

## 1

## Introductory: Hobbes's humanist beginnings

When Thomas Hobbes died on 4 December 1679 he was only four months short of his ninety-second birthday.<sup>1</sup> What if he had died at half that age, and thus in the mid-1630s? On the one hand he would still have exceeded by almost a decade the average expectation of life of those born in 1588, the year of his birth.<sup>2</sup> But on the other hand he would not be remembered as a political philosopher at all.<sup>3</sup> It was only in the late 1630s that, as he tells us in the Preface to *De cive*, he felt compelled by the approaching civil war to join the arguments then raging about the rights of sovereignty and the duties of subjects.<sup>4</sup> Before that time, his interests and intellectual

<sup>1</sup> For biographical information about Hobbes I mainly draw on Skinner 1996. But see also Schuhmann 1998 and Malcolm 2002, pp. 1–26. For a particularly valuable account of Hobbes's earlier years see Malcolm 2007a, pp. 2–15. I also make use of Hobbes's two autobiographies. Tricaud 1985, pp. 280–1 showed that Hobbes drafted his prose *vita* in the 1650s, putting it into final shape shortly before his death. Hobbes himself tells us (Hobbes 1839b, p. xcix, line 375) that he composed his longer verse *vita* at the age of eighty-four, that is, in 1672. The Chatsworth manuscript of the verse *vita* (Hobbes MS A. 6) contains a large number of revisions not recorded in Molesworth's edition of the text. <sup>2</sup> Wrigley and Schofield 1981, pp. 230, 528.

<sup>3</sup> I am assuming that Hobbes was not the author of the *Discourses* incorporated into *Horae subsecivae*, which appeared anonymously in 1620. For the complex questions surrounding the authorship of these texts see Skinner 2002a, vol. 3, pp. 45–6; Malcolm 2007a, p. 7 and note.

<sup>4</sup> Hobbes 1983, Praefatio 19, p. 82.

## HOBBS AND REPUBLICAN LIBERTY

achievements had been far more typical of someone who had been nurtured – as Hobbes had largely been – in the humanist literary culture of the Renaissance.

From John Aubrey, Hobbes's first biographer, we learn that as a boy Hobbes received a thorough classical education. His teacher was a young man called Robert Latimer, described by Aubrey as 'a good Graecian', who had recently taken his degree at Oxford.<sup>5</sup> Hobbes was Latimer's pupil from the age of eight to fourteen, working his way through the six years of study normally required for the completion of the Elizabethan grammar school curriculum.<sup>6</sup> By the end of that period, Aubrey adds, Hobbes had 'so well profited in his learning' that he 'went away a good schoole-scholar to Magdalen-hall, in Oxford' at the beginning of 1603, before he had even reached his fifteenth birthday.<sup>7</sup> This was an unusually young age at which to matriculate, but it is clear that Hobbes had by then acquired an exceptional mastery of the essentially linguistic training required for university entrance. Before going to Oxford, Aubrey tell us, Hobbes produced a Latin verse translation of Euripides' *Medea*, presenting it to his schoolmaster as a parting gift.<sup>8</sup>

In later life Hobbes liked to speak of his years at Oxford as little better than an interruption of his serious intellectual pursuits. He tells us in his verse autobiography

<sup>5</sup> Aubrey 1898, vol. 1, pp. 328, 329.

<sup>6</sup> Hence the highest class was usually known as the sixth form. On the curricula of the smaller grammar schools see Baldwin 1944, vol. 1, pp. 429–35. <sup>7</sup> Aubrey 1898, vol. 1, p. 328.

<sup>8</sup> Aubrey 1898, vol. 1, pp. 328–9.

## INTRODUCTORY

that he was obliged to waste his time listening to lectures on scholastic logic and Aristotelian physics, most of which, he adds in his most derisive tones, were far above his head.<sup>9</sup> If, however, we consult the university statutes in force at the time when Hobbes was an undergraduate, we find that his recollections are something of a travesty of the syllabus he would have followed. Under the humanist reforms introduced in 1564–5 he would have spent two terms reading Latin literature, including Horace, Vergil and Cicero, followed by four terms on rhetoric, in which the set texts included Cicero's orations and Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*.<sup>10</sup> He would also have been required to attend public lectures in the university, and would thus have heard additional courses on rhetoric (Cicero and Quintilian), as well as on ancient literature (including Homer and Euripides) and philosophy (including Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Ethics*).<sup>11</sup> To a large extent the Oxford curriculum of his day was based on the five canonical elements in the Renaissance *studia humanitatis*: the study of grammar, followed by rhetoric, poetry, classical history and moral philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

After graduating in 1608, Hobbes almost immediately entered the service of Baron Cavendish of Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire. Lord Cavendish, who became the first earl of Devonshire in 1618, employed Hobbes as tutor to his eldest son, who succeeded to the earldom in 1626. By that time Hobbes was acting as the second earl's secretary, and had settled down into

<sup>9</sup> Hobbes 1839b, pp. lxxxvi–lxxxvii.      <sup>10</sup> Gibson 1931, p. 378.

<sup>11</sup> Gibson 1931, pp. 344, 390.

<sup>12</sup> On the construction of this syllabus the classic study remains Kristeller 1961, esp. pp. 92–119.

## HOBBS AND REPUBLICAN LIBERTY

a quiet and scholarly mode of life.<sup>13</sup> He informs us in his verse autobiography that his former pupil ‘provided me throughout this period with leisure as well as supplying me with books of every description for my studies.’<sup>14</sup> A catalogue of the Hardwick library, drawn up in Hobbes’s own hand in the late 1620s,<sup>15</sup> shows that he had access to an impressive collection, encompassing the full range of fashionable humanist learning in addition to the major texts of Greek and Latin antiquity and several hundred volumes of what Hobbes was later to stigmatise as School divinity.<sup>16</sup> The catalogue includes the poetry of Petrarch, Ariosto and Tasso,<sup>17</sup> the histories of Guicciardini, Machiavelli and Raleigh<sup>18</sup> and such leading works of Renaissance moral theory as More’s *Utopia*, Erasmus’s *Adagia*, Castiglione’s *Cortegiano*, Bacon’s *Essays*, Guazzo’s *Civile conversazione* and much else besides.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hobbes refers to himself on the title-page of Hobbes 1629 (figure 1) as ‘Secretary to ye late Earle of Devonshire’.

<sup>14</sup> Hobbes 1839b, p. lxxxviii, lines 73–4:

Ille per hoc tempus mihi prae-buit otia, libros  
 Omnimodos studiis prae-buit ille meis.

Cf. Hobbes MS A. 6, in which the second ‘prae-buit’ is replaced by ‘suppeditatque’. Aubrey 1898, vol. 1, pp. 337–8 records Hobbes as saying ‘that at his lord’s house in the countrey there was a good library’.

<sup>15</sup> Hobbes MS E. 1. A. For the suggested date see Hamilton 1978, p. 446; Beal 1987, p. 573; Malcolm 2002, p. 143. Malcolm 2007a, p. 16n. has established that the catalogue was mainly completed by 1628 (although there are some additions from as late as the mid-1630s).

<sup>16</sup> Hobbes 1996, ch. 46, pp. 463, 472. The Hardwick catalogue runs to 143pp., of which pp. 1–54 are entirely devoted to ‘Libri Theologici’.

<sup>17</sup> Hobbes MS E. 1. A, pp. 123, 134, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Hobbes MS E. 1. A, pp. 80, 83, 96, 107, 129.

<sup>19</sup> Hobbes MS E. 1. A, pp. 61, 69–70, 77, 83–4, 97, 126.

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-88676-5 - Hobbes and Republican Liberty  
 Quentin Skinner  
 Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTORY

When Hobbes's own intellectual interests first began to quicken in the 1620s, he initially devoted himself to the three central elements in the *studia humanitatis*: rhetoric, poetry and classical history. His chief rhetorical work was a Latin translation of Aristotle's treatise on the subject, an English version of which appeared anonymously as *A Briefe of the Art of Rhetorique* in 1637.<sup>20</sup> His main achievement as a poet took the form of his *De mirabilibus pecci*,<sup>21</sup> an epic of some five hundred Latin hexameters which he issued at around the same time, although he had written it some ten years before.<sup>22</sup> But it was as a student of classical history that he made his most enduring contribution to the humanist disciplines. During the early 1620s he embarked on a complete translation of Thucydides' history, which he published as *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre* in 1629.<sup>23</sup> The work

<sup>20</sup> Robertson 1886, p. 29 first identified as the third earl's dictation-book the volume, now at Chatsworth, containing the Latin version of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* translated into English and published as the *Briefe* in 1637. See Hobbes MS D. 1; cf. Harwood 1986, pp. 1–2 and Malcolm 1994, p. 815. The Latin version is Hobbes's work, but Karl Schuhmann has established that the English translation is not. (Full details will be given in Schuhmann's forthcoming edition in the Clarendon Edition of Hobbes's works.) The first edition of the English translation is undated, but Arber 1875–94, vol. 4, p. 372 showed that it was entered in the Stationers' Register on 1 February 1636 (1637 new style).

<sup>21</sup> Hobbes 1845a. The Chatsworth manuscript (Hobbes MS A. 1), a scribal copy in two unknown hands, includes a number of additions not included in Molesworth's edition of the text.

<sup>22</sup> Wood 1691–2, vol. 2, p. 479 states that the work was 'printed at Lond about 1636'. For the date of composition see Malcolm 2007a, pp. 10–11.

<sup>23</sup> Hobbes 1629. Although Arber 1875–94, vol. 3, p. 161 showed that Henry Seile, the publisher, entered the book in the Stationers' Register on 18

## HOBBS AND REPUBLICAN LIBERTY

was splendidly produced, and according to Hobbes himself it was received by the experts 'with no little praise'.<sup>24</sup>

With two of these works, Hobbes also made a contribution to the study of grammar, the first and fundamental element in the *studia humanitatis*. When the humanists referred to the *ars grammatica* they were speaking of the ability to read and imitate classical Latin and Greek. They took these skills to be of paramount cultural importance, which in turn helps to explain why the art of translation enjoyed such extraordinarily high prestige in the Renaissance. Having mastered this art at an early age, Hobbes demonstrated his ability to translate from Greek into Latin with his *Rhetoric*, and the still more useful skill of translating directly from Greek into English with his version of Thucydides. During the later 1620s he also made a difficult translation from Latin into English,<sup>25</sup> producing a manuscript version of a 'reason of state' treatise published in 1626 under the title *Altera secretissima instructio*.<sup>26</sup> Without having any earlier translations to fall back upon, Hobbes showed himself fully

Footnote 23 (*cont.*)

March 1628 (1629 new style), it appears to have been completed some time before. Hobbes tells us that it 'lay long by me' before he decided to publish it. See Hobbes 1843a, p. ix, and for further information about the date of composition see Malcolm 2007a, pp. 11–12.

<sup>24</sup> Hobbes 1839a, p. xiv: 'cum nonnulla laude'.

<sup>25</sup> This discovery was made by Noel Malcolm, who has published an edition of Hobbes's translation with a definitive account of its provenance in Malcolm 2007a.

<sup>26</sup> For the title-page see Malcolm 2007a, p. 124; for a tentative dating of the translation to 1627 see p. 17. The work is an anonymous piece of propaganda in support of the Habsburg cause in the Thirty Years War.

## INTRODUCTORY

capable of producing an exact rendering of a dense and self-consciously Tacitean text.<sup>27</sup>

Hobbes's translation of Thucydides reveals that he was a faithful follower of humanist literary practices in a further and still more striking way. His edition is prefaced by a spectacular emblematic frontispiece in which an attempt is made to represent some of the leading themes in Thucydides' narrative. By the time Hobbes was writing, this interest in matching word and image had become a deep preoccupation of humanist culture, a preoccupation owing much to the influence of Quintilian's key contention that the most effective means of moving and persuading an audience will always be to supply its members with an *imago* or picture of whatever we want them to hold in their minds.<sup>28</sup> Quintilian had chiefly been interested in the concept of verbal imagery, and thus in the persuasive power inherent in the figures and tropes of speech. But it proved a short step to the claim that visual images may be capable of exercising a still more potent effect. As Franciscus Junius was to put it in his treatise on *The Painting of the Ancients* in 1638, while an eloquent orator and a skilled painter may both be said to 'have a hidden force to move and compel our minds', the impact of visual images is such that they will always 'doe it more effectually'.<sup>29</sup>

One obvious implication is that the most effective means of capturing people's attention will be to appeal to

<sup>27</sup> Malcolm 2007a, p. 24 emphasises its 'almost parodically Tacitean' style.

<sup>28</sup> Quintilian 1920–2, 6. 2. 30, vol. 2, p. 434. For a discussion see Skinner 1996, pp. 182–8.

<sup>29</sup> Junius 1638, p. 55. On this 'ocularcentrism' in Renaissance humanist culture see Clark 2007, esp. pp. 9–14.

HOBBS AND REPUBLICAN LIBERTY

their eyes and ears at the same time. The prevalence of this belief in turn helps to explain the rise to overwhelming popularity in the latter part of the sixteenth century of the new genre of *emblemata* or emblem-books.<sup>30</sup> The leading pioneer in this development was the humanist jurist Andrea Alciato, whose *Emblemata* first appeared at Augsburg in 1531. Alciato's text was frequently reprinted, and a definitive Latin version was issued at Lyon in 1550, the year of his death.<sup>31</sup> Alciato's technique of juxtaposing edifying images with explanatory verses was initially taken up with the greatest enthusiasm in France. Here the pioneers were Guillaume de la Perrière, whose *Theatre des bons engins* was first published in 1540,<sup>32</sup> and the humanist jurist Pierre Coustau, whose *Le pegme de pierre* of 1560 was the earliest collection to include 'philosophical narrations' in which the images were more fully explained.<sup>33</sup> A further innovation was introduced by Georgette de Montenay in her sternly Calvinistic *Emblemes* of 1567,<sup>34</sup> the first such work to be illustrated with incised

<sup>30</sup> The information that follows is partly taken from the University of Glasgow's online guide to their Stirling Maxwell collection of emblem-books. For references to the emergence of the genre, and Hobbes's awareness of it, see also Farneti 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Alciato 1550 is the edition I basically use, although I also refer to Alciato 1621, in which the text was reprinted with commentaries. For a modern version of the 1550 edition, with translations and notes, see Alciato 1996.

<sup>32</sup> The edition I use, however, is La Perrière 1614, the first English translation.

<sup>33</sup> This feature is missing in the original version of 1555; it first appears in the French edition of 1560, which I therefore use.

<sup>34</sup> Montenay 1571, the edition I use, was until recently assumed to be the first printing, but for the earlier dating see Adams 2003, p. 10.



## INTRODUCTORY

engravings rather than the simpler woodcuts previously used. Meanwhile the Italian tradition continued to be important in the evolution of the genre as a vehicle for moral and political as well as religious thought. Achille Bocchi's *Symbolicarum quaestionum* was published in 1555 and again in 1574,<sup>35</sup> and in 1593 there appeared at Rome one of the most influential of all these works, Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, which went through seven further Italian editions in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>36</sup> The genre may be said to have arrived in England in 1586, the year in which Geoffrey Whitney, drawing heavily on Alciato, produced his *Choice of Emblemes*,<sup>37</sup> after which similar texts were published by Henry Peacham, Francis Quarles, George Wither and others in the opening decades of the new century.

The catalogue of the Hardwick library shows that Hobbes had access to some well-known examples of this burgeoning genre, and there are several confluences to be observed between the *topoi* frequently handled in the emblem-books and some of his own moral and political commitments. The Hardwick library contained a copy of Antoine de La Faye's *Emblemata* of 1610,<sup>38</sup> as well as Sebastián de Covarrubias's *Emblemas morales*, first published at Madrid in the same year.<sup>39</sup> There is also an entry in the

<sup>35</sup> Bocchi 1574 is the edition I use. On Bocchi's place in the history of the emblem-book see Watson 1993.

<sup>36</sup> Ripa 1611 is the edition I use; a facsimile version was published in 1976.

<sup>37</sup> Whitney 1586. Whitney uses over eighty of Alciato's emblems. For his debt to the continental tradition see Manning 1988.

<sup>38</sup> La Faye 1610. But in this case, although the work is made up of Latin epigrams in typical emblem-book style, they are not illustrated.

<sup>39</sup> Hobbes MS E. 1. A, pp. 71, 80.

## HOBBS AND REPUBLICAN LIBERTY

Hardwick catalogue under *Thesaurus politicus*,<sup>40</sup> a possible reference to the beautiful emblem-book produced by Daniel Meisner in 1623, the full title of which was *Thesaurus philo-politicus*, in which the moral messages were incorporated into a series of engravings of European cities.<sup>41</sup>

A further development in the use of *emblemata* began to make itself felt in England towards the end of the sixteenth century. It was at this juncture that there first emerged the phenomenon later known as the ‘comely frontispiece’,<sup>42</sup> and it is striking that some of the most impressive of these images were designed to accompany the translations of the major Greek and Latin texts that began to appear in the same period. An early example is provided by Thomas North’s version of Plutarch’s *Lives*, in which an emblem is incorporated into the title-page.<sup>43</sup> A more complex emblematic frontispiece can be found in Philemon Holland’s translation of Livy in 1600,<sup>44</sup> another in his translation of Suetonius in 1606<sup>45</sup> and yet another of still greater complexity in Thomas Lodge’s translation of Seneca in 1620.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Hobbes MS E. 1. A, p. 115.

<sup>41</sup> Meisner 1623. But the reference in the catalogue may be to the Latin translation of Comino Ventura’s *Tesoro politico* of 1602.

<sup>42</sup> The approximate dating suggested in Corbett and Lightbown 1979, p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Plutarch 1579, title-page; the emblem shows the anchor of faith.

<sup>44</sup> Livy 1600, title-page; the emblem includes the scales of justice and reads ‘quibus respublica conservetur’, ‘by these means the republic is preserved’. For an earlier use of the same motto see Sambucus 1566, p. 97.

<sup>45</sup> Suetonius 1606; the emblem shows a mounted warrior lancing a prostrate foe and reads ‘sic aliena’, ‘thus [we deal with] foreign bodies’.

<sup>46</sup> Lodge 1620, title-page. Lodge’s translation first appeared in 1614, but without the emblematic title-page.