terrible dream of falling into 'an hydeous depe blak watir' which contains 'all maner of serpentis and wormes and wilde bestis fowle and orryble'. The end of the narrative is haunted by the recurring phrase 'the noble felyshyp of the Rounde Table is brokyn for ever' and by a sense of the mutability of all human affairs. Knowingly reflecting the anomalies in his sources, Malory's defeated king is both carried off in a barge 'into the vale of Avylyon to hele [him] of [his] grevous wounds' and buried in a tomb at Glastonbury inscribed: 'HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS'. The ambiguity of a once and future king, a deliverer who would rise from his tomb to save endangered England, may well have offered political comfort to a prisoner in the perilous days of King Edward IV. The idea was certainly to prove of political use to the fanciful mythologizers of the Tudors and the early Stuarts.

Malory's *Morte Darthur* exercised a profound influence over English writers from the age of Spenser (a poet who saw himself as the heir to the last chivalrous enchantments of the Middle Ages) to that of Tennyson (a poet much inclined to echo Malory's melancholy cadences). With historical hindsight it could be said that Malory, the greatest prose writer of the fifteenth century, was composing a prose elegy to the dying age of aristocratic chivalry. It was, however, Caxton, the middle-class entrepreneur who first brought his work to public attention, who emerges, with the benefit of the same hindsight, as the real harbinger of a new age in which the printed word was to play an indispensable and revolutionary role.

3

Renaissance and Reformation: Literature 1510–1620

ALTHOUGH not one of them spoke Welsh, the five English monarchs of the Tudor dynasty were inclined to insist on the significance of their Welsh origins. For propaganda purposes they were pronounced to be princes of ancient British descent who had returned to claim King Arthur's throne and to restore the promised dignity and prestige of Camelot. It was, however, under the Tudor dynasty (1485–1603) that the modern English language emerged and with it a firm sense of England as a nation state. With the accession of James VI of Scotland as James I of England in 1603 that sense of national consciousness was extended to embrace the entire island of Britain. When Calais, the last relic of English domination of France and the symbol of Edward III's victory at Crecy and Henry V's at Agincourt, fell in January 1558 its loss finally exposed the hollowness of the Plantagenet claim to the French Crown. It also, willy-nilly, enforced the idea of the insular sovereignty of the Tudors and of their Stuart successors.

King Henry VIII's 'imperial' sovereignty, his declaration of independence from papal overlordship, had been asserted in 1533 in the preamble to the Act of Parliament which announced the advent of the English Reformation. By this 'Act in Restraint of Appeals', Parliament cut off future legal reference to the superior authority of Rome and proclaimed that England was ruled by 'one supreme head and king' who governed without interference from 'any foreign princes or potentates'. Given the assertion that the islands of Britain and Ireland represented a law unto themselves, and given the claims of the Tudor monarchs to an imperial sovereignty, the process of extending the political influence of the kings of England was pursued with a particular reforming vigour by the ministers and servants of the Crown. Hand in hand with this process went the imposition of the English language as it was spoken and written at court. In 1536, for example, the reform of Welsh legal procedure culminated in what was effectively an act of union between England and Wales. In 1543 the union was reinforced when Wales was organized into twelve counties on the English model, English common law was introduced, and seats

in the Westminster Parliament allocated. By these Acts of Parliament the status of Wales changed from that of an occupied province to that of an integral part of a single (English) realm. The privileges accorded to English customs and to the English language in Wales were even more emphatically enforced in the linguistically and culturally divided Ireland. Gaelic Ireland, stretching beyond the Pale of Dublin and its seaboard, was gradually coerced into submission to English concepts of good manners and good government. An Act of 1537 ordered all the inhabitants of the island to speak the language of its rulers and to adopt English styles of dress. For much of the rest of the century English 'civilization' was to be imposed by armies rather than by laws and by attempts to extirpate Gaelic society rather than to transform it.

The would-be 'imperial' dynastic relations of the Tudor monarchs with the still independent Kingdom of Scotland proved as fraught as their attempts to subdue Ireland. King Henry VII's bid for a lasting peace with his northern neighbour, cemented by the marriage of his daughter to James IV, floundered when Scotland reaffirmed its useful 'auld alliance' with France, and suffered a crushing defeat at the battle of Flodden in 1513. When in 1542 Henry VIII attempted to forge a Protestant alliance by marrying his son Edward to the infant Mary, Queen of Scots, his ambition was effectively countered by the opposition of a Francophile party in Scotland. This same Mary, as a direct descendant of the first of the Tudors and as the prime Catholic claimant to the English throne, proved to be a thorn in the side of the ministers of the last Tudor, the childless upholder of a new Protestant order, Elizabeth I. It was, however, Mary Stuart's Protestant son and Elizabeth's godson, James VI, who was ultimately to unite the Crowns of England and Scotland as Elizabeth's approved successor in 1603.

For James VI and I and his often imaginative panegyrists, the emergence of what the King was proud to style 'Great Britain' seemed to be the fulfilment of an Arthurian dream of an independent and unified island. 'Great Britain' was also viewed as a restoration of the lost order originally given to the nation by its mythical founders, the followers of the Trojan refugee prince, Brutus. As King James entered his English capital in state in March 1604 he was greeted by specially erected triumphal arches, whose iconography reminded him of his supposed Trojan ancestry and fancifully welcomed him to a new Troy ('Troynovant'). The entertainments and pageants written for the same occasion by the playwrights Thomas Dekker and Ben Jonson reinforced these elaborate fancies with a series of scholarly parallels and intellectual conceits. One of the speeches in Dekker's *Magnificent Entertainment* spoke of James and his realm as

> so rich an Empyre, whose fayre brest,
> Contaynes foure Kingdomes by your entrance blest
> By Brute divided, but by you alone,
> All are againe united and made One,
> Whose fruitfull glories shine so far and even,
> They touch not onely earth, but they kisse heaven.

The myth of a restored, integral, and independent Britain, first fostered by the usurping and expansionist Tudor dynasty, continued to sustain the optimistic but increasingly unsteadily based pageantry of the early Stuarts. 'Great Britain' was an ideological convenience, one which expressed a humanly engineered and divinely blessed unity, conformity, and order. The union of kingdoms was also taken to imply the existence of united customs, creeds, and modes of expression.

The truth was not always as uniform and impressive as the contrived fiction. The sixteenth century witnessed changes in national life as radical as any since the Norman Conquest. Henry VIII's break with the Pope, his removal of the English Church from its ancient allegiance to Rome, and his suppression of some eight hundred monastic foundations began a process of religious reform which was later rigorously extended in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth. Although the reshaping of what was proclaimed to be a national Church in England was relatively conservative (the parallel reform in Scotland proved far more radical), the process left the Church both impoverished and subservient to its new royal Supreme Head. If the changes forced on the English Church in the sixteenth century were by no means unique in northern Europe, Henry VIII's reformation deprived the old Catholic order in Europe of one of its major pillars and temporarily cut England off, politically, artistically, and religiously, from a European mainstream. The state, outwardly a happy and harmonious union of the secular and the ecclesiastical, had in fact been given a uniformity imposed from above, not gradually determined by multilateral consensus. Dissent from the new status quo was at best rigorously discouraged, at worst bloodily suppressed. Although to some modern commentators the ideology and machinery of the Tudor state seem to resemble those of a twentieth-century dictatorship, such parallels are often based on loose and uncoordinated historical assumptions. Nevertheless, the literature which sprang from, or was influenced by, the culture of the English court in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries necessarily reflected the political and religious inclinations of a ruling élite. Much of the officially approved, propagandist culture of Renaissance England can now be seen as a calculated attempt to create an illusion of ordered compliance and national unity as a means of discountenancing internal and external opposition.

Poetry at the Court of Henry VIII

English culture was in a state of conspicuous flux in the early sixteenth century. It was actively and experimentally coming to terms with imported novelties which were as much religious and intellectual as they were linguistic. The advances in printing made since the establishment of Caxton's first press at Westminster in 1476 had assisted in the circulation of the pan-European 'new' learning but they had also stimulated a fresh interest in established vernacular

classics. Though Latin remained the prime medium of educated communication and the essential acquirement of any man or woman who pretended to learning, the inherited tradition of poetry in English was increasingly viewed with nationalistic pride. That pride was, however, diluted by the awareness that the language, the conditions of writing, and the very fabric of poetry were changing. In 1532 William Thynne, a gentleman in Henry VIII's service, produced a full edition of Chaucer's works which he dedicated to his royal master. In the Preface to this edition a fellow-courtier, Sir Brian Tuke (d. 1545), directs the attention of readers to the significance of human expression through 'speche or language' and singles out for praise those Englishmen who had 'notably endevoyred and employed them selves to the beautifyeng and bettryng of thenglysh tonge'. For Tuke, 'that noble and famous clerke Chaucer' was the supreme national poet, a writer possessed of 'suche frutefulnesse in wordes . . . so swete and plesaunt sentences . . . suche sensyble and open style lackyng neither maieste ne mediocrite [moderation]'; he was also the eloquent master of a language which now deserved an honoured place amongst other, generally more Latinate, Western European languages. In the same year the printer Thomas Berthelet (or Berthelette) produced an edition of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, also solemnly dedicated to the King. Crucial to his dedication was Berthelet's patriotic stress on the importance of the continued use of an established poetic vocabulary: 'olde englysshe wordes and vulgars', he insists, 'no wyse man because of theyr antiquite wyll throwe asyde'. Modern writers, he complains, had begun to play with neologisms and to introduce 'newe termes . . . whiche they borrowed out of latyne frenche and other langages', an unhappy process which might be reversed by a renewed interest in the study of Gower, a lantern who could provide any true English poet with light 'to wryte counyngly and to garnysshe his sentences in our vulgar tonge'.

To the most prominent and most senior of the early Tudor poets, John Skelton (?1460–1529), the language used by Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate now had self-evident disadvantages. In the character of Dame Margery, the narrator of his poem *Phyllyp Sparrowe* (*c.*1505), he complains of the impossibility of writing eloquently in his native tongue. When Margery attempts to compose an epitaph for the dead pet sparrow, she is forced to admit that 'Our naturall tong is rude, | And hard to be ennuede [made fresh]'. It is a language 'so rusty, | So cankered and so full | Of forwardes [awkward words] and so dul' that if she attempted to 'write ornatly' no terms existed to serve her mind. Dame Margery finds Gower's English 'olde | And of no value' and that of Lydgate 'diffuse'. Even Chaucer, whose matter is 'delectable' and whose language is 'well alowed . . . pleasaunt, easy and playne', fails the test of true modern expressiveness, and her elegy is finally written in Latin 'playne and lyght'. As his self-laudatory poem *The Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell* suggests, Skelton himself was happy to balance the mass of his English works against a body of internationally acceptable poems in Latin. He was also inordinately proud of the tributes accorded to him by the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, and Louvain for his

command of classical rhetoric, and tended to sign himself as 'Poete Laureate'. As a priest and as a former tutor to Prince Henry it was proper that he should have sought to express himself in the language of learning and elevated international communication, yet he remained confident enough of certain residual qualities in his native tongue to employ it for his extraordinarily direct, abusive, and rumbustious satires on contemporary manners.

Despite the vividness of his art, Skelton is a poet who found it difficult to be succinct in his structures and chaste in his choice of words, deficiencies which did not endear him to later sixteenth-century critics. He rejoices in scurrility and in the rhythmic immediacy of ballads and folk-poetry. In *Agaynst the Scottes* (1513), for example, he abuses Scotland for its challenge to the authority of Henry VIII and rubs Scottish noses in their signal defeat at Flodden ('Jemmy is ded | And closyd in led | That was theyr owne kynge. | Fy on that wynnyng!', 'Are nat these Scottys | Folys [fools] and sottys | Such boste to make, | To prate and crake [boast], | To face, to brace, | All voyde of grace'). Closer to home, in *Speke Parrott*, he adopts the persona of a polyglot parrot, a 'byrde of Paradyse, | By Nature devysed of a wonderowus kynde', and turns finally to an attack on the paltriness of an English court over which the King towers nobly like some kind of moral colossus ('So manye bolde barons, there hertes as dull as lede; | So many nobyll bodyes, undyr on dawys [simpleton's] hedd; | So royall a kyng, as reynythe uppon us all— | Syns Dewcalions flodde, was nevyr sene nor shall'). Skelton's intensest bile was, however, reserved for attacks on Henry VIII's powerful minister, Cardinal Wolsey, notably in *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?* (1522). Not only does the narrator famously suggest an improper contemporary confusion between 'the kynges courte' and Wolsey's more sumptuous palace at Hampton Court, he also directly warns of the dangers of the Cardinal's political presumption: 'he wyll play checke mate | With ryall [royal] majeste | Counte himselfe as good as he; | A prelate potencyall | To rule under Bellyall [Belial]'.

The so-called 'Skeltonic metre' (if it is indeed metric) takes its name from Skelton's clever repetitions of tumblingly breathless short lines with two or three accents and an indefinite number of syllables. At times these recurring rhymes seem little better than mere doggerel; at others, readers are faced with a popular verbal and rhythmic energy which could be described as a kind of proto-rap. In the case of *Phyllyp Sparrowe* Skelton can suggest a series of hopping, twittering bird-like jerks. In *The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummynge* (*c.*1520) the irregularity of his metre playfully evokes the atmosphere of an untidy inn, the effects of an unsavoury but potent beer, and the quarrelling, tumbling rush of Elynour's customers. In *Collyn Clout* (*c.*1522), a poem narrated by an unsophisticated pauper, Skelton seeks to typify his own verbal art:

> For though my rhyme be ragged,
> Tattered and jagged,
> Rudely rayne-beaten,
> Rusty and mothe-eaten,

Yf ye take well therwith
It hath in it some pyth.

Collyn Clout speaks roughly, vividly, indelicately, old-fashionedly, but by no means unlearnedly. His eloquence has little to do with the established rules of rhetoric or the supposed courtliness of Latinate lyricism. He attacks the abuses, vices, and hypocrisies of the secular clergy as Langland and Chaucer had before him, but he also deliberately heightens certain specific modern circumstances (including reference to the 'brennynge sparke | Of Luthers warke [work]'). Despite his often radical alertness to the problems inherent in the early Tudor Church and commonwealth, and despite his delight in the resources of the English language, Skelton remained a literary conservative, a poet content with agile variations on established vernacular traditions rather than one who opened his art to the challenge of extraneous influence.

It is a somewhat over-simplified reading of literary history to see Skelton merely as a dogged upholder of a tradition that was rapidly becoming defunct and his younger contemporaries, Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–42) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (?1517–47), as the genteel leaders of an imported, progressive avant-garde. All three poets were innovators in their distinctive ways; all three were bred in a similar Latinate, as opposed to Italianate, culture; all three cultivated plain words and a plain English style and drew on a popular English tradition. Nevertheless, it was to the work of Wyatt and Surrey that later sixteenth-century poets admiringly returned and to the poems of Skelton that they condescendingly looked back as a relic of semi-barbarity.

Relatively few of Wyatt's poems appeared in print in his lifetime, but his work, together with that of Surrey, was effectively canonized in 1557 with the appearance of the influential anthology *Songes and Sonettes, written by the right honorable Lorde Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and other*, a collection familiarly known as *Tottel's Miscellany*. Richard Tottel's Preface to the collection proclaimed that 'the honorable stile' of Surrey and the 'weightinesse' of the work of the 'depewitted' Wyatt offered proof that English poetry could now stand proper comparison with the ancient Latin and the modern Italian. Tottel told his readers that his volume had been published 'to the honor of the English tong, and for the profit of the studious of Englishe eloquence'. With the aid of the nine editions of the *Miscellany* published between 1557 and 1587 a generation of Elizabethan poets and would-be poets (including Shakespeare's Abraham Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) schooled themselves in the courtly expression of love and in the proper verbal posturing of a lover. They were also introduced to the novelty of the Italianate discipline of the fourteen-line sonnet, to *ottava rima*, to *terza rima*, and to unrhymed iambic pentameter. To successive critics, historians, and anthologists the poetry of Wyatt and Surrey was deemed to stand at the fountain-head of a developing lyric tradition, while that of Skelton was presumed to have fed into some kind of literary slough of despond.

Wyatt, the well-travelled and sophisticated courtier-diplomat, introduced a full-blooded Petrarchanism to England. He was well read in the tradition of Tuscan lyric poetry that stemmed from Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* and he translated, and freely adapted into English, verses by Petrarch himself and by several of his fifteenth-century disciples, most notably poems by Serafino d'Aquilano (1466–1500). Wyatt's 'epigrams', often eight-line poems modelled on the *strambotti* of Serafino, also suggest a response to the kind of pithy moral observation cultivated at the French court by Clement Marot (1496–1544) rather than to the comparatively prolix tirades of Skelton. Most of these 'epigrams' reflect on the uncertainties and ambiguities of power and on the process of negotiating a way through the thickets of contemporary politics. If, it is optimistically suggested in one of these poems, venomous thorns sometimes bear flowers, so, by a devout analogy, 'every wo is joynid with some welth'; elsewhere, more sanguinely, an enigmatic pistol informs its owner that 'if I be thine enemy I may thy life ende'; in another, a wretched prisoner, whose life seems to be worn away by the 'stynke and close ayer' of his cell, proclaims that his only hope is 'innocencie' while recognizing that although 'this wound shall heale agayne . . . the scarre shall styll remayne'; in yet another, a man conspicuously out of favour at court bitterly sees his former acquaintance crawling from him 'like lyse [lice] awaye from ded bodies'. In lines based on a translation of a section of Seneca's play *Thyestes*, the speaker sees jockeying for power at court as akin to standing on a 'slipper [slippery] toppe', and the potential for redemptive self-knowledge as lying well beyond its narrow and dangerous confines. As Wyatt's satires and certain of his bleaker lyrics (such as 'Who lyst his welthe and eas Retayne') indicate, heavenly thunder rolls around kings' thrones ('*circa Regna tonat*'), bloody days break hearts, and severed heads serve as dire warnings of the force of royal displeasure. In the epistolary address to his friend, 'Myne owne John Poyntz', he purports to 'fle the presse of courtes . . . | Rather then to lyve thrall under the awe | Of lordly lookes' and he proclaims that he cannot honour those that 'settes their part | With Venus and Baccus all ther lyf long'. One of his most anxious poems ('In mornyng [mourning] wyse') pays tribute to the five men beheaded in 1536 for alleged sexual relations with the disgraced Queen Anne Boleyn (a disgrace in which Wyatt himself was also implicated, though his arrest led merely to a spell in the Tower). Few poems of the period convey as vividly the arbitrary shifts in fate and in the exercise of royal power:

And thus ffarwell eche one in hartye wyse!
The Axe ys home, your hedys be in the stret;
The trykklyngge tearys dothe ffall so from my yes [eyes]
I skarse may wryt, my paper ys so wet.
But what can hepe [help] when dethe hath playd his part,
Thoughe naturs cours wyll thus lament and mone?
Leve sobes therffor, and every crestyn [Christian] hart
Pray ffor the sowlis [souls] of thos be dead and goone.

Wyatt's poem is ostensibly a Christian valediction which indulges in, rather than forbids, mourning, but it is also a poem which edgily acknowledges the political danger of mourning traitors.

Wyatt's love-poetry suggests an equally intimate acquaintance with the whims and moods of those who possess and manipulate power, though here the power dealt with is both political and erotic. It is essentially a courtly poetry; it assumes an acquaintance with codes of manners and formal approaches, withdrawals and responses; it reads signs and interprets codes; it indulges in elaborate displays of both loyalty and affliction and it plays lyrical surfaces against insecure and often perplexed subtexts. Throughout, the poet casts himself in the role of the unfulfilled Petrarchan lover, albeit one who tends to view his mistresses as fickle rather than as chastely detached and one who cultivates an air of melancholic self-pity. Much of the finest verse has a directness and an immediacy of address. Wyatt poses direct questions ('And wylt thow leve me thus?', 'Ys yt possyble | That hye debate, | So sharpe, so sore, and off suche rate | Shuld end so sone and was begone so late? | Is it possible?', 'What shulde I saye | Sinns [since] faithe is dede | And truthe awaye | From you ys fled?') and he throws down challenges or issues for debate ('Unstable dreme according to the place | Be stedfast ons [once]: or els at leist be true', 'Wythe servyng styll | This have I wonne, | Ffor my good wyll | To be undonne'). He is the self-conscious poet singing the role of the defeated lover in 'My lute, awake!' but in 'They fle from me' and 'Who so list to hunt' he is the courtly male stalker, wooer, and pursuer of female animals, both tame and wild. The domesticated animals that once took bread from the narrator's hand in 'They fle from me' desert him when his fortune shifts and 'all is torned thorough my gentilnes | Into a straunge fasshion of forsaking'.

In what was probably his own first appearance in print in 1542, Surrey, Wyatt's junior by fourteen years, paid posthumous tribute to a poet whose innovations were 'wrought to turne to Britaines gayne'. Wyatt had possessed a head 'where wisdom misteries did frame' and a hand 'that taught what might be sayd in ryme'. If Surrey's poem makes only oblique reference to Wyatt's 'witnesse of faith'—his interlinked paraphrases of the seven Penitential Psalms (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143)—it does so as part of an explicitly Christian epitaph in which piety counts for more than courtship. Surrey had, however, clearly been deeply impressed by the novelty and shapeliness of the older poet's borrowings from the Italian and by his recasting of the form of lyrical, amorous verse in English. His own sonnets, which were much admired as pioneer expressions of neo-classical propriety by critics from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, have an assured regularity which smoothes out Wyatt's occasional metrical awkwardness. They also have a certain glibness which suggests a poet writing to a formula rather than evolving a personal mode of expression. Surrey is at his most expressive when he allows a persona to particularize emotion. His stanzaic poem on the Windsor where he was imprisoned in 1537 ('So crewell prison'), for example, looks back on the lost

joys of adolescent friendship, on entertainments, hunts, and tournaments ('On fominge horse with swordes and friendly hertes'), without any need for the traditional moral resort to a reflection on the whims of Fate. The complaint of a grieving wife in 'O happy dames' is also transformed from a public plea for sympathy into a precise evocation of an acute and restless private passion:

> When other lovers in armes acrosse
> Rejoyce their chief delight,
> Drowned in teares to mourne my losse
> I stand the bitter night
> In my window, where I may see
> Before the windes how the cloudes flee.
> Lo, what a mariner love hath made me!

Where Wyatt adapted Petrarch and Petrarchanism to English sounds and into English metres, a good deal of Surrey's verse tends to look back beyond Petrarch to the Latin culture which had informed the development of Tuscan poetry. His debt to Latin verse is most evident in his attempts to echo the syntax and the rhetoric of Virgil in his translations of Books II and IV of the *Aeneid*. An admiration for the sonority of Virgil's poetry was scarcely a new discovery in European humanist circles; the desire to explore a vernacular equivalent to Virgil's formal eloquence was, however, part of a general campaign to reform modern European verse according to Latinate principles. Surrey had before him the pioneer translation of the *Aeneid* by Gavin Douglas who had rendered Virgil's hexameters into lively heroic couplets (or, as he patriotically preferred to call it, 'Scottish metre'). Though Surrey was prepared to lift words, phrases, and even whole lines from Douglas, he made a significant move to unrhymed verse. His choice of an unrhymed pentameter of more or less ten syllables, rather than an approximation to Latin hexameter, had a lasting effect on English poetry.

An Educated Élite: More, Elyot, and Ascham

Wyatt's professed, but unrealized, desire to 'fle the presse of courtes' in order to attain a philosophic calm would probably have been recognized by its first readers as a commonplace which reflected the culture of the Platonic academies of the Renaissance rather than that of a medieval hermitage. The revival of classical learning which had taken place in fifteenth-century Italy had put a particular stress on self-knowledge and on the cultivation of the reasoning faculty through the study of the *literae humaniores*, the body of ancient literature and thought which was regarded as the essential inheritance of modern civilization. A close knowledge of classical Greek and of the philosophy of Plato had come to be particularly esteemed as a means of countering the reductive Aristotelian scholasticism which had dominated the

curricula of medieval universities and seminaries. The study of ancient Greek literature, philosophy, and science had been belatedly introduced to England in the 1490s by the priest-scholars William Grocyn (1449–1519) and Thomas Linacre (?1460–1524), both of whom had extended a conventional enough Oxford education by studying Greek in humanist circles in Italy, notably under the Platonist scholar, Angelo Poliziano (1454–94). When in 1516 Richard Fox, Bishop of Winchester, founded Corpus Christi College at Oxford, he made special provision for a lectureship in Greek as a complement to the study of Latin and Divinity. A desire to reform the secular education of boys according to the principles of the new learning also lay behind the foundation of St Paul's School in London by the Cathedral's Dean, John Colet (1466–1519). The English disciples of the Florentine humanists saw the advance of Greek studies as a means of purging both the textual and the spiritual corruptions of the Middle Ages; they were also Platonists to a man. They sought to reinvigorate Church and State alike by impressing on a new ruling élite the importance of the ideals of spiritual integrity and of a commonwealth as free as possible from depravity.

When the great Dutch scholar, Desiderius Erasmus (?1467–1536), paid his extended visits to England in 1499 and in 1509–14, he absorbed the Platonic enthusiasm of the English humanists. Apart from the scholarly rewards of his working relationships with Grocyn, Linacre, and Colet, Erasmus was particularly taken with the mind, character, and company of a younger man, Thomas More (?1477–1535). The contrast between the public careers of Erasmus and More, both of whom were acknowledged to be intellectuals of European renown by the 1520s, serves to illuminate a crisis in humanist thought. It was not a matter of deciding between the alternative claims of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, for both men had already determined that their vocation to serve God and the God-given human intellect lay in the sphere of public life. For Erasmus the world was best improved by writing, by education, and by a scholar's freedom of action, not by a direct involvement in state politics; for More, however, the highest duty of a man learned in the theory and practice of ancient government was to serve his king. There were ample precedents in Greek and Roman history to justify both courses of action, though to the majority of humanists Erasmus's scrupulous avoidance of court patronage, court promotion, and court corruption seemed the nobler way. A prince was best counselled against tyranny from a safe distance, ideally through a literature which increasingly took on the nature of an extended political discourse. When More was convicted of high treason against the person and dignity of the tyrannical Henry VIII in 1535 he may have seemed to many of his fellow-humanists to have provided yet another salutary example of the perils and deceptions of public service.

More was himself acutely aware of this humanist dilemma. It was he who in 1505 had issued a translation of the *Lyfe of Johan Picus, erle of Myrandula*, a biography of the leading Platonist, Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), a

Florentine aristocrat who had eschewed both the cloister and the court and who had ended his life as a disciple of the reformist Dominican friar, Savonarola. The distinction between the indirect and general counsel of a philosopher and the active and particular work of a royal counsellor surfaces again at the end of the first book of More's Latin masterpiece, *Utopia* (published in Louvain in 1516 under Erasmus's supervision, but not translated into English until 1551). When Raphael Hythlodaeus (whose surname means 'learned in nonsense') argues with a fictional 'Thomas More' (whose surname Erasmus had playfully rendered into Greek as 'moros'—'a fool'), he takes the purely Platonic view that a sensible man ought to steer clear of state politics. 'If I proposed beneficial measures to some king and tried to uproot from his soul the seeds of evil and corruption', Hythlodaeus insists, 'do you not suppose that I should be forthwith banished or treated with ridicule?' 'More', however, advocates not deserting the immediate needs of the commonwealth. Public life, he proposes, is akin to a ship in a storm which a man should not abandon because he cannot control the winds.

The ambiguity of this dialogue is characteristic of *Utopia* as a whole. It is in every sense the book of a writer playing the role of a sophisticated and elusive 'fool'. It is both an experimental intellectual exegesis in the manner of Plato and a *ballon d'essai*, which has since managed to appeal to an extraordinarily wide range of political opinion (always excepting the Machiavellian). It functions on the principle of juxtaposed and often antithetical ideas, not as a blueprint for future social experiment. During the years 1514–18, when More was at work on *Utopia*, he was also engaged on what proved to be an unfinished *History of King Richard III* (a text which after its belated publication in 1557 helped shape the prejudices of Shakespeare's play). This *History*, written in parallel English and Latin texts, suggests that More was a careful student of the techniques of ancient Roman historians as well as an assembler of anecdotes drawn from contemporary witnesses, prominent amongst whom was his boyhood patron, Cardinal Morton. For More, Richard III is the type of the tyrant, a man physically and mentally corrupted, 'close and secrete, a deepe dissimuler, lowlye of counteynaunce, arrogant of heart, outwardly coumpinable [friendly] where he inwardely hated, not letting to kisse whome he thoughte to kyll'. Richard embodies the shortcomings of a monarchic government and twists the web of loyalties centred on the person of the king for his own benefit. *Utopia*, initially set in the semi-autonomous cities of the Netherlands, speculates about a form of government alien to most other European states of the early sixteenth century. The island which Hythlodaeus describes is a loosely decentralized kingdom ruled by a shadowy, elected monarch who governs with the consent of a council of the great and good. Personal property, money, and vice have been effectively abolished and the root-causes of crime, ambition, and political conflict have been eliminated. It has several religions, all of them officially tolerated, and all of them dominated by the principle of a benevolent Supreme Being. Its priesthood, which includes some women, is

limited in numbers because it is open only to the exceptionally pious, 'which means there are very few'. It is a proto-Welfare State in which the old are honoured and the young are taught to be conformist and respectful; dress is uniform and meals are served in communal canteens. The more we know of it, the more Utopia emerges as a society of improbable virtue and equally improbable high-mindedness. It is in fact controlled by a self-perpetuating oligarchy which ultimately functions with the consent of the acquiescent mass of the population and with the forced labour of slaves, disfranchised dissidents, and convicts. Utopia's political and social blessings are countered by its uniformity and its timelessness. It is a place which has abolished original sin, the prospect of redemption, and the idea of history. Nothing changes because its ideology insists that it has fulfilled all human aspirations. For a Christian reader of More's own historical period this 'ideal' must have lain in the realm of the purest and most secular fantasy. *Utopia* should in fact be considered in terms of its exclusive address to a highly educated Renaissance élite. More's 'folly' ended bloodily when he attempted to define Europe according to historically Roman and Catholic boundaries and his King according to the frontiers of national sovereignty; by 1535 the un-placed *Utopia* must have seemed little more than whimsical speculation.

Although More personally fostered the education of his daughter Margaret, he saw the constitution of Utopia as founded on the rule of the oldest male in each household and on the due submission of wives to their husbands. Few humanists were prepared to contemplate the removal of social and educational discrimination against women. Certain well-placed women, notably Henry VIII's daughters Mary and Elizabeth, and their cousin, the brief pretender to Mary's throne, Lady Jane Grey, were given broad and sophisticated educations as a preparation for their public lives, but relatively few other women, even those born into aristocratic households, progressed beyond the acquisition of literacy and the rudiments of Latin. A challenge, led by Erasmus, to older aristocratic prejudices about the instruction of boys, and a desire to extend learning beyond the confines of the clergy, remained, however, one of the central pillars of humanist, and later both Protestant and Jesuit, educational thought. In a society which, with the exception of the persons of the two Tudor Queens, was exclusively dominated by men, the attention of humanist educators was focused on the creation of a cultivated male élite, a ruling class mentally equipped to rule.

The literate and moderately well-educated Henry VIII was the first king of England to write and publish a book—a Latin attack on Luther, known as the *Assertio septem sacramentorum*—which earned him and his successors the papal title of 'Defender of the Faith'. Henry was also, in a self-consciously political way, a patron of literature, which was recognized and honoured in the formal dedications to him of reprinted English classics, of geographical and topographical treatises, and of certain offshoots of the new learning, such as Sir Thomas Elyot's pioneer Latin–English *Dictionary* of 1538. In 1531 Elyot

(?1490–1546) had also inscribed the 'Proheme' of his most influential work, *The Boke named the Governour*, to a King noted for his 'benevolent inclination towards the universall weale' of his subjects. The chief concern of Elyot's book was to demonstrate to a ruling aristocracy that the common good of the realm depended on the proper education of a male upper class. He did not dispute the inherited principle of a single 'soveraigne governour' from whom stemmed order in the state, but he sought to determine that those placed in authority under that sovereign should truly be 'noble wits', trained for public service and capable of broadly advancing the public good. In the twelfth and thirteenth sections of his first book he catalogues examples of well-educated rulers of the past and bemoans the fact that 'noble men be nat as excellent in lernyng as they were in olde tyme amonge the Romanes and grekes'. Although his stress is on the importance of a modern boy's grasp of the grammar of the classical tongues, and on his later advances into the study of rhetoric, cosmography, history, and philosophy, Elyot shows an equal interest in the acquisition of skills in drawing, sculpture, swimming, riding, hunting, music, and dancing. His book is a summary of the broad humanist ideal of aristocratic cultivation tailored to a court and a nobility which looked back nostalgically to fanciful Arthurian codes of chivalry and which attempted to enhance that vision with reference to the modern values embodied in Baldassare Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* (translated into English as *The Courtyer* in 1552–3 by Sir Thomas Hoby (1530–66)).

In one vital sense, however, Elyot was aware that he was writing in and for an age which delighted in scholarly novelty. He was one of the most deliberate and assiduous neologizers of the sixteenth century, a man as proud of his learning as he was of his application of it to the enlargement of his native tongue. In addressing his prospective audience in English and not Latin he acknowledged the need to borrow words 'publicke and commune' from Latin in order to make up for what he saw as the 'insufficiencie of our owne language'. In his *Of the Knowledg whiche maketh a wise man* of 1533 he proudly describes the King himself remarking on the fact that *The Boke named the Governour* contained 'no terme new made by me of a latine or frenche worde, but it is there declared so playnly by one mene or other to a diligent reader that no sentence is therby made derke or hard to understande'. What Elyot referred to as the 'necessary augmentation' of the English language was to include the introduction of such adapted borrowings as 'maturity', 'discretion' and 'industry', though others amongst his new words (such as 'illecebrous', 'pristinate', and 'levigate') failed to establish themselves as indispensable.

In the dedication of his dialogue on the pleasures of archery, *Toxophilus* (1545), to the 'Gentlemen of England', Roger Ascham (1515–68) half apologized for, and half defended, his use of the English language. His gentlemanly dedicatees, he acknowledges, may not share his command of Latin and Greek, but in using the vernacular as his medium he professes to regret the relative inelegance of his native tongue ('every thinge in a maner so meanly, bothe for

the matter and handelynge that no man can do worse'). Ascham is assertively nationalistic in his pride in the longbows which had gained the victory at Agincourt, but he maintains an apologetic stance about what he sees as the clumsiness of the native language of the bowman. In *The Scholemaster* (written *c.* 1563 and published posthumously in 1570) he returns to the premiss that only Latin and Greek provide 'the trew preceptes, and perfite examples of eloquence' though later in his text he will allow that 'the rudenes of common and mother tonges, is no bar for wise speaking'. Unlike Elyot, he was no great cultivator of Latinate neologisms. *The Scholemaster* attempts to set out, in plain and unfussy English, the advantages and uses of a classical education. It recommends kindness not coercion as the wisest course for a teacher and it recognizes the dangers and limitations of flashy intelligence in a boy ('Quicke wittes commonlie, be apte to take, unapte to keepe . . . in most part of all their doinges, over quicke, hastie, rashe, headie, and brainsicke'). His book began, he tells us, with a discussion over dinner at Windsor; it develops as a chatty and discursive series of observations, examples, and anecdotes. He admires Italian culture and the Italian language, but worries about the corruptions of Roman religion and Venetian morals, prejudices he bases on Protestant theology, xenophobia, and a nine days' visit to Venice ('I sawe in that litle tyme, in one Citie, more libertie to sinne, than ever I hard tell of in our noble Citie of London in ix yeare'). If women are notable for their absence from Elyot's *The Governour*, they are conspicuous for their presence in *The Scholemaster*. The book's Preface pointedly refers to Ascham's reading Demosthenes in Greek with Queen Elizabeth as an after-dinner relaxation, and its most famous anecdote, an account of his encounter with Lady Jane Grey (discovered studiously reading Plato while her family was out hunting), is introduced to demonstrate the true pleasures of learning. When Ascham later returns to the praise of Queen Elizabeth's command of ancient and modern languages he flatteringly compares her achievement to that of the cream of her academic male subjects: 'She hath obteyned that excellencie of learnyng, to understand, speake, and write, both wittely with head, and faire with hand, as scarce one or two rare wittes in both the Universities have in many yeares reached unto.' For Ascham, a scholar steeped in liberal humanist concepts and in the experimental theology of the Reformation, knowledge meant freedom. For all its eccentricities, *The Scholemaster* attempts to establish the bases of a discourse on the nature of education in a society. Ascham was also well aware that he was writing for a society which was inclined to accept that the Platonic ideal of a philosopher-king had been realized in the person of a Protestant philosopher-queen.

The Literature of the English Reformation

The English Reformation was alternately initiated, delayed, fostered, reversed, and reshaped by four Tudor monarchs and their ministers. It began with

violent severance and ended with an uneasy compromise. When Henry VIII appointed Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) to the archbishopric of Canterbury in 1532, he promoted a man known to be sympathetic to reform. Cranmer was to become the chief instrument of the King's policy for the removal of papal supremacy in England. When the Pope's long-sought sanction for the King's divorce was denied, it was Cranmer who annulled Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, and he who crowned Anne Boleyn queen in her stead in 1533. It was Cranmer who was chiefly responsible for the promulgation of the 'Ten Articles' in 1536, the first statement of faith issued by the independent English Church, and he who took responsibility for the first official dissemination of the Bible in the English language. It was, however, the King and his Vicar-General, Thomas Cromwell, who set in motion the wholesale dissolution of the monasteries between 1536 and 1539, who created six new bishoprics with cathedrals in defunct abbey churches, and who determined on the destruction of those saints' shrines which had long been centres of pilgrimage (notably, in 1538, that of the early medieval champion of the rights of the Church against the Crown, Thomas Becket).

The dissolution of the monasteries led not only to the extinction of traditional religious communities, to the wholesale destruction of their buildings, and to the dispersal of their historic libraries, but also to vast changes in the ownership of land. The Crown may have felt itself more secure with the power and morale of the Church reduced in proportion to its income, but those who benefited most from the confiscation of monastic, diocesan, and chantry land were laymen, and noblemen and gentlemen in particular. Some seven thousand monks, nuns, and friars were dispossessed in the mid-1530s. A sizeable number of the male religious took on the duties of the secular clergy; some ex-abbots were appointed to bishoprics or became the heads of new cathedral chapters, others lived comfortably in retirement as country squires. The disappearance of the women's communities did, however, leave a hiatus in the development of women's consciousness and culture in England. Despite the traumas occasioned by the destruction of the greater abbeys and the sporadic local attempts to restore the old order, such as the ruthlessly suppressed Pilgrimage of Grace of 1536, later Protestant propaganda fostered a deep and often prurient suspicion of the monastic life which endured until well into the nineteenth century. There was little official mourning for the passing of the religious houses and the culture which had sustained them.

Regardless of the revolutionary nature of his ecclesiastical policies, Henry VIII, who had so stoutly defended the Catholic sacraments against Luther in 1521, remained theologically and liturgically conservative. Under his 'Whip with Six Strings', the Act of Six Articles of 1539, denial of transubstantiation became automatically punishable with burning, communion remained in one kind only, and a reinforcement of the principle of clerical celibacy obliged even Archbishop Cranmer to send his secretly acquired wife back to Germany. When Henry died in January 1547, however, his earlier decision to entrust the

education of his son to convinced Protestants meant that in the new reign the pace of Church reform rapidly accelerated. Edward VI, a precocious 9-year-old at the time of his accession, remained under the influence of the powerful Protestant aristocrats, some might even say gangster barons, who served as counsellors during his turbulent six years as king. By order of the Privy Council, images were forcibly removed from churches, clerical marriages were recognized, and further substantial ecclesiastical endowments confiscated by the Crown; the Acts of Parliament against Lollardy and the Act of Six Articles were repealed and in 1549 an Act of Uniformity imposed the English liturgy, as set forth in the new Book of Common Prayer, on all parish churches and cathedrals. In 1552 this relatively conservative liturgy was revised in order to meet the criticisms of prominent continental Protestants who had found a temporary welcome in England. Neither this second Prayer Book nor its major English promoters endured for long. When the sickly Edward died in 1553, his devoutly Catholic sister and successor, Mary, attempted to undo systematically the reforming zeal of the two previous reigns (though the question of the restoration of church land was left in abeyance). Churchmen and -women who opposed her attempts to stamp out what she unequivocally saw as heresy either suffered for their faith at the stake or took refuge abroad. In safe Protestant enclaves in Germany and Switzerland, English exiles imbibed a yet more heady spirit of religious reform, while at home in 1555–6 Archbishop Cranmer, and the former bishops of London, Worcester, and Gloucester—Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, and John Hooper—became the most prominent victims of a wave of persecution. Mary's short-lived attempt to reconcile England to Rome died with her in November 1558. She left a legacy of bitterness and bigotry which subsequent Protestant historians and propagandists exploited avidly.

The religious and political negatives of Mary's reign were assiduously reversed by Henry VIII's third surviving child, Elizabeth. Largely devoid of particular conviction, though never short of forcefully expressed opinions, Elizabeth chose religious and political expediency, striving throughout her reign to shape and consolidate a national Church which eschewed both Roman excess and Genevan severity. The second Prayer Book of Edward VI's reign was reissued in 1559, with some significantly 'Protestant' nuances removed, and in 1562 the often ambiguous set of doctrinal formulas, known subsequently as the 'Thirty-Nine Articles', was approved by Convocation after Elizabeth had personally interfered with the wording and expression of two of them. The *via media*, the middle way of the Church of England, became the established norm of Elizabethan religious life, imposed by law and generally accepted by the mass of the population. The Anglican settlement was, however, anathematized both by recusant Catholics (especially after Pope Pius V's excommunication of the Queen in 1570) and by an influential number of extreme Protestants who viewed an episcopal Church with a fixed liturgy, calendar, ceremonies, and vestments as unscriptural and corrupt. 'Puritanism', often

allied to and inspired by the radical Presbyterian example of John Knox's Scotland, became increasingly vociferous and contentious from the 1570s onwards. It also left its own distinctive mark on the religious and literary history of Britain.

The Reformers of the English Church placed a consistent stress on the use of the vernacular in worship and on the importance of the Holy Scriptures in a scholarly translation which freed them from the distortions and inaccuracies of the Latin Vulgate. The twenty-fourth of Elizabeth's Articles of Religion insisted that 'it is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church' that services should be conducted 'in a tongue not understanded of the people'. Before the principle of a vernacular liturgy had been established, it was already felt, in both conservative and radical circles, that there was a need for an English Bible translated directly from its Hebrew and Greek originals. When Cranmer instructed all parish priests to provide and display an English Bible in their churches in 1538, the text sponsored by the Archbishop and by Thomas Cromwell was that of the lavishly printed 'Great Bible', revised and reissued, under Cromwell's patronage, in 1540. This 'Great Bible' was a revision of the work of several distinct translators, the most important of whom was William Tyndale (?1494–1536). Tyndale's influence on the text of the volume was both covert and posthumous. Having failed to gain official support for his work, he had gone into exile in Germany in 1524. When copies of his translation of the New Testament arrived in England two years later, the Bishop of London, Thomas More's friend and ally, Cuthbert Tunstall, made desperate attempts both to suppress and to discredit them as Lutheran infections. From his new base in Antwerp Tyndale issued translations of the Pentateuch in 1530 and of the Book of Jonah in 1531; he also left a text of the Books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles in manuscript when he was arrested in 1535. He was executed as a heretic by strangling and burning near Brussels in the October of the following year.

Tyndale expressed a steady confidence both in the 'grace' of the English language and in the potential propriety of, as he put it, a ploughboy's knowing the Scriptures better than a learned bishop. He pre-empted the charge that his native tongue was an unfit vehicle for a translation of the Bible by insisting in his tract *The Obedience of a Christen man* of 1528 that not only did the Greek language agree 'more with the englysh then with the latyne', but the properties of Hebrew agreed 'a thousande tymes moare'. The Hebrew texts, he claimed, could be translated word for word into English 'when thou must seke a compasse in the latyne and yet shalt have moch worke to translate in welfaveredly'. Tyndale's English version is straightforward, homely, unsolemn, and often monosyllabic. His serpent assures Eve with the words 'Tush ye shall not dye' rather than with the more formal 'Ye shall not surely die' of the now familiar 1611 version. He speaks of 'shyre-towns' in Roman Palestine and translates 'centurion' as 'under-captain', but to him are due the coinings of such significant Hebrew-based terms as 'passover' and 'scapegoat'. When

Tyndale renders the Greek words 'ekklesia' and 'presbyteros' into English he opts, however, for the fresh, but accurate, translations 'congregation' and 'senior' rather than for 'church' and 'priest' in order to avoid terms which might have implied that the modern ecclesiastical hierarchy was continuous with that of the age of St Paul. A great deal of Tyndale's pioneer translation survived largely intact, but unacknowledged, as the base from which the English texts of the so-called 'Geneva Bible' of 1560 and of the 'Authorized Version' of 1611 were developed.

The first complete printed English Bible of 1535 was the work of a translator who appears to have been the master of little Greek and distinctly less Hebrew. Miles Coverdale (1488–1568) who, like most of his sixteenth-century successors, took over those books already translated by Tyndale for his edition, added versions of others derived mostly from the Latin text of the Vulgate supplemented by reference to Martin Luther's German Bible. His most lasting impact on English letters was the result of the incorporation of his revised version of the Book of Psalms (1539) into the Book of Common Prayer. As such, Coverdale's Psalter became an integral part of the formal daily worship of the Church of England, ingrained in generations of worshippers through its daily recitation in parish churches and in what the Prayer Book refers to as 'Quires and Places where they sing'. The distinctive 'yeas', 'evens', and 'neithers', which indicate emphases within the original texts, serve to give the English versions a regular and dignified pace which echoes between Psalms expressive of quite different moods. Coverdale's gift for phrasing manages to retain both the solemnity of the Latin Psalter, so long familiar in the worship of the Western Church, and the vivid imagery of the original Hebrew poetry. Mountains skip 'like rammes' in Psalm 114 and in Psalm 65 the valleys 'stand so thicke with corne, that they shall laugh and sing'. The Lord makes 'darknesse his secret place' and 'his pavilion round him, with darke water' in Psalm 18; in Psalm 19, in which 'the heavens declare the glory of God', he comes forth 'as a bridegroome out of his chamber, and rejoyceth as a giant to run his course', while in Psalm 104 he decks himself 'with light as it were with a garment: and spreadest out the heavens like a curtaine'. Certain of Coverdale's most carefully blended phrases (such as the famous 'valley of the shadow of death' of Psalm 23, the description of mariners in Psalm 107 as 'they that goe downe to the Sea in ships', or the haunting mistranslation 'the yron entred into his soule' of Psalm 105) have become so assimilated into spoken English as almost to seem detached from their precise Biblical and liturgical source.

The Book of Common Prayer, to which Coverdale's Psalter was attached, is the statement of one of the most influential liturgical reforms of the sixteenth century, paralleling those of the more conservative Lutheran churches of Germany and those of the Roman Catholic Church set in motion by the Council of Trent. In 1548 Archbishop Cranmer, supported by a committee of scholars, completed the draft of a single, comprehensive and authoritative guide to the future worship of both priest and people in the English Church. It

was designed as a vernacular replacement for the multiple and often purely local Latin rites in use in pre-Reformation England and Wales (notably those of Salisbury, York, Hereford, and Bangor) and for private devotional volumes, breviaries, and prayer books ('Common Prayer' implied public and corporate worship). It was also to serve as a further significant element in the Tudor policy of bringing a degree of uniformity to national life. The 1549 Book of Common Prayer was deliberately open-ended in its eucharistic theology, deliberately conservative in its retention of Mass vestments and in prayers for the dead. As revised in 1552 its emphasis became more Protestant, with, for example, the words 'Mass' and 'altar' omitted from the recast Communion rite. As revised again on the accession of Elizabeth, a certain theological ambiguity crept back into its formulas and expression, much to the subsequent offence of Puritan dissenters. Most of the original wording determined on by Cranmer and his committee remained unaltered despite efforts to curtail, move, or break up certain fixed prayers, addresses, or responses. Cranmer's tact in adapting and simplifying is perhaps best observed in the shapes he evolved for the Morning and Evening Offices, both of them fluent structural developments from the Hours of Prayer used in medieval collegiate and monastic churches and now adapted for use in parish and cathedral alike. The Collects, the short prayers appointed for the major feast-days and Sundays of the Christian year, are, for the most part, careful translations of Latin texts, though Cranmer himself probably added the two first Advent Collects (the second of which famously asks that God might assist the faithful as they 'hear . . . read, marke, learne, and inwardly digest' the Holy Scriptures). The effect of these Collects frequently depends on a balance of synonyms and on a suggestive development of concepts through series of complementary phrases. The second Collect for peace in the 'order for Morning prayer', for example, opens with an address to God as 'the author of peace, and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom' and the third Evening Collect ('for ayde against all perils') petitions: 'Lighten our darknesse, wee beseech thee, O Lord, and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of thy onely Sonne our Saviour Jesus Christ.' The Book of Common Prayer is distinctive for its general (some might say typically English) avoidance of emotional language and imagery. Though scrupulously Christocentric in its piety, it eschews dwelling on the passion, the wounded body, the saving blood, and the bloody sweat of the Saviour; though insistent on the particular dignity accorded to the Virgin Mary and on 'the one communion and fellowship' of the saints, it refuses to drift towards Mariolatry or to contemplate the agonies of the martyrs; though sure and certain of the Resurrection of the Dead and of the 'unspeakable joyes' of the Heavenly City, it declines to indulge in rapturous previews of Heaven; though it recognizes the 'manifold sinnes and wickednesse' of humanity, it generally abstains from the expression of morbid self-abasement and from threatening sinners with an eternity in hell. The 'middle way' pursued by the Church of England, and later

by its imperial daughter Churches, was, from the beginning, significantly defined by the sober beauty and the prescriptive chastity of its liturgy.

Emotionalism and a highly charged description of the sufferings of martyrs were, however, the key to the success of John Foxe's great survey of the persecution of the faithful, the so-called *Book of Martyrs*, first published in English in 1563. His book, approved and officially publicized by Elizabethan bishops, went through four editions in its author's lifetime and was placed next to the Bible on lecterns in many parish churches. Foxe (1516–87), ordained deacon by Bishop Ridley in 1550 according to the form of the new Ordinal, and driven into exile in 1554, was determined to relate the sufferings of English Protestants under Queen Mary to what he saw as the tradition of Christian martyrdom in and by the Western Church. The ambitious full title stressed the urgency of his mission: *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perilous dayes, touching matters of the Church, wherein ar comprehended and described the great persecutions & horrible troubles, that have bene wrought and practised by the Romishe Prelates, speciallye in this Realme of England and Scotlande, from the yeare of our Lorde a thousande, unto the tyme nowe present. Gathered and collected according to the true copies & wrytinges certificatorie as wel of the parties them selves that suffered, as also out of the Bishops Registers, which wer the doers thereof*. Foxe's martyrology attempted to outclass the old legends of the saints by countering them with modern instances of pious resolution. In his first edition he even included a contentiously Protestant Calendar in celebration of the new generation of champions of true Christendom, but, as the new research included in his subsequent editions suggests, he also attempted to undo old superstitions by presenting testimony derived from documentary and oral sources. As a historian he had, however, no use for impartiality. His vigorous side-notes or glosses ('Marke the apish pageants of these popelings', 'This answer smelleth of forging and crafty packing', 'A wholesome company of caterpillars') provide pointers as to how he hopes this text will be read, and his gory wood-block illustrations (showing, for example, a naked Tyndale being strangled, a venerable Cranmer placing his right hand in the flames, and Bishop Bonner clearly enjoying himself as he beats a prisoner in his orchard) serve to underline the theme of the corruption of those who persecute the righteous. For the next two hundred years Foxe's continually reprinted, revised, and vulgarly amplified volume helped to shape the popular myth of the working out of a special providence in the destinies of an elect nation. It presented a series of sensational pictures which suggested that history was a nightmare from which Elizabethan England seemed blessedly to have awoken.

Early and Mid-Sixteenth-Century Drama

The most important effect of the Tudor Reformation on contemporary writing was in many ways the result of its increasingly secular, as opposed to devotional, emphases. The official ideology that preached that Church and

Nation were constitutionally linked in the sovereign state and that God was best served in the world and not in the cloister was echoed, parroted, or merely tacitly accepted in a broad range of the literature of the period. The stress on the secular is particularly evident in the prolific development of vernacular drama during the sixteenth century. Protestant suspicion, allied to the disappearance of its old sponsors—the monasteries, the chantries, and the guilds—gradually suppressed local traditions of popular religious drama (though in some towns morality cycles flourished until the 1570s). In London, civic intolerance and government censorship, banning plays which conflicted with authorized religion or which suggested any degree of profanity, steadily determined a shift away from a drama based on sacred subjects. Even given the number of play-texts that survives, any attempt to chart the rise of a secular theatre in the period is hampered by the often random selection of printed volumes, manuscripts, and records which have come down to us. Certain plays or interludes, written to commission or for specific festivities in royal, noble, or institutional halls, were probably regarded as ephemeral pieces while others which circulated as printed texts were neglected or destroyed as theatrical and literary fashions changed.

Skelton's only surviving play, the 'goodly interlude' *Magnyfycence*, was probably written at some point between 1515 and 1523. Although it is an entertainment ostensibly shaped, like the earlier *Mankind*, as an externalized battle between Virtues and Vices for the human soul, its moral concerns seem to be specific rather than general. *Magnyfycence* treats the importance of moderation in the affairs of a great Someone, not the general virtue of circumspection in the life of an Everyman. Very much in the manner of the humanists, it offers indirect advice to a princely figure by warning against pride, corruption, profligacy, and folly. If, as some commentators suppose, the protagonist's situation offers an allegorical reflection of Cardinal Wolsey's extravagant splendour, the play proceeds to represent the stages of a political and moral collapse. 'Magnificence', laudable enough in itself, here is distorted by pride; pride leads to false magnificence, and the decline into false values provokes a fall from both grace and prosperity.

In the hands of John Foxe's friend and ally, the former Carmelite friar, John Bale (1495–1563), the moral interlude was severed from its increasingly weak Catholic doctrinal roots to become a vehicle for Protestant polemic. Bale, an early protégé of Archbishop Cranmer's, was the author of some twenty-one plays, all of them written in the years 1533–43. His *Kyng Johan* of *c.* 1536 is often claimed as the first English drama to be based on national history, though it uses that history exclusively to make narrow propagandist points and it balances its gestures towards presenting historically based characters with traditional enough embodiments of virtue and vice. King John, the victim of papal displeasure in the early thirteenth century, is shown as a brave precursor of Henry VIII trying to free 'Widow England' from the oppressive grip of 'the wild boar of Rome'. Bale's *Three Lawes*, and the plays that stem from it, *God's*

Promises, *John the Baptist*, and *The Temptation of Our Lord*, all consider the human corruption of the divine scheme of redemption. All four plays equate the distortion of the pure Law of Christ with the former triumphs of the papal Antichrist, and all four look to individual repentance and general reformation as a means of restoring humankind to grace. When, for example, Christ is tempted by Satan in the fourth play, his adversary approaches in the guise of a dim-witted hermit who at first pretends not to recognize biblical quotations ('We religious men live all in contemplation: | Scriptures to study is not our occupation'). Once exposed for what he really is, he gleefully proclaims to Jesus that his prime allies in his scheme to corrupt the Church will in future be popes.

Very little that indicates a particularly vigorous Catholic response to Protestant dramatic propaganda has survived. Much of the acceptable drama performed or revived in Queen Mary's reign suggests a tactful avoidance of contentious issues. John Heywood (1497–?1579), a loyal Catholic who claimed to have achieved the difficult feat of making the Queen smile, was prepared to expose the long-familiar peccadilloes of hypocritical pardoners and friars, but he chose to do so in the form of untidy farces with tidily orthodox conclusions, such as *The playe called the foure PP* (which ends with a declaration of loyalty to the 'Church Universal') and *The Pardoner and the Friar* (which arbitrarily concludes with attempts by the parson and the constable to drive the hypocrites away). Nicholas Udall (1504–56), a schoolmaster who, despite his earlier unconcealed Protestant sympathies, managed to find favour in the palaces of Queen Mary and of her Lord Chancellor, Bishop Gardiner, concentrated on writing plays for the boys in his charge. The comedies ascribed to Udall, most notably *Ralph Roister Doister* (*c.*1552), suggest a writer, well versed in the work of Plautus and Terence, who possessed a modest talent for finding English equivalents to the stock characters of the ancients. The text of *Ralph Roister Doister* is divided, on the ancient model, into acts and scenes, but its boisterous language, its songs, and its tediously rhymed doggerel are confidently those of modern London and not just a dim reflection of ancient Rome. The influence of Terence also shows in the five-act structure of the anonymous *Gammer Gurtons Nedle*, a comedy first performed at Christ's College, Cambridge, probably in the early 1560s (it was printed in 1575). The play's 'low', rustic, and somewhat slight subject (the loss of Gammer Gurton's needle during the mending of a pair of leather breeches and its painful rediscovery when the owner of the breeches is kicked in the backside) is decidedly unacademic (at least in the narrow sense of that term). Although its author was determined to squeeze what entertainment value he could out of a series of trivial domestic crises, the very shapeliness of the play suggests a degree of subtlety and structural sophistication new in English comedy.

English universities and many of the schools that fed them with literate students shared the pan-European vogue for reviving and performing classical plays and for sponsoring new entertainments which would show off the proficiency of their authors and actors. Children's companies, and notably the boys of the Chapel Royal in London, remained a significant feature in the development of Elizabethan drama, but it was the revival of interest in classical tragedy that proved decisive in the evolution of a distinctive national mode. Native English tragedy was distinctly marked by the bloody, high-flown, and sombre influence of Seneca. Between 1559 and 1561 Jasper Heywood (1535–98), the younger son of the author of *The playe called the foure PP*, published English translations of Seneca's *Troas*, *Thyestes*, and *Hercules Furens*. His enterprise was matched in the mid-1560s by workmanlike English versions of four further tragedies, all by young graduates determined to demonstrate that the art of the heathen Seneca could provide Christian England with a lesson in moral gravity and, equally importantly, with a salutary example of dramatic decorum. His plays were seen as model structures, suggesting the serene workings out of divine justice and revealing the effects of human vengeance; they dwelt on the vicissitudes of earthly fortune and they traced the tragic falls of men of high degree; above all, they expressed pithy moral sentiments with an exaggeratedly rhetorical flourish.

When Sir Philip Sidney claimed in his *Defence of Poesie* that Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc* was 'full of stately speeches and well sounding Phrases, clyming to the height of *Seneca* his stile, and as full of notable moralitie', he was offering what would have struck his contemporaries as the zenith of praise. *Gorboduc*, sometimes known by its alternative title *The Tragidie of Ferrex and Porrex*, remains perhaps the most striking and novel of the dramas produced in the opening years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. It does more than naturalize Seneca for an educated English audience; it attempts to harness the potential of national history and myth as a dramatic contribution to an extended political discourse. The play, first acted by the gentlemen students of the Inner Temple in the January of 1562, was performed again at court some days later before the Queen herself. Norton (1532–84) is believed to have contributed the first three acts, Sackville (1536–1608) the last two, but what particularly marks the play is its consistently high-toned exploration of the roots of political decay. Its story, derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth's fanciful history of the descendants of the Trojan Brutus, considers the end of the dynasty brought about by the follies of the old and the jealousies of the young (its parallels to *King Lear*, written some forty years later, would have been evident to Shakespeare's first audiences). As the play's chorus pre-emptively insists at the end of its first act, its action could provide 'A myrrour . . . to princes all | To learne to shunne the cause of suche a fall'. At its end, the dead King Gorboduc's counsellor, Eubulus, is given a speech of some ninety-nine lines which mourns the loss of national unity and civil order and insists, with unashamed anachronism, that a proper way forward should have been the summons of a Parliament that would have appointed royal heirs 'To stay the title of established right, | And in the people plant obedience | While yet the prince did live'. It was a warning that was doubtless clear both to an audience of

lawyers and to the court of an unmarried Queen. The achievement of *Gorboduc* is not merely political and monitory. The play's effects depend on the steady, intelligent, and dramatic development of its theme and on its spectacle. Each of the acts is introduced by a dumb-show; in the first, accompanied by 'the musicke of violence', six wild men act out a demonstration of the dangers of disunity; in the fourth, the 'musicke of howboies' introduces three Furies in black who drive before them a king and a queen 'who had slaine their owne children'; in the last, 'drommes and fluites' are succeeded by armed men 'in order of battaile' who march about and (again anachronistically) noisily discharge their firearms. Despite the presence of what might strike a twentieth-century reader as an excess of both pomp and pomposity, the text of *Gorboduc* can be seen as setting a standard against which later Elizabethan dramatists had to measure their theatrical ambitions.

The Defence and the Practice of Poetry: Puttenham and the Sidneys

The two most articulate and acute Elizabethan critics of poetry, George Puttenham (?1529–91) and Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86), recognized that they were confronting a crisis in English writing. Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) and Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie* (1595) endeavour to trace a poetic tradition which embraces the work of the ancient and of selected vernacular poets and they attempt to define a way forward by offering prescriptive definitions. Both men confidently press the case for poetry as the foremost of the human arts and they suggest that its new European refinement ought to be taken as the gauge of true civilization. For Sidney, taking a broad retrospect, 'neyther Phylosopher nor Historiographer coulde at the first have entred into the gates of populer judgements, if they had not taken a great Pasport of Poetry, which in all Nations at this day, wher learning florisheth not, is plaine to be seene, in all which they have some feeling of Poetry'. Poetry, even amongst the marginalized cultures on the fringes of Europe, had always, he insists, acted as the great communicator, and it was, from the first, the encourager of learning. In glancing at those lands where 'learning florisheth not', Sidney notes that in benighted Turkey 'besides their lawe-giving Divines, they have no other Writers but Poets' and that even in Ireland ('where truelie learning goeth very bare') poets are held 'in a devoute reverence' (though he also later recalls the story that Irish bards could rhyme their victims to death by placing poetical curses on them). For modern England, laying claim to membership of the exclusive club of 'learned' nations, the honour it accorded to its poets should be seen as the touchstone of its modern sophistication, even though, as Sidney feels constrained to admit, 'since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is . . . yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching it'.

Like Sidney's *Defence*, Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* is generally

assumed to have been circulated in manuscript for some time before it finally appeared in print. Puttenham, a nephew of Sir Thomas Elyot, shared with his uncle a conviction of the cultural centrality and proper eminence of the cultivated courtier. His treatise, in three books, returns again and again to the notion of the enhancement of the dignity of the modern gentleman poet by the values and social standing of a princely court. The 'courtly makers' of Henry VIII's reign, 'of whom Sir *Thomas Wyat* . . . & *Henry* Earle of Surrey were the two chieftaines', had been succeeded by 'Noble men and Gentlemen of her Majesties owne servantes, who have written excellently well' (among whom he includes the conspicuously gentlemanly figures of Sidney, Sir Walter Ralegh, and Sir Fulke Greville). Puttenham's carefully developed and scholarly thesis is consequently steeped in the adulatory oils which lubricated the machinery of the Elizabethan state. In the past, he asserts, it was proper that 'all good and vertuous persons should for their great well doings be rewarded with commendation, and the great Princes above all others with honors and praises'. If the ancient poets were 'the trumpetters of all fame', so Puttenham, as the definer of the nature of poetry and an aspirant poet himself, takes the figure of Queen Elizabeth as the focus of his modern enterprise. When he lists 'the most commended writers in our English Poesie' he concludes by trumpeting forth the writerly talents of 'our soveraigne Lady, whose learned, delicate, noble Muse, easily surmounteth all the rest that have written before her time or since, for sense, sweetnesse and subtilltie'. Not only does the Queen exceed 'all the rest of her most humble vassalls' as a practitioner, she is also the subject of his model anagrams and of three of the examples of the pictogrammatic poems, or 'figures', that he prints in his second book ('Of Proportion'). The Queen's 'most noble and vertuous nature' is seen as resembling a spire in a taper-shaped lyric; she is compared to a crowned pillar in a columnar poem; and the shape of a 'Roundell or Spheare' is discovered to reflect essential qualities of the nature of God, the World, and the Virgin Monarch ('All and whole and ever alone, | Single sans peere, simple, and one').

In addition to its insistent and sometimes over-ingenious courtliness, Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* also attempts to establish codes of literary good manners. It offers a definition of a canon of acceptable poets: Chaucer and Gower ('both of them I suppose Knightes') provisionally pass muster, but Skelton, 'a rude rayling rimer' and a 'buffon', is banished from the respectable ranks of those more recent 'courtly makers' whose work Puttenham holds up for admiration. The main emphasis of the second and third books of his treatise falls upon attempts to define and explain genre, form, metre, and imagery. Like many later prescriptive literary theorists, he reveals little actual sensitivity to the material with which he deals, and, while making a pretence of disliking 'schollerly affectation' and the 'peevish affectation of words out of the primative languages', he attempts to dazzle his readers with displays of cleverness, with illustrative diagrams, and with a plethora of Greek definitions.

The overall tone of Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie* seems easy and

conversational in comparison to Puttenham's portentousness. Sidney begins, offhandedly enough, with an anecdote derived from his embassy to Germany during which he encountered one of the Emperor's Italian courtiers. This anecdote allows him to make play both with his Christian name (Philip, the 'lover of horses') and with his knightly profession ('Hee sayd, Souldiours were the noblest estate of mankinde, and horsemen the noblest of Souldiours . . . I think he would have perswaded mee to wishe my selfe a horse'). This witty opening gambit serves to alert us to Sidney's fascination with words and to his unpretentious projection of himself into his writings. As he gradually develops the strands of his argument in *The Defence of Poesie*, he avoids confronting his readers with what might pass as proofs delivered *de haut en bas* by instead bidding them to question the authority of those practitioners who have allowed poetry to descend to 'the laughing-stocke of children'. His treatise is shaped both by a need to reply to the case put by Plato and his fellow *mysomousoi* or Poet-haters, and by an evident pleasure in displaying his own enthusiasms and observations. If Sidney seems prepared to admit that Plato's intolerance has a validity when directed against sacred and philosophical verse—the poetry most likely to corrode or misrepresent ideas—he is at his most relaxed and eloquent when he expounds the counterbalancing virtues of a form of writing which he sees as primarily offering 'delight'. The philosopher, Sidney argues, teaches obscurely because he addresses himself to 'them that are already taught'; the poet, by contrast, is 'the foode for the tenderest stomacks'. When poetry, and lyric poetry above all, gives delight it also breeds virtue. To illustrate his point he variously cites examples of men finding 'their harts mooved to the exercise of courtesie' by reading medieval romances and of Hungarian soldiers rejoicing in 'songes of their Auncestours valour'. He also freely admits how much he was touched by a military ballad sung by a blind fiddler 'with no rougher voyce then rude stile'. When, however, he turns to bemoaning the relative dearth of refined modern love-poetry in English, he speaks as feelingly of amorous verse as he had of the martial, significantly beginning with a chivalric image: 'But truely many of such writings as come under the banner of unresistable love, if I were a Mistres, would never perswade mee they were in love; so coldely they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read Lovers writings . . . then that in truth they feele those passions.' For Sidney, despite his merriment and the calculated gentlemanly nonchalance of his final address to his readers as those that have had 'the evill lucke to reade this incke-wasting toy of mine', poetry has to be taken seriously because it releases the earthbound mind by elevating and inspiriting it. True poetry draws from the experience of sinful humankind, but it ultimately offers both a vision of freedom and an injection of herculean strength, both a celebration of mortal love and the hope of immortality.

In many ways, the arguments posited in *The Defence of Poesie* are qualified, amplified, and justified by the body of Sidney's work in prose and verse, most of it unpublished at the time of his death in 1586. When he died at Arnhem of

wounds received during one of Queen Elizabeth's half-hearted campaigns in support of Dutch independence, he was accorded a hero's funeral in St Paul's Cathedral, 200-odd formal elegies and, some twenty years later, an adulatory biography by Fulke Greville which helped provide the strands from which national myths about suave soldiers and patriotic decorum were woven. The memory of Sidney the courtier, the diplomat, and the soldier became public property; his writings, circulated privately in his lifetime, emerged as crucial to the political, literary, and sexual discourses of the late sixteenth century. The *Arcadia*, his long prose romance interspersed with poems and pastoral elegies, his royal entertainment *The Lady of May*, and his sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* all suggest processes of negotiation, persuasion, self-projection, and self-fashioning which interrelate affairs of state with affairs of the heart. *The Lady of May*, performed before the Queen at Wanstead in 1578 or 1579, takes the form of a dignified dispute between a shepherd and a forester for the hand of the Lady of the title. Having seen the masque the Queen was called upon to act as the judge between the suitors, though, misreading the entertainment's subtext, she is said to have chosen the wrong candidate.

Although the formal speechifying of *The Lady of May* is relieved by the comic Latinate pedantry of the schoolmaster, Rombus ('I am gravidated with child, till I have indoctrinated your plumbeous cerebrosities'), it is the innovative variety, mastery of register, and narrative shaping of *Astrophil and Stella* (written *c.* 1582 and published in 1591) that most clearly distinguishes it from Sidney's earlier treatment of the interaction of courtship with the courtly graces. The 108 sonnets, and the eleven songs which diversify the sequence, describe the development of the unrequited love of a star-lover (Gk. *astrophil*) for a distant star (Lat. *stella*). The difference between the two classical tongues from which the names of the lovers are derived itself suggests the irreconcilable nature of the relationship, but Sidney's poems do not merely play with the idea of distance and unattainability nor do they slavishly follow the pattern of amatory frustration and exultation first established in the fourteenth century by Petrarch. Sidney readily acknowledges that he is working in a well-tried Petrarchan tradition, but he rejects the 'phrases fine' and the 'pale dispaire' of earlier love-poets in the third and sixth of his own sonnets and he is prepared to play ironically with the decorative imagery of the Italian imitators of 'poore *Petrarch's* long deceased woes' in sonnet 15. Where Petrarch's Laura remains coolly unresponsive, Sidney's Astrophil holds to the hope that his Stella might still favour him, and he ends his long campaign aware of his failure, not with Petrarch's expressions of having passed through a purifying spiritual experience. *Astrophil and Stella* is both an extended dialogue with the conventions of the Italian sonneteers and a varied Elizabethan narrative which, by means of a constantly changing viewpoint, considers the developing conflict between private and public obligation. Stella is from the first the ungiving beloved and the generous inspirer of poetry, the object of the poem and the provoker of it, the dumbfounder and the giver of eloquence. The opening sonnet proclaims

the ambiguities of the sequence as a whole; the frustrated lover at first searches for the words which 'came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay', but as he nervously bites his 'truant' pen the responsive voice of the Muse (who is also the unresponsive Stella) directs him to 'looke in thy heart and write'. In sonnet 34 the potential confusions and conflicts between public statement and private silence are expressed in the form of an internal dialogue:

> Come let me write, 'And to what end?' To ease
> A burthned hart, 'How can words ease, which are
> The glasses of thy dayly vexing care?'
> Oft cruell fights well pictured forth do please.
> 'Art not asham'd to publish thy disease?'
> Nay, that may breed my fame, it is so rare:
> 'But will not wise men thinke thy words fond ware?'
> Then be they close, and so none shall displease.
> 'What idler thing, then speake and not be hard?'
> What harder thing then smart, and not to speake?
> Peace, foolish wit, with wit my wit is mard.
> Thus write I while I doubt to write, and wreake
> My harmes on Ink's poore losse, perhaps some find
> *Stella's* great pow'rs, that so confuse my mind.

Although Stella is portrayed as the enabler of poetry, she is also the star, 'the onely Planet of my light', who in sonnet 68 seeks to quench the star-lover's 'noble fire'. Throughout the sequence, the 'noble' concerns of a soldier and courtier intrude only to be frustrated by a woman who commands chivalric service and who exercises a sometime whimsical authority over those who willingly give her service. She who elevates by virtue of her heavenly nature also degrades. That Stella's star-like authority seems at times to parallel that of the Queen, of whose enigmatic political behaviour Sidney complained in his letters, is scarcely coincidental. The imagery of war moulds the urgent sonnet 20 ('Flie, fly, my friends, I have my death wound; fly'), while the jouster and the knight figure in sonnets 41, 49, and 53; the state of contemporary European politics gives an edge to sonnets 8, 29, and 30 ('Whether the Turkish new-moone minded be | To fill his hornes this yeare on Christian coast'), but as Stella asserts her royal command over Astrophil she effectively distracts and confounds alternative enterprise, interposing her imperial presence and her sovereign will even in the face of courtly debate ('These questions busie wits to me do frame; | I, cumbred with good maners, answer do, | But know not how, for still I thinke of you'). Her face is 'Queen *Vertue's* court in sonnet 9; her heart is a citadel 'fortified with wit, stor'd with disdaine' in sonnet 12; she seems to allow her lover the 'monarchie' of her heart in sonnet 69, though, as he recognizes at the end of the poem, 'No kings be crown'd but they some covenants make'; in the penultimate sonnet, 107, she emerges as a 'Princesse' and a 'Queene, who from her presence sends | Whom she imployes' and who provokes fools to comment scornfully on the absolute demands of her rule.

The influence of *Astrophil and Stella* on later English sonneteers was profound. Within Sidney's own circle of family and sympathetic friends his sonnets exercised a particular authority over the poetry of his younger brother Robert (1563–1626). Sir Robert Sidney (created Viscount L'Isle in 1605, and Earl of Leicester in 1618) left his surviving poems in a manuscript collection which was edited and published in its entirety only in 1984. His sonnets, like his brother's, are interspersed with longer songs and, though they tend to lack the range, the wit, and the carefully modulated shifts of mood of *Astrophil and Stella*, they too project an often ambiguous picture of a self-fashioning, self-indulging male lover. The sixth song ('Yonder comes a sad pilgrim'), for example, is shaped as a pseudo-medieval dialogue between a pilgrim returning from the East and the Lady to whom he narrates the circumstances of her melancholy and frustrated lover's death ('Near unto the sea this knight | Was brought to his last will; | Present cares were his delight, | Absent joys did him kill'). His most striking poems are characterized by their vividly dark, almost obsessive meditations on what are so often the poetic commonplaces of transience, decay, and dissolution. The brief seventeenth song broods pessimistically on the approach of night and ponders 'what trust is there to a light | that so swift flyes', while the thirty-first sonnet ('Forsaken woods, trees with sharp storms oppressed') considers a devastated winter landscape and contrasts two perceptions of Time: 'they who knew Time, Time will find again: | I that fair times lost, on Time call in vain'. The twenty-sixth sonnet ('Ah dearest limbs, my life's best joy and stay') opens with the complaint of a wounded man contemplating the amputation of his gangrenous limbs, and draws out a parallel between desperate diseases and the state of the crippled and emotionally corrupted lover:

> My love, more dear to me than hands or eyes,
> Nearer to me than what with me was born,
> Delayed, betrayed, cast under change and scorn,
> Sick past all help or hope, or kills or dies;
> While all the blood it sheds my heart doth bleed
> And with my bowels I his cancers feed.

Philip Sidney's fatally, but cleanly wounded, lover of 'Flie, fly, my friends' was the victim of Cupid's darts; his brother's lover is threatened with a lingering, painful, and probably terminal infection.

Mary Sidney (1561–1621), who married Henry, second Earl of Pembroke in 1577, provided a centre for the Sidney circle at her home at Wilton House. At Wilton Philip Sidney wrote the *Arcadia* for her and there she gathered around her a distinguished group of poets, intellectuals, and Calvinistically-inclined theologians all intent on continuing her brother's cultural mission after his untimely death. It was Mary who approved the posthumous publication of Philip Sidney's works and she who made her own quite distinct contribution to English poetry by revising and continuing her brother's verse translation of the

Psalms (first published in 1823). This enterprise, essentially in keeping with the devoutly Protestant tone of the little court at Wilton, reveals Mary Sidney as a remarkably resourceful experimenter with words and sounds. Where Philip Sidney had aimed at a dextrous solidity of expression in the versions of the first forty-three Psalms that he had completed, Mary's free translations of the remaining 107 suggest a metrical, lexical, phrasal, and metaphorical variety which is quite her own. In Psalm 58, for example, she rejoices in the justification of the faithful and appeals for wrath to descend on the heads of the un-Godly:

> Lord, crack their teeth: Lord, crush these lions' jaws,
> So let them sink as water in the sand.
> When deadly bow their aiming fury draws,
> Shiver the shaft ere past the shooter's hand.
> So make them melt as the dis-housed snail
> Or as the embryo, whose vital band
> Breaks ere it holds, and formless eyes do fail
> To see the sun, though brought to lightful land.

In the urgent plea for delivery from those that persecute 'poor me, Poor innocent' in Psalm 59 she presents a vivid picture of her foes prating and babbling 'void of fear, | For, tush, say they, who now can hear?'. She expands her version of the terse Psalm 134 into an hour-glass-shaped hymn of praise which opens up finally to a vision of an all-creating God 'Whom Sion holds embowered, | Who heaven and earth of nought hath raised'. Where Coverdale speaks of taking 'the wings of the morning' in Psalm 139, Sidney asks the sun to lend 'thy lightful flightful wings'. Where Coverdale had soberly declared that he was 'fearfully and wonderfully made' and that 'though I be made secretly and fashioned beneath in the earth, Thine eyes did see my substance', she delights in the idea of God as a careful craftsman knowing 'how my back was beam-wise laid', seeing the 'raft'ring of my ribs' and the covering human flesh in 'brave embroid'ry fair arrayed' like a divine couturier working away 'in shop both dark and low'. Mary Sidney's is one of the most precise, eloquent, and unsolemn Protestant voices of the sixteenth century.

Sixteenth- and Early Seventeeth-Century Prose Fiction

To argue that the English novel, as it was developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, grew directly from the native saplings of the prose fiction of the sixteenth century is as unhelpful a historical judgement as to insist that Elizabethan and Jacobean fiction should be judged according to the realist norms evolved by the Victorians. What is significant is that the last quarter of the sixteenth century saw a vast increase in the amount of prose fiction available to the reading public (it has been estimated that three times more

fiction was published in the 45-year reign of Queen Elizabeth than had appeared in the eighty preceding years). This explosion of vernacular fiction appears to have established new patterns of reading and writing which have been interpreted all too narrowly as evidence of the rise of 'bourgeois' tastes or seen merely as raw prologues to the imperial theme of the mature English novel. A handful of sixteenth-century texts, most notably Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, continued to be popular, however, with a wide range of English readers long after the age and the audience for which they were originally written. Sidney's *Arcadia*, first printed in its unfinished, revised form in 1590, and in 1593 published in a new version cobbled together with additions from an earlier manuscript, remained a standard favourite. The university teacher and critic, Gabriel Harvey (*c.*1550–1631), recommended it to readers in 1593 as 'a written Pallace of Pleasure, or rather a printed Court of Honour'; it diverted and inspirited King Charles I during his confinement; and, as late as the early nineteenth century, it delighted Charles Lamb, who, in spite of what he recognized as a certain 'stiffness and encumberment' in the narrative, rejoiced in 'the noble images, passions, sentiments and poetical delicacies of character, scattered all over the Arcadia'.

The ancient, medieval, and modern sources of Sidney's *Arcadia* serve to suggest something of the complexity of its origins and its essentially aristocratic reference. Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* of 1504, a series of Italian verse eclogues connected by a prose narrative, gave Sidney his structural cue and shaped his conception of the modern pastoral set amid idealized ancient landscapes. Sidney's perspective on the Greek world was, however, probably determined by the third-century account of the miscellaneous adventures of thwarted and separated lovers, Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*. Sidney's replay of European chivalric norms also reveals a debt to medieval romances and particularly to *Amadis of Gaul*, the fifteenth-century story of Spanish origin which, he had noted in his *Defence*, had retained its power to move men's hearts 'to the exercise of courtesie, liberalitie, and especially courage'. Both the so-called *Old Arcadia* (composed *c.*1577–80) and the revised work of *c.*1581–4 consist of complex narrative patterns built around expressions of conflicting attitudes and codes. King Basilius's impulse to withdraw himself and his family into an Arcadian retreat ostensibly represents a vain attempt to escape the fulfilment of a curse. It also suggests an espousal of passivity and inaction which is to be negated by the active series of intrigues indulged in by the two princes, Musidorus and Pyrocles, who intrude themselves into Basilius's pastoral refuge. Sidney seeks to draw out contrasted themes of honour and deception, calmness of mind and discordant passion, cultivated courtesy and rough wooing, gentility and seduction, ordered ceremonial and violence. The first version of his story culminates in a trial for murder and in the meting out of a savage justice (though the situation is happily resolved by the reawakening of the supposedly poisoned king). In the revised text, where Sidney attempted to expunge the offences of seduction and attempted rape, the insertion of new

characters and of fresh adventures for existing ones serves to add to the multiple oppositions of behaviour and emotion. His narrative shape is as much clogged with moral reflection and circuitous demonstration as his longer sentences are loaded with simile, metaphor, and conceit. The second 'Book or Act' of the *Old Arcadia* opens, for example, with a description of the feverish disruption brought about by the 'poison' of love: 'In these pastoral pastimes a great number of days were sent to follow their flying predecessors, while the cup of poison, which was deeply tasted of all this noble company, had left no sinew of theirs without mortally searching into it; yet never manifesting his venomous work till once that, having drawn out the evening to his longest line, no sooner had the night given place to the breaking out of the morning's light and the sun bestowed his beams upon the tops of the mountains but that the woeful Gynecia (to whom rest was no ease) had left her loathed lodging and gotten herself into the solitary places those deserts were full of, going up and down with such unquiet motions as the grieved and hopeless mind is wont to bring forth.' The *Arcadia* resembles nothing so much as an elaborate Renaissance pleasure-garden, endlessly and symbolically varied with floral knots and mazes, lodges and bowers, topiary and trellis, the familiar and the rare. It serves as a vital key to the dense interweaving of novelty and tradition in English culture in the late sixteenth century, but the very intensity and scale of its artifice have tended to dispirit those modern readers predisposed to prefer the kinship of the wilder touches of nature to the arts of formal cultivation.

Sidney's *Arcadia* exhibits the sophistication to which much courtly Elizabethan prose fiction aspired. A very different display of narrative sophistication is, however, evident in George Gascoigne's *The Adventures of Master F.J.*, first published in Gascoigne's anthology of his own poetry, prose, and drama, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, in 1573. Gascoigne (*c.*1534–77) later relegated an emasculated revision of the story to the 'Weedes' section of his later collection *The Posies of George Gascoigne* (1575) where he was at pains to insist in his Preface that his fiction was purely imaginary and that 'there is no living creature touched or to be noted therby'. This Preface may well have been intended to add a new ironic dimension to an already complex narration and to place a fresh emphasis on a fictionality which had failed to impress some literal-minded readers. In the original version of *Master F.J.* Gascoigne comments generally on the amatory affectations of his time and he debunks the posturings of courtly love, but the very structure of his story indicates that he was also a careful craftsman. F.J.'s amorous adventures are recounted by two intermediary narrators, G.T. and his friend H.W. The often comic presentation of a triangle of lovers, subtly framed by H.W. and G.T., effectively counters G.T.'s self-deprecating protestation that he has merely presented his readers with a 'thriftless history'.

A triangular relationship, though a far less interesting one, also figures in John Lyly's *Euphues: The Triumph of Wyt* (1578). The thin plot of *Euphues* is more a vehicle for Lyly's elaborately poised style than an experiment in narrative

playfulness or an examination of manners and motives. Lyly (?1554–1606) was essentially more interested in the art of speaking than in the art of telling. His book and its sequel *Euphues and his England* (published in 1580 when the much admired *Euphues* was already in its fourth edition) provided a witty, courtly, rhetorical, and learned *divertissement* fit 'for all gentlemen to read, and most necessary to remember'. Lyly presents his readers with character types (Euphues—'well endowed with natural gifts' or 'witty'; Eubulus—'good counsellor'; Philautus—'selfish man') and moves his narrative forward, like a debate, by means of shapely oppositional discourses. If both books purport to preach the virtues of experience married to wit, they do so by exposing readers to moral and intellectual choice. Lyly's once celebrated sentences, principally shaped by balanced antitheses, insist on a reader's grasp of the effect of contrasted perceptions and of extremes. When, for example, Eubulus attempts to explain the dangers which threaten an inexperienced and 'high climbing' intelligence, he offers Euphues a string of examples: 'The fine crystal is sooner crazed than the hard marble, the greenest beech burneth faster than the driest oak, the fairest silk is soonest soiled, and the sweetest wine turneth to the sharpest vinegar. The pestilence doth most rifest infect the clearest complexion, and the caterpillar cleaveth unto the ripest fruit. The most delicate wit is allured with small enticement unto vice and most subject to yield unto vanity.' Although the structure of *Euphues and his England* is marginally less dependent on formal speechifying, it too attempts to elucidate the educational ideas contained in treatises such as Ascham's *The Scholemaster*. Like Ascham, Lyly flatters the learning of Queen Elizabeth and her chief courtiers and even allows the infatuated Euphues to write back to Naples, describing England as 'a place in my opinion (if any such may be in the earth) not inferior to a Paradise'. It is, however, a paradise peopled exclusively by gentlemen and ordered by the demands of gentlemanly behaviour.

The fiction of Thomas Nashe (1567–1601) tends to exhibit less confidence in the traditional standing, values, and authority of an aristocratic élite. Like Lyly, Nashe was fascinated by the potential of a learned, innovative, allusive, and polemical English prose; unlike him, he delighted in a precarious virtuosity and he plays with a style which experiments with the effects of lexical novelty, violence, and disconnection. He allows his various narrators to express themselves in styles appropriate both to their condition and to the often disorienting circumstances in which they find themselves. Even when Nashe purports to speak *in propria persona*, as he does in the burlesque encomium of herrings in *Nashes Lenten Stuffe* (1599), his style can veer towards the carnivalesque. When, for example, he glances at the instance of the English ambassador to the Ottoman Sultan ('the *Behemoth* of *Constantinople*') pleading for the release of certain captives, he refers his readers to documentary sources with a neologistic flourish: 'How impetrable [successful] hee was in mollyfying the adamantinest tiranny of mankinde, and hourely crucifier of *Jesus Christ* crucified, and wrooter up of *Pallestine*, those that be scrutinus to pry into, let

them resolve the *Digests* of our English discoveries cited up in the precedence, and be documentized most locupeatley [richly].' Alternatively, when he meditates on the sins of modern London in the extravagant tract *Christs Teares over Jerusalem* (1593), he attacks the 'gorgeous' ladies of the court by evoking horrors of the grave where funereal toads steal 'orient teeth' and engender their young in 'the jelly of . . . decayed eyes' while the hollow eye-sockets ('theyr transplendent juyce so pollutionately employd') are left to become houses for 'shelly snails'. Nashe's various and episodic fictional works have proved difficult to classify. Both *Pierce Pennilesse his Supplication to the Divell* (1592) and *The Unfortunate Traveller. Or The Life of Jacke Wilton* (1594) have been seen anachronistically as a species of 'journalism', as precursors of the picaresque novel, and as experiments in 'realism'. *Pierce Pennilesse*, the complaint of an impoverished professional writer in search of patronage, takes the form of a satirical diatribe against the 'lamentable condition of our times', times which oblige 'men of Arte' to 'seeke almes of Cormorantes'. Pierce desperately bemoans the decline of aristocratic patronage, but in addressing himself to gentlemen whose circumstances parallel his own he seems both to regret the advent of a market economy for literature and also to acquiesce to a necessary evil. Pierce emerges as an Elizabethan malcontent but not as a displaced Romantic outsider or as the self-proclaimed representative of an alienated intelligentsia; he supports the social system as it is, but regrets that it does not work more directly to his benefit. *The Unfortunate Traveller* (dedicated in its first edition to the Earl of Southampton) is equally sanguine in its view of the shortcomings of the ruling class. Jack Wilton's account of his adventures as 'a Gentleman at least . . . a certain kind of an appendix or page belonging or appertaining in or unto the confines of the English court' looks back to the reign of Henry VIII, 'the onely true subject of Chronicles', the patron of chivalry, and the promoter of military enterprise (most of it, we realize, vainglorious). A reader's view of manners and events is controlled by Jack's vigorous and various first-person narration and by his generally unflattering observation. It is not just *what* Jack sees, but *how* he sees. He sharply 'particularizes' the singularly inelegant performances of the noble jousters in Surrey's tournament at Florence; he voyeuristically watches a sordid rape 'thorough a crannie of my upper chamber unseeled', and he makes a point of exactly recording the revolting details of two executions at Rome after disarmingly proclaiming, 'Ile make short worke, for I am sure I have wearyed all my readers'.

Thomas Deloney's four short, best-selling novels, *Jack of Newberie*, the two parts of *The gentle craft*, and *Thomas of Reading*, were all published in the three closing years of the sixteenth century. Each is informed by the values of a hard-working and successful tradesman rather than by those of a gentleman and courtier. Deloney (?1560–1600), the author of ballads on, amongst other things, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, was able to adapt the simple directness of popular ballad narrative to shape what he described in the address to shoe-

makers prefaced to the first part of *The gentle craft* as 'a quaint and plain discourse . . . seeing we have no cause herein to talk of Courtiers or Scholars'. *Jack of Newberie* (or *Newbury*) is particularly forthright in its proclamation of the sturdy and independent virtues of a Berkshire clothier in the reign of 'that most noble and victorious prince', Henry VIII. Its hero, 'a poore Clothier, whose lands are his looms', ostentatiously shows off both his wealth and his loyalty to the throne by providing a troop of fifty mounted men clad in white coats and red caps for the royal campaign against Scotland, and he later proudly demonstrates to King Henry that he himself is a prince of ants intent on warding off the assaults of idle, gilded butterflies (doubtless a barbed reference to the gentlemen of the court). Having feasted his monarch and impressed him with a pageant performed by local children, Jack emphatically declines the offer of a knighthood by proclaiming that 'honour and worship may be compared to the lake of Lethe, which makes men forget themselves that taste thereof'. This forgetfulness seems to be the vice that separates the careers of the worthy Jack and the proud Cardinal Wolsey who accompanies the King; both are poor boys who have made good, but Jack alone emerges as the possessor of the qualities which make for true social worth. Deloney's clothiers, shoemakers, and merchants can in some ways be seen as the forerunners of the self-confident tradesmen and industrialists of Defoe, Holcroft, Disraeli, Gaskell, and Shaw; more significantly perhaps, none of them are pictured as social-revolutionaries or as a threat to the stratified class-system of Tudor England.

The fiction of Robert Greene (1558–92) was clearly calculated to appeal to a broad audience. Having begun his career with variations on the style, theme, and shape of Lyly's *Euphues* (such as *Mamillia* of 1583 and *Euphues his Censure to Philautus* of 1587), Greene experimented with romances which intermix Sidneian pastoral with Greek romance and proved to be a prolific writer of pamphlets concerned with low life and urban criminality (such as *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage* of 1592 and the three animated studies of 'cony-catching' of the same year). It was, however, with his pastoral romances, *Pandosto. The Triumph of Time* (1588) and *Menaphon* (1589), that he most influenced the developing art of story-telling in prose. Both stories successfully forge together elements of adventure, intrigue, disaster, disguise, malevolent fortune, and relatively happy resolution; both contrast the courtly and the bucolic and both make significant play with cross-class marriage. The popular appeal of Greene's abrupt changes of fortune, shifts of mood, and contrasts of tragic and comic elements in *Pandosto* proved sufficiently attractive to Shakespeare for him to take the plot as the basis of *The Winter's Tale* (*c.*1611). Where Shakespeare allows all to resolve itself happily, Greene kills off his first heroine (Bellaria) at the time of her trial and abruptly 'closes up' his comedy 'with a tragical stratagem'—the suicide of King Pandosto. For Greene, a story describing the irrational behaviour of an enraged king, the trial of a queen, and the pronouncement of her daughter's bastardy may well have contained too

many painful echoes of recent English history for every element in the plot to be blessedly transformed as destiny is fulfilled.

Shakespeare also used the finest of Thomas Lodge's stories, *Rosalynde, Euphues golden legacie*, as a quarry for his *As You Like It*. Lodge (1558–1625) pursued a various career as a sailor, physician, translator, critic, and playwright (he collaborated with Greene on the play *A Looking Glasse for London and England* in 1594), but it is as the author of the subtle, delicately observant, pastoral romance *Rosalynde* (1590) that he is best remembered (and not purely for the novel's Shakespearian ramifications). Lodge's other fiction, especially his forays into the historical (*Robert Second Duke of Normandie* of 1591) and the exotic (*A Margarite of America* of 1596), is untidy and restless; *Rosalynde* is by contrast both shapely and equable. As his full title implies, Lodge nods towards the example of Lyly and sprinkles the soliloquies, or 'meditations', of his characters with choice moral observation in the manner of the supposed author, Euphues. More effectively, Lodge also uses these meditations to explore his characters' feelings and motives and to externalize their inner debates. He varies his texture by including a series of songs, sonnets, and eclogues by means of which characters display both their passions and their technical skills. Rosalynde and her cousin Alinda, her admirer Rosader, and his once oppressive brother Saladyne retreat to an Arden which is already the refuge of the deposed King Gerismond. Arden is an untroubled Arcadia, peopled by poetic shepherds and unvexed by winter, rough weather, and man's ingratitude; its lawns are 'diapred with *Floras* riches' and its trees open to form an Amphitheatre 'interseamed with Limons and Citrons'. It is a garden in which the disguised Rosalynde comes to recognize 'that Peasaunts have theyr passions, as well as Princes, that Swaynes as they have their labours, so they have theyr amours, and Love lurkes assoone about a Sheepcoate as a Pallaice'. Lodge's forest lacks the innate contradictions and contradistinctions of Shakespeare's. Instead, it comes to represent an idealized refuge from the jealousies, the enmities, and the cruelties of the outside world. After a necessary period of withdrawal and realignment, it ultimately forms the base from which King Gerismond and his new knights, Rosader and Saladyne, launch their successful military campaign to restore the lost rights of the kingdom.

The intermixture of love and politics, chivalry and philosophy in Lodge's *Rosalynde* complements the more intricate investigation of those themes in Sidney's *Arcadia*. The powerful influence of Sidney's work can, however, be most directly felt in the moulding of the multiple interconnected narratives which make up Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countesse of Montgomeries Urania* (1621). Both the title and the opening line of *Urania* nod respectfully to its distinguished predecessor, and its decorative title-page was specifically designed to remind readers of a genteel derivation which was as much aristocratic as it was literary. The *Urania* is almost certainly the first work of fiction published by an English woman writer and its title-page emphatically lays out her respectable

credentials: 'written by the right honourable the Lady Mary Wroath. Daughter to the right Noble Robert Earle of Leicester. And Neere to the ever famous, and renowned Sir Philip Sidney knight. And to ye most exalt[ed] Lady Mary Countesse of Pembroke late deceased.' Mary Wroth (*c.* 1586–*post* 1640) adds a decidedly feminine perspective to the Sidneian base from which she worked. Although the *Urania* reveals a pleasure in the rituals of chivalry, in knightly quests, and in the refined pursuit of a love which is both earthly and heavenly, Wroth emerges as a master of character and discourse and as a determined champion of the dignity of her many women characters. Her fictional world may have struck contemporaries as containing a somewhat too exact and offensive transcription of the scandals, traits, shortcomings, and fads of the court of James I (Wroth was obliged to withdraw the book from sale soon after its publication), but to modern readers her interfusion of romance and realism suggests a questioning of the increasingly outmoded codes by which aristocratic society functioned. Wroth's accumulation of story upon story, narrative upon narrative, catalogues a pattern of unhappiness and unfulfilment: love sets traps for the unwary and the vulnerable (particularly women), mistresses are abandoned by bored questors, faithful lovers are spurned and wives oppressed by jealous husbands. In Book I Pamphilia complains that she has been 'tyrannically tortured by love': 'Had I wronged his name, scorned his power or his might, then I had been justly censured to punishment; but ill kings, the more they see obedience, tread the more upon their subjects—so doth this all-conquering king. O love, look on me, my heart is thy prey, my self thy slave. Then take some pity on me.' The *Urania* looks back to medieval romance and to the manner in which those romances were adapted by Elizabethan writers; it also looks forward, albeit stiffly, to the kind of fiction which has little room for conventional and idealized patterns of courtship and emotional fulfilment.

This Island and the Wider World: History, Chorography, and Geography

Although the English Reformation was an emphatic assertion of national independence and mature nationhood, its progress in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI had been marked by an officially sanctioned attack on what later centuries loosely interpreted as the 'national heritage'. The habits, rituals, ceremonies, and religious language of centuries were all subjected to a rigorous process of reform. Monastic foundations, and the pilgrimages to the shrines often associated with them, were suppressed, their buildings demolished or left to decay, and their libraries dispersed. Churches were 'purged' of much of their imagery and even of their secular memorials by the purposeful zeal of often ill-informed iconoclasts. The Church which had once been the chief patron of godliness and good learning and the keeper of a national historical memory found itself deprived of much of its wealth and of many of its traditional

educational resources. By the time the tides of destruction, expurgation, experiment, and Roman reaction were stemmed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth a new sense of national tradition had begun to emerge. It was a tradition informed by a generally Protestant and secular spirit, but it was one that inspired a generation of antiquaries to attempt to conserve the evidence of the past and to shape it into a coherent and avowedly propagandist picture of the history and development of the English nation. The antiquaries of the late sixteenth century found ready enough patrons in Matthew Parker (1504–75) and William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520–98), respectively Elizabeth's first Archbishop of Canterbury and the Queen's chief minister. Both were patrons well aware of the political convenience of historical arguments which stressed the continuing lines of development of Church and Nation alike. Both also recognized that a selective presentation of the materials of the Roman, British, Saxon, Norman, and Plantagenet history of the island could effectively prop up the unsteady Elizabethan religious and political compromise.

John Leland (*c.*1503–52), granted the grand title 'Antiquary Royal' by Henry VIII in 1533, was the founder of this new school of historical and topographical research. Between 1536 and 1542 Leland travelled the length and breadth of England and Wales in an attempt to gather information from the rapidly disappearing records hitherto preserved in monastic libraries. Not only did he avidly snap up what were all too often unconsidered trifles, he also proudly claimed to have visited almost every bay, river, lake, mountain, valley, moor, heath, wood, city, castle, manor-house, monastery, and college in the kingdom. His learning was prodigious, his experience unsurpassed, his notes voluminous, but his projected 'History and Antiquities of this Nation' remained unwritten. Unhinged either by the scope of his 'History' or by the continued threat to the records on which it was to be based, Leland was declared insane in 1550. His surviving manuscript accounts of his journeys and researches, however, proved an invaluable source from which his Elizabethan disciples drew both inspiration and data. They were eventually published in nine volumes as *The Itinerary of John Leland* between 1710 and 1712.

Chief amongst Leland's disciples were the pioneer antiquaries John Stow (1525–1605) and William Camden (1551–1623). Camden followed his master's example and 'perambulated' the island of Britain; Stow, a tailor by profession, concentrated on the single city of whose history and traditions he was inordinately proud, his native London. Stow's *A Survay of London. Conteyning the Originall, Antiquity, Increase, Moderne estate and description of that City* first appeared in 1598 and was reissued in an expanded form in 1603. Its first edition opens with an insistent affirmation of London's honourable antiquity: 'As Rome, the chiefe citie of the world, to glorifie it selfe, drew her originall from the gods, goddesses, and demy gods, by the Trojan progeny, so this famous citie of London for greater glorie, and in emulation of Rome, deriveth itselfe from the very same originall.' For Stow, London's real distinction lay in its actual rather than its legendary history. His account of how the modern city had come into

being was based both on a systematic study of written public records and on his own and other people's memories of how things were. He remembers that in his youth 'devout people, as well men as women of this citie' would walk out to give alms to the 'poore bed-rid people' who occupied cottages at Houndsditch, but he adds that the area is now the property of Magdalene College in Cambridge and that the cottages and the charity are gone for ever. When he records details of the 520-foot high steeple of St Paul's Cathedral which was destroyed by lightning in 1561, he intrudes an abruptly inconclusive sentence concerning the failure of the City and its Bishop to rebuild the once famous spire: 'divers models were devysed and made, but little else was done, through whose default, God knoweth; it was said that the money appointed for the new building of the steeple was collected and brought to the hands of Edmond Grendall, then Bishop of London.' This innuendo (dropped in the 1603 edition) is probably an attempt to settle a score with the intolerantly Puritanical Bishop Grindal who in 1569 had sent his chaplain to snoop into Stow's library of 'unlawful . . . old fantastical popish books printed in the old time'. As Stow's *Survay* consistently suggests, however, although historians may discover no pressing reasons to forgive, they have a profound obligation not to forget.

William Camden's great Latin history of Britain and Ireland, *Britannia sive . . . Angliae, Scotiae, Hiberniae . . . ex antiquitate . . . descriptio* (first published in 1587, and amplified in its sixth edition of 1607), is considerably more ambitious in scope than Stow's *Survay*. Camden's aim was both to provide a scholarly 'chorography' (a historical delineation which combined aspects of geography, topography, and archaeology) of the entire British Isles and also to present a case for the distinctive nature of Britain to a European audience (hence his choice of Latin as a medium). Throughout the *Britannia*, Camden argues for the continuity of British traditions while reminding his readers of the European dimension within which British history might be properly studied. He sees both the lineal descent of the English monarchy and the apostolic descent of the English Church as central to his thesis that the island's institutions had developed consistently, organically, and independently since pre-Roman times. The argument was supplemented and reiterated in Camden's chronicle of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the *Annales Rerum Anglicarum et Hibernicarum regnante Elizabetha* (1615, 1625) and in his delightfully miscellaneous English supplement to the *Britannia*, the frequently reprinted *Remaines of a greater worke concerning Britaine* (1605). The concerns of the *Remaines* range from studies of the origins and development of the English language, through the derivations of names and surnames and the histories of clothes and coins, to examples of rhetorical and proverbial wisdom. Britain, he tells his readers at the outset, is 'the most flourishing and excellent, most renowned and famous isle of the whole world'; it takes 'honour and precedence' over other realms because its 'true Christian religion' was first planted by Joseph of Arimathea, Simon Zelotes, and even (he allows) by the Apostles Peter and Paul. Its ancient line of kings held their throne from God alone, 'acknowledging no superiors, in

no vassalage to emperour or Pope'. Camden's Elizabeth is described as living up both to her Hebrew name as a fosterer of the 'Peace of the Lord' and to her personal motto, *semper eadem* ('always the same'). In his section on anagrams he is even prepared to assert the justice of the rearrangement of the letters of King James's full name (Charles James Stuart) into the patriotic phrase 'Claims Arthurs seat'.

A similar patriotic assurance informs the two volumes of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577, reissued and posthumously expanded in three volumes, 1586–7). Holinshed (d.?1580) was often a plagiarist and 'his' text, in its expanded form, is semi-original material enhanced by a series of borrowings from earlier historians and contributions from contemporaries. Despite this multiple authorship and the enforced deletion of certain passages which offended Queen Elizabeth's censors, the *Chronicles* possessed sufficient authority and consistent narrative vigour to attract the attention of most of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists who adapted incidents from national history for the stage. 'Holinshed' became an especially important quarry for Shakespeare who drew on it for his two Plantagenet tetralogies as well as for *King John*, *Henry VIII*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Cymbeline*. Though Shakespeare substantially altered the story of Lear's misfortunes to suit his particular tragic predilection (in Holinshed's account the King both retains his sanity and regains his throne), in his English history plays he tended to remain faithful to his source as a record of received opinions of character, motive, and political consequence. The King John of the *Chronicles* is the victim of 'the pride and pretended authoritie of the cleargie', and the 'greatlie unfortunate' Richard II is a man 'rather coveting to live in pleasure, than to deale with much businesse, and the weightie affaires of the realme' (though Shakespeare chose to ignore the claim that 'there reigned abundantlie the filthie sinne of leacherie and fornication, with abhominable adulterie, speciallie in the king'). Holinshed's Henry V is a paragon ('a capteine against whom fortune never frowned, nor mischance once spurned . . . his vertues notable, his qualities most praiseworthie'), while his Richard III is a shifty basilisk ('When he stood musing, he would bite and chaw busilie his nether lip . . . the dagger which he ware, he would (when he studied) with his hands plucke up & downe in the sheath to the midst, never drawing it fullie out . . . he was of a readie, pregnant, and quicke wit, wilie to feine, and apt to dissemble'). Despite the aberrant behaviour, the deficient morality, and the frequent sins of usurpation which stain the careers of certain kings, the line of monarchs which marches through the pages of the *Chronicles* effectively stretches out to the crack of doom. England and Scotland are seen as sharing a common history of royal government and destiny, if not as yet a common dynasty. Holinshed's volumes view history from a narrowly monarchic perspective, but if on one level they see the weight of national history and royal tradition as justifying the new emphases of Tudor and Stuart policy, on another they treat the past as a series of dramatic, occasionally tragic, occasionally bathetic, conflicts between personalities.

Patriotic and propagandist zeal was not the exclusive preserve of antiquarians who saw the present as an organic development of patterns implicit in the national past. An emphasis on divine providence, on the providential movement of history, and on the special destinies of Britain also marks the accounts of the often unlearned men engaged in expanding the frontiers of British influence in the world beyond Western Europe. Richard Hakluyt's enterprise in collecting the testimonies and celebrating the exploits of contemporary sailors, traders, adventurers, and explorers in his *Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589) enabled both relatively commonplace and quite extraordinary men to speak out plainly and proudly. Hakluyt (1552–1616) expanded his collection into a three-volume work in 1598–1600 (adding the mercantile word 'Traffiques' to his title). It was further supplemented in 1625 by Samuel Purchas's *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes, contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Land Travell by Englishmen and others*, a work partly based on data acquired but left unpublished by his predecessor. Samuel Purchas (?1557–1626), a London parish priest, chose his title carefully. His heroes, like Hakluyt's, are pilgrims seeking future promises rather than historic shrines. Their secular quests are both blessed and inspired by God. The voyages described by Hakluyt's and Purchas's explorers are beset by storms, fevers, famines, and enemies to the body and the soul; they are rewarded, as the overall editorial structure implies, by the knowledge that something momentous has been achieved for the good of God's Englishmen. Sailors are enslaved by Pagans and Christians alike and they are menaced both by the determined natives whose cultures they threaten and by the Spanish Inquisition ('that rakehell order') whose principles they defy. English travellers are variously fascinated by the sumptuous entertainment at the Czar's table on Christmas Day ('they were served in vessels of gold, and that as much as could stand one by another upon the tables'), by the Emperor Akbar's ménage ('The King hath in Agra and Fatehpur as they do credibly report 1000 elephants, thirtie thousand horses, 1400 tame deer, 800 concubines; such store of ounces, tigers, buffaloes, cocks and hawks that is very strange to see'), and by the 'great reverence' accorded to the King of Benin ('it is such that if we would give as much to Our Saviour Christ we should remove from our heads many plagues which we daily deserve for our contempt and impiety'). Openings for trade are paramount in the Old World; seizures of Spanish Gold, Anglican missionizing, and advantageous English settlement in the New. Hakluyt's and Purchas's economic pilgrims stumble upon the exotic and the wondrous and they react either with amazement or with an insular intolerance of cultural otherness, struggling to articulate the import of their epiphanies.

Perhaps the most sophisticated of Hakluyt's narrators was Sir Walter Ralegh (?1554–1618). Ralegh, one of Queen Elizabeth's most gifted and arrogantly assertive courtiers, remained preoccupied with the idea of an English settlement in Guiana to the unhappy end of his career (indeed, his unsubstantiated

insistence on the wonders of this Eldorado contributed to the charges of treason brought against him by the intransigent and pro-Spanish James I). In his *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* (published by Hakluyt) Ralegh stresses that he had come to a paradisal land as its liberator. He tells the Indian chiefs that he represents something finer than their Spanish oppressors: 'I made them understand that I was the servant of a Queen who was the great *cacique* [chieftain] of the north, and a virgin, and had more *caciqui* under her than there were trees in that island; that she was an enemy to the *Castellani* [Spaniards] in respect of their tyranny and oppression, and that she delivered all such nations about her, as were by them oppressed, and having freed all the coast of the northern world from their servitude, had sent me to free them also, and withal to defend the country of Guiana from their invasion and conquest.' Ralegh was a passionate and arrogant Elizabethan but a less than sympathetic subject of her Stuart successor. He continued to promote, with equal fervency, the virtues of his Virgin Queen and the divinely inspired civilizing mission of the English nation.

In Ralegh's first published prose work, *A Report of the Truth of the Fight About the Isles of the Azores . . . Betwixt the Revenge . . . and an Armada of the King of Spain* (1591), even the gallantly foolish Sir Richard Grenville's crushing defeat in a naval skirmish with Spanish forces could be safely interpreted as a victory for the undying English spirit. His ambitious *The History of the World* (1614), written during the long period of his imprisonment in the Tower as a convicted traitor, is, by contrast, an extended elegiac reflection on disappointment and defeat. The body of the *History* deals with the negatives of the rise and fall of the empires of the ancient world but in the Preface Ralegh meditates both on English politics and on human mutability, the 'tide of man's life' which 'after it turneth and declineth, ever runneth, with a perpetuall ebbe and falling streame, but never floweth againe'. 'Who hath not observed', he asks with some bitterness, 'what labour, practice, peril, bloodshed, and crueltie, the Kings and Princes of the world have undergone, exercised, taken on them, and committed.' It was a question prompted both by the wealth of the historical justification at hand and, it would seem likely, by his own King's vindictiveness (James later condemned the *History* as 'too saucy in censuring princes'). In his *History*, as much as in his poem 'What is our life', Ralegh has recourse to theatrical metaphors ('We are all . . . Comedians in religion', 'God, who is the Author of all our tragedies, hath written out for us, and appointed us all the parts we are to play'). Life, seen in a vast historical context or perilously played out as a versifying courtier, a navigator, and an adventurer, revealed manifold changes of scene. In its last act it also had a tragic earnestness imposed by the inevitability of death.

Ralegh, Spenser, and the Cult of Elizabeth

The forty-odd lyric poems attributed to Ralegh often suggest a man self-consciously playing out a role, or, more precisely, a series of roles as the formal knightly lover, as the courtly poet, or as the bold actor in a drama of passion, adventure, and mortality. Many of the fragmentary translations from classical writers included in *The History of the World*, as well as the later meditations on impending death ('What is our Life?', 'Even such is Time', and the couplet 'On the snuff of a candle, the night before he died'), reinforce the idea of a latter-day stoic whose morale is buttressed by his learning and by the hope of a Christian resurrection. In the case of the haunting pilgrim lyric, 'Give me my scallop shell of quiet' (first published in 1604), he both imagines a heavenly transformation of the earthly body and sports the playfully striking metaphors ('. . . then to tast those nectar suckets | At the cleare wells | Where sweetenes dwells. | Drawne up by saints in Christall buckets'). In his ostensibly amorous verse Ralegh revised Petrarchan conventions by the beams of a distinctly Elizabethan moon. Diana's 'faire and harmles light' is praised by association with the Virgin Queen, a Queen whose majesty was evident in the sway she exercised over dedicated nymphs and knights and whose eternal beauty remained unwithered by sublunary changes. For Ralegh at his most blandiloquent the Queen, rather than any mere beloved, is the woman set apart, the inaccessible ideal, the paragon untouched by human mortality, and the mistress who commands love and service. Elizabeth is the 'dear empresse of my heart' and 'a saint of such perfection', but she is also the absent, distant, and chaste lover of Ralegh's adaptation of the ballad 'As You Came from the Holy Land of Walsinghame'. The poem, shaped as a dialogue between a despairing lover and a pilgrim returning from the Marian shrine at Walsingham, links Elizabeth both to the Virgin Queen of Heaven (whose cult had been so diminished in Protestant England) and to a now distant but eternally youthful and queenly 'nymph' who 'sometymes did me lead with her selfe, | And me lovde as her owne'.

Although Ralegh's powerful lyric 'The Lie' erupts with bitterness against a court which glows and shines 'like rotten wood', the body of his poetry is overtly supportive of the Queen-centred courtly culture which Elizabeth's propagandists presented as an ideal. According to the devout fancies of her semi-official panegyrists, the Queen ruled a court which embodied the idea of unchanging perfection. Her person was to be compared to that of the chaste moon-goddesses Diana and Cynthia and her reign likened to the promised return of heavenly justice and peace under the virgin Astraea (who had been translated skywards as the constellation Virgo at the close of the Golden Age). Less paganly, the fact that Elizabeth's birthday fell on the Christian feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was regarded as a sign of her partaking both of the grace and of the honour accorded to the second Eve. The threat of

political weakness implicit in the rule of a woman who had been declared illegitimate by her father's Parliament, and who had been formally excommunicated by the Pope in 1570, was countered by an orchestrated revival of the pomps and principles of medieval chivalry and by annual Accession Day jousts in celebration of Elizabeth as the queen of romance and the fount of honour. Even the inevitable process of human ageing was ignored not simply by poets who professed to see an eternally youthful nymph, but by a royal Council that in 1563 drafted a proclamation forbidding further portraits of the monarch until an approved pattern of representation had been evolved. That pattern was to exhibit the splendour of the Virgin Queen in a series of hieratic painted images showing a sumptuous but depersonalized figure triumphing as a jewel-encrusted imperial artefact.

Elizabeth fashioned herself in her chosen roles as brilliantly and as self-consciously as her faithful courtier Ralegh acted out his. As an astute, wary, and wily Renaissance politician she readily recognized the intermediary influence of secular icons. She accepted the flattering addresses of courtly poets and ideologically approved painters as assiduously as she submitted herself to the equally flattering arts of her maids of honour, her cosmeticians, her wig-makers, and her dress-designers. She showed herself to her people ostentatiously and theatrically and, when occasion demanded, she was a master of emphatic assertions of royal dignity, velvet-gloved menaces, golden promises, and fine words. When, for example, in 1563 uncertainties about the succession to the throne troubled Parliament, she maternally assured members that 'though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have a more natural mother than I mean to be unto you all'. The Queen, who liked to dwell on the convenient idea that she was 'married' to England, proclaimed to the Commons towards the end of her reign that 'there will never Queen sit in my seat with more zeal to my country, care to my subjects, and that will sooner with willingness yield and venture her life for your good and safety than myself. And though you have had and may have many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had or shall have any that will be more careful and loving'. Perhaps her supreme moment of calculated theatrical bravura was her appropriately costumed address to her troops at Tilbury in 1588 as the Spanish Armada threatened the shores of her kingdom. Elizabeth appeared on horseback armed in a steel breastplate and attended by a page bearing a white-plumed helmet. As she announced in her speech, though she knew she had 'the body but of a weak and feeble Woman', she had 'the heart and stomach of a King, and of a King of England too, and I think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any Prince of Europe should dare invade the Borders of my Realm'.

The image of the eloquent and armour-plated Elizabeth of 1588 may well have contributed to the most conspicuous of many tributes to the Queen in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, that of the figure of the warrior virgin, Britomart. Although Spenser (*c.* 1552–99) had modelled Britomart on a parallel figure in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and had adapted her name from that of a

character in a poem by Virgil, he was also anxious to suggest to his readers that here was a truly British heroine who had actively assumed the port of Mars. Elizabeth is effectively present in each of the six massive books of *The Faerie Queene*. She is the 'Magnificent Empresse' to whom the poem is dedicated (or, rather, 'consecrated'); she is Gloriana, 'that greatest Glorious Quene of *Faerie* lond', who is the fount of chivalry, the 'flowre of grace and chastitie', and the ultimate focus of each of the knightly quests that Spenser sets out to describe; she is the chaste Belphoebe who puts Braggadocchio to flight in Book II and who rescues Amoret from Corflambo in Book IV; above all, her qualities are to be recognized as informing and inspiring the complex expositions of 'morall vertue' pursued as the poem develops towards its intended (but unrealized) climax. In the first three books, published in 1590 (the thirty-first year of the Queen's reign), her dual dignity as Head of State and as Supreme Governor of the Church of England is honoured in allegorical explorations of Holiness, Temperance, and Chastity. The second three books, published in 1596, treat the virtues of Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy, while the incomplete seventh book (represented only by the two so-called 'Mutabilitie Cantos') would have dealt with Constancy, probably as a reflection on the Queen's personal motto, *semper eadem*.

Spenser's grand original scheme for a vast poem in twelve books, each of which was to describe the 'severall adventures' undertaken by knights and knightly dames in honour of the twelve days of Gloriana's annual feast, had been outlined in a letter of January 1589 addressed to Ralegh and published as a Preface to the poem. Gloriana was to be identified with 'the most excellent and glorious person of our sovereine', and the living Queen's virtues were also to be 'shadowed' in the thoughts, words, and deeds of the imagined heroes and heroines who sought the faerie court. Spenser stressed to Ralegh that his poem stood in the epic tradition forged anciently by Homer and Virgil and latterly in Italy by Ariosto and Tasso. Like Virgil, the martial opening lines of whose *Aeneid* were echoed in his own first canto, Spenser was determined to suggest that a modern political settlement was to be seen as legitimized by reference to the mythical 'Trojan' past. His Britomart is descended from 'noble *Britons* sprong from *Trojans* bold' and in canto x of Book II his Sir Guyon discovers volumes concerned with the '*Antiquitie* of *Faerie* lond' and is enthralled by the long account of the historical derivation of Gloriana's royal title from her ancestor, Brutus. Guyon, 'quite ravisht with delight', ends his study by exclaiming with patriotic fervour, 'Deare countrey, o how dearely deare | Ought thy remembraunce, and perpetuall band | Be to thy foster Childe'. As was anciently true of the *Aeneid*, Spenser implies that his own poem should be open to interpretation according to a prevalent ideology. Aeneas, the 'goode governour and a vertuous man', had been identified with Augustus; so Elizabeth could be recognized as a Faerie Queene, as a succession of faerie knights and as the descendant of the peripatetic hero whose adventures run like a thread through the various narratives, the 'magnificent' Arthur.

More pervasive than Spenser's debt of honour to Virgil is the influence on *The Faerie Queene* of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (finished 1532 and impressively translated into English by Sir John Harington in 1591) and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1580, 1581; partially translated into English by Richard Carew in 1594). Spenser imitated phrases, verbal patterns, and knightly images from both texts (which he knew in Italian), and he directly borrowed characters, encounters, and incidents, absorptions which would have been taken as laudable examples of intertextuality by a Renaissance audience. Ariosto's and Tasso's lengthy, digressive poems are belated monuments to the revival, or possibly the reinvention of chivalry in Italy. The subjects of both poets stem from a deep fascination at the court of the d'Este family in Ferrara with the north-European Arthurian romance tradition and with the related codes of knightly behaviour. Spenser may have dispensed with Ariosto's specific references to Charlemagne's campaigns against the Saracens and with the setting of Tasso's epic at the time of the First Crusade, but, despite the deliberate vagueness of time and place in his own poem, he was to prove himself equally responsive to the themes, codes, and landscapes of medieval chivalric romance.

Though Spenser looked back on the past from an essentially Renaissance perspective, and with modern Italian models in mind, his allegory and his language suggest a more immediate response to native literary traditions. As with the dense literary allegories of the English Middle Ages, the 'darke conceit' of Spenser's poem requires that its readers be alert to distinct levels of meaning and interpretation, to extended metaphors, to relatively simple comparisons, and to sophisticated rhetorical parallels. A reading of *The Faerie Queene* demands a response both to a literal meaning and to a series of allegorical constructions (historical, moral, mystical, socio-political). Much as his characters face moral choices and dilemmas, so Spenser's readers need both to deconstruct his metaphors and to discriminate between a variety of possible 'meanings'. It is vital to the adventure of reading the poem that its audience should participate in the process of evaluation by throwing a various light on the darkness of the conceit.

Spenser's acknowledgements of a Chaucerian precedent (he not only derives his description of the forest trees in Book I from a passage in the *Parlement of Foules*, but also makes direct reference to the poem in the third canto of Book VI) suggest that he was fully aware of the methods employed by a major medieval allegorist. The Chaucer who is so appreciatively cited as the 'well of English undefyled' and as the 'pure well head of Poesie' was also a major influence on Spenser's style. Although he was acutely aware of the changes in English since the fifteenth century, Spenser's own poetic language was neither a close imitation of the old, nor an assertively modern one. It was an artificial language which served to draw attention to the very artifice of his poem. It recalled the romance through its often archaic terminology, its heraldic adjectives, and its stock comparisons, but it also served to alert readers to the

anti-naturalistic tenor of the narratives. When he describes Chaucer's English as 'undefyled' Spenser is also hinting at the nature of his own elevated and formal expression, one which eschews glossy modern neologisms as much as it veers away from the colloquial and the quotidian. The imagined world of Spenser's poem is at once an unlocated never-never land ravaged by beasts and giants and a land of lost content, but his language seeks to affirm a historic sturdiness and a tradition of solid specification. The very stateliness of his lament for the decline of chivalric virtue in the first canto of Book III, though closely modelled on a stanza of Ariosto's, completely lacks the ironic twist of the original:

> O goodly usage of those antique times,
> In which the sword was servant unto right;
> When not for malice and contentious crimes,
> But all for praise, and proofe of manly might,
> The martiall brood accustomed to fight:
> Then honour was the meed of victorie,
> And yet the vanquished had no despight:
> Let later age that noble use envie,
> Vile rancour to avoid, and cruell surquedrie [pride or arrogance].

Spenser's English style, for all its historicizing and its artificiality, was to exert a profound influence on those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets who sought either to escape from the Latinate conventions and circumlocutions recommended by neo-classical critics or to test their own technical skills against those of an admired master of stanza form and of a distinct 'poetic' language.

The imaginative pictorialism of *The Faerie Queene* also held a special appeal for those who looked back at it through lenses ground by Romantic, Pre-Raphaelite, and neo-Gothic prejudices. All proleptic and anachronistic perspectives have tended to distort the fact that *The Faerie Queene* is emphatically the work of an artist of the international Renaissance. Spenser's epic syncretically blends and antithetically opposes aspects of the old and the new, the Pagan and the Christian, the revived Roman and the residual Gothic, the pastoral and the courtly. Like the allegorical paintings of Mantegna or Botticelli, or the Titian *poesie* produced for the d'Estes and for Philip II of Spain, Spenser's poem incorporates elements of classical philosophy and biblical lore, radical theological redefinition and obstinately conservative mythopoeia, playful frivolity and ponderously learned reference. Like the great Elizabethan country houses built for show by pushily ambitious English noble families in the closing decades of the sixteenth century (for example, Longleat 1568–80, Wollaton 1580–8, and Hardwick 1590–7), *The Faerie Queene* elaborates the setting of courtly ceremonial and lordly entertainment within the context of architectural regularity, ordered display, and shapely structural cross-reference. It is likely that when Spenser foregrounded accounts of buildings,

gardens, and pageants in his narrative he intended them to be seen as reflections of Renaissance pictorial and architectural display. His architecture and his horticulture are presented precisely and symbolically while his untamed forests, his thickets, plains, and pastures remain vague (if no less symbolic). Acrasia's Bower of Blisse in Book II, for example, is 'a place pickt out by choice of best alive, | That natures worke by art can imitate'; it has a gate that is 'a worke of admirable wit' and a porch fashioned 'with rare device'. The house of Busyrane in canto xi of Book III is hung with 'goodly arras of great majesty', tapestries 'woven with gold and silke' which graphically represent the 'lusty-hed' of the gods. The Temple of Venus, described by Scudamour in canto x of Book IV, is squarely

> . . . seated in an Island strong,
> Abounding all with delices most rare,
> And wall'd by nature gainst invaders wrong,
> That none might have accesse, nor inward fare,
> But by one way, that passage did prepare.
> It was a bridge ybuilt in goodly wize,
> With curious Corbes [corbels] and pendants graven faire,
> And arched all with porches, did arize
> On stately pillours, fram'd after Doric guize.

Where Spenser's landscapes tend to be generalized, his buildings are solid and spatially imagined and his formal gardens are ordered and ornamentally planted. Each is the occasion of a knightly sojourn, temptation, distraction, or recuperation, but each also helps to stabilize the foundations from which the poem's allegory rises.

Nevertheless, to represent Spenser exclusively as a poet of order, solidity, and stasis is to misconstrue him. Where, on the one hand, he idealized the principles of royal government, gentle blood, and the 'great difference | Betweene the vulgar and the noble seed' (Book II, canto iv), on the other he sees his own political present as marked by signs of decay. The modern world has in Book V run 'quite out of square, | From the first point of his appointed sourse, | And being once amisse growe[s] daily wourse and wourse'. There is a real distinction between the confident optimism of the first three books and the increasing sense of things falling apart in the second three. At the end of Book VI, for example, the rampaging Blatant Beast, who has defamed men with his 'vile tongue' and 'many causelesse caused to be blamed', is temporarily tamed by Sir Calidore. In the closing stanzas, however, the Beast breaks free again and threatens in the present tense as he grows 'so great and strong of late, | Barking and biting all that him doe bate, | Albe they worthy blame, or cleare of crime'. Although the Blatant Beast may be only the embodied spirit of slander, he threatens the untarnished ideals of Gloriana's court as much as the wiles of Duessa, Archimago, or Acrasia have done. Moreover, in the 'Mutabilitie Cantos' the timelessness of Gloriana's rule, and even her seemingly ageless beauty, are challenged by the force of inexorable change.

Neither history nor the image of the perfected earthly kingdom presented in the poem can be held in permanent fixity. In a sense, the contradictions within the allegorical and lexical structure of *The Faerie Queene* seem ultimately to claim an equal status with the poem's representations of harmony and its shadowings of perfection. Some commentators have sought an explanation of this troubling awareness of corruption in Spenser's growing disquiet with the state of Ireland (he had acted as secretary to the Lord Deputy and as one of the 'undertakers' for the English settlement of Munster but he was abruptly driven out in 1598 by the sacking of his country house during the rebellion of the O'Neills). If his *View of the Present State of Ireland* (published posthumously in 1633) proclaims the superiority of modern English government, society, and enterprise over the older patterns of Irish clan loyalty, it also suggests an imperial incomprehension of otherness typical enough of the 'civilized' European colonizer of his time (for W. B. Yeats, writing in 1902, Spenser 'never pictured the true countenance of Irish scenery . . . nor did he ever understand the people he lived among or the historical events that were changing all things about him'). Unsubdued, feudal, rebellious Ireland may well have presented a challenge to any extended idealization of the moral virtues of an imagined chivalric past, but it is also possible that the root of Spenser's disquiet lay in England in the court of the ageing Elizabeth. In *Prosopopoia, or Mother Hubberds Tale*, a couplet satire in the Chaucerian manner, probably written in the late 1570s, he had expressed an old-fashioned distaste for the 'newfangleness', the affectation, and the 'inconstant mutabilitie' of court manners. After the successful publication of the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*, however, Spenser had revisited London under the friendly patronage of Ralegh. His reaction to his visit is most clearly indicated in the allegorical pastoral he wrote when he returned to Ireland, *Colin Clouts come home again* (1595). Although the poetic swain, Colin, adulates the 'presence faultlesse' of the great 'shepheardesse, that *Cynthia* hight' (yet another virginal stand-in for the Queen) and although he admires Cynthia's beauty, power, mercy, and divinity, when he is asked why he has abandoned the court of this paragon he is forced to admit that he has witnessed 'enormities' during his stay:

> Where each one seeks with malice and with strife,
> To thrust downe other into foule disgrace,
> Himselfe to raise: and he doth soonest rise
> That best can handle his deceitfull wit,
> In subtil shifts, and finest sleights devise,
> Either by slaundring his well deemed name,
> Through leasings lewd, and fained forgerie.

This is the culture of the Blatant Beast rather than of Arthurian gentility and under its dire influence even the chastely wise Cynthia seems to falter and lapse into misjudgement.

Late Sixteenth-Century Verse

Some readers, predisposed by a post-Romantic preference for lyric poetry, have tended to regard the epic ambitions of *The Faerie Queene* as something of a distraction from the miscellaneous body of verse that Spenser might have written if he had so chosen. As the thirty-third sonnet of the *Amoretti* (printed 1595) suggests, however, Spenser himself thought the reverse. 'Great wrong I doe, I can it not deny | To that most sacred Empresse my dear dred', he announces by way of apology to his Queen rather than to his Muse, for 'not finishing her Queene of faery'. Both the love-affair that occasioned the sonnets, and the writing of the poems themselves, are later referred to in sonnet 80 as a 'pleasant . . . sport' and as an opportunity to take 'new breath' before returning to a higher vocation. If, as is probable, he began work on his epic in *c.* 1579, most of his poetry in other forms seems to have struck Spenser as an intrusion between his grand idea and the proper fulfilment of his project. His earlier work, most notably the twelve eclogues which make up *The Shepheardes Calender* (published in 1579), reveals a poet experimenting with Virgilian pastoral conventions and with a variety of metrical forms, subjects, and voices (ten of the poems are presented as dialogues). It was, however, with the eighty-nine *Amoretti* and the marriage hymn *Epithalamion* which was printed with them that Spenser's lyrical distinction became most evident. The sonnets substantially readjust the Petrarchan model by seeing the mistress not as an unattainable image of perfection, but as a creature reflecting, and sometimes clouding, the glory of her Divine Creator. The sonnets chart the passage of time from the spring of one year to the Lent and Easter of the next (sonnet 68 opens with a direct address to the risen Christ and ends with a pious reminder to the beloved that 'love is the lesson which the Lord us taught'). In some senses *Epithalamion* can be seen as the climactic celebration of the courtship pursued in the sonnets. With its echoes of the Song of Solomon ('Wake, now my love, awake; for it is time') and of the Psalms ('Open the temple gates unto my love') the poem re-enacts the ceremonial and festivities of a marriage, albeit a Christian celebration shot through with pagan reference. Its twenty-four 18-line stanzas, each of which closes with a variation on the same refrain, trace the progress of the bridal couple from a summer dawn to a consummation at nightfall. It delights both in excess (the wine at the banquet is sprinkled on the walls 'that they may sweat, and drunken be withall') and in a counterbalancing decorum (the marriage-bed, from which Puck and 'other evill sprights' are conjured to depart, is chastely illuminated by the moon-goddess, Cynthia, and blessed by Juno, the heavenly patron of 'the laws of wedlock'). Spenser's other nuptial ode, *Prothalamion* (1596), written in honour of the marriage of the two daughters of the Earl of Worcester, is both more formal and more public in tone. It commemorates the journey of the noble brides along a nymph-lined rural Thames to 'merry London', but, on observing certain of the sights of the capital, it also sees fit to introduce a personal complaint about 'old woes' and to nod obsequiously to the Earl of Essex (probably in the hope of redress).

The range of Spenser's poetic achievement is in some important ways representative of the larger ambitions of late sixteenth-century poets and of a general determination not to confine experiment in English verse to one form or type. Although the poetry of the last decades of the century is often marked by an assertive nationalism and by a concern to establish a sophisticated philosophical and political discourse in English, it has more often been seen as notable for the smaller-scale triumphs of a strong, post-Sidneian, lyric impulse. 'Let others sing of Knights and Palladines, | In aged accents and untimely words', Samuel Daniel remarked with obvious reference to *The Faerie Queene* in the forty-sixth sonnet of his *Delia*, 'But I must sing of thee and those faire eyes'. For Daniel (1563–1619) the English model to follow was Sidney, not Spenser. Some twenty-eight of the *Delia* sonnets had originally been published in 1591 as a supplement to an edition of *Astrophil and Stella*. When the fifty sonnets appeared in a separate volume a year later they bore a dedicatory epistle to Mary Sidney which also expressed high-flown admiration for Sir Philip's example. But despite the Sidneian precedent and Daniel's clear debts to Petrarch and to recent Italian and French sonneteers, what most characterizes his poems is an intense delight in the potential richness of English rhythms and the echoing of English speech in English verse (he published *A Defence of Ryme* in 1603 partly as an attempt to refute the 'tyrannicall Rules of idle Rhetorique' which recommended unrhymed verse in the classical manner). In his sonnets he repeats words and, on occasion, re-employs the last line of one poem as the first of another as a means of squeezing meaning, or alternative meanings, from them. Daniel also makes play with inventive verbal and intellectual conceits. 'Swift speedy Time', in sonnet 31, is 'feathred with flying howers [hours]'; winter 'snowes upon thy golden heares [hairs]' in sonnet 33 and sonnet 45 opens with an address to 'Care-charmer sleepe, sonne of the Sable night, | Brother to death, in silent darknes borne'. In several of the most striking sonnets he also recasts situations from classical legend as modern instances: Pygmalion carved 'his proper griefe upon a stone', but the modern poet has to work with Delia's flint (sonnet 13); Delia's self-centredness is exemplified with reference to the fates of Narcissus and Hyacinth (29); the poet is a floundering Leander begging Hero for rescue from the waves (38) and in sonnet 39 his face, 'a volume of despayres', is compared to 'the wayling Iliades of my tragicke wo'. In sonnet 43, Daniel attempts to detach himself from a myopic preoccupation with his frustrated love by patriotically turning his thoughts to the island that bore his mistress. 'Faire *Albion*', victorious over the Armada, is now the 'glory of the North' and has amorously become '*Neptunes* darling helde betweene his arms: | Devided from the world as better worth, | Kept for himselfe, defended from all harmes'. This patriotic urgency later translated itself into a poetic concern with national history, national destiny, and national identity. Daniel's eight books of *The Civil Wars between the*

two Houses of Lancaster and York (published between 1595 and 1609) is both a stanzaic exploration of the pre-Tudor crisis in English affairs to which so many of his contemporaries returned for instructive political lessons, and a study of historic character in the manner of the ancient Roman historians. He also pursued a successful career as a court poet and as a deviser of aptly flattering masques for the eminently flatterable King James.

The political developments which marked the often uneasy transition from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, and from the ebbing optimism of the reign of Queen Elizabeth to the challenges posed by a new dynasty, are commemorated in the twenty-sixth poem of Michael Drayton's sonnet sequence, *Idea* (published in its final version in 1619):

> Calling to minde since first my love begun,
> Th'incertaine times oft varying in their course,
> How things still unexpectedly have runne,
> As't please the fates, by their resistlesse force:
> Lastly, mine eyes amazedly have seene
> Essex great fall, Tyrone his peace to gaine,
> The quiet end of that long-living Queene,
> This Kings faire entrance, and our peace with Spaine,
> We and the Dutch at length our selves to sever;
> Thus the world doth, and evermore shall reele:
> Yet to my goddesse am I constant ever;
> How e'er blind fortune turne her giddie wheele:
> Though heaven and earth, prove both to me untrue,
> Yet I am still inviolate to you.

Drayton (1563–1631) ends with the comfort of a Petrarchan commonplace, but his poem charts a series of rifts, rebellions, and revisions which had determined contemporary English civil, Irish, and foreign policy. A parallel series of rifts and revisions determined how Drayton's readers received his work. He tended to despise those gentleman poets 'whose verses are deduced to chambers . . . kept in cabinets, and must only pass by transcription'. Perhaps because of his own relatively humble origins, he proved himself to be a writer determined to secure his own public reputation by continually rearranging, rethinking, and reworking his steadily growing body of verse. *Idea*, first published as *Ideas Mirror* in 1594, was systematically pruned and expanded during the subsequent twenty-five years. It charts a relationship between lovers which is characterized not by distant adoration but by disruptions, absences, squabbles, and protests. The thirty-first sonnet opens with a conversational shrug ('Since ther's no helpe, come let us kisse and part, | Nay I have done'), while the thirty-third employs the imagery of a battle with Eros ('Truce, gentle love, a parly now I crave, | Me thinkes 'tis long since first these warres begun, | Nor thou, nor I, the better yet can have'). Elsewhere the poet parades his intellectual sparrings with this same 'gentle' Eros. In one of the most striking poems (published in the 1599 arrangement), Love 'in a humour', plays

the prodigal and, having invited the poet's senses 'to a solemn feast', regales them with drink distilled from tears; at the height of the feast, a drunken Eros 'plays a swagg'ring ruffins part' and, Alexander-like, slays 'his dear friend, my kind and truest heart'. In the twenty-fifth sonnet he insists to the god that he hates him ('which I'de have thee know') and in the twenty-ninth he and Love, like wits in an inn, bandy proverbs but end by learning nothing ('having thus awhile each other thwarted, | Fooles as we met, so fooles againe we parted').

The opening sonnet of *Idea* (addressed 'To the reader') seeks to indicate how that reader might seek to view Drayton's *œuvre*: his verse, he suggests, is 'the true image of my mind | Ever in motion, still desiring change' and his muse is 'rightly of the English straine, | That cannot long one fashion intertaine'. By the final 1619 version of the sonnets Drayton had amply demonstrated the versatility required by this inconstant English muse by publishing in a variety of forms and on a variety of subjects. His *The Shepheards Garland* (1593, revised 1606 and 1619), which takes the form of 'eglogs' (eclogues) in the Spenserian pastoral manner, indulges in praise for Queen Elizabeth (Eglog III) and mourning for Sidney (Eglog IV); *Endimion and Phoebe* of 1595 (which was rewritten as *The Man on the Moone* in 1606) experiments with an Ovidian mythological form; the 'legends' of *Pierce Gaveston* (*c.* 1593), *Matilda* (1594), and *Robert Duke of Normandie* (1596) and the ambitiously weighty *Mortimeriados* of 1596 all attempt to deal with subjects from national history. *Mortimeriados*, a study of the turmoil of the reign of Edward II, was expanded with yet more epic pretensions and its seven-line stanzas remoulded as *ottava rima* in imitation of Ariosto, as *The Barons Warres* in 1603. Drayton's determined quarrying of medieval and modern English history for instructive subjects was also evident in two of the more jingoistic *Odes* of 1606, the celebration of new colonial enterprise in 'To the Virginian Voyage' ('You brave heroique minds, | Worthy your countries name, | That honour still pursue, | Goe, and subdue') and the celebrated 'To the Cambro-Britans, and their harpe, his ballad of Agincourt' ('Faire stood the wind for *France*, | When we our sayles advance'). If these two poems contain pre-echoes of the imperial balladry of the late Victorians, *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597), twelve pairs of verse-letters supposedly exchanged by historic lovers and modelled on Ovid's *Heroides*, occasionally serves to suggest prefigurations of the static costumed tableaux beloved of early Romantic painters and imitated in wax by Madame Tussaud. Drayton's patriotic ambitions reached a climax in the 30,000 worthy lines of *Poly-Olbion*, a vast topographical study of England and Wales published in two parts in 1612 and 1622. The title, which partly puns on the name 'Albion', is translatable from the Greek as 'having many blessings'. The island described in the thirty 'songs' into which the poem is divided is explored with the chorographic enthusiasm of Camden (from whose research Drayton borrowed). Its rivers teem with fish, its valleys stand thick with corn, and its hills are haunted by shepherds and fairies. Its often legendary Celtic bedrock is overlaid with fertile Roman, Saxon, and Norman soils and is amply watered by streams each of

which has its tutelary nymph. *Poly-Olbion*, which was dedicated to King James's eldest son Henry, Prince of Wales, perpetually finds occasions for sermons in stones and, thanks to the Arthurian pretensions of the Stuart dynasty, seeks to discover evidence of present good in all historical precedent.

Placed beside the self-assertion, the ebullience, and the nationalism of much of Drayton's work, the poetry of Fulke Greville, first Lord Brooke (1554–1628), seems, to use Drayton's phrase, 'deduced to chambers', excessively private, even despondent. Greville, who published little in his lifetime, made clear how he wished posterity to remember him in the epitaph he composed for his tomb: 'servant to Queen Elizabeth, councillor to King James, and friend to Sir Philip Sidney. Trophaeum Peccati [the trophy or the spoils of sin].' Greville's friendship with, and profound reverence for, Sidney conditioned not simply the flattering biography he wrote of his upright friend but also the censorious remarks that the *Life* contains concerning the reign of Elizabeth and the comparative moral turpitude of the court of King James. Sidney's religious opinions and the example of *Astrophil and Stella* also helped to determine the themes and patterns of Greville's own verse. The earliest lyrics in the posthumously published miscellany, *Caelica* (printed as part of *Certaine Learned and Elegant Workes* in 1633), appear to have circulated in the Sidney circles in the 1580s; the later poems probably date from the early seventeenth century. Taken as a whole, however, the 109 lyrics (41 of them sonnets) radically re-explore Sidneian models and charge them with a distinctive intellectual earnestness and, increasingly, with a Calvinistic gloom. Where Astrophil addresses a single, distant Stella within the developing narrative of a sonnet sequence, Greville's lover focuses his emotional and mental energy on a variety of situations and mistresses (variously named Caelica, Myra, and Cynthia), and interweaves his randomly placed sonnets with other lyrical forms. Love may be, as he describes it in the first of the poems, 'the delight of all well-thinking minds', but throughout the early part of the miscellany he returns again and again to the ideas of impermanence and insecurity in the world, in the individual, and in human relationships. If, as he grants in poem 7, the world is ever moving and the beloved Myra alone seems constant, even she carries in her eyes 'the doome of all Change'. In poem 18 he allows that Caelica finds him changeable but he then turns the accusation round by insisting that it is she who is dominated by ideas of change and contempt. In poem 30 Myra's inconstancy is boldly compared to that of the shifting systems of government in ancient Rome and the sonnet concludes with the reflection that by 'acting many parts' both Rome and Myra have managed to lose their 'commanding arts'. What relates these ostensibly amorous poems to the later religious meditations on the corruption of all human aspiration is the insistent idea that the only unchanging reality is that of a stern, unsmiling, judgmental God. When Greville contemplates the finality of death in poem 87 he is also haunted by the embarrassed exposure of human frailty before the throne of a perfect and sinless Creator:

> When as Mans life, the light of humane lust,
> In socket of his earthly lanthorne burnes,
> That all this glory unto ashes must,
> And generation to corruption turnes;
> Then fond desires that onely feare their end,
> Doe vainly wish for life, but to emend.
>
> But when this life is from the body fled,
> To see it selfe in that *eternall Glasse*,
> *Where time doth end, and thoughts accuse the dead*,
> *Where all to come, is one with all that was*;
> Then living men aske how he left his breath,
> That while he lived never thought of death.

The poem's shivers of horror at the prospect of eternal condemnation are to some extent conditioned by the intellectual control of the theological drama. Where he had once argued with and on behalf of his mistresses, Greville ends by debating the niceties of the human condition before the tribunal of the last and universal Judge. In poem 98 he sees himself 'wrapt up ... in mans degeneration' and only released from 'this depth of sinne, this hellish grave' by the mercy of God; in poem 99 he is pinioned and condemned on a 'sp'rtuall Crosse' from which only the sacrifice of Christ will deliver him, and in poem 109 he looks to a 'God unknowne' to redeem 'that sensuall unsatiable vaste wombe | Of thy seene Churche' (the flawed body of believers) from the consequences of the Fall. If, like Donne, Greville attempts to confront God with metaphors which express the paradoxes implicit in theological definition, in certain of his late poems (most notably poem 102, 'The Serpent, Sinne, by showing humane lust | Visions and dreames inticed man to doe | Follies . . .') he attempts, like Milton, to explore the central issues, the contradictions, and even the rational absurdities in the Christian myth of the Fall.

Greville's discursive poems, or 'Treaties' (treatises), on Monarchy, Human Learning, and Wars, are lengthy and somewhat unadventurous extensions of this process of cerebration in verse. A similar didacticism marks Sir John Davies's meditation in quatrains on the nature of man and the immortality of the soul, *Nosce Teipsum* (1599). Davies (1569–1626) is, however, chiefly remembered for his inventive exploration of the signification of dance in *Orchestra Or a Poeme of Dauncing* (1596). The poem, which purports to represent the ingenious arguments put by the suitor Antinous to Penelope in order to 'woo the Queene to dance', relates the plotted movement of formal dance to the rhythms and patterns of a divinely created Nature. Dancing began, Antinous insists, 'when the first seedes whereof the world did spring, | The Fire, Ayre, Earth and Water did agree, | By Loves perswasion, Natures mighty King, | To leave their first disordered combating'. It asserts the regular harmony of the terrestrial order and it mirrors the tidy concert of the cosmos:

> Behold the *World* how it is *whirled round*,
> And for it is so *whirl'd*, is named so;

In whose large volume many rules are found
Of this new Art, which it doth fairely show:
For your quick eyes in wandring too and fro
From East to West, on no one thing can glaunce,
But if you marke it well, it seemes to daunce.

The poem takes us through the distinctly un-Homeric steps, turns, and leaps of the court dances of the sixteenth century (the galliard, the coranto, and the lavolta) and, like many early twentieth-century theorists of dance, it attempts to intertwine metaphysical, natural, mythological, moral, and ritualistic arguments as a means of justifying the art of the choreographer.

The concern with celestial harmony and earthly concord which runs through Davies's *Orchestra* ought properly to be seen in the context of the ceremonial, the formal entertainments, and the masques which had increasingly determined the prestige of the courts of Europe in the late Renaissance period. Whether through the employment of professional performers and composers, such as the lutenist John Dowland (1563–1626), or through the active involvement of courtiers themselves (some of whom provided Dowland with lyrics), music, dance, and song formed a vital part in proclaiming the cultural standing of a ruling class. Thomas Campion (1567–1620), poet, critic of poetry, musician, and doctor of medicine, wrote 150 lyrics, many of them with instrumental settings provided by the poet himself. In the early years of the seventeenth century Campion also emerged as an especially prominent composer of masques for the court and for influential noble families. When King James's son Henry Frederick died in 1612, Campion published an elegy which paid tribute to a particularly versatile patron of the arts who had been as adept a performer on the stage and the dance-floor as he had been in the tilt-yard ('When Court and Musicke call'd him, off fell armes, | And, as hee had beene shap't for loves alarmes, | In harmony hee spake, and trod the ground | In more proportion then the measur'd sound'). It is, however, as a writer of intense, delicately shaped lyrics, collected as the five *Books of Airs* published between 1601 and 1617, that Campion's own mastery of melodic and metrical proportion becomes most evident. These songs not only suggest the keenness of a musician's ear which delighted in modulation, variation, and repetition, but also fulfil much of Campion's determination to re-create in English the effects of the Latin lyrics of Catullus and Tibullus (his version of Catullus' 'My sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love' is particularly successful). Although his *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602) argues for the primacy of quantitative metres over 'the vulgar and unartificiall custome of riming', and although the poem 'Rose-cheekt *Lawra*, come' exemplifies his sensitive command of a scansion based on the duration of syllables, the majority of his lyrics reveal a mastery of rhyme and varied stanza form. The deftness of many of Campion's adaptations of conventional erotic sentiments, and his fondness for words such as 'bright', 'sun', 'beams', and 'glitter', sometimes serve to conceal the strain of melancholy that lurks in the shadows beyond the sunlit

gardens and groves frequented by courtly lovers. He can, at times, use a lyric to suggest, with some cynicism, that both scorn and death can sting:

When thou must home to shades of underground,
And there arriv'd, a new admired guest,
The beauteous spirits do engirt thee round,
White Iope, blithe Helen and the rest,
To hear the stories of thy finish'd love
From that smooth tongue, whose music hell can move:
Then wilt thou speak of banqueting delights,
Of masks and revels which sweet youth did make,
Of tourneys and great challenges of knights,
And all these triumphs for thy beauties sake.
When thou hast told these honours done to thee,
Then tell, O tell, how thou didst murder mee.

Campion's work, for all its miniature delicacy, testifies not simply to the broad sophistication of English secular music in the reigns of Elizabeth and James, but also to the coming of age of the modern English language as an appropriate vehicle for lyrical emotion.

Marlowe and Shakespeare as non-Dramatic Poets

Christopher Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' ('Come live with me, and be my love, | And we will all the pleasures prove') was probably the most popular of all Elizabethan lyrics. Marlowe (1564–93) himself quoted it, with a nod and a wink to his audience, in the fourth act of *The Jew of Malta*; Sir Hugh Evans sings a snatch of it in the third act of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; Ralegh provided a response ('The Nimphs reply to the Sheepheard') and Donne composed the best known of the many parodies of it in his poem 'The Baite'. The body of Marlowe's surviving verse, none of it printed under his name in his lifetime, suggests, however, that his poetic ambitions lay elsewhere than in the lyric. As a student at Cambridge he produced an uneven, and sometimes carelessly offhand, translation of Ovid's *Elegies* into English couplets. At some point later in his career he turned to a Latin poet with whose rhetoric and spleen he evidently sympathized, translating the first book of Lucan's *De Bello Civili* into unrhymed English pentameters (published posthumously in 1600). This account of the war between Caesar and Pompey, with its opening stress on the miseries of civil strife, held an obvious interest for an England periodically reminded by Tudor propagandists of the disruptions of its own earlier civil wars. Lucan's portrait of a reckless Caesar, who declares on crossing the Rubicon 'Here, here, . . . | An end of peace; here end polluted laws; | Hence leagues and covenants; Fortune thee I follow', also doubtless appealed to the author of *Tamburlaine*.

Despite the occasional fire which shoots from Marlowe's version of *Lucans First Booke*, his most substantial achievement in non-dramatic verse remains the 818 lines of the unfinished *Hero and Leander*. The poem, divided into two parts and somewhat stodgily completed with the addition of four further 'sestiads' by George Chapman, was published in 1598. Marlowe turned once again to Ovid for inspiration though he supplemented his reading with a Latin translation of a narrative poem on the fates of Hero and Leander by the fifth-century Greek poet, Musaeus. The tone, the eroticism, and the wry observation of the poem are, however, emphatically Marlowe's. The story of the meeting, the embracing, and the parting of the lovers is told with an amused detachment which systematically undercuts any suggestion of high tragedy in their situation. Marlowe's prim, meticulously dressed Hero, 'whom young Apollo courted for her hair', is contradictorily described as 'Venus' nun'; his hirsute Leander is possessed of an effeminate beauty which serves to make 'the rudest peasants melt' and men in general to swear 'he was a maid in man's attire'. This sexual ambiguity is set to determine both the 'tragedy' and the poem's overall frame of reference. The temple of Venus is decorated with images of 'the gods in sundry shapes, | Committing heady riots, incest, rapes' which are both hetero- and homosexual. When Leander swims naked across the Hellespont, Neptune, mistaking him for Jove's catamite, Ganymede, caresses him in the waves:

> He clapp'd his plump cheeks, with his tresses play'd,
> And smiling wantonly, his love bewray'd.
> He watch'd his arms, and as they open'd wide
> At every stroke, betwixt them would he slide
> And steal a kiss, and then run out and dance,
> And as he turn'd, cast many a lustful glance,
> And threw him gaudy toys to please his eye,
> And dive into the water, and there pry
> Upon his breast, his thighs and every limb
> And up again, and close behind him swim,
> And talk of love.

Here both the god and the youth are denied due tragic dignity. The threat of drowning is confused with that of sexual assault and divine passion is diluted to little more than liquid philandery. Even Leander's protest 'You are deceiv'd, I am no woman, I' sounds the tinkling note of the *faux naïf* rather than a sonorous chord of high seriousness.

William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593) shares the Ovidian reference, the irony, and the amused irreverence of *Hero and Leander*. Although Shakespeare (1564–1616) probably lacked the breadth of Marlowe's reading of Greek and Latin literature, and although he had also missed out on the social and intellectual cachet of a university education, his poem suggests that he was measuring himself against the standards set by a rival both on the public stage and in the more private realm of neo-classical narrative verse. *Venus and Adonis*, conspicuously dedicated to the much-wooed bachelor Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, describes the courtship of a recalcitrant young man by a mature, 'sick-thoughted' goddess. When we first meet the lovers in the early morning of the opening of the poem, Venus has already pounced on her prey; she is leading his horse by one arm, while under the other she grasps the unwilling object of her attentions 'who blush'd and pouted in a dull disdain, | With leaden appetite, unapt to toy; | She red and hot as coals of glowing fire, | He red for shame, but frosty in desire'. Having established these contrasts of red and white, hot and cold, fire and ice, Shakespeare proceeds to build upon them. Their first encounter reaches a preposterous climax when Adonis falls on top of the buxom goddess who has hung so heavily round his neck, but, when Adonis escapes from her to pursue his adolescent fascination with hunting, the poem modulates between comedy and tragedy before lurching towards a bloody denouement. The goddess of love, aware of the mortal threat to Adonis, has the paradoxes of loving and losing, possessing and parting, pleasure and pain, brought home to her. When she catches sight of the gored body she is as flamboyant in her grief as she once was in her wooing. At first, like a snail, she shrinks back in pain; then 'dumbly she passions, franticly she doteth'; finally, when she articulates her agony, she concocts an erotic fantasy of Adonis's fatal embrace:

> But this foul, grim, and urchin-snouted boar,
> Whose downward eye still looketh for a grave,
> Ne'er saw the beauteous livery that he wore;
> Witness the entertainment that he gave.
> If he did see his face, why then I know
> He thought to kiss him, and hath kill'd him so.
>
> 'Tis true, 'tis true, thus was Adonis slain:
> He ran upon the boar with his sharp spear,
> Who did not whet his teeth at him again,
> But by a kiss thought to persuade him there;
> And nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine
> Sheath'd unaware the tusk in his soft groin.

'Had I been tooth'd like him', Venus confesses as she lovingly expands on the idea of a porcine *Liebestod*, 'with kissing him I should have kill'd him first'.

The 'graver labour' promised in honour of the Earl of Southampton in Shakespeare's dedication to *Venus and Adonis* was probably the far darker, far more conventionally 'tragic' *Lucrece* of 1594. Where the earlier poem had contrasted a passive male sexuality with an active female one, *Lucrece* retells the instructive story of the rape of a virtuous Roman noblewoman by the libidinous Sextus Tarquinius, son of King Tarquin. As Shakespeare reminded his readers in the Argument prefixed to the poem, public reaction to the incident had been instrumental in securing the banishment of the Tarquins and the change of Roman government from a monarchy to a republic. Thus both the labour and

the subject demanded *gravitas*. Although the rapist, the victim, and the rape itself are presented dramatically, the poem relies far more on formal soliloquy, static declamation, and rhetorical complaint than did *Venus and Adonis*. Its narrative movement from Tarquin's plotting of his assault through its realization to Lucrece's exemplary death is purposefully staggered by sections which offer analyses of, and metaphors for, characters' motives, pangs, and passions.

Lucrece's resolute response to her violation follows the high Roman fashion of an assertion of personal integrity in the face of disaster: having eloquently denounced her ravisher, she commits suicide. The no less dignified lament of the unnamed female narrator of 'A Lover's Complaint', however, looks less to Roman models than to the late medieval and Tudor tradition of the 'complaint'. The poem, published as an addendum to Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in 1609, represents the confession of a straw-hatted country girl who has come to recognize 'the patterns of [her former lover's] foul beguiling'. She has been taken in by his protests of love, his presents, his 'deep-brained sonnets', and, above all, by his tears; now, in the agony of her desertion she is throwing his love-tokens and the torn remains of his letters into a river. In one sense she resembles the 'poor soul' of Desdemona's 'song of willow'; in another, she is a refiguration of the suicidal Ophelia. More crucially, Shakespeare's original readers would probably have recognized that in placing the poem at the end of his *Sonnets* he was reflecting on the shape of Daniel's *Delia* which had been published in 1592 with the addition of 'The Complaint of Rosamond', an account of the seduction and destruction of Henry II's mistress, 'the Fair Rosamond'. 'A Lover's Complaint' can also be taken as a particularly bitter coda to the *Sonnets*, one which provides a poignant trans-sexual echo of the concern in some of the most striking of the later poems with confusion, frustration, sexual betrayal, and seduction.

Shakespeare's 154 *Sonnets* have generally been recognized as falling into three distinct groups. The first 126 are addressed to a 'fair youth'; the next 26 refer to a new association with the 'Dark Lady'; the last two give a new twist to the erotic theme by playing fancifully with stories of Cupid and the loss of his (phallic) 'brand'. These unmarked divisions contain within them subgroups (sonnets 1–17, for example, encourage the youth to marry, while sonnets 76–86 are disturbed by the threat posed by a rival poet). In the later poems the ambiguous relationship between the narrator, the young man, and the Dark Lady takes on the nature of an emotional triangle in which, as sonnet 144 suggests, the narrator is torn not only between 'Two loves . . . of comfort and despair' but also between the love for the young man and the love for the woman who appears to have seduced him. If these later poems suggest a confusion of motive and an emotional turmoil, they also serve to remind readers that the overall sequence of the *Sonnets* neither traces an autobiographical pattern nor implies a line of narrative development. Although the 'Dark Lady' poems clearly imply a series of dislocated reactions and shifting viewpoints, the ostensibly adulatory poems addressed to the young man ought also to be seen

as heterogeneous, and occasionally fraught interrogations of the language and perception of love. Shakespeare both reorders and confounds Petrarchan conventions. In two sonnets, addressed respectively to the man and to the woman—numbers 21 ('So is it not with me as with that Muse, | Stirred by a painted beauty to his verse') and 130 ('My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun')—the old hyperboles applied to human beauty are qualified and questioned. Elsewhere the poet transfers exaggerated praise from the 'mistress' of earlier sonnet sequences to a 'master'. The 'lovely boy' is famously compared to a summer's day (18); he, the ambiguous 'master-mistress' of the poet's passion, has a woman's face, 'with Nature's own hand painted' (20); he is the 'Lord of my love' to whom the poet is a vassal (26); he is the Muse 'that pour'st into my verse | Thine own sweet argument'(38), and he ennobles the humble poet with a love that is 'better than high birth . . . | Richer than wealth, prouder than garments cost' (91). Where sonnet 54 sees poetry as the distiller of truth, sonnet 55 proudly claims that 'Not marble nor the gilded monuments | Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme', and sonnet 81 announces that his name 'from hence immortal life shall have', we neither learn the boy's name nor do we have a precise idea of what he looks like.

Nevertheless, time and mortality haunt the first 126 poems. In sonnet 12 ('When I do count the clock that tells the time') the poet relates arbitrary human measurements of time to those of the biological clock before resorting, almost in desperation, to a plea for procreation as the only defence against death. In the superbly controlled sonnet 64, however, love itself has to be defined against the steady pressure of individual, political, and geographical change:

> When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
> The rich proud cost of outworn buried age,
> When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed,
> And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
> When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
> Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
> And the firm soil win of the wat'ry main,
> Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
> When I have seen such interchange of state,
> Or state itself confounded to decay,
> Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate—
> That Time will come and take my love away.
> This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
> But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

The assurance of the boy's love may pierce the poet's gloom with an intense joy in sonnets 29 and 30, their courtship may be accompanied with feelings of exhilaration and poetic triumphalism, but the relationship remains chaste and non-sensual. Compared to Marlowe's thrilled imaginings of the naked Leander, Shakespeare's young man remains as purely aesthetic as he is

anonymous. As many of the earlier sonnets suggest, however, all hopes of human perfection and human union are riven by uncertainties and doubts and glancingly overshadowed by guilt and restlessness (lilies fester in sonnet 94, sonnets 109–112 fret about falseness and scandal, and sonnets 118–120 are marked by metaphors of drugs and disease). Insecurity, sexual vulnerability, and self-loathing burst out with an uncommon violence in sonnet 129, the account of an unspecified, but traumatic, spiritual disturbance. The old idealized love has now been swept away by a torrent of revulsion:

> The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action, and, till action, lust
> Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
> Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust . . .

As this poem suggests, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* do more than revise the conventions and then reject the courtliness or the mythological paraphernalia of the sonnet sequences of the 1590s. They throb with a new metrical energy, they explore a new emotional range, they wrestle with the implications of a new language, and they enact new dramas within their exact, fourteen-line structures. Above all, they suggest that the faults which make and mar human buoyancy lie not in the stars, nor in a particular unattainable star, but in ourselves.

Theatre in the 1590s: Kyd and Marlowe

The widespread prejudice, which has held sway since at least the middle of the eighteenth century, that Elizabethan literature was dominated by the drama would not have been one that was shared by Shakespeare's educated contemporaries. If the fiction of the period was systematically marginalized by subsequent generations of readers and critics, and if perceptions of its poetry were clouded by a predisposition for lyric verse, the work of its playwrights has long been seen as reflecting something of the glory of the steadily read, readily performed, and much eulogized Shakespeare. To the select, but substantial, audiences who first saw Elizabethan and Jacobean plays performed on the London stage, or perhaps acted outside town during provincial tours by the London companies, Shakespeare himself must have seemed one gifted metropolitan dramatist amongst many, while his dramatic enterprise, like that of his rivals, would probably have been viewed more as entertainment than as high art. Published play-texts purchased for domestic study or private diversion were sometimes pirated from illicit copies or, as was the case of the 'bad' Quarto of *Hamlet* of 1603, clumsily assembled with the aid of the erratic memories of members of the cast. In most cases, the title-pages of published plays bear the name of the acting company for whom they were written rather than the name of the author. The relatively prolific Shakespeare, who prepared

his narrative poems for publication in the early 1590s and who probably authorized the appearance of his *Sonnets* in 1609, may well have sought to protect the rights of the companies with which he was associated by reserving the majority of his play-texts for their exclusive use. The first Folio, published posthumously in 1623 by two fellow 'actor-sharers' (shareholders) in the company known as the King's Men, contains thirty-six plays of which eighteen appeared in print for the first time. Ben Jonson, who boldly printed his poems, plays, and masques in 1616 as his *Works*, went to considerable lengths to demonstrate that his plays were to be considered as serious literature and that the actable word deserved the distinction of being transmitted as the readable word. Nevertheless, when Sir Thomas Bodley established his Library at the University of Oxford in 1602, he insisted that it should exclude the kind of ephemera that he referred to as 'idle books and riff raffs' (by which he meant 'almanacks, plays and proclamations'). Modern drama, as Bodley appears to be recognizing, was as transient as it was popular. It was also likely to distract the scholar from more fulfilling demands on his time.

In late sixteenth-century London, however, suburban theatres, outside the control of less than sympathetic City magistrates, had begun to establish themselves as an essential, and internationally acknowledged, part of popular metropolitan culture. They were visited and (fortunately for theatre historians) described and sketched by European visitors; companies of English actors were, in turn, to perform plays on the Continent (Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, for example, was acted at Frankfurt in 1601 and at Dresden in 1626 when its popularity at home was waning). Such prestige, even if qualified by an incomprehension of the English language as a medium, is testimony to the flourish and flexibility of the public theatres and theatre companies of late sixteenth-century London. Both were relatively new creations. A Royal Patent was granted to the Earl of Leicester's men in 1574 and by 1576 James Burbage, a joiner turned actor turned entrepreneur, had recognized the opening presented by royal and aristocratic favour and established a permanent playhouse in Shoreditch. This playhouse, trumpeting its classical pretensions by calling itself the Theatre, signalled the end of the rudimentary performances by actors in inn-yards. The Theatre was followed in 1577 by Burbage's second purpose-built playhouse, the Curtain (also in Shoreditch), and by the more celebrated structures on the south bank of the Thames, the Rose (1587), the Swan (1595), the Globe (1599), and the Hope (1613). From what is known of these theatres, each probably followed a related, pragmatic, but rapidly evolving plan. These wooden, unroofed amphitheatres were either polygonal or so shaped as to allow a polygon to pass itself off as a circle (the 'wooden O' of the Globe referred to in Shakespeare's *Henry V*). It is possible that, both in shape and in orientation, the later playhouses, such as the Globe, contained echoes of the principles of theatre design established by Greek and Roman architects, though the vagaries of the London weather required a roofed stage and unbanked tiers of covered galleries in which richer spectators were seated.

In 1597 Burbage attempted a new venture by leasing the remains of the domestic buildings of the disused Dominican Friary at Blackfriars and requesting permission to convert it into an indoor commercial theatre. Although the move was temporarily blocked by local residents, it was to the new Blackfriars Theatre that Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, moved in 1609.

A Dutch visitor to Bankside in 1596 claimed that the Swan Theatre held as many as 3,000 people, a figure which has been recently justified by estimates that the smaller Rose (the remains of which were excavated in 1989) could hold some 1,937 spectators, a capacity which was increased to an uncomfortable maximum of 2,395 when the theatre was rebuilt in 1592. Given London's population of between 150,000 and 200,000 people, this implies that by 1620 perhaps as many as 25,000 theatre-goers per week visited the six playhouses then working. In 1624 the Spanish ambassador complained that 12,000 people had seen Thomas Middleton's anti-Spanish political satire *A Game at Chess*. The theatres that these large audiences patronized were likely to have been richly decorated according to current English interpretations of Renaissance ornament. Given the substantial income that these audiences brought in, the professional actors they saw were expensively, even extravagantly, costumed. Surviving records indicate, for example, that the wardrobe for Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* contained scarlet and purple satin cloaks, white satin and cloth-of-gold gowns for women characters and, for Tamburlaine himself, a particularly sumptuous doublet in copper lace and carnation velvet; in 1613 the management of the Globe paid no less than £38 for a costume for Cardinal Wolsey in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* (Shakespeare himself had paid £60 for his large house in Stratford). These costumes may have set the actors apart from their audiences. They worked without sets but in close physical proximity to a mass of spectators referred to by Jonson as 'a rude, barbarous crew'. They would scarcely have expected the reverential atmosphere of a modern auditorium. A company would initially have performed a new play a mere handful of times, reviving it or adapting it only as occasion, public demand, or a wide repertory determined. Finally, it should be remembered that the professional companies were composed exclusively of male actors, with boys or, as seems more likely given the demands of certain parts, young men playing women's roles.

The evolution of theatre buildings and companies in the last years of Queen Elizabeth's reign was to some degree paralleled by the rapid development of a newly expressive blank-verse tragedy. The key figures in this evolution were Thomas Kyd (1558–94) and his close associate Christopher Marlowe. Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy: or, Hieronimo is Mad Again*, presented at the Rose Theatre in the early months of 1592 and published anonymously later in the same year, proved amongst the most popular and influential of all the plays of the period. It introduced a new kind of central character, an obsessive, brooding, mistrustful and alienated plotter, and it set a pattern from which a line of

dramatic explorations of the theme of revenge developed. Prominent in this line of 'revenge plays' are Marston's *The Malcontent* of 1604, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* of 1607, and, above all, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* published in 1603 (though Kyd himself is believed to have written an earlier, now lost, play on the same subject). Although it continued to be revived into the early years of the seventeenth century, *The Spanish Tragedy* ultimately proved to be a play as parodied and ridiculed by other dramatists (notably Jonson) as it had once been flattered by imitation. What particularly established its reputation was its intermixture of dense plotting, intense action, swiftly moving dialogue, and long, strategically placed, rhetorically shaped speeches. The soliloquies of Hieronimo, a father determined to revenge the murder of his son, both gave prominence to an inward drama of private disillusion and created an impression of an agonized soul writhing as it debated with itself. Unsubtle and declamatory these speeches may often seem ('O eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears; | O life, no life, but lively form of death; | O world, no world, but mass of public wrongs, | Confus'd and fill'd with murder and misdeeds'), but they were integral to the fusion of violent action, exaggerated gesture, and boisterous rhetoric which mark Kyd's theatrical style.

Calculated exaggeration, coupled with a far greater control of metrical pace and inventive poetic effect, help to determine the often startling and disconcerting quality of Marlowe's dramatic verse, verse that brought English iambic pentameter to its first maturity. If we can trust the evidence wrung from Kyd by the Privy Council in 1593, the 'atheistical' disputations found in the lodgings that he shared with his fellow playwright were Marlowe's, not his. If this is indeed so, the 'atheistical' speculations of Marlowe's plays probably stem from a private fascination with 'forbidden' knowledge, with ambition, and with the disruptive leaps of the human imagination which the Elizabethan political and religious establishment would readily have interpreted as seditious. What also emerges from his plays, however, is the equally disruptive awareness that imaginative ambition must, for good or ill, confront its own limits. In Marlowe's first great theatrical success, *Tamburlaine the Great* (published 1590), for example, Tamburlaine sets out to demonstrate that, though he was born a shepherd, his deeds will prove him a lord. Nature, he claims, teaches us all to have aspiring minds, and he, the aspirer *par excellence* will seek to hold 'the Fates bound fast in iron chains, | And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about'. But Marlowe does not allow such naked military and political ambition to parade itself unchallenged. In the fifth scene of Act II Tamburlaine relishes the prospect of sway in Persia by revealing a commensurate relish for the rolling rhythm of words, names, and reiterations:

> And ride in triumph through Persepolis!—
> Is it not brave to be a king, Techelles!—
> Usumcasane and Theridamas,
> Is it not passing brave to be a king,
> And ride in triumph through Persepolis?

Tamburlaine's subsequent question to his companion, 'Why say, Theridamas, wilt thou be a king?' receives the disenchanted answer, 'Nay, though I praise it, I can live without it'.

Marlowe impels his dramas forwards by evoking the power of dreams and then deflating them. His deflations can be hard-headed refusals to believe in dreams or, sometimes comic, disinclinations to indulge in the fantasies enjoyed by others. Both are equally subversive of pretensions to power. The two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great* (the second written in response to the popularity of the first) confront audiences with a picture of a conquering 'hero', a breaker of moulds and a forger of new orders. Nevertheless, somewhat like those nineteenth-century European writers who belatedly attempted to come to terms with the phenomenon of Napoleon, Marlowe seeks to expose the concept of heroism as well as to praise it. His Tamburlaine is not so much unheroic as hollow. He may not be presented as an unwitting slave to historical or social circumstance, but he is shown as susceptible to the beauty and to the pleas of the beloved Zenocrate and he is finally defeated by Time and Death. Although his aspiration is limitless, his ability to obtain fulfilment is shown as being restricted by forces beyond his control.

A similar pattern can be observed in Marlowe's other tragedies. Although God may seem to be an indifferent observer and although his religion may be mocked as ineffective, his instruments continue to wreak havoc on those who challenge his authority. If some commentators have chosen to see Marlowe as finally retreating from the consequences of the freedom of thought and action that his plays begin to proclaim, the punishments he brings down upon his protagonists in fact derive from their own unbending Promethean daring. In a significant way, each is obliged to confront his own self-indulgence. In *The Jew of Malta* (performed *c.*1592 though not published till 1633) the situation of the overreacher is presented with the kind of exaggerated gusto which threatens to topple over into black comedy. Barabas, whose very name is likely to grate on Christian sensibilities, is glorious in his cupidity, extravagant in his selfishness, and splendid in his ingenuity. His energy is directed to his advancement in the face of his enemies and he glories in the kind of illicit manipulation spoken of in the play's prologue by 'Machiavel'. Barabas himself acknowledges the importance of 'policy' at the point when his attempts to pit one side against another reach their zenith: 'Since by wrong thou got'st authority, | Maintain it bravely by firm policy; | At least, unprofitably lose it not'. It is ultimately by a miscalculation in his 'policy' that he fails, outwitted and sent screaming to his death by a double-crosser far less spirited in his malevolence than is Barabas himself. The tragedy of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (performed at the Rose in the early 1590s and belatedly published in 1604) hangs on an even greater miscalculation. Faustus's intellectual world is one in which humanist new learning has broken free of the strait-jackets of medieval science and divinity. For Faustus himself, restlessly moving from book to book and discipline to discipline in his opening speech, knowledge is power. As with

Tamburlaine, the humbly born man aspires to the realization of his proper natural authority; as with Barabas, the outsider seeks to demonstrate that he is at liberty to reject the imposed restrictions that he despises. Like both, when Faustus sets himself against convention he slips into an arrogant self-justifying fantasy of his invincibility. Marlowe also allows him to confuse opposites and blur distinctions (he sees his necromantic books as 'heavenly' and, more damnably, he signs away his soul to Mephistophilis with Christ's last words on the cross: '*Consummatum est*, 'It is finished' or 'completed'). Before this fatal contract reaches its term, Faustus has frittered away the large opportunities that it has opened to him. He may have gloriously welcomed the spirit of Helen of Troy with an empassioned desire to share her eternity ('Was this the face that launched a thousand ships? | And burnt the topless towers of Ilium? | Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss'), but he has also played silly practical jokes on popes and innkeepers and dumbfounded dukes with unseasonal bunches of grapes. His final speeches, uttered as a clock chimes away his last hours, do, however, force on us an awareness of quite how horridly he has corrupted his genius and ignored the implications of Christian redemption:

> Now hast thou but one bare hour to live.
> And then thou must be damn'd perpetually.
> Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
> That time may cease, and midnight never come;
> Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
> A year, a month, a week a natural day,
> That Faustus may repent and save his soul.
> *O lente, lente currite, noctis equi.*
> The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
> The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.
> O, I'll leap up to my God—Who pulls me down?—
> See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament.
> One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ—

Here Faustus both clings to his cleverness by quoting, out of context, an amorous line from Ovid ('run slowly, slowly, horses of the night') and desperately attempts to reverse his old dismissal of the scheme of salvation as he claims to see the sacrificial streams of blood and to claim Christ for his own. Yet still, as any orthodox member of Marlowe's audience would recognize, neither will his arrogance admit true repentance nor will his intellect fully accept service to the God he has so spectacularly rejected.

Edward II (published in 1592) differs from Marlowe's other tragedies in that it exploits a far greater equilibrium between its central character and those surrounding him. Where the other plays insistently celebrate the dangerous detachment of the hero from the limiting restraints of society, *Edward II* explores the problem of moral conflict within an established society. Unlike the megalomaniac seekers after military, political, or intellectual power,

Edward is born into an inheritance of royal government but effectively throws it away in favour of another mastery, that of a homosexual love unacceptable to the weighty historical world in which he is obliged to move. Edward is a king without command, a lover denied fulfilment, a lion transformed into 'a lamb encompassed by wolves' and a man finally reduced by his enemies (including his wife and son) to the depths of human misery. He is Marlowe's most conventionally 'tragic' character in what is perhaps also his most deeply unconventional tragedy.

Shakespeare's Plays

Politics and History

For some 250 years after the deaths of the dramatists the plays of Shakespeare completely eclipsed those of Kyd and Marlowe. As has become increasingly evident, however, Shakespeare's early tragedies and histories existed, and continue to exist, in a symbiotic relationship with those of his contemporaries. Kyd's revenge dramas stimulated a public appetite to which Shakespeare responded with a sensational replay of Kyd's themes and echoes of his rhetoric in *Titus Andronicus* (*c.*1587, published 1594). Shakespeare's professional rivalry with Marlowe was to be more intense and to prove more fertile. Some of Aaron's speeches in *Titus Andronicus* distantly echo the cadences of *Tamburlaine* and, far less distantly, the malevolent gusto of Barabas. It was, however, with the first sequence of plays based on English history that Shakespeare found a distinctive voice and presented a considered riposte to the radical challenge posed by Marlowe. The 'tiger-hearted' Queen Margaret of the three parts of *Henry VI* (*c.*1588–91), who learns to spit curses, to wheedle, and to fight, is also the mistress of the kind of flamboyant gesture that audiences might readily have associated with Marlowe's male protagonists. It is she who so extravagantly insults the royal pretences of the captured Duke of York and his 'mess of sons' by putting a paper crown on his head and then knocking it off again to the words 'Off with the crown and with the crown his head'. But it is one of these sons, the Gloucester whom she has characterized to his father as 'that valiant crookback prodigy . . . that with his grumbling voice | Was wont to cheer his dad in mutinies', who as Richard III most menacingly outcapers Marlowe's Machiavellian villains. If, as some critics believe, *Edward II* was Marlowe's reply in historical kind, its moodiness and its exploration of the tragic dimension in the fall of a king were in turn to stimulate both the new departures and the plangency of Shakespeare's *Richard II* (*c.*1595, published 1597).

Shakespeare's two sequences of English historical plays (the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*; and *Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry IV* of *c.*1596 and *c.*1597, and *Henry V* of 1599) plus *King John* of *c.*1595 and *Henry VIII* of *c.*1612–13, reinvent the myths, memories, and constructions of recent history which had so preoccupied Tudor historians. They explored divisions, depositions, usurpations, and civil wars, but they also bolstered the concept of secure monarchic government propagated by officially approved apologists for the Tudor dynasty. If the subject-matter of *Richard II* proved to be sufficiently contentious for the deposition scene to be omitted in the three editions published in the lifetime of Queen Elizabeth, and if in 1601 the Earl of Essex and his fellow conspirators recognized that a performance of the play might arouse support for their proposed *coup d'état*, such susceptibility served to prove how well Shakespeare had understood affairs of state. His history plays have continued to shape British perceptions of the national past and of nationhood. They remain political and patriotic statements of some potency (as Laurence Olivier's cinematic reworking of *Henry V* proved at a crucial phase of the Second World War). The ten history plays are central to the conception of Shakespeare as a, perhaps *the*, national poet which began to emerge in the late seventeenth century. To Samuel Johnson, writing in the mid-1760s, the *Henry IV* plays seemed to mark the apogee of a certain kind of dramatic art ('Perhaps no author has ever in two plays afforded so much delight'). To English and European Romantic poets, from Keats, Browning, and Tennyson to Goethe, Hugo, and Pushkin, Shakespeare emerged as the key figure in the moulding of a particular national consciousness and the deviser of the model from which future national historical dramas could develop.

In all, Shakespeare refers to England 247 times in his plays and to the English 143 times. It is scarcely surprising that the vast majority of these references should occur in the history plays (the intensely nationalistic *King John*, for example, mentions England no less than 43 times, *Henry V* 49 times, and *Henry VIII* 12 times). To many fond anthologists, the central statement of Shakespeare's feeling for his homeland occurs in *Richard II* as the dying John of Gaunt feels himself 'a prophet new-inspired':

> This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or as a moat defensive to a house
> Against the envy of less happier lands;
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, . . .

This statement of an ideal, separate, secure, peaceful, kingly, little island is frequently truncated by those who cite it before the prophetic Gaunt gets to his point: the ideal does not exist and the England of Richard II 'hath made a

shameful conquest of itself'. Gaunt's idealized vision is used in the play, and, by means of echoes, in the three dramas that follow it, to expose the reality of a realm descending into disunity and war. The 'other Eden' and the 'demi-paradise' are, if they ever existed, now lost. If, on one level, *Richard II* and its successors explore the consequences of the disruption of the direct line of royal descent from the Conqueror, on another they demonstrate that power-struggles and conflicts of interest are not exclusively concerned with dynastic rights nor does civil peace automatically stem from the legitimate rule of divinely appointed kings. The Earl of Essex would not have been alone in 1601 in recognizing that history was ramified in the guts and minds of the living.

The historical play entitled *The Reign of Edward III*, which was once loosely ascribed to Shakespeare, was published in 1596 (it was registered for publication a year earlier). In its first two acts it is concerned not with showing us a golden age basking in the glory of a chivalrous warrior King, but with that King's dishonourable pursuit of the Countess of Salisbury. Edward emerges as a flawed hero who redeems his 'honour' by chasing the chimera of his supposed rights in France (the same chimera to be pursued, as Shakespeare himself showed, by another 'hero King', Henry V). *The Reign of Edward III* provided the context from which *Richard II* and its successors developed. The memory of Edward III and his foreign wars served to show up the domestic disasters of the reign of Edward's grandson Richard (whose only military campaign is a failed one in Ireland). In turn, the deposition of Richard leads to the disorders which so shake Henry Bolingbroke and which persuade the sleepless king to acknowledge that the crown has sat 'troublesome' upon his head. Even though Henry V attempts to distract minds at home from civil ills by taking up Edward III's claims in France, he too is obliged to muse sleeplessly in the night before the battle of Agincourt on 'the fault | My father made in compassing the crown'. Despite Henry's military triumph and despite his French marriage, Chorus reminds us at the end of the play that his heir's inheritance will be bitter; France will be lost and England will bleed, an event 'which oft our stage hath shown'. *Henry V* returns us, therefore, to the historical point at which Shakespeare began to explore the civil disasters of late medieval history, the first of the three *Henry VI* plays.

What distinguishes *I* and *II Henry IV* from the history plays that Shakespeare wrote both before and after it is his presentation of an England which prospers and suffers beyond the King's court and the circle of the King's aristocratic enemies. In a sense, the cue for this celebration of a wider, popular England lay in the traditional interpretation of the transformation of the scapegrace Prince Hal into the gracious and honourable King Harry. Where Holinshed excused the former as some kind of adolescent prelude to the famous victories of the King, Shakespeare sought to show us a Prince who carefully calculates in all that he does. He is both prig and prodigal son, but in his prodigality he encounters a world which is more than an alternative to his father's troubled

court. Hal does not simply drop *out* from a fraught ruling class, he drops *in* to the society of the ruled. Through Falstaff, he learns the intense delights of irresponsibility and experiences the exercise of an elastic morality, but he has to teach himself the significance of responsibility and the law. Where Falstaff discounts honour as 'a mere scutcheon', Hal has to outface his father's enemy, Hotspur, who once rejoiced in the idea of plucking 'bright honour from the pale-faced moon'. Where Falstaff claims to have misused the King's press 'damnably' in Part I and cynically demonstrates his scandalous methods of recruitment in Justice Shallow's Gloucestershire in Part II, Hal has, with, perhaps, a parallel degree of cynicism, to learn the bluff arts of military command. Falstaff, Shakespeare's amplest comic invention, squashes all endeavour; Hal, the playboy Prince, has occasionally to pause to remind us that he is in fact in earnest training for his future role as 'the mirror of all Christian kings'. Falstaff is warned of his, and Hal's, destiny, in one of the most carefully modulated exchanges in *I Henry IV*. In Act II, scene v the two men play an acting game which parodies an interview between the penitent Prince and his sorrowing father; when Falstaff in the part of Hal mounts a highly imaginative defence of the character of 'plump Jack', the real Hal royally responds to the challenge of banishing him with the blunt force of 'I do: I will'. The scene is suddenly interrupted by the sound of knocking, and it is for the actors to determine how pregnant is the potential pause, how potent is the moment of truth.

The England that contains Justice Shallow's orchard and the battlefield at Shrewsbury, Gad's Hill and the Jerusalem Chamber at Westminster, is a hierarchically ordered nation threatened on all levels by disorder. The English history plays consider how civil order is related to central government. If government is generally represented by the medieval concept of rule by a divinely appointed king from whom honour and justice spring, Shakespeare also suggests that king and subject are linked together by mutual responsibilities. It would be anachronistic to suggest that these responsibilities imply some kind of contract between ruler and ruled, but in certain plays, notably in *Henry V*, he seems to be stressing that a king can rule legitimately only with the assent of those whom he rules, be they nobles or commoners. Powerful noblemen break their feudal oaths in *Richard II*, and in *2 Henry VI* insurgent peasants attempt to break feudalism itself, but throughout Shakespeare's works it is rulers who more often seem to fail in their moral, communal, and governmental responsibilities. The usurping Duke Frederick poisons relationships in *As You Like It*; Vincentio, the Duke of Vienna in *Measure for Measure*, admits that he has 'ever loved the life removed' and that he has for fourteen years neglected 'the needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds'; Prospero, sometime Duke of Milan, confesses in *The Tempest* that he 'grew stranger' to his state by 'being transported | And rapt in secret studies'; in *Hamlet*, Claudius destroys his brother, marries his sister-in-law, assumes the throne, and introduces a rot into the state of Denmark; and in *Macbeth* a usurper and regicide proves as

tyrannical and bloody a curse to Scotland as Richard III had to England. By looking beyond England, whether in the comic mode or the tragic, Shakespeare seems to have accepted, as the vast majority of his contemporaries did, that good government meant the rule of an assiduous and virtuous prince with a sanctioned claim to the throne.

It was only in the more austere Roman plays, dramas which offer a retrospect on governmental systems alien to those of most of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century European states, that Shakespeare was obliged to confront alternatives to the rule of Christian princes. But if *Julius Caesar* (1599) and *Coriolanus* (*c.* 1608) deal with historical alternatives, they also vividly reflect back on Shakespeare's present (corn riots, as an English audience of 1608 would readily have recognized, were not purely a Roman phenomenon). The compact Roman Republic of *Coriolanus* is riven by patrician arrogance and plebeian self-assertion; in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* a now tired republic commands an empire; it staggers on the brink of a lapse into imperial autocracy before beginning the long slide into the imperial decadence of *Titus Andronicus*. To most men and women of the Renaissance, the sweep of Roman history contained within it paramount examples of sober ideals, barely attainable splendours, and dire warnings. As Shakespeare represents that history in his four Roman plays it is the warnings against demagoguery and decadence that predominate. The same warnings have continued to resonate into the twentieth century.

Tragedy and Death

When the disconsolate Richard returns from Ireland to his troubled kingdom in the play to which Shakespeare gave the full title *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, he insists that no one speak to him of comfort. 'Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs', he suggests before proceeding, in a homely and unregal manner, to sit on the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings: 'How some have been deposed, some slain in war, | Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed, | Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed, | All murdered.' For Shakespeare and his contemporaries, as much as for their ancient Greek and Roman predecessors, the very nature of tragedy seemed to require that it explored the sad stories of kings, or at the very least of men and women dignified by royal blood or civil authority. An exemplary dramatic fall, one which stirred the emotions of pity and fear in lesser mortals, had to be a fall from a height of influence and honour. Shakespeare's tragedies deal almost exclusively with the destinies of kings and princes on whose fortunes depend those of the nations they rule. If neither Julius Caesar nor his noble murderers are of royal rank, Caesar at least aspires to it and, as the phenomena which accompany his murder appear to suggest, his greatness is supernaturally affirmed. Only Othello, the noble servant of the Most Serene Republic of Venice, has a merely military rank, but, though his tragedy may ostensibly seem

domestic, seventeenth-century audiences would have been well aware of the threat his downfall posed to Christian supremacy in Cyprus at a time of Turkish ascendancy over the Eastern Mediterranean.

As Kyd, Marlowe, and earlier sixteenth-century English dramatists had defined it on the stage, tragedy was reinforced by explicit enactments of the death of kings. The popularity of the revenge plays that developed from the example of *The Spanish Tragedy* also demonstrates that English audiences rejoiced in the representation of what Shakespeare's Horatio describes as 'carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts ... accidental judgements, casual slaughters ... [and] deaths put on by cunning and forced cause'. Although, as the sometimes vexed reputation of *Hamlet* (*c.* 1599–1601) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries serves to suggest, such deliberate or casual slaughters on stage may not have been to the taste of neo-classical critics, they were integral to the kind of tragedy that Shakespeare accepted as normative. To think of a performance of *Hamlet* without its murders is as absurd an exercise as to contemplate excising the Prince's lengthy meditations on mortality from his soliloquies. Shakespeare's tragic world is uncertain, dangerous, and mortal, and the catastrophes to which all his tragic dramas inexorably move are sealed by the deaths of their protagonists.

It is possible that this dramatic emphasis on mortality reflected the violence of contemporary political life, both at home and abroad. If Protestant England claimed to be righteously indignant over the slaughter of French Huguenots on St Bartholomew's Day 1572, and if it sometimes dwelt pruriently on the seamy side of French, Italian, and Spanish court life, it was itself an uneasy society, haunted by ideas of treason and assassination. It was also ready enough both to extract information from suspects by torture and to execute those it deemed to be traitors according to the bloody ritual of public hanging, drawing, and quartering. The idea of murder as politically expedient may have seemed repugnant to the professionally self-righteous but assassination was by no means a remote or alien phenomenon (as the carefully staged trials of the so-called 'Gunpowder' plotters in 1605 brought home to contemporaries). The glancing references in *Macbeth* (*c.* 1606) to the moral issues raised by this same Gunpowder Plot suggest how a representation of the hurly-burly of the politics of the Scottish past could be made to reverberate into the tangled British present. A historical tragedy written to flatter a Stuart king descended from both Banquo and Edward the Confessor it may be, but *Macbeth* also reflects a deep political unease in which, despite the hiatus between past and present, no monarch could find reassurance. The exploration of turbulence and distrust in the play is not limited to the images of blood and dismemberment with which it begins, nor is it given full expression in King Duncan's inability to find 'the mind's construction in the face'; it is rendered implicit in nature and explicit in the fatal visions, the brain-sickly thoughts, the butchery, the desperate defences, and the fearful isolation of Macbeth himself. Far more so than the sleepless Plantagenets of the history plays, Macbeth is a monarch haunted by

personal desolation and by the extinction of royal ideals and of effective royal influence:

> My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have, but in their stead
> Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath
> Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not.

In *Macbeth* Shakespeare explores a monarch's despair at having to live with the consequences of his desperate and bloody appliances to the inherent political diseases of autocratic government.

The usurping Claudius in *Hamlet*, still clinging to 'those effects for which I did the murder— | My crown, mine own ambition and my queen', seems, despite his own soliloquy of ineffective penitence, to experience relatively little of Macbeth's heavy affliction of conscience. Claudius is Shakespeare's supremely politic king; manipulative, calculating, smooth, secretive, suspicious, and generally well-served by malleable courtiers. His Elsinore is characterized by its eavesdroppers, its note-takers and its double agents. It is not a place where innocence thrives. Elsinore forms a tortuous, patriarchal maze for Ophelia who fails both to negotiate its pitfalls and to understand the cynical logic of its twists and turns; it is a prison for Hamlet who multiplies its complexities while ostensibly attempting to purge them. Hamlet's public problem is how to avenge a political murder in a culture where private vengeance is politically and morally unacceptable; his equally pressing private problem is how to come to terms with the death of his father, with his uncle's accession, and, above all, with his mother's remarriage (and possible complicity in Claudius's crimes). The intertwined dilemmas posed by those problems render the Prince an unsteady and an ineffective revenger. *Hamlet* the drama confuses and complicates the clean lines of a 'revenge play' as soon as Hamlet the character begins to assume roles, to experiment with devices, and to debate issues which veer off from the central one. His meditations, one of which leads Horatio to suggest that he considers 'too curiously', confront him again and again with the fear not of judgement, but with the chill shiver of death and the prospect of a dream-haunted afterlife. The active life is waylaid by the idly contemplative, the confident Renaissance prince by the restless melancholic, the concept of man as the paragon of animals by the *memento mori*. Hamlet's most significant stage-props are a rapier and a skull. *Hamlet* ends with a certain moral neatness which compensates for the disordered heap of corpses which litters the stage. Its protagonist has proved himself ready both for his own contrived death and for the wild justice he brings down upon Claudius and Laertes. Nevertheless, his is an end which contrasts with the more resolute deaths of Shakespeare's other tragic heroes.

If throughout *Hamlet* suicide is seen either as forbidden by a canon of the Everlasting or as an untidy quietus for the unhinged Ophelia, in *Othello* and the Roman plays it is raised again to its pre-Christian, classical dignity. For many members of Shakespeare's first audiences, however, suicide remained a damnable act, a rash end to present woes or accumulated sins on earth (as in the case of Kyd's Isabella and Hieronimo), or a dark act of despair (as in the grave temptation of Spenser's Redcrosse). In *Romeo and Juliet* (*c.*1594–5) the defeated lovers rush into death as precipitously, as incomprehendingly, and as clumsily (if not as fulfillingly) as they had earlier embraced a passionate life. By contrast, in Shakespeare's two great mature love tragedies, *Othello* (1604) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (*c.*1606–7), suicide figures as a noble culmination rather than as an ignoble or despairing escape. For Antony, death by his own hand (albeit bungled) is seen as the proper response of a Roman general to military failure and as the only alternative to public disgrace. For Cleopatra, finally glorious in her robes of state, 'immortal longings' suggest the possibility of a final reunion with a transfigured and heroic husband. The asp's bite seems to her both 'a lover's pinch, | Which hurts and is desired' and a baby at her breast 'who sucks the nurse asleep'. Like Antony, Othello dies as a soldier intent on preserving what is left of his honour and his integrity. He may despair as a man who has been cruelly manipulated and as one whose soul has been caught by perdition, but he too knows what is required of him as a soldier who must follow through the consequences of his earlier ill-considered resolution. If Antony and Cleopatra revel in the chance of an immortal freedom from an empire regulated by the zealous Octavius, Othello, by contrast, dies claiming his part in an ordered Christian society where there are chains of command, records, and distinctions between the baptised and the heathen:

> I pray you in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely but too well,
> Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
> Albeit unused to the melting mood,
> Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinable gum. Set you down this,
> And say besides that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him thus.
> *He stabs himself*

In a sense Othello both dictates his own epitaph and acts out the drama of his inevitable and violent end. Here the 'high Roman fashion' of death, of which his fellow-African Cleopatra speaks, is reasserted for modern times.

High Roman fashions and chivalric military codes are alike absent from the most disturbing, and most obviously revised of Shakespeare's major tragedies, *King Lear* (*c.*1605, printed 1608 with a substantially different text published in the 1623 Folio). *King Lear*, set in pre-Christian Britain, presents us with both a despairing suicide (that of the defeated lover and poisoner, Goneril) and an attempt at suicide (Gloucester's). The main tragic drive of the play derives, however, not from any consistent and inevitable movement towards the death of its main characters but from a series of expectations which Shakespeare systematically confounds or reverses. It is a pattern which would be essentially comic elsewhere in his work. The subversive comments of Lear's Fool, the adoption by Edgar of the role of a crazed beggar, and the fairy-tale-like improbability of the play's opening scenes all suggest how precipitously *King Lear* teeters on the edge of absurdist comedy. When the blinded Gloucester attempts to destroy himself by throwing himself over a cliff at Dover he merely ends up flat on his face (thanks to his son's contrivance). When the painfully chastened Lear seems about to be restored to his rights at the end of the play, Shakespeare, in a calculated reversal of the story provided by his sources, deprives him of Cordelia, of full control of his reasoning faculty, and, above all, of a conventional tragic dignity. In Act III the King madly rages against human ingratitude, exposed to the ravages of the weather like the 'poor naked wretches' who are the meanest of his former subjects. He enters in Act IV 'crowned with weeds and flowers', pronouncing himself 'every inch a king' to the kneeling Gloucester. In Act V he comes on to the stage for the last time bearing the dead body of his daughter, in a scene which proved unpalatable to theatre audiences between 1681 (when Nahum Tate's happy ending was first introduced) and 1838 (when the tragic actor W. C. Macready returned to Shakespeare's original). In the revised version of the play-text (published in the 1623 Folio) Lear's jerky expression suggests that he is torn between the conflicting emotions of agony ('Howl, howl, howl, howl!'), of tenderness ('Her voice was ever soft, | Gentle and low'), and of self-assertion ('I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee'). As he finally collapses, the body in his arms, he may have been forced to abandon the illusion that Cordelia is still breathing but he continues to confuse rage and pity, despair and a sense of natural injustice, perhaps even the dead Fool and the dead daughter:

> And my poor fool is hanged. No, no life.
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
> And thou no breath at all? O, thou wilt come no more.
> Never, never, never.—Pray you, undo
> This button. Thank you, sir. O, O, O, O! (1608 text)

When it is recognized that the King has died, Kent's dual epitaphs emerge as scarcely consolatory ('Vex not his ghost. O, let him pass. He hates him | That would upon the rack of this tough world | Stretch him out longer', 'the wonder is he hath endured so long. | He but usurped his life'). *King Lear* offers little of the tidiness of reordering of most other tragic endings, still less of catharsis, resolution, or absolution. The villainous and the virtuous are silenced by death or distress, and the Duke of Albany, to whom the minimal summing up falls, can only insist that the survivors must 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say'.

Like the problematic *Troilus and Cressida* (*c.*1602) and the possibly collaborative *Timon of Athens* (*c.*1604), *King Lear* insistently explores the awkward, nasty, and uncomfortable aspects of the human condition rather than dignifying them with the paraphernalia, the elevated language, and the rituals demanded by received ideas of tragedy, whether ancient or modern. In significant ways, too, all three plays shift away from a discussion of the ideological, political, and social values of seventeenth-century Europe to a consideration of more alien and alienated worlds where all human values and all human relationships are called into question. Where a Macbeth or a Claudius had usurped a crown, the aged and enraged Lear seems finally to have usurped life itself; where a Hamlet, an Othello, or an Antony had departed with something approaching soldierly dignity, Lear, worn out by life and kingship, dies in a swoon, sadly sitting on the ground.

Women and Comedy

When the brainsick Lear refers to his daughter Cordelia's voice as 'ever soft, | Gentle and low, an excellent thing in women', he seems to be belatedly distinguishing her from the more obvious strident vocal company of her sisters, Goneril and Regan. To many critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most of the broader sisterhood of the women of Shakespeare's histories and tragedies could be safely divided between the strident and the soft and between those who exhibited a distinctly 'unfeminine' aggression (such as Queen Margaret or Lady Macbeth) and those who were all too readily cast as passive female victims (such as Ophelia or Desdemona). Such distinctions are likely to seem grossly inadequate to twentieth-century readers, playgoers, and actors. If Shakespeare, in common with most of his contemporaries, tended to see women as defined and circumscribed in a patriarchal society by their roles as queens, wives, mothers, daughters, and lovers, his plays show that he was also capable of exploring both gender opposition and, more crucially, gender blurring. His women fall into neither 'types' nor 'stereotypes'. In his innovative romantic comedies in particular, where the roles of a Rosalind, a Beatrice, or a Viola would originally have been assigned to men, he allows that women both take crucial initiatives in male-dominated worlds and confuse distinctions between what might loosely be assumed to be 'male' and

'female' characteristics. In general, Shakespeare's sources for the histories and the tragedies obliged him to reflect on power struggles between men, struggles in which women were marginalized unless, like Lady Macbeth, they denied aspects of their femininity or, like Cleopatra, they were prepared to accentuate their physical allure in order to gain a limited political advantage. In the comedies, where happy denouements replace tragic ones and romantic and domestic alliances tend to supersede those engineered in the interests of state policy, negotiations between men and women begin to take place on something approaching an equal footing. Where in the tragedies the vivid independence of a Desdemona is stifled by the weight of male circumstance and the courage of Cordelia is ignored and disparaged, in the comedies women's integrity and intelligence do not merely shine, they briefly triumph.

The structural awkwardness and the many loose ends of what are probably Shakespeare's two earliest comedies, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (*c.*1587) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (*c.*1588), suggest a beginner's uncertainty about dramatic technique and form. Both plays also indicate the degree to which he was dramatizing the ambiguities of his age concerning the freedom of women to act and think independently in courtship and marriage. In the first, a woman dangerously resolves to prove her faith to an undeserving lover; in the second, a woman is brutally schooled in wifely duty by a husband who appears not to merit her service. As part of the contorted plot of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Julia disguises herself as a man in order to follow Proteus from Verona to Milan. Her action (common enough in the prose literature of the sixteenth century) is the first of Shakespeare's many theatrical experiments with the device of female cross-dressing, or, to be more precise, with the disconcerting nuances of a boy actor dressing as a boy while playing the role of a woman. However much Julia's romantic ploy may be related to the European carnival tradition of transvestism, it is one that the far more rumbustiously carnivalesque *The Taming of the Shrew* carefully eschews. The unromantic Katherina's 'taming' by the far from gentle Petruchio consists of a series of rough games, staged tantrums, and physical trials. Throughout, Katherina has to meet direct challenges to her assumed identity and to cope with the antics of a man whose volatility appears to be equally assumed. Finally both have to drop false identities and proclaim their mutual respect. Katherina's public response to her last test, in which she is called upon to affirm a kind of feudal submission to her husband's will ('Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, | Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee . . .'), has been seen by some as a properly cynical response to a hardened cynic. Nevertheless, Katherina's servile placing of her hands beneath Petruchio's foot is answered not by a kick, but by a raising from her knees and a kiss.

Throughout his career Shakespeare amplified, varied, and, at times, reversed the ambiguous gestures of his earliest experiments with comedy. The slick Roman symmetry of *The Comedy of Errors* (*c.*1589–94) is relieved by reflections on family and amatory relationships which almost slip into tenderness. The familial and matrimonial sulkiness of the Athenians with which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*c.*1595–6) opens is reflected in the far more acrimonious and threatening disputes of Oberon and Titania. The play begins with crossed purposes; it unwinds, ironically enough, with a tidiness enforced by the interference of that traditional embodiment of the malign disordering of human affairs, Puck; it ends with multiple marriages celebrated to the accompaniment of a superbly inept tragic entertainment and with the blessing of the once disruptive fairies. As the human lovers wake from their respective dreams in Act IV, each is discovered magically placed beside an unexpected but 'proper' partner, but it is the once rejected Helena who has the hazy wisdom to grasp that she has 'found Demetrius like a jewel, | Mine own and not mine own'. Love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a matter of uncertain discovery; it both claims possession and is obliged to recognize distinctions, differences, individualities. Much the same is true of the discountenancing of the rash and possessive presumptions of the male lovers at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* (*c.*1593–4). In a play shaped around role-playing, word-games, and rhetorical devices it is shockingly apt that at the end life should encounter death, that verbal posturings should be countered by 'Honest plain words', and that sentimental male pretensions of love should be squashed by the Princess's hard-headed insistence that they were received merely as 'bombast and as lining to the time'. When the King of Navarre protests that his proposal of marriage should be accepted at this 'latest minute of the hour', the Princess has the presence of mind to rebut him with the most refined and serious of all Shakespeare's put-downs: 'A time, methinks, too short | To make a world-without-end bargain in'. The play concludes with separations. Jack has not Jill, winter succeeds spring, and characters leave the stage 'severally' to live apart for a twelve month, perhaps for ever.

Although *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (*c.*1597) (which so inspired Verdi and his librettist, Boito) has tended to be overshadowed in the twentieth century by the popularity of the romantic comedies, its position in Shakespeare's comic *œuvre* is central in more than simply the chronological sense. Shakespeare re-introduces characters (Falstaff, Mistress Quickly, Pistol, Nym, and Shallow) from his *Henry IV* plays, but, by implication, he also transfers the setting from Plantagenet to late Tudor England. Its scene is a prosperous English town on the fringes of a royal castle and its park, not an imagined Illyria or an unlocated Arden; its characters are mercantile not noble, and its language is colloquial rather than lyrical. Despite this down-to-earth prosiness, the play allows for the triumph of romantic love over the well-intentioned schemes of parents and the ill-conceived ones of a would-be adulterer. Jack (Fenton) woos and wins his Jill (Anne Page), but Ford, Page, Caius, Slender, and Falstaff, all in their different ways, conspicuously fail in their designs. Although the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* may lack the bouncy resilience of the Falstaff of *I Henry IV*, his role as a self-deceived and preposterous wooer of married women is crucial to the presentation of sexual politics in the play. He is

humiliatingly removed in a basket of dirty linen, compromised in women's clothing (as the 'fat woman of Brainford') and, finally, equipped with the horns traditionally associated with cuckoldry, he is tormented by women and by children disguised as fairies.

In the last scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* ruse is piled upon ruse, and exposure follows on exposure. It is not only Falstaff who is discountenanced, for both Slender and Caius, who assume that they have assignations with women in Windsor Forest, find themselves fobbed off instead with boys in female attire. Disguise and cross-dressing, schemes that explode upon themselves and contrived encounters also figure prominently in the so-called 'romantic' comedies of Shakespeare's middle career. In these plays, however, such festive fooling tends to be demoted to sub-plots while the pains, strains, and pleasures of young love become the central concerns. Essentially, too, the successful resolution of each play depends upon the resourcefulness of its woman protagonist. In *The Merchant of Venice* (*c.*1596–7) Portia, who at the beginning of the action bemoans the passivity posthumously imposed on her by her father ('the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father'), in Act IV assumes the robes of a male advocate and exercises her ingenious intellect in order to rescue Antonio from the dire conditions of Shylock's bond (though in her final dealings with Shylock she signally fails to exhibit the quality of mercy she had once advocated). In *As You Like It* (*c.*1599–1600) Rosalind, banished from her uncle's court, retires to the forest of Arden disguised as a youth named Ganymede. If the name she adopts has overtones of the epicene, the play-acting in which she indulges with Orlando, in order to 'cure' him of his romantic passion for the 'real' Rosalind, adds to the volatility of gender in the play. Rosalind/Ganymede assumes control not simply of Orlando's emotional development but, gradually, of the destinies of virtually all the temporary and permanent sojourners in Arden. Despite the ambiguity of her outward appearance, she is triumphantly the mistress of herself; controlled, sensible, self-analytical, yet neither cold nor phlegmatic. If at one moment she can unsentimentally anatomize human affection in a reproof to the love-sick Orlando ('men are April when they woo, December when they wed. Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives'), in another she can turn to her cousin Celia and exclaim wonderingly: 'O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love. But it cannot be sounded. My affection hath an unknown bottom, like the Bay of Portugal.' Where Rosalind exercises benign authority in exile, the shipwrecked Viola of *Twelfth Night* (1601) is obliged to steer a middle way between the contradictions, the oppositions, and the displays of melancholy, spleen, and choler in the disconcerting world of Illyria. Her protective assumption of the role of a eunuch ('Cesario') effectively protects her from very little; Orsino flirts languorously, Olivia makes direct sexual advances, and the incompetent Sir Andrew Aguecheek insists on challenging her to a duel. It is her resourceful intelligence, and not her disguise, which

preserves her both from the affectations of blinkered lovers and from the folly, hypocrisy, and cruelty that flourishes below stairs in Illyrian aristocratic households.

The disconcertions, tensions, and ambiguities of Illyria are to some degree mirrored in the more violent dislocations of Messina in *Much Ado About Nothing* (*c.*1598–9). They are painfully accentuated in the so-called 'problem' comedies, *All's Well That Ends Well* (*c.*1603) and *Measure for Measure* (1604). *Much Ado About Nothing* begins with references to martial conflict, but as its plot develops it does more than refine and limit that conflict to the battle of wits between Beatrice and Benedick; it is perilously fragmented by slander, acrimony, and dishonour and then rescrambled to allow for a somewhat insecure reconciliation in the last act. It is essentially a play about mutuality, not serenity. Its bitter-sweetness is echoed in Balthasar's song 'Sigh no more, ladies'; men are deceivers, and the much put-upon Hero seems condemned to sigh, but both its comic resolution and its comic energy ultimately turn on the transformation of the grating of Beatrice and Benedick (the blesser and the blessed) into an agreement between equal partners. The conversion of sounds of woe into 'hey, nonny, nonnies' is, however, far more uneasy in the concluding scenes of *All's Well That Ends Well* (with its sick king, its unattractive 'hero', and its long-suffering and determined heroine, Helena) and of *Measure for Measure* (with its problematic Duke, its hypocritical Angelo, and its prickly heroine, Isabella). Both plays rely on bed tricks so that spurned mistresses may claim lovers and both plays force couples into relationships rather than allow relationships to be forged by mutual assent. As its title suggests, *Measure for Measure* offers a series of juxtapositions rather than coalescences. Isabella's passionate and articulate defence of the concept of mercy in Act II is Shakespeare's most probing statement about the difficulty and consequences of judgement, but Isabella can be seen as arguing here as much from untried ideals as from an instinctive or acquired wisdom. Elsewhere, her idealism suggests a naïvety about herself and about the shortcomings of others. *Measure for Measure* is a play of dark corners, hazy margins, and attempts at rigid definition. It poses the necessity of passing moral judgement while demonstrating that all judgement is relative.

The internal 'problems' that are supposed to determine the nature of the 'problem' plays are largely the invention of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Shakespeare criticism. It was argued that because a play like *Measure for Measure* did not necessarily accord with the tidy romantic syntheses of a play such as *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare was likely to have been distracted while writing it by some kind of (undetermined) personal crisis. Unease, uncertain or divided responses, and relative judgements shape all his plays, whether comic or tragic. The tendency to divide his dramatic works into groups and subgroups, with their own internal reflections and parallels, has also helped to determine the varied critical fortunes of Shakespeare's last plays—the four heterogeneous comedies *Pericles* (*c.*1607–8), *Cymbeline* (*c.*1610–11), *The Winter's Tale* (*c.*1609–10), and *The Tempest* (*c.*1610–11)—and the equally

heterogeneous history play *Henry VIII* (sometimes also known as *All is True*, *c.*1612–13). Where some critics have seen evidence of harmony and spirituality, others have noticed only untidiness and tiredness; where some have insisted on Shakespeare's fresh experimentation, others have objected to a rehashing of moribund theatrical conventions; some recognize a new realism, others insist on a calculated retreat from realism.

Shakespeare's last plays effectively continue the irregular line of development of his earlier work by interfusing comic and tragic themes with a new intensity. More piquantly, they seem to affirm that in certain kinds of comedy, human happiness can be rescued from the jaws of despair. Imogen in *Cymbeline* and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* are faced with personal and political crises and meet them with a mature and articulate dignity. Both the untidy and textually problematic *Pericles* (which the editors of the Folio left out of their collection) and the almost neo-classically neat *The Tempest* (to which these same editors gave pride of place) stress the intensity of a father–daughter relationship. *The Winter's Tale* moves jerkily between seasons, kingdoms, and generations, while the action of *The Tempest* takes place on one island in one afternoon. All the last plays require elaborate stage-machinery and all seem to have exploited the scenic effects available in the Blackfriars Theatre. All, in their distinct ways, contrast the sins and shortcomings of an older generation with the resurgent hopes represented by a new, and all balance the advances of death with enactments of rediscovery, rebirth, and resurrection. In each play treachery, calumny, and tyranny distort human and political relationships, and in each the humanist ideals of self-discipline and self-knowledge are represented as counters to public and private misgovernment.

In the last of his plays (probably written in collaboration with John Fletcher) Shakespeare returned to the 'matter' of England. In the often paradoxical political world of *Henry VIII* the true eminence of the King seems to rise as his former allies, friends, and counsellors fall. The play ends with the King benignly content with the prophecies of a glorious future for his infant daughter Elizabeth, but its course has suggested quite how vexed, deathly, and dangerous life could be at Henry's court. For Buckingham and, above all, for Wolsey a reversal of political fortunes, and an impending judicial end, occasion dignified confessional meditations. For Queen Katherine, rejected by the King for reasons of state, but sure and certain of her justification before God and man, the approach of death requires an act of reconciliation with her enemies. In accordance with the accepted rules of a Christian death-bed it also required an ordering of her earthly affairs. Katherine, blessed by a stately vision of bliss, quietly commands a funeral which will proclaim her personal integrity and her unusurped dignity:

> When I am dead, good wench,
> Let me be used with honour. Strew me over
> With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
> I was a chaste wife to my grave. Embalm me,
> Then lay me forth. Although unqueened, yet like
> A queen and daughter to a king inter me.

Queen Katherine dies peacefully in her bed, not raging against heaven or threatened by the ministers of hell. Significantly, too, she is neither condemned to the scaffold nor slaughtered on a battlefield, she is removed neither by poison nor by an assassin's dagger. For all its indeterminate mixture of history, tragedy, comedy, pageant, and spectacle, the once much-admired and now much-neglected *Henry VIII* also introduced the quiet death-bed to non-devotional literature. It both dignified a wronged woman and, perhaps more distinctively, it domesticated a queen.

Ben Jonson and the Comic Theatre

In the 'Induction on the Stage' to his London comedy *Bartholomew Fair* (acted 1614, published 1631) Ben(jamin) Jonson (1572/3–1637) gives to the actor playing his scrivener (copyist) the claim that the new play which will follow will be 'merry, and as full of noise as sport, made to delight all, and to offend none'. This Induction initiates the seepage between actor and non-actor and the interaction of illusion and reality on which the whole comedy is based. It also introduces some pointed side-swipes at the tastes of contemporary audiences. 'He that will swear *Jeronimo* or *Andronicus* are the best plays yet', the scrivener announces with reference to Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and to Shakespeare's earliest and bloodiest tragedy, 'shall pass unexcepted at here as a man whose judgement shews it is constant, and hath stood still these five and twenty, or thirty years'. He deliberately exaggerates the datedness of the bombastic tragedies of the 1590s and implies that old fashions should now be laid to rest (though this may be an ironic suggestion given that the young Jonson was said to have acted the part of Hieronimo and had later written additional speeches for a revival of Kyd's play). The scrivener's subsequent comments on the theatrical vogue for tragi-comical mixed drama, of the kind evolved in Shakespeare's last phase, are, however, far less patronizingly indulgent. '*Tales*, *Tempests*, and such like drolleries' are disdained as indecorous; they are unreal, they offend against nature, and they are vulgarly marred by a 'concupiscence of jigs and dances'.

Shakespeare was, however, not alone in pandering to the public demand for romantic escapism and for happy resolutions to potentially tragic dramas of which Jonson complained. In the address 'to the Reader' prefaced to the Hellenic pastoral *The Faithful Shepherdess* (*c.*1608) John Fletcher (1579–1625) insisted that tragi-comedy was not so called because it intermixed mirth and murder, but because it eschewed death 'which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near to it, which is enough to make it no comedy'. A tragi-comedy represented the sufferings and joys of 'familiar people' and, despite Sir

heterogeneous history play *Henry VIII* (sometimes also known as *All is True*, *c.*1612–13). Where some critics have seen evidence of harmony and spirituality, others have noticed only untidiness and tiredness; where some have insisted on Shakespeare's fresh experimentation, others have objected to a rehashing of moribund theatrical conventions; some recognize a new realism, others insist on a calculated retreat from realism.

Shakespeare's last plays effectively continue the irregular line of development of his earlier work by interfusing comic and tragic themes with a new intensity. More piquantly, they seem to affirm that in certain kinds of comedy, human happiness can be rescued from the jaws of despair. Imogen in *Cymbeline* and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* are faced with personal and political crises and meet them with a mature and articulate dignity. Both the untidy and textually problematic *Pericles* (which the editors of the Folio left out of their collection) and the almost neo-classically neat *The Tempest* (to which these same editors gave pride of place) stress the intensity of a father–daughter relationship. *The Winter's Tale* moves jerkily between seasons, kingdoms, and generations, while the action of *The Tempest* takes place on one island in one afternoon. All the last plays require elaborate stage-machinery and all seem to have exploited the scenic effects available in the Blackfriars Theatre. All, in their distinct ways, contrast the sins and shortcomings of an older generation with the resurgent hopes represented by a new, and all balance the advances of death with enactments of rediscovery, rebirth, and resurrection. In each play treachery, calumny, and tyranny distort human and political relationships, and in each the humanist ideals of self-discipline and self-knowledge are represented as counters to public and private misgovernment.

In the last of his plays (probably written in collaboration with John Fletcher) Shakespeare returned to the 'matter' of England. In the often paradoxical political world of *Henry VIII* the true eminence of the King seems to rise as his former allies, friends, and counsellors fall. The play ends with the King benignly content with the prophecies of a glorious future for his infant daughter Elizabeth, but its course has suggested quite how vexed, deathly, and dangerous life could be at Henry's court. For Buckingham and, above all, for Wolsey a reversal of political fortunes, and an impending judicial end, occasion dignified confessional meditations. For Queen Katherine, rejected by the King for reasons of state, but sure and certain of her justification before God and man, the approach of death requires an act of reconciliation with her enemies. In accordance with the accepted rules of a Christian death-bed it also required an ordering of her earthly affairs. Katherine, blessed by a stately vision of bliss, quietly commands a funeral which will proclaim her personal integrity and her unusurped dignity:

> When I am dead, good wench,
> Let me be used with honour. Strew me over
> With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
> I was a chaste wife to my grave. Embalm me,
> Then lay me forth. Although unqueened, yet like
> A queen and daughter to a king inter me.

Queen Katherine dies peacefully in her bed, not raging against heaven or threatened by the ministers of hell. Significantly, too, she is neither condemned to the scaffold nor slaughtered on a battlefield, she is removed neither by poison nor by an assassin's dagger. For all its indeterminate mixture of history, tragedy, comedy, pageant, and spectacle, the once much-admired and now much-neglected *Henry VIII* also introduced the quiet death-bed to non-devotional literature. It both dignified a wronged woman and, perhaps more distinctively, it domesticated a queen.

Ben Jonson and the Comic Theatre

In the 'Induction on the Stage' to his London comedy *Bartholomew Fair* (acted 1614, published 1631) Ben(jamin) Jonson (1572/3–1637) gives to the actor playing his scrivener (copyist) the claim that the new play which will follow will be 'merry, and as full of noise as sport, made to delight all, and to offend none'. This Induction initiates the seepage between actor and non-actor and the interaction of illusion and reality on which the whole comedy is based. It also introduces some pointed side-swipes at the tastes of contemporary audiences. 'He that will swear *Jeronimo* or *Andronicus* are the best plays yet', the scrivener announces with reference to Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and to Shakespeare's earliest and bloodiest tragedy, 'shall pass unexcepted at here as a man whose judgement shews it is constant, and hath stood still these five and twenty, or thirty years'. He deliberately exaggerates the datedness of the bombastic tragedies of the 1590s and implies that old fashions should now be laid to rest (though this may be an ironic suggestion given that the young Jonson was said to have acted the part of Hieronimo and had later written additional speeches for a revival of Kyd's play). The scrivener's subsequent comments on the theatrical vogue for tragi-comical mixed drama, of the kind evolved in Shakespeare's last phase, are, however, far less patronizingly indulgent. '*Tales*, *Tempests*, and such like drolleries' are disdained as indecorous; they are unreal, they offend against nature, and they are vulgarly marred by a 'concupiscence of jigs and dances'.

Shakespeare was, however, not alone in pandering to the public demand for romantic escapism and for happy resolutions to potentially tragic dramas of which Jonson complained. In the address 'to the Reader' prefaced to the Hellenic pastoral *The Faithful Shepherdess* (*c.*1608) John Fletcher (1579–1625) insisted that tragi-comedy was not so called because it intermixed mirth and murder, but because it eschewed death 'which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near to it, which is enough to make it no comedy'. A tragi-comedy represented the sufferings and joys of 'familiar people' and, despite Sir

Philip Sidney's strictures in *The Defence of Poesie*, it could happily intermingle the elevated and the ordinary ('a God is as lawful in this as in a tragedy, and mean people as in a comedy'). Fletcher, who in his close and successful collaborations—notably with Francis Beaumont (1584–1616)—worked in a variety of theatrical modes, had evolved a particular kind of play characterized by its heterogeneous and sometimes startling combination of intrigue and romance, of the amorous and the perilous, of the bucolic and the lyrical. His tragi-comedies reflect back on the prose pastorals of Sidney and his Italian models and they employ the formula of a happy denouement which implies that even in an imperfect world, virtue could be perfectly rewarded. The plot of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster, or Love lies a-bleeding* (*c.* 1609, published 1620) shows injustices reversed, disasters averted, and heirs restored to their rights once assumed disguises and contrived misunderstandings have finally been removed. In their *A King and No King* (1611, published 1619) King Arbaces's incestuous passion for his supposed sister and his potentially tragic plans for murder, rape, and suicide are somewhat arbitrarily, but necessarily, dissipated by the timely revelation that he is in fact neither a king nor a brother. Fletcher's collaboration with Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613, printed 1634), draws on Chaucer's Knight's Tale in order to retell a story of knightly rivalries, vexed relationships, and sudden reversals. In his concluding speech, however, Duke Theseus offers a distinctly un-Chaucerian meditation on the whims of fortune which might appropriately stand at the end of any of these tragi-comedies. For Theseus, the play's paradoxes and disconcertions can be interpreted as reflections of the unpredictability of Fate and the timing of heavenly justice: 'O you heavenly charmers, | What things you make of us! For what we lack | We laugh, for what we have, are sorry; still | Are children in some kind. Let us be thankful | for that which is . . .'.

Francis Beaumont's rattling burlesque, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (*c.* 1607, printed 1613) differs markedly from his tragi-comic collaborations with Fletcher. It is set in modern London, not in an imagined Arcadian landscape, and it begins as the Prologue to a performance of a genteel play at the Blackfriars Theatre is interrupted by an unruly citizen and his wife who demand that the actors perform something more to their middle-brow taste. Worthy London merchants, this uppity grocer claims, are mocked and irritated by the courtly prejudices of most modern writers; proper subjects of drama, he suggests, might better be found in the mercantile achievements of past and present London. The grocer also wants a part in the play to be reserved for his apprentice, the cocky amateur actor, Rafe. When the citizens get their way and Rafe mounts the boards, chivalry and trade are forced first into an incongruous embrace and ultimately into an unconvincingly genial reconciliation. Although it was not a success with its first audiences, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* vividly demonstrates the extent to which City manners and City characters had come to determine the subjects chosen by the London-based comic dramatists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Since its awkward beginnings in plays such as *Ralph Roister Doister*, non-romantic comedy had made rapid advances in theatrical sophistication and topical cross-reference. *The Old Wives' Tale* (*c.* 1590, published 1595) is a dislocated medley of Plautian and modern English folk elements and an intermixture of the Roman and the rustic, presented by its author, George Peele (1556–96), as a satirical comment on escapist 'pastoral' fashions. Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday, or A Pleasant Comedy of the Gentle Craft* (1599, published 1600) is both more shapely and more specifically a relocation of the ancient Roman urban comedy in commercial modern London. Dekker (?1570–1632), like Deloney before him, is equally specific in his presentation of honest toil and honourable trade as the keys to the health of a modern commonwealth. The play, set at the time of Henry V's French wars, stresses what many Elizabethan merchants would have taken as a self-evident, but none the less revolutionary, social truth, the equal dignity of the gentleman and the skilled craftsman. Simon Eyre, the hero of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, rises to the essentially bourgeois dignity of the Lord Mayoralty of London but his daughter Rose marries a kinsman of the Earl of Lincoln. If, however, the King is prepared to recognize that 'love respects no blood', to Eyre the alliance between the court and trade is an unequal one. 'Those silken fellows are but painted images, outsides, outsides', he tries to insist to his socially mobile daughter, 'What? The Gentle Trade is a living for a man through Europe, through the world!'

Professional pride, the pushiness of the *arriviste*, and the comic conflict between generations and classes also figure in three of Thomas Middleton's London comedies, *A Mad World, My Masters* (*c.* 1605–7, printed 1608), *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605, printed 1608), and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1611). For Middleton, however, social anomalies, new mercantile value-systems, and the equation of money and sex suggest the corruption of urban society. In each play foxes have to be outfoxed and the old who lack both spritely wit and integrity are successfully outwitted by the young. Ingenuity proves to be the best defence against arbitrary oppression. In *A Trick to Catch the Old One* Middleton (1580–1627) shows Theodorus Witgood (whose name implies that his quick intelligence is a divine gift) getting the better of two 'old ones', his usurious London uncle, Pecunius Lucre, and the miserly Walkadine Hoard. From the first he regains his lost inheritance, from the second a bride. If the plot of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* depends less on wit, it shows an equal concern with money, sex, and rank. A London goldsmith, appropriately named Yellowhammer, and his wife Maudline attempt to secure their new position in society by marrying off their daughter to Sir Walter Whorehound, a man of greater social, if not (as his name suggests) moral, standing. Moll Yellowhammer finally manages to trounce them by eloping with an impoverished gentleman of her own choice. At the same time, the Yellowhammers determine that their undergraduate son should be allied to a wealthy Welsh widow ('Yes, sure', Maudline insists, 'a huge heir in Wales, | At least to nineteen mountains, | Besides her goods and

cattell'). The widow, it unfortunately transpires, is no more than Sir Walter's whore. Throughout the play Middleton exposes pretension, false estimates, and idle expectations. His middle-class Yellowhammers err in their vulgar snobberies (they have, for example, sent a silver spoon to their son in Cambridge 'to eat his broth in the hall amongst the gentlemen commoners') while his gentlemanly Whorehound lacks both honour and scruples. The happy denouements of the plays may allow for the triumph of young lovers, but they also revel in the discountenancing of pretenders, fools, and villains.

Philip Massinger (1583–1640), a regular collaborator of Fletcher's from *c.*1616, moderated much of Middleton's harsh irony in his own later citizen comedies by informing them with his own distinctly gentlemanly prejudices. *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (*c.*1625, published 1633) and, to a lesser extent, *The City Madam* (1632, published 1658) follow the precedent of *A Trick to Catch the Old One* in contrasting gentlemanly wit and prodigality with bourgeois hypocrisy and mean-spiritedness. In the long-popular *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* the flamboyantly rapacious Sir Giles Overreach is tricked into restoring his nephew Wellborn's fortunes and reputation. The play is effectively shaped around a struggle between the well-born and the ill-gotten. Wellborn's restored social status is confirmed by his being given charge of a company of soldiers; his new patron, Lord Lovell, marries Lady Allworth, while the tricked parvenu Overreach is driven into a despairing madness and is forcibly removed to Bedlam. The traditional order of things also triumphs in *The City Madam*. Luke Frugal, given charge of his brother's extravagantly ambitious household when that good-natured brother is supposed to have retired to a monastery, proves as monstrous an oppressor as Shakespeare's Angelo (Massinger probably knew *Measure for Measure*). Luke serves his turn in bringing the family back into line, however, and the true master is welcomed back as a deliverer and an exposer of hypocrisy. For Sir John Frugal this restoration of order implies that members of his family should henceforth know their place in the social, sexual, and economic hierarchy, and his wife is told to 'instruct | Our city dames, whom wealth makes proud, to move | In their own spheres, and willingly to confess | . . . A distance 'twixt the city, and the court'. For Massinger tidy comic endings seem to require a return to the status quo ante. The patriarch reassumes command over his household, the parvenu defers to the gentleman, and old money glitters more brightly than the new.

The urban comedies of Ben Jonson are at once more exuberant, more aggressive, and more subversive than those of his contemporaries and imitators. However much his royal entertainments, his court masques, and the poems he addressed to prominent aristocrats may express a deference to the principles of monarchic rule and noble patronage, Jonson's plays reveal him to be an unthinking respecter neither of persons nor of authority. His comedies possess an extravagance of characterization coupled with an extraordinary neatness of plotting. While his earlier plays ridicule the absurdities, anomalies, and inconsistencies which he typifies as 'humours', the sharply crafted plays of

the early 1600s deal more directly with power and manipulation. His protagonists glory in their native genius, but their ambitions, like those of the headstrong ancient builders of the Tower of Babel, are inherently flawed. Like the Babelites, Jonson's characters are confounded by language. In *The Alchemist* in particular, egocentricity, self-centredness, professional jargon, and private cant serve to preclude listening and responding; characters are effectively divided from each other by their distinctive voices, idiolects, and expressions. They can be lost for words or, more crucially, lost in words.

Jonson, who was much given to manifestos and declarations of literary intent, insisted in one of the entries in his various collection of notes and reflections, *Timber, or Discoveries Made upon Men and Manners* (published posthumously in 1640) that comedy had been considered by the Greeks to be equal in dignity to tragedy. Comic dramatists, he added, were held to be moral instructors 'no lesse than the Tragicks'. Modern theatre audiences, he complained, had consistently failed to grasp the point that 'the moving of laughter' was not essential to comedy whereas 'equity, truth, perspicuity, and candour' were. The Prologue to the second version of *Every Man in His Humour*, printed in the Folio volume of his works in 1616, equally represents an attempt to define the qualities of his own dramas in the face of debased popular taste. He claims to 'hate' the kind of play that makes 'a child now swaddled, to proceed Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed, | Past threescore years' and that which 'with three rusty swords' re-enacts 'York and Lancaster's long jars'. *His* plays will have no apologetic choruses, no scenic effects, and no ominous noises off. They will rather employ

> . . . deeds and language, such as men do use,
> And persons, such as comedy would choose,
> When she would show an image of the times,
> And sport with human follies not with crimes.
> Except we make them such, by loving still
> Our popular errors, when we know they're ill.
> I mean such errors as you'll all confess,
> By laughing at them, they deserve no less . . .

This is an attempt to announce the advent of a theatrical new age, an age which will dispose of artifice and substitute plain words, one which will subvert rather than confront, one which will allow that drama can represent a shared and deficient humanity rather than elevate and isolate the tragic hero.

Jonson's revision of *Every Man in His Humour* was in itself a signal to his readers of a personally engineered revolution. The first version of the play, in which Shakespeare is named in the cast list, was first performed in 1598 with a Florentine setting and Italian-sounding characters. In 1616 it re-emerged as an emphatically *London* play, its Lorenzos replaced by Knowells, its Musco by Brainworm, and its 'Bobadilla' translated into the extravagantly English Bobadill, a 'Paul's man', a lounging, professional *flâneur* in the once highly

public space of the nave of St Paul's Cathedral. The 'English' *Every Man* does more than simply sport with human folly; it is a precise study of the kind of whimsical excess which Jonson believes disturbs the steady and reasoned development of human affairs. Excess also determines the nature of Jonson's most subtle, various, and energetic comedies, *Volpone* (1605–6, printed 1607), *Epicene, or the Silent Woman* (1609–10, printed 1616), *The Alchemist* (1610, printed 1612), and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614, printed 1631). *Epicene* is centred on the obsession of Morose, 'a gentleman that loves no noise', with silence. However ecologically sound his private campaign might seem to a twentieth-century audience, Morose is rendered absurd to a seventeenth-century one. He hates the essential sounds of city life, its bells, chatter, street-cries, cart-wheels, and occasional cannon. He seeks instead to withdraw from human society into the selfish security of his own company ('All discourses but mine own afflict me, they seem harsh, impertinent and irksome'). Morose emerges as an eccentric misanthropist who is fair game for those who expose his misanthropy to public scrutiny and ridicule. In order to spite his nephew, he marries himself to a 'silent woman', but his bride first turns out to be a nagging shrew and is ultimately revealed to be no bride at all, but a boy dressed as a girl. The comedy ends with a disturbing ambiguity, not with the tidy romance of a marriage but with a necessary divorce and with the financial justification of Morose's disinherited nephew, Sir Dauphine Eugenie (another 'well-born' heir).

The Alchemist centres not on the admirable tricker as the exposer of folly but on the professional trickster as the maker of fools. It begins with a noisy quarrel ('I fart at thee', 'I'll strip you', 'I'll gum your silks | With good strong water'), rapidly develops by setting a series of carefully engineered schemes in motion, gathers speed in the third act, and then seems to head towards an inevitable catastrophe which Jonson averts by letting the intrigue unwind rather than explode. The whole action of the play is confined to a house in Blackfriars, but as the original audience in the Blackfriars Theatre must have guessed, the play draws a larger London, including that of the audience's experience and expectations, into itself. When in the last act Subtle, the alchemist of the title, vanishes, he is left free to find more gulls in whatever larger London he escapes into (indeed his erstwhile assistant, Face, offers to send him a customer 'now and then, for old acquaintance'). In the course of the action Subtle and Face have managed to exploit an extraordinary range of urban suckers (Mammon the gourmandizing knight, Drugger the tobacco seller, Surly the gamester, and the self-righteous Puritans Tribulation Wholesome and his deacon, Ananias), but we are left at the end with the feeling that the next victim may be sitting next to us in the theatre. Jonson exploits similarly disconcerting effects in *Bartholomew Fair*, a play set in London's once great August Fair. The Fair, with its multi-purpose side-shows (such as Ursula's pig tent which serves as eating-house, privy, and brothel, where 'you may ha' your punk, and your pig in state, sir, both piping hot'), is in fact an unrestrained, carnivalesque city beyond the City. Those who attempt to restrain it, witness against it, or jeer at it, whether

they be Justice Adam Overdo, the Puritan Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, or the two gallants, Quarlous and Winwife, are drawn willy-nilly into its reversals, ambiguities, surprises, and role changes. 'Remember you are but Adam, flesh and blood!', the floundering Overdo is counselled at the end of the play, 'You have your frailty; forget your other name of Overdo and invite us all to supper'. He can do nothing but accede.

Volpone, or The Fox is Jonson's most savage comedy. Despite its title and its Italianate menagerie of characters ('Fox', 'Flesh-fly', 'Vulture', 'Crow', 'Raven') it never seeks to reduce men to beasts or mere concepts. Its virtuous characters, Celia ('Heavenly') and Bonario ('Good'), may act like ciphers and may mouth moral platitudes, but they leave us wondering how else uprightness might express itself in such a singularly naughty world. The Venice of *Volpone* is anything but serene. Its merchants are unscrupulous and self-seeking, its husbands mercenary and violent, its lawyers mendacious and corrupt, and even visitors to it mistake its dissimulation for sophistication. In Volpone's superbly modulated opening speech all values are reversed or thrown open to redefinition:

> Good morning to the day; and next my gold
> Open the shrine, that I may see my saint.
> [*Mosca draws a curtain, revealing piles of gold*]
> Hail the world's soul, and mine! More glad than is
> The teeming earth to see the longed-for sun
> Peep through the horns of the celestial Ram,
> Am I, to view thy splendour darkening his;
> That lying here, amongst my other hoards,
> Show'st like a flame by night, or like the day
> Struck out of chaos, when all darkness fled
> Unto the centre. O, thou son of Sol
> But brighter than thy father, let me kiss,
> With adoration, thee, and every relic
> Of sacred treasure in this blessed room.

Volpone flaunts his riches as did Venice in its prime, and like the city he glories 'more in the cunning purchase of my wealth | Than in the glad possession, since I gain no common way'. Nevertheless, he allows that gold overturns the metaphors of pagan legend and Christian Scripture alike; it usurps the splendours of nature and the joys of love and even renders hell 'with thee to boot' worth heaven. Volpone is no Marlovian outsider, no aspiring intellectual, no detached, clever upstart (unlike Subtle); he is an aristocratic insider with a particular flair for exploiting the darker, passive side of mercantile acquisitiveness. He is, above all, a man of creative energy, one who splendidly acts out a series of roles (the plutocrat, the invalid, the mountebank, the musician, the poet, the lover) but one who is finally obliged by a court (which is only marginally less shifty than he is) to become the permanent invalid he once pretended to be. Venetian justice in *Volpone* is not the ideal held up in *The*

Merchant of Venice. But then Jonson the dramatist, unlike his 'beloved' Shakespeare, seems to have possessed a far greater tendency to distrust both romance and political ideals.

Jonson and the High Roman Fashion

Although Jonson did not necessarily trust ideals and idealists, he was certainly capable of adulating them if and when occasion demanded. 'Occasion' was generally the coincidence of aristocratic aspiration and aristocratic patronage in an age when aristocracy and an aristocratic culture mattered. Jonson, perhaps the most truly neo-Roman of all English writers of the Renaissance period, readily associated himself with Horace and associated the subjects of Horace's poetry with the ambiguities and anomalies of the reign of Augustus. The breadth of his classical reading was particularly evident in the printed form of the masque *Hymenaei* (originally performed at court in 1606 as part of the celebrations of the marital alliance between two upper-class families), for the extensive scholarly notes which supplement the text render it virtually an antiquarian treatise on Roman marriage customs. It was, however, with the poems collected as *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest* in the 1616 Folio that Jonson's direct debt to the Roman poets became most evident (the name of *The Forrest*, for example, translated the Latin word 'silva', both a forest and a collection). The *Epigrammes*, which Jonson considered 'the ripest fruit' of his studies, and which he claimed to value above his plays, contain pithy addresses to his Muse, to King James, to prominent noblemen and noblewomen, to literary friends, allies, and enemies, all expressed as rhymed English adaptations of the compact forms perfected in Latin by Juvenal and Horace. In epigrams 103 and 105, for example, Lady Mary Wroth is praised as the 'faire crowne' of her fair sex, as living up to her famous family and, most elegantly, as the reincarnation of the classical deities ('Madame, had all antiquitie beene lost, | All historie seal'd up, and fables crost; | That we had left us, nor by time, nor place | Least mention of a Nymph, a Muse, a Grace . . . Who could not but create them all from you?'). Lady Mary's husband, Sir Robert Wroth, is the recipient of a Horatian epistle, included in *The Forrest*, which contrasts the vices, sports, and entertainments of the city and the court with the alternative pleasures of country life. Instead of masques ('the short braverie of the night') Wroth can enjoy sound sleep or, from his bed, hear 'the loud stag speake'. He can delight in the ordered and fruitful progress of the seasons and 'live innocent' while others 'watch in guiltie armes, and stand | The furie of a rash command'. A similar evocation of refinement in gentlemanly retirement marks 'To Penshurst', an address to the country estate of Sir Robert Sidney (Mary Wroth's father). The poem's learned recalls of certain of Martial's epigrams and its replay of the anti-urban moralism which pervades Roman poetry of the first century AD help shape a tribute to the aristocratic values that Jonson

chooses to see as eternal. Penshurst is neither architecturally pretentious nor the expression of its owner's oppressive pride. Its park and its tenantry share an extraordinary fertility: fat carps run into nets, eels jump on land in front of fishermen, figs, grapes, and quinces mature in order, and the 'ripe daughters' of farming families come to the house bearing 'an embleme of themselves, in plum, or peare'. Above all, Jonson seems to find an especial joy in his own courteous reception at Penshurst:

> Where comes no guest, but is allow'd to eate,
> Without his feare, and of the lord's owne meate:
> Where the same beere, and bread, and self-same wine,
> That is his Lordships, shall be also mine.
> And I not faine to sit (as some, this day,
> At great mens tables) and yet dine away.

'To Penshurst' purposefully dwells on the idea of the open-handed generosity, the easy elegance, and the unaffected cultivation which Jonson saw as linking a modern aristocracy to the idealized patrician patrons of the ancient Roman poets.

In the eighty-ninth of his prose *Discoveries* ('Nobilium Ingenia') he offered a radically different analysis of the political characteristics of the ruling class. Some noblemen, he insists, serve their prince disinterestedly; others 'love their own ease' and out of vice, nature, or self-direction 'avoid business and care'; others still 'remove themselves upon craft and design' and these the prince should reckon 'in the list of his open enemies'. It is these contradictory inclinations to virtue, service, sloth, treachery, and conspiracy that he explores in his two Roman tragedies, *Sejanus his Fall* (1603, printed 1605) and *Catiline* (1611). Both plays rely heavily on classical dramatic precedent and on learned reference to Latin historians, orators, and poets, but both endeavour to do more than display Jonson's scholarly credentials. Both suggest vivid parallels between Roman corruption, treachery, and venality and the instability of the modern state. Jonson's first audiences may have remained unresponsive to the learned *Catiline* (obliging its author to defend his enterprise in the preface to its printed text), but few would have failed to recognize an analogy between the Catiline conspiracy in 63 BC and that of the Gunpowder Plot of AD 1605. As the more vivid *Sejanus* also suggests, Jonson readily recognized that if patrician virtue could be seen as an ideal linking the ancient and the modern orders, so ancient vice could find echoes in modern social disease. The tragedy centres on the devices and desires of Tiberius, a lazy, suspicious, unscrupulous Emperor determined to rule an increasingly sleazy Rome through the offices of the low-born favourite whom he has promoted to a position of power. Abetted by his master and 'rarefied' by the (literally) poisonous dowager Empress Livia, Sejanus attempts to crush all potential opposition by means of a singularly nasty mixture of threats, violence, fear, and murder. As with many of Jonson's comic sinners (who, in so many ways, stem from him), Sejanus aspires too

highly and his schemes begin to totter. At the opening of Act V he triumphs in his genius and his influence:

> Swell, swell, my joys: and faint not to declare
> Yourselves, as ample, as your causes are.
> I did not live, till now; this is my first hour:
> Wherein I see my thoughts reached by my power.
> But this, and grip my wishes. Great, and high
> The world knows only two, that's Rome and I.
> My roof receives me not; 'tis air I tread:
> And, at each step, I feel my advanced head
> Knock out a star in heav'n! Reared to this height,
> All my desires seem modest, poor and slight,
> That did before sound impudent: 'tis place,
> Not blood, discerns the noble, and the base.
> Is there not something more, than to be Caesar?
> Must we rest there?

The play does not see this dangerous ambition as rooted solely in the unnatural advance of a commoner; it rather observes the social decay of Rome as stemming from the nature of its autocratic government and from the person of an Emperor determined to build a new world in his own image. Sejanus is destroyed because Tiberius finds him dispensable and because the master can manipulate a craven Senate more artfully than the servant. He dies passive and inarticulate, torn apart by a vengeful Roman mob, his body 'scattered, as he needs no grave, | Each little dust covers a little part: | So lies nowhere, and yet often buried'.

The rarely performed *Sejanus* is the only one of the Roman tragedies written by Shakespeare's contemporaries worthy to stand beside *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. George Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* (*c.*1599–1607, printed 1631), which impressively explores Roman stoicism through the witness and heroic suicide of Cato of Utica, has a slow dignity of expression but lacks a compensatory dramatic dynamism. Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (1626, printed 1629) moves away, like *Sejanus*, from the dying Roman republic to the decadence and uncertainties of imperial rule. The Emperor Domitian is as immoral and as dangerously arbitrary in his command as Jonson's Tiberius. The Rome that once fostered the virtues of a Lucrece and a Brutus, the Emperor is told, has 'nothing Roman left now, but in you | The lust of Tarquin'. The play is chiefly remarkable for its strenuous defence of theatre as a corrective to a lax or an oppressive political morality ('Actors may put in for as large a share | As all the sects of the philosophers. | They with cold precepts (perhaps seldom read) | Deliver what an honourable thing | The active virtue is. But does that fire the blood . . . equal to that | Which is presented in our theatres?'). Paris, the Roman actor of the play's title, is to prove a martyr to his cause, dying, as his murderer Domitian cynically notes, 'in action'. Digressive as Paris's proud advocacy of his profession has seemed to some commentators, it long remained popular as an actor's manifesto. In its time it must have seemed as much a protest against historic immorality as it was a declaration in support of the modern stage against the Puritan intolerance which sought to close the theatres on moral grounds.

'Debauch'd and diversivolent': Men, Women, and Tragedy

Although most of the tragedies written for the London stage in the last decade of the sixteenth century and in the first thirty years of the seventeenth century were concerned with the fatal destinies of foreign emperors, kings, princes, or, at the very least, of noblemen, a handful of subsequently influential plays took English domestic mayhem and the fraught relations of middle-class husbands and wives as their subject. Certain of these plays, such as Jonson and Dekker's collaborative *The Lamentable Tragedy of the Page of Plymouth* (payment for which is recorded in the 1590s) have not survived. Notable amongst the plays that have come down to us are three anonymous works, *The Tragedy of Mr Arden of Faversham* (printed 1592 and once, somewhat rashly, attributed to Shakespeare), *A Warning to Fair Women* (printed 1599), and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608, with the yet more rash claim to Shakespearian authorship printed on its title-page). All three were based on real events, the sensational murders of husbands by adulterous wives or their lovers in the first two, and the terrible slaughter of his family by a deranged husband in the third. Thomas Arden, a prosperous Kentish landowner, was murdered in Faversham in 1551; the London merchant, George Sanders, whose lamentable death is re-enacted in *A Warning to Fair Women*, was stabbed in a wood near Woolwich in 1573. Both plays offer somewhat rushed and untidy accounts of murderous plans, fortuitous escapes, bloody dispatches, clumsy attempts at concealment, and final judicial retribution. Neither could be properly styled 'tragic' (though in both, distressed and oppressed women murderers are brought to a tearful penitence before their respective executions). If *A Warning to Fair Women* varies its glimpses of London bourgeois life with moralistic pageants and allegorical dumb-shows, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* tells a stark story starkly, barely pausing, with the exception of one soliloquy for the hair-tearing husband, to allow its characters to articulate the nature of their circumstances. All three plays offer a foretaste of the later development of domestic drama and of the horripilant prose and ballad narratives which marked the popular criminal literature of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (*c.*1603, printed 1607), though set in contemporary Yorkshire, has no obvious source in sensational fact. It does, however, make the most of a sensational fictional situation. Heywood (?1574–1641) opens his play with a wedding between a supposedly 'ideal' woman and a man proud of both his happiness and his social standing ('I am a gentleman, and by my birth | Companion with a king'). The two distinct

strands of the plot rapidly degenerate into bloodshed, deception, and destruction (suggested in scene ii by a brawl and murder during a morning's hawking). Anne, the wife, finds herself in an adulterous maze that she rightly fears 'will prove the labyrinth of sin'. Frankford, the husband, who probes his impending domestic disaster by means of a card-game fraught with *doubles entendres* and dark suspicions, and who later discovers his wife in bed with her lover, finally 'kindly' banishes her from his house and children. 'A mild sentence', Anne laconically comments, though her exile results in a contrite death and ultimate forgiveness from her long-suffering husband. *A Woman Killed with Kindness* is a revenge play without revenge, one in which murderous impulses are controlled and dispelled. It is, nevertheless, like Heywood's second study of adultery, *The English Traveller* (*c.* 1625), a play told from a male point of view, with an audience's sympathies purposefully directed away from 'deceiving' women to 'deceived' men. Heywood does, however, reveal a compensating sympathy with a spirited (if neither domestic nor adulterous) woman in the two parts of *The Fair Maid of the West; or, A Girl worth Gold* (Part One *c.* 1600, Part Two *c.* 1630). The two plays trace the story of Bess Bridges, a Plymouth tanner's daughter, who shows an extraordinary presence of mind both as an innkeeper and as the adventurous owner of a privateer. Bess is neither a blushingly patient innocent nor a brazen transvestite tart, but a resourceful, courageous, and generous heroine who strives for goals and who manages to win what she seeks.

Two spirited women of complementary temperament, but of opposing circumstances, distinguish Beaumont and Fletcher's high-flown, aristocratic, and neo-Greek drama *The Maid's Tragedy* (*c.* 1610, printed 1619). Evadne, conveniently married off to Amintor, refuses to sleep with her new husband on their wedding night; it is neither prudery nor a vow of celibacy that moulds her decision ('A maidenhead, Amintor, | At my years?') but the fact that she is the king's mistress. Aspatia, the 'maid' of the title, who has been abandoned by the same Amintor, spends much of the first part of the play in Ariadne-like bewailings of her loss ('Suppose I stand upon the sea-beach now, | Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown with the wind, | Wild as that desert'). Both women transform their initial passivity into striking action. Aspatia disguises herself as her brother and provokes Amintor to a duel in which he fatally wounds her. Evadne kills the lecherous king by first tying him to his bed ('What pretty new device is this, Evadne? . . . By, by love. | This is a quaint one', he excitedly asks), and then stabbing him. The play ends with the death of Aspatia, with Evadne's suicide following her rejection by Amintor, and with Amintor killing himself beside the corpse of his first love ('Here's to be with thee, love!').

Lysippus, the successor to the throne at the sanguinary climax of *The Maid's Tragedy*, draws a moral conclusion from the events he has witnessed. 'On lustful kings, | Unlook'd-for, sudden deaths from heaven are sent', he proclaims. He then adds a second warning: 'Curst is he that is their instrument'. Lysippus's words might act as motto for any of the revenge plays that stemmed from Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and as a comment on the shady, sinister,

libidinous worlds of those Jacobean dramas set in the palaces of Catholic Europe. George Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (*c.* 1604, printed 1607), based on the dangerous career of a protégé of the brother of Henry III of France, offers a highly unflattering picture of the nastiness of the later sixteenth-century French court. King Henry himself confesses that his own circle is tawdry compared to that of Queen Elizabeth in England:

> . . . as Courts should be th'abstracts of their kingdoms
> In all the beauty, state and worth they hold,
> So is hers, amply, and by her informed.
> The world is not contracted to a man
> With more proportion and expression
> Than in her Court, her kingdom. Our French Court
> Is a mere mirror of confusion to it.

Chapman (?1559–1634) is offering more than a golden retrospect on Elizabeth; he is outlining one of the many juxtapositions on which his play is built. Bussy, like so many of the marginalized malcontents who will follow him in the plays of the 1600s, is a misfit in the discordant and corrupt courtly world in which he moves. His opening soliloquy shifts restlessly between images of uncertain Fortune and equally uncertain Virtue, images which echo Plutarch's *Moralia* rather than the Homer with whose name Chapman's is most frequently associated (his translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the work that he 'was born to do', appeared in 1616). Throughout the play Bussy stands quarrelsomely alone, at times the cursed instrument of the mighty, at others the disinherited outsider who vindicates no moral causes but his own. At the end, entrapped and mortally wounded by the chief of his many enemies, he props himself up on his sword and proclaims himself a Roman statue, already a monument to his own future fame. Chapman's later tragedies, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (*c.* 1610, printed 1613) and the two parts of *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (*c.* 1607, printed 1608), return to the dark intrigues of the French court and to historical characters flawed by the very grandeur of their ambitions. The 'Senecal' Clermont D'Ambois, urged by Bussy's angry ghost to avenge his brother, insists on an honourable course in gaining his ends but finally finds himself unable to carry on living as 'the slave of power' amid 'all the horrors of the vicious time' and resolves to kill himself. Bussy may be revenged, but the ultimate triumph belongs to a corrupt society. The central character of *The Conspiracy . . . of Byron* is, by contrast, supremely confident of his own independent distinction ('. . . men in themselves entire | March safe with naked feet on coals of fire: | I build not outward, nor depend on props'). When he excitedly intrigues against the order imposed by Henry IV, as if he were testing his superior prowess, the King's justice catches him out and condemns him. Byron, faced with an imminent death-sentence, oscillates frenziedly between defiance and acceptance, between an insistence on his justification and a terror of ultimate negation.

The ambivalent gestures of Chapman's plays are to some extent reflected in those of Jonson's sometime bitter enemy and later cordial friend, John Marston (1576–1634). When Jonson privately jested that 'Marston wrott his Father in Lawes preachings and his father in Law his Commedies' he was not necessarily poking fun at Marston's vocation (he followed his father-in-law into the Anglican priesthood in 1609). Jonson was, perhaps, voicing his unease at the moral censoriousness which, coupled with an indeterminacy of genre, marks much of Marston's work. This indeterminacy is particularly evident in the two-part play, *Antonio and Mellida*, written for a boys' company in *c.* 1599 and printed in 1602. The first part explores the 'comic crosses of true love' in upper-class Italy; the second (sometimes known as *Antonio's Revenge*) deals far more darkly, in the manner of *Hamlet*, with tragic crosses, intrigues, ghosts, feigned madness and, above all, revenge. Marston's discordant moral vision is reflected in his equally discordant rhetoric. He echoes Senecan stoicism and Senecan bombast, but he adds to it his own distinct despondency and a verbal cacophony, jolting his audiences with tortuous phrasing, cumulative lists of words, and jerky neologisms. These devices are particularly evident in *The Malcontent* (printed 1602), a play variously (and uncertainly) typed by its critics as a satirical comedy, a tragi-comedy, and a tragedy. With its central character, the banished Duke of Genoa, Altofronto, disguised as Malevole (the malcontent of the title) the play veers disquietingly between snarling exposure of moral corruption and justifications of Malevole's pursuit of political justice. He spits out prose curses ('I'll come among you, you goatish-blooded toderers [*sic*], as gum into taffeta, to fret, to fret. I'll fall like a sponge into water, to suck up, to suck up') and his restlessness is expressed in equally agitated verse:

> I cannot sleep . . .
> The galley-slave, that all the toilsome day
> Tugs at his oar against the stubborn wave,
> Straining his rugged veins, snores fast;
> The stooping scythe-man that doth barb the field
> Thou mak'st wink sure. In night all creatures sleep;
> Only the malcontent, that 'gainst his fate
> Repines and quarrels—alas, he's goodman tell-clock;
> His sallow jaw-bones sink with wasting moan;
> Whilst others' beds are down, his pillow's stone.

Like Malevole, Marston seeks to make his moral point by fretting, by quarrelling, and by exaggerating the male and female disorders of an evil age until they appear as grotesque offences against heaven. His climb into a pulpit was perhaps only a short one.

The anonymous *The Revenger's Tragedy* (printed 1607) takes up many of Marston's themes and devices, distilling them into something more pungent. The play, formerly ascribed to Cyril Tourneur (?1575–1626), the author of *The Atheist's Tragedy* (printed 1611), has recently been more confidently recognized

as the work of Thomas Middleton. *The Atheist's Tragedy* offers an exposure of the dangers of vice consequent upon freethinking (divinely checked when the atheistic villain, D'Amville, accidentally dashes his brains out while raising an axe to behead the virtuous Charlemont) and of the principle of revenge (which the ghost of Charlemont's father insists should be left 'unto the king of kings'). The moral demonstrations of *The Revenger's Tragedy* are equally graphic but, to most twentieth-century audiences, somewhat less risible. It is set in an extravagantly unpleasant but unspecified Italian court, but a disillusioned observer might just as easily have applied its many expressions of disgust with the ways of the princely world to the corruptions of Jacobean England. Not only is the play shaped by an irony akin to Jonson's, but the names of its characters, like those of *Volpone*, are effectively Italianate versions of the type-figures to be met with in the earlier English tradition of Morality plays. Its revenger, the brother of the wronged Castiza (chaste), is bluntly called Vindice; its nobly born villains are expressively named Lussurioso (lecherous), Spurio (the bastard), Ambitioso (ambitious), and Supervacuo (vain) and their followers rejoice in the names Nencio (fool) and Sordido (dodger). The play's discourse is built around frank statements of villainy, cynical assertions of self-justification, and quasi-proverbial maxims which characters employ ironically and sententiously. It is equally emblematic in its action. *The Revenger's Tragedy* is something of an animated *memento mori*, emphatically so when Vindice disposes of the libidinous Duke by contriving that he should kiss the poisoned skull of his murdered mistress. At the beginning of the play Vindice had appeared nursing this 'sallow picture of my poison'd love, | My study's ornament'; in Act III he reappears with the skull 'dressed up in tires' (a wig and women's clothes) and tells his brother that this emblem will both catch a sinner and stand as a warning against all human vanity:

> Does every proud and self-affecting dame
> Camphor her face for this? and grieve her maker
> In sinful baths of milk, when many an infant starves
> For her superfluous outside—all for this?

Vindice is a supremely inventive revenger, one who is overweeningly proud of his invention. As a man, however, he finally stands condemned by a reassertion of the human justice which had seemed so absent from the play. He sees his imminent execution as a last gesture of self-assertion ('are we not reveng'd? | Is there one enemy left alive amongst those? | 'Tis time to die when we ourselves are foes . . . We die after a nest of dukes'). Somehow Antonio's brief attempt to draw token religious and political consolation from the retributive death of the revengers ('Pray heaven their blood may wash away all treason!') echoes hollowly in this generally Godless, unjust, and sepulchral world.

In Middleton's two grimly chilling later tragedies, *Women Beware Women* (*c.* 1621, printed 1657) and his collaboration with William Rowley (?1585–1626) *The Changeling* (1622, printed 1653), it is women who are first corrupted and

then obliged to follow through the consequences of their corruption before being consumed by it. The two interwoven plots of *Women Beware Women* also show women trapped in spaces, often confined, locked and shuttered ones, contrived by men or by other women acting as willing agents of male power. Livia seduces her own niece into an adulterous relationship with her uncle and then works as the Duke of Florence's accomplice in his off-stage seduction of the married Bianca (she plays a distracting game of chess with Bianca's mother-in-law in which the references to black kings, lost pawns, and mating have a horrid duality). Despite her brutal ravishing, Bianca is no Lucrece. Brought up, she later claims, 'with many jealous eyes . . . that never thought they had me sure enough | But when they were upon me', she resolves never to use any daughter of her own so strictly, even though her prospective espousal of liberal parenthood broadens into permissiveness ('they will come to't | And fetch their falls a thousand mile about, | Where one would little think on't'). Sin, as Livia notes at the end of Act II, might taste 'at the first draught like wormwood-water', but when drunk again ''tis nectar ever after'. Moral licence and naked ambition drive both Livia and Bianca to enjoy the exercise of sexual, financial, and political power in a sordid, patriarchal society. Both are, however, to share in the exemplary and emblematic punishments meted out to the Duke's court during the performance of his marriage masque. A range of theatrical props (Cupid's arrows, Hymen's incense, Juno's flaming gold, and nuptial cups) prove fatal to actors and observers alike.

The intoxicating taste of what had once seemed forbidden fruits also marks the central intrigue of Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*. Beatrice-Joanna, the daughter of a Spanish grandee, escapes from an undesired marriage by hiring De Flores, whom she claims to find physically repulsive, to dispose of her fiancé. Her tidy plan does not work out as she had hoped. Instead of fleeing and leaving her to marry the man of her choice, De Flores insists that his price is her virginity. When she protests her modesty, he, with proper justice, responds: 'Push! You forget yourself! | A woman dipp'd in blood, and talk of modesty'. Throughout the intense and febrile scene in which De Flores confronts Beatrice-Joanna with their mutual complicity and interdependence, he systematically inverts each of her protective pretensions. Her last, kneeling, attempt to repulse him as a viper is answered by his embrace:

> Come, rise, and shroud your blushes in my bosom;
> Silence is one of pleasure's best receipts;
> Thy peace is wrought for ever in this yielding.
> 'Las, how the turtle pants! Thou'lt love anon
> What thou so fear'st and faint'st to venture on.

Having found herself 'undone . . . endlessly' she discovers that, willy-nilly, her loathing of De Flores has become love, her repulsion revelation, her physical revulsion physical rapture. What obsesses her now is how to deceive. *The Changeling* outdoes merely 'Gothic' perturbations. Few things in European

culture written before the 1890s rival the power of this representation of antipathy realized as empathy and of the passionate release of an upper-class woman's repressions. Beatrice-Joanna's neuroses are, however, given both a context and a larger dimension in *The Changeling* by the 'comic' sub-plot (probably provided by Rowley). Trivial as the frenzied amatory intrigues of Antonio and Francisco may seem by comparison, their disguises as 'fools and madmen', in order to woo the young wife of the keeper of a madhouse, reflect back on the confinements, the mental disjunctions, and the violence of the main plot.

The dark fatalism, the satiric urgency, and the nervous fragmentation of character in Middleton's tragedies are further accentuated in those of John Webster (*c.* 1578–*c.* 1634). A collaborator of Dekker's and probably also of Rowley's, Heywood's, and Ford's, Webster had also expanded Marston's *The Malcontent* in 1604. His individual reputation rests, however, on two major works, *The White Devil* (*c.* 1609–12, printed 1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (*c.* 1613, printed 1623). As his address 'To the Reader' prefaced to *The White Devil* suggests, Webster saw himself as a modern dramatic poet aware of the example of the ancient tragedians and one who particularly 'cherish'd [a] good opinion of other men's worthy labours' (by which he meant the work of his contemporaries, Chapman, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Shakespeare, Dekker, and Heywood). Although the subjects of both of his tragedies are based on true, bloody, and recent occurrences in the shifty courts of Italy, Webster was an adept borrower of devices, effects, themes, and metaphors from his fellow English dramatists and a gifted, if idiosyncratic, remoulder of second-hand materials. If, as has been argued, he derived his representation of Cornelia's distraction in *The White Devil* from Ophelia's mad-scene in *Hamlet*, his paraphernalia of ghosts, dumb shows, and expedient retribution from revenge plays, and his two satirical Malcontents, Flamineo and Bosola, from Chapman and Marston, he yet managed to place his borrowings in strikingly novel and distinctive contexts.

As its title suggests, *The White Devil* is concerned with paradoxes, antitheses and with enforced dissimulation. When Vittoria Corombona attempts to protest at the quality of 'dissembling men', her brother Flamineo responds, 'We suck'd that, sister, | From women's breasts in our first infancy'. In Act V the same Machiavellian Flamineo offers a further, but far more pained, apology for the exercise of hypocrisy:

> . . . I have liv'd
> Riotously ill, like some that live in court;
> And sometimes, when my face was full of smiles
> Have felt the maze of conscience in my breast.
> Oft gay and honour'd robes those tortures try,—
> We think cag'd birds sing, when indeed they cry.

The major characters in this fast-moving play rarely pause to explore or expound their conditions. They reveal themselves in flashes and in

fragmentary confessions, or are defined in juxtaposition and conflict with other characters. When, for example, Vittoria is put on trial as a 'debauch'd and diversivolent [desiring strife] woman', she demands of the Cardinal who is her chief accuser 'Ha? whore—what's that?'. Once the Cardinal has offered a spluttering definition of the term, she has the gall to reply: 'This character scapes me'. When, later, her equally 'diversivolent' and murderous husband Bracciano faces her with old love-letters from Florence, the discourse seems to scurry from issue to issue and from startling metaphor to metaphor.

The verse, the action, and the situation of *The Duchess of Malfi* are generally less restless. The tragedy opens with references to the 'fix'd order' imposed on the French court by 'their judicious king'. Things prove to be far less well ordered in the courts of Italy. The widowed Duchess of Malfi commits what is seen by her villainous brothers as an unforgivable sin against the dignity of their blood by marrying her steward. These same brothers, Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, and a Cardinal (who has failed to become Pope because 'he did bestow bribes so largely, and so impudently'), determine to destroy their sister, her husband, and their children. Ferdinand is possessed of an especially vicious and nasty mind. 'I would have their bodies | Burnt in a coal-pit', he declares in Act II, 'or dip the sheets they lie in, in pitch or sulphur, | Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match'. Somewhat more controlledly, but no less viciously, he outlines a more effective plan of psychological torture in Act IV:

> Damn her! that body of hers,
> While that my blood ran pure in't, was more worth
> Than that which thou wouldst comfort, call'd a soul—
> I will send her masques of common courtesans,
> Have her meat serv'd up by bawds and ruffians,
> And, 'cause she'll needs be mad, I am resolv'd
> To remove forth the common hospital
> All the mad-folk, and place them near her lodging;
> There let them practise together, sing, and dance,
> And act their gambols to th' full o'th' moon:
> If she can sleep the better for it, let her— . . .

The Duchess, like a prophetic female victim of the twentieth century's refinements of mental degradation, is gradually worn down by the yelps of lunatics and by waxworks supposedly representing her dead family. She is finally dispatched by executioners who enter bearing a coffin, cords, and a bell. She dies passively, mustering what dignity remains to her, meekly kneeling before her murderers and declaring 'heaven-gates are not so highly arch'd | As princes' palaces, they that enter there | Must go upon their knees'. The Duchess poses, like an assured and decorous martyr in a Renaissance painting, a lonely pattern of virtue in an otherwise dark, immoral, male, and seemingly irredeemable world.

The Duchess's husband's dying wish is that his son should 'fly the courts of princes'. This prayer could be echoed, and still remain unanswered, through the tragedies of John Ford (1586–*post* 1639) and James Shirley (1596–1666). Where the seventeenth-century English court, often under Jonson's tutelage, chose to see itself and its manners idealized in masques, Ford's and Shirley's plays, written for the commercial theatre rather than the court, continued the line of disturbing explorations of aristocratic corruption into the Caroline age. The cultivated Charles I, who became king in 1625, tended to favour the kind of courtly, formal drama that served as an instrument of state and accentuated the principles of order, divine harmony, and royal dignity that he espoused. A good number of his metropolitan subjects, however, continued to patronize the public theatres that presented plays which must have offended the high-minded King as much as they outraged the increasingly censorious Puritan members of his Parliament.

The political and moral concerns of court theatre and public theatre were not necessarily as disparate as we might at first think. Ford's early poem *Christ's Bloody Sweat* (1613) is a reminder that he was not devoid of a sense of an urgent human need to respond to God's mercy. Indeed, the central characters in his later tragedies can be seen as moving in a Calvinistic world where, despite gestures of self-assertion, their destinies are inexorable and their souls pre-ordained to damnation. Even in *The Broken Heart* (printed 1633), set in pagan Sparta, the disciplined values of an old military code continue to dominate the action, despite the jealousy, resentment, and pursuit of revenge which threaten to undermine the order of the state. In the third act of the play, the philosopher Tecnicus insists to his pupil Orgilus that honour consists 'not in a bare opinion' but exists as 'the reward of virtue . . . acquir'd | By justice or by valour, which for basis | Hath justice to uphold it'. Nevertheless, in *The Broken Heart*, and in the more celebrated *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (also 1633), assertions of self-hood through the evolution of private moral codes stand opposed to an inherited social morality. Almost as a parody of Puritan individualism, Ford's leading characters, both male and female, define themselves by declaring war on received or traditional definitions of spiritual value. Most shockingly, Giovanni and Annabella, the incestuous brother and sister of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, insist on the rightness of their inverted passion regardless of the strictures of Church, family, and society. 'I have asked counsel of the holy church | Who tells me I may love you', Giovanni contortedly explains to his sister in Act I, 'and 'tis just, | That since I may, I should; and will, yes, will.' He has discovered a sanction which is no sanction and constructed a private moral theology out of feeling. Brother and sister recognize that their illicit love is eternally damnable, but, as Giovanni explains in Act V, this makes for a temporal and temporary paradise:

> O, the glory
> Of two united hearts like hers and mine!
> Let poring bookmen dream of other worlds;

My world and all of happiness is here,
And I'd not change it for the best to come;
A life of pleasure is Elysium.

This is Faustian daring and Faustian arrogance. Giovanni does not merely break a great social taboo, he finally compounds his sin against heaven by killing his sister, parading through a banqueting room with her heart fixed to his dagger, declaring that his act of murder sacrilegiously parallels the sacrifice of Christ and the eclipse which accompanied it ('The glory of my deed | Darken'd the midday sun, made noon as night').

Ford's *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck; A Strange Truth* (printed 1634) attempted, as its Prologue admitted, to revive a genre that had become 'so out of fashion, so unfollow'd'. It did more than resurrect the Elizabethan history play; it returned forcefully to the old political problems of usurpation and good government, but it did so by contrasting the effective but 'usurping' King Henry VII, with a rival pretender to the throne who seriously believes that he is the true heir. Where Ford's sources tend to stress that Perkin Warbeck, the would-be king, was a fraudulent and deluded claimant, the Perkin of the play continues to assert his claim even in the teeth of defeat. He views his imprisonment in the Tower as a return to 'our childhood's dreadful nursery' and his imminent execution as 'A martyrdom of majesty'. Others may see him as a candidate for Bedlam but in his own serenely focused eyes he is an undoubted Prince.

The political disjunctions, contradictions, and disruptions which marked the troubled reign of Charles I overshadowed James Shirley's literary career. Ordained an Anglican priest in the early 1620s, Shirley appears to have resigned his orders on his (rumoured) conversion to Roman Catholicism. Having first established himself as a schoolmaster, from *c.* 1625 he pursued a second successful career as a dramatist. Certain of his comedies, notably *Hyde Park* (1632, printed 1637), look forward to the gentlemanly smoothness of Restoration drama, while *The Triumph of Peace*, a particularly lavish masque written for the Inns of Court in 1634, shows him as an adept flatterer of the 'great king and queen, whose smile | Doth scatter blessings through this isle, | To make it best | And wonder of the rest'. By contrast, Shirley's most notable tragedies, *The Traitor* (1631, printed 1635) and *The Cardinal* (1641, printed 1652), both show courts troubled by dissent, lust, pride, and ambition. The murky Florence of *The Traitor* is ruled by a debauched Duke who is finally disposed of by his ambitious and scheming kinsman, Lorenzo. The Navarre of *The Cardinal* is more blessed in its ruler. It is, however, a kingdom destabilized by untrustworthy and self-seeking counsellors, notably the unscrupulous Cardinal of the title (in whom some commentators have seen elements of both Richelieu and Archbishop Laud). If, as is possible, Shirley was reflecting on the example of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, he would probably also have acknowledged a parallel between the ultimate authority of his King of Navarre

and the English King who frees himself from the oppressive influence of yet another proud and political Cardinal, Wolsey. 'How much are kings abused by those they take to royal grace', Navarre muses, before adding a final emphatic maxim: '*None have more need of perspectives than kings.*'

The Cardinal is a royalist play which may, in part, be seen as a late, flickering contribution to the larger Renaissance humanist discourse on the principles of good government. It is also, in its somewhat stodgy way, the last of the revenge plays, if one largely shorn of Jacobean extravagance and Jacobean verve. When the theatres were shut by an Order of Parliament in 1642, Shirley was obliged to return to school-teaching and to the printing of his now unperformable play-scripts. As an avowed royalist he was also later impeached and fined. Although he provided a relatively modest and tactful masque, entitled *Cupid and Death*, for Cromwell's official reception of the Portuguese ambassador in 1653, Shirley's career effectively belonged in the past. The writing of plays in the 1640s had become an intensely fraught political activity. If some contemporaries viewed the closure of the public theatres in 1642 as a temporary measure and as an expedient sop to Puritan opinion, it must have been obvious that the English state had declared itself antipathetic to the stage, when, five years later, a further parliamentary ordinance against acting was enforced. The traditions of acting and production evolved in the Shakespearian theatre had come to an abrupt end. Until London theatres reopened in 1660, plays were to be literature read, but not literature performed. By 1660, however, though old play-texts remained constant, plays in performance were subject to new theatrical fashions, new styles of acting, and new canons of taste which demanded often drastic revisions, additions, and excisions.

The English Renaissance, which had begun as an opening up to new European learning and to new European styles, ended as a restrictive puritanical assertion of national independence from European norms of government and aesthetics. The English Reformation, which had begun as an assertion of English nationhood under a monarch who saw himself as head, protector, and arbiter of a national Church, ended as a challenge to the idea of monarchy itself. In England the principles on which the Renaissance and the Reformation were based, and by means of which both developed, were, as its literature serves to demonstrate, inextricably intertwined.