

CHATTERTON LECTURE ON POETRY

Michael Drayton's Brilliant Career

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IF IT IS TRUE, as has recently been asserted, that Michael Drayton 'is presently one of the most misunderstood and undervalued poets of the English Renaissance', then perhaps he only has himself to blame.¹ There are some obvious reasons for Drayton's 'subsequent obscurity and an almost total eclipse from the literary scene'.² It is often argued that whereas many of his contemporaries were adept at cultivating the support of the powerful and generous, Drayton was simply incompetent at obtaining patronage. Another familiar claim is that he looked back with a paralysing nostalgia to the Elizabethan age, never really recovering from its demise. In this essay I want to argue that these are mistaken assessments of Drayton's literary career. He was indeed successful in the terms he set himself, establishing himself as a major poet in print, widely read and having influence on the development of other writers. Patronage was only important to him in so far as it served this aim and Drayton was quite prepared to be rude to those aristocrats too foolish to grasp his merits as a writer. Far from being simply a nostalgic author, Drayton realised the potential of the printed word to secure his reputation and embraced this

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¹ Arthur F. Kinney, 'Editor's Note', in Jean R. Brink, *Michael Drayton Revisited* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), p. vii. See also Paula Johnson, 'Michael Drayton, Prophet Without Audience', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 11 (1978), 45–55. This essay has benefited from numerous conversations with David Scott Kastan and James Shapiro, as well as the labours of my research assistant at Columbia University, J. Matthew Zarnowiecki. The anonymous reader for the British Academy made a number of telling interventions and often saved me from myself.

² S. Naqi Husain Jafri, *Aspects of Drayton's Poetry* (Delhi: Doaba House, 1988), p. 1.



Figure 1. Michael Drayton, Frontispiece, from *Poems by Michael Drayton Esquire* (London, 1619), 80. i. 3. Reproduced by kind permission of the British Library.

technical change of literary production. There have been a number of works dealing with the rise of the professional writer. Unfortunately, Drayton, one of the first and most brilliant examples in English literature, has been left out of the story.³

Drayton's portrait has probably not endeared him to subsequent generations of readers. The poet scowls out at readers from the front of the folio edition of his poems published in 1619 (Fig. 1). Images of poets undoubtedly do affect the ways in which readers construct their works, as Michael Keevak's study of the uses of the two portraits of Shakespeare demonstrates. Works written with the balding and plump man in mind cast him as the successful Stratford bourgeois, accumulating property through his role as a shareowner in the theatre and hoarder of grain. Those which privilege the hirsute Romany with the earrings, see Shakespeare as the transgressive bisexual warrior of the Sonnets.⁴ Drayton is represented as a man conscious of his own abilities and also keenly aware that others may value them less than they should. His image dares anyone to deny the poet his real worth. It is difficult, I think, not to see the picture as a direct challenge to the reader to recognise his genius, hardly the most welcoming way of inviting people into your poetic world.⁵

Drayton wears the laurel of the poet laureate, but in doing so he is advertising his spectacular lack of worldly success, for he was, in fact, in Jean Brink's words, 'the one poet of stature who was never recognized by the crown'.⁶ His brother Edmund reported that Michael's estate was all of £24 8s 2d. when he died in 1631, just less than half of Spenser's annual pension from the queen.⁷ Hence the leaves are worn with bitter irony, especially if one realises that Drayton was the first English poet to preface his poetry with a visual representation of himself wearing the laurel crown. Many think that Jonson inaugurated this tradition, but Robert

³ See Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁴ Michael Keevak, *Sexual Shakespeare: Forgery, authorship, portraiture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), ch. 4.

⁵ The three contemporary portraits of Drayton are conveniently reproduced in Oliver Elton, *Michael Drayton: a Critical Study* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966, rpt. of 1905). The portrait of Drayton dated 1599 in the National Portrait Gallery is no longer thought to be his image. For analysis, see Roy Strong, *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits in the National Portrait Gallery*, 2 vols. (London: HMSO, 1969), I, 72. My thanks to the Gallery for advice on this point.

⁶ Brink, *Drayton*, p. 2.

⁷ Bernard H. Newdigate, *Michael Drayton and His Circle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1941), p. 222. Spenser was awarded an annual pension of £50 by the queen in February 1591: see Ruth Mohl, 'Spenser, Edmund', in A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (London and Toronto: Routledge/Toronto University Press, 1990), pp. 668–71, at p. 670.

Vaughan's engraving of Jonson as poet laureate dates from the 1640 edition of his poems and may actually owe something to Drayton's portrait.⁸

The laureateship, real or honorary, was a stated goal of ambitious English poets from John Skelton's *The Garland of Laurel* onwards, a work that Drayton undoubtedly knew.⁹ In his collection, *Odes. With Other Lyrick Poesies* (1619), Drayton makes extensive use of Skelton's characteristic verse style, 'Skeltonics', consisting of short lines of six syllables, rhymed aabab. The opening poem, 'Ode to Himselfe and The Harpe', ends with a conspicuously Janus-faced reference to his supposed predecessor. Drayton comments on his choice and range of poetic styles in the volume, as well as his line of forebears, confronting his readers with their inadequate conception of proper poetry:

To those that with despight
Shall terme these Numbers slight,
Tell them their Judgement's blind,
Much erring from the right,
It is a Noble kind.

Nor is't the Verse doth make,
That giveth, or doth take,
'Tis possible to clyme,
To kindle, or to slake,
Although in SKELTON'S Ryme.¹⁰

Drayton is defending a native English tradition in this volume, deliberately linking the highbrow style and subject matter of the classical Odes of Horace, the influence of which the subsequent poems conspicuously eschew, with the strong native voice of John Skelton.¹¹ Skelton's figure of Colin Clout exposed the vices and pretensions of the over-promoted and

⁸ The Jonson plate is based on a portrait painted between 1622 and 1627 which was then incorporated into the 1640 edition of Jonson's *Works*: see *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and P. Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52), III, ix–x. I owe this reference to Martin Butler. For examples of misdating of his portraits see Rosalind Miles, *Ben Jonson: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge, 1986); Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and The English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 240. I owe this point to David Scott Kastan.

⁹ See Newdigate, *Michael Drayton and His Circle*, p. 22; Jafri, *Aspects of Drayton's Poetry*, p. 50.

¹⁰ *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. J. William Hebel, 5 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, rev. edn., 1961), II, 349. All subsequent references to this edition in parentheses in the text.

¹¹ *Works of Michael Drayton*, V, 145. Geoffrey C. Hillier also notes the stress that Drayton places on the figures of the bards and Druids as national British poets throughout his writings: "Sacred Bards" and "Wise Druides": Drayton and his Archetype of the Poet', *English Literary History*, 51 (1984), 1–15.

talentless courtiers who had received undeserved preferment from the monarch. Drayton's adoption of Skeltonics is surely a pointed reference to the fact that such satirical poetic styles are still needed nearly a century after they were first composed, a clear sign of his sense of his own marginalisation, as the scowling non-laureate reminds us.¹²

As well as his poetic talent, Drayton also had a nearly infallible ability to time his bids for patronage poorly, which is the second reason why he may well have earned his obscurity. However, we should also bear in mind that the same could be said of Edmund Spenser, Drayton's chief literary exemplar, and he has fared rather better in subsequent literary history.¹³ Spenser managed to offend Lord Burghley, probably twice, and then alienate James VI of Scotland through his representation of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, as Duessa, in the second edition of *The Faerie Queene*. The poem was published at a time that James was becoming anxious about his chances of succeeding to the English throne while many Englishmen and women were becoming equally concerned that he was likely to be their next monarch.¹⁴ Drayton followed Spenser's lead with some apparently spectacular examples of inopportune requests and naïve bids for preferment. He concluded his first edition of *England's Heroicall Epistles* (1597), with verse epistles between Mary Tudor, the sister of Henry VIII, and Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, and Lady Jane Grey and Guildford Dudley, all familial ancestors of Viscount Beauchamp, the Suffolk claimant of the English crown and a serious rival to James. He compounded this error by dedicating the work to two prominent Catholic noblemen, William Parker, Baron Monteagle and Henry, Lord Howard, son of the executed Tudor poet, both of whom were already in contact with James.¹⁵ Given that discussion of the succession was effectively illegal—although, of course, writers found a number of allegorical ways to circumvent hostile attention—and that possession of the work of the

¹² See also 'A Skeltoniad' (III, 370), which also makes the claim that Skelton's poetry is capable of dealing with serious and lofty poetic subjects.

¹³ See Paul Alpers, 'Spenser's Influence', in Andrew Hadfield (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 252–71. On Drayton as a 'Spenserian', see Joan Grundy, *The Spenserian Poets: A Study in Elizabethan and Jacobean Poetry* (London: Arnold, 1969); William B. Hunter, *The English Spenserians: The Poetry of Giles Fletcher, George Wither, Michael Drayton, Phineas Fletcher, and Henry More* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1977); Michelle O'Callaghan, *The 'Shepherd Nation': Jacobean Spenserians and Early Stuart Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ See Andrew Hadfield, 'Spenser and the Stuart Succession', *Literature and History*, 3rd ser., 13/1 (Spring 2004), 9–24.

¹⁵ Brink, *Drayton*, pp. 10–11; J. Harris Willson, *King James VI and I* (London: Cape, 1956), p. 138.

Jesuit, Robert Parsons, *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of Ingland* (1594), which discussed the Suffolk claim among others, was considered treason, it looks as if Drayton was sticking his neck out and playing a game in which he had little to win and much to lose.¹⁶

Nor did Drayton stop there. When patronage was—hardly surprisingly—not forthcoming from Monteagle and Northampton, he withdrew the dedications and replaced them with one to Mr Henry Lucas, possibly a former pupil of Drayton's, to whom he complained that 'Many there be in England, of whome for some particularity I might justly challenge greater merit, had I not bene borne in so evill an howre, as to be poisoned with that gaule of ingratitude.'¹⁷ The aggressive intent of the poet is clear enough. *England's Heroicall Epistles* proved extremely popular with the reading public, going through seven editions between 1597 and 1609, so Drayton's outburst reached as wide an audience as possible, hardly the best way to attract future sponsorship.¹⁸ *The Epistles* used a variety of historical contexts to heap praise on the Earl of Essex, which also limited Drayton's chances of receiving reward from aristocratic patrons eager to pay for a skilful propagandist when the earl started to fall from favour in 1599, leading eventually to his ill-fated coup four years after its initial publication (8 February 1601). His one good piece of fortune was that he avoided the fate of Dr John Haywood, imprisoned in the Tower of London for his *First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie the IIII* (1599), which was dedicated to Essex and was read by the Attorney General, Edward Coke, as a treasonable attempt to compare Elizabeth to the deposed Richard II and Essex to Henry IV.¹⁹

By the early 1600s, even Drayton was aware that he was backing the wrong horses and he switched his attention to James. The satirical

¹⁶ Robert Dolman [i.e., Parsons], *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of Ingland* (1594), pt. 2, ch. 6, *passim*. On censorship and the succession, see Janet Clare, 'Art made tongue-tied by authority': Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic censorship (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, 2nd edn.), chs. 3-4; Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), ch. 6; Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977).

¹⁷ Cited in Brink, *Drayton*, p. 11. See also Newdigate, *Michael Drayton and His Circle*, pp. 84-5.

¹⁸ See Richard F. Hardin, 'Convention and Design in Drayton's *Heroicall Epistles*', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 83 (1968), 35-41, p. 35.

¹⁹ Brink, *Drayton*, pp. 62-5; *The First and Second Parts of John Hayward's The Life and Raigne of King Henrie IIII*, ed. John J. Manning (London: Royal Historical Society, 1991: Camden Society 4th series, 42).

The vulture works hard to abuse the law for his own benefit and that of his sovereign, as the last two lines make clear. The lines recall the behaviour of the fox, Lord Burghley, in Spenser's beast fable, who also has the power to abuse the law for his own gain:

But the false Foxe most kindly plaid his part:
 For whatsoever mother wit, or arte
 Could worke, he put in prooffe: no practise slie,
 No counterpoint of cunning policie,
 No reach, no breach, that might him profit bring,
 But he the same did to his purpose wring . . .
 All offices, all leases by him leapt,
 And of them all whatso he likte, he kept.
 Justice he solde injustice for to buy,
 And for to purchase for his progeny.²⁴

The Owle seems to cast the vulture as the successor of the fox, carrying on his work in abusing the law for his own profit, both poems situating themselves as hostile critiques of the *regnum Cecilianum* that was widely seen to dominate English political life, as alleged in works such as Parsons' *Conference about the Next Succession*.²⁵

Predictably enough, Drayton's attempt to secure James's patronage and good opinion failed and by 1606 he satirised James as Olcon in his *Pastorals* for neglecting his flock and leaving them to the mercy of the 'sterne Wolfe and deceitfull Foxe' ('Eclogue the Eighth', line 99), providing a further link between the elder Cecil and the corruption of the vulture represented in *The Owle*.²⁶ His *magnum opus*, *Poly-Olbion* (1613, 1622), was dedicated first to Prince Henry, placing the work within the large circle of discontented Protestant militants who gravitated towards the heir, and, after Henry's death, to Charles, conspicuously cutting the king out.²⁷ He was equally harsh on the noted patron, Lucy, Countess of Bedford, who had failed to support him as he felt she should have done.²⁸

²⁴ Edmund Spenser, 'Prosopopoia: or Mother Hubberds Tale' in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), lines 1137–48.

²⁵ For a recent reappraisal, see Simon Adams, *Leicester and the Court: Essays on Elizabethan Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), chs. 3–4.

²⁶ Brink, *Drayton*, pp. 77–8.

²⁷ See Tristan Marshall, 'Michael Drayton and the Writing of Jacobean Britain', *The Seventeenth Century*, 15 (2000), 127–48. See also Roy Strong, *Henry, Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986); O'Callaghan, *The 'Shepherdess Nation'*.

²⁸ Brink, *Drayton*, p. 76.

The point of Drayton's anger may be less that he failed to secure patronage as such, and more that he failed to secure support to act exactly as he wished, which may have both hindered and helped his poetic reputation. It is hard to see how any sensible, diplomatic, self-interested poet could have hoped to have gained significant reward from the monarch, given his career so far. After all, Drayton's first published poem in James's reign was modelled on the work of Spenser, who had not only offended Lord Burghley, but, more importantly still, James himself. James had taken exception to Spenser because of his representation of James's mother, Mary Queen of Scots, as the evil Duessa in the second edition of *The Faerie Queene* (1596) (see above, p. 123). James was so incensed that he had written to Elizabeth demanding that Spenser be punished for his slanderous transgression, probably because he thought that Spenser's long poem had jeopardised his chances of becoming king of England.²⁹ Hardly surprisingly, Spenser was not exactly an ideal model for an aspiring court poet in the early 1600s. He was, however, a force to be reckoned with if poetry itself rather than worldly success, was your goal.

Drayton, like Spenser and Jonson, appears to have had high expectations of his assumed role as a privileged poet who could make key moral, social and political judgements that would determine the order of society.³⁰ If Drayton wanted patronage and influence it was on his own terms. He makes it clear in public that he will not play the social games that were expected of him to win favour at court with the nation's elite. His published work contains a whole series of calculated snubs to the good and the great in the prefaces and dedications, combined with Juvenalian attacks on the superficial values of those who climb to the top of the greasy social pole.³¹ *The Owle*, a conspicuous re-writing of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, represents the lively and often problematic events taking place at the court of the birds ruled by the eagle. Drayton establishes a contrast between the wise, dispassionate and sage owl, a figure of the poet, and the rapacious, competitive birds who surround the regal eagle and try to prevent the owl from reaching the ear of the monarch. As a result, the owl adopts a conspicuously Stoic pose, declaring himself indifferent to the evils that the world can throw at him:

²⁹ See Richard A. McCabe, 'The Masks of Duessa: Spenser, Mary Queen of Scots and James VI', *English Literary Renaissance*, 17 (1987), 224–42.

³⁰ See Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

³¹ For further details see the excellent analysis in Brink, *Drayton*, chs. 1, 4.

Long have I seene the Worlds unconstant change,
 Joy mooves not me, affliction is not strange.
 I care not for Contempt, I seeke not Fame,
 Knowledge I love, and glorie in the same . . .
 I am a helplesse Bird, a harmelesse Wretch,
 Wanting the power that needfull is to teach.
 Yet care of your great good and generall Weale,
 Unlocks my Tongue, and with a fervent zeale
 Breaks through my Lips which otherwise were pent[.] (ll. 337–47)

The noble bird stands aloof from the flurry of beasts who attack him as he approaches the eagle:

The envious *Crow*, that is so full of spight,
 The hatefull *Buzzard*, and the ravenous *Kite*,
 The greedie *Raven*, that for death doth call,
 Spoyling poore Lambes as from their Dams they fall.
 That picketh out the dying Creatures eye;
 The theevish *Daw*, and the dissembling *Pye*,
 That onely live upon the poorerers spoyle,
 That feed on Dung-hils of the lothsome foyle . . .
 Upon the sudden all these murdrous Fowle,
 Fasten together on the harmelesse *Owle*[.] (ll. 183–90, 199–200)

Drayton's representation of the range of sins to be observed at the late Elizabethan court even goes beyond the negative images Spenser had produced in the 1590s in works such as *Colin Clouts come home againe* (1595), as well as *Mother Hubberds Tale* and *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596).³² It may well have been the case that Drayton imagined that his role as honest truth-teller would have appealed to an incoming monarch keen to sweep away the excesses and corruption of Elizabeth's last decade.³³ The owl specifically warns that wisdom is not to be found in 'every garish Bird' (line 178), informing James, in case he had not already realised, that fine clothes do not make the man. More important, I would suggest, is the emphasis placed on the owl/poet as truth-teller, aware of his own significance, but indifferent to the judgements of others he does not respect (i.e., virtually everyone, given the representation of the good and the great as viciously spiteful creatures).

Drayton's attempts to court patronage from the good and the great are strikingly inept, and his harsh, public reactions to his failures distinguish

³² See Helen Cooper, 'Satire', in A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (London and Toronto: Routledge/Toronto University Press, 1990), pp. 626–8.

³³ See John Guy (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

him from his contemporaries. This is because his real interest was in poetry in print and he tied his fortune as a writer to the history of the printed book, which is why I think that patronage was important for him only in so far as it furthered his career as a poet.³⁴ Certainly, by the time that one of his last works, *The Battaile of Agincourt*, was published (1627), Drayton left the reader in no doubt that he was much more interested in the response of a book-buying public than the goodwill of great lords and ladies. His terse opening prose preface links the reader to the heroes of Agincourt:

To you those Noblest of Gentlemen, of these Renowned Kingdomes of Great Britaine: who in these declining times, have yet in your brave bosomes the sparkes of that sprightly fire, of your couragious Ancestors; and to this houre retaine the seedes of their magnanimitie and Greatnesse, who out of the vertue of your mindes, love and cherish neglected Poesie, the delight of Blessed soules, & the language of Angels. To you are these my Poems dedicated. (III, p. 2)

The first sentence makes a number of slippery manoeuvres, both in terms of what it does and does not say, indicating how Drayton wanted his poem to be read. There is a neat link made between the 'Noblest of Gentlemen' and the soldiers who were victorious at Agincourt, more properly yeomen and 'middling sort' than great aristocrats, suggesting that Drayton wished to cast his net wider in flattering a readerly public rather than a circle of powerful aristocrats, who are conspicuous by their absence from the dedicatory words. (Drayton is clearly conflating the usual practice of addressing one epistle or poem to a patron and another to the general reader.) The implication is that reading his poetry is as patriotic an act as fighting for your nation in France, especially in these 'declining times', a jibe at the lack of virtue and valour at the court, which is responsible for the neglect of Poesie, a problem that the readers in the country at large can help offset.

Equally significant is another conflation, this time between England and Great Britain (and given that Drayton was the author of the chorographical, Ovidian *Poly-Olbion*, sub-titled, *A Chorographically Description of Great Britain*, he was in a better position than most to know about geographical distinctions). The poem itself represents Henry's army as predominantly English, as do his main sources, Holinshed's *Chronicles*

³⁴ For an opposed argument about the career of Edmund Spenser, see Rambuss, *Spenser's Secret Career*. Pioneering work on literary careers has been carried out by Patrick Cheney: see *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

(1587), Speed's *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* (1611) and Samuel Daniel's *The Civil Wars* (1595, 1609).³⁵ However, the link made here between England and Great Britain is an explicit reference to Shakespeare's carefully drawn picture of Henry's army of the four nations in *Henry V* (1599), the history play that gave most prominence to ordinary soldiers as representatives of the nation(s).³⁶ Drayton is connecting himself as poet to a readership and other poets, all through the interactive medium of print.

Drayton's construction of himself as the poet laureate in print assumes a greater importance when read in terms of his consistent sense of himself as the proud man apart who should really be at the centre of the nation's affairs. It is also a sign of what Drayton may really have valued that Ben Jonson wrote a glowing dedicatory poem to *The Battaile of Agincourt*. The closing lines publicly advertise Drayton's important role within a network of literary friends and draw attention to Jonson's own—apparent—desire to belong to this circle: 'I call the world, that envies mee, to see / If I can be a Friend, and Friend to thee' ('The Vision of Ben Jonson, on the Muses of his Friend, M. Drayton', lines 93–4).³⁷ Jonson's dedicatory poem establishes the importance of a *public* friendship between the two poets. The fact that Jonson was critical of Drayton in private later, remarking to William Drummond of Hawthornden that 'Drayton feared him, and he esteemed him not', perhaps only serves to emphasise that both writers saw the importance of the medium of print as a means of poetic representation.³⁸ The poem also makes a series of targeted references to Drayton's published poetry, *England's Heroicall Epistles*, *The Owle*, *The Barons Warres*, *Poly-Olbion*, *The Moon-Calfe* and *The Miseries of Queen Margarite*.³⁹ Jonson is careful to establish a list of classical precursors, poets laureate, whose company Drayton is able to

³⁵ Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1587); John Speed, *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* (1611); Samuel Daniel, *The Civil Wars*, ed. Laurence Michel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), Bk. 5. Daniel skips over Agincourt (stanza 14), but the work had an influence on Drayton. See Raymond Jenkins, 'The Sources of Drayton's *Battaile of Agincourt*', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 41 (1926), 280–93.

³⁶ The anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (early 1590s) also represents the army as English. For further discussion, see Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Thomson, 2003), ch. 2.

³⁷ Compare the extensive dedications to Thomas Coryat's account of his travels, *Coryats Crudities* (1611), which contains a vast array of friendly dedications by fellow writers, one of whom is Drayton.

³⁸ *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 136.

³⁹ On Jonson and Drayton, see Newdigate, *Drayton and his Circle*, ch. 10.

keep: Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Homer, as well as barely suppressed references to Chaucer and Spenser, the former as 'Tyrtaeus' (line 68), the latter as the inspiration behind Drayton's 'Fayerie Court' where Jonson can see 'Cynthia' (lines 79–80), establishing Drayton in an English tradition too. Jonson refers to Drayton's 'vertuous, and well chosen Friends', and expresses his disappointment that he appears to be absent from the list: 'Onely my losse is, that I am not there' (lines 90–1). But this is clearly a sly joke, as Jonson is really referring to those poets who have received verse letters from Drayton. The syntax is difficult—probably deliberately so—but the sense can be determined on a second or third reading. In any case Jonson receives extravagant praise in the same volume as 'learn'd *Jonson* . . . / Whose knowledge did him worthily prefer, / And long was Lord here of the Theater' ('To Henry Reynolds of Poets & Poesie', lines 129, 131–2). Jonson has helped to establish a print community for Drayton and he is there because he has written the poem. Their friendship may or may not be a real one, and the manner in which Jonson praises Drayton could be read as a register of their distance. Whatever the reality, their relationship exists through the public medium of published work.⁴⁰

Drayton's relationship with Jonson can usefully be compared to his relationship with the historian, John Selden (1584–1654), yet another man of relatively humble origins, who like Drayton and Jonson rose to prominence through his intellectual abilities.⁴¹ Selden published the extensive historical notes that accompanied the 1612 edition of *Poly-Olbion*, many of which were critical of the scholarly accuracy of the poet, as his prefatory epistle 'From the Author of the Illustrations' indicates.⁴² To give an example chosen at random: in the eighth Song, representing Shropshire and the River Severn, Drayton recalls the history of the British king, Brennus, who he thinks served with the Gauls against the Romans, and also won victories against the Greeks: 'Against the *Delphian*

⁴⁰ See also Drayton's construction of a literary tradition of poets in the elegy, 'To My Most Dearly-Loved Friend, Henry Reynolds, Esquire, Of Poets and Poesie', published in the same volume. Drayton also concentrates on published poets (III, 226–31).

⁴¹ For details of Selden's life and importance, see *DNB* entry; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *passim*; Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603–1642* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), *passim*.

⁴² For discussion, see Anne Lake Prescott, 'Marginal Discourse: Drayton's Muse and Selden's "Story"', *Studies in Philology*, 88 (1991), 307–28; 'Drayton's Muse and Selden's "Story": The Interfacing of Poetry and History in *Poly-Olbion*', *Studies in Philology*, 87 (1990), 128–35.

Power he shak't his irefull sword'.⁴³ Selden corrects him by pointing out that there are two British figures of this name:

Like liberty as others, takes the Author in affirming that *Brennus*, which was General to the *Gaules* in taking *Rome*, to be the same which overcame *Greece*, and assaulted the Oracle. But the truth of storie stands thus: *Rome* was afflicted by one *Brennus* about the yeare CCC.L.X after, the building . . . About CX. yeares after, were tripartit excursions of the *Gaules*; of an armie under *Cerethrius* into *Thrace*; of the like under *Belgius* or *Bolgius* into *Macedon* and *Illyricum*; of another under one *Brennus* and *Acichorius* into *Pannonia*. (p. 124)

In the eleventh Song, Drayton refers to the slaughter of a thousand monks in Wales by the Northumbrian king, Ethelfrid; Selden opens his note with the comment, 'You may add CC. To the Authors number' (p. 186). And, on p. 300, Selden adds a long note correcting Drayton's erroneous etymology and geographical description of the mouth of the River Rother. Given that such notes draw attention to themselves with confrontational opening sentences, and are contained within a handsome folio edition with large print, carefully prepared illustrations of the land and its attendant nymphs, and an elaborate prefatory illustration of Prince Henry holding a long spear, the unusual nature of Selden's notes are apparent enough to even the most casual reader.

The importance of this commentary is that it happened in print, giving the work the appearance of being a humanist text of great learning and authority. Furthermore, it establishes a link between a major English poet and a historian of the nation's law, thus widening the sense of a community of nationally important intellectuals who would debate vital issues for all to read. The conflict between poet and historian may have assumed an additional importance because they were debating the significance of a text that conspicuously failed to represent the multiple kingdoms governed by James, showing how the monarch's hopes for a united Britain dissolved instead into a multiple England/Albion.⁴⁴

Drayton was indeed one of the most successful published poets in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, and was widely respected by his

⁴³ Michael Drayton, *The Poly-Olbion: A Chorographically Description of Great Britain* (1622) (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970, rpt. of 1889), VIII, line 100. All subsequent references to this edition in parentheses in the text.

⁴⁴ See Andrew Hadfield, 'Spenser, Drayton, and the Question of Britain', *Review of English Studies*, 51 (2000), 582–99. James had hoped for a legal union of England and Scotland, which horrified the English parliament, so it may be of significance that Drayton chose to collaborate with a historian of the law; see Brian P. Levack, *The Formation of the British State: England, Scotland and the Union, 1603–1707* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), ch. 1. On Drayton's conception of British history see also Hillier, "Sacred Bards", pp. 5–6.

fellow writers. Poetry volumes would sell far more copies than published plays: Shakespeare's verse appears to have been much more in demand with the reading public than his drama in the early seventeenth century.⁴⁵ *Englands Heroicall Epistles* was one of the best-selling poetry volumes around the turn of the century, going through seven editions in twelve years (1597–1609), in which time another volume by Drayton appeared in most years. *Poly-Olbion* was a commercial disaster, probably for the simple reason that it was very expensive, but this only serves to emphasise Drayton's conspicuous success as the pre-eminent published poet in the last years of Elizabeth's reign and the first decade of James's. Drayton's only serious rival was Spenser, but *The Faerie Queene* clearly made less of a commercial impact than Drayton's best-selling work, being reprinted three times in twenty years (*The Shepheardes Calender* went through five editions in the twenty years after it was published in 1579).

Drayton's sense of himself as a laureate in print explains why he reacted with such public despondency to the commercial failure of *Poly-Olbion*, and saw fit to chastise in print those who failed to support him, readers and patrons, a literary characteristic he shared with Jonson, the man he undoubtedly saw as his rival as poet laureate in the 1600s and 1610s.⁴⁶ Drayton had little time for poetry that was not published and he chastises what he calls 'cabinet' poetry, verse written to gain influence with important courtiers or to be passed around by a small coterie at court, at various points in his writings, most notably in 'Song 21' of *Poly-Olbion*, published in 1622. Drayton rails against such creatures for:

Inforcing things in Verse for Poesie unfit,
Mere filthy stuffe, that breakes out of the sores of wit:
What Poet reckes the praise upon such Anticks heap'd,
Or envies that their lines, in Cabinets are kept?
Though some fantasticke foole promove their ragged Rymes,
And doe transcribe them o'er a hundred severall times[.] (ll. 175–82)

Drayton is acting as a public scourge of such 'cabinet' poets who abuse their talents by not attempting to influence a wider public through publication. As has often been pointed out, Drayton is attempting to establish

⁴⁵ See Sasha Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare's Poems in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003). On the sales of published playtexts see Peter Blayney, 'The publication of playbooks', in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 383–422. See also Heidi Brayman Hackel, 'The "great variety" of readers and early modern reading practices', in David Scott Kastan (ed.), *A Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 139–57.

⁴⁶ See Miles, *Ben Jonson*, ch. 10; Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates*, ch. 3.

a line of poetry that co-opts Spenser as a model—Spenser established the mock-humanist edition of *The Shepheardes Calender*, a work in which the notes often contradict the text as a form of public debate and which Drayton may have had in mind for *Poly-Olbion*.⁴⁷ It is also likely that Drayton is following through Sir Philip Sidney's arguments in *An Apology for Poetry*, first published in 1595, as Drayton's career was just starting to flourish, that poets possessed insight into and knowledge of human affairs beyond that of philosophers and historians.⁴⁸

Drayton's principal target is probably John Donne, who was notably reluctant to publish his verse and so failed to influence public culture in ways he could have done (Sidney had also been reluctant to publish his works, but pirated editions and posthumous publication meant that he was part of the small canon of English poetry in print by the early 1590s, and he clearly had a huge impact on public culture).⁴⁹ Equally important, as so often, is Drayton's consciousness of his literary 'friend' Ben Jonson.⁵⁰ Jonson had opened his collection of 'Epigrammes' in his *Works* with three poems addressing the reader, the book and his bookseller in turn, and so establishing himself as the poet in print. 'To The Reader' demands that his reader read his poems as he wanted them to be read ('Pray thee, take care, that tak'st my booke in hand, / To read it well: that is, to vnderstand'); 'To My Book', with some careful irony, casts the book as the repository of truth rather than Martilian scurrility ('by thy wiser temper, let men know / Thou art not couetous of least selfe-fame'); and 'To My Bookseller' asks the tradesman not to promote the book but to let only judicious readers come and find it, playing down commercial values even as they are being employed ('If, without these vile arts, it will not sell, / Send it to *Bucklers-bury*, there 'twill, well').⁵¹ A later epigram attacks the hapless 'Poet-Ape', a bad poet who has to plagiarise others' ideas in the absence of his own:

Poor Poet-Ape, that would be thought our chiefe,
Whose workes are eene the fripperie of wit,

⁴⁷ Michael McCanles, 'The Shepheardes Calender as Document and Monument', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 22 (1982), 5–19.

⁴⁸ Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, rev. and exp. R. W. Maslen (3rd edn., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 85–96. Drayton was clearly following in the footsteps of Sidney, given that his second serious work was a sonnet sequence, a genre Sidney had established with *Astrophil and Stella*.

⁴⁹ Brink, *Drayton*, pp. 93–4, 129–30.

⁵⁰ See also Johnson, 'Michael Drayton', pp. 45–6.

⁵¹ All references to *Works*, VIII, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947).

From brocage is become so bold a thiefe,
 As we, the rob'd, leaue rage, and pittie it.
 At first he made low shifts, would picke and gleane,
 Buy the reuersion of old playes; now growne
 To'a little wealth, and credit in the *scene*,
 He takes vp all, makes each mans wit his owne.
 And, told of this, he slights it[.] ('On Poet-Ape', ll. 1-9)

Drayton's attack on bad poetry *per se* redirects the force of Jonson's scorn for plagiarised verse. While Jonson attacks lack of quality and honesty with both self and others, Drayton focuses on poets who write bad verse through abusing the public purpose of poetry, making it private and so corrupt, having the potential to infect those who read it: 'Mere filthy stuff, that breakes out of the sores of wit.' Jonson attacks poetry that is stolen, and therefore serves no new purpose; Drayton rails against poetry that makes itself pointless through being read by so few. It is apparent that poetry that is kept in 'Cabinets' cannot even be envied by other writers, one of the chief targets of Jonson's attack on bad poets. Drayton's logic is that it is better to try and fail in public than succeed in private and in making this potent argument he is deliberately trumping Jonson—in public—and so demonstrating that he has thought more carefully about print culture than the self-styled laureate who opens his book with three poems about publishers and readers.⁵²

Drayton is careful throughout his work to establish a tradition of poets whom he cites and imitates.⁵³ What binds them together is that they are all published writers. *The Shepheardes Garland* (1593), looks back to *The Shepheardes Calender* (it is dedicated to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Spenser's *Virgil's Gnat* was also dedicated to Leicester and published in the *Complaints* volume (1591)).⁵⁴ As if such links might possibly be overlooked by the inattentive reader, Gorbo, in the sixth eclogue, whose stated role in the quatrain that introduces each eclogue, is to call 'to mind the fame, / of our old Ancestrie', concludes the poem by asserting that Pandora should wear the laurel crown and 'be as she hath ever

⁵² For a related argument that suggests that Shakespeare's comedies were written as a direct response to Jonson's, see James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets' War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁵³ See also the list of writers assembled in the elegy to Henry Reynolds (see above, n. 40). Drayton refers to Chaucer, Gower, Surrey, Wyatt, Gascoigne, Churchyard, Spenser, Sidney, Warner, Marlowe, Nashe, Shakespeare, Daniel, Jonson, Chapman, Silvester, Sandys: all of them in print in 1619.

⁵⁴ Leicester died in 1588, so both poets were declaring their allegiance to the earl, who had conspicuously tried to promote an internationalist Protestant agenda at court and had sponsored numerous puritan preachers: see Adams, *Leicester and the Court*.

beene, / The lowly handmaide of the Fayrie Queene' (lines 161–2). Eclogue eight contains a long, humorous 'Motto' (120 lines), that narrates the adventures of a maiden, Dowsabell, daughter of a knight, Cassemen, who is as bold as Sir Thopas. She encounters a shepherd who crows like Chanticleer and has an unusual 'swayne', 'like the bedlam *Tamburlayne*' (lines 171–2). Eventually the shepherd successfully woos her, promising to be 'as kinde, / As *Colin* was to *Rosalinde*' (lines 231–2). The humour may be somewhat forced, but the point is clear enough: Drayton is establishing his credentials, as cheekily as Spenser had in *The Shepheardes Calender*, to join the ranks of the major English poets in the public realm. The plan is made more obvious still, if one notes that two of Drayton's early major works are imitations of Spenser and Sidney (the developing sonnet sequence, *Ideas Mirror/Idea*) and that Chaucer's works, like Skelton's, were published in the 1560s.⁵⁵

Piers Gaveston (1593–4) opens with a description of the ghost of Gaveston returning from hell and urging the poet to tell his story well, so that the reader can comprehend the extent of his tragedy, how he brought down a mighty king and polluted a happy realm. Gaveston's complaint is conspicuously and self-consciously indebted to the complaints in *A Mirror for Magistrates*, one of the major publishing literary ventures of the sixteenth century.⁵⁶ The narratives there, in which ghosts returning to earth to lament their errors and warn others not to follow the paths they had taken, were directed specifically at bad and corrupt government as a means of enabling the reader to help prevent future evils. Drayton's *Gaveston* seduces the king so that both of them are left 'wandring in the labyrinth of lust' (line 316) and so unable to govern effectively. But his major sin is ambition, one of the principal weaknesses of the historical personages represented in *A Mirror*. Gaveston ruins himself, the king and the state:

Loe thus ambition creepes into my breast,
Pleasing my thoughts with this emperious humor,
And with this divell being once possest,
Mine eares are fild with such a buzzing rumor,
As onely pride my glorie doth awaite,
My sences sooth'd with everie selfe-conceite.

⁵⁵ *The Workes of Geffrey Chaucer, newlie printed, with diuers addicions, whiche were neuer in print before: with the siege and destruccion of the worthy citee of Thebes, compiled by Ihon Lidgate, Monke of Berie. As in the table more plainly doeth appere by Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400* (London: John Kyngston, for John Wight, 1561); *Pithy pleasaunt and profitable workes of maister Skelton, Poete Laureate. Nowe collected and newly published. Anno 1568* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1568). Chaucer's works were also published in 1550 and 1598.

⁵⁶ Lily B. Campbell, ed., *A Mirror for Magistrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).

Selfe-love, prides thirst, unsatisfied desier,
 A flood that never yet had any boundes,
 Times pestilence, thou state-consuming fier,
 A mischiefe which all common weales confoundes,
 O Plague of plagues, how many kingdomes rue thee,
 O happie Empiers that yet never knew thee! (ll. 709–720).

This is precisely the sort of moralising that dominates and defines the poetry in *A Mirror*, singled out by Sir Philip Sidney, who was no especial friend to printed works, as a key work of English poetry alongside *The Shepheardes Calender*.⁵⁷

Piers Gaveston also defines itself within the tradition of Marlovian poetry, the erotic physical description of Gaveston (lines 109–50), and the later reference to Edward and Gaveston as Hero and Leander (lines 1417–22), suggesting that Drayton possibly saw *Hero and Leander* (published 1598) in manuscript, as well as taking inspiration from *Edward II* (c.1592).⁵⁸ Such links are more fully developed in *Mortimeriados* (1596) when Drayton returned to the reign of Edward II for inspiration. *Mortimeriados* is one of many ‘republicanesque’ works from the late 1590s which were highly critical of the institution of hereditary monarchy, and hint that other ways of governing—an elective monarchy, or other ways of limiting the power and rights of the crown—may be preferable (although many had not thought through the implications of the political stances they were adopting).⁵⁹ It narrates the relationship between Queen Isabel, wife of Edward II, and Sir Roger Mortimer, Lord Wigmore, represented as a great hero and more kingly than the king. Drayton places subtle echoes of Marlowe’s verse for the attentive reader to spot and so establish a tradition of poetry in print. In the last line of the opening stanza, Edward is referred to as ‘Scourge of the crowne’ (line 7), which would seem to be a recollection of Tamburlaine as the ‘scourge of God’ emblazoned on the title page of the printed edition (1590). Isabel thinks of Mortimer crossing the Thames in terms of Leander crossing the

⁵⁷ Sidney, *Apologie*, p. 110. See, for example, ‘Tragedy 1: The Fall of Robert Tresilian’, *A Mirror*, pp. 73–81; ‘Tragedy 11: How Lorde William Delapole Duke of Suffolke was worthily punished for abusing his Kyng and causing the destruction of good Duke Humfrey’, pp. 162–9.

⁵⁸ The claim that Drayton read Marlowe’s poem, will, of course, remain as speculation, although, given that Marlowe was almost certainly working on *Hero and Leander* before his death on 30 May 1593, and Drayton probably wrote *Piers Gaveston* in the autumn of that year. Kathleen Tillotson and Bernard H. Newdigate suggest that Drayton was also indebted to Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, which further suggests a possible link to Marlowe’s poem, as these two works were often connected: *Works*, V, 23–5.

⁵⁹ See Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, 2005).

Hellespont (lines 762–3). There are also passages which recall parts of Spenser. Tormented by nightmares in his prison cell, which symbolise his inadequacy as a monarch, Edward finds an ancient English chronicle buried deep within a vault under some ‘filthie carcasses’ (line 1927). Hoping to wile away the time, he opens it at random and chances upon a series of examples of kings who lose their thrones through their own bad behaviour. Most relevant to Edward’s case are Harold Godwin and William Rufus who are killed because of their obsession with homosexual vice (lines 1943–53). But he also reads of the brutal civil war of Stephen’s reign (lines 1961–7); the squabble for the crown between Henry I’s sons (lines 1968–74); and the murder of Arthur by John (lines 1982–8). The chronicle ends with the glorious reign of Edward Longshanks, his father, and the last lines that his son sees describe his birth: ‘What day young *Edward* Prince of *Wales* was borne, / Which Letters seeme lyke Magick Charrecters, / Or to despight him they were made in scorne’ (lines 2004–6). Edward collapses in despair and wishes that his name could be torn from the book (line 2007).

The episode is a clear and careful rewriting of Spenser’s use of chronicle history in *The Faerie Queene*. In Book II, canto x, Guyon ‘chaunst’ on the ‘*Antiquitie of Faery lond*’ (II.ix.60), which narrates the story of ancient British kings from Brutus to Uther, including Brennus, who sacks both Rome and Greece (40). In Book II, canto iii, Merlin describes to Britomart the line of kings that she and Artegall will produce, which he sees in his magic mirror, culminating in Elizabeth who seems to triumph over her enemies, until the spell is interrupted for an unknown reason:

But yet the end is not. There *Merlin* stayd,
 As ouercomen of the spirites powre,
 Or other ghastly spectacle dismayd,
 That secretly he saw, yet note discoure:
 Which sudden fitt, and halfe extaticke stoure
 When the two fearfull wemen saw, they grew
 Greatly confused[.] (III.iii.50, ll. 1–7)

Edward suddenly finds his name written in magic characters, reminding him of a history that never happened, a possible future he failed to establish through good rule. The desire to strike himself from the records as the useless son recalls Spenser’s lines which remind the reader that the Tudor dynasty was about to die out because Elizabeth had not produced an heir, the two episodes linked through the sudden reference to magic in Drayton’s poem. It is also worth noting that Drayton’s publisher was Matthew

Lownes, who later became Spenser's publisher too, having first attempted to publish *A View of the Present State of Ireland in 1598*.⁶⁰

The last writer who Drayton routinely acknowledges, places and rewrites in his work, is Shakespeare.⁶¹ The narrator in *Mortimeriados*, describing the ill London experiences under Edward's rule, refers to 'Poore ravish'd *Lucrece* stands to end her lyfe, / Whilst cruell *Tarquin* whets the angrie knyfe' (lines 1553–4), a reminder that the obvious place for a reader to follow the story was in Shakespeare's poem, published in 1594, the only poetic adaptation in English available at that time.⁶² Drayton's career was intimately linked to Shakespeare's, as he was one of the authors of *The First Part of the True and Honourable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle* (performed 1599, published 1600), written as a riposte to the unflattering portrait of Oldcastle/Falstaff in *King Henry IV, Part I* (performed 1597, published 1598).⁶³

Most importantly, Drayton was as interested as Shakespeare in English history and its significance, both as a means of drawing parallels to the present for the purpose of understanding political and moral behaviour, and as a means of understanding the issues that determined the current state of England/Britain. One of his key sources was, of course, Shakespeare's cycles of history plays from the 1590s. *The Barons' Warres* (1603), a poem of six cantos (36,000 lines) in ottava rima, narrates—yet again—the conflicts of the reign of Edward II and the battle between the king on one side and Queen Isabel and Mortimer on the other. Drayton's model is Lucan, epic poet of Roman civil war read by every grammar-school boy.⁶⁴ This can be seen most clearly in implicit comparisons made between the civil wars in early fourteenth-century England and those of the Roman republic. Drayton sees each faction as bad as the other:

That having both such Courage, and such Might,
As to so great a Bus'nesse did belong,
Neither yet thinke, by their unnaturall Fight,
What the Republique suffred them among;

⁶⁰ See Andrew Hadfield, 'Was Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* Censored? A Review of the Evidence', *Notes and Queries*, 239 (Dec. 1994), 459–63.

⁶¹ See Newdigate, *Drayton and His Circle*, ch. 10.

⁶² There is also a reference to Lucrece in *Matilda the faire* (1594) (lines 596–602), possibly published in the wake of Shakespeare's poem. See Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A myth and its transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), ch. 3.

⁶³ See Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (eds.), *The Oldcastle Controversy: 'Sir John Oldcastle, Part I' and 'The Famous Victories of Henry V'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV, Part I* (London: Thomson, 2002), introduction, pp. 54–6.

⁶⁴ Brink, *Drayton*, p. 68.

For mystie Error so deludes their Sight,
 (Which still betwixt them and cleere Reason hung)
 And their Opinions in such sort abus'd,
 As that their Fault can never be excus'd. (Canto II, ll. 73–80)

The epic sense of the significance of English history can be related to the chronicle of the civil wars in Shakespeare's plays about the Wars of the Roses published in 1594, 1595 and 1597, which were—arguably—performed as a cycle in the early 1590s, as well as Daniel's *The Civil Wars*.⁶⁵ Moreover, the lachrymose deposition of Edward II, would appear to owe a great deal to the deposition scene in *Richard II*, rather than anything in Marlowe's play.⁶⁶

Later in his career, after the publication of the first folio (1623), Drayton makes much more close and extensive reference to Shakespeare's works, suggesting that he acquired a copy. *The Battle of Agincourt* (1627) owes much to Shakespeare's *King Henry V*, containing a number of verbal echoes and revisiting the moral dilemmas that Shakespeare articulated in his play.⁶⁷ Drayton, like Shakespeare, forces his readers to confront the painful costs and casualties of war. During the siege of Harfleur, in which the English enter the town through a 'Breach' in the wall (line 813), a suckling baby is killed by a 'luckless quarry leveled at the Towne' (line 795).⁶⁸ And, as in *King Henry V*, the English army kills their prisoners after a French raiding party pillages the English tents and kills the unarmed servants. The ostensible tone of Drayton's poem is self-righteously jingoistic; but, as in Shakespeare's play, the cruelty of the actions is made clear, as is Henry's responsibility:

And in his rage he instantly commands,
 That every English should his prisoner kill,
 Except some fewe in some great Captaines hands
 Whose Ransomes might his emptied Cofers fill . . .
 Those who late thought, small Ransoms them might free
 Saw onely death their Ransomes now must be . . .

Their utmost rage the English now had breath'd,
 And their proud heartes gan somewhat to relent . . .

⁶⁵ See Nicholas Greene, *Shakespeare's Serial History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶⁶ Compare *The Baron's Warres*, V, lines 97–120, with William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker (London: Thomson, 2002), 4.1.182–222.

⁶⁷ For a convincing reconstruction of the historical context of the poem, see Cogswell, 'The Path to Elizium "Lately Discovered"'.
⁶⁸ The word 'breach' occurs at a strategic and memorable place in Shakespeare's play: see *King Henry V*, ed. T. W. Craik (London: Nelson, 1998), 3.1.1.

To easefull rest their bodies they bequeath'd,
 Nor farther harme at all to you they ment,
 And to that paynes must yee them needly putt,
 To draw their knives once more your throats to cutt.
 (ll. 2393–6, 2399–400, 2409–10, 2413–16)⁶⁹

Given the relatively unproblematic representations of Henry V in other historical sources and literature—*The Famous Victories of Henry V*, Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Daniel's *Civil Wars*—Drayton's ambiguous narration, which emphasises the violence it claims to be excusing, appears notably Shakespearian.⁷⁰

The one published poet of consequence who Drayton seems reluctant to draw into a community of authors in print is Ben Jonson, reinforcing the point that Drayton constructed his work in opposition to Jonson's, as well as alongside it. Drayton's own published work reveals him as keen to write as many different kinds of poetry as possible, a further means of establishing his self-proclaimed status. Drayton published eclogues and other pastoral poems, an expanding sonnet sequence, individual sonnets, a paean, an epyllion, a series of elegies, odes, fairy romance, verse epistles, satire, beast fables, complaints, Biblical translations, historical poetry, a vast array of religious verse, as well as collaboratively writing a number of plays.⁷¹ He invented new genres, the chorographical epic/romance, *Poly-Olbion*, and what he called 'nymphalls' (pastoral poems which involve nymphs), as well as being the first author to adopt Ovid's *Heroides* as a hybrid English verse form (Drayton was often referred to as the 'English Ovid').⁷² He wrote in a striking variety of styles and metres: Italianate

⁶⁹ Compare, *Henry V*, 4.7. See also John Sutherland and Cedric Watts, *Henry V, War Criminal? & Other Shakespeare Puzzles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 108–16.

⁷⁰ The other notably Shakespearian poem is *The Miseries of Queene Margarite* (published in 1627 as part of the same volume), which represents the wife of Henry VI as a cruel queen, as she is in Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 3* and *King Richard III*, and the rebellion of Jack Cade. Holinshed's *Chronicles* concentrates on the military tactics of Henry's French campaigns.

⁷¹ Drayton's inventiveness is noted by Heather Dubrow: see 'Lyric Forms', in Arthur F. Kinney (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 178–99, at pp. 182–3. See also Katherine D. Carter, 'Drayton's Craftsmanship: The Encomium and the Blazon in *Englands Heroicall Epistles*', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 38 (1975), 297–314; Joseph A. Berthelot, *Michael Drayton* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 148.

⁷² See Hardin, 'Drayton's *Heroicall Epistles*', pp. 35, 41. See also Geoffrey C. Hillier, 'Now Let Us Make Exchange of Mindes: Techniques of Verse letter Characterisation in Drayton's *England's Heroicall Epistles*', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 33 (April 1988), 31–45; Barbara C. Ewell, 'Unity and The Transformation of Drayton's Poetics in *England's Heroicall Epistles: From Mirrored Ideals to "The Chaos in the Mind"*', *The Modern Language Quarterly*, 44 (1983), 231–50.

sonnets with Petrarchan rhyme schemes, Skeltonics, rhyme royal, heroic couplets, Fourteeners (Poulter's Measure), ottava rima, alexandrines, as well as an array of short lines. His epistle 'To the Reader of The Barons Warres' explains that he has not written his poem principally in couplets, as he was advised, because the 'Harmony thereof, softned the verse more then the Majestie of the subject would permit'. Instead he has chosen an eight line stanza of pentameters, rhyming abababcc, which 'holds the tune cleane thorow to the Base of the Columne . . . and closeth not but with a full satisfaction to the eare for so long detention'. Drayton continues this architectural metaphor for his new verse form, attempting to grace his innovation with permanence: he may have in mind Jonson's stated desire to write in a timeless literary language, and be drawing a pointed contrast between Jonson's overt classicism and his own ability to translate Latin forms into English. He argues that 'this sort of stanza hath in it, Majestie, Perfection, and Solidity, resembling the Pillar which in Architecture is called the Tuscan, whose Shaft is of six Diameters, and Bases of two'. This illustrates his desire to be a technical innovator—like Spenser, who also invented his own stanza form and language, much to the irritation of Ben Jonson (the accompanying diagrams also show how Drayton was alive to the possibilities of print culture).⁷³ Drayton also frequently revised his poetry for new editions, taking full advantage of the medium in which he had chosen to disseminate his work.⁷⁴

Drayton carefully draws on a number of sources and influences, assembling them together so that he situates his own work as part of a tradition of English poetry, of which he is the current laureate (a confidence or arrogance that probably accounts for his edgy rivalry with Ben Jonson). But does he ever manage to go beyond this amalgamation of literary fragments? For all the calculated brilliance of his career, is Drayton a poet worth reading for anything other than literary historical reasons? The issue at stake is whether Drayton ever really establishes a poetic voice and whether he ever becomes more than the—admittedly—impressive sum of his many parts.⁷⁵ For all his technical virtuosity, is he too much in thrall to the tradition he helped to establish, a weak voice who is overpowered by the strong voices of the poets he promotes, reuses and

⁷³ Drayton, *Works*, III, 3–4.

⁷⁴ For details, see Brink, *Drayton*, *passim*.

⁷⁵ For one answer see Barbara C. Ewell, 'From Idea to Act: The New Aesthetics of Drayton's *England's Heroicall Epistles*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 82 (1983), 515–25; 'Unity and the Transformation of Drayton's Poetics'.

recycles?⁷⁶ Do Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare and the Ovid to whom he was frequently compared, overwhelm him?⁷⁷ Or, has he been the victim of changes in taste and canon formation, forces that have left him out of the reckoning (something of a neat irony given his visionary understanding of the possibilities of the medium of print for poets)?⁷⁸

Drayton did undoubtedly have a lyric gift, as the frequently anthologised sonnet, 'Since ther's no helpe, Come let us kisse and part', included in the 1619 revised version of his sonnet sequence, *Idea in Sixtie Three Sonnets*, indicates.⁷⁹ That sequence also reveals a deft touch, an ability to reuse standard poetic tropes, and, a keen sense of characterisation and dramatic interaction, a noted feature of his writing. The opening sonnet, for example, takes the standard Petrarchan conceit that love is often like a dangerous voyage, and then lists the metaphorical straits he has traversed as a lover, allowing the metaphor to obscure the reality it supposedly explains:

Like an adventurous Sea-farer am I,
 Who hath some long and dang'rous Voyage beene,
 And call'd to tell of his Discoverie,
 How farre he sayl'd, what Countries he had seene,
 Proceeding from the Port whence he put forth,
 Shewes by his Compasse, how his Course he steer'd,
 When East, when West, when South, and when by North,
 As how the Pole to ev'ry place was rear'd,
 What Capes he doubled, of what Continent,
 The Gulphes and Straits, that strangely he had past,
 Where most becalm'd, where with foule Weather spent,
 And on what Rocks in perill to be cast?
 Thus in my Love, Time calls me to relate
 My tedious Travels, and oft-varying Fate.

Drayton achieves numerous witty aims in this opening sonnet. First, the irony of the speaker's inability to distinguish between his interest in a woman and his own affairs enables the alert reader to place the sequence in the tradition of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Sir John Davies's manuscript collection, *Gulling Sonnets* (c.1594), an impression confirmed

⁷⁶ See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁷⁷ See William Alexander who claimed that 'Ovids Soule revives in DRAYTON now' ('To M. Michael Drayton', prefatory sonnet to *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1619), III, 131).

⁷⁸ See also Hillier, "'Sacred Bards'", p. 13.

⁷⁹ Kathleen Tillotson notes a 'slight resemblance' to Jonson's Elegy, 'Since you must goe, and I must bid farewell'; *Works of Michael Drayton*, V, 142.

by the second sonnet detailing the murder of the poet's heart.⁸⁰ It is little wonder that she leaves him, just as Stella leaves Astrophil. Second, the concluding reference to 'My tedious Travels' forces the reader to consider whether the speaker's love affair is what is tedious, or his interest in travelling which he clearly wishes to expound at length. Third, we have to wonder whether the sequence is really about love, or whether poetry and politics should be our principal focus.⁸¹ And, fourth, whether this is a problem that the poet recognises, given his notable interest in female characters elsewhere in his writings, especially his versions of the complaint genre.⁸² The opening sonnet is perhaps best read as a dramatic monologue exposing male attitudes and preoccupations.

Much can be said about Drayton's abilities as a poet. Yet Drayton has been badly served by his critics, because even those who seek to defend him often still see him as a second-rate writer of minor interest, perhaps because they fail to see how he tried to establish a particular type of poetic career. Often arguments about his merits are circular, showing that apparently different judgements are actually interrelated, one following from the other and so reinforcing the original assumption. It is frequently assumed that Drayton must have had conservative political opinions because he is a stodgy and worthy poet, and also because his best-known poem is about England and it is still thought that patriots must love their country relatively uncritically.⁸³ Yet, Drayton's work does not support this case. Rather, it reveals him to be no straightforward lover of monarchs. Not only did he make publicly scathing comments about James, but he was also highly critical of monarchs who failed to acknowledge the needs of the people they ruled, using their kingdom for their own gain.⁸⁴ Drayton is also read as a frustrated poet who was less successful at obtaining patronage than many of his friends, rivals and contemporaries, another way of pigeon-holing him as a writer who is outside the mainstream of an English tradition, being neither brazen enough to receive significant

⁸⁰ The 'Gulling Sonnets' were included in the collection *Wittes pilgrimage, (by poeticall essaies) through a vworld of amorous sonnets, soule-passions, and other passages, diuine, philosophical, morall, poeticall, and politicall* (1605).

⁸¹ See the now classic article by Arthur F. Marotti, "'Love is Not Love": Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order', *English Literary History*, 49 (1982), 396–428.

⁸² See John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and 'female complaint': a critical anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁸³ See, for example, Ewell, 'Unity and the Transformation of Drayton's Poetics', p. 232; Hillier, 'Now Let Us Make Exchange of Mindes', p. 41.

⁸⁴ See, for example, 'Matilda to King John', *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, lines 109–10; *The Tragical Legend of Robert, Duke of Normandy*, stanzas 122–3; *Mortimeriados*, lines 1527–33.

support, nor bold enough to reject the ways of the world. He was neither of the two Shakespeares, but a sort of irritable compromise.⁸⁵

Leaving aside the vexed question of literary value for the time being, we might want to ask is this the right way of reading Drayton? Most of what we know of his life can be derived from what he published in his poetry, in the prefatory material.⁸⁶ Given his evident interest in publishing his work, is it not likely that what we know of Drayton's life is what he wants to tell us? It is, of course, possible that the letters and poems that preface Drayton's works have been inserted and organised by his publishers; but, bearing in mind Drayton's meticulous revision of his printed work he was clearly a man who was involved in the public production of his work and who liked to give the appearance of control.⁸⁷ Perhaps critics are guilty of reading Drayton's published life as if it were synonymous with his real one, as though the evidence were not carefully presented to the reader. As a result key ironies are missed.

This is not to claim that Drayton's poems are surrounded by fictions; rather, it is to argue that they are carefully framed and fashioned. As early as 1594 Drayton made it clear to his audience that he attached far more importance to his readership than to his potential patrons. *Matilda, The faire and chaste Daughter of the Lord Robert Fitzwater* was dedicated to Lucy Harrington, Countess of Bedford, in effusive terms. Drayton refers to her as 'adorned with . . . excellent gifts', and urges her to patronise the poem of a noble woman who was 'A mirror of so rare chastitie, as neither the fayre speeches, nor rich rewards of a King, nor death it selfe, could ever remove from her owne chaste thoughts: or from that due regard which shee had of her never-stained honor' (I, p. 210). Nevertheless, the letter 'To the Honourable Gentlemen of Englande, true favorers of Poesie' [my emphasis], shows that Drayton wanted his loyalties to be seen to lie with his public even at this early stage in his writing career:

Learned and honourable Gentlemen, whose kind and favourable acceptance of my late discourse of the life and death of *Piers Gaveston*, hath emboldened mee, to publish this tragical Historie of *Matilda*, which otherwise the fonde censures of the sottish and absurd ignorant had altogether discouraged me . . . who without judgement of reading, have rashlie and injurously wronged the most rare & excellent men who have written in this age wherein wee live. (p. 211)

⁸⁵ This is the central argument of Brink's admirable study.

⁸⁶ See *DNB* entry; Newdigate, *Drayton and his Circle*; Brink, *Drayton*, ch. 1.

⁸⁷ For a contrary argument, albeit relating to another poet, see Jean R. Brink, 'Who Fashioned Edmund Spenser? The Textual History of *The Complaints*', *Studies in Philology*, 88 (1991), 153–68.

Whatever help Lucy can give to Drayton's muse, he declares that it is the readers who really matter to him and persuade him to continue writing. There are good citizens who support his labours and bad ones who cannot appreciate the proper value of literature.

By the time that the second edition of *Poly-Olbion* was published (1612), Drayton's prefatory material was even more heavily weighted towards the relationship between poet and audience. The work was dedicated to Prince Henry, but the poet makes it clear that he is representing the future king's lands for him, and the prince owes him thanks for producing such a useful, important and original work, which has already been attacked by those not capable of reading it adequately: 'My Poeme is genuine, and first in this kinde. It cannot want envie: for, even in the Birth, it alreadie finds that . . . I shall leave your whole British Empire, as this first and southerne part, delineated' (p. 3). Drayton instructs Henry and tells him what he will read and why it is important.⁸⁸ The long letter 'To the Generall Reader' also mounts an opinionated defence of his poem as a work that is in the national interest in recovering Britain's neglected history and blaming the failure of the first edition squarely on his readers' inadequacies:

In publishing this Essay of my Poeme, there is this great disadvantage against me; that it commeth out at this time, when Verses are wholly deduc't to Chambers, and nothing esteem'd in this lunatique Age, but what is kept in Cabinets, and must only passe by Transcription . . . These, I say, make much against me . . . such I meane, as had rather read the fantasies of forraine inventions, then to see the Rarities and Historie of their owne Country delivered by a true native Muse. (p. 13)

The reader can be in no doubt that the relationship between poet and readership has failed because of the inadequacies of the audience, not the poet. The prince may well find much to admire in *Poly-Olbion*, but he can read it in print, placing him on the same level as every other reader.

Drayton berates his readers for their inadequacies and tries to lead them as carefully as he can so that they can read his works correctly, i.e., as he intended. However, he must have realised at some point that trusting your work to the vagaries of print and the wider audience it reached, could no more ensure authorial control than writing in manuscript for a

⁸⁸ See Richard Helgerson, 'The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England', *Representations*, 16 (1986), 51–85; David Galbraith, *Architectonics of Imitation in Spenser, Daniel, and Drayton* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), ch. 5.

coterie audience or a patron.⁸⁹ Drayton has not fared especially well at the hands of the resulting print culture that developed rapidly in the seventeenth century, especially if we recognise that he was one of the few writers astute enough to understand the importance of seeing literature as an artefact or physical object, an acute but by no means isolated irony of literary history. The identity of a poet who sought so hard to establish his own voice has been lost. He has probably remained in the obscure second tier of Renaissance poets for too long and it does not help that there is no cheap, usable selection of his poetry available.⁹⁰ Now that we are far more interested in the material conditions of writing and that amorphous subject labelled the 'history of the book' it is undoubtedly time to pay more attention to one of the writers who understood the importance of the modes and means of literary production, a recognition intimately related to his undoubted literary merit. Drayton's career might appear brilliant once more.

⁸⁹ For a useful overview, see Wendy Wall, 'Authorship and the Material Conditions of Writing', in Kinney, ed., *Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500–1600*, pp. 64–89. See also Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁹⁰ The selections made in 1907, 1927 and 1953 have long been out of print.