



**ENGLISH
RENAISSANCE
POETRY**

**A COLLECTION OF
SHORTER POEMS**

SELECTED BY
JOHN WILLIAMS
INTRODUCTION BY
ROBERT PINSKY

JOHN WILLIAMS (1922–1994) was born and raised in northeast Texas. Despite a talent for writing and acting, he flunked out of a local junior college after his first year. He reluctantly joined the war effort, enlisting in the Army Air Corps, and managed to write a draft of his first novel while there. Once home, Williams found a small publisher for the novel and enrolled at the University of Denver, where he was eventually to receive both his BA and MA, and where he was to return as an instructor in 1954.

He remained on the staff of the creative writing program at the University of Denver until his retirement in 1985. During these years, he was an active guest lecturer and writer, editing an anthology of English Renaissance poetry and publishing two volumes of his own poems, as well as three novels: *Butcher's Crossing*, *Stoner*, and the National Book Award–winning *Augustus* (all published as NYRB Classics).

ROBERT PINSKY's recent books are his *Selected Poems* (2011) and the anthology-manifesto *Singing School* (2013). As U.S. Poet Laureate (1997–2000), Pinsky founded the Favorite Poem Project, with a growing video library at www.favoritepoem.org of Americans of various professions and ages reading aloud and commenting on poems by Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, Shakespeare, and others. His new book of poems is *At the Foundling Hospital* (2016).

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A Collection of Shorter Poems from Skelton to Jonson

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NEW YORK REVIEW BOOKS



New York

THIS IS A NEW YORK REVIEW BOOK
PUBLISHED BY THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS
435 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014
www.nyrb.com

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Cover image: Nicholas Hilliard, *Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland*, c.
1590–95; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
Cover design: Katy Homans

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Williams, John, 1922–1994 editor.

Title: English Renaissance poetry / selected by John Williams ; introduction by
Robert Pinsky.

Description: New York : New York Review Books, 2016. | Series: New York
Review Books classics

Identifiers: LCCN 2015037977 | ISBN 9781590179789 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: English poetry—Early modern, 1500–1700. | Renaissance—
England. | BISAC: POETRY / Anthologies (multiple authors). | POETRY /
General.

Classification: LCC PR1205. E5 2016 | DDC 821/.308—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015037977>

ISBN 978-1-59017-978-9

v1.0

For a complete list of titles, visit www.nyrb.com or write to:
Catalog Requests, NYRB, 435 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

CONTENTS

Biographical Notes

Title Page

Copyright and More Information

Introduction

Preface: Three Phases of Renaissance Poetry

ENGLISH RENAISSANCE POETRY

John Skelton

Sir Thomas More

Sir Thomas Wyatt

Thomas, Lord Vaux

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

George Gascoigne

Barnabe Googe

George Turberville

Sir Edward Dyer

Sir Walter Raleigh

Edmund Spenser

Sir Philip Sidney

Fulke Greville

George Peele

Robert Greene

Thomas Lodge

Samuel Daniel

Michael Drayton

English Madrigal Verse

William Shakespeare

Thomas Campion

Thomas Nashe

John Donne

Ben Jonson

Index

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning, for many poets and readers, there are anthologies. They often provide our earliest source for poems, before the serious investment of buying new books by living poets, or building a personal library of classic collections by the likes of Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, William Blake. Exploring anthologies may inspire that step of commitment to a vocation. For me, the most valuable anthology eventually became, and remains, this one: John Williams's *English Renaissance Poetry*.

But not at first. For many in my generation, anthologies were what we had instead of MFA programs, ways to learn about contemporary poetry. The battle between two anthologies of the 1960s was central: In one corner, with an introduction by Robert Frost, was *The New Poets of England and America* (1957), edited by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson. In the opposite corner, we had *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*, edited by Donald Allen. Like my poet friends, I owned both books when I was in college. The differences between the two books felt important.

In that half-forgotten anthology war, Allen's *New American Poetry* pretty much won: It introduced us young readers to John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, James Schuyler, and Gary Snyder, poets who merited the word "new" in relation to Frost and to T. S. Eliot, both living, preeminent senior figures. The other anthology, with Frost's name on the cover, felt less like a fresh departure. But in time the split between the two books faded: In Hall, Pack, and Simpson's *New Poets* we read early poems by Thom Gunn, Robert Lowell, W. S. Merwin, Adrienne Cecile Rich (as she was still known, one of the few women in either book), and James Wright. The two contending anthologies melded toward each other and both books receded.

Why does *English Renaissance Poetry*, with the scholarly, almost finicky subtitle, *A Collection of Shorter Poems from Skelton to Jonson*, endure? What contemporary relevance inheres in a collection of poems written in the sixteenth century, not long after the beginning of what scholars call Modern English?

One answer is the appeal of an alternative canon. The standard academic curriculum stressed Shakespeare's sonnets and, powerfully affected by Eliot's essays, certain rhetorically flamboyant poems by John Donne, George Herbert, and Andrew Marvell. Williams, influenced by Yvor Winters, is skeptical about sonnets, with a different list of essential poems and poets. And without

necessarily accepting either list, a young poet might relish the disagreement and appreciate the clarity of the issues as they unfolded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Unlike the dueling anthologies of contemporary poetry, this collection of old poems did not invite the risk of mere imitation. From a writer's perspective especially, this anthology offered the possibility of learning something new, as it still does.

And this is, in another sense, a writer's book. John Williams's novels *Butcher's Crossing* (1960), *Stoner* (1965), and *Augustus* (1972)—a Western, an American academic's story, and an epistolary novel set in Augustan Rome—different though they are, share a kind of invisible hypnotism: The sentences create their various worlds and engage the reader with a power hard to define. The quiet, unshowy prose style attains a kind of reverse flamboyance: Look!—the clichés of the American West lucidly transformed; the struggles of a repressed professor made genuinely heroic; the voices of ancient poets and politicians, utterly convincing—all accomplished with a minimum of noise or surface effort.

Back in the 1960s, when this collection was first published (as a Doubleday Anchor Original), a serious reader might notice or sense that it was created by a masterful writer, rather than a conventional scholar. Here is a paragraph from Williams's little introductory note on George Gascoigne (1539?–77):

In virtually every calling that he followed, Gascoigne was a failure; he failed as a courtier, he failed as a gentleman farmer, he failed as a soldier—a series of defeats movingly explained and justified in his greatest poem, *Gascoigne's Woodmanship*. But he was perhaps the best-known English writer of his own day; he composed a blank verse tragedy, *Jocasta*, which was an adaptation of an Italian play; he wrote a comedy in prose, *Supposes*, again an adaptation from Ariosto; he wrote a long satire in blank verse, *The Steel Glass*, a work for which he is, most unfortunately, best remembered; he wrote a fictional prose narrative, the *Adventures of Master F. J.*, the first narrative of its sort to appear in English; and he wrote the first important treatise on English prosody, *Certain Notes of Instruction*. His first book of poetry was *A Hundredth Sundrie Flowers*, which was reissued with additions and alterations in 1575 as *The Posies of George Gascoigne, Esquire*.

The paragraph seems like a brief, straightforward account of Gascoigne's career, emphasizing the poet's restless originality and his worldly frustrations. The prose, with its Hemingway-style repetitions of "failure" and "first," is bold but

plain. The effect, as in the novels, is of a narrative intelligence confident beyond raising its voice.

Williams dismisses in passing the standard academic mentality that noted Gascoigne mainly for a long satire, *The Steel Glass*. Instead, he considers Gascoigne's career as a writer and points to "Gascoigne's Woodmanship" not simply as his best poem but as his "greatest." Disregarding the tastes and values of T. S. Eliot, then at a peak of influence, Williams instead adopts the outlook—and the language—of the thorny poet-critic Yvor Winters's essay "The 16th Century Lyric in England: A Critical and Historical Reinterpretation," published in installments in the February, March, and April 1939 issues of *Poetry*. In that piece Winters, echoed a couple of decades later by Williams, also calls "Gascoigne's Woodmanship" "Gascoigne's greatest poem."

It is cause for wonderment that *Poetry*, the leading monthly magazine for contemporary poetry, published over three issues an essay by a poet still in his thirties, on the subject of sixteenth-century poetry, contradicting accepted scholarly ideas about the subject. A different cause for wonderment is that the essay, long treasured in brittle photocopies, is now readily available online. In the quoted paragraph about Gascoigne's career, Williams's art as a writer reflects his principles as an editor: The repetitions of "failure" are a deft, telling allusion to "Woodmanship," a move that could be fully appreciated only after reading that amazing poem. The editor's biographical introduction imitates the poem: an indirect joke on, and eventually with, the reader.

In "Woodmanship," Gascoigne addresses the powerful Lord Grey of Wilton. Accompanying that Lord in a hunt on one of his estates, the poet has blundered by being a poor shot with his bow. Gascoigne compares his incompetence as a marksman with his inability to get ahead in the world, falling behind more calculating or corrupt figures who are better focused on gain and self-advancement. As a student of the law, Gascoigne says, he blundered by studying the classics and valuing eloquence. Then, trying to be a courtier instead, he naively wasted his "peter pence" on silk stockings, a fancy bonnet and outfit, when wiser men kept their money to spend on bribery. Changing to a military career, as an officer he failed to cheat his men by pocketing money meant for them. Sharper rivals, he tells Lord Grey, those who understand flattery, bribery, and self-promotion, know better how to get life's prizes and rewards:

Yet cannot these with many mast'ries moe
Make me shoot straight at any gainful prick,
Where some that never handled such a bow
Can hit the white or touch it near the quick,

Who can nor speak nor write in pleasant wise,
Nor lead their life by Aristotle's rule,
Nor argue well on questions that arise,
Nor plead a case more than my lord mayor's mule,
Yet can they hit the marks that I do miss . . .

In the poem's closing passage, Gascoigne imagines a final blunder. What if he at last killed a deer, but it was in the wrong category, a doe in nursing-season? Picturing the imagined doe "right before me, at my standing's foot" is another self-deprecating image. I still remember, first reading this poem, being struck by a strange contemporary note in this concluding passage, on the word "suck":

But since my Muse can to my Lord rehearse
What makes me miss, and why I do not shoot,
Let me imagine in this worthless verse,
If right before me, at my standing's foot
There stood a doe, and I should strike her dead,
And then she prove a carrion carcass too,
What figure might I find within my head,
To scuse the rage which ruled me so to do?
Some might interpret with plain paraphrase,
That lack of skill or fortune led the chance,
But I must otherwise expound the case;
I say Jehovah did this doe advance,
And made her bold to stand before me so,
Till I had thrust mine arrow to her heart,
That by the sudden of her overthrow
I might endeavor to amend my part
And turn mine eyes that they no more behold
Such guileful marks as seem more than they be:
And though they glister outwardly like gold,
Are inwardly like brass, as men may see:
And when I see the milk hang in her teat,
Methinks it saith, old babe, now learn to suck,
Who in thy youth couldst never learn the feat
To hit the whites which live with all good luck.
Thus have I told my Lord (God grant in season)
A tedious tale in rhyme, but little reason.

There's an enduring shock to the contemporary feeling of "And when I see the milk hang in her teat / Methinks it saith, old babe, now learn to suck." The sense of sucking up to authority or power strikes a weird, affecting chord with the "old babe" learning to nurse. More historically, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, under "suck," quotes the Coverdale Bible (1535), Psalm 73, in which glib hypocrites prosper: "Corrupte are they . . . They stretch forth their mouth vnto the heauen, & their tonge goeth thorow the worlde. Therefore fall the people vnto them, and there out sucke they no small auantage."

Gascoigne's comedy of the self, his sly way of justifying, even celebrating his ways in contrast to much of the world, has reminded me of Allen Ginsberg. The poem generates a generous laughter in the way he moves between the self-consciousness and clearly feigned modesty of saying things like "this worthless verse." The display of rhetorical mastery, as sometimes in Ginsberg's poetry, includes artful ways of praising and dispraising oneself. There's a related polarity between invention on one side and directness on the other: the elaborate imagination of the doe, including the hanging teat and "the sudden of her overthrow" contrasted with the colloquial simplicity of language in, for example, the one-syllable plainness of "Yet can they hit the marks that I do miss." The plainness is artful: There's a mock-innocence, even something like a smirk, in the concluding two lines that deprecate the poet's "tedious tale in rhyme, but little reason." That coda is Gascoigne's lightly ironic bow to his audience. By addressing a poem about his deficiencies as, in effect, a way of sucking-up to "my Lord," Gascoigne's host and potential patron Lord Grey, the poet adds another level of self-perception, bemusing and bemused.

The artificial element in Gascoigne's plainspoken manner indicates the limitations of a too-rigid, binary division of the period's styles into Plain and Ornate, Drab and Ornamental, or, in the useful, temporal terms of Williams's lucid preface, Native and Petrarchan. It's true that sixteenth-century stylistic principles, innovations, and evolutions are possible to trace with relative clarity compared to the present; in that remote time, changes in the art and in the language itself were rapid, foreign influences were welcome, and the art of poetry was in a storm of experiment. The clarity of those currents is one pleasure of this useful anthology.

But works of art, and artists, do not fit into easy categories or strict divisions. Often, the styles, divisions, categories are most useful when they are challenged, combined, broken, or teased. For example, Walter Raleigh's "Nature, That Washed Her Hands in Milk" begins with the conventional, flirtatious Petrarchan subject matter, treated with defining matters of style: a flamboyantly extended metaphor; playful mythology; sensuous physical details; quick sentences that

dance across clever rhymes:

Nature, that washed her hands in milk
And had forgot to dry them,
Instead of earth took snow and silk
At Love's request, to try them
If she a mistress could compose
To please Love's fancy out of those.

Her eyes he would should be of light,
A violet breath, and lips of jelly,
Her hair not black nor over-bright,
And of the softest down her belly:
As for her inside, he'd have it
Only of wantonness and wit.

The generic objectification of the lady is extreme, though even while scorning the graceful, formulaic rhetoric a reader might laugh with some appreciation at the “As for her inside” ingredients specified for an ideal lover: wantonness and wit. The next stanza continues and extends the conventional, Petrarchist cliché: The lady is cruel. Even the light-footed polysyllables and the brilliantly musical rhymes can't disguise the tritest of phrases for the lady's hardness—“heart of stone”—banal in a way that even the preceding, familiar images of silk and jelly are not.

Reading these stanzas aloud makes even more striking both the physical grace and the conventional material. The poet, it turns out, is using both those attributes dramatically, as foils for the reversal that follows:

But Time, which Nature doth despise,
And rudely gives her love the lie,
Makes hope a fool and sorrow wise,
His hands doth neither wash nor dry,
But, being made of steel and rust,
Turns snow and silk and milk to dust.

The acrobatic, twirling two-syllable rhymes (“dry them/try them,” “belly/jelly”) are gone. The sentence-units are shorter, and the stresses are heavier. The lines are end-stopped and tend toward a definite pause right in the middle. Instead of the polysyllabic “violet” and “wantonness,” this stanza, opposite in every way,

resolves in the monosyllabic “Turns snow and silk and milk to dust.” The symmetrical reversal, with a dark verve of its own, persists and intensifies:

The light, the belly, lips and breath,
He dims, discolors, and destroys,
With those he feeds (but fills not) Death
Which sometimes were the food of Joys:
Yea, Time doth dull each lively wit,
And dries all wantonness with it.

O cruel Time, which takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, and all we have,
And pays us but with age and dust;
Who in the dark and silent grave,
When we have wandered all our ways,
Shuts up the story of our days.

Raleigh’s poem, clearly, delights in the expertise of its opening lacework and the severity of its closing measures. He moves from Petrarchist to plain style, in two suavely opposed parts.

One description of the classical plain style, or *genus tenue*, compares it to highly refined oil: Odorless, colorless, nearly invisible, it has the ability to penetrate deep into the hardest rock. A line from a celebrated poem (and song) in John Dowland’s *Second Booke of Songes or Ayres* says, “It is a precious jewel to be plain.” The line exemplifies the penetrating, unadorned quality it celebrates. But on the other hand, the poem, as a professed defense of plainness, is remarkably fancy. Along with its plain moments, the writing is elaborately and gorgeously ornamented:

Fine knacks for ladies, cheap, choice, brave and new!
Good pennyworths! but money cannot move.
I keep a fair but for the fair to view.
A beggar may be liberal of love.
Though all my wares be trash, the heart is true.

Great gifts are guiles and look for gifts again;
My trifles come as treasures from the mind.
It is a precious jewel to be plain;
Sometimes in shell the Orient’s pearls we find.
Of others take a sheaf. of me a grain.

Within this pack pins points, laces and gloves,
And diverse toys fitting a country fair.
But in my heart, where duty serves and loves,
Turtles and twins, court's brood, a heavenly pair.
Happy the heart that thinks of no removes!

The extended metaphor of the lover (and poet) as a peddler resembles the Petrarchist conceits of the sonnet sequences, enlivened by rhythms that, especially at the beginning of each stanza, imitate street cries. Hawking its poetic and amatory “toys” as “trash,” the poem claims the reverse: “Of others take a sheaf, of me a grain.” Is that line plain? Or does the play on “sheaf” as meaning bundles of paper as well as stalks, make it ornate?

As with the opposed halves of Raleigh's poem, this speech for a street merchant teases and undermines rigid ideas of the two styles while demonstrating an expert understanding of them. Also undermined are the gender stereotypes of courtship, courtly manners, and sonneteering; the first four words imply a condescending challenge: Can ladies distinguish knacks from Orient pearls, trash from jewels? The “treasures from the mind” come to predominate, and the last three lines, though they incorporate the court, raise an ideal of mutual love, rather than flirtation-games.

Somewhere in the background are fads, counter-fads, and reactions. In the 1590s there was a tremendous vogue for sonnet sequences. Many dozens of sequences appeared, inspired by Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* in three popular, pirated editions published in 1591 and 1592, years after Sidney's death in battle in 1586 at the age of thirty-two. Hundreds of sequences appeared, modeled after Sidney and, indirectly, Sidney's own model the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374, anglicized to Petrarch), before the mode went out of style. Wit and energy were concentrated on a single form, with one repeated emotional set-up or plot: the frustrated seduction of a scornful lady. Moreover, that conventional material was treated inventively, but repetitiously, within a standard rhetoric of extended metaphors, conceits, wordplays: the peacock-tail of eloquence. As with technologies, great advances were made by this narrow, intense focus, enabling a new flexibility of sentence, form, and thought: the “third style” of Williams's preface. The concentrated effort on a single form led to the fluent style, he explains, of the great poems by William Shakespeare, Fulke Greville, Ben Jonson, and John Donne.

The coherence of Williams's historical narrative, based on the Yvor Winters essay in *Poetry*, makes it attractive, whether a reader accepts it entirely or only

in part. It's a literary narrative that is reflected in the *actual*, erotic narrative of Fulke Greville's "All my senses, like beacon's flame" (*Caelica* 56).

At night, apparently in a great country house, his senses arouse his desire to consummate an adulterous love affair, says the poet:

All my senses, like beacon's flame,
Gave alarm to desire
To take arms in Cynthia's name
And set all my thoughts on fire.
Fury's wit persuaded me
Happy love was hazard's heir;
Cupid did best shoot and see
In the night where smooth is fair.
Up I start believing well
To see if Cynthia were awake;
Wonders I saw, who can tell?
And thus unto myself I spake:

At which point, in the midst of this assignation, he composes a little Petrarchist rhapsody to himself, letting his unreigned, overheated imagination spin conceits:

"Sweet God Cupid, where am I,
That by pale Diana's light
Such rich beauties do espy
As harm our senses with delight?
Am I borne up to the skies?
See where Jove and Venus shine,
Showing in her heavenly eyes
That desire is divine;

He sees his Cynthia's eyes as the stars (and gods) Jove and Venus, her belly as the Milky Way, her sex as a "dainty throne," and even her husband glorified as the Olympian cuckold Vulcan:

Look where lies the milken way,
Way unto that dainty throne,
Where, while all the Gods would play,
Vulcan thinks to dwell alone."

In an appropriately hypnotic verse measure, with some syncopated or “sprung” rhythm, this sexually and rhetorically heated passage implicitly criticizes the lover’s psychological state:

I gave reins to this conceit,
Hope went on the wheel of lust;
Fancy’s scales are false of weight,
Thoughts take thought that go of trust.

At this point, what may be defective from a psychological or poetic viewpoint—the conceit’s confusion of desire and heaven, sacred and profane, imaginary and real—turns out to be comically defective, also, as a strategy for seduction. While he “[gives] reins to this conceit,” Cynthia changes her mind, or loses her patience, and runs away, leaving the lover with an embarrassing erection:

I stepped forth to touch the sky,
I a God by Cupid dreams;
Cynthia, who did naked lie,
Runs away like silver streams,
Leaving hollow banks behind
Who can neither forward move,
Nor if rivers be unkind
Turn away or leave to love.
There stand I, like arctic pole,
Where Sol passeth o’er the line,
Mourning my benighted soul,
Which so loseth light divine.

His whole body, like his penis, stands there uselessly, compared to the “benighted” North Pole in winter.

While continuing to develop as a witty, dark account of an inept lover, Greville’s poem deepens at its conclusion to enlarge on the conventional idea that Fancy is false. The concluding lines work as *ars amoris* as well as moral instruction—and, conceivably, as literary criticism:

There stand I like men that preach
From the execution place,
At their death content to teach
All the world with their disgrace.
He that lets his Cvnthia lie

Naked on a bed of play
To say prayers ere she die,
Teacheth time to run away.
Let no love-desiring heart
In the stars go seek his fate:
Love is only Nature's art;
Wonder hinders love and hate.
 None can well behold with eyes
 But what underneath him lies.

This passage of knotted ideas and feeling, compressed into the poem's incantational rhythm, lets different ways of writing, courting, thinking, and feeling collide.

It is hard to say which rhetoric is more impressive or dominant in this closing passage of *Caelica* 56—the abstract terms of remarkable lines like “Wonder hinders love and hate” or the wittily involved figurative language of the conceit. The two kinds of rhetoric reflect (and complicate) two orders of understanding: About seduction, Greville presents the grossly pragmatic advice that you must be sure you are lying on top of the desired body before you go wondering and conceit-making about it. In a moral or psychological sense, he reminds us that the eyes can behold only the material world that lies below us, not the world of forms and ideas. The coarse, practical advice to lovers contrasts with the morally ambitious advice implied by the same lines: to use more than one's eyes. The poem is urbane, yet driven.

The urbanity, like the setting of the poem, is partly a matter of social class. Greville, an aristocrat like his lifelong friend Philip Sidney, held the title Lord Brooke. Among the other poets collected here were drinkers and brawlers who lived by their wits and died young. Williams writes of Thomas Nashe, author of “In Time of Plague,” the poem quoted and misquoted by Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *Ulysses*: “Like the other University Wits with whom his name is associated, his personal life was uncertain, his fortunes often low, and his professional career prolific.” George Peele, author of “Bethsabe's Song,” with its haunting cadences, “died at forty, impoverished and forgotten by his friends.”

These young writers of such different social classes shared an intense, innovator's passion for making poetry in English when the language was new and open to a wide range of discoveries from other languages and other times. They created a body of poetry, and a level of fresh attainment, rivaled only by the Modernists of the early twentieth century. With this book, John Williams created the best, most immediate access to their work.

—ROBERT PINSKY

PREFACE

Three Phases of Renaissance Poetry

I

The period from the beginning of the sixteenth century to about 1630 is a crucial one in the history of English poetry. For a little more than a hundred years, that most sturdy and persistent of all literary forms, the short poem, engaged the attentions of the best literary minds of the century, and as a consequence underwent a series of transformations that changed its nature to a degree not usually recognized by the general reader. Caught in the tangled history of that century, and sometimes obscured by it, are some of the great poems in our language; implicit in those poems, and in the criticism engendered by them, are the essential questions of theory and practice that have occupied historians and critics, as well as poets, for the past three hundred and fifty years.

During this English Renaissance, the short poem passed through three distinct but finally inseparable phases. The earliest of these is the Native tradition, so called because of its roots in the short English poem of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and because of its dependence upon a native medieval tradition of grammar and rhetoric; the purest representatives of this tradition are such Tudor and early Elizabethan poets as John Skelton, Sir Thomas More, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Lord Vaux, George Gascoigne, Barnabe Googe, George Turberville, and Sir Walter Raleigh.

The intermediate tradition is the Petrarchan, so called because of its primary dependence upon the new Italian poetry of Francesco Petrarch and his followers in both Italy and France, and because of its secondary dependence upon the “new” Classical Latin, rather than Medieval Latin, as a normative literary language; this revival of interest in the more “eloquent” Latin writers started in Italy with Petrarch and his contemporaries and spread slowly throughout the continent during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The best representatives of this tradition are such Elizabethans as Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Samuel Daniel, Thomas Campion, and the English Madrigalists.

The third phase is one to which it is difficult to attach a familiar label. It is the major tradition of English poetry, one which assimilates and completes the practices of the earlier phases, gathering the virtues of both and dispensing with the vices of either. Though early, Sir Thomas Wyatt in a few poems presages this tradition; but its best representatives are the major poets of the age, Fulke Greville, William Shakespeare, John Donne, and Ben Jonson.

The foregoing implies that there was a fairly conscious progression from one set of principles to another, from one method to another, throughout the century. That which follows will attempt to suggest the nature and implications of those principles and methods. But any real understanding of the progression must be gained, not by a mere rehearsal of the steps, but by a close examination of that which defines them and makes them possible—a body of great poetry that goes word by word, line by line, through the century, and beyond.

II

Around 1510, the humanist and Catholic martyr, Sir Thomas More, could speak unselfconsciously, directly, almost colloquially, to both his subject and his audience, as if nothing separated them:

Whoso delighteth to proven and assay
Of wavering fortune the uncertain lot,
If that the answer please you not alway,
Blame ye not me; for I command you not
Fortune to trust, and eke full well ye wot
I have of her no bridle in my fist:
She runneth loose, and turneth where she list.

Similarly, a few years later, Wyatt could speak with a comparable straightforwardness and certainty:

If thou wilt mighty be, flee from the rage
Of cruel will, and see thou keep thee free
From the foul yoke of sensual bondage . . .

And some fifty years after More had written his lines, George Gascoigne, perhaps the greatest poet of the purely Native tradition, was still able to speak to an audience of whose presence he was certain, in a tone familiar, blunt, and spontaneous:

The common speech is, spend and God will send;
But what sends he? A bottle and a bag,
A staff, a wallet, and a woeful end
For such as list in bravery so to brag.

These are examples of Native style; and though they were written by representatives of three different generations, by men of exceedingly different temperaments and persuasions, the examples have a great deal in common. All that they have in common will not be evident from these snippets, nor will all that they do not have in common. But a fairly careful reading of the whole poems of which these lines are the beginnings and a careful reading of other poems in the Native tradition will specify the following general observations.

The subject of the Native poem is usually broad and generic and of what we might call persistent human significance; the purpose to which the subject is put is instructive or informative or judicial. Almost always, the Native poet speaks from his own intelligence, as if he knew it existed; he feels no compulsion to mask himself, to assume a persona, to work from cunning, or to live in exile. Speaking from his own intelligence, he speaks to another intelligence, as if he knew that that, too, existed; he is a reasonable man, addressing with his own voice other reasonable men; and the tone of the voice tells us that he is confident of the existence of reasonable men in his audience. And since he is a reasonable man speaking to other reasonable men, his discourse is reasonably organized; he speaks in the accepted forms, forms that have traditionally organized the details of men's thought. That is to say, his discourse, which is the poem, is logical.

On the simplest level of structure, but not necessarily the lowest, the poem is additive and accretive, a kind of catalog of qualities or properties, the details of the poem being ordered by the mere presence of a subject that includes them; this ordering may be clumsy and mechanical, as it often is in Surrey, or it may be almost unbearably powerful, as it is in such a poem as Raleigh's *The Lie*. On a slightly more complex level, the poem, if it is brief, may be the elaboration of a single aphorism or proverb or maxim; if longer, it may be composed of a series of maxims, one maxim proceeding more or less necessarily from another. Several of Lord Vaux's poems are composed in this manner, as are other poems by other Native poets. Often a Native poem, especially if it is brief, is structured according to the demands of formal logic, in the shape of an enthymeme, a syllogism, a sorites, a dilemma, or whatever; sometimes, as in Turberville's brief epigram *Of a Rich Miser*, the lines themselves come very close to marking off the premises and conclusion; more often, the terms are more subtly disposed throughout the poem. But the characteristic structure of the Native poem, the structure in which nearly all the greatest poems of the phase are cast, is expository—that is, the method of sound discourse, in which an object, sensible or otherwise, is selected and dealt with in such a way that its various parts are examined in some detail and are rationally related, both to each other and to the object which they constitute. This is the structure of the three poems that I have

quoted; it is also the characteristic structure of the major phase, that which Ben Jonson used in his more ambitious poems and, with a few qualifications, the structure that John Donne elaborated in those poems of his that we most admire.

Since the Native poet is a reasonable man, and since he has organized his discourse as rationally as he is able, his tone will be appropriate to himself, to what he has to say, and to his audience. The rhetoric of his poem, then, will be subdued to his subject, determined by the substance of his poem, and by its own function, which is to give the appropriate value to that substance. Thus, if we read the Native poem passively or inattentively or insensitively—that is, if we read as if we were not mortals listening to another mortal—the style may seem flat, bare, almost lifeless. But if we *listen* to the poem, we shall hear beneath the emphatic stresses, beneath the bare and essential speech, the human cadence of the human voice, speaking to us as if we were alive.

III

Although the beginnings of Native poetry are dim, as are the true beginnings of any movement, the moment of its flourishing is clear. It is a long moment, one which extends from the beginning through the third quarter of the sixteenth century. And though the Petrarchan movement may have had its inception in the thirties, after Wyatt returned from Italy and began translating some of Petrarch's sonnets, it did not really take hold of the imaginations of any poets of talent until the late seventies or early eighties. Within twenty-five or thirty years, its course was run, though it left a mark on English poetry that was not to be removed.

Thus, it is not until the century is drawing to its close that we begin to get the first consistent and determined revisions of Native practice. Here is a sonnet from Sir Philip Sidney's sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*:

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climbst the skies!
How silently, and with how wan a face!
What, may it be that even in heavenly place
That busy archer his sharp arrows tries?
Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes
Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case:
I read it in thy looks: thy languished grace,
To me that feel the like, thy state descries.
Then even of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,
Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?
Are beauties there as proud as here they be?

Do they above love to be loved, and yet
Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?
Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?

Some ten or twelve years later, in the long *Epithalamion* that celebrated his own marriage, Edmund Spenser wrote to the Muses:

Ye learnèd sisters, which have oftentimes
Been to me aiding, others to adorn,
Whom ye thought worthy of your graceful rimes,
That even the greatest did not greatly scorn
To hear their names sung in your simple lays,
But joyed in their praise;
And when ye list your own mishaps to mourn,
Which death, or love, or fortune's wreck did raise,
Your string could soon to sadder tenor turn,
And teach the woods and waters to lament
Your doleful dreariment. . . .

And at about the same time, in the forty-fifth of his sonnets to *Delia*, Samuel Daniel addressed sleep:

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

Just as the three examples of Native style quoted earlier had a great deal in common, so do these three examples of Petrarchan style. Typically, in these

poems subject and theme have drawn so far apart that only by an act of rhetoric can they be reunited. Whether the poem deals explicitly with the moon, with the spirit of poetry, or with sleep, the thematic issue is remarkably similar; each poem attempts a definition of love, and attempts that definition by means that are suggestive and indirect. But the hidden definition is, essentially, quite simple: in Sidney's and Daniel's sonnets, it is the Petrarchan version of unfulfilled love, a version transformed by a mechanical and conventional Platonism that was the common equipment of most Petrarchan poets. Spenser's *Epithalamion* rejects the notion of love as unfulfillment but retains the Petrarchan convention of compliment to a lady who, however real she may be in fact, is only an ornament of the poem.

In such poetry as this, the audience to whom the Native poet addressed his poem has all but disappeared. In the Petrarchan tradition, poems are addressed to the Muses, to the moon, to sleep, to conventional ladies with curious names and identical persons, to highways, to joy, to life, to death—or to the air. No more do we hear the individual voice speaking, personally or impersonally, confident of a listener. The substance of the poem succumbs to its rhetoric, and the rhetoric celebrates itself.

It is a quality of style that most dramatically distinguishes the Petrarchan from the Native practice. Since Petrarchan style is usually supported only by the most perfunctory and conventional themes and subjects, the solidity, straightforwardness, and restraint of Native style is no longer evident; it has given way to an airy elegance, which does not so much support the substance of the poem as it decorates it, to a style distinguished by the ingenuity of its figures, a rapid association of details, a wordplay meant to dazzle rather than to inform, a diction that was faintly archaic and “literary” even in its own time, by an elaborate syntax, and by the varied and subtle rhythms resulting from the play of that syntax against the poetic line.

In Petrarchan practice, the rhetoric is very nearly the whole poem; to it, substance is subservient and structure incidental. Whatever structure the poem has tends to be verbal rather than architectural; for while many Petrarchan poems retain the grammatical form of logical structure, sometimes even of syllogistic structure, that form seldom is more than grammatical; and the details which might have specified the terms of the form are aspects of the rhetoric rather than aspects of the substance. In many ways, the procedure of the Petrarchan poet resembles that of the late Romantic, the Symbolist, and the “modern” poet; that is, the poet is more concerned with qualities and nuances than with relationships and definitions; more concerned with texture than with plot; more concerned with effect than with understanding; more concerned with affect than with

objective accuracy.

There is a great deal of very bad poetry in both the Native and the Petrarchan traditions, although the “badness” of bad Native poetry is (or should be) immediately obvious, while the “badness” of Petrarchan poetry is much less so. But beyond the badness of individual poems, the methods of both schools have peculiar limitations and possibilities, a consideration of which is important if we are to understand the history of the poem as a changing form.

At its worst, Native poetry is platitudinous and empty, barren of feeling and emotion, and most painfully dull. Sometimes the popular poetry, such as that of Thomas Tusser, has what is to some the peculiarly primitive charm of “bad” verse:

Leave husbandry sleeping a while ye must do,
to learn of housekeeping a lesson or two:
Whatever is sent thee, by travail and pain,
a time there is lent thee to render it again.
Although ye defend it, unspent for to be,
another shall spend it, no thank unto thee.
However we climb to accomplish the mind,
we have but a time, thereof profit to find.

If there is charm here, the charm is a result of the badness; and the badness is simply the lack of an intelligence adequate even to the simplest subject, a lack made obvious by the plainness of the Native method. More frequently, however, the badness is both pretentious and dull. Nearly the whole of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, including the once-admired “Induction” by Thomas Sackville, is written in a manner more or less Native. Here are the beginning lines of the “Induction”:

The wrathful winter, ’proaching on apace,
With blustering blasts had all ybared the treen,
And old Saturnus, with his frosty face
With chilling cold had pierced the tender green;
The mantles rent, wherein enwrappèd been
The gladsome groves that now lay overthrown,
The tapets torn, and every bloom down blown.

And some three hundred and fifty lines later:

Great was her force. whom stone wall could not stav.

Her tearing nails snatching at all she saw;
With gaping jaws that by no means ymay
Be satisfied from hunger of her maw,
But eats herself as she that hath no law;
 Gnawing, alas, her carcass all in vain,
 Where you may count each sinew, bone, and vein.

On her while we thus firmly fixed our eyes,
That bled for ruth of such a dreary sight,
Lo, suddenly she shrieked in so huge wise
As made hell gates to shiver with the might;
Wherewith a dart we saw, how it did light
 Right on her breast, and therewithal, pale Death
 Enthrilling it, to reave her of her breath.

Because the intelligence of the poet is insufficient to his subject, and because his technique invites him to do so, all the details of the poem—from the simplest landscape to an ultimate act of physical and moral violence—are reduced to the same level of intensity. What might have been charmingly decorative in the Petrarchan style is simply annoying and crude in the bareness of plain style, and what might have been powerful though irrelevant is embarrassing and unbelievable. Even given a normative style, there is no relation discovered here between rhetoric and the value of the subject; the poem simply goes on, mechanically and dully, from detail to superfluous detail.

But even in the best Native poetry, such as that of Gascoigne, Googe, and Raleigh, there are certain technical limitations, although these are sometimes more theoretical than actual. Basically, these are limitations concerned with diction and syntax, with rhythm, and with the relationship between syntax and poetic line.

In the poetry of the Native tradition, the diction is deliberately plain, almost bare, and subservient to the substance or argument of the poem. The syntax moves toward simplicity, most units being straightforward and declarative, with relatively few qualifiers, interrupters, or displacements of syntactical units. Moreover, the poetic line, with its regular alternation of very light and very heavy stresses, tends to be equivalent to the syntactical unit, supporting it and giving it firmness and point, much in the way that the “heroic couplet” controlled and gave point to grammar and syntax in the eighteenth century. Now, given the firmness of structure, the well-disposed arguments or plots that we find in the best Native poetry, this style and rhythm can be the instrument of a very

special kind of power. But minuteness, delicacy, precise sensory accuracy, the shifting qualities of particulars—these are not available, or not easily available, to the Native method. And when they are not available to literary technique, their existence in our experience is peripheral and imperfect.

The advance that the Petrarchan method made upon English poetry, then, is precisely here. Although Sir Philip Sidney in *The Defence of Poesie* gives perfunctory attention to the medieval and classical precepts out of which grew the Native practice, he is more vitally concerned with a vision of the poet as “diviner, foreseer, or prophet” and with poetry as a “sacred mystery,” emerging from an inspiration that is, in one sense or another, divine. And a study of Sidney’s verse tells us at once that the “sacred mystery” manifested itself most genuinely in the texture, in the surface, in the shimmering and sometimes unsubstantial film of the poem—that is to say, in the rhetoric.

In the best Petrarchan poetry, the rhythmic unit, which is the poetic line, remains relatively firm, while the distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables becomes fainter and fainter, and in some instances all but disappears, as in these first two lines of one of Sidney’s finest poems:

Thou blind man’s mark, thou fool’s self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy’s scum, and dregs of scattered thought. . . .

Both lines are perfectly iambic; but the difference in the degree of accent among the stressed and unstressed syllables is very slight indeed; in the two lines there are only ten metrical stresses, but there are fifteen fairly heavy speech accents. And more extreme examples could have been chosen. Moreover, in the best of this poetry the relationship between the syntactical unit and the poetic line is a great deal more flexible and varied, with syntactical units frequently running abruptly over the line and completing themselves at odd and unexpected positions. Because of this flexibility and freedom, the Petrarchan poet ideally is able to get at subtle and complex qualities of experience that were unavailable to the technique of the Native poet. Minuteness, delicacy, sensory accuracy and richness, the shifting and strange qualities of particulars—for the first time they are consistently gotten at in English poetry. Both poetry and our lives are thus enriched.

But this perception of new qualities is gained at a substantial loss. In order to concentrate their energies upon the qualities of experience, upon nuances, shadings, and possibilities that had theretofore remained undiscovered and undisplayed, the Petrarchan poets felt it necessary to all but ignore the substance of the experience whence those qualities derived. And with disheartening

frequency we come upon poem after poem in which a highly sophisticated technique is expended upon trivial and silly subject matters and themes. In the work of the best Petrarchans this, of course, is not altogether true. Sidney, and especially Thomas Campion, often hit upon subjects that are both moving and significant. Campion is the best of those Petrarchans who worked mainly in the song tradition, and some of his poems are among the purest and most gravely effective in our language; the Petrarchan loss is noticeable in remarkably few of his poems. But in other poets the loss is very real, and always damaging to one degree or another.

It was, then, the task of the poets of the major phase—Greville, Shakespeare, Donne, and Jonson—to recover this loss, to return to some of the essential practices of the Native tradition, yet to retain the richness made possible by the Petrarchan intercession.

IV

So far, I have discussed the “nativeness” of Native poetry and the “petrarchanism” of Petrarchan poetry as if those qualities had absolute significances within themselves. They have not, of course; they are important primarily insofar as they allow us to understand particular poems better, and secondarily insofar as they illuminate the progress and growth of the short poem in English. It should be clear that no poet is a purely Native poet and none a purely Petrarchan poet, at least in the generalized attributes that have been attached here to both those schools.

But given even this qualification, there are certain poets who do not fit very comfortably within the definitions—or, more exactly, who seem to strain outward beyond the limits implied by these definitions.

Though both Wyatt and Surrey introduced the Petrarchan mode to English poetry, neither of them is essentially a Petrarchan poet. Indeed, Wyatt’s translations of Petrarch’s poems habitually tame the rather violent Italian to a more restrained and generalized English speech. Wyatt’s characteristic poems are poems of direct statement, with subdued rhetoric, a strong burden of meaning, and an unmistakable economy of technical means:

Hate whom ye list, for I care not:
Love whom ye list and spare not:
Do what ye list and dread not:
Think what ye list, I fear not. . . .

In such poems as this, Wyatt is squarely in the Native tradition.

But in a few others, such as *Blame not my lute* and the greater *They flee from me*, Wyatt appears to go beyond the limitations of both the Native and Petrarchan movements, and he resembles no one so much as the mature poets of the major phase, Ben Jonson and John Donne, presaging by some sixty or seventy years the reconciliation of the two movements even before the Petrarchan was really established. Despite these poems, however, Wyatt remains a Native poet, the Italianate practice being at the periphery of most of his work.

Likewise, Surrey is primarily a Native poet, though a lesser one; in some respects—perhaps because so many of his sonnets are direct paraphrases from the Italian, and because his structural powers are inferior to those of Wyatt—he seems to come somewhat nearer to the Petrarchans. I suspect that the Italianate quality comes from a couple of accidents: first, Surrey's limited powers as a poet did not allow him to have many subjects that were his own, and he therefore borrowed them from his Italian models; second, the weak structure of his poems allowed him a kind of freedom that was often his ruin, but a freedom that nevertheless reminds us of the quick shifts from detail to detail that we find in much Petrarchan poetry. But Surrey displays little of the technical virtuosity of the Petrarchan school; his meters are stiffer than those of the most native of Native poets, and his management of syntax against poetic line is usually dull and mechanical.

It is in the work of Fulke Greville that we find the first real and apparently conscious conflict between the Native and the Petrarchan practices.

Greville was an exact contemporary of Sir Philip Sidney; he was also his closest friend. The two began writing verse at about the same time; the models for their early verse were the same, and both were imbued with the fashionable neo-Platonism and intellectual Calvinism of the later decades of the sixteenth century. Greville's early poetry shows him to be a follower of the same Petrarchan mode that formed the practice of his friend, Sidney:

Cupid, thou naughty boy, when thou wert loathèd,
Naked and blind, for vagabonding noted,
Thy nakedness I in my reason clothèd,
Mine eyes I gave thee, so was I devoted. . . .

This early verse is not so skillful as that of his friend Sidney's, nor is its texture so luxuriant, its detail so dazzling; but its Petrarchism is obvious. Indeed, if the early poems in Greville's sequence, *Caelica*, were all we had, we would have to place Greville a great deal below Sidney, as indeed he has been placed by

conventional 19th century criticism. But fortunately we have the later poems, which come down to us in a roughly chronological sequence, so that we can see Greville's growth over a period of some thirty years. Increasingly, as we read the sequence, we come to see that what we take to be flaws in the poems are caused not by Greville's ineptitude but by his discomfort in the Petrarchan mode. Gradually, the naughty Cupids disappear; the language becomes more generalized and direct; the structure of the poems becomes firmer, the style more powerful, the details less decorative—until, suddenly, about halfway through the sequence, we are aware that slowly, poem by poem, the strategy has been changing, and that the subjects have been growing more and more important. We have found such poems as *The nurse-life wheat*, the curiously anti-Petrarchan *Absence, the noble truce*; a little later, as we read such a poem as *You that seek what life is in death*, we realize that we have come a long way from the conventional Petrarchan poet that we began with. And when we get to *Caelica: 84*, Greville's farewell to Cupid, we realize that Greville is, as consciously as he can, bidding farewell not only to a subject but to a method. Thereafter occur the great poems of the mature Greville—*The earth with thunder torn*, *Wrapped up*, *O Lord, Down in the depth of mine iniquity*, and one of the most remarkable short poems of the century, *In night, when colors all to black are cast*.

In his *Life of Sidney*—a work that had a great deal to do with elevating Sidney's reputation at the expense of his own—Greville speaks of his own work in this manner: "For my own part, I found my creeping Genius more fixed upon the images of life than the images of wit, and therefore chose not to write to them on whose feet the ox had not already trod, as the proverb is, but to those only that are weather-beaten in the sea of this world, such as having lost sight of their gardens and groves, study to sail on a right course among rocks and quicksands." It was the immersion, for a while, in the Petrarchan method that allowed him to retain his sight of the gardens and groves; but it was his falling back upon the resources of earlier Native method that helped him to sail the right course among the rocks and quicksands.

While Greville was struggling in privacy with the loss of his friend Sidney and with his own slow growth as a poet, at the height of the Petrarchan movement, and strongly moved by the practice of the Petrarchists, William Shakespeare composed his own sequence of sonnets. In many of these, Shakespeare appears simply as an exceedingly skillful Petrarchist, though with an intelligence and perceptivity clearly superior to that of most of his contemporaries. But here and there, sometimes in a few lines, sometimes in a whole poem, we begin to note a recovery, a moving away from the purely ornate and decorative toward something that seems quite new.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O no! it is an ever fixèd mark,
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Except for the broken and abrupt rhythm of the first sentence, the poem opens as straightforwardly, directly, and economically as any Native poem might; indeed, the whole first quatrain is admirably direct, though the subdued play upon “alter” and “remove” reminds us of Petrarchan practice. But after the direct statement of the first quatrain, from the near-metaphorical “bends” in the fourth line, the poem skitters through a series of figures as fanciful as any found in the purest Petrarchist, though Shakespeare’s control over them is superior to that of any of the more ornate Petrarchists, save perhaps Sidney in his best poems. The figures culminate in the Elizabethan commonplace of Time as a sickle, though the epithet “bending” mitigates the triteness somewhat, partly because it echoes “bends” in the fourth line and takes on some of the early force of that conception. Then at the end, the poem reverts to the convention in which it began, that of direct and generalized statement; but the generalized language in the last four lines of the poem has, as it were, passed through the shifting and figurative fire of the six middle lines of the poem, and by that passing has been transformed; especially around lines eleven and twelve clings a richness like an echo or an afterglow, a richness not really implicit in the lines themselves. If we have not here the greatest of poetry, we nevertheless have the beginnings of a method which will lead to the greatest of poetry.

There is in the poetry of John Donne some of the harshness of sound, roughness of diction, and straightforward familiarity that we have already seen in much of the poetry of the Native tradition:

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
 When dost thou think that

Why dost thou thus
Through windows and through curtains call on us? . . .

For God's sake, hold your tongue and let me love! . . .

On the other hand, there is also some of the fancifulness and artificial elegance of the Petrarchan tradition:

Our hands were firmly cementéd
With a fast balm which thence did spring;
Our eye-beams twisted and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string. . . .

Donne's effort to reconcile the opposing tendencies of the Native and Petrarchan traditions is a great deal more obvious than Shakespeare's; but except for the straightforwardness of some of his lines, a frequent roughness of diction and harshness of speech, and his attempt to suggest by poetic means the uncertainty of speech-rhythms, he appears to have worked mainly within the Petrarchan tradition, which is hyperbolic, violent, decorative, and metaphorical, even though his temperament is quite remote from what we might expect in a Petrarchan poet. Many of his poems are deliberate parodies of Petrarchan subjects and conventions; many others, such as the Holy Sonnets, clearly are not. But between these lies a very large body of poetry, the body for which Donne is most famous, in which the two traditions are in violent conflict, a clash which reflects, no doubt, another struggle within Donne's own mind. But because of Donne's uncertainty in the matter, his reader must often remain unsure whether Petrarchism is being parodied or whether it is being seriously employed for serious ends.

It is here, in the not fully resolved conflict between Native and Petrarchan practice, that Donne achieves the "originality" that has been so overvalued by so many readers and critics. Actually, Donne offers very little that is new to the technique of English poetry. He seems "original" in the popular critical sense of that word only if we are ignorant of the two traditions out of which his practice grew, or if we refuse to recognize his use of the two traditions. Some of Donne's greatest successes, as well as some of his most dramatic failures, are made possible by this collision; and the fact that some of his greatest lines are found in some of his worst poems is evidence of the strength of that collision. Donne is truly original precisely where he should be, in his excellence as a poet, which is an excellence that, in a number of poems, surmounts the limitations of schools or

movements, not by ignoring their implications but by understanding them.

If we come to Ben Jonson directly from William Shakespeare, especially if we have not appreciated the revision upon Petrarchist practice that Shakespeare performed and his indebtedness to the native tradition, it may seem that we are stepping over a line that separates one kind of poetry from another, a line resembling the one between the poetry of, let us say, Samuel Daniel and Barnabe Googe. Whereas Shakespeare most obviously uses the Petrarchan practice as a point of departure, Ben Jonson uses the Native practice, and that body of older classical theory out of which the Native practice grew.

Jonson's triumph is his style. It is the first in English lyric poetry that is really capable of comprehending the extreme range and diversity of human experience, without falsifying that experience or doing violence to it. It is a style capable of minor wit and malice, as in this brief epigram *To Doctor Empiric*:

When men a dangerous disease did 'scape
Of old, they gave a cock to Aesculape.
Let me give two, that doubly am got free,
From my disease's danger, and from thee.

It is capable of the delicate and sensual minor music of the song:

Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears;
Yet slower, yet; O faintly gentle springs;
List to the heavy part the music bears,
Woe weeps out her division when she sings:
Droop herbs and flowers;
Fall grief in showers;
Our beauties are not ours.
O, I could still,
Like melting snow upon some craggy hill,
Drop, drop, drop, drop,
Since nature's pride is now a withered daffodil.

It is capable of the most moving and personal of utterances:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy.
Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day. . . .

It is a style that can be light and playful:

Kiss me, sweet: the wary lover
Can your favors keep, and cover,
When the common courting jay
All your bounties will betray. . . .

When the occasion demands, it can be savage and indignant:

Ask not to know this man. If fame should speak
His name in any metal, it would break.
Two letters were enough the plague to tear
Out of his grave, and poison every ear.
A parcel of court-dirt, a heap, a mass
Of all vice hurled together, there he was,
Proud, false, and treacherous, vindictive, all
That thought can add, unthankful, the lay-stall
Of putrid flesh alive! of blood, the sink!
And so I leave to stir him, lest he stink.

And in the very best poems, it can move with quiet dignity and a grave profundity:

Good and great God, can I not think of Thee,
But it must straight my melancholy be?
Is it interpreted in me disease,
That, laden with my sins, I seek for ease?
O, be thou witness, that the reins dost know
And hearts of all, if I be sad for show;
And judge me after, if I dare pretend
To aught but grace, or aim at other end. . . .

There is in Jonson none of the mannered roughness and harshness that we find increasingly in Native style, and that we find in Donne; there is on the other hand none of the mannered artificiality and archaism of the Petrarchan style. The direct economy of Native style is retained, and the fluid subtlety potential in Petrarchan style is refined.

This style is nowhere better displayed than in three of Jonson's greatest poems: *To Heaven*, the first lines of which are quoted above, *To the World: A*

Farewell for a Gentlewoman, and the *Elegy* beginning “Though Beauty be the mark of praise.”

A study of this *Elegy* is especially instructive. It has a subject that would have delighted the most Petrarchan of poets, celebrating as it does a more or less Platonic conception of human love. It is a poem of some power, and it will move all but the most sentimental and insensitive readers.

Yet there is not a conceit, nor even a developed figure in the entire poem; there is not a concrete image; there is not a roughness or flaw of rhythm; there is no “dramatic” structure. The development is straightforward and deliberate, the language is abstract and generalized, and the structure is informally expository. The poem is as rich and subtle and powerful as we could want it; but the richness and subtlety and power proceed from the poet, not from the accidental properties of his subject or his language. The language is designed to demonstrate the intellectual and emotional powers of the poet, after that language has made those powers possible.

It is, finally, a language that has passed from the starkness and bareness of outer reality through the dark, luxuriant jungle of the self and has emerged from that journey entire and powerful. It is the style with which English poetry has had most seriously to contend for the past three hundred and fifty years.

V

According to the view that I have been attempting to define, the significance of the Petrarchist movement—despite its occasional dramatic popularity, despite its affinities with the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and hence its lodgment in literary history—has been widely misunderstood. It is not in the main tradition of English poetry; it was an eccentric movement away from the Native tradition that began with Skelton, More, and their medieval predecessors, and it is at once an enrichment and a decay of that tradition. Indeed the best work within the Petrarchan movement is that which either draws back a bit from the full implications that lie before the principles of the movement, or (like the best work of the Madrigalists and Thomas Campion) tactfully sublimes the potentialities of the method to deliberately minor themes.

If the Petrarchan movement displaced the Native movement, it did not do so as a villain displacing a rightful ruler. The displacement, or something like it, was inevitable. The Native movement was far from exhausted when it was displaced; indeed, the method has had its followers in nearly every poetic

generation since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the most notable in recent years being, perhaps, Thomas Hardy. But the method had taken the language as far as it could, given the principles out of which it worked; some of the great poems in our tongue had been composed according to its principles; and in even such a fine poet as George Gascoigne, we begin to see the method degenerating, mannerism overriding the native power of the style.

Even though we may think of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* as the great and monstrous monument to Petrarchism, we must finally admit that the Petrarchan movement produced no sustained body of poetry as great as that of the Native movement, however fine some Petrarchan poems might be. But we would be foolish to regret wholly the displacement that took place around 1580.

For the displacement was temporary; it became a reconciliation, and finally a marriage. And if the marriage was not an altogether harmonious one, few marriages are. It has lasted through several centuries; and if it still has not reached a perfect balance and accord, that is perhaps all to the good. It is still alive, and we are still trying to work it out.

VI

This collection does not attempt to be inclusive, nor does it attempt to be statistically representative of a little of everything, good, bad, or indifferent, in the period to which it is devoted; it is not designed to illustrate a theory of literary history, though obviously a theory has been derived from it. No such theory of literature will be very valuable if it is based on second- or third-rate works of art, especially if the second- or third-rate is confused with the excellent. Therefore, the poems were chosen on the basis of their literary merit, and on no other.

This anthology is designed for both the general reader and the more specialized student of Renaissance poetry. To the latter especially a note of explanation about the text is due. In all instances I have used the best and most readily available modern editions of the poets whose work is represented; I have not gone very far beyond these sources, or attempted systematically to collate editions, or to compare manuscript versions with printed versions. I am not a textual critic, and such work is beyond my competence. I have relied upon the editors of the various poets for my readings of the poems, though occasionally I have preferred a variant reading to an established one.

Samuel Johnson, in his *Preface to Shakespeare*, notes that "our ancestors were accustomed to so much negligence of English printers, that they could very

patiently endure it.” But the modern reader cannot, nor is there any very good reason why he should try. There may be some advantages, especially to the textual specialist, in offering an edition with “original” spellings and punctuation; but there are many more disadvantages, not the least of which is the likelihood that such an edition will offer the carelessness of a semiliterate typesetter rather than the intention of an author. But aside from that, the old, irregular spelling and punctuation give a spurious archaism to poems that were modern in their time, and that are best read today as if they were poems rather than literary specimens. I have, therefore, modernized spellings and punctuation freely; and to those words whose use has atrophied or whose meaning has shifted, I have appended brief glosses.

The biographical information included in the notes on the various poets has been taken from a number of sources. When there were standard or authoritative biographies available, I of course relied on those works; when there were no such works available, I sometimes had to make choices among conflicting data, especially in the matter of birth and death dates. In some instances my choices may eventually prove to be wrong; but they were made upon the best evidence available to me at the time.

Excepting only the drama written by Shakespeare, the short poem is the most important literary form of the age; I have, therefore, devoted this collection to it. Though a few of the poems in this book appear incidentally in plays, novels, and masques, they are complete in themselves, as are all the other poems. I have not included snippets or excerpts from longer works.

VII

The past two decades have seen a marked increase of critical interest in the poetry of the English Renaissance, an interest not, perhaps, so dramatic as an earlier concern for “metaphysical” poetry, but one which in the long run may be more substantial. A number of valuable new authoritative editions have appeared, notable among them William A. Ringler’s recent *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* (New York: 1962) and Geoffrey Bullough’s *The Poems and Dramas of Fulke Greville* (New York: 1945); the Muse’s Library has given the general reader inexpensive new editions of Wyatt, Raleigh, and Drayton; and Alan Swallow, in his *Men of the Renaissance* series, has made widely available for the first time in many years the work of such poets as Thomas, Lord Vaux, and Barnabe Googe. Among the dozens of critical essays that should concern the student of the period, of especial importance are J. V. Cunningham’s “Phoenix

and the Turtle” and “Logic and the Lyric” in *Tradition and Poetric Structure* (Denver: 1960), and Alan Swallow’s three studies of literary method, as well as his essays on Skelton, Wyatt, and Surrey, in *Editor’s Essays of Two Decades* (Denver: 1961). And two very recent books by younger critics—John Thompson’s *The Founding of English Metre* (New York: 1961) and Wesley Trimpi’s *Ben Jonson’s Poems: A Study of the Plain Style* (Stanford: 1962)—attest to the continuing vitality and growth of this interest.

No one has been more responsible for this increase of critical activity than the poet and critic, Yvor Winters. His essay, “The 16th Century Lyric in England,” which appeared in the magazine *Poetry*, February, March, April, 1939, has had an influence far out of proportion to its general circulation; since its appearance, nearly all informed criticism of the short poem of the period has had, in one way or another, to take account of the theories and judgments enunciated in it. It should be clear to all that this anthology is deeply indebted to that pioneering essay, and to other aspects of the subject upon which Winters has touched in his other critical works: neither this work, nor the interest which occasioned it, would have been possible without Winters’ efforts.

—JOHN WILLIAMS

ENGLISH RENAISSANCE POETRY

JOHN SKELTON: 1460?–1529

Little is known of Skelton's life. His first extant work is an elegy on the death of Edward IV, written in 1483; by 1490 he was a scholar of international reputation. Erasmus called him the "light and ornament of English letters," and William Caxton spoke of him as a scholar, translator, and poet of great renown. But most of the works upon which Skelton's contemporary reputation rested have been lost. He took holy orders in 1498, after he had written his allegorical condemnation of public life, *The Bouge of Court*. In 1504 he retired to Norfolk as rector of Diss.

It is from this time that his real career as a poet starts. No longer is he the proper Latinate poet of the *Elegy to Edward*, or the conventional translator and scholar. He wrote *Phillip Sparrow* and *The Tunning of Elinour Ruming*, developing his distinctive short-lined rhythms and his peculiar, breathless tone. By 1512 Skelton was back in public life, at the court, where he was appointed King's Orator. He died at Westminster, leaving several children by a secret marriage.

Skelton's poetry had little direct influence in his own age, although such twentieth-century poets as Auden and Graves have acknowledged indebtedness. His work is primitive; but within the limits of that primitivism, it is—like the work of a greater modern poet whom he curiously resembles, William Carlos Williams—always skillful and frequently moving. Historically, Skelton's poetry represents the persistence of both a native popular folk tradition and the short-lined accentual Latin verse of the late medieval period in the English language.

TEXT:

The Complete Poems of John Skelton, edited by Phillip Henderson (1948).

WOEFULLY ARRAYED

Woefully arrayed,
My blood, man,
For thee ran,
It may not be nayed:
My body blo and wan,
Woefully arrayed.

Behold me, I pray thee, with all thy whole reason,
And be not so hard-hearted, and for this encheason,
Sith I for thy soul's sake was slain in good season,
Beguiled and betrayèd by Judas' false treason:

Unkindly entreated,
With sharp cord sore freted,
The Jewës me threted:
They mowèd, they grinnèd, they scornèd me,
Condemnèd to death, as thou mayest see,
Woefully arrayed.

Thus naked am I nailèd, O man, for thy sake!
I love thee, then love me; why sleepest thou? awake!
Remember my tender heart-root for thee brake,
With painës my veinës constrained to crake:

Thus tuggèd to and fro,
Thus wrappèd all in woe,
Whereas never man was so,
Entreated thus in most cruel wise,
Was like a lamb offered in sacrifice,
Woefully arrayed.

Of sharp thorn I have worn a crown on my head,
So painèd, so strainèd, so rueful, so red,
Thus bobbèd, thus robbèd, thus for thy love dead,
Unfeignèd I deignèd my blood for to shed:

My feet and handës sore
The sturdy nailës bore: