

Literature in English Society before 1660

Part Two: The Renaissance 1485 - 1660

Introduction

Modern literary theory has often tried to abolish history but it seems always to find its way back, at least as revisionism or new historicism. Some kinds of theory claim that there are no specifically literary texts, that all texts are of the same kind, yet few people try to read a telephone book instead of a novel. It has long been taught that there are no real authors to be studied, but only works, and that what the so-called authors intended their works to mean is of no importance. Yet in modern times, more and more literary biographies have been published in which the author's life and the works are put into very close relationship.

This volume is intended to offer students a simple overall summary of the writers and works most often studied and discussed in the earlier periods of English literature, seen against a background of the main social and political events of their time. This is not a book for experts or specialists but may, I hope, prove of value for people who want to gain a wider view of a particular moment in the development of English literature in English society. The story is not limited to England, since certain European writers and works, as well as a number of events, had a significant influence in England.

The first volume covered the Middle Ages, including the Italian Renaissance. This second volume begins with the last years of the fifteenth century and covers the period during which England was ruled by the Tudor family. It goes on to evoke the writers of the seventeenth century, including Ben Jonson and John Donne, whose literary careers began while Elizabeth was still on the throne, but whose works were almost entirely published for the first time after her death. It ends with the Restoration of 1660 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the point at which modern English constitutional history probably begins.

As stressed in the introduction to the first volume, the information offered in the pages that follow is of the most basic kind. Anyone wishing to study a particular author or work in detail will need to turn to far more specialized studies and come to terms with far more detailed information than can be offered here. At the end of each section of text, readers will find a short list of more specialized works published recently, containing detailed information and fuller bibliographies for deeper research. Before turning to the specialized studies listed at the end of each section, readers will often find fuller information on particular writers and works in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* or a similar encyclopedic work.

It is hoped that the material provided here will serve to give an initial overall impression of the works, the writers, and the society of a period that lies very far from today but has so much of interest to offer. One major shortcoming of this book is its lack of pictorial illustration. Students are strongly encouraged to compile collections of pictures illustrating the period they are studying, in order to gain a better notion of the forms of dress and building, the social fabric, the visual universe, in which people of past centuries lived. The literature of this period is often intensely visual, calling on readers to supply by the imagination what cannot be given otherwise. This book too will only have value when the imagination and the curiosity of its readers act to make up for its weakness and deficiencies.

With the development of the World Wide Web, a huge number of resources have become available on-line. The author intends to include in his own Home-page at Sogang University materials too bulky for inclusion in this book, including longer quotations of poems, detailed plot-summaries and discussions of major Shakespearean plays, and synopses

of many 17th-century plays. The same Home-page includes pointers to useful sites of many kinds. At present (1998) the address is:
<http://ccsun7.sogang.ac.kr/~anthony>

Most of the works quoted in this book exist in a variety of editions, scholarly and popular. It has not been thought necessary to indicate particular editions. For people living in Korea, a major resource for texts has long been the selection available in the various volumes of the Norton Anthologies. Electronic editions of many major works are now available, and readers are advised to search the University of Virginia Electronic Text Library (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>), Project Gutenberg (<http://promo.net/pg/>), and the Oxford Text Archive (<http://firth.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/ota/public/index.shtml>).

In order to help readers not accustomed to older forms of English, the spelling of the quotations has been modernized, except where this would mar the metrical integrity of the original.

The Early Tudor Period

No period of English history until the present century can have witnessed such dramatic changes as the **Tudor** years, during which England was ruled by Henry VII, Henry VIII, and his three children, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth. Although there were many continuities, it is the changes that most strike the attention.

In 1485, when **Henry Tudor** defeated Richard III in battle at **Bosworth**, and took power as Henry VII, England was a medieval land with just over two million inhabitants, ravaged by the civil strife known as the Wars of the Roses, still smarting from the loss of its French provinces, and not sure of its relationship with the European Continent. There were signs of considerable wealth in some regions, mainly thanks to the export of English wool. Printing had just begun, The works of Chaucer and Malory had been published. Grammar schools were being founded in many towns. The New World of the Americas had not yet been discovered. There were no permanent theaters. London had about 60,000 inhabitants.

When **Queen Elizabeth** died in 1603, England had over four million inhabitants. It was firmly Protestant, had avoided involvement in the European wars of the time, and had escaped being invaded by the Spanish Armada. There were already English settlements in North America, and Drake had circumnavigated the globe. There were many printed books of English poetry and history on sale. Shakespeare's company in the Globe theater had already produced *Hamlet*, and he had still to write the other great tragedies. London had over 200,000 inhabitants; inflation and unemployment were severe, harvests had failed although there was no widespread famine.

In 1485, the religion of most English people was traditional Catholicism, although there were some who felt sympathy for the reformist vision of **Wyclif** and the **Lollards**; but since 1401 the law in England had allowed such heretics to be burned, to the greater shame of state and Church, because religious uniformity was felt necessary for the sake of social order. Fear was considered to be a better form of persuasion than reason, and this liking for violent abolition of unwelcome opinions became very popular during the Tudor period. Indeed, all the Tudor monarchs were tyrants, and it was during the reign of Henry VIII that absolutist theories of "imperial" kingship were first formulated under the phrase "the divine right of kings."

The first task of **Henry VII** was to discourage further revolts; this was not easy, and the fear of uprisings, whether by discontented farmers or organized by ambitious lords, remained for a long time. Shakespeare's history plays show people expressing great horror at

the sufferings caused by civil strife. Henry VII was an intensely autocratic monarch obsessed with becoming as wealthy as possible, while wars cost money.

During this period, there was constantly a search by the crown for more money. There was as yet no banking system, the royal exchequer meant in fact boxes of coins that were stored in the king's bedroom. With these the expenses of wars and the pensions of servants had to be paid, as well as the living expenses of the sovereign and the court. The sources of money were taxes of various kinds, fines, and rents from land.

The royal court was the centre of power; the Parliament met regularly to give advice and pass laws, but did not as yet have autonomous power, and when Members of Parliament belonging to the rising merchant class began to try to express opinions in the time of Elizabeth, she became very angry. Yet the unwritten constitution represented the sovereign as ruling "in Parliament" and even when absolutist theories became popular, no monarch in England ever tried to make laws without passing by Parliament.

The court was the place where the government of England was administered, there were many departments, and the court was therefore the place to which educated young men looked for employment. Around the Throne were a small group of powerful men (especially the members of the "Privy Council") who had many chances to meet the King/Queen; some were personal favorites, some were in official positions, but it was access to the monarch that gave them their greatest power, since they could ask for favours. This enabled them to be "patrons" of many who would not be able to ask for a job personally.

Henry VIII

On the death of his father Henry VII in 1509, **Henry VIII** became king at the age of 18. He was the younger of two brothers, but his elder brother Arthur had died in 1502, shortly after his diplomatic wedding to the Spanish **Catherine of Aragon**. The year following his death, it was agreed that she should be engaged to Henry, but he afterwards broke off the agreement. On becoming king, however, he finally married his brother's widow, something not normally permitted in English law, thanks to a papal dispensation. In 1516 they had a daughter, **Mary**, their only child.

In Germany in 1517 **Martin Luther** published his 95 Theses protesting against abuses in the Church. Many of these abuses had been the object of satire for centuries, but the new climate created by the north European Humanists under the leadership of Erasmus, together with changes in society and national politics, made this a decisive event. The countries of Northern Europe recognized an aspiration to national independence and local sovereignty in Luther's call to challenge the corrupt Roman domination of the Church. In response to a widely-felt need, Luther began to translate the Bible into easily-understood German, the New Testament being published in 1522, the Old Testament not until 1534.

In England, Henry's main concern, though, was to have a son. He could not accept the idea of a woman becoming the English sovereign, feeling that her husband would naturally take control. When no more children were born, he began to claim that God was punishing him for having married his brother's widow. He wanted the Pope to give him a divorce, but the Pope was busy with other concerns: Italy had fallen under the control of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, after the defeat of the French in 1524.

The Italian national pride suffered a huge blow with the sack of Rome in 1527 when thousands were killed and the city was looted by the Imperial forces supposed to be protecting it. The Pope became a virtual prisoner of **Spain**, which was now the most powerful empire ever seen. In 1519 the king of Spain, Charles I, inherited the title of Holy Roman Emperor from his grandfather Maximilian. As Emperor he became known as **Charles V**, and

his kingdom covered Spain, all the known parts of North and South America, as well as Germany, Austria,

Croatia, the Netherlands, and most of Italy. This meant that France was surrounded by lands under the control of the Habsburgs, felt threatened, and engaged in constant wars.

Although he wished to be the universal Catholic emperor, Charles V had no time to deal with Luther when he began to speak out; the Protestant demands challenged the central role of Rome, finding nothing like the Papacy in the New Testament which was considered by Luther to be the norm for true Christianity. Luther was in fact a conservative, wishing for a reform in the light of the past, not a complete break. Yet already in 1519, the Swiss **Ulrich Zwingli** was preaching a far more radical break with the past in Zurich, and in 1524 his followers abolished the celebration of the Mass there.

In 1533, Henry VIII decided not to wait any longer, being advised by his loyal churchmen that the Pope had no power in England. They declared that he had never been really married with Catherine of Aragon, that their daughter Mary was a bastard. He married **Anne Boleyn**, and made his faithful servant **Thomas Cranmer** Archbishop of Canterbury. Almost at once Anne Boleyn became pregnant, and gave Henry another daughter, **Elizabeth**.

In 1536 Anne became pregnant again, but she had a miscarriage and the foetus was found to be deformed. Henry saw here a sign of God's wrath, and his councilors had Anne executed on charges of witchcraft. Henry married **Jane Seymour**, who at last gave him a son, **Edward**, but she died in childbirth. In 1539 Henry married **Anne of Cleves** by proxy, although he had never met her. On seeing her face, he sent her back to the Netherlands and in 1540 married **Catherine Howard** instead. She was soon arrested for immorality, and executed in 1542. In 1543 Henry married **Catherine Parr**, who survived him but had no children. Henry seems not to have wanted to think that the near-sterility might be in himself, which it certainly was.

The immediate result of the Pope's refusal to annul the first marriage was to reinforce in Henry the idea that as King of England he ought to have total power over every aspect of English society, including the Church. Henry had always been very firm on the royal privileges, and he did as much as he could to reduce the local powers of the great lords and churchmen, powers inherited from the medieval system. Until then, there had been a balance between king, lords and Church, each exercising power in their own area.

The political events of the late 14th and the 15th century in **Italy** were important here. Each city in Italy had grown up as a free city-state, a republic governed by its citizens. Gradually, though, city after city fell into the hands of one powerful family, the heads of which became the hereditary *signori* (lords) of the city. In Florence, the **Medici family** ruled from 1434, beginning with the famous Cosimo and his son Lorenzo de' Medici. The Renaissance meant for such men the rebirth of Imperial Rome, only each of them saw himself as the future Emperor. From the *signori* of Italy, the idea of imperial absolutism moved northward to France and England. Henry's character was already autocratic, he was only too glad to find a theory, which his theologians also supported from the Bible, allowing him to demand total power.

Henry's break with Rome

Henry's main rival for power in England was the Church, an independent, international body operating under its own laws (canon law). When Henry grew tired of waiting and married Anne Boleyn in 1533, the Pope excommunicated him. Henry simply replied that the Pope had no authority over the Church in his kingdom, denying the centuries-old legal division between the secular and the sacred realms. It is a measure of the fear Henry

inspired that very few churchmen protested against this. Henry demanded to be recognized by the clergy and people as the “only Supreme Head of the English Church.”

Sir Thomas More, who had recently resigned as Lord Chancellor, and Bishop **John Fisher** of Rochester failed to attend the coronation of the new queen. More and Fisher were virtually alone in 1535 in refusing to take the **Oath of Succession** recognizing the new marriage, which Henry imposed on all his male subjects. For them, the Pope could have declared the first marriage null, but he had not done so, and they believed that no one in England had the spiritual authority to do so. To challenge the king’s absolute power was an act of treason, and so, after a dramatic trial in which witnesses lied in order to convict More, he was beheaded, only a few weeks after Fisher.

The mood in England was already strongly marked by the Reformation spirit of Lutheran Germany; printing presses there produced books that found their way to England, and certainly there was a cultural process of change happening. A new pragmatism, perhaps, meant that many people were asking the question, “Why must we?” about some of the traditions of the Church. Individual opinion had come into its own, assisted by the long tradition of criticism of corrupt clergy found already in Chaucer and *Piers Plowman*, as well as among the Lollards. Many people were only too happy to reduce the powers of the Church; the secular state was appearing.

The Dissolution of the Monasteries

Henry had two main concerns: power and money. Having gained power over the very rich English Church, the next step was to take from it the vast estates that it owned. The Church had two main structures; each part of England was a diocese governed by a bishop and divided into parishes controlled by a priest (parson). At the same time there were many religious orders of men and women living in monastic communities (Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carthusians, and others). The dioceses and the religious orders were owners of huge lands given to them over the centuries, in the hope that by the prayers of grateful priests and religious the souls of the rich donors would benefit after death.

Martin Luther had been a member of a religious order; he decided that the life of celibacy that he had vowed to follow could not be God’s will for anyone. The Reformation from the beginning made marriage the only acceptable norm for Christian adulthood, and opened the way for today’s western obsession with sex. The long tradition of **monastic life** was rejected as abnormal and useless; already utilitarianism had become very strong in the minds of the solid merchants of the northern European towns.

Henry could see that in England many monasteries were almost empty; the religious life had undergone a decline, certainly. By now his exchequer was in a bad way, he urgently needed more money, to pay for wars, to give to his supporters, to cover his huge household expenses. At first he thought to close down only some of the richest monasteries. But now continental ideas were pouring into England, not only from Germany, but also from France and Geneva; in 1536 a young French protestant, **Jean Calvin**, published his own proposals for Reform, the Latin *Christianae religionis institutio* (Institution of Christian Religion). From 1541 Calvin settled in Geneva and made it the center of the civic protestantism that has come to be known as Calvinism.

Henry finally decided to abolish all monasteries and take all their possessions for himself. This **Dissolution of the Monasteries** was done with great brutality, no choice being given to any who might wish to continue to live as they felt God had called them. It was an act of unbridled greed, performed by a brutal taskforce. It provoked a backlash of protest, and

in parts of northern England especially there were uprisings in 1536-7, involving men of every social class, called the Pilgrimage of Grace, that were subdued with violence.

Certain of the monasteries had great **libraries**, with many beautiful and important manuscripts. In some cases they were preserved, but only too often they were used as wrapping paper or to light fires. By this time, there were people for whom the “old religion” was completely a thing of the past. They indulged in forms of iconoclasm, in the name of a struggle against superstition but in fact there was more than this. The “cultural revolution” of these years involves the global rejection of a set of images that in turn were emblems of a set of values. When the Church was stripped of its statues, its windows, its rituals, and the sign of belonging to another order of reality that the religious life represented, there was almost nothing left except words. It is perhaps for this reason that the theater, and romances, enjoyed such popularity in the following years.

Renaissance Scotland

Scotland was still a separate kingdom, and went in different directions from England in many ways. Its court had for a long time been allied with France as a means of defence against the English, and as a form of cultural preference. Scottish court culture in the 15th century was far superior to that of England. In 1542 James V of Scotland died, six days after the birth of his only child, a daughter. She was declared queen, and she was known as **Mary, Queen of Scots**. Scotland was put under a Regent. The Reformation currents entering Scotland were from the beginning largely Genevan, and one of the main leaders of the Reform Movement in Scotland was the Calvinist **John Knox**. Since there was no powerful monarch like Henry in Scotland, the whole Reform process became a popular struggle between the general population, eager for Reform, and the local Church authorities of the Catholic tradition.

England after Henry VIII

In 1547 Henry VIII died. His son Edward was only nine years old when he became king **Edward VI**. His uncle, Edward Seymour, became **Protector** with the title **Lord Somerset**, and began to act as if he were king. He favoured protestantism, as did very many of the citizens of London, and in 1549 **Archbishop Cranmer** produced a first **Book of Common Prayer** to govern the forms of public worship to be used in all the parishes of England. It was very close to the old Catholic services in many ways, though using English instead of Latin, and failed to satisfy protestant demands.

In 1551 Somerset lost power and was executed; another powerful lord took his place, the duke of **Northumberland**. He favoured a more radical form of protestantism, and in 1552 a second Book of Common Prayer was produced. The main points about which there was most feeling and discussion involved the nature of saving grace (justification by faith) and the way in which Christ is present in the Bread and Wine of the Sacrament. This second Prayer Book was used in English parish churches almost unchanged until only a few years ago. Between 1549 and 1552, there was a strong drive to turn people against the old religion; the approach was entirely negative. People were taught to be against the Pope, the old rituals, the old beliefs. They were not much taught, though, how to be Christians in any new way. The same problem existed in Luther's Germany.

In 1553 Edward died of tuberculosis, still only a youth. His half-sister **Mary Tudor** became queen at the age of 37. She was not married and had remained a Catholic in protest at her mother's rejection by Henry. In England she is known as "Bloody Mary" because she

tried in a very limited and negative way to bring England back to Catholicism. During her reign nearly 300 people were burned as heretics, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. Many of those burned were young, and had never known a Catholic England. This blind cruelty, the expression of a sick fanaticism that had no basis in true Catholic practice, had been promoted by the Dominicans during the Middle Ages, in the institution called the Inquisition. Mary was very narrow-minded and she did not see that these public burnings would make England hostile to Catholicism for centuries to come.

Mary could name Catholics to replace the bishops in the English Church and try to bring back the ceremonies of the past, but she could not undo what had been done in minds, or give back the Church lands that had been distributed as gifts or sold. She made hundreds of protestants flee into exile and some among them developed radical political theories of resistance. The final sign of Mary's political blindness was her decision to marry the future king of Spain, Philip II, although the English people hated the Spanish.

Early in 1558, the French army captured Calais, the last English possession in France; in the spring, Mary Queen of Scots was married to the French Crown Prince (Dauphin); in November, 1558, Mary Tudor died. **Elizabeth**, her half-sister and Henry VIII's last surviving child, became queen of England at the age of twenty-five.

Humanism in Northern Europe and England

In 1499 England had 114 schools, 85 of which had been founded after 1450. This stimulated the writing of new Latin grammar books, while the teaching of Greek was introduced at Oxford. **John Colet** studied in Florence for several years around 1490, drawn by the Neo-Platonism of Ficino and the young Pico della Mirandola, and learned Greek there. When he taught in Oxford 1496-1504 his lectures were centered on the New Testament, seen in the light of Plotinus and the Pseudo-Dionysius. It was Colet who first brought Erasmus to England in 1499. Colet became Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London in 1505 and re-founded the school there along humanist lines.

Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536) was born in Rotterdam; he became an Augustinian monk, but he was not often in his monastery. He became the leader of the humanists of Northern Europe, and wrote an enormous number of works in admirably elegant Latin. He felt that the wise humanist should not become involved in politics, but be available to give advice to princes. His *Adagia* are a collection of Greek and Latin proverbs and sayings, each with a commentary on its source and meaning; this work expanded greatly during various editions, and is one of the origins of what came to be known as the "essay" after Montaigne. He also wrote a simple handbook on how to be a Christian, *Enchiridion militis christiani* (Handbook of a Christian knight).

Erasmus, like Colet, disliked the medieval Church with its corruptions, its rather naive forms of popular devotion ("superstition"), and its ignorance, to say nothing of the methods and Latin style used by the scholastics, which Erasmus hated. He satirized the Church in his wonderful *Encomium Moriae* (Praise of Folly, 1511) which was suggested to him by conversations with **Thomas More**, at whose house he stayed on visits to London. Erasmus lectured on Greek in Cambridge 1511-4, and 1516 he published the first critical edition of the Greek New Testament, with a new Latin paraphrase. Here he criticized the Latin Vulgate

Bible which had been used for centuries by the Church, giving the example of ways in which the “medieval” Church was found defective by the new learning.

The sharp mocking attacks on the Church by Erasmus opened the way for others, the most famous being the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum* (Letters by obscure men) written by **Ulrich von Hutten** in Germany around 1515, in defence of the German humanist **Johann Reuchlin**. Reuchlin had devoted his life to the study of Hebrew, which he learned directly from the Jewish rabbis. His Hebrew grammar was the first in Western Europe, and because he suggested that the Vulgate Old Testament needed revision he was attacked by ignorant scholastics who knew no Hebrew.

Erasmus knew Luther, and at first sympathized with his protests. But when Luther began to challenge the central doctrines of the Catholic faith, and not merely the human failings of the clergy, Erasmus was unable to follow him, although neither of them accepted the other humanists’ faith in human reason. Erasmus remained in the Catholic Church; he had no answer to the turmoil that had been launched partly by his own very witty attacks on the failings of the medieval Church.

Thomas More

Thomas More, Erasmus’s closest friend in England, has remained a focus of interest for many who will never follow his intellectual or spiritual path; his life and manner of dying fascinate many who will never read anything he wrote except *Utopia*. The play and film *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt (1960) offer a picture of More’s life that has touched many.

Thomas More was born in London in 1478, the son of a lawyer; as a boy he served for several years in the household of John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor, who figures in the discussions of Book I of *Utopia* as the model of a man of power who listens to others’ opinions. Morton was struck by More’s precocious talents, saying, “This child... will prove a marvelous man,” and sending him to study at Oxford for a while. Then, in 1496, More began to study law at Lincoln’s Inn (the London law school). During the years of law study he lived in or near a Carthusian monastery, the Charterhouse, where the monks kept strict silence and lived very serious lives of prayer. More perhaps thought for a time that he should become a priest, but at last found that he would not be able to live without marrying. As a married man he continued to practice monastic-style prayer, fasting, and discipline.

While studying law, More read deeply in Latin, lectured on Augustine’s *City of God* and in 1501 began to study Greek under William Grocyn, a humanist priest in London. More and Erasmus met first in 1499, and became close friends. More married, and had four children before his wife died in 1511; a month later he married again, so that his children could have a mother. In the same year Erasmus dedicated his most popular work to More: the *Encomium Moriae* (Praise of Folly, with a pun on More’s name). More used to write letters in Latin to his young children, and expected them to reply. In More’s family the girls were educated to the same extent as the boys, a great novelty, and the style of communal family life in the Mores’ house in Chelsea made a deep impression on his friends.

Utopia

In 1515 More was sent as a royal ambassador to Flanders (the Netherlands), where he met Peter Gilles, a humanist who was town clerk of Antwerp and a friend of Erasmus. During the months there, he composed the main part of *Utopia*, the description in Latin of an

imaginary land of Nowhere (in Latin *nusquam*, in Greek *utopia*) which is now Part II of the completed work. On his return to England he added Part I, a Platonic dialogue introducing some of the work's main themes. The whole work was published in Louvain in 1516, thanks to Erasmus, and although More had been eager to have it published he expressed great regret a few months later. He perhaps realized that most readers would not be aware of the work's origins in his own private life, and read it in too simple a way.

More's *Utopia* is the single most influential Latin work of the Renaissance, and one of the seminal works of modern literature. It was already widely known in Humanist circles before it was translated into English in 1551, about the same time as it was translated into French, German, Italian and Spanish. Like Plato's *Republic*, it offers the picture of a fictional "other place" in order to provoke reflection on the current state of the reader's own society. It was written at a time when More was thinking deeply about his own future, and especially about the possibility of being an agent of change for the better in English society. One side of him felt that there were many aspects of contemporary English life that were not acceptable, that had to change; another side told him that he was being an over-optimistic dreamer because human nature was incapable of true goodness. *Utopia* arose out of this inner debate.

More than Plato, however, it was the satiric Greek writings of **Lucian of Samosata** (125 - 200) that inspired More to write, as they had prompted Erasmus to compose his *Praise of Folly* and as they later gave rise to Jonson's *Volpone*. Lucian was the Greek writer most widely read and enjoyed in the Renaissance; Erasmus and More both translated many of his works. His sense of irony and his love of challenging intellectual games that were at the same time serious and comic were very close to the spirit of men like Erasmus and More. Lucian's *True Story*, in which a naively foolish narrator named Lucian relates a journey to the Moon, clearly underlies Hythloday's narrative. This work inspired many other 'imaginary journeys,' including *Gulliver's Travels*, where readers can never be sure of the author's own opinion, and have to think for themselves.

The other major inspiration for the form of *Utopia* was the account of voyages of discovery to the New World written by **Amerigo Vespucci** and published all over Europe from 1507. The story of his four journeys between 1497 and 1504 made a tremendous impact and earned him the lasting memorial of giving his name to America, a continent that Columbus and Cabot had discovered before him. More had read Vespucci's work, and he makes his main narrator, Raphael Hythloday, a sailor who accompanied Vespucci on the last three of his journeys, and who remained in Brazil when he returned from the fourth; from there he set out on a journey over the Pacific that gave him the chance to visit Utopia.

"U-topia" means "no-place" and More was conscious of the pun with "eu-topia" meaning "good-place". Utopia is nowhere, because it is fictional, but also because it is applicable in every place as a challenge to the way life is being lived there; at the same time, it is nowhere, because no one would ever want or be able to live as the Utopians do. More's Utopia is a good place, but it is not without its limits and problems. The way the word "Utopianism" is used today might seem to imply that More's work is of the idealizing kind, proposing a model of an alternative, perfect society; this is not correct. In many ways, More's Utopia is a terribly inhuman society. In literary history More's work has inspired such famous social satires as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Orwell's *1984*. Much modern science fiction is either eu-topian or "dystopian" (from "dys-topia" meaning a bad place) but no writer has offered so deeply challenging a text as More.

The narrator of the first Book is More himself, or at least a character (*persona*) called More (in Latin *Morus*); he tells how, in Antwerp, Peter Gilles introduces him to the Portuguese sailor-philosopher Hythloday (*hythlos* in Greek means "nonsense"). He speaks of Hythloday's stories of the Utopians (and others) as an example of "customs from which our own cities, nations, races, and kingdoms might take example in order to correct their errors."

Suddenly, though, he begins to report a discussion that arose there between Hythloday, Peter Gilles, and himself about the possibility of Raphael's usefully serving some king as an advisor on account of the wisdom he has acquired through his experiences.

The first half of Book I, after this introduction, consists of Raphael Hythloday's account of a discussion he was involved in one day during a visit to Cardinal Morton when he was Lord Chancellor. A lawyer commends the English habit of hanging thieves, sometimes 20 at a time. Raphael ventures the opinion that such punishment is unjust since many are forced to steal in order to feed themselves and their families. When the lawyer claims that they could earn money by working, Raphael points out that many crippled soldiers cannot work. The debate extends to the recent spread of enclosures, which has deprived many farm-workers of a job, while those who used to be fed by rich land-owners have been dismissed on account of high grain-prices:

“To make this hideous poverty worse, it exists side by side with wanton luxury. Not only the servants of noblemen, but tradespeople, farmers, and people of every social rank are given to ostentatious extravagance of dress and too much wasteful indulgence in eating. Look at the restaurants, the brothels, and those other places just as bad, the inns, wine-shops and beer-houses. Look at all the crooked games of chance like dice, cards, backgammon, tennis, bowling, and quoits, in which money slips away so fast. Don't all these lead straight to robbery....

“If you do not find a cure for these evils, it is futile to boast of your severity in punishing theft. Your policy may look superficially like justice, but in reality it is neither just nor practical. If you allow young people to be badly brought up, their characters will be gradually corrupted from childhood; and if then you punish them as grown-ups for committing crimes to which their early training has inclined them, what else is this, I ask, but first making them thieves and then punishing them for it?”

Cardinal Morton asks Raphael to suggest an alternative. Again he condemns the death penalty, then reminds the Cardinal that the Romans used to send criminals to work camps; he goes on to suggest that thieves might become slaves not allowed to possess money. The audience is ready to laugh at this foreigner's odd ideas, until the Cardinal expresses his general agreement, when suddenly everyone is full of praise. A fool turns the debate into an anti-monastic joke, by suggesting that the poor should be fed by the rich monasteries, an idea that makes the Friar very angry. In reading this debate, it has to be remembered that England had no prisons in the modern sense until the 19th century, and the problem of social welfare when there is mass unemployment remains largely unsolved even today.

For Raphael, this story is the proof that he has no future as a courtier; for the reader, it is a preparation for the skills needed to read Book 2 correctly. In both books the text claims to record things said by Hythloday; in both he is arguing an extreme, idealistic opinion, and in both the figure of More opposes a differing, more pragmatic opinion.

It would be wrong, though, to assume that the More who speaks in the text of *Utopia* always expresses the opinions of Thomas More the author. Hythloday himself has two sides: he is a fanatical idealist, using the example of Utopia to support his demands for radical social change, and he is also bitterly disillusioned with European society, so that in his fury against the folly of the courtiers at Cardinal Morton's table, he does not even notice the positive example of the uncorrupted statesman offered in Cardinal Morton himself. While Hythloday is a purist, putting his finger on many examples of political immorality in the second half of Book I, More argues in favour of compromise. Hythloday says there is no place for honest men in politics (in court), to which More replies:

“That’s how things go in society, and in the councils of princes. If you cannot pluck up bad ideas by the root, if you cannot cure long-standing evils as completely as you would like, you must not therefore abandon society. Don’t give up the ship in a storm because you cannot direct the winds. And don’t arrogantly force strange ideas on people who you know have set their minds on a different course from yours. You must strive to influence policy indirectly, handle the situation tactfully, and thus what you cannot turn to good, you may at least make less bad. For it is impossible to make all institutions good unless you make all men good, and that I don’t expect to see for a long time yet.”

Part of the interest of the *Utopia* is the fact that it was written within a few years of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, and the views on political morality and of human limitations found in the two works intersect. Raphael’s response to More shows how it is possible to be right and wrong at the same time:

“If we dismiss as out of the question and absurd everything which the perverse customs of men have made to seem unusual, we shall have to set aside most of the commandments of Christ even in a community of Christians. Yet he forbade us to dissemble them, and even ordered that what he whispered to his disciples should be preached openly from the housetops....

This debate can be seen as an expression of Thomas More’s own struggle at this time, in his decision as to the future. For the next 15 years or so, More certainly compromised and acted as a skilled politician, in his rise to the highest lay position in English society as Lord Chancellor. The last months, though, saw him standing firm on a principle that he could not abandon. *Utopia*’s More and Hythloday stand, then, in ironic relationship to one another. Each of them is at the same time right and wrong, wins and loses. Biographically, Hythloday and Morus are both More.

Book II is the description of the communistic way of life on the island of Utopia that Raphael hopes will support his radical social opinions expressed at the end of Book I:

“As long as you have private property, and as long as money is the measure of all things, it is really not possible for a nation to be governed justly or happily. For justice cannot exist where all the best things in life are held by the worst citizens; nor can anyone be happy where property is limited to a few, since those few are always uneasy and the many are utterly wretched.... Thus I am wholly convinced that unless private property is entirely done away with, there can be no fair or just distribution of goods, nor can mankind be happily governed.”

This is one of the main starting-points for the fantasy of Utopia. Writing at the time when modern capitalism was just beginning to take shape in Europe, Thomas More tried to imagine a society in which all the mechanisms of capital were abolished. At the beginning of the century in which people began actively to move off the land and into the cities, he imagined a society in which no such choice was possible, since in Utopia all are obliged to take their turn in the fields. Just as conspicuous consumption and luxurious life-styles were spreading, he made Utopia a country in which all people live at an equal level of austerity.

There is no place for individual desires or private will in Utopia, since the private good is completely subject to the common good. In many ways, as critics have often remarked, Utopia is an extension into society of some of the ideals that existed in the

monasteries, and it is no coincidence that Hythloday ends his story with a speech denouncing pride. Only in Utopia, every form of individuality is seen as pride.

Book II, much more widely read than Book I, begins with a description of Utopia that makes it clear how similar it is in many ways to England in its size and disposition. Amaurot, the capital, is set on a river similar to the Thames, for example. Book II begins with general descriptions of Utopian society, the social hierarchy, the relationship between town and country, and the daily timetable. It is very easy to pick holes in the details of the descriptions. We are told, for example, that when the founder of Utopia, Utopus, first conquered it, it was not an island until he caused a channel fifteen miles wide to be dug to separate it from the continent. We may wonder what was done with the huge quantities of earth and rock removed! There is competition between the householders living in different streets, to produce the best gardens, yet the gardens are always open to anyone who cares to go in and take anything. More (or Hythloday) is clearly not painting a very precise picture but it is striking to note how many aspects of life in Utopia resemble More's own family life.

The main difficulty in reading *Utopia* today comes from the way in which Utopian society is so similar to some of the most repressive and totalitarian systems that recent history has produced. There may be readers who do not care that everyone must wear identical clothing, and must move houses every ten years, or that intimate family meals are strongly discouraged, meals being taken by 30 families together in neighborhood dining halls. More difficult to accept are customs such as the internal passport system:

“Anyone who wants to visit friends in another city, or simply to see the country, can easily obtain permission from his superiors, unless for some special occasion he is needed at home. They travel together in groups, taking a letter from the prince granting leave to travel and fixing a day of return... Anyone who takes upon himself to leave his district without permission, and is caught without the prince's letter, is treated with contempt, brought back as a runaway, and severely punished. If he is bold enough to try it a second time, he is made a slave.”

It is the Utopians' attitude towards these slaves that arouses most critics' anger:

“Slaves do the slaughtering and cleaning in the slaughter-houses: citizens are not allowed to do such work. The Utopians feel that slaughtering our fellow-creatures gradually destroys the sense of compassion, which is the finest sentiment of which our human nature is capable... In the dining-halls, slaves do all the particularly dirty and heavy work.”

Utopia is in the fortunate position of producing far more food than it needs; it keeps two years' supply in stock, and sells the rest abroad. In exchange Utopia purchases iron ore, gold and silver. It never experiences a foreign-exchange deficit, and has accumulated vast quantities of gold. This is used to hire mercenary soldiers from abroad when Utopia is at war, or to buy off the invading army, or to bribe parts of it to attack the rest. Only how to store their fortune? Gold is employed to make fetters for criminals, turning it into a sign of disgrace instead of dignity, for the worst criminals wear crowns and chains of gold, the signs of the highest power and honor in Europe. Jewels and precious stones are the playthings of children, who naturally give them up on becoming adult.

Added vividness comes from a description of the visit to Utopia of foreign envoys, who arrive dressed in gold chains and are naturally taken for the slaves of their servants. Cultural values and conventional attitudes are thus challenged by difference.

Next comes a long section on the moral philosophy practiced in Utopia, and their delight in learning which Hythloday was able to encourage by the classical books that he

brought. Thanks to his books, too, the Utopians were able to re-invent for themselves the art of printing.

In the sections on the care of the sick, and on marriage customs, there are ideas which show clearly that More is not simply describing a perfect model for his own human society. People in Utopia who are incurably sick and in great pain are encouraged by the state to put an end to their lives by a form of sanctioned suicide (euthanasia). This is contrary to Catholic teaching, in More's time as now. If two people, after marriage, find that they have made a mistake and want to marry other partners, divorce and remarriage is permitted. Divorce is also permitted in the case of adultery by one of the parties. This too is not allowed by the Church.

“Women do not marry till they are eighteen, nor men till they are twenty-two. Premarital sex by either men or women, if discovered and proved, is severely punished and those guilty are forbidden to marry during their whole lives, unless the Prince by his pardon lightens the sentence... the reason is that they suppose few people would join in married love, with confinement to a single partner and all the petty annoyances that married life involves, unless they were strictly restrained from a life of promiscuity.

“In choosing marriage partners, they solemnly and seriously follow a custom which seemed to us foolish and absurd in the extreme. Whether she is a widow or a virgin, the bride-to-be is shown naked to the groom by a responsible and respectable matron; and similarly some respectable man presents the groom naked to his future bride. We laughed at this custom and called it absurd; but they were just as amazed at the folly of other nations.... They leave all the rest of her body covered with clothes and estimate the attractiveness of a woman from a mere handsbreadth of her person, the face, which is all they can see.”

Finally, Hythloday notes that adultery (sexual relations between a married person and some other partner) is punished by the strictest form of slavery, while a second conviction is punished by death. Death is also the punishment for rebellion by slaves.

Turning to international relations, Hythloday tells that Utopia never makes any treaties with other lands:

“In that part of the world, treaties and alliances between kings are not generally observed with much good faith.

“In Europe, of course, the dignity of treaties is everywhere kept sacred and inviolable, especially in these regions where the Christian religion prevails. This is partly because the kings are all so just and virtuous, partly also because of the reverence and fear that everyone feels towards the ruling Popes. Just as the Popes themselves never promise anything which they do not most conscientiously perform, so they command all other chiefs of state to abide by their promises in every way. If someone quibbles over it, they compel him to obey by means of pastoral censure and sharp reproof. The Popes rightly declare that it would be particularly disgraceful if people who are specifically called ‘the faithful’ did not adhere faithfully to their solemn word.

“But in that New World nobody trusts treaties. The greater the formalities, the more numerous and solemn the oaths, the sooner the treaty will be broken....”

It is worth comparing these lines with the chapter from Machiavelli quoted in the first volume of this series. In *Utopia*, the irony of this passage is particularly interesting; is

Hythloday being sarcastic? Or is he being particularly unrealistic? Is he saying what he thinks, or is his author manipulating his words? In the next chapter, about the Utopians' strategies in warfare, we find the same Machiavellian spirit at work: "If they overcome the enemy by skill and cunning, they rejoice mightily." The Utopians offer high rewards for the killing of their enemies' king, or his capture. This sows discord and distrust. Yet if they have to fight, they are very brave.

The section on religion has interested many critics, since More imagines a non-Christian civic religion of great nobility and purity:

"Most believe in a single power, unknown, eternal, infinite, inexplicable, far beyond the grasp of the human mind, and diffused throughout the universe, not physically, but in influence. Him they call 'Father' and to him alone they attribute the origin, increase, change, and end of all visible things.' The name given to this supreme being is Mithra, a name taken from Persian religion."

From Hythloday and his companions, the Utopians heard about Christ for the first time, and were deeply impressed, especially by the community of goods practiced in the monasteries. Some of them were baptized, but there was no priest to give the other sacraments. Tolerance is important; a Utopian who began to preach that non-Christians would go to hell was quickly imprisoned and exiled.

Individual freedom of religion was first established by Utopus himself, but within limits: "The only exception he made was a positive and strict law he made against any person who should sink so far below the dignity of human nature as to think that the soul perishes with the body, or that the universe is ruled by mere chance, rather than divine providence." In More's Europe, these two ideas were subjects of intense debate; they were considered to be revealed truths that had to be believed by all Christians, yet thinkers could offer no convincing rational proof of them.

In conclusion, Hythloday compares the equality found in Utopia with the gross inequalities of European society, in a particularly powerful speech:

"What kind of justice is it when a nobleman or a goldsmith or moneylender, or someone else who earns his living by doing either nothing at all or something completely useless to society, gets to live a life of luxury and grandeur? While a laborer, a carter, a carpenter, or a farmer works so hard and so constantly that even a beast of burden would perish under the load; yet this work of theirs is so necessary that no country could survive a year without it. But they earn so meager a living and lead such miserable lives that a beast of burden would really be better off. Beasts do not have to work every minute, and their food is not much worse; in fact they like it better. Besides, they do not have to worry about their future. Working men not only have to sweat and suffer without present reward, but agonize over the prospect of a penniless old age. Their daily wage is inadequate even for their present needs, so there is no possible chance of their saving toward the future."

Hythloday explains the general refusal of people to share what they have with others as a result of Pride. The figure of More concludes with some comments on the tale he has just heard:

It seemed to me that not a few of the customs and laws he had described were quite absurd... but my chief objection was to the basis of their whole system, that is, their communal living and their moneyless economy. This one thing alone takes away

all the nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty which (in the popular view) are considered the true ornaments of any nation....

I cannot agree with everything he said. Yet I confess there are many things in the Commonwealth of Utopia which I wish our own country would imitate, though I don't really expect it will.

Nothing else written by More has ever enjoyed much of a reputation. Most of his writings are Reformation polemics against protestant ideas, very harsh in tone and of no lasting importance. His life of King Richard III, written in Latin and in English but never completed, seems to have been the main origin of the portrait of Richard as a warped-minded hunchback that Shakespeare inherited, although historians cannot agree on how close More was to the facts of the case. Finally, already in prison and awaiting trial, in later 1534-5, More wrote another dialogue, the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, which deserves far more attention than it gets. Here, as in his last work, *De Tristitia Christi* (on the sorrows of Christ), he finds the key to the meaning of life in the sufferings of Christ. There he found the courage needed to confront execution.

Juan Luis Vives

One other continental humanist deserves mention: **Juan Luis Vives** (1493-1540) was born in Spain of a Jewish family that had converted to Catholicism rather than be expelled from the country in 1492. This did not prevent his father from being burned as a heretic by the Inquisition in the 1520s. Vives left Spain to study in Paris and then lived in the Netherlands from 1514 until his death, never returning to Spain. In Louvain he taught Classical literature and became a great admirer of Erasmus; his early writings often attack the sterile form of university teaching then current.

From 1522, Vives began to visit England and spent most of each year there, until 1528. For several years he went to lecture on the Classics in Oxford. While in London he became a close friend of Sir Thomas More, and a frequent visitor to the Mores' home in Chelsea. He was also very close to the queen, Catherine of Aragon, writing two books for the education of Princess Mary. After supporting the queen in the divorce question, he found it better to stop coming to England.

Three of his very many works were particularly influential; everything he wrote was composed in Latin, and today may seem very conservative. What is striking is the way in which Vives, like Erasmus, and More in the *Utopia*, was concerned with the small details of the everyday life of ordinary people. His writings are all concerned with the role of education and the improvement of society, and these works had enormous influence into the later 17th century on those milieux which are often termed puritan.

In *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1523), Vives lays the groundwork for the modern vision of the family unit based on the couple rather than the clan. He writes with deep feeling about the love and devotion a wife should show her husband, which he says is more important than going to church. This love is shown in the way the woman takes responsibility for the running of the home; Vives shows his puritanism in his stress on modesty, plain living, and obedience. The woman, he says, should never read romances or other forms of love-literature, which poison the soul; she should not be concerned with her appearance. Even the dolls so popular with little girls he sees as idolatrous images. The nuclear family, husband, wife, and children, was the main unit of society in 17th century puritan England, largely thanks to More and Vives.

His *On the Care of the Poor* is even more striking in its dynamic, practical Christian vision of society and social obligations. The poor, he insists, must be cared for because they are human beings too, and because Christ said “Love one another.” This love is seen in practical terms; people who build big churches but leave their fellows suffering hunger are sharply criticized. One major insight is his compassion for the insane; he is one of the first writers to demand compassion for the mad, who were usually laughed at.

The second part of this work reads like *Utopia*, without the element of ambiguity. Vives carefully tries to imagine practical ways in which the city authorities might deal with the problem of the poor and unemployed, beggars especially. The main key to his solution is compulsory work; all who have fallen into poverty will receive help from the city, but they must work in return. Those who have only themselves to blame for their problems will have to work harder, and receive only plain food. The children of the poor will be helped by being given free schooling, where they will learn reading, writing, Christian piety, and “a true judgement of things.” Girls will learn to be good housekeepers.

The great treatise *On Studies* (1531) deals mainly with the revision of the university syllabus that was a major part of the Northern humanists’ program. In place of the “useless” analytical logic of the scholastics which Erasmus and the reformers so detested, Vives advocates a program designed to educate the young in virtue and Christian piety. He has a high opinion of the creative powers of the mind, and he longs to see the thinkers in the universities leading society forward to a better future.

Vives followed Erasmus and More and a whole current of contemporary humanistic thought in the stress he put on social usefulness and practical issues. It is by his stress on the central role of intimate family life, on hard work, simplicity of life, and constant formation of the mind that he deserves to be seen as one of the pioneers and main guides of what has come to be called “the Protestant Ethic” which developed during the Civil War in the 17th century in England, and among the puritan colonies in North America.

Early 16th century lyric poetry

The humanists read and wrote Latin from so early an age that they were bilingual. Their vernacular tongue was often a mere convenience for daily life. The conflict between Latin and the vernacular was already a question that Dante felt called to discuss, and with the spread of Latin literary studies in the schools run by the humanists, Northern Europeans became ever more aware of the same tension. In school they read and imitated the poems of Ovid, Virgil, Horace... great masterpieces of perfect style and deeply serious, or comic, content. In society at large they were surrounded by a vernacular poetic culture that was essentially medieval, with Dante, Petrarch, Machaut, Chaucer as recognized masters of their art. It was clearly time for a new beginning, with vernacular poems being written with the stylistic elegance found in the Classics.

Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* was everywhere recognized as the highest example of such poetry; in his poems he had used Classical rhetorical forms such as hyperbole (an extravagant statement used to express or provoke strong emotion, not meant as literal truth), antithesis (a striking combination of words having opposite meanings), periphrasis (the use of complex phrases in place of simple words) and conceits (startling and unexpected metaphors that only yield their sense when thought about). It was this stylistic side of the *Canzoniere* that could be imitated, rather than the unique, private love-experience that had inspired its poems. Mostly, renaissance poets follow the medieval model, and write poems that do not refer to their individual private lives.

The most influential person in this new venture for European poetry was the Italian **Pietro Bembo** (1470-1547), a leading humanist, expert in Latin and Greek, who edited the works of Dante and Petrarch in 1501 for publication by the Aldine Press in Venice, the first of the many pocket-sized editions of famous texts published there. In 1505, Bembo published his *Asolani*, a dialogue about various kinds of love that is the basis for very much renaissance love-literature. The first speaker, Perottino, talks about all the pains and sufferings of unrequited love; the second, Gismondo, enjoys love and mocks the anguish of so much love-poetry; Lavinello offers a form of compromise, since the love of a lady's beauty may lead the man on towards a discovery of God's own beauty; he is contradicted by a hermit, who insists that only spiritual love can be good. All except the hermit compose poems expressing their approach, those of Lavinello being the most noble in style. Above all, Bembo demanded that new poetry should be clear in style and simple in vocabulary, avoiding difficult Latinisms and obscure mythological references, while the poetic form itself should be refined and complex.

Unfortunately, a few years before Bembo, the poets **Antonio Tebaldeo** and **Serafino dell'Aquila** had inspired many poets to imitate the most artificial aspects of Petrarch's imagery, such as the conceit of the lady seen as a house with a golden roof (hair) and ivory doors (teeth), with little cupids shooting arrows from her eyes, or the imagery of the lover's heart being a raging fire. These poets also changed the shape of the sonnet, so that the last line or two became the climax of the whole poem; this was followed in France and England, while Bembo in Italy returned to the strict Petrarchan division into octet and sestet.

Bembo also must take the credit (or blame) for the 16th century's choice of Cicero as the great model for writing Latin prose. In his *De Imitatione* (1512) he justified this choice, as well as that of Virgil for verse. Italy had already chosen Petrarch as its model for vernacular poetry; Bembo gave this choice a new theoretical and practical basis in his *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525), where he also proposed Boccaccio as the model for vernacular prose. Bembo sees harmony as the main quality to be looked for in lyric poetry, a balance between gravity and sweetness. Finally, in 1530, Bembo published his own love poems, in the same year as **Iacopo Sannazaro** died and friends published his poems of idyllic melancholy, while Bembo's *Asolani* appeared in a new edition. 1530 may thus be seen as a vital year for renaissance **Petrarchism** throughout Europe.

John Skelton

In England this same process can be seen clearly in the contrast between the poems of **John Skelton** (1460-1529) and **Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder** (1503-1542). For several years around 1500 Skelton was the tutor of Prince (later King) Henry. Erasmus esteemed him highly and he wrote poems that are remarkable for their vigour, as well as the long morality play, *Magnyfycence*. Many of his poems are in short lines with repeated rhymes, a form now called "skeltonics" and he is one of the most amusing and forceful English poets. His poems are often satiric, and therefore difficult to follow without detailed background information.

To Mistress Margaret Hussey

Merry Margaret

As midsummer flower,
Gentle as falcon
Or hawk of the tower;
With solace and gladness,

Much mirth and no madness,
 All good and no madness,
 All good and no badness;
 So joyously,
 So maidenly,
 So womanly
 Her demeaning
 In everything,
 Far far passing
 That I can endite,
 Or suffice to write
 Of merry Margaret
 As midsummer flower,
 Gentle as falcon
 Or hawk of the tower.
 As patient and as still
 And as full of good will
 As fair Isaphill; (*model Queen, devoted daughter*)
 Coriander, (*sweet spice*)
 Sweet pomander,
 Good Cassander, (*Cassandra of Troy*)
 Steadfast of thought,
 Well made well wrought,
 Far may be sought
 Ere that ye can find
 So courteous so kind
 As merry Margaret,
 This midsummer flower
 Gentle as falcon
 Or hawk of the tower.

Many of Skelton's poems are long, wandering reflections on political and social conflicts in a characteristically rough, honest voice that others imitated in their satires: (*from: Colin Clout*)

And if you stand in doubt
 Who brought this rhyme about,
 My name is Colin Clout.
 I purpose to shake out
 All my cunning bag,
 Like a clerkly hag.
 For though my rhyme be ragged,
 Tattered and jagged,
 Rudely rain-beaten,
 Rusty and moth-eaten,
 If ye take well therewith
 It hath in it some pith.
 For as far as I can see,
 It is wrong with each degree.
 For the temporality (*secular lords*)

Accuseth the spirituality (high churchmen)
 The spirituality again
 Doth grudge and complain
 Upon the temporal men;
 Thus each of other blotter (chatter)
 The one against the other.
 Alas, they make me shudder!
 For in hugger-mugger
 The Church is put in fault
 The prelates been so haut (proud)
 They say and look so high
 As though they would fly
 Above the starry sky.

Skelton lived at court, and also in exile in the countryside, he was familiar with the dangers of being a courtier. One of his most entertaining works is *The Bowge of Courte* (The ship of court), a nightmarish allegorical satire of all the complications life at court can bring:

The Bowge of Court (*from line 491*)

(Dissimulation is speaking)

“More could I say, but what this is enough.
 Adieu till soon, we shall speak more of this.
 Ye must be ruled, as I shall tell you how.
 Amends may be of that is now amiss
 And I am yours, sir, so have I bliss,
 In every point that I can do or say.
 Give me your hand, farewell and have good day.”

Suddenly, as he departed me from,
 Came pressing in one in a wonder array.
 Ere I was aware, behind me he said, “Boo!”
 Then I, astonished of that sudden fray
 Started all at once, I liked nothing his play,
 For if I had not quickly fled the touch,
 He had plucked out the nobles of my pouch.

He was trussed in a garment straight
 I have not seen such another’s page
 For he could well upon a casket wait,
 His hood all pounced and garded like a cage.
 Light lime-finger, he took no other wage.
 “Harken,” quod he, “loo here my hand in thine;
 To us welcome thou art, by St Quentin!”

“But by that Lord that is one and two and three,
 I have an errand to round in your ear.
 He told me so, by God, ye may trust me;
 Pardieu, remember when ye were there,
 There I winked on you -- wote ye not where?”

In *A loco*, I mean *juxta* B;
Woe is him that is blind and may not see!

“But to hear the subtlety and the craft
As I shall tell you, if ye will harken again;
And when I saw the whoresons would you hafte,
To hold my hand, by God, I had great pain.
For forthwith there I had him slain,
But that I dread murder would come out.
Who dealeth with shrews hath need to look about!”

And as he rounded thus in mine ear
Of false collusion confederate by assent,
Me thought I saw lewd fellows here and there
Come for to slat me of mortal intent.
And as they came, the shipboard fast I hent
And thought to leap; and even with that woke,
Caught pen and ink and wrote this little book.

I would therewith no man were discontent,
Beseeching you that shall it see or read
In every point to be indifferent,
Since all in substance of slumbering doth proceed.
I will not say it is matter of deed
But yet ofttime such dreams be founde true.
Now construe ye what is the residue.

Skelton was a master of wit, but he had no care for the questions that were to shape the future poetry of Europe and has therefore been largely neglected.

Sir Thomas Wyatt

The first Englishman to imitate the new poetry from Europe was **Sir Thomas Wyatt** (1503?-1542). Wyatt’s father had been tortured under Richard III for loyalty to the Tudors, and rose to be a member of the Privy Council under Henry VII and Henry VIII. Thomas Wyatt was a courtier from childhood, and in 1526 he was part of a diplomatic mission to France; here he may have encountered the works of renaissance poets such as Guillaume Budé and Clément Marot, who later influenced him.

The next year he went to Italy on a mission to try to help the Pope against the Emperor. Wyatt played an active role in negotiations, was taken prisoner briefly by the Imperial forces, failed to prevent the Imperial conquest of Italy, and left Rome a few days before it was sacked in May 1527. During this visit, Wyatt will have heard about, and perhaps met, writers such as Bembo, Ariosto, and Machiavelli, and probably bought books of poems by Petrarch and other Italians.

In 1536, soon after the arrest of Anne Boleyn, Wyatt was arrested and held for some weeks in the Tower of London until after the queen’s execution. In 1537 he was sent as ambassador to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, who had his court in Spain. In 1538 a churchman sent to help him made a very hostile report about his activities and in 1541, on the basis of it, he was arrested and accused of treason. The king pardoned him, he was set free

again but in 1542 he suddenly fell ill and died while travelling on royal business in southern England.

We know nothing about the details of Wyatt's poetic activities. There is a manuscript in the Egerton manuscripts of the British Library that contains some poems written in Wyatt's own hand, and other poems in another hand-writing with his name written beside them. In June 1557 the printer Richard Tottel published a collection of poems by various writers, mainly Wyatt and Surrey, in which the poems written by Wyatt are carefully marked as such. Until then, such poems had only been copied into the manuscript poetry collections of high-class admirers. Tottel made them available to the general public. He seems to have revised them, correcting the rhythms of many of Wyatt's to make them smoother.

It was **Richard Tottel's** edition of *Songs and Sonnets* (often called **Tottel's Miscellany**) that first made Wyatt's works widely known, 15 years after his death. Tottel was a commercial publisher in London and the publication of this book marks the beginning of the transformation of literary production from private courtly manuscript to commercially printed book, with the obvious change of readership that implies. Until the mid-17th century the two traditions, private circulation in manuscript and printed publication for sale, continue side-by-side. The final triumph of the printed form marks the end of the medieval tradition of courtly poetry. In his Introduction, Tottel explains about the new poetry of renaissance Europe:

That to have written well in verse, yea and in small parcels, deserves great praise, the works of diverse Latin, Italians, and others do prove sufficiently. That our tongue is able in that kind to do as praiseworthy as the rest, the honorable style of the noble earl of Surrey (*Howard*) and the weightiness of the deep-witted Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder's verse... do show abundantly. It remains now, gentle reader, that thou think it not ill done to publish, to the honor of the English tongue, those works which the ungentle hoarders up of such treasures have heretofore envied thee.... If perhaps some mislike the stateliness of style, removed from the rough skill of common ears, I ask help of the learned to defend their learned friends, the authors of this work. And I exhort the unlearned, by reading to be more skillful, and to purge that swinelike grossness that makes the sweet marjoram not to smell to their delight.

It is clear that Tottel felt that the new poetry would not easily please the popular taste of England, and that an effort of education would be required to tear people away from the familiar old styles of the later Middle Ages. Spenser and Shakespeare show how in the end the popular and the elegant styles found a very English reconciliation.

Wyatt is the first person known to have composed in regular **sonnet** form in English; most of the 30 or so sonnets he wrote are translations or adaptations of sonnets by Petrarch or other Italians. While he keeps the division of the poem's 14 lines into eight-line **octet** and six-line **sestet**, Wyatt almost always ends his sonnets with a **couplet** (two consecutive lines with the same rhyme), and this became the standard form for the **English sonnet**. One of his sonnets that contains many of the images often found in later Petrarchan poetry is a faithful translation from Petrarch:

My galley, charged with forgetfulness,
Thorough sharp seas in winter nights doth pass
'Tween rock and rock; and eke my enemy, alas,
That is my lord, steereth with cruelty,
And every oar a thought in readiness,
As though that death were light in such a case.

An endless wind doth tear the sail apace
Of forced sighs and trusty fearfulness.
A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain,
Hath done the wearied cords great hinderance,
Wreathed with error and eke with ignorance.
The stars be hid that led me to this pain,
Drowned is reason that should me consort,
And I remain despairing of the port.

The “lord” in this poem is the god of love, Cupid/Eros, and the male lover is shown as a helpless victim of his feelings. We know that Wyatt married in 1520 but separated from his wife after five years, accusing her of adultery; for the last six years of his life he was living with another woman. There is no reason to suppose that Wyatt was himself tormented with love-longing, or that his sonnets have any autobiographical reference at all.

Most of Wyatt’s sonnets are translations; his own poetic work is mainly in the form of songs, poems in stanzas, sometimes with a refrain in the last line. Again we find translations from the Italian of Petrarch or Serafino etc, in poetic forms close to such renaissance models as the epigram, the canzone, the ballade etc. but many of the songs seem to be original works by Wyatt. One in particular has been much admired (as is normal at this time, the manuscript version has no title but Tottel added one, often simply the opening words):

They flee from me that sometime did me seek
With naked foot stalking in my chamber.
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek
That now are wild and do not remember
That sometime they put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better, but once in special,
In thin array after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall
And she me caught in her arms long and small,
Therewithal sweetly did me kiss
And softly said, ‘Dear heart, how like you this?’

It was no dream: I lay broad waking.
But all is turned thorough my gentleness
Into a strange fashion of forsaking.
And I have leave to go of her goodness
And she also to use newfangleness.
But since that I so kindly am served
I fain would know what she hath deserved.

The poem moves from an image of semi-tame falcons to a more specific but still undefined “she” whose poetic morals seem to owe something to Ovid. The main topic of the whole poem seems to be woman’s inconstancy, as so often in such love complaints. The question in the last line seems quite vindictive; in many of Wyatt’s poems we find a kind of anger, as though his *persona* really does think that a woman is obligated to respond to any man who says he loves her. In the poetry of one-sided, unrequited love there obviously must

be a question about how women should respond, but the bitter tone of many of Wyatt's poems is often quite shocking:

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

As to be heard where ear is none,
As lead to grave in marble stone,
My song may pierce her heart as soon.
Should we then sigh or moan?
No, no, my lute, for I have done.

The rocks do not so cruelly
Repulse the waves continually
As she my suit and affection,
So that I am past remedy,
Whereby my lute and I have done.

....

May chance thee lie withered and old
The winter nights that are so cold,
Plaining in vain unto the moon.
Thy wishes then dare not be told.
Care then who list, for I have done.

And then may chance thee to repent
The time that thou hast lost and spent
To cause thy lovers sigh and swoon.
Then shalt thou know beauty but lent
And wish and want as I have done.

Now cease my lute. This is the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste
And ended is that we begun.
Now is this song both sung and past.
My lute be still, for I have done.

This theme of the cruel lady who enjoys tormenting the lover, and the way that love can turn to hatred, is part of the medieval conventions of love that remained popular in England until the end of the 16th century. Such poetry is marked by a form of anti-feminism, playing a game of wit as the speaking *persona* tries to change the lady's feelings by threats that show how humiliated male vanity feels by the lady's power to say no.

Perhaps, consciously or no, the courtiers who complain in such poems of their unkind ladies are at least partly expressing one of the main difficulties confronting their political ambitions. Power in the court was entirely dependent on favour; the king and high lords were autocratic, their favour could change at any moment, one might serve faithfully for years and

never be given any reward. Power was arbitrary. The court was a dangerous place, full of factions and hidden enemies, where each would-be courtier had to fabricate a public image that would attract favourable attention. The poetry of Wyatt and Surrey is certainly part of their courtly self-fashioning, there is no reason to suppose that they were all the time love-struck.

Wyatt found in the works of Horace and the Italian Luigi Alemanni satirical **verse epistles** (epistolary satires), a form in which he could for once more directly express some of his hostility towards this courtly life, using the *terza rima* of Italian poetry:

From: Mine Own John Poins

(...)

My Poins, I cannot frame me tune to feign,
To cloak the truth, for praise without desert,
Of them that list all vice for to retain.

I cannot honor them that sets their part
With Venus and Bacchus all their life long.
Nor hold my peace of them although I smart.

I cannot crouch nor kneel to do so great a wrong,
To worship them like God on earth alone.
That are as wolves these sely lambs among.

(...)

I cannot wrest the law to fill the coffer,
With innocent blood to feed myself fat,
And do most hurt where most help I offer.

(...)

I am not he, such eloquence to boast
To make the crow in singing as the swan,
Nor call 'the lion' of coward beasts the most,
That cannot take a mouse as the cat can;
And he that dieth of hunger of the gold
Call him Alexander, and say that Pan
Passeth Apollo in music manifold,
Praise Sir Thopas for a noble tale
And scorn the story that the Knight told,

(...)

Say he is rude that cannot lie and feign,
The lecher a lover, and tyranny
To be the right of a prince's reign?

I cannot, I; no, no, it will not be.

(...)

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

(...)

Nor am I now where Christ is given in prey
For money, poison, and treason -- at Rome
A common practice, used might and day.

But here I am in Kent and Christendom
 Among the Muses, where I read and rhyme;
 Where if thou list my Pains for to come,
Thou shalt be judge how I do spend my time.

The end of this poem is notable for its nationalistic note; in the English Reformation there was a strong feeling that England alone had preserved true Christianity, which the break with Rome was designed to restore again after centuries of oppression. We find here the blunt, honest speaker who is part of the satiric convention since Horace. Is the poem autobiographical? Like Alemanni, on whose poem it is based, Wyatt experienced times when he was banished to his country home, where he could enjoy the Humanist ideal of *otium*. Disgust with the falsehood of court life, the insincere flattery and the insecurity reigning there, is found in many later writers. Shakespeare often uses it as one of his images for the difference between appearance and reality; John Donne, who had hoped to become a courtier until his rash marriage, also refers to it in some poems.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

Wyatt was nearly 15 years older than **Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey** (1517-1547). He was the eldest son of the Duke of Norfolk, the highest lord in England, and his cousin Catherine Howard was Henry VIII's fifth queen for two years before being executed. The Howards were descended from kings, and the earl of Surrey (as Henry Howard is usually called) seems to have been a very proud and rather wild young man. He was a soldier in France and rose to be commander of the town of Boulogne in 1545-6. As Henry VIII was dying in early 1547 there was a fierce struggle for power between a faction led by Surrey and his father, and another led by the Seymours and Parrs (the families of the dead mother of young prince Edward and of the present queen). The Howards lost, and Surrey was executed as a precautionary measure a few days before the king's death.

Surrey wrote sonnets and other poems, translating a number of poems by Petrarch and others in an elegant and polished metre. In his sonnets, Wyatt had followed the Italian model and rhymed his 3 quatrains *abba*; Surrey changed this to *abab*, which became the rhyme-scheme of the **English sonnet** of Shakespeare and the other poets of his time. In one of his most popular sonnets, a night-lament for the absence of the loved one, it is not possible to know if the speaker is the man or the woman:

Alas! so all things now do hold their peace,
Heaven and earth disturbed in no thing;
The beasts, the air, the birds their song do cease,
The nightes char the stars about doth bring.
Calm is the sea, the waves work less and less;
So am not I, whom Love, alas, doth wring,
Bringing before my face the great increase
Of my desires, whereat I weep and sing,
In joy and woe, as in a doubtful ease.
For my sweet thoughts sometime do pleasure bring,
But by and by the cause of my dis-ease
Gives me a pang that inwardly doth sting,

When that I think what grief it is again
To live and lack the thing should rid my pain.

Surrey was a companion of Wyatt's son, who was executed for rebellion under Queen Mary; we do not know if he had much contact with Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder, but he wrote an epitaph for him on his death in 1542:

Wyatt resteth here, that quick could never rest,
Whose heavenly gifts, increased by disdain
And virtue, sank the deeper in his breast:
Such profit he of envy could obtain.

A head where wisdom mysteries did frame,
Whose hammers beat still in that lively brain
As on a stithy, where some work of fame
Was daily wrought to turn to Britain's gain.

A visage stern and mild, where both did grow
Vice to condemn, in virtues to rejoice;
Amid great storms whom grace assured so
To live upright and smile at fortune's choice.

A hand that taught what may be said in rhyme,
That reft Chaucer the glory of his wit (robbed)
A mark the which, unperfected for time,
Some may approach but never none shall hit.
(...)

Here is the combination of poetry, politics, and wisdom, that we find again and again in the 16th century. The poet is one who teaches the reader with a skill that he has acquired through experience, reading, and deep reflection. Here such qualities as "virtue" and "nobility" are essential aspects of the "courteous" life at the service of king and nation. The elegant and carefully cultivated style needed by the successful courtier is mirrored in the style of the poetry he reads and writes.

Surrey's main claim to a place in literary history comes from his having been the first English writer to use **blank verse** (decasyllabic lines without rhyme). Latin and Greek heroic poems have no rhyme, and just at the time Surrey was writing, Italians were publishing translations of Virgil without rhyme too; he was almost certainly influenced by them. Surrey translated Books 2 and 4 of the *Aeneid*, consulting the translation of the whole work (in rhyming couplets) made by the Scottish bishop Gawin Douglas (1475-1522). Douglas follows the Chaucerian model, is colloquial and verbose, with nothing of the heroic in his style. Surrey was very deeply impressed by the way Wyatt had translated Petrarch, introducing a quite new way of writing English verse, and Wyatt was certainly his inspiration when, in about 1540, he set to work to create for the first time a truly English equivalent for classical heroic verse.

The *Aeneid* is a highly musical narrative poem of great sophistication; by eliminating rhyme Surrey opens the way for phrase-units of varying length. At the same time, **caesura** (a pause in the course of a line) and **enjambment** (running a phrase over from one line to the next without any pause at the end of the line) take on new importance. Unfortunately, Tottel

modernized and regularized Surrey's work, and only Book 4 can be read in a version (printed 1554) close to Surrey's original:

(As Aeneas sails away from Carthage, Dido tries to kill herself but for a long time her soul lingers in the body)

Almighty Juno having ruth by this
Of her long pains and eke her ling'ring death
From heaven she sent the Goddess Iris down,
The thralling spirit and jointed limbs to loose.
For that neither by lot of destiny
Nor yet by natural death she perished
But wretchedly before her fatal day
And kindled with a sudden rage of flame:
Proserpine had not yet from her head bereft
The golden hair nor judged her to hell.
The dewy Iris thus with golden wings,
A thousand hues showing against the sun,
Amid the skies then did she fly adown:
On Dido's head where as she gan alight,
This hair (quod she) to Pluto consecrate
Commanded I bereave, and eke thy spirit unloose
From this body: and when she had thus said
With her right hand she cut the hair in twain
And therewith all the natural heat gan quench
And into wind the life forthwith resolve.

The skillful way in which Surrey uses enjambment is very striking. Most of the words are simple, only a few have become archaic; the flow of sense, too, is simple, yet the word order is poetic, not colloquial, and the effect is solemn. The lines are decasyllabic (ten syllables), normally, and because of the way English language works, they can usually be scanned as **iambic pentameter** (five iambic feet) although Surrey had probably no idea of dividing his line into "feet" and many of the lines contain only four really strong stresses when read naturally.

None of the century's later poets realized the true greatness of Surrey's achievement, for his work remained unread, buried in Tottel's Miscellany. Blank verse proved the ideal medium for tragic drama, from *Gorboduc* onwards, but when 16th century poets attempted heroic narrative, as Spenser and others did, they used almost every kind of metre *except* blank verse. Only Marlowe used it, in translating book 1 of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, and nobody even noticed that. As a result, Milton sincerely believed that he was the first poet to use blank verse for English heroic poetry, in *Paradise Lost*, and had to repeat the work that Surrey had already done in developing his style.

English Translations of the Bible

The Bible had been translated into Old English, but no one seems to have felt a need for the same work in the high Middle Ages in England, the Latin text was easy enough for students and there were French translations available. With the rise of the populist movements of the later 14th century, **Wyclif** and his followers were the first to organize translations into English of the Latin Vulgate, in 1380-2. Their teachings (known as Lollardy)

were not accepted by the church of the time, but their translations continued in use until, in 1525, the reformer **William Tyndal**, after visiting Luther, published in Germany the first English translation of the New Testament based on the original Greek. In 1530 he published a translation of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) from the Hebrew. He was executed in the Netherlands as a heretic in 1536. Tyndal's translation served as the basis for the style and vocabulary of almost all later English translations. He sometimes used Wyclif's version as a guide.

Miles Coverdale made a translation of the Bible, mainly based on Luther's German version. It was printed in Germany in 1535-7. Coverdale was the first to put the non-Hebrew books of the Old Testament in a separate section ("Apocrypha"). This translation was unscholarly, but through it Tyndal's style passed into common use in the years of Henry VIII's and Archbishop Cranmer's early liturgical reform. For centuries, the Church of England used Coverdale's version of the Psalms for singing in its services, and in some places continues to use it.

In 1539, Coverdale was put in charge of preparing an official version of the Bible commonly called the **Great Bible**, combining Tyndal's, his own, and another version, Matthew's. This Great Bible was authorized for use in church services and it continued in general use until 1568, 10 years after Elizabeth became queen. Almost at the same time, **Taverner's Bible** appeared, which first used the word "parable."

Protestant teachings spread widely in England during the years of the child-king Edward VI (1547-53) and many editions of the Bible were published before his older half-sister Mary became queen and tried to bring back the old Catholic religion, which limited the reading of the Bible. Many protestant theologians escaped to Geneva, where they prepared the **Geneva Bible** which was published in its final version in Geneva in 1560. It continued in general use in England until the Civil War. It was printed in clear type, was quite small in size, and was the first English Bible with verse-numbers. It had notes that expressed Calvinist doctrines, and the Anglican bishops of Elizabeth did not like them. They therefore revised the Great Bible into the **Bishop's Bible** of 1568, which was authorized for use in churches. It served as the basis for the King James Version of 1611.

In 1582, Catholic scholars, escaping persecution under Elizabeth in France and Belgium, published a translation of the New Testament, the **Rheims Version**, from the text of the Vulgate, but following the older English versions in style. It also influenced the 1611 revision. In 1610, Catholic scholars at Douay published a translation of the Vulgate Old Testament, the **Douai Version**.

In 1604 King James I set up a commission of 47 experts to prepare a translation of the Bible, based on all previous ones. This was published in 1611, and became known, for no special reason, as the **Authorized Version**, although many people know it as the **King James Bible**. It remained in use until the 20th century, and the rhythm of the King James Bible has left its mark on the English language. The rhythm, often that of the original Hebrew, read in a rather formal manner in churches and homes, has had a subtle but persistent influence on English prosody over the centuries:

From Isaiah Chapter 53 (in King James's Authorized Version)

He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from him. He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

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