

Cambridge University Press

0521660807 - Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary
Theory in Social Context

Robert Matz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Why was literature so often defended and defined in early modern England in terms of its ability to provide the Horatian ideal of both profit and pleasure? Robert Matz analyzes Renaissance literary theory in the context of social transformations of the period, focusing on conflicting ideas about gentility that emerged as the English aristocracy evolved from a feudal warrior class to a civil elite. Through close readings centered on works by Thomas Elyot, Philip Sidney, and Edmund Spenser, Matz argues that literature attempted to mediate a complex set of contradictory social expectations. His original study engages with important theoretical work such as Pierre Bourdieu's and offers a substantial critique of New Historicist theory. It challenges recent accounts of the power of Renaissance authorship, emphasizing the uncertain status of literature during this time of cultural change, and sheds light on why and how canonical works became canonical.

ROBERT MATZ is Assistant Professor of English at George Mason University.

Cambridge University Press
0521660807 - Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary
Theory in Social Context
Robert Matz
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 37

Defending Literature in Early Modern England

Cambridge University Press
 0521660807 - Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary
 Theory in Social Context
 Robert Matz
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture

General editor

STEPHEN ORGEL

Jackson Eli Reynolds Professor of Humanities, Stanford University

Editorial board

Anne Barton, *University of Cambridge*

Jonathan Dollimore, *University of York*

Marjorie Garber, *Harvard University*

Jonathan Goldberg, *Johns Hopkins University*

Nancy Vickers, *Bryn Mawr College*

Since the 1970s there has been a broad and vital reinterpretation of the nature of literary texts, a move away from formalism to a sense of literature as an aspect of social, economic, political and cultural history. While the earliest New Historicist work was criticized for a narrow and anecdotal view of history, it also served as an important stimulus for post-structuralist, feminist, Marxist and psychoanalytical work, which in turn has increasingly informed and redirected it. Recent writing on the nature of representation, the historical construction of gender and of the concept of identity itself, on theatre as a political and economic phenomenon and on the ideologies of art generally, reveals the breadth of the field. *Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture* is designed to offer historically oriented studies of Renaissance literature and theatre which make use of the insights afforded by theoretical perspectives. The view of history envisioned is above all a view of our own history, a reading of the Renaissance for and from our own time.

Recent titles include

29. Dorothy Stephens *The limits of eroticism in post-Petrarchan narrative: conditional pleasure from Spenser to Marvell*
30. Celia R. Daileader *Eroticism on the Renaissance stage: transcendence, desire, and the limits of the visible*
31. Theodore B. Leinwand *Theatre, finance and society in early modern England*
32. Heather Dubrow *Shakespeare and domestic loss: forms of deprivation, mourning, and recuperation*
33. David M. Posner *The performance of nobility in early modern European literature*
34. Michael C. Schoenfeldt *Bodies and selves in early modern England: physiology and inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton*
35. Lynn Enterline *The rhetoric of the body from Ovid to Shakespeare*
36. Douglas A. Brooks *From playhouse to printing house: drama and authorship in early modern England*

A complete list of books in the series is given at the end of the volume.

Cambridge University Press

0521660807 - Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary
Theory in Social Context

Robert Matz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Defending Literature in Early Modern England

Renaissance Literary Theory in Social Context

Robert Matz

*Assistant Professor of English
George Mason University*



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 0521660807 - Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary
 Theory in Social Context
 Robert Matz
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014, Madrid, Spain

© Robert Matz, 2000

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Monotype Times New Roman 10/12 pt *System* QuarkXPress™ [SE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Matz, Robert.

Defending literature in early modern England: Renaissance
 literary theory in social context / Robert Matz.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in Renaissance literature and
 culture: 37)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 66080 7 (hardback)

1. English literature – Early modern, 1500–1700 – History and
 criticism – Theory, etc. 2. Literature and society – England –
 History – 16th century. 3. Social change – England – History – 16th
 century. 4. Criticism – England – History – 16th century. 5. Social
 change in literature. 6. Renaissance – England. I. Title.

II. Series.

PR418.S64M38 2000

801'.95'094209031 – dc21 99-37797 CIP

ISBN 0 521 66080 7 hardback

Cambridge University Press
0521660807 - Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary
Theory in Social Context
Robert Matz
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For my parents, Joseph and Lorraine Matz

Cambridge University Press
0521660807 - Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary
Theory in Social Context
Robert Matz
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Pastance with good company
I love and shall until I die
Grudge who will, but none deny,
So God be pleased this life will I
For my pastance,
Hunt, sing and dance,
My heart is set,
All goodly sport
To my comfort
Who shall me let?

Henry VIII, "Pastance with good company"
(from Williams, *Henry VIII and His Court*, p. 34)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page xi</i>
1 Introduction: “aut prodesse . . . aut delectare”	1
2 Recreating reading: Elyot’s <i>Boke Named the Governour</i>	25
3 Heroic diversions: Sidney’s <i>Defence of Poetry</i>	56
4 A “gentle discipline”: Spenser’s <i>Faerie Queene</i>	88
5 Epilogue: from text to work?	128
<i>Notes</i>	137
<i>Bibliography</i>	172
<i>Index</i>	182

Cambridge University Press
0521660807 - Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary
Theory in Social Context
Robert Matz
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

A number of friends and colleagues at Johns Hopkins and George Mason University kindly read and helpfully commented on sections of this work. Many thanks to Denise Albanese, David Baker, Charles Dove, Dorice Elliott, David Glimp, Elaine Hadley, Devon Hodges, Rosemary Jann, Barbara Melosh, Cynthia Rogers, Jennifer Summit, and Ned Weed. I've also had the pleasure of wonderful teachers in the English departments at Johns Hopkins and Cornell. I want particularly to express my appreciation to Jonathan Goldberg. As advisor to my dissertation at Johns Hopkins, not to mention through his own critical work, he has taught me a great deal, and provided me with a model of scholarly generosity and energy that I greatly admire. I am glad to have a chance to thank him in print. As my dissertation's second reader, John Guillory provided valuable advice and clear formulations. Thanks also to the George Mason University College of Arts and Sciences, which provided financial support for the completion of this book through its Summer Stipend for Junior Faculty Work. A portion of chapter 3 originally appeared in *English Literary Renaissance* 25 (1995): 131–47. Thanks to the journal for permission to reprint it here. Stephen Orgel was generous with his time and support during this book's publication. At Cambridge University Press, Josie Dixon provided invaluable editorial counsel, and Sue Dickinson gave keen and unflagging attention to the final preparation of the book. Teresa Michals has read or heard – and improved – every one of these pages. She has been a wonderful companion not only through the difficult passages, but the happy ones as well. My new son David has helped me think further about the meaning of play. Finally, this book could not have been completed without the loving and unflinching support that I have received from the rest of my family and especially from my parents. This book is dedicated to them.