INTRODUCTION

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Following *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* edited by David Wallace (1999), this collaborative volume of twenty-six chapters in five Parts narrates the history of English literature written in Britain between the Reformation and the Restoration. *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature* takes account of significant recent discoveries and methodological developments in English literary studies, while providing the general coverage expected of a major critical reference work. We believe that there is a need for an innovatively conceived literary history that examines the interactions between sites of production, reception and circulation, on the one hand, and the aesthetic and generic features of early modern texts, on the other. Our volume provides basic information about and essential exposition of writing in early modern Britain, while exemplifying fresh approaches to the field and the writing of literary history. We hope that this volume, like the one devoted to medieval literature, will prove a valuable resource for scholarly, graduate and undergraduate readers, and that it will influence teaching and research in early modern English literature. We also believe that this *Cambridge History* differs from earlier literary histories in several notable ways.

Our volume is designed to implement what is, at present, a frequently shared working assumption of Anglo-American literary studies, but one that until now has not given shape to the compilation of a literary history. This assumption holds that literature is at once an agent and a product of its culture, simultaneously giving expression to and taking expression from the political, religious and social forces in which its own workings are imbricated. Conceived in this manner, literature can be seen to operate with peculiar power and saliency not just to create culture but also to enliven and enrich it through multiple voices and utterances. In the textual representation, expression and record that is literature, culture finds itself made readable, transmissible, revisable and preservable, while the restrictive and often artificial distinction between 'text' and 'context' dissolves. The design of *The Cambridge History* aims to develop this view of early modern English literature. Designed in this fashion,

our history yields multiple accounts based on various institutional sites and therefore does not assume the dimensions of a *grand récit*.

In several fundamental respects our predecessor, the first *Cambridge History of English Literature*, remains a prototype for the current project of a new, multi-volume account of English literary history from Cambridge University Press. That pioneering literary history was published in fourteen volumes between 1907 and 1917 under the general editorship of A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (the General Index, volume 15, was issued in 1927), and it remained in print until the 1970s. Then and now, the narratives of each literary history are multi-voiced, not single: each chapter has a different author (or, in a few cases, co-authors). Then and now, the structure of each history is polyfaceted, not monolithic: chapters the length of scholarly articles are clustered in chronological or generic subdivisions. Ward and Waller resonantly envisaged themselves and Cambridge University Press as coordinating a grand Baconian and Arnoldian project for collaboratively advancing literary knowledge and understanding among the widest possible English-language readership. In their words, they were aiming 'to provide a history for both the general reader and the student by the combination of a text abstaining as much as possible from technicalities, with bibliographies as full as possible of matter . . . We are convinced that it is the duty of a university press to endeavour both to meet the highest demands that can be made upon its productions by men of learning and letters, and to enable the many to share in the knowledge acquired by the few.'[1] The premiums that Ward and Waller placed on aids to access and further study, by way of bibliographies and other reference tools, on synoptic perspectives and inclusive treatments of subjects in the framing of chapters, and on information and stimulation for a diversity of readers still carry their weight in this new *Cambridge History*.

The first *Cambridge History* remains particularly commendable for its broad and inclusive conception of literature. This encompasses, for the period covered by the present volume, discussions of chronicle- and history-writing, philosophical and scientific writing, early political and economic writings, and writings on navigation and agriculture, as well as the expected accounts of sonnet sequences, song-books and miscellanies, prose genres from sermons to romances to jest-books and broadsides, and compendious coverage of English drama in the age of Shakespeare – which occupies volumes 5 and 6 – in addition

1 A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (eds.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, 15 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1907–27), 3:iv.

to numerous chapters on single authors. The passage of a century, however, has inevitably dated certain aspects of the earlier *Cambridge History* and provided incentives and opportunities for fresh approaches to writing literary history. Ward and Waller's volumes lack an integrative structural design; the variety of the chapters, initially appealing, registers as a miscellany of works and topics. There are, however, recurrent lines of connection, but these too no longer command the acceptance that these volumes assume. One such line of connection implies that the English Renaissance and Reformation and its immediate aftermath in the seventeenth century (*c.* 1509–1660, though including the later works of Milton, Bunyan and Marvell) was an era of unsurpassed and unmatchable literary greatness, uniquely requiring five volumes for its treatment, while English literature from 'the Age of Dryden' to the nineteenth century receives a total of seven. Another line of connection assumes that the way to understand an individual author lies through his – and it is always his – biography and the evaluation of his character: thus, for example, Bacon's philosophical method is found to be flawed, just as his political career was, and Donne's literary audacity, independence and restless intellect are viewed in reference to his extravagances of behaviour. Perhaps the most encompassing line of connection is the untroubled sense, conveyed by the dozens of contributors to these volumes, that what the major and what the minor literary genres are, what the major and what the minor achievements are within these genres, and who the major and the minor authors and schools of practice are is a matter of established knowledge and consensual judgement. The outlines, volumes and values of the Big Picture are objectively out there, only the specifics need filling in – so runs the implicit message of the first *Cambridge History*. Today's readers inhabit a considerably more contestatory and sceptical moment in the study of literature and literary history, while continuing to credit acquisition of knowledge and exercise of critical judgement. The present volume is designed to honour, extend and reconsider the polyvocal, multifaceted dimensions that are the most enduring and productive legacy of Ward and Waller's collaboratively authored volumes.

Other previous histories differ from the present volume of the *Cambridge History* in tending to relegate certain kinds of political and religious texts to background material; or discussing them (if at all) under such categories as political and religious thought. In Douglas Bush's influential *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600–1660* (2nd edn, 1962), there is a long opening chapter on 'The Background of the Age', with subsequent chapters devoted to political thought, science and scientific thought, and religion and

religious thought.[2] The present *Cambridge History* not only breaks down the background/foreground dichotomy; it also refuses to treat writers simply in terms of political or religious thought. Instead, our contributors place more emphasis on rhetorical and literary achievements in relation to religious beliefs and political ideologies. Thus, for example, Bush's volume treats the Levellers John Lilburne and William Walwyn in chapters on political and religious thought, while our history takes account of the texture of their polemical writings in a range of chapters concerned with literature and national identity, religion, and the City of London in the Civil War and Interregnum. Similarly, the significant seventeenth-century writer Gerrard Winstanley attracts only passing mention from Bush – mainly in the context of political ideas, where seventeenth-century historians usually place him. But in our literary history the language and texture of Winstanley's idiosyncratic Biblical and apocalyptic mythmaking are interconnected with his heretical religious beliefs and communist agrarian ideology (Chapters 21–3). Our treatment of literature in relation to various institutions or sites of production dispenses with the more traditional series of 'background' chapters, providing an alternative framework in six comprehensive chapters that address the material conditions, production, circulation, patronage and reception of writing in early modern Britain. We restrict our English-language purview to Britain not because we ignore or deny the vitality and interest of the trans-Atlantic dimension of literature in our period, but because this multifaceted subject has been admirably treated in another *Cambridge History*.[3]

We have also chosen to call this a history of 'early modern English literature', while remaining cognisant of the generality and even the ambiguity of the phrase 'early modern'. Although it can be used too facilely to associate literature in our period with the origins of modernity and individualism, or, more generally, to strike a Whiggish, progressivist note, this formulation is serviceable to us as a means of addressing the vexed problem of periodisation. For one thing, it allows us wider scope at both ends of our chronological spectrum. The term 'English Renaissance' – by no means a term we wish to

2 Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600–1660*, 2nd edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), chs. 1, 8, 9, 10. Bruce King's one-volume *Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) likewise contains a series of 'background' chapters for the years 1600–25, 1625–60 and 1660–1700, and covering such topics as 'causes of political instability', 'literature and society' and 'art, music and science'.

3 See discussions by Myra Jehlen, 'The Literature of Colonization', and by Emory Elliott, 'The New England Puritan Literature', in *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume I (1590–1820)*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Cyrus R. K. Patell (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 13–108, 171–278.

discard – would not have allowed us to configure Part 2 of our volume as we have, with three chapters devoted to literary activity having formative implications for the consolidating culture of the Tudor court, the nascent institution of the Church of England, and the literary expression of national identity. This very era – the middle decades of the sixteenth century – has standardly been regarded as a prologue rather than a notable period of literary culture in its own right. Not so long ago, the 'Golden Age' of the English Renaissance was confidently hailed as arriving with the publication of Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* (1579).[4]

At the other end of our chronological spectrum, the term 'English Renaissance' would have precluded attention to the vast and varied amount of writing produced during the period of the English Civil War and Interregnum and its immediate aftermath, much of which is typically not taught or read under the rubric 'Renaissance'. Indeed, recent historians have argued that Renaissance culture ends about 1640 if not earlier, though a major anthology of English poetry uses the term 'Renaissance' flexibly enough to include verse up to the crisis of the English republic in 1659.[5] The greatest literary figure of seventeenth-century England, John Milton, lived and wrote during the late Renaissance, the English Revolution and the Restoration. His writings can and should be read in terms of all three chronological perspectives, but cannot be fully understood or defined by any one of them. The phrase 'early modern' allows us to address the crucial decades between the Renaissance and the Restoration, and to explore continuities (as well as differences) between the literature of the 1640s and 1650s and the literature preceding and immediately following it. The result is to challenge and complicate traditional chronological boundaries – such as that between the Interregnum and Restoration (see Chapter 26) – without imposing sharp or simplistic divisions as Jacob

4 See C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 64: 'Though "periods" are a mischievous conception they are a methodological necessity . . . I have accordingly divided [the mass of literature which I attempt to study in this book] . . . into what I call the Late Medieval, the Drab Age, and the "Golden" Age. They . . . cannot be precisely dated, and the divisions between them do not apply to prose nearly so well as to verse. The Late Medieval extends very roughly to the end of Edward VI's reign . . . The Drab Age begins before the Late Medieval has ended, towards the end of Henry VIII's reign, and lasts into the late seventies . . . The Golden Age is what we usually think of first when "the great Elizabethans" are mentioned: it is largely responsible, in England, for the emotional overtones of the word *Renaissance*.'

5 See William J. Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance, 1550–1640* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). Peter Burke sees the late Renaissance in Europe and England as extending to around 1630: *The European Renaissance: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). See, however, *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse, 1509–1659*, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen with an introduction by David Norbrook (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1993).

Burckhardt famously did between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Italy, in order to argue for the emergence of a new self-conscious individualism.[6] Finally, the phrase 'early modern English literature' allows us to develop a more broadly inclusive perspective on literary history, where the word 'Renaissance', meaning rebirth, evokes a world of high or urbane literary culture, often associated with the court, humanism and the great revival of antiquity leading to an emulation of classical models for composition. Because our history also addresses much popular writing and 'cheap print' in English, some of it (including ballads, chapbooks and popular romances) intended for the middling or even lower ranks of society (see Chapter 1), the more general term 'early modern English literature' seems advantageous and appropriate to us.

For the largest purposes of this volume, moreover, we want to construe 'literature' in the sense that it had in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English, as helpfully detailed by Raymond Williams in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*.[7] For Sir Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), the goal was to become 'learned in all literature & erudition, divine & humane'.[8] Here, clearly, literature is synonymous with the domain of all knowledge that has been preserved and transmitted in written form. The term came into English through the late medieval and early modern valuation of the skills of reading and the qualities of the book, a valuation intensified by the development of printing. There is a close period association between literature and literacy, and our volume aims to honour that inclusiveness by recognising as 'early modern English literature' a broad spectrum of what later would be classified as history, household advice, religious and political tracts, and much else. Not until the cult of authorship in the eighteenth century, compounded with the Romantic premium on the imagination, did the domain of literature become circumscribed to mean, primarily, poetry, fiction, drama and essays. Any treatment of the literary production during either the English Reformation or English Revolution reveals how inclusive we need to be in addressing the full range of writings produced then, yet (until recently) rarely analysed in detail by literary scholars (e.g. in the first instance political treatises, religious tracts

6 Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); this classic account of the Renaissance was first published in German in 1860. The Burckhardtian spirit remains vital in William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

7 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), s.v. 'literature'.

8 Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. Michael Kiernan, The Oxford Francis Bacon, 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 4.

and broadsides; in the latter period also serial newsbooks, heresiographies and so on). Nonetheless, while the new *Cambridge History* emphasises breadth in terms of what constitutes 'literature', its contributors variously attend to considerations of language, form, style, conventions and literary genres in order to address the poetic and rhetorical achievements of the writers and works of early modern English literature. Ultimately, we seek to integrate our premium on the literary more broadly defined with a better informed sense of the roles played, the cultural work done, and the regard achieved (or not achieved) by English literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The new *Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature* is also unusual in providing no chapters on single authors. Single-author accounts, usually focused on the careers of such consequential writers as Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Jonson and Milton, have been rendered masterfully in other literary histories of the period, where they are staples of presentation. Our aim here is to achieve freshness by allowing individual authors to be evaluated from multiple perspectives and located in relation to a range of institutional sites. This kind of placement may complicate our sense of an individual author's agency; it does not, however, diminish it. What is more, the detailed Index to this *Cambridge History* will enable our readers to find with ease and precision the discussions of specific authors and their works.

Like the one devoted to medieval literature, this volume examines the relation of literary history to other aspects of history, stressing, in particular, the dynamic interactions between texts and institutional contexts in early modern Britain.[9] In our sequence of chapters, aesthetic issues and questions are not divorced from historical conditions or social functions; rather, verses, plays, masques, prose writings and so on are frequently, though not exclusively, read as participating in, as helping to shape and question social and religious processes and philosophical assumptions. Too often, regrettably, new historical accounts have neglected religious developments and conflicts (e.g. the polemical agenda of Reformation literature in the 1530s, 1540s and 1550s; the polemical agenda of Catholic devotional literature in the 1580s; burgeoning anti-popery and ongoing fears of domestic Catholic conspiracies; the Puritan print campaign against the bishops in the 1580s and 1590s; the divisive repercussions of Laudian ceremonial innovations) in relation to the writing of early modern England. This volume therefore aims to redress the balance and give due weight to the intersection of politics and religion from the later years of Henry VIII

9 For acute reflections on the interactions between contexts and texts, see Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), ch. 1.

onward. Indeed, by emphasising the crucial roles of religious discourses, beliefs and institutions in the evolution of early modern literary culture, this literary history underscores their centrality without reductively viewing them as fronts for issues of power. In addition, where our volume explores the intersections between literature and history, it aims to complicate and challenge monolithic views of power and representation in early modern England.

Besides an inclusive chronological scope and the institutional location of various aspects of literary activity, periodisation is a crucial concern in the organisation of this history. The divisions into five Parts set out a sequence of distinct but contiguous phases of national and cultural identity, in which England proportionally produces and circulates more literature in more varied sites than do Scotland and Ireland at this period. Each Part of this volume contributes cumulatively to evoke the historically specific multiple constructions of 'England' as that state, church and language community whose metropolis and matrix was London, site of a quarter of England's population by 1600, and the centre of much literary production, reception and circulation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Besides the great centripetal pull of London's prodigious vitality in the early modern period, another major source of cultural magnetism was the court and the incentives it offered to literary activity and achievement. Hence, while regnal divisions can sometimes be mechanical devices for organising a historical narrative, here they justify their use as vectors pointing to key directions being taken by literary activity. Parts 2, 3 and 4 of this literary history correspond to groupings of reigns or to a long single reign, in the case of Elizabeth I, signifying the centrality of the figure of the monarch to the culturally authoritative institutions of this early modern era. Yet even Part 3 takes account of the non-synchronous phases of Mary Stuart's and James's reigns as monarchs of Scotland.

This new history of early modern English literature has an important multinational dimension to its design as well, especially with regard to the chapters on literature and national identity (Chapters 7, 10, 15, 21). These chapters demonstrate the productivity of recent scholarship on historically specific senses of national identity and 'the British problem' (as well as the cultural tensions conveyed by this term) in the early modern period.[10] While England

10 See, for example, Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590–1612* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill (eds.) *The British Problem, c. 1535–1707* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); David J. Baker, *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell and the Question of Britain* (Stanford University Press, 1997); Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); David J. Baker

is a principal focus, attention is simultaneously devoted to literary production in Scotland and Ireland, with occasional notice of Wales and Ireland in literary representations written in English. For example, Chapter 10 ('Literature and national identity') examines competing conceptions of nationhood: the emerging, multiple visions of Scottish national and independent identity (sometimes in tension with the institution of monarchy) in Scottish Reformation histories (e.g. by John Knox, John Leslie, George Buchanan); the multiple representations of English nationhood in John Foxe, Elizabeth I's writings, Shakespeare's history plays, Samuel Daniel's *Civil Wars* (1595), among other works; images of Ireland (by Richard Stanyhurst, John Derricke, Spenser and others) as negative counter-images of England itself (since there is no discourse of Irish nationhood in the English language at this moment). The subsequent chapter on literature and national identity (Chapter 15) likewise concludes with sections on Scotland and Ireland – a section on Scottish liberties and nationhood (which examines conflicting responses to Buchanan's writings), and a section treating Irish Catholic perspectives on Irish history (e.g. by Philip O'Sullivan Beare and Geoffrey Keating), as well as some of the more hostile literature about the explosive Irish Rebellion. These are just some of the ways, then, that this new *Cambridge History*, provides multi-national perspectives on English literature in Britain.

Within each of the five Parts of this *Cambridge History*, separate chapters are assigned to institutions as they come to the fore and demonstrate their saliency as actively contributing sites of literary production, reception and circulation. So, for example, while the City of London and the household have a long pre-existence as institutions, London here first becomes literarily salient in the reign of Elizabeth (Chapter 13), while the household – itself distributed between the godly household and the landed estate – first demands attention as an active literary category under the earlier Stuarts (Chapter 20). Indeed, two of the more novel features of this new literary history are its chapters on literature and the City of London and on literature and the household. Since they locate sites of important cultural activity, chapter headings themselves serve as dynamic elements in the larger narrative of this literary history. They signal a new coincidence of institutional life and cultural vitality, as does the chapter on literature and the theatre under Elizabeth. Or they may modify already operative categories, as do those treating the Civil War and Commonwealth era where the chapter on 'Literature and the court' is omitted but 'Alternative

and Willy Maley (eds.), *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

sites for literature' are located and discussed, and a chapter on 'Literature and religion' substitutes for one on 'Literature and the church', signifying the then-prevailing institutional turbulence and religious ferment.

The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature also addresses areas of literary history that have received less attention until recently – for example, English and Scottish Reformation literature and the literature of the English Revolution. Since the recently published *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* extends its scope to the dissolution of the monasteries and the death of Henry VIII (1547), this subsequent volume retraces some of the early chronology – specifically the final two decades of Henry VIII's reign – from different perspectives, emphasising the literary achievements of the mid sixteenth century and the genres that flourished then (the popular interlude, allegory and satire, millennial prophecy and Biblical translation), as well as certain writers who promoted Reformation concerns. At the other end of our timespan, the unusually large volume of writing produced between 1640 and 1660 (over 22,000 books, polemical pamphlets, newsbooks, broadsides and manuscripts in the George Thomason collection alone) has been evaluated freshly in recent years by a new generation of literary historians. Prominent in this evaluation have been considerations of licensing and censorship: its nature, extent, effectiveness and impact on literary activity. Our history therefore includes several chapters that consider the role of literature and newly emergent forms of writing in the Civil War and Interregnum – a period of crisis when England's view of itself as God's chosen nation and a modern Protestant Israel was severely challenged. This part of the volume also highlights the literary and rhetorical achievements of important writers of political theory (Hobbes and James Harrington besides others mentioned above). It gives some attention to the flourishing of radical religious writing in the mid seventeenth century and to the role of literary republicanism in the 1640s and 1650s. It contests the notion that not much happens in literary history (outside, say, the major contributions of Milton, Marvell and Hobbes) between 1640 and 1660 and examines interconnections between the literary culture of the Interregnum and the Restoration (Chapters 21–6).[11]

Last but far from least, since we have been steadily increasing our awareness and knowledge of women writers and readers, as well as female patronage

11 Compare the claim by Robert M. Adams that 'periods of social strife and radical experiment don't generally produce much literature, and the two decades from 1640 to 1660 bear out that rule': *The Land and Literature of England: A Historical Account* (New York: Norton 1983), p. 238. More recently, *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland*, by Ronald Carter and John McRae (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) hardly mentions any writing between 1640 and 1660.