

Later Elizabethan Literature

Lyric Poetry

In 1588, the year of the Armada, **William Byrd** published his song book, *Psalms, Sonnets, and Songs of Sadness and Piety*. Byrd was the first musician of genius that England had produced, and he composed wonderful music for the choirs to sing at the services in the royal chapels. He himself always remained faithful to the old (Catholic) religion but the Queen protected him. Byrd's music, both sacred and secular, is still sung today, and the Elizabethan part songs and madrigals are among the finest vocal music ever written. In the 1590s and early 1600s a number of other fine composers were at work, including **Thomas Morley**, **John Dowland** and **Orlando Gibbons**, whose music is still often sung, like that of their great Italian contemporary Monteverdi, who was the father of the modern opera.

Despite the stress on religion in the title of Byrd's song book, it also included secular lyrics by mostly unnamed poets. These skillfully crafted lyrics designed to be set to music have long been one of the most admired features of Elizabethan poetry, culminating in the many songs that Shakespeare either wrote or adapted for inclusion in his plays. While today many search for political and social implications in Elizabethan verse, these poems represent another form of poetic tradition, one that invokes the popular voice while being in fact written by and for the educated classes. Their main concern is to delight.

This anonymous song was set to music by Byrd:

Though Amaryllis dance in green
Like fairy queen;
And sing full clear
Corinna can with smiling cheer.
Yet since their eyes make heart so sore,
Heigh ho, heigh ho, 'chill love no more. (*I'll*)

My sheep are lost for want of food,
And I so wood, (*mad*)
That all the day
I sit and watch a herdmaid gay
Who laughs to see me sit so sore,
Heigh ho, heigh ho, 'chill love no more.

Her loving looks, her beauty bright
Is such delight,
That all in vain
I love to like and lose my gain,
For her that thanks me not therefor,
Heigh ho, heigh ho, 'chill love no more.

Ah wanton eyes, my friendly foes,
And cause of woes,
Your sweet desire
Breeds flames of ice and freeze in fire.
Ye scorn to see me weep so sore,
Heigh ho, heigh ho, 'chill love no more.

As friend remembered not.
Heigh-ho! Sing, etc.
(from *As You Like It*)

Come away, come away death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fly away, fly away breath,
I am slain by a fair cruel maid:
 My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
 O prepare it.
 My part of death no one so true
 Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strewn:
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown:
 A thousand thousand sighs to save,
 Lay me, O where
 Sad lover never find my grave,
 To weep there. (from *Twelfth Night*)

Full fathom five they father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Ding-dong.
Hark! Now I hear them--Ding-dong, bell. (from *The Tempest*)

After 1590, poets in general were beginning to think more deeply about the nature of the rhythms they were using. The influence of Greek and Latin theories of verse was beginning to become pernicious. Greek and Latin poetry was measured verse, patterns of long and short syllables, since those languages had no stressed syllables. English verse in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was normally syllabic, mostly decasyllabic (10 syllables) in the narrative poems, and it is wrong to try to divide lines into “feet” in poems written before the very end of the 16th century. The notion of “feet” is derived directly from Greek metrical patterns of long and short vowels: iambic (*unite, repeat*), trochaic (*unit, instant*), anapestic (*intervene, disarray*), dactylic (*Washington, energy*), or spondaic (*headline, heartfelt*). English lines almost naturally tend towards the iambic rhythm, and this can be found in medieval alliterative poems as well as in Chaucer, but there was no concept of “feet” until the late Elizabethan age received it from the classics.

The first step in this was for English poets to attempt to write English verse “quantatively” like Latin, ignoring the natural pattern of stress and attending only to the length of each syllable. Sidney was an innovator here, but others followed. The setting of quantative lines to music was perhaps made easier; Byrd set some such poems, but it was another musician, **Thomas Campion** (1567 - 1620), who made quantative verse the basis of

his entire system and defended it theoretically in a book, his *Observations in the Art of English Poesy*. Campion wrote his own lyrics, and this one (published in 1602) is designed to illustrate his theory of quantitative verse:

Rose-cheeked Laura, come,
Sing thou smoothly with thy beauty's
Silent music, either other
 Sweetly gracing.

Lovely forms do flow
From concert divinely framed; (*harmony*)
Heav'n is music, and thy beauty's
 Birth is heavenly.

These dull notes we sing
Discords need for helps to grace them;
Only beauty purely loving
 Knows no discord,

But still moves delight,
Like clear springs renewed by flowing,
Ever perfect, ever in them-
 Selves eternal.

Campion was in fact quite wrong to disparage the natural patterns of stress that characterize English and the other modern European vernaculars, and quantitative verse had no future; instead, the native English stress patterns took the place of the long/short vowel patterns in the classical feet (meter being the Greek for measure) and the poetic lines received Greek names: tetrameter (4 feet), pentameter (5 feet, the most popular), hexameter (6 feet). Since most feet were iambic or trochaic (2 syllables), these names simply correspond to octosyllabic, decasyllabic, or twelve syllable lines.

It was his skill in music, rather than his odd ideas about meter, that guided Campion in his poetry-writing, and he is one of the finest writers of the decorative lyric that makes no claim to personal involvement. He began by writing in Latin, knew the Latin lyrical tradition well, and is thus close to Ben Jonson in his concern to write elegant art:

When to her lute Corinna sings,
Her voice revives the leaden strings,
And doth in highest notes appear
As any challenged echo clear;
But when she doth of mourning speak,
E'en with her sighs the strings do break.

And as her lute doth live or die,
Led by her passion, so must I:
For when of pleasure she doth sing,
My thoughts enjoy a sudden spring,
But if she doth of sorrow speak,
E'en from my heart the strings do break.

The educated elite associated with the royal court had for long had the practice of writing for mutual entertainment, cultivating a certain preciousness in verse that was designed to help them project a favourable image of themselves to the more powerful patrons on whom they depended. The spread of printing and the beginning of commercial book-publishing came at a time when the importance of the court was diminishing. In London, especially, the audience for elegant poetry was not now limited to the courtiers. Sidney and Spenser had both discovered in different ways the frustrations of writing for a small private audience. If Sidney's sister **Mary Herbert, countess of Pembroke**, began to have her brother's works published only a few years after his death, it is because she realized that printing offered a more certain immortality.

The corrupt text of *Astrophel and Stella* published in 1591 was only the first of the many collections of songs and sonnets published in the 1590s. It served to spark a great explosion of commercial publication of courtly poetry. While poets of an older generation such as Breton and Churchyard published their works for the first time in 1591-2, in 1592 Samuel Daniel's sonnets to Delia were published together with the melodramatic monologue "The Complaint of Rosamond".

Samuel Daniel (1562 - 1619) was associated with the Countess of Pembroke and it is typical of the age that he also wrote Senecan tragedies, a historical epic on the Wars of the Roses (*The Civil Wars*, 1599), a philosophical poem in defence of learning (*Musophilus*, 1599), as well as a major defence of English prosody (versification) against the theories of Campion, the *Defense of Rhyme* (1603). He also wrote masques for the court of King James before being ousted by Ben Jonson. Daniel's style shows a new polish. Clarity and simplicity of style are his distinguishing features, although his sonnets do not have any of *Astrophel's* vice or verve; they repeat the conventions of love poetry that have come to be known as Petrarchan, although they are generally older than Petrarch. It may be Daniel who suggested to Shakespeare some of the stylistic features of his sonnets, though not the contents. There is something of Donne in the "conceits" (imagery), too. The following are poems often anthologized from his *Delia* sonnets, which have no unifying theme or structure:

Sonnet 33.

When men shall find thy flower, thy glory pass,
And thou, with careful brow sitting alone,
Received hast this message from thy glass,
That tells thee truth, and says that all is gone,
Fresh shalt thou see in me the wounds thou madest,
Though spent thy flame, in me the heat remaining,
I that have loved thee thus before thou fadest,
My faith shall wax, when thou art in thy waning.
The world shall find this miracle in me,
That fire can burn when all the matter's spent;
Then what my faith hath been thyself shall see,
And that thou wast unkind thou mayst repent.
Thou mayst repent that thou hast scorned my tears,
When winter snows upon thy golden hairs.

Sonnet 45.

Care-charmer Sleep, son of the sable Night,
 Brother to Death, in silent darkness born,
 Relieve my languish and restore the light,
 With dark forgetting of my cares, return
 And let the day be time enough to mourn
 The shipwreck of my ill-adventured youth;
 Let waking eyes suffice to wail their scorn
 Without the torment of the night's untruth.
 Cease, dreams, th'imagery of our day desires,
 To model forth the passions of the morrow;
 Never let rising sun approve you liars, (reveal)
 To add more grief to aggravate my sorrow.
 Still let me sleep, embracing clouds in vain,
 And never wake to feel the day's disdain.

In the next year, 1593, another major collection of sonnets appeared, *Idea*, by **Michael Drayton** (1563 - 1631), followed by *Idea's Mirror* in 1594. Drayton later kept revising his poems despite the quick changes of literary fashion, publishing a new edition of his sonnets in 1619, when the form was already completely out of date. He also tried his hand at drama, wrote a nationalistic epic, *The Baron's Wars*, published *England's Heroic Epistles* in 1597, as well as writing *Poly-Olbion*, 30,000 lines about the English countryside. Drayton was a nationalistic Protestant poet who set out to continue the work of Sidney, not realizing perhaps that poetry was not going to have much effect on politics, especially if the poet was not from a famous family. He developed the image of the English poet as a plain-spoken, ordinary man, expressed here in the introduction to *Idea*:

Into these loves who but for passion looks,
 At this first sight here let him lay them by,
 And seek elsewhere, in turning other books
 Which better may his labour satisfy.
 No farfetched sigh shall ever wound my breast,
 Love from mine eye a tear shall never wring,
 Nor in "Ah me's" my whining sonnets dressed;
 A libertine, fantastically I sing,
 My verse is the true image of my mind,
 Ever in motion, still desiring change;
 And as thus to variety inclined,
 So in all humours sportively I range;
 My muse is rightly of the English strain,
 That cannot long one fashion entertain.

This poem is already clearly anti-Petrarchan; generally speaking, Elizabethan love poetry is highly self-conscious and artificial, although Drayton sometimes managed to find a new note, as in these sonnets published in the revised versions of 1619:

Sonnet 6.

How many paltry, foolish, painted things
 That now in coaches trouble every street
 Shall be forgotten, whom no poet sings,
 Ere they be well wrapped in their winding-sheet?

Where I to thee Eternity shall give (Whereas)
When nothing else remaineth of these days,
And queens hereafter shall be glad to live
Upon the alms of thy superfluous praise.
Virgins and matrons, reading these my rhymes,
Shall be so much delighted with thy story
That they shall grieve they lived not in these times
To have seen thee, their sex's only glory;
So shalt thou fly above the vulgar throng,
Still to survive in my immortal song.

61.

Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part;
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me,
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart
That thus so cleanly I myself can free;
Shake hands forever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.
Now, at the last gasp of Love's latest breath, (last)
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou mightst him yet recover.

The strikingly colloquial tone of this last poem much impressed Thomas Hardy, while the lines in the first, "queens hereafter shall be glad to live/ Upon the alms of thy superfluous praise," are almost unequalled in their kind. They show how much Drayton and his contemporaries were influenced by the epigrammatic style, looked for compression and tension in their conceits and imagery, while more and more favouring wit (intellectual impact) above emotion.

Drayton is exceptional in writing and publishing love sonnets well beyond 1600. Of course, the *Songs and Sonnets* of John Donne were not published until 1633, but they were mostly written in his youth, some before 1600 and others soon after that date, and had long been circulating in manuscript copies in the older style.

One other writer of a collection of songs and sonnets deserves to be mentioned, **Mary Wroth**, because she is one of the rare woman writers of the period. Admittedly Queen Elizabeth wrote some smooth philosophical and occasional verses; Mary Herbert the Countess of Pembroke completed Sidney's Psalms; Emilia Lanier wrote religious poems; but Lady Mary Wroth wrote prose and verse of major importance.

She was born into a family of poets, being the daughter of Sidney's younger brother, Sir Robert Sidney. She had two children during an affair with her cousin William Herbert, the son of her aunt, Sir Philip Sidney's sister, Mary Herbert, countess of Pembroke. Mary Wroth wrote a long prose romance, *Urania*, that she published in an unfinished form in 1621. She took as her models people and scandals of the Jacobean court, her romance provoked such a great fuss that she withdrew it from circulation. Included with it is a sequence of songs and

sonnets, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, that is of interest today because the poems are spoken by women, reversing the conventions of the time. The heroine of the romance is named Pamphilia, meaning “all-loving,” while the unfaithful male is called Amphilanthus, meaning “lover of two.” The Petrarchan influence is still strong:

Am I thus conquered? have I lost the powers
That to withstand, which joys to ruin me?
Must I be still while it my strength devours
And captive leads me prisoner, bound, unfree?
Love first shall leave mens fant'sies to them free,
Desire shall quench love's flames, spring hate sweet showers,
Love shall loose all his darts, have sight, and see
His shame, and wishing hinder happy hours.
Why should we not Love's purblind charms resist?
Must we be servile, doing what he list?
No, seek some host to harbour thee: I fly
Thy babish tricks, and freedom do profess;
But O, my hurt makes my lost heart confess
I love, and must. So farewell liberty.

While many volumes of poetry written by a single writer were now being published, the older tradition of Tottel's *Miscellany* was not completely abandoned. Anthologies containing poems by a number of writers, often with uncertain attribution of poems, or containing unauthorized texts, continued to appear. *The Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599 published a few of Shakespeare's sonnets, as well as Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*:

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove (experience)
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rock,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle (skirt)
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,

Come live with me and be my love.

The shepherds' swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

This pastoral fantasy is the only surviving short lyric by Marlowe. It attracted quite a number of imitators and debunkers, the most famous being a poem by **Sir Walter Raleigh**:

The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold,
When rivers rage and rocks grow cold,
And Philomel becometh dumb;
The rest complains of cares to come.

(nightingale)

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields
To wayward winter reckoning yields;
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Thy gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten--
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and ivy buds,
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,
All these in me no means can move
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last and love still breed,
Had joys no date nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

These two contrasting poems illustrate the ultimate English response to the European love tradition; pragmatism proves stronger than romanticism, or at least awareness of the problem of time proves stronger than poetry of the timeless moment. It is significant that the woman's reply is also the work of a male poet.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552 - 1618) would have a larger place in literary history if his poems had been collected and published, even after his death, like those of Donne or Herbert. Instead many are lost, incomplete fragments (a long celebration of Elizabeth, *The Ocean to Cynthia*), or remain unrecognized, anonymous lyrics in manuscript collections. Like so many

others, Raleigh wrote in both the 16th and the 17th centuries. He was Spenser's closest supporter, encouraging him in his publication of *The Faerie Queene*, so that the 1590 edition of the first 3 books contains Spenser's "Letter to Raleigh" in which he outlines his plan for the whole work. Raleigh was an adventurer who founded the first English colony in North America, named Virginia after the queen. He is also thought to have introduced the smoking of tobacco into Europe.

He was a courtier who enjoyed a very close relationship with the Queen until he seduced and married one of her ladies-in-waiting in 1592. The Queen was outraged. Raleigh was mainly engaged in the unofficial sea war against the Spanish; when James became king in 1603 he decided that he wanted peace with Spain, and had Raleigh imprisoned in the Tower of London for treason. The papers of his trial have recently been discovered. While he was there he wrote long sections of a remarkable prose *History of the World*. Popular opinion was on his side, but the king was not moved by that; in 1617, urgently needing more money that the Parliament would not give him, the king allowed Raleigh to go on an expedition against the Spanish to Guiana. Raleigh's plans were betrayed to the Spanish by secret agents, his son was killed in an attack, and he came back empty-handed. In 1618 he was executed without a trial, on the king's orders, and James lost for ever the respect of the ordinary English people.

In some ways Raleigh's poetry recalls that of Wyatt, being written in the sober English style of the man of common sense who knows this world's fickleness, and expresses it in a variation on the old theme of *theatrum mundi* (life is a theater):

What is our life? A play of passion;
Our mirth the music of division;
Our mothers' wombs the tiring-houses be *(dressing-rooms)*
Where we are dressed for this short comedy.
Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is,
That sits and marks still who doth act amiss;
Our graves that hide us from the searching sun
Are like drawn curtains when the play is done.
Thus march we, playing, to our latest rest, *(last)*
Only we die in earnest--that's no jest.

One poem by Raleigh was often copied and provoked a number of replies; it is in the old satirical tradition again, this time the theme is worldly vanity: (*13 stanzas in all, here only a few are given as examples*):

The Lie

Go, soul, the body's guest,
Upon a thankless errand;
Fear not to touch the best;
The truth shall be thy warrant.
Go, since I needs must die,
And give the world the lie.

Say to the court, it glows
And shines like rotten wood;
Say to the church, it shows
What's good, and doth no good.
If church and court reply

Then give them both the lie.

Tell potentates, they live
Acting by others' action;
Not loved unless they give,
Not strong but by a faction.
If potentates reply,
Give potentates the lie.

(. . .)

So when thou hast, as I
Commaned thee, done blabbing--
Although to give the lie
Deserves no less than stabbing--
Stab at thee that will,
No stab the soul can kill.

It is important to recall too that Edmund Spenser's *Complaints, Amoretti*, and other lyric poems were also published in the mid-1590s. This marks the great shift of literary activity from the court to the public domain, the literary object being no longer a manuscript copy made for and by high-class friends but a printed book to be bought and sold in the streets.

Longer Elizabethan poems

Because anthologies have limited space, and school curricula limited time available, we often forget how many of the poems written and published in these years were not short lyrics but longer poems, either narrative or thematic, to say nothing of the great translations. One well-known such longer work is Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, which ought to be seen in conjunction with his translations of Ovid's *Elegies*. For the Elizabethans, Ovid offered a much admired model of sensuous, erotic poetry, and they followed him enthusiastically in about a dozen surviving poems.

Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*

Marlowe's main inspiration was probably Ovid's *Heroides*, where in 2 epistles he offers a version of the story of Hero and Leander, originally told in Greek by Musaeus of Alexandria. It is a story of doomed love, Leander drowning as he is swimming across the Hellespont when a storm blows out the guiding light in Hero's window; Hero in turn kills herself on finding his body. But Marlowe's poem tells only the story of their initial passionate love, with no tragic undertones. It seems to be incomplete, and George Chapman added the tragic ending as well as revising what Marlowe had written, in his version published in 1598. Today, critics prefer Marlowe's unfinished fragment, with its curiously untragic tone and its celebration of a passion that knows no morality and no guilt. It may be thought that Shakespeare was in some sense responding to Marlowe's poem in composing *Romeo and Juliet*. In both works, young love is raised to the highest level of human emotion.

On Hellespont, guilty of true-loves' blood,
In view and opposite, two cities stood,
Sea-borderers, disjoined by Neptune's might;
The one Abydos, the other Sestos hight.
At Sestos Hero dwelt, Hero the fair,
Whom young Apollo courted for her hair,
And offered as a dower his burning throne,
Where she should sit for men to gaze upon.

(named)

Hero is a “nun” in the service of Venus. In line 160, standing in the temple Leander is struck by love’s arrow shot from Hero’s eyes, rather like Troilus in Chaucer’s story. Hero feels the force of his loving gaze, the poet gives the poem’s vision of love, and the scene that follows seems to be echoed in the first meeting of Romeo and Juliet:

It lies not in our power to love or hate,
For will in us is overruled by fate.
When two are stripped, long ere the course begin
We wish that one should lose, the other win;
And one especially do we affect
Of two gold ingots, like in each respect.
The reason no man knows, let it suffice,
What we behold is censured by our eyes.
Where either deliberate, the love is slight;
Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?

170
(favour)

Leander begins a long speech that, strangely, turns into a violent, traditional attack on virginity, using popular sayings:

Virginity, albeit some highly prize it,
Compared with marriage, had you tried them both,
Differs as much as wine and water doth.

Finally, Hero accepts his love, which is a comic touch, since she had never refused it! She refuses his embrace, though, but tells him where she lives, adding “Come thither!” She tries to control her feelings; Cupid mounts to ask the Fates to bless their union, but they are hostile to love and the poet launches into a long myth of his own making (lines 386-482) to explain why, although his story at the same time explains why scholars are always poor.

Suddenly we find that Hero has returned to her tower and Leander is approaching. Their encounter is tempestuous, Hero being full of contradictory feelings, but partly through sexual ignorance, she remains a virgin till morning comes and he floats home in ecstasy. Standing on the shore of the Hellespont, Leander sees Hero’s tower on the other shore, and leaps into the water. Neptune mistakes him for beautiful Ganymede escaping from Zeus and tries to bring him into his palace; Leander nearly drowns. Then, as he swims on, Neptune plays with him:

He clapped his plump cheeks, with his tresses played
And, smiling wantonly, his love bewrayed.
He watched his arms, and as they opened wide,
At every stroke betwixt them he would slide

And steal a kiss, and then run out and dance
And, as he turned, cast many a lustful glance 670
And throw him gaudy toys to please his eye,
And dive into the water and there pry
Upon his breast, his thighs, and every limb,

Leander reaches the shore and knocks at the door, but Hero is surprised to see him naked and runs to hide in the bed, where Leander follows. At first she resists, but the poet is skeptical of her real intentions:

She trembling strove; this strife of hers, like that
Which made the world, another world begat
Of unknown joy. Treason was in her thought,
And cunningly to yield herself she sought.
Seeming not won, yet won she was, at length.
(In such wars women use but half their strength.) 780

Finally, Leander enters her. Day is coming and Hero feels ashamed of what has happened; she tries to leave Leander in the bed,

But as her naked feet were whipping out,
He on the sudden clinged her so about
That mermaidlike unto the floor she slid:
One half appeared, the other half was hid. 800

As day breaks, Marlowe's work ends; critics mostly feel that he could never have gone on to complete a tragic story after such a climax, and that is perhaps the reason why the work was left unfinished and unpublished at his death. Chapman, working with a quite different literary vision, begins his continuation by getting the poor couple properly married, then has them die in the manner prescribed by the story that Marlowe was clearly intent on subverting.

Shakespeare's longer poems

No other poem of the erotic Ovidian tradition can equal Marlowe's, but **Shakespeare** wrote two works that have to be mentioned in this context, the long poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. Both of them are classical stories, the first mythical, the second historical. The first re-tells the story of how Venus falls in love with a handsome youth who is later killed by a wild boar while he is hunting. The second is more tragic in tone, with the sexual violence of the military hero Tarquin against Lucrece (Lucretia) provoking her to commit suicide. In both poems it may be felt that Shakespeare is not happy with his material, and since he was writing in 1593 when the theaters were closed by the plague, it may be that a patron imposed these themes, which have something in common with *Titus Andronicus*.

The two works were published separately, *Venus and Adonis* in 1593, and *Lucrece* in 1594, each in a quarto volume. They were both reprinted many times. *Venus and Adonis* had ten separate quarto editions between 1593 and 1617, *Lucrece* six in the same period. The two poems were both published with dedications addressed by William Shakespeare to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. There has been much speculation about the relationship between the playwright and Southampton; Shakespeare was nearly thirty, the earl only

nineteen. The dedication of *Lucrece* begins “The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end” and includes the sentence “What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have devoted yours.” There is no later sign of any relationship between them, yet many people like to think that Southampton was the Fair Youth who plays such an ambiguous role in the Sonnets.

The two poems were printed by Richard Field, who had been a neighbour and near-contemporary of Shakespeare’s in Stratford before coming to London and setting up a printer’s shop. The two volumes are Shakespeare’s first published work, they follow the form established by Spenser and others for officially sanctioned poetry. It is perhaps significant that Shakespeare never again produced such poems, and that the style of these two works is very unlike that he used in his plays.

Venus and Adonis begins in heroic mode:

Even as the sun with purple-color’d face
Had ta’en his last leave of the weeping morn,
Rose-cheek’d Adonis hied him to the chase...

Venus abruptly sets about trying to seduce Adonis. The tone of the poem is very hard to determine. The classical story has been changed, Shakespeare making Adonis into an adolescent boy who is unmoved by Venus’s beauty, and can only think about hunting. Some passages seem plainly comic:

Look how a bird lies tangled in a net,
So fasten’d in her arms Adonis lies;
Pure shame and aw’d resistance made him fret,
Which bred more beauty in his angry eyes:
 Rain added to a river that is rank
 Perforce will force it overflow the bank.

Still she entreats, and prettily entreats,
For to a pretty ear she tunes her tale.
Still is he sullen, still he lours and frets,
‘Twixt crimson shame and anger ashy pale.
 Being red, she loves him best, and being white,
 Her best is better’d with a more delight.

Look how he can, she cannot choose but love;
And by her faint immortal hand she swears,
From his soft bosom never to remove
Till he take truce with her contending tears,
 Which long have rain’d, making her cheeks all wet:
 And one sweet kiss shall pay this comptless debt.

Upon this promise did he raise his chin,
Like a dive-dapper peering through a wave,
Who being look’d on, ducks as quickly in:
So offers he to give what she did crave,
 But when her lips were ready for his pay,
 He winks, and turns his lips another way.

At this point, Adonis's horse breaks free and goes rushing after a mare. The contrast between the sexually unawakened boy and his lusty horse is again unexpected. Venus hopes that the sight of the animals coupling will make him realize what she wants and grabs Adonis again:

(from line 361)

Full gently now she takes him by the hand,
A lily prison'd in a gaol of snow,
Or ivory in an alabaster band:
So white a friend engirts so white a foe.
 This beauteous combat, wilful and unwilling,
 Show'd like two silver doves that sit a-billing.

(....)

“For shame,” he cries, “let go, and let me go:
My day's delight is past, my horse is gone,
And 'tis your fault I am bereft him so.
I pray you hence, and leave me here alone,
 For all my mind, my thought, my busy care,
 Is how to get my palfrey from the mare.”

At last, Venus faints in frustration and Adonis thinks she is dead. He tries to wake her and suddenly they are united in a passionate kiss but nothing more. Finally they part, he says he is off to hunt the boar, and Venus feels foreboding. She begs him not to go but he insists in the course of a lengthy debate, and leaves. She hears the hunt, and begins to run towards the scene when she hears the barking of dogs at bay. She finds Adonis dead and Shakespeare employs another incongruous image to express her response:

(from line 1033)

Or as the snail, whose tender horns being hit,
Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain,
And there all smother'd up in shade doth sit,
Long after fearing to creep forth again:
 So at his bloody view her eyes are fled
 Into the deep dark cabins of her head.

The body of Adonis is metamorphosed into a flower and Venus departs.

Lucrece is introduced by a prose summary of the classical tale based on Ovid and Livy. The poem itself begins as Tarquin, the last Roman king, sets out in secret from Ardea, a town he is besieging, with the intention of raping the chaste Lucrece, the wife of Collatine. The poem shortens the full story, in which all the Roman leaders boast of their wives' virtue, return to Rome without warning, and find that only Lucrece is quietly working at home, while all the other wives are enjoying themselves in their husbands' absence. In the poem, the mere boasting of Collatine has inspired mad desire in Tarquin.

Tarquin is welcomed by the unsuspecting Lucrece, and the sight of her beauty confirms his purpose. After everyone is in bed, Tarquin lies thinking on the danger of his plan. He rises, and lights a torch, that he addresses rather as Othello does later:

“Fair torch, burn out thy light, and lend it not
To darken her whose light excelleth thine;
And die, unhallow’d thought, before you blot
With your uncleanness that which is divine...” (*lines 190 - 4*)

Tarquin continues his monologue for eight stanzas, hesitating still “between conscience and will”. When will takes control, he continues his monologue for four more stanzas, then sets out for Lucrece’s bedroom. The suspense is prolonged; even the wind seems to try to hinder him, a needle left in Lucrece’s glove pricks him, but at last he stands by her bed. Again the action is delayed by description, until Tarquin puts a hand on her breast and she wakes. He threatens her, at which she makes a long speech, pleading with him not to dishonor her and her husband. This has no effect and the rape occurs.

Tarquin creeps away, while Lucrece laments at great length over her shame, blaming “opportunity” and Time:

“Mis-shapen Time, copesmate of ugly Night,
Swift subtle post, carrier of grisly care,
Eater of youth, false slave of false delight,
Base watch of woes, sin’s pack-horse, virtue’s snare!
Thou nursest all, and murd’rest all that are:
 O hear me then, injurious shifting time!
 Be guilty of my death, since of my crime

She asks Time to curse Tarquin, and resolves that she must die in order to preserve her honor. She cannot find a weapon and day breaks while she continues her lamentation. When her maid comes, she sends a message to Collatine to return at once. While she is waiting, she looks at a great painting of the destruction of Troy, using it as a mirror to her feelings, identifying Tarquin with Sinon.

By the time her husband and others arrive, she has dressed in black to tell her tale, delaying until the end any mention of the name of Tarquin. First she makes them promise to punish the person who violated her, then as soon as she has named Tarquin she stabs herself and dies. All lament, Brutus casts off his disguise as a fool and makes the final speech before the poem ends with the briefest mention that Rome banished Tarquin.

Sir John Davies

Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* and Daniel’s *Musophilus*, already mentioned, are long poems on intellectual themes. Another work of the same kind is the philosophical poem *Nosce Teipsum* (Know Thyself) in the form of a long debate on the immortality of the soul, by **Sir John Davies** (1569 - 1626). In introducing his theme, Davies stresses tensions which are found again later in Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man*:

I know my soul hath power to know all things,
Yet is she blind and ignorant in all;
I know I am one of Nature’s little kings,
Yet to the least and vilest things am thrall.

I know my life's a pain and but a span,
I know my Sense is mockt with every thing:
And, to conclude, I know myself a MAN,
Which is a proud, and yet a wretched thing.

Davies was probably only interested in writing poetry while he was a student at the Middle Temple (law school) in London; later he rose to very high legal positions in Ireland, then England. Davies is better known, though, for his *Orchestra* (published 1596) which is presented as a debate between Ulysses' wife Penelope and Antinous, the leading suitor, about the cosmic symbolism of dancing. Antinous does most of the speaking, presenting the dance as an image of cosmic harmony and social order:

“Dancing, bright lady, then began to be
When the first seeds whereof the world did spring,
The fire air earth and water, did agree
By Love's persuasion, nature's mighty king,
To leave their first discorded combating
And in a dance such measure to observe
As all the world their motion should preserve.

“Since when they still are carried in a round,
And changing come one in another's place;
Yet do they neither mingle nor confound,
But every one doth keep the bounded space
Wherein the dance doth bid it turn or trace.
This wondrous miracle did Love devise,
For dancing is Love's proper exercise.

(....)

This said, the queen with her sweet lips divine
Gently began to move the subtle air,
Which gladly yielding did itself incline
To take a shape between those rubies fair,
And, being formed, softly did repair
With twenty doublings in the empty way
Unto Antinous' ears, and thus did say:

“What eye doth see the heaven but doth admire
When it the movings of the heavens doth see?
Myself, if I to heaven may once aspire,
If that be dancing, will a dancer be;
But as for this, your frantic jollity,
How it began or whence you did it learn
I never could with reason's eye discern.”

Antinous goes on to retell the Creation myth from Hesiod in terms of dance, which gives birth to all the other forms of art and story, as well as shaping social forms. At last Love comes and gives Penelope a magic mirror in which she sees a vision of Queen Elizabeth

seated on her throne, the ultimate image of cosmic harmony! The poem ends in a fragmentary way with an evocation of a dance involving Queen Elizabeth and her court.

Elizabethan translations

Sir Thomas Wyatt translated some of Petrarch's poems, Surrey was inspired by Douglas in his translation of part of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Spenser translated sonnets by French Reformation poets, while both Sidney and his sister translated religious writings from the French. The first printer in England, William Caxton, printed several translations of French narrative works that he himself had made, while the main work of the Reformation in England was the preparation of translations of the Bible into English.

Throughout Europe, too, the Renaissance was full of translation projects, the most important being the translation of the writings of Plato into Latin by the humanists of Florence. In the mid-16th century, the French scholar Jacques Amyot translated Petrarch's *Lives* and other works from Greek into French, and his translations were then in turn translated into English, since there were few or no people in England with enough Greek to work confidently on the original texts.

In 1561, **Sir Thomas Hoby**'s translation of Castiglione's *Courtier* was published and perhaps helped promote a deeper Platonism as well as serving as one of the many works from which the rather uncultivated English nobility learned social graces.

In 1567, **Arthur Golding** published his version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The style he adopted is the long 14-syllable line known as Poulter's Measure, or Fourteeners, that was soon to be abandoned by the educated writers but remained popular for centuries as the preferred style for works intended for uneducated audiences, such as Ballads (which then inspired Coleridge's *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*):

Then sprang up first the golden age,
 which of itself maintained
The truth and right of everything
 unforced and unconstrained.
(...)
There was no town enclosed yet
 with walls and ditches deep.
No horn nor trumpet was in use,
 no sword nor helmet worn;
The world was such that soldiers' help
 might easily be forborn.
The fertile earth as yet was free,
 untouched of spade or plow,
And yet it yielded of itself
 of everything enow.
And men themselves contented well
 with plain and simple food
That on the earth of nature's gift
 without their travail stood,
Did live by raspes, hips and haws,
 by cornels, plums and cherries,
By sloes and apples, nuts and pears,
 and loathsome bramble berries,

And by the acorns dropped on earth
from Jove's broad tree in field.

Golding was a protestant nationalist as well as a humanist, and later Sidney gave him the task of completing a translation of the French Protestant work, *The Trueness of the Christian Religion* that he had begun. Shakespeare read Ovid in the original Latin, too, but many of his references to classical myths echo Golding's version, and it is sometimes said that this was his favourite book.

The two great Italian Renaissance epics, Ariosto's and Tasso's, were also translated at this time, the *Orlando Furioso* by Sir John Harrington as *Godfroy of Bulloigne*; Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* was translated by Edward Fairfax. Their impact was not what such huge efforts might have deserved, and the epic poem of the Renaissance remained of limited interest.

In the early years of the 17th century, the dramatist **George Chapman** began to translate Homer into English, basing his work on translations already made into Latin and French. For the *Iliad*, published in full in 1611, he used fourteeners with considerable skill: (the old men of Troy watch as Helen walks by)

All grave old men, and soldiers
they had been, but for age
Now left the wars; yet Councilors
they were exceeding sage.
And as in well-grown woods, on trees,
cold spiny grasshoppers
Sit chirping and send voices out
that scarce can pierce our ears
For softness and their weak faint sounds,
so talking on the tower
These seniors of the people sat,
who, when they saw the power
Of beauty in the Queen ascend,
even those cold-spirited peers,
Those wise and almost withered men
found this heat in their years
That they were forced, tho whispering,
to say: What man can blame
The Greeks and Trojans to endure,
for so admired a Dame,
So many miseries, and so long?...

(Chapman's *Iliad* iii. 159-69)

When he turned to the *Odyssey*, Chapman chose to use decasyllabic couplets instead, which made his style more obscure:

(*Ulysses makes himself known to his son Telemachus*)

“Telemachus! Admire, nor stand dismayed,
But know thy solid Father, since within
He answers all parts that adorn his skin.
There shall no more Ulysseses come here.

I am the man, that now this twentieth year
(Still under sufferance of a world of ill)
My country earth recover. 'Tis the will
The Prey-professor Pallas puts in act,
Who put me thus together, thus distract
In aged pieces, as even now you saw,
This youth now rendering. 'Tis within the law
Of her free power. Sometimes to show me poor,
Sometimes again thus amply to restore
My youth and Ornaments, she still would please.
The Gods can raise, and throw men down, with ease."

It is a familiar story how the young John Keats was shown a copy of Chapman's translations, one afternoon in 1817, by his companion and tutor, and responded by sending him the next morning his first mature poem, the sonnet "On first looking into Chapman's Homer." It is harder to explain just what it was in Chapman's work that inspired such enthusiasm.

Epilogue

The death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 did not result in the chaos that many had feared. There had already been negotiations with King James VI of Scotland, who was the next heir to the throne in any case, and he was declared king as soon as Elizabeth died. An outbreak of plague in London delayed his formal entry for nearly a year but when he arrived he was made welcome.

The end of Elizabeth's reign meant the end of the myth she embodied, that of "a strong ruler in a weak woman's body" whose relationship with her lords was that of a seductive mistress with her lovers, and with her people was close to that between Catholics and the Virgin Mary. In her place England gained a king who was coarse in his manners, and classical in his tastes.

In many ways, Elizabeth's court was the last medieval court, with a taste for jousting and tournaments, for courtly skills and pastimes. The court of James quickly became a closed milieu dominated by a few favourites and marked by quite blatant sexual immorality. Shakespeare, Donne, and Jonson, as well as Drayton and others, bridge the two centuries and serve to remind us that we ought not to make very strong distinctions between them.