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1500–1600

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NOTES

1 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 17–18.
2 Lisa Jardine, "Strains of Renaissance Reading," *English Literary Renaissance* 25:3 (Autumn 1995): 296–97.
3 James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 117.
4 Simon Thurley, "The Lost Palace of Whitehall," *History Today* 48:1 (January 1998): 51.
5 Richard Helgerson, "Murder in Faversham: Holinshed's Impertinent History," in *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500–1800*, ed. Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997), p. 145.
6 Lauro Martines, "The Protean Face of Renaissance Humanism," *Modern Language Quarterly* 51 (1990): 107.
7 James Tracy, "From Humanism to the Humanities: A Critique of Grafton and Jardine," *Modern Language Quarterly* 51 (1990): 139.
8 William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), from *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), vol. I, p. 226.
9 Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poetrie* (1595), sig. CI; also in Smith, ed., *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, vol. I, p. 156, as *An Apologie for Poetrie*.

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The sixteenth century

What makes a century? It is clearly something more than the simple passage of a hundred years, but equally clearly is something less than a perfectly connected sequence of events with an interconnected beginning, middle, and end. History rarely shapes itself to the motions of the planets or to the arbitrary divisions of the calendar: as Hayden White has shown us, it is more usually shaped by the demands imposed on it by different kinds of narrative structure.[1] Monarchs do not obligingly succumb to *fin de siècle* gloom in order to die with the century, nor do social or literary movements terminate with a bang the moment a century draws to an end.

The sixteenth century is particularly unobliging in its relation to the calendar. Nothing of great note happened in 1500, and nothing of great note happened in 1600 either, as the timeline appended to this volume shows. As a unit of political history the century effectively begins in 1485, when Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth field. Henry VII, as he became, was keen to present this event as a beginning: he employed historians such as Polydore Vergil and Bernard André to construct a Tudor version of history in which Richard III was portrayed as a murderous tyrant, and in which the marriage of Henry himself to Elizabeth of York was presented as the final resolution of fifteenth-century battles between the rival houses of York and Lancaster over the succession.

To many English subjects the era which began in 1485 would appear to have ended in 1603 with the death of Henry VIII's childless daughter Elizabeth. Fears of the Queen's decline and anxiety as to who would succeed her ran through the last thirty years of her reign. In the event the death of Elizabeth was followed by the peaceful accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne. Although panegyrists of James hurried into print with poems which promised the beginning of a new age in 1603, many Londoners (and by 1603 Londoners comprised roughly 10 percent of the population of England) would have felt that year to be one of endings rather than of beginnings: it was marked by a severe plague, in which more

than 30,000 people died.[2] Thomas Dekker in his *Wonderful Year* (1603) describes how after the death of Elizabeth plague transformed the geography of London into a map of death: "Imagine then that all this while, Death (like a Spanish leaguer, or rather like stalking Tamberlaine) hath pitched his tents (being nothing but a heap of winding sheets tacked together) in the sinfully-polluted suburbs: the plague is muster-master and Marshall of the field: burning fevers, boils, blains, and carbuncles, the leaders, Lieutenants, Sergeants, and Corporals."[3] 1603 was, for Dekker, the wonderful year that promised the marriage of Scotland and England through the accession of James VI and I; and yet it was not the future King James, but Death who made his triumphal entry into the city. The year 1603 felt terminal.

So a beginning and an end can be found for the century. But what about a middle? Grand unified narratives about the sixteenth century should be treated with suspicion. There are many residual versions of such fables lurking around: that the Tudors united the nation at the cost of imposing on it absolute rule; that the literature of the period consistently sings the praises of its monarchs; that the Reformation brought with it the rise of a forward-looking Puritan spirit which finally rose against Stuart absolutism in the 1640s. All of these stories have been dismantled by historians over the past twenty years, and with good reason: many of their outlines first take shape in the mythologies constructed about the sixteenth century by Tudor and Protestant propagandists. From 1485 to 1603 English monarchs sought consciously to fashion an image and a posthumous reputation for themselves, and to construct a version of history for popular consumption. The arts of history, poetry, drama, painting, engraving, woodcutting, religious prose-writing, and even architecture were deployed to shape their subjects' perceptions of the dynasty. The title page of Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble ... Families of Lancaster and York* (1550) (or Hall's *Chronicle*, as it is usually known) depicts interwoven rose trees which represent the houses of York and Lancaster, and which eventually merge at the top of the page in the substantial figure of Henry VIII. In Bernard André's history of Henry VII (c. 1502) the climactic battle of Bosworth is an event so great that the blind historian professes he is unable to represent it, and so leaves a dramatically blank page in his narrative.[4] Even the death of Elizabeth was not simply a biological accident, but an act of self-shaping, mediated to the population of England through a careful propaganda campaign. According to John Clapham,

She sat up six days together without any sleep and yet was she not bereaved of any understanding, but had the use thereof, even after her speech failed, as

appeared by divers motions of her eyes and hands lifted up, when she was required by the Bishops to give testimony of the hope and comfort she had had in God. It is reported that when she was demanded whom she would have to sit in her seat after her death, she made answer "No base person, but a king."[5]

With a dumb sign with her hand she is then said to have indicated that the King she meant was James VI of Scotland. It is impossible to tell if this gestural affirmation of the continuity of Tudor and Stuart rule actually occurred, or whether it is what Elizabeth's subjects needed to be told had occurred. But it does show that careful manipulation of images, even in death, was a means by which this family sought to ensure national stability and dynastic continuity. This program was reinforced in one of the major new beginnings within this period, the state entry of Elizabeth I into London in 1558. At one of the mini-pageants that punctuated her progress through the capital ("the whole pageant garnished with red roses and white," as one observer recorded)[6] the Queen was presented with a book called *Verbum Veritatis* (the word of Truth) by an allegorical figure representing Truth, the daughter of Time. Elizabeth is reported to have kissed the volume and to have held it up so all could see, signaling to the London aldermen and livery companies who had paid for the pageant that she would return to the Protestantism of her brother Edward, after the efforts of her sister Mary to draw the nation back to Roman Catholicism. This was a century in which representations were a crucial tool of government.

This is one reason why its literature is so strong: as an art of representation it knows it matters. But it is also why we should be uneasy with mythically unified tales about the period. Tudor rule was not all (heraldic) roses. Revisionist historians over the past few years have noted the ways in which the success of the dynasty depended upon perilous improvization, the careful distribution of patronage, the delicate balancing of faction against faction, and the dispersal of power to the localities. From the 1530s humanist writers such as Thomas Elyot and Thomas Starkey emphasized an ideal of counsel, with its roots in Cicero's *De officiis*, which urged the duty of an educated and eloquent nobility to advise the monarch. Conceptions of government throughout the period were divided between the ideal of a sacred, imperial monarchy on the one hand, and the potentially conflicting ideal of regal government limited by counsel on the other. England was frequently presented as a mixed polity, which counterpoised the power of the Crown with the moral force of parliament and counsel.[7] The literature of the period frequently explores the potential lines of stress within this delicate balance of monarch and advisors. It also frequently reflects some of the less than fully desired by-products of the often less than

perfectly conceived policies of the government. It certainly does not present a static "Elizabethan world picture," as E. M. W. Tillyard called it, of harmonious equipoise between monarch and commons.

In order to flesh out these bald propositions we might take a closer look at some of the attempts made in this period to fashion a Tudor mythology through art. This strategy intrinsically involves risk: those who seek to employ the power of art to their own dynastic ends necessarily acknowledge its potential power over themselves. The example given above of Elizabeth's gracious acceptance of the book given to her by Truth during her state entry illustrates this very clearly. The Queen played a role which was scripted for her by those who wished to advise her: the hotly Protestant Richard Grafton was the chief coordinator of her state entry, and the Latin verses for the occasion were probably composed by another zealous Protestant, Richard Mulcaster, who was to be the schoolmaster of Edmund Spenser.[8] They knew, and Elizabeth probably knew, that half a dozen years before Mary had witnessed a similar pageant at her state entry, and that Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, had ordered that the same book called *Verbum Dei* be painted out in a symbolic erasure of the legacy of reform. Elizabeth's role in her state entry was made for her by factional interests, and that role may well have sat awkwardly with her own religious opinions (her insistence in 1559 that her private chapel contain a crucifix gave rise to some tension with her leading churchmen). As her reign progressed Elizabeth was repeatedly positioned within courtly entertainments and fictions which attempted to shape her actions under pretexts of praising her. The Earl of Leicester's literary comperes, including Sir Philip Sidney, mounted a concerted aesthetic campaign against the Queen's entertaining the courtship of the Catholic duc d'Alençon in the later 1570s.[9] Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, which may have origins in the factional interests of the Earl of Leicester in the 1570s, is often claimed to have presented an idealized image of Tudor polity. It may do so, but its imaginary polity displays the distinct points of stress in Tudor rule. The poem enacts an unresolved battle of a characteristically Tudor kind between the wish to praise an idealized monarch and the urge to refashion the Queen's image and redirect her policies. Spenser's noblemen heroes fight their battles independently of their Queen Gloriana, who appears in the poem only in a dream; and frequently the allegory of the poem privily counsels the Queen to favour policies to which she was resistant, such as expensive anti-Spanish policies in the Low Countries.[10] Art does not passively shape itself to the demands of power in this period; it beguilingly demands that the relationship between monarch and artist be reciprocal, that power is exchanged between the two.

There are many respects in which Tudor policy did have a significant impact on the writing of the period, but it rarely did so in ways which the architects of policy would have wished for or designed. In the period up to the death of Henry VIII in 1547 the majority of writing which has come down to us was composed by people (Skelton, Hawes, More, Wyatt, Surrey) who had direct experience of the Tudor court. The court, which was originally no more than the household of the monarch, became by the end of Henry VII's reign an administrative center which was located for an increasing proportion of the year in London. In the 1490s the inner or Privy Chamber emerged as a separate department of the royal household in which the King performed the majority of his private business, and courtiers who could charm the King in this realm within the court were likely to enjoy economic and political favor. By the 1520s Henry VIII's penchant for giving influential positions in the Privy Chamber to men whom he liked (his "minions" as they were disparagingly called) made the ability to win access to the inner sanctum of the court through persistence, gentle bribery, or artful self-display the central requirement of success in early Tudor England.[11] It also increased the likelihood that the court would become a center of faction and a source of resentful exclusion by those who felt shut out from the process of counsel. The centrality of the court, and the secrecy of the Privy Chamber at the center of that center, meant that unless one gained near access to the monarch – and that often meant getting a piece of paper into his or her hand by fair means or foul – a request for a suit of land or for patronage would fail.

These changes in the court, the primary imaginative locale of writing, had an immediate and continuing impact: from Skelton's *Bowge of Court* (*c.* 1500), through the allegorical narratives of Stephen Hawes in the first decades of the sixteenth century, and the satires of Sir Thomas Wyatt, right up to Spenser's satirical attack on the court in *Colin Clout's Come Home Againe* (1595) and Sir Walter Ralegh's complaint to his Queen in "The Ocean to Cynthia" (probably composed during his imprisonment in 1592), poets meditate on what it is to be excluded from court, indulge the agonies of yearning which result from their exclusion, and contemplate the compensatory freedoms which they might create for themselves in the absence of direct access to authority. The supremely "literary" posture of the Petrarchan lover, yearning for an ever-elusive mistress, and creating from the void of desire a voice of personal lament, grows in its English form from the Tudor court: the first English imitations of Petrarch were composed by the Henrician courtiers Wyatt and Surrey, and the most influential sonnet sequence of the later part of the century, Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (printed in 1591), draws on Sidney's frustratedly edgy

relations with a courtly milieu.[12] The closed circle of the court, which by the end of Elizabeth's reign was open only to a tiny group of noblemen, was the gravitational center of Tudor literature, and like all gravitational centers it was so powerful that few could survive for long at its heart – but writing grew from its excluded margins.

The most complex process of the sixteenth century, the Reformation, also has a major influence on literary activity. But here too the whole long process of breaking from the authority of Rome and constructing a viable alternative church had effects on literature and the nation which were not exactly what its initiators would have desired. In the 1960s and 1970s the dominant view of the Reformation was that it marked a concerted effort to revolutionize the government of the nation, and that the move to Protestantism reflected popular hostility to the excesses of the late medieval church.[13] It did indeed begin – at least in its political aspect – with a string of Acts of Parliament in the 1530s which sought to center authority on the substantial figure of Henry VIII, as the preamble to the Act in Restraint of Appeals illustrates: "Where by divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same, unto whom a body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people divided in terms and by names of spiritualty and temporalty, be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience ..."[14] There is revolution hidden in that lumbering legalese, and it lies in the claim that the English monarch enjoyed "imperial" dominion within his realm over matters both temporal and spiritual. That meant the authority of the Pope in England was in theory at an end. A string of further acts was energetically put forward by Henry's chief minister Thomas Cromwell through the 1530s in order to enforce this rejection of papal authority within the realm of England. The Act of Supremacy of 1534 declared that the King "shall be taken, accepted and reputed the only Supreme Head in earth of the Church of England" (Elton, ed., *The Tudor Constitution*, p. 364). A new treason act, which extended treason to include words, followed closely in 1534, and was the legal instrument which gave a thin justification to the executions of Bishop John Fisher and Thomas More, the two most influential figures to refuse to take the oath appended to the Act of Succession (which required subjects to abjure "any foreign potentate," including the Pope). By 1535 Henry VIII was established, in English law at least, as at once the supreme secular authority in the nation and the Supreme Head of the Church of England.

The desired constitutional effect of the Reformation is best illustrated by the engraved title page of the Great Bible of 1539. It shows the massy form of Henry VIII handing a book called "Verbum Dei" to his chief ministers of church and state, who pass the book down to the commons beneath. The commons cry, as though in gratitude, "God Save the King." But things are always less simple than Tudor iconography makes them appear: the political reformation proceeded at different rates and in different ways depending on which faction enjoyed favor at court, and it interacted in unpredictable ways with popular responses to it. Reformed religion was received with very different levels of understanding and enthusiasm in different areas of the country: Lancashire and Suffolk, for example, were particularly resistant to change. It was not initially a popular movement (although historians argue hotly about this). In the early years of the sixteenth century small groups of "Lollards" (followers of the fourteenth-century reformer John Wycliffe) kept up pressure for reform of the church in London, and their radical voices were given some authority by influential humanist reformers such as John Colet. Zealous Lutherans such as William Tyndale also advanced the cause of religious reform by active campaigns of translation in the 1520s.[15] But in the years which preceded the break with Rome there was no evident diminution in the popularity of the Catholic church in the majority of English parishes – and John Skelton was the most vocal poetic opponent of reform. There were few signs of any major change in popular attitudes to worship for at least the next twenty years. In 1548, when Henry's son Edward VI began a concerted policy of confiscating or destroying the ornaments of Catholic piety – church plate, crucifixes, rood screens – many churchmen did not believe that a permanent change in modes of worship would result. Chalices and clerical vestments, roodscreens and crucifixes, were hidden away in many parishes in the hope of a restoration of traditional practices of worship. As late as 1570 parishioners were leaving gold candlesticks to their churches "should mass ever be said there again" (Haigh, *English Reformations*, pp. 252–53). Martin Bucer regarded the transformation of the church as a reformation from above "by means of ordinances which the majority obey very grudgingly, and by the removal of the instruments of the ancient superstition."[16] The commons, who were squeezed into the very lowest section of the title page of the Great Bible, had their own experiences of reformed religion, which frequently liberated itself from the weighty presence of royal authority. Throughout the sixteenth century, and well on into the next, the English church battled within itself over the best modes of church government, over clerical dress, over the articles of faith, and over the extent to which the constitutional break with Rome should be matched by a break with its theology of grace, intercession, and atonement.

The return to Catholicism attempted by Edward VI's sister Mary from 1553 to 1558 offers further examples of how unpredictable the long-term consequences of Tudor legislation could be. Mary's restoration of the traditional modes of worship was greeted warmly by many lay people (Haigh, *Reformations*, ch. 12), but the persecution and burning of Protestants which followed her accession led about 450 Protestant men and their families to leave England for the European centers of Protestant piety – Emden, Zurich, Strasbourg, Frankfurt, and Geneva. This group of exiles cannot be said to have a unified position on church government, beyond their opposition to Mary and papal supremacy,[17] but after Mary's death in 1558 their writings came to have a defining influence on English Protestantism. During Mary's reign more than eighty separate printed works had arrived in England from the pens of the exiles, including the first unequivocal expressions in English of Protestant resistance theory (the view that a legitimate hereditary monarch who transgresses God's law to become a murderer or a tyrant should be opposed by force) from Christopher Goodman and John Ponet.[18] During these years too the most popular translation of the bible in the period, the so called "Geneva Bible," was produced by William Whittingham and his collaborators. It contained several marginal notes which reflected Protestant resistance theory. Meanwhile in Frankfurt, and later in Basle, John Foxe was gathering material for what was to become the most powerful work of Protestant propaganda of the period and the most popular book of the century apart from the bible itself, the *Acts and Monuments*, or "Foxe's Book of Martyrs," as it became known. The title page of the 1563 edition shows two churches, the reformed and the unreformed (there is no need to say which side is peopled by devils and monks), and that image permeated the religious thought of the Elizabethan period: the twinning of the saintly Una with the duplicitous Duessa in Book 1 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is founded on Foxe's vision. The years of Marian exile gave to English Protestants a missionary zeal which Mary's renovated Catholic church under Cardinal Pole had lacked.

The Marian period also gave English Protestants a stimulus to catalogue and canonize their literary saints. John Bale's *Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytanniae*, printed in Basle in 1557, was by no means the first catalogue of canonical English writers – Skelton and Hawes at the start of the century had created their own pantheons including Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate – but it is by far the fullest in range and detail, and the first to present British literary achievements in Latin to a wider European audience. With the urgency of a Protestant exile Bale insists on the anticlerical and antipapist credentials of the writers whose lives and works he records (Pettegrew, *Marian Protestantism*, pp. 122–24 and 159–61). It is extremely difficult to say whether or not the majority of communicants in the Anglican church by 1580 could meaningfully be termed "Protestant," since most lay people at that date probably believed in the effectiveness of prayers and works as means to salvation; but the number of members of the gentry and of the priesthood who were united in their hostility to the Pope, to idolatry, and to the notion that men could merit salvation by their own actions, was considerably greater by 1580 than it had been in 1557. The mythology of the Reformation created by the Marian exiles played as great a part in this transformation as any act of government.

A general picture is emerging from this discussion of Tudor government, one in which many strands of authority coexist and occasionally struggle against each other, and in which efforts to assert or centralize regal authority often have unpredictable literary consequences. In a period in which there was no standing army or a regular police force this is not surprising: the chief ways of winning influence were through grants of offices, land, or licenses to sell particular commodities. Artfully distributed patronage could win allegiances and loyalty from networks of individuals, but it was not a method of rule which could effectively enforce spiritual or intellectual orthodoxy. The medium which could affect the minds of many people, however, was print. By the end of this period the printed word was the dominant mode of literary publication, but print was never in any full sense under the control of monarchs or their ministers. The rapid development of printing from Caxton's single press in the 1470s to a significant industry by 1590 has given rise to two equally misleading myths. According to the first, print, allied to the Reformation, liberated the minds of Englishmen from the dark clouds of Catholic oppression and made everyone start to think for him- or herself (after a millennium and a half in which the population had presumably gone around staring at their boots and muttering Hail Marys). According to the second myth the Tudor regime exerted a stranglehold of censorship over the press, recognizing both its potential as a medium of propaganda and the dangers posed by popular literacy. The first is really a scaled down version of Protestant propaganda: John Foxe claimed that the Pope "must abolish knowledge and printing, or he must seek a new world to reign over; for else, as this world standeth, printing doubtless will abolish him."[19] The second is substantially false. Control over the presses was in fact exercised, in a characteristically Tudor fashion, by occasional grand (and usually ineffective) gestures of assertiveness, combined with a more or less systematic use of patronage and financial incentives. After Caxton had printed the first book to issue from an English press in 1476 sporadic efforts were made to ally the new medium to the Crown through the establishment of royal

printers, by a number of acts which sought to protect the business interests of the press, and, in 1557, by the granting of a monopoly over printing to members of the Stationers' Company. The mechanism of control was chiefly that of patronage rather than suppression. The authorities did respond *ad hoc* to particular localized threats, but when they did so the absence of means of enforcement tended to result in proclamations which issued big threats but which had in practice only limited effects. After the printing of Tyndale's New Testament in Cologne in 1526, Bishop Tunstall warned booksellers against importing such inflammatory material, but with little effect. Possession of heretical books was made a capital crime by Mary in June 1558, but this did little to stem the flow of Protestant books into English ports (Pettegrew, *Marian Protestantism*, pp. 164–65).[20] From 1586 the Star Chamber required that licenses be obtained for printing individual books, but the sheer number of volumes printed each year at the end of the century made it increasingly difficult to exercise any practical control over the presses: even after 1586 probably no more than half of the books printed each year were ever "allowed" – that is cleared for printing – by those in authority. And the process of having a work "allowed" may often have involved little more than an act of paraphrasing its contents to a member of the Commission.[21] In 1588–89 the illicit printing of anticlerical works by a group of writers who called themselves "Martin Marprelate" did initiate a spate of crack-downs by the authorities on particular genres: the Archbishop of Canterbury John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, ordained in 1599 that "no *Satyres* or *Epigrams* be printed hereafter" and that "noe Englishe historyes be printed excepte they be allowed by some of her maiesties privie Counsell."[22] Satires by Marston, Hall, and Nashe were burned by the public hangman, but nonetheless histories and satires continued to be allowed after that date by the Commission responsible for pre-publication censorship.

From 1581 plays were scrutinized by the Master of the Revels before they were performed, notionally to see if they might be acceptable for performance at court. But here again the Master of the Revels had a financial interest in the theatre (if theatres were closed and he had no plays to license, then he would lose the fee he was paid for scrutinizing each one) and so seems often to have acted in defense of the stage against the city authorities of London.[23] Plays which contained scenes in which monarchs were deposed, or historical plays with uncomfortable analogies with the present, were on several occasions printed without the offending scenes. When Shakespeare's *Richard II* was first printed in 1597 it lacked the scene which dramatizes the deposition of the King. In the best documented instance of theatrical censorship in the period, the Master of the Revels

Edmund Tilney directed the authors of the *Book of Sir Thomas More*, which contained an account of More's role in putting down the "Ill May Day" riot against foreign merchants in 1517, to "leave out the insurrection wholly with the cause thereof." This is not likely to have been the result of Tilney's wish to act as the instrument of civic order: it was probably the result of specific fears about the timing of the performance of the play in the aftermath of the anti-alien riots of 1593.[24] Such blunt measures were deployed only fitfully, and the evidence suggests that the authorities' focus of attention was on religious opinion and on works which might impair the dignity of rulers or noblemen. Ideas, experimental forms, provocatively innovative thinking of the kind which runs through the work of Christopher Marlowe, seem persistently to have hit a blind-spot in the censor's vision. The creaky mechanisms by which the authorities sought to regulate the press left plenty of room for the sharper wits of creative writers to fashion invisible or semi-visible means of reconfiguring the political orthodoxies of the period.[25] For simple reasons of scale the medium of print surged away from the mechanisms of control: according to the *Short-Title Catalogue of English Books* thirty-five works were printed in 1500 (of which the majority were practical manuals of piety); in 1600 no fewer than 268 books are known to have been printed. And this was not just an explosion in volume: the works printed in 1600 included *The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing*, as well as Ben Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour*. Something had happened to English writing between those dates.

What? Well, that innocent question is murderously difficult to answer. The chapters which follow each describe some of the huge number of complex changes which ran through the period. But the most extraordinary literary phenomenon of the century was the sudden burst of literary activity in the 1580s and 1590s, when Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson and Donne were all at work within a few miles of each other. There is inevitably a shortfall between any quasi-causal "explanation" of this kind of miracle and the phenomenon itself. But those writers were the beneficiaries of many things: an expansion of grammar schools had produced an increasingly eloquent, classically learned body of men from relatively humble backgrounds for whom public offices (as secretaries to noblemen or as minor civil servants) were in critically short supply. For men who could not get any other job which would enable them to make use of their training in eloquence, writing provided an opportunity to use their eloquence in a public forum. After about 1560, as chapter 4 shows, there also began a complex set of realignments in the ways in which poets, dramatists, and prose writers regarded their activity, and in the ways in which they were

regarded by their readers. In 1562 Barnabe Googe's *Eclogues* were prefaced by a note from their author protesting that they had been smuggled into print without his knowledge. In 1573 George Gascoigne's *Hundred Sundrie Flowres* was preceded by an elaborate set of epistles which purport to describe how the printer had obtained the manuscript without the author's consent. These, however, were almost certainly composed by Gascoigne himself to give his printed work the *cachet* of a privately circulated manuscript. By 1590 attitudes toward print had changed significantly: poets who were not primarily courtiers frequently printed their works with signed epistles which revealed both their identity and their involvement in the process of printing (although courtiers such as Sir Walter Ralegh appear to have gone to great lengths to keep their work anonymous if it did sneak into print). Sir Philip Sidney, who died in 1586, did not print any of his literary works in his lifetime, but by 1595 all of his works had posthumously seen the light of print. The *Defence of Poetrie* printed in 1595, presented poetry as occupying a distinctive logical category: it was not the bare summary of events offered by history, nor the indigestible abstractions of philosophy, but a hypothetical realm of events as they might be. But the simple fact that Sidney's works were printed, first illicitly and then with the collaboration of his sister Mary, did even more than his theoretical arguments to raise the social status of printed works. This is not to say that circulation of poems in manuscript to a small coterie of friends ceased in the 1590s: manuscript – often in multiple copies – continued to be a major method of publication until the latter part of the seventeenth century and beyond. The majority of the poems of John Donne circulated in manuscript alone until after his death, and readers would regularly transcribe works into their own manuscript compilations for the enjoyment of themselves and their friends.[26] But by 1590, when Spenser printed *The Faerie Queene* with his name on the title page, an environment had emerged in which it was both possible and respectable to present oneself to the world as a professional author.[27] And by 1598 the name of Shakespeare, rather than simply the name of the company which had performed his plays, was frequently appearing on the title pages of the printed versions of his plays. This foregrounding of the author, which is explored more fully in chapter 4, was heightened by a tendency of much literary criticism in the later sixteenth century to create canons of named writers who had contributed to the growth of English language and literature, and to oppose these named figures – usually Chaucer, Wyatt, Surrey, Golding, Gascoigne, Sidney, Spenser – to unnamed poetasters and ballad-mongers. Sometimes, as in Francis Meres' catalogue of English writers in *Palladis Tamia* (1598), these lists are underwritten by ennobling parallels between the literature of London and that of Augustan Rome: as Meres put it "the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and

hony-tongued Shakespeare."[28] By the 1590s poetry could claim for its producers something of the *cachet* of laureateship.

These processes occurred above all in one place: London. And it is no exaggeration to say that without London the literary revolution of the 1580s and 1590s would not have occurred. The city's presses fed the center of the English book trade in the precincts of St. Paul's Cathedral, the hub of the social and religious activity of the capital. London also boasted the only purpose-made theatres in the country. The consumers of these media were drawn from a population which showed the highest levels of literacy in the nation, and which included the smart young men who attended the Inns of Court (the centers of legal training which were often called the country's third university). The city dominated more than 90 percent of the wool trade, which was the chief export industry in the period, and contained a massive body of wealthy and would-be wealthy hangers-on to the court and its attendant bureaucracies. But more than this, London, with its sprawling suburbs, its shady inns, and wandering back streets, was by the 1590s an imaginary locale of extraordinary energy. It was a place in which one could get caught by a debt-collector, lost without trace, robbed, raped, plague-struck, or very rich.

London was governed by a tight and reciprocal collaboration between the Crown and the guilds, livery companies, merchants, and aldermen who had created most of the wealth of the city (Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*). Through the 1590s even these very effective forms of government were creaking under the weight of a population which had expanded from about 35,000 in 1500 to about 200,000 in 1600. In June 1602 there was the first vain attempt to curb the growth of the city by proclamation, since "such multitudes could hardly be governed by ordinary justice to serve God and obey her Majesty."[29] The growth continued unchecked, however, as men and a large number of women from the provinces thronged toward the center of work and wealth, the city which uniquely among European capitals was the center of both power and of mercantile activity. The rate of urban growth was matched in the 1590s by a phenomenal increase in the frequency with which new words entered the language, from about 50 new words per year in 1500 to about 350 in 1600.[30] Among anxious debates as to whether a "homespun" native English vocabulary was preferable to exotic words imported from Rome and Europe, the cosmopolitan London idiom became virtually institutionalized as that of literary English. As George Puttenham put it in his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589): "Ye shall therefore take the usual speech of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within 60 miles, and not much above" (Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, vol. II, p. 150).

Writing in London grew and mutated in the 1580s and 1590s as rapidly

as the city itself. Ballads, chapbooks, accounts of robberies and hangings, all circulated in the same space (and often among the same readers) as writing which laid claim to august literary status. London writers read each others' works, imitated each others' styles, and tried eagerly to overgo each other, with the result that sonnet sequences, plays, epigrams, satires, and prose pamphlets had each year to differ from last year's model. Genres developed and died with an almost unhealthy rapidity. A single genre, the erotic narrative poem (the "epyllion," or brief epic as it is sometimes called) illustrates the almost unhealthy vigor of generic development and transformation in the period.[31] The genre effectively began with Thomas Lodge's *Scylla's Metamorphosis* (1589), but probably took off as a fashionable form with Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. Marlowe's poem was not printed until 1598, but was almost certainly read in manuscript in the early 1590s by a young poet-playwright called William Shakespeare. Marlowe glancingly describes Hero's sleeves "bordered with a grove, / Where Venus in her naked glory strove / To please the careless and disdainful eyes / Of proud Adonis, that before her lies" in one of the densely inlaid pictorial images in which his poem and the genre abounds. Shakespeare may well have sought to expand and ornament this tiny detail into the first printed work to which his name was attached, *Venus and Adonis*, in 1593. By 1601 the sheer smartness of those who had attempted the genre had all but worked it out: Francis Beaumont's *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* takes the key features of the earlier exemplars of the genre, their gender-bending delight in polymorphous sexuality, their unstoppably digressive narrative form, to a point of excess which it is all but impossible to overgo, and, exhausted, the form dropped from the fashionable repertoire. London in the 1580s and 1590s generated a giddily accelerated literary history, fueled by competition, by the desire to earn and to win patronage, and by the desire to pass into the magic circle of named, canonical writers.

This overheated atmosphere generated many of the anxieties that make authors present their writings as "literary," as a special form of discourse over which they have rights of ownership and control. Some key elements in the vocabulary with which to assert literary ownership emerge in this period: the word "plagiary" first enters the language in Joseph Hall's satires (he has the ghost of Petrarch claiming his own from "a plagiary sonnet-wright" in *Virgidemiarum* 4. 2); John Donne's satire 2 vents its spleen against those "who (beggarly) doth chaw [chew] / Others' wits' fruits." Anxieties about the theft and misinterpretation of poems run through Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (1601), and surface in many of his earlier works. Jonson responds to these anxieties by shaping a physically and dramatically substantial character of "the Author" for himself in several of his plays, a character who argues about the interpretation of his texts and the critical

principles on which they rest. The fear that printed words could disperse among a multitude of readers, be misinterpreted, stolen, or simply used as wrapping or lavatory paper has a profound effect on the way in which writers in the 1590s present their own personae: their efforts to be lords and owners of their work are partly the consequences of recognizing the actual vulnerability and ephemerality of their words.[32] Donne, Jonson, and Shakespeare are all writers whose literary careers and literary personae developed in the overheated atmosphere of late Elizabethan London, in which they fought for survival; and without London, that sprawling monster on the threshold of the court, the majority of the writing for which the sixteenth century is remembered would never have been produced.

This chapter began with some reflections on periodization. I suggested that a story of a kind began in or around 1485. In the light of the latter part of this chapter we might wish to allow the starting date of the literary century to drift back to 1476, the introduction of printing into England, or perhaps forward to the 1518 edition of More's *Utopia*, which was one of the earliest works to use the arts of printing to advance its author's career, and which was also one of the first works to attempt to remove the court and the noble household from its picture of a predominantly urban society.[33] The shifts toward print and from a literature of the court toward a literature which has a dominantly urban focus and feel are the central changes in the nature of literary activity in the sixteenth century. Beginnings for these processes can be found toward the end of the fifteenth century and at the start of the sixteenth. These beginnings do not of course mark absolute breaks with the past, since the styles, and the styles of self-presentation, of Wyatt and Skelton and Hawes are deeply indebted to Chaucer, Lydgate, and Gower; but they do anticipate the high-point of English writing in the 1590s. It is not clear that the story which follows these beginnings is entirely continuous: certainly the repeated changes in official religion through the century would have seemed bewildering to many Englishmen, since each reign marked a new beginning. By 1603 it would have been apparent that the accession of James I and the consequent union with Scotland would lead to major changes in how England itself was perceived as a geographical and political entity.

It is also not clear that the story can be said to have ended in 1603. The 1616 first Folio of Ben Jonson's *Workes* – and he was much mocked for using that grandiose word of mere poems and plays – with its monumental title page; the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare's *Tragedies, Comedies and Histories*, with its engraving of the playwright which presides over a prestigious and costly volume; even perhaps the 1645 volume of *Poems of Mr. John Milton both English and Latin*, all testify to the emergence of a

dignified profession of literary authorship which worked in collaboration with the medium of print. The start of this chapter gave some examples of royal self-fashioning, and explored some of the ways in which Tudor monarchs were not entirely in control of their images. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for authors, whose written words were subjected to the unpredictable effects of the early modern presses, and then read by a public which prided itself on its autonomy and taste for innovation. No one, monarch or author, enjoyed absolute rule in the commonwealth of Tudor England. The following chapters explore the bewildering riches of the sixteenth century, which extend through its literary criticism, drama, chronicles of private life, the writing of reformation, popular chapbooks and ballads, to (in the final chapter) an emerging literature of the localities. The development of a form of authorship which was located in London life and articulated through the medium of print was by no means the sole source of riches in the sixteenth century; but after the death of Elizabeth in 1603 it was perhaps the chief legacy left by the dying century.

NOTES

1 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

2 Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 72.

3 Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful Yeare. 1603* (London, 1603), p. 24.

4 Bernard André, *De Vita atque Gestis Henrici Septimi*, ed. James Gairdner, *Rerum Britannicorum Medii Aevi Scriptores* (London: Longman, 1858), p. 32.

5 John Clapham, *Elizabeth of England*, ed. Evelyn Plummer Read and Conyers Read (Philadelphia and London: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), pp. 98–99.

6 J. Nichols, ed., *The Progresses and Public Processions of Elizabeth I*, 3 vols. (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1823), vol. I, p. 41.

7 See John Guy, "Tudor Monarchy and its Critiques" and Patrick Collinson, "The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I," in *The Tudor Monarchy*, ed. John Guy, (London: Arnold, 1997), chs. 3 and 4.

8 For Grafton and Mulcaster's involvement, see Roy Strong, *The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy: Pageantry, Painting, Iconography: II Elizabethan* (Woodbridge: the Boydell Press, 1995), pp. 38–40.

9 See further Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's* Arcadia *and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

10 See Colin Burrow, *Edmund Spenser* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996); David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), ch. 5.

11 See Steven Gunn, "The Courtiers of Henry VII," in *The Tudor Monarchy*, ed. John Guy (London: Arnold, 1997), ch. 9; David Starkey et al., eds., *The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London: Longman, 1987); David Loades, *The Tudor Court*, rev. edn. (London: Headstart History, 1992);

12 See Arthur F. Marotti, "Love is not Love: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *ELH* 49 (1982): 396–428.

13 Notably by G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). The triumphalist account of the rise of Protestantism by A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd edn. (London: Batsford, 1989) is still valuable, but has been questioned by a number of revisionist studies, notably J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). These works have won the battle on the ground, since they convey the impact of the Reformation on individual parishioners as Dickens does not; but they have not won the war. Dickens takes much fuller account than they of the mythologies of Reformation, and these mythologies, rather than parochial dissent, are more often reflected in the literature of the period.

14 G. R. Elton, ed., *The Tudor Constitution*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 353.

15 On London reformers see Susan Bridgen, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), ch. 2.

16 Quoted in Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 145.

17 C. H. Garrett, *The Marian Exiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); also A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, pp. 339–49 and Andrew Pettegrew, *Marian Protestantism: Six Studies* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996).

18 See Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: volume II, the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 221–24.

19 J. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. S. R. Cattley and J. Pratt, 4th edn. (London: Religious Tract Society, 1877), vol. III, p. 720.

20 For the use of printed works by the Marian regime to influence opinion abroad, see Jennifer Loach, "The Marian Establishment and the Printing Press," *English Historical Review* 101 (1986): 135–48.

21 Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 61.

22 Edward Arber, ed., *A Transcript of the Stationers' Register*, 5 vols. (London and Birmingham, 1875–94), vol. III, pp. 677–78.

23 See Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

24 See *Sir Thomas More: a Play by Anthony Munday and others*, ed. Vittorio Gabrieli and Giorgio Melchiori (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 17, and Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, pp. 84–86.

25 See Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: the Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). On theatrical censorship, see Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Professions of Dramatist and Player in Shakespeare's Time, 1590–1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 145–96.

26 See Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1995) and Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

27 Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1983); Patrick Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight: a Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

28 G. Gregory Smith, ed., *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), vol. II, p. 317.

29 Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds., *Tudor Royal Proclamations, Volume III: The Later Tudors, 1588–1603* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 245. On the relative stability of London, see Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*.

30 See Geoffrey Hughes, *Words in Time: A Social History of the English Vocabulary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 101–03. These figures are likely to be exaggerated, since documentation in the OED, on which they are based, is relatively poor for the period 1500–50.

31 For a fuller account, see Clark Hulse, *Metamorphic Verse: The Elizabethan Minor Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

32 See Ian Donaldson, *Jonson's Magic Houses* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), chs. 3 and 12.

33 On the artful shaping of the epigrams printed with the 1518 *Utopia*, see David R. Carlson, *English Humanist Books: Writers and Patrons, Manuscript and Print, 1475–1525* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London, 1993), ch. 7; on the urban structures of *Utopia*, see Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch. 1.

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3

CLARK HULSE

Tudor aesthetics

TWO FABLES

What is "literature"? Who writes it, and who reads it? What good or harm does it do? How is it related to other cultural forms? And what is the appropriate language and kind of writing within which these issues can be framed and argued? These simple questions, which provide the fodder for the complex aesthetic debates of the Enlightenment and the Romantic eras and for the theory wars of the late twentieth century, were likewise disputed in the sixteenth century. It is possible, indeed, to think of the sixteenth century as the first great age of literary criticism,[1] in which a distinctive category of literature was established, and a distinctive way of talking about it and the other arts was developed.

For Tudor writers and readers, the answers to these questions depend primarily on their understanding of literature as a kind of *imitation*. The word *imitation* is a complex one, though, for it allows two important meanings. The first of these is imitation as the copying or echoing of other speech or writing, an understanding of the term that places literature, as imitative writing, in a close relationship to rhetoric, and emphasizes its power to speak to human desires and hence to act as a force either of order or disorder in society. The second important meaning is imitation as the representation of nature, or what Aristotle in his *Poetics* calls *mimesis*. Modern accounts of Renaissance aesthetics, especially accounts that draw primarily on the experience of Renaissance Italy, often describe the transition from medieval to Renaissance poetics as a shift from a rhetorically based imitation to an Aristotelian understanding of *mimesis*. While Aristotle's *Poetics* has an undeniably greater importance at the end of the sixteenth century than it had at the beginning, it is better to understand the two meanings of imitation as always present in Tudor aesthetic discourse and always in dialogue with each another. The exact relationship between them is a primary subject of debate in the period, one from which Tudor