

THE ART OF IMITATION IN THE ORDER OF THINGS:  
POETRY, RHETORIC, AND THE DISCURSIVE FORMATION OF ENGLISH  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

The first part of this thesis offers an analysis of Elizabethan poetical treatises, such as Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, in terms of Michel Foucault's discursive formations, and the ways in which they were instrumental in redefining the sixteenth century literary terrain of poetry, prose, drama, poetics and literary criticism. It examines the role of contributory factors such as the Puritan attack, Renaissance humanism, the Ramist reform of logic and rhetoric, increased levels of literacy and printing. It explores conflicting definitions of poetry in the early modern period and its changing role and function, and the appropriation of significant elements from other discourses, notably rhetoric, arguing that this process constituted part of the wider reorganisation of contemporary knowledges. The second part of the thesis is concerned with the work and practice of the writer George Gascoigne, author of the first poetical treatise in English and his importance as an Elizabethan poet.

For Molly and Tom without whose continued faith, support, and encouragement, as well as their occasional filial nagging, I should never have finished this.

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## INTRODUCTION

### POETICS AND DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS

In the last quarter of the sixteenth and first decade of the seventeenth century around two dozen texts of various kinds were published on the subject of poetry in English.<sup>1</sup> Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (1595)<sup>2</sup> is the best-known followed by the lengthiest of the works, Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589),<sup>3</sup> then perhaps Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* (1598), read for the light it throws on the dating of the work of other writers, in particular Shakespeare, rather than intrinsic merit. The rest are rarely read today, but of these the most interesting are George Gascoigne's *Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English* (1575), William Webbe's *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), Abraham Fraunce's *The Arcadian Rhetoricke* (1588), Thomas Nashe's *Anatomie of Abuse* (1589), Sir John Harington's Preface to his translation of *Orlando Furioso*, *A Brief Apology for Poetry* (1591), Gabriel Harvey's *Four Letters* (1592), Thomas Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602), Samuel Daniel's *A Defence of Ryme* (1603), and Ben Jonson's *Timber or Discoveries* (1605).

Apart from Sidney's *Apology*, which I had read before, I came across the majority of these texts in G. Gregory Smith's edition of *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (1904).

Until that point I had thought Sidney's was a unique work and I was surprised to

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<sup>1</sup> King James I/VI's *Ane Schort Treatise conteining some Reulis and Cautelis to be obseruit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie* (1584), which is written in Scots, is included in G. Gregory Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays* Volume I pp. 208-225 and is clearly relevant to the whole debate.

<sup>2</sup> Sidney died in 1586. Two versions of his text were published in 1595 – Henry Olney's *An Apologie for Poetrie* and William Ponsonby's *The Defence of Poesie*. Geoffrey Shepherd concludes that the "likeliest date" of composition "appears to be during the years 1581 to 1583" although the manuscript circulated widely in the intervening years.

<sup>3</sup> The *Arte of English Poesie* is anonymous but generally attributed to George Puttenham. It was published in 1589, but is thought to have been started, if not completed, at an earlier date, possibly as early as 1569.

discover that, on the contrary, he was only one among a number of Elizabethans concerned with contemporary writing practices. I was intrigued by the way that these texts were concerned with similar issues, even when they disagreed with each other. I was curious as to how it was that they came to be written in the first place and why they should have been written at that time, what their function was and where their ideas had come from. The purpose of this thesis is to provide answers to these questions, putting the texts in their historical, intellectual and literary contexts.

Smith had identified the most important of these texts dealing with fundamental literary questions of the age, but there was related material to be found in other works, especially in introductory material such as prefaces. In fact, it seemed the norm for Elizabethan writers to analyse and discuss the state and constitution of contemporary writing and poetic practice in the introductions to their published work. I read as much of this material as I could, analysing it in terms of content and drawing upon it as and when it appeared relevant. In the most recent collection, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, Brian Vickers has even included snippets of critical material scattered throughout Shakespeare's plays. My thesis focuses though on the longer, better known works, which are generally more detailed and more comprehensive. Smith's edition is still the outstanding work of scholarship in this area to which all subsequent scholars have been indebted.

In his Introduction, Smith argues that "it was at this time in England, and hardly earlier in renaissance Europe, that criticism *per se* first laid claim to rank as a literary 'kind' in the vernacular."<sup>4</sup> J. W. H. Atkins also regards the texts as constituting "the foundation of modern criticism."<sup>5</sup> This collection of texts includes *Arts, Apologies, Abuses, Anatomies, Prefaces*, and letters, and performs a number of

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<sup>4</sup> Smith 1904, I: xii.

<sup>5</sup> J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance* (London: Methuen, 1947), p. v.

different functions. It both attacks and defends poetry, as well as analysing and (re)defining it. It is also engaged with formal elements such as lexis, diction, orthography, prose, verse, rhyme, metre, genre, figures of speech, and translation. It is concerned with what to write and how to write, and also how to read, with interpretation and exegesis, as well as attending to what would today be considered the more usual domain of literary criticism, assessing the merits of a variety of classical and contemporary texts.

Despite its heterogeneous constitution, it appears to represent a body of work dealing with issues of contemporary significance. It is engaged in an ongoing Elizabethan debate concerned with all aspects of contemporary writing practices. Given these factors and the specific time frame, I came to think of these texts in terms of what Michel Foucault calls a “discursive formation” - the term on which he eventually settled after rejecting more conventional ways of grouping together material relating to the same topic, what he calls the “Unities of Discourse,” such as “tradition,” “influence,” “spirit,” and even “book” and “*oeuvre*”, as inadequate in their vagueness or implications of a “background of permanence.”<sup>6</sup> Foucault’s own definition of this term suggests that

Whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order of correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience that we are dealing with a discursive formation.<sup>7</sup>

Taken as a whole these texts clearly represented “types of statement”, dealing with “concepts” which constitute a “regularity”. In many cases writers were responding directly to one another – Thomas Lodge’s *Defence of Poetry* is an angry riposte to

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<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London; New York: Routledge, 1972), pp. 21-23.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, 1972: 38.

Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*; the Harvey/Nashe quarrel spills over into mutual abuse of each other's prose style and use of inkhorn terms, as well as the defensibility of the hexameter. Samuel Daniel's *Defence of Ryme* is a thoughtful, wide-ranging answer to Thomas Campion's condemnation in *Observations in the Arte of English Poesie*.

Foucault seemed to offer a potentially challenging analytical model because he was interested in the different ways cultures think historically and in trying to analyse the fundamental basis of the change in ways of thinking over time. This was obviously relevant for my research as I came to realise that the texts I was considering effectively reorganised and redefined poetry and the terrain of, what might be termed anachronistically, literature in the period. They seemed to constitute a new literary and intellectual project in English. His historical periodisation also seemed pertinent. Foucault is concerned with changes in thought since the sixteenth century. He divides time up in terms of "discontinuities", that is the way in which "within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way."<sup>8</sup> This process he argues "probably begins with an erosion from outside, from that space which is, for thought, on the other side, but in which it has never ceased to think from the very beginning."<sup>9</sup>

Foucault's interest lies in classical thought and its recapitulation in the early modern period. The period in between is rather misty and is discussed insofar as its theoretical basis for thought (resemblance) becomes regarded as demonstrably erroneous – "plethoric yet absolutely poverty-stricken."<sup>10</sup> *The Order of Things* starts with the Renaissance, a transitional period in Foucault's terms in which the

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, 1970: 50.

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, 1970: 30.

fundamental relationship between words and things changes. The world loses its magic and gains reason. Learning in the sixteenth century is structurally weak “made up of an unstable mixture of rational knowledge, notions derived from magical practices, and a whole cultural heritage whose power and authority had been vastly increased by the rediscovery of Greek and Roman authors.”<sup>11</sup> He describes the beginnings of a critique though in contemporary philosophers such as Bacon and Descartes. Keith Thomas makes a similar point in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* as he suggests causes of the decline in the belief of magic in the early modern period:

The first of these was the series of intellectual changes which constituted the scientific and philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century. These changes had a decisive influence upon the thinking of the intellectual élite and in due course percolated down to influence the thought and behaviour of the people at large. The essence of the revolution was the triumph of the mechanical philosophy. It involved the rejection of both scholastic Aristotelianism and of the Neoplatonic theory which had temporarily threatened to take its place. With the collapse of the microcosm theory went the destruction of the whole intellectual basis of astrology, chiromancy, alchemy, physiognomy, astral magic and their associates. The notion that the universe was subject to immutable natural laws killed the concept of miracles, weakened the belief in the physical efficacy of prayer, and diminished faith in the possibility of direct divine inspiration. The Cartesian concept of matter relegated spirits, whether good or bad, to the purely mental world; conjuration ceased to be a meaningful ambition.<sup>12</sup>

For Foucault this impossible, irrational magic is only recaptured in literature. The poet's is “the allegorical role; beneath the language of signs and beneath the interplay of their precisely delineated distinctions, he strains his ears to catch that ‘other language’, the language, without words or discourse, of resemblance.”<sup>13</sup>

What Foucault appeared to be suggesting was that in the reorganisation of

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<sup>11</sup> Foucault, 1970: 32.

<sup>12</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 643.

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, 1970: 50.

knowledges brought about by the Renaissance, literature emerged as a specific, separate discourse, relating to the realm of the fictional in a newly rational world. In those terms I argue that the discourse identified by Smith and others as the beginnings of a vernacular literary criticism constituted the necessary cultural work of definition and regulation of the terrain of vernacular writing practices, which facilitated the flourishing of all sorts of writing – poetry, prose and drama – in the decades following.

Foucault's aim in *The Order of Things* is to analyse the process of cultural change in which epistemological space, the whole field of knowledge in a given historical period, comes to be inscribed with a specific epistemological grid, how knowledge and the order which it represents, has been produced and constructed since the sixteenth century. He is concerned with analysing the changes in the collective body of knowledges of Western culture which he calls the episteme: "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems."<sup>14</sup> His project is not, he asserts, "to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally recognized". Rather than trace a history of knowledge in which the contours of its present day shape may be discerned, Foucault wishes to discover how such an expression of thought, a discourse, might have come into being through analysis of its enabling, underlying way of thinking:

What I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the space of knowledge which have

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<sup>14</sup> Foucault, 1972: 191.

given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an ‘archaeology’.<sup>15</sup>

In *English Prose of the Seventeenth Century 1590-1700*, Roger Pooley suggests that Foucault’s “earlier work...provides a framework...that suggestively links language and ideas”<sup>16</sup> whilst warning that it “needs a lot of translation to work in the English context”. Foucault’s ideas lend themselves to a literary context in a compelling way though since he periodises historical time through meaning: the changing relation of signifier and signified. Theories of representation are the base of any analysis of literature and Foucault links crisis of representation with the development of literature itself, arguing that “in the sixteenth century, one asked oneself how it was possible to know that a sign did in fact designate what it signified; from the seventeenth century, one began to ask how a sign could be linked to what it signified.” The dissociation of signifier and signified meant that “the profound kinship of language with the world was thus dissolved,”<sup>17</sup> producing far-reaching changes:

This involved an immense reorganization of culture, a reorganization of which the Classical age was the first and perhaps the most important stage, since it was responsible for the new arrangement in which we are still caught – since it is the Classical age that separates us from a culture in which the signification of signs did not exist, because it was reabsorbed into the sovereignty of the Like; but in which their enigmatic, monotonous, stubborn, and primitive being shone in an endless dispersion.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault, 1972: xxii.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Pooley, *English Prose of the Seventeenth Century 1590-1700* (London; New York: Longman, 1992), p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, 1970: 43.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, 1970: 43.

In Foucault's view, it was the underlying structural change in thinking which in effect produced literature, a discourse uniquely enabled to recapture the kinship of word and world:

There is nothing now, either in our knowledge or in our reflection, that still recalls even the memory of that being. Nothing, except perhaps literature – and even then in a fashion more allusive and diagonal than direct. It may be said in a sense that 'literature', as it was constituted and so designated on the threshold of the modern age, manifests, at a time when it was least expected, the reappearance, of the living being of language.<sup>19</sup>

The suggestion that the institution of literature is a response to the changed way of thinking, the loss of the knowledge of the world based upon a system of analogy, is significant for my thesis. Literature is typically patterned upon analogy or resemblance, the drawing together of disparate elements in order to reveal an underlying kinship, the concept of unity. In his *Poetics* Aristotle defined metaphor as the "application to one thing of a name belonging to another thing; the transference may be from the species to the genus, or from one species to another, or it may be a matter of analogy."<sup>20</sup> He regarded it as the underlying principle of poetry since, he argued, it demonstrates the ability to perceive resemblances between things:

It is a fine thing to be able to make proper use of all the devices I have mentioned, as also of compound words and unfamiliar importations, but far the most important thing to master is the art of metaphor. This is the one thing that cannot be learnt from anyone else, and it is the mark of great natural ability, for the ability to use metaphor well implies a perception of resemblances.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Foucault, 1970: 43.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry*, in *Classical Literary Criticism* translated by T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), Chapter 21, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, 1965, Chapter 22, p. 65.

Renaissance definitions of poetry, derived from Aristotle and Horace call it an “art of imitation”. “Imitation”, as a model for the representation of reality, suggests an iconic rather than an arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. Literature, Foucault argues, is that discourse which can recapture the unity of the word, of signifier and signified, because it deals in analogy or resemblance. Analogy or resemblance, he argues, had constituted the organising principle for thought up to this point:

Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.<sup>22</sup>

This contained and knowable world, based on the principle of resemblance or analogy, comes however under critical, ultimately unsustainable, pressure:

what has become important is no longer resemblances but identities and differences...At the beginning of the seventeenth century...thought ceases to move in the element of resemblance. Similitude is no longer the form of knowledge but rather the occasion of error.<sup>23</sup>

Thereafter a pattern of thinking based on difference rather than likeness became the dominant model for mental activity – analysis rather than analogy. Foucault argues that “it is Classical thought excluding resemblance as the fundamental experience and primary form of knowledge, denouncing it as a confused mixture that must be

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<sup>22</sup> Foucault, 1970:17.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, 1970: 50-51.

analysed in terms of identity, difference, measurement and order.”<sup>24</sup> The result of this, Foucault suggests, was that

The entire episteme of western culture found its fundamental arrangements modified. And, in particular, the empirical domain which sixteenth-century man saw as a complex of kinships, resemblances, and affinities, and in which language and things were endlessly interwoven – this whole vast field was to take on a new configuration.<sup>25</sup>

He goes on to align this new order with the emergence of science as an essentially rational discourse, not without a certain resistance to the generally accepted nature of this argument:

This new configuration may, I suppose, be called ‘rationalism’; one might say, if one’s mind is filled with ready-made concepts, that the seventeenth century marks the disappearance of the old superstitions or magical beliefs and the entry of nature, at long last, into the scientific order.<sup>26</sup>

These ideas seemed to concur with my sense that what this set of texts was doing was an attempt to order and organise Elizabethan writing in a rational way. Smith believes that the writing of these texts “discloses, as it were, a rude concerted plan for the recognition of the Art of Criticism as a separate branch of English literature.”<sup>27</sup> In my view the discourse constitutes a debate which engages with all aspects of contemporary ideas and practices, in order to produce a workable practice rather than demonstrating any particular teleological design.

The theoretical framework of Foucault’s analytical model was also attractive due to its flexibility, starting with the concept of “discourse” (from *de-currir* – to run), which suggests movement, a process, rather than fixed essential categories. The notion of fluidity in relation to categories, definitions, and ideas seemed appropriate

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<sup>24</sup> Foucault, 1970: 52.

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, 1970: 55.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, 1970: 55.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xcii.

in the treatment of Elizabethan poetics, in which emphasis is put on changing spatial relations, both physical and metaphorical, with the development of print culture, translating sound into space, and the redefinition of notions of public and private space in the practice of poetry and the concept of an individualised subjectivity.

The use of spatial metaphors to describe mental activity has a long intellectual history from at least the concept of the memory theatre onwards.<sup>28</sup> The linguist, Benjamin Lee Whorf argues that this is “characteristic of SAE” (Standard Average European):

It is part of our whole scheme of OBJECTIFYING – imaginatively spatializing qualities and potentials that are quite nonspatial...Noun-meaning...proceeds from physical bodies to referents of far other sort. Since physical bodies and their outlines in PERCEIVED SPACE are denoted by size and shape terms and reckoned by cardinal numbers and plurals, these patterns of denotation and reckoning extend to the symbols of nonspatial meanings, and so suggest an IMAGINARY SPACE...This has gone so far that we can hardly refer to the simplest nonspatial situation without constant resort to physical metaphors.<sup>29</sup>

I had realised that the texts identified in my thesis did not emerge from a vacuum but often used older ideas from various sources. They were engaged, in part at least, with the difficulties of forging the new by synthesising and reconciling different cultural traditions: Chaucer and his adherents of the early Renaissance, native alliterative verse, French romance, and a revived interest in the classics by way of Renaissance humanism and a grammar school curriculum revised by Erasmus and Colet. The terms of Foucault’s analysis seemed especially appropriate therefore:

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<sup>28</sup> Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) details the theory and practice of the memory theatre.

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* edited by John B. Carroll (The Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Wiley and Sons, 1956), pp. 145-146.

The problem arises of knowing whether the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed.<sup>30</sup>

Christina Malcolmsen offers a critical account of the Foucauldian project though and its deployment within the literary context. She sees Foucault's work as being problematic because it is frequently used as a way of explaining the present through the past:

The real problem with Foucault's work for early modern literature is that, although his versions of history avoid Marxist theories of progress, they are also geared exclusively toward an explanation of modernity. Foucault focuses on the early modern period not in order to illuminate the cultural system or episteme in depth, but in order to explain how the practices and institutions in contemporary life developed out of the past, or how they differed under an earlier episteme. He makes no claim to be getting to the bottom of or into detail about the workings of early modern systems of power. The past is used for the purposes of the present.<sup>31</sup>

In his own work, Foucault analysed the discursive formations of science, madness, sexuality and the penal system.<sup>32</sup> In *The Order of Things*, he offers a sophisticated account of the cultural basis of thought but makes no attempt to relate this to its cultural context nor to any enabling material conditions. On the contrary, he is resistant to such interpretative strategies. Simon During suggests that "Archaeology is finally more defined against its enemies - humanism and "anthropology" – than in terms of a specifiable programme."<sup>33</sup> The archaeology of a discourse relates to a critical way of thinking about the texts read in terms of what is written, and how it is written, what it is possible to say and what defines the limits of that possibility.

During argues that

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<sup>30</sup> Foucault, 1972: 32.

<sup>31</sup> Christina Malcolmsen (ed.), *Renaissance Poetry* (London; New York: Longman, 1998), p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> *The Order of Things* (1970), *Discipline and Punish* (1977), *The History of Sexuality* (1979).

<sup>33</sup> Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (Routledge: London and New York, 1992), p. 95.

analyzing *énoncés* as events helps Foucault to make two defamiliarizing moves. First, he can begin to see them as forming patterns not connected to the unities or frames in which they have previously been bundled... He takes patterns of *énoncés* – discursive formations – out of the whole hermeneutic project with its double aim: to understand the present in terms of the past, and to read texts as utterances in terms of the ‘context’ or ‘subtext’. Second, when considered as an event, discourse can be placed in a set of ‘modalities’, neglected while it was thought of in terms of ‘theories’ or “concepts” or “ideas”... Finally, *énoncés* exist in a network of choices, each of which is underdetermined, that is, cannot be known to be absolutely appropriate. Such choices are made, (not necessarily consciously) to exclude, to control, to gain status and so on, and yet, being underdetermined, their intended effect may always misfire.<sup>34</sup>

Whilst I found Foucault’s ideas stimulating and intellectually liberating, my own work seemed deeply implicated in “the whole hermeneutic project” and often considered texts in terms of their “context”. As Malcolmsen says, Foucault does not attempt to illuminate the cultural system or episteme in depth. He does not, for example, reflect on the significance of technological developments such as the printing press. I wanted to consider material causes as well as illustrate discursive effect. The shape of an emergent discourse may be underdetermined in terms of the specific choices it makes, but such choices are always constrained. The Foucauldian model did not posit integration between the material base and cultural superstructure. This had the effect of seeming to suggest that discourse was autonomous, produced in an ideational vacuum, whereas I wanted to examine and draw attention to those material cultural conditions which constituted the discourse’s enabling factors, without being overly deterministic. There is no doubt, for example, that the social milieu within which the debate on poetics was carried on, and the textual material drawn upon as examples, did have a significant effect

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<sup>34</sup> During, 1992: 95-96.

upon the shape of the discourse, how it functioned, and its eventual institutionalisation.

The discourses of poetry, poetics and literary criticism produced through the set of Elizabethan texts I have examined work in an exclusive fashion. Social class is a significant factor in its construction, since it draws heavily on classical texts, excluding thereby not just the illiterate (the majority of men and all but a few women at this time), but all those who had not had the benefit of at least a grammar school education. Feminist scholarship in recent years has discovered the writings of a small number of mainly aristocratic women in the period, such as Mary Sidney and Elizabeth Carey, who participated in the contemporary literary culture within their own social circles. The private nature of their work signified exclusion from the published, and therefore public, debate relating to contemporary vernacular writing. In practice, the overwhelming majority of the participants were university-educated men. Participation in the construction of this discursive formation is, then, a highly exclusive affair in terms of class, gender, educational level and economic status, the gap between the latter two factors proving a significant factor in a number of ways.

Raymond Williams seemed to offer a possible alternative analytical framework with his “epochal analysis” of culture which identifies “dominant”, “residual” and “emergent” cultural categories. He does, as those terms suggest, operate with a notion of “progress” as in the idea of “a transition” from “feudal” to “bourgeois” culture, but, on the other hand, he engages with an idea of cultural complexity and the play and variety of discourses at any given historical moment:

The complexity of a culture is to be found not only in its variable processes and their social definitions – traditions, institutions, and formations – but

also in the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements.<sup>35</sup>

This formulation seemed to me not entirely unrelated to Foucault's definition of "discontinuity" as produced by "an erosion [of thought] from outside". Although Williams works with an underlying notion of progress, his model and Foucault's are not so mutually exclusive as they might appear at first glance. This is attributable perhaps to the influence of Marxism on the thinking of both, at least in terms of the empirical nature of their accounts. Their work is materially textual, examining what has actually been said and written, rather than purely theoretical, but whereas Williams looks for developments, connections and progression, Foucault emphasises rupture, change and difference:

The problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations.<sup>36</sup>

In practice I have combined the two models, focusing on the discursive transformations which, I argue, were appropriated to serve as new foundations for the emergent discourses of the early modern period, but also attending to the material conditions in which such transformations were effected.

The fact that similar sorts of writing were being produced in the developing vernacular languages throughout Western Europe (notably in Italy, France, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands) supports the idea that these texts are more productively considered as a cultural phenomenon relating to wider social changes than as an isolated, local event in English and England. The list of continental

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<sup>35</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1977), p. 121.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, 1972: 5.

writers engaged in a similar debate contains such illustrious names as Julius Caesar Scaliger, Castelvetro and Minturno in Italy, Ronsard, Du Bellay and the Pléiade group in France. The extent to which early English critics drew on continental European material is a matter of debate. Atkins argues that “the direct influence of Scaliger, Castelvetro and the rest would seem to have been comparatively slight,”<sup>37</sup> whereas Smith talks of “the general impression that the English critics, and especially Sidney, were in one way or another conversant with the work of their Italian contemporaries.”<sup>38</sup> Whilst I have not focused or drawn on these continental examples, it is clear that they performed roughly equivalent cultural work to the English texts treated in my thesis of ordering, organising and redefining the cultural landscape in their vernacular languages and literatures.

Within Foucault’s theoretical model, literary criticism, as a discourse, occupies a certain space within the Western episteme. The function of literary criticism is to define and regulate literary or poetic discourses. One of the problems encountered in any attempt to write about the discursive formation of another age, is the problem of terminology: what to call things. As Ernst Curtius says “The ‘Literaturwissenschaft’ of our day has as yet neglected to lay the foundation upon which alone it could raise a stable structure – a history of literary terminology.”<sup>39</sup> Current categories: literature, poetry, prose, poetics, literary criticism, literary theory, are anachronistic and confusing when talking about medieval or Renaissance writing. In *Keywords*, Williams supplies histories of problematic terms which have undergone semantic changes over time, offering four and a half pages on the substantive “literature.”<sup>40</sup> He traces its development from early usage which “corresponded mainly to the

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<sup>37</sup> Atkins, 1947: vi.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, 1904, I: lxxxiii.

<sup>39</sup> Ernst Curtius, “Poetry and Rhetoric” in *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and Literature*, edited by Craig Kallendorf (Mahwah, New Jersey: Hermagoras Press, 1999), p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1983), pp. 183-188.

modern meanings of literacy” through early nineteenth-century usage to its contentious contemporary usage.

Contemporary terms used in the early modern period, such as “poetry”, have also significantly changed their meaning. As one critic of medieval literature says, “It is notoriously difficult to square medieval generic theory, with its classically-derived categories, with actual poetic practice.”<sup>41</sup> The problem of analysing the course of discursive shifts and the way modern definitions of terms have been produced is more fundamental than questions of genre and category, although clearly related. The set of texts with which I am dealing constitutes a major part of the process of definition of the literary terrain, and there is a real struggle over terms, over what constitutes poetry or not; in the case of prose, for instance, Sidney argues that “it is not rhyming and versing that maketh poesy.”<sup>42</sup>

Foucault typically suggests a radical rethink when analysing and discussing discursive formations using anachronistic terms and analytical categories:

We must also question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar. Can one accept, as such, the distinction between the major types of discourse, or that between such forms or genres as science, literature, philosophy, religion, history, fiction, etc., and which tend to create certain great historical individualities? We are not even sure of ourselves when we use these distinctions in our own world of discourse, let alone when we are analysing groups of statements, which, when first formulated, were distributed, divided, and characterized in a quite different way: after all, ‘literature’ and ‘politics’ are recent categories, which can be applied to medieval culture, or even classical culture, only by a retrospective hypothesis, and by an interplay of formal analogies or semantic resemblances; but neither literature, nor politics, nor philosophy and the

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<sup>41</sup> Helen Cooper, ‘Generic Variations on the Theme of Poetic and Civil Authority’ in Boitani and Torti (eds.) *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature*, pp. 83-103 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), p. 86.

<sup>42</sup> Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defence of Poesy* edited by Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), p. 121. All references to Sidney’s *Apology* throughout this thesis will be from this edition.

sciences articulated the field of discourse, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, as they did in the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup>

Aware of the inherent problem of terminology, I have tried to avoid confusion by employing the terms with which we are familiar today, whilst bearing in mind that this introduces anachronism and an inevitable distortion of meaning. I have employed the term “literature” to cover all fiction produced in the period: poetry, prose and drama, “poetry” to refer to patterned productions with heightened diction, “poetics” to signify the meta-discourse concerned with writing poetry, “prose” to signify prose and “literary criticism” to cover those writings which relate largely to work which judges and evaluates other literary productions. As Comensali and Stevens put it in *Discontinuities: New Essays on Renaissance Literature and Criticism*, “From its inception, the one abiding discontinuity that has shaped the discourse of English literary studies has been the tension between science and poetry, fact and imagination, scholarship and criticism, and most recently criticism and theory.”<sup>44</sup>

In the light of poststructuralist analyses of textuality, binary oppositions defining and controlling discursive practices have been deconstructed. Terence Hawkes is one of many who argue against a partial, arbitrary view that

mistakenly separates poetry from the response and analysis that always and everywhere accompany it. It is also a mistake to think of literary criticism as something subsequent to and dependent upon ‘creative’ writing. There is no writing without criticism, and the distinction between them is surely misleading. There are few ‘creative’ writers...who are not also critics. All writers are critical readers of writing, even if their reading is limited to their own work. In other words, it is vital to resist the simple dismissal of criticism as necessarily parasitic.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Foucault, 1972: 22.

<sup>44</sup> Viriano Comensali and Paul Stevens (eds.), *Discontinuities: New Essays on Renaissance Literature and Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. xi.

<sup>45</sup> Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), p.38.

The Elizabethan texts with which I am concerned are a case in point. The writers were themselves practising poets who did not distinguish between their critical and their creative writing. That distinction is the product of a later age; a significant argument of this thesis is, however, that this distinction begins to emerge through the body of writing with which this thesis is concerned. Far from asserting, however, that it is “parasitic”, I shall be arguing the opposite, that the debate around language, writing practices and genres and so on was an essential prerequisite, constituting the terrain of debate which facilitated the production of vernacular writing in the early modern period.

I have organised my thesis in two overarching sections: theory and practice. In the first section I examine the various theoretical issues explored within these texts. I examine in this section those social, historical, political, and cultural factors said to have constituted the conditions of possibility initiating the emergence of this discourse. I have considered the “puritan” attack, arguing that it was only one of a number of possible causes, and that muse-hating had a much longer cultural history in the West, certainly well before the Reformation. I have discussed the significance of cultural and technological factors, such as Renaissance humanism, letterpress printing, and increased levels of literacy and book production. I have argued for the importance of rhetoric as the fundamental organising structure for all discourse in this period, suggesting that one of the major transformations in the formation of this discourse was the realignment of rhetoric and poetry in conjunction with the reforms of Peter Ramus and his successors as they related to discursive organisation. Whereas previously rhetoric and poetry had been regarded as twin stars in the cultural firmament, with rhetoric the more important, during the reorganisation of knowledges and the formation of discourses of the Renaissance,

rhetoric's content is evacuated. Its traditional contents were appropriated and redistributed leading ultimately to the ignominious position it holds today under the general designation "empty rhetoric".

The body of texts selected for my thesis, which I argue constitute the cultural work of discourse formation, is concerned with all aspects of writing practices in the period, from use of the vernacular and orthography to translation, genre and literary criticism. I have analysed these elements within the texts, comparing and contrasting different writers' ideas on all these subjects and how they are resolved through the texts and in practice. I have looked at the significance of translation, as a cultural practice, in the production of vernacular works. I have focused in detail on the significance of the change in meaning and use of the parts of classical rhetoric ("*inventio*", "*dispositio*", "*elocutio*", "*memoria*" and "*pronuntiatio*"), and the ways in which they are appropriated to poetry. I analyse the different constructions put upon rhetoric historically, arguing that the more complex version of rhetoric as a system of personal, moral and psychological development and the construction of the persona was also appropriated, specifically in the changing notions of poetry and the production of the "poetic voice". I have explored in detail the term generally regarded as definitive of poetry in this period - "imitation" - and its relation to contemporary theories and practices of representation.

In the second section of my thesis, designated practice, I have examined the application of theories of poetry in the writings of the late sixteenth-century. In order to ground these ideas, I focused on the writings of George Gascoigne as a representative writer of the period and literary exemplar. Due to the growing interest in Elizabethan prose fiction over the last few years, Gascoigne has become a better-known, even fashionable, writer largely due to *The Adventures of Master F. J.*, a

text which Gascoigne's biographer, George Prouty, called "the first purely English story of the Renaissance"<sup>46</sup> but David Margolies nominated as "the earliest candidate for the distinction of first English novel."<sup>47</sup> Gascoigne's work, however, encompasses much more than this sophisticated, entertaining, satirical and salacious narrative.

Gascoigne is also the author of the first poetic treatise in English, *Certayne Notes of Instruction*, which suggests that he thought seriously about, and was theoretically concerned with, contemporary writing practices, and of the first English translation of a prose comedy from the Italian: *Supposes* (famous as the source of the sub-plot in *The Taming of the Shrew*). He is likewise responsible for the first translation of a Greek tragedy on the English stage: *Jocasta* (translated with Francis Kinwelmershe from Lodovico Dolce's Italian version of *The Phoenissae* of Euripides), the first original nondramatic blank verse production in English: *The Steele Glas*, and the "first English attempt to tell a love story in a series of poems and in this respect...the predecessor of the flood tide of Elizabethan sonnet sequences": *Dan Bartholomew of Bathe*.<sup>48</sup> Gascoigne's *Glasse of Government* is the first English example of a Dutch prodigal-son play and his masques, Prouty points out, are "among the earliest English representatives of this type of dramatic art". His eye-witness prose account of the defeat of the Dutch and English forces in the Spanish Netherlands in 1576, *The Spoyle of Antwerpe*, is one of the earliest examples of news-reporting. Gascoigne was a writer then with his finger on the pulse of Elizabethan writing.

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<sup>46</sup> C. T. Prouty, *George Gascoigne: Elizabethan Courtier, Soldier and Poet* (New York: Benjamin Blau, 1942), p. 284.

<sup>47</sup> David Margolies, *Novel and Society in Elizabethan England* (London; Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Prouty, 1942: 284.

Gascoigne is often regarded as a transitional figure. As Prouty puts it, he was one of those writers whose work was instrumental in facilitating the literary achievements of those coming after him. The works of Sidney and Spenser were still in the future but

(b)efore they could be written, the period of apprenticeship had to continue: the language still needed enrichment through translation and imitation; ideas of form and theory could only come through the work of the lesser men, and Gascoigne had to continue his exploration of literary ideas, conceits and forms.<sup>49</sup>

These seem large claims for a “lesser” writer of the period, although Prouty does pay due attention to the intrinsic merit of Gascoigne’s work as well as highlighting the sense of the exploratory, innovative nature of his writing and the way it functioned to help map out a transformed literary landscape.

Gascoigne has always enjoyed a certain reputation among scholars and critics - Hazlitt for example edited his work (published posthumously in 1869-70) - but in recent years he has undergone his own small Renaissance since Paul Salzman included *The Adventures of Master F.J.* in his acclaimed and much-studied *Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction*<sup>50</sup> which led to a general revival of interest in these and similar works. Roger Pooley, on the other hand, argues for his recognition as a talented and genuinely innovative writer of the period whilst recognising his shortcomings:

It doesn’t need much in the way of strenuous advocacy to argue that Gascoigne has been under-represented in anthologies and undervalued in literary histories. It is important to admit that he is a patchy performer, too; there are banalities, monotonies and unattractive whines which crop up in his writing...(b)ut there are a lot of his poems which will bear re-reading

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<sup>49</sup> Prouty, 1942: 125.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Salzman, *Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

more than a few times; not a ‘voice’, as poetry reviews used to demand of new poets, but a whole range of them.<sup>51</sup>

I hope my thesis gives the credit to his writing it deserves even while arguing for his fundamental importance as a transitional figure. In the year 2000, there were two new editions of Gascoigne’s work - Ronald Binns’ *George Gascoigne: Selected Poems with ‘Certayne notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English’*<sup>52</sup> and G. W. Pigman III’s *George Gascoigne: A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*,<sup>53</sup> which suggests not only a renewed interest in his work but continued scholarly appreciation.

In the second section of my thesis I have explored the developments of poetry and prose in technical terms but also in less tangible ways, in terms of poetic voice and subject matter and I have considered the relationship to contemporary questions of authorship and authority through Elizabethan poetical texts in relation to Gascoigne. As well as drawing the ideas in my thesis together, my conclusion attempts to move beyond its specific focus and to locate the work within the broader cultural frame of reference, its place within the Renaissance reorganisation of knowledges and the Western episteme, and to glance at the continuing and continuous cultural changes producing new discursive formations today in which the discourse I have identified herein is itself transformed in order to produce new foundations.

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<sup>51</sup> Roger Pooley (ed), *The Green Knight* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1982), pp. 22-23.

<sup>52</sup> Ronald Binns, *George Gascoigne: Selected Poems with ‘Certayne notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English’* (London: Zoilus Press, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> G. W. Pigman III, *George Gascoigne: A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). Quotations from Gascoigne’s *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* will be from this edition unless otherwise stated.

## CHAPTER 1

### GENEALOGIES: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

It is a critical commonplace that the last decade of the sixteenth and early decades of the seventeenth century produced a flowering of English poetry, prose and drama. Reasons given to account for this phenomenon vary from the ideational, relating to the influence of religion, to the material, specifically the technological and cultural changes induced by the introduction of letterpress printing. In the Introduction to *Elizabethan Critical Essays* Smith argues that it was the “Puritan attack”<sup>1</sup> which provided the initial impetus for the critical reform and reevaluation of writing practices in the Elizabethan era. Atkins sees religious reaction to poetry as part of the more fundamental shift “when a break, more or less definite, was made with the medieval conceptions of literature and the literary art”, a phenomenon which he regards as “(i)nspired by Italian scholars of the Quattrocento.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars such as Gilmore and Eisenstein, on the other hand, offer a materialist account of discursive change:

The invention and development of printing with movable type brought about the most radical transformation in the conditions of intellectual life in the history of civilization. It opened new horizons in education and in the communication of ideas. Its effects were sooner or later felt in every department of human activity.<sup>3</sup>

Even Walter Ong, the illustrious Jesuit scholar, regards cultural change as a product of material factors in his sophisticated account of the shift from orality to literacy in

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<sup>1</sup> Smith 1904, I: xiv-xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Atkins, 1947: 35.

<sup>3</sup> M. P. Gilmore, *The World of Humanism* (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 186.

works relating to this period such as *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*<sup>4</sup> and *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture*.<sup>5</sup>

A greater sophistication of analyses of the construction and constitution of cultural discourses has derived from the work of cultural theorists associated with the intellectual project of Cultural Studies, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, and Richard Johnson for example with their rereadings of Marx and Gramsci. In conjunction with Structuralist and Poststructuralist theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan and so on, a more comprehensive model of the relationship between culture and society has been produced, in terms of a circuit of consumption and production, breaking down the earlier model of a material base and a cultural superstructure, which failed to account satisfactorily for processes of change. This has facilitated a more inclusive, comprehensive account of the role of discourse within cultures and the production of social change.

A central argument of my thesis is that the “flowering” of English writing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was facilitated by a combination of related factors, material, political, sociological and cultural, which emerged in the early modern period to produce the cultural phenomenon known as the Renaissance, and which produced a concomitant reorganisation of existing fields of knowledge. An important part of this process involved the relocation and redefinition of discourses within the contemporary cultural framework. One of these was poetry, in the inclusive literary sense, which comprehends poetry, prose, drama and literary criticism. The set of texts identified and discussed within this thesis performs, I suggest, the cultural work which organised this change in English through its

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<sup>4</sup> Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1958.

<sup>5</sup> Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 1971.

attempt to analyse all aspects of contemporary writing practices from the most complex, such as the fundamental nature of representation, in its discussion of “imitation”, to the most prosaic, such as lexis and orthography in arguments over the admissibility of individual words, for example.

The relationship between theoretical writings and poetic practice in this period has engaged the attention of critics and scholars. Many point to what they regard as a general sense of a lack of reciprocity between the two. Rosamond Tuve, for example, argues that “There is a remarkable constancy in poetic intentions as they are declared in theory and betrayed in practice throughout the period.”<sup>6</sup> Gary Waller concludes his discussion of “Sixteenth-century theories of poetry” in England by adapting “a famous phrase” of D. H. Lawrence’s - that “we should trust the poetry, not the poetics: what passes for theory seems curiously detached from the richness and unpredictability of the poetry (and the drama) written alongside it.”<sup>7</sup> Waller argues that these early poetic treatises are confused and contradictory, treating a range of material “far broader than what we would today label as ‘literary theory.’”<sup>8</sup> His attitude towards these productions is somewhat patronising:

So when we read either the systematic treatises, or the incidental accounts of poetry’s nature and function written by sixteenth-century writers like Puttenham, Gascoigne, or Sidney, inevitably we will encounter many issues that seem puzzlingly unimportant and irrelevant, even naïve, to us. Even sympathetic modern commentators have noted how derivative Renaissance English criticism is, or have pointed to its seemingly ‘almost complete lack of historical outlook’, as well as to its syncretism, its almost continuous confusion of intellectual categories, logical contradictions, and intellectual naivety.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rosamond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (London; New York: Longman, 1986), p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> Waller, 1986: 35.

<sup>9</sup> Waller, 1986: 36, quoting from Earl Miner, ‘Assaying the Golden World of English Renaissance Poetics’, *Centrum*, 4 (1976), pp. 5-20, p. 7.

Waller does, however, go on to “attempt to tease out” contemporary Renaissance theory from the various poetic treatises, mainly using Sidney and Puttenham, in a useful and interesting way.

Atkins, on the other hand, argues that “the critical work of the time, so far from being remote or irrelevant, has, on the contrary, a close bearing on contemporary literature.”<sup>10</sup> Of the situation in France in the same period, Alex L. Gordon says “If we view sixteenth-century poetry in its entirety, it is clear that the evolving definitions of poetry correspond to the evolving practice of the poets.”<sup>11</sup> I think the same can be said of the situation in England. It is through the confusions and contradictions of contemporary theory that Elizabethan poetic treatises grapple with that they are able to clarify their ideas. Poetic practice equally works to clarify ideas and illustrate possibilities. It was the conjunction of, and attempts to synthesise, different strands of their intellectual and literary heritage from classical poetry and poetics, made accessible through printing, education and the Humanist revival of interest in the classics, with a more local, medieval tradition which led to the confusions and contradictions in theory but which also produced the “richness and unpredictability of the poetry”.

### **Protestantism and the Puritan Attack**

Many critics have sought an immediate cause for the appearance of these texts within the socio-historical/political/religious context of Tudor England. Smith argues that the immediate motive for their production was the need of poetry’s

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<sup>10</sup> Atkins, 1947: v.

<sup>11</sup> Alex L. Gordon, “The Ascendancy of Rhetoric and the Struggle for Poetic in Sixteenth-Century France” p.382 in *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric* edited by James J. Murphy (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 376-385.

apologists to respond to Puritan attacks: “Elizabethan criticism arose in controversy. The early essays are “Apologies” for Poets and Poetry against the attacks of a vigorous Puritanism.<sup>12</sup> He recognises, however, that poetry’s detractors were drawing on an earlier patristic tradition denouncing the iniquity of “stageplays, songs and merry tales deriving from Augustine, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius and Crysostom and from the later humanistic condemnation of poetry.”<sup>13</sup> Whilst focusing his own discussion on literary criticism, Smith acknowledges that “the greater forces which stimulated this literary defence were themselves unliterary... their argument is social, political, personal.”<sup>14</sup> In his view, though, it is the Puritan attack which initiates the discourse, triggering the apologists’ response. He thus regards the attack on poetry as “useful” to the extent that it concentrated the minds of poetry’s defenders: “they called forth a reasoned defence, and compelled their opponents to examine the principles of Poetry.”<sup>15</sup>

In the Introduction to his edition of Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*, Geoffrey Shepherd discusses the divergent cultural and religious traditions within Western Europe and argues for a religious and patriotic motive for the production of Sidney’s work: “Sidney the eager Protestant politician and humanist was fully aware of this need to establish a relevant, consistent, and solid foundation for Protestant art.”<sup>16</sup> More recently Alan Sinfield has argued a similar case: “The diverse constituents of the *Defence* reveal an intervention at a particular political

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xiv.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xvi.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xiv.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Sidney, 1972: 62.

juncture, aimed at appropriating literature to earnest protestant activism through a negotiation of the divergent codes of pagan literature and Protestantism.”<sup>17</sup>

Heightened religious sensibilities represented in the attack on poets and poetry may justly be regarded as a significant element within the discourse, and in some cases as the motivating factor for particular texts. For example Thomas Lodge’s *Defence*<sup>18</sup> is a direct response to Gosson’s *Schoole of Abuse*, which may also have been a distant progenitor of Sidney’s *Apology*. However, to ascribe this as the principal cause of the whole debate is too great a simplification. Both attack and defence are more productively considered as part of a wider debate concerning the nature of representation and writing as a cultural practice and its relation to social change. To point to the Puritan attack as the starting point seems arbitrary. It would be equally valid to ask what provoked the Puritan attack in the first place, and if that was a response to the Humanist revival and interest in pagan literature, and the concomitant loss of power and prestige of scholasticism, what provoked that and so on in a quest of infinite regression. As writing is a product of culture, it is also a constituent shaping part of culture. Writing practices are always implicated within, and articulated to, processes of cultural change. Anxiety concerning such practices is, therefore, more discernible and more urgent in times of social change.

Gascoigne’s *Certayne Notes* (1575), the first poetic treatise in English, is concerned with technical and theoretical matters and does not engage with antipoetic sentiment as such. His Prefatory letter in *The Posies*, “To the reverende

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<sup>17</sup> Alan Sinfield, “The Cultural Politics of the Defence of Poetry” in *Sir Philip Sidney and the Interpretation of Renaissance Culture: The Poet in His Time and Ours* edited by Gary Waller and Michael D. Moore (Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 124-143, p. 124.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Lodge, *The Complete Works* edited by Edmund W. Gosse 1883, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963). The title page is missing but it is generally known as Lodge’s *Defence of Poetry*, written in response to Stephen Gosson’s *School of Abuse*. Reprinted in Smith, 1904, I, pp. 61-86.

Divines” does, however, as he responds to the criticism of his work, *The Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, published two years earlier:

My reverende and welbeloved: whatsoever my youth hath seemed unto the graver sort, I woulde bee verie loth nowe in my middle age to deserve reproch: more loth to touch the credite of any other, and moste loth to have mine owne name become unto you odious. For if I shoulde nowe at this age seeme as carelesse of reproche, as I was in greene youth, readie to goe astray, my faultes might quickly growe double, and myne estimation shoulde bee woorthie too remayne but single. I have learned that although there may bee founde in a Gentleman whereby to be reprehended or rebuked, yet ought he not to be woorthie of reproofe or condemnation... It were not reason (righte reverende) that I shoulde bee ignoraunt howe generally wee are all *magis proni ad malum quàm ad bonum*. Even so is it requisite that I acknowledge a generall reformation of maners more necessarie to bee taught, than anye Whetstone of Vanities is meete (in these dayes) to be suffered. And therefore as youre gravitie hathe thought requysite that all ydle Bookes or wanton Pamphlettes should be forbidden, so might it seeme that I were woorthie of great reprehension, if I shoulde bee the Authour of evill wilfully, or a provoker of vices wittingly.<sup>19</sup>

The penitent tone of Gascoigne’s address is undermined by his second prefatory epistle, “To al yong Gentlemen, and generally to the youth of England” in which, after making his excuses for youthful folly, he launches into an attack on his critics:

Then to come unto the matter, there are three sortes of men which (being wonderfully offended at this booke) have founde therein three maner of matters (say they) verie reprehensible. The men are these: curious Carpers, ignorant Readers, and grave Philosophers. The faultes they finde are, *Iudicare* in the Creede: Chalke for Cheese: and the Comon infection of Love. Of these three sortes of men and matters, I do but very little esteeme the two first. But I deeply regarde the thirde. For of a verie troth, there are one kinde of people nowadays which will mislyke any thing, being bred (as I thinke of the spawne of a Crab or Crevish, which in all streames and waters will swimme eyther sideways, or flat backwards: and when they can indeede finde none other fault, will yet thinke *Iudicare* verie untowardlye placed in the Creede. Or (being a simple Sowter) will finde fault at the shape of the legge: or if they be not there stopped, they wil not spare to step up higher, and say, that *Apelles* paynted Dame *Venus* verie deformed or evill favoured.

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<sup>19</sup> George Gascoigne, *The Posies of George Gascoigne Esquire. Corrected, perfected, and augmented by the Authour. 1575*. All quotations in this thesis are from *George Gascoigne: The Posies* edited by John W. Cunliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907).

Of this sort I make small accounte, bycause indeede they seeke a knotte in the Rushe, and woulde seeme to see verie farre in a Mylstone.<sup>20</sup>

Taking these two circumstances together suggests that the desire to forge a workable poetic practice and the religious, moral attack on literature were contemporary features of the cultural landscape but not necessarily connected in the immediate way sometimes suggested.

Smith does point out that the attack picks up on earlier debates, drawing freely on them as source material and “evidence” for both prosecution and defence. The same debate, however, was being engaged in Italy, France and Spain, which were subject to very little in the way of “Puritan” influence, the French Huguenots excepted. In his general discussion of the influence of contemporary Italian writings on English theorists, Smith concludes, in his discussion of Minturno and Scaliger, that “the general defence of poetry, which was the first pressing problem of English criticism, was the main topic of these Italians.”<sup>21</sup> Of the French connection, Smith says

Interesting as it is to find the old lines of argument on the antiquity of poetry in Sibilet, Pelletier, Fauchet, or De Laudun; or Sidney’s comparison of the poet with the orator in Pelletier, or his views on poets’ being more than rhymers in Sibilet; or to read the general defence of French against ‘outlandish’ and ‘inkhorn’ dangers such as beset English; or to be reminded in Fauchet of Ascham’s account of the origin of rhyme, or in Jean de la Taille of Sidney’s advance in the conception of the Dramatic unities – nothing but parallelism can be proved, or is likely.<sup>22</sup>

If Smith is unconvinced of the degree of direct influence between the two literatures, he does at least clarify the point that essentially the same debate with similar concerns and parameters was being engaged in continental Europe. Atkins

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<sup>20</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 10-11.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, 1904, I: lxxx.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, 1904, I: lxxxvii-lxxxviii.

makes the same point, citing the influence of humanism and the new learning as the prime causes of the discourse:

Inspired by Italian scholars of the Quattrocento, efforts were now made by Humanists in England to apply the New Learning to educational purposes, with the result a new approach to literature was inaugurated, involving a heightened conception of the value of literature, the acquisition of some amount of ancient classical theory and the application of sounder methods of literary appreciation. It was, in fact, a phase in the development of literary theorizing in England full of significance and promise; a phase which in spite of obvious limitations marked the entry into a new sphere of thought, and was successful in diverting criticism from the shallows of post-classical and medieval doctrine into the main stream of literary discussion as represented in the works of classical antiquity.<sup>23</sup>

One of the flaws in Smith's analysis lies in his admission that those strands in critical writing which constitute attack and defence, were not in fact complementary, which also suggests that this is not simply a local response to a local attack:

It must be admitted that the main thesis of the Poet-whippers was not fully met by the Apologists. The controversy was carried on from different standpoints. The Puritans had in view the popular literature of the playhouse and of Paul's. As men of the people they spoke only of what interested the people. "Poetry" with them meant Elderton and Tarleton, or bawdy sonnets; "books" translations of the naughty tales of Italy; "playgoing" the noisy delights of Shoreditch. The defence of Poetry was in the hands of courtiers and scholars who lived beyond the pale of Bohemia. To Sidney, Puttenham, or Harington those things which they admitted were pleasing neither to gentlemen nor Christians were not the sum of the matter. If poetry was to be denounced because of this popular travesty, of which they professed to know little and for which perhaps they cared as little, it was necessary to show that she could be defended on broader and better grounds. Hence it is that each party, though in amiable agreement on the viciousness of Vice, argue for and against the claims of Poetry from different premises.<sup>24</sup>

He is suggesting that whilst the attack was based on religious and moral grounds the defence was a determined redefinition of poetry in class terms.

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<sup>23</sup> Atkins, 1947: 35.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xx.

Although the inclusion or exclusion of naughty Italian tales is a question which did exercise the minds of the defence, it would be true to say that the main protagonists in the attack were not, strictly speaking, Puritans, but, in many cases, shared a religious viewpoint with their devout Protestant antagonists. One reading of the discourse might then vindicate Shepherd and Sinfield by arguing that what is at stake is precisely a Protestant theory of representation. John Northbrooke, who wrote the first published attack,<sup>25</sup> was a Protestant minister. Stephen Gosson too was later ordained, and even Philip Stubbes appears to have been perfectly orthodox in his religious beliefs. In calling him a Puritan then Smith is working with a looser definition of the term such as that offered by C. S. Lewis:

By a puritan the Elizabethans meant one who wished to abolish the episcopacy and remodel the Church of England on the lines which Calvin laid down for Geneva. The puritan party were not separatists or (in the modern sense) dissenters. They usually remained in the Establishment and desired reform from within. There were therefore degrees of Puritanism and it is difficult to draw a hard and fast line.<sup>26</sup>

Puritans were not though an ideologically coherent and self-recognising group in the Elizabethan period. In her unpublished PhD thesis, a critical edition of Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses*, M. J. Kidnie (1997) concludes that Stubbes was rather a "hotter sort of Protestant,"<sup>27</sup> reminding us that we "need to keep in mind derogatory overtones" in the term both then and now. Given the manner in which antipoetic sentiment pervades the writings of this period, I shall argue that the "Puritan attack" on poetry was not, as Smith suggests, confined to a few extremist zealots but part of

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<sup>25</sup> John Northbrooke, *Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes with other Idle Pastimes*, (1577) London: reprinted for the Shakespeare Society, 1843 from the earliest edition.

<sup>26</sup> C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Excluding Drama)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> M. J. Kidnie, "A Critical Edition of Philip Stubbes's *Anatomie of Abuses*" [A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Birmingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy], April 1996, p.11. There is a full discussion of Stubbes' "Puritanism" pp. 8-13.

a wider section of mainstream thinking and related to a deeper cultural anxiety about representation. The arguments of critics and apologists, in fact, have more in common than Smith acknowledges and represent a distinctive element within the discourse in relation to contemporary writing practices. Many of the participants within the debate were devout Protestants and religious considerations did play a significant role, but there were other equally important factors, and theorists of different religious persuasions, all of which contributed to this debate.

Northbrooke's *Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes with other Idle Pastimes* (1577) was the first printed anti-theatrical treatise. In his 1868 reprint of Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (thought to have been inspired by Northbrooke's work) Arber comments on the fact that "The clergy by this time habitually attack the stage; particularly in their 'Paul's Cross' sermons", citing the examples of "T. Willcocks, Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 1577, John Stockwood, schoolmaster of Tunbridge, preaching at the Cross on Bartholomew's day, 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1578, and Mr. Spark, 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1579."<sup>28</sup> Northbrooke's *Treatise* ironically takes the form of a dramatic dialogue, and is almost certainly a work of fiction,<sup>29</sup> between Youth and Age in which the naïve "Youth" is able to benefit from the wisdom and experience of "Age" who, after a discussion of the various types of play, concludes, in response to Youth's direct question concerning contemporary plays, that they are not to be tolerated:

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<sup>28</sup> Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse Containing A Pleasant Invective Against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters &c.* (1579) (London: Shakespeare Society, 1841), edited by Edward Arber, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> The dramatic dialogue was one of the most frequently employed of Humanist genres of the Renaissance according to Alan Bullock in *The Humanist Tradition in the West* p.16, one in which Kristeller argues "the author always pretends to reproduce the substance of a conversation that actually took place. But one has good reason to assume that the dialogue deviates much further from a conversation that actually took place than was the case with orations or letters, and also that in many cases it is a question of pure fiction", *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning* p. 13.

To speake my minde and conscience plainly (and in the feare of God) they are not tollerable, nor sufferable in any common weale, especially where the Gospell is preached.<sup>30</sup>

Northbrooke's targets are the public theatres – he mentions the “Theatre” and “the curtaine” by name, both of which had opened the year prior to the publication of his tract. He supports his argument by drawing on an already existing history of antitheatrical discourse, citing Seneca, St. Paul, Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Cyprian, and quoting St. John Chrysostome who “calleth those places, and playing of enterludes, *festas Satanae*, Sathan's banquets.”<sup>31</sup> He believes that resort to such places is especially harmful to women<sup>32</sup> and inveighs against cross-dressing. He is willing, nevertheless, to countenance “comedies and suche lyke things, whiche schollars doe many times practise and vse, both in the Universities, and also in diuerse other good schooles” with certain provisos:

I thinke it is lawfull for a schoolmaster to practise his schollers to playe comedies, obseruing these and the like cautions: first, that those comedies which they shall playe be not mixt with anye ribaudrie and filthie termes and wordes (which corrupt good manners). Secondly, that it be for learning and vtterance sake, in Latine, and very seldome in Englishe. Thirdly, that they vse not to play commonly and often, but verye rare and seldome. Fourthlye, that they be not pranked and decked vp in gorgeous and sumptuous apparel in their play. Fiftly, that it be not made a common exercise, publickly, for profite and gaine of money, but for learning and exercise sake. And lastly, that their comedies be not mixte with vaine and wanton toyes of loue. These being obserued, I iudge it tolerable for schollers.<sup>33</sup>

Whilst noting in passing that Northbrooke participates even here in the contemporary discussion of genre and the legitimate use of the vernacular, Smith's characterisation of the debate offers a fair representation of his critique. The same

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<sup>30</sup> Northbrooke, 1843: 84.

<sup>31</sup> Northbrooke, 1843: 90.

<sup>32</sup> Northbrooke, 1843: 95.

<sup>33</sup> Northbrooke, 1843: 104.

can be said of Stubbes' section in *The Anatomy of Abuses*<sup>34</sup> which deals with "Stage-Plays and Enterludes, with their wickednes" and of *The Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres* (1580),<sup>35</sup> but it does not adequately describe the situation nor the argument of the most notorious contemporary critic, Stephen Gosson. Assuming that Smith is signifying social class and background by the term "men of the people", this scarcely applies to the Oxford-educated Gosson, who inveighs against poetry in general, as well as the public theatres, which he criticises heavily (at the same time admitting and repenting his own involvement as a writer of plays).<sup>36</sup>

The objects of Gosson's attack include a number of the most popular and highly esteemed classical writers in the period including Virgil, Ovid and Homer. Likening the situation of the writer to that of a Syracusan banqueter spoilt for choice (employing metaphor in a way which ironically demonstrates how completely "literary" is his own thinking and suggests the impossibility of saying anything without resorting to poetic devices), Gosson complains that nevertheless he must "dispraise his methods in writing which, following the course of the amorous poets, dwelleth longest on those points that profit least",<sup>37</sup> and he continues with a lengthy series of vivid animal similes which reveal the poets' unwholesome preferences, in which they emulate

the manner of swine to forsake fayre fields and wallowe in the myre; and the whole practise of poets, either with fables to shewe their abuses, or with playne tearmes to unfolde their mischeefe, discover their shame, discredite

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<sup>34</sup> Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses* (1579) - section on "Stage-playes and Enterludes with their wickedness" ll. 4040 - 4244, sigs. O3v-P2 reprinted in Kidnie op. cit. pp. 235-242.

<sup>35</sup> *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (1580) STC 21677– Smith attributes this to the printer Henry Denham but the text consists of two parts: the first being a translation of Salvian of Marseilles' (ca. 400-480) *De gubernatione Dei*. Book 6, which is referred to as the second blast (Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* is named as the first), and a longer second section "A third blast" by the anonymous author and presumably translator of the first part.

<sup>36</sup> Gosson, 1841: 4.

<sup>37</sup> Gosson, 1841: 9.

themselves, and disperse their poison through the world. Virgil sweats in describing his gnatte; Ovid bestirreth him to paint out his flea: the one shewes his art in the lust of Dido; the other his cunning in the incest of Myrrha, and the trumpet of bawdrie, the Craft of Love.<sup>38</sup>

Smith suggests that “Puritan arguments fall into two main groups – the historical and the moral. The former was the less urgent though it may be undervalued because the other was debated with greater noise and persistency.”<sup>39</sup> Both constitute part of a long debate, and appear and reappear at different times and places within Western literary discourse. In *Squitter-wits and Muse-haters*, Peter C. Herman argues that antipoetic sentiment informed and shaped to a much larger degree than had previously been credited the writings of Sidney, Spenser and Milton:

For the most part, critics now regard Renaissance texts as both producing and reproducing the contradictions and discontinuities of Renaissance culture, thus, if the Renaissance was literally ambivalent about poetry – and given the presence of both attacks and defences of poetry, who [i.e. how] could it not be? – it makes sense that this conflict would somehow figure in the work of Renaissance poets.<sup>40</sup>

Herman recognises a long history to this debate: “antipoetic sentiment is something of a constant in Western culture (one finds it in fifth-century Athens, the English Renaissance, and the eighteenth century as well as today),” but, he goes on to say “I do not mean to essentialize it; antipoetic’s sentiment’s local habitation and political resonances obviously differ from age to age.”<sup>41</sup>

Antipoetic sentiment is not necessarily an essential part of Western culture, but it has been appropriated and relocated within Western cultures at different times giving it the appearance of a “constant”. Those times seem to relate to periods of

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<sup>38</sup> Gosson, 1841: 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, 1904: I, xv.

<sup>40</sup> Peter C. Herman, *Squitter-Wits and Muse-Haters: Sidney, Spenser, Milton and Renaissance Antipoetic Sentiment* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), p.13.

<sup>41</sup> Herman, 1996: 14-15.

rapid social change which produces a concomitant sense of cultural anxiety. Herman's emphasis on its significance within the writings of his three chosen authors leads him to underestimate its more general significance on different sorts of writing. He argues, for example, that

Antipoetic sentiment has, of course, been a significant force in Western culture since Plato, at the very least. During the Middle Ages, antipoetic sentiment survived as a minor prejudice against reading classical literature (sometimes expanding into condemnation of all secular poetry and fiction) that did not really impinge on the creative lives of Chrétien or Chaucer.<sup>42</sup>

The evidence of Chaucer's *Retractation* at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*, which has puzzled and disturbed so many critics and admirers, seems to refute this.

At the end of *The Parson's Tale* (the last fragment written of *The Canterbury Tales*) Chaucer added a section entitled "Heere taketh the makere of this book his leve", generally known as the *Retractation* (ll. 1080-1092), in which Chaucer repents his worldly writings:

Wherfore I biseke yow meekly, for the mercy of God, that ye preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes;/ and namely of my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanities, the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns:/ as is the book of Troilus; the book also of Fame; the book of the XXV. Ladies; the book of the Duchesse; the book of Seint Valentynes day of the Parlement of Briddes; the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen into synne (ll. 1083-5).

In detailed footnotes, Robinson cites scholarly support for the authenticity of the *Retractation*, which he acknowledges "has been often questioned" and goes on to cite numerous other examples of similar death-bed repentances from the Middle Ages onwards.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Herman, 1996: 35.

<sup>43</sup> F. N. Robinson (ed.), *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London; Oxford University Press, 1966), "But it has good support in the MSS, and the testimony of Gascoigne, in his *Dictionarium Theologicum*...shows that the story of Chaucer's death-bed repentance was believed in the fifteenth

In view of this, it seems difficult to sustain the notion that antipoetic sentiment was insignificant in the Middle Ages. Herman continues, however, arguing that

The absence of an effective opposition to literature, in the Middle Ages might be explained by poetry's modest position relative to the other sciences. But once poetry's status began to rise from a craft to theology's equal, and once the poet began rising to the level of an alter Deus, attacks on poetry began to increase in both number and respectability.<sup>44</sup>

This suggests that poetry's stock rose, which in turn motivated the attacks – the exact opposite to Smith's argument. This contrary argument is also problematic though. In *The Arte of Englishe Poetrie* (1589), Puttenham is still deploring the low esteem in which poets and poetry are held:

But in these dayes, although some learned Princes may take delight in them, yet vniuersally it is nat so. For as well Poets as Poesie are despised, & the name become of honourable infamous, suiect to scorne and derision, and rather a reproch than a prayse to any that vseth it: for commonly who so is studious in th'Arte or shewes him selfe excellent in it, they call him in disdayne a *phantasticall*; a light headed or phantasticall man (by conuersion) they call a Poet.<sup>45</sup>

Poetry is still being defended against accusations of mindlessness and immorality.

Elizabethan critics draw heavily on earlier writers in this tradition for support in their argument. Gosson is one of many who cite Plato as their ultimate authority, triumphantly emphasising the banishment of poets from his Republic:

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century.” He goes on to point out that “Instances more or less parallel have been noted by Kittredge, MP, I 12f.; Tatlock, PMLA, XXVIII, 521ff.; and Wells, p. 747 and the list they give – which includes, among others, St. Augustine, Bede, Giraldus Cambrensis, Jean de Meun, Sir Lewis Clifford, Spenser, Herrick, Dryden, Ruskin, Ibsen, Tolstoi – might be easily extended. Henry Vaughan, - while still young, to be sure – repented of the frivolous poetry of his earliest years. In Chaucer's own age Boccaccio is said to have turned, because of conviction of sin, from his licentious writing in Italian to the learned Latin treatises of his later years. (See E. Hutton, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, London 1909, pp. 198 ff.)” p. 772.

<sup>44</sup> Herman, 1996: 23.

<sup>45</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589). Reprinted in Smith, 1904, Volume II pp. 1-193. The text is anonymous but as Smith points out “the evidence of Puttenham's authorship is, if not absolute, at least sufficiently strong to justify the ascription” (II: 1) Book I chapter VIII p. 19.

No mervayle that Plato shut them out of his schoole, and banished them quite from his common wealth, as effeminate writers, unprofitable members, and utter enimies to vertue.<sup>46</sup>

Smith comments tartly on the references to Plato in the attack on poetry that “their directness is sometimes disputable.”<sup>47</sup> Sears Jayne, discussing the use of Plato in Elizabethan texts in general, argues that

In the works that do cite Plato, the Platonic references usually have to do either with Plato’s contention that poets should be banned from an ideal society (*Republic* X. 595A-608B) or with Plato’s theory that poets are inspired by one of four kinds of madness (*Phaedrus*). Except for Sidney, who had read both the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, as well as the *Ion* and the *Symposium*, none of the writers who refer to these opinions of Plato had actually read Plato: they knew about him only from some other source.<sup>48</sup>

In Book III of the *Republic*, whilst discussing the educational needs of the Guardians, the élite military force, Plato concludes that poets offer unsuitable role models for his strictly utilitarian system of education:

So if we are visited in our state by someone who has the skill to transform himself into all sorts of characters and represent all sorts of things, and he wants to show off himself and his poems to us, we shall treat him with all reverence due to a priest and giver of rare pleasure, but shall tell him that he and his kind have no place in our city, being forbidden by our code, and send him elsewhere, after anointing him with myrrh and crowning him. For ourselves, we shall for our own good employ story tellers and poets who are severe rather than amusing, who follow the style of the good man and in all their works abide by the principles we laid down for them when we started out on this attempt to educate our military class.<sup>49</sup>

It appears from this that it is the “style” of the poet that Plato wishes to control, desiring to restrict it to the “severe” which he regards as beneficial, as opposed to the “amusing”, whose influence he regards as deleterious. He elaborates his ideas in

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<sup>46</sup> Gosson, 1841: 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, 1904, I: lxxxiii.

<sup>48</sup> Sears Jayne, *Plato in Renaissance England* (Dordrecht; Boston; London: Kluwer, 1995), p. 122.

<sup>49</sup> Plato, *The Republic* translated by H. D. P. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), Part Three 398 p. 137.

Book X, discussing his theory of art and representation generally (discussed in greater depth in chapter 4: “The Art of Imitation”):

If you consider that the poet gratifies and indulges the natural instinct for tears and the desire to give full vent to our sorrows, both of which we restrain in our private misfortunes. Our better nature, being without adequate moral or intellectual training, relaxes its control, on the grounds that it is someone else’s sufferings it is watching and that there’s nothing wrong in praising and pitying another man with some claim to goodness, even though his grief is excessive; besides, it reckons the pleasure it gets as sheer gain, and would certainly not consent to be deprived of it by condemning the whole poem. For very few people are capable of realizing that our feelings for other people must influence ourselves, and that if we let ourselves feel excessively for the misfortunes of others it will be difficult to restrain our feelings in our own.<sup>50</sup>

In his *Preface to Plato*, Eric Havelock draws attention to the problems that Plato’s attitude to poets and poetry have caused later generations of readers and their reluctance “to take him at face value. The temptation in fact to do otherwise is overwhelming”.<sup>51</sup> Elizabethan writers resorted to various strategies in their attempt to answer these charges. Sidney is one of many who approach him with obvious care but was, as Jayne suggests above, one of the few who had actually read him:

But now indeed my burden is great; now Plato’s name is laid upon me whom, I must confess, of all philosophers I have ever esteemed most worthy of reverence.<sup>52</sup>

He argues that “of all philosophers he is the most poetical.”<sup>53</sup> (This defence echoes Cicero’s response to the objections Plato lists in the *Gorgias* to rhetoric in *De Oratore* in which he claims that while making fun of orators, Plato is, in fact, one

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<sup>50</sup> Plato, 1955: 384.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p. 6

<sup>52</sup> Sidney, 1973: 128.

<sup>53</sup> Sidney, 1973: 128.

himself.)<sup>54</sup> Sidney suggests that poets and philosophers had become enemies due to the envy philosophers felt of the popularity of poets and that, in any case, philosophers were just as open to charges of presenting a corrupting influence since their writing contained far worse examples of disreputable behaviours:

but who should do thus, I confess, should requite the objections made against poets with like cavillation against philosophers; as likewise one should do that should bid one read *Phaedrus* or *Symposium* in Plato, or the discourse of love in Plutarch, and see whether any poet do authorize abominable filthiness, as they do.<sup>55</sup>

Havelock's own reading of the *Republic* historicises it in a radical fashion, pointing out that it is a text whose central concern is educational theory, within which, it implies, poetry is primarily located. He argues that Plato's critique dramatises the historical shift from a primary oral culture, in which poets occupied a central and quite specific location, very different from that in later literate Western cultures:

as educational theory is central to the plan of the *Republic*, so also poetry is central in the educational theory. It occupied this position so it seems in contemporary society, and it was a position held apparently not on the grounds that we would offer; namely poetry's inspirational and imaginative effects, but on the ground that it provided a massive repository of useful knowledge, a sort of encyclopedia of ethics, politics, history and technology which the effective citizen was required to learn as the core of his educational equipment. Poetry represented not something we call by that name, but an indoctrination which today would be comprised in a shelf of text books and works of reference.<sup>56</sup>

In Havelock's analysis, Plato's fundamental objection is to an outmoded way of thinking, represented and transmitted principally by the poets who must, therefore,

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<sup>54</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore* 2 Volumes translated by E. W. Sutton completed with an Introduction by H. Rackham (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann: Harvard University Press), Loeb edition, VIII p. 25.

<sup>55</sup> Sidney, 1973: 128-129.

<sup>56</sup> Havelock, 1963: 27.

be excluded. Supporting his argument with linguistic and textual evidence,

Havelock argues that:

Once it is accepted that the oral situation had persisted through the fifth century, one faces the conclusion that there would also persist what one may call an oral state of mind as well; a mode of consciousness so to speak, and, as we shall see, a vocabulary and syntax, which were not that of a literate bookish culture. And once one admits this and admits that the oral state of mind would show a time lag so that it persisted into a new epoch when the technology of communication had changed, it becomes understandable that the oral state of mind is still for Plato the main enemy.<sup>57</sup>

This argument illuminates the meaning of Plato's text and has had considerable bearing on my thinking, particularly in conjunction with Ong's analysis of the "decay of rhetoric" subsequent to the introduction of print technology. There is a certain historical comparability, in terms of a radical transition from a primarily oral to a literate culture with all the implications for a change in consciousness and the reordering and institutionalisation of knowledges that implies.

Gosson continues his historical critique by comparing the current situation unfavourably with the past in which "(t)he right use of auncient poetrie was to have the notable exploits of worthy captaines, the holsome counsels of good fathers and vertuous lives of predecessors set downe in numbers",<sup>58</sup> whereas now, he argues, "(w)e have infinit poets, and pipers, and suche peevish cattel among us in Englande, that live by merrie begging, mainteyned by almes, and prively encroche upon every man's purse."<sup>59</sup> His criticism encompasses what he regards as a general trend to social degeneracy and extends surprisingly, or unsurprisingly perhaps, as far as university students:

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<sup>57</sup> Havelock, 1963: 41.

<sup>58</sup> Gosson, 1841: 15.

<sup>59</sup> Gosson, 1841: 17.

I cannot but blame those lither contemplators very much, which sit concluding of sillogisms in a corner, which in a close studie in the University coope themselves up xl yeres together, studying al things and professe nothing.<sup>60</sup>

Anxiety around the use of poetry for educational purposes and scepticism concerning its moral value had already been voiced by Humanist scholars, despite their general reputation for supporting the renewal of interest in all sorts of writing, including poetry. Nevertheless, Humanists were part of a culture in which antipoetic feeling was inherent within mainstream thinking and they were as subject to its influence as others. Roger Ascham, for example, in *The Scholemaster* not only inveighs against “Italianate” Englishmen<sup>61</sup> and the fashion for Italian novels but offers an extremely unflattering portrait of the poet as a young man:

For this I know, not onelie by reading of bookes in my studie, but also by experience of life, abrode in the world, that those, which be commonlie the wisest, the best learned, and best men also, when they be olde, were neuer commonlie the quickest witte when they were yonge. The causes why, amongst other, which be many, that moue me thus to thinke, be these fewe, which I will reckon. Quicke wittes commonlie, be apte to take, vnapt to keepe: soone hot and desirous of this and that: as colde and sone very of the same gaine: more quicke to enter spedelie, than hable to pears fare: euen like our sharpe tooles, whose edges be very soone turned. Soch wittes delight them selues in easie and pleasant studies, and neuer passe farre forward in hie and hard sciences. And therefore, the quickest wittes commonlie may proue the best Poetes, but not the wisest Orators: readie of tonge to speak, baldlie, not deepe of iudgement, either for good counsel or wise writing.<sup>62</sup>

Poets are only one of Erasmus’ satirical targets in *In Praise of Folly*:

The Poets, however...own a professed dependence on me, being a sort of lawless blades, that by prescription claim a license to a proverb, while the whole intent of their profession is only to smooth up and tickle the ears of fools, that by mere toys and fabulous shams, with which (however ridiculous) they are so bolstered up in an airy imagination, as to promise themselves an everlasting name, and promise, by their balderdash, at the

<sup>60</sup> Gosson, 1841: 41.

<sup>61</sup> Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (1570) (Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1967), Iiiiv-Iiiii.

<sup>62</sup> Ascham, 1967: Ciiiiv.

same time to celebrate the never-dying memory of others. To these rapturous wits self-love and flattery are never-failing attendants; nor do any prove more zealous or constant devotees to folly.<sup>63</sup>

Vives<sup>64</sup> too, whilst he has a more elevated notion of poetry, displays all the humanistic distaste for medieval literature, in deploring the vogue for popular romances, the most significant new genre of the Middle Ages, asking

What delight can be in so plain and foolish lies? One killeth twenty himself alone, another killeth thirty, wounded with a hundred swords and left dead, riseth up again and on the next day made whole and strong, overcometh two giants and then goeth away, loaden with gold and silver and precious stones more than a galley would carry away. What madness is it of folks to have pleasure in these books? There is no wit in them but a few words of wanton lust.<sup>65</sup>

Gosson is clearly reiterating and keying into an already well-rehearsed debate, and he concludes that “(h)e that goes to sea must smel of the ship, and that which sayles into poets wil savour of pitch.”<sup>66</sup> The persistence of this critique suggests not necessarily that antipoetic sentiment is an essential element of Western poetic discourse but that it represents a facet of cultural anxiety relating to social change, which is liable to resurface at critical junctures.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1876), p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> Spanish Humanist scholar, Juan Luis Vives, was in charge of Mary Tudor’s education from 1523 until 1528. He was known as the second Quintilian and wrote widely on educational theory including *de Ratione Studii Puerilis* (1523).

<sup>65</sup> Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women* (London: Arnold, 1912), p. 56.

<sup>66</sup> Gosson, 1841: 13.

<sup>67</sup> One of the most challenging recent accounts of cultural anxiety in relation to writing practices has been Jacques Derrida’s in *Dissemination* and *Of Grammatology*. In the former text, he analyses Plato’s critique of writing in terms of an Oedipal drama in which writing represents a parricidal act. Whilst his account lacks historical sensibility, it does highlight cultural anxieties relating to mimetic practice generally and makes for a dazzling read.

## The defence of poetry

Poetry's defence rests on justifying the existence of a discourse based on make-believe and elevating the role, position and function of the poet. Smith analyses two principal divisions within it, which he terms "the historical testimony in favour of poetry" and the "excellence of its nature or character."<sup>68</sup> In the historical sense three main proofs are adduced of the virtues of poetry: its "hoary antiquity", its universality – the fact that a vernacular literature is found among all peoples – and claims of an elevated readership, the fact that it has "enjoyed the favour of the greatest" – "argument by testimonial" as Smith describes it<sup>69</sup>: this last often given exaggerated importance in order to answer detractors who likewise cite notable critics as authority for their attack.

Sidney is one of many who, in their attempts to elevate the role and function of poetry and the poet, claim an ancient and honourable lineage by tracing a genealogy back to classical Greece:

But let us now see how the Greeks named it, and how they deemed it. The Greeks called him "a poet", which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It cometh of this word *poiein*, which is 'to make': which name, how high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences than by my partial allegation.<sup>70</sup>

He answers religious objections by stressing the poetic nature of the Scriptures from the Psalms to the New Testament. In his identification of three kinds of poet, Sidney argues that

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<sup>68</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xxi.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xxi-xxii.

<sup>70</sup> Sidney, 1973: 99.

The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms; Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs: Moses and Deborah in their Hymns; and the writer of Job; which beside other, the learned Emanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius do entitle the poetic part of the Scripture. Against these none will speak that hath the Holy Ghost in due reverence.<sup>71</sup>

Christ's use of parables to convey his ideas, Sidney suggests, offer supreme examples of the point he is making:

Certainly, even our Saviour Christ could as well have given the moral commonplaces of uncharitableness and humbleness as the divine narration of Dives and Lazarus; or of disobedience and mercy, as that heavenly discourse of the lost child and the gracious father; but that his through-searching wisdom knew he estate of Dives burning in hell, and of Lazarus being in Abraham's bosom, would more constantly (as it were) inhabit both the memory and judgment.<sup>72</sup>

Sidney promotes poetry by limiting the discursive space and function of poetry's main rivals – history and philosophy – arguing that history fails to deliver the requisite examples of moral elevation, whilst philosophy is too dry and theoretical.<sup>57</sup>

Thomas Nashe also stresses the ancient lineage of the poet, and his moral authority, whilst hinting at Neoplatonic theories of the “divine furor”<sup>73</sup>:

I account of Poetrie as of a more hidden and diuine kinde of Philosophy, enwrapped in blinde Fables and darke stories, wherein the principles of more excellent Arts and morrall precepts of manners, illustrated with diuers examples of other Kingdomes and Countries, are contained: for amongst the Grecians there were Poets before there were any Philosophers, who embraced entirely the studie of wisdom, as Cicero testifieth in his Tusculanes: whereas he saith that, of all sorts of men, Poets are most ancient, who, to the intent they might allure men with a greater longing to learning, have followed two things, sweetnes of verse and variety of

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<sup>71</sup> Sidney, 1973: 101-102.

<sup>72</sup> Sidney, 1973: 108-109.

<sup>57</sup> Sidney, 1973: 105.

<sup>73</sup> Neoplatonists had developed Plato's view of the “sensible world” in terms of a “manifestation of the divine”, an “image of the Intelligible which gave the former a more positive value” (R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, Bristol Classical Press, p. 162). Plotinus argued that the mind of the artist had direct access to ideal forms (*Enneads* V 8.i).

invention, knowing that delight doth prick men forward to the attaining of knowledge, and that true things are rather admired if they be included in some wittie fiction, like to Pearles that delight more if they be deeper sette in gold.<sup>74</sup>

In this quotation Nashe also defends poetry on the grounds of its intrinsically moral nature, the aesthetic pleasure it offers and its hidden power to promote virtue. Smith argues that the moral element of the defence is based largely on the medieval doctrine of the allegory: “The older view assumes that the *moralitas* is the kernel, and that the fable and poetic imaginings are an outside means to attract the reader to some hidden good.”<sup>75</sup> This concept also has its origins in earlier critics, in particular in the views on art and poetry discussed by Horace in his *Ars Poetica*, the most influential poetic treatise throughout both Medieval and Renaissance periods. Jonson translated the whole into English verse, a sign of his high regard, and its influence on his own ideas in *Timber or Discoveries* is evident. Geoffrey Shepherd sees Horace’s importance to Renaissance poetic thinking as so great that, he argues, “throughout western Europe the beginnings of critical literary analysis are signalled by the rendering into the vernaculars of Horace’s Art of Poetry”,<sup>76</sup> citing Archdeacon Grant’s 1567 translation as the first English version. The notion of poetry’s utility is central to Horace’s treatise, in which the key Renaissance phrase “to teach and delight” has its origins:

Poets aim at giving either profit or delight, or at combining the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life... The man who has managed to blend profit with delight wins everyone’s approbation, for he gives his reader pleasure at the same time as he instructs him.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* (1589) reprinted in Smith (1904) I pp. 321-337, p. 328-329.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xxiv.

<sup>76</sup> Shepherd, 1973: 43.

<sup>77</sup> Horace, *The Art of Poetry* translated by T. S. Dorsch in *Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 90-91.

Sidney is one of many who take up this phrase, or variations upon it, combining it with another Renaissance commonplace: “Poesy therefore is...a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight.”<sup>78</sup> Richard Stanyhurst employs it together with a definition of allegory in the Preface to his 1582 translation of *The Aeneid*:

For where as thee chiefe prayse of a wryter consisteth in thee enterlacing of pleasure with profit, oure author hath so wiselye allayed thee one with thee oother as thee shallow reader may be delighted with a smoothe tale, and the diuing searcher may be advantaged by savoring a pretious treatise.<sup>79</sup>

The two most common versions of this defence are interpretative theories of allegory and the cruder, more reductive, “sugar-coated pill” theory. Harington uses it, citing Plutarch and Tasso as authorities, in the Preface to his translation of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, in which he commends

specially Heroicall Poesie, that with her sweet statelinesse doth erect the mind & lift it vp to the consideration of the highest matters, and allureth them that of themselues would otherwise loth them to take and swallow & digest the holsome precepts of Philosophie, and many times even of the true diuinitie. Wherefore Plutarch, hauing written a whole treatise of the praise of *Homers* workes, and another of reading Poets, doth begin this latter with this comparison, that as men that are sickly and haue weak stomakes or daintie tastes do many times thinke that flesh moste delicate to eate that is not fleshe, and those fishes that be not, so young men (saith he) do like best that Philosophie, and such are the pleasant writings of learned Poets, that are the popular Philosophers and the popular diuines. Likewise Tasso in his excellent work of Jerusalem *Liberata* likeneth Poetrie to the Phisicke that men give vnto little children when they are sick.<sup>80</sup>

Gosson, however, meets and rejects this standard defence in *The Schoole of Abuse*:

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<sup>78</sup> Sidney, 1973: 101. In his extended note to Sidney’s use of the term, Smith points out that the concept of poetry as a “speaking picture” is “a commonplace of Elizabethan and Renaissance criticism”, deriving from Horace, described by Plutarch in *De Audiendis Poetis*, (3) as “an established metaphor” (Smith, 1904, I p: 386).

<sup>79</sup> Richard Stanyhurst, from the Dedication and Preface to the translation of *The Aeneid* (1582) reprinted in Smith, 1904, I: 135-147, p. I: 136.

<sup>80</sup> Sir John Harington, *A Preface, or rather a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie, and of the author and Translator* is prefixed to his translation of *Orlando Furioso* (1591). It is reprinted in Smith, 1904, II: 194-222, Smith II: 198-199.

I must confesse that poets are the whetstones of wit, notwithstanding that wit is dearely bought: where honie and gall are mixt, it will be hard to ever the one from the other. The deceitfull phisition geveth sweete syrropes to make his poison goe downe the smoother.<sup>81</sup>

In the *Ars Poetica*, Horace emphasises the generally civilizing effect of poetry at the same time as stressing its inspirational effect on soldiers:

While men still roamed the forests, they were restrained from bloodshed and a bestial way of life by Orpheus...the illustrious Homer and Tyrtæus fired the hearts of men to martial deeds with their verses.<sup>82</sup>

Poetry's apologists are all anxious to refute Plato's charge that poetry weakens the moral fibre. Sidney famously argues that

Poetry is the companion of the camps. I dare undertake, Orlando Furioso, or honest King Arthur, will never displease a soldier...Alexander left his schoolmaster, living Aristotle, behind him, but took dead Homer with him.<sup>83</sup>

Harington argues that poetry is a social necessity and furthermore constitutes a useful primer, developing the reading skills requisite for embarking on the Scriptures:

I cannot denie but to vs that are Christians, in respect of the high end of all, which is the health of our soules, not only Poetrie but al other studies of philosophy are in a manner vaine and superfluous, yea (as the wise man saith) whatsoever is under the sunne is vanitie of vanities, and nothing but vanities. But sith we liue with men and not with saints, and because few men can embrace this strict and stoicall diuinitie, or rather, indeed, for that the holy scriptures, in which those high mysteries of our saluation are contained, are a deepe & profound studie and not subiect to euery weake capacitie, no nor to the highest wits and iudgments, except they be first illuminat by God's spirit or instructed by his teachers and preachers: therefore we do first read some other authors, making them as it were a looking glasse to the eyes of oure minde, and then after we haue gathered more strength, we enter into profounde studies of higher mysteries, hauing first as it were enabled our

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<sup>81</sup> Gosson, 1841: 10.

<sup>82</sup> Horace, 1965: 92-93.

<sup>83</sup> Sidney, 1973: 127.

eyes by long beholding the sunne in a bason of water at laste to looke vpon the sunne it selfe.<sup>84</sup>

This passage suggests that the reading skills that Harington has in mind are of the sophisticated, allegorical kind familiar to the educated reader of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Allegory had become a standard reading strategy largely through Isidore of Seville's reiteration of Quintilian's ideas in his *Etymologies*, a compendium of classical learning, highly influential throughout the Middle Ages as a standard school text, and forming, therefore, one of the main bridges between classical and medieval eras.

The church fathers had developed allegorical interpretation as a technique for biblical exegesis deployed in the Middle Ages and extended to include pagan and vernacular writers:

A pagan poet like Virgil or even Ovid, if properly interpreted, could offer fragments of universal truth (Platonically conceived), whether or not intended to do so. His heroes and heroines, their adventures and loves, could be regarded as symbols of ultimate "realities"...and of moral precepts. Thus the amours of nymphs and pagan gods could pass muster as symbols of didactic import (the soul's quest for perfection, and so on).<sup>85</sup>

Allegory was promoted strategically in order to bridge the cultural divide between the end of the Roman Empire and the Christian Middle Ages. John MacQueen describes how allegorical interpretation was employed within the medieval educational system in order to render pagan writers acceptable to a Christian society:

In the Christian grammar school, the process of adaptation was particularly important. The great Latin poets, especially Virgil, Ovid and Statius, remained the most important curriculum authors. Yet it was impossible to

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<sup>84</sup> Harington, 1904, II: 197-198.

<sup>85</sup> Margaret Schlauch, *English Medieval Literature and Its Social Foundations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 120.

understand their poetry without some considerable knowledge of the pagan mythology which the Church regarded as standing totally in opposition to itself...One possible solution was the concept of myth as allegory. Pagan and Christian mythographers elaborated this concept, and their work, which extends in an unbroken chain from the later Empire to the seventeenth century, culminated in the encyclopaedic *De Geneologia Deorum Gentilium*, 'Concerning the Genealogy of the Pagan Gods', which Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75) compiled towards the end of his life. Ostensibly the book was a conspectus of classical mythology, but virtually every divinity and demigod whose name is mentioned received some kind of allegorical interpretation.<sup>86</sup>

Allegory was a technique which lent itself to cultural metamorphosis and could be adapted to serve different needs within a given culture. There were four traditional levels of biblical allegory, formulated by John Cassian, assimilated by Bede with classical grammarians and rhetoricians, and elaborated by St. Augustine in his *Doctrina Christiana*: firstly "a literal meaning (*sensus literalis*) insofar as it was assumed to have occurred in historical reality": secondly "an allegorical meaning, showing that the original event anticipated one to occur later in the New Testament"; thirdly "a tropological meaning, exemplifying moral precept"; and fourthly "an analogical meaning, pointing to the future life."<sup>87</sup> Readers looked, therefore, beneath the surface of a work to seek out universal, religious truths in which the characters were regarded primarily as symbolic representations of abstract qualities.

As Angus Fletcher notes in *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, "Allegory is a protean device, omnipresent in Western literature from the earliest times to the modern era"<sup>88</sup> which, as MacQueen points out, has an ancient cultural history, forming a traditional element in the defence of poetry:

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<sup>86</sup> John MacQueen, *Allegory* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 46-47.

<sup>87</sup> Schlauch, 1967: 120.

<sup>88</sup> Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 1.

Already at a date much earlier than Isidore's, the treatment of the gods as abstractions and the etymologising of their names had become two principal weapons of defence for poetry in her quarrel with philosophy – a quarrel which Plato in the *Republic* began by demonstrating the moral need to control children's reading."<sup>89</sup>

Plato had argued against allegorical interpretation on the grounds of its being too sophisticated, that that sort of discrimination was too much to expect of young minds:

Stories like those of Hera being bound by her son, or of Hephaestus flung from heaven by his father for taking his mother's part when she was beaten, and all those battles of the gods in Homer, must not be admitted into our own state, whether they be allegorical or not. A child cannot distinguish the allegorical sense from the literal, and the ideas he takes in at that age are likely to become indelibly fixed.<sup>90</sup>

As MacQueen comments, Plato "did not, it is obvious, have much confidence in allegorical interpretations (with which, equally obviously, he was familiar)."<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, allegory formed a significant strand in thinking about poetry within Western culture. Margaret Schlauch argues that

The preference for abstractions as higher orders than concrete items of experience had one result of enormous consequence in literature. It led to the great vogue of allegory in the modern sense of the word: that is, narrative in which the actors are or somehow represent ideas and qualities rather than real people.<sup>92</sup>

She goes on to cite the medieval take up of Prudentius' *Psychomachia* in the morality plays as a literary example, and suggests that "(t)he allegorical vision became an important instrument in the hands of great vernacular poets of the 13<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> MacQueen, 1970: 12.

<sup>90</sup> Plato, *Republic* translated with an introduction and notes by Francis MacDonald Cornford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), II 378.

<sup>91</sup> MacQueen, 1970: 12-13.

<sup>92</sup> Schlauch, 1967: 122.

and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries”<sup>93</sup> referring to the work of Dante, Jean de Meun, Langland and Chaucer.

In *Allegory and Representation*, Stephen Greenblatt argues that, “allegory arises in periods of loss, periods in which a once powerful theological, political, or familial authority is threatened with effacement.”<sup>94</sup> Allegory provided a means of translating one set of signifiers into another cultural framework. The renewed emphasis on allegory as a defence of poetry, as evidenced by the Elizabethan texts under discussion, can be read as a signifier of the cultural anxiety occasioned by the changes associated with medieval and Renaissance periods and the effacement of existing structures of power. The texts discussed in this thesis, which, I have argued, constituted a new discursive formation in English, were all concerned with the legitimacy or illegitimacy of poetry. In order to support their argument they drew on earlier writers and discourses, which described anti-poetic sentiment, for authority. The attack on poetry and the terms of its defence is symptomatic of a crisis of representation which brought into question fundamental social and cultural values.

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<sup>93</sup> Schlauch, 1967: 130.

<sup>94</sup> Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *Allegory and Representation* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. viii.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRINT, LITERACY, BOOK PRODUCTION, AND RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

Theorists such as Smith or Atkins argued for the development of poetry and literary criticism being brought about by contemporary religious and philosophical ideas, albeit against a background of social change. The alternative model, in which change in the economic and technological base, is productive of social and cultural change, is advanced by critics who regard culture as determined by material circumstances. The role of letterpress printing as an “agent of change” has been recognised by a generation of scholars who acknowledge their debt to Elizabeth Eisenstein’s seminal study, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*.<sup>1</sup>

Recognition of the importance of printing’s role in producing cultural change was, however, articulated by at least one early modern commentator. Samuel Daniel argued against those who denigrated the Middle Ages as barbarous and unlearned, in his admirable, open-minded discussion of the state of contemporary learning, offering examples of medieval scholarship, and tracing the development of the Renaissance backwards then forwards to the fall of Constantinople which reintroduced classical Greek philosophy to Christendom. He sees the importance of printing in the process in

transporting Philosophie, beaten by the Turke out of *Greece*, into christendome. Hereupon came that mightie confluence of Learning in these parts, which, returning as it were *per postlinium*, and here meeting then with

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

the new inuented stampe of Printing, spread it selfe indeed in a more vniuersall sorte then the world euer heretofore had it.<sup>2</sup>

Printing facilitated the spread of classical texts but it also enabled the development and transmission of written productions and learning in the vernacular. Textual production needed a market of readers and could only take off therefore in a society with an increasingly literate populace. Literacy and book production show a coterminous and mutually reinforcing rise throughout the early modern period, enhanced by the introduction of print and relating to the development and increased use of the vernacular.

McCrum offers some broad figures for book production in the Tudor and Stuart period which bear out this trend:

Before 1500 the total number of books printed throughout Europe was about 35,000, most of them in Latin. Between 1500 and 1640, in England alone, some 20,000 items in English were printed, ranging from pamphlets and broadsheets to folios and Bibles.<sup>3</sup>

As Barbara Strang points out, however, the phenomenon of vernacular book production, although accelerated by printing, was not wholly indebted to it:

That it was worth printing books in English tells us something about the extent of literacy and the desire for reading in those who were comfortably off without necessarily knowing the languages of learning; and this audience was not new. The extant number of manuscript copies of the major popular long works of the 14c – the *Canterbury Tales*, *Piers Plowman*, ‘*Mandeville’s*’ *Travels* – is greater than the extant number of copies of any Caxton edition.<sup>4</sup>

The invention of letterpress printing, the increase in literacy, development of centralised administration and education systems, all eventually served to promote

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Daniel, *A Defence of Ryme* (1603) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), reprinted in Gregory Smith, 1904, II pp. 356-384, p. 369.

<sup>3</sup> Robert McCrum et al., *The Story of English* (London: Faber, 1986), p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Strang, *A History of English* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 157.

text-based knowledge with its linear system of organisation and ways of thinking. Writing had long been known in the West but its practice had been relatively restricted, chirographically controlled, until the development of letterpress printing, to the learned few. In a largely illiterate population, manuscript culture in the West retained a significant element of orality:

Manuscript cultures remained largely oral-aural even in the retrieval of material preserved in texts. Manuscripts were not easy to read, by later typographic standards, and what readers found in manuscripts they tended to commit at least somewhat to memory. Relocating material in a manuscript was not always easy. Memorization was encouraged and facilitated also by the fact that in highly oral manuscript cultures, the verbalization one encountered even in written texts often continued the oral mnemonic patterning that made for ready recall. Moreover, readers commonly vocalized, read slowly aloud or sotto voce, even when reading alone, and this also helped fix matter in the memory.<sup>5</sup>

The transition from primary orality to literacy presents one of the most profound of cultural changes. Medieval and early modern culture is on the cusp of that change. The development of print culture in the fifteenth century constituted a major factor in the transition.

Estimates of literacy levels vary. Popular writers of all periods in their enthusiasm probably overestimate. McCrum states, “(s)ome estimates suggest that by 1600 nearly half the population had some kind of minimal literacy, at least in the cities and towns.”<sup>6</sup> Barber offers a more detailed account:

The expansion of the reading public may have been encouraged by the introduction of printing, but it was already taking place in the middle of the 15th century, long before Caxton established his press at Westminster in 1476. The new public arose as a result of the expansion and secularisation of education; the grammar schools expanded in the 15th century, and alongside them were many new ‘petty schools’, which taught reading and writing in English. When our period opened, a substantial part of the population could

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London; New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> McCrum, 1986: 91.

read; in 1533, Sir Thomas More asserted that over half the population could read (Bennett 1947); even if this was an overestimate, it is clear that there was a large potential reading public.

A considerable part of this reading public must have been unable to read Latin. Many of them, however, had a great desire for learning,<sup>7</sup> and the citizen classes in particular had a thirst for self-improvement.<sup>7</sup>

Later scholarship, using more sophisticated methods of analysis, has revised these figures downwards and produced a more pragmatic explanation of the phenomenon.

In *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England*, David Cressy posits a complex diagrammatic model of interaction relating literacy, book production, education, and book ownership.<sup>8</sup> Discussing the educational history of the period, he concludes that:

The progress of education in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was irregular rather than steady, and was affected by such things as fashion, the state of the economy, government and church policy. There was an over-all expansion of facilities, but it is arguable that the increase went mostly to benefit the middle and upper groups in society, who already possessed basic literacy, leaving the poor to the charity or despair of the clergy. Educational opportunity was highly stratified and did not always reflect the intentions of reformers and philanthropists. Education was undoubtedly related to literacy but the two were not inextricably linked.<sup>9</sup>

Cressy stresses that “(t)he links between educational history and the measurement of literacy are...indirect and imprecise. Most of the evidence concerns grammar schools and there is little to suggest that elementary education was similarly expanded. Where it is possible to trace the careers of petty schoolmasters they seem to have given fitful service...Reliable information about the extent of petty schooling and the teaching of literacy is woefully wanting.”<sup>10</sup> He goes on to make the point, however, that we should not “assume that the acquisition of literacy was

<sup>7</sup> Barber, C., *Early Modern English* (London: André Deutsch, 1976), p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Cressy, 1980: 53.

<sup>10</sup> Cressy, 1980: 52.

exclusively the product of formal schooling. Family, friends and neighbours could share the task of teaching, but we have no way of calculating how often this happened or with what success.”<sup>11</sup> He examines the various attempts to gauge literacy levels in the period concluding that “(o)nly one type of literacy is directly measurable – the ability or inability to write a signature; and that by itself may be the least interesting and least significant.”<sup>12</sup> Despite obvious drawbacks to this method of measurement – “the possibility of feigned marks veiling true literacy and precocious or artificial signatures masking the real illiteracy of their makers”<sup>13</sup> – Cressy believes that it offers the most reliable and accurate method of assessment.

Based on the records of legal “depositions, declarations and such scraps of evidence as can be assembled”<sup>14</sup> and breaking down the data in terms of region, social position/occupation and gender, Cressy’s analysis reveals a fairly steady pattern of increasing literacy throughout the period. As he says: “(t)he period from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century saw, in most parts of the western world, a general transition from restricted to mass literacy”<sup>15</sup> Literacy levels at the beginning of the period are not easy to assess:

Aggregate figures for the sixteenth century are not readily available, but a reasonable guess might place male illiteracy around 80% and female illiteracy close to 95% at the time of the accession of Elizabeth. A projection back to the reign of Henry VII would find perhaps 90% of Englishmen illiterate at the turn of the century, with illiteracy claiming as many as 99% of the women. In the fifteenth century and earlier writing skills were the preserve of a very small minority, although probably a somewhat greater proportion could read.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cressy, 1980: 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> Cressy, 1980: 53.

<sup>13</sup> Cressy, 1980: 55.

<sup>14</sup> Cressy, 1980: 176.

<sup>15</sup> Cressy, 1980: 175.

<sup>16</sup> Cressy, 1980: 176.

By 1600 the level of male literacy in England was approximately 30% and female literacy around 5%. Nevertheless Cressy concludes that “(b)y the end of the Stuart period the English had achieved a level of literacy unknown in the past and unmatched elsewhere in early modern Europe.”<sup>17</sup> He makes the point that London was exceptional in its notably higher levels of literacy.

The factors which led to the rise in literacy levels are analysed in terms of a combination of the, roughly speaking, ideological versus economic. He borrows his analytical terms from migration theorists, denominating them as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, which he defines thus:

The ‘push’ could appear as an official or unofficial campaign for literacy – that is, an ideologically inspired pressure from above which had the capacity to foist on people a skill or pattern of behaviour which they might not otherwise have sought. Its components could include government action by legislation or sponsorship of programmes, specifically aimed at improving literacy, the efforts and exhortations of educators, and the words and deeds of religious activists. It is exemplified by the Swedish state-Lutheran literacy campaign, by the educational policy of the Scottish Kirk, by the puritan educational programme in New England, and by the efforts of divines and philanthropists to improve basic education in England.

The ‘pull’ factors on the other side of the equation, locate the origins of expanding literacy in the social and economic environment. Literacy, for some people, had a practical, mundane utility and they sought it for themselves and their children because the particular skills of reading and writing were useful in their everyday lives. They did not need to be inspired or cajoled towards literacy, but, rather, they discovered its value for themselves. Its value in the market place or in private affairs could make literacy attractive regardless of the higher purposes attached to it by the ideologues.<sup>18</sup>

When considering the relative importance of these two factors Cressy concludes that “(t)he evidence strongly suggests that the ‘push’ towards literacy in Tudor and Stuart England was in fact quite weak, and that the progress which undoubtedly did

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<sup>17</sup> Cressy, 1980: 176.

<sup>18</sup> Cressy, 1980: 184.

occur owed more to ‘pull’ factors than to anything else.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, economic factors tend to predominate in the acquisition of literacy. The pattern of socio-cultural development in the period was, however, as Cressy and other commentators have pointed out, complex: Margaret Spufford, for example, offers a more dynamic picture suggesting that “illiteracy was everywhere face to face with literacy, and the oral with the printed word.”<sup>20</sup> Whilst it is impossible to be categorical in terms of numbers of readers, the general conclusion can be drawn that the middle of the sixteenth century showed a consistent rise in levels of literacy and was a critical point in the use and development of the vernacular – a phenomenon influenced by a number of cultural and economic factors.

There was a rise then in the numbers of those who could read but were not necessarily schooled in the classics. Despite a large amount of research on the education system in the early modern period, generalised national estimates are difficult to come by, whereas there is a wealth of detail relating to specific schools and practices. There is considerable disagreement as to the degree of genuine educational expansion in the period, nevertheless, Helen Jewell does quote Lawrence Stone’s figure of “2.5 per cent of the male age cohort”<sup>21</sup> entering higher education in the early seventeenth century. A propos the situation of education in the earlier period, she concludes “(h)istorians’ tendency to underestimate pre-Reformation schools numerically made post-Reformation developments seem more revolutionary, but many schools claimed as new were places which had something probably similar earlier.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cressy, 1980: 186.

<sup>20</sup> “First steps in Literacy” reprinted in *Literacy and Social Development in the West: A Reader* ed. Harvey J. Graff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.142.

<sup>21</sup> Helen Jewell, *Education in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Jewell, 1998: 29.

Book production in the period is one gauge of the development of literacy and educational levels. As Elizabeth Eisenstein points out though, there is no simple correlation between education and reading tastes:

All too often it is taken for granted that 'low-brow' or 'vulgar' works reflect 'lower class' tastes, despite contrary evidence offered by authorship and library catalogues. Before the advent of mass literacy the most 'popular' works were those which appealed to diverse groups of readers and not just to the plebes.

Divisions between Latin and vernacular reading publics are also much more difficult to correlate with social status than many accounts suggest...insofar as the vernacular translation movement was aimed at readers who were unlearned in Latin, it was often designed to appeal to pages as well as apprentices; to landed gentry, cavaliers and courtiers as well as to shopkeepers and clerks.<sup>23</sup>

Reading vernacular texts was not simply confined to those unable to read Latin, and the explosion of books printed in the vernacular in the sixteenth century catered for popular, but not necessarily lower class, tastes. Increased literacy produced a larger reading public and a concomitant demand for books to read. This demand was satisfied by a combination of translation and original book production. The increase in vernacular writing of all types led to the development of all vernacular discourses and to the production of texts which functioned, as I have suggested, to articulate, order and regulate these new forms of writing at the theoretical as well as the material level.

### **Renaissance Humanism**

The other factor which must be regarded as contributing significantly to the production of the discursive formation of a vernacular poetics, and profoundly

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<sup>23</sup> Eisenstein, 1979: 63.

influencing its shape and constitution, is Renaissance Humanism, a term which itself requires a brief explanation. “Humanism” like “Renaissance” is often used in a rather loose way: indeed the two terms are sometimes taken to be synonymous. Scholars in recent years have attempted to offer more precise definitions and to restrict their use to historically specific contexts. In *The Humanist Tradition in the West*, Alan Bullock argues for specificity, drawing attention to other important cultural movements and developments. He argues that “(t)he old characterization of the Renaissance as the age of humanism is no longer acceptable” because there were in fact a variety of diverse movements and trends such as “the Reformation, the Counter Reformation and the wars of religion” and “the medieval tradition of scholastic philosophy and the study of Aristotle.” He argues that these were not replaced by humanistic studies but rather “survived” and “flourished” and “constituted not a little...to the revolutionary changes in scientific thought which begin with Copernicus and Galileo.”<sup>24</sup>

Bullock defines “modern usage” of the term “humanist” with reference to Peter Burke’s criteria in *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy, 1420-1540*,<sup>25</sup> as a particular group of educated individuals, probably “no more than a hundred” and

confining it to men versed in the knowledge of Latin, less conceivably of Greek as well, who used their skill to make a living as lecturers, teachers, tutors in noble or wealthy families, secretaries responsible for official correspondence and speeches in the Papal curia and other courts and chancelleries. Through them and their writings there spread amongst the educated classes of the Italian cities an enthusiasm and taste for the ancient Mediterranean world of which they felt themselves the heirs. Out of this in turn developed a new mixture of culture, not an imitation but a new style of thought and feeling, not least of looking, which later came to be seen as distinctive and to which the nineteenth century gave the name humanism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Alan Bullock, *The Humanist Tradition in the West* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 1985), pp. 12-13.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy, 1420-1540* (London: Batsford, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Bullock, 1985: 20-21.

Bullock adopts an evolutionary model of political/cultural change, arguing that “there was no abrupt or easily defined break between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Other medieval habits of thought besides scholasticism survived into the sixteenth century in many parts of Europe, and *vice versa* there were precedents in the Middle Ages for Renaissance ways of looking at man and his world.”<sup>27</sup> He goes on, however, to recognise that “what the art historian Erwin Panofsky calls the thousand ties linking the age of the Renaissance to the Middle Ages does not mean taking continuity to mean identity.”<sup>28</sup> He identifies the “crucial difference” between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages in terms of a profoundly altered historical perspective:

The Middle Ages had been able to appropriate what they wanted from classical antiquity precisely because they felt no sense of separateness from the ancient world. But whatever they borrowed from antiquity, whether in art, mythology, literature or philosophy, they incorporated into their own entirely different Christian system of belief and altered its original significance to fit this without any sense of anachronism. It was only with Petrarch and the Italian humanists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that the world of antiquity came to be seen no longer as a storehouse to be plundered, but as a separate civilization in its own right. Instead of the sense of casual familiarity with the ancient world which the Middle Ages had felt, the Renaissance saw it for the first time in an historical perspective, as remote, unfamiliar and fascinating. Their efforts were devoted not to incorporating particular features of it but trying to penetrate it as a coherent and very different world which they admired as immeasurably superior to their own.<sup>29</sup>

It was, Bullock suggests, “the Italian humanists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries who developed the idea of a ‘renaissance’ of antiquity and invented the term ‘the middle age’ to describe the gulf which separated them from the ancient

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<sup>27</sup> Bullock, 1985: 13-14.

<sup>28</sup> Bullock, 1985: 14.

<sup>29</sup> Bullock, 1985: 14.

world they claimed to be restoring.”<sup>30</sup> This changed perspective towards the past was to have significant linguistic and literary effects.

Since the end of the Roman Empire, Latin had been absorbed and transformed within the indigenous cultures of those lands, which had been under its dominion, and the various romance languages had evolved. It was, however, still in use within the Church, educational, and legal systems. The Latin language itself also evolved over time losing much of its earlier precision, using pronouns in “a quite undifferentiated way” and losing “many of the sharper distinctions in the meaning of Latin conjunctions and connective adverbs.”<sup>31</sup> Humanists, in their enthusiasm for the classical texts they had rediscovered, attempted to restore Latin to its classical purity under Cicero, imposing “learned Latin” in their teaching and thereby sealing its ultimate fate, since it could no longer be regarded as a living language. Tony Davies argues that “humanism, at this time, is above all a question of language, and the oddly ambivalent antiquarianism of these pioneers of the old emerges most clearly in their highly equivocal attitude towards the vernacular languages of their own time.”<sup>32</sup> Despite this ambivalence, their foundation of a new scholarly and educational movement cannot be underestimated:

From amateurish beginnings in the thirteenth century, gradually building up a large fund of knowledge, the humanists recovered lost texts from monastic libraries; developed the techniques of textual criticism to emend corrupt editions and created classical archaeology with the systematic study of Roman remains. They greatly improved Western knowledge not only of Greek as a language, but, through the translations of Greek texts, of Greek thought and literature for those who knew only Latin, producing a complete translation of Plato’s work for the first time and even in the case of Aristotle more accurate versions than the Middle Ages had possessed.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bullock, 1985: 14.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 103.

<sup>32</sup> Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 78.

<sup>33</sup> Bullock, 1985: 22.

Although few in number, and with a preference for operating in select social groups of likeminded individuals, humanist scholars had a disproportionate cultural effect, principally through their belief in education and their enthusiastic take up of the technological innovation of print. Humanist reforms in education with their greater emphasis on language, literature and rhetoric, were first introduced into the universities from where they spread to the grammar schools:

The universities were older than the grammar schools, and they experienced first the humanist reforms in teaching which were to have so vital an influence on the schools. Oxford and Cambridge, like all European universities in the Middle Ages, had been dominated by scholasticism, the study of Aristotle's logic being the single most important element. The early sixteenth-century English humanists began to put into practice the ideals of studying classical literature which had been developed in fifteenth-century Florence under the inspiration of the Byzantine educationalist Chrysoloras, and they made far-reaching changes in the university curricula. Where logic had held the main place, rhetoric and grammar (including study of the classics) now shared it with logic, and Greek was added.<sup>34</sup>

The renewed emphasis on rhetoric and interest in language and classical literature generally changed the educational outlook significantly. The educational reforms of Italian humanism spread to northern Europe via the group of scholars, including Grocyn, Linacre, and Colet, who travelled to Italy in the late fifteenth century:

The northern Renaissance overlaps with the later phase of the Italian. The first generation of northerners to study in Italy had travelled there in the 1480s and 1490s, and northern humanism came to fruition in the early sixteenth century. 1508 was the year in which Greek was first regularly taught in the University of Paris. 1516 was the year which saw the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia* and Erasmus' Greek New Testament, the three humanist colleges of Corpus Christi, Oxford, Christ's College and St. John's at Cambridge were created at the same time.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 265.

<sup>35</sup> Bullock, 1985: 25-26.

Humanist reforms were introduced first into the universities and from there into the grammar schools: “The innovations of Erasmus and Colet at St. Paul’s had been followed out in so many towns by the 1560s that the generation born then, which includes many of the greatest writers of the English Renaissance, were able to benefit from a remarkably intense education in the arts of language.”<sup>36</sup> The enormous influence of Erasmus’ teaching can be gauged by the popularity of his textbook, *De copia*, which went through one hundred and eighty editions in the sixteenth century.<sup>37</sup> The aim was to produce fluent writers and speakers of Latin. Ong describes texts such as Erasmus’ *Adages* as “providing the small change picked up in the vernaculars largely through oral chit-chat but hard to come by when one learns a language so chirographically and typographically committed as Latin was.”<sup>38</sup>

Rhetoric, in particular in the writings of Cicero and Quintilian on the subject, had a profound influence on humanist teaching and ideas. It comprehended and, up to the Renaissance, was able to sustain a range and variety of definitions according to different authors and commentators. William Kennedy argues that these can be reduced to two basic approaches:

Since late antiquity two conceptions of rhetoric have prevailed. One defines it as the art of embellishment and ornamentation; the other, as the art of communication and persuasion. Though not mutually exclusive, these two views have sometimes seemed so through a distorted emphasis on one at the other’s expense. The first conception dates back to ancient compendia of elocutionary devices, figures, tropes and other verbal arrangements with examples drawn from the classical poets. Plato, however, in his *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, Cicero in his *De Oratore*, and Quintilian in his *Institutio oratoria* all expressed deep skepticism about this concept of rhetoric. They defined it instead as the art of communication and persuasion

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<sup>36</sup> Vickers, 1988: 265.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), pp. 13 – 14.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 30.

and treated it as a moral art far exceeding the mere arrangement of words that all speech necessarily entails. Though all four (Plato, the least; Quintilian, the most) accorded due attention to elocution, their deeper concern was with other strategies involving the speaker's characterization and his relationship to an audience.<sup>39</sup>

The conception of rhetoric which prevailed with the humanists, most clearly demonstrated by their admiration of Cicero, was of the second variety, an all-encompassing art which comprehended not simply a bag of verbal tricks and techniques but a recipe for the ideal (masculine) human and social development. Cicero, in the person of Crassus (his chief spokesperson in *De Oratore*), makes great claims for eloquence as the foundation of civil society and urges on the youthful would-be orator in tones that ring through humanist texts down to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. In his discussion of eloquence, Crassus demands of his audience

what other power could have been strong enough either to gather scattered humanity into one place, or to lead it out of its brutish existence in the wilderness up to our present condition of civilization as men and as citizens, or, after the establishment of social communities, to give shape to laws, tribunals, and civic rights? And not to pursue any further instances – wellnigh countless as they are – I will conclude the whole matter in a few words, for my assertion is this: that the wise control of the complete orator is that which chiefly upholds not only his own dignity, but the safety of countless individuals and of the entire state. Go forward therefore, my young friends, in your present course, and bend your energies to that study which engages you, that so it may be in your power to become a glory to yourselves, a source of service to your friends, and profitable members of the Republic.<sup>40</sup>

Cicero's orator is the great man of the age, who must be in possession of all contemporary virtues and accomplishments. Within this formulation, rhetoric comprehends all other disciplines:

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<sup>39</sup> William J. Kennedy, *Rhetorical Norms in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore* translated with an introduction by H. Rackham (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1967), I viii: 24-25.

in an orator we must demand the subtlety of the logician, the thoughts of the philosopher, a diction almost poetic, a lawyer's memory, a tragedian's voice, and the bearing almost of the consummate actor. Accordingly no rarer thing than a finished orator can be discovered among the sons of men.<sup>41</sup>

A century later, Quintilian sets out his intention in *Institutio Oratoria* in similar terms, laying stress first and foremost on the personal qualities of virtue required:

My aim, then, is the education of the perfect orator. The first essential for such an one is that he should be a good man, and consequently we demand of him not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but of all the excellencies of character as well. For I will not admit that the principles of upright and honourable living should, as some have held, be regarded as the concern of philosophy. The man who can really play his part as a citizen and is capable of meeting the demands both of public and private business, the man who can guide a state by his counsels, give it a firm basis by his legislation and purge its vices by his decisions as a judge, is assuredly no other than the orator of our quest.<sup>42</sup>

The influence of such ideas on Renaissance rhetorical texts is unmistakable.

Rhetoric comprehends a complete moral educational system. In the Preface to *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), the humanist Thomas Wilson makes similarly large claims, with a noticeably Christian inflection, for the orator and for his own purpose in writing:

And among all others, I think him most worthy fame, and amongst men to be taken for half a god, that therein doth chiefly, and above all others, excel men wherein men do excel beasts. For he that is among the reasonable of all most reasonable, and among the witty of all most witty, and among the eloquent of all most eloquent – him think I among all men not only to be taken for a singular man, but rather to be counted for half a god. For in seeking the excellency hereof, the sooner he draweth to perfection, the nigher he cometh to God, who is the chief wisdom, and therefore called God because he is most wise, or rather wisdom itself.

Now then, seeing that God giveth his heavenly grace unto all such as call unto him with stretched hands and humble heart, never wanting to those that want not to themselves, I purpose by his grace and especial assistance to set forth precepts of eloquence, and to show what observation the wise have

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<sup>41</sup> Cicero, 1967: 89-91.

<sup>42</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 4 Volumes translated by H. E. Butler (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1958), I. Pr. 9. pp. 9-11.

used in handling of their matters, that the unlearned, by seeing the practice of others, may have some knowledge themselves and learn by their neighbor's device what is necessary for themselves in their own case.<sup>43</sup>

Wilson's claims for the power of rhetoric have a long history but, as Vickers points out:

Not many of his contemporaries were ever in the position of being able to raise a siege with their eloquence! His work belongs to that rosy picture of rhetoric as an unqualified benefit to man derived from Quintilian and soon to be sharply challenged by the Elizabethan dramatists, above all Shakespeare.<sup>44</sup>

The influence of such ideas on humanism is clear in relation to theories of education, the importance of rhetoric as a discipline, and devotion to Cicero above all other writers. Its influence is equally significant on the education of young men, eager for social advancement, in the development of the genre of the courtesy book, such as Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (translated by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561 as *The Book of the Courtier*). If the great man in Republican Rome was the orator, the comparable figure in the Renaissance was the courtier. This function of the courtesy book is at least partly appropriated in Elizabethan poetic treatises such as Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (Book III chapters xxiii – xxiv), or Sidney's *Apology* which also addresses itself to aristocratic young men, as the *exordium* makes clear: "When the right virtuous Edward Wotton and I were at the Emperor's court together, we gave ourselves to learn horsemanship of John Pietro Pugliano, one that with great commendation had the place of an esquire in his stable" and so on.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560) edited with notes and commentary by Peter E. Medine (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 42-43.

<sup>44</sup> Brian Vickers, "Some Reflections on the Rhetoric Textbook" in *Renaissance Rhetoric* edited by Peter Mack pp. 81-102 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> Sidney, 1973: 95.

Despite his enthusiasm for the art in general, Vickers regards humanist attitudes towards rhetoric as somewhat ingenuous:

the humanists had ‘an almost incredible faith in the power of the word’, and one may feel that both the rhetoricians promise of automatic success and their inability to conceive that speech could be put to evil ends show a fundamental lack of realism. But these interlinked beliefs in the social nature of man, the centrality of language to human exchange, the rhetorician’s ability to influence people, his dedication to truth and virtue – this whole system made it inevitable that attention should be focused on *elocutio* as eloquence in the service of the noblest human ideals, and the figures of rhetoric as the best means of realizing them.<sup>46</sup>

Any system involving techniques of persuasion is naturally open to abuse, since it might be manipulated simply to advance self interest - how to win friends and influence people - the traditional charge levelled against rhetoric by its critics from earliest times. But, whereas Plato’s attack on poets and poetry were endlessly rehearsed by Renaissance critics, his attack on rhetoric (in the *Gorgias*) by contrast were practically ignored:

Both the orator and the poet had been attacked by Plato, but from that common inheritance the poet in the Renaissance had received much more criticism for his link with feigning, during that fruitless confusion between fiction and lies, and for his connection with the theatre...The orator, by contrast, got off lightly, and attacks on rhetoric in English during this period were few.<sup>47</sup>

In relation to changes in the sphere of literature and writing practices, humanism had a specific influence on the development of a significant number of literary genres. Scholarly literary genres (as opposed to popular genres such as the romance) of the late middle ages were the textbook, the commentary, the *quaestio* (the

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<sup>46</sup> Vickers, 1988: 285. He is quoting from H. H. Gray, “Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence” in *Renaissance Essays* edited by P. O. Kristeller and P. P. Wiener (New York, 1968) from *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24 (1963), p. 205.

<sup>47</sup> Vickers, 1988: 412.

question or disputation), and the treatise.<sup>48</sup> These were developed by humanists and augmented by the oration, the letter, the dialogue and the translation. Textbooks and treatises on rhetoric and moral philosophy were produced (the most popular and most successful being Erasmus' *De copia*) plus numerous commentaries on ancient authors. In line with a renewed interest in rhetoric and linguistic skills, ways of analysing and interpreting texts underwent a change: "Grammatical and historical interpretation for the most part takes the place of dialectical analysis and argumentation, more value is placed on style, and the terminology of scholastic learning is rather avoided."<sup>49</sup>

The oration, a genre that owed its inspiration directly to rhetorical practice, became the most important form for "the formulation of philosophical and scientific ideas."<sup>50</sup> Delivered orally and composed for specific occasions, a marriage, funeral or visit by some dignitary, for example, they were scripted and normally preserved in textual form. The extent to which the oration might truly ever have been considered an oral form is in some doubt. As early as the Greek rhetorician, Isocrates, (436-338 BC), it seems to have been primarily a literary form, as modern translators and editors testify: "He called his writings orations, but they are such only in the sense that they are invested with the form and atmosphere of oratory. He, himself, never delivered a speech, and few of his discourses were written for delivery. He was in reality a political pamphleteer."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Scholar and his Public in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance" in *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning* edited and translated by Edward P. Mahoney (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Kristeller, 1974: 10.

<sup>50</sup> Kristeller, 1974: 10.

<sup>51</sup> George Norlin makes this point in the Introduction to his translation of *Isocrates* in 3 Volumes (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1966), Loeb Classical Library, p. xxx.

The *ars dictaminis*, the medieval art of letter writing, was also governed by the rules of rhetoric: letters themselves were “organized in the same fashion as orations, proceeding from exordium, through statement of proposition, to be proved, proof, and refutation of adversaries, to a peroration or conclusion.”<sup>52</sup> Letter writing developed under Renaissance humanists; on the one hand it became a more personal and more expressive medium, on the other it tended towards a more public form:

The private letters of the humanists, like the letters of all periods, were above all personal communications of the sender, but from the first they had at the same time a literary appearance. The humanist wrote his letters with his reading public in mind... The writer as well as the addressee gladly showed around an interesting or beautifully written letter, and with Petrarch there begins the long line of humanists who collected their own letters and at the same time carefully polished and revised them... One factor in this was the interest in the actual content of the letter. The letter often played at that time the role of the newspaper: it was quickly read and copied on account of the news it contained. In many cases, the letter had a scholarly or philosophical content and was really nothing but a treatise to which the form of the letter gave it as it were a personal tone, as the humanists liked to do.<sup>53</sup>

The apparent contradiction here suggests a more self-conscious, more literary, art – the development of the idea of a literary voice, a persona, such as suggested by Greenblatt’s theory of self-fashioning (to be discussed more fully in Part II). Lisa Jardine argues in *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (subtitled *The Construction of Charisma in Print*) that Erasmus uses his printed writings in order to construct his scholarly persona, offering a portrait of “Erasmus constructing himself in letters – on the printed page – as a particular sort of exemplary scholarly figure for the Renaissance: a symbolic origin of, and focus for, a *renovatio* in learning in which the scholar himself strives for visibility rather than invisibility, textual presence rather than

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<sup>52</sup> Ong, 1971: 27-28.

<sup>53</sup> Kristeller, 1974: 12.

absence.”<sup>54</sup> Erasmus and other humanist writers employ the new print technology by adapting the techniques of rhetoric to a new medium. The tendency to construct fictionalised personae and situations is widespread throughout a number of rhetorical and grammatical genres, for example Angel Day’s vernacular book of grammar and rhetoric, which included a selection of exemplary letters, *The English Secreterie* (1593)<sup>55</sup> turned into a quasi-fictional venture, a forerunner of the epistolary novel.

The basic difference between the letter and the treatise (apart from the former’s more personal tone) is length. The treatise was also organized in terms of classical rhetoric though: “Scholarly treatises of all sorts had an oratorical coloring.”<sup>56</sup> The dialogue became a popular form (employed by Northbrooke, Gosson and Stubbes among many others) based in the majority of cases on pure fiction. Kristeller argues that the medium’s popularity can be explained “just as in the case of the letter, by the predilection for personal, subjective expression, as well as by the admiration for famous ancient models.”<sup>57</sup>

One of the most commonly recognised achievements of the humanists was the number and quality of their translations, particularly from Greek into Latin, which meant that “many writings were made accessible to the Western world for the first time, just as many already previously known works were circulated in supposedly better translations.”<sup>58</sup> These attracted a wider circle of readers than original treatises. Kristeller sums up his discussion of humanist literature with reference to its

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<sup>54</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 43.

<sup>55</sup> Angel Day, *The English secreterie: or, plaine and direct methode, for the enditing of all manner of epistles or letters, aswell familliar as others*: Early English Books, 1475-1640 STC/Reel 214.1.

<sup>56</sup> Ong, 1971: 28.

<sup>57</sup> Kristeller, 1974: 13.

<sup>58</sup> Kristeller, 1974: 15.

preparation for and reception by a wider readership than the narrower audience for earlier scholastic texts:

We can say of humanistic literature that it was certainly also read by school-boys and university students, but unlike scholastic literature it directed itself primarily to a highly cultured lay public, namely, to princes and statesmen, ecclesiastics and merchants, as well as to doctors and lawyers, and also to scholars and academicians of the various disciplines, all of whom had in common with one another a classical-humanistic education.<sup>59</sup>

The influence of humanism on the development of writing practices can be seen to be significant in every area. It widened the range of material at a time of increasing literacy, and greater access to written materials through the development of printing. It catered for a wider reading public and also, through the adoption of rhetorical ideas and techniques, organized writing practices within a well-defined system. Humanism developed generic literary categories and critical thinking about contemporary and classical texts. More than that though, it emphasized the role of the speaking/writing subject, derived from ancient rhetorical models stressing the intellectual, moral and psychological development of the orator which, I shall argue, was later transformed into the construction of literary personae. Its significance, in conjunction with other material and cultural factors and practices, on the development of a discourse which self-consciously reflected on contemporary writing, and in which all the writers considered in this thesis were educated, has to be recognised.

Humanist ideas, as Davies suggests, are in some senses ever-present, changing over time, but Renaissance humanism represented too disparate a set of people, projects and ideas, to become culturally dominant:

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<sup>59</sup> Kristeller, 1974: 16-17.

In general the relations between the majority of the *umanisti*, and their position within the major institutions of intellectual authority, remained fluid and often precarious. And just as ‘humanism’ has no consistent meaning (indeed, no linguistic existence) in the period, so the humanists – teachers, scholars, patrons, publishers or wealthy amateurs of the ‘new learning’ – had no common programme of interests or objectives.<sup>60</sup>

Kinney offers a rather more idealised portrait of Renaissance humanists and the humanist project, arguing that:

Discovering the texts of the antique civilizations, Roman as well as Greek, and inheriting through Colet and others the concordant ideas of the Florentine Neoplatonists, the Tudor humanists came to an increasing certainty that they could fashion and refashion themselves, and so fashion and refashion society. Being educable, man might also be perfectible.<sup>61</sup>

Humanist poetics, in his view, owed its existence to an increasingly obvious clash between an idealistic theory and the sordid reality of life:

From the start, humanist poetics was not merely bookish, although it maintained an abiding admiration for the Greek and Roman texts that stubbornly remained at the roots of its thought and accomplishment. Humanist poetics was also a communal effort serving the state and its people. This, too, the Renaissance learned from its inherited past. What became increasingly clear, however, as the sixteenth century proceeded through expansion, war, religious persecution and reformation, and expansion once again, was that the human values preached from a classical past when aligned with Christianity could not always account for subsequent observation and experience. Discrepancies multiplied, and the writers of humanist poetics, wishing to secure the values of their humanist training, turned increasingly to the branches of imaginative poetry to explore the usefulness and, increasingly, the limitations, of the past.<sup>62</sup>

Kinney makes it clear, however, that humanist poetics was limited culturally in time and space: “As we can date the start of humanist poetics with the statutes of St. Paul’s School, London, in 1512, so we can date the beginnings of a posthumanist

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<sup>60</sup> Davies, 1997: 75.

<sup>61</sup> Kinney, 1986: 5.

<sup>62</sup> Kinney, 1986: xi.

poetics with the 1540 publication of the first summary of Copernican astronomy, the *Narratio prima* of Rheticus.”<sup>63</sup>

The texts in my thesis all relate to a decisively posthumanist period in Kinney’s terms. Although keen to embrace the new technology of print in order to spread their ideas, humanist focus on the primacy of rhetoric as an intellectual discipline was to prove limiting, based as it was upon a mental organisation related to orality. Nevertheless it provided an important discursive element, which was ultimately to be transformed to serve as one of the foundations of the new literary terrain. For this reason, I have treated humanism as an external factor rather than positioning the poetical texts within it. There are obvious continuities between humanist and posthumanist poetics, in the emphasis on the didactic qualities of art for example, but finally it is difference, the way in which certain elements are appropriated and transformed, which are more significant in terms of the emergent discourse.

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<sup>63</sup> Kinney, 1986: 446.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ART OF IMITATION

In arguing for and against poetry's legitimacy, the most thoughtful Elizabethan writers justify its existence through analysis of its fundamental constitution: what poetry is and what it is for. The most significant term in discussions of Renaissance poetics is "imitation" and competing definitions of the term crystallise the debate over representation and meaning, revealing contradiction and a sense of the deeply problematic nature of the problem.

Following classical models, notably Aristotle and Horace, most writers offer variations on Sidney's well-known definition:

Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight.<sup>1</sup>

Sidney cites Aristotle as his authority, translating *mimesis* as "imitation", a recent English coinage from Latin *imitatio* (*OED* 1502). *Mimesis* was the term used by both Plato and Aristotle to signify representation but their use of the term was very different. For Plato it had fundamentally negative connotations. He regarded artistic production as thrice removed from the "throne of truth,"<sup>2</sup> extrapolating his theory of art from the example of the carpenter, the painter and the bed:

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney, 1973: 101.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Republic* translated by H. D. P. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), Bk X, 597 p. 374.

We have seen that there are three sorts of bed. The first exists in the ultimate nature of things, and if it was made by anyone it must, I suppose, have been made by God. The second is made by the carpenter, the third by the painter.<sup>3</sup>

The artist, Plato argues, “represents what the other two make” and, when asked specifically whether he represents “the ultimate reality or the things the craftsman makes,” replies “(t)he things the craftsman makes.” He concludes that

The artist’s representation is therefore a long way removed from truth, and he is able to reproduce everything because he never penetrates beneath the superficial appearance of anything. For example, a painter can paint a portrait of a shoemaker or a carpenter or any other craftsman without knowing anything about their crafts at all; yet, if he is skilful enough, his portrait of a carpenter may, at a distance, deceive children or simple people into thinking it is a real carpenter.<sup>4</sup>

The artist is thus a sort of charlatan and art a spurious activity.

Aristotle, on the other hand, regards *mimesis* as the central practice of poetry: “the capacity to produce an imitation is the essential characteristic of the poet.”<sup>5</sup> He regards this in a positive light: “Man...learns his first lessons through imitation, and we observe that all men find pleasure in imitations.”<sup>6</sup> Human beings are differentiated from animals in Aristotle’s view through this imitative ability. Erwin Panofsky argues that in the Renaissance this conception of imitation was restored:

art theory lifted from a thousand years of oblivion the notion – self-evident in classical antiquity, purged away by Neoplatonism and hardly ever considered in medieval thought – that the work of art is a faithful reproduction of reality.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Plato, 1955, Book X, 597, p. 373.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, 1955, Book X, 598, p. 374.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics: A translation and commentary for students of literature* translated by Leon Golden with commentary by O. B. Hardison Jr. (Tallahassee: University of Florida Presses, 1981), I 1447b ll.37-38.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, 1981: IV 1448b ll.3-6.

<sup>7</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* translated by Joseph J. S. Peake (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), p. 47.

Erich Auerbach does not make precisely the same case in *Mimesis*, but that might be one way of reading his theory of two “styles” of representation of reality: Homeric and Old Testament, which in his view “exercised their determining influence...in European literature.”<sup>8</sup> The Homeric style of representation Auerbach characterises as “fully externalised description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective; on the other hand, (in the Old Testament style) certain parts (are) brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, ‘background’ quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic.”<sup>9</sup> Panofsky’s assertion that it was during the Renaissance that the concept of “art work as a faithful reproduction of reality” can be related to the humanists’ renewed enthusiasm for the classics and Auerbach’s Homeric style of representation. The development of vernacular literature constitutes in these terms a gradual synthesis of the two.

M. H. Abrams argues that mimesis was, in fact, the earliest aesthetic theory: “(t)he mimetic orientation – the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe – was probably the most primitive aesthetic theory,” and he goes on to analyse it as a “relational term, signifying two items and some correspondence between them.”<sup>10</sup> Abrams describes the ubiquity and cultural longevity of the term:

‘Imitation’ continued to be a prominent item in the critical vocabulary for a long time after Aristotle – all the way through the eighteenth century, in fact,

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<sup>8</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* translated from the German by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Auerbach, 1953: 23.

<sup>10</sup> M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 8.

the systematic importance given to the term differed greatly from critic to critic; those objects in the universe that art imitates, or should imitate, were variously conceived as either actual or in some sense ideal; and from the first, there was a tendency to replace Aristotle's 'action' as the principal object of imitation with such elements as human characters, or thought, or even inanimate things. But particularly after the recovery of the *Poetics* and the great burst of aesthetic theory in sixteenth-century Italy, whenever a critic was moved to get down to fundamentals and frame a comprehensive definition of art, the predicate usually included the word 'imitation' or else one of those parallel terms which, whatever differences they might imply, all faced in the same direction: 'reflection', 'representation', 'counterfeiting', 'feigning', 'copy' or 'image'.<sup>11</sup>

As Abrams says these terms crop up time and again throughout Elizabethan texts relating to poetic practices. In his discussion of "The Objects of Imitation",<sup>12</sup> Abrams analyses imitation's two principal objects as "empirical" and "transcendental" ideals, defining the former as a "heightened", "refined" version of "reality":

The theorist who held that art reflected nature was committed to looking 'out there,' rather than into the artist for the subject matter of a work. He was at once confronted by the conspicuous fact that the image is rarely a facsimile of any single object or event in the external world, and sometimes presents to the spectator a kind of being for which there is no precedent whatever in the world of sense. This deviation of art from reality has always been a cardinal problem for aesthetic philosophy, and the main basis for the charge by writers indifferent or hostile to art that it is trivial, or positively mischievous. Classic and neo-classic defenders of art alike solved the problem by claiming that poetry imitates not the actual, but selected matters, qualities, tendencies, or forms, which are within or behind the actual-veridical elements in the constitution of the universe which are of higher worth than gross and unselected reality itself. In reflecting these, the mirror held up to nature reflects what, in opposition to 'real nature', English critics often called 'nature improved', or 'heightened' or 'refined' or in the French phrase, *la belle nature*.<sup>13</sup>

Abrams distinguishes this model from the "Transcendental Ideal", a model derived, he argues, from Neoplatonism. On the basis of the writings of Neoplatonic

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<sup>11</sup> Abrams, 1953: 11.

<sup>12</sup> Abrams, 1953: 35-36.

<sup>13</sup> Abrams, 1953: 35.

philosophers such as Plotinus (205-270 AD), the Florentine Academy developed an aesthetic model in which they

might retain the frame of Plato's cosmos and yet avoid Plato's derogation of the arts simply by allowing the artist to by-pass the sensible world in order to imitate the Ideas at first hand. By this sleight, the work of art is conceived to reflect the ideal more accurately than does imperfect nature itself.<sup>14</sup>

Abrams's analysis of pre-Romantic theories of art distinguishes two basic models. Jonathan Dollimore also offers alternative theoretical models in "Two concepts of mimesis" which are related, though not identical, to Abrams's. Acknowledging that "(i)n the *Poetics* Aristotle used the concept of mimesis in several senses," Dollimore goes on to argue that "imitation was freely interpreted in the Renaissance."<sup>15</sup> He distinguishes two main versions: an "ideal mimesis" in which "art represents an ideal moral order which improves those capable of apprehending it" and an "empiricist mimesis": a non-didactic representation of "immediate reality". These contradictory concepts produced, he suggests, a "dynamic conflict" and the tension it generated was exploited by dramatists of the period as a "way of getting us to confront the problematic nature of reality itself."<sup>16</sup>

Dollimore's analysis works for the dramatic examples he discusses and fits theories, such as Joel Altman's,<sup>17</sup> which explore the lively, confrontational nature of early modern drama. The most usual meaning of "imitation", however, in contemporary Renaissance terms was in relation to the art of rhetoric. It was the technique employed for perfecting speaking and writing. *Imitatio* constituted one of

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<sup>14</sup> Abrams, 1953: 42.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, "Two concepts of Mimesis: Renaissance Literary Theory and *The Revenger's Tragedy*" in *Drama and Mimesis: Themes in Drama 2*, pp. 25-50 edited by James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Dollimore, 1980: 25-27.

<sup>17</sup> Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1978).

the three elements recommended in the teaching of rhetoric – *ars, imitatio, exercitatio*. The *Ad Herennium* offers a typical formulation. After describing the five parts of rhetoric, the author continues:

All these faculties we can acquire by three means: Theory, Imitation, and Practice. By theory is meant a set of rules that provide a definite method and system of speaking. Imitation stimulates us to attain, in accordance with a studied method, the effectiveness of certain models in speaking. Practice is assiduous exercise and experience in speaking.<sup>18</sup>

Rhetorical treatises recommended the emulation of classical models in order to perfect style. The post-classical eclipse of poetry, the limitation of its range and significance, and its subsuming under rhetoric, had produced a narrowed understanding of imitation which came to mean a predominantly linguistic technique designed to improve style. Walter Ong sees the emphasis on imitation as a direct result of the combined influences of rhetoric and humanism, encouraged by a reverence for the classical past:

the classic orator proceeded in much the same rhapsodic<sup>19</sup> way as the ancient bard, and so, in theory, did his Renaissance followers. Doctrines of invention, rhetorical and dialectical or logical, had encouraged the view that composition was largely, if not essentially, an assembling of previously readied material. The humanists had reinforced this view with their doctrine of imitation and their insistence – not new in actuality but only in conscious emphasis – that antiquity was the storehouse of knowledge and eloquence.<sup>20</sup>

In order to achieve the requisite purity of classical Latin, imitation became a central tenet of humanism and the desirability of emulating Cicero's style amounted to a cult - "Ciceronianism".

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<sup>18</sup> *Ad C. Herennium: de ratione dicendi* translated by Harry Caplan (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1964), I. ii. 3, pp. 7, 9.

<sup>19</sup> "Rhapsody" is from the Greek *rhapsodein* and describes the oral poets' technique of formulaic composition - "stitching together".

<sup>20</sup> Ong, 1971: 35.

The definition of poetry, therefore, as “an art of imitation,” rather than offering a comprehensive definition, tended to beg the question: if poetry was an art of imitation, what exactly was it supposed to be imitating – real life, a hyperreal world of the poetic imagination, or classical literary models? Horace had argued that “the experienced poet, as an imitative artist, should look to human life and character for his models, and from them derive a language that is true to life.”<sup>21</sup> Vives too argued against the slavish imitation of Cicero or any particular model, advocating that the student emulate the spirit as well as the style of a great writer in order to produce his own work. He maintains that true “imitation” involves a consideration of “the art and method by which such and such effects were achieved by a given author, in order that similar artifices may accomplish for the imitator his own intention in his work.”<sup>22</sup>

Vernacular writings take up both senses. Earlier writers, such as Wilson and Ascham argue for literary imitation as the best. In his prescription for learning the art of rhetoric, Wilson reiterates the classical recipe:

for though many by nature without art have proved worthy, yet is art a surer guide than nature, considering we see as lively by the art what we do as though we read a thing in writing, whereas nature’s doings are not so open to all men. Again, those that have good wits by nature shall better increase them by art to help them forward.<sup>23</sup>

Ascham develops the idea in *The Scholemaster* (1570). Book I is concerned with the “bringing up of youth”; Book II, on “the ready way to the Latin tong,” describes how to learn languages and increase eloquence. It includes a section on imitation

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<sup>21</sup> Horace: *On the Art of Poetry* translated by T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 90.

<sup>22</sup> Foster Watson, *Vives on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913) includes a translation of *De tradendis disciplines* pp. 1 – 304, p. 195.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, 1994: 49.

intended as a precursor to a separate book on the subject. The projected work was to consider different types of writing in relation to imitation:

And thus the trew difference of stiles, in euerie Author and euerie kinde of learning, may easelie be knowne by this diuision:

	( Poeticum,
	( Historicum
in genus	( Philosophicum,
	( Oratorium,

Which I thought in this place to touch onelie, not to prosecute at large, bicause, God willyng, in the Latin tong, I will fullie handle it in my booke de Imitatione.<sup>24</sup>

In his attempts to analyse different types of imitation, Ascham recognises the complexity of the subject, which he regards as central to learning: “Imitation is a facultie to expresse liuelie and perfitelie that example which ye go about to follow,”<sup>25</sup> distinguishing three kinds. The first relates to theatrical practice: “(t)he whole doctrine of Comedies and Tragedies is a perfite imitation, or faire liuelie painted picture of the life of euerie degree of man.” He then moves straight on to the “second kind of Imitation (which) is to follow for learning of tonges and sciences the best authors.”<sup>26</sup> Here Ascham stresses the importance of good models over and above choice of subject matter, arguing in effect that expression and idea are inseparable and that to attempt to distinguish between them would be harmful: “Ye know not what hurt ye do to learning, that care not for wordes but for matter, and so make a deuorse betwixt the tong and the hart.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ascham, 1870: 141.

<sup>25</sup> Ascham, 1870: 116.

<sup>26</sup> Ascham, 1870: 119.

<sup>27</sup> Ascham, 1870: 118.

The third kind of imitation, defined by Ascham, is the decision over which writers to follow and the techniques to be adopted. Ascham had a poor opinion of poets and poetry generally and he recommends orators and historians as preferable models – Varro, Salust, Caesar and Cicero. On the other hand he praises Plautus for that “purenesse of the Latin tong” and Terence whose “wordes be chosen so purelie, placed so orderly, and all his stuffe so neetlie packed vp and wittely compassed in euerie place.” Yet while praising the elegance and perfection of their style, he condemns them for their chosen “matter” which he regards as

altogether within the compasse of the meanest mens maners, and doth not stretch to any thing of any great weight at all, but standeth chiefly in vttering the thoughtes and conditions of hard fathers, foolish mother, vnthrifty yong men, craftie seruants, sotle bawds, and wilie harlots, and so is moch spent in finding out fine fetches and packing vp pelting matters, soch as in London commonlie cum to the hearing of the Masters of Bridewell.<sup>28</sup>

This seems to contradict his earlier claim that words cannot be divorced from matter in such an arbitrary way.

Sidney recognises the theoretical problem posed by the statement that “Poesy...is an art of imitation,” as he attempts to define its appropriate object. It is “Nature” which constitutes the immediate object of the imitative arts:

There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of Nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend as they become actors and players, as it were of what Nature will have set forth.<sup>29</sup>

The poet, however, is a special case in Sidney’s argument; whilst practitioners of the “serving sciences” are “still compassed within the circle of a question according to the proposed matter”, Sidney rejects such limitations for the poet who “disdaining

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<sup>28</sup> Ascham, 1870: 142-143.

<sup>29</sup> Sidney, 1973: 99-100.

to be tied to any such subjection” and “lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature”. Sidney goes on to claim a unique place for the poet:

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.

He is not interested in an “empiricist mimesis”, that is a representation of everyday life, which would belong to the province of the historian rather than the poet and would be unsuitable for the didactic purpose he has described for poetry – “to teach and delight.”<sup>30</sup>

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle offers a range of mimetic possibilities. In relation to character he argues that “the objects imitated are either better than or worse than or like the norm.”<sup>31</sup> In Sidney’s view poetry should be engaged specifically with representing that “other nature”, the “golden” world of potentialities as opposed to the degenerate “brazen” world of reality. Sidney stresses the didactic possibilities of poetry; Nature is incapable of producing perfection in the same way as the poet:

for whom as the other things are, so it seemeth in him her uttermost cunning is employed – and know whether she have brought forth so true a lover as Theagenes, so constant a friend as Pylades, so valiant a man as Orlando, so right a prince as Xenophon’s Cyrus, so excellent a man in every way as Virgil’s Aeneas.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Sidney, 1973: 100-101.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, 1981: II, 1448a.

<sup>32</sup> Sidney, 1973: 100.

By the same token “if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out (as the tragedy writer answered to one that misliked the show of such persons) so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them”.<sup>33</sup>

Although Plato was hostile to mimesis, Florentine scholars, such as Ficino and the Florentine Academy, offered a sympathetic rereading of artistic representation. They drew on the work of Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus, who had argued that artists imitated the idea not the material:

Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for...we must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Ideas from which Nature itself derives, and, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking.<sup>34</sup>

The influence on Sidney’s thinking of such ideas is evident in his description of the “golden world” of the poet when he argues that

The works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction; for any understanding knoweth the skill of the artificer standeth in that *Idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that Idea is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he hath imagined them.<sup>35</sup>

Sidney envisages poetic representation as the “essential”, corresponding to the Idea, whereas “Nature” produces the mere imitation, in accord with Plato’s original model. As Walter R. Davis puts it “Poetry becomes, for Sidney, the animation of a Platonic Idea.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sidney, 1973: 111.

<sup>34</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* translated by Stephen Mackenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), v. viii. I.

<sup>35</sup> Sidney, 1973: 101.

<sup>36</sup> Walter R. Davis, *Idea and Act in Elizabethan Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 30.

He is aware though of the potential accusation of blasphemy in his account, which makes such grand claims for the poet's creativity:

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature: which in nothing he showeth so much as in Poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.<sup>37</sup>

The concept of the poet creator, deriving his creative gift direct from God, was not new. As Abrams puts it "(t)hat there is some connection between artist and divinity is, of course, as old as the belief that poetry is sponsored and inspired by the gods." Abrams credits Sidney with the introduction of the idea of the poem as heterocosm into English criticism<sup>38</sup> adding

To this idea, Sidney's contemporary, George Puttenham, joined the portentous word 'create'; in ecclesiastical Latin, *creare* was the common word to connote the orthodox concept that God made the world 'out of nothing.'<sup>39</sup>

Puttenham calls the poet a "maker," likening poetic creation to God's, but rejecting the Neoplatonic ideas which pervade Sidney's thinking as well as the humanistic, rhetorical theory of imitation as artistic creativity which he defines as translation:

A POET is as much to say as a maker. And our English name well conformes with the Greeke word, for of *poiein*, to make, they call a maker Poeta. Such as (by way of resemblance and reuerently) we may say of God; who without any trauell to his diuine imagination made all the world of nought, nor also by any paterne or mould, as the Platonicks with their Ideas do phantastically suppose. Euen so the very Poet makes and contriues out of

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<sup>37</sup> Sidney, 1973: 101.

<sup>38</sup> Abrams, 1953: 272-273.

<sup>39</sup> Abrams, 1953: 273-4.

his owne braine both the verse and matter of his poeme, and not by anie foreine copie or example, as doth the translator, who therefore may well be sayd a versifier, but not a Poet.<sup>40</sup>

He goes on to develop his ideas, producing an empiricist definition of imitation, in which he distinguishes the elements of creativity:

And neuertheless, withoute any repugnancie at all, a Poet may in some sort be said a follower or imitator, because he can expresse the true and liuely of euery thing is set before him, and which he taketh in hand to describe: and so in that respect is both a maker and a counterfaior: and Poesie an art not only of making, but also of imitation.<sup>41</sup>

Puttenham suggests various options concerning the source of poetic creativity, arguing that poetry is either the product of divine inspiration *or* natural ability and talent, *or* intelligence and understanding, *or* experience and observation, *or* any combination of these factors:

this science in his perfection can not grow but by some diuine instinct – Platonicks call it furor; or by great subtiltie of the spirits & wit; or by much experience and obseruation of the world, and course of kinde; or, peraduenture, by all or most part of them.<sup>42</sup>

He concludes that, whichever is the case, poetry is equally praiseworthy, before readmitting the notion of imitation of literary models as valid and, indeed, the most commendable of techniques:

It is therefore of Poets thus to be conceiued, that if they be able to deuise and make all these things of them selues, without any subiect of veritie, that they be (by maner of speech) as creating gods. If they do it by instinct diuine or naturall, then surely much faouored from aboue; if by their experience, then no doubt very wise men; if by any president or paterne layd before them, then truly the most excellent imitators and counterfaiors of all others.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* reprinted in Smith, 1904 volume II, pp. 1-193, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 3.

<sup>42</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 3-4.

In this extract, Puttenham's lack of resolution articulates the play of meaning in the conflicting ideas about "imitation". His first category of poets "able to devise and make all these things of them selues" suggests something akin to what, in modern, (post-Romantic) terminology, might be called "the creative imagination". His discussion of "fancy" and "phantasy", immediately after his defence of poetry and the poet, in which he distinguishes between "sound and disordered 'fancy'" and the possibility of phantasy's representing "the best, most comely, and bewtiful images or appearances of thinges to the soule and according to their very truth"<sup>44</sup> also suggests that, in Atkins's words, "Puttenham was hinting at something like the workings of 'imagination' in its modern sense."<sup>45</sup>

Geoffrey Shepherd argues powerfully against reading any notion of "creativity" into Sidney's *Apology*:

The whole idea of creation was still generally regarded as the prerogative of God. Whatever early sixteenth-century critics may appear to say to us, it is always best to assume that they are thinking of a poet's work as fiction-making, not as creation: their verb is *effingere*, not *creare*. And Sidney certainly does not think of poetry as a creation in any sixteenth-century sense of the word.<sup>46</sup>

Shepherd recognises the ambiguities in the term "imitation" but tends to blame the pedantry of generations of assiduous schoolmasters for its semantic derogation:

When the art of letters fell into the clutches of the schoolmasters of the Roman world, a much looser and broader notion of imitation becomes current...the endless discipline of the schools in marking and re-examining the beauties of their standard texts gave a further thrust to that inescapable tendency of all schools to turn life into contents of books. Often enough imitation comes to be spoken of not as a representation of life but simply as an imitation of life in books – a copying of old authors.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 20.

<sup>45</sup> Atkins, 1947: 160.

<sup>46</sup> Sidney, 1973: 62.

<sup>47</sup> Sidney, 1973: 48.

This slippage is due in part at least to the confusion between rhetoric and poetry (to be discussed in the next section), and its formalisation in a set of techniques designed to improve oratorical performance. Shepherd recognises the influence of such ideas on Sidney suggesting that “much of Sidney’s argument is based on the belief that the old writers of Greece and Rome provide us with our most reliable models. But,” he continues, “Sidney throughout is also grappling with the more profound conception of imitation. And men who thought about the arts in the sixteenth century found it necessary to re-forged the whole doctrine and give it a new edge.” Shepherd concludes that in Sidney’s view, the poet “does not base his imitation on the appearance or behaviour of particular men, but on generalised Man behaving in a characteristically representative way.”<sup>49</sup>

When Sidney goes on to discuss the need for poets to develop their writing skills he returns immediately to rhetorical prescription without acknowledging any contradiction in his use of imitation at this point to describe a different practice. He quotes the *orator fit, poeta nascitur* tag [the orator is made, the poet born] before going on to explain

Yet confess I always that as the fertilest ground must be manured, so must the highest-flying wit have a Daedalus to guide him. That Daedalus, they say...hath three wings to bear itself up into the air of due commendation: that is, Art, Imitation, and Exercise.<sup>50</sup>

He discusses earlier writers, classical, medieval and contemporary, before condemning the slavish imitation of classical writers as inappropriate in a bizarre metaphor:

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<sup>49</sup> Sidney, 1973: 48-49.

<sup>50</sup> Sidney, 1973: 132-133.

Truly I could wish...the diligent imitators of Tully [Cicero] and Demosthenes (most worthy to be imitated) did not so much keep Nizolian paper-books of their figures and phrases, as by attentive translation (as it were) devour them whole and make them wholly theirs. For now they cast sugar and spice upon every dish that is served to the table, like those Indians, not content to wear earrings at the fit and natural place of the ears, but they will thrust jewels through their nose and lips, because they will be sure to be fine.<sup>51</sup>

He singles out for praise “divers smally learned courtiers” in whom he has found “a more sound style than in some professors of learning” which he guesses is because

the courtier, following that which by practice he findeth fittest to nature, therein (though he know it not) doth according to art: where the other, using art to show art, and not to hide art (as in these cases he should do), flieth from nature, and indeed abuseth art.<sup>52</sup>

Sidney calls poetry “an art of imitation” and prescribes “imitation” as a technique for improving writing skills, but condemns the slavish adherence to classical models, recommending an artless art which should appear “natural”. He rejects “nature” though as an appropriate model for the poet in favour of “Nature”, the poet’s own created world. Ronald Levao argues that “Sidney’s discussion of poetic inspiration, for example, is deliberately tangled and ambivalent.”<sup>53</sup> He regards it as part of his ironic performance within *The Apology*. I agree that Sidney is deploying a sophisticated narrative persona in the text but the contradictions in his argument are not purely performative and restricted to his writing alone. They are common to the works of all his contemporaries in their efforts to define the meaning of poetry. Such contradictions indicate rather the complexity of the problem, as the convoluted

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<sup>51</sup> Sidney, 1973: 138.

<sup>52</sup> Sidney, 1973: 139.

<sup>53</sup> Ronald Levao, “Sidney’s Feigned *Apology*” in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* edited by Dennis Kay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 127- 146, p. 129.

discussions reveal the difficulties faced by Elizabethan writers in their attempts at resolution.

Whilst for many, imitation constituted the essence of poetry, to others it appeared inimical. Gabriel Harvey is interesting because he seems to have changed his mind. In the exchange of letters with Spenser between 1579 and 1580 Harvey thinks of imitation in the sense of following literary models. He praises Spenser specifically for writing “in imitation of HERODOTUS”<sup>54</sup> and his admiration of *The Shepheardes Calendar* is based, he claims, on its comparability with his own literary favourites:

I like your DREAMES passingly well: and the rather because they savour of that singular extraordinarie veine and invention whiche I ever fancied moste, and in a manner admired onlye, in LUCIAN, PETRARCHE, ARETINE, PASQUILL, and all the most delicate and fine conceited Grecians and Italians.<sup>55</sup>

Then comes a detectable shift in his ideas. Whilst still embracing “exercise” as a prerequisite for literary achievement, he now considers the importance of life and experience as the basis for literary practice: “Pregnant Rules auail much, but visible Examples amount incredibly: Experience, the onely life of perfection, & onely perfection of life.”<sup>56</sup> In this at least, Harvey is at one with Nashe.

Nashe is against the whole concept and is characteristically forthright in condemning “the servile imitation of vainglorious tragoedians, who contend not so seriouslie to excel in action as to embowel the clowdes in a speech of comparison.”<sup>57</sup> In Nashe’s mind imitation comprehends both language and subject

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<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Harvey, *Four Letters* reprinted in Smith, 1904, I: 115.

<sup>55</sup> Harvey, 1904, I: 114.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* reprinted in Smith, 1904, II: 235.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Nashe, Preface to Greene’s *Menaphon* reprinted in Smith, 1904, I: 307-308.

matter. He is equally contemptuous of those who take their plots from Italian romance (Ariosto) as those who plunder the classics for their expression:

Indeede, I must needs say the descending yeares from the Philosophers *Athens* have not been supplied with such present Oratours as were able in anie English vaine to be eloquent of their owne: but either they must borrow invention of Ariosto and his countrey-men, take vp choice of words by exchange in *Tullies Tusculane* and the Latine Historiographers store-houses, similitudes, nay whole sheetes and tractacts verbatim, from the plenty of *Plutarch* and *Plinie*, and, to conclude, their whole methode of writing from the libertie of Comicall fictions that have succeeded to our Rethoritians by a second imitation: so that well may the Adage, *Nil dictum quod non dictum prius*, [Nothing has been said which has not been said before] bee the most iudiciall estimate of our latter Writers.<sup>58</sup>

He acknowledges his own debt to Aretine, though, in *The Unfortunate Traveller* and in *The Anatomie of Absurditie* argues the need for artistic technique since: “There is no such discredit of Arte as an ignoraunt Artificer”. He regards rhetoric as an ornament to art, but not constitutive of it, arguing for experience as the primary requisite: “Endeauour to adde vnto Arte Experience: experience is more profitable voide of arte then arte which hath not experience.”<sup>59</sup>

Samuel Daniel also regards imitation in a poor light: discussing the use of rhyme, for example, he concludes “As good still to vse ryme and a little reason as neither ryme nor reason, for no doubt, as idle wits will write in that kinde, as do now in this, imitation wil after, though it breake her necke.”<sup>60</sup> He stresses the virtues of independence of thought liberated from the constraints of classical models:

Me thinks we should not so soone yield our consents captiue to the authoritie of Antiquitie vnlesse we saw more reason; all our vnderstandings are not to be built by the square of *Greece* and *Italie*. We are the children of nature as well as they; we are not so placed out of the way of iudgement but

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<sup>58</sup> Nashe, 1904, I: 309.

<sup>59</sup> Nashe, 1904, I: 334-335.

<sup>60</sup> Samuel Daniel, *A Defence of Ryme* reprinted in Smith, 1904, II: 356-384, p. 363.

that the same Sunne of Discretion shineth vpon vs; we haue our portion of the same virtues as well as the same vices.<sup>61</sup>

In a judgement that Atkins regards as “convincing” and “final”,<sup>62</sup> Daniel says

It is not the obseruing of Trochaiques nor their Iambicques that wil make our writings ought the wiser. All their Poesie, all their Philosophie is nothing, unlesse we bring the discerning light of concept with vs to apply it to vse. It is not bookes, but only that great booke of the world and the all-ouerspreading grace of heauen that makes men truly iudiciall.<sup>63</sup>

This passage suggests that poetry is neither simply a question of learned techniques nor even of intellectual understanding but, in a formulation that seems to anticipate Romantic theory (Abrams’ metaphor of the lamp), Daniel stresses that the writer must “bring” and “apply” the “discerning light of concept”. Unlike Sidney, he does not reject the “world”, as he finds it; the writer’s task is to make sense of that world, to enlighten understanding, to make “men truly iudiciall”.

George Chapman likewise regards the literary practice of imitation in a negative light. In his Preface to *Seaven Bookes of the Iliades* he discusses the relative merits of Homer and Virgil, condemning the “imitatorie spirit” of Virgil’s writings:

Nor do I deny...*Eneas* arms to be forged with an exceeding height of wit by *Virgil*, but compared with these of *Homer* they are nothing...since my publication of the other seven bookes comparison hath been made betweene *Virgill* and *Homer*; who can be compared in nothing...And whosoever shall reade *Homer* thoroughly and worthily will know the question comes from a superficiall an too vnripe reader; for *Homers* Poems were writ from a free furie, an absolute & full soule, *Virgils* out of a courtly, laborious, and altogether imitatorie spirit: not a *Simile* hee hath but is *Homers*: not an invention, person, or disposition but is wholly or originally built vpon *Homericall* foundations, and in many places hath the verie wordes *Homer* vseth.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Daniel, 1904: 366-367.

<sup>62</sup> Atkins, 1947: 195.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel, 1904: 367.

<sup>64</sup> George Chapman, Preface to *Seaven Bookes of the Iliades* reprinted in Smith, 1904, II: 295-307, p. 298.

Chapman is objecting here to the practice recommended by rhetoricians and humanists to imitate notable authors. His phrasing suggests ideas of ownership and the concept of intellectual property rights.

One of the most telling signs of a changed response to the concept of imitation can be found in the 1597 coining of “plagiary” (*OED*), which cites Ben Jonson as the first printed reference to the term. The concept of originality and intellectual property rights are related to the development of print culture and the emergence of the professional writer. It would be expected therefore that Jonson would regard imitation in the light of an inimical practice. His attitude is complex though, participating in the contradictions evident throughout contemporary writings.

Jonson develops his theories in *Timber or Discoveries* in which he rehearses all the key terms of the debate, attempting to elucidate their meanings. The influence of Horace is obvious in his likening “*Poetry and Picture*” as “arts of a like nature, and both busy about imitation...For they both invent, feign, and devise many things, and accommodate all they invent to the use and service of nature.”<sup>65</sup> It is not clear whether Jonson is using these three terms “invent, feign, and devise” synonymously or whether he draws any distinction between them. The *OED* gives all three as synonyms from 1535 to 1821, in a sense now archaic or obsolete: “Invent 2. To find out or produce by mental activity; to devise – 1821; to fabricate, feign, ‘make up’ 1535”. To read them simply as synonyms, however, does not seem very productive; whilst it does have the effect of aligning the terms within the discourse, it does not throw much light on the creative process that Jonson is trying to analyse. Reading

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<sup>65</sup> *The Oxford Authors: Ben Jonson* edited by Ian Donaldson (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 561. Jonson called his theoretical treatise/commonplace book, in which he put down his thoughts about writing, *Timber; or, Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter* pp. 521-594.

the terms, therefore, as Jonson's description of an ordered process seems more useful.

The use of "invent" as the first term here recalls manuals of rhetoric (to be discussed in detail in the following section). Its meaning is indeterminate, having an intermediate sense between finding a topic and treating it in an original way, and having an original idea. "Feign" has a now rare meaning "To relate in fiction; to fable" which is, perhaps, the most likely sense in which Jonson was using the term here. In the section of *Discoveries* called "What is a poet", he calls a poet "a maker, or a feigner:" and goes on to argue that

his art, an art of imitation or feigning, expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony...Hence he is called a poet, not he which writeth in measure only, but that feigneth and formeth a fable, and writes things like the truth. For the fable and fiction is (as it were) the form and soul of any poetical work or poem.<sup>66</sup>

"Imitation", therefore, consists of "writing things like the truth", not copying classical models.

The third term in Jonson's analysis: "devise" is another of those words undergoing semantic changes. Derived from *dividere* – to divide, its meaning (as with invent) embraces both literal and figurative senses. The *OED* offers an archaic meaning from 1513, "to feign – invent". It also records a now obsolete meaning (-1814) "To conceive; to conjecture". It seems, therefore, to suggest a combination of formal treatment, as in "device: ingenuity" with an ideational sense, of having an ingenious idea. When Jonson goes on to discuss the development of a writer's skills, however, he goes back to rhetorical prescription, reiterating the lack of distinction between writing and speaking: "For a man to write well, there are required three necessities:

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<sup>66</sup> Jonson, 1985: 582.

to read the best authors, observe the best speakers, and much exercise of his own style.”<sup>67</sup>

“What is a Poet?” prints Jonson’s marginal annotations: “1. Ingenium”: “a goodness of natural wit”, “2. Exercitatio”: “exercise of those parts, and frequent”, “3. Imitatio” and, following on from that, a restatement of the classical definition. Jonson attempts, using Horace as his authority, to offer a fuller definition of the term:

The third requisite in our poet or maker is imitation, to be able to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use. To make choice of one excellent man above the rest, and so to follow him till he grow very he, or so like him as the copy may be mistaken for the principal. Not as a creature that swallows what it takes in crude, raw, or indigested, but that feeds with an appetite, and hath a stomach to concoct, divide, and turn all into nourishment. Not to imitate servilely (as Horace saith) and catch at vices for virtue, but to draw forth out of the best and choicest flowers, with the bee, and turn all into honey, work it into one relish and savour, make our imitation sweet; observe how the best writers have imitated and follow them.<sup>68</sup>

Jonson’s contradictory statements exemplify the conflict and ambiguity over terms and ideas in the emergence of poetic discourse. He continues to attempt to elucidate the relationship between nature, exercise, imitation, study and art in a restatement of the idea of an empiricist mimesis in which nature is to be the guide:

I am not of that opinion to conclude a poet’s liberty within the narrow limits of laws, which either the grammarians or philosophers prescribe. For before they found out those laws there were many excellent poets that fulfilled them; amongst whom none more perfect than Sophocles...or... Alcibiades, who had rather nature for guide than art for his master.<sup>69</sup>

Dollimore’s argument that the tension between conflicting versions of imitation was dramatically productive is perfectly exemplified within Jonson’s plays, as well as

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<sup>67</sup> Jonson, 1985: 566.

<sup>68</sup> Jonson, 1985: 585-6.

<sup>69</sup> Jonson, 1985: 587-8.

his theoretical arguments. The combination of classical models with an exuberant picture of contemporary life seems characteristic of Jonson's dramaturgy.

In his introduction to *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, J. E. Spingarn suggests that the two opposing strands of the English Critical tradition, which I shall refer to for convenience by the shorthand terms applied by later critics - Romantics and Augustans - are both derived from Sidney but developed by the next generation of writers:

Bacon and Jonson are the representative critics of the Jacobean period. Both alike inherited the traditions of Elizabethan culture, and modified and transformed them. The imaginative element in Sidney's theory of poetry was carried on by Bacon, who added historic and scientific factors not in the Elizabethan scheme. The classical side of Sidney's theory was developed by Jonson, who gave a new and increased prestige to the rules formulated by the Italians, and shifted the interest of criticism to the external and objective side of literary art.<sup>70</sup>

In *The Advancement of Learning* Bacon divides knowledge, "human learning", into "the three partes of Mans vnderstanding, which is the seate of Learning: History to his memory, Poesie to his Imagination, and Philosophie to his Reason."<sup>71</sup> Whilst Bacon emphasizes the "imaginative element" in poetry, he does so at poetry's expense by downgrading it in relation to history and philosophy, in contradistinction to Sidney. For Bacon poetry is a fictive art, not offering eternal truths, but a sort of fantastic wish fulfilment which creates unnatural monsters:

Poesie is a part of Learning in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly referre to the Imagination, which, being not tyed to the Lawes of Matter, may at pleasure

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<sup>70</sup> J. E. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* Volume I 1605-1650 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), p. ix.

<sup>71</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* edited by William Aldis Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), Second Book, I. 1. p. 85.

Ioyne that which nature hath seuered, & seuer that which Nature hath ioyned, And so make vnlawfull Matches & diuorses of things.<sup>72</sup>

This passage is striking for its pointed contradiction of the well-known beginning of Horace's *Ars Poetica*:

If to a woman's head a painter would  
Set a horse-neck, and diuers feathers fold  
On every limb, ta'en from a several creature,  
Presenting upwards a fair female feature,  
Which in some swarthy fish uncomely ends:  
Admitted to the sight, although his friends,  
Could you contain your laughter? Credit me,  
This piece, my Pisos, and that book agree,  
Whose shapes, like sick men's dreams, are feign'd so vain,  
As neither head, nor feet, one form retain. –  
But equal power to painter and to poet,  
Of daring all hath still been given. We know it;  
And both do crave, and give again this leave.  
Yet, not as therefore wild and tame should cleave  
Together; not that we should serpents see  
With doves; or lambs with tigers coupled be.<sup>73</sup>

Bacon seems to be suggesting that poetry can deliver where reality falls short. He divides poetry into “Wordes” – a “character of stile” and “Matter” which is a “FAINED HISTORIE”:

The vse of this FAINED HISTORIE hath beene to give some shadowe of satisfaction to the minde of Man in those points wherein the Nature of things doth desire it, the world being in proportion inferior to the soule; by reason whereof there is agreeable to the spirit of Man a more ample Greatnesse, a more exact Goodnesse,<sup>74</sup> and a more absolute varietee then can be found in the nature of things.

Bacon's analysis conceives of poetry as belonging to a separate area of understanding, a realm of the fictional, which does not represent “real life”. It might

<sup>72</sup> Bacon, 1900, Second Book, IV, 1: 101.

<sup>73</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Works of Ben Jonson* edited by William Gifford (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1865), p. 728.

<sup>74</sup> Bacon, 1900, IV, 2: 101.

appear that Bacon's ideas have a lot in common with Sidney's but he is writing from a very different perspective. Whereas Sidney idealises poetry and elevates the status of the poet, Bacon conflates poetry and drama and dismisses them, even whilst acknowledging their function of making ideas accessible:

In this third part of Learning which is Poesie, I can report no deficiencie. For being as a plant that commeth of the lust of the earth, without a formal seede, it hath sprung vp and spread abroad, more than any other kinde: But to ascribe vnto it that which is due for the expressing of affections, passions, corruptions and customs, we are beholding to Poets more then to the Philosophers workes, and for wit and eloquence not much lesse then to Orators harangues. But it is not good to stay too long in the Theater: let vs now passe on to the iudicial Place or Pallace of the Mind, which we are to approach and view, with more Reuerence and attention.<sup>75</sup>

For Bacon the “iudicial Place or Pallace of the Mind” deserving “more Reuerence and attention” is science or natural philosophy to which he turns. Bacon's aim was to create a distinction between fiction and reality. Far from elevating the role of poetry and the poet, he is anxious to preclude poetry's claims to represent the truth. In the contemporary reorganisation of knowledges this was to constitute a major factor and its success is demonstrated by how completely naturalised this distinction has become. Recent poststructuralist thinking, however, has sought to deconstruct such binary oppositions by demonstrating how illusory they are in practice.

The idea that both strands in literary thinking can be traced back to Sidney emphasises the contradictions inherent within the discourse, its complicated genealogy and mixed heritage. Attempts to analyse and redefine the constitution, role and function of poetry are central to the debate and crucial to the development of English literary practice. Spingarn credits Bacon with adding “historical and scientific elements” not in Sidney's original scheme. All the texts in this thesis,

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<sup>75</sup> Bacon, 1900, IV, 5: 104-105.

though, attempt to organise vernacular writing practices in their own way in a more or less historical and scientific fashion. They engage with analysing the elements which they regard as constituting literature, and put them in a historical context by commenting on their relation to past performance. Through this they are participating in the rationalising mind-set of the age, attempting to define and locate the provenance of English vernacular writings.

## CHAPTER 4

### POETRY AND RHETORIC

Discursive formation is constituted by “transformations which serve as new foundations”<sup>1</sup>. English literary discourses, produced by the reorganisation of knowledge in the Renaissance, were constituted by the transformation and appropriation of elements from other, related discourses which no longer represented the changing culture’s needs and circumstances. In this section I shall focus on the relationship between poetry and rhetoric, the most significant of those discourses, transformed and appropriated by the new poetics.

In *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance*, Atkins discusses the status of poetry at the beginning of the period. It was

but the handmaid of theology or philosophy, it was a branch of logic, it was ‘versified rhetoric’, it was no real art but merely vain trifling, a ‘spice’, a plaything; or again, and here was the generally accepted idea...it was an esoteric art based on allegory, laden with hidden meanings and adorned with verse and fine diction.<sup>2</sup>

Rhetoric had reached its position of intellectual dominance on the basis that knowledge is power; it had grasped an understanding of the power of communication, constructing a theoretical model for an effective communicative technique. Despite a brief renaissance under humanist pedagogies, however, it became atomized and some of its most important elements, the construction of the

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, 1972: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Atkins, 1947: 103.

subject and the intense linguistic training in grammar, figures, and tropes, were relocated within a reorganized discursive framework.

Rhetoric is “the anglicized Greek word for public speaking, and thus refers primarily to oral verbalization, not to writing. It comes from the Greek term *rheima*, a word or saying, which in turn derives from Proto-Indo-European *wer*, the source of the Latin *verbum* and of our “word”.<sup>3</sup> By the fifth century B.C. rhetoric had become a highly formalized system for organizing spoken discourse with a complex set of rules, categorizing speech in terms of type and function, analysing and systematizing its kinds, parts and figures. It was inaugurated in Classical Greece but transplanted successfully to Rome via travelling Greek rhetoricians where it came to dominate the teaching syllabus.<sup>4</sup>

Classical rhetoric was divided into three kinds depending on its purpose: Epideictic or Demonstrative (occasional), concerned with praise or blame of a particular person or persons; Judicial (forensic), relating to the law and concerned specifically with prosecution or defence; and Deliberative (political), concerned with the course of political action to be taken. Beyond that (depending on which system is described) it had five divisions, speeches seven parts, three kinds of style, and every figure and type of phrase was categorized. Such organizational complexity was, however, only made possible through the invention of the phonetic alphabet and the use of writing. As Derrida says “(t)he very idea of institution...is unthinkable before the possibility of writing.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite being primarily an oral art, rhetoric’s articulation has been necessarily textual. The tension between its oral origins and literate cultural inscription is

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<sup>3</sup> Ong, 1971: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Vickers, 1988: 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 44.

inherent and its history has been of constant change and adaptation. Brian Vickers points out “Rhetoric’s role in later antiquity (was) as a purely written discipline.”<sup>6</sup>

Cicero indeed recognised the art of *eloquentia* (public speaking) as a literary activity:

The pen is the best and most eminent author and teacher of eloquence, and rightly so. For if an extempore and casual speech is easily beaten by one prepared and thought-out, this latter in turn will assuredly be surpassed by what has been written with care and diligence. The truth is that all commonplaces, whether furnished by art or by individual talent and wisdom, at any rate such as appertain to the subject of our writing, appear and rush forward as we are seeking out and surveying the matter with all our natural acuteness; and all the thoughts and expressions, which are the most brilliant in their several kinds, must needs flow up in succession to the point of our pen; then too the actual marshalling and arrangement of words is made perfect in the course of writing, in a rhythm and measure proper to oratory as distinct from poetry.<sup>7</sup>

In the Middle Ages rhetoric underwent a period of “fragmentation” in a material sense, in terms of the condition of surviving classical texts, and intellectually in terms of the disintegration of the notion of rhetoric as a comprehensive cultural practice:

The metaphor of fragmentation seems peculiarly appropriate to describe medieval rhetoric. Externally, the classical texts had survived in a damaged and haphazard state; internally, readers atomized what had been transmitted to fit their own needs. Further, rhetoric suffered a whole series of transformations, first as a university and school discipline, involving its status within the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic). These changes were sometimes the result of inter-faculty rivalry, the so-called ‘Battle of the Liberal Arts,’ which generated much heat and little light. But some important changes in the teaching of rhetoric derived from external influences, the needs of a new social group, both secular and ecclesiastical, involved in the growth of written communication - what might not unfairly be described as business correspondence. All these developments had the

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<sup>6</sup> Vickers, 1988: 225.

<sup>7</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore* 2 Volumes Loeb Edition translated by E. W. Sutton (London: William Heinemann, Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), I xxxiii pp. 103-105.

effect of making rhetoric more specialized, damaging its existence as a central and coherent educational system.<sup>8</sup>

In the Renaissance rhetoric's status was again elevated - it was "reintegrated," in Vickers's term, most importantly under the influence of humanist scholars.

Kristeller argues that for humanists, the relationship between rhetoric and poetry was particularly close:

Rhetorics and poetics were considered sisters by the humanists, for they were thought to provide the rules for writing well in prose and in verse, respectively. This view omitted several important dimensions of both rhetoric and poetics that were well understood in classical Greece, but it accorded with ideas that had been widespread in late antiquity and during the Middle Ages. Long before the term *humanisti* had been coined, the humanists called themselves poets and orators, as did their contemporaries. Thus there was in the Renaissance, as for some time before, a close parallelism between rhetorical and poetical theory, and a good deal of mutual influence between the two areas.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between the two arts seems to have been confused from the beginning. Heinrich Plett suggests that this confusion "originates in the *Poetics* of Aristotle, chapters 19 to 22, which deal with questions of grammar, metaphor, and rare words. Ever since Aristotle's treatise, which expressly refers the reader to the same author's *Rhetoric* for a full treatment of these topics, doctrines of poetry have repeatedly been influenced by the neighbouring discipline of rhetoric."<sup>10</sup> In the *Rhetoric* also there is enough ambiguity to produce confusion, as Aristotle attempts to distinguish between the two:

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<sup>8</sup> Vickers, 1988: 220.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Rhetoric in Medieval and Renaissance Culture" in *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric* edited by James J. Murphy (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 1 – 19, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Plett, "The Place and Function of Style in Renaissance Poetics" in *Renaissance Eloquence*, edited by James J. Murphy (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 356-357.

Dramatic ability is a natural gift, and can hardly be systematically taught. The principles of good diction can be so taught, and therefore we have men of ability in this direction too, who win prizes in their turn, as well as those speakers who excel in delivery – speeches of the written or literary kind owe more of their effect to their diction than to their thought.

It was naturally the poets who first set the movement going.<sup>11</sup>

Cicero, too, argues for their closeness, suggesting that the poet is more restricted in metre but freer with regard to vocabulary:

The truth is that the poet is a very near kinsman of the orator, rather more heavily fettered as regards rhythm, but with ampler freedom in his choice of words, while in the use of many sorts of ornament he is his ally and almost his counterpart; in one respect at all events something like identity exists, since he sets no boundaries or limits to his claims, such as would prevent him from ranging, whither he will with the same freedom and license as the other.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst rhetoric was the more highly regarded of the two arts, their similarity can be perceived in the articulation of their respective functions. The traditional functions of rhetoric were “to teach, delight and move or persuade”; in *De optimo genere oratorum* (*The Best Kind of Orator*) Cicero says “The supreme orator, then, is the one whose speech instructs, delights and moves the minds of his audience. The orator is in duty bound to instruct; giving pleasure is a free gift to the audience, to move them is indispensable.”<sup>13</sup> This compares with Thomas Wilson’s articulation of the same ideas:

### The End of Rhetoric

Three things are required of an orator,

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetorica* translated by W. Rhys Roberts, Vol. XI of *The Works of Aristotle* edited by Sir David Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), Book III, i 15.

<sup>12</sup> Cicero, 1967, I, XVI pp. 51-53.

<sup>13</sup> Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum* with an English translation by H. M. Hubbell, Volume 2 of *Cicero Works* Loeb Classical Library (London; Cambridge Massachusetts: William Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1960), I. 3-11. 4, p. 357.

1. To teache,
2. To delight,
3. And to persuade<sup>14</sup>

Poetry's apologists claimed a dual function on its behalf – "to teach and delight". Sidney makes it clear, however, that he regards this as possible only in so far as the poet is able to "move" his audience, arguing that "moving is of a higher degree than teaching, it may by this appear, that it is well nigh the cause and the effect of teaching. For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught? and what so much good doth that teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach?"<sup>15</sup>

### **Ramism and the reform of rhetoric**

The role of rhetoric had been promoted by humanism within the educational system at the expense of dialectic (logic), but was itself changing in scope and function. The most notable proponent of this change in relation to educational reforms and the changing role of rhetoric was Peter Ramus (Pierre de la Ramée), his adherents and forerunners. Ramus' reforms of dialectic are attempts at organizing the division of materials between the disciplines in a more logical way. The usual five-part division of classical rhetoric, in the ubiquitous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, for example (erroneously ascribed to Cicero owing to its similarity to his early rhetorical text *De Inventione*), were:

*Inventio*      The amassing of one's material which consists of things to discuss

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric* edited with notes and commentary by Peter E. Medine (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Sidney, 1973: 112.

which are true or probably true.

*Dispositio* The arrangement of one's material.

*Elocutio* The clothing of one's material in suitable words and phrases.

*Memoria* The art of remembering a speech.

*Pronuntiatio* The art of delivery, by voice and gesture.<sup>16</sup>

In the Ramist division of rhetoric, as described by Abraham Fraunce in *The Arcadian Rhetoricke*, both *inventio* and *dispositio* are removed and reassigned from rhetoric to dialectic. Subject matter (*inventio*) and structure (*dispositio*) were regarded as central to all discourse rather than as functions of rhetoric; *memoria* was eliminated completely, thereby tacitly recognising that rhetoric was no longer a primarily oral art. This left only two divisions – *elocutio* and *pronuntiatio*. In practice, little attention was given to *pronuntiatio* (the art of delivery), which left *elocutio* (style) as a simplified system of tropes and figures.

Ramus' reform of rhetoric can be seen as a signifier of the more general process of academic and intellectual reform, of the reorganisation of the Western episteme, the expansion of knowledge, relative availability in a print culture and the move towards increasing specialisation and exclusivity. Rhetoric, as a primary oral art, was under constant pressure, changing and adapting to meet different cultural needs. Its relationship to poetry, as to other discourses, changed as both were in the process of redefinition and relocation within a changing epistemological framework. Rhetoric gradually lost its predominant position in relation to poetry whilst poetry appropriated and transformed a large part of rhetoric's traditional content.

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<sup>16</sup> Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 243.

## Appropriation and Transformation

Up to the Renaissance poetry had been subsumed by rhetoric, the more important and influential art form, which had obtained its dominant position due to its practical application in the politico-juridical arena. After the medieval poetry of Chaucer, Langland and the Gawain-poet, modern critics typically talk of the poetry of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century in terms of “decline” - Margaret Schlauch for example says:

After the galaxy of writers that illuminated the latter half of the fourteenth century in England, the literary culture of the next period offers a spectacle of decline. There were more writers producing literature than ever before, some in considerable quantities, but the level remains lower throughout the century. The best of these writers remained conspicuously imitative.<sup>17</sup>

C. S. Lewis categorises sixteenth century English literature, in characteristically polemical fashion, into “Late Medieval”, “Drab”, and “Golden”.<sup>18</sup> Socio-political reasons for this “decline” are adduced - the Wars of the Roses and lack of interest or opportunity for cultural matters. Contemporary Elizabethan writers also recognised a problem but Sidney ascribes this dearth to the current low esteem in which poets and poetry were held, rather than war:

Poesy, thus embraced in all other places, should only find in our time a hard welcome in England, I think the very earth lamenteth it, and therefore decketh our soil with fewer laurels than it was accustomed. For heretofore poets have in England also flourished, and which is to be noted, even in those times when the trumpet of Mars did sound loudest.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Schlauch, 1967: 283.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, 1965: 1.

<sup>19</sup> Sidney, 1973: 131.

Vickers suggests that the decline in poetry coincided with the decline in the status of, and its revival with a renewed interest in, rhetoric:

The decline of rhetoric in the wake of logic's rise to power in the Middle Ages was followed by a decline in poetry. Certainly the rediscovery of rhetoric in the Renaissance coincided with a great spurt of literary creativity in all the vernaculars. The intense verbal discipline of rhetoric, its emphasis on invention, composition, and an expressivity suited to content and feeling, can now be seen not as the perverse development of 'arid' devices lacking any rationale, but as a training offering both stimulus and guidance.<sup>20</sup>

A renewed interest and emphasis on linguistic skills obviously developed literary ability but, not only do practising poets in the period distinguish carefully between the two arts, many of them articulate a positive hostility towards rhetoric which they regard as a sort of repressive literary straitjacket – Samuel Daniel, for example, talks of “the tyrannicall Rules of idle Rhetorique”.<sup>21</sup>

Lee Sonnino, on the other hand, regards the relationship between the two arts as an evolutionary one in which rhetorical treatises turn into poetic ones:

The transubstantiation of the rhetorical text into a treatise on poetry is one result of the movement in the Renaissance away from the spoken word towards the word written or printed.<sup>22</sup>

This seems to suggest that rhetoric is to orality as poetry is to literacy. This was not the case, however. Rhetoric had been chirographically controlled for a thousand years. It also ignores the concept of oral poetry. Rhetoric's status had not been unchanged from its inception in classical Greece. As Vickers points out, it was “constantly being diminished.”<sup>23</sup> Although regarded, in theory at least, as an oral

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<sup>20</sup> Vickers, 1988: 334.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Daniel, *A Defence of Ryme* (1603) Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos edited by G. B. Harrison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), Sig.G4, p.12.

<sup>22</sup> Sonnino, 1968: 9.

<sup>23</sup> Vickers, 1988: 221.

art, rhetoric had been epistemologically inscribed since the beginnings of literacy. It had adapted as required by the exigencies of cultural changes but retained, nevertheless, much of its original shape and inspiration:

Rhetoric, despite its deep involvement in the written medium, retained its earlier, expressly oral contours intact: normally it included as one of its five parts *pronuntiatio* or delivery – which meant oral delivery – as well as memory. The Ramists managed finally to discard this latter (memory), but not the former (oral delivery), although, like the others, they actually devoted little enough space to delivery in their rhetoric textbooks. This avowed commitment to the oral flew in the face of the fact that Latin, the language of the schools (and *a fortiori* its satellite Greek and far dimmer satellite Hebrew), had been completely controlled by chirography for almost a thousand years.<sup>24</sup>

The effect on rhetoric of humanism and Ramism, appear contradictory – humanism promoted rhetoric, Ramism demoted it. Don Paul Abbott suggests that it produced the effect of making “logic more ‘rhetorical’, that is, ‘topical.’”<sup>25</sup> In practical terms all discourses were governed by rhetorical theory – not only texts such as Sidney’s *Apologie* but Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* is “organized as a classical oration and ‘proved’ by examples.”<sup>26</sup> Scientific writing in general was produced according to the rules of rhetoric, Kepler’s astronomical treatise *Apologia Pro Tychone Contra Ursum* (c. 1601) for example.<sup>27</sup> Vickers argues that “the greatest scientists of the age could use such models proves that classical rhetoric was able to validate its claim to be of use to contemporary life by adapting itself to new subjects, and new forms.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ong, 1971: 28-29.

<sup>25</sup> Don Paul Abbott, “The Renaissance” pp. 75-100 in *The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric* edited by Winifred B. Horner (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Ong, 1971: 102.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Jardine, *The Birth of History and the Philosophy of Science: Kepler’s ‘A Defence of Tycho against Ursus’ with Essays on its Provenance and Signification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 72-79.

<sup>28</sup> Vickers, 1988: 293.

It is certainly testimony to the widespread influence of rhetorical practice but this is not surprising if rhetoric is regarded as a way of ordering and organising discourse, regardless of subject matter. Kepler and Galileo, together with all their contemporaries, had learned rhetoric as a matter of course - Kepler had actually taught it at Graz. In the long run, though, despite Vickers's claims for rhetoric's ability to adapt to change, it was unable to sustain its position as a discourse suitable for rational, scientific enquiry. Ong suggests that this was due to rhetoric's virtues as a persuasive discourse, which made it an excellent training for drama but inappropriate for the dispassionate methodology of the new science:

A rhetorically dominated education gave a boy no training whatsoever in uncommitted, "objective," neutral exposition or narrative. It was not dialectic alone which gave the Tudor age its argumentative cast. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, and the orator who exemplifies its training is a committed man, one who speaks for a side...Rhetoric produced individuals predisposed to approach any subject by taking a side, because they were not formally trained to do anything else: any side, perhaps, but some side certainly.<sup>29</sup>

Enlarging on the polemical element in rhetorical training which he regards as akin to a masculine puberty rite, Ong points out that Latin was "only for the boys and men" and that the few "'lettered' women who knew Latin, such as Sir Thomas More's daughter, Margaret, and Lady Jane Grey and Queen Elizabeth" were "very few, and they studied with tutors, away from the halls of disputation, at home, where other girls who learned some reading and writing did so almost always by working with the more peaceable vernacular."<sup>30</sup>

Within the contemporary reorganisation of discourses, the relations between poetry and rhetoric underwent profound change. Poetry had been recognized in the

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<sup>29</sup> Ong, 1971: 65.

<sup>30</sup> Ong, 1971: 65-66.

classical world as a separate discourse but stress was put on its similarity to rhetoric - what the two arts had in common - rather than the ways in which they diverged.

Sonnino argues that later writings that deal with rhetoric, whoever their ostensible target, are in fact written for the poet:

The rhetoric of Cicero is based upon and directed towards a political orator, spokesman for and adviser to the rulers of a commonwealth. The Ciceronian orator is a man of public virtue, and eloquence is the torch by which he transmits his essential political understanding. For Quintilian, writing later under an empire, the good orator is a good man, a man of private virtue who exercises his eloquence for the individual. He is not a governor, he is a lawyer and the emphasis in the *Institutio* falls on forensic oratory whereas the *De Oratore* is also concerned with deliberative oratory, the discussion and decision of great collective causes. In the Renaissance we encounter a new phenomenon. The object of textbook attention is often a would-be writer, sometimes a poet. Several of the major original rhetorical works of the Renaissance are treatises on poetry which include a large section on rhetoric.<sup>31</sup>

Sonnino cites continental examples such as Scaliger's *Poetices* but there are English examples such as Abraham Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhethorike*, which is part rhetoric, part commonplace book, part courtesy book, employing poetical examples. Many of the texts are poetics which not only incorporate material traditionally assigned to rhetoric such as the use of tropes, figures of speech, and colours, but appropriate rhetoric's vocabulary and theoretical content as well. Foucault's analyses of discursive formations looks at the ways in which a discourse is expressed; what it is possible to say at any given period relates to a culture's way of thinking. In his discussion of the problems of the development and acceptance of the English vernacular Richard Foster Jones argues that one of the contemporary problems was rhetoric's powerful position as the discourse which effectively governed all contemporary writing practices so that

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<sup>31</sup> Sonnino, 1968: 8.

there were no critical terms available for praise except those appropriate to rhetoric, so that only style and language could be noticed...Just as the terms for praise derive from the rhetorical tradition, so do the expressions found in the self-criticism so prevalent in the English works of the century.<sup>32</sup>

It is natural then that poetry employ and appropriate terms traditionally associated with rhetoric.

For the purposes of my argument, it would be convenient if this period saw a rise in poetic texts and a concomitant decrease in the number of rhetorical texts in England as it did in Renaissance France, where “a great revival of poetry led to treatises on poetics outnumbering formal rhetoric-books.”<sup>33</sup> In England this was not the case. Between 1500 and 1600, there were roughly twice as many rhetoric books as poetics published in England - fifty-one to two dozen. Out of the fifty-one, however, only eight were printed in English, the rest were in Latin. The majority of English rhetorics are, moreover, translations such as Abraham Fraunce’s *Arcadian Rhetorike* or Dudley Fenner’s *The Artes of Logike and Rhetorike, plainlie set foorth in the English Tounge, easie to be learned and practised* (translations of Ramus’ *Dialecticae partitiones* and Talaeus’ *Institutiones oratoricae*).

The majority of the Latin works are editions of those classical writers already mentioned: Cicero, Quintilian, and Sallust, or Latin translations of the Greek writers on rhetoric. The fact that the majority of the works are in Latin and that even those texts written in English are so dependent upon earlier works leads inescapably to the conclusion that there is, as Vickers puts it, “very little that is original in English, or

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Foster Jones, *The Triumph of the English Language: A Survey of Opinions Concerning the Vernacular from the Introduction of Printing to the Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953), pp. 26 – 27.

<sup>33</sup> Vickers, 1988: 280.

indeed any other vernacular rhetoric of this period.”<sup>34</sup> It suggests furthermore that they represent a cultural practice which, even as it seems to be enjoying its own renaissance, is, in fact, in an irreversible process of decline. The vernacular rhetorics proceed from a notably earlier date than the poetics: Leonard Cox’s *The Arte or Crafte of Rhethoryke* (1524), Richard Sherry’s *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550), Thomas Wilson’s *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), Richard Rainolde’s *A Booke Called the Foundacion of Rhetoricke* (1563), Dudley Fenner’s *The Artes of Logike and Rhetorick* (1584), Abraham Fraunce’s *The Arcadian Rhetoricke* (1588), Angel Day’s *The English Secretorie* (1592), and Henry Peacham’s *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593). Their sources are the main classical works on rhetoric: Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian plus later humanist scholars such as Erasmus, Melancthon and Ramus.

In his championing of the cause of rhetoric, Vickers cites Sidney and Puttenham as writers whose works “rank with the best vernacular rhetorics of the Renaissance and have a keener awareness of the relevance of their language than do a number of their continental rivals.”<sup>35</sup> This statement is working with a definition of rhetoric as the contemporary organising system of all discourse, both spoken and written, whereas in my view Sidney and Puttenham are both, in their different ways, struggling to redefine poetry. Puttenham in particular does this by appropriating material traditionally assigned to rhetoric, Sidney by careful distinction between the two arts. In both cases the course of their writing tends to a disengagement of the two. Poetry is dependent upon rhetoric for its theoretical framework and

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Vickers, “‘The Power of Persuasion’: Images of the Orator, Elyot to Shakespeare” in *Renaissance Eloquence* edited by James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 411.

<sup>35</sup> Vickers, 1988: 411-412.

terminology, and the influence of rhetoric upon new definitions and ideas concerning poetry is evident.

### **Rhetoric and semantic change**

In Havelock's analysis of Plato's writings, he suggested that contemporary changes in ways of thinking in classical Greece could be traced via semantic and lexical shifts in which "the transition from the oral to the written and from the concrete to the abstract"<sup>36</sup> effectively recorded cultural change. As he says "(d)irect evidence for mental phenomena can lie only in linguistic usage."<sup>37</sup> In a similar way tracing shifts in meaning through Elizabethan texts can suggest the ways in which contemporary thinking underwent fundamental changes. Because rhetoric had provided the terminology for thinking and writing about all discursive practices including poetry, these new poetical and theoretical texts often deployed the same terms but they underwent significant changes in meaning. In *Humanism*, Davies comments on the "striking semantic reversals that from the sixteenth century rendered words like *individual* (originally 'inseparable') and *identity* ('sameness') over to meaning almost exactly the opposite of their traditional ones."<sup>38</sup> A similarly complex semantic shift can be seen in many of the terms relating to rhetoric and linguistic practices generally, as well as more complex sets of ideas concerning the constitution and function of representation. Rhetoric had by this time been reduced effectively to *elocutio* (style) and *pronuntiatio* (delivery), but the terminology of the traditional parts of rhetoric is still in evidence, occurring at times and in places,

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<sup>36</sup> Havelock, 1963: ix.

<sup>37</sup> Havelock, 1963: v.

<sup>38</sup> Davies, 1997: 16-17.

which demonstrate clearly the process of cultural change at semantic and epistemological level.

One of the most significant terms demonstrating a contemporary semantic shift is *inventio* – invention - the first division in the parts of rhetoric. It was, as Ong points out, traditionally regarded as the most important element:

From the beginning in antiquity, *inventio* had received the lion's share of attention. It was particularly important insofar as rhetoric affected the writing of literature as such, for *inventio* corresponded roughly to what our post-romantic world would call "use of the creative imagination," although it was implemented chiefly by exploitation of the highly conventional "places" or commonplaces (*loci* or *loci communes*)...In one sense of the term commonplaces were headings suggesting thoughts for any and all subjects and available in various competing lists.<sup>39</sup>

Cicero's most influential early rhetorical text is simply called *De Inventione*. In it he defines the parts of rhetoric thus:

The parts of it, as most authorities have stated, are Invention, Arrangement, Expression, Memory, Delivery. Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible. Arrangement is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order. Expression is the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter. Memory is the firm mental grasp of matter and words. Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style.<sup>40</sup>

Wilson, in his *Art of Rhetoric*, offers this definition:

The finding out of apt matter, called otherwise Invention, is a searching out of things true, or things likely, the which may reasonably set forth a matter, and make it appear probable.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ong, 1971: 57. The Greek term for the (common)places is *topos* (s), *topoi* (pl).- hence the adjective "topical". This again relates to the spatial conception of mental organisation.

<sup>40</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione* translated by H. M. Hubbell (London; Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1960), I. vii. 9, pp. 19-21.

<sup>41</sup> Wilson, 1994: 49.

*Inventio*, then, meant finding suitable subject matter, which is either true or which can be made to appear so. The term comes from *in - venire* “to come upon, discover” (*OED*). Dictionaries record the transformations of a word undergoing semantic change in the middle of the sixteenth century. The usual meaning today, “The original contrivance or production of a new method or means of doing something, of an art, kind of instrument, etc. previously unknown”, is the third meaning offered in the *OED*, and the first citation is from Elyot’s *Book Named the Governour*, I xxvi (1531). Earlier meanings, most of which are now given as archaic or obsolete, relate to its original sense of coming upon, finding or discovering. The specific meaning for rhetoric (1d) is “The finding out or selection of topics to be treated, or arguments to be used.” “Invention” is clearly, therefore, a term undergoing a semantic reversal of meaning at this time. It is moving away from senses which related to a literal meaning concerned with finding and towards a signification which relates to imagination and creativity - to conceptions of originality and a way of thinking based upon the notion of an individualised subjectivity, as opposed to the location of ideas in a common store. Use of the term throughout texts of the period is therefore fraught with ambiguity; meaning is caught within this semantic slippage in which competing definitions slide in and out of focus.

In rhetorical practice “invention” had meant searching the cultural store of commonplaces for a selection of things to say on any chosen topic. Ong explains how this system worked:

The nature of the *topoi* – or loci or places or commonplaces – is well-known. They are the headings or key notions to which one turns to find out what is available in one’s store of knowledge for discourse on any given subject. The places help thus either to answer questions...or to treat “simple themes” (*themata simplicia*), such as man, animal, body, and so on. Lists of the topics

or places commonly include such things as definition, genus, species, wholes, parts, adjacents...relatives, comparisons, opposites, and...witnesses. These are the headings one is to run through when one has to say something on any subject, to pronounce a eulogy or to plead a cause or simply give a lecture on a question of the day.<sup>42</sup>

This process describes a highly prescriptive system in which the utterances it produced were liable to be predictable in content. Its prescriptive nature is related to rhetoric's origins, and the need to have within the mental grasp a ready selection of things to say. Orality functions through the adept deployment of verbal formulae; a technique employed by the classic orator as well as the oral poet. The Renaissance schoolboy trained in Erasmus' *De copia*,<sup>43</sup> designed to produce a copious flow of words should, therefore, "never have been at a loss to play with any word or idea or – what was much the same – to develop any word or idea systematically."<sup>44</sup> Ong is one of many who recognise the positive benefits of such rigorous and detailed verbal training. He concludes that "Tudor exuberance of language and expression was not accidental, but programmed."<sup>45</sup>

The store of commonplaces in the oral mind functions as a residuum of cultural knowledge. The concept of such an accessible intellectual storehouse was enthusiastically taken up into print. Cultural changes do not occur overnight but carry forward residues from an earlier paradigm which survive despite their notional redundancy. One such genre, in which traditional systems of intellectual organisation relating to a primary oral culture were transposed into print, was the

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<sup>42</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 104.

<sup>43</sup> Erasmus, Desiderius of Rotterdam, *On Copia of Words and Ideas, (De utraque verborum ac rerum copia)* translated from the Latin with an introduction by Donald B. King and David Rix (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1963).

<sup>44</sup> Ong, 1971: 63.

<sup>45</sup> Ong, 1971: 63.

commonplace book, which flourished during the sixteenth century until its “demise...at the end of the seventeenth century.”<sup>46</sup> Ann Moss suggests that

Perhaps the most interesting by-product of rhetoric is the steady stream of collected sayings and excerpts useful for writing and for general education. These collections, or printed commonplace books, often of vast size, result from two drives in Tudor times: the humanist desire to expedite *inventio* by having at hand massive stores of material for “imitation”, both in content and style, and the habit of collecting commonplace material inherited from the Middle Ages, when *florilegia* and conflated commentaries multiplied beyond anything dreamed of in antiquity. Letterpress printing gave a new outlet to the collecting drive by facilitating not only multiplication of texts but also – what was more important – relatively thorough and exacting indexing. The back-breaking work of indexing became worthwhile once typography provided the same pagination in any number of copies. The resulting collections are often – but not always – identifiable by their titles, which exploit the gathering or hunting imagery associated with rhetorical *inventio*.<sup>47</sup>

Defining their role as “the principal support system of humanist pedagogy”, Ann Moss goes on to describe the production and function of commonplace books within the educational system:

Pupils were required to make themselves common-place books, and to collect excerpts from their reading under the appropriate heads. When they came to construct compositions of their own, they were encouraged to use their common-place books as a resource, culling from them quotations, examples, and other illustrative material, as well as replicating the categories of thought enshrined in the common-place heads. Children educated in this way brought into adult life certain mental attitudes, and certain habits of reading and writing which characterized literate culture in Western Europe over a remarkably long period.<sup>48</sup>

Francis Meres’ *Palladis Tamia: Wit’s Treasury* (1598) is nowadays one of the best known Elizabethan examples of the genre. Drawing on R. R. Bolgar’s *The*

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<sup>46</sup> Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. vi.

<sup>47</sup> Ong, 1971: 76.

<sup>48</sup> Moss, 1996: v.

*Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries*,<sup>49</sup> Ong suggests some of the implications that humanism, with its emphasis on rhetorical practice, brought to education:

Doctrines of invention, rhetorical and dialectical or logical, had encouraged the view that composition was largely, if not essentially an assembling of previously readied material. The humanists had reinforced this view with their doctrine of imitation and their insistence – not now in actuality but only in conscious emphasis – that antiquity was the storehouse of knowledge and eloquence. Bolgar has shown how humanist educational procedures enforced the assumption that the classics were writings which could be dismembered into bite-size pieces for reassemblage into new configurations. Indeed, he has made the point that the humanist achievement consisted largely in transferring into the modern consciousness the best of classical antiquity largely by just such a process of decomposition and recomposition.<sup>50</sup>

The notion of originality is only possible in a literate culture. As Ong puts it, “in all oral performance, the question of originality as a virtue does not even arise. The oral traffics in the already known.”<sup>51</sup> It was “(o)only in the early nineteenth century, when the residue of oralism had greatly diminished as its major depository, Latin, lost effectiveness, does ‘commonplace’ become a generally derogatory term.”<sup>52</sup> It is in the cultural shift from primary orality to literacy, therefore, that invention undergoes a fundamental change in meaning, taking on Romantic or “modern” overtones of originality of thought.

George Gascoigne’s *Certayne notes of Instruction* begins “The first and most necesarie point that euer I founde meete to be considered in making of a delectable poeme is this, to grounde it upon some fine inuention.”<sup>53</sup> To modern ears this sounds odd. Acquaintance with rhetorical texts, however, alerts the reader to a complex set of possible meanings. Although the Ramist reform of rhetoric had

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<sup>49</sup> R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1954).

<sup>50</sup> Ong, 1971: 35.

<sup>51</sup> Ong, 1971: 37.

<sup>52</sup> Ong, 1971: 37.

<sup>53</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 465.

located invention within dialectic, nevertheless the rhetorical resonance of the term is striking. Gascoigne's is the first vernacular poetic treatise; his use of the term 'invention' links the rhetorical past of poetry to its romantic future. His precise meaning is ambiguous. Is he using "invention" to signify searching the store of commonplaces for a suitable topic to write about, or is he employing it in a modern sense - thinking up an original idea? Or is he exploiting the semantic ambiguity and allowing the reader to do the same? Or is he simply unaware of the difference? It is impossible to say whether Gascoigne had one meaning or another in mind although clues can be sought in elucidation of the term he offers by extrapolating from further comments.

Gascoigne elaborates upon his opening sentence, arguing that a poem is not simply "versified ornament" and suggesting rather that it should be considered as an integrated structure of content and form:

For it is not inough to roll in pleasant woordes, nor yet to thunder in *Rym*, *Ram*, *Ruff*, by letter (quoth my master Chaucer) nor yet to abounde in apt vocables, or epythetes, vnlesse the Inuention haue in it also *aliquid salis*. By this *aliquid salis*, I meane some good and fine deuise, shewing the quicke capacitie of a writer and where I say some *good and fine inuention*, I meane that I would haue it both fine and good. For many inuentions are so superfine, that they are *Vix good*. And againe many Inuentions are good, and yet not finely handled. And for a general forwarning: what Theame soeuer you do take in hande, if you do handle it but *tanquam in oratione perpetua*, and neuer studie for some depth of deuise in ye Inuention, and som figures also in the handling thereof: it will appeare to the skilfull Reader but a tale of a tubbe.<sup>54</sup>

Gascoigne does not specify the source of the "invention"- his only concern seems to be that it should be good. He is chiefly concerned with originality of treatment, rejecting the sort of formulaic style of the rhetoric books (as well as earlier poetics

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<sup>54</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 465.

such as Geoffrey de Vinsauf's medieval poetics, *Poetria Nova*).<sup>55</sup> His advice to the would-be poet, has moved into the "seedbed of irony"<sup>56</sup> that is writing:

If I should vndertake to wryte in prayse of a gentlewoman, I would neither praise hir christal eye, nor hir cherrie lippe, &c. For these things are *trita & obvia*. But I would either finde some supernaturall cause whereby my penne might walke in the superlative degree, or els I would vndertake to aunswere for any imperfection that she hath, and therevpon voyse the prayse of hir commendation.<sup>57</sup>

In his Introduction to Sidney's *Apology*, Shepherd suggests that Sidney makes the distinction between poetry and rhetoric but wishes to preserve the dignity of poetry's association with an "exalted rhetoric":

When Cicero becomes the humanists' special darling, poetry tends to be subsumed under rhetoric and is regarded, however respectfully, as a metrical and highly ornamented variant of prose. This seems to be the way in which Roger Ascham and Thomas Wilson think of poetry. One of Sidney's aims is to liberate poetry from an absolute dependence on rhetoric without denying all the benefits of dignity which it had recently acquired from an intimate association with an exalted rhetoric.<sup>58</sup>

Whilst paying lip service to rhetoric, Sidney seems more concerned to limit its sphere of influence by redefining it as one of the "serving sciences". He argues for the unique capacity of the poet to produce original ideas, appropriating invention for the poet, and limiting the place and scope of rhetoric and the rhetorician, together with all other arts and sciences. He critiques the conventional codification of other discourses by drawing attention to and rejecting, on the poet's behalf, their limitations:

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<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey de Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova* translated by Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967).

<sup>56</sup> Ong, 1988: 103.

<sup>57</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 465-466.

<sup>58</sup> Sidney, 1973: 44.

There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of Nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend, as they become actors and players, as it were, of what Nature will have set forth. So doth the astronomer look upon the stars, and, by that he seeth, setteth down what order Nature hath taken therein. So do the geometrician and the arithmetician in their diverse sorts of quantities. So doth the musician in times tell you which by nature agree, which not. The natural philosopher thereon hath his name, and the moral philosopher standeth upon the natural virtues, vices, and passions of man; and ‘follow Nature’ (saith he) ‘therin, and thou shalt not err’. The lawyer saith what man hath determined; the historian what men have done. The grammarian speaketh only of the rules of speech; and the rhetorician and logician, considering what in Nature will soonest prove and persuade, thereon give artificial rules, which still are compassed within the circle of a question according to the proposed matter. The physician weigheth the nature of a man’s body, and the nature of things helpful or hurtful unto it. And the metaphysic, though it be in the second and abstract notions, and therefore be counted supernatural, yet doth he indeed build upon the depth of Nature.

Only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.<sup>59</sup>

Sidney clearly regards the “artificial rules” of rhetoric as a “subjection” which the poet must overcome by his own imaginative creativity. “The vigour of his own invention” does not suggest ransacking the commonplaces for something to say; on the contrary, it seems to demand a heroic degree of original thinking on the part of the poet.

Sonnino argues that a rhetorical training produced writing that was better structured: “Training in composition based on this kind of system for writing led eventually to poetry which gave a coherent definition of its subject instead of an arbitrarily selected list of qualities”.<sup>60</sup> Like Gascoigne, Sidney argues for the importance of the overall structure of a work:

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<sup>59</sup> Sidney, 1973: 99-100.

<sup>60</sup> Sonnino, 1968: 6.

For there being two principal parts – matter to be expressed by words and words to express the matter – in neither we use Art or Imitation rightly. Our matter is quodlibet indeed, though wrongly performing Ovid’s verse,

Quicquid conabur dicere, versus erit:  
[whatever I tried to say turned into verse]

never marshalling it into an assured rank, that almost the readers cannot tell where they find themselves...let most of the verses be put into prose, and then ask the meaning, and it will be found that one verse did but beget another, without ordering at the first what should be at the last; which becomes a confused mass of words, with a tingling sound of rhyme, barely accompanied with reason.<sup>61</sup>

The notion of the “unity of the literary text,”<sup>62</sup> which has recently come under pressure from the perspective of postmodernism, has a long history. Critics usually cite Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy and the primary importance of plot in the *Poetics* as “an imitation of a noble and complete action”<sup>63</sup> as the first articulation of the need for structure in a work of art. Vickers looks even further back to Plato, and quotes Socrates’s critique of Lysias’s speech for its lack of unity, when he argues that:

any discourse ought to be constructed like a living creature, with its own body, as it were; it must not lack either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to suit each other and the whole work.<sup>64</sup>

Ong has argued that coherent structure is the hallmark of writing, particularly of print:

Print makes for more tightly closed verbal art forms, especially in narrative. Until print, the only linearly plotted lengthy story line was that of the drama, which from antiquity had been controlled by writing. Euripides’ tragedies

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<sup>61</sup> Sidney, 1973: 133.

<sup>62</sup> Antony Easthope, *Literary Into Cultural Studies* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 22-42.

<sup>63</sup> Aristotle, 1981: 1449b, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters* edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns with an Introduction and Prefatory notes, pp. 475-525 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), 264c, p. 510.

were texts composed in writing and then memorized verbatim to be presented orally. With print, tight plotting is extended to the lengthy narrative.<sup>65</sup>

Oral compositions do not function in the same way - typically heroic epics start *in medias res* and follow a loose, episodic structure - copiousness and redundancy are normal, giving the performer time to think and the audience time to assimilate what it has heard. In his chapter on “Tudor Writings” in *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* Ong argues that “Tudor looseness of style” is a sign of a cultural “residual oralism.”<sup>66</sup>

Like *inventio*, *dispositio* (structure), which had traditionally been the second part of rhetoric, had been reassigned within the Ramist reforms to dialectic. Both Gascoigne and Sidney stress its significance for poetry. The Ramist reform of logic and rhetoric had reduced rhetoric to *elocutio* and *pronuntiatio*. Memory was eliminated on the grounds that a well-structured work will not need to be memorised, that the sequence of the work will flow “naturally” in a logical manner. The art of memory organised the mental world of knowledge in spatial terms. (Frances Yates has described the complexity of these “memory theatres” in *The Art of Memory*.)<sup>67</sup> Sidney argues that verse’s inherently memorable qualities render the art redundant and adds this to the other elements in his defence of poetry:

Now, that verse far exceedeth prose in the knitting up of the memory, the reason is manifest: the words (besides their delight, which hath a great affinity to memory) being so set as one word cannot be lost but the whole work fails; which accuseth itself, calleth the remembrance back to itself, and so most strongly confirmeth it. Besides, one word so, as it were, begetting another, as, be it in rhyme or measured verse, by the former a man shall have a near guess to the follower. Lastly, even they that have taught the art of memory have showed nothing so apt for it as a certain room divided into

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<sup>65</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London; New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 133.

<sup>66</sup> Ong, 1971: 38.

<sup>67</sup> Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

many places well and thoroughly known. Now, that hath the verse in effect perfectly, every word having his natural seat, which seat must needs make the word remembered. But what needeth more in a thing so known to all men? Who is it that ever was a scholar that doth not carry away some verses of Virgil, Horace, or Cato, which in his youth he learned, and even to his old age serve him for hourly lessons?; as

*Percontatorem fugito, nam garrulous idem est.*

*Dum sibi quisque placet, credula turba sumus*<sup>68</sup>

But the fitness it hath for memory is notably proved by all delivery of arts: wherein for the most part, from Grammar to Logic, Mathematic, Physic and the rest, the rules chiefly necessary to be borne away are compiled in verses. So that verse being in itself sweet and orderly, and being best for memory, the only handle of knowledge, it must be in jest that any man can speak against it.<sup>69</sup>

Gascoigne comprehends structure (*dispositio*) as part of invention and likewise has very little to say about acquisition of style (*elocutio*), simply stating that if the writer starts off with a good idea the right words will come:

I would haue you stand most vpon the excellencie of your Invention, & sticke not to studie deeply for some fine deuise. For, that beyng founde, pleasant woordes will follow well inough and fast inough.<sup>70</sup>

This is very far removed from the obsessive concern with style of rhetorical texts. Gascoigne is, as noted above, dismissive of standard rhetorical examples which he regards as mere cliché – “*trita & obvia*.”<sup>71</sup>

Sidney too appears to reject the incorporation of rhetorical tropes and figures by poetry. He is even less concerned with technique, suggesting that the source of poetry lies within the poet. He derides “that honey-flowing matron eloquence

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<sup>68</sup> Horace, *Epistles* I: viii. 69 quoted and translated by Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* I iv. 8 “an inquisitive man is a prattler; so upon the like reason a credulous man is a deceiver.”

<sup>69</sup> Sidney, 1973: 122.

<sup>70</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 466.

<sup>71</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 466.

apparelled, or rather disguised, in a courtesan-like painted affectation,”<sup>72</sup> arguing against the artificiality produced by verses which employ technique at the expense of feeling:

But truly many of such writings as come under the banner of irresistible love, if I were a mistress, would never persuade me they were in love; so coldly they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read lovers’ writings (and so caught up certain swelling phrases which hang together like a man which once told me the wind was at north-west and by south, because he would be sure to name winds enough), than that in truth they feel those passions, which easily (as I think) may be betrayed by that same forcibleness or energia (as the Greeks call it) of the writer. But let this be a sufficient though short note, that we miss the right use of the material point of Poesy.<sup>73</sup>

In his sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney famously urged the poet to “look in thy heart, and write.”<sup>74</sup> Astrophil’s first sonnet deals specifically with the problem of writing and representation and he rejects the rhetorical practice of using literary models as inadequate to his task:

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,  
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain;  
Oft turning others’ leaves, to see if thence would flow  
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburnt brain.  
But words came halting forth, wanting invention’s stay;  
Invention, nature’s child, fled step-dame study’s blows;  
And others’ feet still seemed but strangers in my way.<sup>75</sup>

But Sidney can only write with apparent freedom of expression because he has so thoroughly internalised the lessons of his rhetorical training. It is ironically his writings that provide Abraham Fraunce with the main source of English examples for his *Arcadian Rhetorike*.

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<sup>72</sup> Sidney, 1973: 138.

<sup>73</sup> Sidney, 1973: 137-138.

<sup>74</sup> Sidney “Astrophil and Stella” from *Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Poems* (ed.) Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 117.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p. 117, ll.5-11

Fraunce's *Rhetorike* (1588) is in essence a translation of the *Rhetorica* of Omer Talon (Taleus) with additions by Ramus, although, as Ethel Seaton points out in her edition, it is not a completely faithful translation: "Fraunce...treats his author as a stream, through which he goes on stepping-stones."<sup>76</sup> It is an odd text but its confusion draws attention to the changing definitions and relative positions of rhetoric and poetry. Despite calling itself a "Rhetorike", Fraunce's work is a combination of courtesy and commonplace book. Seaton discusses its curious constitution in a way which casts doubt on its purpose or function, arguing that "The Arcadian Rhetorike combined the virtues of a useful textbook and an elegant anthology. Whether it had much influence is a question not easily to be resolved."<sup>77</sup> She concludes that it probably did not, but, insofar as it produced any benefits, this was more likely to be to poets and poetry: "Fraunce may indeed have helped to persuade the English of their poets' European standards. One would like to feel that he did something to help the poets themselves."<sup>78</sup>

The way in which Fraunce's *Rhetorike* might be construed as having been useful was for its recognition and elevation of contemporary English poetry. At the beginning of the first chapter of the first book, Fraunce analyses "What Rhetorike is." It is, he says "an Art of speaking" and, he continues, "It hath two parts, Eloquution and Pronuntiation."<sup>79</sup> The two parts are not treated equally though; in the facsimile edition, Book One, which concerns "Eloquution" comprises eight

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<sup>76</sup> Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike* edited by Ethel Seaton (Oxford: published for the Luttrell Society by Basil Blackwell, 1950), pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>77</sup> Fraunce, 1950: li.

<sup>78</sup> Fraunce, 1950: li.

<sup>79</sup> Fraunce, 1950: 3.

signatures (A - H), whereas Book Two, which deals with “Pronuntiation” has only two (I- K).<sup>80</sup>

Book One on “Eloquution” is a list of what we would now regard as poetical figures. Fraunce methodically breaks every element down into two:

Eloquution is the first part of rhetorike, concerning the ordering & trimming of speach. It hath also 2.parts, Congruitie and Brauerie. Congruitie is that which causeth the speach to be pure and cohaerent: & it is performed either by Etimologie, which co[n]cerneth the affections of seuerall words: or Syntaxis, which dooth orderly conioyne them together. Heere should all Grammatical rules (as they call them) be placed: I omit them for this time, as being scarce resolued in this conceipt. Brauerie of speach consisteth in Tropes, or turning; and in Figures or fashionings.<sup>81</sup>

Fraunce’s work is reminiscent of the structuralist analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure with its emphasis on the dual axes of language.<sup>82</sup> The impression of a relationship between rhetoric and structuralism is reinforced by his analysis of the “two kinde of tropes. The first co[n]teineth *Metonymia*, the cha[n]ge of name: and *Ironia*, a scoffing or iesting speach: the second comprehendeth a *Metaphore* and *Synecdoche*.”<sup>83</sup> David Lodge comments in *Modes of Modern Writing* that “the idea of a binary opposition between metaphor and metonymy can be traced back to Russian Formalism.”<sup>84</sup> He traces the theory back to Roman Jakobson’s essay “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances.”<sup>85</sup> The work of

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<sup>80</sup> In Seaton’s edition this equates to pp. 1-105 for Book 1, pp. 106-129 for Book 2 – a page from book 2 seems to be missing but, as Seaton points out, in view of its content, this does not seem a great loss.

<sup>81</sup> Fraunce, 1950: 3.

<sup>82</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, with the collaboration of Albert Riedlinger, translated and annotated by Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983). Saussure talks about the “internal dualism of language” and analyses all aspects of language in dualist terms - chapter 5, for example, discusses “Syntagmatic” and “Associative Relations”.

<sup>83</sup> Fraunce, 1950: 4.

<sup>84</sup> David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 73.

<sup>85</sup> Roman Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances” first published in *Fundamentals of Language* by Jakobson and Halle (1956), partly reprinted in Lodge’s collection *Modern Criticism and Theory* pp. 57-61 as “The metaphoric and metonymic poles”.

structuralist and formalist critics seems to employ a similar way of thinking as well as terminology in its systematisation and categorisation. Arguably the modern debate around whether literature should be regarded as a formal or expressive system, and Renaissance attempts to analyse and redefine poetry, represent updated versions of the conflicting versions of rhetoric. The answer is, as ever, inconclusive since figures and tropes are evident in all discourse; in Terry Eagleton's pungent phrase "there is more metaphor in Manchester than there is in Marvell."<sup>86</sup>

As Fraunce works his way through all the figures of metonymy, metaphor, allegory, synecdoche, anaphora, epizeuxis, anadiplosis, apostrophe, prosopoeia and so on, he illustrates each with a quotation first from Homer, second from Virgil, third from Sidney, fourth from Tasso, then sometimes from Sallust, and lastly from either one of two contemporary Spanish poets, Boscan or Garcilasso. In Fraunce's theoretical organisation, "Poetry" and "Prose" are given as the two parts constituting "Dimension" relating to that division of "Figures" defined as "Of the Word". Poetry is then subdivided into the two constituent parts: "Rhyme" and "Metre". Fraunce seems to be operating here with the earlier conception of poetry as part of rhetoric, which is, in turn, constituted by a set of verbal rules and regulations – the bag of tricks. The practice Fraunce adopts might be construed as evidence for Sonnino's thesis that later rhetorics were written for poets but it might equally be seen as part of that process whereby the parts of rhetoric are appropriated, absorbed and assimilated to the newly-defined discourses of poetry and poetics.

The problem of defining the genre into which such a work fits is symptomatic. Although both Gascoigne and Sidney dismiss the use of rhetorical devices with apparent contempt, Puttenham does not. His *Arte of English Poesie* comprises three

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<sup>86</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 6.

books: the first “Of Poets and Poesie” is a defence and historical review of the standing of poetry and poets, the second “Of Proportion Poetical” deals with metre and the third “Of Ornament” the traditional third part of rhetoric, *elocutio*, the figures and tropes, which Puttenham refers to as “ornament poetical”. His work treats writing and speaking without distinction, drawing examples freely from poets, such as Homer and Virgil, and from orators, such as Quintilian, Cicero and Sallust - one reason perhaps why his work is often categorised as a rhetorical rather than a poetical text.<sup>87</sup> Puttenham is certainly dealing with ideas and materials which were conventionally regarded as the province of rhetoric. The fact that Puttenham, himself, calls his work an “Arte of Poesie” should not be dismissed, however. There is certainly confusion in his mind as to distinctions between the two arts but it is clear that, insofar as they are to be distinguished, he conceives of his material as belonging properly to poetry rather than to rhetoric.

It is easy to see where the problem of classification arises since Puttenham’s *Arte of Poesie* has so much in common with Fraunce’s *Rhetorike*. Apart from their extensive and methodical treatment of linguistic figures and tropes, they both deal with matter that would be deemed well outside the terrain of both arts today, treating as they do material more suited to the courtesy book. Puttenham, for example gives the courtier advice on how to wear his stockings<sup>88</sup> and Fraunce’s work on “Pronuntiatio or Vtterance” ends with the following invaluable advice: “For the feete; it is vndecent to stand waggling now on one foote, now on another.”<sup>89</sup> Both seem to point to a future which comprehends all the risible elements in the modern signification of elocution and etiquette.

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<sup>87</sup> For example Don Paul Abbott in Horner (1983) calls it a “rhetorical work” p. 76 and Vickers above p. 117.

<sup>88</sup> Puttenham, 1968, Book 3, chapter XXIV.

<sup>89</sup> Fraunce, 1950: 129

Rhetoric was a system designed initially to organise spoken then, increasingly, written discourse. The invention of printing, rise in levels of literacy, and quantities of written material in all forms, made its formal aims redundant. Rhetoric's constituent parts, the product of many years of formalisation, were not however abandoned, but appropriated by and assimilated to related discourses. Ramism had assigned the first parts, *inventio* and *dispositio*, to logic leaving *elocutio*, *pronuntiatio* and *memoria*. In practice poets brought up in a rhetorical tradition had internalised rhetoric's systematic organisation and employed both *inventio* and *dispositio* in their writing. As poetry is constituted by a heightened attention to linguistic expression, it also took over the figures and tropes which traditionally comprised *elocutio*. The drama constituted a natural location for *pronuntiatio* (delivery) and *memoria*.

I shall consider the ways in which a more sophisticated understanding of rhetoric, as a means of persuasion and system of personal development, were transformed in the second part of my thesis when I look at poetic practice, and consider the relationship between rhetorical persona and the development of poetic voice as signs of changing notions of subjectivity and the concept of the individual.

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## CHAPTER 5

### LANGUAGE, TRANSLATION, GENRE, AND CRITICISM

The emergence of a new discursive formation produced vernacular poetics, literary criticism, and a new literary terrain. The foundation of the new discourses was constituted by the appropriation and transformation of elements of older discourses, which no longer answered the culture's needs. The development of the European vernaculars is an important sign of the wider cultural changes which were taking place, although as Roger Lass points out "social change itself does not (and indeed cannot) directly cause linguistic change".<sup>1</sup> As he goes on to say though, that "is not to say that language is insulated from the rest of culture: only that we need to make certain important distinctions, in terms of the levels on which 'causal' factors operate, and the detailed relations between cultural facts and the properties of linguistic systems."<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Adamson argues that within this period (1476-1776), "the codifying of language and the canonising of literature were not merely simultaneous but symbiotic processes."<sup>3</sup> The texts with which this thesis is concerned were instrumental in both canonising literature and codifying the language, engaged as they were in theorising all aspects of vernacular writing practices including the linguistic medium in which they were written.

A vernacular literature can only flourish working within a medium sufficiently subtle and flexible to enable it to communicate a range of ideas and experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Lass, *The Cambridge History of the English Language* Volume III, 1476-1776 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Lass, 1999: 4.

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Adamson, "Literary Language" chapter 7 in *The Cambridge History of the English Language* Volume III, 1476-1776 edited by Roger Lass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 539.

Many contemporary writers at the beginning of the early modern period felt that English was inadequate to the task. Humanist scholars had had an overriding interest in linguistic matters but the first generation wrote in the classical Latin they had reformed and established as the medium of instruction in the grammar schools. They edited and printed Latin texts and translated other classical texts (particularly Greek) into Latin, making them available for the first time to a wider audience. They were ambivalent concerning the use of the vernacular. The next generation - Elyot, Ascham and Wilson - wrote and published in English. Morris Croll argues that humanist writing in the vernacular was atypical and unrepresentative:

Some humanists, it is true, foresaw the modern uses of their mother languages: Bembo, DuBellay, Ascham, for instance. Yet their writings are not representative of the usual vernacular prose of their time; and there is little distortion in the statement that in 1550 all serious, modern thought was expressed in Latin; all that was traditional, or merely popular, in its character tended to find its way into vernacular prose.<sup>4</sup>

As he goes on to point out though “(o)ne hundred years after that date the progress of modernism had reversed these relations in most respects.”<sup>5</sup> The influx of classical and Renaissance texts and ideas demanded new ways of thinking, writing and speaking, which were promoted by the educational reforms of the humanists.

Later humanists were frequently defensive about their decision to write in English, citing its “barbarousness” and expressive inadequacies but justifying it in patriotic terms. In the Dedicatory Epistle to the first of his English works (the only one published in his lifetime), *Toxophilus, The Schole of Shootinge* (1545) (a treatise on the art of archery dedicated to Henry VIII), Ascham says:

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<sup>4</sup> Morris W. Croll, “Attic Prose: Lipsius, Montaigne, Bacon” reprinted in *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and Literature* pp. 119-146 edited by Craig Kallendorf (Mahwah, New Jersey: Hermagoras Press, 1999), pp. 128-129.

<sup>5</sup> Croll, 1999: 129.

And although to haue written this boke either in latin or Greke (which thing I wold be verie glad yet to do, if I might surelie know your Graces pleasure there in) had bene more easier & fit for mi trade in study, yet neuerthelesse, I supposinge it no point of honestie, that mi commodite should stop & hinder ani parte either of the pleasure or profite of manie, haue written this Englishe matter in the Englishe tongue, for Englishe men: where in this I trust that your Grace (if it shall please your Highnesse to rede it) shal perceauie it to be a thinge Honeste for me to write, pleasant for some to rede, and profitable for manie to follow, contening a pastime, honest for the minde, holsome for the body, fit for eueri man, vile for no man vsing the day & ope[n] place for Honestie to rule it, not lurking in corners for disorder to abuse it.<sup>6</sup>

Ascham justifies his decision arguing that it will benefit the many, rather than the few, and linking this in turn with honesty, pleasure, and profit, and an overall sense of wholesome masculinity. After the dedication he goes on to address the readership he obviously has in mind: “All Gentle Men and Yomen of Englande.”

In his prefatory epistle to *The Rule of Reason*, Wilson justifies his writing in English on similar grounds, arguing that “divers learned men of other countries have...not suffered any of the sciences liberal to be hidden in the Greek or Latin tongue, but have made each of them familiar to their vulgar people.”<sup>7</sup> Ong speculates on the possible reasons for the upsurge in academic vernacular texts in the middle of the sixteenth century:

School statutes uniformly mention textbooks in Latin for classroom use, but by the 1530's, and increasingly in the latter half of the century, some of these found their way into English translation, probably for a variety of reasons. Some teachers might ignore school statutes and do at least part of their teaching in English. Others might translate a work from Latin to guarantee their mastery of it. Some works translated or written in English might be designed for those who, like the upper-class youth prescribed for in Elyot's *Governour* (1531), did not go to the university, or for law students in London...the extraordinary demand which produced eight editions of *The Arte of Rhetorique* by 1585 together with the fact that its numerous illustrative examples relate to the law, the pulpit, and public affairs, lends

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus, The Schole of Shootinge* (1545) (Amsterdam; New York: Da Capo Press, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969), sig. A.iii - A.iii.v.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The Rule of Reason* (Amsterdam; New York: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum: Da Capo Press, 1970), sig. A.iii.v.

substance to the conjecture that Wilson intended it for the young gentlemen and noblemen studying law at the Inns of Court.<sup>8</sup>

However the decision was rationalized, it is clear that there was a market of readers to be served, who chose to read English texts. Charles Barber argues that:

In the course of our period, Latin, despite its continuing prestige, gradually declined in importance in England, and the prestige of the vernacular rose. Among the forces working in favour of the English language were national feeling, the expansion of the reading public, and the effects of the Reformation.<sup>9</sup>

The texts in my thesis fall into that final quarter of the century when arguments over the validity of writing in English had already been won. Puttenham says that his “intent is to make this Art vulgar for all English mens vse.”<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Harvey states the case forcibly, citing the prestige of various Romance vernaculars in contradistinction to the general depreciation of English:

What thoughe Italy, Spayne, and Fraunce, rauished with a certayne glorious and ambitious desier (your gallantshipp would peraduenture terme it zeale and deuotion) to sett oute and aduance ther owne languages aboute the very Greake and Lattin, if it were possible, and standinge altogether vppon termes of honour and exquisite formes of speches, karringe a Certayne braue magnificent grace and maiesty with them, do so highly and honorably esteeme of ther cuntrye poets, reposing on greate parte of their soueraigne glory and reputation abroad in the worlde in the famous writings of their noblist wittes?...What, a goddess name, passe we what was dun in ruinous Athens or decayed Roome a thousande yeares agoe? Doist thou not ouersensibely perceiue that the market goith far otherwise in Inglande, wherein nothing is reputed so contemptible, and so baselye and vilelye accounted of, as whatsouer is taken for Inglish, whether it be handsum fashions in apparrell, or seemely and honorable in behaiour, or choise wordes and phrases in speache, or anye notable thinge else in effecte that saurith of our owne cuntrye and is not ether merely or mixtely outlandishe?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ong, 1971: 69-70.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Barber, *Early Modern English* (London: André Deutsch, 1976), p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Puttenham, 1904, II: 25.

<sup>11</sup> Gabriel Harvey, *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets* (1592) (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), reprinted in part in Smith, 1904, I: 123-4.

The period of discursive formation and reorganisation in the field of literary practices is also the period in which the language is undergoing some of its most significant developments. In *A History of English* Barbara Strang marks 1570 as the end of period II (1770-1570 working backwards from the present day), arguing that it was a period which “witnessed major social changes which had a great bearing on the language,”<sup>12</sup> notably “urbanisation” which produced “subordination of the old local structuring of language-varieties to a new social structuring.”<sup>13</sup> Apart from the great increase in vocabulary associated with the period, Strang identifies standardisation of orthography and development of the sound system, especially in relation to vowels as the most striking changes – this is the period of the emergence of the long “a” /a:/ (probably from a Cockney dialect) and the short “u” /ʌ/, the reorganisation of diphthongs such as “ea” producing in some cases an /i:/ as in “each” but in others surprisingly an /e:/ sound as in “break”, plus the very significant weakening of post-vocalic “r”, the change which rendered the earlier full rhyme “charge” and “George” archaic. It also assimilated earlier distinctions of /tj, sj/ as in the disyllabic pronunciation of endings such as *-tion* to the “s” as in “sugar” and “sure” to produce modern day pronunciations of “patience” and “mission”. There were changes to stress and loss of vocalisation of “l” in “talk”, “walk” and so on. Strang argues though that the greatest changes were lexical and that “The most important factor for the history of vocabulary during II was the lowering of barriers and broadening of horizons.”<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the sixteenth century English underwent an astonishing increase in its vocabulary. McCrum suggests that “(t)he importance of the Renaissance to the English language was that it added between 10,000 and 12,000 new words to the

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Strang, *A History of English* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> Strang, 1989: 105.

<sup>14</sup> Strang, 1989: 120.

lexicon.”<sup>15</sup> Barber agrees that “the period was indeed one of great expansion, and that substantial use was made both of borrowing (especially from Latin) and of word-formation (especially by affixation).<sup>16</sup> From his analysis of 2% of the *Oxford English Dictionary* he was able to draw the following conclusions:

The number of new words introduced during our period was much greater than the number introduced in ME, a period of twice the length. In the sample, there are 697 words recorded as arising in ME. The number of words recorded as existing in 1500 is 653: these are words which eModE inherits from OE and ME. But to these, during the period 1500-1700, are added no less than 1.988 new words: that is to say, the vocabulary is more than quadrupled.<sup>17</sup>

A. C. Partridge suggests that in the early modern period “nearly forty per cent of words in literary usage were of foreign origin.”<sup>18</sup>

Much of the debate within the texts in my thesis is concerned with the admissibility of introducing loanwords from other languages, notably Latin, as opposed to resurrecting archaic words from Old English, or coining neologisms. Preference for one practice over another is not simply a matter of personal style. Style itself carried wider cultural, political and religious significance. An aureate style (defined by Janel Mueller as “the cultivation of grandiosity in expression”)<sup>19</sup> was associated with Catholicism and the plain style with Puritanism. In practice, as

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<sup>15</sup> Robert McCrum, William Cran, Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English* (London: Faber, 1986), p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Barber, 1976: 166.

<sup>17</sup> As Barber goes on to point out though “(t)hese figures must be interpreted with caution” and he cites the possible causes of inaccuracies in *OED* recording, such as the relatively smaller number of extant ME texts and the rareness of some words. He stresses that the fact of a word’s existence does not offer any clues as to the frequency of its occurrence. Disregarding Scots and obviously dialect words plus words of “obscure or doubtful” etymology leaves 1,848 words of which 1,223 were acquired by affixation: that is adding to an existing root, stem or word, most importantly suffixation (607), prefixation (261) and compounding (217). The remaining third – 625 – are loanwords. By far the greatest number of these are from Latin (393) followed by French (121), then Greek (35). When he breaks the numbers of Latin loanwords down further, the periods 1551-1590 and 1591-1660 are seen to be the most significant in numerical terms, 18 and 31, respectively.

<sup>18</sup> A. C. Partridge, *Tudor to Augustan English: A Study in Syntax and Style from Caxton to Johnson* (London: André Deutsch, 1969), p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Janel M. Mueller, *The Native Tongue and the Word: Developments in English Prose Style 1380-1580* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 164.

Pooley points out, “Plain style is less an absence of complexity, or rhetoric, or metaphor, or even emotion, than a visible restraint of all these.”<sup>20</sup>

In his Preface to *The Posies*, “The Epistle to the Reverend Divines”, Gascoigne, a Protestant from a Catholic family who had fought for the Prince of Orange, defends his preference for “the olde English wordes”:

Next unto this, I have alwayes been of opinion, that it is not unpossible eyther in Poemes or in Prose too write both compendiously, and perfectly in our Englishe tongue. And therefore although I challenge not vnto my selfe the name of an English Poet, yet may the Reader finde oute in my writings, that I have more faulted in keeping the olde English wordes (*quamquis iam obsoleta*) than in borrowing of other languages, such Epithetes and Adiectiues as smell of the Inkehorne.<sup>21</sup>

Gabriel Harvey defended Spenser’s decision to fill perceived lexical gaps by deploying old English words, for which he was criticised by Sidney amongst others: “That same framing of his style to an old rustic language I dare not allow, since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latine, nor Sannazzaro in Italian did affect it.”<sup>22</sup> E[dward] K[irkham] also defends him in the Epistle Dedicatory to “The Shepherds Calendar”, arguing that the practice derived from acquaintance with classical poetry and citing Cicero as his authority. He recognises, nevertheless, that the practice should not be used indiscriminately:

Yet nether euery where must old words be stuffed in, nor the common Dialecte and maner of speaking so corrupted therby, that, as in old buildings, it seme disorderly and ruinous. But all as in most exsquisite pictures they vse to blaze and portraict not onely the daintie lineaments of beautye, but also rounde about it to shadow the rude thicketts and craggy clifts, that, by the basenesse of such parts, more excellency may accrew to the principall; for oftymes we fynde ourselues, I knowe not how, singularly delighted with the shewe of such naturall rudenesse, and take great pleasure in that disorderly

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<sup>20</sup> Pooley, 1992: 65.

<sup>21</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 5.

<sup>22</sup> Sidney, 1973: 133.

order. Euen so doe those rough and harsh termes enlumine, and make more clearly to appeare, the brightnesse of braue and glorious words.<sup>23</sup>

Kirkham goes on to justify Spenser's practice of employing old English and dialect words by condemning the alternatives, namely neologism and borrowing:

for in my opinion it is one special prayse of many whych are dew to this Poete, that he hath laboured to restore, as to theyr rightfull heritage, such good and naturall English words as haue ben long time out of vse and almost cleane disherited. Which is the onely cause that our Mother tonge, which truely of it self is both ful enough for prose and stately enough for verse, hath long time ben counted bare and barrein of both. Which default when as some endeuoured to salue and recure, they patched up the holes with peces and rags of other languages, borrowing here of the French, there of the Italian, euery where of the Latine; not weighing how il those tongues accorde with themselues, but much worse with ours: So now they haue made our English tongue a gallimaufrey or hodgepodge of al other speches.<sup>24</sup>

Moore sees the preference for borrowing as characteristic of early modern English, a result of the Norman Conquest. He argues that

The great influence of French is shown not only by the adoption of numerous loanwords as early as the eleventh century – which naturally increased immensely during the following centuries... The power of framing new words and compounds from native material was largely lost, and the habit of borrowing terms ready-made from French was firmly rooted in the linguistic sense of the nation.<sup>25</sup>

Strang and Mueller though see it as more concerned with cultural attitudes, as Mueller puts it “associations of cultural prestige or superiority as well as a delight in linguistic variety and curiosity provide far more powerful motivations for borrowing and assimilation than do imputed gaps in the lexicon.”<sup>26</sup> The import and employment of loanwords produces stylistic changes beyond the simple addition to

<sup>23</sup> E.K. [Edward Kirkham], “The Epistle Dedicatory to the Shepherds Calender” (1579) reprinted in Smith, 1904, I: 127- 134, p. 129.

<sup>24</sup> E. K., 1904: 129-130.

<sup>25</sup> Moore, 1970: 5.

<sup>26</sup> Mueller, 1984: 153. See also Strang 1989 pp. 92-96, 120-131, 184-187, 250-257.

the lexicon. In effect it modernised the language, introducing a theoretical and technical vocabulary.

It was the practice of introducing loanwords, particularly from Latin, which excited most comment, and the debate around “inkhorn” terms is engaged. In his advice to Donati in *Certayne Notes of Instruction* Gascoigne is brief and to the point, connecting monosyllables with patriotism:

5. Here by the way I thinke it not amisse to forewarne you that you thrust as few wordes of many syllables into your verse as may be: and herevnto I might alledge many reasons: first the most auncient English wordes are of one sillable, so that the more monosyllables that you vse, the truer Englishman you shall seeme, and the lesse you shall smell of the Inkehorne...

9. Also asmuche as may be, eschew straunge words, or *obsoleta et inusitata*, vnlesse the Theame do giue iust occasion: marie in some places a straunge worde doth drawe attentiu reading, but yet I would haue you therin to vse discretion.<sup>27</sup>

Puttenham is clear in his prescription for the appropriate linguistic medium for the contemporary poet – the courtly, educated English spoken within a sixty mile radius of London - no strange words and no archaisms:

This part in our maker or Poet must be heedyly looked vnto, that it be naturall, pure, and the most vsuall of all his countrey; and for the same purpose rather that which is spoken in the kings Court, or in the good townes and Cities within the land, then in the marches and frontiers, or in port townes, where straungers haunt for traffike sake, or yet in Vniuersities where Schollers vse much peeuish affectation of words out of the primatiue languages, or finally, in any vplandish village or corner of a Realme, where is no resort but of poore rusticall or vnciuill people: neither shall he follow the speech of a craftes man or carter, or other of the inferiour sort, though he be inhabitant or bred in the best towne and Citie in this Realme, for such persons doe abuse good speeches by strange accents or ill shapen soundes and false ortographie. But he shall follow generally the better brought vp sort...men ciuill and graciously behaoured and bred. Our Maker therefore at these dayes shall not follow Piers plowman nor Gower nor Lydgate noe

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<sup>27</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 468-469.

yet Chaucer, for their language is now out of vse with vs; neither shall he take the termes of Northern-men, such as they vse in dayly talke, whether they be noble men or gentlemen or of their best clarkes, all is a matter; nor in effect any speech used beyond the riuer of Trent, though no man can deny but that theirs is the purer English Saxon at this day, yet it is not so Courtly nor so currant as Southerne English is; no more is the far Westerne mans speech. Ye shall therefore take the vsuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles, and not much aboute.<sup>28</sup>

Puttenham here exhibits those metropolitan prejudices still aired today. Whilst against jargon terms though, he offers a number of examples of new words that he argues are legitimate – such as “scientificke” and “mechanicall” - because they allow for a finer shade of meaning.<sup>29</sup>

Harvey and Nashe vent their splenetic quarrel in mutual abuse of each other’s prose style. What is striking in retrospect is the extent to which so many of the examples they quote of each other’s linguistic aberrations (about 60% of Harvey’s, somewhat fewer of Nashe’s more extravagant style) have been effortlessly absorbed into the lexicon. They offer lists; Nashe for example cites “*Ingenuitie; Iouiall mind; valorous Authours; inckehorne aduentures; inckehorne pads; putatiue opinions; putatiue artists; energeticall persuasions; Rascallitie; materiallitie; artificiallitie; Fantasticallitie; diuine Entelechy; loud mentery; deceitfull perfidy; addicted to Theory.*”<sup>30</sup>

Harvey hit back the following year (1593) in *Pierce’s Supererogation*, defending himself and his own lexical choices whilst reviling Nashe’s.<sup>31</sup> Nashe took up the cudgels again, justifying his own exuberant approach to language and rationalizing

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<sup>28</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 149-150.

<sup>29</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 151.

<sup>30</sup> Nashe, 1904, II: 241-242.

<sup>31</sup> Harvey, 1904, II: 275-7.

his preference for polysyllabic compounds and borrowings over the monosyllabic norm of old English:

To the second rancke of reprehenders, that complain of my boystrous compound wordes, and ending my Italionate coyned verbes all in ize, thus I replie: that no winde that blowes strong but is boystrous, no speech or wordes, of any power or force to confute or persuade, but must be swelling and boystrous. For the compounding of my wordes, therein I imitate rich men, who, having gathered store of white single money together, convert a number of those small scutes into great peeces of gold, such as double pistols and Portugues. Our English tongue, of all languages, most swarmeth with the single money of monasillables, which are the onely scandal of it. Bookes written in them, and no other, seeme like shopkeepers boxes, that contain nothing else save halfe-pence, three farthings and two-pences. Therefore, what did me I, but having a huge heape of those worthelesse shreds of small English in my pia mater's purse, to make the royaller shew with them to mens eyes, had them to the compunders immediately, and exchanged them fourre into one, and others into more, according to the Greek, French, Spanish, and Italian.<sup>32</sup>

Jonson points out in *Discoveries* the alternative fates that await those who rashly undertake the practice of neologism or borrowing but goes on to argue that it is necessary and that usage accustoms the ear: "A man coins not a new word without some peril and less fruit: for if it happen to be received, the praise is but moderate; if refused, the scorn is assured. Yet we must adventure, for things at first hard and rough are by use made tender and gentle."<sup>33</sup> He argues for a rational middle way:

Custom is the most certain mistress of language, as the public stamp makes the current money. But we must not be too frequent with the mint, every day coining, nor fetch words from the extreme and utmost ages; since the chief virtue of a style is perspicuity, and nothing so vicious in it as to need an interpreter. Words borrowed of antiquity do lend a kind of majesty to style, and are not without their delight sometimes; for they have the authority of years, and out of their intermission do win to themselves a kind of grace like

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<sup>32</sup> The epistle "To the Reader" prefixed to the second (1594) edition of T. Nashe's "Christ's Tears over Jerusalem"; reprinted by Collier in the Introduction to Harvey's "Pierce Supererogation" (1593), No. 7 of the *Miscellaneous Tracts, Temp. Eliz. & Jac. I.*

<sup>33</sup> Jonson, 1985: 571-2.

newness. But the eldest of the present, and newest of the past language is the best.<sup>34</sup>

It was precisely this heterogeneous constitution though which was ultimately to prove English's strength, lending it wonderful flexibility of range, style and register, which a number of contemporary critics recognised and articulated. Richard Carew in *The Excellencie of the English Tongue* (1595) argues that the basis of English is that rich admixture of coined and native terms and expression:

The longe wordes that wee borrowe, being intermingled with the shorte of our owne store, make vp a perfitt harmonye, by culling from out which mixture (with Iudgment) yow maye frame your speech according to the matter you must worke on, maiesticall, pleasaunte, delicate, or manly, more or lesse, in what sorte you please. Adde hereunto, that what soeuer grace any other Language carryeth, in Verse or Prose, in Tropes or Metaphors, in Ecchoes or Agnominations, they maye all be liuely and exactly represented in ours.<sup>35</sup>

Sidney defends English for its variety, its grammatical simplicity, and expressive clarity and beauty:

I know some will say it is a mingled language. And why not so much the better, taking the best of both the other? Another will say it wanteth grammar. Nay truly, it hath that praise, that it wanteth not grammar: for grammar it might have, but needs it not; being so easy of itself, and so void of those cumbersome differences of cases, genders, moods, and tenses, which I think was a piece of the Tower of Babylon's curse, that a man should be put to school to learn his mother-tongue. But for the uttering sweetly and properly the conceits of the mind, which is the end of speech, that it hath equally with any other tongue in the world: and is particularly happy in compositions of two or three words together, neare the Greeke, far beyond the Latin: which is one of the greatest beauties can be in a language.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jonson, 1985: 572.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Carew, *The Excellency of the English Tongue* (?1595-6) reprinted in Smith, 1904, II:285-294, p. 293.

<sup>36</sup> Sidney, 1973: 140.

In the debate over English diction and composition, extremes are gradually reconciled and a flexible, workable compromise reached which included borrowing (especially from Latin), neologism and the deployment of old English. As Strang says, “The new world was also an intellectual one. The thought and sensibility of the Renaissance likewise carried virtually a single cultural vocabulary across the civilised world. Further, it established the intellectual climate in which insistence on the use of vernaculars flourished. These tongues had to develop, so far as they lacked it, the language of serious literature, of religion, of scholarship – which within the period came to include the new science.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Translation**

“The age of the first Elizabeth was also the first great age of translation in England.”<sup>38</sup>

The expansion of the English lexicon through the introduction of loanwords, and the new range of literary genres and styles were brought about, to a large extent, by the extensive practice of translation throughout this period. Gascoigne translated Ariosto’s prose comedy *The Supposes* (*I Suppositi*), performed at Gray’s Inn in 1566 in the same year as *Jocasta*, which he had translated with Francis Kinwelmarsh (from the French rather than directly from Greek, although it can still claim to be the first Greek tragedy on the English stage). After his initial reverses and subsequent reformation Gascoigne seems to have taken up translation of serious works as part of his concerted effort toward social rehabilitation, translating Pope Innocent III’s *De contemptu mundi* as *The Droomme of Doomes Day. Wherein the Frailties of Mans Lyfe, Are Portrayed*, and Saint Augustine’s *De ebriitate* as *A*

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<sup>37</sup> Strang, 1989: 121.

<sup>38</sup> Theodore Savory, *The Art of Translation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p. 39.

*Delicate Diet, for Daintiemouthde Droonkardes*, with the addition of further authorities and contemporary examples. He is also credited with translating Jacques de Fouilloux's *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting*. He presented a set of translations to the Queen of an anonymous tale, *The Pleasant Tale of Hemetes the Hermit*, in Latin, Italian and French designed to demonstrate his linguistic abilities as part of his concerted campaign for preferment. The range and extent of Gascoigne's translations are impressive, but the practice was common.

The writers responsible for those texts, which redefined poetics and contemporary writing practices, worked unselfconsciously across the range of genres. They were all engaged though, to a greater or lesser extent, with translation. Some, such as George Chapman, are best known for their work in this field, and some of the texts I have considered form Prefaces to their translations of classical writers – for example Chapman's Preface to the *Seaven Bookes of the Iliades* (1598). Apart from original works such as *Bussy Dambois* though, Chapman also translated *Ovid's Banquet of Sence* (1595), *Achilles Shield* (1598), *Petrarchs Seven Penitentiall Psalms* (1612), *Homer's Odysses* (1614-15), *The Divine Poem of Musaeus* (1616), and *The Georgicks of Hesiod* (1618).

Sidney commenced a translation of *A Worke concerning the trewnesse of the Christian Religion from French*, which was finished by Golding, and the first forty-three of one hundred and fifty verse translations of the Psalms. Bacon also translated the Psalms; Webbe translated two of Vergil's Eclogues; Samuel Daniel translated *The Worthy Tract of Paulus Jovius* (Paolo Giovio's *Dialogo dell' imprese militari et amorase*) (1585); Jonson had translated Horace's *Ars Poetica* and Harington not only translated Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1591), but also *The*

*Englishman's Doctor* and *Joannes de Mediolano Or, The Schoole of Salome* (1607) and *The sixth Book of Vergil's Aeneid*.

Other well-known writers of the period also included translating as part of their normal writing activities – for example Marlowe's *Lucans First Booke Translated Line for Line* (published posthumously 1600) or Robert Greene's *Gwydonius: The Carde of Fancie* (1584) and *The Royal Exchange* from the Italian with an additional commentary. H. S. Bennett makes the point that the majority of translators restricted their attempts to a few texts, offering a number of hypotheses for this:

It is worthwhile, however, to note that the practice of translating was widespread, so that we have the names of many hundreds of translators, although most of them are credited with one or two works only. Either they found the task too laborious, or their work did not win approval enough to encourage them to persevere, or else their professional life became too exacting.<sup>39</sup>

It would be more accurate however to regard translation as a normal part of Elizabethan writing.<sup>40</sup> It was only later that translation came to be viewed as a specialist activity. This is not really surprising given the central role it played in contemporary grammar school pedagogy. Norton argues that “grammar, interpretation, translation, and writing emerge fully as sister arts in the Renaissance classroom.”<sup>41</sup> Designed to induce a thorough understanding of Latin and the classics, knowledge of the language was perfected through the system known as

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<sup>39</sup> H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers 1475-1557: being a study of the book trade from Caxton to the incorporation of the Stationers' Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 104.

<sup>40</sup> This is one area where women writers from the aristocratic class who were beneficiaries of a humanistic education feature to a limited degree, although their works are of an even more private nature than that of their male counterparts, for example Lady Jane Lumley translated *The Tragedie of Iphigeneia* in 1553 and Mary Sidney translated *The Tragedie of Antonie* in 1590 as well as completing her brother's translation of the Psalms.

<sup>41</sup> Glyn P. Norton, *The Ideology and Language of Translation in Renaissance France and their Humanist Antecedents* (Genève: Librairie Aroz S.A., 1984), p. 29.

‘double translation’ as described by Ascham, but derived from classical practice, in “The first booke teaching the bryngyng vp of youth” in *The Scholemaster*:

let the master read vnto hym the Epistles of *Cicero*, gathered together and chosen out by *Sturmius*, for the capacitie of children.

First, let him teach the childe, cherefullie and plainlie, the cause, and matter of the letter: then, let him construe it into Englishe, so oft, as the childe may easily carie awaie the vnderstanding of it: Lastlie, parse it ouer perfitlie. This done thus, let the childe, by and by, both construe and parse it ouer againe: so, that it may appeare, that the childe douteth in nothing, that his master taught him before. After this, the childe must take a paper booke, and sitting in some place, where no man shall prompe him, by him self, let him translate into Englishe his former leson. Then shewing it to his master, let the master take from him his latin booke, and pausing an houre, at the least, than let the childe translate his owne Englishe into latin againe, in an other paper booke. When the childe bringeth it, turned into latin, the master must compare it with *Tullies* booke, and laie them both together: and where the childe doth well, either in chosing, or true placing of *Tullies* wordes, let the master praise him, and saie here ye do well...But to go forward, as you perceiue, your scholer to goe better and better on awaie, first, with vnderstanding his lesson more quicklie, with parsing more readily, with translating more spedelie and perfitlie then he was wonte, after, giue him longer lessons to translate.<sup>42</sup>

Such arduous and painstaking teaching practices were not only effective in perfecting a conscientious student’s grasp of Latin, but served to render the art of translating itself a normal part of Elizabethan writing. In his critical biography of George Gascoigne, C. T. Prouty claims “(i)t is, of course, a truism that every great age of literature begins largely with translation, and that the career of the individual poet resembles in outline the pattern of the age.”<sup>43</sup> Definition is not always clear-cut though. Susan Bassnett-McGuire suggests that

What is generally understood as translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that (1) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and (2) the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ascham, 1870: 26, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Prouty, 1966: 253.

<sup>44</sup> Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 2.

As Jean Boase-Beier and Michael Holman point out, in practice this is not always straightforward:

An examination of the work of many writers and translators will...cast doubt upon the idea that a clear distinction between original and translation can be made whether as process or as product, and will inevitably lead to the conclusion that terms such as “faithfulness” or “creativity” or indeed “translation” are anything but clear-cut...Ovid, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Eliot; these merely provide examples of what all writers do, namely, integrate other people’s writing into their own.<sup>45</sup>

They go on to suggest the problematic nature of producing such a “clear distinction” in relation to “allusion” which seems significant in its relation to the humanistic practice of “imitation”:

Allusion, too, is a process of integrating other writing, taking particular elements of another work and making explicit references to them, building these references into the context of the new work...Allusion, in being unacknowledged and fully integrated, would appear to differ from translation or adaptation, which nowadays almost always give sources in order to avoid the accusation of plagiarism. Yet the distinction between translation and other types of borrowing is rarely clear-cut.<sup>46</sup>

These debates are not new. In his dedication of the *Seauen Books of the Iliades* (1598) Chapman gives his own theory of translation:

The work of a skilfull and worthy translator is to observe the sentences, figures and formes of speech proposed in his author, his true sence and height, and to adorne them with figures and formes of oration fitted to the originall in the same tongue to which they are translated: and these things I would gladlie have made the questions of whatsoever my labours have deserved.<sup>47</sup>

Barnabe Rich, however, points out some of the problems encountered by the translator in his address to the Gentlemen Readers of his translation of *The Famous*

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<sup>45</sup> Jean Boase-Beier and Michael Holman (eds.), *The Practices of Literary Translation: Constraints and Creativity* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1999), pp. 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> Boase-Beier and Holman, 1999: 4.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, 1904, II: 296.

*Hystory of Herodotus* (1584). The conventionally modest disclaimer is couched in a sartorial metaphor which articulates the translator's dilemma: "The truth is (Gentlemen) in making them new attire...I was cutting my cloth by another mans measure, beeyng great difference whether we invent a fashion of our owne, or imitate a paterne set down by another."<sup>48</sup>

Bassnett-McGuire argues that "the development of native language literatures with the decline of the great Latin tradition in the Renaissance" is an example of the way in which "(l)iterary history shows very clearly how great is the debt that is so frequently owed to translation."<sup>49</sup> George Steiner sees translation in Renaissance Europe as occupying a central role in cultural development which facilitated the transformation of the old into the new:

At a time of explosive innovation, and amid a real threat of surfeit and disorder, translation absorbed, shaped, oriented the necessary raw material. It was, in a full sense of the term, the *matière première* of the imagination. Moreover, it established a logic of relation between past and present, and between different tongues and traditions which were splitting apart under stress of nationalism and religious conflict.<sup>50</sup>

There have always been two basic approaches towards translation and its cultural significance: "The distinction between word for word and sense for sense translation, established within the Roman system, has continued to be a point for debate in one way or another right up to the present."<sup>51</sup> In the Preface to his translation of Cato's *Mimi* (a grammar school text book) Taverner explains somewhat ingenuously that he does not wish to make life too easy for the pupil tempted to use his translation as a crib: "I have not translated the boke worde for worde, for then I shuld have taken awaye the office of your schole maister, and also

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<sup>48</sup> Barnabe Rich, STC 13224, sig. A2.

<sup>49</sup> Bassnett-McGuire, 1991: xii.

<sup>50</sup> George Steiner, *After Babel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 247.

<sup>51</sup> Bassnett-McGuire, 1991: 39.

occasion you to be more negligent and slacke in your studie upon trust of the translation therof.”<sup>52</sup>

There is a fine line dividing translation and imitation. Part of the process of organising vernacular writing practices in this period involves redefining the relation between them. In the *Ars Poetica*, in his advocacy of imitation as essential to the development of good writing, Horace distinguishes between the two:

A theme that is familiar can be made your own property so long as you do not waste your time on a hackneyed treatment; nor should you try to render your original word for word like a slavish translator, or in imitating another writer plunge yourself into difficulties from which shame, or the rules you have laid down for yourself, prevent you from extricating yourself.<sup>53</sup>

Gascoigne makes the distinction in his own writings between translation and invention in the title page to *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* which he claims are “Gathered partely (by translation) in the fyne outlandish Gardins of Euripides, Ouid, Petrarke, Ariosto, and others: and partly by inuention, out of our owne fruitfull Orchardes in Englande” (1573).<sup>54</sup>

The work of the most distinguished translators in the period does more than render available English versions of classical or continental texts, however. It Englished those texts in such a way that they became an integral part of the national culture. This applies to works such as North’s *Plutarch*, Golding’s *Metamorphoses*, Chapman’s *Homer*, Hoby’s *Courtier*, Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s *Essays* or the great variety of works by the “translator general” of the age, Philemon Holland.<sup>55</sup> This was achieved was by deploying a free translation in a vivid, contemporary style. Certain characteristics are detectable, for example, the use of

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<sup>52</sup> Taverner, STC 4844 – Bennett p. 170.

<sup>53</sup> T. S. Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism: Aristotle, Horace, Longinus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 1.

<sup>55</sup> T. Fuller, *History of the Worthies of England* ed. P. A. Nuttall (London, 1840), III, 287.

doublets and conjunctions, and the preference for the concrete over the abstract, which gives the writing a colloquial, English quality. J. F. Nims, for example argues that Golding, a “moderately faithful” translator, “begins by metamorphosing Ovid: by turning the sophisticated Roman into a ruddy country gentleman with tremendous gusto, a sharp eye on the life around him, an ear for racy speech, and a gift for energetic doggerel.”<sup>56</sup> Townsend Rich says of Harington that “In many cases he translated with such freedom that the Italian originals of particular stanzas of the English are difficult to find.”<sup>57</sup> Allardyce Nicoll defends Chapman’s style of free translation arguing that

albeit with over-enthusiastic licence, he has taken the only path a translating poet can travel: he has determined that it is his business to provide, not a word-for-word version of the original, but a poem that attempts to recreate the spirit of the original in an alien tongue. When he speaks of his ‘English Homer’ he does not simply mean ‘Homer in English’; his words are to be interpreted literally and ‘English Homer’ is to be regarded as an independent exercise in the creative imagination. If on occasions he adds whole lines for which Homer gives him no authority, if continually he provides his own qualifying epithets (so that for example, the Homeric ‘Nestor’ becomes ‘the good old Nestor’), he is not to be blamed. This is merely part of his general endeavour, an integral and indeed necessary part of the work of art he has wrought.<sup>58</sup>

Holland in common with all Elizabethan translators doubles nouns, verbs and adjectives to produce a vivid native speech pattern: “storme and tempest”, “meet and decent”, “whipped and scourged”, “cherish and foster.”<sup>59</sup> North, translating from French rather than the original Greek, preserves the pattern of Amyot’s prose in the use of doublets, for example *megan strategon* (a great leader) becomes “ung

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<sup>56</sup> Arthur Golding, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation* edited by J. F. Nims (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p.xxxi.

<sup>57</sup> Townsend Rich, *Harington and Ariosto: A Study in Elizabethan Verse Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 71.

<sup>58</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *Chapman’s Homer: The Iliad, The Odyssey and the Lesser Homeric* Volume I *The Iliad* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. xiii.

<sup>59</sup> F. O. Matthiesen, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), p. 190.

sage et vaillant capitaine”. He copies Amyot also in explaining terms and allusions which he guesses will be beyond his reader without some explanation. North, however, goes further turning “ces gens de religion” into “all this goodly rable of superstition and priestes.”<sup>60</sup> Holland too strives for clarity in his translation adding not only explanatory notes but a vividly theatrical sense in the realisation of his text. Livy’s “Concursu hominum rixa ac prope proelium fuit” becomes “Whereupon the people ran together, and made a riot, grew to words, and from words to brawles, insomuch as they went together by the eares, and made a fray in manner of a battell.”<sup>61</sup>

Hoby exhibits similar characteristics in “goe against the shotte of a Canon” for the Italian “aspettar” or “fell to daunsinge” for “cominciarono a danzare” or “Get thee hence in the Dyvelles name” instead of “Vattene in malora” and included “conversational phrases”<sup>62</sup> such as “Goo to, saye on then”; “Behoulde I beseeche ye, saide then the Dutchesse”. The effect of these additions as with Chapman’s Homer is, as Matthiessen comments: “The courtier has become an Englishman, but he is less the scholar, and more the man of action.”<sup>63</sup>

Gascoigne likewise translates freely and adds touches of his own. As Barish describes it: his “chief stylistic virtue is the increased picturesqueness of the language.”<sup>64</sup> He adds “realistic touches”,<sup>65</sup> for example particularizing amounts of money or goods – “eggs” become “twenty eggs”, “malefica vecchia”<sup>66</sup> becomes this

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<sup>60</sup> Matthiessen, 1965: 91.

<sup>61</sup> Matthiessen, 1965: 189.

<sup>62</sup> Matthiessen, 1965: 45.

<sup>63</sup> Matthiessen, 1965: 45.

<sup>64</sup> Jonas A Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Barish, 1967: 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *I suppositi* I, 124 in *Le Commedie* 2 volumes edited by Michele Catalano (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1933).

“old scabbed queane”.<sup>67</sup> Gascoigne adds native proverbs and sayings which gives immediacy and a local flavour to his work.

The effect of this style of translation was not to produce a sense of distance between the original and the contemporary reader but to bring the texts “into the main tide of English literature.”<sup>68</sup> Whilst these works are considered translations, it is clear that they are much more than that. The writers make the texts their own and English them in a way resembling the practice of imitation rather than the strict practice of translation as we understand it today. Matthiessen sums Elizabethan translation up in this way:

Theoretically there may be no defence for such a method of translating, but in practice it succeeded as no other could. For it made the foreign classics rich with English associations; it took Plutarch and Montaigne deep into the national consciousness.<sup>69</sup>

It also produced a specific type of literature and the literary based along class and gender lines, naturalising the classics and continental learning.

Tensions relating to imitation as a literary device and its increasing denigration by those writers of a pre-Romantic inclination who promoted an idea of originality are rehearsed in the practices and debates around translation. Webbe commends Spenser “Whose fine poeticall witt and most exquisite learning, as he shewed abundantly in that peece of worke, [is] in my iudgement inferiour to the workes neither of Theocritus in Greeke nor Virgill in Latine, whom he narrowly immitateth.”<sup>70</sup>

Nashe accepts translation as a scholarly practice but condemns contemporary dramatists who “feed on nought but the crummes that fal from the translators

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<sup>67</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 216 (*Supposes* III.iv.67).

<sup>68</sup> Matthiessen, 1965: 7.

<sup>69</sup> Matthiessen, 1965: 4.

<sup>70</sup> Webbe, 1904, I: 232.

trencher.”<sup>71</sup> He attempts to make a qualitative distinction between types of translation from his well-known rant aimed at Kyd to earlier humanistic translations into Latin. The flood of vernacular translations from both Latin and Italian attracts his particular scorn:

It is a common practise now a daies amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through euery arte and thriue by none, to leaue the trade of *Nouerint*, whereto they were borne, and busie themselues with the indeuors of Art, that could scarcely latinize their necke-verse if they should haue neede; yet English *Seneca* read by candle light yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Bloud is a begger*, and so foorth; and, if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will afford you whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfulls of tragical speeches...The sea exhaled by droppes will in continuance be drie, and *Seneca* let bloud line by line and page by page at length must needes die to our stage: which makes his famisht followers to imitate the Kidde in *Aesop*, who, enamored with the Foxes newfangles, forsooke all hopes of life to leape into a new occupation, and these men, renouncing all possibilitie of credit or estimation, to intermeddle with Italian translations: wherein how poorely they haue plodded (as those that are neither prouenzall men nor are able to distinguish of Articles), let all indifferent Gentlemen that haue trauailed in that tongue discern by their twopenie pamphlets:...But least in this declamatory vaine I shoulde condemne all & commend none, I will propound to your learned imitation those men of import that haue laboured with credit in this laudable kinde of Translation. In the forefront of whom I cannot but place that aged Father *Erasmus*, that inuested most of our Greeke Writers in the roabes of the auncient *Romaines*: in whose traces *Philip Melanchton*, *Sadolet*, *Plantine*, and manie other reuerent Germanes insisting haue reedified the ruines of our decayed Libraries, and merueilouslie inriched the Latine tongue with the expence of their toyle. Not long after, their emulation, being transported into *England*, euerie priuate Scholler, *William Turner* and who not, beganne to vaunt their smattering of Latine in English Impressions.<sup>72</sup>

In *The Anatomie of Absurditie* he is equally scathing about translators whom he blames for their lack of morality, their showing off and the shallow state of contemporary learning:

Good God, that those that neuer tasted of any thing saue the excrementes of Artes, whose threddebare knowledge, being bought at the second hand, is

<sup>71</sup> Nash[e], Preface to Greene's *Menaphon* reprinted in Smith 1904, I: 308.

<sup>72</sup> Nashe, 1904: 311-313.

spotted, blemished, and defaced through translators rigorous rude dealing, shoulde preferre their sluttered sutes before other mens glittering gorgious array, should offer them water out of a muddie pit, who haue continually recourse to the Fountaine, or dregs to drink, who haue wine to sell.<sup>73</sup>

Puttenham attempts a different distinction in which he simultaneously elevates the poet by his emphasis on creative originality but downgrades the translator:

Euen so the very Poet makes & contriues out of his owne braine both the verse & matter of his poeme, & not by any foreine copie or example, as doth the translator, who therefore may well be sayd a versifier, but not a Poet.<sup>74</sup>

In his review of poets, past and present, though he distinguishes the two functions in the same way as Gascoigne, recognising that they co-existed happily in a writer such as Chaucer:

*Chaucer*, with *Gower*, *Lidgat*, and *Harding*, for their antiquitie ought to haue the first place, and *Chaucer*, as the most renowned of them all, for the much learning appeareth to be in him aboue any of the rest. And though many of his bookes be but bare translations out of the Latin & French, yet are they wel handled, as his bookes of *Troilus* and *Cresseid*, and the Romant of the Rose, whereof he translated but one halfe...the Canterbury tales were Chaucers owne inuention, as I suppose, and where he sheweth more the naturall of his pleasant wit then in any other of his workes.<sup>75</sup>

Harington on the other hand, a practitioner of free translations himself, distinguishes his preference for the legitimacy of translation over what he clearly regards as the illegitimacy of the unacknowledged borrowings of an earlier generation of writers:

It is possible that, if I would haue employed that time that I haue done vpon this vpon some inuention of mine owne, I could haue by this made it haue risen to a iust volume, &, if I wold, haue done, as many spare not to do, flowne very high with stolen fethers. But I had rather men should see and know that I borrow all then that I steale any: and I would wish to be called

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<sup>73</sup> Nashe, 1904, I: 325.

<sup>74</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 3.

<sup>75</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 64.

rather one of the worst translators than one of the meaner makers, specially sith the Earle of Surrey and *Sir Thomas Wiat*, that are yet called the first refiners of the English tong, were both translators out of Italian.<sup>76</sup>

Harington is articulating a shift in sensibility, which marks modernity in this context, distinguishing the two practices and rejecting the concept of imitation as a base for creativity.

Dryden, in the next century, continued the practice of translation as an integral part of his writings, distinguishing three types, including imitation, as one of those but recognizing some ambiguity in the definition:

All translation, I suppose, may be reduced to these three heads.

First, that of metaphrase, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another. Thus, or near this manner, was Horace his *Art of Poetry* translated by Ben Jonson. The second way is that of paraphrase, or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered...The third way is that of imitation, where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases.<sup>77</sup>

Through the Englishing of so many classical and contemporary texts, English culture was expanded in its range of ideas, reference, and new areas of knowledge. The demand for vernacular texts grew throughout the sixteenth century, and translations of all kinds of material played a large part in satisfying this demand, particularly religious works but also books on mathematics, medicine, history, geography, horticulture, animal husbandry, military strategy as well as grammars and rhetorics. As Robert Whittinton put it in the early part of the sixteenth century

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<sup>76</sup> Harington, 1904: 218-9.

<sup>77</sup> John Dryden, "Ovid and the Art of Translation" in *Dryden's Essays* pp. 146-155 (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1954), p. 151.

“I se many yonge persones...very studious of knowledge of thynges, and be vehemently bente to rede newe workes, and in especyall [those] that be translated into the vulgare tonge.”<sup>78</sup>

Whilst all topics are covered, the majority of works, both original works in the vernacular and translations, are of a religious nature - the vernacular religious works include a very large number of sermons. The whole subject of translation was more urgent and more hotly contested in relation to biblical translation. The Reformation has been called “primarily a dispute between translators.”<sup>79</sup> Translation had a profound shaping influence on the culture at every level, intellectual and philosophical, as well as on language and literary forms. It introduced new words, texts, genres and ideas which were, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, assimilated into English culture and naturalised.

## Genre

One of the reasons that the early modern period enjoys a rich literary reputation lies in the range and variety of new styles and genres experienced for the first time in English. George Gascoigne was personally responsible for a surprising number of such innovations, but the period is characterised by novelty and experiment. This generic development was due in large part to the translation of classical and continental works which were then adapted, transformed and assimilated to the vernacular literary landscape. The practice of imitation was instrumental in this process as Rosalie Colie explains:

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<sup>78</sup> Robert Whittinton, STC 5278 (1534), sig.b3r.

<sup>79</sup> Edmond Cary, *Les Grands Traducteurs Français* (Genève: Librairie de l'Université, 1963), p. 7 cited in Bassnett p.55.

Even though the chief concept of mimesis may often have acted as a constraint upon literary innovation in the Renaissance, another version of imitation, simply the imitation of formal models, was in spite of its inbuilt conservatism a factor for literary change.<sup>80</sup>

Discussing the early modern institution of “Literary language” Adamson argues that “the drive to establish a national literature...led writers to challenge the achievements of Latin literature by faithfully reproducing its genres and styles in the vernacular.”<sup>81</sup>

Rosalie Colie sees the process in terms of cultural fluidity:

As subcultures continually melt into or are absorbed by a neighbouring culture, so did the kinds in our [early modern] period melt into one another – often to enrich the possibilities of literature taken as a system.<sup>82</sup>

Colie argues that “(t)he fact that the *concept* of generic form was taken for granted is more important than any definition of a specific generic norm could ever be.”<sup>83</sup>

Alastair Fowler explains the process in terms of the shift from orality to literacy and the print revolution, as he considers the movement from classical to Renaissance practices:

Alterations in the elements must have wide repercussions through genres and groups of genres. It is not just a matter of the immediate changes entailed by the elemental form itself. There are more thoroughgoing and ramifying consequential trains of changes. Genre’s whole texture, for example, must have felt the different tensions between verse and prose, when the typographic tradition replaced the chirographic, and memory began to atrophy. The earlier tradition implied an oral literary model, on which a whole system of oral genres depended. When that model was replaced, so was every genre bound up with it.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1973), p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> Adamson, 1999: 541-542.

<sup>82</sup> Colie, 1973: 116.

<sup>83</sup> Colie, 1973: 8.

<sup>84</sup> Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 48.

When Sidney comes to discuss the “third” and best type of poets, he explains how they are to be classified in a list which combines metre and genre:

The most notable be the Heroic, Lyric, Tragic, Comic, Satiric, Iambic, Elegiac, Pastoral, and certain others, some of these being termed according to the matter they deal with, some by the sorts of verses they liked best to write in.<sup>85</sup>

Alastair Fowler argues that “In ancient criticism, *metrical structure* was especially genre-linked. Indeed, meters were so rigorously connected with particular kinds as to provide a basis of classification.”<sup>86</sup> The desire for classification, rationalisation and order is typical of the period and most of the texts discussed offer some sort of categorisation, most commonly in terms of metre (to be discussed in chapter 8).

Puttenham offers the most detailed account of contemporary genres in chapters XI to XXX of “The First Book of Poets and Poesie”. He explains each metre or genre, its history, linking the form with its most significant practitioners. Chapter XI is subtitled “Of Poemes and their sundry formes and how thereby the auncient poets received surnames.”<sup>87</sup> He goes on to explain that

As the matter of Poesie is diuers, so was the forme of their poemes & maner of writing, for all of them wrote not in one sort, euen as all of them wrote not vpon one matter. Neither was euey Poet alike cunning in all, as in some one kinde of Poesie, nor vttered with like felicitie. But wherein any one most excelled, thereof he took a surname, as to be called a Poet, *Heroick*, *Lyrick*, *Elegiack*, *Epigrammatist*, or otherwise.<sup>88</sup>

Puttenham then defines “Poets Heroick”, citing Homer and Virgill as the most “auncient” examples and continues through an exhaustive list of modes and genres, defining them and giving classical examples. After heroic poetry, he moves on to

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<sup>85</sup> Sidney, 1973: 103.

<sup>86</sup> Fowler, 1982: 61-62.

<sup>87</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 26.

<sup>88</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 26.

lyric and elegiac, then to comedies and tragedies, eclogues, satire, epigrams and pantomime. He devotes the next nineteen chapters to detailed discussion of each type, concluding

So haue we remembred and set forth to your Maiestie very briefly all the commended fourmes of the auncient Poesie, which we in our vulgare makings do imitate and vse vnder these common names: enterlude, song. Ballade, carroll, and ditty; borrowing them also from the French, al sauuing this word ‘song’ which is our naturall Saxon English word: the rest, such as time and vsurpation by custome haue allowed vs out of the primitiue Greeke & Latine, as Comedie, Tragedie, Ode, Epitaphe, Elegie, Epigramme, and other moe.<sup>89</sup>

Puttenham’s definitions show his historical understanding as well as the applications of certain genres, as in his discussion of pastoral for example:

Some be of opinion, and the chiefe of those who haue written in this Art among the Latines, that the pastoral Poesie which we commonly call by the name of *Eglogue* and *Bucolick*, a tearme brought in by the Sicilian Poets, should be the first of any other, and before the *Satyre*, *Comedie*, or *Tragedie*, because, say they, the shepherds and haywards assemblies & meetings when they kept their cattell and heards in the common fields and forests was the first familiar conuersation, and their babble and talk vnder bushes and shady trees the first disputation and contentious reasoning, and their fleshly heates growing of ease the first idle woings, and their songs made to their mates or paramours either vpon sorrow or iolity of courage the first amorous musicks; sometime also they sang and played on their pipes for wagers, striuing who should get the best game and be cunningest...But for all this I do deny that the *Eglogue* should be the first and most auncient forme of artificiall Poesie, being perswaded that the Poet deuised the *Eglogue* long after the other *dramatick* poems, not of purpose to counterfait or represent the rusticall manner of loues and communication, bvt vnder the vaile of homely persons and in rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters, and such as perchance had not bene safe to haue bene disclosed in any other sort, which may be perceiued by the *Eglogues* of *Virgill*, in which are treated by the figure matter of greater importance than the loues of *Titirus* and *Corydon*.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 61.

<sup>90</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 39-40.

Puttenham suggests how genres are appropriated and evolve, as he goes on to discuss the ways in which vernacular writers employ them. He also explains the concept of poetic decorum derived from Aristotle, who divided material into high, medium (“meane”), and low (“base”), the diction to suit the subject matter:

To haue the stile decent & comely it behooueth the maker or Poet to follow the nature of his subiect, that is if his matter be high and loftie that the stile be so to, if meane, the stile also to be meane, if base, the stile humble and base accordingly: and they that do otherwise vse it, applying to meane matter hie and loftie stile, and to hie matters stile eyther meane or base, and to the base matters the meane or hie stile, do vtterly disgrace their poesie and shew themselues nothing skilfull in their arte, nor hauing regard to the decencie, which is the chiefe praise of any writer.<sup>91</sup>

William Webbe divides poetry into three “sortes” and lists the genres appropriate to each:

Though there be many sortes of poeticall writings, and Poetry is not debarred from any matter which may be expressed by penne or speche, yet for the better vnderstanding and breefer method of thys discourse, I may comprehende the same in three sortes, which are Comicall, Tragicall, Historiall. Vnder the first may be contained all such *Epigrammes*, *Elegies*, and delectable ditties, which Poets haue deuised respecting onely the delight thereof: in the seconde, all dolefull complaints, lamentable chaunces, and what soeuer is poetically expressed in sorrow and heauines. In the third we may comprise the reste of all such matters which is indifferent betweene the other two, [which] doo commonly occupy the pennes of Poets: such are the poeticall compyling of Chronicles, the friendly greetings betweene freendes, and very many sortes besides, which for the better distinction may be referred to one of these three kindes of Poetry.<sup>92</sup>

Unease concerning changes and specifically mixing of genres is often expressed as the Humanists inherited classical notions of the separateness and specificity of different genres from Cicero, Quintilian and Horace. Horace had stipulated that

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<sup>91</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 155.

<sup>92</sup> Webbe, 1904: 250.

“The comic matter will not be exprest/In tragic verse...each subject should retain/  
The place allotted it, with decent thewes.”<sup>93</sup> Cicero argues similarly that

poetry takes many forms. That is to say, every composition in verse, tragedy, comedy, epic, and also melic and dithyrambic (a form more extensively cultivated by Greeks than by Romans) has its own individuality, distinct from the others. So in tragedy a comic style is a blemish, and in comedy the tragic style is unseemly; and so with the other genres, each has its own tone and a way of speaking which the scholars recognize.<sup>94</sup>

Sidney is one of many writers whose attitude towards the mixing of kinds is contradictory. On the one hand he defends the practice:

Now in his parts, kinds, or species (as you list to term them), it is to be noted that some poesies have coupled together two or three kinds, as tragical and comical, whereupon is risen the tragic-comical. Some, in the like manner, have mingled prose and verse, as Sannazzaro and Boethius. Some have mingled matters heroical and pastoral. But that cometh all to one in this question, for, if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful.<sup>95</sup>

In his own writings, of course, as with so many of his contemporaries, Sidney mingled kinds in precisely this way. *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* exhibits just such a mixture of pastoral and heroic, prose and poetry, tragic and comic. Nevertheless, when he comes to discuss the drama of his contemporaries, having ridiculed their failure to observe the unities of time, place and action, which he believes (mistakenly) that Aristotle decreed, Sidney goes on to object to this “mingling” which produces the “mongrel tragic-comedy”:

Besides these gross absurdities, how all their plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders, to play a part in

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<sup>93</sup> Jonson, 1865: 730. Jonson's translation of *Versibus exponi tragicis res comica non vult...Singula quaeque locum teneant sortita decenter* ll.96-99.

<sup>94</sup> Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum* edited with an English translation by H. M. Hubbell (London; Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1960) Volume 2 of *Cicero Works*, Loeb Classical Library, I. 1 Loeb p. 355.

<sup>95</sup> Sidney, 1973: 116.

majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragic-comedy obtained.<sup>96</sup>

Sidney is perhaps simply objecting here to the gratuitous introduction of clowns into tragedy which he might be willing to accept if the “matter so carrieth it”. Tragic-comedy’s later popularity suggests the development of genres in which classical criteria are no longer determinant.

The humanist revival of interest in the classics had introduced classical forms and genres, which were translated, adapted and transformed to produce a new vernacular repertoire of literary works. To the medieval lyric, ballad, romance, verse narrative and morality play, were added secular comedies, based on the Roman comedies of Terence and Plautus, such as Nicholas Udall’s *Ralph Roister Doister* (1541), tragedies in imitation of Seneca, Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* (c.1589) for example, or Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (early 1590’s), prose narratives from the translations of Italian novellas, as well as a variety of poetic forms, from sonnet to eclogue, and metres such as the iambic pentameter. These genres were modified and transformed to produce a new, expanded vernacular literary terrain.

### **Criticism**

Of his edition of *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Smith argues that the “additional interest” they offer is that “in them we have the first hints in English of the Critical Temper.”<sup>97</sup> They also constitute the beginnings of the establishing of an English literary canon. The process of selecting texts which are regarded as important in

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<sup>96</sup> Sidney, 1973: 135.

<sup>97</sup> Smith, 1904, I: lxvi.

terms of their literary quality and/or their historical significance as literary forbears is commenced and vigorously debated. The construction of such a literary genealogy functions to elevate the cultural prestige of vernacular literature to the level of the classics, which is to be judged on the same basis and in the same breath, and also to suggest a continuity between the two. The development of a new and expanded range of genres and metres is produced in conjunction with the start of the English literary canon, a body of vernacular writing promoted as the best of each type or form.

Elizabethan critical thinking works on a basis of exclusiveness versus inclusiveness. The strategy adopted by both camps is the construction of alternative literary genealogies, including and excluding writers whom they wish to acknowledge as literary forerunners and influences. Ascham, Webbe, and Nashe are exclusive. They denigrate native productions of an earlier period, particularly medieval writers, excepting certain approved exceptions, notably Chaucer, Lydgate and Gower. The other discernible strand of critical thinking is more tolerant and broad-minded, more willing to recognise and value work which does not adhere to strictly classical criteria. Sidney, Puttenham and Daniel are the representative writers of this group.

Ascham is one of many who express their general admiration for the classics, which are then used as a benchmark for the achievements of later writers:

In the Greeke and Latin tong, the two onelie learned tonges, which be kept not in common taulke but in priuate bookes, we finde always wisdome and eloquence, good matter and good vtternace, neuer or seldom asunder. For all soch Authors as be fullest of good matter and right iudgement in doctrine be likewise always most proper in wordes, most apte in sentence, most plaine and pure in vttering the same.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ascham, 1870: 117.

Ascham's criteria relate specifically to attitudes exhibited in later writers towards imitation and he praises those who adopt a positive attitude and reprehends those who do not:

*Quintilian* writeth of it, shortly and coldlie for the matter, yet hotelie and spitefullie enough against the Imitation of *Tullie*.  
*Erasmus*, being more occupied in spying other mens faultes than declaring his owne aduise, is mistaken of many, to the great hurt of studie, for his authoritie sake.<sup>99</sup>

Ascham's approach is scholarly but narrow. Since imitation constitutes his chief literary criterion, he values those writers who practise it and selects for his critical attention passages which exhibit the direct influence of classical models:

And here, who soeuer hath bene diligent to read aduisedlie ouer *Terence*, *Seneca*, *Virgil*, *Horace*, or els *Aristophanes*, *Sophocles*, *Homer*, and *Pindar*, and shall diligently marke the difference they vse, in proprietie of wordes, in forme of sentence, in handling of their matter, he shall easelie perceiue what is fitte and *decorum* in euerie one, to the trew vse of perfitte Imitation.<sup>100</sup>

William Webbe constructs a narrative of literary development offering a historical overview of poetry from its classical beginnings, listing all the major poets on the way, selecting Virgil and Ovid for especial praise, before he comes to English poetry, which he regards as a continuation of the classical tradition:

To begin therefore with the first that was worthelye memorable in the excellent gyfte of Poetrye, the best writers agree that it was *Orpheus*, who by the sweete gyft of his heauenly Poetry withdrew men from raungyng vncertainly and wandring brutishly about, and made them gather together and keepe company, make houses, and keep fellowshippe together, who therefore is reported (as *Horace* sayth) to asswage the fiercenesse of Tygers and mooue the hard Flynts.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ascham, 1870: 124.

<sup>100</sup> Ascham, 1870: 139

<sup>101</sup> Webbe, 1904: 234.

When he wishes to praise a contemporary poet - Edmund Spenser - he does so by producing comparisons with writers he regards as classical progenitors, Virgil and Theocritus.<sup>102</sup> Webbe then produces a list of significant vernacular poets - Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate. Chaucer is singled out for particular but not uncritical praise. Chaucer's contemporary popularity is attested by Thomas Wilson's remark that "the fine courtier wil talke nothing but Chaucer."<sup>103</sup> Webbe's reservations concerning Chaucer's style reflect the changes in pronunciation which had taken place over the previous two centuries, the loss of sounding of the final 'e' for example which meant that his verse apparently no longer scanned. Nevertheless, he offers an assessment of Chaucer's qualities, which might still be considered valid:

Though the manner of hys stile may seeme blunte and course to many fine English eares at these dayes, yet in trueth, if it be equally pondered, and with good iudgement aduised, and confirmed with the time wherein he wrote, a man shall perceiue thereby euen a true picture or perfect shape of a right Poet. He by his delightsome vayne so gulled the eares of men with his deuises, that, although corruption bare such sway in most matters that learning and truth might skant bee admitted to shewe it selfe, yet without controllment might hee gyred at the vices and abuses of all states, and gawle with very sharpe and eger inuentions, which he did so learnedly and pleasantly that none therefore would call him into question. For such was his bolde spyrit, that what enormities he saw in any he would not spare to pay them home, eyther in playne words, or els in some pretty and pleasant couert, that the simplest might espy him.<sup>104</sup>

He also mentions Langland's work under the name of the eponymous hero of his poem, which he admires in particular for the absence of rhyme:

The next of our auncient Poets that I can tell of I suppose to be Pierce Ploughman, who in hys dooinges is somewhat harshe and obscure, but indeede a very pithy wryter, and (to hys commendation I speake it) was the first that I haue seene that obserued the quantity of our verse without the curiosity of Ryme.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Webbe, 1904: 231-232.

<sup>103</sup> Wilson, 1994: 188.

<sup>104</sup> Webbe, 1904: 240.

<sup>105</sup> Webbe, 1904: 242.

Of Skelton he merely comments on his satirical power: “hee was doubtless a pleasant conceyted fellowe, and of a very sharpe wytte, exceeding bolde, and would nyppe to the very quicke where he once sette holde.”<sup>106</sup> Gascoigne is the next poet in his literary genealogy. He not only offers his own commendation but quotes E[dward] K[irkham]’s:

Next hym I thynke I may place master *George Gaskoyne*, as painefull a Souldier in the affayres of hys Prince and Country as he was a wytty Poet in his writing: whose commendations, because I found in one of better iudgment then my selfe, I wyl sette downe hys wordes, and suppressse myne owne: of hym thus wryteth *E. K.*, vppon the ninth *Æglogue* of the new Poet. ‘Master *George Gaskoyne*, a wytty Gentleman and the very cheefe of our late rymers, who, and if some partes of learning wanted not (albe it is well knowne he altogether wanted not learning), no doubt would haue attained to the excellencye of those famous Poets. For gyfts of wytt and naturall promptnes appeare in him abundantly.’<sup>107</sup>

In compiling his genealogy, Webbe makes it quite clear who or what is to be excluded. He rejects that native tradition of ballad-makers, establishing poetry as a discourse with clear class and cultural boundaries:

If I let passe the vncou[n]table rabble of ryming Ballet makers and compilers of sencelesse sonets, who be most busy to stuffe euery stall full of grosse deuises and vnlearned Pamphlets, I trust I shall with the best sort be held excused. For though many such can frame an Alehouse song of fiue or sixe score verses, hobbling vppon some tune of a Northen Iygge, or Robyn hoode, or La lubber etc., and perhappes obserue iust number of syllables, eyght in one line, sixe in an other, and there withal an A to make a iercke in the ende: yet if these might be accounted Poets (as it is sayde some of them make meanes to be promoted to the Lawrell) surely we shall shortly haue whole swarmes of Poets: and euery one that can frame a Booke in Ryme, though for want of matter it be but in commendations of Copper noses or Bottle Ale, wyll catch at the Garlande due to Poets; whose potticall, poeticall (I should say), heades I would wyshe at their worshipfull comencements might in steede of Lawrell be gorgiously garnished with fayre greene Barley, in token of their good affection to our Englishe Malt.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Webbe, 1904: 242.

<sup>107</sup> Webbe, 1904: 242.

<sup>108</sup> Webbe, 1904: 246.

In his Preface to Greene's *Menaphon, A General Censure*, and in his *Anatomie of Absurditie*, Nashe produces a literary line resembling Webbe's in its exclusivity. He too is anxious to disown romance, in any shape or form, and exclude it from poetic discourse, railing against

these bable bookemungers (who) endeour but to repaire the ruinous wals of Venus Court, to restore to the worlde that forgotten Legendary licence of lying, to imitate a fresh the fantastically dreames of those exiled abbie-lubbers, from whose idle pens proceeded those worne out impressions of the feyned no where acts of Arthur of the rounde table, Arthur of little Brittain, Sir Tristram, Hewon of Burdeaux, the Squire of low degree, the foure sons of Amon, with infinite others. It is not of my yeeres nor studie to censure these mens foolerie more theologicallie, but to shew how they to no Commonwealth commoditie tosse ouer their troubled imaginations to haue the praise of the learning which they lack.<sup>109</sup>

From this attack on the producers of romance, he moves on to a gratuitous laceration of that group he takes to be its primary consumers "their friends of the Feminine sexe."<sup>110</sup>

Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* is essentially a literary commonplace book. It opens with a selection of quotations from various classical writers, most notably Plutarch, which relate to poets and poetry, and to what Meres regards as its undeservedly poor reputation. The best known section of his short work however is entitled A COMPARATIUE DISCOURSE OF OUR ENGLISH POETS WITH THE GREEKE, LATINE, AND ITALIAN POETS, in which he contrives with considerable determination to compare these four literatures. He is painstaking in the working out of his system:

As Greece had three poets of great antiquity, Orpheus, Linus, and Musaeus, and Italy other three auncient poets, Liuius Andronicus, Ennius, and Plautus: so hath England three auncient poets, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate.

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<sup>109</sup> Nashe, 1904, I: 323.

<sup>110</sup> Nashe, 1904, I: 323.

As Homer is reputed the Prince of Greek poets, and Petrarch of Italian poets: so Chaucer is accounted the God of English poets.

As Homer was the first that adorned the Greek tongue with true quantity: so Piers Plowman was the first that observed the true quantitie of our verse without the curiositie of rime.<sup>111</sup>

He proceeds thus through all the genres comparing classical and vernacular writers until he comes to that section which is the most familiar, the most often quoted and, to most scholars' minds, the only interesting part of his text:

As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to lie in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ovid liues in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare, witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c.

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. For Comedy, witness his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Loue Labors Lost, his Loue Labours Wonne, his Midsummers Night Dreame, and his Merchant of Venice; for Tragedy, his Richard the 2, Richard the 3, Henry the 4, King Iohn, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Iuliet.

As Epilus Stolo said that the Muses would speake with Plautus tongue if they would speak Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeares fine filed phrase if they would speak English.<sup>112</sup>

These favourable judgements on one of his contemporaries have established Meres' reputation as a critic.

Puttenham, Sidney and Daniel all construct a more inclusive literary history which encompasses the classics but is also willing to accept less elevated genres.

Puttenham commends the classics, listing the chief genres and the most renowned practitioner of each - "*Heroick*": *Homer* and "*Virgill*", "*Lirique*: *Pindarus*, *Anacreon*, *Callimachus*, *Horace* and *Catullus*, "*Elegiack*: *Ouid*, *Tibullus*, & *Propertius*, "*Comicall*: *Menander*, *Aristophanes*, *Terence* and *Plautus*, "*Tragicall*": *Euripides*, *Sophocles* and *Seneca*, "*Eglogues*" (pastoral): *Theocritus*

<sup>111</sup> Meres, 1904: 314.

<sup>112</sup> Meres, 1904: 317-318.

and *Virgill*, “*Satyricques: Lucilius, Iuuenall, Persius* and “*he that wrote the booke called Piers plowman.*”<sup>113</sup> Puttenham also includes *Epigrammatistes, Mimistes* and *Pantomimi* as well as writers of pagan “*hymnes*” such as Cicero. He enlarges on the different types of poem and their functions historically before going on to include romance in his canon, arguing that difference is legitimate.

Sidney too includes romance, using the popularity of the *Morte Arthur* as signifying that poetry is not effeminate or corrupting. Daniel demonstrates a tolerant and remarkable breadth of understanding. Whilst he makes it clear that he admires the classical writers of Greece and Italy, he makes it equally clear that theirs are not the only admirable texts nor indeed classical culture the only culture:

Will not experience confute vs, if wee shoulde say the state of China, which neuer heard of Anapestiques, Trochies, and Tribraques, were grosse, barbarous, and vnciuille? And is it not a most apparant ignorance, both of the succession of learning in Europe and the generall course of things, to say ‘that all lay pittifully deformed in those lack-learning times from the declining of the Romane Empire till the light of the Latine tongue was reuiued by Rewcline, Erasmus, and Moore’? when for three hundred yeeres before them, about the coming downe of Tamburlaine into Europe, Franciscus Petrarcha (who then no doubt likewise found whom to imitate) shewed all the best notions of learning, in that degree of excellencie both in Latine, Prose and Verse, and in the vulgare Italian, as all the wittes of posteritie haue not yet much ouer-matched him in all kindes to this day.<sup>114</sup>

Daniel goes on to commend classical writers and later humanists arguing though that during that whole period there have been equally worthy English writers “And yet long before all these, and likewise with these, was not our Nation behinde in her portion of spirite and worthnesse, but concurrent with the best of all this lettered world; witnesse venerable Bede, that flourished aboue a thousand yeeres since.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 26-27.

<sup>114</sup> Daniel, 1904: 367-8.

<sup>115</sup> Daniel, 1904: 369-370.

He cites an extensive, knowledgeable list of distinguished English writers including Walter Mappe, Bacon and Ockham, concluding:

The distribution of giftes are vniuersall, and all seasons haue them in some sort...it is our weaknesse that makes vs mistake or misconceiue in these delineations of men the true figure of their worth. And our passion and beliefe is so apte to leade vs beyond truth, that vnlesse we try them by the iust compasse of humanitie, and as they were men, we shall cast their figures in the ayre, when we should make their models vpon Earth.<sup>116</sup>

Daniel's critical assessment is intelligent, rational and completely "modern" in its thinking.

Sidney singles out Chaucer among earlier English poets. Whilst he commends the *Mirror of Magistrates* and "the Earl of Surrey's lyrics", however, he takes Spenser to task for his deployment of archaisms in *The Shepherd's Calendar*. Sidney was notoriously dismissive of the drama of the day, and is often cited, therefore, as one of the anti-theatrical faction. The only contemporary play which he praises is *Gorboduc*, which he compares with Seneca, criticising, nevertheless its failure to observe the classical unities of time, place and action:

Our Tragedies and Comedies (not without cause cried out against), observing rules neither of honest civility nor of skilful Poetry, excepting Gorboduc (again, I say, of those that I have seen), which notwithstanding, as it is full of stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca's style, and as full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach, and so obtain the very end of Poesy, yet in truth it is very defectious in the circumstances, which grieveth me, because it might not remain as an exact model of all tragedies. For it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. For where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many days, and many places, inartificially imagined.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Daniel, 1904: 370-371.

<sup>117</sup> Sidney, 1973: 133-134.

The supposed unities of Aristotle became neo-classical dogma particularly in continental drama and highly influential in England. Modern critics, however, have pointed out that Aristotle's *Poetics* is a descriptive rather than prescriptive work.<sup>118</sup> Sidney never lived to see the drama of the decades after his death but it seems inconceivable that he could have failed to acknowledge its brilliance. It is the contention of this thesis that it was the theoretical writings of the last quarter of the sixteenth century by writers such as Sidney, Puttenham, Webbe, Harvey, Nashe, Jonson, Harington, Lodge, and Gascoigne that facilitated those plays, as well as the great flowering of poetry and prose, which came after.

The texts that I have identified as a discursive formation mapped out the literary terrain for the future in their struggles and debates over the shape, course, formation and function of poetry, how it should be judged and valued and the beginnings of a vernacular canon. Their writing, judgements and criteria, what they say and how they say it, are themselves carriers of meaning and influence the future course of English writing. They define it as a discourse in a particular way as gendered and belonging within a limited, class-based, social group, demanding a particular type and level of education – classical, humanistic, tendencies are still evident within the discourse today. The knottiest problems in the critical debate, particularly in relation to imitation, rehearse the critical division of the next century between Augustans and Romantics.

Discursive space is an imaginary landscape with a fluid topography. The shape of change is effected by the cultural work of theorists and practitioners within and

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<sup>118</sup> In the *Poetics* Aristotle had argued that “the plot of a play, being the representation of an action, must present it as a unified whole” (chapter 8), that it should have “a beginning, a middle, and an end” (chapter 7), distinguishing tragedy from epic (narrative fiction) in that it ought “as far as possible to keep within a single revolution of the sun, or only slightly to exceed it, whereas the epic observes no limits in its time of action” (chapter 5) translated by T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth; Penguin Books, 1965).

without. Writers on Elizabethan poetics debated and discussed specific issues such as the inclusion of borrowed words to expand the lexicon; they translated classical and vernacular texts, introducing new ideas and new forms; they attempted to lay down rules and standards for vernacular style, and to offer critical judgement by comparison with the classical yardsticks they were familiar with. All these elements functioned together to produce a new medium of expression, a new consciousness of writing practices leading to an elevation of poets and poetics, realised in the literary productivity of the decades following.

## PART II: PRACTICE

### CHAPTER 6

#### GEORGE GASCOIGNE – EXEMPLARY ELIZABETHAN POET

In this section I shall look at literary practices in the Elizabethan period. Whilst still referring to the range of theoretical texts already discussed, I shall focus on a particular writer as both representative and exemplar. The writer I have chosen is George Gascoigne because of the combination of range and variety in his writing in conjunction with its innovative, experimental quality. His social location as an upper class young man trying to gain advancement at court, seeing writing as a means to further that aim, rather than regarding himself as a professional writer was typical. As Puttenham points out with regret in *The Arte of Englishe Poetrie*, publishing was regarded by many as beneath the dignity of a gentleman:

of such among the Nobilitie or gentrie as be very well seene in many laudable sciences, and especially in making or Poesie, it is so come to passe that they haue no courage to write, &, if they haue, yet are they loathe to be knowen of their skill. So as I know very many notable Gentlemen in the Court that haue written commendably, and suppressed it agayne, or els suffred it to be publisht without their owne names to it: as it were a discredit for a Gentleman to seeme learned and to shew him selfe amorous of any good Art.<sup>1</sup>

Gascoigne is also a good example because “he did many things for the first time, or almost the first time, especially in the domestication of literary kinds and

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<sup>1</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 22.

forms.”<sup>2</sup> Roger Pooley suggests that he “ought to be in the *Guinness Book of Records*”.<sup>3</sup> C. T. Prouty offers this list of Gascoigne’s achievements:

He was the first to write an English treatise on poetry [the *Certayne Notes of Instruction*], the first to translate a prose comedy from the Italian [*The Supposes*], the first to put Greek tragedy, even at secondhand, on the English stage [*Jocasta*]. *The Steele Glas* is the first original nondramatic blank verse in English, while it is unique in Elizabethan satire in its essentially English character. “The Adventures of F. J.” is the first purely English story of the Renaissance, and its equal is not found until the eighteenth century. “Dan Bartholomew” is the first attempt to tell a love story in a series of poems and in this respect is the predecessor of the flood tide of Elizabethan sonnet sequences. His masques are among the earliest English representations of this type of dramatic art. Finally *The Spoyle of Antwerpe* is an early example of news-reporting.<sup>4</sup>

I have chosen Gascoigne finally for the many qualities in his writing, which make it both representative and original at the same time. He is representative in that, as John Thompson put it “Gascoigne...only described what everyone was doing or trying to do”,<sup>5</sup> and original, in producing writing that was innovative and imaginative. In this section I shall analyse those characteristics of contemporary writing displayed by Gascoigne, and the relationship between theory and practice in his work, focusing on the new and innovative. I shall explore his versatility, and contemporary developments in poetry and prose in the period, as well as defining the “new note” in Gascoigne’s writing.

Gascoigne’s literary significance has been recognised by both contemporary and modern critics. Spenser, for example in his gloss to the November eclogue in the *Shepherd’s Calendar* calls him a “wittie gentleman” and “the very chefe of our

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<sup>2</sup> *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* edited by Ian Ousby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 362.

<sup>3</sup> George Gascoigne, *The Green Knight: Selected Poetry and Prose* edited by Roger Pooley (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1982), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Prouty, 1966: 284.

<sup>5</sup> John Thompson, *The Founding of English Metre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 75.

late rymers.”<sup>6</sup> Nashe wrote that “Master Gascoigne is not to be abridged of his deserved esteem, who first beat the path to that perfection which our best poets have aspired to since his departure.”<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Harvey, a friend and admirer, composed two poems to commemorate his death, the first describing his entrance into the Elysian Fields which starts

And if with pleasure thou delightes  
To feede thine eie, injoye thy fill;  
Here mayst thoug gratis vewe the gostes  
That Socrates surveyith still.<sup>8</sup>

The second, although untitled, clearly relates to Gascoigne:

What George? I pray the spare the world  
And give men leave to temporaize;  
Our tyme is shorte, weele lawghe with the,  
If once to heaven we take our rise.<sup>9</sup>

In recent times Veré L. Rubel stated that “The chief poet of the decade of the [fifteen] seventies was George Gascoigne, a writer of considerable ability.”<sup>10</sup>

Important and influential critics such as Yvor Winters have gone further claiming that “The greatest poet of the school is George Gascoigne, a poet unfortunate in that he has been all but irrevocably pigeon-holed as a dull precursor in the history of certain major forms, but who deserves to be ranked, I believe, among six or seven

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<sup>6</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579) (Menston, England: The Scolar Press, 1968), Fol. 48.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Nashe, “To the Gentlemen Students of Both Universities”, Preface to Greene’s *Menaphon* pp. 81-94 (Ottawa, Canada: Dovehouse Editions, 1996), pp. 88-89.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Harvey, *Letter-Book* pp. 56-57, reprinted in Epilogue to Prout’s biography pp. 280-281.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey, *Letter-Book* pp. 68-70, reprinted in Prouty, 1966, pp. 281-283.

<sup>10</sup> Veré L. Rubel, *Poetic Diction in the English Renaissance from Skelton through Spenser* (New York; London: Modern Language Association of America: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 186. Chapter XII is entitled “Gascoigne and the Later Poets, Including Sidney and Warner”.

greatest lyric poets of the century, and perhaps higher.”<sup>11</sup> Roger Pooley argues that “too often he is taken by literary historians as a merely transitional figure, building on the formal achievements of Wyatt and Surrey, and really only clearing the way for what Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare were to achieve a few years later.”<sup>12</sup> Pooley argues against the limitations of such a construction, whilst offering an honest assessment of his work.<sup>13</sup>

John Buxton is more critical; whilst paying due consideration to his gifts he draws attention to what he regards as Gascoigne’s shortcomings. His sense of frustration is evident:

In him the later Elizabethans recognized the most gifted poet among their immediate predecessors while at the same time they saw that he failed, through some lack of concentration, to develop his gifts to their full excellence. Their judgment is just, but is worth examining, to discover again the promise of his poetry and the causes of its lack of fulfilment. For his poems are not in themselves disappointing, but a man who tried so many kinds, and who thought so lucidly about his art, ought not to have stopped short; when greatness was within his reach he allowed himself to be distracted.<sup>14</sup>

Gary Waller more perceptively locates Gascoigne firmly within his artistic context, whilst recognising the individual quality of his writing:

Gascoigne’s poetry, undoubtedly the most interesting written in England between Wyatt and Sidney, is more distinctive because it starts to articulate a little of the bind in which his poetry has been put as it wrestles to express something through, but not confined to, the moral commonplaces of the society. A typical eager seeker for court preferment, the speaker of Gascoigne’s verse remains moralistic, and in fact his choice of the complaint curiously medieval; none the less some of the contradictions characteristic of

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<sup>11</sup> Yvor Winters, “The 16<sup>th</sup> Century Lyric in England: A Critical and Historical Reinterpretation” in *Elizabethan Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism* edited by Paul J. Alpers pp. 93-125 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> Gascoigne, 1982: 7.

<sup>13</sup> Gascoigne, 1982: 22-23, quoted above in the introduction p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> John Buxton, *A Tradition of Poetry* (London; New York: Macmillan: St. Martin’s Press, 1967), p. 36.

the age's most interesting poetry are starting to come through these serious lines.<sup>15</sup>

Gascoigne is a complex writer, both modern and medieval, a transitional figure who was also original, anxious and eager. It is the combination of all these characteristics, which gives his writing its distinctive quality - the combination of simplicity and sophistication, lyric and satire, and the synthesis of different genres and expressive forms, which make his work interesting and original.

### **Versatility & Originality**

Gascoigne's versatility as a writer is frequently commented upon. Depending on point of view this is regarded as either a positive or a negative trait. He wrote poetry, plays, masques, satire, prose narrative, translations, news reporting, poetic theory and was involved with the editing of Humphrey Gilbert's *A Discourse of a Discoverie for a New Passage to Cataia*. This impressive-sounding list is by no means unique in the period though. Versatility and willingness to experiment seem to be the norm rather than the exception among Elizabethan writers. This is not surprising given the situation of contemporary writing at the beginning of its vernacular development at a point when the literary terrain was fluid and unfixd. The *DLB* dwells on these qualities in its appraisal of many Elizabethan writers:

Thomas Dekker was one of the most versatile of Renaissance English writers, and the plays and the nondramatic pamphlets (usually cast in the form of journalistic essays and narratives) that he produced during a career extending from the late 1590s to the early 1630s provide a record of popular taste during the last years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, through the reign of James I, and into the early years of Charles I.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (London; New York: Longman, 1986), pp. 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> *DLB*, Vol. 132: 49.

Of Ben Jonson, who wrote plays, poetry, masques, translations and literary theory, it states: “We are now able to appreciate the diversity of Jonson’s achievement and his continued willingness to experiment with new literary forms.”<sup>17</sup> Of Samuel Daniel:

Though admired as a lyric poet and historian, Samuel Daniel has found few enthusiastic readers for his dramatic works. Sober minded, restrained, reflective, and frequently prosaic, Daniel stands outside the popular-stage tradition, yet as an innovator he is of considerable importance in the history of Renaissance drama.<sup>18</sup>

Of Anthony Munday:

Few Elizabethan and Jacobean authors produced as varied a canon as did Anthony Munday. He wrote plays, translated Continental prose romances, produced original prose fiction, apparently wrote ballads in his earlier years, was, in the early 1580s, by far the most controversial “news reporter” in London, and in his later years devised pageants for the City of London, as well as expanding and bringing up to date Stow’s *Chronicle of the city*.<sup>19</sup>

Henry Chettle is described as a writer who “existed on the insecure fringes of sixteenth-century literary culture. He followed a career that embraced printing, editing, pamphleteering and playwriting.”<sup>20</sup> Gascoigne’s own stepson, Nicholas Breton (Gascoigne had married his widowed mother, Elizabeth Bacon Breton, in notoriously confused circumstances) is applauded for his writing in an “impressive variety of genres” and in its consideration of his literary status, the *DLB* argues that “He shares with Robert Greene the distinction of being the first professional writers in English.”<sup>21</sup>

Such “versatility” in the range and variety of writing practices was not unusual.

Innovation and experiment are a significant part of the process of exploring and

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<sup>17</sup> *DLB*, Vol. 132: 176-177.

<sup>18</sup> *DLB*, Vol. 62: 31.

<sup>19</sup> *DLB*, Vol. 132: 236.

<sup>20</sup> *DLB*, Vol. 136: 40

<sup>21</sup> *DLB*, Vol. 136: 37.

establishing a new literary terrain in which the boundaries of language, form and genre are still relatively unfixed. Being original, doing something for the first time, and trying lots of different things is more likely in these circumstances before conventions, dogma, and tradition have set in. In Gascoigne's case constantly trying new things, new ideas, new forms and genres is entirely consistent with what we know of the rest of his life. Temperamentally he appears to have found it difficult to settle to any particular career and his personal life was full of incident. Gabriel Harvey offered this assessment of his character:

Want of resolution & constancy, marred his witt & undid himself. Sum vanity: & more levity: his special faulte, & the continual causes of his misfortunes. Many other have maintained themselves gallantly upon sum one of his qualities: nothing fadgeth with him, for want of Resolution, & Constancy in any one kind. He shall never thrive with any thing, that can brooke no crosses, or hath not learned to make the best of the worst, in his profession. It is no marvell, though he had cold successe in his actions, that in his studies, & Looves, thought upon ye Warres; in the warres, mused upon his studies, & Looves.<sup>22</sup>

Such a personality, whilst not perhaps conducive to personal happiness, proved productive in literary terms. Some of Gascoigne's best poems are those in which he reflected wryly upon his own shortcomings and failures in life - *Gascoigne's Woodmanship* or *Gascoigne's Gardenings* for example. He seems in many ways the embodiment of the poet according to Ascham's scathing portrait in *The Scholemaster* - quick on the uptake but incapable of sticking at anything.

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<sup>22</sup> Prouty, 1966: 278.

## CHAPTER 7

### POETRY

Despite his relatively short life and brief writing span, Gascoigne was a prolific writer of both poetry and prose. Throughout Elizabethan poetic treatises a pressing matter was the definition of “poetry” itself: did it constitute a purely formal identity in terms of style, or was it related in some way to content? In the Middle Ages, poetry had been regarded as pure form, “versified rhetoric”. New definitions, which emerged in the course of the debate around the nature and constitution of poetry, relating to a revival of classical theories of imitation, expanded this. Elizabethan writers tackled the question in terms of whether verse is an essential prerequisite of poetry. Sidney is in the minority in arguing that it is not:

For indeed the greatest part of poets have apparelled their poetical inventions in that numbrous kind of writing which is called verse – indeed but apparelled, verse being but an ornament and no cause to Poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets.<sup>1</sup>

Sidney offers historical examples of those he considers “excellent poets” such as Xenophon and Heliodorus “and yet both these writ in prose”.<sup>2</sup> From this he draws the conclusion that form as such is not the key matter, that it is rather the ability to convey ideas through convincing imitation and high-minded purpose that constitutes poetry, but that a good style, in the sense of careful and thoughtful language, is of the essence:

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney, 1973: 103.

<sup>2</sup> Sidney, 1973: 103.

It is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet – no more than a long gown maketh an advocate...But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by, although the senate of poets hath chosen verse as their fittest raiment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all, so in manner to go beyond them: not speaking (table talk fashion or like men in a dream) words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peizing each syllable of each word by just proportion according to the dignity of the subject.<sup>3</sup>

William Webbe takes it for granted that poetry is written in verse, but in his mind this is a necessary not a sufficient condition – he agrees for instance with Aristotle's verdict on Empedocles:

that in hys iudgment he was onley a naturall Philosopher, no Poet at all, nor that he was like vnto Homer in any thing but hys meeter or number of feete, that is he wrote in verse.<sup>4</sup>

Puttenham argues that verse is better than prose being more economical and memorable and therefore, being the better speakers and writers, poets, by definition, wrote in verse:

speech by meeter is a kind of vtterance more cleanly couched and more delicate to the eare then prose is, because it is more currant and more slipper vpon the tongue, and withal tunable and melodious, as a kind of Musicke, and therefore may be tearmed a musicall speech or vtterance, which cannot but please the hearer very well. Another cause is that it is briefer more compendious, and easier to beare away and be retained in memorie, then that which is contained in multitude of words and full of tedious ambage and long periods. It is beside a maner of vtterance more eloquent and rethoricall then the ordinarie prose which we vse in our daily talke, because it is decked and set out with all maner of fresh colours and figures, which maketh that it sooner inuegleth the iudgement of man, and carieth his opinion this way and that, whither soeuer the heart by impression of the eare shalbe most affectionately bent and directed. The vtterance in prose is not of so great efficacie, because not only it is dayly vsed, and by that occasion the eare is ouergluttet with it, but is also not so voluble and slipper vpon the tong, being wide and lose, and nothing numerous, nor contriued into measures and sounded with so gallant and harmonicall accents, nor, in fine, allowed that

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<sup>3</sup> Sidney, 1973: 103.

<sup>4</sup> Webbe, 1904: 236.

figuratiue conueyance nor so great licence in choise of words and phrases as meeter is. So as the Poets were also from the beginning the best perswaders, and their eloquence the first Rethoricke of the world, euen so it became that the high mysteries of the gods should be reuealed & taught by a maner of vtterance and language of extraordinarie phrase, and briefe and compendious, and aboue al others sweet and ciuill as the Metricall is.<sup>5</sup>

Puttenham is relaxed with regard to subject matter. He defends figurative language on the grounds of decorum, arguing that even "viciositee" is acceptable if it is in character and plausible since

Trespases in speech (whereof there be many) as geue dolour and disliking to the eare & minde by any foule indecencie or disproportion of sounde, situation, or sence, they be called and not without cause the vicious parts or rather heresies of language: wherefore the matter resteth much in the definition and acceptance of this word *decorum*, for whatsoever is so cannot iustly be misliked. In which respect it may come to passe that what the Grammarian setteth downe for a viciositee in speech may become a vertue and no vice; contrariwise his commended figure may fall into a reprochfull fault: the best and most assured remedy whereof is generally to follow the saying of *Bias: ne quid nimis*. So as in keeping measure, and not exceeding nor shewing any defect in the vse of his figures, he cannot lightly do amisse, if he haue besides (as that must needes be) a speciall regard to all circumstances of the person, place, time, cause, and purpose he hath in hand; which being well obserued, it easily auoideth all the recited inconueniences, and maketh now and then very vice goe for a formall vertue in the exercise of this Arte.<sup>6</sup>

Harvey, on the other hand, demands that poetry is characterised by sweetness and light:

Good sweete Oratour, be a deuine Poet indeede; and vse heauenly Eloquence indeede; and employ thy golden talent with amounting vsance indeede; and with heroicall Cantoes honour right Vertue, & braue valour indeede; as noble Sir Philip Sidney and gentle Maister Spencer haue done, with immortal Fame; and I will bestow more complements of rare amplifications vpon thee then euer any bestowed vpon them, or this Tounge euer afforded, or any Aretinish mountaine of huge exaggerations can bring foorth. Right artificiality (whereat I once aimed to the vttermost power of my slender capacity) is not mad-brained, or ridiculous, or absurd, or

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<sup>5</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 161.

blasphemous, or monstrous, but deepe conceited, but pleasurable, but delicate, but exquisite, but gracious, but admirable; not according to the fantastick mould of *Aretine* or *Rabelays*, but according to the fine model of *Orpheus*, *Homer*, *Pindarus*, & the excellentest wittes of Greece, and of the Lande that floweth with milke and hony.<sup>7</sup>

Harington agrees with Sidney, however, that poetry can encompass prose, and in his analysis distinguished what he terms the “two parts of Poetrie, namely inuention or fiction and verse.”<sup>8</sup>

The debate relating to definitions of poetry and prose was not new. As Curtius points out the two had a long and complicated historical relationship:

Antiquity did not conceive of poetry and prose as two forms of expression differing in essence and origin. On the contrary, both fall within the inclusive concept “discourse.” Poetry is metrical discourse. But artistic prose competes with it from from the time of *Gorgias* on. The question whether poetry or prose is “more difficult” was discussed even in the time of Isocrates. Turning poetry into prose is introduced into the schools of rhetoric as an exercise about the first century of our era. Quintilian recommends it to orators (X, 5, 4). Augustine had to paraphrase passages from the *Aeneid* in school (Conf., I, 17, 27). In late Greek and Roman Antiquity, as in the Byzantine Middle Ages, paraphrase became an end in itself.<sup>9</sup>

The situation became even more complicated in the Middle Ages when there were “two poetic systems – the syllable-measuring, or metric, and the accentual, or rhythmic” and the *ars dictaminis* (the art of letter-writing) “came to be divided into metrical, rhythmical, and prose *dictamina*.” Curtius adds that “(t)o these was later added, as a fourth recognized kind of style, rhymed prose (*mixtum sive compositum*). This division too assumes that poetry and prose are regulated discourse: prose being regulated by rhythm, poetry by meter or by rhythm and

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<sup>7</sup> Harvey, 1904, II: 234.

<sup>8</sup> Harington, 1904: 204.

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Curtius, “Poetry and Rhetoric” in *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and Literature* ed. Craig Kallendorf (Mahwah, N. J.: Hermagoras Press, 1999), p. 43.

rhyme.”<sup>10</sup> Curtius concludes that “in the Middle Ages the terminologies of poetry and prose easily interchange.”<sup>11</sup>

## Rhyme and Metre

Gascoigne is one of many writers championing the development of English poetry:

Marie in deede I may not compare Pamphlets unto Poems, neither yet may justly advant for our native cuntrymen, that they have in their verses hitherto (translations excepted) delivered unto us any such notable volume, as have bene by Poets of antiquitie, left unto the posteritie. And the more pitie, that amongst so many toward wittes no one hath bene hitherto encouraged to followe the trace of that worthy and famous Knight *Sir Geffrey Chaucer*, and after many pretie devises spent in youth, for the obtayning a worthles victorie might consume and consummate his age in discribing the right pathway to perfect felicitie, with the due preservation of the same. The which although some may judge over grave a subject to be handled in style metrical, yet for that I have found in the verses of eloquent Latinists, learned Greeks, and pleasant *Italians*, sundrie directions, whereby a man may be guided toward thattayning of that unspeakable treasure, I have thus farre lamented, that our countrey men have chosen rather to winne a passover praise by the wanton penning of a few loving layes, than to gayne immortall fame, by the Clarkely handlinge of so profitable a Theame. For if quicknes of invencion, proper vocables, apt Epythetes, and store of monasillables may help a pleasant brayne to be crowned with Lawrell, I doubt not but both our countrey men and countrie language might be entronised amonge the olde foreleaders unto the mount *Helicon*.<sup>12</sup>

Gregory Smith argues that “(i)t may be premised that the first endeavours towards reform would be concerned with technical details rather than general principles”<sup>13</sup>

Whilst many focus on technical details, most engage with general principles as well.

In his introductory discussion of prosody, Smith concludes that “in their (the Elizabethans) efforts to be rid of the jingle of English metres they were working for

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<sup>10</sup> Curtius, 1999: 44.

<sup>11</sup> Curtius, 1999: 46.

<sup>12</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 143-144.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xxxvi-xxxvii.

the recognition of blank verse, and were in reality justifying it on the side of theory.”<sup>14</sup> William Webbe is one of many who recognise the need for English poetry to be “truly reformed”:

Thus much I am bolde to say in behalfe of Poetrie, not that I meane to call in question the reuerend and learned workes of Poetrie written in our tongue by men of rare iudgement and most excellent Poets, but euen as it were by way of supplication to the famous and learned Lawreat Masters of Englande, that they would but consult one halfe howre with their heauenly Muse what credite they might winne to theyr natiue speche, what enormities they might wipe out of English Poetry, what fitte vaine they might frequent, wherein to shewe forth their worthie faculties if English Poetrie were truly reformed, and some perfect platforme or Prosodia of versifying were by them ratified and sette downe, eyther in imitation of Greekes and Latines, or, where it would skant abyde the touch of theyr Rules, the like obseruations selected and established by the naturall affectation of the speche.<sup>15</sup>

There is a sense throughout of undertaking a new project in the vernacular, as

Harvey puts it:

WE BEGINNERS haue the start and aduantage of our Followers, who are to frame and conforme both their Examples and Precepts according to that President which they haue of vs: as no doubt Homer or some other in *Greeke*, and ENNIUS or I know not who else in *Latine*, did preiudice and ouerrule those that followeth them, as well for the quantities of syllables as number of feete, and the like: their onely Examples going for current payment, and standing in steade of Lawes and Rules with the posteritie.<sup>16</sup>

Harvey makes the analogy with classical precedents and recognises the way in which theory and practice are related. Gascoigne provides a list of types of verse, defining them and their characteristics and applications, such as rhyme royal for example:

Rythme royall is a verse of ten sillables, and seven such verses make a staffe, whereof the first and third lines do aunswere (acrosse) in like terminations and rime, the second, fourth, and fifth, do likewise answere

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<sup>14</sup> Smith, 1904, I: xlix.

<sup>15</sup> Webbe, 1904, I: 228-9.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey, 1904, I: 103.

eche other in terminations, and the two last do combine and shut up the Sentence: this hath bene called Rithme royall, & surely it is a royall kinde of verse, serving best for grave discourses.<sup>17</sup>

He goes on to describe ballads, roundlets, sonnets, dyzaines, syxaines, verlays, poulter's measure and riding rhyme. Webbe also offers an exhaustive list from verses of sixteen syllables (Gascoigne's sixaines) with examples of each type.

One of the chief difficulties in the development of English poetry was adapting classical prosody based on syllable and vowel length into the stress accented rhythms of English. As Sidney explains:

Now of versifying there are two sorts, the one ancient, the other modern: the ancient marked the quantity of each syllable, and according to that framed his verse; the modern observing only number (with some regard of the accent), the chief life of it standeth in that like sounding of the words which we call rhyme. Whether of these be the most excellent, would bear many speeches: the ancient (no doubt) more fit for music, both words and time observing quantity, and more fit lively to express divers passions, by the low or lofty sound of the well-weighed syllable. The latter, likewise, with his rhyme, striketh a certain music to the ear; and, in fine, since it doth delight, though by another way, it obtains the same purpose: there being in either sweetness, and wanting in neither majesty.<sup>18</sup>

He argues that English is suitable for both types due to its varied accent, which lends flexibility:

Truly the English, before any other vulgar language I know, is fit for both sorts: for, for the ancient, the Italian is so full of vowels that it must ever be cumbered with elisions; the Dutch so, of the other side, with consonants, that they cannot yield the sweet sliding fit for a verse; the French in his whole language hath not one word that hath accent in the last syllable saving two, called *antepenultima*; and little more hath the Spanish, and therefore very gracelessly may they use dactyls. The English is subject to none of these defects.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 471.

<sup>18</sup> Sidney, 1973: 140.

<sup>19</sup> Sidney, 1973: 140-141.

Gascoigne articulated the problem of metre in English poetry, advising that once the poet has fixed on his metre he should stick to it:

3 I will next advise you that you hold the just measure wherewith you begin your verse...whether it be in a verse of sixe syllables, eight, ten, twelve, &c. and though this precept might seeme ridiculous unto you, since every yong scholler can conceive that he ought to continue in the same measure wherewith he beginneth, yet do I see and read many mens Poems now adayes, whiche beginning with the measure of xii. In the first line, & xiiii. In the second (which is the common kinde of verse) they wil yet (by that time they have passed over a few verses) fal into xiiii. & fourteen, & *sic de similibus*, the which is either forgetfulnes or carelesnes.<sup>20</sup>

He goes on to analyse the fundamental nature of English metre and its complex inheritance. As Prouty puts it “he developed tradition by usage.”<sup>21</sup> Gascoigne recognises that English is a stress-accented language and that it is essential, therefore, that a word should be used within any given metrical scheme in such a way that its natural emphasis is consonant with the metre:

4 And in your verses remember to place every worde in his natural Emphasis or sound, that is to say in such wise, and with such length or shortnesse, elevation or depression of syllables, as it is commonly pronounced or used.<sup>22</sup>

He argues that the basic foot in English poetry is the iamb:

Note you that comonly now a dayes in english rimes...we use none other order but a foote of two syllables, wherof the first is depressed or made short, & the second is elevate or made lo[n]g: and that sound or scanning continueth throughout the verse.<sup>23</sup>

He recognises, however, that in the past different metrical feet were used citing two verse lines composed of iambs and anapests, the first noticeably alliterative after the old English verse metre:

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<sup>20</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 466.

<sup>21</sup> Prouty, 1966: 131.

<sup>22</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 467.

<sup>23</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 467.

No wight in this world, that wealth can attayne,  
 Unlesse he beleve, that all is but vayne.<sup>24</sup>

Gascoigne and his contemporaries did not understand the fundamental changes in pronunciation that had occurred in the fifteenth century, particularly the loss of the sounding of the final “e”, so that, although the Elizabethans greatly admired Chaucer, they nevertheless believed that he had a poor metrical sense, because of what they saw as his verse lines’ failure to scan. Gascoigne defends him arguing that he used a quantitative verse, as Latin had done, based not on the number of syllables, and hence feet per line, but on the length of the syllable which compensated for number:

Also our father *Chaucer* hath used the same libertie in feete and measures that the Latinists do use: and who so ever do peruse and well consider his workes, he shall finde that although his lines are not always of one selfe same number of Syllables, yet being redde by one that hath understanding, the longest verse and that which hath most Syllables in it, will fall (to the eare) correspondent unto that whiche hath fewest syllables in it: and like wise that whiche hath in it fewest syllables, shalbe found yet to consist of woordes that have suche naturall sounde, as may seeme equall in length to a verse which hath many moe sillables of lighter accentes.<sup>25</sup>

Gascoigne is trying to analyse the difference between old English stress metres, classical quantitative metres, and vernacular metres which scanned regularly and, in English, were stress accented. The attempt to analyse and ultimately synthesize these different traditions was central to the development of English poetry. What Smith calls the “jingle” of English metres had to be organised before it could be naturalised and deployed with elegance or ease.

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<sup>24</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 467-8.

<sup>25</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 468.

Gascoigne regrets this limitation to a basic iambic metre but accepts that “it is so” in which case he advises “let us take the forde as we finde it”. He then goes on to offer two lines of iambic pentameter composed of the same words, the first of which “may passe the musters” whilst the second “is neyther true nor pleasant”:

I understand your meaning by your eye.

Your meaning I understand by your eye.<sup>26</sup>

The second he argues fails because the natural stress falls upon the second syllable in “understand” “which is contrarie to the naturall or usual pronu[n]ciation”<sup>27</sup>

Gascoigne is adamant that the poet should contrive to fit words to metre in such a way that the stress falls on the normal verbal emphasis.

In his fourth letter to Spenser, Harvey specifically praises the work of Sidney and Drant in their attempts at reforming English verse writing or as he puts it

to helpe forwarde our new famous enterprise for the Exchanging of Barbarous and Balductum Rymes with Artificial Verses, the one being in manner of pure fine Goulde, the other but counterfet and base ylfauoured Copper.<sup>28</sup>

Harvey goes on to point out, however, that before English can be accommodated to classical prosody, it requires fundamental orthographic reform:

I am of Opinion there is no one more regular and iustificable direction, eyther for the assured and infallible Certaintie of our English Artificiall Prosodye particularly, or generally to bring our Language into Arte and to frame a Grammer or rhetorike thereof, than first of all vniuersally to agree vpon ONE AND THE SAME ORTOGRAPHIE, in all pointes conformable and proportionate to our COMMON NATURAL PROSODYE.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 468.

<sup>27</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 468.

<sup>28</sup> Harvey, 1904, I: 101.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, 1904, I: 102.

Harvey, himself, was notorious for his championing and practice of the hexametre, the staple classical metre in Latin and Greek. Indeed in his third letter to Spenser he demands “If I neuer deserue anye better remembraunce, let mee rather be epitaphed, The Inuentour of the English Hexameter.”<sup>30</sup> William Webbe is also an enthusiast, “(t)he most famous verse of all the rest is called *Hexametrum Epicum*, which consisteth of sixe feete, whereof the first foure are indifferently either *Spondai* or *Dactyli*, the fift is euermore a *dactyl*, and the sixt a *Spondoe*, as thus,

*Tyterus happily thou liest tumbling vnder a beetch tree.*<sup>31</sup>

This is the first line of Webbe’s translation of Virgil’s first eclogue, which he has undertaken to translate “because I thought no matter of mine owne inuention nor any other of antiquitye more fitte for tryal of thys thing, before there were some more speciall direction which might leade to a lesse troublesome manner of writing.”<sup>32</sup> Puttenham whose avowed aim in writing his *Arte of Englishe Poesie* is “to make of a rude rimer a learned and a Courtly Poet”<sup>33</sup> also argues for the “grauitie and statelinesse” of the hexameter, arguing on the grounds of the precedent set by the Greek epic:

Therefore was nothing committed to historie but matters of great and excellent persons & things, that the same by irritation of good courages (such as emulation causeth) might worke more effectually, which occasioned the story writer to chuse an higher stile fit for his subiect, the Prosaicke in prose, the Poet in meetre, and the Poets was by verse exameter for his grauitie and statelinesse most allowable: neither would they intermingle him with any other shorter measure, vnlesse it were in matters of such qualitie as became best to be song with the voice and to some musicall instrument...in which cases they made those poemes in variable measures, & coupled a short verse with a long to serue that purpose the better.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Harvey, 1904, II: 230.

<sup>31</sup> Webbe, 1904: 282-3.

<sup>32</sup> Webbe, 1904: 284.

<sup>33</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 164.

<sup>34</sup> Puttenham, 1904: 43.

Nashe, however, argues that it is an unsuitable metre for the “craggy” stress patterns of English and that, despite its noble lineage, even English poets such as Chaucer and Spenser did not necessarily feel compelled to employ it in their verses:

O Heathenists and Pagan Hexameters, come thy waies down from thy *Doctourship*, & learne thy Primer of Poetry ouer again; for certainly thy pen is in state of a Reprobate with all men of iudgement and reckoning... Needes hee must cast vp Certayne crude humours of English Hexameter Verses that lay vppon his stomacke; a Noble-man stode in his way as he was vomiting, and from top to toe he all to berayd him with Tuscanisme...

Tubalcan, alias Tuball, first founder of Farriers Hall, here is a great complaint made, that *Vtriusque Academiae Robertus Greene* hath mockt thee, because hee saide that as thou wert the first inuenter of English Hexameter verses...

The Hexameter verse I graunt to be a Gentleman of an auncient house (so is many an English begger); yet this Clyme of ours hee cannot thriue in. Our speech is too craggy for him to set his plough in; hee goes twitching and hopping in our language like a man running vpon quagmires, vp the hill in one Syllable, and downe the dale in another, retaining no part of that stately smooth gate which he vaunts himselfe with amongst the Greeks and Latins.

*Homer and Virgil*, two valorous Authors, yet were they neuer knighted, they wrote in Hexameter Verses: Ergo, Chaucer and Spencer, the *Homer* and *Virgil* of England, were farre ouerseene that they wrote not all their Poems in Hexameter verses also. In many Countries veluet and Satten is a commoner weare than cloth amongst vs: Ergo wee must leaue wearing of cloth, and goe euerie one in veluet and satten, because other Countries vse so.

The Text will not beare it, good *Gilgilis Hobberdehoy*. *Our english tongue is nothing too good, but too bad to imitate the Greeke and Latine.*<sup>35</sup>

Gascoigne’s *Certayne Notes* offer precise instructions for writing poetry. His definition of the sonnet is reproduced in John Fuller’s account in *The Sonnet* (1972):

Then have you Sonnets, some thinke that all Poemes (being short) may be called Sonnets, as in deede it is a diminutive worde derived of sonare, but yet I can beste allowe to call those Sonnets which are of fourteen lynes, every line conteyning tenne syllables. The first twelve do ryme in staves of four lines by crosse meetre, and the last twoo ryming together do conclude the whole.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Nashe, 1904, II: 239-240.

<sup>36</sup> John Fuller, *The Sonnet* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 15 quoting from *Certayne Notes* Gascoigne, 1907, I: 471.

Samuel Daniel uses his discussion of the sonnet to extrapolate on the importance of structure in writing poetry, as in all arts:

Nor is this certaine limit obserued in Sonnets, any tyrannicall bounding of the conceit, but rather reducing it in *giram* and a iust forme, neither too long for the shortest proiect, nor too short for the longest, being but onely employed for a present passion. For the body of our imagination being as an vnformed Chaos without fashion, without day, if by the diuine power of the spirit it be wrought into an Orbe of order and forme, is it not more pleasing to Nature, that desires a certaintie and comports not with that which is infinite, to haue these closes, rather than not to know where to end, or how farre to goe, especially seeing our passions are often without measure?... Besides, is it not most delightful to see much excellentlie ordred in a small roome, or little gallantly disposed and made to fill vp a space of like capacitie, in such sort that the one would not appeare so beautifull in a larger circuite, nor the other do well in a lesse? Which often we find to be so, according to the powers of nature in a workman.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the lack of any specific mention of it in *Certayne Notes*, Gascoigne is an early practitioner of the iambic pentameter. He wrote approximately 3,500 lines of rhyme royal (seven decasyllabic lines rhyming *ababbcc*), a metre favoured by his model, Chaucer, in long poems such as *Dan Bartholmew of Bathe*, *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*, and *The Grief of Joy*, as well as thirty-two sonnets and sixteen other poems in iambic pentameter. He is also credited with writing “the first original English poem in blank verse,”<sup>38</sup> *The Steele Glas*, and employing it in the translation of *Jocasta* he produced with Francis Kinwelmarsh.

Critics as early as Aristotle had argued that iambics constituted a rhythm that conformed to normal speech patterns that might be used in heroic verse with certain provisos:

In iambic verse, which as far as possible models itself on speech, the only appropriate terms are those that anyone might use in speeches, and these are words in current use, metaphors, and ornamental words.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Daniel, 1904: 366.

<sup>38</sup>Prouty, 1966: 132.

<sup>39</sup>Aristotle, 1965, Chapter 22, p. 64.

He had gone on, however, to say “(e)xperience has shown that the heroic hexameter is the right metre for epic.”<sup>40</sup> In the event, Nashe was right: English proved too “craggy” for the hexameter to establish itself. It was the iambic pentameter that became the foremost English metre, ultimately unrhymed to produce blank verse.

Chaucer had first introduced iambic pentameter into English but it was Surrey who is generally credited with the introduction of blank verse. A. C. Spearing argues that Surrey “invented blank verse” in his translation of Books II and III of the *Aeneid*.<sup>41</sup> In “The Formation of the Heroic Medium” Howard Baker suggests a more complicated genealogy: “Blank verse, I am convinced, has its roots in medieval poetry.”<sup>42</sup> He accepts the general view that “Surrey found suggestion for an English blank verse in an unrhymed Italian version of the *Aeneid*” but argues that the “urge to write a rhymeless verse was a general Renaissance phenomenon, behind which lay, no doubt, the example of the ancients.”<sup>43</sup> In his view though Surrey’s diction, phrasing and organization of the verses is “as native as Chaucer’s, his blank verse is cut from the best of traditional patterns”<sup>44</sup> and he goes on to argue that he adapted Gavin Douglas’s earlier translation “transformed into unrhymed heroics”. It is therefore “back in Gavin Douglas and the felicitous Scottish traditions that English blank verse takes its source.”<sup>45</sup>

Nicholas Grimald had also contributed two blank verse fragments to *Tottel’s Miscellany* four years before he and Thomas Sackville collaborated on *Gorboduc*, written in 1561. John M. Berdan argues for the importance of medieval Latin poetry

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<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, 1965, Chapter 24, p. 67.

<sup>41</sup> A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 312.

<sup>42</sup> Howard Baker, “The Formation of the Heroic Medium” in Paul J. Alpers ed. *Elizabethan Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 126-168, p. 129.

<sup>43</sup> Baker, 1967: 138.

<sup>44</sup> Baker, 1967: 139.

<sup>45</sup> Baker, 1967: 142.

in the development of vernacular poetry: “since Medieval Latin is both accentual and rimed, the similarity in structures made it possible to apply precepts for the composition of verse in Medieval Latin to the composition of verse in English.”<sup>46</sup> He sees the development of English poetry as a “continued struggle to force the old medieval forms to express the new Renaissance conceptions”<sup>47</sup> and the process as an ongoing one of compromise and synthesis. As far as blank verse is concerned, Berdan offers a number of possible scenarios for its introduction: that it was essentially Chaucer’s riding rhyme (decasyllabic couplets) “without the rimes”, that it was a conscious borrowing from the Italians, and he again cites Surrey and Italian translations of the classics, or that it was from Grimald.<sup>48</sup> His own conclusion is that the influence of humanism was paramount in its development: “Humanism evolved blank verse from the nature of its being in both countries. And the English writers were encouraged to persevere by the Italian precedents.”<sup>49</sup>

Berdan also points out that Gascoigne employs the metre, despite not mentioning it in *Certayne Notes*. In the prefatory address to *The Steele Glas* though, Gascoigne explains that he has chosen to write in blank verse because he regards rhyme as too frivolous for the most serious and important works:

To vaunt, were vaine: and flattrie were a faulte.  
 But truth to tell, there is a sort of fame,  
 The which I seeke, by science to assault,  
 And so to leave, remembrance of my name.  
 The walles wherof are wondrous harde to clyme:

And much to high, for ladders made of ryme.  
 Then since I see, that rimes can seldome reache,  
 Unto the toppe, of such a stately Towre,  
 By reasons force, I meane to make some breache,

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<sup>46</sup> John M. Berdan, *Early Tudor Poetry 1485-1547* (Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoestring Press, 1961), p. 127.

<sup>47</sup> Berdan, 1961: 2.

<sup>48</sup> Berdan, 1961: 352-354.

<sup>49</sup> Berdan, 1961: 358.

Which yet may helpe, my feeble fainting power,  
That so at last, my Muse might enter in,  
And reason rule, that rime could never win.<sup>50</sup>

John Thompson suggests in *The Founding of English Metre*, “In verse forms Gascoigne follows the writers of Tottel.”<sup>51</sup> Whilst, as Thompson argues, Gascoigne was not perhaps “an innovator in forms”<sup>52</sup> he was, nevertheless, clear about what constituted useful models and appropriate forms for a new poetic diction, and his theory and practice suggest a thoughtful and conscious artist. Thompson recognises that, in metrical terms, Gascoigne “was stricter at the musters than anyone before him. He writes a verse which almost, but not quite, demands a perpetual double attention to every syllable, to its place in speech and to its place in an abstract pattern.”<sup>53</sup>

Gascoigne does stress the need for a caesura, a metrical pause or break in the poetical line, arguing that it should come in a regular position:

13 There are also Certayne pauses or restes in a verse whiche may be called Ceasures, [sic] whereof I woulde be lothe to stande long, since it is at discretion of the wryter, and they have bene first devised (as should seeme) by the Musicians: but yet thus much I will adventure to wryte, that in mine opinion in a verse of eight syllables, the pause will stand best in the midst, in a verse of tenne it will best be placed at the ende of the first foure syllables: in a verse of twelve, in the midst, in verses of twelve, in the firste and fourteen in the seconde, wee place the pause commonly in the midst of the first, and at the ende of the first eight syllables in the second. In the Rithme royall, it is at the writers discretion, and forceth not where the pause be until the ende of the line.<sup>54</sup>

Gascoigne follows his own precepts with great fidelity leading at times to a certain monotony of rhythm. In *The Elizabethan Poets: The Making of English*

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<sup>50</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 140.

<sup>51</sup> John Thompson, *The Founding of English Metre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Thompson, 1966: 76.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, 1966: 87.

<sup>54</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 470-471.

*Poetry from Wyatt to Ben Jonson* Fred Inglis argues that it was “From medieval poets they [the Elizabethans] learned the strong stresses and heavy caesura of the old alliterative line” commenting that “the same step treads heavily through George Gascoigne.”<sup>55</sup> Prouty also thinks that “the literal following of a rule made Gascoigne’s regularity too obvious and harsh”<sup>56</sup> and wonders why Gascoigne failed to perceive the “resulting fluidity” of the variable position of the caesura he allowed in rhyme royal. Prouty makes the point though that “The necessity for rule was a principle which had to be firmly established before poets could venture to break away in variation.”<sup>57</sup>

The admissability of rhyme itself is another hotly contested topic. Ascham had argued in *The Scholemaster* that poets should know better, inveighing against “that barbarous and rude Ryming”:

But now, when men know the difference, and haue the examples, both of the best and of the worst, surelie to follow rather the *Gothes* in Ryming than the Greekes in trew versifying were euen to eate ackornes with swyne, when we may freely eate wheate bread emonges men.<sup>58</sup>

He goes on to justify his prejudice on the usual grounds of elevated forerunners such as Quintilian:

This mislikyng of Ryming beginneth not now of any newfangled singularitie, but hath bene long misliked of many, and that of men of greatest learning and deepest iudgement. And soch that defend it do so, either for lacke of knowledge what is best, or els of verie enuie that any should performe that in learning, whereunto they, as I sayd before, either for ignorance can not, or for idelnes will not, labor to attaine vnto.

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<sup>55</sup> Fred Inglis, *The Elizabethan Poets: The Making of English Poetry from Wyatt to Ben Jonson* (London: Evans Press, 1969), p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> Prouty, 1966: 130.

<sup>57</sup> Prouty, 1966: 131.

<sup>58</sup> Ascham, 1870: 145.

And you that prayse this Ryming, because ye neither haue reason why to like it nor can shew learning to defend it, yet I will helpe you with the authoritie of the oldest and learnedst tyme.<sup>59</sup>

Richard Stanyhurst in his dedication of his translation of Virgil to Lord

Dunsinane also regards rhyme as an inferior and ignoble art. The examples he gives to pour scorn on the practice are all of extremely imperfect rhymes, however:

Abingtowne, Abingtowne, God bee with thee:

For thou haste a steeple lyke a dagger sheathe.

And an oother in thee prayse, not of a steeple, but of a dagger.

When al is goane but thee black scabbard,

Wel fare thee haft with thee duggeon dagger.

Thee therd (for I wyl present your lordship with a leshe) in thee commendacion of bacon.

Hee is not a king that weareth satten,  
But hee is a king that eateth bacon.<sup>60</sup>

His remedy to such “*wooden rythmours*” is a course in the classics:

Thee reddyest way therefore too flap these droanes from thee sweete senting hiues of *Poetrye* is for thee learned too applye them selues wholye (yf they be delighted with that veyne) too thee true making of verses in such wise as thee *Greekes* and *Latins*, thee fathers of knowledge, haue done, and too leaue too these doltish coystrels theyre rude rythming and balducktoom ballads.<sup>61</sup>

Gascoigne does not argue against rhyme *per se* but exhorts his reader “also to beware of rime without reason” explaining that

My meaning is hereby that your rime leade you not from your firste Inuention, for many writers, when they haue layed the platforme of their

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<sup>59</sup> Ascham, 1870: 147.

<sup>60</sup> Stanyhurst, 1904: 40-141.

<sup>61</sup> Stanyhurst, 1904: 141.

invention, are yet drawn sometimes (by ryme) to forget it or at least to alter it, as when they cannot readily finde out a worde whiche maye rime to the first (and yet continue their determinate Invention) they do then eyther botche it vp with a worde that will ryme (howe small reason soeuer it carie with it), or els they alter their first worde and so percasse decline or trouble their former Invention: But do you always hold your first determined Invention, and do rather searche the bottome of your braynes for apte wordes than chaunge good reason for rumbling rime.<sup>62</sup>

He goes on to offer practical advice as to how this might be achieved stressing the importance he places on content. Rhyme is to be the servant not the master:

7. To help you a little with ryme (which is also a plaine yong schollers lesson), worke thus: when you haue set downe your first verse, take the last worde thereof and coumpt ouer all the wordes of the selfe same sounde by order of the Alphabete: As, for example, the laste woorde of your firste line is care, to rhyme therwith you haue bare, clare, dare, fare, gare, hare, and share, mare, snare, rare, stare, and ware, &c. Of all these take that which best may serue your purpose, carrying reason with rime: and if none of them will serue so, then alter the laste worde of your former verse, but yet do not alter the meaning of your Invention.<sup>63</sup>

Gascoigne had justified his decision not to employ rhyme in *The Steele Glas*, however, by arguing that it was inappropriate to the most serious subjects.

Sidney, of course, regarded verse as “an ornament and no cause to poetry,” but as admirable, nevertheless, for its inherently “memorable” quality. Daniel, writing in response to Campion’s attack explains his motive in undertaking the work in the Dedication of his *Defence of Ryme* to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke:

The Generall Custome and vse of Ryme in this kingdome, Noble Lord, hauing beene so long (as if from a Graunt of Nature) held vnquestionable, made me to imagine that it lay altogether out of the way of contradiction, and was become so natural, as we should neuer haue had a thought to cast it off into reproach, or be made to thinke that it ill-became our language. But now I see, when there is opposition made to all things in the world by wordes, wee must now at length likewise fall to contend for words themselues, and make a question whether they be right or not. For we are

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<sup>62</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 468.

<sup>63</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 469

tolde how that our measures goe wrong, all Ryming is grosse, vulgare, barbarous; which if it be so, we haue lost much labour to no purpose; and, for mine owne particular, I cannot blame the fortune of the times and mine owne Genius, that cast me vppon so wrong a course, drawne with the current of custome and an vnexamined example.<sup>64</sup>

Responding directly to Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602), in which he castigates the use of rhyme in English poetry, Daniel argues that he would be willing to tolerate Campion's advocacy of classical metrics had *he* been more tolerant of rhyme and goes on to justify its use on both aesthetic and historical grounds:

We could well haue allowed of his numbers, had he not disgraced our Ryme, which both Custome and Nature doth most powerfully defend: Custome that is before all Law, Nature that is aboue all Arte. Euery language hath her proper number or measure fitted to vse and delight, which Custome, intertaininge by the allowance of the Eare, doth indenize and make naturall. All verse is but a frame of wordes confined within certaine measure, differing from the ordinarie speech, and introduced, the better to expresse mens conceipts, both for delight and memorie. Which frame of words consisting of *Rithmus* or *Metrum*, Number or measure, are disposed into diuers fashions, according to the humour of the Composer and the set of the time...For as Greeke and Latine verse consists of the number and quantitie of syllables, so doth the English verse of measure and accent. And though it doth not strictly obserue long and short syllables, yet it most religiously respects the accent; and as the short and the long make number; so that the English verse then hath number, measure, and harmonie in the best proportion of Musicke.<sup>65</sup>

Daniel brings a rational, historicizing intelligence to the subject, arguing that it is pointless to attempt to lay down dogmatic rules for art:

But in these things, I say, I dare not take vpon mee to teach that they ought to be so, in respect my selfe holds them to be so, or that I thinke it right: for indeed there is no right thing in these things that are continually in a wandring motion, carried with the violence of vncertaine likings, being but onely the time that giues them their power. For if this right or truth should be no other thing then that wee make it, we shall shape it into a thousand

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<sup>64</sup> Daniel, 1904: 357-8.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel, 1904: 359-360.

figures, seeing this excellent painter, Man, can so well lay the colours which himselfe grinds in his owne affections, as that hee will make them serue for any shadow and any counterfeit.<sup>66</sup>

In his view culture in general and language in particular constitute “a Character of that perpetuall reuolution which wee see to be in all things that neuer remaine the same.”<sup>67</sup>

The revolution in poetry in the sixteenth century is the attempt to forge a workable practice out of a variety of disparate materials and Gascoigne was foremost amongst those writers who brought this about in their own practices. His writing combined these traditions in a conscious, deliberate way. His best work is most often praised for its “directness of expression.”<sup>68</sup> Praising his “rather simple and unadorned style”, Prouty argues that

This simple style is characteristic of the really best poems of Gascoigne, wherein his muse is that of the great tradition of English poetry. “Gascoignes Lullabie,” “Gascoignes gardnings,” and the lines written “In that other ende of his sayde close walke” are such as to make us wish he had never seen the *Songes and Sonettes* or heard of Petrarch.<sup>69</sup>

He goes on to compare the first stanza of “Gascoignes good morrow”:

You that have spent the silent night,  
In sleepe and quiet rest,  
And joye to see the cheerefull lyght  
That ryseth in the East:  
Now cleare your voyce, now chere your hart,  
Come helpe me nowe to sing:  
Eche willing wight come beare a part,  
To prayse the heavenly King. (p. 55, ll. 1-8)

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<sup>66</sup> Daniel, 1904: 383.

<sup>67</sup> Daniel, 1904: 384.

<sup>68</sup> John Buxton, *A Tradition of Poetry* (London; New York: Macmillan: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 47.

<sup>69</sup> Prouty, 1966: 123.

with a stanza from *Dan Bartholomew*, from which he argues the former seems “incredibly remote”:

And yet they be but sorrowes smoke,  
 my brest the fordge where fury playes,  
 My panting hart, it strikes the stroke,  
 my fancie blowes the flame always,  
 The coles are kindled by desire  
 and Cupide warmes him by the fire. (p. 116, ll. 31-36.)

Prouty concludes that “seemingly we cannot have the one without the other.”<sup>70</sup> I think that Prouty misses the satirical tone of nearly all Gascoigne’s writing on the theme of love. *Dan Bartholomew* should be read in my view as a satire on the Petrarchan lover, written in a comic mode. This is obvious in the jogtrot rhythm, apostrophisings, repetitions, and verbal infelicities of “happie happe” and “feele hir feelingly” in “Dan Bartholomew’s first Triumphe”

Oh that my tongue had skill, to tell hir prayse aright,  
 Or that my pen hir due desertes, in worthy verse could write:  
 Or that my minde could muse, or happie heart conceive,  
 Some words that might resound hir worth, by high *Minervas* leave.  
 Oh how the blooming joyes, do blossome in my brest,  
 To think my secret thought, how far she steines ye rest.  
 Me thinkes I heare her speake, me thinkes I see hir still,  
 Me thinkes I feele hir feelingly, me thinkes I know hir will.  
 Me thinkes I see the states which sue to her for grace,  
 Me thinkes I see one looke of hirs repulse them all apace.  
 Me thinkes that houre is yet, and evermore shall be,  
 Wherein my happie happe was first, hir heavenly face to see:  
 Wherein I spide the writte, which woond betweene hir eyne,  
 And sayd behold, be bold, *for I, am borne to be but thine.* (p. 102, ll. 17-30.)

The lower depths of bathos are reached, however, in “Dan Bartholomewes Dolorous discourses”:

And all in rage, enraged as I am,

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<sup>70</sup> Prouty, 1966: 124.

I take my sheete, my slippers and my Gowne,  
 And in the *Bathe* from whence but late I came,  
 I cast my selfe in dollours there to drowne. (ll.1-4, p. 112)

*Dan Bartholomew* offers a cautionary tale to the overwrought young lover but surely Gascoigne never intended the verse to be taken seriously.

Gascoigne's writing successfully blends the classical and the traditional, combining and synthesizing ideas and techniques as he works. This process can be seen in his satirical poem *The Steele Glas*, or the themes set him by his friends John Vaughan and Richard Courtop. As Spearing points out "Satire on the corruption, venality and wretchedness of court life already had a long history in European literature by Wyatt's time...It received new impetus in the Renaissance, however, with the spread of absolute rulers who made their courts centres of power as well as of taste and fashion."<sup>71</sup> Gascoigne's poems seem to owe their inspiration to the satires of Horace or Ovid, but are given a new and characteristically English twist by his introduction of concrete and individualised characters.

Prouty makes a similar point in contrasting Gascoigne's handling of the theme *Magnum vectigal parcimonia* with Wyatt's "Myne own John Pains" arguing that "instead of Wyatt's philosophical point of view and classical allusions", Gascoigne deals in the concrete and specific:

The common speech is, spend and God will send,  
 But what sends he? a bottell and a bagge,  
 A staffe, a wallet and a wofull ende. (ll.1-3)

This gives Gascoigne's poem a sharpness and specificity which removes it from the commonplace. Prouty goes on to discuss Gascoigne's poem, praising its

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<sup>71</sup> Spearing, 1985: 307.

introduction of concrete characters:

The life of a wandering beggar waits the courtly spendthrift, in comparison with whom “Hick, Hobbe and Dicke with cloutes upon their knee” are rich indeed. They have money safely hidden away, and Davie Debet never enters their parlor. Where Wyatt is concerned in “Myne own John Pains” with the loss of personal integrity, Gascoigne here reveals the tangible financial ruin of those who pursue Lady Meed. It is to the spirit of *Piers Plowman* that we must look for the source of Gascoigne’s earthy realism.”<sup>72</sup>

Pooley praises Gascoigne in similar terms<sup>73</sup> for his innovative introduction of the cast of the medieval morality play into a courtly poem such as “The arraig[n]ment of a Lover” in which “George,” defends himself against the charge of flattery:

At Beautyes barre as I dyd stande,  
 When false suspect accused mee,  
*George* (quod the Judge) holde up thy hande  
 Thou art arraigned of Flatterye:  
 Tell therefore howe thou wylt bee tryde?  
 Whose judgement here wylt thou abyde?

...

Then crafte the cryer cal’d a quest,  
 Of whome was falsehoode formost feere,  
 A packe of pickethankes were the rest,  
 Which came false witsse for to beare,  
 The jurye suche, the Judge unjust,  
 Sentence was sayde, I should be trust.

Jelous the Jayler bound mee fast,  
 To heare the verdite of the byll,  
*George* (quod the Judge) nowe thou art cast,  
 Thou must goe hence to heavie hill,  
 And there be hanged all but the head,  
 God rest thy soule when thou art dead.<sup>74</sup>

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Gascoigne’s use of his own name in the poem is a characteristic feature of his writing. The individualisation of experience and emergence of “poetic voice” is one

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<sup>72</sup> Prouty, 1966: 124-125.

<sup>73</sup> Gascoigne, 1982: 12.

<sup>74</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 38.

of the most significant contemporary developments, related to changing ways of thought and conceptions of the subject in the early modern period.

### **Poetic Voice**

If poetry was undergoing change and reform in a technical sense in the sixteenth century, subject matter and genre were also transformed. The poetry most highly valued by critics today is the “so-called ‘golden’ poetry of the last twenty years of the century” – notably the personalised, individual lyrics of Sidney, Shakespeare and Donne. As Waller points out, however, the lyric was the least highly regarded mode of the sixteenth century: “Right at the bottom of Puttenham’s hierarchy of poetical kinds is the poetry we find most characteristic of and interesting in the sixteenth century.”<sup>75</sup> He argues that the “enormous prestige since the Romantics of the short lyric as the apparent revelation of sincere personal feelings...helps modern readers to respond enthusiastically to lyrics.”<sup>76</sup>

The discursive changes, which elevated poetry at the expense of rhetoric, involved the relocation and redefinition of poetry. Gary Waller and other materialist critics have drawn attention to the public role of poetry as a courtly practice designed to procure favour and preferment, and its location within a political regime of control and containment. A major factor in the discursive reorganization of the early modern period, however, is constituted by poetry’s progressive privatisation of experience. Literature becomes generically more specialised, with the drama occupying a space in the social realm, distinct from poetry, which is increasingly

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<sup>75</sup> Waller, 1986: 72.

<sup>76</sup> Waller, 1986: 72.

individualised. The “public poetry” of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, for example, is rarely read today and seems anachronistic because it spoke to an obsolescent poetic model, epic. This, in turn, relates to the change in reading practices from oral performance to private reading.

Waller analyses the “interesting difference between the sixteenth-century English court poet...and his medieval predecessors”:

For the medieval courtly maker poetry was part of a social game which expressed the Court’s sense of collective identity. The poet’s writings were contributions not to a self-contained autonomous category of ‘literature’ but primarily to ‘social life and, especially, to the delicate fiction of courtly love which helped to sustain the life and interest of social relations.’<sup>77</sup>

Waller contrasts this public role of the medieval poet with the privatisation of experience in sixteenth-century poetry:

What differentiates this medieval structure from that characteristic of the sixteenth-century is the increasing complexity of the codes within which courtier and poet had to work. In particular, what develops is an increasing sensitivity to and uneasiness about the nature of the ‘self’, the ‘individual’, and the ‘individual voice’ of the poet within the discourse that spoke through him.<sup>78</sup>

Many critics have identified the emergence of an individualised voice as characteristic of sixteenth-century poetry. Waller argues that “most early and mid-century English poetry, with the notable exception of Wyatt’s seems...utilitarian and pedantic. It is abstract and moralizing, epitomized in *A Mirror for Magistrates* ...it seems to be worlds apart from the delicate sophistication and seeming individuality of later poets like Sidney or Shakespeare.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly Berdan argues that in the early Tudor period “With the exception of More and Skelton, the

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<sup>77</sup> Waller, 1986: 88.

<sup>78</sup> Waller, 1986: 88-89.

<sup>79</sup> Waller, 1986: 38-39.

personality of the writer seems subordinated to the form in which he writes...The reader does not feel near to the author; the latter's voice seems faint and far away."<sup>80</sup>

Berdan's explanation for this is twofold: "He cannot make his form express himself...because the age was one of beginnings."<sup>81</sup> Poetic expression is restricted by the need for formal, technical work on language, metre and so on, before the poet can express himself freely.

In *The "Inward" Language*, Anne Ferry analyses the writing practices of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, and Donne in an attempt to explicate what she perceives as "the vast difference" between the poems of Shakespeare and Wyatt, and the way in which changing mental and psychological patterns are expressed through the medium of poetry, arguing that "Both the nature of poetry about inward experience and the notion of what is in the heart rendered by it changed radically between Wyatt's lifetime and about 1600."<sup>82</sup> Ferry traces the development of poetical expression in terms of its personalization, the "use of a biographical name"<sup>83</sup> and the identification of an interiority, which points to a sense of a continuous internal existence.

Ferry rejects as "beyond the limits" of her study "the shaping relationship of language to thinking"<sup>84</sup> but introduces it by asking what she calls a "fundamental question" about the changing relationship between poets, language and experience and how this was expressed in a new poetry, a question which she argues is "twofold, or can be asked in two forms":

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<sup>80</sup> Berdan, 1961: 504.

<sup>81</sup> Berdan, 1961: 505.

<sup>82</sup> Anne Ferry, *The "Inward" Language: Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Ferry, 1983: 16.

<sup>84</sup> Ferry, 1983: 7.

How did sixteenth-century English poetry develop in ways that enabled Shakespeare and other writers to render a new sense of what is in the heart? How did poets of the sixteenth century come to invent a sense of inward experience reflected in new uses of language in their poetry?<sup>85</sup>

Ferry disclaims the possibility of any causal relation between the two:

it cannot be clearly or singly argued that changes in verbal patterns altered poets' conceptions, or that new concepts generated different uses of language. The two kinds of change, like the two forms of question about them, appear to represent different ways of considering a single phenomenon, or inseparable process which cannot be differentiated into cause and effect.<sup>86</sup>

As she points out, it is impossible to isolate cause and effect in cultural change in this way. She locates this process though within the wider cultural context:

Many cultural historians have located an all-encompassing revolution in the sixteenth century, arguing that it was the period when the "mental organisation of the individual of the modern Western world was created in England."<sup>87</sup>

Ferry argues that "literary history is created by and in works of literature" and the actual process of change can "be discovered only in details."<sup>88</sup> Her study focuses on the formal and technical details of the process of change, which explores the way in which previously literal expressions become increasingly metaphorical in their usage (as Havelock did in his analysis of the development of classical Greek). Comparing Shakespeare with Wyatt, she contrasts them in terms of soliloquy versus public address. In Wyatt's verse "metaphors scarcely function figuratively."<sup>89</sup> The language of the earlier poets, in the complaint for example, makes "(c)ertain

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<sup>85</sup> Ferry, 1983: 4.

<sup>86</sup> Ferry, 1983: 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ferry, 1983: 4. Ferry is quoting from Zevedei Barbu, *Problems of Historical Psychology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 145.

<sup>88</sup> Ferry, 1983: 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ferry, 1983: 69.

assumptions about what is in the heart and the capacity of poetry to represent it”.

However extreme and varied the style, designed “to represent complexity of inward states” it implies, nevertheless, Ferry argues

that what is in the heart is expressible and recognizable in outward manifestations, such as sobs and sighs, but especially in the verbal utterance of the complaint. The common device of the catalogue most clearly embodies this view by assuming that inward states can be described by names for categories carrying fixed and recognizable meanings, like names for physical phenomena such as tears and sighs.<sup>90</sup>

Through her analysis of the writing of the poets in her study, Ferry describes the gradual separation of internal state and external expression. The earlier work is characterised as general and public in its expression. Ferry suggests that the sonnets of Sidney and Shakespeare are more truly autobiographical, that they are less public in the characterisation of relationship with the reader. Because they seem more personal, the reader seems to be put in the position of “overhearing private speech” not fully aware of what is going on, unlike public poems of straightforward praise or blame:

The qualities that distinguish these sonnets make them autobiographical in a very different sense than those which contain references to the poet’s circumstances and acquaintance. Their language, at once more specific but more veiled, seems to refer to actual incidents, known privately only to the lover and the lady involved in the episodes, who is intimately addressed... The particular but undisclosed nature of the episodes hinted as the occasions for these sonnets, their more than usual intimacy of address, their elaboration of the lover’s involvement in causing pain to himself and to his beloved, their dramatization of his imaginative entrance into another person’s heart, make these poems radically different in kind from a representative sixteenth-century complaint.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ferry, 1983: 78.

<sup>91</sup> Ferry, 1983: 25-26, 29.

Ferry argues that the autobiographical nature of the poems is signalled by the use of the poet's name, which she regards as an evolving feature of sixteenth-century poets:

This use of a biographical name points to an identification of the author with the lover speaking in his poems. Yet inconsistencies were common in uses both of authors and speakers, and in the formulation of titles for love poems. These show that sixteenth-century English writers did not always equate author and speaker, but also that they had not formulated a distinct conception of the relationships possible between them, or of their significance. That is to say, they seem not to have considered, in any terms comparable to those in recent studies of their verse, the issues clustered around the modern critical term *persona* for which no parallel word or phrase existed in English.<sup>92</sup>

One way of understanding this expressive change is to locate it within the development of an individualised subjectivity. The construction of subjectivity in the early modern period has constituted an important focus for literary and social research. Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy*, for example, charts "in the drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the eventual construction of an order of subjectivity which is recognizably modern."<sup>93</sup> This modern "order of subjectivity" is "Liberal humanism (which) proposes that the subject is the free, unconstrained author of meaning and action, the origin of history. Unified, knowing and autonomous."<sup>94</sup> In the demonstration of her thesis, that the emergence of the modern subject can be traced in the development from the generalised hero of *Everyman* to the highly individualised Hamlet, Belsey draws on poststructuralist theories of the subject to argue that the subject of liberal humanism was a cultural effect, socially constructed, rather than an essential category of "the human":

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<sup>92</sup> Ferry, 1983: 16-17.

<sup>93</sup> Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Belsey, 1985: 8.

both liberal humanism and the subject it produces appear to be an effect of a continuing history, rather than its culmination. The individual, it now seems, was not released at last from the heads of people who had waited only for the peace and leisure to cultivate what lay ineluctably within them and within all of us. On the contrary, the liberal-humanist subject, the product of a specific epoch and a specific class, was constructed in conflict and in contradiction – with conflicting and contradictory consequences.<sup>95</sup>

Belsey points out that “(t)o be a subject is to have access to signifying practice, to identify with the ‘I’ of the utterance and the ‘I’ who speaks. The subject is held in place in a specific discourse, a specific knowledge, by the meanings available there.”<sup>96</sup> The insistent “I” of the sonnet sequences of Sidney or Shakespeare is held in place by the discourse which produces them. The newly conceptualised early modern subject required a poetic idiom capable of expressing a sense of interiority. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, Belsey argues that it is the development of the soliloquy, in conjunction with iambic pentameter, which enables the dramatic presentation of an individualised subjectivity:

In conjunction with the more or less contemporaneous development of the iambic pentameter, the soliloquy makes audible the personal voice and offers access to the presence of an individual speaker.<sup>97</sup>

Iambic pentameter provided a medium which had the “capacity” to sound “like the English that everyone spoke, only a bit grander and more eloquent.”<sup>98</sup>

The signifying practice, however, which produced a subject “who speaks” in early modern culture was rhetoric. Its cultural specificity in terms of gender and class led precisely to the “conflicting and contradictory consequences”, which excluded most men and all women, as Belsey describes. In its discursive transformation, poetry

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<sup>95</sup> Belsey, 1985: 8-9.

<sup>96</sup> Belsey, 1985: 5.

<sup>97</sup> Belsey, 1985: 42. Belsey cites Williams, 1981:142.

<sup>98</sup> George T. Wright, “Shakespeare’s Metre Scanned” in *Reading Shakespeare’s Dramatic Language: A Guide* edited by Sylvia Adamson et al. (London: Thomson Learning, 2001), pp. 51-70, p. 52.

appropriated that dimension of rhetoric relating to the construction of the persona, as, in the increasingly rational, scientifically based reorganisation of the Western episteme, it became specifically the discourse through which subjectivity is constituted: “Fiction defines and redefines the subject.”<sup>99</sup>

This notion of the emergence of an individualised subjectivity can be related to the poets’ increased sense of the personal in their writing and the concept of a poetic voice. An increasing sense of cultural interiority was signified in the changing spatial relations demarcating public and private space.<sup>100</sup> Its poetic significance is demonstrated by the use of terms such as “chamber”, and “closet” and other phrases denoting architectural metaphors. Ferry adduces these factors in conjunction with the work of social and architectural historians who “have collected evidence that the existence and use of such rooms was increasing in the sixteenth century, which in turn they interpret as a sign of growing interest among Englishmen in their individuality, to be enjoyed in privacy and explored in introspection.”<sup>101</sup>

Gascoigne falls chronologically and stylistically in the middle of the shift in discursive changes. The “new note” so often cited in his writing is defined precisely as his personalisation of experience. Prouty, for example talks of Gascoigne’s exploring

a vein neglected by his predecessors but used by both Turbervile and Churchyard, namely, a poetic rendition of events in the life of the author. Churchyard tells of his experiences in the Scotch wars; Turbervile, of his voyage to Russia; but Gascoigne personalizes the verse essay or history...he emphasizes the importance of the individual reaction to events. This same point of view is found in his love narratives. In these, however, he avails himself of the models of his predecessors. The love story with interpolated poems is as old as Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*. Gascoigne, though using this conventional framework in “The Adventures of Master F. J.,” tells his own

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<sup>99</sup> Belsey, 1985: 6.

<sup>100</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, New York; London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>101</sup> Ferry, 1983: 47.

story and thus follows the autobiographical tradition of Turberville and Churchyard. To this, however, he adds his own contribution – the importance of individual psychological reaction.<sup>102</sup>

Pooley argues that “looking at the work as a whole...Gascoigne’s most enduring character is ‘Gascoigne’, not to be confused with the historical figure who may often be observed sending him up from a distance.”<sup>103</sup> Waller regards him as an example of an Elizabethan poet caught between discursive paradigms, which lends his writing its characteristic edgy quality:

The best of this poetry – some of Googe’s or Gascoigne’s – is distinguished by sonority, directness, and a stubborn dedication to the educational and moral ideals of humanism. Occasionally something more struggles to the surface. Gascoigne’s poetry, undoubtedly the most interesting written in England between Wyatt and Sidney, is more distinctive because it starts to articulate a little of the bind in which his poetry has been put as it wrestles to express something through, but not confined to, the moral commonplaces of the society. A typical eager seeker for court preferment, the speaker of Gascoigne’s verse remains moralistic, and in fact his choice of the complaint curiously medieval; none the less some of the contradictions characteristic of the age’s most interesting poetry are starting to come through these serious lines.<sup>104</sup>

Not all of Gascoigne’s verse is moralistic but his work illustrates changing poetic practices and expression. Ferry cites the inconsistency of Wyatt’s approach in his use of titles as opposed to generic descriptions of his work as characteristic of changing practice, a characteristic found in Gascoigne who sometimes employs specific titles: “Gascoignes good morrow”, “Gascoignes good night”, “The Recantation of a Lover”, but at others uses discursive descriptions which rehearse the argument of the work: “The refusal of a lover, written to a gentlewoman who had refused him and chosen a husband (as he thought) much inferior to himselfe,

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<sup>102</sup> Prouty, 1966: 122.

<sup>103</sup> Gascoigne, 1982: 22.

<sup>104</sup> Waller, 1986: 39-40.

both in knowledge, birth, and parsonage, wherin he bewraieth both their names in clowdes, and how she was won from him with swete gloves, and broken ringes”.

Gascoigne is working within changing poetic conventions but his poetry is, at the same time, one of the factors producing those changes. It is sophisticated and individual, communicating in a direct, personal tone, as for example in *Gascoignes good night*:

When thou hast spent the lingring day in pleasure and delight,  
Or after toyle and wearie waye, dost seeke to rest at night:  
Unto thy paynes or pleasures past, adde this one labour yet,  
Ere sleepe close up thyne eye to fast, do not thy God forget, (ll. 1-4, p. 58)

or in the suspiciously jaunty *The praise of Phillip Sparrowe*:

Of all the byrdes that I doe know,  
Phillip my Sparow hath no peare:  
For sit she high or lye she lowe,  
Be shee farre off, or be shee neare,  
There is no byrde so fayre, so fine,  
Nor yet so freshe as this of myne (ll. 1-6, p. 455).

## CHAPTER 8

### PROSE

Gascoigne was a prolific writer of verse but he wrote some of his most interesting and important works in prose. As well as his *Certayne Notes of Instruction* and various Dedicatory Epistles, these include *Supposes* (a translation of Ariosto's *I Suppositi*), *The Glasse of Government* (an original work influenced by the Dutch prodigal-son plays), *The Droomme of Doomes day* (a translation and expansion of Pope Innocent III's *De contemptu mundi*), *A delicate Diet, for daintiemouthde Droonkards* (a translation of St. Augustine's *De ebriitate*), *Hemetes the Heremyte* (a masque presented to the Queen – not written by Gascoigne but used as a vehicle to demonstrate his linguistic abilities in the trilingual translations into French, Latin and Italian he offered as a New Year's gift 1576), *The Spoyle of Antwerp* (his eyewitness account of the Spanish victory and sack of that city), as well as the larger part of his most well-known work, *The Adventures of Master F. J.*

The early modern period marked the transition from middle to modern English. It is also the period in which prose develops as a medium for fiction. Its use increased throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially through translation and early prose narratives. In the Introduction to his *Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction* Paul Salzman talks of “the wide variety of approaches to prose narrative that flourished alongside the vigorous experiments with poetry and drama that characterize the Elizabethan period.”<sup>1</sup> Linguistic exuberance and generic experiment

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Salzman (ed.), *An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.vii.

were typical features of a literary discourse in the process of constitution. Many commentators have noted the coincidence of early modern writing with post-romantic, modernist and postmodern productions in reaction against the “unrelenting realism”<sup>2</sup> of the classic realist text. Pooley for example says “Many of the changes in recent fiction, even those associated with the postmodern, such as pastiche, the preoccupation with stylishness, and discontinuity, find a curious, partial echo in this earlier fiction.”<sup>3</sup>

If Elizabethan prose narratives seem refreshingly liberated from conventional constraints, it is at least partly due to prose’s novelty as a literary medium; as Jonas Barish puts it “(i)n the sixteenth century...verse was the norm, and prose the exotic intruder.”<sup>4</sup> Malory had written the prose *Morte D’Arthur* in the previous century, but Barish argues that, despite this, prose “(a)s a language for explicitly literary works of art... had barely intruded with Malory.”<sup>5</sup> Malory’s work is based on a principle of linguistic and narrative simplification. What Vinaver refers to as Malory’s “instinctive understanding of the principle of ‘singleness’”<sup>6</sup> applies as much to his syntax as to his “unravelling”<sup>7</sup> of the complex interlaced narrative threads of his sources, and is responsible for the “apparently effortless narrative movement” of the tales.

In the sixteenth century the situation changed. Whilst Ong regards “Tudor looseness of style”<sup>8</sup> as a symptom of “residual oralism” which naturally lacked the discipline of the medium of print, Barish argues that it was due rather to the effect

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<sup>2</sup> Salzman, 1987: vii.

<sup>3</sup> Pooley, 1992: 17.

<sup>4</sup> Jonas A. Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Barish, 1967: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.viii.

<sup>7</sup> Malory, 1971: viii.

<sup>8</sup> Ong, 1971: 38.

of the humanist revival of interest in the classics and the linguistic discipline of rhetoric:

In the hands of sixteenth-century writers, it underwent a series of strenuous trials and errors, in which its possibilities as a literary medium were explored by the importing into it of techniques associated with poetry, medieval pulpit rhetoric, and classic oratory.<sup>9</sup>

The synthesis of different styles in conjunction with an expanded lexical and syntactical range, the demands of print culture for texts, and the influx of translations all helped promote the development of prose. Pooley sums up the complex development of English prose in this period simply:

one of the central creations of the seventeenth century was an English prose which had consistently raided Latin vocabulary to expand its technical range, but which had gradually emancipated itself from a need to imitate Latin syntactic patterns.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the excesses of Ciceronianism, Roger Sharrock sees the introduction of more complex syntactical structures based on Latin into English as ultimately “beneficial”:

It is easy to expose the absurdities of Ciceronianism. But...the movement was in the long run more beneficial than harmful. Early Renaissance prose was loose and rambling, and the deliberation needed to compose a periodic sentence had a salutary effect on many writers...many began to think out their sentences as an ordered progress from beginning to end of a statement; too often in early prose, like Topsy, the sentences just grew.<sup>11</sup>

A. C. Partridge analyses these changes from the grammarian’s viewpoint:

The differences displayed by poets and prose writers after 1500 are chiefly those of word choice and syntax; vocabulary and the structure of sentences

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<sup>9</sup> Barish, 1967: 1.

<sup>10</sup> Pooley, 1992: 10.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Sharrock (ed.), *The Pelican Book of English Prose* Volume 1: From the beginnings to 1780 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 39.

had, in fact, become the important elements in the differentiation of styles...A syntactical development in early New English was its improved co-ordination and subordination of clauses. Transitions within paragraphs were eased by the use of relative pronouns derived from the interrogatives *who* and *which*, as well as by a variety of new prepositions and conjunctions. Prepositional phrases took the place of the inflected cases and adverbs. Add to these changes the increased use of auxiliaries, verbs of incomplete predication such as *can*, *may*, *shall*, *will* and *must*, and the employment of the primaries *be*, *do* and *have* in the formation of moods and tenses, and the analytical sentence structure which New English from Old English, so broadly accounted for. The period from 1350 to 1500 was the age of grammatical transition, without observers, dictionaries or grammars to make meaningful the confusion.<sup>13</sup>

Elizabethan prose is commonly noted for its self-conscious, patterned quality. The most notorious example is Lyly's euphuistic style, characterised by balanced and antithetical constructions, which rely heavily on alliteration and assonance. Its diction conveys an effect of comic paradox produced partly by its syntactical complexity and partly by the juxtaposition of items from differing lexical registers as in the opening chapter of his first work, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, which enjoyed such an immediate success on publication in 1578:

There dwelt in Athens a young gentleman of great patrimony, and of so comely a personage, that it was doubted whether he were more bound to nature for the lineaments of his person, or to fortune for the increase of his possessions. But nature, impatient of comparisons, and as it were disdainful of a companion or copartner in her working, added to this comeliness of his body such a sharp capacity of mind that not only she proved fortune counterfeit, but was half of that opinion that she herself was only current.<sup>14</sup>

In her analysis of his style, Leah Scragg draws attention to the nature of its syntactical patterning and its derivation from an earlier Latinate style:

The corner-stone of both Lyly's brief period of literary ascendancy, and his lasting importance in the history of the Elizabethan-Jacobean stage, is undoubtedly his development of what has become known as the euphuistic

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<sup>13</sup> Partridge, 1969: 19.

<sup>14</sup> John Lyly, *Selected Prose and Dramatic Work* edited and introduced by Leah Scragg (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1997), p. 3.

style. Though the mode itself is significantly older than the prose work with which it is now associated, having roots extending into medieval Latin, it was transformed by Lyly into an instrument capable of expressing a highly complex vision. At the heart of the euphuistic mode lies the use of antithetical patterning, a sentence characteristically falling into a series of paired clauses, the second matching the first syntactically but contrasting with it in meaning, with the oppositions between the two pointed by assonance and alliteration...More distinctively Lylian is the insistent use of illustrative analogies drawn from classical mythology or the more fabulous aspects of natural history and which turn, like the prose style, on polarity or contradiction...The mode clearly lends itself to (and has its origins in) debate, and familiar debate topics form the starting point for the majority of Lyly's works.<sup>15</sup>

Lyly's style draws attention to itself and the contrivances of its art. Sidney's prose in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1593) similarly employs a diction indebted to a humanistic education with its elaborate syntax, numerous dependent clauses and curious lexis. Despite the difficulties of maintaining control over its long periods, Sidney achieves an effect of ease and lightness, as in this description of Musidorus's plight after one of many misfortunes:

Musidorus (who, besides he was merely unacquainted in the country, had his wits astonished with sorrow) gave easy consent to that from which he saw no reason to disagree: and therefore (defraying the mariners with a ring bestowed upon them) they took their journey together through Laconia; Claius and Strephon by course carrying his chest for him, Musidorus only bearing in his countenance evident marks of a sorrowful mind supported with a weak body; which they perceiving, and knowing that the violence of sorrow is not, at the first, to be striven withal (being like a mighty beast, sooner tamed with following than overthrown by withstanding) they gave way unto it for that day and the next; never troubling him either with asking questions or finding fault with his melancholy, but rather fitting to his dolour dolourous discourses of their own and other folks' misfortunes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lyly, 1997: viii-ix.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* edited with an introduction by Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 69.

In his Introduction, Maurice Evans suggests that its ornate, rhetorical style, representing a particular non-naturalistic artistic tradition, is definitive of the *Arcadia* as “a romance, not a novel.”<sup>17</sup>

At the same time an opposite stylistic “countercycle” which tended towards naturalness and the plain style was already “in motion” before this ornate stylistic “cycle” which

culminated in the scrollwork of *Euphues* and the *Arcadia*, and in the massive sonorities of Hooker’s *Laws*, each a triumph of style that tended to shun, rather than court, resemblance to ordinary speech...had run its course a countercycle was in motion that aimed at the exact opposite, at the repudiation of “curiosity” and a return to “naturalness.” Tentatively, first, in the cony-catching pamphlets of Greene and others, and then, more self-consciously, in the pamphlet skirmishes between Nashe and Harvey, the Ciceronianism of Ascham and the ornateness of Lyly were arraigned, condemned, and replaced with a licentious style that affected to dispense with all artifice. The first wave of experiment tended to make prose the rival of verse. The second tended to give it a character as distinct as possible from that of verse, and (in principle) as close a possible to the spoken word.<sup>18</sup>

In his analysis of the development of modern English prose, Robert Adolph concludes that it was essentially a late seventeenth century phenomenon: “In the Restoration prose became prosaic.”<sup>19</sup> He nevertheless goes back to the previous century in order to explain its development, analysing the difference between pre- and post-Restoration prose styles:

Writers as different as Bunyan and Dryden understand prose as a vehicle for communicating intelligibly rather than revealing the mind of the author or speaker or showing off his command of literary devices. A writer like Defoe is close to this norm and is the best possible evidence that great art can emerge from utilitarian presuppositions. Once the norm is established, writers like Congreve and Swift achieve fine effects by artful deviations from it. Before the Restoration there is no settled norm at all.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sidney, 1977: 19.

<sup>18</sup> Barish, 1967: 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Adolph, *The Rise of Modern Prose Style* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The M. I. T. Press: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968), p. 302.

<sup>20</sup> Adolph, 1968: 302.

Accepting the consensus view that it “arose around the time of the Restoration,” Adolph examines in detail the conflicting accounts offered in the scholarly controversy between Morris Croll and R. F. Jones in the early part of the twentieth century. Croll had argued that modern English prose style derived from early modern writers who consciously rejected the tenets of Ciceronianism (imitation of his elegant style and deployment of a strictly pre-Augustan lexis), cultivating instead a plain style based on that of writers such as Tacitus, who had argued in his *Dialogus de oratoribus*<sup>21</sup> for a simpler style of rhetoric:

standard modern English prose style dates from about 1600, appearing first in such figures as Bacon and Burton as the so-called “Anti-Ciceronian” movement. Its chief models are the alleged Anti-Ciceronians of Antiquity, especially Seneca and Tacitus.<sup>22</sup>

In the *Dialogus*, Tacitus argues that the high rhetoric of the earlier period suited the needs of the time with all its political and social upheavals, whereas a simpler style was more suited to later, less dramatic times.<sup>23</sup>

Jones, on the other hand, saw the major stylistic shift in English prose style as occurring around 1660 as a result of the “direct, specific influence of the new science”<sup>24</sup> arguing that it was derived from the new scientific spirit “embodied in such documents as Sprat’s *History of the Royal-Society*.”<sup>25</sup> Adolph sums up the debate:

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<sup>21</sup> Tacitus, *A Dialogue on Oratory* in Tacitus: *Dialogus Agricola Germania, The Dialogus of Cornelius Tacitus* translated by William Peterson, Loeb Classical Library (London; New York: William Heinemann; G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1920), chapters 36-42 pp. 110-128.

<sup>22</sup> Adolph, 1968: 5.

<sup>23</sup> Tacitus, 1920: chapters 36-42.

<sup>24</sup> Adolph, 1968: 5.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* edited with critical apparatus by Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (St. Louis: Washington University Press, 1966), reprint of the 1667 edition Wing S 5032.

For Croll, the stylistic platform of the scientists is an *adaptation* of “Anti-Ciceronian” norms; for Jones, the scientists are reacting *against* “Anti-Ciceronianism,” and decisively influencing English prose style in general.<sup>26</sup>

Describing his own position as “closer to Jones than to Croll,” Adolph argues that “the evidence suggests strongly that the ultimate influence on the new prose is neither ‘science’ nor ‘Anti-Ciceronianism’ but the new utilitarianism around which the values of the age are integrated.”<sup>27</sup> His conclusions, though, seem less than conclusive:

To my knowledge...the Restoration is the first time in English history when utilitarian criteria become official doctrine for literary prose in general.

The causes for this development are difficult to isolate. I see most of them adumbrated early in the century in Bacon. Only a few of the Restoration authors however...acknowledge their debt to Bacon explicitly or even seem aware of it. Whether Bacon and his followers created the new climate of opinion or are themselves responding to it is another of those horrible chicken-or-egg questions that haunt the history of ideas, and which I will not pretend to answer.<sup>28</sup>

Attempting to locate a specific point of origin for major changes in discursive practice is probably an illusory quest. The exigencies of the times - print culture, increased literacy and use of the vernacular, less emphasis on the Classics, the rise of science, and Enlightenment thinking - all contributed to the development of a more pragmatic, less rhetorical prose style with less need or time for copiousness and redundancy associated with the needs of the orator. Although he rejects Croll’s argument that Bacon is influenced specifically by anti-Ciceronianism, Adolph regards the strand of prose writing which eventually becomes the accepted norm, as derived in some way from the classical plain style, which, as he acknowledges, had a long discursive history. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato had distinguished between the

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<sup>26</sup> Adolph, 1968: 5.

<sup>27</sup> Adolph, 1968: 6.

<sup>28</sup> Adolph, 1968: 302-303.

persuasive rhetoric of the orator and the plain style of the philosopher who seeks only after truth. Plato distrusted all forms of representation (as in his view of mimesis), and this mistrust extends to language, particularly rhetoric. He posits a direct language in which there is a complete coincidence of word and thing, which speaks only truth and which is able “to influence men’s souls.”<sup>29</sup>

Cicero, however, so often held up as the advocate of an ornamented, persuasive rhetoric, had distinguished different ways of speaking, putting the plain style (*genus humile*) in first place, highlighting its deceptive sophistication:

First, then, we must delineate the one whom some deem to be the only true “Attic” orator. He is restrained and plain, he follows the ordinary usage, really differing more than is supposed from those who are not eloquent at all. Consequently the audience, even if they are no speakers themselves, are sure they can speak in that fashion. For that plainness of style seems easy to imitate at first thought, but when attempted nothing is more difficult. For although it is not full-blooded, it should nevertheless have some of the sap of life, so that, though it lack great strength, it may still be, so to speak, in sound health.<sup>30</sup>

Cicero discusses the style of the Attic orator as one who displays “a not unpleasant carelessness on the part of a man paying more attention to thought than to words.”<sup>31</sup>

This, of course was precisely what Ascham, the avowed Ciceronian, had warned against in *The Scholemaster*, although in point of fact, Ascham’s own prose seems to owe as much to the plain style as to any very elaborate rhetoric.

Quintilian too, likening eloquence to dress, advocated a style not overly-decorative, in which words are secondary to matter:

a tasteful and magnificent dress...lends added dignity to its wearer: but effeminate and luxurious apparel fails to adorn the body and merely reveals the foulness of the mind. Similarly a translucent and iridescent style merely serves to emasculate the subject which it arrays with such pomp of words.

<sup>29</sup> Plato, 1961: 517 (*Phaedrus* 271. d.).

<sup>30</sup> Cicero, 1967: 361-363 (*Orator* 75-76).

<sup>31</sup> Cicero, 1967: 363.

Therefore I would have the orator, while careful in his choice of words, be even more concerned about his subject matter. For, as a rule, the best words are essentially suggested by and are discovered by their own intrinsic light. But today we hunt for these words as though they were always hiding themselves and striving to elude our grasp. And thus we fail to realise that they are to be found in the subject of our speech, and seek them elsewhere, and, when we have found them, force them to suit their context.<sup>32</sup>

The *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* specifies three kinds of style - Grand, Middle and Simple:

The Grand type consists of a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words. The Middle type consists of words of a lower, yet not of the lowest and most colloquial, class of words. The Simple type is brought down even to the most current idiom of standard speech.<sup>33</sup>

Different types of discourse traditionally had different functions: the vigorous grand style was, according to Cicero,<sup>34</sup> to persuade, the middle for delight, and the plain served for proof. It became identified with the less prestigious genres of comedy, satire, epigram and epistle. In his analysis of the work of Ben Jonson, Wesley Trimpi demonstrates that the intention common to all four genres was

to reveal with the greatest possible candidness and accuracy what men actually do. Since the satirist hopes that when they see themselves objectively reflected, as if in a mirror, they will be inclined to reform.<sup>35</sup>

He goes on to point out in his note to this page that the speculum became a symbol for comedy and satire at an early point. This classical tradition of relating comedy, satire and the plain style had already been assimilated into the vernacular in medieval poetry but, as Barish argues, “The triumph of prose as the language of comedy, and its convergence with realism, seem by hindsight an almost inevitable

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<sup>32</sup> Quintilian, 1958-1961: VIII, Pr. 20-21, p. 189 (Volume III).

<sup>33</sup> *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, IV, viii.11 p. 253.

<sup>34</sup> Cicero, *Orator* 21. 69 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Wesley Trimpi, *Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 11-12.

outcome of the history of the genre” and he goes on to suggest it is “perhaps the final issue of Aristotle’s identification of comic style and comic characters as ‘low’.”<sup>36</sup>

Gascoigne’s prose writing falls into the categories traditionally associated with prose and the plain style. *Supposes* is a comedy. *The Glasse of Government* is described as “A tragicall Comedie so entituled, bycause therein are handled aswell the rewardes for Vertues, as also the punishment for Vices”.<sup>37</sup> *The Spoyle of Antwerp* is epistolary in form and tone, as are *The Droome of Doomes Day* and *A Delicate Diet*. *The Adventures of Master F. J.* would best be described as a satirical romance, which combines social satire with a sophisticated exploration of the nature of narrative.

The choice of prose for the translation of *Supposes* must have been, as Barish points out, deliberate, since Ariosto had, in fact, produced two versions of the play, the first in prose, but then a second in verse:

The fact that Gascoigne was free to choose between alternate versions of his original, one in verse, one in prose – and that, indeed, he worked simultaneously from both texts – perhaps lends some significance to his choice of prose for his own version.<sup>38</sup>

Whilst Barish recognises Gascoigne’s prose translation of *I suppositi* as an original contribution to the development of the “alliance between comic prose and realism”,<sup>39</sup> he credits Lyly with having produced “the first genuine comic prose in English”<sup>40</sup> in *Euphues*. With regard to Gascoigne’s style, Barish concludes that

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<sup>36</sup> Barish, 1967: 273.

<sup>37</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 1.

<sup>38</sup> Barish, 1967: 4.

<sup>39</sup> Barish, 1967: 4.

<sup>40</sup> Barish, 1967: 9.

“both the merits and defects of style in *Supposes* are his own.”<sup>41</sup> The merits (as discussed in the section on translation), are the way in which he Englishes his text, infusing it with “a good many realistic touches”: particularizing details, interpolating native proverbs into the dialogue and generally colloquializing the language, so that for Barish “the chief stylistic virtue is the increased picturesqueness of the language.” On the other hand, he regards “The most obvious defect” as “Gascoigne’s relentless hunt for the letter, which produces a lumpy, thudding, spasmodic rhythm.”<sup>42</sup> Apart from “excessive alliteration”, Gascoigne’s other stylistic faults are his weakness for “poetical embellishments” - his “Petrarchizing” - and his “sermonizing.”<sup>43</sup>

Barish’s final diagnosis, however, argues that “At the root of the trouble lies the fact that Gascoigne does not work with a very flexible syntax.”<sup>44</sup> Gascoigne’s merits and defects may be his own but they are also the merits and defects of the age: the cultural appropriation of the continental text which offers not just a translation but transforms it into a genuinely English text, plus working in a linguistic medium still in a fluid state in which different traditions, ideas and discourses are coming together. It is true that in the examples Barish offers, the English lacks the syntactical flexibility and the elegance of the Italian, but perhaps the point is that that type of syntax sounds very unEnglish. Many students today find Lyly unreadable whereas Gascoigne, despite some eccentricities, especially in his use of archaisms, is accessible because his style is more direct and the syntax less convoluted. Writing a decade earlier than Lyly and two decades before Sidney, it may be that Gascoigne is employing a ruder linguistic medium, not honed by a

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<sup>41</sup> Barish, 1967: 5.

<sup>42</sup> Barish, 1967: 5.

<sup>43</sup> Barish, 1967: 6.

<sup>44</sup> Barish, 1967: 7.

would-be approximation to the classical period, but, since Gascoigne is constantly experimenting in his writing, it might be that he is working with this relatively new medium in a conscious, deliberate way.

In *Certayne Notes* Gascoigne recommended the use of old English terms in preference to foreign borrowings and inkhorn terms and a concentration on subject matter (invention) rather than words, all characteristics of the plain style.

Nevertheless there are many examples in his writing which anticipate elements of the ornate patterning of Lyly or Sidney, with frequent antithetical clauses, long periods with numerous relative and dependent clauses and parentheses as in H. W.'s address "To the Reader":

In August last passed my familiar friend Master *G. T.* bestowed upon me the reading of a written Booke, wherein he had collected divers discourses and verses, invented upon sundrie occasions, by sundrie gentlemen (in mine opinion) right commendable for their capacitie. And herewithal my said friend charged me, that I should use them onely for mine owne particular commoditie, and eftsones safely deliver the originall copie to him againe, wherein I must confesse my selfe but halfe a marchant, for the copie unto him I have safely redelivered. But the worke (for I thought it worthy to be published) I have entreated my friend *A. B.* to emprint: as one that thought better to please a number by a common commoditie then to feede the humor of any private parson by nedelesse singularitie.<sup>45</sup>

This type of patterning, however, becomes more pronounced in the mouths of the "courtly" characters, as for example in Dame Pergo's interpolated tale, which gives it an archaic-sounding quality, which matches the quality of the tale, and suggests that Gascoigne is deploying style very deliberately as a register of class, character and genre:

'This notwithstanding, the worthy Knight continued his sute wyth no lesse vehement affection than earst hee hadde begone it, even by the space of seven yeares. At the last, whether discomfited by my dealinges or tyred by

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<sup>45</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 141-142.

long travayle, or that he had percase light uppon the lake that is in the forest of *Ardena*, and so in haste and all thristie, had dronke some droppes of disdayne, whereby his hot flames were quenched, or that he had undertaken to serve no longer but his just terme of apprenticehode, or that the teeth of time had gnawen and tyred his dulled sprites in such sorte as that all beenombed he was constrayned to use some artificial balme for that quickning of his sences, or by what cause moved I know not, he did not onely leave his long continued sute, but (as I have since perceyved) grew to hate me more deadly than before I had disdayned him.<sup>46</sup>

Gascoigne's prose varies between middle and plain styles; when he adopts a grander style, there is an element of parody in his treatment. His understanding of its narrative possibilities is revealed in the sophisticated interplay between poetry and prose in *The Adventures of Master F. J.* The conduct of the young knight's adulterous affair with Elynor is charted through F. J.'s poems which are, in turn, completely overwhelmed by G. T.'s prose commentary. G. T. is busy and officious, constantly explaining the situation, but his explanations have the paradoxical effect of undermining both his own and F. J.'s credibility and judgement. Through the unhappy course of the affair, F. J. is forced to confront the delusional nature of his version of events, and G. T.'s indulgent and collusive commentary calls into question his reliability as a narrator.

The narrative moves effortlessly from H. W.'s introductory and G. T.'s explanatory letters straight into F. J.'s first prose note to Elynor and from there into his first set of verses in praise of her beauty. G. T.'s attempts to pass professional judgement on his performance betray primarily the limitations of his own understanding. When F. J. is cast down by Elynor's treatment at the beginning of their relationship, full of self-pity, he writes

A cloud of care hath covred all my coste,  
And stormes of stryfe do threaten to appeare:

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<sup>46</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 192.

The waves of woo, which I mistrusted moste,  
Have broke the bankes wherein my lyfe lay clere: (ll. 1-4).<sup>47</sup>

G. T. guilelessly explains that,

This is but a rough meeter, and reason, for it was devised in great disquiet of mynd and written in rage, yet have I seene much worse passe the musters, yea and where both the Lieutenant and Provost Marshall were men of rype judgement.<sup>48</sup>

He excuses the poem on the grounds that it was written in a state of passion, as though this might account for its imperfections. For F. J.'s shameless crowing in "a mooneshine Banquet", G. T. offers further excuses, including that it had a nice tune:

This Ballade, or howsoever I shall terme it, percase you will not like, and yet in my judgement it hath great good store of deepe invention, and for the order of the verse, it is not common, I have not heard many of like proporcion. Some will accompt it but a dyddeldome: but who so had heard *F. J.* sing it to the lute, by a note of his owne devise, I suppose he would esteeme it to bee a pleasaunt diddeldome; and for my part, if I were not parcial, I would say more in commendacion of it than now I meane to do, leaving it to your like and judgements.<sup>49</sup>

His only comment on the inexcusable "Frydayes Breakefast" is that "This Sonet is short and sweete, reasonably well, according to the occasion etc."<sup>50</sup> But G. T. is at a loss to explain the hubristic "*Beautie* shut up thy shop", suggesting that

By this challenge I gesse, that either hee was then in an exstasie, or els sure I am now in a lunacie, for it is a proud challenge made to *Beautie* hir selfe and all hir companions: and ymaging that *Beautie*, having a shop where she uttred hir wares of all sundry sortes, his Ladie had stollen the fynest away, leaving none behind hir but paynting, bolstring, forcing, and such like, the which in his rage he judgeth good nough to serve the Court, and thereuppon grew a great quarrel. When these verses were by the negligence

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<sup>47</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 161.

<sup>48</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 162.

<sup>49</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 171.

<sup>50</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 175.

of his Mistresse dispersed into sundry hands, and so at last to the reading of a Courtier.<sup>51</sup>

The effect produced by G. T.'s comments is comic especially as he goes on to explain that Elynor is enraged because she thinks they are addressed to another woman called "Hellen". This increases as he muses how it could not really be Hellen because F. J. did not know Hellen at this time and that in any case she "was and is of so base condicion as may deserve no maner commendacion in any honest judgement". He feels able, therefore, to vouch for his friend: "therfore I will excuse my friend *F. J.* and adventure my penne in his behalfe, that he would never bestow verse of so mean a subject". He immediately casts doubt on this opinion and the quality of his own judgement, as well as the future moral course of his friend, however: "And yet some of his acquayntance, being also acquainted (better than I) that *F. J.* was sometimes acquaynted with Hellene, have stode in argument with mee, that it was written by Hellene and not by Elynor" before proceeding to the comforting reflection that perhaps he may have adapted it later to fit Hellen "and so make it serve both their turnes, as elder lovers have done before and still do and will do worlde without end. Amen."<sup>52</sup>

As any fashionable poet, F. J. includes translations from the Italian as in the sonnet to Elynor's teeth, which G. T. excuses on the grounds of its being a mere translation adding that "were it not a little to much prayse (as the Italians do most commonly offend in the superlative) I could the more commend it."<sup>53</sup> Remembering Gascoigne's advice in *Certayne Notes* to beware the "*trita & obvia*" in undertaking "to wryte in prayse of a gentlewoman" and that he would find "some supernaturall

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<sup>51</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 176.

<sup>52</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 177.

<sup>53</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 178.

cause wherby my penne might walke in the superlative degree”<sup>54</sup> a satirical intent is evident. He also translates part of Ariosto’s thirty-first song, adding a stanza of his own.

As he comes to understand the reality of his situation, F. J.’s poems become simpler and more direct: “I could not though I would,”<sup>55</sup> “With hir in arms that had my hart in hold,”<sup>56</sup> and the bitter, brutal final poem in the tale, in which F. J. picks up Elynor’s defiant “And if I did what then?”<sup>57</sup> The series of personae Gascoigne employs within *The Adventures of Master F. J.* produces a kaleidoscopic effect. The poems are accomplished and apposite, but, within the context of G. T.’s prose narration, the unsavoury aspects of the situation cannot be concealed. Gascoigne uses the ironic gap between the two, in conjunction with Frances’s words and the interpolated tales, to produce a bravura display of prose’s narrative possibilities.

The text of *F. J.* effectively debunks the high-flown sentiments and phrases of F. J.’s verses through the prose commentary of G. T. Gascoigne comments upon his self-conscious use of prose and deliberate variety of style in the conclusion to *F. J.*:

It is time now to make an end of this thriftlesse Historie, wherein although I could wade much further, as to declare his departure, what thanks he gave to his *Hope* etc. Yet I will cease, as one that had rather leave it unperfect than make it to plaine. I have past it over with quod he, and quod she, after my homely manner of writing, using sundry names for one person, as the Dame, the Lady, Mistresse, etc. The Lorde of the Castle, the Master of the house, and the hoste: neverthelesse for that I have seene good aucthors terme every gentlewoman a Lady, and every gentleman *domine*, I have thought it no greater faulte then pettie treason thus to entermyngle them, nothing doubting but you will easely understand my meaning, and that is asmuch as I desire. Now henceforwardes I will trouble you no more with such a barbarous style in prose, but will onely recite unto you sundry verses written by sundry gentlemen, adding nothing of myne owne, but onely a tittle to every Poeme...<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 465-466.

<sup>55</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 212.

<sup>56</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 213.

<sup>57</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 215.

<sup>58</sup> Gascoigne, 2000: 215-6.

This last claim is bluff, however, since Gascoigne clearly wrote all the verses himself, although he managed to fool many critics, and even early editors such as Ward, into an ingenious wild-goose chase for his supposed fellow poets.

*F. J.*, for all its experimental qualities, reads as a work under artistic control. Gascoigne handles his material with great sophistication. Written a quarter of a century earlier, it anticipates many of the characteristics of Cervantes's great novel, *Don Quixote*. This is not to compare the two directly, Gascoigne's is a slight work in comparison with the scale and scope of the Spanish masterpiece, but nevertheless there are similarities of theme and treatment. Both take the romance genre into the contemporary world and demonstrate the impossibility of its literal application. Cervantes has much more sympathy and affection for his protagonists. Don Quixote's romantic idealism engages our sympathies in a way that the naïve but essentially cynical opportunism of *F. J.* never could, even when we make allowance for his youth and obtuseness. Sancho Panza's empiricism reaches heroic dimensions, as *F. J.*'s worldly editor, *G. T.*, never will. Both works, though, explore the two fundamentals of literature, how to live in the world and how to write about it, and the problematic relationship between them in a comic, satirical way.

For *The Droomme of Doome's Day*, on the other hand, "Wherin the frailties and miseries of mans lyfe, are lyvely portrayed, and learnedly set forth"<sup>59</sup> with its religious source and theme, Gascoigne maintains a profound seriousness of tone even when he is not directly translating from Pope Innocent III. The work is divided into three parts: "*The view of worldly Vanities*. Exhorting us to contempne, all pompes, pleasures, delighes, and vanities, of this lyfe"; "*The shame of sinne*. Displaying and laying open the huge greatnesse and enormities of the same, by

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<sup>59</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 209.

sundrye good examples & comparisons”; and “*The Needels Eye*. Wherein wee are taught the right rules of a true Christian life, and the straight passage unto everlasting felicitie”. Gascoigne added to these a “private Letter, the which doth teach remedies against the bitternesse of Death.”<sup>60</sup> It is a deeply religious work, preoccupied with the vanity of life and full of biblical resonances:

There are many and almost innumerable thinges which ought to enduce us unto the avoiding and eschewing of sinnes. Fyrst the consideration of the shortnesse, vanytie, unstablenesse, and dysceitfulnesse of this present lief. For what is our lyfe, but a smoke most swiftly vaynyshing, and a moisture fading by little and littell, for our dayes are lyke a shadowe upon the earth, and it tarryeth not at all.<sup>61</sup>

*A Delicate Diet for Daintiemouthde Droonkardes* is written in Gascoigne’s personal, lively style despite the unpromising nature of the task, as he explains his design:

Whyles I travailed in Translation, and collection of my Droomme of Doomes daye: and was busyed in sorting of the same (for I gathered the whole out of sundry Pamphlets:) I chaunced at passage, to espye one shorte epistle, written against Dronkenesse...

Which Epistle, both for the credite of the Aucthour, and for the tytles sake I thought good to peruse: fynding the same compendious, and eloquent, as the same Aucthour dyd commonlye wryte.

But when I had thoroughly considered it, and therewithal had some consideration of the huge enormities, and shames which daylie followe that sinne: yea, when I had fullye advised mee, howe commonly it is nowe a dayes exercised amongste us: and how slylie it stealeth into this Realme through continuall custome of cheering, and banqueting: I thought it shoulde not be unprofitable, nor any way unpleasaunt (unlesse it be to such as can not abyde to heare of vertue, for feare least they might be ashamed of theyr vyce) to adde some Aucthoryties and examples for the more speedy extyrpation of this monstrous plant, lately crepte into the pleasaunt Orchyardes of Englande.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 210.

<sup>61</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 324.

<sup>62</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 455.

In *The Spoyle of Antwerpe*, in which his anxiety to communicate the truth of his account is the overriding factor, Gascoigne employs the same directness of address, but the way in which he shapes his material and his stylistic polish is still apparent:

*Since my hap was to bee present at so piteous a spectacle, as the sackyng and spoyle of Antwerpe, (a lamentable example whiche hath alrede filled all Europe with dreadfull newes of great calamitie) I have thought good for the benefit of my cuntrye, to publish a true report thereof. The which may aswel serve for profitable example unto all estates of suche condicion as suffred in the same: as also, answer all honest expectations with a meane truthe, set downe between thextreme surmises of sundry doubtfull mindes: And increased by the manyfolde light tales whiche have been engendred by feareful or affectionate rehearsals.*<sup>63</sup>

His writing has real power when he is trying to communicate the horrors of what he has witnessed and the moral judgement he brings to bear on events:

For perso[n] and Country, they spared neither friende nor foe: Portingal nor Turke: for profession and religion, the Jesuites must geve their ready coyne: and all other religious houses both coyne and plate with all shorte endes that were good and portable. The ryche was spoyled because he had: & the poore were hanged because they had nothing: neither strength could prevayle to make resystaunce, nor weaknesse move pittie to refrayne their horrible cruelty. And this was not onely done when the chase was hotte, but (as I earst sayd) when the blood was colde, and they now victors without resystaunce. I refrayne to rehearse the heapes of deade Carcases whiche laye at every Trench where they entred: the thicknesse whereof, did in many places exceede the height of a man.<sup>64</sup>

Given the brevity and eventful nature of his life, Gascoigne was a prolific writer of both poetry and prose. His prose style lacks the polish and super-sophistication of a Lyly or a Sidney but gains in its directness and sense of engagement with the world around him. Eschewing imitation and the grand style, he seeks to express himself in a prose which is relatively unadorned, suited to the new times and, in its mixed lexis and syntax, approximates successfully the future development of the language.

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<sup>63</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 590.

<sup>64</sup> Gascoigne, 1910: 596.

## CHAPTER 9

### AUTHORS AND AUTHORITY

Gascoigne's prose style is colloquial and immediate. Its strength is the directness of address, which gives his writing a sense of authenticity. This in turn lends it a certain authority. Its authority relies on the credibility of the witness, established through the wealth of detail plus the frank, engaging manner of the narrator. *Dan Bartholomew* consists of a series of poems detailing the events of his ultimately unhappy and unsuccessful love affair but, as with *F.J.*, Gascoigne mediates the text through a commentator, The Reporter, and as with *F. J.*, this produces a complex narrative strategy. The Reporter is used to construct a narrative framework to Dan Bartholomew's tale, which serves to authenticate its content. He establishes himself by specifically disclaiming any authority as poet, casting his role as a simple mouthpiece. This strategy functions to distance reader and writer, whilst simultaneously putting forward truth claims for the work:

#### *The delectable history of sundry*

adventures passed by Dan Bartholomew of Bathe.

The Reporter.

To tell a tale without authoritye,  
 Or fayne a Fable by invencion,  
 That one proceedes of quicke capacitye,  
 That other proves but small discretion,  
 Yet have both one and other oft bene done.  
 And if I were a poet as some be,  
 You might perhaps here some such tale of me.

But far I fynde my feeble skylle to faynt,  
 To faine in figures as the learned can,  
 And yet my tongue is tyde by due constraint,  
 To tell nothing but trueth of every man:  
 I will assay even as I first began,  
 To tell you nowe a tale and that of truth,  
 Which I my selfe sawe proved in my youth.<sup>1</sup>

Gascoigne constructs an authorial persona not personally responsible for the work.

As Pooley points out “part of the fictiveness of prose fiction involves a fiction of origins, of which the discovery of a manuscript...is a prime trope.”<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his writing career Gascoigne deliberately played with and manipulated literary personae calling himself variously “The Green Knight” and “The Reporter.” Another strategy, which produced a similar effect, was his use of a variety of “posies” – a technique employed by a number of later writers such as Robert Greene. In *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, these are designed to give the illusion of a cast of characters responsible for the separate productions in the collection. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “Posy” as a “syncopated” form of “poesy” – the form used on the volume’s title page. It means “1. A short motto, orig[inally] a line or verse of poetry, inscribed on a knife, within a ring, as a heraldic motto, etc.” The secondary meaning of a “bunch of flowers; a nosegay” has the transfigurative sense of a “collection of ‘flowers’ of poetry or rhetoric”, in comparison with “anthology”.

The employment of posies in this way seems to function, in part at least, to construct a notional “author” figure within his texts, one furthermore whose identity becomes a signifier of the text itself and, thereby, a guarantor of its authenticity and

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<sup>1</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 96.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Pooley “‘I confesse it to be a mere toy’: How to Read the Preliminary Matter to Renaissance Fiction” in *Critical Approaches to English Prose Fiction 1520-1640* edited by Donald Beecher (Ottawa, Canada: Dovehouse Editions, 1998), pp. 109 – 122, p. 110.

authority and partly to disguise the identity of the real author. Gascoigne's use of posies is highly developed and suggestive of the linguistic traces of the term's homophonic ambiguities – posies/posies/poses. He used a variety of these at different times – *Si fortunatus infelix* (if one is fortunate, one is unhappy), *spraeta tamen vivunt* (they live in spite of scorn), “ever or never”, *Haud ictus sapio* (I regard not my wound), *Fato non fortuna* (By fate not fortune), and *Meritum petere grave* (to seek reward is serious) – it certainly was in Gascoigne's case – until he settled on *Tam Marti quam Mercurio* (As much to Mars as to Mercury) which Walter Raleigh used after Gascoigne's death. It is true as Cyndia Susan Clegg<sup>3</sup> points out that it was eventually through his writing that Gascoigne was finally to gain advancement and employment. Being an author, however, seems to have been problematic, leading Gascoigne to distance himself from his fiction through a variety of narrative strategies, which serve to authenticate his material whilst denying his personal authority and responsibility.

Foucault suggested in “What is an Author?” that the “author-function” emerged historically in order to limit and control the promiscuous flow of fictions and to locate responsibility for transgressive texts: “Texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors...to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive.”<sup>4</sup> In *Pretexts of Authority* Kevin Dunn offers “a revised version of this formula” arguing that

Since both discursive transgression and its punishment antedate the full-blown development of authorship as an institution in the European tradition...texts, books, and discourses begin to need authors at the moment when their transgression itself seeks institutionalisation. In other words, it is when the subversive discourse finds itself on the brink of empowerment, of

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<sup>3</sup> Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Foucault “What Is An Author?” reprinted in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* edited by David Lodge (London; New York: Longman, 1988), p. 202.

articulating something more than a negative critique of the reigning orthodoxies, that the authority of the author becomes necessary.<sup>5</sup>

He develops this argument through application to the Reformation, citing Luther's radical "institutional alternative to the Church" as his prime example.

The end of the sixteenth/beginning of the seventeenth century represents the period of development of the printed book trade, increasing literacy levels and what Walter Ong called "the technologizing of the word."<sup>6</sup> The emergence of the concept of the author, however, is generally regarded as belonging to a later period – the eighteenth century. The "author-function" unites and authorises the works of a given writer, although not usually to the extent, as Foucault points out, of including their laundry lists. Dunn argues that the concept of the author developed in the market place of the early modern period: "in its early incarnation the market for books opened up the possibility of an authorial voice."<sup>7</sup> He goes on to suggest that the take up of such a voice is a result of the writer's inscription into the market economy: "the highly developed market culture of the seventeenth century and beyond fully commodified that voice."<sup>8</sup>

Drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas, Dunn analyses change in the concept of authority between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in terms of the weakening of the power of the church and concomitant emergence of a "bourgeois public sphere":

The creation of a bourgeois public sphere brought with it important changes to the concept of authority, political but also literary. For the medieval writer, authority was a textual inheritance, a finite set of authorities who could be adduced and copied but rarely added to. The essential genre for the

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<sup>5</sup> Kevin Dunn, *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ong, 1982, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*.

<sup>7</sup> Dunn, 1994: 10.

<sup>8</sup> Dunn, 1994: 10.

medieval writer was thus the gloss, the ligature between authority and writer. Whether the gloss was the writer's in the margin of an authorized text or an authority cited to buttress the writer's words, the scene of writing always appeared as an interplay between a preestablished "master text" and the writer's liminal approach to that text. Authority, in other words, was hierarchically determined and inevitably *borrowed*; strategies of what might be called self-authorization were beside the point.<sup>9</sup>

Dunn specifically relates the changing concept of authority to the influence of humanism, which he sees as "double-sided" – "in service to monarchical and aristocratic interests but at its core part of market culture."<sup>10</sup> He argues that it is "this moment between the medieval and Enlightenment models of authority" that constitutes the "moment as the space of the fullest exercise of self-authorizing rhetoric in the Western literary tradition before the Romantics."<sup>11</sup> Defining the origins of humanism in the Italian bourgeoisie and the development of a growing book market facilitated by the printing press, Dunn derives the self-authorizing strategy of the literary preface from the rhetorical strategies of the *exordium* - another example of the appropriation of rhetorical devices to serve the new needs and interests of changing cultural conditions. He appears to suggest a reciprocal relation between rhetoric's traditional modesty *exordium* and the epistle dedicatory but then acknowledges that the relationship was perhaps rather more one-sided, an effective appropriation of rhetorical form in the service of a literary device: "By late antiquity, the rhetorical *exordium* had been largely shaped by its frequent doubling as an epistle dedicatory, if not totally assimilated to it."<sup>12</sup>

In response, or reaction, to the work of Foucault and Barthes, whose post-structuralist approaches to literature deprive the author of agency and authority, recent thinking has sought to offer a more complex account of the situation,

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<sup>9</sup> Dunn, 1994: 8.

<sup>10</sup> Dunn, 1994: 9.

<sup>11</sup> Dunn, 1994: 9.

<sup>12</sup> Dunn, 1994: 7.

regarding the author less as “an effect of discourse” and more as a site of ideological conflict. In *Poetic License: Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts*, Jacqueline T. Miller distinguishes between “*literary* authority” and “*authority*” in general which she defines as

that which can sanction and certify the poetic text. In this context, an authority external to the poet encompasses a wide range of possibilities: it may refer to a traditionally accepted system of belief, a fixed principle of order, a recognised figure with authoritative status (God, or a god [Jove], or a goddess [Fame or Nature], literary conventions or traditions (a genre, or a conventional framework), literary predecessors (Chaucer’s “olde bokes” and *auctores*, or the writers on whom Renaissance poets based their theory of imitation), or the structure of the actual or the natural. In short, it includes various established principles, systems, or sources that the poet cannot claim to have produced himself and that may be called upon to sanction a text that has conformed to them.<sup>13</sup>

Reinserting the concept of agency into the work of the poet, Miller argues that this notion of authority represents “the established criteria against which the poet’s voice must certify itself when it wants to demonstrate its autonomy” and she goes on to define her concept of “the poet’s own authority” as “his ability to create and endorse independently his own vision in his poetry, to uphold his full responsibility and power to validate that vision.”<sup>14</sup>

Miller sees the poet’s position as inherently problematic, “complicated by a pull in two directions”: compliance with external authority which may be “insufficient to accommodate his own vision and voice” versus “creative independence.”<sup>15</sup> Her work, focusing on medieval and Renaissance writers, is designed “to show that the tension between the desire for creative autonomy and the pressure of inherited or conventionally accepted authoritative systems or voices is a central artistic concern

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<sup>13</sup> Jacqueline T. Miller, *Poetic License: Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts* (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, 1986: 5.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, 1986: 4.

whose roots extend further back than is customarily acknowledged.”<sup>16</sup> Miller traces this tension back to Quintilian, Horace and beyond, arguing that poetic authority is implicit in the notion of poetic license: the authority given to poets to break grammatical, metrical and linguistic rules. She highlights the ambiguities in the Renaissance concept of imitation as further evidence of the innate tension in all poets and poetry between externally sanctioned and self-authorizing versions of poetic authority.

A. J. Minnis pushes back the notion of authorial agency to the medieval period arguing that a changed concept of authority in the thirteenth century can be located “as a result of the new methods of thinking and techniques of study which scholars derived from Aristotle.”<sup>17</sup> He defines this “Aristotelian prologue” as “based on the four major causes which...governed all activity and change in the universe”.

According to this schema, the *auctor* is given the place of prime significance:

The *auctor* would be discussed as the ‘efficient cause’ or motivating agent of the text, his materials would be discussed as the ‘material cause’, his literary style and structure would be considered as twin aspects of the ‘formal cause’, while his ultimate end or objective in writing would be considered as the ‘final cause.’<sup>18</sup>

Minnis argues that the effect of this change was that “they brought commentators considerably closer to their auctores” which produced an irreversible alteration in the relationship between the two:

The *auctor* remained an authority, someone to be believed and imitated, but his human qualities began to receive more attention. This crucial development is writ large in the prologues to commentaries on the Bible. In twelfth-century exegesis, the primacy of allegorical interpretation had

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<sup>16</sup> Miller, 1986: 6.

<sup>17</sup> A. J. Minnis, “The Significance of the Medieval Theory of Authorship” in *Authorship from Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader* pp. 23-30 edited by Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Minnis, 1995: 26-27.

hindered the emergence of viable literary theory: God was believed to have inspired the human writers of Scripture in a way which defied literary description. Twelfth-century exegetes were interested in the *auctor* mainly as a source of authority. But in the thirteenth century, a new type of exegesis emerged, in which the focus had shifted from the divine *auctor* to the human *auctor* of Scripture.<sup>19</sup>

This changed relation to Scriptural text, authority, and the author was transferred to secular works:

Thirteenth-century schoolmen produced a critical vocabulary which enabled the literary features of Scriptural texts to be analysed thoroughly, and which encouraged the emergence in the fourteenth century of a more liberal attitude to classical poetry. Something of the new status which had been afforded to Scriptural poetry in particular and to the poetic and rhetorical modes employed throughout Scripture in general, seems to have ‘rubbed off’ on secular poetry. Scriptural *auctores* were being read literally, with close attention being paid to those poetic methods believed to be part of the literal sense; pagan poets were being read allegorically or ‘moralised’ – and thus the twain could meet.

Scholastic idioms of literary theory, which received their fullest development at the hands of theologians, became widely disseminated, appearing in works written both in Latin and in the European vernaculars. They influenced the attitudes which many major writers – including Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer and Gower – had towards the moral and aesthetic value of their creativity, the literary roles and forms they had adopted, and the ultimate functions which they envisaged their works as performing.<sup>20</sup>

These analyses, which seem contradictory, nevertheless, locate the origins of the modern concept of the author, not in a teleological sense moving ineluctably toward the massively iconic figure of the Author, but pragmatically focusing on those minor changes in emphasis which accumulate quantitatively to effect qualitative change. The notion of the authority of the writer is implicit in the formation of a vernacular discourse of poetry and poetics, which argues that writers deliberately shape and are responsible for texts. Models of authority are confused and

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<sup>19</sup> Minnis, 1995: 27.

<sup>20</sup> Minnis, 1995: 28.

ambiguous though. Different fundamental attitudes are signified, as Miller points out, in the approach to differing concepts of imitation, although not specifically explicated in terms of self-authorization. If, as Sidney puts it, the poet is “lifted up with the vigour of his own invention...(and) freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit”,<sup>21</sup> an implicit claim to the authority of the writer is made.

Pooley has voiced his scepticism concerning the tendency of “Early Modern scholars of a historicising bent to regard their own period as registering all sorts of seismic shifts that seem, on closer examination, to be part of much longer movements and histories.”<sup>22</sup> He takes an evolutionary view, pointing to work on medieval writers who employed similar self-authorising strategies. It is always a question of perspective though. There were differences between the medieval and Renaissance worlds, but how these are to be analysed and defined is the problem. “Closer examination” of any given period, as he says, will always reveal a mixture of ideas and practices. The “historicising bent” tries to focus on the way in which, in Foucault’s terms, “within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way”,<sup>23</sup> a process which “probably begins with an erosion from outside, from that space which is, for thought, on the other side, but in which it has never ceased to think from the very beginning.”<sup>24</sup> The long view can identify those movements, that erosion of thought from outside which produces cultural change.

Similar disquiet has been expressed regarding the emergence of that other hero of the early modern period – the subject. Stephen Greenblatt argues that “there is in the early modern period a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic

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<sup>21</sup> Sidney, 1973: 100.

<sup>22</sup> Pooley, 1998: 121.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, 1970: 50.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, 1970: 50.

structures that govern the generation of identities.” He acknowledges, however, that “Such self-consciousness had been widespread among the elite in the classical world,”<sup>25</sup> although later suppressed by the Christian church. Foucault discusses the process in classical culture in similar terms in *Technologies of the Self*.<sup>26</sup> The name Greenblatt gave to this process is “self-fashioning”. Greenblatt’s self-fashioners are all writers and he reads the evidence of their self-fashioning through their textual presences. It is axiomatic that, were they not writers, their evidential existence would be through the texts of other writers. The construction of the self is related therefore to socio-textual construction, which, in turn, is predicated upon the existence of the author. The emergence of the author seems to be related historically to the construction of the subject, therefore. Both are products of the early modern period at the point of change when the old order is breaking down and a new social organisation with a greater degree of individual autonomy and social mobility appears. The author is, as it were, the subject writ large in print.

It was not, as Belsey points out, that the “individual” was “released at last from the heads of people who had waited only for the peace and leisure to cultivate what lay ineluctably within them and within all of us.”<sup>27</sup> The individual, “the liberal-humanist subject, (was) the product of a specific epoch and a specific class, (and) was constructed in conflict and in contradiction.”<sup>28</sup> Individuals clearly existed beforehand, but Belsey is suggesting that the way of thinking about the self and others changed at this period due to those socio-cultural forces rehearsed throughout this thesis – the religious reformation, development of an exchange economy based

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (London: Tavistock, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Belsey, 1985: 8.

<sup>28</sup> Belsey, 1985: 9.

on a cash nexus, increased trade, literacy and social mobility, and the dwindling of the old order. The individual thus comes to be redefined within the new social formation in a way which relies on innate rather than external criteria. Gascoigne strove to establish himself through his writings but it was a project fraught with contradiction and conflict. Writing himself made him an author, however much he tried to distance himself and disclaim authority.

Greenblatt argues that “Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language.”<sup>29</sup> The predominant linguistic system of the early modern period, in which all Greenblatt’s subjects had been educated, was rhetoric and, as discussed previously, there were two distinct though related concepts of rhetoric: sophisticated argument or wordplay simply to gain a point versus a system of persuasion based on the production of a sympathetic persona implying an understanding of a sort of strategic psychology. Aristotle had argued that effective advocacy “may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” and that

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided...It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Greenblatt, 1980: 9.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.2.1356a.

Dunn suggests, however, that there is a fundamental difference between postclassical theories of the author and rhetorical constructions of the subject:

One should not confuse this strategy for oratorical authority, however, with a postclassical sense of the “author” or with an appeal to the persuasive powers of the “subject.” The theorists [Cicero and Quintilian] are clear on this point: an effective self-presentation includes a deferential attitude toward the judge or judges, a disinterested stance toward the case, and a low, unornamented style.<sup>31</sup>

The self-authorizing strategy of a writer such as Gascoigne, though, seems indebted to the type of rhetorical strategy recommended by Quintilian, Cicero and Aristotle. His starting point is the construction of the persona of his narrator, even, or especially, when that narrator is himself. It is essentially a dramatic technique represented by a plausible, credible “voice”, which lends his writing its persuasive and immediate quality. In this way Gascoigne’s writing seems artless, which confused both contemporary and later critics.

Quintilian recommended a strategy of self-abnegation (*captatio benevolentiae*) in order to achieve greater persuasive efficacy: “We shall derive some silent support from representing that we are weak, unprepared, and no match for the powerful talents arrayed against us.”<sup>32</sup> He goes on to analyse the psychological basis of this strategy: “For men have a natural prejudice in favour of those who are struggling against difficulties, and a scrupulous judge is always specially ready to listen to an advocate whom he does not suspect to have designs on his integrity.”<sup>33</sup> Dunn draws a distinction between rhetoric’s deployment of techniques such as the *captatio benevolentiae* and the emergent self-authorizing strategies of “the humanist ideal of

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<sup>31</sup> Dunn, 1994: 4.

<sup>32</sup> Quintilian, 1958: 4.1.8.

<sup>33</sup> Quintilian, 1958: 4.1.9.

authorial individualism.”<sup>34</sup> He argues for a more publicly “authoritative” version of authority:

Early modern practice not only took into account but significantly internalised and extended the oratorical prescriptions of ancient theorists. In particular, the resistance to the *captatio benevolentiae* was at its most complex (if not its height) during the early modern period, when the line between the public and the private was being redrawn, and when one system of authority, that of the church, was fading, while the next great authorizing system, represented by the liberal state and the myth of scientific progress, was not yet fully in place. In this discursive interstice the humanist ideal of authorial individualism emerged, an ideal, however, that was in practice constantly compromised by public discourses that, if weakened or nascent, were still powerful influences toward “corporate” thinking.<sup>35</sup>

This suggests a powerful strategic divergence between public and private discourses. Public discourses with aspirations to truth claims could hardly hope to be taken seriously if they professed humility, ignorance and confusion, whereas literary discourses of poetry and fiction, successively removed from the public domain and operating at the level of the personal and intimate, successfully employed such strategies.

In his analysis of the process of cultural change from medieval to Renaissance, Greenblatt describes the disintegration of the “old feudal models” and their replacement by “new models”, arguing that “The chief intellectual and linguistic tool in this creation was rhetoric, which held the central place in the humanist education to which most gentlemen were at least exposed.”<sup>36</sup> Rhetoric served, he adds, to “theatricalize culture”. He goes on to describe the struggle for “recognition and attention...common to almost all Renaissance courts” and their theatricality in the sense of “both disguise and histrionic self-presentation.”<sup>37</sup> New Historicist and

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<sup>34</sup> Dunn, 1994: x.

<sup>35</sup> Dunn, 1994: x.

<sup>36</sup> Greenblatt, 1980: 162.

<sup>37</sup> Greenblatt, 1980: 162.

Cultural Materialist critics such as Louis Adrian Montrose, Leonard Tennenhouse and Jonathan Goldberg have explored the notion of theatricality and display as part of the production and maintenance of power in Tudor and Stuart regimes.<sup>38</sup> In his analysis of court masques, Stephen Orgel suggests that this love of spectacle and display arrived “with the accession of the first British Renaissance monarch, Henry VIII, who loved playing the central role in any enterprise.”<sup>39</sup> In the increasingly centralised state of Tudor England, power was made visible in public spectacle and royal progresses. As Elizabeth I says “We princes...are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed.”<sup>40</sup> This sense of the court and courtiers being always on show and the importance of developing and maintaining a courtly role is detailed in courtesy books such as Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, translated by Thomas Hoby in 1561.

Whilst Gascoigne does not fall into that category of self-made, middle class young men described by Greenblatt, the same principle applies to individuals such as he. Even though he occupied a different social location he was just as anxious to succeed in the changing and increasingly difficult social conditions in which he found himself, with the difference that he tends to look back to a better, simpler time when he might have filled a more elevated place by virtue of his lineage and inherited position. (Indeed Greenblatt recognised that Thomas Wyatt did not exactly

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<sup>38</sup> Louis Adrian Montrose, “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture” in *Representing the Renaissance* edited by Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley; Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 31-64, Leonard Tennenhouse, “Strategies of State and political plays: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VIII*, in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 109-129, Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and their Contemporaries* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1975), p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments 1584-1601* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957), 2:119.

fit his stereotype either and, in poetic terms, Wyatt represents a much more appropriate model for a writer such as Gascoigne.)

The self-fashioning process is exemplified in Gascoigne's writing – producing a recognisable authorial voice within his texts as well as “George Gascoigne”: failed scholar, lawyer, courtier, lover and soldier, and would-be moralist. It is most apparent in specifically autobiographical poems such as *Gascoigne's Gardenings* or *Gascoigne's Wodmanship*, in which, even when he is at his most disarmingly frank, Gascoigne is at his most artful. Written to commemorate his incompetence as a marksman while shooting deer on Lord Grey's estate, for example, *Gascoigne's Wodmanship* draws an analogy between his inability to hit the mark in life as in hunting, which turns into a sophisticated job application in which he begs his lordship “To train him yet into some better trade”.

As Ferry points out, Gascoigne is one of few sixteenth-century poets to use his own name in a biographical poem. An important area of her analysis examines the relationship between author and narrator, which she argues is complex and inconsistent. From the evidence of the sonnet sequences that she examines in detail, Ferry concluded that, although “sixteenth-century English writers did not always equate author and speaker”,<sup>41</sup> without any sort of theorisation of the possible relationships between author and speaker, they lacked the concept of the literary persona. This element of her analysis is less convincing than the precise linguistic and technical changes in poetic writings of the period and the psychological implications that she describes. The most rewarding writers in the period clearly had a sophisticated grasp of the concept of a writing persona, even if they did not have a critical term for it. Reading Chaucer was all the rage at court (as Puttenham points

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<sup>41</sup> Ferry, 1983: 16.

out) and he had developed a sophisticated persona as the naïve, ineffectual narrator “Chaucer” for whom he apologises as one whose “wit is short.”<sup>42</sup> Gascoigne recommends Chaucer as a model in the opening of *F. J.* and his satirical romance may well have been inspired by “Chaucers Tale of Thopas” whose banality and old-fashioned construction drives Harry Bailey to exclaim “Namoore of this, for Goddes dignitee” (l.2109), and refusing to allow “Chaucer” any more of his “drasty rymyng” (l.2120), he insists that he try again in prose this time.

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer had constructed a similarly self-deprecating narrator who claims that he serves the servants of the “God of Loves” (l.15) but dare not love himself “for myn unliklynesse” (l.16). As Piero Boitani puts it, “the Narrator of *Troilus* becomes for us a sort of Tristram Shandy *ante litteram*, and his voice cannot but strike our ear with a slight Shandean resonance.”<sup>43</sup> Reconstructing the reading practices of four hundred years ago of writers writing two hundred years earlier is obviously a largely speculative exercise. Nevertheless, the echoes of Chaucer’s narrative techniques and authorial persona are everywhere in Gascoigne. Gascoigne’s comic authorial personae are indebted in my view to Chaucer, in conjunction with the rhetorical personae advocated by the classical rhetorics, and continental models found in translation such as Boccaccio, regarded by Boitani as Chaucer’s own principal model.<sup>44</sup>

In his discussion of the writer who “has emerged in the English literary tradition virtually as the iconic name for authorship itself,”<sup>45</sup> namely Shakespeare, David Scott Kastan points out that “increasingly it is clear that his own literary career

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<sup>42</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* edited by F. N. Robinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), *General Prologue*, l.746, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (eds.), *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), p. 200.

<sup>44</sup> Boitani and Torti, 1991: 200.

<sup>45</sup> David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 33.

strikingly resists the very notions of artistic authority and autonomy that his name has come triumphantly to represent.”<sup>46</sup> But if Shakespeare did not lay claim to “artistic authority and autonomy,” Jonson did. Kastan goes on to offer a pragmatic model of the author as one who:

writes always and only within specific conditions of possibility, both institutional and imaginative, connecting the individual talent to preexisting modes of thought, linguistic rules, literary conventions, social codes, legal restraints, material practices, and commercial conditions of production.<sup>47</sup>

The situation is, as Kastan points out, problematic when it comes to considering individual examples. It is easier to explore the concept of the author and authority in a writer of fictional narratives than in a dramatist, since passages of diegesis are more likely to display inscribed notions and sources of authority than a mimetic mode.

Gascoigne represents the ambiguity of the author’s position in the conflict between claims to authorship and disclaimers of responsibility which pervade his writing. R. W. Maslen suggests that “The process of producing narrative fictions seems always to have filled Elizabethan writers with anxiety,”<sup>48</sup> adducing the habit of apologetic title pages promising “profit and delight” as evidence of this assertion. Pooley, on the other hand, argues that such practices signify “not so much a change in the status of the author...as an awareness of different levels of readership.”<sup>49</sup> He draws on Geoffrey Galt Harpham’s work on prefaces to the earliest saints’ lives<sup>50</sup> to argue that the “nervous preface” is “More than the modesty topos, the *captatae*

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<sup>46</sup> Kastan, 1999: 33.

<sup>47</sup> Kastan, 1999: 33.

<sup>48</sup> R. W. Maslen, *Elizabethan Fictions: Espionage, Counter-espionage and the Duplicity of Fiction in Early Elizabethan Prose Narratives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 68.

<sup>49</sup> Pooley, 1998: 112.

<sup>50</sup> Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Art and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

*benevolentiae* of rhetorical practice” and that “the role of the preface in pointing out the imperfections of what follows thus parallels writerly and readerly attempts at representation.”<sup>51</sup> Positioning and constructing the reader is clearly an important function of this paratextual material but the anxiety betrayed in these prefaces is also related to the anti-poetic sentiment examined in the first chapter of my thesis plus the concept of authorship and its related implicit claim to authority.

The author in Dunn’s formulation takes responsibility for transgressive texts, but all texts are potentially transgressive in that they make an implicit claim to authority. Fiction is an inherently subversive discourse. Maslen has argued that

Throughout the sixteenth century, prose fiction seems consistently to have been regarded, by its authors as well as by its readers, as the most slippery of mediums. Its slipperiness lay partly in the difficulty of defining what it was. Prose fiction refused to conform to any of the generic categories by which contemporary textbooks charted the hegemony of what is written: tragedy, comedy, history, epic, satire, and the rest.<sup>52</sup>

It was, Maslen suggests, the “literary equivalent of espionage”, pointing to the careers of many writers, including Gascoigne, who were subsequently taken into “government employment” - a euphemism, more or less, for spying.<sup>53</sup> Maslen’s argument is that being writers of prose fiction automatically marked men out as potential spies and endowed them with a set of dubious qualifications:

On the one hand it marked them out as exceptionally clever young men, cunning in the uses of rhetoric, logic, sophistry, and fraud, knowledgeable about current affairs in Europe, sharp-eyed and wary when surrounded by enemies, and capable of setting down their observations in a prose that revealed a good deal more to the scrutiny of the well-informed than it did to the casual reader. On the other hand it proclaimed their potential for corruption: the shakiness of their loyalties, the delight they took in putting themselves in danger, their interest in the doings of Catholic nations, and

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<sup>51</sup> Pooley, 1998: 112.

<sup>52</sup> Maslen, 1997: 11-12.

<sup>53</sup> Maslen, 1997: 10.

their mastery of skills that would make them formidable undercover activists should the forces of the counter-Reformation manage to recruit them.<sup>54</sup>

Maslen argues that prose fiction “masquerades as anything but fiction”<sup>55</sup> and cites the various genres that this new type of writing pretends to - “*The Adventures of Master F. J.* poses as a piece of literary criticism” for example whilst “John Grange’s *The Golden Aphroditis* (1577) cannot decide whether it is a cutting allegorical satire, a fluffy romance, a morsel of high-society gossip, or an extended exercise in plagiarism.”<sup>56</sup> As Cyndia Susan Clegg<sup>57</sup> has demonstrated though, being accused of writing “cutting allegorical satire” or “a morsel of high-society gossip” was a far more dangerous venture and Gascoigne was driven to assert in his defence that he at least was only writing fiction. The anxiety evident in writers at this period was induced by the tension between desire to get themselves noticed and make a name, and fear of overstepping the mark and getting into trouble. This double bind is very much in evidence in Gascoigne’s first foray into publishing and his attempts to conceal his identity as well as the measures he takes to deny responsibility for his work by distancing himself from his literary productions.

The issue of authorship of Gascoigne’s first published work, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573), was problematic from the start. It is generally accepted nowadays that it is all Gascoigne’s work and that the elaborate set of prefatory letters and the claim to be the work of “sundry gentlemen” (G. T.’s conclusion to *The Adventures of Master F. J.*, the first work in the printed text of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*) was pure smokescreen. At least one of his later editors, B. N. Ward, who produced the 1926 facsimile edition, was taken in however, claiming in his introduction that,

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<sup>54</sup> Maslen, 1997: 10.

<sup>55</sup> Maslen, 1997: 12.

<sup>56</sup> Maslen, 1997: 12.

<sup>57</sup> Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chapter 5, pp. 103 – 122.

“*A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* was first published in the summer of 1573. Although it is usually considered to be the work of one man only – George Gascoigne – we shall see that it is really an anthology: the first, in fact, of many anthologies published in Queen Elizabeth’s reign.”<sup>58</sup> Ward then goes to extraordinary and ingenious lengths to uncover the identities of Gascoigne’s putative collaborators, including most of the usual suspects - Sir Christopher Hatton, Leicester, Raleigh and the ubiquitous Edward de Vere. This view has been finally exploded by the painstaking bibliographical research of Adrian Weiss who makes it clear that, even though he was out of the country for much of the time during which it was being prepared for the press, Gascoigne was in fact solely responsible for the text, although his absence and the frequent delays in sending material meant that the finished work did not appear in precisely the format which he intended.<sup>59</sup>

The received wisdom, advocated by Gascoigne scholars and critics such as his biographer C. T. Prouty, was, using the evidence of Gascoigne’s prefatory material to the 1575 revised and amended edition, *The Posies*, that the reception of his first work was unsuccessful and that it had in fact been banned. Clegg’s discussion of Gascoigne and these two works casts doubt on this interpretation of events. Clegg argues that “the evidence is curiously contrary,”<sup>60</sup> and that Gascoigne’s venture into print was successful in that it produced the desired result - preferment and a job. She points out that:

royal favor came just nine days after fifty copies of *The Posies* were “Receyved into the [Stationers’] hall by appointment of the Q. M. Commissioners.” This censorship, following as it does in the wake of Gascoigne’s apparent success, suggests that we have misread both the

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<sup>58</sup> George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres: from the original edition* edited by B. M. Ward (London: Frederick Etchells and Hugh Macdonald, 1926), p. vii.

<sup>59</sup> Adrian Weiss, “Shared Printing, Printer’s Copy, and the Text(s) of Gascoigne’s *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*” *Studies in Bibliography* Vol XLV, 1992 pp. 71 – 104.

<sup>60</sup> Clegg, 1997: 107.

relationship between Gascoigne's political career and his texts – and the censorship of those texts.<sup>61</sup>

In her view, Gascoigne revised his work not because it had been banned, for which there is no evidence, but rather because it was read as a thinly disguised account of the amorous adventures of some one or other courtier, in other words that it was not fiction. The new prefatory material, Clegg argues, is designed to produce a sexualised reading which encourages the reader to “read for moral significance but *not* for parallels to personal circumstances” producing thereby a moral rather than a conjectural reading of the text. The other revisions are designed to reinforce this programme in Clegg's view as most of the supposedly offensive material – its sexual explicitness – is left in.

There are certain problems with this account however. Gascoigne does not in fact include all the sexually explicit material from *Flowres*, as Clegg admits: “He does... abbreviate the narrator's comments about the assignation.” This suggests, Clegg argues, that “Such Chaucerian specificity as the 1573 text has may well have been judged inappropriate in an Elizabethan courtly romance”<sup>62</sup> and in any case, she suggests, this was done as a blind to hide his real intention – to deflect conjecture as to the identity of the participants in his sordid escapade. In his letter “To the reverende Divines” - part of Gascoigne's new prefatory material in *The Posies* – he addresses with some asperity the problem of his work being read naively as a true account of actual events:

I understande that sundrie well disposed mindes have taken offence at certaine wanton wordes and sentences passed in the fable of Ferdinando Jeronimi, and the Ladie Elinora de Valasco, the which in the first edition was termed The adventures of master F. J. And that also therwith some busie

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<sup>61</sup> Clegg, 1997: 107.

<sup>62</sup> Clegg, 1997: 116-117.

conjectures have presumed to thinke that the same was indeed written to the scandalizing of some worthie personages, whom they would seeme therby to know. Surely (right reverend) I smile to see the simplicitie of such, who being indeed starke staring blind, would yet seeme to see farre into a milestone. And the rather I scorne their rashe judgements, for that in talking with .xx. of them one after another, there have not two agreed in one conjecture. Alas, alas, if I had bene so foolishe as to have passed in recital a thing so done in deede, yet all the world might thinke me verie simple if I would call John, John, or Mary, Mary. But for the better satisfying of all men universally, I doe here protest unto you (reverend) even by the hope of my salvation, that there is no living creature touched or to be noted therby.<sup>63</sup>

Gascoigne may be objecting too much here but it does seem incredible that someone as anxious as he for preferment should court disaster by referring, in however oblique a fashion, to discreditable events involving the very persons whom he wished to impress and whose patronage he sought. Clegg's argument that Gascoigne derived benefit from publication at one point and that he then "undoubtedly benefited more by having his 'wanton...and lascivious' words out of the limelight and out of circulation"<sup>64</sup> seems confused and confusing. It could be argued, employing the same logic, that drawing attention to this is a sophisticated invitation to read the text as a roman à clef and entitling his new volume *The Posies*, with its homophonic trace - "poses" - offers an even greater temptation.

Gascoigne certainly did not regard himself as a professional writer but saw his literary skills as a means to personal advancement. As he explains in the Epistle to the Reverend Divines, he has five reasons for venturing into print which cover the range of possible motives to write in this (or any other) period: the first is poetry's innately "right good and excellent qualitie", the second as a demonstration of the fitness of English as a literary medium; the third he admits quite openly is in the hope of obtaining a patron:

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<sup>63</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 7.

<sup>64</sup> Clegg, 1997: 121.

Thirdly, as I seeke advaancement by vertue, so was I desirous that there might remaine in publike recorde, some pledge or token of those giftes wherwith it hath pleased the Almightye to endue me: To the ende that thereby the virtuous might bee encouraged to employ my penne in some exercise which might tende both to my preferment, and to the profite of my Countrey. For many a man may like mine outwarde presence, might yet have doubted whether the qualities of my minde had bene correspondent to the proportion of my bodie.<sup>65</sup>

The fourth reason which Gascoigne gives is to prove that he has reformed morally, despite which he was reluctant to waste his earlier lighthearted work, which he lastly argues will serve as a moral warning “a myrrour for unbridled youth, to avoyde those perilles which I had passed.”<sup>66</sup> His intentions are completely in line with contemporary thinking on the subject – “to profit, delight and persuade”. The defensive tone is equally typical, evidence of the anxiety induced by going into print and the public inscription of his name. This anxiety is manifested in the complex mixture of desire to both claim and yet deny his authority as the author.

Given the many reverses of his career and the pathos of an early death, only a year after finally gaining the much sought-after government employment, it is hard to think of Gascoigne’s life in terms of worldly success. His writing certainly constituted his most successful venture and remains a fascinating testament of an individual writer and the literary practices of his times: lively, engaging, sophisticated, witty, and comic, serious, troubled, moral and anxious, experimental and conservative, looking backwards and forwards, synthesising different genres, styles and elements from the past and forging, through practice and theory, a new praxis for the future. In *The Green Knight’s Farewell to Fancy*, though, Gascoigne satirises the vanities of his early life becoming disenchanted with fiction and his own literary skills:

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<sup>65</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 5.

<sup>66</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 5.

A fancy fed me once, to write in verse and rhyme,  
To wray my grief, to crave reward, to cover still my crime:  
To frame a long discourse, on stirring of a straw,  
To rumble rhyme in raff and ruff, yet all not worth a haw:  
To hear it said there goeth, the *Man that writes so well*,  
But since I see, what poets be, *Fancy* (quoth he) *farewell*.<sup>67</sup>

Given his talent and ability, the quality of much of his writing as well as his service to the advancement of English literature, “the Man that writes so well” seems a fitting literary epitaph.

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<sup>67</sup> Gascoigne, 1907: 381.

## **CONCLUSION: RHETORIC, POST-STRUCTURALISM AND THE POSTMODERN**

The argument of this thesis has been that the last quarter of the sixteenth century saw the institution of a new constellation of discourses in English: vernacular poetics and literary criticism, and a newly-constituted fictional terrain of prose, poetry and drama. This process was initiated by the body of theoretical texts which I have analysed in this thesis. There is no simple, single answer to the questions I set out with, as to how and why they should have been written at that particular historical moment, although it proved easier to explore the various functions they fulfilled and the basis of their ideas. They brought together material and ideas from a variety of different sources including classical poetics, revitalised by humanism and first hand experience of newly-translated classical texts, the art of rhetoric as a systematic organisation of verbal and written discourse, scholasticism with its allegorical theories of reading and authorship, and religious, patristic and classical doctrines imbued with anti-poetic sentiment and distrust of fiction and representation. They explored and debated all elements of contemporary writing practices from language and orthography to poetic tropes and figures, rhyme, metre, and genre, at the same time attempting to dismiss or justify poetry itself and the writing of fiction.

The discursive status of these works is attested by the fact that they are still referred to and reinterpreted as part of the critical tradition today in contradistinction, in Foucault's terms, to the institution of a science. Foucault argues that the fundamental difference between a science and a discourse is that the work of the founder(s) of a science, whilst of historical interest, is no longer important for

future developments of that science, whereas the writings of a founder of a discourse form a continuing part of that work and are still relevant to thinking on that subject:

the founding act of a science can always be reintroduced within the machinery of those transformations that derive from it.

In contrast, the initiation of a discursive practice is heterogeneous to its subsequent transformations.<sup>1</sup>

The writings of Sidney, Puttenham, Webbe, Gascoigne, Jonson and others are regularly discussed and referred to in literary criticism, suggesting that their contribution remains ongoing and relevant.

Their emergence at that particular period has to be regarded as a sign of the profound cultural changes that the West was undergoing, notably the change from a primary oral culture to an increasingly literate one, hastened by the introduction of printing and the concomitant rise in literacy levels. I have tried, therefore, to locate the emergence of this particular discursive shift within the larger process of cultural change. Their institution, I have argued, forms part of the intellectual impetus towards the rationalisation and classification of knowledges. Agricola, Melanchthon and Ramus and, later, Descartes were part of this movement. The new thinking was in reaction to a knowledge based on faith and religious teachings, and to the dogmatic pedagogical interpretation of Aristotle as practised by scholasticism. In England, the most noted proponent was Francis Bacon, who articulated his ideas in works such as *Novum Organum*, a deliberate reference to Aristotle's *Organum*, as a new systematisation of knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "What is an author?" in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* edited by David Lodge (Harlow: Longman, 1988), p. 207.

Bacon had written his critique of scholasticism in *The Great Instauration*. His *Advancement of Learning* attempts to classify “The parts of human learning.”<sup>2</sup> He divides this into “the three parts of man’s understanding, which is the seat of learning: history to his memory, poesy to his imagination, and philosophy to his reason.”<sup>3</sup> He goes on to analyse each part further distinguishing the four parts of history, for example, as “natural, civil, ecclesiastical, and literary.”<sup>4</sup> He then subdivides each category, defining it as he proceeds. Natural history is divided into “three sorts: of nature in course; of nature erring or varying; and of nature altered or wrought; that is, history of creatures, history of marvels, and history of arts.”<sup>5</sup> In each case, Bacon tries to define what he regards as constitutive of legitimate knowledge. Of the four types of history (“natural, civil, ecclesiastical, and literary”), he comments “the three first I allow as extant, the fourth I note as deficient.”<sup>6</sup> As he considers each division of learning, Bacon is anxious to distinguish fact from fiction and to discredit and dissociate the latter from serious learning. Of his three parts of the history of nature – “creatures”, “marvels” and “arts” he says

The first of these no doubt is extant, and that in good perfection: the two latter are handled so weakly and unprofitably, as I am moved to note them as deficient. For I find no sufficient or competent collection of the works of nature which have a digression and deflexion from the ordinary course of generations, productions, and motions; whether they be singularities of place and region, or the strange events of time and chance, or the effects of yet unknown proprieties, or of instances of exception to general kinds. It is true, I find a number of books of fabulous experiments and secrets, and frivolous impostures for pleasure and strangeness; but a substantial and severe collection of heteroclitics or irregulars of nature, well-examined and described, I find not: specially not with due rejection of fables and popular errors. For as things now are, if an untruth in nature be once on foot, what by reason of the neglect of examination, and countenance of antiquity, and what

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* edited by Aldis Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), The Second Book I.1 p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> Bacon, 1900: 85.

<sup>4</sup> Bacon, 1900: 85.

<sup>5</sup> Bacon, 1900: 86.

<sup>6</sup> Bacon, 1900: 85.

by reason of the use of opinion in similitudes and ornaments of speech, it is never called down.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst attention has been drawn to Bacon's shortcomings as a scientist, Anthony Quinton argues that "For all his doubts it should be said that Bacon's classification of the sciences is one of the most thorough and without doubt the most influential things of its kind there has ever been."<sup>8</sup> His aim throughout is to establish rigorous criteria for the admissibility of what constitutes knowledge. He rejects magic, myth and hearsay whilst allowing a place in his scheme for fiction, but it is a carefully restricted and defined place:

IV. 1. Poesy is a part of learning in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly refer to the imagination; which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined; and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things...It is taken in two senses in respect of words or matter. In the first it is but a character of style, and belongeth to arts of speech, and is not pertinent for the present. In the latter it is (as hath been said) one of the principal portions of learning, and is nothing else but feigned history, which may be styled as well in prose as in verse.<sup>9</sup>

Here Bacon rejects the claims of fiction (poesy), whether it is written in verse or prose, to be considered as real knowledge while recognising it historically as "one of the principal portions of learning." It is rather "feigned history." Its function is wish-fulfilment:

The use of this feigned history hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it...because the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bacon, 1900: 86-87.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Quinton, *Francis Bacon* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Bacon, 1900: 101.

<sup>10</sup> Bacon, 1900:101.

After going on to analyse the typology of poesy, Bacon concludes that, to his mind, it has no defect since it has no substance:

In this third part of learning, which is poesy, I can report no deficiency. For being as a plant that cometh of the lust of the earth, without a formal seed, it hath sprung up and spread abroad more than any other kind. But to ascribe unto it that which is due, for the expressing of affections, passions, corruptions, and customs, we are beholding to poets more than to the philosophers' works; and for wit and eloquence, not much less than to orators' harangues.<sup>11</sup>

Bacon recognises the importance of fiction, he just does not want it confused with fact. Historically it had been, though, as he points out, one of the “principal portions of learning”, that is one of the most common and most important. Ejected from the newly-defined domain of rational knowledge, that whole way of thinking and knowing based not on fact or empirical data, but on myth, story, and the imagination, is relocated within a discourse specifically concerned with fiction-making: poesy. This has the paradoxical effect of restricting its possibilities in terms of truth claims but expanding the discursive space of poetry, prose, drama, and imaginative-writing in general. A way of thinking which, in Foucault's terms, was “plethoric yet absolutely poverty-stricken”<sup>12</sup> is relocated within the Western episteme into a vastly expanded discursive terrain of the fictional, offering great scope to literature as a discourse in the future since it speaks directly to a traditional way of thinking and organising ideas no longer considered intellectually valid. This is the space in which the world is made whole again as the poet fulfills that “allegorical role; beneath the language of signs and beneath the interplay of their

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<sup>11</sup> Bacon, 1900: 104.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, 1970: 30.

precisely delineated distinctions, (as) he strains his ears to catch that ‘other language’, the language, without words or discourse, of resemblance.”<sup>13</sup>

The discourse’s institution effectively reorganised the terrain of English vernacular writing. It legitimised the writing of poetry and elevated the role of the poet by arguing for the necessity and historical precedents of poetry and placing the work of contemporary writers in the vernacular alongside revered classical writers. It disentangled rhyme and metre and established appropriate models for later poets, discarding for example the hexameter in favour of the iambic pentameter, thereby enabling the great output of writing in this metre in the following decades. The increasing significance of the individual, the development of interiority in spatial and philosophical terms produced a new personalisation of thought and experience represented by the subject and diction of a recognisably new type of poetic voice. The many works of translation encouraged the writing of prose as a medium for comedy and for prose fiction, which was to lead to the development of the novel. The art of rhetoric, despite attempts to adapt to print culture, became increasingly redundant. Its most powerful elements, such as its systematisation of tropes and figures and its understanding of techniques of persuasion, were appropriated and relocated. The beginnings of literary criticism discernible in these texts, but intermingled with many other elements and ideas, are built upon in the following centuries by critics such as Dryden, Johnson and Hazlitt.

The elements which went into the formation of poetics, literature and literary criticism, were appropriated and transformed from other discourses to produce the “new foundations” of this discursive formation. One of the most significant of the constituent elements was the art of rhetoric, as reformed by Ramism, its most

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault, 1970: 50.

important constituent parts reassigned to other discourses. The first two – *inventio* and *dispositio* – were assigned to dialectic, reducing its rich historical system of linguistic and psychological organisation to *elocutio* and *pronuntiatio*. Memory was effectively made redundant as the main vehicle for retaining knowledge within print culture but the inherently memorable qualities of poetry, which rendered it emotionally significant, were still valued within the discourse as a whole.

Nothing could be more symptomatic of the depths to which the art of rhetoric has sunk in esteem today than the usual accompanying epithet - “empty.” It is used to convey a notion of persuasive language, skilfully deployed but essentially devoid of meaning. Likewise “elocution” has acquired risible connotations of lower middle class aspiration. Walter Ong argues that “(t)he displacement and rearrangement of rhetoric is, from one point of view, the story of the modern world. By now this great depository of culture has exfoliated into a variety of seemingly disparate things,”<sup>14</sup> and he goes on to cite a number of these, which do not all reflect very favourably on rhetoric’s place in the order of things today, from “elementary and high school English courses” to “marketing and advertising and creative writing.”<sup>15</sup> Ong’s view is that “The history of rhetoric simply mirrors the evolution of society.”<sup>16</sup>

Cultural practices are never simply reflective. They are also productive of social change, but nevertheless the general point he is making, that the changed status and position of rhetoric can be regarded as an index of a changed cultural framework, can be regarded as correct. Given this, the renewed academic and critical interest in rhetoric seems a curious intellectual phenomenon. Don Paul Abbott believes that

It is increasingly difficult to imagine an account of the arts of Renaissance poetry or drama that does not exhibit a corresponding appreciation of the art

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<sup>14</sup> Ong, 1971: 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ong, 1971: 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ong, 1971: 9.

of rhetoric. Indeed, a treatment of Renaissance culture that remains oblivious to the rhetorical tradition is almost inconceivable.<sup>17</sup>

The upsurge of recent research in this area may be due in part at least to the development of poststructuralist and postmodern theories of discourse and the subject. Analysis of historical cultural production forms a significant part of contemporary academic research and in this respect new historicism or cultural materialism might be expected to engage with rhetoric as a practice, in their interest to contextualise literary productions with writings across the range of contemporary discourses. At the same time, as a reaction to the liberal educational reforms of the 1960s and 70s, widely regarded today as having failed to deliver the hoped for improvements in academic performance, interest is once again on more formal, structured pedagogic systems and it may be that some of the academic interest in rhetoric is owing to this change of emphasis. Terry Eagleton, for example, seems to be suggesting a return to its study in the teaching of English today, as he proclaims:

Like all the best radical positions...mine is a thoroughly traditionalist one. I wish to recall literary criticism from certain fashionable, new-fangled ways of thinking it has been seduced by – ‘literature’ as a specially privileged object, the ‘aesthetic’ as separable from social determinants, and so on – and return it to the ancient paths which it has abandoned. Although my case is thus reactionary, I do not mean that we should revive the whole range of ancient rhetorical terms and substitute these for modern critical language...Rhetoric, or discourse theory, shares with Formalism, structuralism and semiotics an interest in the formal devices of language, but like reception theory is also concerned with how these devices are actually effective at the point of ‘consumption’; its preoccupation with discourse as a form of power and desire can learn much from deconstruction and psychoanalytical theory, and its belief that discourse can be a humanly transformative affair shares a good deal with liberal humanism. The fact that ‘literary theory’ is an illusion does not mean that we cannot retrieve from it many valuable concepts for a different kind of discursive practice altogether.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Abbott, 1983: 75.

<sup>18</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 206.

Eagleton seems to be equating “discourse theory” with rhetoric in this quotation and to suggest that its comprehensive nature offers a useful model for literary studies.

My thesis argues that there was a fundamental shift in the writing practices of the early modern period and, focusing on this process in English, I have analysed the way this process worked within a changing socio-cultural formation. I have also tried to demonstrate that this was part of the wider reorganisation of knowledges constituting what Foucault calls the Western episteme. Whilst the details of the changes were not inevitable in a deterministic sense, they can be seen to form part of the wider pattern of social change in cultural and technological practices such as the introduction of letterpress printing, increased levels of literacy, trade and demand for goods and services, including vernacular literature.

Writers today examining discursive and cultural changes in the postmodern period have variously identified and rejected, or come to regard as extinct, the significant discourses of the modern period such as liberal humanism, capitalism, religion. They have argued for a fragmented contemporary cultural formation characterised by “the loss of the real”,<sup>19</sup> or of “grand narratives”,<sup>20</sup> and the notion of the “split of the subject”.<sup>21</sup> Catherine Belsey for example describes how the concept of the autonomous individual, just beginning to be articulated in the early modern period, might now be regarded as a product of history (itself a discursive construct), in relation to the notion of the “split subject” of Lacanian analysis.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of the author figure also had its beginnings in the early modern period, as print culture commodified writing. Recent commentators have drawn

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<sup>19</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983).

<sup>20</sup> Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental concepts of Psychoanalysis* translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977. Reprinted Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Belsey, 1985: 8-9.

attention to the affinity (but not identity) between pre- and post-modern theories of authorship. The earlier view positing the notion of the author as a medium of transmission for the word of God, the later, exemplified in the work of poststructuralist critics such as Barthes, as a sort of discursive crossroad through which language passes:

the modern scriptor...is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is externally written *here and now*...For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.<sup>23</sup>

As Seán Burke points out in his gloss of this quotation, “We need only for ‘language’ substitute ‘God’ here to replicate precisely the dominant Medieval view of the *auctor*.”<sup>24</sup>

Rhetoric can be seen as a discourse which is, in some ways, more in tune with postmodern thinking. It does not posit an integrated autonomous subject but comprehends the notion of production of subjectivity through performance and in social relationship. Ann Moss argues that “the current revival and revaluation of rhetoric, both as a system of argumentation and a medium of expressivity, has alerted critical thinking to look for evidence of the functioning of a sophisticated machinery of verbal production, long neglected.”<sup>25</sup> She relates the common-place book, in the preface to her work, to the publisher’s promotional blurb for the electronic edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, which informed academics that it was “an ideal tool for anyone writing reports, speeches, essays, or

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<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” reprinted in *Modern Criticism and Theory* edited by David Lodge (Harlow: Longman, 1988), pp. 167-171.

<sup>24</sup> Burke, 1995: xvii.

<sup>25</sup> Moss, 1996: vi.

even a novel,” and that it “could pick out quotations in seconds” which would “back up your argument or point of view.”<sup>26</sup> The point she goes on to make is that:

(t)he common-place book may now be obsolete as a piece of equipment, but the environment in which it functioned persists. Quotation still acts conservatively as a control on present experience, in both senses of the word ‘control’. In the world of post-modernism, quotation has acquired anew, indeed almost manic vigour, as quotation marks festoon the spoken and written discourse of enunciators anxious to dissociate themselves from identification with concepts by deferring the verbal signs of concepts to some unnamed and unlocatable origin.<sup>27</sup>

This in turn relates to another characteristic of postmodern writing – intertextuality – the idea that “most works of literature, in emitting messages that refer to themselves, also make constant reference to other works of literature.”<sup>28</sup>

Hawkes points out that this

leads to one of the most important insights into the nature of literature that semiotics affords. For books finally appear to portray or reflect, not the real physical world, but a world reduced to other dimensions; to the shape and structures of the activity of writing: the world as a text.<sup>29</sup>

This theory of writing has affinity with rhetorical theories and the prescription of “imitation”. Ong goes further in *Orality and Literacy* relating the concept of intertextuality to print culture’s concern with creativity and originality, and emphasising its distinction in this respect from orality:

Print ultimately gives rise to the modern issue of intertextuality, which is so central a concern in phenomenological and critical circles today... Intertextuality refers to a literary and psychological commonplace: a text cannot be created simply out of lived experience. A novelist writes a novel because he or she is familiar with this kind of textual organization of experience.

Manuscript culture had taken intertextuality for granted. Still tied to the commonplace tradition of the old oral world, it deliberately created texts out

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<sup>26</sup> Moss, 1996: v.

<sup>27</sup> Moss, 1996: vi.

<sup>28</sup> Hawkes, 1988: 144.

<sup>29</sup> Hawkes, 1998: 144.

of other texts, borrowing, adapting, sharing the common, originally oral, formulas and themes, even though it worked them up into fresh literary forms impossible without writing...Print culture gave birth to the romantic notions of 'originality' and 'creativity', which set apart an individual work from other works even more, seeing its origins and meaning as independent of outside influence, at least ideally. When in the past few decades doctrines of intertextuality arose to counteract the isolationist aesthetics of a romantic print culture, they came as a kind of shock...Manuscript cultures had few if any anxieties about influence to plague them, and oral cultures had virtually none.<sup>30</sup>

The struggle over conflicting definitions of imitation, coming as it does almost at the start of print culture, represents the beginnings of Romantic theories of writing.

Like many of his contemporaries, Gascoigne worked across the range of contemporary literary forms and genres - poetry, prose, comedy, tragedy, satire, editing, news-reporting, translation, literary theory. His work forms part of that body of writing in which theory and practice function to map out the new terrain, in terms of form and genre, rhyme and metre, lexis and syntax. Analysis of a writer such as Gascoigne demonstrates the ways in which the work of an individual both articulates and is articulated within the process of cultural change as he wrote, trying to construct a role for himself through his writing. A courtly pastime in which he deployed his literary gifts to please and amuse his friends, became, in a changed social climate, in which birth was not by itself deemed a sufficient qualification for preferment, a skill to gain employment and financial reward.

All lives are both individual and representative of their time, lived in the present, caught between past and future. Gascoigne lived and wrote in a period of great social change which is reflected in his writing. His writing and that of his contemporaries though is one of the factors that produced change through the construction they put upon the world and the way in which they represented it. The

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<sup>30</sup> Ong, 1982: 133-134.

ways in which they wrote, the forms and genres they employed, influenced by education, upbringing, and consumption of classical and vernacular literature, in conjunction with their personal talents and experiences, produced the richness and diversity of Elizabethan writing. Their work produced those “transformations” which became the “new foundations” of a discursive formation. These foundations still form the recognisable basis of a discourse, which has been in an ongoing and constant process of change ever since.

Elizabethan writing is read today for its richness and variety as well as the glimpses it offers us of a world “like and yet unlike” our own. It fascinates and challenges, at times offering resistance to understanding, at others curious resonances. This is in part due to its heterogeneous constitution and a paradoxical feeling of modernity as it tries to grapple with change and the new, in all areas of life. The confidence of the new order is belied by the anxiety apparent everywhere, striking a chord with contemporary concerns discernible in current attitudes to mass technology and change:

Just as the exchange value of the classics was superseded by that of the vernacular literatures, and that of poetry by the novel, so now the exchange value of literature itself is about to be replaced by that of mass cultural, multimedia forms.<sup>31</sup>

Change is inevitable but it does not emerge from a vacuum and “transformations” are constantly produced to “serve as new foundations” which are always and everywhere rebuilt.

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<sup>31</sup> Viriano Comensali and Paul Stevens (eds.), *Discontinuities: New Essays on Renaissance Literature and Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. xi.

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