The Sixteenth Century

Cultural Background

and

Court Poetry
Political situation - Timeline:

- 1485: Battle of Bosworth Field: → **Henry VII**
- 1509: **Henry VIII** marries Katherine of Aragon
- 1533: Henry VIII marries Anne Boleyn and divorces Katherine of Aragon
- 1534: Act of Supremacy
- 1536: Act for Dissolution of the Lesser Monasteries
Henry VIII  Anne Boleyn
Political situation - Timeline:

- 1547: Edward VI
- 1553: Mary I → “Bloody Mary”
- 1554: Queen Elizabeth imprisoned
- 1558: Elizabeth I
- 1559: Act of Uniformity
- 1587: execution of Mary Stuart
- 1588: Defeat of the Spanish Armada
Characteristics of the Tudor Period

- from medieval feudal state to a centralised absolute state
- distinction against other nations – esp. Spain (Catholic!)
- pragmatic legitimation
- Reformation
  → emergence of a nation state
- 'political body building‘ of monarchs
- literature participates in the establishment of a ‘Tudor Myth’
The Tudor Myth

- History told according to the needs of Tudor monarchs, with a moral theme:

- Guilt of Henry IV (1st Lancastrian king) in deposing an anointed king, Richard II (last Plantagenet king), leads to moral and political chaos for next century
- Wars of the Roses (1377-1485)
- Wars capped by Richard III
- Harmony restored by Henry Tudor
- Henry VII—unites rival dynasties (→ Tudor Rose)
- Henry VII is divinely sanctioned: wrong of Richard II’s deposition finally made right
The Tudor Myth

An oversimplified view of history:

• Ignores wrongs committed by Richard II himself

• Misrepresents causes of the Wars of the Roses

• Leaves out non-elite players

• Omits or adapts important events and persons
The Tudor Myth:
Why tell history this way?

Tudor Myth celebrates a new dynasty

Tudor Myth grants divine right

Tudor myth implies God watches over England

Tudor Myth provides ideology and symbol for the first Tudor king
Cultural Orientations in the 16th Century: Renaissance

- Renaissance = re-birth or new birth, i.e. return towards antiquity
- in England, Renaissance later than in Italy
- impacts of the Reformation and national Tudor identity
Cultural Orientations in the 16th Century: Humanism

- revival of ancient languages → translations, these also help to revaluate English
- man into the centre; book of nature
- in England: esp. educational programme, e.g. Thomas Elyot, The Boke named the Governour; or Roger Ascham, The Scholemaster
- important: idea of order
- Elyot: "A public weal is a body living, compact of sundry estates and degrees of men, which is disposed by the order of equity and governed by the rule and moderation of reason"
  → state as body politic is an image of divine orders and laws
Hierachy of body politic

1. Nobility (Hochadel)
2. Gentry (Niedere Landadel)
3. Yeomanry (landbesitzendes Großbürgertum)
4. Artisans, farmers, workmen
5. Vagabonds and beggars
Shakespeare had his Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* deliver his famous "degree speech" drawing a dark portrait of the horrible and universal chaos caused by the loss of the old geocentric order:

“O, when degree is shaked,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick!
How could communities,
Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And, hark, what discord follows!”
Macrocosm vs. Microcosm

1. Macrocosm
   (celestial spheres => court/ state)

   vs.

Microcosm
   (mankind => country/ individual)
2. Chain of Being \textit{[aurea catena Homeri]}
(stratified/hierarchical order of the world)

“Since every place in the scale [of being] must be filled, and since each is what it is by virtue of the special limitations which differentiate it from any other, man's duty was to keep his place, and not to seek to transcend it -- which, nevertheless, he was characteristically prone to do” (Lovejoy).
3. from vita contemplatativa
i.e. monastic retreat
(Middle Ages)
or *otium*

_________
to vita activa
i.e. civic life
(Renaissance)
or *negotium*
4. Physiology and Psychology:

four humours the body is composed of:

1. blood
2. black bile (Melancholia)
3. yellow bile
4. phlegm spirits ("vapors" = nervous system in modern terms)
Bibliography

Eustace Mandeville Wedenhall Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* [1943]. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. [Tudor Myth: be careful this is obsolete research!]

Court Poetry of the Sixteenth Century

“I can make the foregoing discussion of `ideology' more concrete by an explicit example of how it functioned in the sixteenth century. In his influential essay on `Ideological State Apparatuses', Althusser discusses the very concrete practices by which any society structures, even in part creates, the allegiances by which its members feel they `belong' to it - the system of education, characteristic lifestyle, patterns of religion, family organization and so forth. It is by means of such institutions and structures, what he called `apparatuses', that ideology functions. Except that - and here we enter into a discussion of the dominant `apparatuses' of this period - the poetry of the sixteenth century was not produced by `ordinary people'. Or to put it differently, the received canon of sixteenth-century poetry is almost entirely the product of (written for, and almost always by) a small fraction of the population - the aristocracy, the gentry and those aspiring members of the `middle' classes who had some pretensions to upward mobility, what Evans terms `a new social phenomenon', the second generation of the new bourgeoisie going to university and abandoning their fathers' professions for a life of letters” (Gary Waller, English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century [London: Longman, 1993, p. 14]).
The major institution that dominates 16th-Century poetry is the Court.

"Around the monarch was the Court"
Court and Country

Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *English Civil War*:

“The Court was where as in a mirror, we may best see the face of that time, and the affections and temper of the people in general [for] the court measured the temper and affection of the country”.
Court and People

“Men and women ‘swarmed’ to the Court for power, gain, gossip, titles, favours, rewards and entertainment. The Court was more than merely the seat of government, or wherever the monarch happened to be.” (Waller, p. 14f.)
How is poetry presented?

“Throughout the period, poetry is thought primarily of as action in and for the Court, as performance, even as production, not merely as written text. The poems are the visible edge of a whole complex social text”
How is poetry presented?

“The Court … appropriated poetry as one of the practices by which it tried to exercise its political dominance. Within the Court, poetry was seen as entertainment by and for amateur gentleman poets of the Court; it was … ‘idealised talk’ performed and enjoyed along with what Lewis terms ‘a little music after supper’”
Court and Poet

“There was […] from the time of Henry VII and VIII, an increasingly tightly organized system of patronage that exercised power over artists, musicians and writers, in an interaction of ‘patrons and prince pleasers’. Directly utilitarian writing was what the sixteenth-century monarchs and Courts preferred to support.” (Waller)

See also:
Green Richard Firth, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.
Poetry and the Reader

“All writers agreed that poetry's universal and ancient status is conceded by the best authorities; that because of its divine origins and social nature, poetry could … be a moral force; and that it communicated its didactic aims with a pleasurableness that enhanced its power to change our lives.”

Sir Philip Sidney: *Defence of Poesy*

Poets “do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, without which delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved”

poetry is not “an art of lies, but of true doctrine”, full of “virtue-breeding delightfulness”.
George Puttenham (?1520-1590)

*The Arte of English Poesie* (1589)

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586)

*Defence of Poesie* (1595)
The Art of Poetry

Where are the origins of true art?
Ingenium + Imitatio = Variatio
Ars vs. Doctrina [poeta doctus]

Rhetorics
Thomas Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553/60)

a) [poets:] Elocutio – Inventio – Dispositio – [for orators: Memoria – Pronuntiatio]

b) *Poeta rhetor* must observe the distinctions of stilus humilis – stilus medocris – stilus gravis
Puttenham’s description of the development of English Poetry from Lydgate (15th century) to the Earl of Surrey (16th century):

After whom followed _John Lydgate_ the monke of Bury, & that nameles, who wrote the _Satyre_ called Piers Plowman, next him followed _Harding_ the Chronicler, then in king _Henry_ th'eight times _Skelton_, (I wot not for what great worthines) surnamed the Poet _Laureat_.

…
In the latter end of the same kings reign sprong up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir Thomas Wyat at th'elder & Henry Earle of Surrey were the two chieftaines, who having travailed into Italie [and France from 1526-27], and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie as nouices newly crept out of the schooles of Dante Arioste and Petrarch [Serafino, Alamanni], they greatly pollished our rude & homely maner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had bene before, and for that cause may iustly be sayd the first reformers of our English metre and stile.” (quoted from: George Puttenham. The Arte of English Poesie. 1569; rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1968)
Court Poets of the 16th Century

- Sir Thomas Wyatt
- Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey
- William Dunbar (1460?-1520)
- Sir Walter Ralegh (1552?-1618)
- Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (1554-1628)
- Edmund Spenser
- Sir Philip Sidney
Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)

poet during the reign of Henry VIII
fell in love with Anne Boleyn
imprisoned in 1535 and 1541

import and translation of Petrarchan sonnets
wrote c. 25 sonnets

Wyatt's advice to his newly-married son, 15 April 1537: Letter no. 1

Loue wel and agre with your wife, for where is noyse and debate in the hous, ther is unquiet dwelling. And mitch more wher it is in one bed. Frame wel your self to loue, and rule wel and honestly your wife as your felow, and she shat loue and reuerens you as her hed ... And the bliss-ing of god for good agrement between the wife and husband is fruyt of many children, which I for the like thinge doe lack, and the faulte is both in your mother and me, but chieflie in her.
Come on now, my lorde of Londone, what is my abhominable and viciouse livinge? Do ye know yt or have ye harde yt? I graunte I do not professe chastite, but yet I vse not abomination. Yf ye knowe yt, tell yt here, with whome and when. Yf ye harde yt, who is your autor? Have you sene me have anye harlet in my howse whilst ye were in my companie?
Wyatt and Petrarca

*Imitatio*

Petrarca idealized sonnets on Laura
abba abba cde cde

*Variatio*

psychological realism
abba abba abba cc (final couplet)
Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey
(c. 1517-47)

“[Wyatt was] confessedly inferior to Surrey in harmony of numbers, perspicuity of expression, and facility of phraseology”

“Surrey, for his justness of thought, correctness of style, and purity of expression, may justly be pronounced the first English classical poet”
Earl of Surrey

Aristocrat, Courtier (cousin of Catherine Howard, fifth wife of H VIII), commanding officer and poet.

A courtier’s manual:
Baldassare Castiglione *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528)
Ideals of Italian humanism => renewal of English language and literature
Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey
“Alas! so all things now do hold their peace”

Alas! so all things now do hold their peace,
Heaven and earth disturbed in nothing.
The beasts, the air, the birds their song do cease,
The nightes chare the stars about doth bring.
Calm is the sea, the waves work less and less:
So am not I, whom love, alas, doth wring,
Bringing before my face the great increase
Of my desires, whereat I weep and sing
In joy and woe as in a doubtful ease;
For my sweet thoughts sometime do pleasure bring,
But by and by the cause of my disease
Gives me a pang that inwardly doth sting.
When that I think what grief it is again
To live and lack the thing should rid my pain.
'Sonnet craze' at the end of the sixteenth century:

Sir Thomas Wyatt
Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey
Edmund Spenser
Sir Philip Sidney
Samuel Daniel
Michael Drayton
Thomas Lodge
Barnabe Barnes

William Shakespeare