English and American Studies

Theory and Practice

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2.2 | The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

2.2.1 | Overview

At first glance, the field of early modern studies may appear so heterogeneous as to hardly justify the use of a common term. There is no consensus as to how such labels as '**Renaissance**,' '**Humanism**,' '**early modern**,' or '**Restoration**' are to be understood or precisely which periods of time they cover in their respective European contexts. All of them carry reductive and sometimes misleading connotations—whether they harness our attention to the assumption of a wholesale cultural revival of classical antiquity, structured according to earlier processes on the continent (e.g. the Florentine Renaissance or the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*); privilege certain areas of learning, scholarship, and education together with a concept of 'the human'; transport a hidden bias about degrees, stages, and values of modernity and its ultimate arrival; or concentrate on political developments, postulating caesuras at the expense of continuities in other areas of reality, or modelling them according to patterns of disruption and return. While this state of terminological affairs appears unsatisfactory, it also seems hardly possible to mend it. Still, one way out of the difficulties that arise if we rely on traditional period divisions may be to stress kinds of continuity capable of bracketing together the two centuries of cultural and political history between the reigns of Henry VIII (1509–1547) and William of Orange (1689–1702): transformations of antiquity, the emergence of new science and new philosophy, the long process of the Reformation, systems of literary patronage and beginning professionalisation, and the project of nation-building.

The major structures of **Tudor as well as Stuart aesthetics** bridge the extremes between urbane accomplishment and technical brilliance on the one side, built on an increasing awareness of the multiplication of perspectives and realms of knowledge, and on the other, a generalised sense of anxiety, discord and disintegration with a loss of certainties deepening even to despair. This consciousness of a growing and irreducible plurality of world views—i.e. "the cultural principles of pluralism and plenitude" (Kinney, Introduction 6) implying the proximity and relatedness of human dignity and misery articulated by continental Humanists at the beginning of the period as well as a vague sense of a multiplicity of 'worlds'—continues to inform artistic production in England right into the eighteenth century.

In the period which saw the emergence of Humanistic education, emphatic notions of literary authorship and its first professionalizations, men (and some women) were educated to be "**rhetorical men**" (cf. Lanham), human beings whose central competence was eloquence—a verbal and semantic versatility which as "self-fashioning" and performance in a multitude of ways informed the whole of life (cf. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*). Far from the moral dubiousness of hypocrisy, authorial dissimulation is part and parcel of this all-embracing theatricality, a generalisation of the courtly model, which was to become a signature of the period as a whole. Antiquity, to Rhetorical Man, is a central part of his lexicon and the major treasury of his invention. The "Invention of the Human" claimed by Harold Bloom for Shakespeare's theatre may, after all, amount to just this: a mentality whose mainstay is the idea of performative humanity (beyond a Humanism which provided the scholarship and the ancient materials) and poetic subjectivities relying on imaginative transformations of a selectively perceived and re-shaped antiquity.

Timeline: Tudor and Stuart Dynasties	
1485–1509	Henry VII: Inauguration of Tudor dynasty
1509–1547	Henry VIII
1526	William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament
1534	Separation from Roman Catholicism: Henry VIII head of the Church of England
1547–1553	Edward VI
1553–1558	Mary I (return to Catholicism)
1558–1603	Elizabeth I (return to Protestantism)
1599	Opening of the Globe Theatre
1603–1625	James I: Inauguration of Stuart dynasty
1607	Establishment of the first English colony in the New World
1625–1649	Charles I
1642–1649	Civil War; Closing of theatres; Charles I executed in 1649
1649–1660	Interregnum
1660	Restoration of Charles II; Foundation of Royal Society; Reopening of theatres
1685–1688	James II
1688–1689	Glorious Revolution; Accession of William of Orange (1689–1702)

2.2.2 | Transformations of Antiquity

The philosophical and literary transformations of antiquity constitute one form of continuity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the intensely verbal and textual culture of English early modernity depends, and indeed thrives on, the textual cultures of classical antiquity. True, transformations of antiquity neither begin nor end with the period of time under consideration. But in their characteristically sixteenth- and seventeenth-century profile they contain the promise to accommodate both the salient changes and the perduring cultural sameness which give the period a recognisable consistency. In England, the early modern period is not a time in which philosophical systems are originated or, like Cartesian thought in France, systematically developed from first principles. Neither are systematic positions elaborated by Greek and Latin thinkers handed down unchanged through the centuries, to be 're-born' in the belated English Renaissance. Rather, these are selected, recomposed and changed—transformed, as elements from heterogeneous schools of thought are reorganised in versions, mode and media aimed at cultural situations very different from their origins. Thus, the 'transformative' approach tries to avoid connotations of an unmodified 'return' or 'reception' of the paradigms of Graeco-Roman Antiquity. It also attempts to accommodate an interest that guides much recent research in explaining the mentalities that shaped the period and made possible its extraordinary cultural achievements.

Spenser and Browne

In a poem from his sonnet sequence *Amoretti* (1594), Edmund **Spenser**, or his poetic *persona*, appears to be enjoying something we might expect him to reject rather than celebrate, namely the beauty of created beings, intensely and sensually experienced. Thus, in sonnet 72 the poet imagines his soul as a bird of prey in a moment of perfect relaxation:

Oft when my spirit doth spred her bolder winges,
    In mind to mount up to the purest sky:
    it down is weighd with thoght of earthly things
    and clogd with burden of mortality,
Where when that soverayne beauty it doth spy,   5
    resembling heavens glory in her light:
    drawne with sweet pleasures bayt, it back doth fly,
    and unto heaven forgets her former flight.
There my fraile fancy fed with full delight,
    doth bath in blisse and mantleth most at ease: 10
    ne thinks of other heaven, but how it might
    her harts desire with most contentment please.
Hart need not wish none other happinesse,
    but here on earth to have such hevens blisse.

Instead of soaring to the highest spiritual heights, the speaker's "spirit" appears, in the second half of the poem, to be content with the contemplation of earthly beauty. But what is it that motivates him to this ambitious ascent in the first place, and why does he break it off in order to opt for the second-best? And is it really the inferior option? Why should he imagine his soul as a bird of prey? Why does this kind of subject call for precisely this form of a fourteen-line poem in iambic pentameter and a complicated rhyme scheme? What is it that leads a late sixteenth-century poet to cast love in terms of a "flight unto heaven" supposed to help him shed all "thoght of earthly things"? Is the soul's, and in particular: the imagination's ("my fraile fancy"), return to the "sweet pleasures" below a kind of failure or really another kind of success? What exactly do these pleasures consist in, seeing that they promise both sensual and spiritual delight? And why is it that this soul-bird feels so blissfully self-satisfied, although it has just missed its aim?

In order to answer questions of this kind we need to know something not only about **Neoplatonic philosophy** in late antiquity but also about the shapes the Neoplatonic doctrine of the soul had assumed in Spenser's time. These were in many respects a far cry from the original—as witnessed, for instance, by this poem and its bold remodelling of typical Neoplatonic structures of cyclical 'conversion' in favour of a pattern of artistic self-affirmation. The point is that, while we might argue that early modern writers to some extent invented their own antiquity, the implication is not so much that they thereby distorted it, but that, by making the transformations serve new and unforethought ends, they productively **re-functionalised** the former ideas, thoughts, and systematic configurations.

Interpretation

Interpretation

Our second example is separated by more than half a century from Spenser's text. Sir Thomas **Browne** opens a treatise he calls *Hydriotaphia, Urne-Buriall, or, A Discourse of the Sepulchrall Urnes lately found in Norfolk* (1658) as follows:

In the deep discovery of the Subterranean world, a shallow part would satisfie some enquirers; who, if two or three yards were open about the surface, would not care to rake the bowels of *Potosi* and regions towards the Centre. Nature hath furnished one part of the Earth, and man another. The treasures of time lie high, in Urnes, Coynes, and Monuments, scarce below the roots of some vegetables. Time hath endlesse rarities, and shows of all varieties; which reveals old things in heaven, makes new discoveries in earth, and even earth it self a discovery. That great Antiquity *America* lay buried for thousands of years; and a large part of the earth is still in the Urne to us.

Obviously, here the emphasis appears to be less on the spiritual than on the material and natural. But what exactly does the speaker refer to when he mentions that "Nature" has "furnished one part of the Earth"? Are we therefore entitled to excavate and exploit earth's treasures like the legendary silver mines of Potosi? And are there indeed other, subterranean worlds to discover? Can there be other worlds besides the one we occupy? Is it permitted to imagine them? If we do, as the text whimsically seems to suggest, by dying and being buried, in a quite literal sense "furnish" the earth, turning it into a kind of necropolis that only waits to be discovered by later generations, very much like the New World "*America*" (here wittily referred to as a "great Antiquity"— just as desirable, of course, to an antiquarian, as any brand-new world): if the new is really the old, and vice versa, are we then justified in treating both as mere material for our research? Are the things that are "still in the Urne to us" connected to the living individuals they

once were—and if so, how? Finally, if what we find and explore are indisputably objects to be experienced by means of our senses, how do we then reconcile our findings with metaphysical doctrines of the immortality of the soul and indeed, the resurrection of the body?

Again, these questions are underpinned by a sense that, in this rather dizzying opening paragraph to a far-ranging treatise on burial customs, we are dealing with transformations of antiquity, blended with the special antiquarian sense the term acquired in the seventeenth century and playfully spiced with a grain of the discoverer's enthusiasm. Here, we may be faced with Browne's own version of **Epicurean materialism** as well as a Naturalism that seems to have been processed by thinkers as unorthodox as himself and interested in the possibility of 'other worlds' (such as Giordano Bruno). Still, we should be fatally wrong if we tried to identify Browne with just one of these ways of thinking. At one point in his extended autobiographical essay *Religio Medici*, he warns us not to pin him down to any one of the available schools of thought: "I have runne through all sects, yet finde no rest in any, though our first studies & *junior* endeavors may stile us Peripateticks, Stoicks, or Academicks, yet I perceive the wisest Heads prove at last, almost all Scepticks, and stand like *Janus* in the field of knowledge" (pt. 2, sect. 8). As could be shown, however, what looks like a confessed allegiance to the **Scepticism** fashionable in seventeenth-century England, is itself to be taken with a pinch of salt. Like the other philosophies mentioned—Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Platonism—Pyrrhonism is just part of a large quarry from which Browne and his contemporaries break the chunks they need in order to fashion their own, syncretistic and often very special literary identities.

Ancient Philosophy in Early Modern Mentalities

Much like the other topics discussed in this chapter, the complex transformations of antiquity which structure our period could be unfolded along overlapping parameters of performance, narrative, discursive reflection, and, not least, the formation of poetic subjectivities—quite literally self-created, public images of 'makers' (cf. Greek *poiein*) who

were proud of their achievements and confidently fashioned themselves as artists capable of making a difference in the world for which they wrote. Prior to considerations of this kind, however, a fundamental question arises: **Which antiquity do we refer to?** If literature grows from, and is capable of changing, historical mentalities, we should turn to them first and enquire in particular into those parts of their profile which owe so much to older forma-

tions. True, the presence of Graeco-Roman thinking has always been recognised as a hallmark of the period, invented to mark the difference between one's own enlightened and the preceding 'dark' age. Nonetheless, as indicated by the above examples, the English Renaissance is clearly neither a unified nor a comprehensive re-birth of classical antiquity. Especially with respect to its natural philosophy, the period is arguably still to a very large extent **Aristotelian**. For university syllabi as well as individual scholars, the Latin Aristotle and his scholastic commentators remained the major authorities, to be challenged only with the beginnings of the New Science (see our next section). However, with respect to ethics, the cultures of the self and of everyday life, it should be stressed that it is above all Hellenistic, that is to say, late antiquity with its Stoic, Sceptic, Neoplatonic, and increasingly also Epicurean thinkers which provided the models and the formative texts. As these were gradually becoming available in Latin or even in English, they attracted an interest that went beyond the scholarly and its specialist disciplines. By way of multiple mediations through texts, artefacts, social practices, and especially literary culture, their ideas and precepts percolated into the everyday. In this process of selective adoption and recombination, philosophical positions derived from antiquity were blended into sometimes contradictory and often idiosyncratic wholes with other elements, above all with Christian thought.

Still, Hellenistic profiles often remain visible in their outlines. Thus, the **Stoicisms** of Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and especially Cicero furnished not only humanist scholars from John Colet to Thomas More with some of the mainstays and many ingredients of their writings and respective arts of life. Fusing with other elements of ancient (and medieval) faculty theory and the affective regimes associated with these, they contributed to shaping a mentality and *habitus* in which the management of the passions together with a technique and economy of the self, including its public service and contribution to the commonwealth, played a major role and which retained its validity throughout the seventeenth century. With Cicero's *De officiis* serving as one of the central texts in grammar school education, Stoic *romanitas* comes to inspire Elizabethan notions of 'virtue'—including its masculinist implications.

That the cultural transfer of Stoicism need not be channelled institutionally and did not depend on a university education is borne out by the scholarly

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Definition

→ **Stoicism:** a strongly rationalist school of thought founded by Zenon of Kition, Chrysippus, and Cleanthes and popularised by Roman thinkers such as Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius. While ancient Greek Stoicism developed a system of logic, metaphysics and physics that explained the world as well-ordered *cosmos* held together by sympathetic relationships, Roman Stoics tended to stress the ethical dimension of their philosophy, presenting it above all as an art of life. Since the world, for the Stoic, is well-ordered, it is reasonable to accept the inevitable, and most important to remain unmoved (in a state of *apathia*) in the face of obstacles, catastrophes, and blows of fate. The main thing is to 'live according to nature,' that is, to follow the flow of life, keep a mental distance from external events as well as inner turmoil. Stoicism goes well with ideologies of military heroism and political virtue. Elizabethans loved it, and since the writings of Cicero and Seneca were read at grammar school, the notion of Stoical virtue, selfless public service, and generalised 'Roman-ness' was deeply ingrained at all levels of culture.

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qualities of Ben Jonson's writings as well as William Shakespeare's—witness the intense topicality of passages such as Polonius' admonition of Laertes in *Hamlet* ("to thine own self be true," Act 1); the Duke's exhortation in *Measure for Measure* ("Be absolute for death," Act 3) addressed to the imprisoned and ultimately unreceptive Claudio; or Ulysses' famous 'degree' speech in *Troilus and Cressida* (Act 1), with the various characters' unsuccessful attempts to come to terms with their passions. In all of these, pieces of Stoic wisdom have already been transformed into, and can be evoked as, commonplaces. It is in this topical and essentially a-systematic shape that they now form part of new, and complex, literary configurations; not only, but prominently, in Shakespeare's Roman Plays or in Jonson's 'classicism.'

Side by side with the Stoic, we find Sceptic modes of thought infiltrating English literature after 1562, the publication date of Henri Etienne's Latin edition of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, the manifesto of Late Antique **Scepticism** by Sextus Empiricus. Mediated, most prominently, through Montaigne's *Essays* (especially the "Apology for Raimond Sebonde") congenially translated by John Florio (1601) and later through Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy,* 'structural' scepticisms abound in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature and inform its imaginative energy.

Again, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a case in point, but this also holds for *The Tempest*, with its almost verbatim allusions to Montaigne in combination

Definition

→ **Scepticism** (or **Pyrrhonism**): Hellenistic way of thinking, finding its origins in the eponymous Pyrrhon of Elis, a radical philosopher who, however, left nothing in writing. The most important Sceptical author in late antiquity was Sextus Empiricus (2nd half of the 2nd century) with his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. In the face of controversy, Sceptics abstain from making up their minds and committing themselves. They remain undecided, preferring to put the warring positions in brackets (*epoché*) and to suspend judgment in order to preserve their mental equilibrium (*ataraxia*).

with literary strategies which actively create and stage aporetic situations in which readers and spectators cannot but respond with the sceptical *epoché* later to be ambiguously recommended by Thomas Browne: We are asked to suspend judgment and direct our thoughtful attention to problems that admit of no ready solution. Cleopatra's death at her own hands in *Antony and Cleopatra*—"Let's do't after the high Roman fashion" (Act 4)—presents another, complex example. It combines the Stoic element of constancy with hedonistic, 'Epicurean' voluptuousness and the "Immortal longings" (Act 5) reminiscent of yet another kind of Hellenism in a manner which makes it impossible to reduce the aesthetic experience offered on stage to any of these ideological certainties—a structurally Sceptical effect.

Elements of **Epicureanism** also gain a foothold in English mentalities, increasing through the sixteenth century and gaining prominence, indeed notoriety, in the second half of the seventeenth. While Elizabethans still tended to reduce the teaching of Epicurus to its hedonistic stereotypes (and to repudiate them accordingly), a growing number of translations of Lucretius' long didactic

Definition

→ **Epicureanism:** a school of thought going back to the teachings of Epicurus, a materialist thinker who explained everything as the result of atoms and their movements and who taught that the aim of life is to attain happiness (*hedonè*, or pleasure), which in turn consists in freedom from fear and follows from an ascetic lifestyle. Only a few fragments of Epicurus' writings have survived, and we owe most of our knowledge about his doctrine to Lucretius and his great didactic poem *De rerum natura*. In the 17th century, many natural scientists found in atomist thought explanations of natural phenomena closer to experience and common sense than those provided by speculative thought in the tradition of medieval Aristotelianism ('scholasticism') and its commentators.

poem *De rerum natura*, its major literary compendium, contributed to a much more varied reception, ranging from the ethical to the scientific.

From the 1770s, "Lucretius English't"—in parts or in its totality—by John Evelyn (1656–1657), Thomas Creech (1682), John Dryden (1685) and, first but never published, by the Puritan Lucy Hutchinson (ca. 1650) was greeted with enthusiasm. At one end, it furthered downright Libertinist stances such as the Earl of Rochester's, and, in unlikely hybridisations with modified Neoplatonic and Sceptic structures, Aphra Behn's; at the other, Lucretian naturalism and atomism afforded confirmation as well as arguments to natural philosophers, virtuosos, and empirical scientists interested in the corpuscular make-up of the universe. Again in surprising combinations, these surface in the writings of Thomas Browne. The capacities of the atomistic model to account for material as well as psychological and spiritual phenomena rendered it particularly attractive to avid (if less discriminating) readers and writers such as Margaret Cavendish, whose prolific fictions, poetry, and expository writings cover the whole range of explanatory possibilities available to contemporary theory, fusing them to experimental and often adventurous configurations.

Finally, let us turn to the philosophy which inspired the Italian Renaissance like no other: **Platonism**, especially the **Neoplatonism** of Plotinus and his followers. It was epitomised in thinkers, translators, and cultural mediators like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, remained virulent in the syncretistic naturalism of Giordano Bruno, and continued to resonate in various transformations through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England. We have already seen it at work in Spenser's *Amoretti* 72, in its speaker's fascination with the possibilities of a spiritual ascent to the highest as well as his awareness of the challenges to sensuality and the appreciation of beauty this poses. Ancient Neoplatonism not only persists subculturally in Hermeticist and Occultist writings; it has also strongly informed English Petrarchism since its inception in *Tottels Miscellany* and the poetry of Wyatt and Surrey, to be continued and modified in sonnet sequences by Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare as well as in Sidney's romance novel sui generis, the *Arcadia*. It is thus part of the freight of philosophical implications carried by the sonnet form. But it also drives and structures Spenser's allegory in *The Faerie Queene*. In its transformations, it inspires English courtli-

➔ **Neoplatonism:** a school of thought, a metaphysical philosophy and a way of life pursued by followers of Plato and founded by Plotinus. Neoplatonists tend to be concerned, above all, with truth, beauty, and goodness—which, in their view, are ultimately identical—, and also with the way everything flows from a single source of being ("the One") and returns to it in one unbroken chain of simultaneous descent and ascent. Its disciples strive to participate with mind, soul, and body in this self-reflexive movement towards union with the transcendent One. Neoplatonism plays an important role on several levels of early modern culture—in love poetry, religion, courtliness as well as the self-presentation of monarchy.

ness through the medium of Castiglione's and Hoby's *Book of the Courtier*. And it provides the ideological context in which 'Seraphic' friendships flourish in the seventeenth century, prefiguring the new epistolary and literary culture of sensibility which, prepared by Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, was to give distinctive profile to the eighteenth-century novel from Richardson to Jane Austen.

Literary Transformations

It cannot be stressed enough that, in the literary texts of the period (and often in the non-fictional as well), the above-mentioned mindsets freely, and often surprisingly, intermingle. Hardly ever do we find unalloyed reproductions of ancient ways of thinking—not even in the works of the Libertine John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, or the enthusiastic Christian Neoplatonist Thomas Traherne. What we do find are **selective perceptions and inventive recombinations of Hellenisms**, which amount to sometimes astonishing interventions in ancient reference texts and their systematic structures. Ancient texts, ideas and modes of thinking are thus profoundly altered through succeeding stages of interpretation, translation, and edition. Antiquity is re-functionalised in keeping with new and fairly specific historical and cultural requirements. That the latter span a wide spectrum, sometimes covering polar opposites, becomes obvious even if we

consider only the field of affective regimes—these extend from the restrictive and ascetic disciplines to be derived from Stoic, Sceptic, and Epicurean techniques and arguments aimed at achieving tranquillity of the soul (*apathia* and *ataraxia* respectively) to the enthusiastic recommendations articulated by Neoplatonic models in order to achieve spiritual union with the highest.

In these processes of productive transformation, the principle of plenitude—not to be confused with arbitrariness or indifference—appears to rule supreme. This may be indicated by reference to one of the earliest examples, **Thomas More's *Utopia*** (1516). Originally published in Latin, the text was translated into English in 1551. Preceded by a 'Dialogue of Counsel,' it depicts the social and religious customs of an imaginary island called Utopia. More's highly influential *jeu d'esprit* has given the genre of utopia its name. In addition to numerous other facets of knowledge and ideology, More's text abounds with Stoical wisdom, proverbs and precepts drawing in many cases on the copious collection of *Adagia* compiled by his friend Erasmus. It seems to propagate Epicurean naturalism in the areas of marital ethics and certain social practices, combining the description of hedonistic elements in Utopian society with ascetic ones. Yet in matters of theology and religion as well as in some aspects of politics, the Utopians appear to advocate monistic, Platonising models, while their church government approximates that of an enlightened Catholicism. None of these, however, can safely be ascribed to Thomas More himself. This is due to the structural Scepticism of a highly ironical narrative constituted by the multiple embedding and inconclusive dialogues of pseudo-authorial voices (the narrator, the traveller Hythloday, the 'More'-figure in the text).

It is precisely this kind of **irreducible pluralism** with its possibilities of juridical and philosophical argument as well as serious play which is a major source of the aesthetic delight provided by More's text. While similar descriptions could be given of the Hellenistic elements and strategies employed and interlaced in works written around the middle of the period and especially during the enormously productive decades towards the end of the sixteenth century, such

Frontispiece of More's
Utopia (1516), showing
a woodcut of the island

Frontispiece of More's *Utopia* (1516), showing a woodcut of the island

as the great epics of Sidney's *Arcadia* or Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, it should be pointed out that this holds even for late seventeenth-century texts which at first glance follow a wholly different poetic ratio. Thus, **Andrew Marvell's poetry**, composed by an author with known Protestant and Republican affiliations, engineers, through the way his verses marshal mutually exclusive ways of thinking, ironical effects which amount to an almost total elusiveness of the stance they might be seen to advocate. Resonating with Classical scholarship in unexpected places, Marvell's "Poetry of Criticism" (to echo Rosalie Colie), for instance in "The Garden," "On a Drop of Dew," but also in his long and perplexing topographical masterpiece "Upon Appleton House," evokes and scrutinises both central and recondite ideas of ancient Neoplatonism, experimentally and provocatively combining them with Naturalisms of a sometimes extreme, materialistic kind. Ultimately, his verse provides matrices of poetic reception and effect, in turn spanning the poles that the period as a whole tries to encompass—immanence and transcendence, enthusiasm and melancholic despair, harmony and disintegration, plurality and oneness.

2.2.3 | New Science and New Philosophy

It is in the transformative context described above that changes of mind-set are to be seen which took their beginnings in the sixteenth century but became more pronounced and gained institutional stability in the seventeenth. Although some of the developments responsible for these changes appear to be primarily of a contextual kind, these, too, affect and are in turn affected by, the literature of the period. The phenomena we need to consider here are related to the emergence of new methods, concepts, theories, and institutions in what were to become the natural sciences; a process often referred to as **Scientific Revolution**. Recent intellectual historians schooled by Quentin Skinner have explored this complex in a way immediately relevant for literary studies (cf. e.g. Mulsow and Mahler). For if literature is also a way of thinking, it will not remain unaffected by

fundamental changes in other ways of thinking about the world and, concomitantly, the self. The history of Science, its origins as well as the processes leading to its disciplinary emancipation, consolidation, and institutional establishment in the Royal Society, including the important role played in this by the writings of **Francis Bacon**, are at present still hotly debated. The answers to some of the questions raised in the course of this discussion are not without relevance to the study of the literature of the period. Besides, they also involve transformations of antiquity. Hence, it matters whether the origins of scientific culture are assumed to be somehow autochthonous and its beginnings abrupt and dateable or whether, as has recently been suggested (among others by Dieter Groh and Stephen Gaukroger), they are to be sought in the Middle Ages, possibly as early as the 'Renaissance' of the twelfth century, and here not only in natural philosophy, but also in theology (cf. entry I.2.1). Therefore, we can no longer understand New Science exclusively (and perhaps not even predominantly) as a product of greater processes of secularisation, for example as a result of the internal dynamics of physical research and mechanical experimentation. On the contrary, it will be seen to emerge at least equally from the attempt to harmonise scientific observations systematically with religious faith, to discern traces of God's creative action in a universe which was still considered as divine economy and perceived to be structured by relations of analogy and correspondence, sympathy and antipathy in accordance with ancient models.

What seems to be fairly undisputed, notwithstanding the outcome of this debate, is the crucial role, culminating in the English seventeenth century, of **experimentalism** and the **Royal Society** which was founded in 1660 to promote scientific, experimental research. Still, here too, interactions with developments on the continent (some of these mediated through English Royalist exiles) have been noted which relativise notions of insularity: both Cartesian rationalism and diverse attempts, most vigorously pursued by Gassendi and his followers, to reconcile Epicurean atomism with Christian theology form parts of the horizon of both English and continental thinkers interested in the New Science. One of the most familiar examples (with earlier precursors such as the aristocratic Northumberland Circle) is the **Cavendish Circle** around the exiled Duke and Duchess of Newcastle, which included, if only
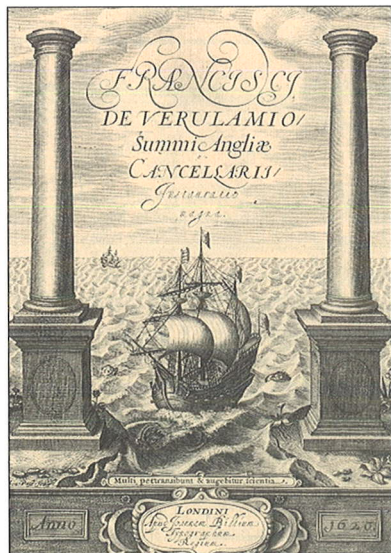
temporarily, René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes, and more continuously, Walter Charleton. Charleton's attempt to reconcile the various possible approaches to knowledge of the natural world resulted in his *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana* (1654)—a treatise typically mirroring in its monstrous title both the heterogeneity of its subject matter and the ambition to weld it into a new whole. But even within the more traditional and institutionally secure scholarly networks, such as the Cambridge Platonists, we find the strong impulse to integrate different types of knowledge and styles of thinking; most impressively perhaps in the person and writings of Henry More, correspondent of Descartes and inventor of the term 'Cartesianism,' himself a scientific dilettante of sorts, interested in Cabbala and Hermeticism and believer in witchcraft, but simultaneously an eminent Christian theologian, aspiring poet, and Platonist. Among his numerous works, the *Democritus Platonissans* (1646) possibly bears most eloquent witness to the length to which he and his contemporaries were prepared to go in order to bring together what threatened to fall apart.

For some, of course, this had already happened. Their **sense of disorientation and disintegration** was aptly summarised by John Donne's much-quoted and easily generalised lament in *The First Anniversarie* that "new Philosophy cals all in doubt" (line 205) and "'Tis all in pieces, all cohearence gone" (213). What is shared, however, by the protagonists in this scenario of scientifically acerbated simultaneity of the non-simultaneous is not only remarkably consistent in its central aspects, but also, again, prominently displays literary features. For what the anti-Aristotelism, or rather: anti-scholasticism, typical of the proponents of the New Science amounted to was above all a strong resentment of a certain style of thinking, speaking, and writing—in other words, the kind of rhetoric epitomized by the 'schoolmen' and characterised by abstraction, speculation, endless ramifications of commentary, and the dogmatism of competing 'schools.' Spokesmen of the Royal Society such as Robert Hooke and Thomas Sprat sought to counter scholastic culture by propagating a new type of scientific communication that had the additional advantage of conforming with the ideals of Protestant preaching: **plain style**.

The Literary Productivity of the Scientific Revolution

Scientific ferment and philosophical disorder thus turn into a source of **epistemological as well as literary productivity**. The seventeenth century develops into a laboratory situation of an unprecedented kind, with a sense of experimentalism and the excitement of exploring the reaches of the new knowledge and methodology side by side with intensified emphasis on the need for stability, rock-bottom truth, and the (re-)discovery of first and unshakeable principles. Thanks to Humanist philology, the textual materials were available and ready to be searched and re-employed with an 'experiential' curiosity which, in the essayistic boldness of some of its results, paralleled the experiments performed and recorded by virtuosos and natural scientists. Thus, for all its flaunting of anti-scholasticism, the rise of the experimental sciences is intimately connected with changes in the system of literary 'kinds,' or genres and modes of writing (Colie, *Resources of Kind*). Not only does the period appear obsessed with ways of finding and ascertaining truth, inspired by religious and confessional fervour on the one hand and scientific zeal on the other, but also with the desire to articulate and present it adequately. It is the media and modes in which knowledge is communicated and insight made possible which matter. But while the rhetorical norm of *delectare et docere*, requiring literary texts both to delight and teach, still held sway in poetics, it did make a difference whether the truth to be taught was felt to be spiritual, hidden and divine, perhaps ultimately inaccessible, or physical and material, sensually apprehensible and, because immanent, ultimately accessible by mechanical means. Accordingly, we find considerable inventiveness with respect to poetic forms, especially in the **poets** later called '**Metaphysical**' (Donne, Herbert, Marvell, and, in a different manner, Crashaw and Vaughan), but also—resuming

Plurality of genres

Definition

The name → **'metaphysical poets'** was belatedly given to a group of English poets who wrote religious poems in the seventeenth century. The poems have become famous for their 'conceits,' that is, for their innovative use of witty metaphors, as well as for their frequent blending of the erotic and the religious. Important poets are John **Donne**, George **Herbert**, Richard **Crashaw**, Andrew **Marvell** and Henry **Vaughan**.

some of the innovatory momentum of Elizabethan non-dramatic writing—in prose.

Here, one of the most fertile and imaginative inventors is certainly **Margaret Cavendish,** the Duchess of Newcastle. Her copious writings cover the whole range from the poetic to the expository, including the dramatic. Although she has, over the last decade, grown into one of the icons of historical feminism, her admittedly eccentric but certainly symptomatic contribution to the contemporary scientific and philosophical debates (albeit nowhere near as learned or systematic as *The Principles of the Most Modern and Ancient Philosophy* by Anne Conway) as well as to the genres of utopia and science fiction in her *Blazing World* (1666) and other texts still deserves closer attention. Another writer, already canonical in some respects, who is coming to be recognised as the author of texts that can be considered as paradigmatic for the period by virtue of their very contradictoriness and 'experimental' openness that never cease to surprise is Sir **Thomas Browne.** He has long been admired, particularly in his *Religio Medici*, his *Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall*, and his *Garden of Cyrus*, as one of the early masters of English prose (and severely criticised for his seeming illogicality). Now he is beginning to be appreciated also for the analytical as well as integrative qualities that render his texts so typical of his century's untiring, fascinated, and radical search for truth—a truth capable of accommodating the metaphysical with the natural without compromising either. Undaunted by the dangers of religious heterodoxy, yet mindful of the respect merited by all kinds of belief, aware of uncertainties and incoherence, yet unwilling to content himself with them, Browne seeks to present this truth in literary strategies which throw into relief his own poetic subjectivity and a curiosity which extends to the microscopic structures of immanence as well as to a transcendence not to be apprehended by the telescope.

2.2.4 | Religious Literature: A Long Reformation

Politics of religion and privacy of confession

No outline of Renaissance and early modern literary mentalities can be complete without taking into account their religious dimension. Despite Bacon's attempts to divide science and theology, in this period neither scholarly nor scientific world views are easily separable from matters of belief.

Conversely, religion was anything but a private or institutionally contained matter: attended by troubling and highly contested questions with respect to the shape Christianity was to take in England under the auspices of the Reformation, it is intimately connected with public affairs of all kinds. However, the **inseparability of religion and politics** on the one hand corresponds, on the other, to a remarkable individual secretiveness about personal beliefs, indeed, their widespread dissimulation. Heterodoxy could have terrifying consequences in an age that witnessed several radical switches between old and new faiths, between Roman Catholicism and various brands of Protestantism, following the volte-faces in church politics instigated by the respective monarchs from Henry VIII through Edward VI, 'Bloody' Mary Tudor, and Elizabeth in the sixteenth century, from Stuart rule to Puritan Interregnum and back again in the seventeenth. Hence, early modern subjects, like their rulers, tended to keep their own counsel with respect to their innermost convictions (cf. King). The consequences, for the literature of the period, go far beyond biographical questions concerning the tacit beliefs of individual authors—despite the present debate as to whether Shakespeare was a crypto-Catholic and to which extent this affects his writings and their reception (Wilson).

The difficulties of charting the course of the **Protestant Reformation** in England, in its inextricable mixture of political and theological factors, its spectrum of theological positions between Calvinist radicalism and Anglo-Catholic moderation, and its wide range of hotly contested issues from matters of liturgy, vestments, ritual and music to questions of ecclesiastic law or the constitution of individual congregations are further compounded by the asynchronies of social and regional developments, with parts of the English aristocracy in the North retaining their older religious allegiances, many Scots developing a strong attachment to Geneva, and Ireland (with the exception of 'colonial' settlements in the northern counties) adhering to Rome. While generalisations appear hardly possible, it seems worthwhile to recall that the Reformation in the British Isles did not originate as a theological, let alone univocal, movement. Accordingly, despite the ordainment of its initial steps 'from above' in consequence of Henry VIII's marriage politics, it neither took a linear course, following a teleology that inexorably led to the triumph of Protestantism, nor did it happen abruptly, with people's minds switching from the old to a new reli-

gion in one historical instant. Instead, we are faced with **overlapping and intermittent processes**, with "the vagaries of dynastic politics and the survival of Catholic resistance to changes in religion" (King 106) over roughly two centuries.

In this field of highly charged symbolic moves, often revolving around the Lutheran twin demands focussed on the Word—*sola scriptura*—and the individual believer's soul—*sola fides*—**religious writing**, too, acquires important, but multiple and shifting, not to say duplicitous, functions. Formal, ideological, public and personal agendas do not always coincide. Hence, as Heather Dubrow has pointed out with respect to the Renaissance lyric, "we need to approach it from many critical perspectives, alert to both technical virtuosity and ideological imperatives and thus to the complex interplay between formal potentialities and cultural history" (197). With a view to this sharpened tension between the textual and the contextual in a situation of intense interplay between literary and extra-literary traditions and agents, it is indeed due to its formal and thematic potentialities that the religious literature of the period systematically runs a twofold risk that nonetheless ultimately accounts for its productivity. As a Renaissance literary 'kind,' it is expected to be, above all, oriented towards God and the divine. Both the presentation of authorial interiority and the ostentation of poetic art for their own sakes fall under generic restraints the more severe as they are theologically motivated. Neither the poet's self nor the aesthetic perfection of the piece ought to attract more interest than absolutely necessary for the achievement of its rhetorical purpose. If the end of poetry is to teach and move, the end of religious poetry is to lead the soul towards God. Even more than in other genres, textual delight here is not to be caused (or experienced) without ulterior purpose, but serves as a vehicle for the recognition and praise of the Highest. Within this normative frame, to place the means before the end would imply theological as well as poetic failure, a falling short of the aim and a settling for the merely human, i.e., at the utmost, the second best.

Between Subjectivity and Didacticism

While this raises systematic obstacles, it nonetheless does not exclude religious literature from the two signature achievements of the period—**the development and consolidation of poetic subjectivity** as well as the emancipation of aesthetic functions from ideological precepts and didactic or edifying purposes. On the contrary: against the changing background of new emphases on the text concerning its accessibility, readability, the modes of its interpretation as well as the literate believer's states of mind, this prescriptive poetics may be observed to enable what it seemed out to prevent—in the works of Protestant as well as Catholic writers. Under scrutiny, many pieces of religious writing will reveal strategies which effectively circumvent generic restrictions. In fact, some of them, especially (though not exclusively) examples of seventeenth-century Metaphysical Poetry, might even be seen as particularly congenial media for the unfolding of poetic inwardness together with unprecedented aesthetic brilliance. In these cases, the palpable poetic sign, through functioning as a perfect means of sacred communication, does indeed paradoxically achieve seemingly irreconcilable ends—literary perfection together with theological insight, textual beauty coinciding with heavenly. While Spenser's *Faerie Queene* or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* employ and transform the resources of allegory in different ways and with the didactic still often overruling the aesthetic, Spenser's *Fowre Hymnes* may be considered a case in point, aided by an explicitly Neoplatonic poetics; equally, Southwell's "The Burning Babe" and many of George Herbert's poems; certainly also Andrew Marvell's extraordinary "On a Drop of Dew," or Traherne's rapturous *Centuries*. But then, as these successful stagings of transcendence take place as it were under the cover of a presumptively innocuous literary kind, they may themselves—even in confessional or laudatory modes (as, for example, in Marvell's ambivalent celebrations of Cromwell)—be taken as evidence of the dissimulation so characteristic of the period as a whole. Thus, and perhaps surprisingly, it is in the systematic ambiguities attending the modes of religious literature and literary culture that many of the innovative aspects of early modern writing—including issues of personal authorship, poetic subjectivity, inwardness and sensibility, and aesthetic reflexivity—prepare themselves, leading, in some of their eminent protagonists, from Wyatt and Surrey, through Spenser to Donne, Herbert, Milton, and Marvell, to productive perplexities and resonant duplicities that point far beyond the cultural conflicts from which they emerge.

Having said this, it must immediately be conceded that a huge amount of texts remain well

Orthodoxy and its discontents

within the pale of **traditional religious rhetoric** and **conventional didactic**—especially those composed for everyday use and with polemic purposes. Foremost among these is a proliferation of controversialist, polemical, and satiric writings engaging in the conflicts of the day—with texts ranging from contributions to the vestments and Admonition controversies to Milton's treatise *On Church Government* or Marvell's *Rehearsal Transpros'd* and other polemics of the second half the seventeenth century; from the Marprelate tracts through resistant propagandist writing by Marian continental exiles on the one hand, on the other, Catholic underground writing and recusant literature from the 1570s onwards, in the wake of the Jesuit mission to England; from anti-papist broadsheets to large and immensely popular works like John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of the English Martyrs* (1563), or the weighty foundational text of Anglican ecclesiology, Richard Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1559). Thus, we find a great diversity of writings, especially of prose texts whose aspirations are not in the first place literary—from sermons to fables, anecdotes, or adventure narratives, but also of popular verse genres, including ballads, songs, and epigrams. An impressive variety of these is contained in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* alone. Foxe effectively models his Protestant martyrology on Roman Catholic hagiography and legend, adding, as 'historical' evidence, numerous illustrations in the shape of lurid woodcuts that illustrate how the Protestant 'saints' suffered in bearing witness to their faith, how they showed their exemplary constancy, and how, more often than not, providence would intervene in favour of the persecuted. If these can be said to constitute new, iconic media, which lend stark profile to some Protestant mentalities, contemporary spirituality was also shaped by symbolic practices of a different provenance: As Louis Martz observed in his landmark study of 1954, there was a considerable influx, increasing during the seventeenth century, of devotional literature from the continent, appreciated not only by Catholic believers. Thus, patterns of classical Ignatian meditation and affective discipline can be seen to structure the English religious imagination across the denominational divide, for instance in the poetry and sermons of John Donne.

Translations and Millenarian Writing

Another highly influential area of religious writing is that of translation (cf. Cummings for theological controversies surrounding, for example, a term like 'justification'). Stimulated by humanist educational reform stressing the return to the Greek (and Hebrew) source texts, and furthered by attempts to raise the English vernacular to a standard comparable in dignity to Latin and in versatility with that of continental dialects such as the Italian of Petrarch, the striving after a codification of ritual in the national language found expression in Cranmer's *Book of Homilies* (1547) and the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549). Possibly even more important, Protestant respect for, and philological attention to, the Word of God gives rise to a succession of **Bible translations** in the period, beginning with Tyndale's highly influential New Testament (Worms 1526), followed in 1535 by the first complete English Bible, the Coverdale Bible, and the Great Bible (1539) under Henry VIII. Protestant exiles under Mary produced the Geneva Bible (1560), with annotations, concordance, illustrations, and further aids to a close evangelical understanding, also with a clear Calvinistic bias; to be followed by the less controversial Bishops' Bible (1568) and the Rheims-Douai Bible (1582; 1609–1610), produced by Catholic exiles and close to the Vulgate; finally by the King James Bible or Authorised Version in 1611. While these translations are literary achievements in their own right, the influence Biblical diction (especially in the Tyndale and King James versions) exerted—and to the present day exerts—on everyday language as well as the literature of the period can hardly be overestimated.

If we find the—occasional or frequent—Biblical turn of phrase in Spenser and Shakespeare, other Renaissance authors also tried their hand at a more specialized Biblical genre: that of **psalm**

Protestant martyrdom as depicted in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*

The Burning of Katherine Cawches and her two Daughters in the Isle of Garnsey.

Publish'd as the Act directs for H. Trapp, Pater-noster Row.

translation. Again, this literary kind can be seen to fulfil a number of functions, not all of them purely religious. Thus, in the explosive atmosphere of the 1530s at the court of Henry VIII, the renderings of the Penitential Psalms by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, and Sir Thomas Wyatt were much more than a pious exercise. Mediated through the psalmist's voice, David the kingly poet and singer par excellence, these texts served the purposes of authorial self-expression, bitter lamentation and protest, as well as barely veiled criticism of the translator's treatment at the monarch's hands. If there arose the need for individual courtly dissimulation under Henry, on a different level and far from courtly concerns, we find open communal proclamation of faith under his son Edward VI, albeit in the same medium: the so-called Sternhold-Hopkins psalter, *The Whole Book of Psalms* in a versified translation by Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins, gained immense popularity among Protestants and ran to numerous editions in both centuries. While 'English'd' psalms thus lent voice not only to the suffering individual but also assisted the building of nonconformist Protestant congregations, in Mary and Philip Sidney's important metrical translation of the complete psalter they became, under Elizabeth I, a medium for poetic experiment on an unprecedented scale. And, once again, they help to dissemble individual faith while displaying literary virtuosity, for, as in the *Arcadia*, the Sidney siblings' collaboration yields no indication or evidence of their 'true' confessional allegiances.

While concern with Last Things is a hallmark of religious writing, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also saw a marked increase in **apocalyptic and millenarian writing**. Some of it displays interesting affiliations with the growing scientific fervour of the day, Bacon's *Valerius Terminus* affording instructive insights into the period's eschatological vein. Yet growing concern with the (possibly imminent) end of the world found its counterpart not least in **Milton**'s monumental effort to interpret its beginnings in *Paradise Lost*. The grandiose display of learning in Milton's epic and the self-consciously artistic accomplishment to be found also in his minor poetry once again describe the figure that characterises much of early modern religious literature: that of a subjectivity ostensibly effacing itself, but at the same time asserting its validity and dynamic versatility through its poetic skill. We have become used to discerning it in **John Donne's**

poetry, whose speakers pretend so eloquently to minimise themselves, often histrionically, in their struggles for *metanoia* or conversion (sometimes to annihilation, as for instance in the "Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day," but also in many of the Holy Sonnets). Repeatedly, even abjectly, they protest utter heteronomy in poems like "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," but at the same time they transparently manage to aggrandise themselves in their poetic artistry. While this sense of an assertive ego, present and vigorous even in devotion and self-humiliation, appears less pronounced in the verse of **George Herbert**, here too, if less obtrusively, we can observe the poetic subject finding itself under scrutiny. Herbert's speakers, however, recognise themselves in the eyes of an Other, and, while speaking not only of their own afflictions but of divine redemptive action, repeatedly and sometimes surprisingly succeed in spreading "Easter Wings."

If this type of paradoxical 'heterology' is one of the signatures of early modern religious writing, it finally becomes possible to also perceive a major way in which it points towards later developments—for instance to the literature and culture of sensibility of the succeeding centuries (cf. entry I.2.3). From this perspective, too, we might expect some of the familiar emphases in the Early Modern canon to shift towards lesser known writers. Thus, it is perhaps time to rediscover the seraphic vision of **Thomas Traherne** with its all-encompassing theme of felicity and enjoyment of the visible world. While the second half of the seventeenth century, especially in dissenting and Puritan milieus, sees a flourishing of the literary modes of soul-searching, in diaries, letters, and confessional outpourings, which for many critics have long been among the discursive forerunners of the eighteenth-century novel, the theologically much more orthodox Traherne, in his exuberant, second-person prose meditations as well as his reflexive poetry, produces strikingly unorthodox writings. Here is a poetic voice only seemingly eccentric. Considered in the context of a newly emerging cult of 'seraphic' friendships in unlikely (courtly as well as scholarly) circles, his insistence on universal relatedness and the immanence of paradise affords an alternative view of English religious literature. Perhaps Traherne's undogmatic enthusiasm for the delights of the visible as amiable lineaments of the transcendent marks a kind of ending to the age of Reformation.

2.2.5 | The Literary Culture of the Court and Popular Literature

Print, Patronage, and Professionalisation

In early modern England, the royal court was the centre not only of power, but also of the arts and learning. Many of the most famous early modern writers were courtiers, for instance Sir Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh. Some writers of lower social status, such as John Lyly, Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton, sought careers as civil servants and advertised their skills and their reverence to the crown or to aristocratic patrons via their literary works. Many literary texts originated from courtly entertainments or from the stylised rituals of courtship, and they were initially only exchanged among the courtly coterie in manuscript form. Print established itself only gradually; especially at the court, literature kept circulating in **manuscript form** throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Aristocrats who wrote poetry, plays or narratives did not openly consider their works as a serious occupation, but as a pastime that displayed their wit, rhetorical sophistication and education. In fact, aristocrats avoided the publication of their works, since writing for money and for the public was considered vulgar.

This 'stigma of print' applied particularly to **female authors**, since the gender ideals of the day opposed female speaking (or writing) in public. As a consequence, the few existing women authors mainly translated devotional literature. However, during the seventeenth century, prolific female authors evolved: the poetry by Elizabeth Tyrwhitt, Anne Dowriche, Isabelle Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer has been explored by early modern scholars in recent years; the *Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), the first play by an English female author, Elizabeth Cary, was published (albeit not performed) before women acted on English stages, and important female authors of long prose narratives emerged, including Margaret Cavendish, Mary Wroth, and Aphra Behn.

From aristocratic to professional authorship

The attitude towards print of aristocrats and those aspiring to a career at court began to change in the seventeenth century, when, for example, Ben Jonson collected his own works in an impressive folio edition (1616). Working as a professional author was difficult in the early modern period, and those who attempted such a career, like Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe, often suffered poverty. Neither copyrights nor royalties were paid, and the writers only received a small fee when they delivered their books to the printers. Therefore, authors sought patronage from wealthy aristocrats, whose support sometimes involved inclusion in intellectual and artistic circles. For instance, Lucy Russell, a close confidante of Queen Anne, supported John Donne, Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, and Samuel Daniel. When Charles I was executed in 1642, the **patronage system** that centred on the court life collapsed, too, and many leading authors lost their positions, were imprisoned or fled the country. As a result of the disintegration of aristocratic circles in which manuscripts were exchanged, more authors began to publish their work from the 1640s onwards.
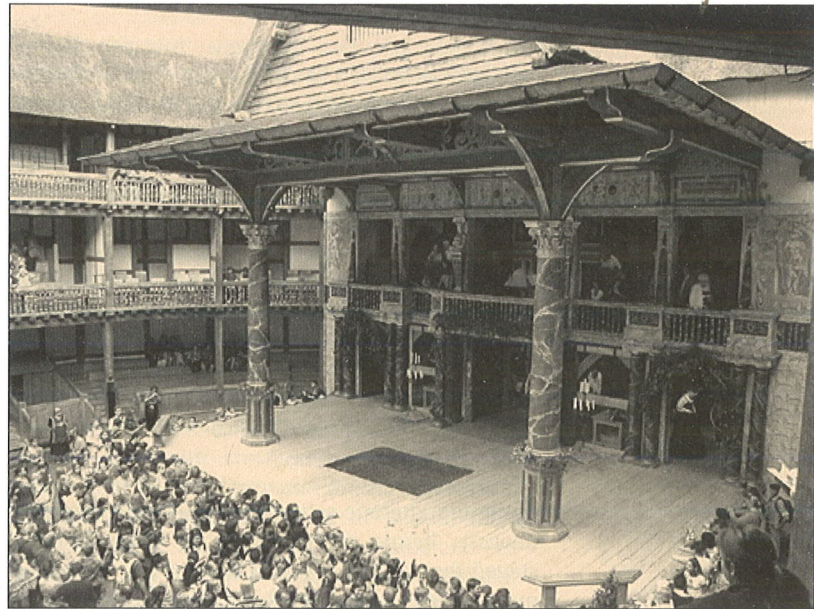
Early Modern Drama

Dramatists, especially when they were shareholders of theatres as William Shakespeare was, had better chances to make a living from writing, since the theatre was a commercialised form of entertainment in late sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century England, with the exception of the Civil War and the Interregnum years (1642–1660), when public theatres were shut down by official decree. Public theatres had been built since the 1560s (Shakespeare's famous **Globe Theatre** opened in 1599), and each accommodated roughly two thousand spectators. Theatre companies also sought patronage by aristocrats, but for legal rather than financial reasons, since unsponsored groups were prone to punishments as vagrants. For instance, Shakespeare's troupe was first called 'The Lord Chamberlain's Men,' and after 1603, when James I took over their patronage, 'The King's Men.'

Shakespeare's plays are the most famous literary works of the early modern period. Nonetheless, we should keep in mind that the Elizabethan and the Jacobean period had a rich theatre culture which staged plays by a variety of authors including Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson. The roughly forty plays by Shakespeare cover the whole dramatic range from tragedies (*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*) and comedies (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*), to the so-called 'romances' which blend comic and tragic elements with a sense of the marvellous (*The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*), and 'history plays' (*Richard II*, *King John*). Drawing on a wide array of sources, from historiographies and travel reports to prose narra-

tives and the dramatic tradition, the plays addressed particularly early modern concerns; for example, the legitimisation of royal sovereignty, the rise of commerce, and the role of colonisation. At the same time, they raise such fundamental topics (and are written in such rich and engaging style and constructed with such an artful dramaturgy) that they have remained attractive for theatre audiences today and are an integral part of the curricula at schools and universities worldwide. For example, the humorous exploration of **gender roles** in Shakespeare's comedies is still engaging today. Shakespeare frequently has his characters disguise themselves across the boundaries of gender and thus tests out to which degree gender is essential and to which degree it is a result of performance (see entry II.6 for a theoretical exploration of this issue). In *As You Like It*, this question is heightened, because the protagonist undergoes a multiple gender transformation: Rosalind dresses up as Ganymede and then play-acts Rosalind for Orlando, who fell in love with the young gentlewoman but does not recognise her in her male attire. Because female roles were embodied by boy actors on the Renaissance stage, early modern audiences saw a fourfold gender performance that also complicated the erotic attraction between the figures. Besides gender and sexuality, also Shakespeare's exploration of **ethnicity** remains a topical issue today. His tragedy *Othello* depicts the mechanisms of racism as well as the exoticist fascination of the foreign in such a complex manner that theatre productions and films keep performing and adapting Shakespeare's text.

Shakespeare's plays partake in the important early modern developments outlined in this chapter: They transform the **heritage of antiquity**, for example by staging political events of the Roman Empire as in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar*, by adapting classical sources such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (e.g. in *Titus Andronicus* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and by engaging with philosophic discourses of antiquity as discussed above. The plays also register the advent of new science, for example in their astrological metaphors. Recently, scholars have investigated the impact of the Reformation on Elizabethan drama and have explored how abandoned Catholic rituals were creatively modified on Shakespeare's stage. One example of such a concern with abandoned Catholic rites is discussed in the exemplary analysis of *Hamlet* in entry IV.3. When the ghost of Hamlet's father returns and demands that his son

take revenge for his murder, the play invokes the notion of purgatory, which was denounced by the Reformed state religion. Further examples of the relevance of **religion** for Shakespeare's plays are encounters with the other, for example with Jewishness in *The Merchant of Venice*. *The Merchant* is also interesting with regard to genre. The fact that it is called a "comical history" in its title shows us that Shakespeare's contemporaries would have perceived the play as a comedy. However, one of its central concerns, anti-Semitism, and the fact that the disadvantaged Jewish character, Shylock, in the end falls victim to a biased pseudo-legal trial makes the play hardly a comedy for audiences today. *The Merchant* is therefore a good example for how notions of genre change over the centuries, and that they change not only because of literary renewal, but also because of political and cultural developments.

The importance of Shakespeare's history plays for the project of **nation-building** has long been acknowledged in early modern studies; looking back at England's past, they investigate the legitimisation of the Tudor rule (see interpretation on p. 32).

When theatres were reopened in the **Restoration period** after 1660, comedies of manners became the most widespread form of entertainment. These witty comedies by authors like George Etherege, William Wycherley, Aphra Behn and William Congreve mock the follies and power struggles of the English upper society and depict

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre has been reconstructed on London's Southbank.

Interpretation

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*

Richard III revisits the beginning of the Tudor dynasty by chronicling events of the 1480s, when the Wars of the Roses came to an end. In order to legitimise the Tudor rule as the onset of a more civilised and peaceful era, Richard III, who was defeated by the first Tudor king, Henry VII, is depicted as a cruel tyrant who is deformed physically as much as morally. This characterisation follows the biased historiographies written during the reign of Elizabeth I, but at the same time, Shakespeare gives the villain alluring wit and he lets him engage intimately with audiences from his soliloquy at the beginning of the play.

Therefore, while *Richard III* on the one hand conforms to the Tudor myth (it ends with a speech by Henry VII who prays that his offspring will "Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace / With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days"), on the other hand it makes a straightforward condemnation of Richard difficult for the audience. Apart from *Richard III*'s historical significance, its exploration of totalitarianism and of the fascination of evil as much as the witty rhetorics and spectacular political role-play of Richard have made the play attractive for audiences (and actors) until today.

the immoral erotic schemes of libertines. Simultaneously, heroic plays, chiefly by John Dryden, staged the conflict between honour and love on a more serious note. The Restoration stage saw an important innovation in performance practice, as female actors entered the stage.

The location of the public theatres outside of the city of London, on the South bank of the Thames, signals the **low cultural status of the theatre** in the early modern period: the buildings were neighboured by taverns, brothels and arenas for bear-baiting and cock fights. Accordingly, the performances were frequently criticised by religious hardliners for their amoral impact on audiences. Later, indoor theatres were erected within the limits of the city, which, by contrast to the open-air buildings on the South bank, were artificially lit and were visited by more wealthy spectators. For example, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612–1613) was written for the Blackfriars, an indoor theatre, and its staging accordingly requires a number of special lighting effects. The fact that *The Duchess* was later also performed at the Globe is representative of the broad social appeal of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays: They addressed both the cultural elite, well-educated aristocrats who would, for example, appreciate rhetorical finesse or intertextual allusions to classical sources (as would many of the non-aristocratic spectators who profited from the Humanist school education), and the less privileged inhabitants of London, who presumably paid for a thrilling plot and engaging characters. The theatre was hence a **'popular' form** in the sense established by Peter Burke, since it stands for a common culture shared by early moderns across the ranks, ages and genders. This phenomenon of an intermingling of the elite and the popular also holds true for other literary kinds; for example, jest-books, which are usually considered a socially and aesthetically low text sort, were also read by Edmund Spenser, and they were almost exclusively devised by aristocrats.

Besides the popular South bank stages and the more restricted indoor theatres, an elite form of theatrical entertainment was staged at the court: **the masque**. Masques were performances for special occasions, such as weddings or visits by important foreign guests, which mostly depicted mythological subjects. Courtiers, sometimes even the queen herself, took part as actors in these masques, and at the end, other courtiers joined the masquers in a dance. By contrast to the reduced scenery of the popular theatre, masques, in particular in Stuart times, afforded lavish costumes and expensive scenery; but they shared with the South bank performances an inclusion of music and dance (Ravelhofer). Ben Jonson, the most famous author of courtly masques, collaborated with the stage designer Inigo Jones on many masques. Jonson is said to have established the proscenium stage by 1620. Together with the elaborate scenery, the proscenium stage allowed for a more realistic illusion than the word scenery ('Wortkulisse') of the popular open-air stage surrounded on three sides by the audiences. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* includes a wedding masque to celebrate the betrothal of Miranda and Ferdinand, and Prospero here comments on the illusionary power of the masque (and, at the same time, the 'magic' of theatre in general), "the baseless fabric of this vision," "such stuff as dreams are made on" (Act 4).

Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*

Thomas Nashe's narrative *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) is indicative of a turn to **'popular' forms of literature**, such as the jest-book and the cony-catching pamphlet (stories of tricksters), which are deliberately opposed to 'elite' kinds in order to appeal to readers of middle ranks rather than aristocratic patrons.

Nashe's protagonist is not a young prince or princess, as typical of the chivalric and erotic romances written by Philip Sidney, Robert Greene, and Thomas Lodge and adapted in Shakespeare's plays, but a servant called Wilton—whom Nashe specifies as a 'page,' thus setting up a metafictional meaning of his tale. The protagonist accompanies Surrey, the pre-eminent Henrician courtly poet, during his travels on the European continent, and ultimately comes to compete with his aristocratic superior in a scenario that blends sexual and literary rivalry. Here, the narrating protagonist mocks the outworn, sterile Neoplatonic Petrarchan poetry of his master, which makes Surrey "leap into verse" and "with [...] rhymes assault" his beloved. Rather than being interested in winning her, however, Surrey appears to be "more in love with his own curious forming fancy than her face; and truth it is, many become passionate lovers only to win praise to their wits." The narrator Wilton himself is more pragmatic than "to woo women with riddles." Instead, he seduces the woman whom both men adore: "My master beat the bush and kept a coil and a prattling, but I caught the bird; simplicity and plainness shall carry it away in another world." Boasting with his sexual success, Wilton contrasts the aristocratic, elitist poetry of his master with his own "dunstable [i.e., plain] tale" with "some cunning plot" which "made up my market." The 'simplicity' and 'plainness' of the 'page' hence have an important metafictional meaning (even though Nashe's own style does not always follow this demand of 'plainness'; the claim is an emancipatory strategy rather than an apt characterisation of Nashe's prose): the plain, cunningly plotted narrative outdoes the master's elaborate rhymed poetry as a means of courtship, but also on the print market frequented by non-aristocratic consumers. Accordingly, the narrator of *The Unfortunate Traveller* repeatedly addresses his implied readers of middle ranks with whom he allies against the aristocratic other—a strategy which is unusual and daring in 1594, but became more common in the seventeenth century.

Thus, the narrative sets up a contrast between literary **modes** (poetry versus narrative), **styles** (elaborate rhetorics versus plainness), **distribution forms** (manuscript versus print), classes (aristocratic versus middle rank), **generations** (father-figure versus son), but also between **nations** (Italianate versus English). The latter distinction became increasingly important in early modern England, which found itself caught in a paradox of continuous cultural exchange and a new interest in nation-building.

Plain Style and the Emergence of Popular Prose Fiction

During the Restoration, a new predominant style of elegant simplicity was established, which was often seen in opposition to the highly rhetorical style of Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, maybe most succinctly represented in the work of John Lyly, whose extravagant style in his two *Euphues* tales established a literary fashion full of antitheses and alliterations that was called 'Euphuism.' However, the 'new' simplicity, which was represented, for example, by Marvell and Dryden and which was partly influenced by the above-discussed turn to science, the Protestant appreciation of plain style, and an indebtedness to classical ideals of rhetorical clarity, had been prepared much earlier. When we take a closer look at Elizabethan narratives, a new predilection for simple, straightforward writing can be observed, and this form of literature was often presented by its authors as an anti-courtly gesture (by contrast to Dryden's work, most prominently his heroic plays, which still referred to aristocratic ideals of honour).

2.2.6 | European Englishness? Cultural Exchange versus Nation-Building

In the early modern period, we can trace a **gradual emancipation of England** in linguistic and literary terms, a development which went hand in hand with a growing sense of being a distinct nation and

with a beginning sense of patriotism on the national scale (by contrast to the more regional allegiances typical of the Middle Ages). The break with Roman Catholicism and the establishment of the Anglican Church isolated the country from a transnational network of religious and political allegiance and endorsed a view of England as a self-contained national unit. The concomitant Protestant turn to the English vernacular (most notably in the *Book of Common Prayer* and the English Bible as discussed above) together with the increase in literacy during the last quarter of the sixteenth century (if, however, chiefly among the male population) contributed to the creation of language and reader communities, which arguably formed the basis for envisioning a national community. As Benedict Anderson has argued in a seminal study, nations have to be understood as imagined communities, and critics have shown that many of Anderson's arguments, which he developed mainly for the eighteenth century, also apply to sixteenth-century England in crucial respects (cf. Helgerson; Shrank). Sometimes, a sense of the nation included the Irish, Welsh, and Scottish, but most often, the English defined themselves against the other peoples on the Isles. Be it the imagined communities of readers of printed narratives, or the experienced communities during vernacular church services, in early modern theatres or during aristocratic gatherings when poetry was read out aloud, literature and language played a decisive role in the shaping of Englishness. Additionally, many texts and performances also engaged on the level of content with the growing sense of nationhood, most straightforwardly those which represented English history: for example, Shakespeare's history plays and the popular genre of (sometimes fictionalised) chronicles, which Helgerson calls "the Ur-genre of national self-representation" (11), most famously Raphael Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (1577).

Therefore, the establishment of a **sense of Englishness** in the sixteenth century was a process of imagination, of construction, of writing and reading. Textual cultures of the word and the world were closely intertwined, as, for example, the catchy title of John Florio's *A World of Words* highlights (see Pfister, "Die englische Renaissance"). Beforehand, the English had often been thought of as being characterised by a *lack* of specific traits and by their changeability and easy infatuation with things foreign. In a number of pamphlets, an inability to resist the attraction of novelty and change, then called

Early modern literature fostered a sense of nationhood.

'newfangledness,' was presented as an inherently English quality. At times, it was explained by geographic specificities; living on an island, the English were thought to be so liable to the influence of the moon and the tides that they were changeable in their political, cultural, and religious allegiances. William Rankins's *Seven Satires* in the late sixteenth century still chastised the changeable English who "with the Moone participate their minde," and thus with "[t]he vainest Planet, and most transitory." Hence, Rankins mocked, they *"Proteus*-like […] change their peeuish shape" ("Satyr Primus: Contra Lunatistam").

Establishing an English Literary Culture

The earlier sixteenth century was characterised by a **fascination with foreign lands, languages, and literatures**. Travel, in particular the educative 'grand tour' of Europe, was regarded highly in Henrician times, and classical or contemporary foreign tales, poems and plays were read widely in England, either in the original or in translations, which sometimes offered rather free adaptations of the sources and hence were one of the starting points of English vernacular literature. However, in the course of the century, the English increasingly began to define themselves against Continental countries, and with the discovery of the New World and beginning colonialism, also against more distant people. This development went hand in hand with an **increasing rejection** of foreign phrases and literary models. In particular, the English tried to outgrow the long-standing notion of British barbarism, which had originated with the contempt of early Italian humanists for the *barbari Britanni*, the Oxford Scholastics and logicians who had frequented Italian universities since the fourteenth century. Ever since a letter of Petrarch likened the Oxford writers to the Cyclopes of Sicily, the stereotype of barbarism haunted the English. Accordingly, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) was written in the more prestigious language of Latin rather than in English, and it aimed at an international community of highly educated readers. This attitude changed throughout the century, as a result of which *Utopia* was translated into English in the 1550s. Thomas Hoby declared his 1561 translation of Castiglione's *Courtier* to be part of an emancipatory project: "that we alone of the worlde maye not bee styll counted barbarous in oure tunge, as in time out of minde we haue bene in our maners." The "brightness and full per-

fection" of the English tongue can compete with the Italian original, Hoby maintained ("The Epistle of the Translator"). Perhaps most famously, Spenser called for a validated literary English in a letter to Gabriel Harvey in 1580: "Why a God's name, may not we, as else the Greeks, have the kingdom of our own language?" (qtd. in Smith 99)—a desire reflected in E. K.'s epistolary to Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender,* too.

And yet, even if authors agreed that English had to be legitimised as a **literary language**, the question remained: Which English? The English language was only slowly homogenised by print, and authors felt that they had to actively shape the 'new' English language. In this context, vocabulary-building became a crucial aspect of nation-building (Blank; Müller). However, linguistic policies differed radically. Some adhered to a descriptive poetology and accepted the large amount of loan words in English, while others developed a normative poetology and called for a purer English literary language. In a similar manner, while some accepted the transcultural nature of English literature, others began to reject European literary models. For some authors, genuine 'Englishness' became a new, important yardstick to measure their oeuvre. Roger Ascham, a leading humanist and tutor of Elizabeth I, criticised the harmful impact of Italian literature on English readers: "those books" will "corrupt honest living" and "subvert true religion. More papists be made by your merry books of Italy than by your earnest books of Louvain" (*The Schoolmaster* bk. 1). According to Ascham, fictional literature has a greater impact on readers than theological treatises of the counter-Reformation printed in Louvain. Although Ascham criticises medieval erotic romances written in the English vernacular, too (cf. entry I.2.1), he sees Italianate books as more dangerous for "the simple head of an Englishman": "And yet ten *Morte Darthurs* do not the tenth part so much harm as one of these books made in Italy and translated in England. They open [...] such subtle, cunning, new, and diverse shifts to carry young wills to vanity and young wits to mischief" (*The Schoolmaster* bk. 1).

Despite the publication of Ascham's highly influential *Schoolmaster* in 1570, most authors kept using foreign sources for their own works. Nonetheless, a number of authors attempted to construct **a genuinely English mode of writing**. They employed various strategies to mark their works as English. In addition to the use of a plain

style, as discussed above, they turned to medieval modes and sometimes used archaic language, too; most famously in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which creates an artificially archaic English. In a typical move of the Renaissance humanist, Philip Sidney, in his influential *Apology for Poetry*, despises the medieval period as "that uncivil age," but he nonetheless incidentally confesses his inclination towards medieval literature: "Certainly, I must confess my own barbarousness, I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved." In his preface to Greene's *Menaphon,* Nashe goes a step further, as he criticises the slavish imitation of foreign sources, in particular the "English Italians" who are infatuated with "Petrarch, Tasso, Celiano, with an infinite number of others" and disregard the English tradition of "Chaucer, Lydgate, Gower."

In addition to creating a distinct English style and to recovering traditional English forms, authors mocked an infatuation with things foreign on the level of content. We saw an example of how the Italianate Englishman was parodied in Elizabethan literature in Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*. In the seventeenth century, the Frenchified Englishman became a stock character of ridicule. For example, Jonson in "On English Monsieur," published in 1616, asks mockingly,

Would you believe, when you this Monsieur see,
That his whole body should speak French, not he?
That so much scarf of France, and hat, and feather,
And shoe, and tie, and garter should come hither
And land on one whose face durst never be
Toward the sea, farther than half-way tree?
That he, untravelled, should be French so much,
As Frenchmen in his company should seem Dutch? (lines 1–8)

Despite these attempts at establishing a truly English form of writing and ridiculing Italianate and Frenchified Englishmen, English authors kept translating foreign texts, working with European literary models and integrating foreign sources into their own texts. There was a shift from a ma-

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Focus on Reading Early English Books

Almost all the key texts of the early modern period have been digitised and are available on *Early English Books Online* (http://eebo.chadwyck.com), which should be accessible via your university's campus network. All the primary literature that is quoted in this entry can be found there as well.

jority of Italian translations in the sixteenth century to French texts in the seventeenth century, a change which partly had to do with Charles II's predilection for French modes when he returned from his exile in France together with his French wife Henrietta Maria. Thus, in political as much as literary respects, a fascination for foreign modes coincided with xenophobia and with an increasing national pride—and this holds true for cultures of the word as much as of the world.

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