In the English Renaissance, becoming a father was the main way for a man to be treated as a full member of the community. Yet patriarchal identity was by no means as secure as is often assumed: when poets invoke the idea of paternity in love poetry and other forms, they are therefore invoking all the anxieties that a culture with contradictory notions of sexuality imposed. This study takes these anxieties seriously, arguing that writers such as Sidney and Spenser deployed images of childbirth to harmonize public and private spheres, to develop a full sense of selfhood in their verse, and even to come to new accommodations between the sexes. Shakespeare, Donne and Jonson, in turn, saw the appeal of the older poets’ aims, but resisted their more radical implications. The result is a fiercely personal yet publicly committed poetry that would not be seen again until the time of the Romantics.

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POETRY AND PATERNITY
IN RENAISSANCE
ENGLAND

Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Jonson

TOM MACFAUL
For my parents
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Abbreviations

ELR  English Literary Renaissance
NQ  Notes & Queries
ODNB  Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OED  Oxford English Dictionary
RES  Review of English Studies
RQ  Renaissance Quarterly
SEL  Studies in English Literature
SP  Studies in Philology