasive wit and aggressive habits to serve a larger social or religious purpose. (Nashe probably ghost-wrote at least one semi-official pamphlet against the unorthodox religious polemicist Martin Marprelate in 1590, and he often invokes some larger social purpose for his writing.) Adventures that began as jests quickly cease to be all in fun. Nashe, like his hero, wants to attack the mighty but also to purify his literary and social milieu.

Terror of the World: Tragedy

One formal temptation for this urban writer with a keen eye for hypocrisy was tragedy, a genre in which human vices get justly paid. At times Nashe gestures toward the satiric and moralizing tragedy that would become popular among Jacobean playwrights like Middleton, but his satiric habits always slide into comedy. Disturbingly, Nashe turns every tragic event into a joke. The signature example of his habit of undercutting his own tragic pathos comes when Jack returns to London for what he calls “the waning of my youthful days” (273) and witnesses an outbreak of the sweating sickness. Plagues were regular occurrences in late Elizabethan London, and Nashe probably died during one in 1601. But Nashe’s description of the sweating sickness finds comedy even in disease:

I have seen an old woman at that season, having three chins, wipe them all away one after another, as they melted to water, and left herself nothing but an upper chap. (274)

The comic touches perplex Nashe’s critics, who cannot decide if this passage is meant purely to amuse or if it indicates a crisis of social or bodily knowledge (see Mentz 2006: 183–91). Any solution to this interpretive problem must recognize that the passage clearly means both things; it presents a brutal image of bodily dismemberment in the tone of the jest-book. Tragedy in The Unfortunate Traveler never arrives unaccompanied. Like the old woman’s solitary upper chap, Nashe’s version of tragedy comprises only part of the picture.

The faux-tragic interlude of the sweating sickness breaks Jack’s heroic sense of self; he no longer calls himself king, even in jest. Fleeing London, he travels to a battlefield in France and sees the massacre of the Anabaptists in Münster. (On Nashe’s departures from history, see Kinney 1986: 304–62.) Jack witnesses brutality in the name of orthodoxy, and he responds with doublespeak: “Pitiful and lamentable was their unpitied and well-performed slaughter” (285). The sentence carefully balances the perspectives of the Anabaptists (who are to be pitied and lamented) and the “Emperial” soldiers who kill them (and are solid, unemotional performers). Jack recognizes
that the Anabaptists must be punished for religious error, but, like his imagined imperial troops, he wears his heart on his sleeve: “The Emperials themselves that were their executioners, like a father that weeps when he beats his child, yet still weeps and still beats, not without much ruth and sorrow prosecuted that lamentable massacre” (285). Hints of sympathy for theological radicalism appear in the stylistically radical Nashe, and this episode marks the first of several narrative crises: Jack almost stops writing. “This tale must at one time or other give up the ghost,” he observes, “and as good now as stay longer” (286). Faced with “tragical catastrophe of this Münsterian conflict” (286), Jack runs toward home and England, wanting never to play trickster games or see tragic events again. To convince his hero not to end the narrative game, Nashe throws a different literary model in his path.

This Supernatural Kind of Wit: Lyric Poetry

In one of his many attempts to break into Elizabethan literary culture, Nashe in 1591 published an adulatory preface to an unauthorized edition of Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*. Like the letter to Southampton that introduces *The Unfortunate Traveler*, however, this preface may have insulted its addressee, Sidney’s sister the Countess of Pembroke. The 1591 edition was suppressed and then re-issued without Nashe’s epistle (see Mentz 2000). The parodic intensity of Nashe’s professed adulation of Sidney – “the least sillable of his name,” he writes, “sounded in the eares of judgement, is able to giue the meanest line he writes a dowry of immortality” (Nashe 1966: 3.329) – resurfaces in *The Unfortunate Traveler*’s portrait of another aristocrat-poet, the Earl of Surrey. Arriving on the scene as Jack seems about to give up writing (and traveling), Surrey makes the case for poetry’s redemptive power. What Jack calls “this supernatural kind of wit” (287) convinces him to join Surrey’s service and travel to Italy.

Even as Jack takes a new master (Surrey replaces Henry VIII) and *The Unfortunate Traveler* finds a new literary model (lyric poetry in the context of a humanist coterie circle), the text emphasizes that Jack will never be a contented servant. As he previously set himself up as a jesting rival to the king of England, so he chafes under the foot of the ideal poet. He fears that Surrey, who unlike Henry VIII not only rules but speaks, will displace him: “Let me not speak any more of [Surrey’s] accomplishments,” Jack notes, “for fear I spend all my spirits in praising him, and leave myself no vigour of wit or effects of a soul to go forward with my history” (287). Progress in the “history” (the book’s alternate title is *The History of Jack Wilton*) gets figured as a bodily liquid or a fuel, and Jack worries that Surrey will suck the fuel out of the system. (On Nashe’s use of liquidity as a metaphor for writing, see Mentz 2007: 10.) But Surrey’s entrance does not transform Jack’s tale into a lyric sequence or even a humanist romance like Sidney’s *New Arcadia* (1590). Rather Surrey and Jack together “bear half-stakes … in the lottery of travel” (287). In other words, Surrey competes on Jack’s turf.
Their wanderings take them to Rotterdam and Wittenberg, where their adventures extend Nashe’s satire to include humanist educational and rhetorical practices. Jack and Surrey mock various worthies as they parade by. They leave Erasmus and More to pursue “discontented studies” (291), they sneer at Luther (who “uttered nothing to make a man laugh” [295]), and they mock the ghost of Cicero, whose falsifying rhetoric nearly convinces a jury “to install his guilty client for a god” (298). While Jack laughs at humanism, however, Surrey focuses on Italy. His quest combines humanist and erotic goals: He seeks Italy, “with Aeneas,” not to build an empire but to enter a chivalric tournament and “by an open challenge defend [Geraldine’s] beauty against all comers” (289). Like Erasmus, More, Luther, and Cicero, Surrey exemplifies humanist ideals even as Nashe’s text incorporates these ideals in a mixed form of entertainment. The primary love plot in The Unfortunate Traveler involves not Surrey and Geraldine (who never appears), but Jack and Diamante, the “courtesan” he meets in a Venetian prison.

Meeting Diamante splits Jack’s relationship with Surrey and ends the text’s flirtation with humanist love poetry. Surrey and Jack have been imprisoned for passing counterfeit coins (the coins reflect Jack’s efforts to remake himself in Surrey’s image), and there they find Diamante, a magnifico’s wife falsely imprisoned on suspicion of adultery. Surrey woos her with courtly games: “Sometimes he would imagine her in a melancholy humor to be his Geraldine, and court her in terms correspondent” (307). The crowning moment, however, comes when Surrey “leap[s]” from prose to verse and “with these or such-like rhymes assault[s] her”:

If I must die, Oh, let me choose my death:
Suck out my soul with kisses, cruel maid,
In thy breasts crystal balls embalm my breath. … (307)

The poem parodies the central Petrarchan conceit in which the cruel mistress kills the poet-lover with disdain, and the second line perhaps alludes to the sorceress Acrasia in Spenser’s Faerie Queene. Courtly rhetoric and lyric poetry, however, do not carry the day. While Jack admires Surrey’s poetry, he woos in his own style: “My master beat the bush and kept a coil and a prattling, but I caught the bird” (308). The high lyric mode of Elizabethan humanist culture (and the Sidney circle) becomes mere “prattling.” Jack’s wooing is prosaic but effective. The three jailbirds get released not by one of Surrey’s aristocratic contacts, but one of Nashe’s cultural heroes, Pietro Aretino, the Italian pornographer, poet, and social critic.

Nashe’s extended portrait of Aretino reprises the terms he had used to celebrate Robert Greene in 1589. The key to both writers is speed and wit; Aretino, like Greene, is “one of the wittiest knaves that ever God made” (309). Also like Greene, Aretino seems perfectly adapted to the tools of his trade: He “writ with nought but the spirit of ink … whereas others of his age were but the lay temporality of inkhorn terms” (309). Even more than the 1589 preface to Greene, however, the description of Aretino becomes Nashe’s (idealized) self-portrait. Aretino writes violently — “His pen was
sharp-pointed like a poniard” (309) – and critically – “His sight pierced like lightening into the entrails of all abuses” (310). Nashe carefully denies Aretino’s authorship of an atheistic tract attributed to him, and celebrates the titles posterity gave him: “Il flagello de’ principi, Il veritiero, Il divino, and L’unico Aretino” (“The Scourge of Princes, The Truthful, The Divine, The Unique Aretino”) (310–11). (The last title was not properly Aretino’s, but Nashe may not have known that.) Aretino represents an active, modern writer, a better model than Surrey (or Sidney). For Nashe, Aretino exceeds those humanist icons “Tully [i.e., Cicero], Virgil, Ovid, [and] Seneca,” and even in heaven “methinks so indefinite a spirit should have no peace or intermission of pains, but be penning ditties to the archangels in another world” (311). Here is Nashe’s heaven: Endless occasion for more writing.

The insertion of Aretino into the Surrey-section of The Unfortunate Traveler accentuates the limits of the English poet as a model. Jack and Surrey have long since “agreed to change names” (298) because the Earl craves “more liberty of behaviour” and also because Jack can modify his own appearance to “tune it either high or low” (298). Being Surrey, it seems, is merely a matter of play-acting. When Jack runs off with Diamante after leaving prison, he passes himself off “by no other name but the young Earl of Surrey; my pomp, my apparel, train, and expense was nothing inferior to his; my looks were as lofty, my words as magnifical” (312). The physical markers of aristocratic identity (pomp, apparel, train) seem no harder to replicate than the correspondent behaviors (looks, words). Jack’s counterfeit Surrey replaces the real one. (On Nashe’s literary ambitions in this episode, see Guy-Bray 2007: 13.) When the Earl catches the imposters, Jack agrees to abandon Diamante for a time, but Surrey’s days as guiding light are numbered.

The Surrey subplot climaxes at the long-awaited tournament in Florence, where Surrey triumphs in defense of Geraldine’s honor. The knights, from the Black Knight (“his headpiece seemed to be a little oven fraught full with smoldering flames, for nothing but sulphur and smoke voided out of the cleft of his beaver” [318]) to the Forsaken Knight (“whose helmet was crowned with nothing but cypress and willow garlands” [319]), spoof aristocratic pretensions (see Duncan-Jones 1968). But Surrey, despite his fanciful trappings (“His armour was intermixed with lilies and roses . . .” [316]), trumps the field: “Only the Earl of Surrey, my master, observed the true measures of honour and made all his encounters new-scor their armour in the dust; so great was his glory that day as Geraldine was thereby eternally glorified” (323). Poised to expand his fame by “enact[ing] something there worthy of the annals of posterity” (324), Surrey instead gets recalled by Jack’s former rival Henry VIII. At this point Nashe signals the triumph of Jack’s urban, competitive style over its humanist lyric rival by shifting his stylistic register from high to low. With Henry’s summons, Jack writes, Surrey’s “fame was quite cut off by the shins, and there was no reprieve but Bezelus manus, he must into England” (324). The awkwardly rendered Spanish phrase (“kiss the hands,” beza las manos) traps Surrey in a linguistically limited world of courtly manners and gestures. Jack, reunited with Diamante, leaves Florence for Rome.
Queen of the World: Satire

Rome had a particular cultural meaning in Elizabethan England. Like the rest of Italy, it housed vice and iniquity, but as the home of the Pope, Rome was the source, rather than merely a symptom, of religious error. In the saying popularized by Elizabeth’s tutor Roger Ascham (one of the humanists Nashe satirizes), “an Italianated Englishman is an incarnate devil.” (On England’s cultural fear of Italy, see Mentz 2004.) Nashe’s Rome extends humanist anti-Italian sentiment, but as with his portrait of humanism in general, the tone is mixed. Nashe attacks Italy, but he seems animated by Italianate abuses in English cities.

One way to parse the vexed question of tone in the Roman episodes of The Unfortunate Traveler is to recall that Nashe’s true target is less Rome than London. When Jack introduces Rome as “Queen of the world,” he emphasizes the city’s status as “metropolitan mistress of all other cities” (324). The splendors of this city overshadow plague-infested London. Rome teems with religious error, including “the Church of the Seven Sibyls” (325), which overflows with heterodox religions, and “Pontius Pilate’s house” (dutifully, Jack “pissed against it” [325]). But the heart of Jack’s Rome appears in the extended portrait of “a summer banqueting house belonging to a merchant” (327) that provides both the longest descriptive passage in the book and a sustained meditation on urban utopia.

The summer banqueting house, like the old woman’s wiped-away chin, is a controversial passage among Nashe critics. On the one hand the house appears to be a true ideal, a structure which “could not be matched except God should make another paradise” (327). On the other, the place is artificial, “counterfeited in that likeness that Adam lorded over it before his fall” (327). Controversy arises over the meaning of the words “paradise” and “counterfeited”: Is it genuine paradise or false? The question is not easily settled (see Mentz 2006: 197–9), but once again the central point seems to be a contrast with Nashe’s London: “Oh Rome,” Jack concludes, “if thou hast in thee such soul-exalting objects, what a thing is heaven in comparison of thee …? Yet this must I say to the shame of us Protestants: if good works may merit heaven, they do them, we talk of them” (330). The banqueting house presents a fantasy of urban culture without London’s rough edges, a thoroughly reformed cityscape. As Jack’s adventures in Rome become increasingly hellish (Ferguson 1981 suggests that Nashe follows Dante), the artificial heaven of the banqueting house represents the power of human artistry (Yates 2003 reads it as representing the printing press) and a potential model for English culture.

No Heaven but Revenge: Novella

Another set of hero-villain-rivals and another literary genre soon displace the banqueting house’s urban fantasy. Esdras of Grenado, “a notable banditto” (331), introduces
the violent, sensationalist plot of the Italian novella, an ironic narrative form that emerged in urban Italy in the fourteenth century (see Clements and Gibaldi, 1977), when he takes advantage of plague to “break into those rich men’s houses in the night where the plague most reigned, and if there were none but the mistress and maid left alive, to ravish them both and bring away all the wealth they could fasten upon” (331). Esdras employs the plague that Jack fled, he steals more than Jack, and he commits a crime, premeditated rape, new in the narrative. When Esdras and his partner Bartol invade the house where Jack and Diamante sleep, the encounter paralyzes our once-active hero. “Save her, kill me,” cries Jack when Esdras leads Diamante off at rapier point, “And I’ll ransom her with a thousand ducats” (332). No longer a thief, and never much of a warrior, Jack remains passive and weak. The money he offers Esdras, in fact, is Diamante’s, extracted from the estate of her now-dead husband.

Jack’s passivity connects him to Heraclide, the virtuous matron in whose home Jack and Diamante are lodging. Heraclide, like the banqueting house, represents a Roman ideal. Like her model Lucrece, she commits suicide after her rape, and she invokes the language of early modern religious polemic: “why should I not hold myself damned,” she asks, “(if predestination’s opinions be true) that am predestinate to this horrible abuse?” (337). English Protestants may have despised the Roman matron who echoes Juan Luis Vives’ arguments for suicide (see Mentz 2006: 200–1), but her example paralyzes Jack: “Conjecture the rest, my words stick fast in the mire and are clean tired; would I had never undertook this tragical tale” (336). Heraclide’s theological argument creates a self-immolating triumph — “The only repeal we have from God’s indefinite chastisement is to chastise ourselves in this world,” she says (339) — but her death leads, brutally, to more mockery: “So, throughly stabbed, fell she down and knocked her head against her husband’s body, wherewith he, not having been aired his full four-and-twenty hours, start as out of a dream” (339). Jack, the only witness, is imprisoned for the crime, punished for witnessing (and failing to prevent) another tragedy.

Jack’s imprisonment leads to further novella-like episodes in Rome’s underworld involving Juliana the Pope’s mistress, Zacherie his bloodthirsty physician, and Zadoch, an invective-spouting anti-Catholic Jew. Jack loses himself in this maze of desires, where Juliana preys on him sexually and Zacherie and Zadoch want to dissect his flesh. Roman decadence takes the shine off travel. While the hero as “traveler” (with the Elizabethan-spelling pun on “travailler” always implicit) has until now represented Jack’s rhetorical and physical prowess, in Rome travel becomes torture. Preserved from hanging by Bartol’s deathbed confession, Jack encounters a nameless English earl whose exile makes him another mirror for our hero. But this earl (unlike Surrey) describes travel itself as the root of evil. “The first traveler was Cain,” he lectures Jack, “and he was called a vagabond runagate on the face of the earth. Travel (like the travail wherein smiths put wild horses when they shoe them) is good for nothing but to tame and bring men under” (341). Describing Italy as the source of atheism, “epicurising,” whoring, poisoning, and “sodomitry” (345), the earl insists
that Jack “Get thee home, my young lad” (346). Uncharacteristically tongue-tied, Jack does not take the earl’s advice (yet), but when he falls back into the novella-world in a pit outside Zadoch’s house he believes that “God plagued me for deriding such a grave fatherly advertiser” (347). The earl represents the second-to-last of Jack’s rivals, but unlike English models from Henry VIII to Surrey, Jack does not overtly mock him. He seems almost ready to take this advice.

The logical extension of the earl’s claims appears in the villain Cutwolfe, whose execution comprises the final episode. Cutwolfe, like Jack, is a relentless traveler, but unlike Jack he has a purpose: He seeks Esdras to revenge the death of his brother Bartol. Telling his history at the gallows (gallows confessions, like Greene’s *Black Book’s Messenger* [1592], were a popular urban genre), Cutwolfe becomes a nightmarishly unfortunate traveler. “Twenty months together I pursued [Esdras],” Cutwolfe declares,

> from Rome to Naples, from Naples to Caiete, passing over the river, from Caiete to Sienna, from Sienna to Florence, from Florence to Parma, from Parma to Pavia, from Pavia to Sion, from Sion to Geneva, from Geneva back again towards Rome, where in the way it was my chance to meet him in the nick here in Bologna. (364)

While there’s some glancing reference to religious strife in the movement from (Calvinist) Geneva back towards Rome, what’s most striking is Cutwolfe’s arbitrary motion. He represents the outer limit of constant, incessant travel. More purposeful than Jack, with his mind always on revenge (“There is no heaven but revenge” [367] he insists), Cutwolfe’s circumambulations around northern Italy mirror and mock Jack’s travels.

Throughout the book, Jack’s physical wanderings extend and parallel his rhetorical fecundity. Cutwolfe’s travels, however, generate a horrific cutting-off of words. In a plot-twist that parallels the most melodramatic examples in the Italianate novella, Cutwolfe performs on Esdras “some notable new Italianism, whose platform might not only extend on his body, but his soul also” (368). “First and foremost,” he insists that Esdras “renounce God … and utterly disclaim the whole title or interest he had in any covenant of salvation” (368). Then, in order that Esdras not recant that oath, Cutwolfe “shot him full in the throat with my pistol” (368). The cruelest threat of all, this episode makes clear, is ending the stream of words. Cutwolfe, who thinks his cruelty makes him semi-divine (“The farther we wade in revenge, the nearer come we to the throne of the Almighty” [369]), gets torn and broken by the executioner, but he scares Jack straight and completes Nashe’s experiment with the novella.

Jack’s reaction to Cutwolfe’s villainy is predictable because we have seen it before. From the sweating sickness to the massacre of the Anabaptists to Heraclide’s rape to his own near-hanging, Jack reacts to tragedy by wishing to stop traveling and talking. This time he follows his own advice and rejects Cutwolfe’s novella-model. In doing so, he returns briefly to the language of religion. “Unsearchable is the book of our destinies,” he says, and with this semi-Calvinist submission to his fate he flees back
to Henry VIII in France. Jack is less a chastened believer, however, than a bourgeois subject, newly married (and rich). Cutwolfe ends his travels, but Diamante makes a new life possible.

“Much like a Prince”: Romance

Jack returns to Henry a married man: “To such straight life did [Cutwolfe’s death] thenceforward incite me that ere I went out of Bologna I married my courtesan, performed many alms-deeds, and hasted so fast out of that Sodom of Italy, that within forty days I arrived at the King of England’s camp” (370). His “courtesan” has been intermittently with him since Venice, funding a lavish display when they imitated Surrey and Geraldine (and also Antony and Cleopatra), preserving him from Esdras and Bartol at Heraclide’s house, and rescuing him from Juliana in Rome. Diamante is in fact the only figure in the narrative who does not threaten Jack (even Heraclide inadvertently gets him arrested) and instead provides a “source of consolation and safety” (see Relihan 1996: 151). She becomes, in Jack’s words, “my redeemer” (358), and her presence guides the narrative retrospectively into the familiar marriage-plot of romance. (By romance I mean the loss-wandering-recovering plot early modern Europe inherited from The Odyssey and Greek romance; see Mentz 2001 and 2006. On romance and the novella, see also Mentz 2004.) Through Diamante, Nashe’s text engages with the romance narratives of his print culture peers Robert Greene and Thomas Lodge, as well as Sidney’s New Arcadia and the Greek romance models that influenced all these writers. (The name Diamante echoes a minor character in Heliodorus’s Aethiopica; on Heliodorus and Elizabethan prose fiction, see Mentz 2006: 47–71.) The elaborate description that introduces the heroine also suggests a political subtext: “[Diamante] figured forth a high discontented disdain; much like a prince puffing and storming at the treason of some subject fled lately out of his power” (202). (On Diamante’s description and its Chaucerian subtext, see Mentz 2006: 202–3.) Like Spenser’s Gloriana or Shakespeare’s Titania, Diamante ambiguously figures the Virgin Queen who ruled late sixteenth-century England.

Jack’s travels end where they began, in France, but the text hints that the prose-machine could be geared up again. “All the conclusive epilogue I will make is this,” Jack writes, “that if herein I have pleased any, it shall animate me to more pains in this kind” (370). “Animate” reads like a gloss on Jack’s identity as a (printed) page, a representation of writing itself, but, perhaps because of the apparent lack of success of The Unfortunate Traveler with Elizabethan readers, Nashe never returned to this character or this type of fiction. His two major works after 1594 were Have with You to Saffron Walden (1596), an extended invective against Gabriel Harvey, and Lenten Stuffe (1599), a celebration of Yarmouth and its herring fishery. The controversy with Harvey led to both writers’ works being banned in 1599, and Nashe seems to have died around 1601. Like that of his friend Robert Greene, Nashe’s ghost made frequent appearances in the prose of early seventeenth-century urban writers like Middleton
and Dekker (see Manly). These writers recognized that Nashe’s works, including *The Unfortunate Traveler*, embodied mid-1590s print culture, as this restless writer attempted to corral his energy and wit into recognizable if hybrid forms.

**Conclusion: Trimming Thomas Nashe from 1593 to 2009**

The critical reaction to Nashe’s works began in the aftermath of Robert Greene’s death in 1592. Nashe’s (partial) defense of Greene against Harvey’s published attacks on him led to Harvey’s full-throated attack in *Pierce’s Supererogation* (1593) and Nashe’s counter-attack, *Have with You to Saffron-Walden*. A side-bar in this controversy, *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (1597), produced our only contemporary image of Nashe, a mustachioed young gentleman with a smirk on his face and iron fetters on his legs. (The image appears on the cover of Nicholl’s *Cup of News.*) *The Trimming* is a lively bit of Elizabethan invective that imitates Nashe’s style while attacking his person. This chapter’s epigraph shows how the book imitated Nashe. Invented terms like “parasitupocritical” are meaningless, but they have a Nashean ring: exaggerated, satirical, and slightly absurd. The volume mimics the author it purports to “trim.” Thus *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* captures the impact of this writer on Elizabethan literary culture.

I will conclude by observing how closely an attacking volume like *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* follows the form of *The Unfortunate Traveler*. Their title pages, through which each book marketed itself to Elizabethan book-buyers, mirror each other. Both present the title and author’s name in large type near the top of the page. *The Trimming* celebrates its purported author more resoundingly, reading, “By the high-titled patron Don Ricardo de Medico campo, Barber Chirugionto Trinitue Colledge in Cambridge,” while *The Unfortunate Traveler* names its (more famous) author simply as “Tho. Nashe.” (*The Trimming*’s named author is Richard Lichfield, the Cambridge barber to whom Nashe had ironically dedicated *Have with You*. It was once assumed that Harvey wrote *Trimming* himself, but more information about Lichfield has made his authorship appear tenable.) Both books have short Latin mottos and printer’s marks; Nashe’s bears the mark of Cuthbert Burby, a London prominent printer between 1592 and 1607, while Lichfield’s bears the mark of a fictitious printer, “Philip Scarlet.” Scarlet seems to be a pseudonym chosen for its match with Thomas Scarlet, the printer of *The Unfortunate Traveler*, who had died in 1596. The *Trimming* thus presents itself to book-buyers as another book written in Nashe’s style and published by his circle, imitating the layout of the title page and name of the printer. (Imitating recently dead authors was fairly common in the 1590s; on Greene’s legacy, see Mentz 2006: 207–19.) Nashe died penniless, but he cast a long shadow on the literature of late Tudor and early Stuart London.

Treating Nashe’s *Unfortunate Traveler* as a mainstay of late Elizabethan culture can reduce literary history’s dependence on aristocrats like Sidney, ambitious functionaries like Spenser, and the public stage. These venues have for too long generated a court-
or-stage binary, in which the major forms of Elizabethan literary expression were either appeals for patronage or forays into the theatrical marketplace. While I would not minimize these venues, Nashe emphasizes that the period also saw the massive growth of London’s print industry, and the culture of print not only influenced the forms in which we read Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, but also generated its own native writers, including Greene, Lodge, Nashe, Dekker, Middleton, and others. The literary London that The Unfortunate Traveler describes is more brutal than nostalgic, and more varied than unified, but it represents rich ground for cultural invention. Nashe’s book sums up Tudor literature’s sense of itself as a nearly coherent body of changeable literary models, and it also gestures toward the radical changes that urbanization, growing literacy, and print culture would generate in coming centuries.

References


Further Reading

## Index

Note: “n” after a page reference denotes a footnote on that page and individual footnote numbers are shown in parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abu Ghraib</th>
<th>335</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acts of Parliament</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England: Advancement of True Religion (1542–3)</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alien Printers</td>
<td>1484/1529/1534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeals (1533)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripture (1543)</td>
<td>23; Supremacy and Uniformity (1559)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland: Witchcraft (1563)</td>
<td>32, 37, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Frank</td>
<td>128–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelson, B. M.</td>
<td>330, 331, 336n(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesop</td>
<td>336n(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africans</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Discovery</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agincourt, Battle of (1415)</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricola, Alexander</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricola, Georgius</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrippa, Henry Cornelius</td>
<td>97, 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alamire, Petrus</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Andalus</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alençon, François de Valois, Duc d’</td>
<td>248, 381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander, Gavin</td>
<td>4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356–7, 358, 359, 360, 361–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander, William</td>
<td>402, 407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander VI, Pope</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Severus, Roman Emperor</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia</td>
<td>285–6, 389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alexandrines</td>
<td>156, 370, 371, 377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis, Guillaume</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfonsi, Petrus</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algonquians</td>
<td>67, 72, 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response to English technology</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ripe for conversion to Christianity</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aliens</td>
<td>100, 252, 471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>removal of</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allde, John</td>
<td>196, 197, 200, 201, 202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alliteraton</td>
<td>144, 368, 377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allusion</td>
<td>4, 148, 154, 432, 453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ironic</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politics and</td>
<td>381–94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alsace</td>
<td>246, 253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altman, J. B.</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazons</td>
<td>75, 76, 284, 289, 330, 397, 399, 403, 405, 482, 484, 486, 487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amersham</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabaptists</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anapestic substitution</td>
<td>366, 377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anatomy and dissection</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson, Thomas</td>
<td>457n(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre, Bernard</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>androgyny</td>
<td>383, 384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglicanism</td>
<td>26, 233, 237, 454, 481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Ottoman association</td>
<td>57, 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Spanish relations</td>
<td>69, 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjou (house)</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne, St</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne of Cleves</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne of Denmark</td>
<td>38, 40, 90–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anti-Catholicism</td>
<td>61, 72, 448, 457n(7), 498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crude iconoclasm</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intense</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antichrist</td>
<td>15, 53, 55, 223, 232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pope takes his place as</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anticlericalism</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anti-papal policies</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antwerp</td>
<td>88, 91, 280, 286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>applied mathematics</td>
<td>96–7, 101, 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerns about the diabolical basis</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archimedes</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aretino, Pietro</td>
<td>370, 495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariosto, Ludovico</td>
<td>221, 261, 263, 269–70, 271, 341, 423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>113, 145, 286, 287, 331, 347, 358, 361, 412, 478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Anima</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetics</td>
<td>352–3, 357, 362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>352, 356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armin, Robert</td>
<td>332, 333–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armstrong, Archy</td>
<td>330, 334–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ars dictaminis</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arse-kissing</td>
<td>312, 313, 314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arsenius, Walter</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthurian legends</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales</td>
<td>21, 52, 80, 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Crafts movement</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arundel, Aletheia, Lady</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arundel, Elizabeth, Lady</td>
<td>263, 265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arundel, Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of</td>
<td>83–4, 87, 89, 157, 268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arundel, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascham, Roger</td>
<td>261, 267, 268, 274, 318, 332, 372, 497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkenazim</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Askew, Anne</td>
<td>4, 295–308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblie of Ladies, The (anon)</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistenzporträt</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assize courts</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>astronomy</td>
<td>65, 96, 97, 98, 101, 104, 216, 347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atheism</td>
<td>60, 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atkinson, W. E. D.</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>49, 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see also North Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attaignant, Pierre</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attridge, Derek</td>
<td>359, 368, 372, 373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aubrey, John</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augsburg</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustine, St</td>
<td>279, 292n(1), 446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authorship</td>
<td>188, 295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and appropriations</td>
<td>296–301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corporate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axton, Marie</td>
<td>316, 321n(2), 384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azores</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon, Anne Cooke, Lady</td>
<td>186, 270, 271–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon, Francis</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon, Roger</td>
<td>104–5, 225, 347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad fun</td>
<td>4, 7, 324–38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baffin Island</td>
<td>71, 485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baildon, John</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bainbridge, John</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baines Note</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bajetta, C.</td>
<td>135, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker, D.</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakhtinian festivity</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldhoven, Georg Martinius von</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, E.</td>
<td>230, 231, 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, John</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, T. W.</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, William</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bale, John</td>
<td>186, 194, 195, 200, 206, 209, 295, 299, 300, 301, 303, 304, 315, 318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Johan</td>
<td>201, 222–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Laws</td>
<td>196, 199, 201, 204, 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bales, Peter</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballard, G.</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bancroft, Richard, Archbishop of London 41
Bandello, Matteo 54, 269
Banyster, Edward 220, 221, 226n(5)
barbarianism 5
Barclay, Alexander 151, 328
Barrett, Rob 229, 230
Barrie, James 341
Barrow, Henry 318
Barrow, J. D. 292n(4)
Bartels, E. C. 467
Bartlett, K. R. 262, 266
Basanier, Martin 478
Basel 25, 52
Bashe, Edward 132
Bassano family 82–3
bastard-bearers 16
Baumer, F. L. 51
Beacon, Richard 459, 460, 463, 471nn(2/4)
Beauchesne, Jean de 126, 129
Beaufort, Lady Margaret 297
Beaumont, Francis 344
Beazley, C. R. 481
Beilin, E. 247, 263, 295, 299, 300, 307n(1)
Beijczy, I. 282
Belgium 246, 253
Beling, Richard 402, 407
Bell, C. 241
Belleforest, François de 341
Benedictine abbots 16
Bennett, H. S. 184
Benson, Pamela J. 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 265, 268, 270
Bentley, Thomas 178–9, 181, 185, 186, 187, 189, 190
Bergen 479
Berger, Harry 413, 423
Berkeley, Francys 263
Berkeley, Henry, Lord 263
Berkeley, Mary 263
Berkeley, Thomas 263
Berkshire 34
Bernardo, A. S. 147, 149n(4)
Beroviero family 107
Berry, Eleanor 367
Berthelet, Thomas 253
Bertie, Robert 265
Bescherrewer 343
Bester, Alfred 348
Betteridge, T. 299, 300, 307n(2)
Bevington, David 315
Beza, Theodore (Bèze, Théodore de) 84, 431
Bible 19, 22, 28–9, 51, 53, 64, 180, 190, 232, 233, 296
behavior patterns familiar from 302
freedom to read 303
mechanical marvels compared to miracles 102
Bibliander, Theodorus 52
Bidwell, John 254
bilingualism 251, 253
Bill against witchcraft (England 1559) 32
Billingsley, Sir Henry 96
Bilney, Thomas 20, 21
Binneman, Henry 196–7
bishops 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 147, 311
employed as councillors and administrators 16
mocking 330
Bishops’ Register 300
black magic 105, 313, 314
Black Mass 313
Blackstone, M. 233
Blage, George 161
Blank, P. 310, 320
blank verse 156, 372, 373, 377
Blitheman, William 85
Blue John 334
Blundeville, Thomas 99, 136
Boas, Frederick 310, 320
Boccaccio, Giovanni 54, 141, 269
Bodin, Jean 39
Bodleian Library 131, 136, 172n, 220, 241
Boffey, Julia 252, 253
Bogdan, R. 336n(1)
Boiardo 221
Boleyn, Anne 21, 22, 26, 159, 217
Boleyn, George 161
Bologna 87
book burnings 21, 253
Book of Common Prayer 23, 27, 28, 268
rebellions against 256
Bucer, Martin 311
Buchanan, George 248
Bucher, B. 72
Buckingham, George Villiers, 1st Duke of 334, 335
Buckinghamshire 18–19
Bühler, Curt 134
Bullinger, Heinrich 23
Bulstrode, Cecilia 273
Burckhardt, Jakob 213, 246
Burghley, Mildred (Cooke), Lady 270, 271
Burghley, William Cecil, Lord 26, 87, 91, 137, 186, 237, 263, 298–9
memorial poems on the death of 133
Burgundy 81, 246, 253
Burke, Edmund 291
Burnet, M. T. 336n(1)
Burney, Charles 83
Burnley 236, 240
St Mary’s chantry 238
Burns, R. I. 125
Burton, J. 59, 61
Bury St Edmunds monastery 240
Byrd, William 80, 83–4, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90
Cabezon, Antonio de 85
Cabot, John 475
caesuras 370, 371, 372, 373, 375, 377
authorized 376
epic 378
Caius, John 265
Caius Plinius Secundus 477
Calais 247, 248
Caldwell, Ellen 383, 392
calligraphy 136
Calmann, Gerta 287
Calvin, John 23, 135
Calvinists 26, 39, 42, 66, 84, 256, 455, 499
irreparable human sinfulness central to
soteriology 447
predestination doctrine 27
radical 102
scatology in propaganda versus Mass 321n(3)
Cambises (Preston) 117, 196, 202, 206, 209, 326
Cambrensis, Giraldus 460, 472n(10)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge (Massachusetts)</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge University</td>
<td>40, 104, 309, 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ's College</td>
<td>310, 311, 319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John's College</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity College</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden, William</td>
<td>461–2, 467, 470, 471, 472n(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camineus, Balthasar</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, Julie</td>
<td>438, 439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, M. B.</td>
<td>67, 284, 477, 482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, T.</td>
<td>432, 441n(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campion, Edmund</td>
<td>132, 460, 461, 464, 472n(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campion, Thomas</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Three Points</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capitalism</td>
<td>1, 279, 286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carew, Richard</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carey (Carew), Elizabeth Spencer</td>
<td>263, 272, 273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carleton, George, Bishop of Llandaff</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlson, David</td>
<td>3, 7, 8, 10, 140, 141, 161, 217, 247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolingian handwriting</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpini, John de Piano</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carr, D.</td>
<td>19, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carr, Ralph</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartesianism</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carthusians</td>
<td>16, 282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartier, Jacques</td>
<td>65, 67, 68, 476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartwright, Kent</td>
<td>107–8, 312, 313, 384, 394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartwright, Thomas</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cary, Adolphus</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cary, Elizabeth Tanfield, Lady Faulkland</td>
<td>119, 267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castelvetro, Lodovico</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castiglione, Baldassare</td>
<td>266, 270, 329, 425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castiglione, Giovanni Battista</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholicism/Catholics</td>
<td>6, 15–30, 88, 266, 297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>claim of universal truth</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflict between Protestants and</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conspiracies to restore</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversion from</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversion to</td>
<td>91, 221, 267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derided as “Turks”</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disavowal and destruction of relics</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drama and</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early modern English</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exiles</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exorcism and sacramentals</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hidden, unwitting apostasy at the heart of</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ignored during Elizabeth’s reign</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illegal</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innovative synthesis of Protestantism</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyd’s attachment to</td>
<td>457n(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linked with primitivism</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lost rituals of remembering the dead</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loyalism</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mocking or exhibiting</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monarchs of France and Spain a constant</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menace</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>musicians</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national restoration</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orthodox</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-reformation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>printing of plays</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>propaganda</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religio-political threats posed by</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resemblances between native Indian actions, icons and</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ritual attacked by Protestants</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>romance associated with</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secret</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>short-lived return under Mary</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stereotypical oaths</td>
<td>312, 315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superiority of Protestantism over</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superstition and</td>
<td>42, 72, 74, 315, 321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suspect reassigning of substance</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenuous preconceptions about</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see also Jesuits; recusants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic-Protestant hybridity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave, Terence</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavendish, Sir Thomas</td>
<td>65, 99, 485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cawley, A. C.</td>
<td>236, 237, 240, 241, 242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caxton, William</td>
<td>53, 128, 140–1, 141–2, 145, 149, 214–15, 218, 251, 253, 255, 257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first book printed in English</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil, Sir Robert</td>
<td>483, 484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil family archive</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see also Burghley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index

celibacy 16, 386
Cervantes, Miguel de 221
Chaderton, William, Bishop of Chester 233
Chandos Players 333
Chaney, E. 266
Chanson de geste 53–4
Chanson de Roland 54
Chaplin, J. E. 71
Charlemagne 147
Charles, Prince of Wales (Charles I)
Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor 55, 56
Charles le Hardi, Duke of Burgundy 248
Charlewood, John 196, 269
Chartier, Alain 254, 255
Chaucer, Geoffrey 3, 7, 140, 146, 148, 155, 219, 226nn(2/3), 438, 500
Boece 214–15
Book of the Duchess 218
Booke of Troilus 369
Canterbury Tales 128, 154, 215, 217, 369
House of Fame 216, 340
Knight’s Tale 218
Prologue to Shakespeare 218
\textit{Troilus and Criseyde} 141, 217
Cheke, Sir John 95, 266
Chelmsford 33, 36, 37, 44
Cheney, Donald 424, 426
Chertsey, Andrew 256
Chesham 19
Chester 28, 129, 233, 327
Chester Cycle (biblical plays) 228, 229, 230–5, 236
China 63, 98, 290
Chinano/William 58, 59
Chipping Norton 182
Christian IV, King of Denmark 91
Christian–Islamic conflict 49, 56
Christianity/Christians 39, 52, 53, 54, 59, 64, 68, 179, 280, 284, 288–9, 292n(2), 413, 431, 432, 440, 445, 457n(3)
battle between forces of good and evil 43
celebrating triumphs over the enemies of 185
conversion to 72, 98
embrace of technological innovation 102
enslaver of 60
Holy Land as center of identity 51
homogeneous morality 446
hypocritical 61
institution without precedent in the history of 21
inverted beliefs and actions 41
Islam and 52, 53, 54, 55
materials used to fight and kill 57
personal piety 306
potential for transformation into 67
relief from Muslim oppression 51
revelation and intervention of divine providence 221
sense of awe 103
struggle with devil as source of temptation 305
universalizing of the gospel 301
writings of early Fathers 135
also Catholicism; Protestantism
Christianization 33
Christian Terence movement 317–18
\textit{chronographia} 354
Chrysostom, St 325, 336n(2)
church courts 16, 26
witches and 32, 34
Church of England 21, 27, 180, 231, 238, 297
Convocation (1571) 295
fines for refusing to attend services 238
reformed theology 446
see also Anglicanism
Churchyard, Thomas 63, 372
Cicero 141–2, 148, 282, 286, 289–90, 324, 355, 358, 367, 495, 496
Cieza de León, Pedro de 483
Cinthio, Giraldi 266
Cipolla, Carlo 98–9
cittern and bandora 92
Clair, Colin 100
Clanvowe, Thomas 340
Clark, S. 313
Clarke, Danielle 190, 431, 437
Clarke, E. 182, 189
classicism 141, 371, 373
medievalism and 6–8
Clement VII, Pope 21, 56, 57
Clements, R. J. 498
Clifford, Lady Anne 401
clocks 98, 100, 101, 102–3, 105
Clopper, L. 228, 229, 230, 231, 234, 236
closed consorts 92
Cluniac Corpus 52, 53
Cobham, Henry 91
Cockaigne 7, 283, 284, 285, 286
Cohen, Adam Max 2, 6, 7, 9, 95, 98, 99, 104, 105, 107
Coldiron, A. E. B. 3, 7, 8, 11, 247, 251, 255, 257
Cole, Humfrey 101
Coles, Kimberly 5, 8, 9, 301, 302–3
Colet, John, Dean of St Paul’s 16, 135
Coletti, Theresa 3, 6, 7, 228, 231
collaboration 188, 196
Collinson, P. 27, 311
colonization see exploration; New World
Colonna, Cardinal Giovanni 147
Colonna, Francesco 343
Colonna, Vittoria 270–1
Columbus, Christopher 64, 74, 476
Colwell, Thomas 196, 197, 200, 201, 205
comedy 311, 315, 316, 329, 391
pagan Terentian 317
play that transgresses the laws of 317–18
romantic 408
scatological 310
Comey, Innocent 84
Commaundre, Robert 131
Commedia Divina (Dante) 268, 343
communism 279, 290
Companion to Shakespeare’s Works, A (ed. Dutton & Howard) 2
confession 19, 37, 41, 44, 47, 59, 231, 233, 241, 298, 300, 305, 447, 498, 499
central to Scottish witchcraft trials 35
layperson 17
mock 315
optional 23
Congreve, William 339
Constantinople 54, 57, 60
English Ligier in porch of Grand Signor 58
Contra legem Saracenorum 53
conversion 52, 54, 58, 72, 91, 198, 221, 267, 295
Algonquins ripe for 98
efforts at 70
eradication of Islam in 56
Cooke, Sir Anthony 266, 270
Copernicus, N. 339, 347
Copland, Robert 199, 253
Cornish, William 80, 196, 197, 199–201, 204
Cornwall 271, 320
Cornwall rebellions (1548/1549) 256
Corpus Christi plays 222, 223, 225, 236, 240
Cotton, Robert Bruce 228
Cotton MS 136, 235–6
Council of Trent (1545–63) 23–4, 447
Counter-Reformation 25, 222
counterpoint 81, 88, 137
courtier poets 8
Coventry 18, 19, 228
Cox, J. C. 127
Crane, R. 220
Cranmer, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury 21, 22, 23, 25, 194, 222, 268, 296–7, 298, 301, 312
Crecquillon, Thomas 85
Cremona 83
Cressy, David 447
Croce, Giovanni 90
Cromwell, Thomas 21, 22, 23, 127, 142–3, 194, 223
Crooke, Helkiah 114–16
crusades 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 57
papally endorsed 56
Protestant rejection of 55
threatened 223
Cruz, J. A. H. M. 50
crystal glass 107
cult of virginity 4
see also Virgin Queen
Cumberland, George Clifford, 3rd Earl of 485
Cumberland (county) 334
Cummings, R. 252
Cusco 72
Daalder, J. 164, 172n, 173nn(3–5/12–14/19/22), 174nn(24–5/28–32/35), 175n(38)
Daborne, Robert 54
Dalkey 471n(1)
Index

Daneau, Lambert 39
Daniel, Samuel 250, 261, 379
Dante Alighieri 146, 268, 343, 497
D’Anzolo del Gallo, Andrea and Domenico 107
D’Aquilano, Serafino 370
Dare, Christopher 299
Darrell, John 41, 43
Dasypodius, Konrad 103
Davie, Donald 430–1, 432
Davies, John 460, 472(7)
Davies, O. 32, 46
Davies, R. 19
Davis, Joel 436, 438
Davis, John 95–6, 99–100
Davy, Richard 81
Day, Angel 129
Day, John 272
De Bry, Theodor 65, 67, 68, 69–70, 72, 76
DeCook, Travis 291
Dee, John 95, 96, 97, 101, 104, 108, 481
Dekker, Thomas 490, 351, 359–60, 501, 502
Delaney, P. 315
Della Casa, Giovanni 324, 329, 331, 332
Delumeau, Jean 447
Demers, Patricia 181, 182, 271, 441n(1)
demonologies 38, 39–40, 44, 305
Denmark 92
see also Anne of Denmark; Christian IV; Elsinore
Denny, Edward, Lord 405, 408, 440
Derby Earls see Stanley
Derendel, Peter 257
Derricke, John 460, 461, 472n(7)
Desprez, Josquin 81, 82
Dethick, Sir Gilbert 135
Dethick, Henry 351
Dethick, William 135
Deuteronomy 445
Devereux, J. 314
Devereux, Sir Francis 58, 65, 72, 74, 99, 476, 485
drama 228–45, 309, 339, 344
absurdist 341
biblical 3, 228
civic spectacles 61
forms of representation 60, 214
mirror’s importance in 108
religious 6, 241
social 326
dramaturgy 108, 448, 451
allegorical 382
dream-visions 7, 221, 340, 342, 343
Dryden, John 214, 218, 226n(1)
Du Bartas, G. 247
Du Bellay, Jean 247
Dublin 129
Dudley see Leicester; Northumberland
Duffin, Ross 2, 6, 8
Duffy, E. 24, 51, 312
Duhamel, P. A. 282
Duncan, Douglas 309, 316, 317, 318, 320, 321
Duncan-Jones, Katherine 273, 437, 496
Dundalk 471n(1)
Dunlop, Bessie 44
Dunstable, John 79
Durston, G. 34
Dutch art theory 343
Dutch type 254
Dyer, Edward 374
dynasties 83, 141, 180, 181, 237, 289, 381
end of 61
warring 404
witchcraft and 40, 41

Early Banns 230
East, Thomas 89, 128
East Anglia 24, 133, 240
agrarian disturbances 23
N-Town cycle of plays 235
Ecclesiastes 156
Eden, Richard 63–4, 74, 479–81
Edgerton, William 309
Edinburgh 35
education
humanist 369
language of 11
male elite 265
traveling for 266
women’s 184, 266
Edward, Prince of Wales (Edward II) 225
Edward III, King of England 216
Edward IV, King of England 15, 180, 248, 255
Edward VI, King of England 23, 80, 81, 84, 86, 194, 256, 272, 309, 310, 311
accession 195, 298
Church Latin abolished under 319
death of 24–5
establishment of Protestant church 56
“stranger churches” under 268
Edwards, Kathryn 2, 6, 7, 9
Edwards, Richard 85–6, 208
EEBO (Early English Books Online) 33
Egerton MS 131, 161, 162, 163, 165, 172n, 174n(24/32), 220
Elaine Beilin 295
Elizabeth I, Queen of England 2, 4, 26, 27, 40, 41, 42, 49, 68, 101, 102, 200, 217, 233, 237, 261, 295
accession 29, 196
alliance with Ottoman Empire 51
anxieties about residual or resurgent Catholicism under 28
compulsory Protestantism under 241
death (1603) 168
Duc d’Alençon’s courtship of 248, 381
excommunication by Pius V 57, 71
letters between Murad III and 58, 60–1
likeness to the Amazons 75
manuscripts and printed texts 134, 135, 182, 185, 186, 247, 263, 272
music and international influences 80, 81, 86–8, 90
Parr editions and Tyrwhit presented to 179
Pembroke’s dedicatory poem to 428
postal routes 129–30
question of marriage and succession 225
see also Virgin Queen
Elsinore 91
Elyot, Sir Thomas 112–13, 156, 158, 173n(10), 329, 468, 473n(21/24)
Emerson, O. F. 433
Emmerson, R. 228, 231
empathic realism 341
enargeia 353–4, 355, 360, 361
English language 11, 214, 257, 268, 373
implications for the future of 320
English nationalism 219, 471
Englishness 372
English Pale 459, 471n(1)
enjambment 371, 372, 376, 378
Enlightenment 213, 325
entertainment 80
Ephesus 479
Epictetus 158
epigones 151
epistolary exchanges 142, 143, 147, 148, 159
satires 151, 161, 169
Erasmus, Desiderius 55, 113, 143, 183, 224, 297, 298, 353–4, 360, 361, 495
Adages 289
Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>513</td>
<td>De conscribendis epistolae 142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>De copia 131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster 184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encomium Moriae 283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Testament 20, 135, 296–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Praise of Folly 331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>451, 457n(7)</td>
<td>Erne, Lukas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, 155, 395, 396, 397, 400, 402, 409, 416, 495</td>
<td>eroticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>424</td>
<td>dissolutely queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>fear that female readers might be seduced by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161–71</td>
<td>sameness and difference in lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>391</td>
<td>Utopian lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Erskine, John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222, 223–4, 225, 232</td>
<td>eschatology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>333</td>
<td>Esom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91, 137</td>
<td>Essex, Robert Devereux, Earl of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24, 32, 46, 87</td>
<td>Essex (county)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80–1</td>
<td>see also Chelmsford; Great Waltham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5, 8, 461, 463, 464, 466–71</td>
<td>ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>460–4</td>
<td>ethnographic discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80–1</td>
<td>Eton Choirbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>313</td>
<td>Eucharist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17, 239, 306, 312, 318, 446</td>
<td>denounced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114, 309, 310, 312–13, 314, 334</td>
<td>excrement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41, 42, 43, 47</td>
<td>exorcism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188</td>
<td>Ezell, Margaret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>269–70</td>
<td>Fairfax, Edward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42, 43, 44</td>
<td>fairies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>253, 254</td>
<td>Faques, William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>256</td>
<td>farce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Edwardian humanist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309</td>
<td>scatological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Farnaby, Giles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80, 82</td>
<td>Fayfax Manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187</td>
<td>Fedele, Cassandra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>469, 473n(24)</td>
<td>Feerick, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>332</td>
<td>Felver, C. S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11, 265, 269, 396, 399–410</td>
<td>female readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>183, 254, 295–6, 429, 430–1, 454</td>
<td>feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>witchcraft studies and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251, 497</td>
<td>Ferguson, M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>287, 289</td>
<td>Ferns, C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87–8, 89, 90, 91</td>
<td>Ferrabosco, Alfonso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Ferrabosco, Alfonso (son of above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>311</td>
<td>Ferrers, George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>311</td>
<td>Feuillerat, A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248</td>
<td>Field of the Cloth of Gold (1520)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>341</td>
<td>Fielding, Henry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>firearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>fireworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Firth of Forth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22, 301–2, 307n(1)</td>
<td>Fisher, John, Bishop of Rochester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Five Wounds of Christ (standard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81, 82, 83, 85, 100</td>
<td>Flanders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Flavian period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218–19, 344</td>
<td>Fletcher, John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82, 87</td>
<td>Florence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72, 478</td>
<td>Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65, 68, 264–5</td>
<td>Florio, John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>263, 268</td>
<td>Florio, Michelangelo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>313</td>
<td>Flötner, Peter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>460, 461, 463, 466–9, 472nn(14–15), 473n(22)</td>
<td>Floyd-Wilson, Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131, 136, 174n(31), 263</td>
<td>Folger Shakespeare Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32, 38–9, 47, 220, 247</td>
<td>folklore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>347</td>
<td>Fontenelle, Bernard le Bovier de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 7, 114, 222, 235, 283, 310, 311, 313, 315, 325–36</td>
<td>fools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>implicitly sub-human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>254</td>
<td>Foot, Mirjam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>340</td>
<td>formal realism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>fornicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>472n(13)</td>
<td>Fortescue, Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Foster, S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182</td>
<td>Foucault, M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fowler, Alastair</td>
<td>4, 7, 10, 174(24), 342, 343, 345, 346, 348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox, A.</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foxe, John</td>
<td>19, 213, 299, 300–1, 303, 317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts and Monuments</td>
<td>25–6, 131, 218, 295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fracasetti, J.</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>54, 67, 115, 267, 330–1, 369, 493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic monarchs a constant menace</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cosmographer royal</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England's historic and ambiguous relationship to feuding religious and political groups</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French presences in Tudor England</td>
<td>3, 7, 246–60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry VIII's camp in</td>
<td>490, 492, 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monastic institutions</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music</td>
<td>81, 82, 83, 87, 88, 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paper imported from</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant devotional manuscripts presented to patrons and royalty</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>romance narratives circulated between England and</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steady connections between Scotland and war with</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis, St</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis/François I, King of France</td>
<td>56, 248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franciscans</td>
<td>16, 477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franco-Flemish tradition</td>
<td>80, 81, 82, 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franco-Spanish wars (1494–1559)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frauncis, Elizabeth</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeman, Arthur</td>
<td>451, 470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeman, T. S.</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French dictionaries</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French language</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French romances</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frisius, Gemma</td>
<td>96, 101, 478, 479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Froben (publisher)</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frobisher, Martin</td>
<td>63, 71, 72, 476, 485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuchs, Barbara</td>
<td>397, 399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuller, Mary</td>
<td>5, 6, 7, 9, 481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulwood, William</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fumerton, P.</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielli, V.</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaele, Philippa</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galen</td>
<td>114, 115, 121, 470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galis, Richard</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gammer Garton’s Needle (Stevenson)</td>
<td>4, 8, 117, 206, 309–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardiner, Stephen, Bishop of Winchester</td>
<td>22, 23, 299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garnesche, Sir Christopher</td>
<td>143–4, 145, 146, 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garnier, Robert</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett, M.</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain Notes of Instruction</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supposes</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Steel Glas</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaskell, M.</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gast, Paul</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastoldi, Giovanni</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaus</td>
<td>461, 462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“gaze”</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gemini (Lambrit), Thomas</td>
<td>100–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French discourses on gender</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious differences and/or</td>
<td>301–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>27, 51, 72, 331, 499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genitilia</td>
<td>112, 319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gentry families</td>
<td>241–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoffrey of Monmouth</td>
<td>222, 481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George, D.</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geritz, A.</td>
<td>292n(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>223, 254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>episcopal office in</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glassmaking</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music printing</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>renowned Protestant propagandist</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenorlied</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibaldi, J.</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, Gail McMurray</td>
<td>3, 6, 7, 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, J.</td>
<td>31, 182, 189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, M.</td>
<td>33, 34, 35, 37, 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifford, George</td>
<td>40, 41, 42–3, 44, 190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert, A.</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert, Sir Humphrey</td>
<td>64, 468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovio, Paolo</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index

glassmaking 106–7, 109
Globe Theater 92, 99
Gloucestershire 20, 21
Glover, Mary 34, 35, 41
Gnaphaeus, G. 317–18
Godefrey of Boloyne 53
gold 63, 99, 482, 483, 484
Goldberg, Benjamin 108
Goodare, J. 40, 41, 42, 46
Goodwin, Chris 133
Goose, N. 247
gospelling 296
Gosson, Stephen 351, 359, 360, 361, 362, 467
Gothic Revival 213
Goths 372
Gower, John 216
Gowthwaite Hall 240
Grabes, Herbert 106, 109
Grafton, A. 97, 101, 102, 103, 104
Graffon, Richard 159, 460, 472n(10)
Graham, M. F. 37
Grand Tour 8, 9, 87
Grantham, Henry 263
Grantley, Darryl 192
Great Bible (1539) 22
Great Ellingham 134
Great Waltham 31
Greek 8, 52, 104, 183, 189, 311
Greenblatt, Stephen 70, 423, 463, 466
Greene, Graham 339
Greene, R. L. 174n(31)
Greene, Robert 400, 472n(5/16), 490, 495, 500, 501, 502
Alphonsus, King of Aragon 54, 60
Black Book’s Messenger 499
Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay 225–6
Menaphon 491
Selinus 60
Greene, Roland 433
Greenham, Richard 190
Greer, Germania 187–8
Greg, W. W. 192 198
Gregory, Robert 130–1
Greville, Fulke 360, 396, 399, 400, 401, 402, 436, 441n(6)
Grey, Lady Jane 25, 263
Griffin, William 206
Griffith, E. 25
Griffiths, J. 140
Grindal, Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury 27
Gringosity, Pierre 254
Griselada story 141
Grosseteste, Robert 347
Grossinger, C. 313
Gruytball the Clowne 334
Gruyttoode, Jacobus de 180
Guazzo, Stefano 329
Guervara, Antonio 159
Guiana 75, 482–6
Guicciardini, Lodovico 269
Guilds 20, 101, 106, 107, 230
Guillemeau, J. 116
Gunpowder 105–6
Gurney, Henry 133–4
Gutenberga, Johann 128
Guy-Bray, S. 496
Gyffard Partbooks 86
Hackett, Helen 400, 401
Hadfield, Andrew 65, 66, 69, 71, 74, 76, 140, 460, 461, 462, 472n(9)
Haigh, Inglebert 253
Haghiographies 18, 220, 255
Haigh, C. 241
Haiton 481
Hakluyt, Richard (the elder) 64–5, 68
Hakluyt, Richard (the younger) 5, 53, 58, 61, 63–9, 70, 71–2, 74, 76(1), 475–81
Halasz, A. 179
Hall, L. 241
Halpin, N. J. 381
Hamilton, D. 235
Hamlin, Hannibal 433, 434
Hammer, Meredith 460, 461
Hampton Court 145
Handwritten documents 3, 125, 126
Hanmer, Meredith 58, 59
Hannay, Margaret P. 273, 295, 402, 428–9, 431–2, 433, 434, 439, 441n(3)
Happe, Peter 3, 201, 230, 236, 237
Hapsburgs 81, 82, 86, 248
Harborne, William 57
Harington, John 263, 269, 270, 271, 273, 428, 429, 440
Harington, John (the elder) 157, 161, 163
Harington, Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford 264, 265, 272, 273, 428
Harriot, Thomas 65–6, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72–3, 74, 76, 95, 96, 98, 102
Harley MS 136, 161, 172n, 231
harmony 79, 81, 84
bold experiments 90
Harsnett, Samuel 41
Hartog, François 462–3, 465, 472n(8)
Harvard Law Library 131
Harvey, Gabriel 374, 396, 500, 501
Harvey, William 265
Hatfield House 133
Haultin, Pierre 89
Hawes, Stephen 151, 215–16, 217
Heale, E. 161, 172n, 217
Heath, Thomas 408
Hecla, Mount 479
Heidelberg, University of 224
Helgerson, Richard 287, 292n(6), 374, 440
Heliodorus 500
Helleiner, K. F. 292n(3)
Helmstetter, Georgius 224
Hemmingsen, Neils 40
Heninger, S. 353
Henri IV, King of France 330
Henrietta Maria, Queen of England 330
Henry II, King of France 87
Henry III, King of England 225
Henry V, King of England 141, 250, 473n(20)
Henry VII, King of England 15, 49–50, 51, 64, 80–1, 148, 475
accession 79, 180
poet laureate to 247
state of letters in the age of 140, 142
Henry VIII, King of England 16, 26, 28, 52, 100, 220, 221, 223, 248, 252, 432, 494, 496
alliance with Holy Roman Emperor 56
appalled by Luther’s ideas 20
break with Rome (1534) 50, 56, 256
camp in France 490, 492, 499–500
conservative policies 195
controversy over divorce from Catherine of Aragon 194
courtier writing in manuscript and print 151–77
final years of reign 4, 23, 222, 295, 372
first recorded payment to Master of Posts 129
highly placed/prominent courtiers/slaves of 282, 368
music 80, 82–4, 85, 88
notion of England as empire 217
ongoing practices at the court of 248
policies of 195, 213
political antagonisms or ambivalences toward 8
powerful tensions in court 142
printers to 180, 216, 253
Protestant theology refuted by 55
reformation of 21–3, 198, 326
relationship with minions 143
state of letters in the age of 140
tensions in court 142
transcriptions for humanists in court 135
tutor to 247
Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales 83, 330
Henslowe, Philip 460
Herbert, George 433
Herbert, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke 5, 10, 132, 185, 188, 189, 247, 272, 273, 396, 399, 401–2, 410, 428–43, 494
Herbert, William 405, 471n(2)
heresy 18–20, 57, 237, 295, 298, 299, 302, 303, 306
Henry VIII’s opposition to 22
Islam as 53, 55
question of what to do about 25
Hero of Alexandria 103
Herodotus 462, 463, 465, 472n(8)
Herrick, Marvin 317, 318
Hertford, Edward Seymour, 1st Earl of 87
Hertford (town) 126
Hervey, M. F. S. 263
Heywood, John 88, 194, 196, 198, 200, 203, 204, 205, 206, 256, 325–6
Heywood, Thomas 75
Hilliard, S. 489, 490
Hills, R. 125, 126
Hirschfeld, Heather 5, 6
Hiscock, A. 297, 298, 299, 302
history 225
biblical 222, 223
literary 223
HMC (Historical Manuscripts Commission) 137
Hobbes, Thomas 285, 326, 336n(3)
Hobby, Elaine 181
Hoby, Elizabeth (formerly Lady) 270
Hoby, Lady Margaret 189–90, 307
Hoby, Philip 266
Hoby, Thomas 266, 269, 270, 329
Hogarth, William 348
Holbein, Hans 22, 332
Holcomb, C. 329, 331, 332
Holinshead, Raphael 131, 460, 464, 471n(2)
Holland, Henry 40, 42, 47
Holland (country) 254
Hollander, John 366
Holmes, C. 43, 44, 46
Holmes, P. 49
Holyband/Holiband, Claude 251, 264
Holyhead 129
Holy League 51
Homer 218–19, 226n(1), 287, 357
Hood, Thomas 99
Hooker, Richard 26
Hopkins, L. 461, 471, 473n(19)
Horace 372
Hornback, Robert 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 309–23
Hoskyns, John 350, 356
Howard (Berkeley), Katherine 263
Howard, Thomas 162
Howard, Thomas, 2nd Earl of Arundel 265
Hudson, Ann 217
Hudson, Jeffrey 330
Hues, Robert 99
Hughes 1988: 242
Hugh of St Victor 343
Huguenots 87, 89, 126, 136, 256
religious discourses 249
Hulse, C. 351
Hulsius, Levinus 487
Hulton, Paul 65
human body see skin
humanism/humanists 7, 22, 109, 135, 183, 220, 265, 314, 495
anti-Italian sentiment 497
criticism of monasteries 16
fascination with expanding array of known languages 280
highly educated 182
mirror’s importance in philosophy of 108
rhetorical theory and literary practice 4
Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453) 247, 248
Hunt, S. 324
Hunt, Thomas 253
Hunter, D. 125
Hunter, G. K. 352, 384, 388
Huntington Library 126, 174n(31)
Hunwick (Durham) 320
Hutson, L. 489
Hutten, Ulrich von 288
Hyde, Agnes 266
Hyrdle, Richard 184, 186
iambic pentameter 4, 7, 155, 156, 364–80, 433, 435
Ibsen, Henrik 341
Iceland 478–9, 487
iconoclasm 310–15, 316, 317, 319, 321
shipment of products of 57
idolatry 54, 73, 311
abhorrence of 55
arse-kissing 314
superstition and 15, 74, 312, 465
illiteracy 50, 57, 145, 146, 296
imagination 4, 10, 141
efforts to theorize the works of 9
immorality 10, 152, 270, 412
Christian 55
Italy famed for 267, 268
monastery life 22
Inalcik, H. 50
Incas 483
incunables 128
India 284, 285, 480
individualization/individuality 3, 188
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ingelend, Thomas</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inglis, Esther</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingram, David</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingram, R. W.</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocent III, Pope</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocent VIII, Pope</td>
<td>49–50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquisition</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument-makers</td>
<td>95, 96, 97, 98, 99–101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interludes</td>
<td>3, 85, 332, 345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printers of</td>
<td>192–210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International influences</td>
<td>79–94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventions</td>
<td>2, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady shrine</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>334, 459–74, 485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English people exposed to Irish ethnicity</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Reformation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential recidivism into barbaric commonality</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac, Henricus</td>
<td>81, 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella, Queen of Spain</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>49–62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian language</td>
<td>52, 135, 214, 257, 261, 271–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English students of</td>
<td>9, 262–3, 268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction in</td>
<td>11, 263–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3, 8, 246, 254, 266, 269–70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England’s cultural fear of</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glassmaking</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration of skilled craftsmen</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monastic institutions</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>82–4, 85, 87, 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma of</td>
<td>267–8, 271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackass films</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, Elizabeth</td>
<td>44–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaggard, William</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, Henry</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, Susan</td>
<td>197, 307n(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James VI, King of Scotland/James I, King of England</td>
<td>31, 38, 40, 41, 41, 103, 114, 330, 333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jameson, F.</td>
<td>290, 291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jankowski, Theodora M.</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jardine, L.</td>
<td>141, 142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javitch, D.</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayne, S.</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffes, Abel</td>
<td>196–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen, P.</td>
<td>240, 241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesters</td>
<td>325, 327, 329, 330, 331, 333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deformed</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesuits</td>
<td>27, 66, 102, 235, 327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrels between secular priests and</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rekindling Catholic belief and practice</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewel, John</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mocking or exhibiting</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical families</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed as “antichristian”</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, King of England</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, F. R.</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, John</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, S. F.</td>
<td>445, 455, 457n(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnstone, Nathan</td>
<td>305, 306, 307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnstown, James</td>
<td>402, 407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, H. L.</td>
<td>472n(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, K.</td>
<td>32, 41, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Richard</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonson, Ben</td>
<td>120, 265, 310, 345, 437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jónsson, Arngrímur</td>
<td>478–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorden, Edward</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>53, 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juel-Jensen, B.</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian of Norwich</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julien le Notaire</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julio-Claudian period</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius II, Pope</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenal</td>
<td>148, 153, 173n(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaplan, R.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karakasis, E.</td>
<td>319, 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaske, Carol</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kassel</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine of Aragon</td>
<td>25, 52, 80, 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annulment of marriage</td>
<td>21, 194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keilen, Sean</td>
<td>316–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kellim, Albert</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kellim family</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index

Kells 471n(1)
Kelly, Joan 262
Kemp, T. D. 300, 301, 307n(1)
Kemp, Will 92, 333, 492–3
Kempe, Margery 50, 331
Kempis, Thomas à 297
Kendal, J. F. 102
Kendal (town) 240
Kent 24, 253
Weald of 18
Kerrigan, W. 449, 451
Kett’s Rebellion (1549) 256
Ketton see Robert of Ketton
keyboard forms 2, 85
Kilcullen 471n(1)
Killygrew (Cooke), Katherine 170, 271
King, J. N. 295
King, John (Tudor printer) 201, 204, 205
King, John (contemporary literary scholar) 273, 321
King’s Book (1543) 22
King’s Printers 180, 216, 253, 254
Kinnammon, N. 433
Kinney, Arthur 140, 360, 489, 493
Kinney, Clare 4–5, 9, 10, 11
Kinwelmershe, Francis 196
Kirchmayer, Thomas 311, 318
Knapp, J. 292n(5), 457n(4)
Knight, G. Wilson 388
Knights Hospitaller 56
Knolles, Richard 61
Knorr, J. 301, 307n(2)
Knyvet, Edmund 161
Kourou River 487
Kozikowski, S. J. 321(4)
Kratzer, Nicolaus 135
Kuhlemann, U. 70
Kuskin, W. 253
Kyd, Thomas 54, 60, 120, 444, 448–57
Kyeser, Conrad 103
Kyn Robert of Cicyle (anon) 327

Lake, Peter 231, 233
Lakowski, R. I. 292n(1)
Lamb, Mary Ellen 190, 396, 403, 440
Lambard, William 481

Lancashire 228, 229–30, 233, 237, 239, 241
see also Burnley
Lancaster 240
Langland, William 50, 145, 289, 343
Langton, Christopher 112
Langton, Stephen, Archbishop of Canterbury 223

language 11, 262, 486
arbitrariness of 288
functions of the “natural emphasis” of 365
instruction books 251
poetic 214
protective 491
visual images and 4
“world-making function” of 304
Lanier, Nicholas 87
Lanier family 86–7
Lanyer, Aemilia 436, 440
Larner, Christina 33
Lascelles, John 303
Lassus, Roland de 85, 88, 89, 91
Late Banns 230, 231, 234
Latimer, Hugh, Bishop of Worcester 25, 298, 301, 307
Latin 37, 104, 141, 147, 148, 157, 183, 189, 269, 272, 311, 354, 372, 476
bogus 314
Church, abolished 319
English relationship to 11
epigrams 271
epitaphs 131
first translation of Qur’an (1143) 52
logolatry mocked in Catholic ritual 318
manuscripts 135
musical works 80, 86
need to eschew 318
oratory 140
ornamentum 355
rejection of 318
rules of quantity 373, 374
significant implications for the future of 320
Latin Mass 17, 22, 80
abolished (1549) 23
widespread restoration of 25
Latin Vulgate 231
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laud, William, Archbishop of Canterbury</td>
<td>66, 334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laudonnière, René de</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laughter</td>
<td>4, 324–38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence, J.</td>
<td>265, 268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawson, J.</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lawyers</td>
<td>16, 64–5, 68, 131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Subsidy Rolls</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>League of Gentlemen (BBC)</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Antony</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, S.</td>
<td>247, 311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Thomas</td>
<td>472n(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Fèvre, Raoul</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Franc, Martin</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legg, J. W.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Guin, Ursula</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Huray, P.</td>
<td>84, 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leicester, Robert Dudley, Earl of</td>
<td>91, 108, 132, 161, 440, 483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leinwand, Theodore</td>
<td>334–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leland, John</td>
<td>221, 223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lentulo, Scipio</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lepanto, Battle of (1571)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lerer, Seth</td>
<td>3, 7–8, 9, 140, 141, 144, 149nn(1/2), 154, 215, 217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Roy, Adrian</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbia</td>
<td>182, 184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Utopia</td>
<td>4, 382, 389, 391, 392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie, M.</td>
<td>292n(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Strange, N.</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lestringant, E.</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>letters</td>
<td>3, 129–30, 140–50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettou, Jean</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levack, B. P.</td>
<td>32, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lever, Thomas</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leviticus</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewalski, B. K.</td>
<td>273, 401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, C. S.</td>
<td>489–90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lex Mahumet pseudoprophet</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ley, John</td>
<td>485–6, 487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lichfield, Richard</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liège</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lievesay, J. L.</td>
<td>263, 268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linacre, Thomas</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>296, 327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincolnshire</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey, Robert</td>
<td>472n(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistic knowledge</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linton, Joan Pong</td>
<td>4, 6, 9, 10, 299, 300, 303–4, 305, 307, 492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipsius, Justus</td>
<td>183–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbon cathedral</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lit de justice</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literacy</td>
<td>126, 145, 264, 296, 307n(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class-restricted</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>false</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>growing</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanist</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monolingual</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrarchan</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>polyglot</td>
<td>250–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rising</td>
<td>10, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women's</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liturgy</td>
<td>79–80, 86, 187, 238, 240, 301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lock, Anne</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodge, Thomas</td>
<td>221, 351, 359, 360, 490, 500, 502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lollards</td>
<td>7, 18–21, 26, 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>18, 21, 24, 49, 72, 87, 132, 235, 280, 489–503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gentry houses</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guilds</td>
<td>20, 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanists in</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instrument-makers</td>
<td>95, 99–101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interludes</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mail from</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proliferation of theaters</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>streets/districts/buildings: Blackfriars</td>
<td>100, 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad Street Ward</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch churchyard</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buildings Chancery Lane, Rolls House</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crooked Lane, St Michael's church</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleet Street</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray's Inn</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwich</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holborn, St Andrew</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Church</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambeth/Lambeth Palace</td>
<td>99, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lothbury 199</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithfield</td>
<td>295, 303, 305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Katherine's Hospital</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Paul's Cathedral</td>
<td>85, 89, 91, 101, 135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thames Street</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longchamps, Nigel de</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>López de Gómarra, Francisco</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorimer, Joyce</td>
<td>484, 485, 486, 487</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Louis XII, King of France 248
Louis XIII, King of France 330
Louvain 96
Love, Harold 132, 133, 138
Lovell family 131
Low Countries 55, 84, 92, 194, 485
    flight of Protestant craftsmen and technicians from 100
    paper from 125
Lowys, Elizabeth 31
Lucan 153, 155, 173n(7)
Lucar, Elizabeth 262
Lucar, Emanuel 262
Lucian 279
Lucretius 423
Luke (gospel) 298
Lumiansky, R. M. 230, 232, 233
Lumley, Jane, Lady 183, 184, 185, 189, 190, 268–9
    see also Dowland; Ferrabosco; Le Roy
Luther, Martin 7, 16, 19–20, 52, 55, 447, 457n(9), 495
    burnings of his books 21
    city associated with 224
    Depiction of the Papacy 313
Lutherans 53, 55, 57, 298, 313, 317, 447, 457n(7)
Luu, L. 247
Luxembourgeois 246
Lydgate, John 146, 215, 216, 218, 369, 370
    Life of our Lady 220, 226n(5)
    St Patrick’s Purgatory 226n(5)
    Troy Book 141, 214
Lyly, John 181, 400, 401
    Galatea 4, 381–94
Lyon 253, 254
Lyonnais 247
lyric poetry 132–3, 189, 250, 432, 494–6
lyrics 148, 151, 154, 249, 262, 273, 368, 403–4, 406, 433
    bowdlerized 89
    detailed musical depiction of 90
    erotic 161–71
    love 138, 255
    poignant 489
    rapturous 399
MacCalzean, Euphame 38
Macdonald, M. 33
Macdonald, S. 41
Macfarlane, Alan 32, 33
Machaut, Guillaume de 79
Machiavelli, Niccolò 266, 269, 282, 320, 399, 445, 450
Machlinia, William 253
Machonici Sarracenorum principis vita 52
MacLaren, I. 482, 487
MacMillan, K. 64, 67, 68, 71
Macro, Cox 228
Mad Mathurine 330–1
madrigals 2, 85
    Italian 89–91
    three separate classes of 102
Maguin, J. 309
Maitland, John, Lord Chancellor of Scotland 38
Maldon 42
Maley, W. 464, 465, 466, 468, 470, 472n(7), 473(17)
Malory, Sir Thomas 53
Malta
    Ottoman siege of 56
    rapacious Christians of 60
Maloney, William S. 74
Mandeville Travels 5, 7, 50, 53, 55, 284–6, 289, 476–7, 481, 482, 487
Manley, L. 235, 501
Manningham, John 130
Mansion, Colard 253
Mantua 266
Manuel I, King of Portugal 49, 51
manuscripts 2, 5, 6, 125–39, 236, 263, 433, 479, 485–6
    exploration of genres and practices 3
    Henrician courtier writing 151–77
    also Cotton; Egerton; Harley; Mulliner
Marenzio, Luca 90, 91
Index

Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy 180, 248, 255
Marguerite de Navarre 186, 247, 269, 297
Maria, Spanish Infanta 334
Marin, Louis 287
Markham, Gervase 402, 407
Marlowe, Christopher 228, 356, 489
Doctor Faustus 224–5
Edward II 225
The Jew of Malta 60, 61, 326
Tamburlaine 5, 59–60, 61, 118–19, 377–8, 459–74
Marot, Clément 84, 247, 249, 254
Marot, Jean 370
Marot-de Bèze Psalter 432
Marotti, A. F. 137, 434
Marprelate tracts 27, 492
Marracayay 487
Marsalek, K. S. 321n(1)
Marshall, Peter 2, 6, 7
Marston, John 120
Martial 148
Martin, H.-J. 125
Martyrdom 63–4, 74, 213, 477, 479
Martyr, Peter 132, 185, 302, 303, 306
Protestant 213, 295, 300–1, 304, 457n(7)
template for lesser believers 25
women’s 183
Mary, Queen of Scots 27, 71, 76, 247
Mary I, Queen of England 25–6, 28, 43, 51, 74, 80, 217, 223
accession 84, 196
author of printed texts 182
devotion to 81
music during reign 85, 86
persecution of Protestant Reformers under 310
return to papal supremacy 56
short-lived return to official Catholicism 237
Maslen, R. W. 330
Mason, H. A. 156, 161, 163, 172n, 173nn(4/7), 175n(37)
masses 343, 344, 346, 398
Masten, Jeffrey 188
Matchinske, M. 241, 300, 303
mathematics 95, 97, 101, 102, 104, 347
leading lights in 96
Mathorez, J. 331
Matthew (gospel) 58, 297
Maurice of Nassau, Prince 136
May, Steven W. 3, 7, 10, 137, 250, 256
Maynyal, Guillaume 253
Mazzio, C. 457n(8)
Mazzola, Elizabeth 303, 437
McAdam, I. 457n(7)
McCabe, R. 462, 463
McCutcheon, E. 288, 292n(8)
McPherson, D. 318
McVan, A. J. 330
mechanics 102, 104
Mechelen/Mechlin 82, 253
Medici (house) 248
medievalism 213–27, 241
and classicism 6–8
and radicalism 3–4, 279–94
Mediterranean 50
Christian–Islamic conflict 56
Medwall, Henry 116–17
Meghen, Peter 135
Melancthon, Philip 52, 317, 319
Melville, Elizabeth, Lady Culross 181
menageries 329–31
Mendoza, Bernardino de 57
Mentz, Steve 5, 8, 9, 489, 491, 493, 494, 497, 498, 500, 501
Mercator, Gerard 96, 101, 479
Merchant Taylor’s Company/School 262, 332
Meredyth, George 341
Meredyth, P. 240
Meres, Francis 133
Messenger, E. C. 312
metaphors 2, 8, 360
visual 355
meter see iambic pentameter
metrical psalm-singing 2, 29, 89
Sternhold-Hopkins 84, 430, 433
Mexix, P. 472n(13)
Mexico 72, 478, 483
Meyer-Lee, R. J. 140
Middle English 370
Middleton, Anne 151
Index

Middleton, Henry 196–7, 208
Middleton, Thomas 344, 493, 500, 502
Middleton, William 194, 196, 201, 204
Milan 83
military colonization 247
Miller, David Lee 446
Miller, Jack 333–4
milling machinery 95
Mills, David 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 236
Milton, John 342, 377, 396
mimesis 4, 339, 340, 343, 347, 348, 352, 353, 354, 361, 468–71
Plato and his critique of 356–7
unfamiliar 344
minstrels 81, 84
Miola, Robert 231, 237, 241
Mirror for Magistrates 377
mirrors 107–8, 109
missionaries 27–8
mixed consorts 92
modernism 1, 9, 341
Molière 347
Molyneux, Emery 96, 99
monasteries 95, 240, 241, 286
decision to seize 95
destruction of 221
dissolution of 16, 22, 24, 223
rebels protesting against closure of 23
refounded 25
Mongol court 477
Monmouth, Humphrey 20
Monnas, L. 239, 240
Monte, Philippe de 85, 89–90
Montrose, Louis 75, 486
Moors 335
Morality plays 222, 224, 228
More, John 128
More, Sir Thomas 16, 22, 43, 55, 198, 495
appointment as Lord Chancellor 21
execution of 56
Utopia 3–4, 7, 8, 10, 16, 145, 279–94, 331
Moretus, Jean 183
Morini, Massimiliano 184
Morison, Richard 194, 265
Morley, Henry Parker, Lord 158
Morley, Thomas 90, 92
Mornay, Philippe de 188
Morocco 51
Moroney, D. 87
Morris, William 290
Morris troupes 333, 492
Morison, Fynes 460
Moseley, C. W. R. D. 55
Mueller, Janelle 295–6, 297, 298, 301, 302
Mulcaster, Richard 332
Mulliner Book 85
Mulryne, J. R. 444
Mumford, Lewis 95, 104
Mummerset 320
Munday, Anthony 234–5
Mundy, William 86
Münster, Sebastian 478, 479
Münster (city) 493, 494
Murad III, Ottoman ruler 58, 61
Murano 106, 107
Murphy, J. 241
music
influenced by religious change 6
international influences and 79–94
new values and techniques 2
poetry as 4
music paper 128
music publishing industry 88
Muslims 8
see also Islam
Nagel, A. P. 292n(2)
Nagel, Hans 81
Nashe, Thomas 263, 429
The Unfortunate Traveler 5, 8, 489–503
National Archives 136
national identity 8
National Library of Scotland 220
nationality 279
Native Americans 37, 72, 76
efforts to convert 70
nature
and human art 9
and technê 412–27
navigational instruments 96, 97, 99, 100–1, 105, 106
Neely, C. 321n(1)
Neill, Michael 446
Nelson, Alan 309, 311, 319
Nelson, Thomas 58
neo-Platonism 357, 358, 359, 398, 403, 407
New English settlers 459–60, 462
New Testament 232, 297, 457n(3)
Erasmus 20, 135
St Jerome 135
Tyndale 20, 180
New World 63–78
England’s perceptions of 8
English people exposed to savages of 9
stereotypes invoked to understand 7
winning to Protestantism and away from Catholicism 6
Newes from Scotland 34, 38
Newman, K. 247
Newton, Thomas 49
Newtonian universe 339
Nicholl, C. 489
Nidaros 479
Nietzsche, Friedrich 178
Nigropontus 58
Nine Years War (1594–1603) 460, 471n(3)
nomadism 464–8
non-belief 60
Nonesuch Palace 83, 84
Norfolk, Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of 23, 371
Norfolk (county) 87, 133, 207, 236
rebellions in 256
Norman Conquest (1066) 68
Normand, L. 33, 35, 37, 42, 45
Normandy 247, 248, 253
North, J. 347
North Africa 50, 52, 61
importations from 57
North Atlantic 63
English claims to 481
North Berwick witches 37–8, 40, 41
Northeast Passage 100
Northern Rebellion (1569) 57
Northumberland, John Dudley, Duke of 23, 25
see also Percy
Northwest Passage 63, 99
Norton, Thomas 206, 208, 209, 210, 377
Norway 479
Norwich 493
novella genre 497–500
Nuremberg 88, 313
Nürnberg Chronicle 104
Oath of Supremacy 301
Ochino, Bernardino 268, 271, 272
Odoric de Pordenone 477, 481
OED (Oxford English Dictionary) 69, 125, 145, 213, 313
Old English settlers 459, 463, 469–70
Old French 372
Oldridge, D. 47
Old Testament 232, 240
optics 106, 225, 347
Order of St John of Jerusalem 56
original sin 5, 6
Orinoco River 484, 487
Oertelius, Abraham 479
Osborn, L. 350, 356
Ottoman Empire 49, 51, 52, 54–8, 61
Ovid 141, 148, 155, 216, 284, 423, 496
Owen, William 132
Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature (Pincombe & Shrank) 1
Oxford University 16, 91, 104, 105, 269, 318
see also Bodleian Library; OED
Oxford University Press 431
Pace, Richard 265
Padua 267
Padua, University of 265, 266
Paget, Thomas 91
Painter, William 54, 269, 270
Palestrina, Giovanni da 90
Palladio, Andrea 346
Palmer, Barbara 230, 236, 237–8, 240, 241
pamphlets 2, 64, 65, 127, 178, 490, 491, 493
portable 179
Index

witchcraft 33–4, 35, 36, 38, 40, 45
papacy 49, 51

distaste for 22
paper 125–9
Papistry 11, 73, 267
demonized 318
Paracelsus 111, 347
paradisistole 386, 387, 392
Paradise Lost (Milton) 342, 377
Paré, A. 115–16
Paris 67, 87, 91, 96, 253, 330, 478, 479
fashion in 16th century and after 249
massacre of Protestants (1572) 27
parish clergy 16
Parker, J. 228
Parker, Matthew, Archbishop of Canterbury 27, 311
Parkes, Malcolm 236
Parr, Katharine 4, 135, 179, 272, 295–308
Parsons/Persons, Robert 66, 76n(3), 235, 241

participatory realism 4, 341, 344, 347, 348
Paster, G. K. 112, 321n(1)
Paston, Edward 87

patrologia 354
patronage 20, 21, 140, 233, 242, 255, 263, 491, 502
Paul, St 20, 302
Paul IV, Pope 25
Payne, A. 63, 65
Peacham, Henry 332, 353, 354
Pearce, T. M. 473n(20)
Pearsall, Derek 218
Peck, D. C. 132
Peele, George 60
Peler, Johannes de 81
Pembroke, Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of 401
Percy, Henry, 9th Earl of Northumberland 98, 148
Perereira, Benito 102
Perkins, William 40, 42, 44, 47, 447
Perry, C. 321n(1)
Persels, J. 321(3)
Persia 59
Peru 483
Peter the Venerable 52

famous letter to Boccaccio 141
first Englishman to translate 37
Wyatt’s reading of 376
Petre family 87
Petri, Nicolaus 127
Petrucci, Ottaviano 88
Phaer, Thomas 373
Phalèse, Pierre 91
Philip I, the Handsome, King of Castile 81
Philip II, King of Spain 25, 49, 51, 85, 86, 182
Philips, Katherine 188
Philips, Peter 91

Picts 76, 472n(10)
Pier Plowman (Langland) 145, 289, 343
Pilgrimage of Grace (1536) 22–3, 24, 56
Pimcombe, Mike 1, 4, 10, 11, 389, 392
Pinero, Arthur 339, 340
Pirandello, Luigi 341
Pius V, Pope 57, 71
Pizan, Christine de 254, 257
Plantagenets 225, 248
Plantin, Christophe 89
Plato 97, 145, 279, 286, 289, 290, 350, 356–8, 359, 361, 362, 412
Plautus 315, 318, 320
plays 181, 183, 339, 340
biblical 228, 229, 230–5, 236
choirboy 85
excremental 310
history 377
medieval 223
mocking 335
polemical 194
printers and booksellers of 193–202
psychoanalytic study of 5
recusant 240

see also Corpus Christi plays; Morality plays
Pliny 477, 478, 480, 482
Plotinus 358
Plutarch 157, 360, 362, 388
Plymouth 129
poetic license 58, 365–8
poetry 7, 151–71, 182, 217, 428
courtier 10
dominance of iambic foot in 4
Henrician 3
Latin 148
lines drawn from other poems 217
religious 302
seeing through words in theories of 350–63
sixain form 248, 249–50, 371, 375
vituperative 143–4
see also lyric poetry; versification
Poitevines 247
Pole, Cardinal Reginald 22, 25, 265, 266
political critique 3, 145
politics 2, 8, 57, 69, 402
international 59
literary allusion and 381–94
patronage and 140
religious and 6, 295, 296, 298
Scottish court 42
women’s engagement in 181
Pollard, A. W. 172n, 192
Pollard, Tanya 2, 6, 9, 111
polyphony 2, 79–80, 81, 84, 86, 89, 301, 302
continental 82
first printed collection 88
Pomfret 255
Pope, Thomas 92
Popham, George 483
Popham, John, Lord Chief Justice 66
pornographic images 109
Portsmouth 81
Portugal 450, 451
sea voyages 99
see also Manuel I
Possevino, Antonio 102
post-Provençal presence 247
Poulter’s measure 371, 373
Powell, Thomas 396
Power, Leonel 79
Poyntz, John 149, 151, 152, 154, 155, 157, 158, 173n(3)
Praetorius, Michael 92
pragmatographia 354
Prague 182, 184, 187
Pratt, Mary Louise 257
predestination 27, 456, 498
double 447
pre-marital sex 401
Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 213
Presbyterianism 35, 36, 37
part of the expansion of 42
Prescott, Anne Lake 3–4, 7, 8, 10, 247, 288, 292n(8)
Preston, Thomas 117, 206, 209
Preston (town) 240
Price, Griffith 131
priests 19, 20, 42, 60, 145, 239, 240, 242, 266, 306, 311
allowed to marry 23
castigated for ignorance 16
fool 313, 315, 328
fraudulent 314
harshly treated 28
illicit practices 238, 241
ordination levels 17
whoreson 315, 319
printing/printers 2, 6, 11, 15–16, 53, 111, 151–210, 252, 253
Catholic plays 194
commercial potential 34
continental 89
male voice appropriated 3
music 88–9, 91
paratexts 491–2
Scottish 38
see also manuscripts; also under various printers’ names, e.g. Allde; Caxton; Colwell; Copland; De Worde; Faques; Griffin; Hulsius; Jaggard; Mansion; Maynyal; Moretus; Pynson; Rastell; Scarlet; Tottel; Toy
Pritchard, R. E. 432
Privy Council 35, 38, 130, 241, 300, 470
proclamations 180, 182, 195, 254
Procter, T. 468, 473n(20)
Prophet Muhammad 52, 53, 55, 61
consistently demonized 56
prose narrative 489–503
prosopopoeia 354
Prosser, Eleanor 445
Protestantism 2, 7, 8, 19, 25, 28–9, 51, 63–78, 91, 218, 223, 267, 456
aligning romance with discourses of 219
allegory 222
areas with sizable minorities 20
attacks on Mass 314
campaign against cunning folk and Catholics 42
claim of universal truth 58
clerical exiles 26
compulsory 241
compulsory under Elizabeth 241
conversion to 58, 198
desire to protect one’s interiority 9
doctrine of election 446
drama a useful tool in the proliferation of official ideas 194
emerging popular spirituality 307
emerging prophetic tradition 303
England’s return heralded 217
female martyrlogies, devotional writers and poets 6
flight of craftsmen and technicians 100
Geneva Bible 51
innovative synthesis of Catholicism and 26
Italian not to be studied by young women 271
leading theologian 40
literate country populated by Scandinavian colonists 478
liturgy 80, 187
magisterial 300
martyrdom 213, 300–1, 304, 457n(7)
Northern territories of Italy sympathetic to 267
original sin 5, 6
persecution of Reformers under Mary 310
power of providentialism in 41
Prayer Book (revised 1552) 23
printing of polemical plays 194
prominent women 4
radical 222
rejection of crusades 55
renowned German propagandist 314
return to 86
sacred repertoire 84
simultaneous emergence of Luther and 55
staunch 318
subjectivity 298, 302
superiority over Catholicism and all religions 58
universalism and personalism 301
vernacular language 268
well-established Italian community 267
see also Calvin; Huguenots; Luther; Presbyterianism; Puritans; Reformation
Prowse (Locke), Anne 185
Psalms 63, 64, 132, 135, 155, 305, 370, 401, 437
French translation of 136
paraphrases of 154, 156, 169, 189, 307
penitential 154, 161, 169, 432
putative author of 185
Sydnean 5, 401, 428, 429–36, 439, 440, 441
see also metrical psalm-singing
pseudonymous texts 181
psychoanalytic perspective 5, 303
Ptolemy 339, 347, 461
Puckering, John, Lord 459, 463
Pudsey, Edward 131
Pugin, A. W. N. 213
Purchas, Samuel 481
purgatory 22, 26
Puritans 26, 29, 109, 235, 310
and arts 351
clergy apt to detect influence of popery 28
common ground between other Protestants and 27
correct mode of practice 189
witchcraft and 41, 42, 43
zealous 233
Purkiss, Diane 183, 190
Puttenham, George 4, 324, 351, 354–5, 356–7, 359, 361, 386
Pynson, Richard 180, 193, 197, 200, 203, 216, 217, 253
Pythagorean universe 347
Quakers 181
quantitative verse 373–4
querelle des femmes 254
Quilligan, Maureen 403
Quinn, David B. 459, 469, 476, 477, 481
Quintilian 324, 353, 356, 361
Qur’an 52, 60

Rabelais, François 247, 314
racialist discourse 5
Radcliffe, A. 348
Radcliffe, Ralph 318
radicalism 3–4, 222, 279–94
Raguin, V. 239
Raitiere, M. 292n(1)
Raleigh, Sir Walter 65, 66, 69, 74–5, 76n(2), 99, 134, 250, 379, 482–7, 490
Ramelli, Agostino 103
Ramus, Petrus (Pierre de la Ramée) 97, 102
Rastell, John 88, 113, 193–4, 197, 198, 256, 318
Rastell, William 196, 197, 198, 201
Rathmell, J. C. A. 430, 434–5
Rattigan, Terence 339, 340
readers 10
female 11, 265, 269, 396, 399–410
realism 4, 7, 339–49
Reorde, Robert 95, 104–5
recusants 80, 220, 228, 230, 240
gentry houses 242
imprisonment for 238
paranoia about 241
prosecution of 470
punished 28
threats posed by 71
Redford, John 85, 107–8, 320
birthplace of 224
demands for 16
failure in Tudor Ireland 28
issues surrounding 253
movements of religious exiles 2
persecution of Reformers 310
precondition and explanation for success of 16
restored 26
seismic shift created by 224

shipment of products of iconoclasm 57
tensions that would lead to 29
vernacular Bible reading stimulated by 180
Regnault, François 253
Reid, Thom 44
religion 2, 4, 15–18
and folklore 32
interest in 5
Native Americans and 72
politics of 24
radical groups 181
recusant 242
see also Christianity; Islam; Judaism
religious conflict 1, 6, 57, 102, 242
negotiation of 229
religious iconography 105
religious persecution 100
religious polemics 5, 42, 488, 489, 493, 498
oppositional 2
religious upheaval 6, 11, 33
Relihan, C. 500
Renatus, Flavius Vegetius 103
Restoration 81, 83
Revelation 53
revenge 339, 344, 444–58, 497–500
courtly 101, 495
deliberative 316
elloquent 318
embodiment 303, 306
falsifying 495
fecund 499
flair with 141
passionate 397
sweepingly explicit 449
taught at school 351
traditional aims of 352
rhetoric of presence 353, 355, 356
rhythm 365–7, 369, 370, 375, 376, 379
stress-based, rhyme and 372
Ribault, John 72
Ricardian writers 151
Riccoldo da Montecroce 53
Rich, Barnaby 54
Rich, Penelope 90–1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>529</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard III, King of England</td>
<td>15, 19, 152, 180, 248, 255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson, C.</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson, D. A.</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson, Samuel</td>
<td>339, 346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riche, Barnabe</td>
<td>54, 261, 400, 460, 465, 470, 472n(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond-upon-Thames</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridley, Nicholas, Bishop of London</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rienstra, D.</td>
<td>431, 433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riggs, David</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringler, W. A.</td>
<td>249, 257, 434, 435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert of Ketton</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts, G.</td>
<td>33, 35, 37, 42, 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts, Josephine</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts family</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Hood ballads</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson, Ralph</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robson, Simon</td>
<td>331, 332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roche, J. J.</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rollins, H. E.</td>
<td>169, 171, 172n, 173nn(4/12/23), 174nn(33/35–6), 175nn(37), 372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>romance</td>
<td>3, 5, 190, 214, 219–22, 255, 395–411, 500–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcadia-inspired</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homiletic</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metrical</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Empire</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman law</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Rite</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romans (book)</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantics</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romany, Frank</td>
<td>472n(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>27, 85, 91, 102, 316, 497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construction of hospitals</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English College</td>
<td>241, 266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fall/collapse of</td>
<td>106, 125, 279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inward allegiance to</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literature of</td>
<td>8, 141, 182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prestige suffered in wake of Reformation</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronsard, Pierre de</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rood, Theodoric</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roper, Margaret More</td>
<td>184, 186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosenband, L. N.</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Theater</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross, Thomas</td>
<td>321n(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossetti, Dante Gabriel</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotman, B.</td>
<td>292n(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotterdam</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rouen</td>
<td>86, 247, 253, 254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rousseau, Jean-Jacques</td>
<td>285, 291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>royal prerogative courts</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>royal supremacy</td>
<td>21, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rozett, Martha Tuck</td>
<td>446, 457n(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rübbenfigur</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rue, Pierre de la</td>
<td>81, 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rufus, Conrad Mutianus</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushton, P.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruskin, John</td>
<td>213, 348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell (Cooke), Lady Elizabeth</td>
<td>270, 271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutland, Roger Manners, Earl of</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachs, Hans</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacks, David</td>
<td>65, 66, 67, 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sackville, Thomas</td>
<td>206, 208, 209, 210, 377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sacraments</td>
<td>7, 17, 18, 19, 47, 59, 240, 318, 299, 306, 311, 312, 315, 318, 456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arguments over how to define</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sadism</td>
<td>328–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saintsbury, George</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales, Roger</td>
<td>461, 466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltonstall, W.</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanders, E.</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanderson, William</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanford, Hugh</td>
<td>401, 436, 437, 438–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saracens</td>
<td>50–5, 58, 219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>romantic or threatening</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarum Rite</td>
<td>79–80, 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satire</td>
<td>120, 149, 315–16, 319, 320, 321, 334, 497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anti-Papal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>epistolary</td>
<td>151, 161, 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iconoclastic</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menippean</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political</td>
<td>8, 131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scatological</td>
<td>4, 314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savile, Sir Henry</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scamozzi, Vincenzo</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scansion</td>
<td>365, 367, 368, 369, 373, 377</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index

Scarlet, Thomas 501
Scarry, Elaine 304
scatology 4, 309, 310, 312, 316, 319, 320, 321
and arse-kissing 313
Calvinist uses in propaganda 321n(3)
confabulation of Catholic ritual and 314–15
Scattergood, J. 140
Schechner, Richard 326
Scheurweghs, Gustave 318
Schleiner, Louise 271, 273
Schoenfeldt, Michael 170
Schwarz, K. 75, 76
Schwoebel, R. 50
Scot, Reginald 40–1
Scotland 129, 136, 220, 472n(10)
steady connections between France and 248
witchcraft 31, 32, 33, 34, 35–9, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46–7
Skot, John 193, 200, 203
Scott, M. A. 269
Scottish court see James VI; Mary, Queen of Scots
Scottish Kirk 35, 37, 43, 46
Scottish law 35
Scribner, R. W. 313, 315
Scripture 18, 19, 22, 185, 186, 231–4, 298, 299, 302, 396, 414, 447
approved Catholic translation of 25
citation and analysis of 303
curtailment of rights to read in English 23
mistranslations of 41
theatricalization of 229
Scythians 5, 377, 460–9, 471, 472n(8–10)
Seager, Jane 135, 189
seasonal migration 462
secretariats 127
sectarianism 6, 67, 71
secularism 6, 7
seditious images 109
Segar, Francis 256
Seife, C. 292(4)
seigneurial Catholicism 28
Semenza, Christopher 457n(3)
Seneca 158, 159, 173nn(5/7/18), 358, 372, 496
Sephardim 83
Serlio, Sebastiano 346
Sermsy, Claudin de 85
Sessions, William 372
sexuality 391, 393, 432
pre-marital sex 401
sexual heat 333
Seymour, Anne 269
Seymour, Edward, Duke of Somerset, Lord Protector 23, 161, 299
Seymour, Jane 23, 269
Seymour, Margaret 269
Seymour, Thomas 161
Sforza, Costanza 187
Shakespeare, William 1, 2, 4, 60, 92, 99, 133, 134, 219, 225, 250, 261, 265, 274, 342, 351, 356, 364, 438, 440, 490, 502
As You Like It 332, 391
Coriolanus 340
Hamlet 327, 339, 340, 345, 446
Henry IV (I) 282
Henry IV (II) 60
Henry VI (I) 344
King Lear 222, 327, 340
Macbeth 345
Measure for Measure 344
Merry Wives of Windsor 114
Midsummer Night’s Dream 114, 381, 500
Othello 53, 268, 327, 336n(4)
Pericles 345
Richard II 327
Romeo and Juliet 324, 378
Taming of the Shrew 264, 339, 340
Tempest 340
Titus Andronicus 326–7
Troilus and Cressida 340
Twelfth Night 333
Two Noble Kinsmen 218, 333; see also Fletcher
Winter’s Tale 340, 378
Sharpe, J. A. 32, 33, 35, 38, 42, 43, 45
shawms and sackbuts 81
Shephard, Robert 290
Shepherd, Luke 318
Sheppard, John 84, 86
Sheryngham (composer) 80
Shirley, John 345–6
Shorter, A. H. 126
Shrank, Cathy 1, 234
Shuger, Debora 457n(6), 461
Siberch, Johannes 142
Sicily 479
Siculus, Diodorus 461
Sidney, Sir Henry 131
Sidney, Mary see Herbert
Sidney, Sir Philip 10, 64, 72, 329, 431–7
Astrophil and Stella 132, 250, 261, 266, 375–6, 433, 434, 438, 494
Defense of Poesy 226n(3), 351, 352, 358, 430, 438
New Arcadia 494, 500
Sidney, Robert 137
Simpson, James 213–14
Six Articles of Faith 296
Skelton, John 3, 140–50, 151, 216
Magnificence 143, 194, 198, 203
skepticism 40, 41, 119, 120, 174n(24), 237, 316, 368, 433, 481, 483, 487
official and popular 484
Skilliter, Susan 57, 58, 61
skin 2, 9, 111–22
Skinner, Quentin 289, 353
Skretkowicz, V. 437, 438
Smith, Hallett 430, 432
Smith, Helen 3, 6, 9, 10
Smith, J. H. 321n(5)
Smith, J. & K. 237
Smith, John (clown) 311
Smith, John (writer) 475
Smith, Richard 196, 197, 207, 208
Smyth, John 263
Socrates 159
Somerset (county) 320
Somerset family see Seymour (Edward)
Southsidekens 84
South-Flemish presence 246
Southampton, Henry Wriothesly, Earl of 265, 303, 491, 494
Southeast England 20
Southwest England 129
Southworth, J. 334, 335
Spain 28, 455, 457n(7)
attempt to invade England (1588) 27
Catholic monarchs a constant menace 71
England’s relationship with 8
escalating hostilities with 51
Inquisition 83
monastic institutions 52
music 81, 87, 91
religio-political threats posed by 71
see also Isabella; Philip II
Spanish Armada (1588) 57, 334, 457n(7), 463
Spanish Caribbean 483
Spanish migrations 462
Spanish Netherlands 27, 91, 92
Spanish romance 190, 402
Spanish Tragedy, The 5, 339, 444–58
Spearling, A. C. 340
spectator realism 4, 7, 339–40, 341, 343–8
Specula 106–7
Speght, Thomas 218
Spencer, T. J. B. 346
Spenser, Edmund 460, 472n(14)
The Faerie Queene 5, 218, 222, 226n(2), 261, 341–2, 356, 376–7, 412–27, 495
The Shepheards Calender 374–5, 426
Spiegel, Gerald 372
spirits 42, 44
spondee 376, 377, 378
St Albans 253
St Leger, Antony 161
St Omer 327
St Osyth trials (1582) 35, 41
Stallybrass, P. 112, 128, 129, 133
Stanley, Ferdinando, Lord Strange 233, 234, 235
Stanley, George 233
Stanley, Henry, Earl of Derby 233–4
Stanley, Mrs 5, 408–10
Stanyhurst, Richard 374, 460, 461, 464, 471n(2)
Star Chamber 34
Starkey, Thomas 265
State Papers 136
Index

Stationers Company 168, 253
Staverton, Frances 184
Stavreva, K. 35, 44
STC (Short Title Catalogue) 33, 130, 172n, 174nn(27/31), 180, 182, 192, 193, 263, 472n(6)
Steen, S. J. 263
Stephen, L. 311
stereotypes 7, 31, 325
anti-Spanish 8
anti-theatrical 321
Catholic oaths 312, 315
dialect 320
familiar 16
female 300
Muslim/anti-Muslim 57, 61
proto-puritan 321
Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter 430
Sterrett, J. R. S. 472n(9)
Stevens, J. 80
Stevens, Martin 236, 237, 240, 241, 242
Stevenson, William 206, 310–21
Stewart, Alan 130, 437
Stierle, Karlheinz 258
Stock, Brian 213
Stonyhurst Pageants, The 240
Stoppard, Tom 315
Stow, John 217
Strabo 460, 461, 462, 472n(9)
Strasbourg 311
Strasbourg cathedral 103
stressed syllables 365
Striggio, Alessandro 87, 90
Strode, William 346
Stuart, Arabella 76, 263
Stuart manuscripts 137
Stuart policies and literature 31
Stubbes, Philip 307
sub-Saharan Africa 52
Suffolk, Richard de la Pole, Earl of 82
Suffolk (county) 207, 236
Summers, Will 334–5
Summit, J. 300
superstition 23, 25, 47, 60, 313, 314, 462
Catholicism and 42, 72, 74, 315, 321
conventional markers of 320
hostility to 22
idolatry and 15, 74, 312, 465
presumed link between witchcraft and 42
superstitious diligence 318, 319
Frauenlieder 165–8
Songs and Sonettes 169, 171
Survey of Scottish Witchcraft (2003) 33
Swayne, Ellis 87
Sweelinck, J. P. 91
Sweet, Timothy 70
Swift, Jonathan 291
Swiss presence 246
Sylvan Bartholo 271
syncopation 366, 376
Syon Abbey nuns 19
Syon House 98
Taccola 103
Taffin, Jean 185
Tallis, Thomas 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89
Tamburlaine the Great (Marlowe) 5, 59–60, 61, 118–19, 377–8, 459–74
Tanner, Robert 99
Tarlton, Richard 330
Tasso, Torquato 266, 269, 270, 416, 422, 423
Tate, John 126
Taverner, John 84
tax forms 128
Taylor, E. G. R. 65–6, 68, 69, 95, 477, 478
technē 9
nature and 412–27
promises and dangers of 5
technological change 15–16
technology 7, 95–110
advances in 9
experts who helped to transform 6
print 178–91
sense of wonder evoked by 2
Ten Articles (1536) 22
Tenerife 479
Tenures de la Loi, Les 250
Index

Terence 234, 312, 315–20
Textor, Ravisius 318
textual property 188
Thackeray, William 340
Thames Valley 20
theodicy 39
Theophrastus 145, 356
Thevet, André 477–8, 482
Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) 26, 91
Thomas, Keith 32–3, 331
Thomson, P. 173nn(3/4/5/7/11/12/13/14/17/18/22), 174n(24–7/29–32/35), 175n(38)
Thorláksson, Guðbrandur, Bishop of Hólar 478, 479
Throckmorton, Michael 266
Thynne, William 216–17
Tietze-Conrat, E. 330
Tilbury 75
Timur Khan see Tamburlaine
Tisdale, John 196
Tishem, Catherine 262
Tixall Manuscript 401
TLS (Times Literary Supplement) 368
Tolan, J. 52, 53
topographia 354
torture 37, 38, 152, 295, 300, 304–5, 313, 324, 421, 445, 453
accepted part of Scottish law 35
used extra-judicially in royal prerogative courts 34
Toulousiens 247
Tower of London 136
Towneley, Christopher 237
Towneley, John 237, 238–9, 240
Towneley, Mary 237, 238
Towneley plays/manuscript 228, 229, 230, 235–42
Toy (printer) 480
Tracy, William 21
trade 1
international 111
unfavorable balance of 70
tragicomedies 344
transubstantiation 17, 239
controversy over 299
denounced/rejected 18, 296
tavel 1, 7, 265–7
international 111
tavel writing
monstrous beings of 9
real and unreal in 475–88
Travitsky, B. 402
treason 66
Treveris, P. 194, 198
trilingualism 251
Trill, Suzanne 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 431
Trithemius, Johannes 224
trochaic substitution 367, 371, 372, 375, 376
Trolloope, Anthony 339, 341
Troyes 89
Tuke, Sir Brian 129
Tunstall, Cuthbert, Bishop of London 20, 265
Turberville, George 372
Turks 2, 7, 8, 49, 51, 52, 54, 56, 59, 118, 455, 466
commitment to fight in Holy Land 53
contrasted positively with hypocritical Christians 61
conversion of 58
enforced performances by 336n(1)
Islam indivisible from 60
opposed to true Christian faith 55
terrible image 9
threatening figure of 460
Turner, Gerard 100
Tydeman, William 309, 320
Tye, Christopher 84, 86
Tyerman, C. 49, 50, 53, 56
Tyler, Margaret 190, 402
Tyndale, William 20, 55, 180, 288, 298, 301, 307
typefaces 253, 254
typographers 89
Tyrone, Hugh O’Neill, 2nd Earl of 471n(3)
Tyrwhit, Elizabeth 179, 187
Tyrwhitt, Thomas 217
Tzanaki, R. 50
Index

Ubaldini, Petruccio 135
Udall, Nicholas 206, 309, 318–19, 320, 332
universals 357–8
universities 21, 28
unstressed syllables 365, 368, 369
Unton, Sir Edward 269
Urquhart, Thomas 248
Urswick, Christopher, Dean of York and Windsor 135

Valois (house) 248
see also Alençon
values
  aristocratic 335
  literary 7
  musical 2
  religious 2, 15, 18, 49
  residual 7
  shared 49
Van de Passe, Simon 439
Van der Burgh, Guillaume 81
Van der Straten, Dirk 194, 201
Vanhoutte, Jacqueline 382, 383
Van Osterwick, Gomer 88
Van Wilder, Philip and Peter 81
Vasquez, H. 231
Vaughan, D. M. 51
Vaughan, G. 238, 240
Vautrollier, Thomas 89
Vaux, Thomas 161
Vecchi, Orazio 90
Velz, John 310, 313
Venice 83, 88, 266
  glassmaking 106, 107, 109
  sympathetic to Protestantism 267
Venuti, Lawrence 251
Vérard, Antoine 200
verbal gesture 151
Verdelot, Philippe 82
Vere, Anne de (Cecil), Countess of Oxford 273
Vere, Edward de, Earl of Oxford 383
Vergil, Polydore 316
Vermigli, Pietro Martire 268
versification 3, 4, 7, 9, 158, 255, 256, 257, 352, 356, 364–80, 403, 431
  brief but powerful account of 351
  essentially musical account of 354
Vesalius, Andrea 111
Vesuvius, Mt 479
Vicary, Thomas 116
Vickers, B. 134
Vienna 55, 87
vihuelistas 85
Vincent of Beauvais 53
viols 81, 83, 86, 92
Virgil (or Vergil), Publius Vergilius Maro 141, 154, 155, 161, 169 218–19, 226n(1), 284, 343, 373, 492, 496
  Aeneid 132, 140, 155, 372
Virginia 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75, 99, 475
Virgin Queen 70, 381, 382, 383, 384, 386, 387–8, 393, 500
  male views of 10
  self-representation as 75
Vitruvius 103
Vostre, Simon 253
vulgarism 321

Wackenfels, Helena Maria Wacker von 187
Wakefield 229, 236, 237, 240
Walen, Denise 391
Wales 133
Walker, G. 140, 154, 216, 326, 432, 441n(2)
  Walkington, T. 114
Wall, S. E. 300
Wall, Wendy 318, 321n(7)
Wallace, D. 247
Wallace, W. A. 347
Walker, Gary 296
Walmsley, Thomas 240
Walsh, M. W. 327
Walsham, A. 42, 45
Walsingham, Sir Francis 66, 76n(1), 265
Wanley Partbooks 84
Wann, L. 240
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warboys trials (1582)</th>
<th>41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ward, Mary</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren, Nancy Bradley</td>
<td>2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 76n(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterhouse, Agnes</td>
<td>36–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterhouse, Joan</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wateridge, Thomas</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watkins, J.</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson, Thomas</td>
<td>90, 250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watt, D.</td>
<td>303, 307n(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watt, Ian</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watt, T.</td>
<td>133, 300, 302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waymouth, George</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weamys, Anna</td>
<td>406–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wegener, G.</td>
<td>292n(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells, S.</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsford, E.</td>
<td>326, 330, 336n(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesel</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>479–80, 481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westcote, Sebastian</td>
<td>85, 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West of England</td>
<td>459–74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weston, Elizabeth</td>
<td>182–3, 184, 186, 187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weymouth</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whalley Abbey</td>
<td>238, 239, 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whetstone, George</td>
<td>472n(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whigam, R. G.</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whipping</td>
<td>331–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, John</td>
<td>65, 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Lynn</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, M.</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, P.</td>
<td>228, 229, 231, 233, 310, 311, 321n(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Rowland</td>
<td>471n(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehall</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead, Neil</td>
<td>483, 484, 486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehorne, Peter</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitford, Richard</td>
<td>297, 301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitgift, John, Archbishop of Canterbury</td>
<td>27, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitinton, Robert</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney, Isabella</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whirworth, C. W.</td>
<td>309, 310, 311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whyte, Rowland</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wickham, G.</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilby, E.</td>
<td>32, 43, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilkins, John</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willaert, Adrian</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William of Newbury</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Deanne</td>
<td>3, 7, 219, 247, 251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Jerry</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, P.</td>
<td>76n(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willicius</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis, D.</td>
<td>42, 44, 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wills, Richard</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Thomas</td>
<td>135, 265, 320, 331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windet, John</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wirtzung, Christopher</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>witchcraft</td>
<td>2, 7, 9, 22, 31–48, 305, 324, 419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wittenberg</td>
<td>224, 495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfe, Heather</td>
<td>3, 7, 10, 130, 267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfe, Jessica</td>
<td>5, 9, 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfe, John (Giovanni Volfeo)</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wölfniburget</td>
<td>91, 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womack, Peter</td>
<td>229, 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disappearance from literary history</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marginalized</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prominent Protestant</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woodcuts</td>
<td>34, 180, 201, 254, 257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comic</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crudely violent</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powerfully distinctive</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooding, L.</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woods, Susanne</td>
<td>367, 375, 379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodville, Anthony</td>
<td>255–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolson, J.</td>
<td>262, 265, 269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wootton, David</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcestershire</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wotton, Henry</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woudhuysen, H. R.</td>
<td>133, 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, George</td>
<td>370, 375, 378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, Katherine</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wriothesly -&gt; Southamt</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing manuals</td>
<td>126, 129, 137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wroth, Lady Mary 5, 402–8, 439, 440
Wyatt, M. 265, 268
Wyatt, Sir Thomas 3, 4, 8, 148, 151–64, 166, 168, 169, 170, 173nn(7/12/20/22), 174n(24), 217, 250, 261, 364, 367–70, 371–2, 376, 431, 432
Wyclif, John 18, 19, 50, 218
Wyer, Robert 253
Wylkynson, Robert 81
xenophobia 253, 336n(1)

Yarmouth 129, 500
Yates, J. 497

Yonge, Nicholas 89, 90
York 43, 240
Yorkists 256
Yorkshire 28, 229–30, 240–1
see also Wakefield; York
Young, Frances B. 429

Zell, M. 32, 41, 42
Zijderveld, A. C. 330, 336n(5)
Zocca, L. R. 107
Zonca, Vittorio 103
Zuñiga, Frances 330