Doing Away with the Drab Age: Research Opportunities in Mid-Tudor Literature (1530-1580)

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In autumn 1997, a handful of academics met at Newcastle University to give papers at a one-day conference called: 'The Drab Age Revisited: English Literature 1530-1580'. As far as any of the participants knew, it was the first time that a conference had been called on an era that was pretty much excluded from the canonical periods on either side of it: the Middle Ages, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Renaissance. Following that meeting, an association was formed — the Tudor Symposium — to foster interest in the whole range of literature produced in the long sixteenth-century, and to bring people working at either end of it into contact with people working in the middle. Five international conferences have followed, and, in the autumn of 2009, the symposium is to initiate a new series of conferences by reverting to the theme which started the ball rolling a dozen years earlier: 'New Perspectives on Mid-Tudor Literature: The Drab Age Revisited (Again)'.

This essay is intended to give undergraduate and graduate readers of Literature Compass an idea of what has been going on in 'mid-Tudor studies' over the past ten years or so; of some of the problems the area has traditionally faced, and still faces; and of the opportunities for new research it offers. In the pages that follow, we take a politely polemical attitude towards the prejudices which have allowed mid-Tudor literature to be dismissed as 'Drab'; and we have tried to indicate why we — and an increasing body of academics across the world — find the writing of the middle decades so appealing. The dates of this period are as approximate as those of any other, but we have allowed ourselves to believe that the death of John Skelton in 1529 marks the end of one era and the publication of Edmund Spenser's Shepheardes Calender in 1579 marks the start of a new one. The fact that they both used the pen-name 'Colin Clout' adds a not quite spurious solidarity between these two rather eccentric poets, but the real reason for choosing the period 1530-1580 is that this is the one chosen by the villain of our piece: C. S. Lewis. It is with him that we start our work of reclamation.

I. The lie of the land

The idea of an era of literature stretching from roughly 1530 to 1580 is not a new one. This was the period dismissed as the 'Drab Age' by C. S. Lewis in his contribution to the Oxford History of English Literature in 1954.[1] Disseminated in a book aimed at a general, as well as an academic audience, and with the cultural

[1] C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 64.

authority of a mid-twentieth-century Oxbridge don, this devastatingly witty label has had a long and deleterious impact on the perception of the literature of this period, and of the history of English literature in general. It needs to be discarded, of course, but to do that we need to understand why Lewis chose it in the first place.

On the one hand, we may trace Lewis's impatience with English writing from Sir Thomas Wyatt to George Gascoigne to the sheer arduousness of the commission; Lewis spent much of the nearly twenty years between 1935 and 1952 working on the volume (though he was also writing other books at the same time, such as the first five volumes in the Chronicles of Narnia). As early as 1938, however, it became clear to him that he had taken on more than he wanted to chew: 'The O HELL [an allusion to the series acronym OHEL] lies like a nightmare on my chest [...] Do you think there's any chance of the world ending before the O HELL appears?'.[2] It is evident from the book he finally wrote that Lewis was eager to reach the promised land of what he called the 'Golden Age', and that it was his sense of duty which compelled him to trudge through fifty years of literature which he despised as worthless in comparison with Golden poets such as Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney.[3]

It is not hard to see, then, why Lewis came up with the dyslogistic label of the 'Drab Age'.[4] It allowed him to take revenge on the mid-Tudor authors who, he felt, had wasted his time; and he knew that he could get away with it, since the critical tradition was already predisposed to treat these authors as insignificant forerunners of the 'great Elizabethans'.[5] Lewis's disparaging label has stuck, and here, too, we must ask ourselves why. A cynical observer might note that it has the virtue of releasing early modernists whose specialisms typically concentrate on later Renaissance writing from the obligation to acquaint themselves with the material he (so unwillingly) pored over. But, more recently, genuine pressures on the resourcing of universities from public funds, as the world has shifted to the political and economic Right, has led to a series of rationalisations which have made it difficult for advocates of mid-Tudor literature to make a case

[2] C. S. Lewis, letter to F. P. Wilson (25 January 1938), cit. by Walter Hooper, C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide (London: Fount, 1997), p. 477.

[3] Francis Warner recalls Lewis's working method: 'Every time he read an author he wrote himself an essay on the subject, dated it, and put it in a drawer for a year and a day. He would then take it out and mark it. Any essay falling below a clear alpha was sent back to be done again' (cit. Hooper, 1997, p. 478).

[4] Lewis himself insists that it is not 'dyslogistic', but by contrasting this 'earnest, heavy-handed, commonplace age' against the 'Golden Age' of the 'great Elizabethans' he makes it inevitable that readers will perceive it as a derogatory term (1954, p. 64). Likewise, Lewis accepts that there is a certain continuity between pre- and post-1580 poetry: '[The Golden poets] wrote the same kinds, if not the same kind, of poetry as their predecessors' (p. 323). But the emphasis is still on Golden excellence: 'no genius is so fortunate as he who has the power to do well what his predecessors have been doing badly'.

[5] Lewis largely follows the periodic formulation found in George Saintsbury's Short History of English Literature, first published in 1898, the year of Lewis's birth, and last reprinted in 1957.

for the inclusion of their period in the canon. 'Modularisation' has split the curriculum into ever smaller units and set them in competition with one another for student places; the less familiar areas soon become unviable and are threatened with extinction in this increasingly unregulated economy.

In fact, whole periods are disappearing, as Helen Cooper noted in her inaugural lecture at the University of Cambridge in 2005, when she was appointed to the chair in Medieval and Renaissance Literature — a chair which was created in for none other than C. S. Lewis himself in 1954. Cooper reminds us that Lewis remarked in his own inaugural on the growing tendency over his own life time, the first half of the twentieth century, for scholars to challenge the traditional rupture between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and she notes that the tendency had continued in the second half of the century as well, as evidenced by the creation of 'various centres of Medieval and Renaissance Studies' or the fact that 'many academic posts are now advertised as jointly Medieval-Renaissance'.[6] But she warns us not to be taken in by all of this:

> All too often, however, the linking of periods serves as a cover for the downgrading of the Middle Ages. Joint posts are all too often a coding for the suppression of any distinctively medieval teaching: you appoint an early modernist, and that is what they teach.

This an uncomfortable truth that many universities across the world are having to face at this very moment; and if it is a bad time for mediaeval literature, that great and ancient empire of study, what chance is there for the tiny fledgling province of mid-Tudor studies? We might conduct research in this area, but the bulk of our teaching is habitually devoted to the more canonical Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. For us, 'research-led' teaching usually entails wheeling in a lesser-known Tudor as context for their more illustrious literary ancestors.

English subject benchmarks, set by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, state that Single Honours literature students in the UK should acquire 'knowledge of writing from periods before 1800'.[7] This statement recognises that many institutions must be tempted to drop pre-1800 literature, and, as Cooper notes, it is mediaeval literature that is the first to go. English Literature for many departments now begins in earnest with Shakespeare, with maybe some retrospective gestures to lone figures in the earlier period. Typical of this is the standard module on 'The Sonnet', which begins with Wyatt and then leaps to Sidney, a structure which appears to encompass the mid-Tudor but really excludes it. These are also the contours traced by Stephen Greenblatt's immensely influential Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare, which jumps from 'Power, Sexuality, and Inwardness in Wyatt's Poetry' (chapter 3) to

[6] Helen Cooper, Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Cambridge, 29 April 2005 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 3.

[7] The statement may be read at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/english.asp#3.

'Fashion[ing] a Gentleman: Spenser and the Destruction of the Bower of Bliss' (chapter 4): some six decades of self-fashioning — between Wyatt's verses in the 1530s and Spenser's Faerie Queene (1590, 1596) — are leap-frogged in the process, years in which Gascoigne, for one, was busy crafting an array of variously self-advancing and self-mocking personae.[8]

Thomas More's Utopia (1516), the subject of Greenblatt's first chapter, is another traditional outlier: it belongs to an older periodisation of the Renaissance, one not specifically geared to the needs and interests of literature students, in which more emphasis was placed on the reception of the 'New Learning' in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Utopia survives on the undergraduate curriculum because it is fun to read (although rarely are students directed to its earliest English translation, by Ralph Robinson in 1551); its imaginative qualities also allow for fruitful comparison in lecture or seminar with the fictional worlds created in, say, Spenser's epic or Sidney's Arcadia. Yet a whole half-century and more of literature is by-passed by this popular manoeuvre.

However, despite this general occlusion of the mid-Tudor at undergraduate level, interest in this period is burgeoning, not least because — as terra incognita — it offers rich pickings for postgraduate students, needing to satisfy the criterion of producing original research for their doctoral dissertations. The move towards the mid-sixteenth century is not purely cynical, however. There is a genuine enthusiasm for the area because it offers academics the opportunity to work between disciplines, especially between History and Literature; and interdisciplinarity is now insistently championed by funding bodies such as the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The appeal of Tudor history is clear: it was a time of religious flux, when the boundaries of knowledge were being pushed back, when the English language was finding a new confidence, and when England was emerging as a nation and future empire. It was a time, in other words, when the foundations of modern England were being forged (and along with that, the problematic relationship between England and Britain). In addition, its monarchs — 'the Terrible Tudors' in the phrase of the popular brand established by Terry Deary and Martin Brown: 'Horrible Henry', 'Misery Mary', 'Bad Bess' — have a fascinating and understandable glamour, the strength of their personalities enhanced by the vivid portraiture from Hans Holbein onwards.

The revival of interest in mid-sixteenth-century literature is being led, predominantly, by political readings; the Reformation is in many ways treated as a political, as much as a religious, process.[9] The shift

[8] Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). For Gascoigne as an exemplary, indeed, trend-setting self-fashioner, see Richard Helgerson, The Elizabethan Prodigals (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), ch. 3, and Gillian Austen, George Gascoigne (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008).

[9] See, for example, John N. King, English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), David Norbrook, 'The Reformation and Prophetic Poetry', Poetry and Politics in the

in critical approaches can be illustrated by the changing nature of the work on the drama of the period. Unlike research into other genres, there has been a continuous interest in mid-Tudor drama and theatre, in which both mediaevalists and early modernists may claim an interest. The order for the suppression of the traditional Corpus Christi plays in the 1570s allows for a late date to be given for the waning of mediaeval English drama, one supported by the disappearance of the old morality genre in the late 1570s with the appearance in 1576 of the first purpose-built playhouse — The Theatre — and the subsequent emergence of the metropolitan theatrical culture which would produce what we call 'English Renaissance Drama' in all its generic variety and abundance. In addition, pre-1576 drama has always benefited from the 'Shakespeare effect'. Study of earlier plays had an obvious significance in what they could tell us about the origins of Shakespearean drama; a more general early modernist interest in mid-Tudor literature seems likely to continue for much the same reason: that it can reveal the origins of Shakespeare and the other 'great Elizabethans'.

There has thus been a fruitful overlap between these two areas of the mediaeval and Shakespearean. Nonetheless, the focus of scholarship has shifted over the last few decades, in the wake — or at the forefront — of the historicist project in which sixteenth-century literature is read for what it can tell us about the politics of the period. Particularly important in this area has been the work of Greg Walker, especially his Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII (Cambridge University Press, 1991) and The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama (Cambridge University Press, 1998). Walker may be singled out as a paradigmatic example, too, since he is also the editor of the Blackwell Anthology of Medieval Drama (2000). Whereas Walker's 'early Renaissance' book — a monograph for a mainly academic market — covers the period from the 1530s to the 1560s, the medieval volume, designed for undergraduate teaching, only goes up to the 1540s; its Renaissance counterpart for Blackwell, edited by Arthur F. Kinney (1999), only really gets going with Thomas Kyd's Spanish Tragedy (1587) — earlier drama being represented somewhat cursorily with two brief royal entertainments, Richard Mulcaster's The Queen's Majesty's Passage (1559) and Sidney's Lady of May (1578).

Here we see the outline of the old no-man's land of mid-Tudor literature, compounded by market pressures catering to undergraduate curricula. Even so, thanks to the political and historical emphasis of scholars such as Walker, there is a growing sense of the drama of the middle decades of the sixteenth century as having a character of its own, not merely a composite of 'mediaeval' and 'early modern/Renaissance'. Mid-sixteenth-century drama has consequently been Tudorised, and is starting to

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English Renaissance (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), ch. 2; Andrew Hadfield, Literature, Politics and National Identity, Reformation to Renaissance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Thomas Betteridge, Literature and Politics in the English Reformation (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), Cathy Shrank, Writing the Nation in Reformation England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

be valued as a product of its own time and place.[10] The lessons learned through the study of this genre can, and should, be applied to the non-dramatic writing of the period — not least because it is precisely this non-dramatic writing, and particularly poetry, which has been scarred by Lewis' vitriol (drama having been excluded from his study).

II. Areas for exploration

Current scholarship on drama reveals the on-going interest in high politics. The colourful tapestry of the Tudor court, and the strongly-drawn personalities of the characters who lived, loved, intrigued and died there, often in gripping and gruesome ways, has a clear and abiding appeal. But this emphasis on the court has perhaps led to a lack of attention to writing that was produced outside its magic circle. There is much work still to be done, for example, on the courtly penumbra, the twilit world on the very edges of — or outside — the court that so many of our better-studied writers inhabited.[11] Take the genre of life-writing. The mid-Tudor period builds on a late-mediaeval tradition of private, non-courtly individuals (often women) who documented their own lives. The mediaevalists have Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich; the mid-Tudorists have figures such as Anne Askew and Isabella Whitney self-consciously moulding their lives on given models and often with an eye to a wider readership. In the mid-1570s the musician Thomas Whythorne, for example, fashions his experiences — for the benefit of his 'good friend' — as following the various stages of a man's life, as he evolves from ingenue, to rakish lover (exchanging poems with an array of predatory aristocratic women), to reformed middle aged man.[12] These writers give us insight into a non-elite world.

They also remind us of the still overlooked position of women writers from the period, despite groundbreaking initiatives, such as the AHRC-funded Perdita Project, based at Warwick and Nottingham Trent, or Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson's Early Modern Women Poets: An Anthology (Oxford University Press, 2001).[13] How many surveys of English Renaissance sonnets, for example, take in the

[10] Witness, for example, the AHRC-funded project, 'Staging the Henrician Court', led by Walker and Betteridge (2008-2010), an interdisciplinary research project investigating the staging of John Heywood's Play of the Weather (1533), http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundedResearch/Pages/ResearchDetail.aspx?id=127880.

[11] For the literary circles surrounding the queen at ever greater distances, see Steven W. May's introduction to his edition of The Elizabethan Courtier Poets: The Poems and their Context (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

[12] Thomas Whythorne, The Autobiography, ed. by James M. Osborn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 3; see Elizabeth Heale, Authobiography and Authorship in Renaissance Verse: Chronicles of the Self (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 41-56.

[13] Early Modern Women Poets features the work of thirty women poets active 1530-1580; Perdita has ten. Details of the Perdita project may be accessed at: http://human.ntu.ac.uk/research/perdita/frames/html/index.htm.

work of Anne Locke, daughter of a London merchant adventurer, who wrote the first sonnet sequence in English, A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner: Written in the Manner of Paraphrase upon the 51 Psalm of David (1560)? Undoubtedly, part of the reason for overlooking Locke's Meditation is that it is camouflaged by being appended to her translation of the Sermons of John Calvin. A translation of the work of this austere Genevan pastor is not the obvious place to start looking for poetic innovation, but it is exactly this sort of juxtaposition — surprising to our eyes — which is characteristic of Tudor writing, as is the inventive hybridity of Locke's Meditation, a psalm paraphrase cum sonnet sequence.

One way of investigating literary production beyond the Tudor court is to look closely at the much-neglected anthologies of verse which started to appear in the second half of the sixteenth century. One of the landmark publications of Tudor literature is a volume of lyrics called Songs and Sonnets, more popularly known after its printer as 'Tottel's Miscellany'. First issued in 1557, at the tail-end of the reign of Mary I, it made available in print models of aristocratic poetry for imitation by non-courtly writers, who, by virtue of their literacy and leisure, were generally drawn from the Tudor gentry (a class which encompassed any who might live without manual labour). The volume showcased an array of continental verse forms Englished, above all, by Wyatt — the sonnet, ottava rima, strambotto, rondeau — as well as his vernacular experiments, such as the much-maligned poulter's measure. This variety was not merely for 'the honour of the English tongue'; it was 'for profit of the studious of English eloquence' and that 'the unlearned, by reading' might 'learn to be more skilful'.[14]

The importance of this volume is hard to overstate: it ushered in a new age of modern English poetry far more effectively than Spenser's inaugural work, The Shepheardes Calender, twenty years later in 1579. Much has been written about the 'hype' surrounding the launch of the 'New Poet': in a superb marketing ploy designed to tantalise he is never named as Spenser, only as 'Immeritô'; nor, moreover, is the poet all that 'new' (his translations for the lively polemic A Theatre for Wordlings had been published in 1569). Yet the fiction created by The Shepheardes Calender — that this small, self-consciously canon-building work heralded a new era of English literature — has had lasting appeal. The less-trumpeted Songs and Sonnets, on the other hand, gave English writers two 'new poets', both named, and both intensely 'notable': Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, executed for treason in 1543, and Wyatt, who died in 1541 and was immediately 'canonised' by Surrey in the same way that Sidney would be by hordes of eager poets after his death in 1586.[15]

[14] Richard Tottel, 'To the Reader', Songs and Sonnets (1557), ed. (as Tottel's Miscellany) by Hyder Rollins (rev. ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1966), 2 vols, I, 2.

[15] Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, An Excellent Epitaph of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1542); Howard's epitaph is more commonly known as 'Wyatt resteth here'.

Here at last were the 'modern classics' who might be compared to the old, revered models of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Lydgate. Indeed, although Chaucer's reputation was undiminished by the appearance of these new stars, it may be that the reason Lydgate disappeared from view around now — not to be reprinted until the Victorian period — was because of the competition he faced from Surrey and Wyatt.[16] In his 2002 volume for the new Oxford English Literary History, the series recently commissioned to replace the old 'OHEL', James Simpson has argued strongly that many pre-Reformation writers and genres were actively suppressed by the political authorities in the 1530s and 1540s;[17] but we should not lose sight of the importance of fashion as well. Wyatt and Surrey were simply more 'up to date' than Lydgate, and their works were assiduously imitated by Elizabethan poets who wished to write in a self-consciously 'modern' as well as a 'courtly' style.[18]

However, despite its monumental status, few these days read Tottel for the poetry. Editors and scholars of Wyatt and Surrey use the miscellany to remind themselves of the superiority of the manuscript versions of their poets' verses; but who now reads the lyrics by the other named author, Nicholas Grimald, far less the poems of the many 'uncertain authors' which also made their way into the anthology?[19] Despite the so-called 'death of the author', as academics and readers we seem to be uncomfortable when it comes to dealing with anonymous writing. We like to have a context for the works we read; if the life is not available, then we like to have an oeuvre to fall back on. Isolated texts worry us.

And if Songs and Sonnets is neglected, then the anthologies which it inspired are even less familiar, except, perhaps to make mock at their titles: A Handful of Pleasant Delights (c. 1566), The Paradise of Dainty Devices (1576), or The Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions (1578). The alliteration itself (think of the comic soubriquet 'Terrible Tudors') is enough to permit the modern critic to consign these volumes of verse to oblivion with a chuckle. Lewis compares them to the 'knick-knacks' cherished in a 'gimcrack parlour' of the Victorian Age — but at least he had read them.[20] To view these miscellanies without prejudice necessitates tackling head-on the problem of how we might engage meaningfully with anonymous writing, but doing so also promises to open up a new and richer understanding of Tudor literature, to recognise it not as the product of isolated individuals, but as drawing on a collective set of tropes, allusions, rhetorical stances. And Tudor writing was a social activity. Manuscript miscellanies frequently have entries in different hands, suggesting a circulation of the work — a practice reflected,

[16] Printed editions of Lydgate's work — aside from those smuggled into editions of Chaucer's Works — dry up in the 1560s; when his single prose work, The Serpent of Division, was republished in 1590, it was entirely rewritten in Elizabethan prose.

[17] James Simpson, Reform and Cultural Revolution, Oxford English Literary History 2: 1350-1547 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. the 'Envoi', pp. 558-61.

[18] The influence of Tottel can be seen in the fact that Whythorne calls his autobiographical manuscript Songs and Sonnets.

[19] The MLA bibliography lists seventeen items on Nicholas Grimald (accessed 14 April 2009): only four post-date 1980.

[20] Lewis, English Literature, pp. 266-67.

albeit disingenuously, in the prefatory material to Gascoigne's 'Adventures of Master F. J.' (1573), where 'H. W.' explains how 'G. T.' lent him the 'written book' (i.e. manuscript) which he passed on to the printer 'A. B.'.[21] Indeed, Gascoigne's narrators, as they toy with autobiography and pseudo-documentary, give us other insights into the sociability of Tudor literary practice. 'The Devices of Sundry Gentlemen' tells us how 'Gascoigne' was 'required by five sundry gentlemen to write in verse somewhat worthy to remembered, before he entered their fellowship'.[22]

Ballads and pamphlets offer us further understanding of this critically neglected world. These ephemeral publications are part of the literary landscape in seventeenth-century studies. That this is the case is in part due to the undoubted explosion of material around the Civil War, but it is also due to the accidents of bibliography: first, the role played by seventeenth-century collectors such as George Thomason and Samuel Pepys in preserving this material; and secondly, the fact that many of these broadsides were not included in the twentieth century in the Short Title Catalogue, an indispensable finding aid for any early modernist. Nevertheless, this type of publication flew off the presses of mid-Tudor England, in response to matters of import: the death of monarchs, traitors, villains and other notables, or perceived crises — be they violent popular uprisings or the birth of deformed pigs.[23] To ignore them is to neglect a piece of our socio-political history: they show us politics being debated on the street and (if the bibulous balladeer William Elderton is anything to go by) in the tavern.

There is an energy and linguistic inventiveness to even these slight pieces, witnessed, for example, by the parody of pretentious ink-horn terms in An Artificial Apology, Articularly [sic] Answering to the Obstreperous Obgannings of One W.G., an interjection in a flyting between William Gray and one Thomas Smyth in 1540, in the aftermath of the fall and execution of Thomas Cromwell. As the witty title of this broadside shows us, these ballads are often composed by men of education, some of whom went on to prolonged literary careers. Not least among these is the soldier-poet Thomas Churchyard, who engaged in a prolonged contention with the (possibly fictional) Thomas Camell (c. 1551) and others, which disputes whether or not commoners have the right to voice opinions about affairs of state. One of the earliest examples of Ovidian literature appears in the context of this debate: Thomas Hedley's verse pamphlet, Of Such as on Fantasy Decree, uses 'Ovid's tale' of King Midas to warn Camell against drawing judgement on others' works.

[21] George Gascoigne, A Hundreth Sundry Flowers, ed. by George W Pigman, III (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

[22] Ibid., p. 274.

[23] The best of the many pig-ballads is A Marvellous Strange Deformed Swine, written by 'I. P', probably John Philips, around 1570 (it also glances at the Rising in the North in 1569).

The traces of Ovidianism in these ephemeral publications is an indication that the culture of the Tudor grammar-school was gradually making itself felt in vernacular literature written for a more or less 'popular' readership, that is, one that was not confined to an educated or social elite, though it might include them as well. Since the 1530s, educational reformers had been working to replace an older way of learning Latin grammar — for that is what boys learnt at 'grammar-school' — with their own method, which was very similar to one used by teachers and scholars on the continent, and which is often labelled as 'humanist'. Boys were still taught the basic linguistic structure of Latin, but the old exercises based on learning grammatical points from sentences made up by teachers — the so-called 'Vulgars' — were slowly abandoned in favour of exercises in which they learnt how to imitate the 'classics' of Latin prose (especially the orator and statesman Cicero) and poetry (where Ovid and Virgil were favourite authors).[24] Schoolboys still read the ancient classics in order to imitate them in Latin, but some of what they learnt, especially in the case of poetry, started to make its way into their English writing as well.

This is not to say that English poets did not imitate the classics before the 1530s; it is the scale of the influence of Latin verse on vernacular poetry that is so remarkable. This may be seen in the great translation projects of the early Elizabethan period. By 1580, most of the school-room poets had been translated into English: Ovid's Metamorphoses (Arthur Golding: 1565-67), Heroides (George Turberville: 1567), Tristia (Churchyard: 1572); Virgil's Aeneid (Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne: 1558-1573), Bucolics (Abraham Fleming: 1575); Horace's Satires (Thomas Drant: 1566), Ars Poetica and Epistles (1567). Neo-Latin poets on the curriculum were also translated: Mantuan's Adolescentia (Turberville: 1567), Palingenius's Zodiacus vitae (Barnabe Googe: 1560-1565). This is an impressive achievement, and to these titles we must add the translations of an author not on the curriculum but nonetheless much admired: Seneca. Most of his tragedies had been translated, by various hands, before the end of the 1560s.

Some of the excitement felt by these poets — most of them young men connected with the two universities (Oxford and Cambridge) or the Inns of Court — can be felt in the long verse prologue which Jasper Heywood set to his translation of Seneca's Thyestes in 1560. Heywood relates how Seneca came to him in a dream and asked him to translate his play; Heywood modestly pointed to other men better equipped to take on the task: Thomas North, Thomas Sackville, Thomas Norton, Christopher Yelverton, William Baldwin, Thomas Blundeville, William Bavand, Barnabe Googe, 'and yet great number more'.[25] Here is the

[24] A useful guide to European humanism is Jill Kraye, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1996); for a dissenting view of the English context, see Mike Pincombe, Elizabethan Humanism: Literature and Learning in the Later Sixteenth Century (London: Longman-Pearson Education, 2001).

[25] Jasper Heywood, trans., Thyestes, by Seneca (1560), ed. by Joost Daalder (London: Benn, 1982), 'Prologue', line 103. Amongst these Inns of Court poets and playwrights is Gascoigne, whose work was discussed earlier in the context of the sociability of Tudor writing; he himself produced a neo-classical, *Jocasta* (1566), in collaboration with a fellow Innsman, Francis Kinwelmersh.

roll-call of English literary talent in the first years of Elizabeth I's reign. Heywood knows there is 'a princely place in Parnass hill' waiting for these writers, and Seneca confirms this in a long description of the Muse's palace, which includes a new wing, recently built, to house portraits and statues 'of hundreds [of] English men, | That give their tongue a greater grace, by pure and painful pen' (lines 274-74).

It is easy to smile (as one of the present authors has done in a less enlightened moment) at Heywood's 'boosting' of these writers, some of whom remain unknown even to relatively diligent early modernists.[26] But there can be no denying that the 1560s was a decade of unprecedented literary ferment, which remains hardly recognised, and certainly little charted.[27] Much has been written on the similar but slightly less effervescent and more intensively hyped nouvelle vague of the 1570s, when Spenser and Sidney arrive as harbingers of the 'Golden Age'. But the real Renaissance — the rebirth of classical culture — gets underway a full generation earlier, and it is time that somebody wrote a book to tell us how and why.[28]

III. Aesthetics

We noted above that the peculiarities of the historical period in which mid-Tudor literature was written offer the scholar and teacher many opportunities to bring this body of writing to life in an essay or in the class-room. In particular, there is much satisfaction to be derived from analyses of these works which reveal hidden allusions to political events, or which in less obviously 'topical' ways make manifest the work's relation to the historical circumstances of its production and reception — for instance, how releasing a copy of Edward VI's dying prayer, with a large woodcut and a sentimental account of his last moments (in which he wishes that England might be saved from papistry), might be an intervention in the question of his succession in the fraught weeks after his death in July 1553. On the other hand, relatively little attention has been paid to the formal virtues of the poetry and prose of the period; indeed, critics who are otherwise well disposed toward mid-Tudor authors may still berate them for a variety of aesthetic failings. The case for the historical importance of the writing of this period is starting to be made, but few have yet championed its literariness.

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[26] This shameful moment is recorded in Mike Pincombe, 'Thomas Sackville Tragicus: A Case of Poetic Identity', in Sixteenth-Century Identities, ed. by A. J. Piesse (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), pp. 120-40, at pp. 118-19.

[27] Our own project, 'The Origins of Early Modern Literature' (http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/origins/) has begun to map the literary activity of this period; the project is discussed below. One of the former post-dcotoral researchers on this project, Fred Schurink, is currently writing a monograph on Tudor translations, funded by a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship.

[28] There is hope in the shape of two recent doctoral dissertations: Simon McKeown's 'Barnabe Googe: Poetry and Society in the 1560s' (Queen's College Belfast: 1993) and Jessica Winston's 'Literature and Politics at the Early Elizabethan Inns of Court' (University of California, Santa Barbara: 2002). For those who cannot wait, a useful starting-point would be Norman L. Jones, The Birth of the Elizabethan Age: England in the 1560s (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

Formal analysis and a concomitant appreciation of literary artefacts for their aesthetics are not currently much employed by most early modernists, as we favour more historicist approaches. As a result, evaluations of mid-Tudor style, particularly its poetics, tend to recycle too-easily received commonplaces without further interrogation. One thinks, for example, of the phrase 'lumbering fourteeners'. Do fourteen-syllable couplets really 'lumber'? Yet this phrase has now entered the realm of popular criticism — there are no fewer than thirteen hits on Google (though, predictably, none for 'frisky fourteeners').[29] The other long line favoured by Tudor poets, poulter's measure, fares even worse ('anything is better than poulter's,' observes Lewis, after a diatribe against Golding's 'ugly fourteeners').[30] But, of course, there is nothing intrinsically inferior about these long lines, and even Lewis was intermittently impressed by Phaer's Virgil ('At some of the great lines [...] he has come as near to success as anyone', p. 249).

To appreciate mid-Tudor verse one must read it with an open mind. Naturally, there is plenty of bad writing; that is true of any age — even our own. It is probably true that the poets of this particular period had particular faults. One of these might be the syntactic inversions that some of them will tolerate in order to make their verses rhyme, a point raised by the engagingly straightforward William Webbe in his Discourse of English Poetry (1586): 'For though it be tolerable in a verse to set words so extraordinarily as other speech will not admit, yet heed is to be taken lest by too much affecting that manner we make both the verse unpleasant and the sense obscure'.[31]

On the other hand, the same point was also made in a more partisan spirit by Abraham Fleming in his second translation of Virgil's Bucolics (1589). Fleming was a late convertite to the so-called 'quantitative movement' amongst Elizabethan poets, which advocated the replacement of traditional English rhymed verse with a prosody based on the unrhymed syllabic metres of ancient Greek and Roman poetry.[32] For his original translation in 1575, Fleming had used — yes, fourteeners. But now he chose 'bare metre' and 'not in foolish rhyme, the nice observation whereof many times darkeneth, corrupteth, perverteth and falsifieth both the sense and the signification'.[33] Why is Fleming so indignant about 'foolish rhyme'? Not simply for

[29] Googled on 2 April 2009. Somewhat ominously, one of these was found in a review of two paperback reprints of Chapman's Homer translations by Colin Burrow — commissioned author of The Elizabethans for the new 'OEHL'. See his 'Chapmania', Guardian, Thursday 20 June 2002 http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/jun/20/homer [accessed 2 April 2009].

[30] Lewis, English Literature, pp. 252, 251.

[31] William Webbe, A Discourse of English Poetry, in Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. by G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), I, pp. 226-302, at p. 274.

[32] For this interesting episode in the history of Tudor neo-classicism, see Derek Attridge, Well-Weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[33] Abraham Fleming (trans.), Bucolics, by Virgil (1589; EEBO facsimile of STC 24817), image 5.

the reasons he gives, but because, like those who use the phrase 'lumbering fourteeners', Fleming is really parroting an attitude.

Disdain for 'rhyme' was first given currency by Roger Ascham in The Schoolmaster (1570), but it came of age when, as part of their campaign to launch the 'New Poet', Spenser and his Cambridge friend, Gabriel Harvey, published a series of letters in 1580, where they discussed the experiments in 'reformed versifying' in which they were currently engaged. Harvey was genuinely interested in the technicalities of the new prosody, and Spenser was titillated by the access it gave him to courtier-poets Sidney and his friend, Sir Edward Dyer: 'they have me, I thank them, in some use of familiarity', simpers the excited young sub-gentleman.[34]

Phrases from this correspondence, which shimmered with the borrowed glamour of Sidney, soon found themselves used as the small change of quantitative parlance, often taken more seriously than they were originally intended. Harvey is hyperbolically delighted that Sidney and Dyer are to 'help forward our new famous enterprise for the exchanging of barbarous and balductum rhymes with artificial verses', but, two years later, Richard Stanyhurst, in his translation into 'metre' of the first four books of Virgil's Aeneid (1582), repeats it all too seriously when he produces an array of doggerel rhymes to mock — 'He is not a king that weareth satin, | But he is a king that eateth bacon' — and barks out that we should all 'leave to these doltish coistrels their rude rhyming and balductum ballads'.[35] Fleming belongs to the same rather irascible crew of metrical reformers.[36]

This leads us to one of the most important and attractive qualities of mid-Tudor literature: its owlish humour. Spenser's letters to Harvey do have the authentic ring of smug self-satisfaction, it is true, but Harvey's letters to Spenser are pervaded by the ironical hyperbole that marks much mid-Tudor prose, as, for example, when he refers to his young friend's missives as 'long, large, lavish, luxurious, laxative letters', then immediately checks himself with a mock-reproof: 'now, a' God's name, when did I ever in my life hunt the letter [alliterate] before?'[37] Alliteration, because of its similarity to rhyme, was also criticised by the

[34] Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser, Two Other Very Commendable Letters, in The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, ed. by J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), pp. 633-43, at p. 633.

[35] Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser, Three Proper and Witty Familiar Letters, in Spenser, Poetical Works, pp. 609-32, at p. 623; Richard Stanyhurst, 'Dedication and Preface', in Smith, Elizabethan Critical Essays, I, 135-47, at 141.

[36] To be fair, the pre-quantitative Fleming is more lenient to doggerel. In 1580, he wrote an account of the memorials erected in honour of a London philanthropist, one of which was written in very simple style: 'The verses upon his tomb-stone are not so well in my thinking: 'That I have, that I gave, That I spent, that I had'. It may be they were disordered, for there is no rhyme, though there be reason'. See A Memorial of the Famous Monuments and Charitable Alms-Deeds of the Right Worshipful Master William Lambe (1580; EEBO facsimile of STC 11047), image 20.

[37] Harvey and Spenser, Two Letters, p. 639.

reformed versifiers. Harvey thus can display his taste and learning at the same time as making fun of himself and his preoccupation with what he regards as trivial: 'Fie on childish affection in the discoursing and deciding of school-matters'.[38]

Harvey inherits this sense of humour from earlier writers such as William Baldwin, whose Beware the Cat (1570) is now widely recognised as one of the masterpieces of mid-Tudor prose. This is a complex dialogue centred around the unlikely tale of a man who made and took a potion which allowed him to understand the speech of cats, and Baldwin takes great delight in parading his pseudo-technical expertise in medicine and magic. But the most amusing part of the book is the ironically dead-pan commentary that fills its margins, subverting the fantastical story it tells with its deflationary remarks.[39] Baldwin gives himself a small role within the dialogue, but presents himself not as its witty creator but rather as a narrow-minded semi-scholar (compare Chaucer's self-deprecating portraits in The Canterbury Tales or The House of Fame). The work was much admired by later writers, especially Nashe, who was Baldwin's Elizabethan heir in many respects. But its touch may also be seen in The Shepheardes Calender. We are supposed to admire the poetry, but the best bit of the book is without doubt the ironically pedantic commentary by the mysterious 'E. K.'. The 'Drab' element easily beats out the 'Golden' (and sixteenth-century paratext is a rich area for study).[40]

Baldwin is the master of this kind of humour, not only in Beware the Cat, but also in the surprisingly funny dialogue he wrote to link the 'tragedies' in one of the other great mid-Tudor landmarks: A Mirror of Magistrates (1559, 1563). A group of writers have been commissioned to write the last two centuries of English history in the form of laments spoken as if by the ghosts of kings and noblemen who came to a sticky end through Fortune or their own vices. In some ways, this collection covers similar ground to the contention between Churchyard and Camell, since it shows non-elites participating in political debate, and Churchyard was just one of the contributing authors who did not come from gentry stock (others include Baldwin himself and Francis Seager); the collection is also addressed, in all versions up to 1611, not just 'to the nobility' but to 'all other in office'.

One might think that a sombre tone would be appropriate for such weighty material, but it is all very light-hearted. The poets chaff each other on their performances, and only once do they seem at all affected by the tragic tales they relate, when the tragedy of the apparently virtuous earl of Salisbury causes them to

[38] Ibid., p. 640.

[39] Indeed, this tradition of ironic glossing can be found in R. Smyth's 1540 ballad, An Artificial Apology, which advertises in its title the 'annotations of the mellifluous and mystical Master Mynterne, marked in the margent [margin] for the enucleation of certain obscure obelisks'.

[40] The best introduction to theories of paratext is Gérard Genette's Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

fall 'into a dump, inwardly lamenting his woeful destiny'.[41] Otherwise, they simply comment on the quality of the metrical technique, usually rather facetiously, and move on to the next performance. A particularly funny moment occurs when Baldwin relates how he fell asleep and saw two badly mangled figures approach him, one of which, headless, has to speak through his 'weasand-pipe' — his brutally truncated wind-pipe.[42] Baldwin registers the orthodox Aristotelian responses of fear and pity when he sees this tragic spectacle, but he cannot help drawing attention to the 'ventriloquism' of the poets' performance in the other tragedies, for this is literally what the ghost does in this case: he speaks from his belly (venter, belly; loquor, speak).

Black humour is perhaps an appropriate response to the violent political culture of mid-Tudor England. It was not only leading members of the nobility who lost their heads with alarming frequency under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I but, increasingly, ordinary people whose consciences refused to let them to turn their coats in the bewildering succession of religious U-turns, and who suffered martyrdom as a consequence. The almost continuous pattern of rebellion and suppression that marked the earlier Tudor period, and belied the myth that Henry VII had brought peace and an end to civil war, together with the unprecedented opportunities offered to the rapacious by the dissolution of the religious houses after the break with Rome, made it especially hard to make the case for the moral authority of the ruling class in this period. Humour was one way of dealing with the evacuation of real respect for royalty or nobility.

For an example we may take the tale of 'Flamock's Fart' in George Puttenham's Art of English Poesy, published in 1589, though most of it was probably written in the late 1560s. Following the tradition of classical rhetoric manuals, Puttenham devotes considerable space to humour in his book, and, inter alia, tells the story of how Henry VIII blew his horn as he entered his hunting-park at Greenwich, and how Sir Andrew Flamock, 'a merry, conceited man and apt to scoff [...] let out a rap nothing faintly'.[43] The king was offended but Flamock pacified him with a witty answer: 'If it please you, Sir, [...] your Majesty blew one blast for the keeper, and I another for his man'. Flamock wriggles out of a tricky situation, but, since we are told that he had 'his tail at commandment', there is no mistaking this minor act of revolt against his social subordination ('If it please you, Sir'). It may be noted that Henry was less pleased when Flamock mocked Henry's improvised verses on his love for 'a fair lady' (probably Katherine Howard): 'Within this tower, | There lieth a flower, | That hath my heart'. Flamock finished the rhyme as you may guess, and Henry sent him away 'that he should no more be so near to him'.

[41] The Mirror for Magistrates, ed. by Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 154.

[42] Mirror, p. 181.

[43] George Puttenham, The Art of English Poesy, ed. by Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (1589; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007), p. 352.

Or we have the instance of a poet whom Lewis dismissed as being 'very, very bad'.[44] In 1565, Thomas Peend (or Delapeend) produced A Pleasant Fable of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, to which he added 'a moral in English verse' in poulter's measure. The first part is a lively adaptation of the tale in Ovid's Metamorphosis, which, though it displeased Lewis, was good enough to exert its influence on the hyper-Golden poetry of Hero and Leander by Christopher Marlowe.[45] The moral is unremarkable, perhaps, but the final part of the poem moves into more interesting territory when it asks a series of rhetorical questions on the theme of 'why do women love men so passionately?'. He ends by asking what induced Venus 'to serve that grisly sire, | The coppersmith deformed, [...] Sir Vulcan with his drowsy [scurvy] poll, | A smith which did on stithy [anvil] toll'.[46] At this point, when he has to explain why Venus shifted her attention from beautiful boys like Adonis to an ugly and menial god like Vulcan, Peend becomes very coy, and refers to the fate that met Tiresias when he was tempted to inquire to deeply into the love-life of the gods. But the answer seems to be clear enough: Adonis may be pretty, but Vulcan gives sexual satisfaction when he toils on Venus's stithy. Peend's moralising is thus undercut by this witty Parthian shot.

Humour, then, appears in often unexpected places — be it in works of historical and political import, such as A Mirror for Magistrates, or moralising works like Peend's epyllion or the single-authored miscellanies of Inns of Court writers like Googe and Turberville. Richard Panofsky characterizes 'the distinctive voice of the early Elizabethan poet' as that 'of the schoolmaster exhorting or reminding possibly wayward youths'.[47] Yet this didacticism goes in hand with, and is subverted by, a dry, tongue-in-cheek wit, as in Googe's précis of the already clichéd pains of the archetypal Petrarchan lover. 'Two lines shall tell the grief that I by love sustain,' he writes: 'I burn, I flame, I faint, I freeze, of hell I feel the pain'.[48] To fail to recognise the humour is to be like Gascoigne's 'block-headed reader', who fell in to the trap of interpreting too literally the contention between Camell and Churchyard (discussed earlier), 'constru[ing]' it to 'be indeed a quarrel between two neighbors, of whom that one having a camel in keeping, and that other having charge of the churchyard, it was supposed they had grown to debate'.[49]

IV. Recovering mid-Tudor literature: resources and challenges

[44] Lewis, English Literature, p. 250.

[45] Lewis recognised the debt (1954, p. 323).

[46] Thomas Peend, A Pleasant Fable of Hermpahroditus and Salmacis (1565; EEBO facsimile of STC 18971), images 13-14.

[47] Cited in Helgerson, Elizabethan Prodigals, 32.

[48] Barnabe Googe, Eclogues, Epitaphs and Sonnets, ed. by Judith M. Kennedy (1563; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 98 (# 37).

[49] Gascoigne, Hundreth Sundry Flowers, ed. by Pigman, p. 366.

The time, then, is ripe for a reassessment of mid-sixteenth-century writing: to rediscover its humour, inventiveness and — dare we say it? — charm; to reclaim its marginalised voices and genres.[50] Much fine work is already in print or underway. Oxford University Press and Blackwell have been sponsoring a number of forthcoming collections of essays which, for the first time, will provide major surveys of the writing of this neglected period, amongst them the Blackwell Companion to Tudor Literature, 1485-1603, edited by Kent Cartwright, and several volumes in the Oxford Handbook series: Tudor Literature (edited by the authors of this piece), Tudor Drama (ed. Thomas Betteridge and Walker) and Early Modern Prose (ed. Andrew Hadfield).[51] Valuable resources already exist, often in the form of dusty and forgotten editions from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, produced under the auspices of such series as the Camden Society, the Early English Texts Society, or the Scottish Texts Society. The Yearbook of English Studies also issued a special edition on Tudor literature in 2008, edited by Andrew Hiscock (vol. 38).

New technology also creates new research opportunities. Most important of these is the search engine, which generates material that would otherwise take a life time to find in paper. One of the earliest and most extensive of these web-based projects is Chadwyck Healey's Literature Online (LION), which has by now scanned and edited nearly all the poetry and drama of our period (inter alia), as well as a good deal of literary prose; their poetry collection includes some manuscript verse. Early English Books Online (EEBO), to which LION is now linked, provides facsimile images of almost every page printed in England or in Britain up to 1700; vast quantities of these have been scanned and processed by an optical recognition system, which, whilst rather patchy with respect to accuracy, nonetheless provide astonishing coverage.[52]

These databases have emancipated texts: you do not need to go to research libraries, at Harvard, Oxford or elsewhere; on the whole, you can read these once inaccessible texts from your study, in digitised versions of sixteenth-century editions (provided your institution subscribes to the databases, that is). Perhaps if Lewis had access to such a resource, he would not have found his Tudor volume quite so hellish, nor its literature quite so darned 'drab'. The emancipation of texts is also demographic as well as geographic. With a little training (for example, in reading black letter type), EEBO makes them accessible to undergraduates

[50] Besides those already highlighted in the main text, genres requiring sustained study include non-dramatic dialogue and anthologies of short 'tragical tales' (proto-novelle), such as Geoffrey Fenton's Certain Tragical Discourses (1567), George Painter's Palace of Pleasure (2 volumes, 1566, 1567) and George Pettie's A Petite Place of Pettie his Pleasure (1576).

[51] Oxford University Press also have a particularly strong recent record of Tudor monographs, including: Brian Cummings, The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace (2002); Helen Cooper, The English Romance in Time (2004); Greg Walker, Writing under Tyranny (2005); James Daybell, Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England (2006); Alexandra Gillespie, Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books, 1473-1557 (2006). The crucial mediaeval-Renaissance watershed is interrogated in the forthcoming Oxford University Press collection: Cultural Reformations, ed. by James Simpson and Brian Cummings.

[52] See: http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/marketing/editpolicy2.jsp, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home (accessed 14 April 2009).

as well as academics. For the first time, we do not have to rely on market economics — or on persuading a traditional printer to produce an edition — if we want to teach and study non-canonical writing.

However, the opportunities are not without their own challenges. Unrestrained reliance on search engines risks treating texts as sources to be mined for useful 'quote-bytes'. Keyword searches can speed up the process of finding relevant texts, but they should not become a substitute for actually reading them. Plucking quotations out of context potentially distorts them; for example, in dialogue (without a doubt, the most prominent of Tudor genres in print) it matters who says what, and that information — about the reliability or not of the interlocutor — can only be gleaned by a thorough consideration of the work as a whole.[53] The new technology allows us to reach parts of the corpus that earlier critics hardly knew existed, and thus to speed up production of material. However, we must be careful that this 'new' work does not simply confirm conclusions reached by well-established consideration of the traditional canon. We must read and think about entire texts, not simply grab quotations.

The valuable service provided by LION and, still more so, EEBO, also threatens the viability of printed scholarly editions. The texts on these resources come without notes or other critical, bibliographical or biographical apparatus. Yet such supporting material is often crucial for opening up texts which can otherwise be obscure — be it linguistically (as unwary readers become embroiled in often labyrinthine Tudor sentences, for example), or because of the density of contemporary allusions. The scarcity of secondary scholarship on many mid-Tudor texts means that this explanatory material is currently unavailable. Here again, though, electronic resources are breaking new ground: EEBO has recently launched a series of 'Introductions', co-ordinated by Edward Wilson-Lee, which discuss various contextual, bibliographical, and reception-based issues associated with a work in EEBO that has received no recent scholarly edition. The authors of the current article also lead an on-going project, 'The Origins of Early Modern Literature' (OEML), funded for its first three years by the AHRC, designed — like the EEBO Introduction Series — to open up access to the material of the mid-Tudor years.[54] The project website hosts an annotated, and still expanding, catalogue of literary works printed in English between 1519 and 1579. This includes details of titles, authors (including the authors of liminary material, such as prefaces and dedicatory poems), printers, booksellers, dedicatees, entries in the Stationers Register, and other bibliographical information. It also contains a list of contents for each work, and information about genres, subjects, sources, adaptations and literary coteries, as well as short essays on the context for each work.

[53] Roger Deakins estimates that there are about 230 sixteenth-century prose dialogues extant in print, 'Tudor Prose Dialogue', Studies in English Literature, 20 (1980), pp. 5-23, at p. 9. This figure obviously excludes verse dialogues, or dialogues in manuscript.

[54] The URL is: http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/origins/.

The variety of search types available (people, genre, subject, date, keyword) make it an extremely flexible finding aid, for example to trace allusions or locate works using particular genres or verse forms.

Owing to its accessibility and coverage, the arrival of EEBO has impacted on manuscript studies. As noted above, if you are using early printed books, for much of the time, you can now do so in the comfort and convenience of your study. That is far less easy when dealing with manuscripts. Some are available on microfiche, microfilm and CD-Roms. However, for a non-specialist readership, physical access is not the only difficulty: manuscript works must be edited, not least because sixteenth-century handwriting is illegible to the untrained eye.[55] Indeed, a vast stock of undiscovered literature is still out there, in private collections, country houses, or local archives. In 2007, for example, the British Library acquired a forgotten sixteenth-century anthology of verse and prose (now BL Additional MS. 82370), previously in private ownership. Compiled in South Yorkshire, this will cast light on the kind of literary activity taking place well beyond the metropolis and its immediate environs. This document is about to be edited as part of an AHRC-funded project ('Early Modern Manuscript Poetry'), led by Steven W. May, which — by producing editions of this and two other, more well-known manuscripts and an edition of Elizabethan verse satires — promises to add about 200 poems to the literary canon.[56]

A further note of caution should be sounded about EEBO. Many bibliographical issues — including binding, paper type, evidence of censorship — can only be resolved by seeing the book in person. Nor are all copies of an early modern edition identical. Texts were often corrected during the print run, meaning that variant copies exist. Seeing one version does not mean you have seen a representative of all the copies of that edition. Different copies can also bear the traces of early readers, information which can add greatly to our understanding of how our forebears used, handled and responded to their books. If we become too reliant on EEBO (as wonderful and useful as it is), we risk overlooking this still unmined resource.

There is one additional challenge that we want to raise. At present, there is no reliable bibliographical finding aid for secondary material on literature in general, let alone a minority interest like Tudor literature. Cataloguing agencies like the Modern Language Association (MLA) and British Humanities Index (BHI) do not, and cannot, provide full coverage. There is too much being produced, and too few cataloguing resources. The risk is that interesting work can get lost; and here there is a vicious circle. If a work is not catalogued on one of these resources, it is unlikely to be cited. If it is not cited, it is unlikely to be read. Previously, authors could contact the MLA with bibliographical details of their works, but this is no longer

[55] Useful introductions to, and digitised samples of, early modern hands can be found at http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/ceres/ehoc/ and http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/Palaeography/. These sites also include practical, on-line tutorials.

[56] These manuscripts are Victoria and Albert Museum, Dyce MS. 44; British Library, Harleian MS. 7392(2).

available. What we need is a Wiki-ography for criticism of the period, updated by authors and readers. Once again, the new technology makes such a thing possible.

Conclusion

Tudor writers were obsessed with the passage of time and the 'ruins' of past civilisations it left in its wake. But it is clear that the present moment offers unprecedented opportunities for the recovery and exploration of the literary and intellectual culture of mid-Tudor England. For all our caveats, LION and EEBO and OEML and other electronic resources are revealing up a research vista previously unimaginable in its (relatively) open access to the ordinary student of literature. But it is not only a question of technological innovation: what really counts is the new lease on life given to mid-Tudor studies by the people who are active in its promotion. Looking back over these past ten or a dozen years, it is gratifying to see how a handful of enthusiasts has grown into several hundreds. In 1997, whilst one of the authors was engaged in slightly anxious discussions of the future of mid-Tudor literature, the other was busy starting her PhD on exactly that topic, blithely unaware of its beleaguered state. Anxiety has given way to a sense of modest confidence that mid-Tudor topics can engage the interest of the rising generation of scholars, and it should be noted that Wilson-Lee's EEBO introductions have mainly been contributed by postgraduate students working on the texts they have written up. The next step? Yes — undergraduate dissertations! If we have succeeded in this brief article in making mid-Tudor literature seem attractive and worth studying at the level of the BA, perhaps, in another ten or a dozen years, we may see the period even edging its way back on to the undergraduate curriculum — and that would be a real achievement.