

文艺复兴时期 的文学与文化

RENAISSANCE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Lisa Hopkins & Matthew Steggle 著



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丛书作者均是国际上英美文学界声名卓著的学者；丛书文字简练，语言生动，对我国的外国文学及理论研究者、在校学生及其他文学爱好者都是不可多得的珍品。

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Introduction

What is the Renaissance? Perhaps the first thing to say is that it is not a term which anyone at the time would have used. We use the term 'Renaissance' to denote, broadly speaking, the period from *c.*1500 to *c.*1640, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes no instance of its use before 1840, when it appears in inverted commas as a French term, and not until the twentieth century did it become a standard description of a literary and historical period. The logic of the term is to signal the period's interest in the classical past: 'Renaissance' means 'rebirth', and what was being reborn was classical learning, lost during the Dark Ages but now recovered through the labours of scholars (initially mainly Italian) who called themselves humanists, because they were recovering knowledge which was centred on humans and their experiences.

Some modern scholars have felt that we should not necessarily stick with the term 'Renaissance', and have preferred to refer to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as 'the early modern period'. This is partly because 'Renaissance' describes only the experiences of the small, educated elite who were engaged with classical learning rather than the vast majority of the population, and partly to stress the idea that what we are seeing here is essentially the origins of our own period, rather than some alien and different world. However, we have preferred the term 'Renaissance', because even though the word itself was not one which people at the time would have understood, the concept certainly was: the idea

of the relationship with the classical past lay at the heart of much of what the period as a whole was interested in.

Furthermore, this book is only about a small part of what other studies might refer to as the 'Renaissance'. It is focused on Britain more than Europe, on England more than Britain, on London more than the rest of England, and on English-language literature (rather than any of the many other cultural forms one might consider part of the Renaissance), and its coverage is determined by what is most relevant to illustrate and explain those works normally considered as 'Renaissance literature'.

The Renaissance period is generally reckoned as having produced some of the finest achievements of English literature, a perception centred usually on the figure of Shakespeare, who will make his way in and out of the discussions that follow. But the Renaissance period is of interest as more than just a background to Shakespeare's greatest plays. It is a period which played out crucial debates about the nature of Englishness and Britishness; the relation of Britain to Europe and the world; British politics, British language and British religion, the consequences of which can still be felt across the world today.

The guide that follows is divided into four sections. Chapter 1 provides a short historical background to the period as a whole, with illustrative examples from Renaissance literature; Chapter 2 focuses on that literature *as* literature, looking at formal and generic features; and Chapter 3 addresses 'critical approaches', the ideas which one brings to any discussion of these texts. Chapter 4 offers some starting points for independent work on the texts of this period.

Historical, Cultural and Intellectual Context

Politics and Economics
Religion
Science and Technology
Art and Culture
Social Structures

POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

The Reformation

It is impossible to talk about politics in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries without also mentioning religion. This is particularly true when it comes to the Reformation, which started as an attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church but ultimately gave rise to the very different sect of Protestantism.

Two principal causes came together to produce the English Reformation. The first was political. In 1509, the 18-year-old Henry VIII succeeded to the throne of his father Henry VII, the first king of the Tudor dynasty. The Tudors did not have a strong dynastic claim to the throne – Henry VII had won the crown in battle, killing Richard III at Bosworth in 1485 – and the turmoil of the Wars of the Roses, of which Bosworth had been the last battle, was only one generation in the past. The most urgent issue facing Henry VIII was therefore the need to marry and father

children to secure his dynasty. He chose as his wife Catherine of Aragon, the widow of his elder brother, Prince Arthur. Catherine was older than Henry, but her parents, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, had united Spain for the first time, and her sisters had married into the ruling families of Portugal and Burgundy (which then included the Netherlands), so, dynastically, she was a magnificent match. However, the marriage produced only one child who survived beyond babyhood, and that was a daughter, Mary. England had not had a successful queen regnant (that is, one who reigned in her own right, as opposed to being the wife of a king) since the days of the legendary Boadicea. In any case, Henry wanted a son. His dissatisfaction at Catherine's failure to produce one was compounded when he fell in love with Anne Boleyn, the daughter of an obscure Kentish knight. Henry had had mistresses before, but Anne held out for marriage.

The obvious solution seemed to be a divorce. Although divorces were impossible to obtain under normal circumstances, popes had usually been willing to annul the marriages of kings whose wives did not bear sons, and Henry could point to the fact that Catherine had been previously married to his elder brother, so the marriage could be seen as technically incestuous. However, there was a complication. Catherine's nephew, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, was currently holding the pope prisoner, and the pope could not offend his captor by annulling the marriage of his aunt. He dismissed Henry's request.

At any earlier period of history, that would almost certainly have been the end of the matter. The pope, who was seen as the successor of Christ's disciple St Peter, was the sole, supreme and unquestioned ruler of the entire Catholic Church (and hence the spiritual overlord of virtually everyone in Europe, apart from those few territories where Jews were still tolerated). But on 31 October 1517 a disillusioned former monk called Martin Luther had nailed 95 theses questioning the doctrines and authority of the Catholic Church to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, and

had effectively launched what soon became known as the Reformation. Initially designed as a process of 'reforming' or purifying the Catholic Church, this soon moved to complete opposition to Catholicism and came to be known as Protestantism. It was making many converts, including Anne Boleyn, who had been exposed to Lutheran ideas while she was finishing her education at the French court. It also provided Henry VIII with a framework of ideas with which to challenge the pope's authority and his decision not to grant him a divorce.

Although it is important to stress that Henry VIII never became a Protestant himself – indeed his view was that he himself was still a good Catholic, and that it was the pope who had deviated from the true path – he did nevertheless take the steps that launched England on the road to full-blown Protestantism. In 1533 he declared that he was the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and appointed the Lutheran-minded Thomas Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury. Cranmer promptly declared that Henry's marriage to Catherine had never been valid and officiated at the wedding of Henry to the now-pregnant Anne Boleyn (though she, too, fell from favour when the child she was carrying proved to be a daughter, the future Elizabeth I). Partly because he feared that Catherine of Aragon's offended nephew, the Emperor, would make war on him, Henry also ordered the closure of all England's numerous and wealthy abbeys and monasteries, thus changing England's landscape for ever and causing a massive redistribution of wealth. He gave some of the land confiscated from the monasteries to knights and nobles, thus cementing their loyalty to him, and spent much of the money on ships (most famously the *Mary Rose*) intended to ward off the invasion which he feared would come from either France or Spain as a result of his decision to break with the pope, thus founding the British navy. While Henry's reign is best known for his six wives – two divorced, two beheaded (one of them Elizabeth's mother Anne Boleyn), one died and one survived – the changes that it wrought on Elizabethan society were much more profound.

Elizabeth I

Elizabeth, the baby who had been in Anne Boleyn's womb when Henry VIII married her, inherited the naval strength which her father had begun to build, but she also inherited the religious and political tensions which had made it necessary. When Henry died in 1547, he was succeeded in the first instance by the 10-year-old Edward VI, the son whom Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour, had finally given him. When Edward died in 1553, Mary Tudor, sometimes known as 'Bloody Mary' or, more properly, Mary I, who was the daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon, came to the throne (note that she is not the same person as Mary, Queen of Scots), but she too died in 1558. Elizabeth, the only surviving child of Henry VIII, succeeded her half-sister. Although the reign of Mary had set a precedent for the presence of a woman on the English throne, it had not been a particularly successful one: Queen Mary had had to suppress a rebellion by supporters of her cousin, Lady Jane Grey, at the start of her reign, had been bitterly disappointed not to produce a child, and had eventually died relatively young, knowing that her crown would inevitably pass to a half-sister who would reverse everything she had tried to do in the matter of religion. Parliament begged Elizabeth to marry, so that she could be 'properly' guided by a husband and could produce heirs, but there was also great disquiet about this prospect, not least because Queen Mary's husband, Philip of Spain, had been extremely unpopular in England.

However, Elizabeth did not marry. Perhaps she might have done so if her childhood friend, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, had been free, but he was already married by the time she came to the throne, and when his wife died in suspicious circumstances (she was found dead at the foot of a flight of stairs), the scandal would have been too great to risk. Instead Elizabeth ruled alone, with the help of her council, headed by William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Thus, if politics in the reign of Henry VIII revolved around the king's need for a son, politics in the reign of Elizabeth centred on the

queen's gender. In the early part of the reign, this also affected her relationship with neighbouring powers, as she played for as long as she could with holding out the possibility that she might marry one or other of her many foreign suitors, who included the Archduke of Austria, Philip of Spain, King Erik of Sweden, and the younger brother of the King of France. However, Elizabeth was already 25 when she came to the throne, and well before her 45-year reign drew to a close, it was abundantly apparent that her child-bearing years were over and that she would not marry.

If a queen was an anomaly in the first place, an unmarried queen – indeed an unmarried woman at all in this period – was even more of one (the legal position at the time was that all women, of whatever age, were considered to be either married or about to be married). Elizabeth benefited, however, from an unforeseen effect of the Reformation. The disappearance of the intercessory role of the Virgin Mary and of the saints, many of whom were female, had left a psychological and cultural gap which a virgin queen was exceptionally well placed to fill. As a result, something of a cult developed around the queen, with a number of mythological personae, most notably various versions of the moon goddess, used to represent her, and these became a crucial part of the queen's public image.

An unusual coincidence meant that the question of the queen's image was particularly important, because the British Isles, which had known no reigning queen for many hundreds of years, now suddenly had two. In neighbouring Scotland, then an entirely separate and independent country from England, Henry VIII's nephew, King James V, had died young and been succeeded by his only surviving child, a week-old daughter called Mary (not to be confused with Elizabeth's elder half-sister Mary Tudor). While still only a child, the little queen had been sent to France and married to the eldest son of the French king, but her husband died shortly after succeeding to the crown and Mary returned to Scotland as a young widow, speaking only French, a Catholic in a Protestant country, and thoroughly alienated from her

homeland and subjects. She made a disastrous marriage to her cousin, Henry, Lord Darnley, and though this marriage gave her a son, the future James VI, it ended soon afterwards with the mysterious murder of Darnley. When Mary immediately married the chief suspect, James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, the Scots, already shocked by her Catholicism and what was seen as her frivolous behaviour, rebelled. Mary was imprisoned, but escaped to England, presenting Elizabeth with a serious problem. As a Protestant, Elizabeth had no desire to offend her Protestant Scottish neighbours, who were currently causing her no trouble; but as a queen herself, she wanted to show the importance of respecting the rights of other queens.

The compromise she arrived at was to imprison Mary in England, an imprisonment which ultimately lasted for 19 years. This led to badly strained relations with France, of which Mary had once, however briefly, been queen consort, and with Spain, where Philip II, already outraged by Henry VIII's treatment of his great-aunt, Catherine of Aragon, was now appalled by England's imprisonment of another Catholic queen. (Philip was further irritated by Elizabeth's toleration of English privateers intercepting Spanish ships, something which will be discussed below under Concepts of Value.) As a result, an atmosphere of extreme paranoia about domestic security developed in England. Catholics became increasingly suspect and, under Sir Francis Walsingham, the English government developed its first intelligence service, for which Christopher Marlowe and Edmund Spenser, among others, appear to have worked. There was a feverish atmosphere of plots and counterplots, culminating in the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1587 after Walsingham's spies had secured evidence of her willingness to be involved in a plot to assassinate Elizabeth.

The execution of Mary brought hostilities with Spain to a head. Philip had prepared an 'Invincible Armada' of ships to sail against England, to bring it back into the Catholic fold. The armada would have sailed as soon as the news of Mary's death reached Madrid, but the weather prevented it. The

English anxiously awaited invasion throughout 1587 (the year of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*) and the first half of 1588, until the Invincible Armada finally sailed in the summer of 1588 – and was dispersed by storms, which the English interpreted as 'God's Wind'.

Elizabeth's troubles were by no means over, however. Although Philip's plans to invade England had suffered a setback from which they would never recover, he was still active elsewhere in Europe. A series of early deaths and dynastic failures had given Philip's father, the Emperor Charles V, an extraordinary collection of territories. Charles's mother, Juana the Mad (the sister of Catherine of Aragon), had inherited both the Spanish crown and the Spanish territories of the New World; his father, Philip the Fair, was the heir to Burgundy, which included what are now the Low Countries or Netherlands. Travel between these many dominions was difficult if not impossible, and first Charles and then Philip ruled the Low Countries through a series of regents. Inevitably, it proved difficult to retain their hold on the territory, especially after Protestantism began to spread through the Netherlands. Philip repressed this with increasing ferocity, sending the brutal Duke of Alba to suppress the rebellion against Spanish rule. The Dutch appealed to Elizabeth, as a fellow Protestant, and she responded by sending her close friend (some said lover), the Earl of Leicester, at the head of a military expedition to support the rebels. With Leicester went his nephew and heir, Sir Philip Sidney, author of the sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* and of *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, who was to meet his death there. The English military presence in the Netherlands gave the Low Countries a high profile in English politics for the remainder of the queen's reign.

The final arena of Elizabethan military activity was Ireland. Because this was largely Catholic, the English government feared that it could be used as a back door for a Spanish invasion. Although normally parsimonious, Elizabeth spent a great deal of money on trying to subdue native Irish resistance, but successive English armies were defeated by the

terrain and the Irish fighters' superior local knowledge. Finally, Elizabeth sent her last favourite, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, son of her cousin and stepson of Leicester, to Ireland. Essex saw himself as a military hero, but he too was unable to reduce the Irish to submission. Desperate to explain his failure to do so, he returned to England without permission. Legend has it that he arrived so early in the morning that he caught the queen without her wig and make-up on; he certainly plunged so far from favour that in 1601 he decided that his one remaining option was to lead the only armed rebellion of Elizabeth's reign. It was a miserable failure. Essex was executed and the queen lived out the last years of her reign in peace, dying in 1603, certainly less popular than she had been, but still undisputed Queen of England.

James and Charles

Elizabeth's successor was James VI of Scotland, the only child of Mary, Queen of Scots. James, who had been King of Scotland since he was a baby, was now in his late thirties, married to a Danish princess, and the father of several children. On all these grounds he seemed at first a welcome change from Elizabeth, but his initial popularity soon cooled. James had two major political projects: he wanted to bring an end to all hostilities with foreign powers, and he wanted to unite his separate inheritances of Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland into a 'British Empire'. Peace in Ireland came courtesy of a victory by Essex's brother-in-law, Lord Mountjoy, which actually occurred during the last days of Elizabeth's reign, but which was not known in London until after her death; a much less popular move came when James also made a peace treaty with Spain.

James's domestic life was less peaceful than his foreign policy. Almost certainly homosexual, he was even more susceptible to male favourites than Elizabeth had been, and not always wise in those he selected. This gave rise to a number of scandals at his court, of which the most notable centred on the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury on the orders of