

## RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

(3)

### **The Renaissance**

In 1550, the painter Georgio Vasari wrote of a rinascità in the arts in his native Florence and in Italy in the 15th century, a 'rebirth'. The French 19th-century historian Jules Michelet extended this idea of a 'renaissance' from the Italian 15th century, the Quattrocento, to a general cultural renewal in western Europe beginning earlier. Michelet's idea has proved very popular with historians.

The turn towards classical models of verse began with a man whom Chaucer calls 'Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete'. On Easter Sunday 1341, Petrarch ('Petrak') was crowned with a wreath of laurel in Rome before Robert, King of Naples. The Renaissance revived classical cultural models, such as the laureation of poets. Greek had died out in the West, but returned after 1400 with the arrival of Byzantine scholars in Italy, who in 1440 founded a Platonic Academy in Florence. After the Turks took Constantinople in 1453, Greek scholars brought manuscripts to Italy, Petrarch, a humanist, collected classical manuscripts. Aldus Manutius (1449-1515) printed elegant classical texts at his Aldine press in Venice. The Renaissance is sometimes called the 'Revival of Learning', yet the classical texts it 'discovered' had survived because they had been copied into medieval manuscripts. The contrast between Renaissance learning and medieval ignorance is often exaggerated.

The Renaissance spread from 15th-century Italy to France, Spain and beyond. The Northern Renaissance was, except in the Low Countries, more intellectual than artistic; it was set back by the Reformation. The art of the Italian Renaissance is today better known than its literature. The High Renaissance trio of Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo Buonarotti and Raffaello Sanzio (Raphael) typify its characteristics: Leonardo was a painter, an anatomist, a scientist and inventor; Michaelangelo a sculptor, an architect, a painter and a poet; and Raphael's paintings in the Vatican gave classic form to the long flowering of Italian art.

The change from medieval to Renaissance was at first more formal than substantial; literature changed less than art and architecture, although the content of all three remained Christian. Celebrated icons of the High Renaissance are Michaelangelo's gigantic David in Florence, his central design for St Peter's Basilica in Rome, and its Sistine Chapel. In Italy the Renaissance had intellectual origins, drawing on the study of Plato (c.427-348 BC) and his followers. It also found civic expression in the Florence of the Medici and the Rome of Leo X (Pope 1513-21), as well as many smaller city-states.

### **Expectations**

The Renaissance held a higher and more heroic idea of human capacity than had been allowed for by the ascetic side of medieval thought. Pico della Mirandola's *Of the Dignity of Man* (1486) emphasizes the human capacity to ascend the Platonic scale of creation, attaining a heavenly state through a progressive self-education and self-fashioning; his idea of the perfectibility of Man was Christian. The sculpture of Michaelangelo is neither nobler nor more beautiful than the French romanesque of Moissac or the French Gothic of Chartres, but its pride in naked physical beauty, though based on classical models, is new. His youthful David is a giant superman in comparison with human figures in medieval art.

Ambition is a theme of the drama of Christopher Marlowe (1564-93): his protagonists, Tamburlaine and Dr Faustus, scorn conventional norms, though they overreach and fall. Marlowe was fascinated also by *The Prince* (1513), in which Machiavelli (1469-1527) had anatomized the cynical means by which Cesare Borgia had kept power. Machiavelli advises the Prince to be feared rather than loved. His failure to condemn shocked and fascinated the English subjects of Henry VIII; his moral irony went unnoticed.

### **Investigations**

Contemporary with the Renaissance were physical discoveries by Iberians, of the West Indies by Christopher Columbus (1492) and of the western sea route to India by Vasco da Gama (1498); Ferdinand Magellan rounded the world in 1521.

Scientific developments, as in anatomy, were less dramatic, but the changing approach to natural philosophy announced by Francis Bacon (1561-1626) called for a more experimental science, and a more secular outlook. In a universe in which man seemed less limited and heaven less near, the bounds to human achievement were not moral but natural: time and mortality. Life was less wretchedly a preparation for the life to come.

Since the Fall of Rome in the 5th century, historians have found renaissances in the 8th century under Charlemagne, and in the 12th century; but the 15th-century revival of classical models made the Gothic seem deficient. The period between the Fall of Rome and the Renaissance was first termed a *medium ævum*, a 'middle age', by a Neo-Latin writer in 1604.

Conceptions of the physical universe changed. Scholastic theory had to give ground to empirical testing: Galileo (1564-1642) verified with his telescope the heliocentric theory of Copernicus (1474-1543); anatomists dissected the human body; and Machiavelli described power-politics at work.

Ideals changed: medieval saint and warrior gave way to Renaissance hero, courtier, gentleman. Christianity may have remained, but Christendom, a western Europe united rather than divided by religion, ended at the Reformation. The humanist ideal is expressed by Hamlet: 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals ...!' 'And yet,' Hamlet concludes,

in words less often quoted, 'And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me.'

Humanist disappointment at human actuality is pungent in the last line of Shakespeare's Sonnet 94: 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.' The Renaissance began in hope but ended in a disillusion, first expressed in the 1590s in England; scepticism came later. It was not until the 17th century that some thinkers in England came to regard metaphysics with scepticism and Christianity with reserve.

### **England's place in the world**

The Spanish and Portuguese discovery of the New World meant that England was no longer at the end of Europe but at its leading edge. The centralization of power in the Crown and of finance in London enabled her to take advantage of this. England gained in power in the 16th century; her defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 showed that with God's help David could beat Goliath. In 1603, with the accession of King James I, the Scottish crown came to England; Britain was poised for empire. The spring signalled by Mores Utopia (1517) and the verse of Wyatt had been blighted by the disruption of religion in the 1530s, its fruition put back forty years. In 1564, the year of Michaelangelo's death and Shakespeare's birth, the Italian Renaissance was over, but the English Renaissance had hardly begun. By 1579 a renewed cultural confidence was clear in Sir Philip Sidney's Defence of Poesy; and the achievement of Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare followed.

English literary history cherishes the poetry of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-47), and such humanist writings as The Governor (1531) by Thomas Elyot and The Schoolmaster (1558) of Roger Ascham, who became tutor to Queen Elizabeth. The achievements of the sixty-two years between Utopia and 1579 would include the refoundation of humanist schools, the development of a critical prospectus for English poetry, the establishment of its metre, and the writing of the first blank verse, some fine lyrics and songs, and the first Elizabethan plays. These preparations eventually led up to that Renaissance man, Sir Philip Sidney. Yet Sidney's Defence of Poesy (1579) found little to praise in English writing to date. The establishment of the Tudor state under Henry VII and Henry VIII and of a national church under Elizabeth I necessitated a consciously national literature, so that English might compete with Latin, Greek, French, Spanish and Portuguese. It was too late to compete with Italian: as late as 1638, the Puritan John Milton went to Italy to complete his education.

By 1579, when English was about to 'burst out into sudden blaze', French already had the poems of Du Bellay and Ronsard to rival those of Petrarch. English writers had been unlucky under Henry VIII, who beheaded More and Surrey. Wyatt, a lover of Ann Boleyn, escaped the axe, but his son rebelled against Mary Tudor and lost his head. Mary burnt many Protestants as heretics; her father Henry, brother Edward and sister Elizabeth executed fewer Catholics, including in 1587 Mary Queen of Scots, as traitors. After 1581, Catholicism was considered as treason; Elizabeth also executed four Puritans.

## **The Reformation**

The Protestant Reformation had begun in 1517 with Martin Luther's attacks on the Church's penitential system, order and doctrine. The Reformation, like the Renaissance, was an outcome of a gradual transfer of authority away from weaker central and communal structures to stronger local individual ones, and an accompanying transfer from external to internal ways of thinking, feeling and representing.

These changes towards modern nation-states and individualism had begun in the 12th century, but the final stages were not gradual: after decades of turmoil and long wars in the north, Europe divided into states either Catholic or Protestant. In 1519 Henry VIII wrote the first book by an English king since King Alfred, though in Latin not English. His Latin Defence of the Seven Sacraments, against Luther, was rewarded by Rome with the title of Fidei Defensor ('Defender of the Faith': a title retained on modern coinage as 'F.D.'). Henry had had some help with the book from Thomas More. Failing to produce a male heir by Catherine of Aragon, Henry asked Rome for a divorce; he wanted to marry Ann Boleyn. Rome hesitated, Ann fell pregnant, Henry went ahead with the marriage, Rome excommunicated him, and Henry made Thomas Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury. When in 1533 Henry made himself Supreme Head of the Church, now the Church of England, More, who had resigned as Chancellor, declined to take the Oath of Supremacy legitimizing Henry's coup. More was beheaded in 1535. By 1540 the three thousand religious houses of England were suppressed, and their abbeys, plate and lands taken by the Crown and sold off.

Shrines were ransacked for gold and jewels, notably that of the Archbishop who in 1170 had stood up for Church against Crown, Thomas Becket.

Henry held to Catholic doctrines, but in the six years under his young son Edward VI (1547-53), reform was imposed; there were now only two sacraments. For the next six years, under Mary (Henry's legitimate daughter by Catherine of Aragon), Catholicism returned with much support. Mary began gently, recalling the Benedictines to Westminster Abbey, but not touching monastic lands. But her marriage to Philip II of Spain was unpopular, and after a rebellion led by the son of the poet Wyatt, orthodoxy was in peril. Cranmer and others were burnt to death for heresy.

Elizabeth I (1558-1603), Ann Boleyn's daughter, gradually imposed a compromise between Protestant teaching and Catholic practice. The Queen liked Catholic liturgy, and strongly believed in bishops. There was a major Catholic Northern Rising, but Catholics lost ground when in 1570 Rome declared the Queen illegitimate (as her father's Parliament had done in 1536).

The divisions of the Reformation can still be seen in Europe and in the United Kingdom. The effects on popular worship, on social provision, and on general culture, were disastrous. The leading Northern humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) had advocated reform of Church, education and society, but recoiled from the mayhem Luther unleashed. In

Spain, Cardinal Ximenes turned from liberal humanism to the defence of orthodoxy, as did More in England.

### **Sir Thomas More**

Thomas More (1478-1535), a lawyer's son, wrote a new kind of book, the life of a new kind of writer, Pico della Mirandola, a Platonist aristocrat who withdrew from court and cloister to study and write *Of the Dignity of Man* (1486). Humanists shared a new faith in education: a classical education which taught bright lads, and the princes and princesses they would serve, how to write. In theory, a boy familiar with the examples and warnings of classical history should make a good prince, statesman or adviser.

Rhetoric, the art of persuasive public speaking and of literary composition, was the tool of these new ideals. Rhetoric challenged the medieval sciences of logic and theology. Greek was taught in the elite schools and colleges founded by early English humanists, such as the school founded by the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, John Colet (1466-1519) and Bishop Fox's Corpus Christi College, Oxford (1516). The humanists were serious Christians: Colet wanted the boys at St Paul's School to be 'taught always in good literature both Latin and Greek and good authors such as have the very Roman eloquence joined with wisdom, especially Christian authors that wrote their wisdom with clear and chaste Latin either in verse or in prose, for my intent is by the school specially to increase knowledge and worshipping of God and Our Lord Jesus and good Christian life and manners'. Erasmus taught Greek at Cambridge for five years. He dedicated to his friend More his Latin work *Encomium Moriae* (1507). The title means both *Praise of Folly* and *Praise of More*, as the Greek for a fool is *moros*.

Mores Latin *Utopia* was brought out by Erasmus in Louvain in 1517. It was not 'Englished' until 1551; in 1557 appeared More's unfinished English *History of King Richard III*. *Utopia* describes an ideal country, like Plato's *Republic* but also like the witty *True History of Lucian* (AD c.115-c.200). Raphael Hythloday is a travelling scholar, who in Book II tells of his visit to a far-off geometrical island run like a commune with an elected, reasonable ruler. There is no private property, gold is used for chamber pots, vice is unknown, and priests are few and virtuous; some are female. Clothes are uniform; marriage is preceded by mutual naked inspection in the presence of a respected elder. *Utopia* (Gk: 'nowhere') is thus most unlike the Christian, feudal, passionate England of Book I, where starving men who have stolen food are unreasonably punished. Hythloday and a character called Thomas More discuss whether a scholar should advise the prince directly, or indirectly by his pen; More says directly, Hythloday indirectly. But to the European elite for whom *Utopia* and *Praise of Folly* were written, the learned traveller's name would suggest an angelic dispenser of nonsense. 'More' means moron; the king is called Ademos (Gk: 'without a people'). More tells Hythloday that while Utopian communism sounds interesting, it would never do in England.

Such jokes, and the ironical mode of Utopia as a whole, make it, like Praise of Folly, proof against a censor seeking to ascertain the author's teaching on a particular point. This learned joke released into the European think-tank such absurd ideas as basing society on reason alone. But such ideas could be disowned, as Utopia is clearly a spoof of travellers' tales, an elaborate joke. Shakespeare used fools to tell truths, and systematic irony was to be powerfully used in Swift's Gulliver's Travels. At the heart of this great in-joke was a serious issue for humanists: the choice of life. More chose justice, Erasmus his books; both died Catholics, Erasmus in his bed.

The Reformation made it clear that a humanist education would not restrain the passions of men. Lord Chancellor More defended orthodoxy against freethinking heresy, repressing Protestant versions of the Bible; he died as 'the king's good servant, but God's first.'

### **The Courtier**

The Tudors gave their subjects openings for the practice of wit on the scaffold. To make light of difficulty was expected of the complete gentleman, a Renaissance ideal well known by 1535. Its classic embodiment, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528), was translated into Spanish in 1534 and French by 1538. Although read in England, it reached print only in 1561 in Sir Thomas Hoby's version, *The Boke of the Courtier*.

How does the new courtesy differ from the medieval ideal? Chaucer's 'parfit gentil Knyght' is curteis and his Squire has the physical and social skills; the 15th-century princes Charles d'Orleans and James I of Scotland were fine poets; the young King Henry VIII was a champion athlete who composed songs and motets, and also wrote a treatise in Latin. The Renaissance gentleman was more consciously Christian, more highly educated, more skilled in speech.

Castiglione set his dialogue at the court of Federigo of Urbino, patron of the painters Piero della Francesca, Botticelli and Raphael and the humanist Pietro Bembo. Castiglione's Urbino, in which ladies preside, remains attractive. After a discourse of Cardinal Bembo on the ladder of Platonic Love,

The Lord Gaspar began to prepare himself to speak to the Duchess. 'Of this,' quoth she, 'let M. Peter [Bembo] be judge, and the matter shall stand to his verdict, whether women be not as meet for heavenly love as men. But because the plead between you may happen be too long, it shall not be amiss to defer it until tomorrow.'

'Nay, tonight,' quoth the Lord Cesar Gonzaga.

'And how can it be tonight?' quoth the Duchess.

The Lord Cesar answered: 'Because it is day already,' and showed her the light that began to enter in at the clefts of the windows. Then every man arose

upon his feet with much wonder, because they had not thought that the reasonings had lasted longer than the accustomed wont, saving only that they were begun much later, and with their pleasantness had deceived so the lords' minds that they wist not of the going away of the hours. And not one of them felt any heaviness of sleep in his eyes, the which often happeneth when a man is up after his accustomed hour to go to bed. When the windows then were opened on the side of the palace that hath his prospect toward the high top of Mount Catri they saw already risen in the east a fair morning like unto the colour of roses, and all stars voided, saving only the sweet governess of the heaven, Venus, which keepeth the bounds of the night and the day, from which appeared to blow a sweet blast that, filling the air with a biting cold, began to quicken the tunable notes of the pretty birds among the hushing woods of the hills at hand. Whereupon they all, taking their leave with reverence of the Duchess, departed toward their lodgings without torch, the light of the day sufficing.

The courtier is a layman, well grounded in classical literature and history, and in the arts; a skilled fencer and rider; a composer and performer of music and song; he converses well. He is trained to rule, and with magnanimity. Accomplishment must seem natural, worn with sprezzatura, an effortless grace. Ophelia says that Hamlet has 'the courtier's, scholar's, soldier's eye, tongue, sword': the ideal of Castiglione in the rhetoric of the humanist. Sir Philip Sidney was the pattern of this ideal. He described his vast Arcadia as a trifle. As he lay dying on the battlefield, he is said to have given his water-bottle to a common soldier, saying, 'Take it, for thy necessity is yet greater than mine.' Sidney had been christened Philip after his god-father, the Queen's husband; he died attacking Philip II's troops in the Spanish Netherlands in 1586, aged 32.

### **Sir Thomas Wyatt**

Two generations before Sidney, the first English literary Renaissance is summed up in Surrey's 'Epitaph on Sir Thomas Wyatt' (1542), praising the parts of the first English gentleman-poet. Among them:

A tongue that served in foreign realms his king,  
Whose courteous talk to virtue did inflame  
Each noble heart: a worthy guide to bring  
Our English youth by travail unto fame.  
An eye whose judgment no affect could blind, feeling  
Friends to allure and foes to reconcile,  
Whose piercing look did represent a mind  
With virtue fraught, reposèd, void of guile.

Wyatt is said to have a courtier's eye, a scholar's tongue, and a hand that, according to Surrey, 'taught what may be said in rhyme,/That reft [stole from] Chaucer the glory of his wit'. Poetry

is only one of Wyatt's parts; Surrey goes on to praise his patriotism, his virtue, his soul. A belief in moral example is typical of Tudor poetics; so is the boast that Wyatt has stolen Chaucer's glory. Chaucer had more modesty and discernment when he told his 'littel boke' (Troilus and Criseyde) to 'kiss the steps' of the classical poets (see page 37). Renaissance poets were publicists for poetry; ambition made them envious of past glory and present competition. Compared with the medieval John Gower, gentle as a man and as a poet, Wyatt is tense and modern.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) was a courtier, a diplomat in France and Spain. He celebrated his return home to a more honest country in 'Tagus farewell, that westward with thy streams'. He translated sonnets from Petrarch and Alamanni; one example runs:

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind, whoever desires  
But as for me, alas, I may no more.  
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore  
I am of them that farthest cometh behind.  
Yet may I, by no means, my wearied mind  
Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore  
Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,  
Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.  
Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,  
As well as I, may spend his time in vaine.  
And graven with diamonds in letters plain  
There is written, her fair neck round about,  
'Noli me tangere, for Caesar's I am,  
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.'

This poem (pub. 1815) adapts a sonnet of Petrarch: the dear 'deer' is identified as Ann Boleyn, whose pursuit Wyatt had to give up. Hunting was a royal prerogative, and the verse on her collar (itself an adaptation of two of Christ's sayings) casts Henry VIII as Caesar. Wyatt was twice in prison, but his coolness got him out. (Other suspected lovers of Ann Boleyn's were less lucky: 'The axe is home, your heads be in the street', Wyatt wrote to them.)

His own pride can be scented elsewhere in his verse, for example in 'They flee from me that sometime did me seek/With naked foot stalking in my chamber.' Only in his songs is he the conventional Petrarchan lover:

My lute, awake! Perform the last  
Labour that thou and I shall waste,  
And end that I have now begun;  
For when this song is sung and past,  
My lute, be still, for I have done.



The grave grace of his lines has a conscious art quite unlike the rapid social verse of his predecessor at court, John Skelton (1460-1529): Wyatt's metrical control makes the learned Skelton, a gifted satirist, sound a casual entertainer. The Renaissance set high standards of conscious art. Wyatt reft Skelton the glory of his wit, even in satire. When Wyatt was banished from court in 1536, he wrote a verse letter to a friend: 'Mine own John Pains, since ye delight to know/The cause why that homeward I me draw/And flee the press of courts ...'. The letter, adapted from a satire by Alamanni (1495-1556), contrasts the flattery and corruption of court with the moral health of country life. The innocence of rural retirement, a theme of the Roman poet Horace (65-8 BC), is naturalized.

This maketh meat home to hunt and hawk,  
And in foul weather at my book to sit,  
In frost and snow then with my bow to stalk.  
No man does mark whereso I ride or go ...

This seems timelessly English. But Wyatt's conclusion has a new kind of Englishness:

I am not now in France, to judge the wine,  
With sav'ry sauce those delicates to feel; delicacies  
Nor yet in Spain, where one must him incline, bow, humble himself  
Rather than to be, outwardly to seem.  
I meddle not with wits that be so fine;  
Nor Flanders' cheer letteth not my sight to deem drink preventeth  
Of black and white, nor taketh my wit away  
With beastliness, they beasts do so esteem.  
\Nor am I not where Christ is given in prey  
For money, poison, and treason -at Rome  
A common practice, usèd night and day.  
But here I am in Kent and Christendom,  
Among the Muses, where I read and rhyme;  
Where, if thou list, my Pains for to come,  
Thou shalt be judge how I do spend my time.

The effects of Reformation and Renaissance on England show here. Christendom is now not Europe but a state of mind. In a newly assured but local poetry, the xenophobic superiority of

an Englishman to beastly Flemings and corrupt sophisticated Latins is proclaimed - in a tissue of echoes from Alamanni and Horace. Yet Wyatt's voice is independent and personal. He was not the last to resent the ingratitude of princes; one of his poems translates a gloomy chorus from Seneca. A comparison with Mores Christianity is instructive.

### **The Earl of Surrey**

The Earl of Surrey (1517-47), eldest son of the Duke of Norfolk, head of the nobility of England, printed his epitaph on Wyatt. Normally, gentlemen did not print verse but circulated it in manuscripts. Wyatt and Surrey were first printed in 1557 in Tottel's Miscellany of Songs and Sonnets. Thus it was in Mary's reign that two modern verseforms reached print: the sonnet, and an unrhymed iambic pentameter, first used in Surrey's versions of Virgil's Aeneid II and IV, known as 'blank verse'.

Surrey's songs and sonnets were more popular than Wyatt's; poets found their regular movement easier to imitate. Surrey's version of a poem by Petrarch begins, 'Love, that doth reign and live within my thought'. Wyatt's begins, 'The long love that in my thought doth harbour'. Surrey found 'doth' and 'within' metrically convenient. Twentieth-century critics preferred Wyatt, who has a voice, and more to say, although Surrey dared to glance at Henry VIII in 'Th' Assyrian king, in peace with foul desire'. Surrey was beheaded on a false charge, aged 30.

Surrey's major achievement is his Virgil, not just because it pioneered blank verse. In the Renaissance, as in the Middle Ages, translation was not wholly distinct from composition, although Renaissance philology produced better texts and stricter notions of fidelity. As Latin, Europe's old vernacular, faded, educated readers were eager for writings in the new national vernaculars. There was a need and a new prestige for translation and for the modernizing kind of adaptation known as imitation.

Surrey had the example of the Eneados of Gavin Douglas (c.1513). The comparison is instructive: Surrey has no prologues, fewer fireworks, more fidelity. Douglas turns each line of Virgil into a lively couplet; Surrey's pentameters have a Latin concision. His version of the Fall of Troy in Aeneid II has tragic dignity. Here Hector's ghost tells Aeneas to leave the ruins of Troy and found a new empire:

from the bottom of his breast

Sighing he said: 'Flee, flee, O goddess' son,

And save thee from the fury of this flame.

Our en'mies now are masters of the walls,

And Troyë town now falleth from the top.

Sufficeth that is done for Priam's reign. that which

If force might serve to succour Troyë town,  
This right hand well mought have been her defence. might  
But Troyë now commendeth to thy charge  
Her holy reliques and her privy gods.  
Them join to thee, as fellows of thy fate.  
Large walls rear thou for them: for so thou shalt,  
After time spent in th' o'erwandered flood.' sea

He left this regular stately verse to Sidney and Marlowe to perfect.

### **Religious prose**

In the push to develop a native vernacular English, prose was first required. Prose is merely written language; the Bourgeois Gentleman of the French comic playwright Molière (1622-73) was surprised to discover that he had been speaking prose all his life. Whereas verse chooses to dance in metre, and take on rhyme and other patternings, prose walks with no rules other than those of syntax.

Prose has such a variety of tasks that its history is not readily summarized, and its qualities are not well indicated in brief quotation. Chaucer's prose is unformed compared with his verse, but the prose Shakespeare gave Falstaff shows how much ground had been made up. Yet posterity has awarded all the literary prizes to Tudor verse (drama was chiefly in verse), except in one area central to the life of 16th-century England.

### **Bible translation**

The Reformation created an urgent need for a religious prose. Luther wanted to put the word of God into the ploughboy's hand; his German Bible (finished in 1545) helped to form not only German Protestants but also the German language. The English Bible, in the Authorized Version (AV) of 1611, although less decisive in the evolution of the language, played a similar role in the culture of English-speaking countries; it was adopted in Presbyterian Scotland and later in the Empire. More generally, the Reformation gave the book and the word a privileged place in Protestant lands, and the non-verbal arts a lower place. The spreading of the Word was the task of the apostles, given the gift of tongues. The Bible, put into Greek before the time of Christ, has overwhelmingly been read ever since in translation. The aim of its translators has been fidelity. Fidelity was the rule of Jerome (c.342-420) when he translated the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin, the language of the people of the West. Jerome's Vulgate was in the vulgar tongue, and, like the 16th-century translators, he wrote to be read aloud.

St Augustine (358-430) says in his Confessions that he was astonished to see Ambrose of Milan read without moving his lips. Though a practised orator, Augustine had not seen this before. The Protestants who practised the private unguided reading of which the Church disapproved also moved their lips or heard the words in their heads.

By 1539 Miles Coverdale (1488-1568), producer of the first complete printed English Bible, knew that his words formed part of the services of the Church of England. Translators producing texts for such a use did not neglect rhythm and rhetorical spoken quality: they wrote for the tongue to perform and for the ear to hear. Very different is the situation of modern Bible translators, translating for speedy silent readers in a world where there is too much to read. Their gift of tongues is an expertise in ancient languages.

The psalms, gospel, epistles and Old Testament lessons were part of church services, as before, but were now in English. Under Elizabeth, church attendance on Sundays was required by law. As important to Anglicans as the Bible was the Book of Common Prayer (BCP, 1549) with its still largely Catholic liturgy, translated under Cranmer from the Church's Latin. For centuries the words and cadences of the AV and the BCP conducted English people from the cradle to the altar to the grave, and through the Christian year, as Latin had done for a millennium. In the 1920s, T. S. Eliot's titles 'The Burial of the Dead' and 'Ash-Wednesday' needed no footnotes; they had been in the BCP since the 16th century.

### **Instructive prose**

Le Morte Darthur, that masterpiece of 15th-century prose, perfects a storytelling mode originally oral. Renaissance prose had more abstract and prescriptive tasks: the titles *The Prince*, *The Governor*, *Toxophilus*, *The Courtier* and *The Schoolmaster* propose ideal secular roles. The roots of these words are not Old English: Latin, with its romance derivatives, had honeycombed English, and was again the source of new words. Fifteenth-century scholars had borrowed from Latin to meet a technical need or to add weight; Latin duplicates added choice, sonority or play. Patriotic humanists wanted English to replace Latin as the literary medium, but it was Latin which provided both the new words and the stylistic models. Writers about language, whether grammarians or humanists, took their ideas of style from Cicero (106-43 BC) and Quintilian (AD c.35c.100). Latin-derived words poured into 16th-century English in quantities which worried linguistic patriots. Adventurers in elaborate new styles fought conservatives resisting 'inkhorn' terms too obviously taken from books. An example of plain Tudor prose is Roper's *Life of More*, written in Queen Mary's reign.

The first significant prose writers were tutors to the great. **Sir Thomas Elyot** (c.1490-1546) served Cardinal Wolsey; at Wolsey's fall, he wrote his *Governor* (1531), dedicated to Henry VIII. Its theme is the necessity for governors, and for governors to be educated - in classical literature. Elyot says that Henry praised him for not introducing any Latin or French words too hard to understand; he was made an ambassador. The humanist John Cheke (1514-57) became tutor to Edward VI.

**Roger Ascham** (1515-68) taught Greek at Cambridge, but it was sport rather than Greek which brought him leisure. He dedicated his *Toxophilus* (1545) to Henry, which earned him a pension. *Toxophilus* (Gk: 'bow-lover') is a treatise on how to use the longbow, the weapon that had won at Agincourt. At home in Kent and Christendom, Wyatt had stalked with his bow in the winter. Ascham has a good page on wind-drag in winter:

That morning the sun shone bright and clear, the wind was whistling aloft and sharp according to the time of the year. The snow in the highway lay loose and trodden with horses' feet: so as the wind blew, it took the loose snow with it, and made it so slide upon the snow in the field which was hard and crusted by reason of the frost overnight, that thereby I might see very well the whole nature of the wind as it blew that day.

Archery made for pure English.

Ascham became tutor in 1548 to Princess Elizabeth, and served Queens Mary and Elizabeth as Latin secretary, a job which Milton performed for the Commonwealth a century later. Ascham says in his *Schoolmaster*, posthumously published in 1570, that he preferred writing Latin or Greek to writing English. On schoolmastering, Ascham is humane and sensible, but otherwise partisan. Thus, he finds good Lady Jane Grey reading Plato at home while her family are hunting in the park. Good Queen Elizabeth (his pupil) is more learned than all but one or two of her subjects. But, rather than the Bible, Ascham says, our forefathers preferred reading Malory, in whom 'those be counted the noblest knights that do kill most men without any quarrel and commit foulest adulteries by subtlest shifts.' Italy is the source not of Platonic learning but Catholic vices.

Lady Jane, a 17-year-old put on the throne for nine days in an attempted coup in 1553, is also a heroine in the vividly partisan *Book of Martyrs* (1563) by John Foxe (1516-87). As an act of state propaganda, a copy of Foxe, illustrated with lurid woodcuts, was placed in English churches on the lectern, next to the Bible. Foxe reports that the last words of Hugh Latimer, burnt at the stake under Mary, were (to a fellow-martyr): 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as, I trust, shall never be put out.'

## **Drama**

The spiritual and cultural trauma of the Reformation may account for the fact that the major literature of the period 1540-79 was in the translation of religious texts. The proceeds of the suppression of the monasteries and their schools did not go into education. As England lurched from Luther to Calvin to Rome to her own compromise, the crown was an unsafe patron. But poets needed patrons. Before the Elizabethan theatre opened, there was no paying profession of writing. University men tried vainly to bridge the gap between uncommercial 'gentle' status and scribbling for a tiny market. Yet in this fallow period secular drama began.

The Mystery and Morality plays continued, the Mysteries until Shakespeare's day; his Falstaff and Shylock owe something to the antic Vice in the Mysteries, who entertained the audience before his dismissal. As guilds clubbed together to buy pageant waggons and costumes, Mysteries became dearer. The civic link slackened; companies of players travelled between inns and great houses (as in Hamlet). The Mysteries were Corpus Christi plays, summer plays. A new kind of play, the interlude, was now played between courses in big houses at Christmas and Easter.

A moral entertainment, the interlude involved debates similar to the one Thomas More reports in Utopia, set in the household of Cardinal Morton, where More had been a page. Morton's chaplain Medwall wrote the first interlude we have, Fulgens and Lucrece, played at Christmas 1497 before the ambassadors of Flanders and Spain; Lucrece has two suitors, a nobleman and a comic servant. Roper's Life tells us that as a page More would 'suddenly sometimes step in among the players, and never studying for the matter, make a part of his own there presently among them'.

Drama became a family habit: More's brother-in-law John Rastell (? 1470-1536) had a stage in his garden in Finsbury Fields, London. He printed Fulgens on his own press; also his own interlude The Four Elements, with the first printed music. Rastell's daughter married John Heywood (c.1497-1580), author of the farcical interlude, The Four Ps. In this, a Palmer, a Pardoner, a 'Pothecary and a Pedlar compete to tell the biggest lie; the Palmer wins by claiming that he had never known a woman lose her temper.

Roman comedies by Plautus and Terence were adapted by humanist schoolmasters for their pupils: the first English comedy to survive, Ralph Roister Doister, was written by Nicolas Udall (1504-56), headmaster of Eton in the 1530s; it crosses Plautus with popular tradition. (The Pyramus-and-Thisbe interlude in A Midsummer Night's Dream borrows from Udall a joke based on mispunctuation.) At Christmas, university students appointed a Lord of Misrule, and put on plays in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and the hall of Christ Church, Oxford. Gammer Gurton's Needle, performed at Christ's, Cambridge, in the early 1560s, is neater, if lower, than Udall's play. (The grandmother's needle, lost when mending the breeches of Hodge, a rustic in love, is eventually found when Diccon, a rogue, kicks Hodge, driving it into his backside; it is funnier than it sounds.)

**John's son Jasper Heywood** (1535-98), a Jesuit (and uncle to John Donne), published in 1559 a translation into English of Seneca's Troas, and, with others, Seneca his Ten Tragedies (1581). ('Seneca his' = 'Seneca's'; the expansion of the possessive ending is mistaken pedantry.) Seneca was tutor, then minister to the emperor Nero, executing his atrocious whims - such as feeding Christians to lions. When Nero turned against him, Seneca gathered his friends and, in AD 69, committed a philosopher's suicide. His fall recalls those of Wolsey, More and Cromwell. His 'closet' drama - written for the study or recital, not for the stage - places reason above passion, human dignity above inscrutable fate. What Boethius was to the Middle Ages, Seneca became to the Elizabethans; Greek tragedies were not yet

available. Breaking the classical rule that horror must be offstage, the English enacted what Seneca reported. His characters moralize blackly and at length about unseen atrocities and the vengeance of the gods, but Elizabethans saw what Romans read about. Sidney praised Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's blank-verse tragedy *Gorboduc* (1561) as 'full of stately speeches and well sounding Phrases, clyming to the height of Seneca his style, and as full of notable moralitie.' Sackville had already contributed to the 1559 *Mirror for Magistrates*, a best-selling multi-authored continuation of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*. A writer in this bad time for writers was George Gascoigne (1539-78), a gentleman-poet who lost his money and tried his pen at most things, including *Supposes*, a play adapted from Ariosto, a source for Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. This is the period also of *Chronicles* by Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed, which, like North's *Plutarch* of 1579, provided material for tragedies and history plays. Hoby's *Courtier* and Arthur Golding's *Ovid* are enjoyable works of this period. Shakespeare liked Golding's version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which still pleases, despite the seven-foot lines in which it was written and the stiff moral allegory prefixed to each book. Many of the original poems of this century are also translations; the converse is true as well.

**English Bible Translations** The first English translation of the Bible we know of is by Bede, who finished his version of the gospels in 735 (see page 18). Aelfric (d.c.1020) translated Genesis and other parts of the Old Testament. Parts of several Old English translations survive; there were also Middle English versions, notably those produced by disciples of Wyclif (d.1384; see page 48). The first English Bible translated from Greek and Hebrew rather than Latin was by the gifted William Tyndale, who in 1523, in exile, began a New Testament. He was martyred in 1536. The first complete printed English Bible was published in 1535 by Miles Coverdale in Zurich. In 1540 the Great Bible, adding Coverdale to Tyndale, was placed in churches.

In 1560 came the Geneva Bible, by Protestant refugees with a Calvinist commentary. In 1568 the less Protestant Bishops' Bible was issued in England. Catholic refugees produced a New Testament in Rheims (1582) and an Old Testament at Douai (1610); the Douai-Rheims Bible is translated from the Vulgate. In 1604, King James authorized 'a more exact Translation into the English Tongue', avoiding the errors of Papists and also of 'self-conceited Brethren'. Under the chairmanship of Lancelot Andrewes, teams of scholars produced in 1611 the Authorized Version (AV) or King James Version. It was based on the original tongues and drew on earlier English versions, especially Tyndale's. It was not revised until 1881-5.