

OXFORD



Sixteenth-Century British Poetry

Edited by Catherine Bates and Patrick Cheney

THE OXFORD HISTORY *of* POETRY *in* ENGLISH

THE OXFORD HISTORY OF POETRY IN ENGLISH

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*Dedicated to the Beloved Memory of
Michael O'Neill
1953–2018
Professor of English, University of Durham, United Kingdom
Founding Coordinating Editor, OHOPE,
Great Romantics Scholar and Distinguished British Poet*

THE OXFORD HISTORY OF POETRY IN ENGLISH

The Oxford History of Poetry in English (OHOPE) is designed to offer a fresh, multi-voiced, and comprehensive analysis of 'poetry': from Anglo-Saxon culture through contemporary British, Irish, American, and Global culture, including English, Scottish, and Welsh poetry, Anglo-American colonial and post-colonial poetry, and poetry in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, India, Africa, Asia, and other international locales. *OHOPE* both synthesises existing scholarship and presents cutting-edge research, employing a global team of expert contributors for each of the fourteen volumes.

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The Oxford History of Poetry in English

Sixteenth-Century British Poetry

Volume 4

Edited by

CATHERINE BATES AND PATRICK CHENEY

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
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First Edition published in 2022

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021946350

ISBN 978-0-19-883069-6

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198830696.001.0001

Printed and bound in the UK by
TJ Books Limited

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To William J. Kennedy

General Editor's Preface

The Oxford History of Poetry in English (OHOPE) aims to offer a fresh, multi-voiced, and comprehensive survey of its vast and complicated topic: from Anglo-Saxon poetry through contemporary British, Irish, American, and Global poetry, including English, Scottish, and Welsh poetry, Anglo-American colonial and post-colonial poetry, and poetry in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, India, Africa, Asia, and other locales.

By 'poetry in English', we mean, quite simply, *poetry written in the English language*: Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, Modern English. 'English' poetry certainly emerges in Anglo-Saxon England, around the sixth century CE; but, as 'poetry in English' develops, it extends beyond the geographical boundaries of England. Today, poetry in English is planetary. While *OHOPE* necessarily limits the coverage, if not the scope, simply to come into existence, hopefully the Series will join other international projects in the world-service of 'poetry'.

What do we mean by 'poetry'? While we believe that most readers will know what we mean, the topic is intricate, so much so that a quick definition proves elusive. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* offers six major definitions, with seven sub-definitions, bringing the total to thirteen. The definitions range from 'Imaginative or creative literature in general; fable, fiction', to 'The art or work of a poet', and can include even 'A treatise on the art of poetry', or, 'figurative. Something comparable to poetry in its beauty or emotional impact; a poetic quality of beauty and intensity of emotion; the poetic quality of something'. The earliest attested use of the word 'poetry' traces to the 1380s, in contexts that emphasize the contested truth claims of figurative representation. In Chaucer's *House of Fame*, one of the rivalrous authorities on the Troy story 'seyde that Omer made lyes, / Feynyng in hys poetries' (1477–8). The ending of *Troilus and Criseyde* includes a valediction for 'the forme of olde clerkis speche / In poetrie' (5.1854–5). John Trevisa's translation of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* (finished in 1387) connects idolatry and poetry: 'Of þe bryngyng forþ of mawmetrie com wel nyh al þe feyninge of poetrie' (2.279). In the 1390s, by contrast, Chaucer's Clerk sees poetry as an authoritative, illustrious tradition embodied in 'Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete, / ...whos rethorike sweete / Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie' (*Canterbury Tales* IV.31–3). Intriguingly, none of the OED definitions speaks of metre, let alone rhyme, and there is no suggestion that poetry includes different 'kinds' (or forms or genres). The recent and authoritative *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012), perhaps wisely, does not include an entry on 'poetry' itself. Because poetry remains such an elusive concept—and can include language in distinct metres (such as iambic pentameter) and rhymes (such as the 'Shakespearean' sonnet, rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*, or three quatrains and a couplet)—we might remain content simply to open the concept up, and let the volumes in the Series speak on their own.

OHOPE does proceed through a general rubric. We have encouraged our contributors to address their project through the following formula: *poetry as poetry*—rather than say, *poetry as context* or *in context*. The goal is to highlight the art of poetry itself, as it unfolds historically in time, across idioms, forms, nations, and so forth. Yet we do not think such a goal at odds with context, nor should it be. Each volume is thus free to situate poetry historically, ideologically, as the editors see fit.

Precisely because 'Poetry in English' spans some fifteen centuries, 'develops in four major historical 'languages' (Old, Middle, Early Modern, Modern), spread across multiple nations

(ever-changing), and includes countless poets, both men and women, the fourteen-volume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* cannot succeed in mapping the full terrain. That has never been the goal. In keeping with the Press's Oxford Series template, the volumes remain necessarily selective: no satisfactorily comprehensive 'coverage' is possible, or perhaps desirable. Each volume does the best it can to remain representative, and fair.

We believe that *OHOPE* fills a gap in the available scholarship and criticism. At present, there is no authoritative history of poetry in English covering British, Irish, American, and Global poetry from the medieval through the modern eras. Readers might like to know that the origins to the present history evidently began with Alexander Pope. In the eighteenth century, Pope *conceived* of a history of 'British' poetry, but it took Thomas Warton to begin writing one, which he left unfinished at his death, still at work on the English Renaissance. Accordingly, the first to complete a comprehensive *History of British Poetry* was W. J. Courthope, who published a six-volume, single-authored work between 1895 and 1905. Other histories followed: in 1947, Herbert Grierson and J. C. Smith co-authored a one-volume *Critical History of English Poetry* (Oxford); in 1961, James Reeves published *A Short History of English Poetry from 1340–1940* (New York); in 1962, Kenneth Hopkins published *English Poetry: A Short History* (London); and in 1981, G. S. Fraser produced *A Short History of English Poetry* (Shepton Mallet). Between 1977 and 1981, Routledge began a *History of English Poetry*, but evidently the series was never completed; only three volumes are in print: *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, edited by Derek A. Pearsall; *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Poetry 1660–1780*, edited by Eric Rothstein; and *Poetry of the Romantic Period*, edited by J. R. de J. Jackson. In 1994, Carl Woodring, working with James Shapiro as Associate Editor, published *The Columbia History of British Poetry*, a one-volume edited collection beginning with Old English Poetry and ending in 1990. In 2010, the most recent attempt at such a history appeared, edited by the late Michael O'Neill, *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, another single-volume collection, covering England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, with all chapters devoted to a single author or a small group of authors.

As for histories of American poetry, in 1993 Jay Parini published an edited *Columbia History of American Poetry*, making Columbia the first press to print a history of poetry combining 'British' and 'American'—anticipating the present *Oxford History*, yet on a much-reduced scale, minus Global poetry, and now thirty years from its publication date. Earlier histories in American poetry include Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska's 1946 *History of American Poetry 1900–1940* (Harcourt Brace) and Donald Barlow Stauffer's 1974 *Short History of American Poetry* (Dutton). No histories of Global poetry in English exist. Consequently, the field remains wide open for a comprehensive history that includes Global, American, and British and Irish poetry, medieval to modern.

The target audience for *OHOPE* is similarly complex, to include the general reader of poetry, students at several levels (upper-division secondary school, undergraduate, graduate), teachers at all levels, literary critics, and textual scholars—effectively, anyone interested in poetry in English. Each chapter aims to meet the primary criterion required for this readership: a combination of both a general orientation to its topic and a fresh approach and contribution to the field. A comprehensive Bibliography will be printed at the back of each volume.

Moreover, each volume aims to feature a stable set of chapters. Not simply will there be chapters on major poets ('Milton'), but each volume aims to include chapters on the following topics, geared to the particular era or century it covers:

- The nature of authorship and literary career, as well as the role of the poet in society.
- Imitation and intertextuality.

- Prosody, poetics, and the nature of literary theory.
- Figuration and allusiveness.
- Modes of representation (e.g. allegory, ekphrasis, and blazon during the Renaissance).
- Genre, mode, and form.
- Translation.
- The material production and circulation of poetry (manuscript, performance, print), including the role of patronage.

OHOPE pays significant attention to such major cultural vectors as religion/theology, politics/nationalism, race/class, and gender/sexuality. However, the goal will be unusual in today's critical climate: to connect such vectors to the *matter of poetry* itself; to discuss 'history' and the 'material' insofar as it allows for the historicisation of poetry *as an art*. Above all, *The Oxford History of Poetry in English* aims to provide an authoritative, useful helpmeet for enjoying and embracing one of the seminal achievements of world-art.

Patrick Cheney

Acknowledgements

The Oxford History of Poetry in English has had a long history. Formally, it began on 16 April 2008, when Andrew McNeillie, then Senior Commissioning Editor of Literature at the Press, invited Patrick Cheney to be General Editor of the Series. The history continued when Penn State University offered its support—in particular, when the Head of the English Department at the time, Robin Schulze, offered financial and administrative support. Cheney then appointed four Coordinating Editors to manage the wide range of coverage for the Series, and we remain indebted to their early work and support: along with Professor Schulze, Robert R. Edwards, Laura L. Knoppers, and Robert Caserio. The Penn State team produced a detailed proposal to the Press, which in turn produced a series of readers' reports, including recommendations for revision, one of which was to widen leadership of the project. At this point, a new set of Coordinating Editors was appointed: along with Professor Edwards for Medieval and Professor Knoppers for Early Modern (now at the University of Notre Dame), Michael O'Neill of the University of Durham for Modern British and Irish, Langdon Hammer of Yale for American, and Vinay Dharwadker of the University of Wisconsin for Global. A revised proposal then went to Press readers, to whom again we remain grateful. When Professor O'Neill passed away in 2018, his colleague at Durham, Stephen Regan, was appointed Coordinating Editor of Modern British and Irish. Recently as well, Professor Hammer has stepped down, and new appointments are underway. We wish to express our gratitude to all these early begetters of *The Oxford History of Poetry in English*.

In particular, Cheney wishes to express gratitude to the subsequent Head of the English Department at Penn State, Mark Morrisson, for ongoing support, as well as the Heads of the Department of Comparative Literature, Caroline D. Eckhart and Bob Edwards. At Penn State, a sturdy group of Research Assistants has provided loyal help over many years: especially Danielle Ryle, the first designated *OHOPE* Research Assistant, but also Jayme Peacock, Brice Peterson, Ted Chelis, Paul Zajac, and Katharine Cleland. Throughout, Bob Edwards and Laura Knoppers have been a constant source of advice and support. Finally, Cheney wishes to thank John Watkins of the University of Minnesota for serving as an initial Co-Editor of *Sixteenth-Century British Poetry*.

At the Press, we would like to thank Jacqueline Norton, current Senior Commissioning Editor of British, European, and American Literature, for her guidance over many years; and, more recently, Eleanor Collins, Senior Publishing Editor of Literature, and Karen Raith, Commissioning Editor of Humanities and Social Sciences. The project has been extremely complex, and we remain grateful for the advice we have received.

Finally, we owe a special debt of gratitude to Nanami Kobayashi, Senior Research Assistant to Cheney at Penn State, for working heroically with Catherine Bates to compile a very complex document: the volume Bibliography. Nanami has displayed a remarkable eye for organisation and detail, right when the project needed it most. Nanami has also joined another Research Assistant, Mattison Schuknecht, in reading proofs for the entire book. Our work has been made immeasurably easier by the prompt and professional support of our Project Manager and production contact, Vasuki Ravichandran. We are extremely grateful to our superb copy editor, Jen Hinchliffe, whose eagle-eye identified (and saved us from)

many errors. Heartfelt thanks also go to Assistant Commissioning Editor, Aimee Wright, who has been closely involved with the volume in its final stages.

OHOPE is dedicated to the memory of Michael O'Neill, who sadly passed away on 21 December 2018. Not merely a distinguished Romantics scholar and British poet, Michael was a Coordinating Editor of the Modern British and Irish unit of *OHOPE*, for which he provided expert, collegial leadership.

Volume 4 of *OHOPE*, *Sixteenth-Century British Poetry*, is dedicated to William J. Kennedy, Avalon Foundation Professor Emeritus in the Humanities at Cornell University. Bill has been a friend and colleague of the volume editors for many years. We admire his long-standing contribution to Renaissance studies, both English and Continental, and we appreciate the work he has done on behalf of our own careers. As recipient of the Renaissance Society of America's Paul Oskar Kristeller Lifetime Achievement Award 2021, William J. Kennedy has himself had a truly distinguished 'Renaissance' career.

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Editorial Note

All *OHOPE* volumes work from the Series Style Guide, a modified version of the one used by Oxford University Press for humanities publications. Individual *OHOPE* volumes may further modify the Style Guide according to needs—for instance, the need to print and translate Old and Middle English in Volumes 1–3, or of early modern Scots in Volume 4.

Because the *OHOPE* volumes include amongst their diverse readership the general reader and undergraduate students, the Series silently modernises all quotations of primary works, even when the texts being used rely on ‘old spelling’ form. Exceptions will be made in some cases, in keeping with scholarly understanding of the intentionality of the old spelling for a particular author.

Where feasible, then, the standard editions of all authors have been quoted and cited. Primary texts are cited in full in the endnotes on their first occurrence, with abbreviated in-text citations thereafter. Secondary texts are cited in full in the endnotes on their first occurrence, with an abbreviated endnote thereafter.

When difficult words or phrases appear in the quotation of primary texts, they will be marked with an asterisk (*) and supported by a marginal gloss.

Quotations from Classical authors generally come from the Loeb Classical Library. For convenience, all Greek words quoted in the texts are transliterated. All Latin quotations are translated into English.

Each *OHOPE* volume concludes with a detailed, alphabetised Bibliography, combining primary and secondary sources, and citing works identified in the individual chapters themselves.

Throughout the volume, *OED* abbreviates the *Oxford English Dictionary* online. *ODNB* abbreviates the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online.

1

Introduction

Catherine Bates and Patrick Cheney

The sixteenth century forms the birth moment of *modern* ‘English’ poetry: that is, poetry written in the modern English language.¹ In our volume title—*Sixteenth-Century British Poetry*—we use the term ‘British’ to indicate our inclusion of poetry produced across Britain: in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. As Volume 4 in the fourteen-volume *Oxford History of Poetry in English (OHOPE)*, *Sixteenth-Century British Poetry* aims to feature a history of the birth of modern poetry in greater detail than any previous volume.² To accomplish its aim, *Sixteenth-Century British Poetry* attends to the specific literary transitions, institutional contexts, artistic practices, and literary genres out of which, and within which, individual poets produce their poems.

Although *Sixteenth-Century British Poetry* offers a fresh, multi-voiced, and comprehensive survey of sixteenth-century British poetry, we acknowledge that the volume cannot cover everything, and everyone, and has no ambition to do so. Alternatively, the volume focuses on major topics and poets, with some attention given to less frequently covered material. In accord with the Oxford History series, the volume addresses a complex audience, including literary critics, textual scholars, the general reader of poetry, students at several levels (upper-division secondary school, undergraduate, graduate), and teachers at all levels. Each chapter attempts to meet the primary criterion required for this readership: a combination of both a general orientation and a fresh approach and contribution to the field.

¹ ‘Modern’ English replaces ‘Middle English’ during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, especially through the Great Vowel Shift: for example, the shift away from pronouncing long vowels. See Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, fifth edition (London, 2002); and Roger Lass (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol. 3, 1476–1776 (Cambridge, 1999).

² *OHOPE* differs from the *Oxford English Literary History* series, edited by Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow, which prioritises the historical over the literary; see, e.g., James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History*, Vol. 2, 1350–1547: *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2002); Vol. 3, 1533–1603: *The Elizabethans*, by Colin Burrow, is forthcoming. The Wiley-Blackwell *A Companion to Renaissance Poetry*, edited by Catherine Bates (Chichester, 2018), covers poetry in both the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. Excellent material, fundamentally contextual, also appears in Arthur F. Kinney (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500–1600* (Cambridge, 2000); Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485–1603* (Oxford, 2009); and Michael Hattaway (ed.), *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* (Chichester, 2010). More broadly, Michael O’Neill (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Poetry* (Cambridge, 2010), includes five chapters on the sixteenth century, ranging from Dunbar and Douglas to Marlowe and Shakespeare. More specifically, see David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (eds), *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge, 2002). Patrick Cheney, *Reading Sixteenth-Century Poetry* (Malden, MA, 2011), focuses on the topic of the present volume, but does not include its coverage and scope (for a detailed bibliography, see 295–8). Earlier studies include especially C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954); but also Maurice Evans, *English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century*, second edition (London, 1967); and Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, second edition (London, 1993). For the historical background, see Patrick Collinson (ed.), *The Sixteenth Century, 1485–1603* (Oxford, 2002). The present volume complements recent volumes in the *Oxford Handbook* series, such as Richard A. McCabe (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford, 2010); Jonathan Post (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare’s Poetry* (Oxford, 2013); and Catherine Bates (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philip Sidney* (forthcoming).

Overall, *Sixteenth-Century British Poetry* highlights a broad critical narrative about the advent of modern English poetry, from John Skelton at the beginning to Edmund Spenser at the end. These two poets are the major ‘laureate poets’ of the sixteenth century, and each produces a unique multi-genre corpus of poems relating the self-reflexive poet to both the nation and eternity, producing an art that features a link between politics and religion, usually narrated in a fiction structured around a gender dynamic, often male and female.³ In between Skelton and Spenser, such poets as Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Isabella Whitney and George Gascoigne, Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert, Sir Walter Raleigh and Christopher Marlowe, and finally William Shakespeare all contribute to the formation of a national poetic enterprise. Thus the volume aims to chart the way in which—during the four reigns of the century, Henrician (1485–1547), Edwardian (1547–53), Marian (1553–8), and Elizabethan (1558–1603)—sixteenth-century poets work with Classical, medieval, Continental, and native traditions (e.g., Virgil, Dante, Petrarch, and Chaucer) to develop a series of breakthroughs: in English prosody, especially iambic pentameter and blank verse; in literary genre, such as the sonnet, pastoral, epic, and satire; but also such complex verse forms as the sestina;⁴ the idea of a poetic career (including Virgilian, Ovidian, Horatian, and Petrarchan models; see Chapter 9); and the articulation of both an ‘inward’ and a ‘public’ style and voice (see Chapter 6).

Sixteenth-Century British Poetry also attends to the momentous cultural events that underpin these literary achievements: the consolidation of the printing press and the humanist increase in education and literacy; the advent of the Reformation and the formation of the modern Church of England; the centralisation of the English monarchy and the counterpointing of anti-monarchical, ‘republican’ thought; the colonial exploration of the Americas and international competition with imperial Spain; the building of the new commercial theatres in London (intersecting with ‘poetry’ in compelling ways); the advancement of modern science; the new Protestant emphasis on companionate marriage and the consequent inauguration of women’s rights; and the harbinger of a shift from an ‘exterior’ *episteme* (or system of knowledge) to an ‘interior’ one, paving the way for the seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes and others, as leading voices of modern identity. The volume includes both male and female poets, canonical and non-canonical, both ‘high’ and ‘popular’ forms, across the four major poetic idioms of the century: lyric, epic, narrative, and dramatic.

We have designed the volume primarily to let contextual material underwrite the art of poetry, so as to emphasise such topics as metre and form, figuration and allusiveness, representation and literary career. The volume shows that, by the end of the century, literary

³ On Spenser as a laureate, see Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley, CA, 1983), 55–100; on Skelton, see Jane Griffiths, *John Skelton and Poetic Authority: Defining the Liberty to Speak* (Oxford, 2006), 18–37. For a magisterial history of the intersection of Tudor politics and religion, see John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988). For an important recent study of ‘The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature’ (book subtitle), see Melissa E. Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects* (Oxford, 2011). On the late sixteenth-century same-sex poetry of Richard Barnfield, see Ceri Sullivan, ‘Richard Barnfield’, in David Scott Kastan (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 2006), 1.128–9; and Laura Aydelotte, ‘Barnfield, Richard’, in Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr, and Alan Stewart (eds), *The Encyclopedia of English Renaissance Literature*, 3 vols. (Chichester, 2012), 47–9.

⁴ A sestina consists of six stanzas of six lines each followed by a three-line envoy: ‘The same six end words occur in each stanza, but in a shifting order that follows a fixed pattern: each successive stanza takes its pattern from the preceding stanza (i.e., last and first, then next to last and second, then third from last and third)’; in the envoy, the end words typically come from the six words in the above pattern: see A. Preminger, C. Scott, and D. Caplan, ‘Sestina’, in Roland Greene (gen. ed.), *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, fourth edition (Princeton, NJ, 2012), 1296–7.

culture relies on the printing press and the commercial theatre (and, to an extent, on manuscript culture) to leave a lasting legacy for English literature: an authorial template yoking ‘dramatic’ and ‘nondramatic’ poetry within a literary career, as Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson take leadership, all in response to the poetic career of Spenser.⁵

Within *OHOPE*, *Sixteenth-Century British Poetry* forms a midpoint between Volume 3, *Medieval Poetry: 1400–1500* (edited by Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards), and Volume 5, *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry* (edited by Laura L. Knoppers). Inside *OHOPE*’s comprehensive structure, *Sixteenth-Century British Poetry* forms the first of a three-volume set devoted to Early Modern British Poetry, to be concluded by Volume 6, *Eighteenth-Century British Poetry* (edited by Christine Gerrard). This specific Series design aims to establish continuity between the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, even as it registers important differences, disruptions, and discontinuities.

Below, we review the structure and contents of the volume in more detail, and end with a case study that helps illustrate ‘sixteenth-century British poetry’ in the poem of one poet: Edmund Spenser in the Temple of Venus episode in Book 4, canto 10 of *The Faerie Queene* (1596).

Transitions and Contexts

Sixteenth-Century British Poetry divides into five parts, the first of which we title ‘Transitions and Contexts’. Fulfilling its aim to ‘retell the history of early modern English poetry’, Seth Lerer opens the volume by tracing the shift from the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance, and by showing how the poetry of the early and mid-sixteenth century not only marks that moment of transition but reveals a new fascination for the transitional itself. Reviving three little-known works, he discusses ways in which poets of that period used the Roman poet Ovid—specifically, the tales of Pyramus and Thisbe, Morpheus, and Midas in the *Metamorphoses*—to explore meta-poetic themes of literary translation, mutation, and change. Lerer ends by showing how, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1594–6), Shakespeare celebrates and dramatises the literary transformations—witty, crazy, imaginative, experimental, and self-aware—of the century preceding it. In the first of two chapters on context, Andrew Hadfield goes on to explore the part the period’s unique social matrix played in its cultural production. Humanist educational practice disseminated a new familiarity with the classics that was to impact radically on vernacular literature, introducing ideals of Latinity in grammar, metre, argument, and genre that were both adopted and creatively changed. The confessional upheavals of the Reformation promoted a new attention to the scriptural Word and encouraged practices like translation as ways of personalising devotion and religious belief. And a newly centralised monarchical power prompted a complicated mix of eulogy, censorship, critique, advice-literature, and comparison with republican models. In the second chapter on context, Helen Smith looks at the professional environment from which the poetry of the period emerged. For poesy—literally, ‘making’—was the product not only of poets but a supporting cast of scribes, copyists, patrons, printers, publishers,

⁵ On the printing press as the premier invention for sixteenth-century England, see Colin Burrow, ‘The Sixteenth Century’, in Arthur F. Kinney (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500–1600* (Cambridge, 2000), 11–28. On both print and theatre, see Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright* (Cambridge, 2004).

stationers, and booksellers. Without these agents (not to mention a material supply of paper, parchment, pens, quills, ink, book-bindings, nor the industrial machinery of the printing press), poetry could not have been written, circulated, read, copied, rewritten, and revised. The continuance of manuscript circulation and practices like commonplacing (collecting the sayings of other writers within a commonplace book) made possible the open-ended and collaborative projects by men and women that typify the century, and that the new medium of print both imitated and enabled.

Practices

The second part of the volume, 'Practices', features five chapters: on poetics, style, allusiveness, figuration, and the literary career, respectively. In the first of these, Patrick Cheney argues that sixteenth-century poetics is characterised by the shift from a largely rhetorical model towards a theory of the sublime. He notes that one of the major innovations of the century was its recurrent publication of treatises on poetics (in Latin but increasingly in English): an indication of the renewed self-consciousness and self-definition with which poets of the period sought to fashion an art of poetry appropriate to their place and time. Along with paratexts and poetry itself, these treatises negotiated the competing claims of a civic-humanist rhetorical project, that justified literature on grounds of its benefit to the state, against a sublime poetics of inspiration and transport that emphasised a higher, almost mystical engagement with art and the drive towards individual freedom on the part of poet and reader alike. In the following chapter, on style, Jeff Dolven follows byways rather than highways, drawing attention to stylistic roads *not* taken in sixteenth-century poetry as a way of demonstrating the sheer creativity and experimentation of the period. It is from this 'rich matrix'—'a field of stylistic possibility as broad as the geography of Europe and as deep, and various, as its pasts'—that a recognisably sixteenth-century style was to emerge: the realisation, namely, that style is necessarily something idiosyncratic and individual. Style lies in what other poets forsake or leave behind, like the archaisms and allegory of Spenser, or the inimitable voice of John Donne. It was the sixteenth century that had the confidence to discover that 'every good poet's style is a dead end'.

The two chapters that follow both consider features without which poetry would not be poetry. In the first, Colin Burrow writes about allusiveness: that ever-reverberating echo-chamber within which poets refer knowingly or otherwise to one another. Alluding to William Empson's model in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Burrow unpacks seven types of allusiveness—no less ambiguous—that range from the 'fully ideational', at one end (in which a prior author or text is imitated but without any verbal allusions), to the 'fully citational', at the other (in which every line imitates or quotes an earlier text). Interesting things happen when one code or discourse is transposed onto another, as when a high form like tragedy alludes to a low form like the ballad and the different registers 'audibly collide'. As the practice of allusion changes from John Skelton's friendly embrace of his medieval masters at the beginning of the century, to John Marston's aggressive parody of his fellow satirists at the end, it becomes a marker of the new kind of 'possessive authorship' that begins to emerge. In the second of this pair of chapters, Hannah Crawforth writes about figuration: that reliance on figures of speech such as simile and metaphor which makes poetry what it is. Taking her cue from Kenneth Burke, she presents figuration as thought in action: as what, for sixteenth-century writers, gave

language its agency, drama, effectiveness, and instrumentality (in a word, its life). She maps onto the writing of Fulke Greville—especially his ‘sonnet’ sequence, *Caelica*—the four main tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, while acknowledging (along with Burke) their notorious tendency to merge into one another. Taking Greville as a representative example is itself, of course, a form of critical figuration, and Greville’s distinctive use of the tropes is thus illustratively figured as a synecdoche for sixteenth-century poetic practice as a whole.

In a final chapter of this section, Daniel Juan Gil discusses a major innovation of sixteenth-century poetry—the idea of a literary career—as the power invested in poetic figuration came to be extended to the power of the poet figure him- (and increasingly, her-) self. Revising the seminal work of Richard Helgerson, which had focused on individual poets and their careers, Gil presents a more sociological study of the conditions that made the existence of such ‘career poets’ possible at all. One such was the civic-humanist rhetorical model, discussed above, which gave poetry a social function and thus endowed it with cultural capital. A text like Richard Tottel’s famous miscellany, *Songs and Sonnets*, effectively extended such capital to a new elite—the ‘gentle reader’ who might not be courtly but was capable of fine literary discriminations and taste—as distinction came to be based less on social access than cultural competence.

Forms

The third part of the volume, ‘Forms’, consists of eleven chapters which focus on the major forms and genres of the period, demonstrating the framing-vitality of genre in the revolutionary development of English verse. This section begins with Tom MacFaul on that quintessentially sixteenth-century phenomenon, the poetic miscellany. Continuing with the theme of the literary career, his chapter considers the role of the poet—and the attendant question of authorship—as it was seen to develop across three key miscellanies: Tottel’s *Songs and Sonnets* (1557), *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), and *England’s Helicon* (1600). Where the miscellany format initially served to create a sense of community amongst both poets and their readers by appealing to a common humanity and mobilising (a carefully non-sectarian) pity, the end of the century saw the emergence of greater individualism, akin to the ‘possessive authorship’ mapped out by Colin Burrow in Chapter 7. The next chapter, by Joseph Campana and Catherine Bates, looks at lyric (the most common component of the miscellanies), and after considering ways in which the form has been theorised, both then and now, it goes on to consider ways in which it has been practised. Typically, lyric is both short and sweet. Diminutive in size, a lyric poem is capable of being taken in at a glance, and it thus has a special appeal to the eye. At the same time, deriving its name from the lyre, lyric has anciently been associated with song, and its musical cadences of rhythm and rhyme also have a special appeal to the ear. While this chapter focuses on forms like the ode, epigram, riddle, song, and Psalm, the chapter that follows, by Chris Stamatakis, continues the investigation of lyric by looking at the particular form which the sixteenth century made its own: the sonnet. Here, these competing tendencies towards visual and acoustic constitute just one of a ‘series of dilemmas’ that characterise the sonnet form, as it pulls between closure and dilation, fixity and revision, copy and *copia*, rhyme and reason, sense and sound. ‘The history of the sixteenth-century sonnet’, Stamatakis writes, ‘is the history of these tussles’. Like every good sonnet, this chapter is governed by an overarching conceit—in this case the motif of ‘labour’—as, in

producing this deceptively easy form, the sonneteer is shown labouring for invention, copious abundance, and renewal.

Towards the end of his chapter, Stamatakis notes that—towards the end of its own short but intense development throughout the sixteenth century—the sonnet ‘seems steadily to modulate into, and cede ground to, the epigram’. In the next chapter, Michelle O’Callaghan follows this lead by looking at the sharper, more pointed forms that characterise the period’s evolution of verse satire. She revises the conventional view that satire shifted from the humour, ridicule, and mockery associated with the Roman poet Horace (and imitated by Sir Thomas Wyatt in the earlier part of the century) to the bitter railing and rough invective associated with the Roman satirists Juvenal and Persius (and imitated by British satirists of the 1590s, including Joseph Hall, John Marston, and John Donne), to show that verse satire was always polyphonic, multi-vocal, and drawn from a variety of sources. The theme of satire continues into the chapter that follows in which Helen Cooper examines pastoral, again emphasising the form’s reliance on a range of different models (native, Classical, Continental), registers (high and low), and types of language (courtly and rustic, amorous and plainspoken). As with satire, generic variety proved to be one of pastoral’s key strengths, as it negotiated the distance between poetic ideals and idylls, on the one hand, and their social and political realities, on the other.

The next two chapters look in turn at the genre which theorists of the period regarded as the highest and most serious of all—namely, epic—and its diminutive version, the minor or mock-epic, also known as the epyllion. Tamsin Badcoe opens the discussion by arguing that sixteenth-century epic invites us to look beyond what might be regarded as its most obvious features (eulogy, heroism, maleness) in order to consider the sheer multiplicity of voices it accommodates. Although handed down by the acknowledged greats of the literary past (such as Homer and Virgil, Dante and Petrarch), epic provided ample opportunities for cultural appropriation. Translation might seem an act of humble imitation, but it gave sixteenth-century poets a chance to develop a style and narrative suited to their own particular moment (and, indeed, to open up the singular epic voice to a plurality of voices, including those of women). In addition to *The Faerie Queene*, the chapter looks at less well-known texts such as *Albion’s England* by William Warner, and an epic elegy on Sir Francis Drake by Charles Fitzgeoffrey. The plurality of epic is sufficiently generous to include within its compass the parodic counter-form of the epyllion, which Daniel Moss goes on to discuss in the chapter that follows. Ovidian rather than Virgilian in content and tone, the genre of the minor epic turns out to contain as much variety as the form it mocks if not modifies. Moss painstakingly unfolds a typology of minor epic which differentiates between ‘associative’ imitation—in which an author advertises his (it always is ‘his’) continuity with the form’s pioneers—and the ‘dissociative’ type, in which an author uses the form to distinguish himself from his rivals. As such, minor epic came to signal a distinctive opportunity for self-fashioning and self-positioning in the course of a writer’s literary career.

Philip Schwyzer next examines one of the knottiest problems to vex the writers of sixteenth-century verse: the relation between history (‘truth’) and poetry (‘fiction’). In some ways, history could be considered as a form of poetry. Sixteenth-century readers regarded the style of medieval chronicles as alien and ‘quaint’ by the standards of their own time, for example, in comparison with which a pared-down plain style seemed evidence of historical veracity. Yet, by focusing on moments when ‘history’ appears as a text-within-a-text—most notably when Sir Guyon and Prince Arthur read the histories of their respective nations in Book 2, canto 10 of *The Faerie Queene*—Schwyzer demonstrates how inextricable the two forms really were. Far from being fictive or ‘made-up’, poetry

reveals a deep historical truth: namely, that (going back to Homer's *Iliad*) wars are only symptoms of passion or love, and '*historia . . . founded in hysteria*'.

The last three chapters of this section consider poetic forms that deal with different kinds of human pain. In the first of these, Andrea Brady looks at the conflicting origins and definitions of elegy: from ancient times a form associated with both love (especially sex) and death. For all their differences, however, the love elegy and funeral elegy have a surprising amount in common, not least a shared generic ambiguity. Both forms appeal to collective human experience while emphasising the trauma of the individual, and—perhaps because of this—they both also serve the competitive function whereby a poet or persona gains distinction from the sheer incomparability of their frustration or grief. Ironically, elegy's very 'lack of distinction as a genre' seems precisely to enable this distinction on the part of its speaker or maker. In the second of these chapters, Paul D. Stegner takes up the story of complaint, a form which seems implicitly to ask whether poetry can have an effect: bring about change, make a difference, correct injustices, and right wrongs. By the end of the chapter, the answer to this question seems to be 'no', but—as with elegy—the one purpose complaint *does* seem to serve is the poet's own self-promotion and self-authorisation. Like elegy, complaint, too, lacks clearly defined formal characteristics, but again this generic ambiguity became an opportunity for poets to make the form their own and to further their status and literary careers by doing so. In the third of these chapters, Claire McEachern explores devotional poetry, the point at which sacred and profane—devotion to a human beloved or devotion to the divine—converge. Rather than see one lead causally to the other, however (as if the amorous poetry of, say, Philip Sidney led directly to the religious poetry of, say, George Herbert), McEachern reads sixteenth-century devotional lyric on its own terms, asking what Reformation-era mentalities thought the form was and was capable of doing. Her chapter thus focuses on the period's obsession with scriptural paraphrase—especially that of the Psalms—as a place to explore relations between the divine Word and human words, to distinguish different kinds of authorship, and to find ways of expressing extremes of frustration, anxiety, sorrow, grief, and repentance (as well as love), on both an individual and a collective level, and across the confessional divide.

Poets

The fourth part of the volume, 'Poets', features twelve chapters on sixteenth-century poets, ranging from Skelton at one end to Mary Sidney Herbert at the other. In the opening chapter, Jane Griffiths examines the formal experimentation which characterises Skelton's poetry, above all, the distinctive form invented by him and known as 'Skeltonics'. However wild or anarchic it might seem, this unique form is shown to be closely governed, its organising principle being the poet's careful patterning of sound through rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, and word association. It was on the practice of such technical skill that Skelton grounded his understanding of the poet's cultural capital and authority: as a 'maker' who has the power to 'make new matter out of words', and to be 'the maker of his own meaning'. In the chapter that follows, on the poetry of sixteenth-century Scotland, Willy Maley and Theo van Heijnsbergen take a similar approach, showing how elements that might seem chaotic—even 'unpoetic'—in forms such as satire or flytings (competitive exchanges of insults) are in fact the result of careful decisions: guttural or alliterative lines, for example, might serve as the 'structural attribute' of a 'purposeful phonaesthetics', allowing verse in Scots to combine the scatological with the sublime. Scottish poets also conceived of

themselves as ‘makers’ (or ‘makars’), emphasising the technique and craft of their art with a self-consciousness that drew attention to its own creative process. Indeed, this ‘nexus of the metafictional, the reader-focused, and the moral’ can be described as the ‘core defining characteristic’ of Scottish poetry in this period. Scottish poets looked to French rather than Italian culture for much of the century, but the next chapter considers the poets largely responsible for introducing Italian forms into English verse: Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. Here, Cathy Shrank draws out some of the differences between these two poets so commonly paired. Where Surrey is interested in ventriloquising or impersonating other voices, for example, Wyatt typically intensifies the lyric ‘I’ (although, no less typically, that ‘I’ proves more opaque than revelatory). Where Surrey is interested in the external, natural world, Wyatt is drawn to internal, closed, and claustrophobic spaces and to the experience of suffering within. Surrey’s self-sacrificing and stoical lover and his loyal, passive, wifely beloved, contrast with Wyatt’s offended and spiteful version, and his proactive but treacherous mistress.

In the next chapter, Danielle Clarke does for mid-Tudor poetry what Seth Lerer did for the early decades of the century, emphasising the vibrant, experimental, democratising, socially mixed, and politically engaged nature of this transitional period, and the importance of stressing connections and continuities as the production of poetry and notions of authorship developed apace. One of the characteristic forms of this period, for example, was the single-authored collection, in which writers (women as well as men) appropriated the popular miscellany format in order to display their poetic virtuosity and variety, to create a readership, and to assert their own authority on the page by material, spatial, and typographical means.

In the chapter on Sidney that follows, Catherine Bates brings out the underlying theme of the volume as a whole, namely that formalist analysis is inseparable from historicist study and central to understanding the history of poetry. Like Hannah Crawforth in Chapter 8, Bates too draws on the work of Kenneth Burke. By choosing to write almost exclusively in the genres of lyric and pastoral, Sidney implies that poetry is specifically called upon to transact power-relations that are discrepant or out of sync. When communication is attempted between different classes of being (or beings of a different class), an extra effort is required—a rhetoric of courtship, a need for persuasion, in a word, art—that proves quite unnecessary when the parties in question are on a par, speak the same language, and understand each other perfectly. In negotiating relations that are complex—whether sexually in the case of lyric, or socially in the case of pastoral—poetry is thus generated by the inequalities of gender and class.

The next two chapters consider the vast poetic output of Edmund Spenser, and in the first of these Ayesha Ramachandran unfolds the complex communication that occurs between the poet’s shorter poems and his great epic, *The Faerie Queene*. Necessarily existing in a scalar relation to the latter, in a ratio of small to large, Spenser’s lyric, pastoral, satiric, and complaint poems are locked in ‘continuous conversation’ with the epic and offer an ‘oblique commentary’ on its contexts and content. The shorter poems thus serve as a ‘crucial counterpoint’ to the epic, mobilising a set of voices—personal, private, critical, marginalised, pessimistic, despairing—that take a different perspective on its nationalistic ambitions. In the second of these two chapters, Richard McCabe shows that this conversation—between different genres, between part and whole—is no less complex, active, and ongoing within *The Faerie Queene* itself. Spenser’s ‘generic fusion’ of epic and romance, for example, is central to the poem’s aesthetic, as is its endemic deferral of closure or meaning. Indeed, indeterminacy proves ‘aesthetically functional’ here, as the reader is drawn into the same

interpretative doubts and struggles as the protagonists themselves. If the shorter poems comment on the epic from the outside, the narrator's voice does the same from within, being 'by turns assertive, apologetic, hopeful, or despondent', and ultimately subject to attack. In the 1596 edition of the poem, Books 4–6 serve as a brooding reflection on the hope and optimism of Books 1–3, published in 1590.

Katharine Cleland follows this with a chapter on three poets who fashioned their poetic identities and oeuvres in conversation both with each other and with Spenser, the undisputed laureate of their day. Presenting themselves as professional print-poets with a claim to 'laureate' status themselves, Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, and George Chapman each contributed to the formation of an English literary tradition addressed to a general readership rather than an elite few. Vying with one another as much as with Spenser, these three poets engage variously with lyric, pastoral, epic, and epyllion as ways of crafting their début and defining a coherent poetic career.

The next two chapters consider the poet-playwrights, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, respectively. In describing Marlowe's poetry as 'anti-epic at its innermost core', Rachel Eisendrath again shows how productive the period's conversation with epic turns out to be. In this case, Marlowe exhibits a profound tension with, if not resistance to, epic poetry and all it signifies: machismo, empire, violence, subordination, and power grabs. Against the relentlessly teleological narrative and end-driven action of epic, he cultivates instead a poetics of dallying, dawdle, and delay that pits Ovid against Virgil in order to parody epic and subvert it. For Marlowe, it is poetry that has agency, not strongmen or epic heroes. The ability to create fictional realities and whole new worlds—not to mention selves—reveals an unknown power, albeit one that needs the 'intense sociality of human life' to avoid being illusory and lonely. In the chapter on Shakespeare's poetry, Dymna Callaghan focuses on the largely Ovidian voice that characterises his verse. Shaped by convention and lyric artifice, Shakespeare's poetic voice was early identified with Ovid: described by a contemporary as 'mellifluous and honey-tongued', its sound was heard as sweet and smooth. At the same time, the poet is often left 'tongue-tied' (sonnets 66, 80, 85)—his voice constricted—as if its flow was experienced most acutely at those very moments of impediment or block. These competing tendencies between an outpouring of words, on the one hand, and utter speechlessness, on the other, are worked out at greater length in Shakespeare's longer narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and to some extent *A Lover's Complaint*.

In the last two chapters of this section, the question of poetic voice is moot. One of the most striking features of Sir Walter Raleigh's poetry, for example, is doubt about what he wrote or whether a poem (attributed, perhaps, to 'Ignoto') might be his. Acknowledging the characteristic elusiveness of the Raleigh canon, Andrew Hiscock uses it as an illustrative example of the 'experience of early modern poetics more generally'. Raleigh's surviving output includes a sententious poetry of common experience and proverbial wisdom, in which anything personal or individualised is rejected in favour of a more general and universal perspective on human life. In stark contrast to the plain style and authoritative voice of these poems, however, is the chaotic and hysterical voice of the 'Cynthia' poems (addressed to Queen Elizabeth), which goes to the opposite extreme in expressing both 'personal defeat and cultural disintegration'. In the chapter that follows, Gillian Wright looks at the poetry of Mary Sidney Herbert, a similarly elusive figure whose poetic corpus it has also taken some time to establish. Wright engages with the full range of Sidney Herbert's manuscript and print poetry, while asking why 'such dazzling poetry [is] so difficult to write about'. As with Raleigh, there are issues of authorship and attribution, but also of voice.

In the work for which Sidney Herbert is most famous—her completion of the metrical paraphrase of the Psalms begun by her brother, Philip Sidney—she is shown to subordinate her own voice to his, or to the version in the Geneva Bible they both used, but also to speak boldly ‘in the voice of God’ and so to ventriloquise the deity Himself.

Transitions

To close, the volume ends as it began, with a chapter on ‘Transitions’: this time, the transition to the seventeenth century. Here Michael Schoenfeldt summarises sixteenth-century poetry by looking back at its various forms—including the sonnet, satire, pastoral, epyllion, and devotional verse—from the perspective of the seventeenth century. He shows that, however arbitrary such century divisions might be for the purposes of periodisation, the transition from one literary era to another is in this case a real one: ‘the death of a long-serving female monarch is synchronised, almost precisely, with a profound change in literary style’. The idealisation that characterised the sonnet boom in the 1590s, for example, no longer seemed so appropriate after Elizabeth’s death in 1603, while the satire of that decade developed into an edginess, anxiety, and ‘general darkening’ of mood that is made particularly visible in the poetry of that ‘profoundly transitional writer’, John Donne. The chapter rounds off the volume by casting a backward glance at what has gone before while looking ahead to the century (and the volume in *OHOPE*) that follows.

A Case Study: Spenser’s Temple of Venus and Sixteenth-Century Poetry

To illustrate succinctly what might be innovative about poetry in English during the sixteenth century, we turn by way of example to Spenser’s Temple of Venus episode in Book 4, canto 10 of *The Faerie Queene*. Perhaps remarkably, this episode depends on, gathers in, and revolutionises the major topics that are covered in the present volume. To begin with, the episode is unique within *The Faerie Queene*—and probably within sixteenth-century British poetry as a whole—insofar as it proceeds via no fewer than five voices, all of which emerge in a single verse style: the style of *The Faerie Queene* itself.⁶ The first voice is that of Edmund Spenser, whose name is advertised as the author of the book on the 1596 title page. The second voice is that of the narrator, which scholars distinguish from the voice of the poet.⁷ The third voice is that of the hero inside the fiction, Sir Scudamour: a character written by the author and voiced by the narrator, who tells other characters in the fiction (including the heroine of Chastity in Book 3, Britomart) about his abduction of the virgin Amoret from the Temple of Venus. Fourth, inside the story that Scudamour tells, an anonymous ‘one’ (*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.43, line 7) sings a four-stanza Hymn to Venus (see *Faerie Queene*, 4.10.44–7).⁸ And fifth (as if coming round full circle), the voice singing this

⁶ In addition to Dolven in this volume (Chapter 6), see David Scott Wilson-Okamura, *Spenser’s International Style* (Cambridge, 2013). See also Richard Danson Brown, *The Art of The Faerie Queene* (Manchester, 2019).

⁷ See Jerome S. Dees, ‘The Narrator of *The Faerie Queene*: Patterns of Response’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 12 (1971), 537–68, and ‘Ship Imagery’, in A. C. Hamilton (gen. ed.), *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto, 1990), 655–6.

⁸ Edmund Spenser, in A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Faerie Queene*, revised second edition (Harlow, 2007).

Hymn records Spenser's own English translation of the Hymn to Venus with which the Latin poet Lucretius opened his Latin epic, *De Rerum Natura* [*On the Nature of Things*].⁹

In assembling this choral set of voices, the Temple of Venus episode advances the poem's famed nine-line 'Spenserian stanza', which rhymes *ababbcbcc*, and which Spenser adapts from the eight-line stanza known as *ottava rima* (rhyming *abababcc*) used by his two precursors in the genre of epic romance, Ludovico Ariosto in the *Orlando Furioso* and Torquato Tasso in the *Gerusalemme Liberata*. The Temple of Venus episode is a poetic tour de force, a high point of Spenserian authorship but also of sixteenth-century poetry in English.

Spenser's 'imitation' of other authors and texts exfoliates almost exponentially. In addition to the 'Englishing' of the Lucretian Hymn to Venus and the verse form of Tasso and Ariosto—that is, Classical and Renaissance—the episode imitates two key medieval works: lines 3150–256 of Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose* (c 1275) for the figure of Daunger guarding the Temple of Venus (see *Faerie Queene*, 4.10.13–17); and lines 239–40 of Chaucer's *Parlement of Fowls* (c 1380) for the figure of Dame Concord (see *Faerie Queene*, 4.10.31–5), as well as lines 269–73 of the same text for the description of Venus's body (see *Faerie Queene*, 4.10.40–3).¹⁰ The intertextual concentration of medieval, Classical, and Renaissance texts in a single episode makes the Temple of Venus a veritable case study of Spenserian *imitatio*.¹¹

The presence especially of medieval texts marks the Temple of Venus episode as a 'transitional' text, as discussed by Lerer in Chapter 2. By linking the medieval period with a Renaissance work, the episode constructs a model of periodicity—of the way in which a 'Renaissance' work comes into being at a moment of 'rebirth' ('*renaissance*' in French) in European history.¹² Conversely, certain features of the episode—in particular, its biting edge, to be discussed presently—mark the Temple as a harbinger of the 'darker' poetry to emerge in the English literary landscape, mounted by the surge of satires in the late 1590s and early seventeenth century (Marston, Hall, Donne), by the fierce comic energy of Ben Jonson (*Every Man In His Humour*, *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*), and by the darkening shadows of Shakespeare in the great tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*), as well as in his 'problem comedies' (*All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*) (see Schoenfeldt, Chapter 33 in this volume).¹³

The position of the Temple of Venus episode within the structure of *The Faerie Queene* is itself anomalous. While the episode presents what C. S. Lewis famously calls the 'allegorical core' of Book 4, it alone of the core cantos within the six Books emerges through the complexity of the five-voice harmony articulated above.¹⁴ To be precise, the Temple episode is the only core canto narrated by a character inside the fiction. The House of Holiness in Book 1, the Castle of Alma in Book 2, the Gardens of Adonis in Book 3, Isis Church in

⁹ See Anthony Esolen, 'Spenserian Chaos: Lucretius in *The Faerie Queene*', *Spenser Studies*, 11 (1994), 31–51.

¹⁰ See the notes of Hamilton (ed.), *Faerie Queene*, 484 (on Jean de Meun), and 487–8 (on Chaucer). On Chaucer in the episode, see Judith H. Anderson, 'The "Covert Vele": Chaucer, Spenser, and Venus', *English Literary Renaissance*, 24 (1994), 638–59. On *The Romance of the Rose* in Spenser, see Maureen Quilligan, 'Words and Sex: The Language of Allegory in the *De planctu naturae*, the *Roman of the Rose*, and Book III of *The Faerie Queene*', *Allegorica*, 2.1 (1977), 195–216; and Paul Piehler, 'The *Romance of the Rose*', in A. C. Hamilton (gen. ed.), *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto, 1990), 618–19.

¹¹ In addition to Burrow in this volume (Chapter 7), see his magisterial book: *Imitating Authors: Plato to Futurity* (Oxford, 2019).

¹² The seminal work on the Renaissance as a period concept in England and the Continent remains William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD, 1989).

¹³ On this critical narrative, including criticism, see, Cheney, *Reading Sixteenth-Century Poetry*, 280–7.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford, 1936), 334.

Book 5, and Mount Acidale in Book 6 are all told by the poet-narrator.¹⁵ Alternatively, the conspicuous narrative status of the Temple in the structure of *The Faerie Queene* draws attention to itself as a moment of authorship. There is nothing else like it in Spenser's poetic canon, or, one wants to say, in the canon of sixteenth-century poetry.

The poetry in the episode itself is 'golden', to borrow Lewis's influential classification for the groundbreaking style of Spenser and Sidney:

By *golden* poetry I mean not simply good poetry, but poetry which is, so to speak, innocent or ingenuous . . . [I]n the Golden period of Elizabethan poetry . . . [m]en have at last learned how to write; for a few years nothing more is needed than to play out again and again the strong, simple music of the uncontorted line and to load one's poem with all that is naturally delightful—with flowers and swans, with ladies' hair, hands, lips, breasts, and eyes, with silver and gold, woods and waters, the stars, the moon and the sun.¹⁶

In the Temple of Venus episode, Spenser's description of the Garden of Venus outside the Temple exemplifies the style of golden poetry:

Fresh shadowes, fit to shroud from sunny ray;
 Faire lawnds,* to take the sunne in season dew; **open spaces*
 Sweet springs, in which a thousand Nymphs did play;
 Soft rombling brookes, that gentle slomber drew;
 High reared mounts, the lands about to vew;
 Low looking dales, disloignd* from common gaze; **remote*
 Delightfull bowres, to solace louers trew;
 False Labyrinthes, fond runners eyes to daze:
 All which by nature made did nature selfe amaze.

(*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.24)

Lines 1–8 feature parallelism: each line begins with a geographical phrase designating a specific feature of the landscape ('Fair lawnds', and so on), while the remainder of each line adds a detail regarding its use, value, or effect ('Delightfull bowres, to solace louers trew', and so forth). In this precise description, the artful verse presents the natural state of the landscape, so much so that the place amazes even Nature herself: a localised instance of what Paul de Man calls 'the master trope of poetic discourse', personification (or *prosopopoeia*).¹⁷ In his *Art of English Poetry* (1589), George Puttenham calls the larger figure of speech in this stanza *parison*, 'the figure of even'—or 'clauses of equal quantity'—where the

¹⁵ See Thomas P. Roche, Jr, *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Princeton, NJ, 1964), 128.

¹⁶ Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 64–5. Lewis distinguishes late Tudor golden poetry from early Tudor 'drab' poetry.

¹⁷ Paul de Man, 'Hypogram and Inscription: Michael Riffaterre's Poetics of Reading', *Diacritics*, 11.4 (1981), 17–35, 33. On the importance of the trope, including during the Renaissance, see James J. Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge, 1994); Gavin Alexander, 'Prosopoeia: The Speaking Figure', in Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (eds), *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge, 2007), 97–112; Andrew Escobedo, *Volition's Face: Personification and the Will in Renaissance Literature* (Notre Dame, IN, 2017); and Evan Cheney, "'Thou hast a free passeporte": Poetic Personation and Literary Patronage in Spenser's *Prosopoeia*, Or *Mother Hubberds Tale*, and *The Shepherdes Calender*', *Studies in Philology*, 118 (2021), 538–64.

parallel phrases culminate in a single operating verb ('amaze') that unifies the lines into a single grammatical construction.¹⁸ The lush and sunny description of the *locus amoenus* (place of beauty), with its lawns, springs, brooks, mountains, dales, bowers, and labyrinths, draws attention to the beauty of the place but also, simultaneously, to its golden verse. In this landscape, 'Nymphs' play, 'louers' solace, and 'runners' are 'daze[d]' by the 'False Labyrinthes' of the garden world.¹⁹

The word 'False' is at once playful and arresting, while the triple rhyme surrounding the 'Labyrinth'—'gaze . . . daze . . . amaze'—absents the depiction from a simple ethical standard to enter the condition increasingly classified as the sublime: a heightened verse that explodes simple ethics through rapture or terror or both.²⁰ Suddenly the 'golden' verse of the landscape acquires a complexity that may arrest the reader or catch her off guard. Paradoxically, line 9 scripts the harmony of art and nature, the only core canto in *The Faerie Queene* to do so—unlike, say, the Bower of Bliss (Book 2, canto 12), which features the authority of art alone, or the Gardens of Adonis (Book 3, canto 6), which feature the authority of nature.²¹ Once more, the poetics of the Temple makes it stand out as an inset artefact exemplary of sixteenth-century poetry.

Scudamour describes the beautiful garden landscape to his auditors, but in his story he presents himself as bypassing it—'all those sights . . . / Might not my steps withhold' (*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.29, lines 1–2)—because he aims to march into the Temple of Venus itself, where he finds Amoret, his destined bride. As a knight traversing Faeryland in the Book of Friendship's core canto, Scudamour—armed with the 'shield of Loue' (*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.8, line 4) that gives him his very name (French, *éscu*, 'shield', *d'amour*, 'of love')—emerges as a heroic exemplar of the poem's genre, epic romance.²² That is to say, the Temple episode constitutes a mini-epic romance, a versification of Spenser's heroic genre. Accordingly, critics see the episode as scripting an inset version of his literary career, for the name of the heroine in this mini-epic romance—Amoret—evokes in turn the title of Spenser's sonnet sequence, the *Amoretti* (literally, 'little loves').²³ The link between the love lyrics and wedding poem published as *Amoretti and Epithalamion* in 1595, and the

¹⁸ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy* (1589), in Brian C. Vickers (ed.), *English Renaissance Literary Criticism* (Oxford, 1999), 190–296, 263–4. We owe this idea and phrasing to Andrew Zurcher (personal communication, 28 March 2020).

¹⁹ On the labyrinth and the temple as the 'two cardinal images' for Spenser's 'prophetic structure', see Angus Fletcher, *The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser* (Chicago, IL, 1971), 11. Fletcher mentions the Temple of Venus episode only four times in passing, even though the word 'labyrinth' appears only three other times in Spenser's poetry (one of which is his translation of Joachim du Bellay in *The Ruines of Rome*).

²⁰ For further detail on the sublime as a principle of sixteenth-century poetics, see Cheney, Chapter 5 in this volume. On the sublime exploding 'Good and Evil', see Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY, 1964), 223; on the Spenserian sublime, 268–78. On the sublime during the English Renaissance, see Patrick Cheney, *English Authorship and the Early Modern Sublime: Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson* (Cambridge, 2018), including chapters 2 and 3 on Spenser; and Catherine Bates, *On Not Defending Poetry: Defence and Indefensibility in Sidney's Defence of Poesy* (Oxford, 2017), xii. For the Classical sublime, see Philip Hardie, *Lucretian Receptions: History, The Sublime, Knowledge* (Cambridge, 2009); and James I. Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2016). For the medieval sublime, see C. Stephen Jaeger (ed.), *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics: Art, Architecture, Literature, Music* (Basingstoke, 2010). *The Oxford Handbook of the Sublime* is forthcoming, edited by Emily Brady, Patrick Cheney, and Philip Hardie.

²¹ Millar MacLure, 'Nature and Art in *The Faerie Queene*', in A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *Essential Articles for the Study of Edmund Spenser* (Hamden, CT, 1972), 171–88, 174–5.

²² We borrow the generic classification from the title of Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford, 1993).

²³ Anderson, 'The "Covert Vele"', 645, links the depiction to that of Orpheus in *Epithalamion*, revealing Spenser's inset career linkage between his national epic and his marriage poetry.

second half of Spenser's epic romance (Books 4–6 of *The Faerie Queene*) published in 1596, thus functions as an inset advertisement for Spenser's literary career.²⁴

Yet, the gender dynamic of the inset epic romance is notoriously explosive and has troubled nearly everyone who has discussed it. The reason is that at the heart of the Book's core canto the heroic Spenserian knight, Sir Scudamour, *abducts* Amoret from the Temple, where she is under the delusion that she is protected by the feminine authority of the goddess Venus. Scudamour violates the virgin's will, as a 'rape'²⁵: 'She often prayd, and often me besought, / Sometime with tender teares to let her goe' (*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.57, lines 1–2). Yet, Scudamour refuses to listen: 'yet for nought, / That euer she to me could say or doe / Could she her wished freedome fro me woove; / But forth I led her through the Temple gate' (*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.57, lines 3–6). Even more shockingly, the knight abducts Amoret *because* her protector, Venus—hermaphroditic in nature, 'both kinds in one, / Both male and female' (*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.41, lines 6–7)—'fauour[s]' Scudamour's 'pretence', even 'laugh[ing]' at his boldness and at Amoret's victimisation with 'amiable grace' (*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.56, lines 3–4). As if to signal the ominous nature of the abduction, the combined voice and verse of Scudamour, his inset-narrator, and the poet Spenser likens the 'daunger[ous]' act to Orpheus's recovery of his wife Eurydice from the Underworld (see *Faerie Queene*, 4.10.58, lines 1–5): a recovery that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is both a heroic act of marital care and a tragic act of marital loss, for—after her joyful reunion with her husband—Eurydice violates the gods' decree by turning to look back at the Underworld, thereby paying the ultimate price of eternal separation from her husband.²⁶ The reference to Orpheus, the premier icon of the poet in Classical, medieval, Renaissance, and Spenserian poetry, prepares for the sudden merging of narrative voices in the canto's concluding line: 'So ended he his tale, where I this Canto end' (*Faerie Queene*, 4.10.58, line 9).²⁷ If ever Edmund Spenser marks an episode with an authorial signature, this is it.

The complexity of the Temple of Venus episode, authoring as it does a troubling gender dynamic, helps explain why critics tend to pass it by, especially in comparison to the other core cantos.²⁸ Amongst those who do discuss the episode, we discover two fundamental interpretations: 'benign and malefic'.²⁹ In an important recent interpretation, Melissa Sanchez sets the mould for seeing the complexity of Spenser's design: 'The actual brutality of Amoret's experiences complicates the allegorical significance they should produce, and

²⁴ In addition to Gil in this volume (Chapter 9), see Patrick Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto, 1993), for the role of love lyric and epic in Spenser's career. The inset lyric Hymn to Venus translated from Lucretian epic underwrites the episode's career dynamic.

²⁵ Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects*, 63.

²⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10.1–85, in Frank Justus Miller (trans.), revised G. P. Goold, *Metamorphoses*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1916), 2.64–71. See Thomas H. Cain, *Praise in 'The Faerie Queene'* (Lincoln, NE, 1978), 166–7; and Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), 204–5.

²⁷ On Spenser as Orphic poet, see Thomas H. Cain, 'Spenser and the Renaissance Orpheus', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 41 (1971), 24–47; Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight*; and Strythe Pugh, 'Orpheus and Eurydice in the Middle Books of *The Faerie Queene*', *Spenser Studies*, 31–2 (2017–18), 1–41.

²⁸ Our two major studies of Books 3 and 4 have notably short units on the episode: Roche, *Kindly Flame*, 128–33; and Lauren Silberman, *Transforming Desire: Erotic Knowledge in Books III and IV of The Faerie Queene* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), 78–82. Today, critics tend to focus on the Temple's photographic negative, the Bower of Bliss, taking the lead of Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL, 1980), 157–92.

²⁹ Anderson, 'The "Covert Vele"', 657. For 'benign', see Roche, *Kindly Flame*, 128–33; for 'malign', Jonathan Goldberg, *Endesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore, MD, 1981), 88–92. For a 'balanced overall interpretation', Anderson cites Harry Berger, Jr, *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), 195–202. Anderson concludes: 'Spenser's Temple may be a troubling place and at best a morally mixed one, but it is not simply evil' (656n29). One of the most recent readings follows Anderson: Andrew Escobedo, 'The Sincerity of Rapture', *Spenser Studies*, 24 (2009), 185–208, 199.

thus troubles the idealized picture of devotion that her chastity should perpetuate.³⁰ As Sanchez adds of ‘Spenser’s project of examining the irrational grounds of obedience’, ‘[i]n apprehending the distance between idealized narratives of mutual devotion and actual structures of unilateral sacrifice, the reader of *The Faerie Queene* may confront his or her own complicity with the failures and injustices of late sixteenth-century political practice’.³¹ Importantly, Sanchez lays bare the political context for the episode, which forms part of ‘Spenser’s pessimistic view of the possibilities of loyal resistance’ during ‘the “second reign” of Elizabeth’. The episode thus shows Spenser’s ‘allegiance to a group who drew the queen’s suspicion for their investment in the international Protestant cause and commitment to aristocratic participation in government’: ‘Scudamour’s initial abduction and chronic petulance and distrust would situate him as the prototypical tyrant described by Thomas Smith³² in *De Republica Anglorum* (composed c 1562–5, published 1583), the sixteenth century’s most important apologia for the ‘mixed’ government of Elizabethan England, combining monarchy with republic.³³

This is not the place to respond to Sanchez—or criticism at large—but we might mention that her account does not refer to the vehicle for such a sexually charged political poetics in the Temple of Venus episode: Spenser’s poetry. To Sanchez’s analysis, we might add a sublime conundrum, for the poet manages to do something unparalleled in modern English poetry. By crystallising five poetic voices in his unitary authorship, the multi-voiced poet creates a riveting artefact in the genre of epic romance that self-consciously weds the natural beauty of English verse to one of the most profoundly unsettling ethical depictions in sixteenth-century British poetry.

³⁰ Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects*, 63.

³¹ Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects*, 64.

³² Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects*, 63.

³³ Patrick Collinson influentially speaks of ‘The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, essay title, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 69 (1987), 394–424. For Spenser’s participation in mixed government, see David J. Baker, ‘Spenser and Politics’, in McCabe (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, 48–64.

PART I
TRANSITIONS AND CONTEXTS

2

Transitions

Seth Lerer

The idea of transition is both a matter of literary history and a history of literary matter. Traditional accounts of early sixteenth-century imaginative writing place its insecurities along the arc of transition. Scholars of the C. S. Lewis generation saw its verse as ‘drab’. The obeisances to Chaucer, the fascination with aureation, and the proliferation of manuscript anthologies of Middle English poetry created the impression that the literary culture of the first half of the century was largely backward looking. The poetry of John Lydgate, for example, filled personal and country-house anthologies from the 1470s through the 1540s. Stephen Hawes’ long allegories of virtuous journey and heroic encounter were some of the most popular books printed in the 1510s. And Chaucer himself continued to form the inventories of English printers through the reigns of Henry VII and VIII.¹

Any encounter with the poetry of early Tudor England will reveal spelling, vocabulary, and syntax so irregular that most modern readers would wonder how even audiences of the time could make sense of it. Verse lines of these decades seem to scan awkwardly, hovering between firm iambic pentameters and looser collocations of stress and rhythm. The subject matter of the period’s literature, to modern audiences, also jars against our expectations. Elaborate allegories of spiritual growth, extended personifications of virtues and vices, and static moral lessons fail to fit our idea of Henry VIII’s court as one of ‘pastime with good company’ lived to the lilt of ‘Greensleeves’.²

It is little wonder that the poetic emergence of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, in the 1520s and 1530s has long been seen as an efflorescence. Their inward-looking reflections and their carefully curated figurative diction make them seem to shine against the sullen ground of their forebears and contemporaries.³ How representative is

¹ For the idea of the ‘Drab Age’, see C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954). For accounts of Chaucer’s reception, the making of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century literary culture, and the place of medieval English literature in the first decades of print, see the following: A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1985); Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, NJ, 1993); David Carlson, *English Humanist Books: Writers and Patrons, Manuscript and Print, 1475–1525* (Toronto, 1993); Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books, 1473–1557* (Oxford, 2006); Robert Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge, 2007); Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature, 1430–1530* (Oxford, 2007); and Jane Griffiths, *Diverting Authorities: Experimental Glossing Practices in Manuscript and Print* (Oxford, 2014).

² For surveys of the poetry of the early Tudor period that call attention to the challenges of manuscript presentation, literary language, and editorial intervention, see Jonathan Crewe, *Trials of Authorship: Anterior Forms and Poetic Reconstruction from Wyatt to Shakespeare* (Berkeley, CA, 1990); Peter C. Herman (ed.), *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts* (Urbana-Champaign, IL, 1994); and Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY, 1995). For the worlds of music and poetry in the age of Henry VIII, see the still-unrivaled John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (Cambridge, 1961).

³ See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL, 1980), with its immensely influential chapter, ‘Power, Sexuality, and Inwardness in Wyatt’s Poetry’. See, too, Elizabeth Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry* (London, 1998).

their poetry of the period when Wynkyn de Worde's print shop was turning out religious allegories and beast fables, or when John Skelton's drumbeat rhymes and rhythms were cracking fissures in the Henrician court's decorum? Most teachers and students are only dimly aware of the large and rich production of literary works, in both manuscript and print, that do not look like Wyatt or Surrey. Our traditional literary history makes it seem as if what remade English verse a century after Chaucer was the discovery of Petrarch and the development of a heightened literary subjectivity. Most classroom surveys leapfrog over the stutters of the middle of the century to get from 'They flee from me' to Sidney and Spenser.

Thanks to two generations of revisionary scholarship, we now have a far more textured sense of early modern English poetry than before.⁴ We know that, for example, Wyatt's verse appeared in manuscript anthologies with rougher scansion and more irregular orthography than it did in the regularised form of Richard Tottel's *Songs and Sonnets* of 1557. And we know, too, that this collection (known today as Tottel's Miscellany) brims with poetry far unlike the lithe Petrarchism of its most famous authors. Much of the Miscellany offers the verse of the now forgotten Nicholas Grimald, whose long lines bristle with rough alliterations and onomatopoeia. The volume offers anonymous renditions of Ovidian mythology, elegies to barely remembered historical figures, and echoes of popular songs transmuted into printed stanzas. Even Chaucer himself appears, his poem 'Truth' printed, untitled, and unattributed, amidst a clutch of advisory stanzas.⁵

But if the literary history of the early sixteenth century cannot, any longer, be constructed as a time of secure transition, its content may be seen as fascinated by the theme. Whatever their idiom or ideology, texts from throughout the century concerned themselves with change. The gods made flesh, the lovers turned to birds, the dross of everyday turned to the gold of the imagination—these are the reference points of writers from Skelton through Shakespeare. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* first appeared in print in 1471. By 1500, over thirty editions had appeared throughout Europe. William Caxton published an English prose version in 1480. Arthur Golding's verse translation appeared in 1557. By then, its tales had become the touchstones for expressing art's relationship to social life. The Ovidianism of early modern England is by no means homogeneous through time and region. Nonetheless, it became a strategy for reflecting on the place of aesthetic judgement in royal rule. The legend of King Midas, for example, raised this issue. Compelled to judge between the beauties of Apollo's lyre and the rough tones of Pan's pipes, Midas chose Pan. Widely read, retold, and reimagined throughout early modern English literature, this legend became the site of poetic and dramatic reflection on the arts of power and the insecurities of royal patronage. The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, in addition, re-emerged as a model for forbidden love in an increasingly commercialised and urban world. And the stories of Orpheus, Morpheus, and Pygmalion came, more and more, to provoke cultural discussions of the transformative power of human artistry. This clutch of myths is by no means the only selection from Ovid that influenced the early modern audience. But they are amongst the most influential as lessons in aesthetic judgement. They offer stories of false metamorphoses or bad transformations. Midas gets his asses' ears, Orpheus ends his life dismembered by the

⁴ Witness the range and inclusiveness of David Norbrook and H. R. Woudhuysen (eds), *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse, 1509–1659* (London, 1993).

⁵ For recent scholarship on the first decades of sixteenth-century poetry, print, and Tottel's Miscellany in particular, see Paul A. Marquis, 'Editing and Unediting Richard Tottel's *Songs and Sonettes*', *The Book Collector*, 56 (2007), 353–75; and Stephen Hamrick (ed.), *Tottel's Songs and Sonettes in Context* (Farnham, 2013).

bacchantes, and Pygmalion's statue, come to life, all-too-soon realises the price we pay for living as an object of desire.⁶

All of these tales found their expression in the Middle English of Chaucer, Gower, and their fifteenth-century heirs.⁷ What makes their early sixteenth-century appropriation different is a new access to Ovid, both in Latin and vernaculars, and a new social function for mythological poetry. To explore the transitions of the early modern period is to examine the new fascination with the transitional, the mutable, and the powerful. It is to see how an arc of literary writing moves across old myths to spark new outbursts of lyric, satire, and desire. My goal in this chapter is to call attention to a range of literary productivity still little known but at times brilliantly imaginative, formally experimental, and socially self-aware.

This material also deeply influenced Shakespeare's sense of his literary past. I close this chapter with an invitation to see his *Midsummer Night's Dream* as a play that dramatises the transitions in poetic practice. With its framework of the royal Athenian wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, the play hearkens back to Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and its dramas of rule and spectacle. With its rustic artisans planning a play of Pyramus and Thisbe, it draws on the afterlife of Chaucer's version of the story in his *Legend of Good Women*. And with its vision of the long-eared, ass-headed Bottom, it recalls two centuries of Midas, from Chaucer's version of his story in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*—whose 'asses eres' are a secret only to himself and to his wife (Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Tale*, line 954, *Riverside Chaucer*, 118)—to the satires of mid-sixteenth-century poets.⁸

Finally, my purpose is pedagogical as well as scholarly. Armed with the access to online reproductions of early books and with the databases of poetic corpora and criticism, today's teacher and student can engage with sixteenth-century literary culture in ways once accessible only to scholars in restricted archives. The study of this period of transition is tailor-made for a new digital humanities. What the critic Franco Moretti has said about the Victorian novel may stand for our experience of sixteenth-century poetry: we continue to work on a 'canonical fraction . . . not even one percent of published literature' of the age. Our techniques of close reading, Moretti has argued, 'depend on an extremely small canon . . . You invest so much in individual texts only if you think that very few of them really matter.'⁹ Our classroom syllabi remain, still, deeply invested in a small number of individual authors and texts. Given the resources now available to students and to scholars, we can read this literary past in its broadest scope, recovering neglected texts and enabling collaboration in research and writing that enhances the production of literary knowledge. My goal, here, is to present some cases of that literary recovery. I do not neglect close reading as my point of access: indeed, I argue that many of these texts respond brilliantly to nuanced and attentive criticism. In the end, my chapter is a provocation to do more work with more texts and, in the process, to retell the history of early modern English poetry.

⁶ For the history of early modern English Ovidianism, see Sarah Anna Brown, et al. (eds), *Ovid in English, 1480–1625. Part 1: Metamorphoses* (London, 2013); Lindsay Ann Reid, *Ovidian Bibliofictions and the Tudor Book* (London, 2014).

⁷ See John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven, CT, 1979); James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (eds), *Ovid in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2011); Andrew Galloway, 'Ovid in Chaucer and Gower', in John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands (eds), *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid* (Chichester, 2014), 187–201.

⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, in Larry D. Benson (gen. ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, third edition (Boston, MA, 1987). For Shakespeare's Chaucerianism and his use, more generally, of medieval literary materials, see E. Talbot Donaldson, *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer* (New Haven, CT, 1985); Deanne Williams, *The French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 2004); Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London, 2010); and Ruth Morse, et al. (eds), *Medieval Shakespeare: Past and Presents* (Cambridge, 2013).

⁹ Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London, 2013), 48.

Pyramus and Thisbe at Home

Amongst the most popular of Ovid's tales of thwarted love was that of Pyramus and Thisbe. The story of two lovers separated by familial mistrust and, then, by a physical barrier is eternal, echoing from Roman comedy through medieval allegory and modern tragedy. It was a story almost infinitely adaptable to different social worlds. Chaucer retold the lovers' story in his *Legend of Good Women*, and his version circulated widely in the two centuries after his death. There, the lovers live within an architecture of desire: the houses, the wall, and finally the tomb of Ninus where they meet their end are all built structures that, instead of keeping them safe, provoke their danger.¹⁰

Inspired by Chaucer's *Tale*, but distinct in emphasis and idiom, was the version of the narrative embedded in the poem that the printer Richard Pynson brought out (most likely in 1528), *La conusaunce d'amours*.¹¹ Written in the seven-line, rhyme royal stanza (with its *ababbcc* rhyme scheme) familiar from *Troilus and Criseyde* and its later-medieval heirs, *La conusaunce d'amours* begins with an equally familiar medieval trick. The poet finds himself wandering in a beautiful landscape in the spring. He sees a group of courtly men and women singing and dancing. Following a few of the women, he comes to a building, where another beautiful woman stands at the door. He enters and is led into a parlour, where he sits and talks with her. They speak of love, and she begins to lecture him on the true virtues of devotion and friendship. In the course of her instruction, she retells the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. The more they were kept apart, she recounts, 'The more fervently / in love they burned' (Anonymous, *La Connaissance*, line 133). Together, the lovers develop a kind of private language: a set of 'signs / token and looking' (Anonymous, *La Connaissance*, line 135) to express their minds. Soon, they agree to meet at the tomb of the ancient Babylonian king, Ninus. Thisbe arrives first, only to find a lion, still bloody from its kill, drinking at the tomb's fountain. Frightened, she runs away, dropping her kerchief. The lion takes it up and bloodies it with its mouth. When Pyramus appears, he sees the bloody fabric, thinks Thisbe dead, and kills himself. His own blood spurts out, turning the white berries of the nearby mulberry tree all red. Thisbe returns, sees the bloody stains, finds her dead lover, offers a powerful lament, and then kills herself. What follows is an authorial commentary on the story, a summary of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (another tale of misbegotten love), and finally a set of moral exempla drawn from other myths.

In this bald summary, little seems original. The poem is full of conventional medieval devices: the long laments, the repetitions of complaint and the prolix verbal texture built up out of doubling of terms, and a polysyllabic aureate vocabulary. But there are important features that present its old myth for a new audience. First and foremost is the moral of the story. In a section marked out as the Damosel's interpretation, she notes that the lovers would still be alive if the parents had acceded to their wills.

¹⁰ 'The Legend of Thisbe' circulated separately, in Cambridge University Library MS Ff 1.6 (fols. 64–67^v), and fragmentarily in Magdalene College, Cambridge, MS Pepys 2006 (53–88). The *Legend of Good Women* was not printed until William Thynne's edition of Chaucer's Works in 1532. John Gower offered a version of the story in his *Confessio Amantis*, 3.1331–494. The story is frequently alluded to by the Chaucerians John Lydgate and Stephen Hawes.

¹¹ Critical discussions of the poem are few. See Martine Braekman, 'Prolegomena to an Edition of the Poem, *la Conusaunce Damours*, Printed Around 1528', *Studia Neophilologica*, 68 (1996), 25–8; Seth Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit* (Cambridge, 1997), 23–5; and Reid, *Ovidian Bibliofictions*, 91–4. The text is available online at <https://www.otago.ac.nz/english-linguistics/tudor/connaissance5631.html>. I quote from this text, cited by line number. I have modernised spelling.

Ye might have had your goodly children still
 If ye had done / as reason doth require
 To marry them / after their desire.

(Anonymous, *La Connaissance*, lines 355–7)

She turns this argument, however, not into a claim for true love's independence, but into an affirmation of the sacrament of marriage and the need for institutional approval of desire.

These gentles did / as Christians now a day
 Most commonly / use for to do
 Which no doubt is / a much cursed way
 And causer of many evils also
 They marry / without consent of the two
 Which marriage is not worth a hawe * **the fruit of the hawthorn*
 Damnable / and eke against the law.
 For to receive this high sacrament
 Is required much solemnity
 But one most special / that is free assent
 Of both persons / of high and low degree
 Without which / marriage cannot be
 Perfectly allowed / before the glorious face
 Of the high God / in the celestial place.

(Anonymous, *La Connaissance*, lines 358–72)

In the contexts of the late 1520s, these lines transform a story of mythic love into a statement about domesticity, about parental authority, and about the sacramentality of marriage. Such passages fit well with what had been emerging as an English, Catholic response to the perceived threats of a Continental Reformation: arguments questioning the sacramental nature of worship, about the nature of hierarchical authority, and about the nature of law and religion. In fact, the whole question of parental control of marriage had become a touchstone of debates in the late 1520s and 1530s. Steven Ozment, in his tellingly titled book, *When Fathers Ruled*, looks closely at the family debates of the years on either side of the European Reformation, and he quotes this statute from the city of Augsburg from 1537:

Children are not to be forced against their will into a marriage they find unpleasant and undesirable; parents should take the greatest care to respect and advance what is to the profit and well-being of their children's persons and possessions.¹²

I find the resonances striking. Both the English poem and the German statute make clear that respecting the wishes of the children is central to successful marriage (where success, here, is not just a matter of personal desire but of economic advancement: profit and well-being). But what is distinctive about the English poem is the emphasis on sacrament. 'Free

¹² Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), 39, and see his broader discussion at 25–49.

assent' matters; but what matters more is the institutional affirmation of that assent within the law and within the church. What the poem does is offer up another, ideal, built environment for socially acceptable desire. Now, it is not the household or the enclosed garden or the tomb. It is the 'celestial place' that is the house of love. Two hearts may be 'closed in one'. But they must be enclosed in a divinely sanctioned place of being.

There is much more to this poem, however, than polemic. It revives mythic tropes of poetic creation. Late in the story, as the narrator falls asleep, it is in Morpheus's arms that he imagines his somnolence. At this point, the poem becomes a kind of displaced dream vision: a classic, medieval genre, but now put late in the narrative (instead of at its opening) in order to call attention to its artificiality.¹³ For this is a poem that uses earlier literary techniques and calls attention, in a highly self-conscious way, to the artful use of those techniques. This is not a simple dream vision or dialogue. It is a poem that deploys dream vision and dialogue as the building blocks for a text highly aware of its own textuality. The narrator opens with a statement that the body of the poem was 'told . . . to me'—that is, it is a received text—but now, the mode of transmission is not telling but writing: 'As here after / ye may read and see' (Anonymous, *La Connaissance*, lines 20–1). This is not a medieval text (e.g., of the kind exemplified in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, where the fictional narrator of the Clerk retells, to a fictional audience of listeners, a story supposedly told to him by the historical Petrarch). This is an early modern document. As Lindsay Ann Reid has put it, the poem 'takes as its subject the processes whereby literature is created as much as the seemingly central topic of amour'. She goes on, '[It] shape[s] and elucidate[s] the methods of literary composition that it internally fictionalizes'.¹⁴ Such interpretations link this poem with the highly self-aware, self-mediating tone of John Skelton, and they invite us, as modern readers, to see how the transmission of the past is not a transparent linear process but, instead, a complex back-and-forth of allusion, appropriation, and reflection.

These are the features that make *La conusaunce d'amours*, for all its medieval trappings, a powerful, early modern text. Its Ovidian myths now serve not simply as a source of plot or character but as a stimulus for reflecting poetic mythography itself: that is, how the exploration of tales of art and judgement enable the writer to assert a sense of literary ambition. Unlike its Chaucerian models—where the poems of the past serve as a guide to largely courtly models of behaviour, taste, and expression—*La conusaunce d'amours* suggests a new, domestic place for literature and its ambitions. And as a printed text, a product of and for commercial reproduction, this poem invites a new range of readers to participate in literary advice and in literary history.

Morpheus in the Margins

Part of the job of poems such as *La conusaunce d'amours* (and there are many of them) was to teach new readers how the old realms of the imagination can become new places of pursuit. Ovid's Morpheus oversaw the realms of sleep and dream. By the early modern period, he came, as well, to oversee the worlds of poetic and dramatic impersonation.¹⁵ His shape-shifting became, for early modern artists, a model for what the artist did. He is the maker of masks, the ventriloquist of others. The famous scene of Morpheus within the Cave

¹³ For the idea of the poem as a displaced dream vision, see Braekman, 'Prolegomena'.

¹⁴ Reid, *Ovidian Bibliofictions*, 93.

¹⁵ Morpheus appears most extensively in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 11, in the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, when he is called upon to impersonate the dead King Ceyx, in a dream, to his queen, Alcyone. Chaucer

of Sleep—a place where the god comes to be called upon to impersonate a dead man in the dream of his still-living beloved—had, as Colin Burrow notes, a story with the ‘richest afterlife’ of any in the poem. It offers up, in Burrow’s words, ‘an energetic defence of the imitative arts’, inviting us to ‘think of what it is to imitate both living people and past literatures’.¹⁶

How do we imitate both living people and past literatures? This question stands behind a range of early Tudor poetic experiments designed to test the limits of literary form. Some, like *La conusaunce d’amours*, appropriate earlier devices to make claims for contemporary polemic. Others, like the brilliantly bizarre poetic bricolage, *The Fantasy of the Passion of the Fox*, deform those devices to display an emerging poetic virtuosity in the vernacular.¹⁷ This poem survives in one copy, printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1530. It tells the story of a poet who, mourning the death of his pet fox, falls asleep and dreams about that fox’s death. He spends much time describing the animal, its habits, and its actions, and concludes with a long testament to his virtues. In the course of these adventures and expostulations, the poet invokes the Ovidian story of Morpheus and the Cave of Sleep and offers up an imagined popular attack on the fox that sounds—in idiom, in verse form, and in rhyme choice—uncannily like Skelton at his most satiric. And in its elaborate attentions to the possibilities of beast fable and human–animal exchange, it looks back over a tradition of comic poetry running from Chaucer’s *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* to Skelton’s *Phyllyp Sparowe*. There is polemic in this poem, but there is also a sublime lunacy, and it is that latter feature that I think makes it a brilliant critical commentary on vernacular poetic practice in transition.

Unlike *La conusaunce d’amours*, whose dream vision starts amidst the beauties of late spring, *The Fantasy of the Passion of the Fox* begins in autumn. This move, as Jane Griffiths has suggested, aligns the poem immediately with Skelton’s legacy (the autumnal opening of his satire, *The Bowge of Court*, comes to mind).¹⁸ But what this move does, as well, is enable the poet to reflect on the place of his own poem on the generic map of early sixteenth-century verse:

In fantasies marvellous my mind was pight*	*occupied
For a fox-whelp that lacked a late*	*of late
Though his manners would other / Curribus he hight*	*was named
Full pleasant in pastime / pretending no debate	
To no person living / but a cruel fate	
Envy hath him banished / I wot not whether	

appropriated this section at the opening of his *Book of the Duchess*, transforming the so-called Cave of Sleep episode into a comedy of exaggeration. For the centrality of Morpheus to Classical representations of the artist as shape-shifter and impersonator, see Philip Hardie, *Ovid’s Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge, 2002), 259, 272–85.

¹⁶ Colin Burrow, ‘Full of the Maker’s Guile’: Ovid on Imitating and on the Imitation of Ovid’, in Philip Hardie, et al. (eds), *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on the Metamorphoses and Its Reception* (Cambridge, 1999), 271–87, 279–80. On different forms of imitation, see also Chapter 7 in this volume.

¹⁷ *The Fantasy of the Passion of the Fox*, survives in only one copy, now in the Cambridge University Library. Critical discussion is minimal: Elizabeth Porges Watson, ‘A Vulpine Martyr: *The Fantasy of the Passion of the Fox*’, *Renardus*, 6 (1993), 105–26; Jane Griffiths, ‘“An Ende of an Olde Song”: Middle English Lyric and the Skeltonic’, *Review of English Studies*, 60 (2009), 705–22. The online edition is at <https://www.otago.ac.nz/english-linguistics/tudor/passionoffox10685.html>. I quote from this text, cited by line number; I have modernised spelling.

¹⁸ Griffiths, ‘“An Ende of an Olde Song”’.

I fear me of death / but god forbid that
That such mischance should us dissever.

(Anonymous, *Passion*, lines 9–16)

The marvellous fantasies besetting the poet's mind and the image of the fox-whelp recall the turnings of the sleepless narrator of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*: a narrator who would himself descend into the cave of Morpheus to get a gift of sleep and, then, see in his dream a 'whelp' that leads him on his journey. Chaucer's little dog becomes a fox here, as if the Nun's Priest's Reynard had taken over the courtly vision of the *Book of the Duchess*, with the whole scene transported into the early sixteenth-century allegory of Stephen Hawes, whose *Pastime of Pleasure* remained one of the most popular books of the period (note the phrase, 'full pleasant in pastime'). Debate and envy, banishment and mischance, remain the tracer words of the late medieval allegorical tradition, now ironised into a story about a pet fox granted a learned Latin name: Curribus.

We are in an increasingly learned world: a world in which the old verities of popular poetry become reread and retold by an annotating Latinist. What is so striking about the poem's printed form, in fact, are the marginalia calling attention to the sources of its imagination. For when the poet falls asleep and dreams, he dreams in Ovid's world. A beautiful woman appears to him:

Such one I had not seen afore to appear
Except it were Iris that Ovid in his fable
Counteth unto Juno / his maiden and his messenger.

(Anonymous, *Passion*, lines 70–2)

If the reader does not get this reference, the printed marginalia gives us direction: 'lege ovidium li. ij' (i.e., 'read Ovid', with the reference to Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses*). We are, increasingly, no longer in the medieval world of allusion but in the early modern, humanist world of citation. True, many medieval manuscripts would have been annotated with source markers, giving authors' names and places in their works. But those annotations, for example in the manuscripts of Chaucer, would have been the learned additions of later scribes.¹⁹ Here, the printed text contains the annotations themselves. They are an integral part of the reading experience of the poem. They make, in other words, the poem not just a story but an anthology of reference.

And so, when the narrator arrives at Morpheus's Cave of Sleep, we get this printed explanation on the side:

Morpheus Phobotor Phantasos be.iii. goddesses of dreams Morpheus
showeth only the similitude of reasonable creatures. Phobotor sometimes
showeth serpents / birds / and such unreasonable. Phantasos only stones /
houses / the sea and such things without life.

(Anonymous, *Passion*, marginalia to lines 133–4)

¹⁹ On the Latin marginalia to the *Canterbury Tales*, see Graham D. Caie, 'The Significance of Marginal Glosses in the Earliest Manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*', in David L. Jeffrey (ed.), *Chaucer and the Scriptural Tradition* (Ottawa, 1984), 75–88; Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Professional Readers at Work: Annotators, Editors, and Correctors in Middle English Literary Texts', in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, et al. (eds), *Opening up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches* (Ithaca, NY, 2012).

This is not Chaucer's comic descent into the realm of sleep, nor is it the allusive fantasy of the poet of *La conusaunce d'amours*. This is the scholar's reading and translation of Ovid's text, fully in keeping with contemporary sixteenth-century interpretations of the God of Sleep as the aegis of performance and impersonation.

Morpheus me-thought began his kind anon
To show me the similitude of many a man.

(Anonymous, *Passion*, lines 145–6)

Morpheus was showing his similitudes not only in literature but also in visual and plastic art. Indeed, he came to be considered the presiding aegis not just over sleep and dreaming, but of all forms of representation. The Italian artist Annibale Caro, confidant of Michelangelo, designed the villa for Cardinal Allesandro Farnese with Morpheus in mind. There, in the villa's bedroom, the god of sleep stood at the centre of a complex allegorical mural. Caro instructed the artist of the bedroom to depict the scene as follows: 'Morpheus is called by Ovid the artificer and maker of figures; and therefore you will show him in the act of making masks of various appearances, placing some of them at his feet.' Morpheus the mask-maker is the shower of similitudes, the figure for personification itself.²⁰

What a great break, then, from learned long lines and rich allusions of this portion of the poem to the pulsing Skeltonics²¹ of its 'Exclamatio inuidorum', the imagined scene of the pet fox's escape and pursuit:

Now to disclose
How he broke lose
Ye may suppose
Great noise was made.

(Anonymous, *Passion*, lines 177–80)

These scenes emerge as if the *Nun's Priest's Tale*—with its loud pursuit of Reynard the Fox—were being retold by the Skelton of *Phyllyp Sparowe*:

Some cried hang him
Some said save him
Some would have slain him
To have his skin.

(Anonymous, *Passion*, lines 201–4)

After nearly a hundred lines of this metrical aggression, the poem then returns to the long lines of its opening, offering a Testament in the voice of the fox himself, a move reminiscent of the *Testament* of John Lydgate, complete with polysyllabic, aureate rhymes, and long strings of repetition:²²

²⁰ Quoted and discussed in Maria Ruvoldt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration: Metaphors of Sex, Sleep, and Dreams* (Cambridge, 2004), 177. See 177–85 for discussions of Morpheus as mask-maker in the age of Michelangelo.

²¹ By Skeltonics, critics refer to the short, rhymed couplets of John Skelton's satirical poetry. See John Norton-Smith, 'The Origins of "Skeltonics"', *Essays in Criticism*, 23 (1973), 57–62.

²² For the *Testament* of John Lydgate, and its historical, generic, and stylistic features (and potential influences), see Sebastian Sobceki, 'Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction: The *Testament* as a Literary Palinode', *The Chaucer Review*, 49 (2015), 265–93.

I Curribus of Mere diocese of Sarum
 Of subtle mind and will *condo testamentum*. *offer my testament
 (Anonymous, *Passion*, lines 299–300)

The fox bequeaths each body part to a different profession:

My feet to order spices to the apothecary
 My liver and my lungs more medicinal
 Take them who will I am agreeable.
 (Anonymous, *Passion*, lines 316–18)

What is this thing? More than a poem, it comes off as a material artefact of culture, a work of printing, editing, and careful compositing that shows the place of the humanist in the print shop. Like *La conusaunce d'amours*, the *Fantasy* offers an anthology of forms and tales. But far more than that earlier poem, it offers a survey of just about every possible way of writing English verse in the Henrician period. We may think of a poem such as this one as 'transitional', in that it bridges both historical and formal locales. But it is transitional, as well, in that it takes as its own theme the passages from one state to another: from death to life, from waking to sleeping, from heard tale to printed text.

Midas in the Database

Morpheus may have been the aegis for transitions from one state or status to another. But for early modern poets, it was King Midas who embodied the very act of transformation. We know his story, these days, largely for his golden touch: the curse of avarice that turned all he grasped into glittering, but useless, gold. In Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid spent far more lines, however, on the story of his faulty literary judgement. Choosing Pan over Apollo, he gets asses' ears in retribution for his bad decision. That part of his life had become so familiar to early sixteenth-century readers that Thomas Wyatt need not even call him by name to include him within his list of bad interpreters in his Satire to Sir John Pains. There, in a string of allusions calibrated to affirm the rough wit and ineloquence of the poet, Wyatt presents those who would prefer the crow to the swan, Sir Thopas to the Knight, and Pan to Apollo:

And he that dieth for hunger of the gold,
 Call him Alexander, and say that Pan
 Passeth Apollo in music many fold.
 (Wyatt, 'Mine Own John Pains', lines 47–9, *Complete Poems*, 187)²³

The unnamed Midas here—who died for hunger of gold—may, by the foolish poet, be confused with Alexander, and his preference for Pan may be compared with Wyatt's own self-deprecating foolishness. 'My wit is naught. I cannot learn the way' (Wyatt, 'Mine Own John Pains', line 57).

²³ Sir Thomas Wyatt, in R. A. Rebholz (ed.), *The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1978).

By the middle of the century, Midas was everywhere. He shows up in brief social satires, in long allegories, and in lyrics about love and loss. A search through the online Literature Proquest database yields thirty poetic uses before 1600 (not to mention the eight dramatic appearances and twenty-three prose ones).²⁴ To scroll through these citations is to see a list of writers far from our anthologies and syllabi. It is, in some sense, to descend into the under-canon of English verse: Thomas Hedley, George Whittaker, John Hall, Edmund Elviden, Francis Rouse, Geoffrey Whitney. These, and a dozen or so other names, stand beside Christopher Marlowe, Barnabe Googe, John Lyly, Philip Sidney, and William Shakespeare on the digital page. They are the great unread, or perhaps for the modern student, the great unreadable. What happens if we read them closely?

The earliest of them is Thomas Hedley's single printed sheet, 'The Judgement of Midas' of 1552.²⁵ At first glance, the poem it contains seems more like an Aesopic fable than a myth: a brief account, capped by a moral exhortation not to judge what you do not know. But, examined closely, it says something about the uses of poetic mythology in social satire. The poem opens:

Of such as on fantasy decree and discuss
On other men's works, lo Ovid's tale thus.

(Hedley, 'Of such', title)

Given that the poem was originally printed as part of a set of polemical broadsides in an argument between two scholars, Thomas Churchyard and Thomas Camel, this opening may seem topically transparent. Those who would, in their 'fantasy', pass judgement on the works of other men (I paraphrase), read Ovid's tale that follows. In a sense, this is a plea for reticence. But in another sense, this is a statement about literary criticism itself. Part of the emerging presence of poetry in the mid-sixteenth century is precisely this critical purpose. Exempla for moral behaviour, or social action, come increasingly to embrace reading and writing of literature. Poetry has become a form of courtliness, with both standing as forms of verbal and social behaviour designed to demonstrate the artfulness of what a man might be. Rough-hewn though Hedley's poem might appear, it is contemporary with circulation of Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*: that great manual of humanist self-fashioning that would appear, in Thomas Hoby's English, in 1561.²⁶

'Rude Pan', the poem proper opens, seeks to 'Compare to mend Apollo's melody' ('Of such', lines 1, 2). Here, Pan sets out not simply to compete but to improve—'mend'—Apollo's music, and the competition phrases itself in terms of a new, English vernacular vocabulary of artistic performance and criticism. Words such as 'boisterously' (line 7) and 'melodiously' (line 8) describe the playing of the two divinities. 'Midas stood by to judge and to decree' (line 11). Pan is the 'rural' god. What we have here is the emerging lexicon of literary judgement: a set of critical terms that would lie at the heart of an Elizabethan lyric aesthetic. But in this poem, they may well be new. 'Boisterously' is not recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* until 1586 (and except for a lone Caxton quotation from the 1480s, the word boisterous does not appear until the middle of the sixteenth century). 'Melodiously', with the exception of a quotation from Lydgate, does not appear again in the

²⁴ Based on a search for texts dated 1477–1600, 'Midas'. <https://literature.proquest.com/searchTexts.do>.

²⁵ Thomas Hedley, 'Of Such as on Fantasy Decree & Discuss: On Other Men's Works, lo Ovid's Tale Thus' (London, 1522), reprinted in 1560. See the discussion in Brown, *Ovid in English*, 8–9, and the edited text at 61–3.

²⁶ For the impact of Castiglione on the practices of mid-sixteenth-century poet/courtiers, see Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton, NJ, 1978); and Peter Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier* (University Park, PA, 1996).

Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter *OED*) until 1566. And while the idiom of a ‘rural Pan’ is a Classical commonplace, it does not appear with any frequency in English until the middle of the sixteenth century.²⁷

These are the markers of a language in transition. They represent new ways of trying to express performance and reception. They come together with a set of more familiar terms—decree, excel, soft, sweet, strange—to form a way of talking about lyric ravishment. A survey of those poets in the database shows both divine and human musicians increasingly ‘melodious’. It shows ‘soft’, ‘sweet’, and ‘strange’ collocating into markers of aesthetic affect. *Quam suave murmur?* How sweet your murmur, asked the poet Thomas Campion, in 1595, of the great lutenist John Dowland.²⁸ ‘If music and sweet poetry agree’, begins the sonnet to Dowland by Richard Barnfield, printed in *The Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599.²⁹ For Shakespeare’s Caliban, a prisoner on his island full of noises, there are ‘Sounds, and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not’ (Shakespeare, *Tempest*, 3.2.129, *Norton Shakespeare*, 3247), while his all-too-human visitors and cohabitants hear and see everything as ‘strange’ (that word shows up more times in *The Tempest* than in any other Shakespeare play).³⁰ Go back, now, and read Hedley’s lines:

Apollo’s harp and song went very soft,
And sweet and strange, as none might sweeter be,
But yet, thought Midas, this music likes not me.

(Hedley, ‘Of such’, lines 16–18)

Now we see Midas not just as a fool but as a listener unaware of shifting fashion. The new taste for the soft and sweet, for the strange sounds that would begin to fill Elizabethan ears, fails to please him. This kind of Apollonian song would become the model for new lyricism, and the now-neglected poets of my database ring with his melodies (a certain John Grange, in *The Golden Aphroditis* of 1577, has Apollo play ‘melodiously’).³¹ This is the pre-history of Prospero’s aesthetic world, the kind of verse that circulated in the adolescence of his author and his audience, the verse of the first decades of Elizabethan courts and print shops that, by the 1610s, would have seemed as old fashioned as, say, the rough lines of Nicholas Grimald would have seemed to audiences of the 1590s.

For Grimald, writing in the 1540s and 1550s and appearing throughout Tottel’s Miscellany, sweetness was not absent.³² He certainly could sound like Surrey when he wanted to:

²⁷ Going beyond the *OED*, I can find only two sets of citations for the word ‘boisterously’ before 1600. William Warner (1558–1609) uses the word twice in his prose work, *Pan his Syrinx* (London, 1584); Thomas Beard (d. 1632) uses it once in his *Theatre of God’s Judgements* (London, 1597). For these citations and quotations, see the search for ‘boisterously’ at www.literature.proquest.com.

²⁸ Thomas Campion, in *Poemata* (London, 1595). I quote from the edition and translation in Diana Poulton, *John Dowland* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), 46.

²⁹ Originally published Richard Barnfield, *Poems in Divers Humours* (London, 1598), and reprinted in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (London, 1599). This latter volume offered Shakespeare’s name on the title page, but only five of its poems are actually by Shakespeare. For Barnfield’s authorship and the contexts of the poem’s making and circulation, see Colin Burrow (ed.), William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems* (Oxford, 2002), 348–9.

³⁰ William Shakespeare, in Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (eds), *The Norton Shakespeare*, third edition (New York, 2016). The word ‘strange’ appears nineteen times in the play; ‘strangely’ appears four times; ‘strangeness’ twice.

³¹ Within this book, two poems associate Apollo with this term: ‘Lucina grant Apollo may / melodiously devise / My filed phrase’ (‘Ye Muses Nine’, 35–7); ‘Methinks I hear Apollo grant / Melodiously for to devise’ (‘N. O. Beginning, A. O. Followeth, craving aide of the Muses and chief Musicians’, 13–14). I quote from the texts at [literature.proquest.com](http://www.literature.proquest.com).

³² On Grimald, his range of work, and his influence in possibly shaping the contents and ordering of Tottel’s Miscellany, see Marquis, ‘Editing and Unediting’; Paul A. Marquis, *Richard Tottel’s Songes and Sonettes: The*

What sweet relief the showers to thirsty plants we see:
 What dear delight, the blooms to bees: my true love is to me.

(Rollins, *Tottel's Miscellany*, 1.93, lines 3–4; poem 128,
 lines 1–2 sequential numbering)³³

But he could also be theatrical, if not histrionic, in his roughness. His long poem, ‘The Death of Zoroas’, opens with the sounds of ‘clattering arms’ and ‘raging broils of war’ (Rollins, *Tottel's Miscellany*, 1.115, line 12; poem 165, line 1 sequential numbering). The fight against the Persians in the poem rings with onomatopoeic phrases and alliterations: ‘taratantars’, ‘shrouded with shafts’ (Rollins, *Tottel's Miscellany*, 1.115, lines 13, 14; poem 165, lines 2, 3 sequential numbering). Amongst this welter, Zoroas speaks, condemning Alexander, while the conqueror replies:

O monstrous man (quod he) what so thou art,
 I pray thee, live: ne do not, with thy death,
 This lodge of lore, the Muses mansion mar.

(Rollins, *Tottel's Miscellany*, 1.117, lines 5–7; poem 165,
 lines 71–3, sequential numbering)

What should we make of such lines? Should we learn Midas’s lesson and prefer sweet melodies to boisterous noise? These questions are the ones precisely raised for the early twenty-first century as much as for the mid-sixteenth. As poets began to experiment with using Classical mythology for new purposes, as they began to juxtapose different prosodic forms, and as they used the medium of print to reach an audience beyond the coterie of manuscript circulation—as they began to do all of these things—they challenged readers’ tastes and expectations. The myths that I have all-too-briefly touched on here—of Pyramus and Thisbe, Morpheus, and Midas—all came to express emerging aesthetic attitudes. They enabled writers to think of inspiration as part of a literary history. Things were both old and new; transition came to be an idea of the temporal as well as the metamorphic.

The Transitions of Nick Bottom

In no work of canonical Renaissance literature are these myths and meanings explored so brilliantly as in Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Take, for example, that great moment in Act 2, scene 2, when the rustic artisans (rural poets if ever there were any) plan out their play in celebration of the wedding of their royal rulers, Theseus and Hippolyta. They settle on the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, little aware how brilliantly inappropriate such a story would be for a royal marriage. Nonetheless, Peter Quince settles on the tale, and

Elizabethan Version (Tempe, AZ, 2007); and Seth Lerer, ‘Cultivation and Inhumation: Some Thoughts on the Cultural Impact of Tottel’s *Songes and Sonettes*’, in Stephen Hamrick (ed.), *Tottel’s Songes and Sonettes in Context* (Farnham, 2013), 147–61. I modernise the text of Grimald here.

³³ Hyder Edward Rollins (ed.), *Tottel’s Miscellany (1557–1587)*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1965). I am citing from Q1, here, the first quarto of the Miscellany, published on 5 June 1557, as opposed to Q2, published only weeks later on 31 July 1557 and used as the basis for all later sixteenth-century editions. There are, however, substantive differences between Q1 and Q2; this poem by Grimald, for example, does not appear in Q2. Rollins’s is the only modern edition to use Q1 as its copy-text. I have provided both Rollins’s numeration (which starts afresh on each page) and sequential line numbering which is specific to each poem.

Nick Bottom the Weaver—great spinner of fables and mis-weaver of words—breaks in by asking whether Pyramus is a lover or a tyrant. Peter Quince answers: ‘A lover that kills himself, most gallant, for love’, and Bottom unwinds the stem of his wit to offer this now famous oration:

The raging rocks
 And shivering shocks
 Shall break the locks
 Of Prison gates,
 And *Phibbus’ car* *the chariot of Phoebus
 Shall shine from far
 And make and mar
 The foolish Fates.

(Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 1.2.24–31,
 Norton Shakespeare, 1054)

Long derided for its mispronunciation and its metre, its clanging rhymes and awkward alliterations, Bottom’s speech may be better understood as the undigested memories of older prosodic forms. There is the feel, here, of the short Skeltonic lines of *The Fantasy of the Passion of the Fox*. There is the clang of Nicholas Grimald:

Gan pass the noise of taratantars clang:
 Shrouded with shafts, the heaven: with cloud of darts,
 Covered, the air: against full fatted bulls,
 As forceth kindled ire the Lions keen:
 Whose greedy guts the gnawing hunger pricks.

(Rollins, *Tottel’s Miscellany*, 1.115, lines 13–17; poem 165,
 lines 2–6 sequential numbering)

Such lines—with their bombast transmuted into rustic parody in Bottom’s mouth—would have seemed to a reader of the 1590s as overdone and archaic as the lines of the players in *Hamlet*, whose Classical exaggerations stand as verbal foil to Shakespeare’s own lithe idiom. Indeed, it may well be a commonplace of Shakespeare criticism to note that the playwright’s presentation of plays-within-plays often devolves to critiques of generational distance. Shakespeare’s players evoke idioms of earlier performance, whether they be the intricacies of the interludes at Inns of Court, or the rusticities of cycle drama and itinerant mummings.

But neither Shakespeare nor his characters are done with Bottom’s classicism. A figure of transition himself, Bottom is constantly warping the thread of literary allusion, misquoting and mis-metring. And yet, before he has the chance to play his Pyramus before the royals, he plays another, metamorphic part before a different court. The pawn in Oberon’s revenge against Titania for stealing his beloved Indian Boy, Bottom becomes transformed into an ass before a besotted fairy queen. His foolish snout and his long ears make him, at this point, something of a rustic Midas, a literary aegis who calls not for Apollo’s pipes but for the rough sounds of a Pan: ‘I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let’s have the tongs and bones’ (Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 4.1.27–8, Norton Shakespeare, 1081).

Bottom is now heir to a history of literary satire. The Midas of the Wife of Bath becomes, increasingly, an archetype of folly: Hedley called him ‘sad’ and ‘dismayed’; George Turberville called him a ‘dolt’, with a ‘bestly head’; and George Sandys, in his English verse

version of the *Metamorphoses*, synthesised a century of social critique in his view of Midas as a 'fool', and 'sottish'.³⁴ In Shakespeare's play, Titania wants to 'kiss' the transformed Bottom's 'fair large ears' (Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 4.1.4, Norton Shakespeare, 1080). But such ears only make their wearer deaf to melody and blind to his own condition. Feeling his head, he announces to Cobweb:

I must to the barber's, monsieur; for methinks I am marvelous hairy about the face. And I am such a tender ass, if my hair do but tickle me, I must scratch.

(Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 4.1.23–5,
Norton Shakespeare, 1080)

Strange that Bottom should wish to go to the barber's, for it was the barber who had been uniquely privy to Midas's deformity and, in Ovid's tale, just could not keep the secret. He went into the reeds and told them that Midas had asses' ears, and then when the reeds grew and the wind blew through them, they rustled out his secret words.

Unlike Midas, however, Bottom gets his own head back, but not before he sleeps and wakes and thinks it all a dream. For this brief moment, resting in the arms of fairies, if not Morpheus, Bottom thinks back on all this strangeness and comes up with something sweetly benign. And it is left to Theseus, the royal aegis of aesthetic criticism, to watch the rustics' play and generously judge.

More strange than true. I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.

(Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.2–3,
Norton Shakespeare, 1086)

My chapter has set out to introduce the antique fables and the fairy toys to readers who may find them strange. The poetry of the English early sixteenth century is more fabulous (in all senses of that word) than we have often thought. To teach and study this collection is to travel through the website and the early printed book, through the digital facsimile and the database. It will take more than Theseus's 'cool reason' to make sense of much of it. But in the process, we may find new poems to teach, new verses to study, and new melodies to hear.

³⁴ For Turberville, see his 'The Lover Against One that Compared his Mistress with his Lady', in *Epitaphs, Epigrams, Songs and Sonnets* (London, 1567), 14, 14'; for Sandys', see his *Ovid's Metamorphoses Englished* (London, 1626), 220.

3

Social Contexts

Andrew Hadfield

Sixteenth-century poetry can be read, like any poetry, without knowledge of the context in which it was produced. However, an ignorance of the conditions of writing is always likely to produce distorted and implausible readings, as well as limit both understanding and enjoyment of the verse. In this chapter, I will outline three fundamental aspects of English society in the period, which separate the past from our post-Enlightenment, post-Industrial Revolution society: humanism (in particular its dissemination through the education system); religion (specifically the impact of the Reformation); and political ideas of government before the advent of parliamentary democracy, concluding with a discussion of censorship.

Rhetoric, Poetics, and Poetry

C. S. Lewis's claim that 'Rhetoric is the greatest barrier between us and our ancestors' points out that not only is each era defined by its education system but also that the system in question will determine what type of literature is written and read.¹ The rediscovery of many Latin and Greek writings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries led to a re-evaluation of the importance of what became known as the 'classics'. Writers and educators—'humanists'—transformed the education system of the late Middle Ages, which had been based on the assumption that a university's primary function was to teach theology and philosophy in order to train the next generation of ecclesiastics and scholarly monks. A European-wide system of education was developed based on key figures such as Cicero and Quintilian, which was disseminated through schools (in particular, grammar schools) and universities. At the centre was the notion that students needed to comprehend the seven liberal arts: the Trivium, consisting of Grammar, Dialectic (logic), and Rhetoric, was taught first, followed by the Quadrivium, consisting of Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music. In particular, emphasis was placed on the study of rhetoric, the art of persuasion, which had been important in medieval schooling but now, following educational theorists such as Quintilian, assumed centre stage in education. Students were taught how to manipulate language to express different ideas and arguments. Specifically, they were taught how to argue *in utramque partem* [on either side], arguing for and against certain propositions in class, with examinations based on public disputation.² This intellectual culture of argument, based on the arts of persuasion, was designed to train

¹ C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), 61.

² See Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 2002); Helen M. Jewell, *Education in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998); Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996); and Lisa Jardine, 'Humanist Logic', in Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (eds), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), 173–98.

students for a variety of jobs and professions: secretaries, teachers, civil servants, stewards in great households, lawyers, clergymen, translators, amongst others.³ It should not surprise us that such a mode of thinking also aided the development of professional drama in London, nor that drama and the law were intimately linked through their common basis in the study of rhetoric.⁴

Poetry and poetic theory developed from the same root. Experiments with quantitative metre—attempts by Gabriel Harvey and Richard Stanyhurst to develop a form of English poetry based on Latin prosody—were inspired by the humanist belief in the value of Latin literature and culture and the need to make English writing Latinate.⁵ However, Stanyhurst's translation of the first four books of the *Aeneid* in syllabic hexameters was caricatured by Thomas Nashe as treading 'a foul lumbering boisterous wallowing measure' (Nashe, *Strange News, Works*, 1.299).⁶ English poetry, it seemed, could not be made to sound quite like Latin. The opening, as much an adaptation as a translation, has little of the direct and bold style of the original, where the poet marks his change of genre and gestures towards the epic struggle of powerful men and women whose destiny is determined by forces beyond their control:

I that in old season with reeds oaten harmony whistled
 My rural sonnet; from forest flitted I forced
 Thee* sulking swincker* thee soil, though craggy, to sunder. *the *labourer
 A labour and a travail too plough-swains heartily welcome.
 Now manhood and garbroyls* I chant, and martial horror. *disturbance, tumult
 I blaze thee* captain first from Troy city repairing, *the
 Like wand'ring pilgrim too* famosed* Italy trudging, *to *famoused
 And coast of Lavyn: soused with tempestuous hurlwind,* *whirlwind
 On land and sailing, by God's predestinate order:
 But chief through Juno's long fostered deadly revenge.

(Stanyhurst, *First Four Books*, sig. B3)⁷

Stanyhurst is, as Derek Attridge observes, faithful to Latin rules of composition, and attempts to write English poetry in terms of Latin quantitative metre, alternating short and long syllables (hence lengthening 'to' to 'too' and 'the' to 'thee'). The problem for an English reader is that the scansion is based on the printed word, not its sound, so English words have to be read in terms of their syllables as if they were Latin, and their English sound irrelevant, which creates an unusual, eccentric effect.⁸

³ See Rosemary O'Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England, 1450–1800: Servants of the Commonweal* (Harlow, 2000).

⁴ See Quentin Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2014); Lorna Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2015); and Jessica Winston, *Lawyers at Play: Literature, Law and Politics at the Early Modern Inns of Court, 1558–1581* (Oxford, 2016).

⁵ See Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres* (Cambridge, 1974).

⁶ Thomas Nashe, *Strange News, Of the intercepting certain Letters* (1592), in Ronald B. McKerrow (ed.), revised F. P. Wilson, *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1958). See Lewis, *English Literature*, 365, and Thomas Herron, 'Pale Martyr: Politicizing Richard Stanyhurst's *Aeneis* (1582)', in Thomas Herron and Michael Potterton (eds), *Dublin and the Pale in the Renaissance* (Dublin, 2011), 291–318. On 'boisterous' as a term of literary judgement, see also Chapter 2 in this volume.

⁷ Richard Stanyhurst, *The First Four Books of Virgil His Aeneis* (Leiden, 1582). See also the discussion of this passage in Chapters 6 and 15 in this volume.

⁸ See Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables*, 166–7.

Equally importantly, the syntax is wrenched out of shape, and words have a variety of registers, many invented by Stanyhurst to fit his rules of scansion. Furthermore, a number of archaic and unusual terms are chosen for the same reason. He also makes slightly odd decisions, starting off an epic poem with comments about pastoral poetry in conspicuously rustic language, which imitate the homely, rural vernacular of works such as Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579). The first three lines, with their rustic, alliterative diction, can be read as a strange mixture of the opening to the prologue of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, 'Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote' (Chaucer, *Works*, sig. A2); the first line of William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, 'In a summer season, when set was the sun' (Langland, *Vision*, sig. A1); and Spenser's *Januarye* eclogue, 'A Shepeheards boye (no better doe him call) / when Winters wastful spight was almost spent, / All in a sunneshine day, as did befall' (Spenser, *Shepheardes Calender*, sig. A1).⁹ The attempt to transform English poetry, combining a vernacular tradition with Latin scansion, is clear enough and can be read alongside other contemporary poetic experiments such as Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, which acknowledged the need for English to learn from other traditions and tried out a variety of metres and styles.¹⁰ But the effect here is clumsy and surprising, and leaves the epic rooted in the pastoral rather than announcing itself as a newly ambitious and significant enterprise that will transform the possibilities of English literature. Phrases such as 'manhood and garbroyls I chant' are reminiscent of medieval romance rather than Latin epic, and 'wandering pilgrim' is surely more of the same, if it is not from a saint's life, and the contrast between the Reformation-flavoured 'God's predestined order' and 'Juno's long fostered deadly revenge', which does finally have an epic quality, is confusing and, in keeping with the passage cited here, sends out mixed messages.

Certainly, in contrast to Thomas Phaer's translation (completed by Thomas Twyne), favoured by the self-styled classicist Thomas Nashe, Stanyhurst's version looks forced and excessively self-conscious:

I that my slender Oaten Pipe in verse was wont to sound
Of woods, and next to that I taught for husbandmen the ground,
How fruit unto their greedy lust they might constrain to bring,
A work of thanks: Lo now of Mars, and dreadful wars I sing,
Of arms, and of the man of Troy, that first by fatal fight
Did thence arrive to Lavine land, that now Italia, hight.

(Phaer and Twyne, *Whole Twelve Books*, sig. A1)¹¹

The same emphasis on the flight from pastoral is present in the opening lines, as it is in Stanyhurst, but the diction and scansion are clear and clean, marking a break with the historical vernacular and the variety of forms of English that characterise Stanyhurst's translation. It is hardly a surprise that the famous phrase 'arms and the man', common to all subsequent English versions of the *Aeneid*, is first used here (Stanyhurst's 'manhood and

⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, in William Thynne (ed.), *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1563); William Langland, *The Vision of Pierce Plowman* (London, 1561); Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender* (London, 1579). On Spenser's similar device in starting off an epic poem with comments about pastoral poetry, see also Chapter 27 in this volume.

¹⁰ See William J. Kennedy, 'Petraarchan Poetics', in Glyn P. Norton (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 3, *The Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1999), 119–26.

¹¹ Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne (trans.), *The Whole Twelve Books of the Aeneids of Virgil* (London, 1573). For Nashe's praise of this translation, see his Preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (1589), in *Works*, 3.19.

garbroyls' did not catch on). Phaer situates the reader in a world of epic conflict, one that could be modern or ancient, while Stanyhurst struggles to forge something new, the experimental nature of the verse leaving us strangely rooted in the past.

While experiments with quantitative metre may have proved something of a dead end, the new principles of education seem to have established other more durable features in English poetry. In particular, dialogue and dramatic speech assumed a greater significance. The importance of poetic dialogue has been neglected.¹² Many poets published verse dialogues on a variety of subjects, such as Richard Barnfield's *The Combat Between Conscience and Covetousness, in the Mind of Man* (1598). Barnfield's poem combines a traditional, homely moral with a more satirical and despairing edge, as Covetousness triumphs and becomes the dominating principle of government, validating his boast at the start:

The greatest Princes are my followers,
 The King in Peace, the Captain in the Wars:
 The Courtier, and the simple Country-man:
 The Judge, the Merchant, and the Gentleman:
 The learned Lawyer, and the Politician:
 The skilful Surgeon, and the fine Physician:
 In brief, all sorts of men me entertain,
 And hold me, as their Soul's sole Sovereign.

(Barnfield, *Combat*, lines 30–7, *Complete Poems*, 162)¹³

Conscience does its best to stand up to Covetousness's proud onslaught:

Truth is the right, that I must stand upon,
 (For other title, hath poor *Conscience* none)
 First I will prove it, by Antiquity,
 That thou art but an up-start, unto me;
 Before that thou were ever thought upon,
 The mind of Man, belonged to me alone.

(Barnfield, *Combat*, lines 51–6, *Complete Poems*, 163)

These are good humanist principles of argument, citing the first example as a means of establishing precedence, replicating contemporary arguments about history, whereby disputants sought to establish truth by uncovering the oldest source.¹⁴ Accordingly, Conscience is making a proper claim that should help it triumph. Conscience further argues that Adam was given a conscience when God created him 'to rule his mind' (line 60), and to be his governor. These claims fail to convince Covetousness, who counters, with a patronisingly worldly air:

Alas poor *Conscience*, how thou art deceived?
 As though of sense, thou wert quite bereaved.

¹² The subject awaits the definitive study by Cathy Shrank.

¹³ Richard Barnfield, in George Klawitter (ed.), *The Complete Poems* (Selinsgrove, 1990; reprinted New York, 2005).

¹⁴ See T. D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London, 1950), particularly chapter 6.

What wilt thou say (that thinks thou canst not err)
 If I can prove myself the ancients?
 Though into Adam's mind, God did infuse thee,
 Before his fall, yet man did never use thee.
 What was it else, but *Avarice* in *Eve*,
 (Thinking thereby, in greater Bliss to live)
 That made her taste, of the forbidden fruit?
 Of her Desire was not I the root?

(Barnfield, *Combat*, lines 71–80, *Complete Poems*, 163–4)

Unfortunately, Covetousness also knows how to dispute and appeals to the same principles as Conscience to counter his claim. He, too, claims precedence, arguing that avarice came before conscience, and so demonstrating a knowledge of the contemporary theological debates on the subject.¹⁵ Covetousness may be immoral, cynical, and self-interested but the figure knows the principles of forensic rhetoric (again revealing the close connection between law and literature).¹⁶ Its triumph is justified by the Fall of Mankind and the victory of appetite over reason, but also by the state of the world with the dominance of greed and hypocrisy. The only hope is that the astute reader will recognise the problem and take action to reassert the rights of Conscience.

Barnfield employs his education and knowledge of rhetoric elsewhere in his writing. His most celebrated/notorious work, *The Tears of an Affectionate Shepherd Sick for Love. Or The Complaint of Daphnis for the Love of Ganymede* (1594), belongs to the well-established genre of complaint, the lament of a speaker for their loss, usually a loved one. Complaints were not an invention of the early modern period and both Chaucer and Lydgate had produced well-known examples, but they proliferated in the sixteenth century. They were almost invariably delivered by an imagined female speaker created by a male poet.¹⁷ Barnfield consciously subverts the expectations of the reader in imagining a male speaker lamenting the loss of a male lover. Daphnis is a familiar name in pastoral poetry, the Greek shepherd who invented the genre; Ganymede was also familiar to readers, especially in the 1590s, as the beautiful boy who inspired homosexual desire, most notably in Jupiter, king of the gods.¹⁸ Barnfield is clearly using these names to draw attention to his poem. Ganymede had featured in Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe's play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, published in 1594, appearing on stage at the start of the play. Marlowe may have been in Barnfield's mind (certainly by 1598 Marlowe was notorious as an atheist and homosexual).¹⁹ Furthermore, in dedicating the volume to Penelope Rich (1563–1607), Barnfield was signalling further the transgressive nature of his poem, as his dedicatee was the original Stella of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, and was also well known by the late 1590s to be the lover of Charles Blount, eighth Baron Mountjoy (1563–1606), and she had had a son, christened Mountjoy in 1597, not included in her husband's pedigree.²⁰ Indeed, Barnfield

¹⁵ See Abraham Stoll, *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge, 2017).

¹⁶ See Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare*, chapter 1.

¹⁷ See John Kerrigan (ed.), *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and 'Female Complaint': A Critical Anthology* (Oxford, 1991). For more on the complaint genre, see also Chapter 19 in this volume.

¹⁸ See Leonard Barkan, *Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism* (Stanford, CA, 1991).

¹⁹ See Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of God's Judgement* (London, 1597), 146–7; William Rankin, *Seven Satires* (London, 1598), 17; Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (London, 1598), 286–7; and Russell A. Fraser, *The War Against Poetry* (Princeton, NJ, 1971), 23–4.

²⁰ See Sylvia Freedman, *Poor Penelope: Lady Penelope Rich, An Elizabethan Woman* (Abbotsbrook, 1983), chapter 10; and Alison Wall, 'Rich [née Devereux], Penelope, Lady Rich', *ODNB* (2004).

would appear to have drawn attention to Lady Rich's independent character in Daphnis's lines exhorting his lover to be bold and to pay no attention to criticism and opposition:

Learn of the Gentlewomen of this Age,
That set their Beauties to the open view,
Making Disdain their Lord, true Love their Page,
A Custom Zeal doth hate, Desert doth rue:
Learn to look red, anon wax pale and wan,
Making a mock of Love, a scorn of man.

(Barnfield, *Affectionate Shepherd*, Second Day's Lamentation,
lines 158–63, *Complete Poems*, 58)

Not only is Barnfield signalling a court scandal in obviously positive terms but he is also using his rhetorical skills to apply the standards of female beauty—a pale complexion with red cheeks—to a man.

The *Affectionate Shepherd* was written by a poet who knew how to have an emotional impact on an audience and who understood the rhetorical nature of argument.²¹ The foremost authority on rhetorical training, Quintilian, had made a powerful case that appealing to the emotions should play a crucial role in the armoury of any skilled orator, in particular forensic oratory, for which 'Emotion is justifiably combined with the Proofs of each fact' (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book 6, chapter 2, *Orator's Education*, 3.45).²² Quintilian divides emotions into two, using Greek terms, pathos and ethos, the former signalling emotions as we might understand them (in particular the inspiration of sadness and sympathy), and the latter a more moral sense:

The *ethos* which I mean, and which I want to see in a speaker, will be that which is recommended primarily by goodness: not only mild and calm, but usually attractive and polite, and pleasing and delightful to the listeners. The great virtue in expressing it lies in making it seem that everything flows from the nature of the facts and the persons, so that the speaker's character shines through his speech and is somehow recognised.

(Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book 6, chapter 2, *Orator's Education*, 3.51)

It is surely not stretching a point too far to suggest that Barnfield's carefully crafted defence of same-sex love owes much to his knowledge of how to argue a persuasive case using existing forms of thinking and writing, and moulding them for his own purposes. The poem opens with an aubade (a song sung at dawn), the lover lamenting the departure of his partner in polite and affectionate terms designed to make the reader pause and wonder what could be wrong with his feelings:

Scarce had the morning Star hid from the light
Heaven's crimson Canopy with stars bespangled,
But I began to rue th'unhappy sight
Of that fair Boy that had my heart entangled;
Cursing the Time, the Place, the sense, the sin;
I came, I saw, I viewed, I slipped in.

²¹ See Paul Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester* (Oxford, 2002), 72–84.

²² Quintilian, in Donald A. Russell (ed. and trans.), *The Orator's Education*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2002).

If it be sin to love a sweet-fac'd Boy,
 (Whose amber locks trussed up in golden trammels* **plaits or braids*
 Dangle adown his lovely cheeks with joy,
 When pearl and flowers his fair hair enamels)
 If it be sin to love a lovely Lad;
 Oh then sin I, for whom my soul is sad.

(Barnfield, *Affectionate Shepherd*, lines 1–12, *Complete Poems*, 44)

The nature of these lines is made even more obvious when they are read in terms of the dedicatory poem to Lady Rich which precedes them, signed by 'Your Honour's most affectionate and perpetually devoted Shepherd: DAPHNIS'. This praises her as a 'Fair lovely Lady, whose Angelic eyes / Are Vestal Candles of sweet Beauty's Treasure' (Barnfield, *Affectionate Shepherd*, dedicatory poem, lines 1–2, *Complete Poems*, 43), making the shepherd's devotion to the adulterous courtier and the beautiful boy inseparable (perhaps even matching her eyes and his hair and cheeks). The second stanza of the poem proper stands as an interrogatio or erotema, a rhetorical question that requires no answer designed to make the reader acquiesce to the poet's argument.²³ It is evidently not a sin to love a boy of such beauty, especially when he should be judged by the same standards of beauty as the poet's patron.

Barnfield's poem uses a variety of rhetorical devices to adapt poetic traditions and modes of representing beauty and sexual relations to persuade his readers that same-sex love is as valid as heterosexual love. Poets often used enumeratio, the list—part of the principle of copia which, following Erasmus, emphasised that the amplification and expansion of writing was inherently enjoyable—to make a point.²⁴ Daphnis adopts this device to persuade Ganymede—and the reader—that his suit is honourable and valuable:

Against my Birthday thou shalt be my guest:
 We'll have Green-cheeses and fine Syllabubs;
 And thou shalt be the chief of all my feast.
 And I will give thee two fine pretty Cubs,
 With two Young Whelps, to make thee sport withal,
 A golden Racket, and a Tennis-ball.
 A gilded Nutmeg, and a race of Ginger,
 A silken Girdle, and a drawn-work* Band, **patterned by drawn threads*
 Cuffs for thy wrists, a gold Ring for thy finger,
 And sweet Rose-water for thy Lily-white hand;
 A Purse of silk, bespanged with spots of gold,
 As brave a one as ere thou didst behold.
 A pair of Knives, a green Hat and a Feather,
 New Gloves to put upon thy milk-white hand,
 I'll give thee, for to keep thee from the weather,
 With Phoenix feathers shall thy face be fanned,
 Cooling those Cheeks, that being cooled wax red,
 Like Lilies in a bed of Roses shed.

(Barnfield, *Affectionate Shepherd*, Second Day's Lamentation,
 lines 85–102, *Complete Poems*, 55)

²³ See Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (New York, 1968), 117–18.

²⁴ See Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford, 1979).

This enticing inventory has, of course, been carefully selected. The gifts include fresh (green) cheese; syllabubs (dishes made from milk or cream with added wine or cider and sugar); expensive spices from an exotic destination such as the Spice Islands (the Moluccas), ginger and nutmeg; the very best quality sports equipment for a royal game (tennis was 'real tennis', played indoors); the finest clothes; perfume; and so on. The list becomes more conspicuously far-fetched towards the end, concluding with the speaker claiming he can procure a fan made of phoenix feathers taken from the mythical bird that could regenerate itself in fire every five hundred years or so. Barnfield is showing how desperate Daphnis is to procure Ganymede's love, and, in doing so, demonstrating his skill at manipulating what might seem like a simple poetic device to the unwary reader.

There are a number of precedents for Barnfield's poem, in which the lover showers gifts on his beloved, notably in pastoral poems, such as the *Januarye* eclogue of Spenser's *The Shepherdes Calender* (1579), which also concerns the hopeless suit of the bereft shepherd, Hobbinol, for another, Colin Clout. The educational system which encouraged argument *in utramque partem* also fostered dispute and debate between poets, who were invariably conscious of what others were writing and often looked to respond in their own work.²⁵ It is likely that Barnfield was imitating Christopher Marlowe's lyric, 'Come live with me and be my love' (entitled 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love'), which was not actually published until 1599, but which circulated in manuscript after Marlowe's death in 1593. It elicited a number of responses from other poets, including Walter Raleigh and John Donne.²⁶ Marlowe's speaker, unlike Barnfield's, is un-named, as is the addressee, but it is clear that the addressee is not necessarily a woman, making it a useful precedent. He or she is offered a range of thoughtfully assembled gifts:

And I will make thee beds of Roses,
And a thousand fragrant poesies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle,
Embroider'd 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.

(Marlowe, 'Come live with me', lines 9–16, *Complete Works*, 1.215)²⁷

There is a mixture of intricately produced domestic treats—roses, cap, kirtle (tunic for either men or women)—and exotic ones made from coral and amber, two of the most expensive

²⁵ See Andrew Hadfield, 'Spenser's Rosalind', *Modern Language Review*, 104 (2009), 935–46.

²⁶ See R. S. Forsythe, 'The Passionate Shepherd; and English Poetry', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 40.3 (1925), 692–742; and further discussions of this poem in Chapters 10, 14, 29, 31, and 33 in this volume.

²⁷ Christopher Marlowe, in Roma Gill, et al. (eds), *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1987–98).

materials available.²⁸ The description moves outwards away from the intimacy of the bower to the wider pastoral community via the references to wool and fur, and then onwards to a global context with the references to coral and amber. The last lines cited here indicate the speaker's increasingly desperate desire as heavy emphasis is placed on the conditional 'if', foregrounding the likelihood that the suit is likely to fail. A similar development can be discerned in Barnfield's lines, as Daphnis's promises conclude with a fan of phoenix feathers.

Barnfield is not responding directly to Marlowe's poem as Raleigh was in his lyric, 'The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd', nor writing an exposure of the fictions of pastoral poetry as Donne was in 'The Bait'. But like them he is showing that poets, trained in the art of rhetoric, liked to argue with each other, playfully, affectionately, and seriously, as they had done at school and university.

Religion

However, when we consider what is surely the most significant element of life in the sixteenth century, most poets are conspicuously elusive. There is a vast number of poems directly or indirectly on religious subjects, but we know very little about the religious beliefs of most Elizabethan writers, apart from those who changed confessional allegiance, like Ben Jonson.²⁹ Even so, at the end of his long life it was hard to know which side Jonson was on.³⁰ Of course, it is probably a fair assumption that Thomas Dekker (*c* 1572–1632), author of the anti-Catholic satire *The Whore of Babylon* (1607), was likely a Protestant (unless he was covering his tracks or simply wanted to take the money), and that the martyred poet Robert Southwell (1561–95) was a Catholic. But it is extremely difficult to work out the religious beliefs of nearly all significant writers either from their writings or from surviving life records. Although Gabriel Harvey and Thomas Nashe insulted each other in print in a conflict that had a strong relationship to the scandalous Puritan pamphlets known as the Marprelate Tracts (1588–9), we cannot easily work out what either really believed.³¹ Edmund Spenser is far more enigmatic and elusive than the frequently applied label 'Protestant Poet' assumes: no life records survive testifying to his religious affiliation, and it is clear that both his sons were suspected of Catholicism in the mid-seventeenth century.³² John Lyly (1554–1606) wrote for the bishops in the Marprelate conflict, alongside Nashe, but there is no clue to his religious affiliation in his life or work beyond this. Like Ben Jonson, John Donne (1573–1631) had a life defined by religious change and personal turmoil, but working out his beliefs is not a straightforward task, so shrouded are they in mystery.³³ Many claims have been made about Shakespeare's beliefs but none has found general acceptance.³⁴

²⁸ See Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (New York, 1996), 76; and Matthew Dimmock, 'Guns and Gawds: Elizabethan England's Infidel Trade', in Jyotsna A. Singh (ed.), *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion* (Oxford, 2009), 207–21, 213–14.

²⁹ This paragraph is partly based on one in an earlier essay, Andrew Hadfield, 'Shakespeare, Biography, and Belief', in Hannibal Hamlin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion* (Cambridge, 2019), 18–33.

³⁰ See Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford, 2011), 138–44, 228–9, 256–9.

³¹ See Joseph Black (ed.), *The Martin Marprelate Tracts: A Modernized and Annotated Edition* (Cambridge, 2008), lxi–lxii.

³² See Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford, 2012), 207.

³³ See David Wootton, 'John Donne's Religion of Love', in John Brooke and Ian MacLean (eds), *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion* (Oxford, 2005), 31–80.

³⁴ See David Scott Kastan, *A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion* (Oxford, 2014), chapter 1.

This should not surprise any student of the sixteenth century. The Reformation came as a great shock to many who had no inkling that the King of England's marital difficulties would transform a country known as somewhat culturally backward and relatively conservative in 1530 to a militant Protestant state twenty years later.³⁵ Nor could they have been aware that the country would then veer in the opposite direction and become a Catholic theocracy before settling down to a relative equilibrium under Elizabeth.³⁶ Even then, any hope of a relatively untroubled religious polity dominated by a state church that asked few direct questions of a believer was shattered with the Bull of Pope Pius V, 'Regnans in Excelsis', issued on 25 February 1570, declaring that the English queen was a heretic and it was the duty of her Catholic subjects to attempt to depose her and return England to the true religion.³⁷ The resulting propaganda war between Protestants and Catholics was one of the most significant features that shaped the culture of Elizabeth's later reign.³⁸

In these uncertain and fractious times it is hardly surprising that writers were not eager to declare their confessional allegiance, and much recent scholarship has stressed the widespread allegiance to traditional religious practices and the Catholic Church as it became after the schism, the loyalty of many to the state church whatever their particular faith, and the careful disguise of belief.³⁹ People were invariably rooted in particular communities and were often reluctant to tear these apart for the sake of their individual beliefs: it may be that what mattered to many readers was Christian instruction and comfort in verse, not doctrinal adhesion. Furthermore, as Alison Shell has demonstrated, poets often shared a common stock of images, representations, and ways of thinking and writing, which makes it hard to line up loyalties and writings in a straightforward manner.⁴⁰ Shell points out that the publication of Robert Southwell's *Saint Peter's Complaint* in 1595 seems to have inspired other poets to publish: 'It is as if the presence of Southwell in the market-place helped the value of all religious verse, and made it a more urgent matter to print.'⁴¹

John Donne was from a prominent Catholic family, his brother dying in prison for harbouring a priest. After his attempts to forge a career at court were thwarted by the discovery of his marriage, Donne eventually pursued a career in the Church of England as Dean of St. Paul's (1621), having been ordained as a priest in January 1615. It is hard to establish where Donne's religious sympathies really lay, whether he was always a Catholic at heart, or whether he was a sincere and committed convert.⁴² It is no surprise that Donne has been connected to the important sect The Family of Love, their evasive antinomian beliefs

³⁵ See Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987); and Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts, Vol. 1, Laws Against Images* (Oxford, 1988), 246–77.

³⁶ See Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England Under Mary Tudor* (New Haven, CT, 2009); and Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2003), 357–62.

³⁷ See Wallace T. MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I* (London, 1993), 328–35.

³⁸ See Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 2016).

³⁹ See Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 1999); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–1700* (London, 2003), 382–93; and Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁴⁰ See Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558–1660* (Cambridge, 1999), chapter 2.

⁴¹ Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy*, 66.

⁴² See Mary Arshagouni Papazian, *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation: New Perspectives* (Detroit, MI, 2003); Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge, 2009); Dennis Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington, IN, 1995); and Kimberly Anne Coles, 'The Matter of Belief in John Donne's *Holy Sonnets*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 68 (2015), 899–931.

enabling him to avoid unwelcome attention to his beliefs, answer difficult questions in evasive ways, and even lie.⁴³ Donne's poetry neatly sidesteps religious disputes. Holy Sonnet 7, which may well predate Donne's clerical career and was probably written in the early 1600s, possibly earlier, provides a familiar image of the Apocalypse:

At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes,
Shall behold God, and never taste deaths woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For, if above all these, my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,
When we are there; here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

(Donne, Holy Sonnet 7, *Poetical Works*, 296)⁴⁴

Fears that the end of the world was nigh were common in the 1590s in particular, and the defeat of the Armada in 1588 proved less a springboard for a mood of national rejoicing than a fear that the strength of Catholicism had only been temporarily repelled, as the schism in Christendom heralded the last days before Christ returned to reclaim his rightful kingdom.⁴⁵ The skeletons would rise from their graves and assume the appearance of a fleshy form ready to spend eternity in heaven or hell. Donne's sonnet expresses the fears of a speaker who worries that he is too sinful to repent, only for him to imagine God granting him grace through his own blood sacrifice, and realise that what he thinks is an impossible desire has in fact happened.

There is no obvious clue of the speaker's confessional allegiance: rather, he is gripped by the thought that God will not allow him to confess and absolve himself, a dilemma that had been staged in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, performed frequently throughout the 1590s and so a play that Donne was likely to have seen.⁴⁶ Faustus despaired that he was

⁴³ See Wootton, 'Donne's Religion of Love'.

⁴⁴ John Donne, in Sir Herbert Grierson (ed.), *Poetical Works* (Oxford, 1933).

⁴⁵ See Carol Z. Weiner, 'The Beleaguered Isle: A Study of Elizabethan and Early Jacobean Anti-Catholicism', *Past & Present*, 51 (May 1971), 27–62; C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (eds), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Manchester, 1984); and Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2000).

⁴⁶ It might further be noted that in his final speech Faustus clings to the theory of metempsychosis, that his soul should disintegrate and he be changed into 'some brutish beast' because 'all beasts are happy, for when they die, / Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements', and so do not have to be judged by God (Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 13.104–5, *Complete Works*, 2.45). Donne's Holy Sonnet 9 also urges God to forget him, the opening quatrain expressing the desire to be an animal or plant: 'If poisonous minerals, and if that tree, / Whose fruit threw death on else immortal us, / If lecherous goats, if serpents envious / Cannot be damn'd; Alas; why should I be?' (Donne, Holy Sonnet 9, lines 1–4, *Poetical Works*, 297).