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Tesi di Laurea

The evolution of the English vernacular in the early Renaissance. The language as a means to assert national identity through poetry.

A comparative study between Italy, France and
England.

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Introduction

If any man woulde blame me, eyther for takynge such a matter in hande, or els for writing it in the Englyshe tongue, this answere I may make hym, that whan the beste of the realme thinke it honest for them to vse, I one of the meanest sorte, ought not to suppose it vile for me to write: And though to haue written it in an other tonge, had bene bothe more profitable for my study, and also more honest for my name, yet I can thinke my labour wel bestowed, yf with a little hynderaunce of my profit and name, maye come any fourtheraunce, to the pleasure or commoditie, of the gentlemen and yeomen of Englande, for whose sake I took this matter in hande. And as for ye Latin or greke tonge, euery thing is so excellently done in them, that none can do better: In the Englysh tonge contrary, euery thinge in a maner so meanly, bothe for the matterand handelynge, that no man can do worse. For therein the least learned for the moste parte, haue ben always moost reedye to wryte And they whiche had leaste hope in latin, haue bene moste boulde in englyshe: when surelye euery man that is moste ready to taulke, is not moost able to wryte. He that wyll wryte well in any tongue, muste folowe thys councel of Aristotle, to speake as the common people do, to thinke as wise men do; and so shoulde euery man vnderstande hym, and the iudgement of wyse men alowe hym.

Roger Ascham

Toxophilus

The language that characterises both a country and its citizens and embodies all their crucial and distinctive traits does not appear spontaneously nor is an extemporaneous process, nor is to be rooted in the territory since the remotest of times. The role of an idiom is not to be confined to literary studies or to the speculative and entertaining domain of a fictional reality. A language is not merely a code adopted to communicate or a series of sweet or stilted sounds which suddenly and radically transform as soon as the boundary of a land is crossed. There has been a time in history when poets became the artisans of the language and they managed to make it display the virtues and grandeur of those individuals who chose to cherish it. Furthermore, during the culturally fervent period of the Renaissance the boundary between idioms was rather blurred and malleable and thus the intermingling of terms belonging to very dissimilar European traditions gave birth to an extremely heterogeneous and eloquent language. The influence that occurred among tongues was particularly deep and relentless and the set of grammatical rules pertaining to it were fluctuating

between both theoretical principles and practical uses. The rebirth of interest for deeper and authentic kinds of knowledge and the great thirst for the cultivation of the mind, ancient wisdom, new discoveries and individual empowering invited Renaissance men to become particularly sensitive to the way they could express and communicate their worth and achievements to the world.

It should be borne in mind that human beings are always looking for their identity. They are not only concerned with what constitutes their essence but also with the most suitable means to shape and disclose it. The innate need to interact and communicate which can be detected in every individual, in some cases, can become an impending urge that a base and primitive language cannot possibly manage to fully satisfy. When a group of individuals then congregate to form a nation and, as time passes, they achieve a degree of success and powerfulness, they start to feel the need to seal their status and to spread their renown beyond the boundaries of their country through an official and indelible mark that has the capacity to bear witness to their value as an advanced civilization. The *medium* they judged to be the most appropriate and eloquent was the written word. However, not only content with scribbling down some records of their great enterprises in *n'importe quel charactère*, they needed a specific set of words that could reflect their authentic and unique nature. The approach to their identity should be unmistakably clear and immediately recognizable. In addition, English citizens did not simply accept the adoption of a collection of common base words to deliver the grandiosity of their colossal emerging empire: they instead looked for a refined and highly elegant language. Their noble apparatus was keen enough to long for *la crème de la crème*. They were also aware that to obtain such a literary excellence they needed to confer this task to the most gifted minds of their country and to protect and sustain them throughout their laborious and unprecedented enterprise. The lustre and prestige that could - and would – derive from such a commitment were certainly worth the effort and secrecy, both of which were a requirement of Renaissance writers.

Royal authorities privately promoted this literary work on the language by assuring to their agents – the poets at court – the most favourable conditions to carry on their task. It has never been an official duty to perform. Both the aristocracy and the authors were deeply aware of the necessity to undertake such a process of refinement and promotion of their mother tongue to gain prominence and dignity on a wider level. Their aspirations were perfectly in tune with the new spirit brought about by the Renaissance both locally and abroad.

There was a historical movement of aesthetic principles and stylistic techniques which started in Italy that went on in France and took place again in England. The influence exerted by the literary debates on the language was crucial for the forging of the national identity and for its delivery worldwide in the following centuries. It is impossible to ignore or minimise the utmost concern that animated the most fervent minds of the Renaissance. If we read attentively between the lines of many English manuscripts, we could detect the reference to Italian and French texts which were the pillars of the establishment of the vernacular as the standard and official medium to adopt in order to create a sense of belonging to the same community.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Italy adorned the literary scene with the highly poetic language which had been elaborated by several talented writers such as Dante, Petrarch, Bembo and Speroni. In the fourteenth and fifteenth-century France, the debate around the language and national identity reached its peak and poets such as Ronsard and Du Bellay fervently asserted the importance of adopting their own mother tongue to express their status in the most authentic and powerful way. England had undergone profound changes throughout the sixteenth century. In 1585, it took over the European leading in finance and became the centre for foreign investment. In 1588, it outclassed the Spanish vessels with its innovative naval strategy and the defeat of the Spanish Armada guaranteed its mastery of the seas and allowed the country to expand and develop its own independent trade routes bringing about consistent national wealth.

The sources of the literary revival could be detected in England's subsequent national self-confidence, economic growth and military prowess. England merrily welcomed the continental revival of classical learning and promoted the new interest in the ancient authors' masterpieces. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 made Greek scholars emigrate to Italy and many libraries started to be searched for forgotten manuscripts. Plato became a model for philosophical speculation and Cicero was praised for his prosaic eloquence. Greek started to be seen as a subject that should be taught in universities, and new grammar schools in which the main part of the curriculum was devoted to classical studies were opened between 1550 and 1650. The continental reverence for the past reached England in the sixteenth century but the so called "golden period" of English literature reached its peak only when English writers moved away from the classical tutelage to gain their own independence.

However, the "English Renaissance" was far more complex than the revival of classical learning or the imitation of ancient canons. It represented a multiple shift in human thought. C. S. Lewis attributed the merit of this change of attitude to a few individual poets of genius who appeared in England in that period and who managed to open the cultural, linguistic and philosophical horizons of the reading public. In addition to the work undertaken by these talented writers, a number of early humanists were conducting a search for an alternative authority that could succeed in the discovery of new styles of thought. Indeed, they aimed to express the eclectic attitude that led to the choice to adopt only those classical concepts that could confer a dignified and prestigious identity to the nation.

As far as the attitude toward the language is concerned, during the early modern period, educated English people were self-conscious and apprehensive about the English language. They were concerned especially about its prestige compared with other languages, its suitability for works of literature and scholarship, and the adequacy of its vocabulary for didactic, literary and technical purposes and the necessity of regulating their idiom. The tumultuous debates throughout the period

that were tackling the suitability of English for poetic, scientific and official political works involved many humanists and intellectuals and had a resonance on an international scale. The inferiority of English was constantly perceived as the most insidious hindrance to the development and triumph of the English language.

Unlike English, both Italian and French had high prestige and could boast an old-century tradition as literary languages. What is more, Latin was still the international language of scholarship in Western Europe. However, the emerging forces in favour of English were certainly overwhelming the conservative and cautious lock to ancient idioms. Indeed, the increasing national feeling, the relevant expansion of the reading public prompted by the introduction of printing, the effects of the Reformation, the massive influence exerted by translations and expansion and secularisation of education promoted the rise of the English vernacular. The practices of translation and education acquired a great relevance and allowed the circulation of knowledge and the spread of the vernacular among the population. The harmony and beauty of the English language and style were praised and enjoyed by the literate public.

As Ascham underlined, his country needed a language that could be "fitted for Englishmen both at home and abroad" adding that "certain rules of art may be laid down to ensure its being learnt thoroughly by all our fellow-countrymen" (Ascham, p. 5). In his Introduction to *Toxophilus*, he also pointed out that English poets certainly found the practice of writing in English being, at first, irksome and laborious but their love for their country and the delight deriving from their mother tongue that they had cherished from their childhood allowed them to overcome all difficulties. Finally, he underlined in the most sincere of tones that it was for the pleasure and profit of the many that he had written "this Englishe matter in the Englishe tongue, for Englishe men" (Ascham, p. 14).

CHAPTER 1

The need to establish a national language

1.1 Politics and Poetry: the bound between power and verse

The supremacy of the secular state in the Renaissance is the most striking achievement gained over medieval religious strictness and constraints. Poets often seemed to question themselves about the real role the poetry they intended to produce could play in the ambience where they operated. As a matter of fact, Spenser thoughtfully asked himself in one of his eclogues, "O peerless poesie, where is then thy place?" before his eviction from the "Price's palace" – the forging house of poetry (Spenser, p. 1104). The Crown is undeniably involved in the poetic production of the time. National issues are imbied in the works of those poets who firmly believed in the necessity to reshape the values and the identity of their country. Literature could be imagined as a sort of "ideological cement" which is essential for the building of a nation. Furthermore, those Renaissance authors who became aware of the need to forge an English literature and to establish a vernacular culture also admitted that this kind of task inevitably involved the fact of renegotiating the bind with the political authority on which the existence of any text would depend (Hadfield, pp. 9-10). However, the issue of patronage connected to the support of poets is far more complex than what could appear from the *façade* of royal display. What poetry actually shared with government and war was its aristocratic essence. It was finally held in high esteem because it was quintessentially an elitist activity. It was the privilege of high classes thus to threaten its *status* which was slightly perceived as a virtual menace to the national and governmental *apparatus*. Threatens to the Crown, as can easily be understood - either subtle or potential threatens - could not be admitted under any circumstance.

This is the reason why poets searched for support in the courts of noble gentlemen and thanks to the dealing with noblemen they made their works shimmering of royal colours. Courts were the places were celestial music was produced and where the new language found a fertile ground to flourish. The *Maecenas* of Renaissance age encouraged the development of the arts and supported poets, musicians and painters in order to adorn and enrich the empire. Puttenham, for example, held the belief that poets were lucky enough to be "cunning Princepleasers" (Puttenham, p. 137). Indeed, poets like Chaucer – who won the favour of Richard II –, John Skelton - the tutor of Henry VIII – or William Cornish – the Master to the Children of the Chapel Royal – confirmed the approval and support the most eminent princes were inclined to provide. An eloquent example of the importance of patronage is presented by Fraser when he concisely describes the following case, "And Henry the eight, for a few Psalmes of David translated and turned into English Metre by Sternhold, made him groome of his Privy Chamber" (Fraser, p. 139). The willingness of noble benefactors to show their wealth and prestige through the promotion and support of artists was one of the most powerful reasons which motivated their generosity. Spenser created flattering verses in his preface to the *Faerie Queene* and was certainly adulating his vital supporter in an implicit but eloquent way. In addition, poetry seemed to have become the prerequisite to achieve a social and cultural prestige and a distinction that the hereditary right could no longer provide. In the previous centuries, the current of *fin amor* proclaimed by the troubadours and the *trouvères* in Southern France and Northern Italy expressed through poetry the sentiment of the class which admired and financed them. The criterion of excellence shifted from genealogic lineage and blood to intellectual prowess and refined elocution. Merit and talent substituted inheritance and noble birth. Nobility was signalled through an excellent performance. The virtue conveyed by the poetic *genius* was not merely a matter of academic debate. Indeed, Henry VIII affirmed that he would prefer "the meanest man…to rule and govern" instead of "an inept individual of noble birth" (Fraser, p. 144). This statement revealed a bias towards talented artists which certainly conferred them enough confidence to allow them to plan the cultural and linguistic revolution they longed for. However, the assiduity

with which poets worked on their writings at the very beginning of their career to achieve a dignified *status* was doubtlessly admirable. Since the Renaissance could be defined as an "age of privilege", the insistence on distinction is not confined to a few elected individuals but it is extended to a heterogeneous group of intellectuals who interact in order to create a new identity for their own nation. The organic filaments which intertwined shaped a kind of society which gathered in different groups wisely organized according to their proficiency and peculiar *savoir-faire*. Hadfield emphasised the fact that Renaissance poets had "both to fashion and authorise" their own texts as works of literature and, at the same time, he acknowledged that the "imagined community" they addressed included some individuals and excluded others (Hadfield, pp. 2-3). As a matter of fact, the structure of the intellectual circles reflected the hierarchical order of the upper classes as a sort of subtle parallel which progressed on the same wavelength of the highest social ranks.

Another relevant point connected to the enterprise undertaken by these social and intellectual gatherings and to their industrious collaboration was their final common purpose. This seems to be connected to a series of values and priorities which aristocracy silently adopted and which were consequently mirrored by the art of poetry. The aristocratic ideology connected to the best use of time to adorn human life was not centred on practical utilitarian issues or on monetary gain. On the contrary, it sustained a kind of practice which could fashion noblemen's existences. Aristocrats privileged slow but careful and highly refined activities because they undoubtedly aimed to achieve excellence in any domain. They conceived the perfect gentleman as an *amateur* of poetry who adopted a professional attitude in any enterprise he undertook. He should be talented but *nonchalant* at the same time. When dealing with politics and society he should show attachment to decent, conservative and authoritative positions. The acumen of a cultivated individual certainly derived from his chance to experience leisure. Notwithstanding this, the Renaissance aristocrat seems to identify the pragmatic base of art with the activity of trade. Since his main concern is to devote his

life to pleasure, mental exercise and commercial production, he knows he must find a suitable *medium* to assert his power authoritatively without neglecting his personal inclinations. According to Spenser, Sidney seems to offer a valuable solution to this issue. Indeed, he embodies the perfect *compendium* of the characteristics of both an Epicurean gentleman and an industrious craftsman, thus being an appealing model for what the nobility was searching for. Indeed, Spenser described him as a very reputable and gentle individual who deserved both chivalric and intellectual acknowledgements of his talent. This praise reflects the fact that Sidney's life alternated worthy service and heroic ardour. Elegance and wit characterised Sidney's writings and, what is more, the moral principles he gracefully presented in his poems were diligently applied to his own life as his affectionate and dear friend Greville recounted after Sidney's death. Thus art intrinsically became the preoccupation as well as the emblem of the most illustrious and exemplary men. King Edward VI and King James I invested a relevant sum of money to recompense the artists they chose to welcome at their royal demeanour. The monopoly they held over the intellectual and cultural sphere was easily recognisable. This generous and slightly careless squandering of money and resources could have concealed an implicit reliance on poets and learned men whose task was to forge the most appropriate identity for the kingdom they governed. In this way, they enjoyed the benefits their *noblesse* bestowed them with and they advertised a remarkable advanced empire thank to the valuable competences and refined skills of the talented individuals at their service. This was a wise, fruitful and mutually rewarding plan which apparently managed to work.

On the other hand, the noble class was not the only group which was in tune with what poetry represented. Indeed, it was also possible to detect some common features between the tradesman and the poet. They were both industrious, devoted to their work, eager to improve it and to gain a profitable result as well as careful in their activity and thankful to those who appreciated it. Finally, they were also proud of creating excellent outcomes which could improve the world in which they

lived. However, while the poet was mainly concerned with the beautiful, the good and the true, the merchant focused his attention on his pecuniary income. For this reasons, it is not simple to define with precision a national identity which could reflect all the members of society at a time. From an aesthetical point of view, should poetry just represent the most excellent and refined aspects of upper ranks? Should its "voice" be partial or universal? It is not simple to find a compromise between antithetical existences and exigencies but it seems that in the Renaissance the models of wellness and perfection were the most suitable to express the will to improve reality and aspiration towards the most refined and prestigious standards and this was commonly accepted as the only way to bring benefits to the whole system. Thus, although poetry was not a faithful snapshot of Renaissance society in the whole, the image it portrayed seemed to be peacefully accepted as a hope and an aspiration toward a more advanced and dignified standard of life. Moreover, it is not just a matter of "internal satisfaction". Indeed, what seemed to concern Renaissance individuals in England was, above all, the image they projected abroad. The will to exalt the reputation of England when dealing with other European nations and the pride to be superior to the most advanced Western countries were very powerful inputs to carry on this kind of portrayal of their native land. The moral opposition to plays and poems reflected a virtual revolt against the state. This was not the outcome of Puritanism. Many courtly poets and playwrights started to be associated with a pleasurable and privileged social rank and those writers who attacked the hedonistic aspect of art actually meant to oppose to the Tudors and Stuarts' *arte di governare*.

The vivid interference of art in the controversial relation between the State and the Church seems to be recognised by King James I himself. There was a sort of a triple association between the artist, the orthodox churchman and the Crown which entails a common bind that could be detected in their dedication to pure truth. The poet is often involved in the management of the established order and this originated a sort of powerful league between the eloquent written word and the official ruling of the State. The unrelenting concern with the imponderable truth which is hidden behind the literary

façade is not only an English but also a European phenomenon. The input which enhanced both the economy and a strict form came from art. It was both anonymous and distinctive of a renewed Renaissance art. The heretic perception of poems which took place in the Renaissance among certain intellectuals in England, was essentially initiated by Plato and resulted in the so-called "war against poetry". Poets were accused of vain idleness and their cloudy metaphors were believed to lead the reader towards a *selva oscura* which prevented him from achieving virtue. Notwithstanding this, Renaissance writers managed to eloquently overwhelm these attacks since the energetic age in which they lived was animated by civic and intellectual inputs which were transposed by them in pieces of literature which powerfully enhanced the compelling progress in the *Bildung* of their nation.

CHAPTER 2

The comparison with continental countries and the search for literary supremacy

2.1 First attempts to codify the language and to establish a literary canon.

The impending authority of the Classics and the struggle for recognition

Since its birth, the English language was in need of authoritative models to properly develop and to be credible. The majestic works of the Antiquity brought about further complications to this issue. Together with a deep awareness of the impossibility to attain perfection in modern writings, authenticity and originality made this enterprise even more complex. However, despite all these hindrances, Renaissance poets were stubborn, passionate and ambitious enough to carry on their task to bestow their writings with toil, care and elegance, thus conferring to their mother tongue the refinement and power it needed to assert the prestige of their nation. It was necessary to defend the English language from detractors and to justify the new enterprise they intended to undertake. After clarifying the reasons of their decision, they had to deal with the unsteady status of the vernacular in order to find a way to codify a language which had valuable qualities but which needed to be organized in a structured frame according to specific and universal rules. In addition, it had to compete with the authority of the great masterpieces of the past in order to emerge as a dignified idiom. The intellectual movement which allowed these needs to be expressed was called "vernacular humanism" and it was based on the principles asserted by two clever minds belonging to the Italian Renaissance: Leon Battista Alberti and Cristoforo Landino. Through their detailed works, they introduced innovative and enlightening ideals which became the lighthouses of the English Renaissance. Clarity, precision, simplicity and proportion were the key terms selected to define the most valuable traits to exalt in a language which was intended to identify a respectable

civilization. However, there were great debates during the early modern period concerning the best model to adopt in order to articulate the essence of a nation. Indeed, great ancient thinkers and philosophers were brought to life again in order to support the cultural discussion between the excellence of Antiquity - cherished by Latin and Greek - and the renovated modern spirit exclusively conveyed by the vernacular in order to express an innovative framework of mind.

2.2 The Italian enhancers of Vernacular Humanism

2.2 a. Leon Battista Alberti

Leon Battista Alberti seemed to be interested not just in the models of stylistic perfection of Antiquity but also in several sciences modern poets were dealing with such as logic, mathematics and geometry which, in some cases, were at the basis of their activities. Indeed, he appreciates the content of the writings belonging to the so called "scientific" writers and since he wrote both in Latin and in the vernacular, it is interesting to notice how he chose archaic forms from the language of the classics while he was aware that modern Latin was not as grand as the language employed by the Ancients. He was not supporting the *imitatio* of Cicero's texts, indeed, he was employing a rather "mordant" tone and a brief sharp style for his pieces of writing. This choice would certainly influence a number of early modern English poets who would adopt a very concise and vivid style in their experimental literary writings. Alberti certainly underlined the uniqueness of Cicero and the impossibility to reproduce his magnificent masterpieces, but he also pointed out that he preferred to provide an innovative and original contribution instead of idly being at a standstill passively contemplating earlier achievements. Indeed, he asserted that "intellect, judgement, memory, appetite, anger, reason, and discretion" were to be considered as "divine forces" which could allow the poet to create innovative works (Strier, p. 5). This attitude towards change and originality would be adopted by a circle of bright English humanists as a fundamental value in the shaping of a unique

national literature. As English writers would realise in the sixteenth century, he was particularly aware of the difficulty of achieving high literary standards after the golden age of Classical authors but he still admitted the possibility for a young Renaissance writer to practice an uncorrupted and productive kind of imitation when in the proem to his *Momus* he affirmed, "Proximus huic erit is, qui cognitas et communes fortassis res novo quodam et insperato scribendi genere tractarit[1] (McLaughlin, p. 154). He was much more concerned with originality, clarity and concision rather than eloquence as his technical treatises may confirm. For instance, in his famous *De Re Aedificatoria* (1452) he proclaimed his ideal of clarity and harmony, stressing the importance of intelligibility and brevity. These principles would have a great ascendance on the attitude of the English poets towards the written text since they were firmly convinced that it should mirror the essential features of their valiant nation.

It is also worth noticing that he was the first Renaissance author in Italy to write a grammar of the vernacular around 1440 – the *Grammatichetta* – which he rapidly introduces as "questo nostro opuscolo, in quale io raccolsi l'uso della lingua nostra in brevissime annotazioni" (Alberti, p. 2). It was also a result of the 1435 dispute about the role of the vernacular at that time. In this work, Alberti describes how the *volgare* originated from the barbarian invasions and how it managed to cherish a certain regularity of style and rhythm. His will to enhance the vernacular was strictly connected to his proud acknowledgment of the enterprise Italian Renaissance artists carried out to promote and elevate their own tongue, managing to equal, in his view, the ancient eminent writers of Antiquity. The same enterprise would be undertaken by Sidney and Spenser in England during the sixteenth century. Indeed, the English writers' way of conceiving their texts re-enacted the claims Italian artists were advancing in order to create the authority and eminence they believed their nation deserved. Alberti concludes his work by affirming that the best and most advisable *modus operandi* for modern poets in order to imitate Latin, was to use their own native language to

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[1] Translation: next to the original writer will be he who treats material that is perhaps well known and in the common domain, but in a new and unanticipated style.

compose learned pieces of writings and that this was essentially the most suited way to toil and polish the vernacular. Tackling the issue of imitation, Alberti constructs a very powerful parallel when he compares the inventor of the mosaics which came from the old temple of Ephesus with the Renaissance writer who embellish his writing with prestigious fragments from the temple of the Classical culture. The multifarious and multifaceted nature of the English language would perfectly embody Alberti's comparison. It seems that the only element of originality left to the Renaissance poet lies in selecting a certain number of "classical gems" and re-arranging them in a different context as he admits, "E veggonsi queste cose litterarie usurpate da tanti, e in tanti loro scritti adoperate e disseminate, che oggi a chi voglia ragionarne resta altro nulla che solo el raccogliere e assortirle e poi accoppiarle insieme con qualche varietà dagli altri e adattezza dell'opera sua, quasi come suo instituto sia imitare in questo chi altrove fece el pavimento" (McLaughlin, p. 164). This is exactly the philosophy which would underlie not only Spenser's allegorical verses but also the poetic compositions of many of his fellow humanists. The fundamental contribution given by Alberti to the theory of imitation and the affirmation of the prominence of the vernacular is that he managed to extend the frontiers of humanist Latin adopting an eclectic approach which allowed him to deal with technical exigencies and, at the same time, to exalt the lively features of a vernacular which dynamically evolved from solemn and exemplary ancient sources. To all appearance, this attitude towards the language would characterise the set of peculiar qualities which early modern writers would confer to their literary creations in early Renaissance England.

2.2 b. Cristoforo Landino

In his *Prolusione petrarchesca* (1467) Landino points out the humble origins of Latin compared to the origins of the other vernaculars which were developing in Europe. He derives from Alberti his exhortation to his reader to use the vernacular for serious works. This idea to elevate a humble idiom to a powerful position which could be the means to express and convey political issues was

the key choice which allowed English to acquire that dignity and authority which it originally lacked. In Italy, a good tactic adopted by Landino in order to promote his vernacular was to praise the excellent level achieved by his fellow citizen Leon Battista Alberti when he mentions him in his eulogistic discourse, by stating "Ma uomo che più industria abbi messo in ampliare questa lingua che Batista Alberti certo credo che nessuno si truovi. (…) attendete con quanta industria ogni eleganzia, composizione e dignità che appresso a' Latini si trouva si sia ingegnato a noi transferire" (McLaughlin, p. 178). Landino focuses his attention in particular on two specific terms - *ampliare* and *trasferire* - in order to highlight the importance to expand Latin first, by forging new words, and second, by finding an equivalent, poignant content and polished style. Landino held Alberti in high esteem since he believed that he managed to achieve both these ambitious aims. These principles would later be adopted by the group of the neologisers in England in order to expand and renew their vernacular. In addition, as far as the linguistic issue is concerned, Landino was among the first who drew interesting parallels between the vernacular and the Greek language. This is the reason why a number of English poets during the Renaissance carefully studied Landino's works since they were highly interested in finding a way to transfer the Greek culture and precepts in their literary vernacular works. The *volgare* which has the pretention to imitate classical languages should not be limited to a diction which illustrious writers may decide to sanction but, on the contrary, should gradually be opened to those humanists who could proficiently display their knowledge of Latin. Indeed, it was believed that, "è necessario essere latino chi vuole essere buono toscano", meaning that competence in Latin was required in order to aspire to become a good Tuscan (speaker)[2]. The same belief would be held by Elizabethan poets who were convinced that in order to become a good English writer it was necessary to devote a large amount of time to the study of the Classics. Latin was still considered crucial by Landino since it was the only source from which the true art of the erudite language could be derived and from which a dignified content could be drawn as an expression of philosophical *sententiae* and of the *studia humanitatis*.

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[2] Tuscan was the vernacular which was emerging as the new national language in Italy.

Moreover, Landino wisely recognised that his vernacular was not yet a "rich enough language" thus it required a solid pattern to imitate in order to grow and acquire distinctive agreeable qualities. Indeed, he affirmed, "E perché la nostra lingua non è ancora aveza a molti leggiadri e floridi modi di parlare I quali possono e giocosità e gravità partorire, dobbiamo con buona sicurità in questo imitare e' nostri padri latini e come quegli con la greca la loro ornarono, così noi la nostra con la latina" (Landino, p. 1). The same bitter awareness concerning the inferiority of the vernacular would lead English humanists to improve their mother tongue through the adoption of Latin and Greek models of style and eloquence. This sort of chain which allows poets of different generations to continue the tradition of imitation of their predecessors, seems to confer them a kind of right which allows them to take from the past the material they need to construct the basis of their supposed new linguistic empire. It is also worth noticing how humanist poets felt the necessity to invent new terms and to coin new expressions in order to give voice to a reality in rapid change but, at the same time, they felt the need to have solid and well-established supports to confer dignity and credibility to their project.

In addition, Landino is well aware that the language should be adapted cautiously to the identity of the country it intended to represent, without forcing it to go against his nature. For this reason, it is important to enrich it without committing the mistake of creating Latin calques or by misinterpreting the original meaning of the terms of an idiom which was considered to be already perfect in its original architecture. It is a matter of admiring and reproducing the language without stealing or distorting anything. This mindful and moderate approach towards the enrichment of the language would influence the mindset of many English scholars who were reflecting and working on the language during the early modern period and who definitely shared this judicious perspective. According to Landino, another complex issue to deal with is the transferral of the cultural change. For instance, in his list of "Fiorentini eccellenti in eloquenzia" he provides a sort of account of the Florentine culture, finding himself in a predicament when he has to express patriotic

familiar content. Landino ideally preferred to conceive imitation as a combination of natural invention and the study of Latin literary texts and of oratory skills. By the 1480s, he was quite optimistic about the condition of the vernacular since he was convinced that the programme enacted to promote it was almost fulfilled. Indeed, he proudly stated, "già da ora per la vertù degli scrittori da me nominate è divenuta abondante ed elegante, e ogni giorno, se non mancheranno gli studi, più diventerà" (McLaughlin, p. 182). Landino definitely agreed with Cicero's trust in the richness conveyed by the vernacular and with his patriotic claim that "latinam linguam…locupletiorem esse quam graecam"[3] (Zumpt, p. 252).

2.3 The major literary disputes around 1500

The fervent intellectual circles and the first literary controversies in Italy

There was an impending issue concerning the language during the Renaissance and it was becoming increasingly central in intellectual and social debates. It started to be crucially relevant firstly in Italy and then in France and England since the fervent intellectual circles in these countries were deeply concerned with the linguistic expression of their new values and culture. In Italy, Dante, Sperone Speroni and Pietro Bembo were the first writers to face this problem directly and to explicitly assert the birth of a new idiom as the most suitable means to display and articulate the needs and achievements of a civilization which was no more connected to the previous age. The same urge to express the detachment from a backward past in order to assert a new and more powerful identity would be shared by English humanist writers and reflected by their industrious and relentless work on their vernacular during the sixteenth century.

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[3] Translation: the Latin language…is richer than Greek.

Giovan Francesco Pico's letters to Bembo

Pico's first letter to Bembo in 1512 when *Prose della volgar lingua* seemed to have been already completed, deals with the concept of imitation. The idea that an author should imitate a group of different authors and not just one single model is accompanied by the urge to develop a personal and peculiar style in order to be praised and to give a useful contribution to the assertion of a dignified and worthy identity. Both Puttenham and Spenser would adopt Pico's view when they conceived their poetic compositions by considering multiple enriching sources and by creating an innovative literary production which could refine and exalt their nation. Pico supports the extremely fertile variety presented by the classical writers and he never points out relevant similarities among them. He also makes reference to the Platonic Ideas highlighting the fact that the natural tendency of men is to imitate and this could be detected in a number of different areas. As Aristotle's *Poetics* confirms, the prominence of the "writer's natural instinct" to create something new comes just after the imitative phase.

He underlines the existence of an innate idea originally implanted in the mind which generates innovative and unprecedented formulations. Indeed, Pico definitely emphasised the principle of *inventio* in the tripartite set which involves also *dispositio* and *elocutio*. Likewise, Sidney would realise and subsequently highlight the paramount importance of forging verses *ex novo* in order to confer to his language and to his nation a triumphant uniqueness. The peak of Pico's letter is represented by his strong opposition to Ciceronianism. As a matter of fact, he attacks its dangerous nature connected to faulty manuscripts and he tries to show the ineffectiveness of the project, pointing out the tendency of the imitator to transform himself into a simple copier of Cicero's masterpieces. The crucial point is that Bembo was a Ciceronian and this hostility displayed by Pico was meant to contrast Bembo's claim to have the ability to discourse on any subject like Cicero. Pico's strong emphasis on the Neoplatonic innate idea which generates the best work of art inevitably instigated Bembo's reaction. Bembo started his letter mentioning the superiority of the

written word over the spoken one, showing that the debate on *imitatio* which was taking place at that time had not only been presented in his *Prose della volgar lingua* but was reiterated through different *media* in order to stress the great influence it had on the intellectual environment in Italy as well as in all Europe. Bembo immediately points out Pico's incoherence in defending the imitation of all good authors in the first part of his *epistola* to affirm then completely the opposite in discouraging this practice. What is more, Bembo is firmly convinced that only through the reading and knowledge of other authors' works it is possible to forge creative ideas, thus he rejects Pico's conception of an inborn *nucleus* of inventive spirit. In addition, Bembo specifies that his approach is not an abstract, unfounded speculation on idyllic models of literary perfection, on the contrary, he adopts the pragmatic example of Cicero to pursue his poetic ideal. The industrious and pragmatic attitude displayed by Bembo would not be ignored by the circle of English Renaissance intellectuals who would definitely pursue the principles and method he asserted. Bembo continued his letter by meticulously describing the different steps he adopted in the process of imitation and creation of his own works, although he presented quite controversial points since he seemed to pursue an original content but he adopts a classical tone to express it. However, it is comprehensible that these struggling extremes appear to be still in tension because this kind of dilemma connected to the issue of imitation has never been solved since Petrarch's time. On the one hand, he seems prone to avoid a kind of unoriginal topic but, on the other hand, he cannot avoid employing an elegance of style and language which was left as a precious inheritance by Latin and Greek ancestors. Notwithstanding this, Bembo upheld the belief that a third stage in the evolution of this process could represent the solution to this kind of *impasse*. Indeed, he introduces the choice of a single mediocre literary model to have the chance to work hard on his *exemplum* but without feeling guilty or frustrated for his inability to achieve the greatness of ancient outstanding authors. In this way, he can easily excuse himself for his ineloquence in Latin, providing a more valid reason to adopt the vernacular as the language which best fulfils his wishes as a writer and as a Renaissance humanist. This humble and frank assertion is one of the crucial points which would be developed by early

modern poets in England when they emphasised balance, humility and avoidance of excess as virtues rather than boasting a number of superlative stylistic qualities they objectively could not claim at the beginning of their enterprise.

Moreover, it is interesting to observe the eloquence Bembo displays to illustrate his choices and intents in order to entirely devote himself to the cultivation of the vernacular:

> ad quae quidem conscribenda eo maiore studio incubuimus, quod ita depravata multa atque perverse iam a plurimis ea in lingua tradebantur, obsolete prope recto illo usu atque proprio scribendi; brevi ut videretur, nisi qui seam sustentavisset, eo prolapsura ut diutissime sine honore, sine splendore, sine ullo cultu dignitateque iaceret[4] (McLaughlin, p. 263).

However, there is one point in which Bembo and Pico seem to agree. Bembo drew a distinction between the act of *imitari* and *sumere* since the first refers only to imitation of style while the second involves the change of other parts such as subject, order and sentential. For this reason, it could be assumed that the writer had the faculty to choose the subject (*sumere*) from another author but should only imitate the best style (*imitari*). This synthesis would be adopted as a guideline by both Sidney and Spenser in the process of promotion of their renovated literary identity against their detractors. Bembo's vernacular poems abandon the elements adopted in the late Quattrocento remaining faithful to the dialogue form and to the poetic genres of *Sonetto* and *Canzone*. Aldus Manutius' editions of Petrarch and Dante created by Bembo between 1501 and 1502 show how he applied humanist techniques to vernacular philology. Bembo's letter to Pico is a sort of manifesto of his *literati credo* which best exemplifies both his creative and his critical writings. Bembo exercised a profound influence on the development of the vernacular, marking not only the culmination of the process of promotion of this new tongue but he also managed to transfer and adapt Ciceronianism to

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[4] Translation: I was all the keener to write in the vernacular since most works were being written so corruptly and inelegantly in that language, and its correct usage and manner of writing had been so neglected, that it seemed to me that, unless someone propped it up, it would collapse to such an extent that for a long time it would lie prostrate, without honour, without splendour, and without any polish or dignity.

the *volgare*. He championed Petrarch as a modern model for the emerging idiom which was starting to spread not only in Italy but also towards the northern countries in Europe.

Bembo seems to be promoting the humanist Latin model of the Golden Age-Decline-Revival on the Italian vernacular literature. Each of these three stages could be associated respectively to the Trecento, Quattrocento and Cinquecento, evoking a sort of coming of age of the vernacular as Bembo points out, "Massime insino ad ora si può dire essere l'adolescenza di questa lingua, perchè ognora più si fa elegante e gentile. E potrebbe facilmente nella gioventù ed adulta età sua venire ancora in maggiore perfezione"(Bembo, p. 64). Bembo, unlike the Florentine Neoplatonist Pico, choses to elevate the vernacular relying on *verba* rather than on *res*. Finally, it could be stated that Bembo's choice to adopt Ciceronianism allowed the vernacular to develop an array of literary peculiarities which promoted its blossoming and, at the same time, closed the question of literary imitation in Renaissance Italy and transferred it to England.

2.4 The crucial role of French and Italian in the shaping of the English linguistic identity

The theory and Practice of Literary imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo

> *Molti vogliono giudicare gli stili e parlar de' numeri e della imitazione; ma a me non sanno già essi dare ad intendere che cosa sia stile nè numero, né in che consista la imitazione.*
>
> B. Castiglione
>
> *Il cortegiano* (1528)

The term "imitation" raises a great number of doubts and uncertainties which has been largely repeated to describe Renaissance literary texts and paintings but whose meaning was much less

clear. It is arguably the most significant literary concept of the Italian cultural history in the period 1400-1530 but it pervaded with even greater evidence France and England in the following decades. In particular, English poets devoted the first stage of their work on the language to the study and imitation of those models of stylistic perfection which were undoubtedly exerting an ascendance on the European cultural and political identity. This phenomenon could not be ignored in the construction of a refined and dignified idiom which intended to express both an unprecedented linguistic authority and national supremacy.

Imitation was a critical and literary practice which engrossed many bright minds in Italy. Petrarch and Bembo were literally obsessed by the reproduction of a work of art which was intended to be developed in the footsteps of noteworthy predecessors. The flood of polemics which dominated the fifteen century bore witness to the weighty role literary imitation played in the process of poetic creation and which was crucial to establish the status of a literary text.

As far as the theoretical side of this debate is concerned, the level of discourse is precise and sophisticated and stylistic choices are articulated in a refined and intelligent way. The Quattrocento in Italy does not simply anticipate the achievements of the Cinquecento but presents all the crucial strategies employed in the practice of *imitatio* by many English authors in the sixteenth century in a sort of intertextual allusiveness connected to a number of idiosyncratic languages. In addition, considering the relationship between Latin and the vernacular in the Renaissance, it could be noticed how the Latin language was refined primarily through a lexical purism foreshadowed by Petrarch, then, through a focus on syntax as confirmed by Valla and finally with a particular attention to morphology and orthography due to the introduction of printing. The development of the vernacular underwent a similar process as appears in Fortunio's *Regole della volgare lingua* (1516) which re-enacts all these poetic principles. Similarly, Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525) embraces a discussion which tackles issues such as lexis, syntax, morphology and style and opens a series of debates on the language which would involve many intellectuals and scholars in

early Renaissance England. A relevant degree of consistency seemed to be guaranteed by the adherence to imitation. The triumph of Ciceronianism and Petrarchism was evident during the first decades of the sixteenth century since the need to restore a certain order among the chaotic "voices" of Italian literature was deeply felt by Renaissance writers. The consequences of Bembo's approach did not only concern his literary works. Indeed, his Golden Age pattern which was followed by the movement called "Decline and Revival" in both Latin and vernacular literatures, questioned the models presented by Alberti. Confidence in the present and a critical tendency towards the past could be probably detected in Castiglione and Machiavelli but the majority of writers shared Bembo's position so the prestige bestowed upon the Ancients became once again distant and unattainable. In the sixteenth century, several English poets would experience the same feeling of irretrievability and inferiority which characterised Bembo's attitude towards the Classics.

The polemics went on after 1530 in France and England but in Italy the debate between Latin and the vernacular was soon sorted out in favour of the latter. From that point, Italian became the most appropriate means of communication on both oral and literary grounds. After 1530, the issue of imitation in Italy was reconsidered in the light of Aristotle's *Poetics* since this text became central in several debates among critics and it would become crucial for early modern English writers too. However, it should be borne in mind that the Aristotelian concept of imitation is connected to nature while Renaissance writers were even more concerned with the rhetorical imitation of the Classics both in Italy and England. Behind the word "imitation" lies a manifold activity involving literary theory and practice which are closely connected with the Italian Cinquecento. It is interesting to notice that theories of literary imitation were applied to Latin and vernacular writings and the rise of Ciceronianism in both languages showed how classical texts influenced Renaissance creative processes. The practice of *imitatio* stated back to the medieval period with Dante and developed in a slightly different *praxis* during the Renaissance. In the years after 1530, Latin was no more a plausible choice for literary works and the group of Renaissance Ciceronians headed by

Bembo introduced and supported the use of the vernacular as a new *medium* of literary production. The debate on imitation was firstly and primarily an academic debate but then it extended to broader fields of interest. The emphasis was not only on theoretical texts on imitation but also on the practice of writing in the footsteps of great models. Petrarch and Boccaccio were considered the chief models respectively for poetry and prose. However, imitation was a principle and an activity which was rather widespread among learned men in the Quattrocento and it involved humanists of the stature of Valla, Alberti, Salutati, Landino and Poliziano whose industrious and innovative activity would inspire the enterprise of early modern poets in England. In addition to the numerous ramifications which could be considered in connection to this issue, it is also of paramount importance to analyse the practical consequences of this practice since the age of Italian humanism created the roots for the development of literary debates all over Europe. For instance, the gradual but complex evolution of Ciceronianism in Latin, the creation of a canon for minor and major authors and the linguistic *querelle* between the ancients and the moderns as well as the transposition of classical terminology into the vernacular were intimately linked to imitation, bringing about conspicuous changes in Renaissance Western Europe.

Plato's concept of *mimesis* was meaningfully related to literature during the Renaissance since it was meant to represent life and the natural world. However, considering reality to be a mere copy of the perfect ideal forms of the universe, the term acquired a rather negative undertone. Despite this, Aristotle used the term "imitation" to describe the portrayal of life through the work of art. Both these conceptions were well-known to Renaissance writers, but these mainly referred to the process by which a writer intentionally or unintentionally borrowed from another work of art bringing about a noticeable literary echo from the original text. Isocrates added his principle of imitation to the three traditional components of Greek rhetoric – nature, theory and practice. Similarly, in the famous ancient text *Ad Herennium* it is highlighted that the duty of orators was to borrow from a previous writer in order to make the imitation perceivable to the audience but, at the same time, it

was also necessary to rearrange the material borrowed. The faithful reference to the works of other authors was not considered categorically inadmissible as it is today. The Renaissance cult of Cicero developed from the humanist linguistic purism but the main reason is the fact that Latin was becoming a dead language which was unable to reflect the new Renaissance reality. "Classical elegance" and "contemporary accuracy" were two cherished values for the Quattrocento literati and since Latin had always had a great ascendance on their education and literary tastes, it was necessary to merge them in a new synthesis which could be in tune with their new ideals. Their mastery of Ciceronian style allowed them to attempt the writing of works characterised by virtuosity and notable grace. The expertise they gained from the imitation of Latin authors such as Apuleius, Seneca and Tacitus developed their eloquent skills with an unprecedented rapidity.

The question of literary imitation involved the most prominent minds of the time. Dante himself had proclaimed the superiority of *volgare* over Latin when he had affirmed, "nobilior est vulgaris"[5] providing three reasons in support of his statement (Alighieri, p. 2). The first was that it was the original language which was spoken by mankind, the second was that it is a mother tongue which is adopted everywhere and the third was that vernacular is natural instead of artificial. This set of rules are intended to show in a very simple, clear and genuine way the noble qualities a kind of poetry written in vernacular could offer. This is exactly the model that Renaissance English writers would later adopt in their writings. Finally, it was possible to create a superior type of literature whose role was to ennoble those individuals who were brave enough to promote and use their native tongue in their works adopting a more transparent and faithful perspective. Nevertheless, the prestige Italian could display had its source in Latin and this linguistic and literary affinity could not be ignored by early modern English authors – at least in the first stages of the formation of the new language – as this extract explains,

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[5] Translation: The vernacular is nobler

Idcirco accidit ut, quantum illos proximius imitemur, tantium rectius poetemur. Unde nos, doctrine opera intendentes, doctrinatas eorum poetrias emulari oportet (2. 4. 3)[6].

Later Bembo distinguished *imitatio* from *aemulatio* describing these terms as two different phases of the imitative process. The canon of those Latin poets who are worth imitating is described by Dante in *Vita Nova* 25 and in the fourth canto of *Inferno*. Basically, the study of Latin should help vernacular poets to find that kind of *constructionis elatio* which allows poems to reach the high and sublime standard required to poetry to be noteworthy (Alighieri, p. 39). Despite all good principles connected to the copy and reproduction of classical patterns, the kind of *imitatio* Dante employs in his *Commedia* is quite imbibed with re-elaboration and originality. This vernacular masterpiece seems to refer to an embryonic phase of Humanism and, at the same time, to undermining the undiscussed greatness of his predecessors. He dared to challenge the hugely venerated *status* of the ancient masters introducing an alternative – the vernacular – which could equal them without giving the impression of being inferior or inadequate to express the purposes it was pursuing.

In the second book of *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Latin poets are praised to have written a high-quality body of literary works since the language they adopted was symmetrical, ordered and clear and it was frequent to find this kind of regularity in ancient writings. It is quite difficult to judge if this assumption derived from a sceptical and prejudicial attitude or if it was really a grounded point of view but, according to Dante, the most advisable and adequate solution was to emulate classical writers taking their masterpieces as the perfect models to imitate in order to achieve praiseworthy results.

However, in the middle of the fourteenth century, Petrarch re-established the process of imitation which was usually associated to the Classics. The influence Seneca had on Petrarch appeared to be central for a relevant number of Renaissance poets. In his *Controversiae,* Seneca pointed out that, "Non est unus, quamvis praecipuus sit, imitandus…" (Seneca, p. 2) underlining the necessity to

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[6] Translation: For that reason it happens that the closer we imitate them, the better our poetry will be. Consequently we who are writing a work of (poetic) doctrine should emulate their learned works of poetics.

avoid the imitation of one single model - however eminent it could appear – in order to encourage writers to embrace a wider variety of worthy examples to broad their horizons and to enrich their knowledge. D. A. Russell confirmed this maxim, adding that it was also advantageous to "penetrate beyond superficial verbal imitation to a reworking that recaptures the true spirit and significance of the original" (McLaughlin, p. 22). Petrarch reacted in particular against the ornate Latin of the *artes dictaminis* which would be taken into high consideration by English poets in the following centuries.

It is also interesting to notice how Petrarch relied on Quintilian's advice about the process of *imitatio*. Indeed, he warned poets against superficial imitation since it could easily involve a dangerous lack of originality. In addition, Petrarch agreed with the Latin poet when he affirmed, "Nihil crescit sola imitatione"[7] (Muratori, p. 128) since he concurred with the fact that, "Ea quae in oratore maxima sunt imitabilia non sunt, ingenium, inventio, vis, facilitas…"[8] (McLaughlin, p. 24). Petrarch's reluctance to the idea of adopting the same terms used by his predecessors mirrored his apprehension connected to an overwhelming influence which could stop the mechanisms which allowed him to express his powerful creative ideas. Notwithstanding this, the influence Seneca had on Petrarch was arguably exemplified in *Epistolae 84*[9] where the Latin poet, while instructing his pupil on literary imitation, illustrates the three main principles connected to the art of *imitatio*. The first is unity of style, the second is differentiation from previous models and the third is the concealment of the models. These principles would be the hub of the method adopted by English writers in the middle of the sixteenth century whenever they conceived a new text. Seneca employs a nice image to sketch the kind of imitation he wishes for the young writers who seek advice. Indeed, he points out that the imitative work should be like a son who looks like his father, and he should elaborate a kind of style that - like a choir – can generate a unique tone derived from an

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[7] Translation: Progress cannot be made by imitation alone.
[8] Translation: An orator's greatest assets cannot be imitated: his genius, his powers of invention, his rhetorical vigour and fluency…
[9] A fundamental text in classical imitation theory.

array of distinct voices. This is what would be carried out in early modern England where the heterogeneous group of ancestors who gave birth to the nation left a variety of different languages and traditions which would be skilfully merged by Renaissance poets and delightfully displayed in their literary masterpieces. Moreover, Seneca introduced another powerful and eloquent metaphor connected to this issue. He compares poets to bees which collect honey from flowers but without specifying if what they finally produce is merely made up of the substance they picked up. On the other hand, Petrarch was absolutely convinced that there was an extra element added to the final product since what he called "mellification" seemed to derive from "mirifica quadam permixtione"[10] (McLaughlin, p. 26).

At this point the personal contribution of the writer appears to be crucial in the very act of the artistic creation. As Sidney would experience in his *Defence*, Petrarch himself is not always free from guiltiness when he feels he is reproducing his ancestors' works. However, he is also loyal enough to recognise that the process of *imitatio* which involves the reworking of other writers' ideas in a different and personal style is certainly praiseworthy and of superior value. Petrarch is well aware that every poet should develop his own distinctive style even if it could not compete with the refinement and grace of the authors of the Antiquity. Similarly to Horace, he affirms, "multo malim meus mihi stilus sit, incultus licet atque horridus, sed in morem toge habilis, ad mensuram mei ingenii factus"[11] (McLaughlin, p. 27). Petrarch is not implying the complete eradication of ancient wise models but he privileges *similitudo* over *identitas*, thus he considers his models as great *exempla* but he relentlessly works preserving his own identity and autonomy, "sint cum duce oculi, sit iudicium, sit libertas"[12] (McLaughlin, p. 28). Indeed, the kind of imitation Petrarch intends to follow is much more subtle than a mere copy of words from other authors. The echo of Latin texts should be slightly perceived from the adoption of a certain number of rhetorical

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[10] Translation: by a miraculous blending process.
[11] Translation: I would much prefer that my style should be my own, no matter how uncouth and inelegant, just like a well-worn toga, made to measure to suit my own intellect.
[12] Translation: let me follow a leader, but with my own eyes, my own judgement, my own freedom.

figures but the articulation of ideas should be completely independent and the choice of vocabulary absolutely innovative. Petrarch's cult of classical clarity and elegance is evident in his manuscripts where he adopts a form of self-imitation in repeating the terms and expressions he forged throughout his work as Puttenham would do in his *Arte of English Poesie* in 1589. Petrarch was certainly a great admirer of Cicero but, notwithstanding this, he avoided becoming his "slavish follower" as he finally points out by saying, "post tanti viri vestigial novam non imitationis sed doctrine proprie preclarique operis gloriam invenisti"[13] (McLaughlin, p. 34).

Another relevant example which highlights the debate going on around the issue of imitation during the Renaissance is the dispute between Coluccio Salutati and the younger generation of humanists, about the choice of the most correct method connected to the imitation of ancient writers. In his response to a letter by Bruni, Salutati, after listing his own personal corrections to his previous *epistola*, pointed out in quite a provoking tone, "but I have always believed that one should imitate antiquity in such a way that the imitation should not emerge as an exact reproduction, but rather should always include some element of modernity. You know that I am not unaware of the style of our own most famous Cicero, and that I willingly use his words. However, it is one thing to copy, and quite another to imitate. Imitation always contains something that is proper to the imitator, and does not entirely belong to the author imitated; whereas copying tends to reproduce in entirety the imitated author" (McLaughlin, p.73). Indeed, Salutati preferred and promoted a kind of imitation which included an element of *novitas* in order to give the chance to some aspects of modernity to emerge and start to flourish. This need to express the "new" would be deeply felt by the majority of early modern poets in Renaissance England since they were definitely concerned with the expression of a modern set of ideologies and achievements which could not be fully conveyed through a backward and ineloquent idiom. Moreover, Salutati insisted on the necessity of individual

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[13] Translation: despite following in the footsteps of such a great writer, you managed to achieve new glory not by imitating him but by writing a famous work which set out your own doctrine.

contribution in order to achieve greater literary standards thus emphasising the crucial role modern nations could play in the literary *scenario*. The greatness attributed to Cicero consisted in having endowed Latin with an elegant vocabulary which was suitable to convey philosophical ideas in a polished and refined style. The ideal Renaissance practice was to adorn erudite content with elegant style, refined lexis and prose rhythm. In addition, the perfect imitation should always involve the amplitude and abundance pursued by Cicero, the brevity promoted by Sallust and the magnificence celebrated by Livy. An interesting focus on the vernacular was then provided by Bruni when he highlighted the noble features which characterised his *volgare*, pointing out that a poet should be judged on the grounds of *what* he writes and not according to the language he chooses to adopt. Indeed, he underlined his belief by stating, "lo scrivere in istile litterato o volgare non ha a fare al fatto, né altra differenza è se non come scrivere in Greco od in latino. Ciascuna lingua ha la sua perfezione e suo suono, e suo parlare limato e scientifico". This emphasis on the Latin concept of *res* would also characterise the English way of conceiving the literary work in the Renaissance. Indeed, the main purpose of the language was to eloquently display the concrete achievements of the nation allowing the reader to perceive the effective value of the English civilization. At the same time, Bruni seemed to notice a sort of Achilles' heel when, referring to two of the Three Crowns, he claimed that Dante lacked a complete mastery of Latin, underlining also Petrarch's inability to emulate the style of the Classics. According to his view, these were relevant reasons to choose the vernacular instead of the great languages of the Antiquity. Moreover, this supposed absence of Latin qualities is connected to another critique moved against these poets. It seems as if they had limited imitative skills compared to the ones displayed by the new generation of humanists – which involved Bruni, Niccoli, Antonio da Rho and some other learned members – thus their achievements in poetry could not be worth enough to reproduce and honour the wisdom of the ancients. This relentless attack to previous authors is carried on also by Lorenzo Valla who, as early as 1435, defined Bruni's Latin as inert, asunder and feeble. Indeed, in his opinion, it seemed to lack that weight and smartness that he considered to be essential qualities for an innovative work of art.

He could certainly not admit that the language could be scant or contaminated as the group of the purists would sustain in sixteenth-century England. However, Bruni's passion for Latin was accompanied by a great interest in promoting the vernacular and he firmly believed to be skilful enough to manage to elevate it to a prestigious position, exalting it more than his fellow poets had done before him. As Leon Battista Alberti did in the following decades, he primarily supported the purpose of developing a set of conditions which could allow the *volgare* to outstrip classical languages. This would unquestionably be the same aim of English poets in the early modern age.

CHAPTER 3

The great ascendance of the Classics and their adoption as marks of social status

3.1 The literary prestige of Greek and Latin

The role of social prestige in the Renaissance approach to the Greek tradition

The reason why the language became so crucial in this ambitious enterprise was that humanists associated a refined idiom with a dignified nation. The elitist trait was crucial. Indeed, both aristocracy and poetry aspired towards a higher sphere and were primarily conceived for a *niche*. The search for superiority and exclusiveness in a *tour d'ivoir* far above mediocrity was the key aspect which allowed poetry to improve the poets' status. Moreover, when a nation starts to be aware of its new influence and power, it becomes increasingly eager to spread its influence on other nations and its prerogative is to show its cultural and military superiority. For these reasons, communication became a crucial aspect to develop in order to achieve this purpose. This is why a new and eloquent language started to coincide with a modern and powerful nation. It was necessary to find an innovative and, at the same time, poignant way to express the change which occurred at that time and which inevitably marked the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in England. Indeed, big steps imply big changes and the English language began to be considered the most suitable means to express them. The visual representation of power and the display of virtues were the main concern of the English court. The majority of noblemen used to believe that their essence and role coincided with what they showed to the world. This is the reason why prestige and refinement had to be conveyed through an elegant and decent language which could concretely advertise the worthiness of a nation and which could express the highest point reached by its rulers. In addition, it should be borne in mind that power was not for the many. Thus the inaccessibility of

the poetic language to the masses was an extremely appealing feature for the noble class at first. Moreover, it is important to be aware of the fact that an idiom embodies and conveys a whole set of ideologies and values. The search for the purest and highest models of linguistic perfection was based on the majestic canons of the Classics since they were considered the cultural and linguistic peak of all civilizations. Indeed, the knowledge of Latin and Greek became, primarily, a mark of social prestige.

This section aims to explore the influence of the Greek language in the Western world during the Renaissance with a particular focus on the crucial role played by education in the assertion of social prestige through this idiom in England. First, it will explore the origins of the spread of this refined language in Europe from an historical and cultural point of view. Second, it will analyse the central role Venice played in the cherishment of the Greek language and culture underlining the relevant contribution some Greek scholars brought to the promotion of this prestigious tongue in the English world. Third, it will highlight the huge impact Vergerio's treatise had on the conception of the study of Greek and on its influence on the ruling class. Then, it will present Bruni's treatise *De studiis et literis* in order to emphasise the link between the stylistic qualities of Greek and the powerful appeal they had on sophisticated and ambitious Renaissance scholars. Finally, it will show how Guarino's work associated the knowledge of Greek to the display of social distinction.

The late antiquity and the study of Greek exerted a great influence on Italian Renaissance. The bilingualism which characterised the Roman Empire at that time was a crucial factor for the spread of the classical languages.

The prominence of Greek among the elitist group of the Western languages which monopolised knowledge in Europe during the Renaissance started immediately after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and a relevant consequence connected to it was the moving of a huge numbers of volumes

from the Library in Alexandria to the South of Italy. This displacement of thousands of Greek volumes - but also of many Greek citizens and intellectuals which had to move away from their country - undoubtedly brought to Italy a precious amount of texts which seemed to be the shrines of a superior culture. The crucial role Greek teachers played in the spread of the Greek culture during the Renaissance is witnessed by the diffusion among the noble class of the Greek language firstly and primarily through the study of the language itself. Indeed, Greek was exclusively studied in grammars thus the first approach students had with the language was essentially through them. The role of these massive books was relevant not only as far as the teaching of the tongue was concerned but, most importantly, in order to convey a certain *aura* of intellectual superiority. The knowledge of the Greek language seemed to hold a mysterious power which attracted many Renaissance intellectuals who were inexplicably fascinated and, at the same time, challenged by what appeared to their eyes as an unintelligible and cryptic sequence of symbols. This apparent inaccessible code seemed to hide an extremely charming appeal which was worthy being explored. However, the only key to access this immensely rich *corpus* of knowledge was a deep and assiduous study of the language. Effort and devotion were essential in order to undertake the study of Greek for a great number of Renaissance intellectuals who intended to master this idiom. Indeed, during the first phase of their education they had to concentrate only on grammatical rules, syntactic schemes and morphological tables of formations of terms in order to memorise the fundamental roots of the tongue. In addition, the only direct contact with the Greek language came from their teachers. This is why the role Greek masters played in education was essential. In the first period, immediately after the fall of the Empire, native-tongue teachers were available to teach their language – and all their background culture – to Italian students. Unfortunately, in the following decades, it became gradually rarer to find autochthone Greeks who were able to speak the original idiom of their country. The few Greek citizens left did even not know the original tongue their ancestors used to speak, so the feeling of usefulness and inaptitude became dominant among them. They found themselves exiled in a new land whose citizens were no more willing to welcome them

to work at their courts as teachers because they considered their Greek tongue irremediably corrupted and fairly different from the authentic one. This obsession for originality and authenticity and the constant desire to go back to the sources of a pure knowledge which pervaded Renaissance intellectuals and which exerted a great influence on English works were justified by their rejection of that intellectual "approximation" which was no longer admitted in circles where exactness and refinement were the key values to adopt in any kind of literary activity. Since the Greek language appeared as an arcane and complex idiom which required a serious and careful devotion, Renaissance English society associated it with a worthy and distinguished mark of social prestige, transforming it into a sort of *status symbol*. The study of Greek was considered a difficult and time-consuming subject to study and only clever and smart minds could manage to undertake such an enterprise. In addition, its intrinsic characteristics made it a peculiar language to learn. All Renaissance English humanists recognised that Greek was a refined and sophisticated language, not only for its idiomatic traits and its unique musicality but also for the first-rank culture which it conveyed. The oldest existent copy which bears witness to the great value of Greek is the version of St Basil's essay on the value of Greek literature which dates back to 1403. It was very popular during the English Renaissance and it is a kind of "charter for a liberal education" (Wilson, p. 14). Castiglione himself in his *The Courtier* highly recommended the study of Greek "because of the abundance and variety of things that are so divinely written in it" (Wilson, p. 157). The deep philosophical knowledge imbibed in this language was a perfect appeal to the sensitivity of Renaissance English scholars and nobles who were becoming increasingly eager to master this language and, as a consequence, to display their intellectual and social worth. In time, this pompous reason became the main input and appeal to the study of this idiom whose usefulness was not immediately apparent to the majority of learned men. Indeed, learning Greek was not essential as knowing Latin but, apparently, this was exactly the reason why noble minds in search for an official acknowledgment of their skilfulness and worthiness decided to undertake the study of Greek.

Byzantine Greek refugees in the West played a key role in the promotion of Greek studies first in Italy and then in England. The scholars exiled from their native land who arrived in Southern Italy after the wreckage of the Byzantine world were not isolated individuals occasionally landing on the peninsula. They were in constant communication with one another and they quickly settled up in many flourishing Italian cities where they were determined to establish a sort of revived Greek nation (Geanakoplos, p.7). Venice, in particular, was considered as a kind of second homeland for them. The Greek diaspora in the West brought about the development of a feeling very close to patriotism which could be perceived in the texts written by Greek scholars for their Western patrons. The ambition they had to elevate Greek as the new *status symbol* of the European civilization was clearly connected on the one hand to the pride for their centuries-old culture and, on the other hand, to their affinity to the noble and refined lifestyle they found in the Renaissance élites. The restoration of Greek letters literally widened the "intellectual horizon of Western Europe" during the Renaissance. Greek *émigrés* contributed to the spread of Greek studies in Western Europe mainly by teaching, by transcribing manuscripts and by preparing texts for printing thus diffusing new challenging and sophisticated material to ennoble the most prestigious minds. The primacy Venice attained in the study of Greek made it a sort of "mecca" for intellectuals who found themselves engrossed by this language and culture. It was a prolific centre opened to host scholars interested in Greek from many different countries all over Europe in the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century. They had the opportunity to meet the most brilliant Hellenists of the time, prolifically increasing the importance of the access to Greek. Thanks to the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius a large number of Greek manuscripts were printed and circulated among private circles of the *Serenissima*. It is interesting to consider that Erasmus' sojourn in Venice in the Aldine circle of Hellenists was particularly relevant for the dissemination of Greek letters in Northern Europe. Even if the transmission of Greek from its original *nucleus* to just a limited number of humanists in the most relevant Renaissance centres of Italy could be considered as a *niche* experience, it had a great impact on the rise of Greek as a privileged and exemplary means to

achieve intellectual and social prestige. Spenser, in one of his letters dated from Westminster and from Leicester House mentioned the Greek term "Aeropagus" to name the elitist group of Renaissance English poets whose ambition was to forge a new privileged "language of power" and whose activity was certainly exclusive and sophisticated (Helgerson, p. 30).

The printing of Greek texts in Venice by Aldus Manutius between 1494 and 1495 attracted Renaissance English scholars since printed texts "brought greater recognition" to the work and to its author thus increasing the respectability of the writer but also of the reader who became a sort of "official disciple" (Geanakoplos, p. 60). Considering Venice a real "babel of tongues" (Geanakoplos, p. 69), the prominence of the Greek language was even more evident there than in any other place in Europe and the degree of exclusiveness conferred to it was certainly indicative of a superior engagement involved in dealing with it. Analysing the case of Cardinal Bessarion, a sort of mutual exchange in terms of prestige between Venice and the Greek culture could be detected and this will have a great impact on the English culture and literary works too. It seems that the rewarding welcoming of intellectual *émigrés* from Greece was paid back with the possibility to learn their prestigious tongue thus to have access to one of the most wise and praiseworthy cultures of Eastern and Western Europe. The Cardinal himself defined Venice as a new alternative to Byzantium thus acknowledging both the enchanting richness of the Venetian empire and its interests in the exaltation of the crucial and unique cultivation of the arts. Intellectuals such as Zacharias Calliergis who set up the first Greek press in Medici Rome, Janus Lascaris –the Greek scholar who gave lectures on Thucydides, Demosthenes, Sophocles and the Greek Anthology - and Demetrius Ducas - the Cretan Pioneer of Hellenic studies in Spain - seemed to be the only Greek scholars living in the West who were able to "claim descent from the old imperial Byzantine dynasty" thus underlining the original and autochthone support to the exaltation of Greek in the new Western noble environment (Geanakoplos, p. 202). Calliergis mingled with the circle of wise Hellenists in Padua, promoting the ascendance of Greek thus leaving Latin in a less privileged

position. The promotion of Greek studies had also – if not mainly – been possible thanks to Italian patrons – such as Agostino Chigi - who supported eminent Greek humanists in the education of wealthy individuals attracted by the haughtiness Greek could confer them. It is relevant to notice how a prominent figure as Desiderius Erasmus emphasised the great importance conferred to the knowledge of Greek, as is possible to perceive from the few lines he wrote to his patron Anthony of St. Bergen, "If you would drink deeply of the wellspring of wisdom apply to Greek. We have in Latin at best some small brooks and turbid pools; while the Greek have the purest fountains and rivers flowing with gold" adding also that erudition in Latin is "crippled and imperfect without Greek" (Geanakoplos, p. 258). He was one of the most influent intellectuals of the English Renaissance and he contributed to shape the English humanist ideology. The close collaboration and interaction between Greek scholars and Venetian intellectuals or publishers in the Aldine Academy seemed to implicitly reinforce the exclusive *aura* which surrounded Greek, implying that it was a language which concerned great personalities and which exalted their brightness and talent. In addition, the fact that a relevant number of Greek manuscripts was cherished in private libraries confirms again the exclusiveness brought about by this refined idiom which would become the hub of the English process of refinement and ascendance.

Greek and Latin were labelled under the same concept of unity in Antiquity and their two sophisticated cultures became the hub of Renaissance culture in England. There were two main issues connected with the Greek language: the learning of Greek and the translation from Greek. As far as the translation of Greek texts is concerned, it is important to remark the fact that the first texts to be translated by Italian students were the grammars which were entirely written in Greek thus required the reader to undertake first the study of a technical language which subsequently allowed him to proceed with the study and translation of simple sentences while it was only at a later stage of the process of learning, that complex and challenging texts were introduced. Indeed, great

authors' writings such as a number of literary masterpieces by Socrates, Aristotle, Plato or Homer were introduced only when students proved to be able to deal proficiently with the language. This is a further proof of the extreme inaccessibility of the wise and superior knowledge of the Greek tradition since language was a barrier which could not be easily and quickly overcome in England. It was, in a sense, a sort of climb towards the immense mountain of a culture which allowed only the best performers to reach its peak and to discover its wonders. The excitement connected to the exploration and acquisition of this language made English intellectuals curious and interested to learn more about Greek culture. Indeed, the fascination raised by the Greek language and culture soon reached even the North of Europe. First French and then English learned men came into contact with this "new" language and started to become increasingly engrossed with it. Learning Greek became a sort of mechanical process which conferred a sort of sacred mystical power on those humanists who finally succeeded in mastering this ancient idiom. They were considered like "elected individuals" which had access to exclusive circles since they possessed the highest kind of knowledge. For this reason, they also felt the urge and responsibility to be a guide for their society since the wisdom they gained from the Ancients persuaded them to engage in political issues. The learning they acquired in time allowed them to revive a tradition which provided the fundamentals of the Western world. The possibility to read the original works of Ancient Greek philosophers - the masters and models of the great civilizations of the Romans - was surely a great advantage since these texts were good examples to rely on in order to better understand the origins of an heroic past which - if correctly deciphered and imitated - could certainly still teach wise principles to modern men.

A meaningful example of the importance of Greek in the education of those individuals who aspired to reach a remarkable position in society was the treatise *De ingenuis moribus* by Petrus Paulus Vergerius. Vergerius is connected to Paduan Humanism during the period in which Vittorino da Feltre resided there. His enthusiasm for the Greek language influenced the humanist current in

Florence. *De ingenuis moribus*, addressed to Ubertinus, Francesco Carrara's son, was one of the most read productions of a movement called the Revival of Letters. Bembo prized him as a worthy philosopher. Prof. Combi, one of the latest and most ardent students of Vergerius, sustained that he was 'one of the most illustrious of the long series of Italian educators, and the first to approach the subject upon new lines, and with a larger scope, rendered possible by the Revival and demanded by the altered conditions of society" (Woodwood, p. 94). Vergerius was considered a fine humanist and his Letters reveal an innate and uncorrupted use of the Latin language and a wide knowledge of Classical texts. He was particularly concerned with the education of upper classes since the illustrious Carrara family had been for many generations the sovereign of one of the most ancient and learned cities of Northern Italy. This prestigious position should be reflected by the excellence of learning and Greek culture offered the best material to work on. The author of this treatise upon the principles of Learning and Conduct seems to extend the access to his subject matter to all those who are "blessed by nature with quickened minds and lofty aims" thus selecting his readership from the very first chapter of his work, bestowing a sense of exclusiveness and uniqueness which elevated both him and his writing at the same time. Moreover, this mark of social prestige was to be conferred from the very beginning to noble children through education, prizing "every sign of alertness, of industry, of thoroughness, in the growing character" in order to reach the highest excellence (Woodward, p. 97). The need to provide an external exemplary model from the ancient past seems to derive from the fact that "we gain surer stimulus from contemplating others than from the reflection of our own selves" (Woodward, p. 98). In addition, human beings are more likely to be instructed and inspired by a "living voice" rather than by a dead one. This is why the revival of the wisdom of the Antiquity became crucial to allow Greek intellectuals' brilliant minds to have an impact on new generations of young rulers. The paramount importance conferred to the education of children is strictly connected to the regulation of the State, since the proper training of a young heir to the throne would inevitably shape his personality as an adult monarch. Thus, since a governor must occupy a higher and more prestigious position, it is necessary to find a way to assert

his superiority through a concrete and manifest *medium.* Greek language, thanks to its complexity and unintelligibility, conferred a certain tone of superiority to those who had the capacity to deal with it. Liberal studies were the most suitable means to pursue the ideal of the worthy excellent learned man. However, they involved a constant practice of virtue and wisdom. Education was considered to be necessary in order to develop the "highest gifts of body and of mind which ennoble men" (Woodward, p. 102). It was then crucial to start the apprentice of the idiom from infancy in order to train children to make constant intellectual efforts to become intelligent and virtuous monarchs. Indeed, Vergerius was convinced that it was not possible to attend wisdom in adulthood unless commitment to study started from an early age. He confirmed this idea when he wrote, "Dum faciles animi iuvenum, dum mobilis aetas" (Woodward, p.102). This was arguably one of the best ways to develop a remarkable faculty of reasoning and conversing upon solemn and complex topics in order to forge men of great merit.

Training in Arms or in Letters were considered two activities which conferred a certain distinction to men who possessed a noble spirit. Literature was defined as a subject suitable both for intellectual development and for the shaping of personality. For this reason, Vergerius was convinced that a certain degree of courage was requested to undertake its study. The study of Greek, in particular, seemed to be apt to virtuous men who would be both helped and adorned by knowledge. Aristotle himself encouraged an active approach to the study of Letters since he affirmed that men cannot just speculate on abstract principles but they have to take an active role in the management of the State. It is of great importance "to go to the best teachers even for the Rudiments" and to rely only on first rank masters in order to "implant deep roots in the growing mind" (Woodward, p. 110). Vergerius seemed to put on the same level the training in the Arms and the training in the Letters as far as great and powerful individuals are concerned. A strikingly similar parallel would be presented by Roger Ascham in his *Toxophilus* in 1545 when he highlighted the importance of cultivating both the mind through study and the body through archery. He introduced the example of Alexander the Great by describing him both as a skilful

weapon handler and a clever student of Homer. He also advised his interlocutor that if he wanted to become a man of high prestige he should devote a relevant part of his day to liberal studies thus securing himself a fuller and richer life through learning. In addition, eloquence and linguistic refinement seemed to be fine marks of distinction which were provided by education in the Classics.

Another relevant example of the influence Greek studies had on English humanists is provided by a treatise written in the form of a letter called *De studiis et literis* by Leonardo Bruni d'Arezzo and addressed to the illustrious Lady Baptista Malatesta, which bore witness to the great Renaissance concern for classical studies. This lady was one of the most thoughtful women in Italy during the Renaissance and this document highlights the crucial power some intellectual women were acquiring thanks to their devote study of Greek texts. Moral precepts and the art of moral conversation were highly regarded as fundamental qualities a man who aspired to prestige and power should try to acquire through the analysis of the great Greek Fathers. Leonardo opens his letter emphasising the high social status of the lady and the repute she had in the literary field. He elegantly flatters her by praising the distinction she had already gained and by encouraging her towards further engagement in the study of classical authors. He even provides a small list of the most astonishing female models – such as Cornelia, Sappho, Aspasia - which should inspire her to become a virtuous and distinguished learned woman. He joins the acme of his praise when he affirms that her intelligence could only be nourished by the best material underlining the exclusive role the woman can embody if only she agrees to submit herself to hard work in the study of the Classics. He seems to admit that "true learning" has disappeared at his time, repeating the adjective twice to the "vulgar jargon" which make theologians content with their studies (Woodward, p. 123). He blames a number of early modern writers for their ignorance in the literary domain, asserting, at the same time, the distinguished role of Classical languages. The study of such apparently obscure and certainly complex codes seems to imply that only skilful and refined talents could approach this

type of study. Only those broad minds who were able to undertook appropriate scholarship and to pay enough attention to stylistic and grammatical details, could be considered worthy enough to raise long-lasting constructions. The author recommends a deep involvement in the study of vocabulary, figures of speech and, in particular, of the grammar of the ancient language since only those who finally master the language could be rightly revered and elevated above the average standard of scholars. Even the choice of authors must be a delicate matter which should be carefully and cleverly considered. Indeed, Bruni points out that a style which lacks artistic features could badly influence our own compositions and spoil our taste. This is the reason why it is always a wise choice to adopt a critical eye in dealing with both modern and ancient culture. Indeed, the path Renaissance English intellectuals decided to follow tended to shape their identity and often determined their *social status.* The choice to enter the refined world of wisdom of the Great Ancient masters was a way of affirming an authoritative superiority over the other social classes. The impossibility to grasp the meaning of what they were studying and displaying and the awe-inducing reaction which was provoked by their knowledge of a new, rare and complex subject matter, were powerful inputs for those nobles and intellectuals who aspired to the highest positions of the social scale. In this way, they acquired a prestige and a repute which could not be contested or undermined not only by the majority of the population, but also by aristocratic and learned members of noble circles of the upper classes. It was a sort of internal competition where ambition was becoming increasingly high and the tendency to raise the bar symbolised the insatiable search for power and prestige which characterised the most illustrious ranks of the "new civilised Renaissance". As Bruni observed, "You will notice that such refinements will apply only to one who aspires to proficiency in the finer shades of criticism and expression, but such a one must certainly by observation and practice become familiar with every device which lends distinction and adornment to the literary art" (Woodward, p. 126). In this letter, a great importance is conferred to poetry in connection with stylistic elegance and power of expression. Indeed, Bruni provides a list of talented thinkers and intellectuals from the past, observing that they all had excellent poets as models of literary and

stylistic greatness. For instance, Aristotle seemed to be relentlessly quoting Homer, Hesiod, Pindar and Euripides and he knew their masterpieces as well as he knew the works of several worthy philosophers. He then remembered poetry's charming form and the interesting variety of the contents it dealt with, its relationship with memory and the perfect accordance with rhythmical and metrical patterns. This seemed to him to be the best kind of poetry since it had a sort of affinity both with the intellect and with emotions. Indeed, it was regarded as a strongly attractive means to elevate knowledge and to ennoble educated poetic individuals. This prestige was primarily conveyed by Greek in its nature of *medium* of communication as Bruni pointed out concluding his letter, "one may fairly ask what advantage it is to possess profound and varied learning if one cannot convey it in language worthy of the subject. Where, however, this double capacity exists – breadth of learning and grace of style – we allow the highest title to distinction and to abiding fame" (Woodward, p. 133). This higher form of knowledge conveyed by the study of the Greek language was emphasised by the most cultured teachers to their faithful students. Education played a crucial role in the upbringing of young nobles who were expected to become the worthiest and wisest rulers of their nation. The author of the letter was firmly convinced that a certain acquaintance with the majestic authors of antiquity is crucial to pursue a poignant and effective kind of education. In addition, a constant and close contact with Greek texts was a very good practice to enact and the translation of the original manuscripts was a precious technique to internalise the gracefulness of their style and the acuteness of their contents. However, this kind of activity could only be enacted after a long period of training and learning of the Greek language which was essentially related to the study of grammars. As Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini wrote in his treatise to Ladislaus, King of Bohemia and Hungary, "Grammar (…) is the portal to all knowledge whatsoever. As a subject of study it is more complex and more fruitful than its name would imply, and it yields its full profit only to such as enter early and zealously upon its pursuit. The greatest minds have not been ashamed to shew themselves earnest in the study of grammar" (Woodward, p. 144). A number of great but rare models – such as Julius Caesar and Augustus - are mentioned by the author in order to

provide future princes with outstanding examples of powerful and illustrious men devoted to this discipline.

However, one of the most eloquent authors who particularly emphasised the relevance of Greek studies as a means of social distinction was Battista Guarino. In his *Upon the method of Teaching and of Reading the Classical Authors* (1459) he introduced the general principles which animated his School at Ferrara, often echoing his father's teaching method and precepts. These principles would be successively adopted by those English humanists who intended to convey the wisdom that only the Greek culture could provide. An important place is occupied by Greek authors in this work and can be detected how at that time the honour connected to a respectable social status provided by education was only allowed to those intellectuals who were familiar both with Latin and Greek. This Treatise asserted for the first time in formal terms the great influence and ascendance the Greek language had on humanist search for intellectual and social prestige. It is interesting to notice how Guarino connects a certain longing for ambition and a committed submission to the learning of the Classics. This could be perceived when, at the end of one of his reflections upon the nature of education, he stated, "there can be no proficiency in studies unless there be first the desire to excel" (Woodward, p. 162). It is significant that very much attention was paid by English scholars to the study of the ancients, in particular, to the study of Greek as a subject which was complex and poignant enough to confer unparalleled dignity and admiration to those who managed to reach a certain degree of proficiency in dealing with it. The ability of writing in Latin was considered a fundamental prerequisite for a bright humanist but the conviction that Greek language and literature were to be considered at least of equal importance, if not even superior, was slowly emerging. As far as Renaissance English educators started to explore it, they became increasingly convinced of the fact that its nature was so peculiar and unique that those who would be willing and able to acquire it, deserved to occupy a place of higher praise and prestige in society. This is the reason why the English ruling class and keen scholars and intellectuals were eager to approach it and to

decipher the language which could bestow them with a solemn *aura* of distinction. Guarino affirmed, "The time has come when we must speak with no uncertain voice upon this vital requirement of scholarship. I am well aware that those who are ignorant of the Greek tongue decry its necessity, for reasons which are sufficiently evident. But I can allow no doubt to remain as to my own conviction that without a knowledge of Greek Latin scholarship itself is, in any real sense, impossible"(Woodward, p.166). He also acknowledges the huge number of terms and vowel sounds borrowed from Greek. Without a certain familiarity with the Greek language and grammar it is impossible to approach etymology and thus the vocabulary derived from this idiom will remain inevitably obscure. What is more, he underlines the crucial dependence of illustrious Latin authors such as Cicero, Quintilian, Cato and Horace upon Greek both in the field of literature and rhetoric. As Brian Vickers affirms, the role played by rhetoric in the field of education is crucial for the transmission of the "inherited knowledge" and the encyclopaedic tradition. The enthusiastic revival of the heritage of the Classics in the Renaissance certainly allowed English scholars to consider rhetoric as an "indispensable acquisition" for all educated men (Mack, pp. 81-82). The ability to speak and write in an eloquent way and to read and understand eminent classical authors in their original language provided future rulers with the right set of virtues.

Guarino does acknowledge the fact that Greek has not the same immediacy and intelligibility Latin possesses, thus it cannot be considered an informal ordinary language but rather an erudite tongue which need a much more careful and elaborate teaching. However, to encourage future students of Greek to endure in their plan to learn this certainly convoluted language, he assured them that a good knowledge of Latin could allow them to approach Greek without great difficulty assuring him to make quick, noticeable progress. Both in Italy and England, the study of Greek was initially confined exclusively to the study of grammar. On the one hand, the textbook was the only authoritative book which the student could study in the first period of his apprenticeship. On the other hand, the teacher was the only "living" source helping him to practise the language and to

solve his doubts. For these reasons, the learning of Greek was an activity confined just to a *niche* and it required virtuous qualities such as cleverness, commitment, constancy and devotion. However, after a first basic approach to the language, in order to reach a certain refinement which allows praise and distinction, it is necessary to proceed into deeper study and analysis of the Greek tongue exploring all different shades of meaning and mastering grammatical structures and patterns of style. As a proof of this necessity, Guarino wisely quoted one of Horace's keen observations on this issue, "Of writing well, be sure, the secret lies/ in wisdom: therefore study to be wise" (Woodward, p. 169). An advanced knowledge of Greek is essential to genuinely claim to be worthy enough to deserve social esteem and renown. However, the eminence bestowed by the mastery of this tongue did not always derive from a deep knowledge of the tongue and from a genuine passion for learning a challenging subject. The search for public praise and celebrity was often essentially enacted just by thirst for power and glory. This is perhaps a less noble input to undertake the fascinating enterprise of the study of a language which was originally the purest expression of a disinterested engrossment for culture and wisdom. The Greek authors seem to be great monuments of eloquence and a perusal of a number of ancient manuscripts confirms the fact that lofty moral standards and peculiarly elegant style were combined to create a subject matter of great value. At the end of his education, the private student who can master Greek grammar and confidently adopt a systematic method of analysis and memorisation, should be able to autonomously proceed in the study of the language in the absence of a teacher and to secure himself a high level of proficiency. This intellectual ability will be then translated into a social ability to manoeuvre and control human relationships and to elevate oneself from the average standard. Indeed, as David Norbrook underlined, rhetoric often reflected a "strategy of persuasion with very palpable designs" and it was, in a way, subservient to political authority as well as the expression of specific social interests (Mack, pp. 140-41). Greek language and literature are appealing because every concept is expressed through a clear and elegant style, each virtuous deed is properly described and refined thoughts are

gracefully expressed, allowing individuals to discover the most appealing nurture both for their intellect and their soul.

In conclusion, it can be observed that the great influence the study of the Greek language and culture exerted on Italian and English scholars during the Renaissance was relevant as a means of assertion of a certain exclusiveness and social prestige among the upper classes. The complexity and charm which intellectuals connected to Greek engrossed many brilliant ambitious minds in the Western world who aspired to achieve a kind of distinction and wisdom which were associated with the unique superiority of great ancient Greek models. The power conveyed by Greek to those individuals who aimed at elevating their social position to higher ranks was not always solely and genuinely connected to the linguistic refinement and wise content of ancient moral and philosophical principles, but merely associated to the prestige of an idiom which only bright and noble minds had the ability to master.

CHAPTER 4

The choice to cultivate the language as an elitist and background activity

4.1 The hindrances to the establishment of the English vernacular in the early Renaissance

As time passed, English rulers understood that the need to communicate with their subjects who had to fight for the safety of their nation was far more relevant than their frivolous caprice to relegate the language to their private circles. The new priority was to create a collective feeling of belonging to the same nation and to fight against other countries to benefit from what a victory implies. This is why the appreciation and adoption of the new idiom became a collective phenomenon. The language acquired the new task of identifying a nation in the whole. All citizens had to recognize themselves in their language so the best idiom to adopt was precisely the language spoken by every single English man. The main features of the new tongue were clarity, simplicity and familiarity since it had to be close to the hearts of the soldiers who had to fight for their land. The Queen was the first to be aware of the importance of promoting this kind of qualities the language needed to display. In addition, the Reformation and the different efforts made by Renaissance intellectuals to translate the Bible played a crucial role in the exaltation and development of the vernacular in England. This is why English acquired and exalted these traits to differentiate itself from the other European languages in order to assert the individuality and superiority of the nation it represented. Thus poetry started to be inextricably intertwined with politics and all the principles supported by the nation were conveyed abroad by a language which had to be remarkably authoritative to assert its leading position. The economic and military supremacy England had achieved deserved a reputable way to be presented to the world. Greek models of perfection and exclusiveness had to be

taken into account and appreciated but it was necessary to let the English vernacular become what classical languages had been before it. Great ancestors are necessary to provide a solid and respectable basis but they are not enough to allow a nation to evolve and to adapt to new international mechanisms. Once a civilization has clarified its extraordinary origins, it has to develop its own peculiar set of characteristics to reflect the needs of a society which is naturally and radically different from the previous ones. As a matter of fact, the vernacular was the most genuine and representative way to give a proof of what England had achieved at that time. Slowly, the idea that English intellectuals had the duty to dignify their mother tongues as well as English soldiers had the duty to fight for their nation become evident. As Spenser intended to communicate through his most subtle poetry, the Queen had to guide its subjects. Being in close contact with her, he was certainly aware that she chose to adopt a direct approach and to personally intervene in political and military matters. Indeed, Spenser conceived the language as the bridge between the Crown and the nation. It became crucial for the victory or the defeat of the country. It was a direct link between principles and deeds. It translated ideals into action. It brought the Queen's will in the battlefield. It was adopted to order, to incite, to punish and to reward. For all these reasons, it could not be a simple and ineloquent vernacular. It needed much more than toil and care. It needed devotion and passion. Not just for aesthetic and literary taste but, first and foremost, the safety and worthiness of the English nation.

There is certainly an economic motive which underlies the attacks on poetry during the Renaissance but it became especially harsh during the second half of the sixteenth century. Indeed, money seemed to represent the new soul of the world. It appeared as if the new ideal was "Nil penna, sed usus", that is to say, to dismiss the plumage and to consider just the practical value (Fraser, p. 55). All wasteful activities and idle writings were considered to be an unacceptable burden according to the mercantile perspective. A great pressure was felt by tradesmen since time was perceived as precious and fruitless artistic enterprises which did not bring any profit to the country had to be

carefully avoided. For this reasons, the polemic against poetry was deeply feared by modern poets who had to find poignant arguments to justify their literary production and, above all, they had to prove that the pieces of writing they were creating adopting the new vernacular were of an astonishing quality. In addition, poets were well aware that theatre was considered the most immoral and corruptive form of art and plays were supposed to arouse idleness which was the mother of all vices. This vain display of abstraction was threatening to relegate poetry to a subordinate and almost irrelevant role. For this reason, it was crucial to craft high-quality works of art adorned by a powerful and enchanting tongue. George Puttenham in his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), pointing out the reputation enjoyed by poetry and poets in old times, wanted to refashion the prestigious role poets had in the glorious past of the Antiquity in order to remove the scornful disgrace in which writers had to deal with in modern days. In sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, the purpose Poetry had was, as Erasmus stated in his *Paraphrases*, "to supply gaps, to soften the abrupt, to arrange the confused, to simplify the involved, to untie the knotty, to throw light on the obscure" (Erasmus, p. 109). Even if this was quite an ambitious goal to pursue, the intention behind this statement was the *scintilla* which enhanced the process of trust and promotion of a new language through a genre which deserved to be highly regarded.

It could be also noticed that poetry and politics were closely connected as Sidney showed when he asked himself in his *Apologie for Poetry*, "why England (the Mother of excellent mindes) should bee growne so hard a step-mother to Poets" (Sidney, p. 48). However, those individuals who wanted to be recognised and appreciated in politics were aiming at tackling poetry as a new superior and distinguished means to promote their own *persona* under a more original and sophisticated light. It seemed that "the sixteenth-century poet, as he is in step with the lachrymose temper of his time, is not yet the occasion of scandal or reproach. So far, it is the idle virtues that earn the sun. The population of England, in the years just before Elizabeth ascends the throne, has to achieve the level it had reached two centuries earlier, on the eve of the great plague" (Fraser, p. 9).

In addition, during Elizabethan times, there seemed to be an unsettling reference to the value of time in several lyrical poems. In the golden world of Antiquity, men were not concerned with wasting time in idle and leisure activities. On the contrary, in the modern era this careless attitude is no longer accepted since time had become synonym of money thus poetry started to reflect this constant worry which was also connected to the sullen appeal death exerted and the melancholic feelings associated to it. This is certainly a relevant trait which started to characterise England very early in the Renaissance. The inacceptable squandering of time was not allowed in a society which was relentlessly developing its skills and culturally advancing. Poets began to exhort their fellow citizens to profit from the blissful occasions they encountered in their present-day existence. During the sixteenth and seventeenth century the awareness of a mindless wasting of time became one of the prevailing topics in poetry. Several texts among Shakespeare' poems and plays present the inexorable progress of time. Similarly, the sonnet cycles of Sidney and Spencer tackle this issue pointing out the ineluctable fate of the individual facing time and its inevitable effects. Marvell is aware of the shadow of Time as well as Faustus ends his days beseeching Time to halt his flow. The threaten of censorship was always looming over Renaissance poets' heads but, notwithstanding this, they skilfully managed to express vivid and provoking thoughts, shaping them through unusual refined images and a genuinely captivating style.

In book III of the *Republic*, Plato attacks poetry stating that "in the poet, who daffs the world aside, the claims of business are dishonoured" (Plato, p. 228). He conceives poetry as an imitative art which requires "his adepts uncommon dedication" (Plato, p. 236). Unfortunately, according to Plato, the obstacle to this request is the fact that men are only able to do one single thing well and not many. This implies that if the poet chooses to dedicate his whole existence to the activity of writing, he cannot play a serious part in life. In Plato's view, the cultivation of art involves the abandonment of an active involvement in life. This argument was often raised during the

Renaissance in the polemic against poetry. Poetry seemed to belong to the little *interstizi* between the events which took place in the world. For this reason, in the utilitarian domain which was increasingly establishing its leading role, the apparent separation between the individual and business poetry was bringing about was to condemn without appeal. England in the dawn of the Enlightenment appeared to be very optimistic thanks to the portentous intellectual and economic achievements it was experiencing. The poet and the merchant could be both considered, even if in different forms, "time experts". Indeed, the English Renaissance did not deal with a static and never-changing world, on the contrary, its kaleidoscopic views on culture and the mutability of approaches which dismantled centuries-old beliefs, enabled poets to become the most suitable forgers and promoters of that renovated reality. This peculiar vibe encouraged writers to react against all sort of critiques perpetrated against them and favoured their attempt to introduce their native tongue as the most appropriate mark of their noteworthy achievements. This need had certainly been in the air for quite a long time before the first poetic outburst but times were not yet mature enough to welcome new cultural and linguistic perspectives and to cope with the fervent fight Renaissance poets managed to triumphantly win.

Furthermore, an interesting hint is provided by Plato's conception of politics and poetry when he observes that they both deal with the surface of events, implying that the true source of progress is to be found on a deeper layer. Indeed, the poetic intelligence and the kind of temperament which enhanced the use of poetic language, seemed to be pursuing the noble impulse of self-aggrandizement. The reaction against many years of irrational beliefs and religious brainwashing had led to applaud qualities such as industry, thrift and material productivity, which were properly reflected in the edifice of poetry. Poetic verse appeared as the emblem of these noble principles and, at the same time, it represented the best *medium* to convey them to a population who needed to be freed from a stifling past. Poetry could provide new forms of identity since it was the only genre to

be involved in the changing panorama of events. Although it was initially attacked as a "corrosive of civic virtue", it then proved to be the most powerful means to bestow citizens with moral and rightful teachings since it appealed to a combination of different appealing "ingredients" which keenly engrossed and persuaded them to adopt honest and admirable behaviour.

4.2 The rudeness and lack of eloquence of the English language compared to the excellence of the Antiquity

The main hindrances Renaissance poets had to tackle during the process of enrichment and refinement of the language were the rudeness and ineloquence of a primitive English vernacular which was far behind many other European languages. The crucial task Renaissance poets had to cope with was how to make it fit for poetry. In addition, they had to justify their adoption of the English vernacular for their poems instead of relying on Greek and Latin compositions which certainly had an ancient and reputable literary tradition. The impossibility of shaping a language which could boast all the qualities the other idioms had acquired in the previous centuries was a constant reminder of the backwardness of their mother tongue. They constantly struggled to find proper words to express deep concepts in a sophisticated and pleasurable way. It was certainly hard to avoid the comparison with the fluency and musicality of Romance languages but, at the same time, the English poets were well aware of the potentiality of their idiom. Behind its rude surface there were innovative ideas and strong uncorrupted values which needed to be shown and conveyed to the world. Their Anglo-Saxon ancestors had left a heritage which was worth being conveyed. Their tradition had poignancy. The only step which was required was to forge a suitable means to ennoble the vernacular and to assert its relevance. The worthiness and poignancy of English was deeply rooted in the history of the nation but its beauty and nobility had to be acquired from the constellation of the great tongues of the Western tradition. This intuition was the key to the rise of the English language. The powerful mixture between centuries-old decent principles and the

sweetness and metrical elegance of continental works assured the success of the idiom and then the triumph of the nation. A careful selection of the best characteristics of foreign tongues was the result of the extreme sensitiveness and receptiveness of English poets to the wonders and tunes a language is able to articulate. They dealt with these issues by working very hard and carefully on the vernacular until they managed to elevate it through the composition of magnificent pieces of poetry. This is how they finally sealed both the triumph of the English language and nation.

4.3 English as the ineloquent language

The depreciation and underestimation of literary works during the fifteenth century in England was apparently a common practice. The modesty which characterised the approach of early modern writers to poetry was accompanied by the common belief that the English vernacular was a rude and improper idiom although poets were increasingly adopting it as their favourite means to express their creativity. The French scholar Luce Giard observes that Dante himself, who was not certainly willing to underestimate his vernacular, had sadly to acknowledge,

Ché, primamente, non era subietto ma sovrano, e per vertù e per belleza. Per nobiltà, perché lo latino è perpetuo e non corruttibile, e lo volgare è non stabile e corruttibile (…) Onde vedemo ne le cittadi d'Italia (…) da cinquanta anni in qua molti vocabuli essere spenti e nati e variati, onde de 'l picciol tempo così transmuta, molto più transmuta lo maggiore[14].

Even in his *De vugari eloquentia* in which the explicit intent is to support the vernacular, Dante had to admit that his mother tongue is unstable and changeable as well as fragmented and easily destructible. Despite his wish to ennoble his vernacular through poetry, he had to adopt "une education toute latine" in order to enrich his poor and unsteady language (Branca & Ossola, p. 517).

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[14] Dante, *Convivio*, I, 5, quoted in Luce Giard, "L'institution da la langue (Moyen Age et Renaissance)" in *Cultura e Società nel Rinascimento tra riforme e manierismi* edited by V. Branca & C. Ossola, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1984.

In England, a perfect witness of a similar tendency towards the vernacular is Caxton who definitely proved to have an oversensitive approach to language and style in his own compositions. He suffered for his imperfect knowledge of the French language, and probably even more, for the ungracious and unrefined idiom he learned as a child in the Kent countryside. Caxton often lamented his inability to master the art of rhetoric and thus his lack of an adorned fluency of expression. The poet was also well aware that the use of an unsteady vernacular could bring about a certain confusion in the understanding of a number of texts. At the end of his life, he admitted that the language of his childhood was profoundly different from the one he knew at present, emphasising the quick changes English underwent in the space of less than a century. Moreover, he knew that the introduction of the printing process made authors more aware of the expressions they chose to use since they became aware that they would be judged by a much wider audience. English poets were convinced of the worthiness of the material they elaborated but their distrust for their mother tongue prevented them from conveying the value and excellence of the content of their works. This entailed a feeling of inferiority which could compromise the quality of the final literary outcome. Indeed, it is not uncommon for Caxton to express his dissatisfaction with the lack of appropriateness of his language, as he affirmed when he had to translate a Dutch tale into what he considered his rough and base English.

Similarly to Caxton, Lydgate in *Here begynneth a treatyse of a galaunt* attributed the misunderstandings engendered by his native tongue to the five invasions of England which brought about five changes of the language. As a matter of fact, was discovered a record of a translator who, in 1530, dealing with the impossibility to find the fittest words in a translation from Latin into English, wrote, "There is also many words that haue dyuerse vnderstondynges/ and some tyme they ar taken in one wyse/ some tyme in an other/ and som tyme they may be taken in dyuerse wyse in one reson or clause (…) Oure language is also so dyuerse in yt selfe/ that the commen maner of spekynge in Englysshe of some contre/ can skante be vnderstondid in some other contre of the same

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londe" (Jones, p. 5). On the other hand, it is interesting to notice how Thomas Norton in his work *The Ordinall of Alchimy* (1477) expressed the need to defend his use of a plain and familiar speech since he argued that he was addressing his writings to a non-cultivated population.

It could be easily inferred that eloquence represented the stylistic ideal in Renaissance writings and since it has always been associated with classical languages, it appeared quite bewildering that it could be conveyed by the vernacular and that it could arouse the same powerful effects. During the sixteenth century, eloquence was associated with the introduction of neologisms and a number of disguised classical words were used to reproduce a sort of aureate style in poetry. The English language in itself was considered ineloquent, as the many adjectives used to describe it can confirm. This is the reason why poets felt the need to borrow terms and expressions from the excellent shrine of the Ancients. However, it is interesting to notice that the adjectives used to define the English tongue did not have the same meaning contemporary critics tend to associate with them. Indeed, the great majority of them derived from Latin. For instance, "vile" meant "of little/no worth", "base" meant "low/common" or "vulgar" meant "unlearned" (Jones, p. 7).

As far as the origins of English refinement are concerned, it is not clear if Caxton genuinely admired Chaucer for being the first poet to bestow elegance and eloquence on the English language or if he was just a conventional flatterer who addressed the classical ancestors of the English tongue. In fact, Caxton, in the Epilogue to Chaucer's *Consolation of Philosophie,* referred to the poet as "the first founder and enbelisher of ornate eloquence in englissh…making the sayd language ornate and fayr. which shall endure perpetuelly" and then, in the Prohemye to the *Canterbury Tales*, he exalted Chaucer "for his ornate writing in our tongue" adding that he "may wel haue the name of a laureate poet/ For to fore that he by hys labour enbellyshyd/ornated/ and made faire our englisshe/ in thys Royame was had rude speche" (Crotch, pp. 37, 90)[15].

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[15] Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton, ed. W. J. B. Crotch, 1928, E.E.T.S., Original Series, No. 176).

Another example is provided by Thomas Cooper who held the *word* in high esteem. He referred to the appellative of "barbarus" when he illustrated the way Greek people called those populations who were not able to speak their language, also making reference to all the bad qualities the English language presented compared to that perfect classical idiom. In fact, the adjective "barbarous" often stands for uneloquent. In addition, he listed a number of terms such as "rude", "ignorant", "rusticall", "churlyshe", "without eloquence" which underlined a certain lack of manners and countenance in the English vernacular (Jones, p. 7). When classical neologisms and figurative language are taken into account, it can be noticed how the vernacular may have derived its eloquence from ancient patterns in a process of re-elaboration which mixed creative writing with a strong awareness of the past literary tradition. The discourse elaborated by the poet was meant to convince. Eloquence was the key to persuade a sceptical and adverse audience of the relevance of both the new idiom and the ideas elaborated in the Renaissance, in order to bring about a sentiment of cohesion shared by all the citizens of the same nation.

In 1499, the Bishop of Durham was the first to publish a work, partially written in English, which was meant to be read and understood by those people who did not have a good knowledge of Latin. However, he admitted that his rude native tongue –especially as when it relates to poetry – cannot match the perfection of Latin. A relevant point which should be considered is the fact that the English language was denigrated and inferior not only in comparison with Latin but also compared to other European languages, especially Italian and French. As far as their independence from classical languages is concerned, these were much more advanced in the process of refinement and authority in comparison with English. The lack of codification and of a stable canon, together with the distrust and unfamiliarity which were felt towards the vernacular, prevented the English language from achieving the same *status* of the other European idioms in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Skelton was clearly convinced that the English vernacular did not intrinsically

possess the "polished and ornate expressions" which were definitely crucial to create a properly eloquent discourse. There seemed to be a kind of jealous attitude especially towards the French language since it appeared to have all the qualities English was longing for. This could be noticed in an anonymous French treatise probably written during the sixteenth century,

> (…) yet between frenche and englysshe is grete deffens.
> Their longage In redynge is douse and dylycate.
> In their mother tonge they be so fortunate.
> They haue the bybyll and the apocalypys of devynyte,
> With other nobyll bokes that in Englyche may not be
> (Jones, p. 10)

Moreover, a revealing example of the close connection between the inappropriateness of the English vernacular and the concern displayed by the royal class, is mentioned in another anonymous book which appeared during the Renaissance period, whose cover showed the following inscription,

> Of the tryumphe / and the uses that Charles themperour / and the most mighty redouted kyng of England / Henry the .viii. were saluted with / passing through London (1520?)

In the original inscription, it could be detected a sentences stating,

> The mater / that I propose to declare / in rude englysshe / in sentence grose and bare…
> (Jones, p. 10)

Another relevant point which is associated with the superiority of the French language over English is the fact that it was one of the languages used to translate the Bible. Indeed, there was a slightly remarkable belief that the vernacular could be improved by the expression of the Holy principles of this colossal and sacred text. Apart from this reference to French, the Bible was canonically

associated with Latin. Sir Thomas Elyot in *The Gouernour* (1531) was interested in dealing with the vernacular exactly to relate it to Latin since this ancient tongue was considered holy and worthy enough to be admired and imitated. He pointed out that the reason why poets still adopted Latin in their works was that it expressed good ideas with a superior elegance and delight which could never be articulated by the English tongue. Interestingly, the word "englyssh" was not spelled with a capital letter, as if, ironically, it was not worthy enough to detain such exclusiveness and prestige. The elegance of the Latin language seems to be untranslatable in the English vernacular.

Then, a definitely nationalistic undertone was employed by Andrew Borde in his brief illustration of the evolution the English language. He affirmed, "The speche of Englande is a base speche to other noble speches, as Italion, Castylion, and Frenche; howbeit the speche of Englande of late dayes is amended" (Jones, pp. 13-14). However, the nationalistic spirit was not enough to raise the English language to the level of the other European languages. For instance, Robert Recorde, in his preface to *The Grounde of Artes* (1543) pointed out that his native tongue fell short in eloquence when he directly addressed the king stating, "This sentence of Cicero am I lothe to translate into Englishe, partly for that vnto your Maiestie (Edward VI) it needeth no translation, but especially knowing how far the grace of Tullies eloquence doth excel any Englishmans tongue, and much more exceedeth the basenesse of my barbarous stile" (Jones, p. 14). It is peculiar to notice how poets such as Elyot who adopted the English tongue in their writings were not yet ready to defend the vernacular in terms of sublime vigour and persuasiveness. It was the poet Robert Ascham who really emphasised *ad hoc* the prestige of his English native tongue. In his dedication to *Toxophilus* (1545), he affirmed that Latin was certainly an elegant and prestigious idiom but English was the language of the most powerful men in the realm. He decided to leave aside his mastery of Latin to educate noble members to a wise and systematic use of the new vernacular. However, he was well aware that Latin and Greek could still be considered eloquent and prestigious idioms while the

English tongue was certainly far behind them. However, the fact that Ascham adopted the vernacular in his writings did not determine a global, unconditional admiration for the English tongue. On the contrary, he enthusiastically pointed out his appreciation for other European languages who could boast a longer tradition. Indeed, he wrote that together with Greek and Latin, he loved Italian more than any other tongue. Nevertheless, despite the objective acknowledgment of the superiority of all these well-established languages over English, Ascham could not avoid mentioning the increasing relevance the vernacular was gaining under the eyes of the royal nobility of England. In his dedication to Henry VIII, he informed the king about his purpose of writing in English since he intended to forge a new powerful and effective *medium* to communicate with the many, in order to allow them to profit from the benefits conveyed by the vernacular. At the same time, Ascham managed to be persuasive enough to make the king perceive that the language he was adopting was "a thinge Honeste for me to write, pleasaunt for some to rede, and profitable for manie to follow" (Ascham, p. 14) The honesty and usefulness recognised in those works written in the English vernacular were becoming evident and crucial aspects during that period. English poets were very conscious of the limitations their vernacular had. Indeed, the qualities of grace and majesty required time to be acquired. There were hindrances and feelings of frustration above all in the process of translation since the lack of an adequate vocabulary to convey the undeniable excellence of ancient texts left many Renaissance authors bewildered and powerless in dealing with this task. For all these reasons, the first phases of affirmation of the English vernacular were quite delicate and complex to cope with. Writers always found themselves at a disadvantage when they had to prove the worthiness of their job. However, at the same time, the conviction that the vernacular had potentiality and could manage to overtop traditional archaic idioms was stronger and motivated them to pursue their goal and to find the right way to support their enterprise. Certainly, the elitist nature of poetry incredibly helped them to appeal to the nobility and to gain the material support they needed to carry on with their aims. National identity at that time was in a crucial, embryonic phase. There was no fixed, well-established sense of patriotic individuality. What is

more, there was no direct expression of a set of characteristics which were exclusively peculiar to England. Thus poets intended to elaborate a language which was specifically and solely conceived to manifest these features in front of the world. It was certainly not easy to make English emerge and compete with traditional and widespread remarkable tongues, but the conviction poets had to succeed in this enterprise allowed them to keep pursuing their ambitious goal.

A direct association of the language with the nation is provided by Alexander Neville in his dedication of a translation of the *Oedipus* (1563), where he juxtaposes the two terms by stating, "In fine I beseche all togyther (…) to beare with my rudeness, and consydre the grosenes of oure owne Country language, whiche can by no means aspire to the hyghe lofty Latinists Stile" (Jones, p. 18). Despite the lack of confidence in the power of the vernacular to reach high levels of refinement and influence when dealing with issues connected to the nation, the way he innovatively associated his "country" with the "language" is certainly meaningful since he recognised that these two worlds were to be considered closely intertwined one to the other.

In the following years, the depreciating attitude towards the vernacular slowly vanished when the first noticeable example of how English was acquiring a remarkable status appeared in the field of translation. For instance, Sir Thomas Hoby's Epistle to *The Courtier* (1561) reveals the state of English mannerisms and the progress thereof as a reflection that, even though the English language has not yet reached an equal state of mannerly merit, England civilisation is not intrinsically barbarous. Furthermore, Richard Eden, in a letter addressed to Sir William Cecil in 1562, highlighted the adequacy of English when learned men had to deal with translations. As a matter of fact, he explained that Latin was considered a prestigious language with a rich vocabulary while English was rather poor and barbarous because of his lack of a sumptuous literary tradition. Thus, the best way now to enrich it was to encapsulate all the arts and fine expressions which could be found in the Latin tongue through their translation into English. As far as this issue is concerned, vernacular writers were really struggling to support the valuable and domestic nature of English.

However, these were not the only two characteristics which made English noteworthy. Its adequacy to the context in which it was emerging placed it in a position of remarkable consideration. Indeed, in the *Preface* to *The Golden Treatise of the Aucient and Learned Father Vincentius Lirinensis* (1559?), an author who signed himself as A. P. wrote,

The third and last motiue which incouraged me to this labour, and ought partly to moue thee to the reading, is the breuitie of the worke, the finess of the method, the eloquence of the stile… Only I am to craue pardon that my rough and rude English, nothing aunswereth his smoothe and curious latin, and therefore I could wish thee, if skill serueth, rather to common and parle with the Author him selfe, then to vse the helpe of his rude interpretor, otherwise for such as be not of so deepe reading, for whom especially I haue taken this paine, I am to desire that they nothing dislike the soueraign medicine for the wooden box, nor the exquisite and rare gemme for the course casket (Jones, pp. 20-21).

Renaissance poets could not conceive that their works were considered unworthy because of the rudeness of the *medium*. This is the reason why they put so much emphasis on the care and toil of the vernacular and they really intended to do justice to the content it conveyed. Authors who approached the practice of translation also admitted the fact that sometimes their mother tongue had actually more potentialities than those they could explicitly recognise. John Lyly was certainly persuaded to inspire confidence in his fellow citizens about the literary power the English tongue possessed. Even if, arguably, he was not completely convinced that what he was hoping was really achievable, he noticed how English people were eager to hear a finer speech than the one which could be articulated through their language as well as to taste a better kind of bread than the one made from wheat or to wear prettier clothes than the ones produced with wool. This metaphorical comparison confirms that for Renaissance writers and readers, it was more significant to aspire to an ideal of language then to recognise what it actually was at that moment.

Richard Shacklock, in the dedication to Queen Elizabeth of a translation written in that period, affirms that despite the lack of eloquence of the English language, his mother tongue could properly render the original meaning of the source text, advising his Majesty that the vernacular should be more willingly accepted and welcomed as the speech of their own country for profit than in any

other finer but foreign language for pleasure. Unfortunately, the distrust in the literary qualities of the English language persisted for great part of the sixteenth century. The literary excellence of Latin occupied a height that the vernacular could never reach. The praise of this ancient language through a series of superlative adjectives which was perpetrated by several Renaissance English authors, underlined the literary inadequacy of their mother tongue even into the last quarter of the century. According to them, to undertake translations in their own unworthy idiom inevitably entailed the loss of earlier virtues or of natural beauty and grace. Another interesting point raised by Ascham was his doubt about the possibility that the English language could be used by ignorant men, instead of the learned, to express dangerous and low principles. Nevertheless, there was also a conspicuous number of authors which kept viewing English under a favourable light. They were aware that the factors which aroused suspicion, reluctance and depreciation towards the vernacular were to detect in the passage between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Indeed, the strangeness and unintelligibility of Middle English compared to the new vernacular which was still in transformation, entailed a certain diffidence. This happened because the new trend was to remove and dismiss all dark ties which could link Renaissance learned men to the seclusion and ignorance of the previous period. According to Richard Pynson, in the Proheme to his edition of the *Canterbury Tales* (1526), Chaucer was one of the pioneers of this new enterprise since through his industry he embellished, adorned and beautified the English tongue. On the contrary, from Skelton's point of view, Gower was the first who adorned the rude English language although he recognised that Chaucer understood how to carry on an enterprise which could freshly refine the idiom in a gentler way. This innovative reference to the freshness of the vernacular is a good signal of the will to renovate the English tongue. Indeed, in the last quarter of the sixteenth century the confidence in the potentiality of the idiom began to increase. Moreover, the seemingly highly denigrating adjectives used in many treatises to describe the ineloquence of the English tongue, did not have a completely negative connotation so that they did not really highlight an incommensurable displeasure towards the nature of the vernacular. It could be argued that there was

a contrast between the importance bestowed by Humanists upon eloquence and the rather opposite view the Puritans of the Reformation had concerning the features a valuable language should have. Indeed, a sort of haughty mistrust in the gracefulness of style conferred to the composition could be detected in puritan views and this kind of dislike was very akin to the attitude they had towards poetry. An emphasis upon utility and morality was certainly much more evident from their discourses concerning the teaching of the vernacular. The lack of clarity usually associated with rhetorical figures and the impertinence of neologisms were not adequate characteristics for a language who aspired to be the expression of a leading nation. Rhetorical inadequacy was sometimes considered more a virtue than a defect. In addition, the printing process seemed to emphasise the superiority of modern achievements over the archaic, old-fashioned traditions of the past. Printing was considered such an excellent and revolutionary invention that each of its products was a gift and an honour of God, a re-establishment and spread of knowledge as well as the end of the mysteries of the World of the Pope and Politicians. The increasing of the reading public together with the diffusion of the Bible in a world which had always been accustomed to depend upon the religious official authority of the Church, were two aspects which could not be ignored when the genesis of the social and historical background of the vernacular is analysed. The holy Word of the Scriptures needed individual interpretation thus comprehensible and accessible material connected to it was crucial. As a matter of fact, the English language was the most suitable means to reach a widespread audience and this allowed it to acquire both great dignity and prestige. Finally, geographical explorations and the quickened intellectual spirit which were undeniable emblems of the Renaissance, enacted the spread of a new knowledge through the vernacular since, by the end of the sixteenth century, it became the most natural and spontaneous *medium* to convey modern achievements.

CHAPTER 5

The emergence of the language on the European scene

5.1 The war against poetry.

The Defence of the language and the assertion of pride and worthiness.

Du Bellay in France vs Sidney in England

Plato in his work *The Republic* presents a scene where "poetry and her friends" are put on trial by a philosopher and sentenced to banishment before letting them formulate a speech of defence. In Western civilizations, literary theoretical explanations have taken the forms of apologies, defences, excuses or justification apparently leading the reader to infer that poetry is not so bold and ambitiously self-assertive as he could assume. However, in a closer and subtler analysis, it could be observed that this technical device actually conceals a more powerfully persuasive aim. The verbal act of apology relies on interpretive explanation and on the qualification of personal views. Although many critics share the belief that an ideal realm where the author can avoid explaining himself to foreigners – referring to those who might not understand or approve of the author's words or deeds – could exist, Renaissance poets had their good reasons for adopting the apologetic technique. Indeed, they supported the idea that an act of apology is essential not just for those individuals who are not endowed with power but also for those people who try to achieve and preserve it in their own nation as well as abroad. Actually, this strategy hides a genuine confidence in the poets' power and their right to it. Their defences were not intended as admissions of inferiority, on the contrary, they were worthily justifying their own virtues. Socrates, one of the most prominent of ancient masters according to Renaissance authors, reminded them of the original etymology of the term *apology* which derives from a Greek word meaning "a speech in defence"

(from *apo*, "away", and *logia*, "speaking") though it was often ambiguously used to denote the regretful acknowledgment of a fault. For this reason, even if Renaissance poets employed the term in its original sense, it was hard to distinguish it from an implicit admission of an error causing several misunderstandings. Even Plato's *Republic*, which represented a crucial text to Renaissance justifications of poetry, deliberately exploits the ambivalence of meaning of the term apology to illuminate the philosopher's role in a complex scene of trial. According to Socrates' view, the silent destiny imposed on poetic works would prevent poetry from speaking in self-defence, thus bringing about the failure of the persuasive role of its apology which is, in fact, essential to allow poems to be comprehensible and to appeal to a wide and heterogeneous audience.

Renaissance poets frequently agreed with Plato's suggestion to adopt apologies as tools of defence. Even when they used apologies to argue against Plato's conception of poetry they highly estimated his desire to be appreciated by both wide and small audiences. It could be observed that apologies or defences are a true attempt to find a sensible solution when communication fails. However, it should be borne in mind that the apologetic lowering to a humble position results in a subtle and intelligent assertion of ambition. The poets' aspiration connected to the rise of the poetic *status* to the holiness and *grandeur* of Antiquity, finds proper expression when the reader approaches a careful analysis of the text, being able to go beyond the surface to discover the real intentions of the author. Examples of compelled and eloquent defences in the Renaissance are, in particular, Joachim Du Bellay's *La Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoise* (1549) and Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* (1595). It is worth noticing how, for the first time, this literary genre as a mode of discourse to cast theoretical statements about Renaissance literature was considered in the panorama of literary masterpieces. This, in a way, reflects the need to find a new means of expression to confer authority to a new language which is going to claim the same worthiness of its traditional and well-established ancestors. Moreover, by writing this kind of defences, the authors aimed at inviting the reader to focus his attention on some peculiar details since the "aspects of things that

are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity" (Wittgenstein in Elder, p. 213). The poet underlines that both the excuses we may find both in ordinary language and literary defences are "before our eyes". They are always with us but they are rarely observed attentively. Since Renaissance authors who were writing at the dawn of the Age of Print understandably exploited the form of the defence to point out the several contradictory attitudes towards oral and written discourse, in particular, between the vernacular and the ancient noble tongues, they must have learnt valuable teachings from past written sources deriving from oral traditions. The nature of the defence, in fact, was in itself on the edge between speech and writing, that is to say between a need to express new identities and the restrictive attachment to the previous ancient tradition. Indeed, according to Helgerson the apology can be detected between "rational transcendence" and "polemical engagement" or between an "ideal of stasis" and the "reality of change" (p. 283). An example of this liminarity is provided by Socrates when he paradoxically asked permission to use "the same words" he had employed in the marketplace, as if the written word possessed a holy inviolability which prevented oral expression from having access to the page. It is interesting to notice what Socrates affirms, "in a fitting soul intelligent words are able to help themselves and him who planted them, which are not fruitless, but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words capable of continuing the process forever" (Plato, 1925, p. 1). The same "plant metaphor" will be used by Du Bellay later in his *Deffence*. This allows us to understand how Renaissance poets took the teachings of the ancients as models to assert the potential of their language to blossom. They compared the writer's words to human beings and whenever they failed to communicate with the modern reader, it was because they were constrained in silence to linger in a state of vulnerability. For this reason, Renaissance poets' *genius* had no chance to be expressed. Renaissance authors were convinced of the power of the written word to change cultural and social horizons. At the same time, new signifiers and signified needed a safe place both to be introduced and to gradually find their room. They needed the right audience and a proper context to be fully persuasive and effective. They also pleaded for a sort of "Fatherly figure"

which could be able to defend them from the attack of distrustful malevolent individuals. A newly-born language implies new fathers. Indeed, "every word, when once it is written…knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself" (Ferguson, p. 7). This kind of defence became increasingly relevant in a society where writing was gradually gaining a paramount importance as a means of education. In composing his defence, a Renaissance poet was defending a kind of language which was seeking to emerge in an environment deeply rooted in Latin and in the tradition of the Ancients. Like Plato, early modern poets were absolutely persuaded of the fact that poetry represented an oral method of teaching and of conceiving information which had all the possibilities to evolve in an articulated, universal and timeless means of expression. Renaissance authors were deeply concerned with displaying Plato's fervent involvement in cultural struggles for power. What is more, defences have contributed to question and blur the boundary between theoretical and disinterested uses of language and pragmatic and self-interested purposes. As a matter of fact, Renaissance poets promoted the idea that any kind of dissertation was, in some respects, the expression of its author's wishes and was intentionally conceived to allow him to take some kind of advantage from it, either political or pecuniary. It could be argued that there could be some kinds of discourses which are moved by an ideal of "pure persuasion". However, it could only be possible to talk of "impure persuasion" since "pure persuasion" – in its absolute sense – cannot be detected in human literary writings. At this point, it cannot be neglected that an interesting connection can be drawn between the form of the defence and rhetorical motives. There are certainly different kinds and degrees of advantage that a writer may seek to gain. Actually, pure writing should be a type of writing which does not manifest any psychological nor political aim while a deliberative speech seems to be often "directed towards the future" (Burke, p. 10). As a matter of fact, Burke stated,

In the English tradition of love poems written in praise of one's mistress or as a mock invective against love, (…) the poet's tactics are not read as he would have them read unless the reader watches their playful adaptation of rhetorical forms to poetic purpose.

Then he immediately added,

   The defence is a signal instance of the Renaissance capacity to create mixed genres which contain imitations of various classical forms and bear resemblances to "new-old" forms.

(Burke, p. 11)

This has been defined as a sort of minor but fascinating rhetorical genre which could have the power to stage a competition between nations, languages, art forms and poets. Traces of the so called *paragone* could be found in several sixteenth-century defences and the competition between ancient and modern languages – which was, indeed, Du Bellay's main concern – was a central issue for a great number of humanists and intellectuals during the Renaissance all over Western Europe.

Renaissance poets were certainly well aware of the public role played by classical orators and of the fact that this was inextricably connected to either a democratic or a republican form of government. In the same way, they established similar links between their poetic works and the political *milieu* of their age. As a matter of fact, Puttenham confirms in his *Arte of English Poesie* that poetic purposes are never purely poetic. In addition, Sidney firmly thought that the end of art is not only to shape readers' actions but also to shape their minds.

The desire to use poetic means for political ends notably increased during the Renaissance. For this reason, defences of poetry cannot be classified as pieces of disinterested art written just for aesthetic purposes. At the same time, they cannot be classified as impartial critical theories. They seem to undermine the notion of an "aesthetic realm uncontaminated by rhetoric". They reflect on the aims and means of their own discourse, certainly adopting an active role in the support of the poet's ego. When defences, as well as languages, inhabit and explore a territory, attempting to expand its boundaries, the desire for personal advantage increases. These new horizons, then, could be

reflected on the written text. Renaissance poets considered their role as writers also from a political point of view since they had the hope and ambition to detain a certain influence on their audience through their eloquent poetic productions. Some critics argue that since Aristotle in his *Poetics* did not manage to be bold and persuasive enough to establish poetry's value as an autonomous activity, the heirs of the classical tradition – Renaissance authors – had to relegate their literary works to a defensive stance. Despite this, the defence of literature has become a cultural phenomenon, making people aware of the poets' will to elevate literature to the range of the classical canons in order to dignify their own civilization as a whole. As far as this issue is concerned, both Du Bellay and Sidney were eager to find their place in a sort of "golden world" where the poet could be master of his own territory. They were convinced that the only way to achieve this was to engage and struggle against those who were sceptical about the chances modern writers had to conquer power and authority through the spread of their comparatively humble works.

5.2 The eminent model of Joachim Du Bellay and his vigorous *defense* of his native language

The new consciousness of the Renaissance was born not in a perfected and fixed linguistic system but at the intersection of many languages and at the point of their most intense interorientation and struggle.

Mikhail Bakhtin

Rabelais and His World

The arena where Renaissance authors struggled to impose their new vernacular could be imagined as a sort of middle passage or as a crossroads where many different languages – ancient as well as modern - intersected and melt, mirroring and generating ideological conflicts. In France, Joachim Du Bellay vividly and vehemently put forward a revolutionary linguistic movement which became

central to the French *querelle* which was animating humanists in all Europe. Du Bellay's little treatise entitled *La Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoise* (1549) was a controversial text both for the author's revolutionary explicit claim of worthiness and autonomy of his mother tongue and for his contradictory faithful imitation of previous authors and frustration in front of his awareness of the impossibility to achieve the standard of greatness of the Latin and Greek traditions.

Du Bellay had certainly a forthcoming and almost aggressive attitude when he advanced his arguments in favour of the establishment of the French vernacular. He conceived his text as a sort of *manifesto* designed to present the literary and social theories of a group of intellectuals who gathered to reflect upon cultural, social, philosophic and literary topics and to discuss the role they had in the conveyance of a number of crucial issues in their modern society. This was conceived to take place through a means which could be apt to embody the new explorative and renovated spirit which was developing in the fervent hub of Renaissance debates. This famous group of French intellectuals who gathered to discuss these innovative topics was originally called "la Brigade" but it changed then his name into a nobler, more poetic and ambitious appellative referring to the constellation of the seven brightest stars in the universe - "la Pléiade". This is just a basic example of their will to make their personalities and their innovative and poignant ideas shine among the circles where they used to operate. Du Bellay's work could be defined as the expression of a collective poetics and it involved also a noteworthy effort to illustrate the enterprise of the brilliant members of this new humanist group as well as the French language. The audacious attempt to introduce their noble ideas through a means which did not have a recognised *status* in Renaissance society was a brave move since no one had previously ventured exposing themselves to critics and to potential failure in such a precarious project. This effort involved vehement denunciations of earlier French authors who were accused of not being bold enough to display their works in their native tongue thus depriving their nation of the right and pleasure to explore the content of their work in depth. Renaissance poets accused them of adopting a coward attitude toward an enterprise

which should have been enacted as soon as possible – since the Italians had already developed a remarkable number of literary texts written in their native idiom – and, according to the members of the *Pléiade*, this was a shameful and unforgivable example of the idleness and lack of courage of their French predecessors. For this reason, they introduced a sort of list, presenting the desirable features a modern French writer should possess in order to be worthy enough to increase the prestige of the nation he belongs to. These precise prescriptions for the "future poet" to whom the treatise is addressed testifies to Du Bellay's aim to guide and instruct a new generation of writers who, through a strategy of "self-assertion or self-defence", could be able to constitute a new avant-garde society which could have the freedom to appreciate the richness and eloquence of their own tongue. Through this thought-provoking enterprise, Du Bellay was trying to challenge his contemporaries to react to their passive submission to the language of the Ancients whose greatness and value could not certainly be denied but which were becoming unable to express the new needs and changes of a society which had made gigantic steps in the evolution of its culture, philosophy, economy and politics. He was convinced that Renaissance civilization had reached a level of development which placed it at a higher stage in the global panorama and which thus required a proper and unique linguistic vehicle to express new achievements.

However, it should be borne in mind that Du Bellay's argument was also influenced by the fact that the group at the *Collège de Coqueret* was chiefly composed of young nobleman who, though they had traditional upper-class opinions, were influenced by the study of the classical texts under the guide of a learned humanist philologist, Jean Dorat. For instance, Du Bellay's attacks to previous French poets such as Marot and Scève reflected the imbibed prejudices he had against lower-class authors and his fervent admiration for the ancients – who, in his opinion, constituted "the nobility of letters" *par excellence* – is paradoxically in contrast with his praise of the unexplored virtues of Renaissance poets who would be even superior to them if only they were brave enough to express their talents explicitly in French. The humanist ideology was exploited by Du Bellay and the members of his circle to reinforce an elitist social perspective which was threatened by the blurring

of class distinction during the sixteenth century in France. Nevertheless, this was also a powerful ideological weapon in the complex social struggle which was taking place at that time and which pinned the ancient writers against the modern. Du Bellay was certainly aware that the vernacular was a living language which possessed all the qualities to become a worthy instrument of literary expression. His rhetorical efforts to achieve a grand style with aspirations to social greatness reflected also his fears that a weak and unsteady language could undermine his social self-image. Thus, if we take into account that he identified his language with France, the reputation of the whole nation would have been spoiled if his vernacular was not worthy enough to fulfil high expectations. Despite Du Bellay's engagement, the vernacular had been skilfully defended and illustrated long before him. Probably, his search for personal glory pushed him to follow the example of a great number of French talented individuals who did not disdain to be both skilful writers and knights, without caring about the hypocritical positions of those who relegated literary activities only to a delectable *élite*. The metaphor of the war which is implied in this passage shows how he intended to draw a parallel between the profession of letters and the profession of arms. Indeed, the project of "illustrating" the French language could be partly considered an attempt to ennoble the writer who feels that the industrious activity of writing could represent a derogation of his estate. Thus, the pen serves both as a figurative substitute for the sword and a literary means for acquiring the power and property it represents. This is a clear example of the connection which was keenly established between the writing and the land, between literature and nation. In a more careful analysis, the old and the new aristocratic souls merged in Du Bellay's breast. The old soul revered authority while the new one was heartily encouraged to develop. He perceived that the great authors of both ancient and modern eras were gaining power by exercising their skills and by usurping the places of others. At the same time, he longed for a future in which poets could simply surpass the past without merely repeating it.

A crucial role was played by the theory of imitation in Du Bellay's work. First of all, although he sustained that the French language was not as poor as many esteemed it, he honestly recognised that

his native tongue needed to be enriched by foreign sources. He condemned those who simply adopted Latin and Greek instead of trying to work on their mother tongues. He believed that many French writers did not estimate French because they did not use it to compose their works. On the contrary, he maintains that they only appealed to Greek and Latin and thus they induced all the other authors to corrupt French adopting a Greek or Latin fashion. Moreover, those writers tended to attribute all existing virtues only to classical languages implying that only ancient idioms were ideal to compose verses. In this way, they only displayed the poverty of their own language without finding any remedy to enrich and improve it. They only preached to have ephemeral hopes and vague wishes that the language could change and become virtuous one day or another in a remote future. After listing all these abstract promises, Du Bellay genuinely asked himself – and the reader - how and when they would be concretely put into practice.

Nineteenth and twentieth-century critics have argued that Du Bellay was just perpetrating evident patriotic aims without noticing that his very emphasis was on imitation. This was seen as a sort of betrayal both to his country as a whole and to those intellectuals who valued the concept of "invention" associated with the faculty of the individual to create *ex-novo* something which belongs directly and uniquely to his own self. Indeed, as B. Vickers pointed out, "It is, first, not simply 'invention' in the modern sense of 'making up out of nothing', but rather 'finding', 'the art of exploring the material to discover all the arguments which may be brought to bear in support of a proposition, and in refutation of the opposing arguments" (Vickers, p. 62). Although in some parts of the *Deffence* Du Bellay asserted that he had tried to resemble any other writer but himself and that his poems displayed his own ideas instead of counterfeit literary products belonging to other writers, he also recognised the unreachable highness of the Ancients. Du Bellay constantly oscillates between considering imitation as an act of reverent homage and as an act of aggressive theft. Despite this troubling predicament connected to the issue of imitation, what seems to be quite

clear in his mind is that he intended to convey the idea that the native language he personified as presently poor and weak was capable of future greatness. A general lack of self-esteem could explain Du Bellay's desire to emulate the authors he would like to see as noble relatives. He felt, in a sense, too powerless to create great works from his natural faculty alone. However, even in the process of writing his *Deffence,* he was highly indebted with Sperone Speroni's treatise since most part of the notions examined were taken directly from his work. It is not quite clear how he considered this literary plundering. Nevertheless, it was plausibly acceptable in the Renaissance since the conception of literary property rights and plagiarism did not exist at that time. Most of Renaissance literary creations could be considered the result of the struggle between a natural mode of invention and an artificial mode of appropriation. If carefully explored, Du Bellay's *Deffence* reveals that the battle taking place between ancients and moderns reflected also the conflicts between modern different national and class allegiances.

Another point relevant to this analysis is Emerson's view upon the building of a new literary empire. Referring to Caesar and Adam as great ancestors and addressing his own civilization, Emerson wrote in his *Nature*,

…your domination is as great as theirs, though without fine names. Build, therefore, your own world (Robinson, p. 1).

It is as if the construction of a literary world would supply for a political and social dimension in which it was becoming possible to assert national worthiness and a dignified identity. The building metaphor is likewise employed by Du Bellay to construct the "edifice" of language which will house the future French poet. However, this attempt to create an alcove through the use of the vernacular is threatened by the unsteadiness of the architecture of a site which seems not ready to host this new structure.

In Book 2, ch. 12, Du Bellay displays a vigorous patriotic praise of the moral virtues of his people which, as a consequence, the vernacular was supposed to embody. What could be perceived as a bewildering issue, is the fact that he appeals to the authority of Cicero and Virgil to justify his *elogium*. Despite this apparent controversy, the real reason which lies behind this choice is that Du Bellay admired the audacity of these two great poets who adopted the Latin language to express their ideas instead of simply following the more convenient and standard tradition to write literary texts in Greek. In addition, Du Bellay also mentioned eminent modern Italian writers such as Petrarch, Boccaccio and Bembo who did exactly the same choosing the Italian vernacular as the most suitable means of expression. Although all these authors could boast of having a remarkable talent in Latin, they enacted a sort of "conversion" to their mother tongue which implied also a passage from the holy dimension of the Church in which Latin was employed for the *sermo patrius* by the priests to a "vulgar" language which even uncultured commoners could easily understand. This bears witness to a cultural movement towards both a cultural and linguistic differentiation in order to allow the modern writer to enjoy a new and relative autonomy in the shaping and display of his thoughts. A keen observation introduced by Du Bellay was that if even Italian writers found the courage to differentiate themselves from their Roman ancestors, adopting a language which was no more the Latin spoken by their forefathers, even more so the other European authors had a good reason to use a new tongue to play an influential role in their own societies. Ties to the past had definitely to be removed in order to achieve a deserved independence. Indeed, through the use of a renovated language, the poet could answer his desire to be the first to reach those high ranks which other poets did not manage to achieve. This search for primacy and exclusiveness was a deeply-felt need which Renaissance authors often let their readers perceive in their writings. At the same time, it was not easy to be the first to start this kind of enterprise, since the risks and challenges connected to a "first exposure" undeniably constituted disheartening deterrents. For instance, the lack of courage of several poets who dealt with this issue, could be due to the fact that they had no previous points of reference to allow them to tackle the demanding task to be influential through a language

which did not have any steady roots. As a matter of fact, Du Bellay recognized this hindrance when he wrote,

Someone (perhaps), already persuaded by the reasons I have alleged, would willingly be converted to his vulgar tongue, if he had some domestic examples. And I say he should more quickly betake himself thereto, to be the first to occupy the place where others have failed (Ferguson, p. 25).

Another issue which haunted Renaissance poets was the achievement of originality. They were not only concerned with originality of form but also with originality of content, since the most eminent topics had already been explored in the excellent and compelled masterpieces offered by Antiquity. It seemed as if very little was left to say since Greek and Latin had already developed all possible topics and expressed all kinds of literary perfections that very little was left to say to other languages.

The idea of the literary domain of literature was associated to the availability to the modern poet of an unoccupied land, an empty territory at his disposal to build his own kingdom. This would be a great privilege, if only the unexplored area was not inhabited by the ghosts of his forefathers which loomed on it. For this reason, Du Bellay alternates optimistic and pessimistic passages in his treaty since his vision of the future is spotted by the oppressive and overwhelming shadow of the past. He also shifted from his ambition of primary achievement to a recognition of secondariness. This is the reason why his position sometimes seems stuck between unapproachable prospects and irretrievable memories. This could be one of the reasons which prevented Du Bellay from clearly discerning between invention and imitation. The boundaries between originality and faithfulness to the ancient patterns are always blurred and it is not always possible to draw a line to establish how innovative a Renaissance literary work is. The poet affirms,

I would warn him who would undertake a great work, that he should not fear to invent, adopt, or compose in imitation of the Greeks some French words, as Cicero boasts of having done in his language (Ferguson, p. 27).

Indeed, Du Bellay tends to associate power with the ability to move readers by eloquence through the richness of his discourse. There seems to be an equation between literary power and historical background, as if the linguistic and the historical aspects were inextricably intertwined and interdependent one from the other. In his attempt to gain independence from the past, the author uses a quite peculiar metaphor connected to vegetation. In the first chapter of his *Deffence*, entitled *L'Origine des langues*, he draws a parallel between languages and plants, sustaining the idea that all languages are inherently equal in value, thus imputing the chaotic mixture of different languages to the Biblical myth of Babel:

This diversity and confusion can rightly be called the Tower of Babel. For languages are not born of themselves after the fashion of herbs, roots, or trees: some infirm and weak in their nature; the others healthy, robust, and more fitted to carry the burden of human conceptions; but all their virtue is born in the world of the desire and will of mortals (Ferguson, p. 28).

Actually, the view that the origin of languages is conventional rather than natural, had also been highlighted by Charles de Bovelles in his *Liber de differentia vulgarium linguarum et Gallici sermonis varietate* (1533) and by Rabelais in *Le Tiers Livre*. Du Bellay's argument echoed Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo delle Lingue* (1542) where the Italian writer introduces exactly the ideas expressed in the above passage. Even more astonishing is the fact that Du Bellay literally translated Speroni's text word for word. This is a clear example of the total absence of acknowledgments towards the original source. Should it be interpreted as an act of homage or as a mindless expropriation/dispossession?

The *topos* of the Tower of Babel is not employed to point out the original fall in Eden paralleled with a linguistic fall in modern times, but rather as an implicit reference to man's free will. In fact, this *topos* is supporting the poet's ability to redeem linguistic confusion through the exercise of his own *arbitre*. Moreover, Du Bellay agrees with Speroni's conviction that the diversity of languages does not forcibly imply an impediment to understanding, as did, on the contrary, the ancestral myth

of Babel where the inability to communicate was a fair punishment for those men who did not hesitate to display their hubris.

However, this supposed "equality of all languages" could not justify the "common and vulgar" language which, at that stage of the evolution, characterised the vernacular. Probably, the invocation to ancient renowned authors was intended as a strategy to obtain the necessary credentials in order to ennoble the principles asserted in Renaissance texts. The value of each language cannot be relegated to a particular place in a natural or God-given hierarchy. The notion of an arbitrary origin of language should only be connected to the clever and conscious exercise of free will. The individual power of changing the effect and impact that a certain idiom has on its readership is neither unproblematic nor optimistic as may appear at first glance. At present, there *are* inequalities among languages. The demanding task Renaissance authors had to cope with is to erase this prejudice and to substitute it with concrete examples of comparatively high level standard writings belonging to different nations. Only by managing to prove that different languages can equally express worthy principles - applicable to any population at any time - they will succeed in their enterprise. This could be achieved only if a clear distinction between form and content is provided. The best weapon Renaissance authors could adopt in their defences was the concept of individual labour, defined in French as "*industrie*". Du Bellay is particularly confident in the power industry holds and he illustrates this to his readers by asserting,

…in the succession of time, some (languages), from having been more carefully regulated, have become richer than others; but this should not be attributed to the felicity of the said languages, but solely to the artifice and industry of men (Ferguson, p. 30).

Thus, he implies that worthiness and power are not innate traits in a language but they are provided by the relentless refining activity the "owners" of that language undertake to elevate it to a higher level, since by empowering it they consequently empower themselves.

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This direct and almost natural deduction will have a relevant impact on the importance attributed to the toil and refinement of the native tongues by a great number of humanists and intellectuals during the Renaissance. However, by appropriating Speroni's text in such a deliberate way, Du Bellay actually intended to attack Italian assumptions of superiority – both in the political and in the literary sphere – revealing, at the same time, a certain concern about the issue of incorporation of foreign ideas in patriotic texts. This kind of subtle revenge has distant roots. Roman authors had stolen from the French their memories of heroic deeds - in a word, their history. If identity is built up by memories of the past, the deprivation of the French *souvenirs d'autres temps* represents a loss of identity for their nation. It would be as if poets had gained the right to compensate this lack of historical greatness by taking Italian literary models and incorporating them to their present literary *scenario*. When the image a nation conceives to reflect his identity is determined by the texts produced by a conquering nation, thus "when one's *nature* has been defined in a foreign language by others", it is almost impossible to conceive something different from a violent act of denaturation. Nevertheless, the fact of cultivating the so far neglected plant of the language was becoming a crucial issue. This natural process involved three fundamental steps. First, the transplantation of the language into a fertile soil, then the substitution of the "useless branches" with some new ones and finally the embellishment of the new apparatus with enriching elements taken directly from the ancient tongues (Ferguson, p.31). However, even if languages seemed to have all the pertinent traits of a flourishing plant, their relative strength or weakness depended on the cultivators and not on the plant itself. The point is that without a gradual process of careful cultivation, no language can hope to become a "grand oak". It is also interesting to notice that a young plant needs more care than an old one. It is also true that it is more sensible to let a new plant grow instead of an old one because it will be more fruitful. It will be almost against nature struggling to keep alive a weary and consumed old plant since its golden age cannot be brought back. Inventive richness should be the first principle adopted by the new poets who aim at shaping the modern canon. An artisan of the language who decides to work on his native tongue at home on

his own ground, should not merely adopt a theory of labour as acquisition of the property of others but should add those specific traits which make a language unique and distinct from all the existing ones. In Speroni's *Dialogo delle lingue* a character representing a fictitious Bembo defends the vernacular against a classical scholar, Lazaro. It is undeniable that "great poetry cannot be translated without loss of its original eloquence" but when Bembo advocated for the "cultivation" of the vernacular, he intended to create a language which would be able to compete with those of the ancients. Even scientific and philosophical works should be translated into the vernacular to be disseminated, but the main focus for Bembo is still on poetry since, according to his view, only verses can enhance the creative power of a language.

The emphasis on imitation could also be interpreted as a reflection of class ideology. The language seems to be compared to noble knights or pilgrims since it is an "ambulatory pawn" which has to travel from one territory to the other to take possession of a land. Du Bellay, in fact, tries to confer a legitimate status to imitation by considering it as an enriching gift from foreign tongues. According to his view, the language could be defined as a principle of power which he calls *energie* and a rich cluster which he names *copie* connecting it to encyclopaedic knowledge. Indeed, the central point of his discussion is "the divinity of invention" which seems to take the form of energy only when he starts dealing with poetry – as he did with the arguments borrowed by Speroni and Bembo. It could be also observed that the vernacular is not infertile since it can produce fruitful outcomes deriving from the process of invention. In addition, a language cannot become strong enough without joining other nearby plants, those "abstract plants" which can ideally be close to it, either geographically or temporarily, and which can thus become a perfect source of invention. One of the main problems which aroused at this point is the fact that his nation has been so far a desolate land since it has been *longuement sterile* due to the presence of unworthy and unsatisfactory progenitors which should soon be replaced with nobler ones.

Just as it was most praiseworthy in the ancients to invent well, so is it most useful (for the moderns) to imitate well; it is especially useful for those whose language is not yet very copious nor rich (Ferguson, p.34).

This conception of invention as the transfer of a property to another should now imply an elaboration of content and form which is necessary to build the basis for a new idiom. Unfortunately, sometimes it seems not to be enough. Du Bellay, indeed, makes reference to "un je ne sais quoi" (Du Bellay, p. 233) which will transform the work of the moderns in a truly unique piece of art. It is the *genius* which is essential in every noteworthy literary creation otherwise Renaissance works would be just sterile repetition of the classical texts. It is also interesting to notice how relevant could be the transportation of literary power into a myth of progress connected to a geographical and historical dimension. This *translatio studii* implies a broader range of humanistic concerns such as the appropriation of philosophical ideas the Greeks took from their predecessor. They considered the other populations as "barbarian" but, in fact, originally, they were themselves "crude newcomers" if compared to Eastern masters from whom they took valuable teachings[16] (Ferguson, p. 35). The same happened to the Romans who were deeply indebted towards Greek masters. However, thanks to their contribution, they managed to create excellent works which in turn deserved to be praised and imitated. This intermingling of different cultures and ideologies is essential in the shaping and enrichment of a new language. Poets cannot hope to aspire to a high-level rank if they ignore the amount of knowledge and the achievements which have been reached by previous brilliant learned minds. The subtle term which is used to indicate this sort of imitation/appropriation of others' works is *empreunter* and it referred to a kind of borrowing which should allow the writer to avoid guiltiness and to tackle the problematic relation between the realm of ideas and that of politics.

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[16] "les uns aux Indes, pour voir les gymnosophistes, les autres en Egypte, pour emprunter de ces vieux prestres & prophetes ces grandes richesses, don't la Grece est maintenant si superbe" (p. 35).

Du Bellay was simply seeking to construct a defence against his concern that modern poets might not legitimately equal the ancients. His utmost hope is that in time his vernacular could acquire all the qualities necessary to equal Latin and Greek authors. He is also convinced of the fact that great works, even if absolutely perfect and inimitable, cannot preserve their value forever, thus the only way to allow precious writings to last perpetually is to let them shift from one state to another seeing their end as a new beginning for future generations' works.

> …if the philosophy sown by Aristotle and Plato in the fertile Attic field were replanted in our French plain, it would not be casting it among the brambles and thorns, where it would become sterile, but would be making it near rather than distant and, instead of a stranger, a citizen of our republic (Du Bellay, p. 244).

There is always an idea of national identity behind these considerations since the founding of new empires are always constructed on the ruins of previous ones, in an attempt to build a stronger and more powerful kingdom which is always determined in comparison with its antecedent.

Moreover, the *translatio studii* theory involves that a slow but nourishing process is always more productive than a sudden and abrupt sprout, as Du Bellay reiterates throughout the illustration of his "plant-metaphor",

> Every tree which is born, flowers, and bears fruit quickly, also grows old and dies very quickly; and, on the contrary, that (tree) lasts for years, which has laboured long to throw out its roots (Du Bellay, p. 242).

According to Du Bellay's elevation of poetry, the power of literature consists of relentlessly bringing new prestige to modern poets and writers without being spoiled by the destructive action of time.

As far as the issue of translation is concerned, it should be considered that if in the very act of translating a text a certain amount of the original power of the source idiom is inevitably lost in the passage to another set of principles belonging to a different culture, it should be clarified if the

energy and worthiness of a piece of writing is solely connected to his content or if the language which conveys it can be separated from the object it expresses.

At this point, Du Bellay introduces one of the most impenetrable but, at the same time, fascinating of his reflections. He touches the core of the question. Indeed, his discourse reaches his climax when he mentions the need for a writer to make his reader perceive "the spirit of the language" (Du Bellay, p. 235), the hidden, mysterious and indefinable principle which empowers his work as nobody else is able to do, meaning either his predecessors or his contemporaries. This ungraspable essence should be the core element which can animate a poem, turning it into a proper artistic product. This implies that the writer can adopt any external reference and exploit any authoritative influence to construct his work on the condition that he is talented enough to add that "je ne sais quoi" which will leave his reader fascinated in a sort of awing admiration. All the ornaments of language should be employed then to decorate the hub of the literary work in order to elevate it and to let it shine as it deserves. Indeed, the author wisely underlines,

> that grandeur of style, magnificence of words, gravity of sentences, audacity and variety of figures, and countless other lights of poetry: in short, that energy and undefinable spirit that is in their writings, and which the Latins would call *genius* (Du Bellay, p. 235).

Nevertheless, the difficulty which the poet encounters in differentiating excellence of thought or content from quality of style, represents a constant obsession for him and this predicament could be applied to both philosophy and poetry since these two arts are strictly connected one to the other during the Renaissance. Moreover, the ability of the modern poet to move and delight should be another fundamental aspect of his writings. In Du Bellay's view, the French are inferior to their ancient ancestors also because they spent a great amount of time in studying them, investing their energy in a time-consuming admiration instead of working on their mother tongue to produce new masterpieces. This is one of the main reasons imputable to the inferiority of French writers since the relentless devotion they dedicated to Greek and Latin authors prevented them from achieving

strength and maturity. This is particularly well emphasised by Du Bellay when he complains about the spoiling of his youth by vainly attempting to forge innovative and refined compositions in a sort of pointless return to childhood. Thus, this activity of submission to classical texts will shamefully procrastinate the evolution and triumph of the French language, and consequently, of the French nation. Du Bellay was then taken as a model, not only for the undeniably adherence to reality of the content of his treatise, but above all for the straightforward and audacious style he adopted and for the rhetorical fervour through which he conveyed thoughts which were deeply felt by the majority of intellectuals in France, Italy and England.

It is always astonishing to see how he manages to persuade his reader alternating passages where he deliberately denigrates the study of the ancients and parts where he praises the devotion of modern writers to classical authors as unattainable models of perfection. This probably mirrors the double tendency Renaissance authors had in general when they had to come to terms with this crucial and controversial issue in their writings. The unconditional admiration for the Antiquity which pervaded all fields of knowledge in the Early Modern period exerted its greatest influence on the production of literary works. An example of the ambiguity concealed behind the adoption of foreign models by autochthone writers is exemplified in this passage:

If the affection which we bear to foreign tongues (whatever excellence there may be in them) should prevent this great felicity (the flowering of French poetry), but of vexation; they would be worthy finally not to be learnt, but recovered by those who have no more need of the lively understanding of the spirit than of the sound of dead words (Du Bellay, p. 249).

It will be quite pointless just taking the work of the ancients without any kind of personal re-elaboration since it is the "living intellect of the spirit" of modern poets which will finally make a text influential and vibrant for its own society. The purest and noblest imitation – the only type of imitation which would be, actually, worthy of praise – is the imitation of Nature since it is a

constant and eternal awe-inducing source which could be observed by any writer in any historical period and which could inspire a variety of different reactions and feelings and, notwithstanding this, it manages to be uncorrupted and original in its traits and qualities. Consequently, it deserves to be experienced and exalted by all writers in a great number of different idioms. However, the fact of imitating also literary works in foreign tongues could be considered a positive practice because in Du Bellay's view, the type of communication which is carried on uniquely in one of the interlocutors' mother tongue is comparable to the elementary speech performed by children and thus deprived of any kind of persuasive power. However, he furtherly states, "nous hommes devrions faire le semblable, chacun avecque sa langue, sans avoir recours aux autres" (Du Bellay, p. 40). It is certainly bewildering how, once again, Du Bellay seems to contradict himself. Nature appears to be not a satisfactory and exhaustive source of imitation, indeed, the appeal of Greek and Latin masterpieces is the key to achieve what he is actually searching for. Indeed, he is looking for a way both to seize the virtues of great works from the Antiquity and to cherish its own individual traits.

His real project is to make French poetry equal to the poetry created by the ancients. He finally addresses future French poets by advising not to imitate their predecessors but to achieve an equal magnificent level in the quality of their own compositions. In fact, he aspires to a sort of mystical union with the works of the ancients but he would also like to cherish his own holy shrine containing the treasures of his own tongue. In addition, he does not take the translators of poetry into high consideration since they seem to refuse to use their vernacular thus not differentiating their works from the ancients' ones. They are also accused of not being able to capture the genius concealed behind the texts they deal with, thus failing to properly convey ideas as these were originally conceived. Probably, what Du Bellay really wished to pursue was, in fact, the imitation of the practice of imitation – e.g. as the Romans' enterprise to imitate the Greek – more than a mere imitation of ancient texts. The ancient texts were, in a sense, in a synecdochic relation with the new

ones. Indeed, it was as if the ancient authors had been savoured and assimilated by their imitators becoming part of the whole body of the vernacular, where the source text became the skeleton and the vital fluids of the new literary work. Each language has a quality of style which distinguishes it from the others. Du Bellay defines the actual condition of French as an unpolished and harsh language and since a stilted language cannot rely on eloquence, it cannot sharply reach the quintessential kernel of the discourse. Du Bellay discloses this concept when he states,

Nature herself has not known how to make even things that seem very similar so alike that they cannot be distinguished by some mark or difference. I say this, because many persons who write in all languages fail to penetrate to the most hidden and interior parts of the author whom they have taken for a model; instead, they apply themselves only to what meets the eye, and amuse themselves with the beauty of words, losing the force of things (Du Bellay, p. 238).

The skilful poet should provide the resemblance Nature was not able to generate and this ability should be easily detected in his writings. The difference should lie in the language - thus on the form - and not in the wisdom of the concept. In addition, the issue of identity exists but it is connected to power and does not take into account the diversity provided by languages. Renaissance poets are invited to select the language which is more suitable to express their ideas "chacun selon son naturel & et l'argument qu'il vouloit elire" (Du Bellay, p. 236). It is interesting to notice how the term *elire* is employed. It certainly has an eloquent double meaning. The first one - "to elect" - implies an elitist audience, thus a careful selection, a choice among a great number of different options. The second one - "to elevate to the highest sphere" – refers to the fact that the new language is expected to deal with modern principles. Every piece of writing which imitates faithfully the original copy without any sort of metamorphosis involved, could be considered a theft. As a consequence, what is important to do is to select only those ancient virtues which could be steady pillars in the building of the new work. It is necessary to adapt the different units of the source text in order to make them suitable to renovated purposes.

Du Bellay refers again to the coincidence between linguistic identity and national identity when he states that if modern writers do not include any change in the classical texts, these works will result

being "in our language as strangers in a city" and he added that, as a consequence, "periphrases will always serve as interpreters" (Du Bellay, p. 243). It is certainly more advisable to interpret rather than to simply reproduce, but it is still essential to work on the language to achieve a superior sphere of worthiness. This aspiration towards higher levels of expression, indeed, is to be found in a metaphysical dimension. It is necessary to forge new powerful words to define abstract concepts and complex intellectual principles. An example of this could be presented through Cicero's definition of metaphorical words since he describes them as terms which are moved from their original land and implanted in a foreign territory. It is as if these ungraspable ideas could not find suitable expression in the words of a certain language thus being doomed to homelessness.

In the conclusion to his work, Du Bellay seems to refer to a double journey. First, he lands in France, where writers can finally find a "safe port" where they can settle down. Then, he arrives in Rome where he exhorts future poets to exploit all Roman resources to construct their new political and linguistic empire. Both past and future labour on the language are involved in this travelling among different countries. Once again, after this reference, he paradoxically invites the young writer to befriend the French Muses and thus to write in his native tongue distrusting alien influences and dangerous foreign enemies. He also specifies that if modern poets aimed at becoming successful in their craft, they should not limit themselves to the superficial beauties of the language but they have to "penetrate the most hidden and interior parts" of it as they would do with their source of inspiration.

Through his *Deffence*, Du Bellay tries to show the harmfulness of his desires and ambitions and, simultaneously, seeks a sort of comfort from a sense of guilt which is engendered by his longing for property and power connected to the land and to the language and by a sort of appropriation of his masters' works. The act of writing itself is considered by the author as a sort of Oedipal crime.

In conclusion, it could be affirmed that Du Bellay found himself in a condition which was common to many Renaissance writers all across Europe. Indeed, being both a poor aristocratic and a new-

born poet, he embodied the inability experienced by the Renaissance poet to be comfortable and familiar with the use of one single language in a single country at a certain time. His deep knowledge of both French and Latin made him aware of the different but equally worthy qualities of the two idioms. However, he eventually chose to adopt and promote his vernacular in his sonnets and writings since he firmly believed that modern poets had to be the new representatives of that immense potentiality of poetry which was emerging in their own era.

5.3 Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*.

The English struggle against Renaissance detractors to assert virtue and morality through poetry.

In the sixteenth century, England could relate very closely with the linguistic debates which were going on in the continent during the previous centuries. The need to assert national identity on an international scale was emerging. For this reason, the codification of a language which was still in an embryonic phase of development started to be a great obstacle to the expression of individual worthiness and power. Italy and France had a great influence on the English approach to the linguistic debate. The attempt to establish vernacular as the new official language in England was a difficult task for early modern poets who needed to justify their writings against detractors. Italian and French were seen by many English poets as the perfect languages to imitate. Indeed, Sidney did in England what Du Bellay and Bembo respectively did in their native lands. Indeed, the most meaningful and peculiar case of defence of the English language and poetry was provided by him. He composed a majestic piece of literature and critique and he managed to highlight - for the first time in an extremely refined and eloquent way - all the features and qualities of his own mother tongue among a myriad of different languages which were considered far more advanced and praiseworthy than his own humble vernacular. He provided a brilliant insight on the reasons why the language he spoke was worthy to be noticed and elevated to a superior rank, displaying not only

its great literary value but also the huge potentiality of a vernacular which was still at the very beginning of its rise.

It is not always easy to detect the real boundary between a fictitious literary discourse constructed just to delight and entertain the audience and the real virtuous teachings the poet genuinely intends to convey. In this chapter I will explore how Sidney in his *Apologie for Poetry* manages to become a moral agent by adopting a persuasive approach which involves three quintessential qualities of poetry. After describing the reasons which motivated Sidney to respond to the group of Renaissance scholars and intellectuals who attacked poetry considering it a useless and immoral genre, I will attempt to illustrate the wisely-conceived tripartite strategy Sidney seems to implicitly consider while writing his *Apology*. First, I will explore the power poetry has to inflame the spirit of individuals by appealing to their sensitivity and I will analyse the poet's ability to combine his linguistic and rhetorical skills to forge an extremely refined, sophisticated and eloquent discourse. Secondly, I will analyse the complex and close relationship Sidney constructs between the author and the reader, emphasising the inextricable intertwining which derives from their interesting interaction. Thirdly, I will highlight the subtle ambiguity which constantly permeates the poet's work, never allowing the reader to rely on absolute moral truths but enticing him to adopt a virtuous behaviour and to actively and morally engage in his social context.

A remarkable number of Renaissance intellectuals considered literature to be, essentially, a great lie. In particular, poetry was condemned as false and impure and this is exactly what Sidney attempted to disprove approaching and presenting it as an ethical discipline. In addition, poetry was regarded as fiction written with the unique intent to deceive people. Historical truth and factual evidence were generally considered better subjects to pursue in writing during the Elizabethan period. Sidney intended to contrast "that kind of people who seek a praise by dispraising others" (Greenblatt, p.

1066) calling *Mysomousoi* - meaning poet-haters - all detractors of poetry since they were supposed to be animated exclusively by moral fervour and they did not take into account the intrinsic qualities poetry possessed (Fraser, p. 6). In addition, Sidney was aware that the banishing of poetry from Plato's *Republic* on the account of the arguable accusation that it lied, challenged and complicated the approach to it. Fictional works of art were morally condemned and one of the main points raised to criticise them was their uselessness. The poem seemed to be regarded by detractors as a mere gathering of tropes and, therefore, it was thought to be a mendacious product. In Book 14 of his *Genealogia deorum gentilium,* Boccaccio eloquently described how Renaissance "despisers" of literature considered poets and their artistic creations, writing that they completely dismiss poetry and they undervalue its worthiness. They consider poetry as a pointless and foolish art. According to their views, poets are mere charlatans who only convey their speeches through base and mendacious words. As a natural consequences, all their poems are lies and their compositions are impenetrable, obscene and absurd tales belonging to immoral pagan cults. They preach that the poets are also the corruptors of the intellect and the instigators of atrocious crimes.

However, *The School of Abuse* written by Stephen Gosson in 1579 was one of the most canny and unforgiving attacks to Sidney's literary creations. The critiques Gosson made against Sidney induced him to write his *Apologie for Poetrie* (1579-81) to demonstrate that poetry not only deserved high consideration and reverence but that it was the most powerful medium to enchant and persuade human beings making them aspire towards noble virtues. Sidney seems to conceive a rather privileged *status* for the poet who is sincere enough to admit that the metaphors he uses have to be interpreted. Thus, he does not impose any kind of immoral or uncorrupted model to his readers. On the contrary, his refined and praiseworthy poetry always enriches the world with "fresh knowledge, combining the gift of speech with the gift of reason" (Parini, p. 11).

The literary refined qualities of Sidney's *Apologie* play an important role in the reception of the ideas explored throughout the text. Sidney is aware of the power of poetry to "inflame the passions" and this is one of the main reasons why he chooses to rely on poetry to assert the relevance of his thought. He contrasts the strict moralism of the Puritan Church which used to relegate poetry to a scornful role, depriving it of its dignity and freedom of expression. It should also be taken into account that Sidney, adopting Horace's principle of *docere delectando*, merged poetry and rhetoric in order to achieve the highest form of persuasion. In terms of "moving force", poetry and rhetoric are almost on the same wavelength since both appeal to the reader's deepest sensitivity of intellectual perception. The poet is engaged in both challenging and re-establishing the linguistic rules, constantly waving between a language of play and a language of power. He points out that poetry possesses a positive influence which should be properly mastered by modern poets in order to be useful for public purposes. Sidney was literally inflamed by poetry and he really believed in the possibility to change individuals from the inside through his works. He considered poetry to be superior to philosophy which, in his view, was literally too abstract and abstruse and even too theatrical. On the contrary, poetry was an effective imaginative *medium* which could provide unforgettable images to the reader since it possessed an emotional charge which philosophy did not have. When he mentions the historian and the philosopher, he refers to their lack of stylistic power. He argues that the philosopher's spiny expressions are not suitable to invite people to learn and that the historian's loquacious discourses fail in touching the heart of the readership. Sidney believes that the absence of self-knowledge could be equated with a lack of attractiveness in style. For this reason, the task of the poet is to supply this *vacuum* with a renovated and fine mode of speech. Indeed, he is convinced that the poet can provide both the philosopher's wise precepts and the historian's concrete proofs thus he has the right and means to undertake both roles. As a consequence, poetry seems to be the perfect synthesis between philosophical and historical domains. The poet's claim of superiority can be perceived when he informs his readers that he is the only one who is able to provide the alluring and stirring pattern which will allow changes in society.

He does emphasise the idea that a self-promoting attitude towards the work of art is always essential to assert principles in a credible and persuasive way. Nevertheless, the disguise of the defence is a necessary, modest and keen means to smooth the author's presumptuousness which could prevent the reader from sympathising with him. In brief, it is the perfect ingredient to create an effective balance between the strength and boldness of self-assertion and the humility to let to the reader judge and accept his work. When Sidney writes, "poetry ever sets virtue so out in her best colours" (Greenblatt, p. 1059), he probably refers to the precious and rare refinement that the *genius* of poets, if humbly and patiently cherished and exercised, can finally provide. The reference is to the well-crafted and aesthetically pleasant object of poetry. The poetic "sweet charming force" seemed to have exactly the kind of power which was able to penetrate in the more subtle and sensitive minds of the Renaissance. Sidney's ability to combine words in the structure of the sonnet and to perfectly match them with deep and thought-provoking hints of his striving soul, elevates him to a superior and noble rank. The acuteness of his observations interrelated with the poetic sensitiveness results in an inspiring and envisioning kind of poetry which does not need any defence or any further explanation for its *raison d'être*. The style which characterises this exemplary work provides high examples of literary refinement. A series of long and consciously crafted sentences as well as the choice of peculiar and expressive adjectives denote a sophisticated and toiled way of illustrating the subject matter. The signifier perfectly matches the signified thus expressing the different shades of the concepts he presents in a definitely engrossing and persuasive tone. The intent is to capture the reader's attention allowing him to be enchanted and moved by the poet's discourse.

The moving power poetry intrinsically possesses, underlines the fact that the readers cannot be moved towards virtue if they are not captured and delighted by instructive and elegantly expressed principles. However, as Emerson states, "the possibility of interpretation is in the identity of the observer with the observed" (Myerson, Petrulionis & Walls, p. 23). Indeed, the poet, in the very act

of writing, trusts the critical faculties of his reader. The poet himself should adopt as a model the great examples of the past to produce an original and praiseworthy literary work. This is the reason why he sustains the importance for Renaissance poets to adopt patrons from the Antiquity who were poets and readers at the same time and who could thus be the perfect *exempla* for the pursuit of their enterprise. They bring a dignified teaching of wisdom which would be unconceivable without training to virtue. Sidney attempts to be both the master and the servant of his reader. The relationship between the "speaker-master" and the "listener-servant" is ordinarily and conventionally employed to assert the primacy of the author and the submission of the reader. On the contrary, in Sidney's *Apologie*, it is specifically conceived to question the degree of relevance of both the poet and the reader in the process of poetic ascendance. This happens because without a critical and aware listener -- who should be intelligent enough to catch the writer's message and brave enough to put it into practice -- the poet's task and intentions are pointless and his ideals would be inevitably lost. If the "masterly listener" is not persuaded, the "divinely inspired maker" consequently fails in his enterprise. However, the poet seems to be confident enough in his persuasive qualities as a writer and thus he acutely allows his auditor an apparent freedom of conferring the ultimate judgement upon his enterprise. Finally, Sidney is convinced that poetry can move only those readers who are willing to be moved, solving that paradoxical condition of being servant and master at once. This was probably one of the most likely ways to succeed at a time when asserting such innovative and revolutionary perspectives on poetry was extremely complicated.

Despite the close interplay between the author and the reader, where Sidney eloquently attempts to persuade his reader to adopt virtuous behaviour, the poetic discourse seems to be radically imbibed with ambiguity. It is particularly interesting to highlight what Sidney himself declares, "Believe, with me, that there are many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly,

lest by profane wits it should be abused" (Sidney, p. 62). In addition, Sidney raises a sort of epistemological issue when he calls into question his treatise's credibility, informing his reader that he wrote *as if* he shared what he was scribbling on the page. Sidney seems to hide the truth behind carefully selected words thus making again his final purpose more obscure and unintelligible. Sidney's notion of "fore-conceit" – intended as the presence in the author's mind of a certain conception before it is actually written - seems to introduce further complications as to how the treatise is envisioned[17]. At the same time, he is also aware that poetry's power of persuasion could be ambiguous on moral grounds since it can improve intellectual faculties. However, he does not change his method of approaching the reader because he is genuinely convinced of the strength of the ideas which he is supporting behind this arguably puzzling machinery. According to Sidney, the technique of a dialogue which constantly raises doubts is the best way to induce the reader to deep reflection. By directly inviting his interlocutor to answer his enquiries and to take a clear position on crucial literary and moral issues, the poet is confident enough that the reaction of his reader will be in favour of the purposes he is pursuing. For instance, the repetition of the verb "to believe" seems to relentlessly trigger the reader into the conviction that he can share the author's thoughts and, thus, faithfully engage in the enterprise he proposes. The apparently controversial claim that the author juxtaposes different perspectives on the moral value of poetry throughout the text, is meant to make the reader wave among all possible positions which could be relied to the argument the poet is tackling. Sidney employs such exemplary rhetorical skills that the reader is eventually unconsciously led to agree with his final aim[18]. The poet, in a certain sense, seems to appeal to the cryptic side of poetry. The mysterious and blurred impressions which he conveys to the reader about his real intentions in the very act of writing his *Apologie* are probably the paradoxical key of his success. He almost relies on the fact that the more he is able to leave his reader in a feeling of bewilderment and bafflement, the more he can be sure to capture his attention and to gain his

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[17] The reference is to the conception of an idea which comes before the actual creation of the piece of literature, appealing to the very source of what can be called the original *nucleus* of invention.
[18] As a proof of Sidney's strategy in adopting an ambiguous but effective approach, Ferguson cites the "paradox of the Cretan liar", arguing that "if we do not believe that Sidney's discourse 'says what it means', then we do believe it when it says that it does not say what it means" (Ferguson, p. 154).

admiration. This lack of a steady conclusion will invite the reader to come back again on the work of the poet, looking for further meaning. The more the reader approaches the text, the more he will bind himself to its content. Thus, a long and careful study of the treatise which also takes into account a number of different perspectives, will lead the reader to believe he can tackle and understand a very highbrow and serious author. The possibility to gain access to the complex and relevant ideas presented by the author, allows the reader to experience a kind of flattering feeling of reward which enhances his willingness to know more and to put into practice the difficult teaching he gained after a long and demanding process. This is the very moment in which the writer can start outmanoeuvring minds in order to convey those virtues which will shape moral and uncorrupted individuals in his own imperfect society. J. Parini concludes his work by stating, "Poetry matters because it takes into account the full range of moral considerations, moving against the easy black-and-white formulations" (p. 132). Indeed, in this enterprise, Sidney implicitly intended to inspire regular people to bravery and virtue showing them a variety of possible approaches to morality without imposing any peremptory choice. This seems to be possible because poetry aims to persuade individuals to engage in virtuous actions *sine nullum dictare*. Sidney firmly believed in the humanistic principle which focused on the practical function of education and on the importance of applying the learning gained from study to the world. Poetry, in particular, allows the reader to aspire towards a superior form of intelligence. However, individuals really need to be simultaneously encouraged towards virtue by concrete examples which have to be poignant enough to trigger them into noble actions. Indeed, Sidney, as Aristotle, seems to privilege *praxis* over *gnosis* (Greenblatt, p. 1060). Likewise Petrarch, he hoped that his readers could become "*connoisseurs* of poetry" in order to perceive and share both the moral and the emotional side of his experience (Strier, p. 64). Intellectual pursuit and emotional involvement are the perfect ingredients to promote this kind of deep influence on the reader. As a matter of fact, Denys Thompson considers the poet to be a "servant of society" since he considers him to be "a moralist who dispenses truth" (p. 206). Moreover, this inextricable connection between morality and the work of

art was also emphasised by the poet D. H. Lawrence who affirmed, "The essential function of art is moral. Not aesthetic, not decorative, not pastime and recreation. But moral. The essential function of art is moral" (Lawrence 1924, p. 170 in Thompson, p. 206). Finally, it should be borne in mind that Sidney's *Apologie* is essentially a way to reach a virtue and authenticity. Consequently, it does not pretend to have already achieved the destination but it aims to guide the reader towards a virtuous, moral and active behaviour.

In conclusion, it could be stated that Sidney's *Apologie* was conceived as a skilful and sophisticated exercise of the mind employed to persuade the reader of the worthiness and power poetry had to promote moral virtue. His treatise exemplarily replied to a number of unfair attacks against literature pointing out the erroneous claim concerning the immorality of literary works of art. It wisely invited the reader to analyse his own values and principles exhorting him to revise the foundation of his thoughts and beliefs. Sidney had the capacity of engrossing his reader adorning every point he raised with a grace and an elegance of expression which delightfully captured his interlocutor's attention favouring his final approval. The worthiness of moral contents is always accompanied by vigour of invention and gracefulness of style in order to invoke intellectual and social engagement. In exercising his ability as a skilful and talented writer, Sidney was keen enough to avoid asserting moral universal principles explicitly but he just hinted at them. He adopted an apparently unbiased attitude which conferred to his reader the honour of making the last decision about accepting or rejecting his arguments. However, the witty and eloquent qualities of the text together with its unparalleled power of subtly provoking the audience seem to finally lead the reader to adopt the kind of virtuous behaviour Sidney is truly aspiring to.

5.4 Sir Philip Sidney: Pleas for Power

It is remarkable that we find it so hard to impute our own best sense to a dead author.

R. W. Emerson

Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks

After Du Bellay published his *Defense* in France, Sir Philip Sidney undertook a similar treatise in England during the sixteenth century when he wrote his *Apologie for Poetrie*, better known as *The Defence of Poesie* (1595). In the poem *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney presents a series of young male heroes who relentlessly try to find a justification which could explain their desires for a kind of amorous or political action which is not allowed by social conventions. The discourse they enact is ambiguously placed mid-way between self-justification and apology. The author employs for this purpose what Puttenham called "the courtly figure" that is to say allegory, since it was the most effective weapon poets used to defend their works from sharp attacks during the Renaissance. Sidney, through the adoption of allegories, intended to veil – but at the same time to cautiously explore – the "brazen world" of the court. Through the technique of subtle dissimulation, he managed to hide both political and autobiographical issues in his *Defence of Poesie*. The relation between form and content seems to emerge in this context since language becomes the most cogent instrument to convey the accounts and interpretations of those events which were actually taking place in Renaissance courts. In addition, he conferred a certain degree of authority to his theory of poetry through a "sophisticated exercise in audience psychology" rather than through deep and rich elaboration of complex concepts. Indeed, he sincerely explains,

The strong grace of *Defence* and its eclectic representative value for sixteenth-century literary theory compensate for its lack of profundity or of original thinking (Ferguson, p. 138).

It should also be borne in mind that his *Defence* originally addressed a courtly *milieu* where the figure of the Queen as an influential judge could not be ignored. However, it was of utmost

importance for those poets who were really eager to emerge in Renaissance society to impose their ideas through the vernacular to become brave enough to make their voice heard. In order to be able to do this, they had to be – or pretend to be - bold and self-confident individuals. Indeed, the worst threat looming on their heads was carelessness towards their mind and soul since it implied a negative influence on their poetic works. Indeed, their self-promotion was not a reproachable sign of arrogance but a necessary strategy to dignify their artistic production. Advertising their poems through a proud and boastful behaviour was the only tactic they could adopt to be taken into consideration by the highest ranks of society and thus to manage to change the current *status* of vernacular.

As Shakespeare wrote in his *Henry V*,

> Self-love, my liege, is not so vile a sin
As self-neglecting

This rejection of negligence towards their own work and *persona* was also strictly related to the mindful toil and labour which was highly regarded as a fundamental activity to manage to confer a certain prestige to the vernacular. The poet himself emphasised the narcissistic undertone of his work since the issue of "self-love" allowed him to be particularly persuasive in his theoretical discourse. Sidney also raised an interesting point which had not been tackled so far. To justify the aim of his *Defence*, he made his readers reflect upon the fact that the value or prestige of any issue or phenomenon cannot be assessed unless in comparison with others. He formulated a military metaphor to illustrate his assertion, stating that it is impossible to foretell the offensive and defensive initiatives the Queen could undertake unless you do not let her act in relation to those whom she is most intimately close with.

Sidney is aware of the power poetry has to "inflame the passions" and this is one of the main reasons for which he chooses to rely on poetry in order to assert the relevance of his vernacular

through this literary genre. What is more, he intends to fight the strict moralism of the Puritan Church which relegated poetry to a scornful role, depriving it of its dignity and freedom of expression. Sidney detected a certain similarity between the persuasive features of poetry and rhetoric. He seems to bring to life Aristotle's struggle to assert the importance of rhetoric in order to highlight the qualities of poetry connected to a kind of power which could be potentially corruptive. His project is conceived to mediate between conflicting but inextricable forces and tendencies which are testified by poetry and rhetoric in the intricate allusion to political consequences. In his opinion, the establishment of a new language is not just a matter of authority and power. Modern poets should adopt a more informal and intimate attitude by choosing the vernacular for their writings.

"The senate of poets" is a powerful metaphor introduced by Sidney to refer to the body politics in England. He is convinced that poetry can benefit both from the personal dimension of the individual and the public spheres of common affairs. This happens because verse is the most suitable mediator between passion and reason since it promotes virtue in the construction of wit and intellect - which are essential qualities for a statesman. The reference to war is often perceivable in Sidney's discourses about poetry since he sustained the idea that a civil conflict among the Muses was taking place because poetry seemed to have fallen from its high, privileged and noble position, becoming less-valued and denigrated by present day civilizations. Sidney's effort was to re-establish the role of poetry as the supreme judge in the competition which was taking place at his time between the excellent language of the ancients and the less noble vernacular promoted by the moderns. The origins of this debate can be traced back to the Italian *Questione della lingua*. This dispute between languages and authors reminded Sidney of the kind of interplay Aristotle introduced among Greek orators when they sought a way to emerge and to confer importance and persuasiveness to their apparently feeble arguments.

Moreover, Sidney illustrates the examples of the historian and the philosopher who, in his view, lacked stylistic power. He also refers to poetry as a muscle which needs constant exercise in order to be properly shaped. It seems as if it the poet was a brave knight, almost a warrior, who had to be the winner in a tournament. According to his view, the poet could also be considered a "prince" whose duty was to be brave enough to keep high the honour of his country. The writer's claim of superiority could be slightly perceived when he informed his readers that he was the only one who was able to provide the enhancing moving impulse which would allow changes in society. He affirmed this because he was convinced that the ability to move, if compared to didactic acts, stands on a higher level and he subsequently added another meaningful detail underlining the relationship between poetry and political power when he argued that the poet is the "monarch" of all sciences.

He inserted poetry in a web of interrelated influences which constituted the basis of Renaissance culture. He firmly believed that modern poetry deserved recognition thus he was working hard to elevate its *status* to a higher position where the construction of a monarchy centred on its moving force would be possible. Moreover, this rhetorical ascent of poetry would allow the poet to support the spread of his noteworthy ideas concerning the essential role of poetry promoting a new language and identity. Sidney did not hesitate to turn the points raised in other disciplines in favour of his own defence of the adoption of the vernacular in poetry. Indeed, he compared the poet to a prince who did not aim to become a tyrant but, on the contrary, who desired to be dutiful towards his people by devoting his time to an activity which could benefit all the citizens of his kingdom. The activity, in Sidney's ideal project, was the refinement and promotion of the vernacular through poetry.

One of the main arguments he introduces is the fact that poetry is able to provide an idyllic representation of nature. He chooses to present Gods, semi-Gods and heroes to make the reader aspire to the highest virtues in order to achieve those ideals which will allow him to distance himself from common and ordinary writers thus becoming closer to the divine essence. Indeed, the

poet's task was to embellish the natural world. When Sidney writes, "the world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden" he probably refers to the precious and rare refinement that the *genius* of poets, if humbly and patiently cherished and exercised, can finally provide. The reference is to the well-crafted and aesthetically pleasant object of poetry where the exclusiveness of the outcome is doubly highlighted by the ambiguous position of a certain number of adverbs which could refer both to the creator and the object created. Notwithstanding this, they seem to be both unique and irreplaceable. The ambitious pretension of the poet to be better than his own maker could be easily inferred from Sidney's words since the imperfect nature seems in need of constant refinement and care and the poet appears to be the only individual with the adequate knowledge to achieve this. There is a very strong theological argument behind the fact that, on the one hand, nature should be perfect, but, on the other hand, it seems to be rather imperfect. This lack of absolute perfection of nature is due to the original fall of man from Eden. Because of the original sin, modern society lives in an imperfect world so the perfectible natural elements are in need to be improved, adorned and elevated by the poet. The poet seems to be the equivalent of God and could even claim to be able to surpass him. A divinity is involved in the process of literary creation. Sidney aimed to elevate poetry to a spiritual level as if the poet was the vicar of God on earth and thus has the holy task to conduct a superior and worthy mission. The language of poetry was certainly the most commendable way to do that. The ability to convey arguments in a persuasive and awe-inducing way was one of the most complex tasks the poet had to face. However, he was divinely helped from God to achieve this. The poet's conviction that only by emulating superior masters the writer could aspire to deserve formal praise explicitly connects poetic inspiration to the divine. In addition, Sidney introduces a crucial distinction between an "erected wit" and an "infected will" when dealing with poetry. In doing this, he brings together two traditions. The first is the Christian tradition of the original sin and of the fall of man from Eden. The second refers to the Platonic tradition. According to Plato's *Phaedrus* men's soul is a part of the divine universe and thus belongs to a celestial and superior sphere. It has wings to fly in that dimension but, unfortunately,

according to the myth, it happened that one day dirt and infection made its feathers fall out. The fall on earth implied man's birth. Human intelligence is the only reminder of his previous life in the ethereal world. Thus, only through his intelligence, the individual can aspire to a higher dimension and can hope to reach the divine sphere again.

In addition, it is important to highlight the way the poet manipulate the language he masters. Indeed, the literary features of Sidney's *Defense* play an important role in the reception of the ideas explored throughout the text. It is not infrequent to detect word-plays, such as the term "maker" which is used to refer both to God and man, even bordering on blasphemy.

Sidney answers to Gosson's attacks by saying that literature is by no means a conveyor of immorality but, on the contrary, the best way to achieve moral virtue. Poetry, in particular, allows the reader to aspire towards a superior form of intelligence. In addition, individuals really need to be encouraged towards virtue by concrete examples which could be poignant enough to trigger them into noble actions. Sidney is sure that poetry is the most masterful means to accomplish that. Intellectual pursuit and emotional involvement are the perfect ingredients to promote this kind of deep influence in the reader. Sidney employed his poetic language and fiction to make his own arguments more memorable. Moreover he refers also to sciences other than poetry, such as Geometry, Astronomy, Grammar, Law, History and Philosophy. He is aware that nature is their object of study and that therefore their scope is limited to what we experience in the world but he uses them to emphasise the contrast with the divine origin of poetry. Indeed, he affirms, "Only the Poet disdeining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth foorth, or quite a new, forms such as never were in nature" (Sidney, p. 8). Through poetry, the poet expresses his ideas with the force of a divine breath allowing verses to surpass human deeds. It is the "erected wit" which makes perfection evident to men but often the "infected will" which is insidiously part of the human nature prevents individuals from achieving it.

Renaissance poetic theories were an effective way to rationalise Renaissance poetry. Sidney is not restricting the meaning of poetry to texts written in verse. The opposition between fiction and reality raises the issue of poetry seen as an act of invention and as a way of making things up. The *Defense* claims its own *status* as a piece of literary criticism and as a piece of literature in itself because the double value it embodies cannot be reduced to one single sharp definition. It certainly informs the reader about the beneficial effects literature can bring. Moreover, in order to promote the virtue of poetic works, Sidney definitely undermines the credibility of factual writing and, thus, of his own writing too. The *Defense* is a witty and self-ironizing example of successful poetic fiction. It seems almost like a sort of forensic oration where Sidney appears like a lawyer speaking in a court of law and defending poetry in a very passionate and persuasive way. The convincingness of the argument seemed to be one of the main criteria to judge the value of his work.

The *Defence* is not to be analysed as a text of poetics, but for what it says about the importance of the vernacular as a literary language.

The two principal components of the *Defense* could be encapsulated in two principles:

- Imitation
- Teach and Delight

The first principle has very remote origins. Aristotle in his *Poetics* highlights how the term "imitation" derives from *mimesis*, referring to the fact that any kind of art – in this case, poetry - should start from the recreation of a world which should appear as similar as possible to the natural one in order to recreate a beauty and harmony which earlier poems had not managed to express. However, imitation should not simply hold the mirror up to nature. It should not be the mere copy of the empirical and experimental world, but it should imitate the ideal type of nature, deprived of all imperfection and weakness. Poetry must represent an essential universal experience transcending

cultural specific details. Presenting universal heroic types and ideals, it provides the superlative and most quintessential version of reality.

As far as the second principle is concerned, Horace's maxim which connects the didactic function of a text with its pleasurable dimension seems to be one of the pillars of Sidney's discourse. The poet imitates what *should* be. He does not have the pretension of asserting axioms or factual truth. He simply portraits a golden work of art and the object of imitation is a sort of apprehended reality. Considering the real etymology of the word "imitation" - "to make up out of nothing" - it could be observed how this term implies a transformation of the real into the ideal starting from a basic and elementary level. The banishing of poetry from Plato's *Republic* on the account of the arguable accusation that it lies challenges and complicates the approach to it, considering that Renaissance poets and writers were deeply concerned in the study of Plato and in the influence of his works on literature. The *Defense* seems to be pro-Plato and anti-Plato at the same time although sustaining – in the whole – his ideal philosophy. The role of poetry was, in fact, to exhort individuals to actively intervene in life and its capacity of changing human ideologies and views is one of its most peculiar and valuable traits.

The *Defense* draws from a number of different sources. It could be considered a unique synthesis of the classical defences of literature from the Antiquity. The historical background should certainly be taken into account to understand the reasons behind the writing of Renaissance literary works. Two main phenomena should be taken into account. The first one is the Protestant Reformation with its new emphasis on the personal responsibility of the soul and on the issue of salvation depending upon individuals. The second one is Humanism which put the stress on the practical function of education and on the importance of applying the learning gained from study to the world. The teaching of rhetoric and the great emphasis on international communication connected also with the spread of the classical languages among the upper circles of the population, enabled poetry to be

conceived under a new sparkling light. The inflaming power the Defence had of instructing the reader through the consistence of the arguments skilfully aroused by the poet, made Sidney's voice an authoritative and reliable means of self-expression which inspired many writers and intellectuals of the time. Sidney attributes to poetry the power to both dull and hone individuals' wit since it is only by discovering pleasure in the exercise of the mind that they can enjoy and adopt the wisdom of valuable teachings. In his *Defence*, Sidney presents poets as "makers of themselves, not takers of others" but the irony behind this statement could be perceived since the imitation of superior literary models is crucial for the poet's creative activity. However, in his *Correspondence*, he emphasises the fact that the "fruit of virtue" which comes from the exploration – and, to a certain extent, appropriation – of other authors' great works, is cultivated to be finally put into practice "so that public advantage may be the result" (*Correspondence*, p. 159, in Ferguson, p. 233).

Despite Sidney's firm conviction in the arguments he illustrated, it was not always possible at that time to express these dangerously innovative ideas in an assertive and straightforward tone. This could mean that the poet may lose the favour of the Queen, as Hurbert Languet suggested in one of his letters to the poet,

> I admire your courage in freely admonishing the Queen and your countrymen of that which is to the state's advantage, but you must take care not to go so far that the unpopularity of your conduct be more than you can bear (…) For I do not doubt there will be many who will run to the safe side of the vessel, when they find you are unsuccessful in resisting the Queen's will, or that she seriously offended at your opposition (30 January 1580; *Correspondence*, pp. 187-88, in Ferguson, p. 233).

The *Defence* also intrinsically explores the nature of writing itself as a chronological progression of words which allows the author to conceal his secret intentions and be far away from the rhetorical figures which, if detected and correctly interpreted, can provide hints about the real purpose of the writer. The problem is to decide to what extent originality can be devoid of any external influence if knowledge consists in the layering of notions apprehended from other minds. Is individual

elaboration sufficient to justify the poet's literary outcome? The very act of writing down a text involves a conscious and unconscious re-elaboration of the original pure intuitive principle thus involving a co-penetration of cultural and emotional elements which transform mere intuition into a compelled thought. This consideration must be situated at the basis of any theory of imitation when issues of originality and authenticity are consciously questioned. This point is crucial for Renaissance poets and, as P. B. Shelley will explore centuries later, the recognition of individual formulations and the process of writing them down are inextricably connected with the contrast between inspiration and composition. In addition, Renaissance poets most importantly highlight the fact that both are involved in the attempt of gaining recognition from others and, in particular, from an inquisitive audience which includes not only those detractors who deny the poet's talent and the recognition he deserves but also modern poets who will attentively analyse and judge the poet's work.

5.5 The structure of the *Defence* and its connection to national power

The *Defence* opens with Sidney listening to an oration as part of an imaginary audience. He presented a horseman praising the image of himself as an ambiguous figure both socially and ethically anomalous which seems to exist in order to establish and confirm the role of the poet as a "monarch" and a "master of war". This clear parallel that Sidney draws between the poet and great statesmen significantly connects the domain of poetry to the political and military dimension of the nation. Indeed, the activity the poet starts is compared to the rise in the social scale undertaken by the horseman who aspire to become the noblest man among his peers. Sidney underlines his aspiration in the *Defence* when he wrote,

no earthly thing bred such wonder to a prince as to be a good horseman (Sidney, p. 1).

The riding master seems to be engaged in a project of self-promotion which Sidney defines as an "exercise" of his "contemplations" but, at the same time, a kind of subversion of roles takes place when the horse appears to be superior to his master since its apparent "lack of speech" makes him a better creature compared to the human being. It is quite an ambiguous counterpoint since it seems to involve the silent listener as a fundamental interlocutor in the interplay. The relationship between the "speaker-master" and the "listener-servant" is ordinarily and conventionally employed to assert the primacy of the author and the submission of the reader. Notwithstanding this, it is specifically conceived to question the relevance of both the interlocutors in the process of poetic ascendance since, without a critical and aware listener, who is smart enough to catch the writer's message and brave enough to put it into practice, the poet's task and intentions are pointless and any ideal would be inevitably lost. If the "masterly listener" is not persuaded, the "divinely inspired maker" consequently fails his enterprise. Thus, the worthiness of contents should be always accompanied by vigour of invention and gracefulness of style in order to appeal to the reader's interests and to raise in him a crucial degree of interest and engrossment. In exercising his ability as a skilful and talented writer, Sidney does not boldly assert high and complex principles but he just hints at them adopting an unbiased attitude and leaving to his reader the honour of making the last decision about accepting or rejecting his arguments. He seems to be confident enough in his persuasive qualities as a writer and thus he acutely allows his auditor the apparent freedom to confer the ultimate judgement upon his enterprise. This was probably one of the best ways to succeed at a time when asserting such innovative and revolutionary perspectives on poetry and the relevance of the vernacular was sceptically taken into account.

In addition, it should also be noticed that in the first section of his *Defence*, Sidney not only articulates a meaningful dialogue between the author and his reader through the metaphor of the horseman but he also gives a powerful example of his poetic imagination, constructing his treatise

as a piece of refined literary work in which the artistic trait can be pleasantly perceived. This double component of his work, which enacts Horace's principle of *docere* and *delectare* at the same time, confers to the *Defence* awe-inducing and persuasive qualities. As far as the reader proceeds in his reading of the treatise, he has to deal with thoughtful insights about the nature and function of poetry, finding himself directly involved in a sort of metalinguistic musing which questions his entire *persona*. In addition, Sidney was probably addressing modern writers with the intent of convincing them of the impending need to confer to their own native tongue an authority and worthiness which could do justice to their new advancements in intellectual, cultural, economic, social and political life. What is more, Sidney appeals to the domain of desire to persuade his addressee that it is worth considering the attempt to elevate poetry to a higher *status* and the fairest way to perform this task is to adopt the vernacular since it is the most sincere and vivid means to reflect the value of the poet's innovative purposes. Sidney is also deeply convinced that "imagination may make the too much loved earth more lovely", thus leaving his reader both perplexed and baffled in front of the display of the poet-rhetorician's real weapons to be effectively convincing when he addresses his audience.

After sustaining the value of a kind of poetry which will always deserve to be praised, he seems to discredit his own arguments by apologising with his reader about his bad luck in dealing with his ink-wasting toy. The same poets who were considered the antique wardens of Greek holy treasures, in some points of the text, seem to become the rightful heirs of fools. The repetition of the verb "to believe" relentlessly triggers the reader into the conviction that he can share the author's thoughts and thus he can faithfully engage in the enterprise he proposes. He seems to be finally caught in a trapping net since if he decides not to believe in the authority of ancient poets, he cannot consequently deny what Sidney is evidently sustaining. The apparently controversial claims that the author juxtaposes throughout the whole text are meant to make his reader wave among all possible positions which could be relied to the argument he is tackling. However, he does so employing such

exemplary rhetorical skills that the reader is eventually unconsciously led to agree with his final aim.

It is particularly interesting to highlight what Sidney himself declares,

Believe, with me, that there are many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused (Sidney, p. 62).

Here, once again, the author appeals to the exclusiveness of knowledge which only a limited number of "elected" poets could be keen and lucky enough to have access to. This could represent the turn of the screw of the entire discourse Sidney develops in his *Defence*. The appeal of an elitist *status* is much more persuasive than any other historical or philosophical argument. Poetry seems to have the ability to conceal a potentially valuable content. It seems that the poet himself does not lie because he does not affirm anything but the orator which is speaking to his interlocutor employs several rhetorical means to persuade him to believe that his discourse come out of truth. The key point actually appears to be the will to conceal the intention which is common both to the poet and the orator. These two figures finally coincide with Sidney bringing unity and a certain degree of hidden coherence to the text. It is a refined and subtle way of closing a circle which the author drew behind a wreath adorned by his poetic style and his creative and inventive skills.

5.6 The genuine success of Sidney's enterprise

Tell all the truth but tell it slant

Success in circuit lies

Too bright for our infirm delight…

Emily Dickinson

Sidney's *Defence* is a complicated layering of hidden intents and implications. The main intent which underlies it seems to be the will to exercise a certain mastery over the audience. It best summarises both the aim and the input of this literary project and it also seems to be the essential message Sidney wants to convey to the modern generation of poets.

> imagination so far substantially (…) worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make any Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him (Sidney, p. 9).

It is also worth noticing that the content of Sidney's work was highly provocative and did not leave the audience indifferent. Ovid's *Art* was condemned by Augustus since the emperor interpreted the poet's words as an invitation to adopt an immoral behaviour. Ovid, as Sidney, then felt the urge to defend himself and his work by saying that his intention was not to teach immorality and he remarked that poetry could be a "double-edged sword" and that who is responsible for its misuse is not the author but the reader. Indeed, he discharged in a wise and acute way any further attack. Both authors willingly intended to provoke a reaction since they were aware of the fact that change comes from movement and action and not from stillness of thought.

Then, it should be borne in mind that Renaissance authors were not very interested – and thus careful – in preserving the rightfulness and exclusiveness of an author's work of art from deliberate imitation and appropriation. Indeed, the reader had not only the right to usurp and manipulate any ancient literary text but was even incited to do so in order to pursue his aims through the best means available. Renaissance authors conferred to the claim to power a paramount importance in order to bestow their works with authority. Indeed, as Donne asserts in his *Sermons*, "by emptying his art of its (claims to) power, [the poet] acknowledges his own powerlessness" (Fish, p. 69).

The *Defense* could be finally conceived – "like the poetry it paradoxically praises" - as an "exercise of the mind" inviting the reader to analyse his own values and principles to revise and ascertain the foundation of his thoughts and beliefs. This is peculiarly emphasised in Sidney's *Defence* since the author intended to forge a conscious and self-aware writer who could be aware of the potentiality of poetry to find the courage to face and fight the sharp opponents who denigrated the role literature had in the shaping of virtuous individuals and heroic nations.

However, there is another perspective which is worth taking into account. The individual dimension of the poet appears to be in conflict with the care he seems to take for his audience and for the works of future generations of writers. The singular self-interest which naturally characterizes every human being cannot be denied. The same can be said for rhetoric which will always be intrinsically connected to the need to obtain power through words. In addition, Aristotle's wise observation against Plato's claim that rhetoric is devised to move accusations instead of being adopted to justify one's choices and behavior. This enhance the idea that rhetoric has the double function of linking the power of words to the human act of self-defence. In fact, in proposing this argument, Aristotle defends rhetoric almost on the same basis on which Plato condemned it. In Sidney's *Defense* there seems to emerge an unsolvable contrast between the ideal and the pragmatic nature of the treatise. The poet's attempt to inspire virtue in his readers' mind subtly coincides with the display he

elaborated to promote his own talent to the eyes of the world. In any case, whatever his real intention was, he managed to create an appealing virtuous model for Renaissance writers and by presenting it through a graceful, powerful and engrossing kind of poetry he naturally succeeded in achieving his goal.

CHAPTER 6

The controversial selection of the crucial traits of the English language

6.1 The complex issue of imitation

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.

T. S. Eliot

The Sacred Wood

The author, in his poetic work *Astrophil and Stella*, showed his position as a poet compared to other disdainful imitators in an attempt to prove his own originality and value. However, his internal struggle between sincerity and conventionality soon emerged since the poet was constantly lacerated by this double tendency. On the one hand, he was governed by the Renaissance influence of imitation and veneration towards the Ancients and, one the other hand, his natural instinct of differentiating himself from his contemporaries in order to forge an innovative and renovated kind of poetry drove him in the opposite direction.

The first example of this controversial struggle could be detected in Sonnet 1, where Sidney proved how the authenticity of love deserved a suitable and graceful style to be properly articulated and displayed to the world. From the very beginning, he presented the importance of industry and toil of the poetic language in order to forge a new, praiseworthy poetic expression. He was concerned with the labour on the written word to fully express his internal predicament when he wrote,

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,

Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain
(Sidney, ll. 5-8)

However, immediately after, he was forced to recognise the ineluctable and inevitable influence exerted by his predecessors and by the ancient poetic tradition, invoking the rescuing force of Invention to guide him towards the model of Nature as a pure and uncorrupted source of inspiration,

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
(Sidney, ll. 9-11)

The final couplet gave a genuine and highly vivid image of the poet sitting at his desk, in the very act of writing, musing on his condition as a poet and, at the same time, struggling to find appropriate and refined terms to voice his inner world in a noble and powerful way.

Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite
(Sidney, l. 13)

Suddenly, his Muse – almost certainly his beloved Stella – appeared as a revealing vision in front of him and, in an almost mocking tone, gave him the most obvious but precious advice she could ever provide,

'Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write'
(Sidney, l. 14)

It is also relevant to notice that Sidney chose to deal with this issue from the very first sonnet of his collection, underlining his urge to affirm the prominence of the poetic *questione*.

He constantly questions himself about how he can truly be a good poet and he is concerned about finding the most suitable path which could lead him towards a first-hand expression of his inner dimension. He feels the need to allow his honest and sincere feelings to be conveyed to his reader but, at the same time, the strict and constrictive rules of the court prevent a free and naïve release of the stream of his emotions.

In Sonnet 5, he refers to Beauty as an essential quality poetry should display since it is seen as the exterior reflection of virtue. However, the poet warns his reader about the fact that what he perceives as Beauty through his senses is actually a shadow which conceals an abstract and deeper conception of it which is definitely far away from the immanent world.

> True, that true beauty virtue is indeed,
> Whereof this beauty can be but a shade,
> Which elements with mortal mixture breed
> (Sidney, ll. 9-11)

This concept recalls the Neo-Platonic theory of Beauty according to which "physical beauty is only a shadow of inner virtue, which is at one with the true, transcendent, and immortal idea of Beauty" (Sidney, p. 49) This conception of Beauty was likewise articulated by Baldassarre Castiglione in his *Il Cortegiano*. This is confirmed also in Sonnet 16 when Sidney states,

> Beauties, which were of many carats fine,
> My boiling sprites did thither soon incline
> (Sidney, ll. 2-3)

As Du Bellay did, he employed the "plant metaphor" to refer to the blossoming beauty of poetry since he mentions the "flowers of rhetoric" which, in his view, are undoubtedly worth being cultivated and admired.

Renaissance humanists considered that Beauty should emerge primarily through a fine, gentle and graceful poetic style which was the most appropriate means to allow it to fully express the whole range of its unearthly qualities. For this reason, the constant search for the fittest term and the most elegant line was harassing the mind of those Renaissance poets who were genuinely engaged in the task of making poetry the worthiest instrument to mirror the paramount achievements of their intellects.

What is more, he compares poets – referring in this passage to the whole mankind – to pilgrims who should genuinely let their souls move towards their own nation. In this way, he subtly leads his audience towards a nationalistic interpretation of his poetic discourse.

In Sonnet 15, Sidney carries on his attack against those bookish imitators who submitted the wonderfully free expression of their souls to constrictive and stiffing metrical schemes, creating a series of chains made of stilted emotions.

> You that do dictionary's method bring
> Into your rhymes, running in rattling rows
> (Sidney, ll. 5-6)

Then he goes on scorning modern poets' artificial constructions and their naturalized ingenuity in the mere imitation of Petrarch's style, highlighting the far-fetched attitude they adopted in the representation of their inner realm. He also complains about their lack of innate talent. In addition, the appropriation of past masterpieces seemed to him an unfair robbery, as if modern poets were erudite thieves and not talented craftsmen. However, he is confident enough that their improper acts will be soon unveiled. As a matter of fact, he asserts,

> You that poor Petrarch's long-deceased woes
> With new-born sighs and denizened wit do sing:
> You take wrong ways, those far-fet helps be such
> As do bewray a want of inward touch,
> And sure at length stolen goods do come to light.
> (Sidney, ll. 7-11)

Sidney eloquently concludes his sonnet with what is arguably his main concern, that is to say, his search for recognition, which should not be intended as frivolous and vain ambition to glory, but as the acknowledgment of a deeply-felt passion and of a hard and industrious process which deserves to be displayed and appreciated. In addition, a crucial point Sidney tends to emphasise throughout all his poetic collection, is the omnipresent ascendance of the Muse on the writing process since she has the power to provide an incomparable contribution in the creation of the poet's artistic work.

> But if (both for your love and skill) your name
> You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,
> Stella behold, and then begin to indite.
> (Sidney, ll. 12-14)

Sidney, through the use of the term "indite" implies a much more complex project which lies behind the act of writing. He basically identifies four fundamental steps in the process of poetry

composition. The poet should be firstly fond of the subject matter and fully engaged in the issue he is going to represent, both emotionally and intellectually. Secondly, he should devote himself to the study of the language he intends to use to convey his intimate dimension, trying to find the best technique through which he can express his inner universe and powerfully and concisely encapsulate his myriad of emotions and thoughts which the main topic aroused. Thirdly, he should work and rework his writings and he should find the most persuasive way to disclose his poetry to his readers in order to be persuasive enough to capture their attention and to deeply involve them in his enterprise. Then, if he is talented enough, he will capture them, convincing them to take him as a model.

He then refers to a mysterious "fifth element" which could seem to be a fundamental gem of the writing process. In fact, he distances himself from the allusive reference to alchemists who used to extract this supplementary element to obtain the finest material, to oppose it to the very nature of the poetic work, as he states in the final lines of Sonnet 28,

    Look at my hands for no such quintessence,
But know that I in pure simplicity
Breathe out the flames which burn within my heart
(Sidney, ll. 11-13)

However, Sidney is not always so confident in the fact that his enterprise will be perfectly carried out and that he will reach his goals. What is more, the process of writing is not always so easy to tackle and hesitance and fears can sometimes be a hindrance to his work. He sporadically let his troubles emerge, as he does in Sonnet 34 when he inserts these lines into his poetic discourse,

    'What idler thing, than speak and not to be hard?'

What harder thing than smart, and not to speak?

…

Thus while I write I doubt to write, and wreak

My harms on Ink's poor loss

(Sidney, ll. 9-10 & 12-13)

Or again in Sonnet 49 when he writes,

…humble thoughts, which bit of reverence move,

Curbed with fear, …

(Sidney, ll. 6-7)

Despite some moments of bewilderment, he carries on his parallel between the process of poetic writing and the military metaphor. Indeed, he juxtaposes weapons to human parts of the body connected to writing, while always focussing on his final rewarding triumph, as he states in Sonnet 41,

Having this day my horse, my hand my lance

Guided so well that I obtained the prize,

Both by the judgement of the English eyes

And of some sent from that sweet enemy France;

Horsemen my skill in horsemanship advance

(Sidney, ll. 1-5)

In Sonnet 28, he accuses his fellow poets to relegate their emotions and thoughts to a fixed and constrictive metrical frame since they are too concerned with their ambitions and their attempts to be as close as possible to the dictates of great masters. Sidney affirms not being interested in digging so deep for brazen fame. However, he constantly reminds his readers that he always acts

guided and inspired by a superior entity, Stella – potentially, the Queen – thus implicitly informing them that he is operating from a high and privileged position.

However, it is not always so easy to detect the real boundary between the real intentions of the poet and his mere strategy to persuade his audience to believe his assertions. Despite this, his eloquence is certainly praiseworthy since what emerges from the succession of his lines is ease in using his native tongue to best effect. He manages to engross the reader in every point he raises with a grace and elegance of expression which sweetens the reading and favours the interlocutor's approval.

Sidney establishes a Christian metaphysical frame to oppose to critics' attacks against poetry by comparing the poetic power to an electric circuit which conveys energy directly from the author to the reader. This issue was very much debated in Italian intellectual circles and the moral principles connected to poetry really concerned Sidney's discourse. He envisions poetry's moral value focussing on the display of the subject matter since its function is not only connected to the concepts conveyed by the written text but also intrinsically influenced by the authorial intention and the reader's response. Sidney turns the philosopher and the historian from potential enemies to allies in the shaping of a new method of reading. As Plutarch affirmed in his essay *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat* (*How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*), the reader who has been unfairly taught since the very beginning of his literary education that poets tend to lie in their writings, is not prone to believe a poetic text without a critical approach to it. Sidney believes that among all writers the most sincere is actually the poet and he then adds that the reader who is wise enough to recognise the true intent behind a superficial level of analysis - and thus to go beyond the literal sense - will never be deceived or corrupted by the poet.

The poet, in the very act of writing, trusts the critical faculties of his readers and, in his *digression* on English literature, he invites those who are delighted by poetry to rationally look at themselves

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without surrendering to flattery. Sidney is hoping that the writers of the future generation will become critical readers of their own works in order to exercise an objective and keen judgement on their writings. Paradoxically, he also firmly believed that the first enemy to the new kind of writing which was spreading during the Renaissance was the new poet himself, who only through a careful activity of self-assessment and judgement could be worthy and ready to fight external detractors. If the Renaissance poet himself became strict and clever enough to submit his own work to a critical overview which kept as a model of supervision the great examples of the past, he could produce an original work of art which was enough to be glorified and admired by sceptical and diffident detractors. Ancient poets could spread valuable teachings of wisdom which, however, would be unconceivable without a superior training to virtue. He subsequently referred to the mythological figure of Daedalus in asserting the three fundamental principles which would allow invention and he admitted the necessity to cultivate with care even the most fertile ground in order to obtain a kind of poetry which would be original and which, as Daedalus' wings, was made of art, imitation and training. The real ambition of Renaissance poets thus lied in their hope to surpass Nature in the creation of perfect poetic texts. Nevertheless, they were also tempted to take a step backward when they confronted with the impossibility to render the magnificence of the natural world through simple words, and this became even more evident, when they realised they had a poor and limited range of vocabulary at their disposal.

The theory of poetry formulated by Sidney appeared as a needed solution to the conflicting tendencies which troubled both the society as a whole and the individual. The *charme* and the elegance of poetry seemed to have the kind of power which could enchant and inspire the most brilliant and curious minds of the Renaissance and appeal to those ideals of nation which were still intrinsically detained in the private dimension and which were just looking for the most appropriate and suitable means to come to light. It was not simply a matter of metaphysical or Platonic love or a

complaint about deceived desires, but, at a deeper analysis, the language promoted by poets as the persuasive power political discourse was looking for. A new political agenda which aimed at promoting new values and ideas in a renovated and more advanced society needed also a completely fresh and pure language devoid of biased echoes from the past in order to fully embody the new ideals of the Renaissance civilization. It is interesting to notice how Sidney is not only tackling the "other" of his own discourse but the "other" of the reader, since the author's "I" enacts a dialogue between the subject which speaks and his interlocutor. It seems as if a "voice of freedom" and a "voice of censuring" are constantly interplaying: the first with the aim of asserting poetry's power to confirm the supremacy of monarchy, and the second, seemingly as protecting power from its potential for abuse. This double function attributed to poetry both as a rhetorical and an aesthetic phenomenon actually increases its potentiality and its persuasive power.

Sidney himself invites his readers not to flatter themselves in front of the "glass of reason" but to submit poetry to a clever and mindful analysis in order to appreciate all its different shades of meaning (Ferguson, p. 150). Basically, Sidney is asking all readers to become critics of themselves while they read and to exert their judgement on the text. It is not clear if Sidney leaves this aura of suspension to implicitly exhort his readers to engage in the enterprise he puts forward or if, as a poet, he simply feels the literary duty to answer the attacks made by Gosson against his subject matter in order to defend what he firmly believes to be one of the supreme means of expression Renaissance writers have at their disposal to create powerful pieces of art.

6.2 The promotion and diffusion of the vernacular through education and translation

The desire to educate people who did not have the "linguistic keys to learning" was a need the Renaissance Englishmen increasingly felt. Surrounded by a huge amount of literary canonical texts from the Antiquity and confined in the tradition of ancient unchangeable literary patterns, they were

almost drifted by the duty to introduce and convey a new approach in the field of education. Indeed, Renaissance intellectuals had the impression that great amounts of knowledge were restrained in the narrow cages of the cultivated traditional idioms thus it was their duty to use the vernacular to allow a wider reading public to have access to this precious source of erudition. The native tongue should assure an uncompromised altruism in order to educate those who were not the privileged members of the high class. However, this project was quite utopian since, at least at the very beginning of the emergence of the vernacular, it was very difficult to allow this phenomenon to spread on a large scale. The vernacular in itself should be conceived for the common good of a nation. Ideally, relevant and successful books in foreign languages should be adequately translated into English. The Renaissance physician and translator William Ward seemed to share the same position but he added,

> there is no man so bestiall, so rude, or so blunte of wyt, but that he is (by a certain instinct of natural inclination) desirous to know things not before knowen, to heare newes not before heard, and to vnderstand bokes in his maternall tongue, written first in a foreign langage (…)[19] (Jones, p. 35).

However, the gap between the learned and the unlearned and the disparity concerning the disciplines they were respectively allowed to explore were remarkable. For this reason, since the language reflected a specific set of ideologies and a precise conception of what a social *status* should aim at, it was rather clear that a difference in the definition of certain boundaries was to be highlighted. The great number of "Defenses" made by Renaissance writers to apologise for the idiom they were adopting in their works, partly concealed the will not to displease the noble class by dealing with issues which also concerned lower ranks of the population. Indeed, they consistently envisaged their texts for an unlatined audience only after having gained the attention and the support of the powerful personalities of their age. They were conscious that in sixteenth-century England they had to deal with an audience which was made of two distinct social classes. In

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[19] In the dedication of *The Secretes of the Reverende Maister Alexis of Piemount* (1558).

addition, they became increasingly aware that although displaying a good knowledge of Latin and Greek was the best way to inform and amplify their discourse, the use of the vernacular was essential to allow the content of their works to be conveyed and appreciated.

During the first three quarters of the sixteenth century, Renaissance writers were persuaded of the fact that education was the most crucial *medium* to disseminate fundamental principles to forge national identity. The translator and writer Thomas Paynell in the poetical preface to a translation of an Italian poem, recognises that the muse who inspired him ordered to turn his sumptuous poetical style into his native vernacular in order to be understood by everyone around him. Secular and religious education appeared to be crucial issues to pursue at that time. Moreover, some translators, by emphasising the importance to deal with such an eminent author as Cicero, pointed out that even if with a plain and inelegant style their country could be effortlessly fluent in philosophical works in order to benefit English men who were unlearned but eager to learn. However, despite the new emphasis on the vernacular, a transitional period was necessary to introduce this tongue in the literary and didactic panorama. There seemed to be a great urge for education and the preference accorded to the mother tongue to carry out this enterprise was certainly evident to Renaissance scholars. A widespread practice in the project of education was to translate a great number of books into the English vernacular, by adopting not only an accessible vocabulary but also by simplifying complex and thought-provoking precepts in order to guarantee to uneducated individuals an easier understanding. In addition, the publishing of volumes in English seemed to be an efficient strategy to promote education.

First of all, the English language had to overcome a series of obstacles in its rise to prestige and excellence. As a matter of fact, Palsgrave insisted on the fact that English could be able to accurately express the content of a text originally written in Latin even more than any other European language but it had to be cultivated by scholars and delivered by educators. In his

opinion, English was the ideal language to adopt since the other languages were corrupted by the idioms brought about by the Germanic invasions. Another relevant and popular point in favour of the rise and establishment of the vernacular at that time was the comparison poets made with the birth of ancient languages. Indeed, both Greek and Latin were once vernaculars but, unlikely English at its current state, they were employed in all fields for any purpose. As a matter of fact, the Scotch translator of Pierre de la Ramée's *The Logike of the moste excellent philosopher P. Ramus Martyr, newly translated, and in diuers places corrected after the mynde of the Author* (1574) remarked,

Hipocrates and Galen Greke Phisitions, leue the Greke tongue, because it was their natiue language, to seek some Hebrewe or Latin? Did Cicero who was a Latinist borne write his Philosophie and Rethorike in the Greke tongue? Or was he content with his mother tongue? and surely as he testifiethe hym self, he had the perfecte knowledge of the Greke toonge, yet he wrote nothing therin which we haue extant at this day (p. 15).

Other Renaissance authors such as George Baker supported the idea that the English tongue was as necessary for the English as the Greek was for the Greeks, underlining the value of the idiom in itself independently from the nation it belonged to. They relentlessly reiterated the fact that the language Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch and a number of other remarkable ancient writers[20] adopted when they composed their masterpieces, was their own mother tongue. Moreover, they were convinced that England was not less worthy than the previous ancient empires and this was confirmed by Philemon Holland when he rhetorically asked, "are we the onely nation under heaven unworthy to taste of such knowledge?" (Jones, p. 43).

The nationalistic spirit was revealed by many Renaissance intellectuals and it justified the urge to translate influential books into the vernacular outnumbering the translations which appeared in the same period in other languages. According to the most fervent supporters of the vernacular in the literary domain, to promote a new tradition for a nation's own language appeared as a duty that

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[20] Virgil, Cicero and St. Jerome are other frequently quoted authors who chose their native tongue to convey their texts to the world.

every literate Englishman was required to carry out. For instance, John Brende wished that English could be recognised "as forward as other nations that have all worthy histories in their natural languages" and Nicholas Grimald, who justified his desire to transpose Cicero's thought into English, intended "to do likewise" for his countriemen "as Italians, Frenchmen, Spaniardes, Dutchmen, and other foreins haue liberally done for theyrs" (Jones, p. 44).

The strong competitiveness between the English vernacular and the most prominent romance languages of the Renaissance – in particular, Italian and French – had no easy solution. As it could be noticed, several English writers highlighted the disparity which characterised a great number of works in different vernaculars. It should be admitted that the prestige of the *volgare* in France and Italy was sometimes described with hyperbolic terms by English intellectuals. However, as Henry Parker observes, all the Latin works were immediately translated into the vernacular in both these continental countries while in England, sadly, this was not the case. William Painter provided an even more vivid description of what was happening in his native land in comparison with other European nations,

> …to see the passing diligence of other Countreys, by curious imbelishing of their states, with the troublous trauaile of their brain, and laborsome course of penne, (…) that no Historie remain vnder the maske and vnknowne attire of other tongues (Jones, p. 44).

Finally, Henry Billingsley - English merchant, Lord Mayor of London and the first translator of Euclid into English - supported the same view Du Bellay and Sperone Speroni promoted respectively in France and in Italy concerning the crucial and careful the labour every mother tongue deserves. He elaborated an argument in defence of the English vernacular which was extremely similar to the discourse exposed by continental authors to their audience. Indeed, hoping that other writers would follow his example, he wrote,

> our English tounge shall no lesse be enriched with good Authors, then are other straunge tounges: as the Dutch, French, Italian, and Spanishe: in which are red all good authors in a maner, founde amongst the Grekes or Latines. Which is the chiefest cause that amongst them do florishe so

many cunning and skilfull men, in the inuention of straunge and wonderfull thinges, as in these our daies we see there do (Jones, pp. 44- 45).

This is undoubtedly an honest and fruitful promotion of an approach to a language which is meant to become the national banner and which could be allowed to be proudly displayed in order to gain international esteem.

6.3 The relationship between form and content in the translation of Renaissance poetry

In the field of translation, the conviction that content and form were separate and separable was widely spread during the Early Modern period. The majority of humanists recognised that there was a meaning or a substance which was not dependent on the words through which it was articulated. For this reason, the content could be girded by a sort of garment made of a variety of different terms. This view could be detected also in the neoclassical conception of the function of poetry. If Horace's maxim "to teach and delight" is intended as the *conditio sine qua* non poetry exerts his great influence, a verse could be thought as the outcome of the combination between content and form. Since the act of teaching has always been associated with the substance of a work while the act of delighting derives its power from the form of a text, translators seem to have the right to momentarily separate substance and form in order to catch the essence of a composition and to convey its message. During the Renaissance, this way of conceiving translation was reinforced by the separability of the steps which were to follow in the elaboration of a rhetorical speech. The message to deliver derived from the process of invention, while form and style pertained to the procedures of disposition and elocution. A relevant example which, in a sense, demonstrated how early modern authors considered content and form as two distinct unities is provided by Sidney's

Defence of Poesie. In particular, in a passage where he tackled the traditional ballad of Chevy Chase, he acknowledged that it was the actual content of the ballad which engrossed him although it was "clothed" in a rude and primitive "wrapping". The confidence in the possibility of discerning the content from its form - in addition to the new thirst for knowledge and need to go back to the original sources of key illuminating texts - enabled people to deal with a great number of translations during the Renaissance. According to early modern translators, the ideology behind the act of translation was to convey the hub of a text using a set of words belonging to a different language on the condition that these words were sufficiently accurate to render the original conception of the author.

However, they soon realised that the core of poetry was strictly related to the terms employed to express it and the fact of changing the authentic outset would inevitably compromise what needed to be conveyed. As a consequence, the power of the text would dissolve and the reader's reaction would be altered. This is why the majority of knowledge conveyed by translators derived from the translation of prose works. On the contrary, it was necessary to engage and challenge the most refined minds of the time in order to create a language which would be accurate and eloquent enough to allow poetry not only to be translated but interpreted and reformulated in a proper and respectable way, in the first stage of the process at least. As a matter of fact, as far as time passed, the only way to allow English writers to achieve the same powerful display of their *autochthone* identity without diminishing it by imitating other authors or by translating verses from other sources was to produce a new body of works which could stand and speak for themselves.

Certainly, the way of conceiving the translation of Renaissance poetry is controversial. At first, translations were enhanced and spread because of the belief that the content could be separated from the form but this view also implied that a work was inevitably simplified for the sake of knowledge. This approach was perpetuated in order to make the massive body of learned and wise works of the Antiquity available to the average reader of the growing middle class. It has often been

unfairly neglected that what really promoted the writing of innovative works in English was the peculiar, unique and untranslatable character of the English vernacular. This came after the boom of translations and promoted English as fittest language to express specific contents and principles. English could do that in a way that other languages could not. The translation of foreign texts into English carried a particular "added value" and these compositions were appreciated by the readership exactly for this peculiarity. The clarity, plainness and intelligibility of the English language made works accessible to the reading public in a way that other languages could not do. Something of the original language was inevitably lost. Renaissance authors were aware of that. This is why they often felt frustrated and powerless while they were carrying out their enterprise. Notwithstanding this, they were confident enough in the potential of the English language and in its ability to add something new and even more enriching and rewarding to the original works. This is the reason why they finally acknowledged the impossibility of fully rendering the prestige and refinement of the ancient models of perfection. Moreover, they also desired the creation of *ex novo* compositions wherein form and content could be harmoniously intertwined together in order to express the virtues and the value of the language and to achieve a unique kind of magnificence.

CHAPTER 7

The path towards self-aggrandisement

7.1 The issue of originality and authenticity and the "inkhorn" controversy

I know, some will say it is a mingled language. And why not so much the better, taking the best of both the other?

Philip Sidney

An Apologie for Poetrie

The main issues concerning the linguistic debate were essentially imitation, authenticity and originality. They were tackled in two different steps. The first concerned the imitation of the Ancients – Greek and Latin authors who produced outstanding literary, philosophical and rhetorical masterpieces - and the imitation of the Moderns – contemporary early modern European writers, especially Italian and French models. The second dealt with the authenticity of a work of art opposed to the principle of originality which was a very controversial but crucial quality that the language must possess in order for it to emerge and succeed on an international scale.

The comparison with the literary traditions of the continent and the canons of Antiquity made English poets aware of the need to learn from more advanced and refined models. As has been illustrated in the previous chapter, the first necessary process that needed to be undertaken was imitation. Renaissance writers started to copy and faithfully reproduce all the stylistic patterns of European masterpieces. However, as Italian and French intellectuals had done before them, they had to deal with the great literary and linguistic controversy about the best and most appropriate works to imitate to produce great and valuable compositions. Indeed, this debate opposed the majestic texts of Greek and Latin literature to the modern up-to-date works of Renaissance authors.

The choice of the highest and most appropriate model to adopt was complex and full of consequences.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the second step of the process which drove the English language to its establishment as a unique and powerful idiom. The opposition between authenticity and originality in the process of creation of a national tongue animated the debate between two main intellectual and linguistic currents in England. The first was represented by the Purists - J. Cheke, R. Ascham and G. Puttenham – who adopted the availing resources in their original language to improve it and who were against hybrid idioms and the borrowing from foreign tongues. They were sustained by the group of the Archiasers – which included E. Spenser – who promoted the revival of obsolete words and the use of regional dialects to enrich the English language. The second opposed current was that of the Neologisers – among whom T. Elyot and R. Mulcaster appeared - who favoured the production of new technical terms through the borrowing or adaptation of words from classical languages.

A strictly related problem English poets had to deal with was the contrast between two fundamental precepts involved in the process of textual elaboration. They obsessively had in mind questions such as "What could be defined as authentic?", "What genuinely belonged to the ancient English tradition?", "Which are the criteria to adopt to make a choice?" First of all, it was necessary to clarify which were the real roots of the English language. A crucial aspect to consider was also what written texts could be considered part of the English literary background. Indeed, it was not clear yet if the Latin and French authors could be defined as the "fathers" of the English original tongue or if they were just foreign corruptors of the native tongue belonging to the Anglo-Saxon lineage. In addition, once this crucial point was solved, it was necessary to establish an edge between what was a copy of the authentic, a sort of second similar version modelled on the original work and, on the contrary, what was a composition *ex-novo*, inspired by the great predecessors but totally innovative and original in its nature. Unfortunately, it is not so easy to provide a clear distinction between these

two types of compositions since during the Renaissance there was a subtle and blurred distinction between what was a copy and what was a brand-new literary piece of writing. In fact, the act of inserting literary quotations from ancient authors or reproducing the same kind of composition invented by skilful and brilliant writers, was a mark of prestige and erudition.

7.2 Purists & Archaisers vs Neologisers

During the sixteenth century there were a certain number of arguments in favour of the English language. Even if the general opinion was against the use of this idiom, the forces which were crucial to assert the worthiness of the language turned out to be effective and rightful in their pursuit of the flourishing of English. The first argument which sustained the relevance of the English vernacular was its usefulness in providing the population of England with works of scholarship in English in order not to waste time and effort in translating texts written in foreign languages. The second point which was put forward was that both Greek and Latin had themselves once been mother tongues. Indeed, the Romans wrote their compositions in Latin thus leaving Greek aside. In addition, deficiencies in the English vocabulary could be remedied by coining or borrowing new words. Finally, the production of new works in English would certainly enrich the language allowing it to stop being ineloquent and barbarous in order for it to instead develop into a copious and elegant language. Renaissance authors considered prefaces to be the most adequate means to express this new enterprise but also the principles which enhanced the development of the language. In particular, prefaces to translations were very frequently adopted in sixteenth-century editions. A very illuminating example of a defensive preface which emphasised the public utility of the English vernacular was the "Epistle to the Reader" which was prefixed to the first English version *Dialecticae Partitiones* written by Petrus Ramus. Its translator started it by underlining the high sense of duty of the writer and his honesty in presenting the contents of his work in a form which

could be accessible to the majority of his readers. Indeed, he was undertaking a work which was conceived:

> …to hyde or kepe secrete nothing, whiche they knowe maye bring greate vtilitie to the common wealthe: I thought it my dewtie (hauing perceyued the greate commoditie whiche this booke bryngethe to the Reader of what state and qualitie soeuer he be) to make thee and all others to whose knowledge it shall come pertakers thereof.

<div align="right">(Barber, pp. 48-49).</div>

The noble and practical intention of the translator was to involve a wider audience which was made up of individuals belonging to all social classes in order to let them benefit from the subject matter but also appreciate and acquire the language which gilded the main topic. He firmly believed that the fact of leaving a useful work untranslated could be quite an implicit offence to a group of readers who were genuinely eager to discover and to learn more than what was actually offered to them. Profitable material and admirable knowledge had to become available to the audience and the task to render them accessible to the reading public was perceived as the religious duty that a writer should pursue. He also considered that his detractors were motivated by the Catholic imperative to keep holy contents concealed through the use of the Latin language and thereby denying any access to higher knowledge to ordinary people. However, this opposition to the spread of learned pieces of writing gradually faded away during the second half of the sixteenth century. Tyndale, in *The Obedience of a Christian Man* introduced the Protestant argument in favour of the translation of the Bible which implied that all people should have access to religious knowledge and the chance to develop critical thinking. In this respect, the need to allow people to become familiar with biblical texts and to acquire the ability to develop an individual interpretation of the original scriptures was made possible by the knowledge of the language in which the Bible was written and conveyed. Easiness and closeness in the approach to the holy book were key factors which enabled common people to become confident in the adoption of their mother tongue in order to deal with very serious and relevant issues. This phenomenon conferred dignity and trust to an idiom which was previously perceived as stilted and unsuitable to compete with other more advanced and refined languages. In

addition, the constant reference to ancient authors made writers aware that the Greeks and the Romans had a high and valuable consideration of their mother tongue and thus they did not adopt a foreign language to convey their ideas. For this reason, if English civilization really aspired to embrace the same wisdom and attitude, they should definitely choose their native tongue in order to show their identity and prestige to the world. For instance, the Seven Liberal Arts which constituted the basis of traditional education needed an appropriate idiom that was precise enough to articulate and convey the technical set of activities which shaped the English *persona*. For all these reasons, it was crucial to put into practice those principles which originally inspired intellectuals in their learned and private circles in order to transpose them into a new coherent ideology which could instruct and animate the spirit of the whole nation. As a consequence, it became imperative to *laborethe*, *amplifye*, *borrowe* and *giue new meanings* to existing words. The belief of being both unnatural and unkind in deciding not to adopt and improve the English language was constantly recalled by poets at the beginning of their works. They held the idea that every language was eloquent enough for itself and their native speakers had to become well aware of the value of the words they naturally uttered. The poets were refining the language in order to root out all the good knowledge and virtue within it. The apologetic attitude towards the English language slowly changed into confidence and pride concerning an idiom which was no more a base speech but was acquiring the features of a decent and independent language. In the seventeenth century, authors would naturally boast the superiority of the English language. For instance, William Lisle would interestingly bear witness to the achievements of sixteenth-century authors by stating,

our language is improued aboue all others now spoken by any nation, and became the fairest, the nimblest, the fullest; most apt to vary the phrase, most ready to receiue good composition, most adorned with sweet words and sentences, with witty quips and ouer-ruling Prouerbes: yea able to expresse any hard conceit whatsoeuer with great dexterity; weighty in weighty matters, merry in merry, braue in braue" (Barber, p. 51)

He had no doubts about the expressive qualities English had developed. However, it is important to notice that he was confident enough to express all of this because he had been previously struck and

inspired by those Renaissance authors who were brave enough to strongly manifest their unshakable trust in the power of the English vernacular. However, the same resoluteness and determination in illustrating the virtuous traits of the English language had previously been displayed by Richard Mulcaster. The enterprise he undertook indicated that he definitely confided in the eloquence of his mother tongue. A proof of this, can be detected in the Peroration to *The First Part of the Elementarie* (1582) wherein he provided a very impassionate defence of why he chose to write in English and why he denounced the risks of being restricted by a stubborn attachment to Latin. He was convinced that a passive enslavement to ancient languages could obfuscate the qualities of English. He firmly believed that English excelled the other European idioms since it possessed a certain number of peculiarities which were not translatable into foreign tongues and which rendered English magnificently unique.

According to Barber, English seems to have become an eloquent language between 1575 and 1580. There are four main factors which contributed in the making of English as a poignant and expressive language.

1. Serious and influential texts started to be written in English, and Renaissance writers transformed the English vernacular into a language which could convey a considerable body of learning. The poets were able to turn their compositions in English into prestigious pieces of literature. During the Elizabethan age, the idea that poetry could be the turn of the screw to beautify and elevate a language gained prominence and spread. Around 1580, poets such as Sidney, Lyly and Spenser invested all their energy and exploited all their skills to persuade people that the English language was acquiring worth and refinement and thus it was ready to "enter the scene" and promote the superiority England had achieved.

2. English vocabulary had relevantly increased incorporating many different foreign words – especially Greek, Latin, French and Italian terms - which definitely enriched and ennobled

the language. The prestigious tradition which had laid behind these tongues and their expressiveness made English much more valuable and appealing.

3. Classical rhetoric definitely contributed to confer to the English language adornment and vividness. Many different figures of rhetoric started to be relentlessly adopted and adapted to create multifaceted frameworks and sparkling effects to the language.

4. The English language was certainly much more cultivated and adorned than it previously was and it started to acquire more fixed and ruled features. Through this, its original instability slowly disappeared even if the language was never officially codified.

It is interesting to notice that the most relevant dispute which animated English literary circles during the sixteenth century was the debate about vocabulary expansion. Copiousness, which would become one of the most distinctive features of the English language, was generated by vehement and zealous discussions about the most appropriate words to adopt in order to forge a new powerful and eloquent idiom. Three main schools of thought promoted their ideas about the expansion of lexicon which was taking place in England. The first was led by the Purists who promoted the use of existing English words either by giving them new meanings in order to provide technical vocabulary for specific fields of knowledge or by using them to create brand-new words by compounding or affixation. The second school of thought was intrinsically intertwined with the first one and it was animated by the Archaisers who maintained that obsolete English terms should be revived and adopted in current works. There were several words which were no longer adopted in the standard language but which survived in regional dialects. They were often advocated to re-enter and shape the English vernacular. The third school of thought was against the previous two and it was supported by the Neologisers. They argued that the language should be enriched by borrowing from ancient and prestigious sources in order to gain the eloquence it genuinely needed. They were in favour of loan words, especially from Latin, and they claimed that the only way to

increase the prestige of the English vernacular was to incorporate powerful terms from more advanced and traditional idioms. Purists and Archaisers used to call learned loans as "inkhorn terms" and they were strongly against them. The technique Neologisers applied every time they intended to produce a new technical term was to borrow a word from the classical languages and to slightly adapt it in order to obtain a new reputable unit to build an illustrious English vocabulary. Although this method could seem quite easy and straightforward it was actually more complex and demanding than one could expect. At that time, the language already possessed a great number of words whose structure resembled the one belonging to other European languages. The origin of the pattern adopted to coin new words was often difficult to detect. Indeed, it was very hard to exactly establish from which term an English word derived. It was almost impossible to decide if the word was simply taken from French or if it came directly from Latin since French was also forged from this ancient idiom. However, it has been shown that Middle English derived its lexicon from French loans. Then, it should be taken into account that the meaning of learned loans was not always naturally clear and straightforward to a reader who had no familiarity with Latin or French. For this reason, English translators were focussed on modifying the English vocabulary in order to make it accessible to the modern average reader who could not master foreign tongues. To solve this obstacle the translator coined a certain number of words and then provided them with explanatory notes or with a simple description of their meaning. For instance, Sir Thomas Elyot – who often borrowed from Greek and Latin – inserted for the first time these brief explanations in his work: *The Governor*. Indeed, there was no previous record of the terms he introduced in the OED. Elyot's technique was innovative and familiar at the same time - since he provided a very accessible way to approach new, unusual terms. He paired every new word with an easier synonym, or with an explanatory sentence, in order to facilitate the reader's approach to it and to help him to include it in his personal vocabulary. Sometimes new terms were also introduced from Latin and an exhaustive explanation was provided. The urge for the introduction of these terms in the English language was because the idiom itself needed a peculiar and distinctive tone. For this reason, it was improved by

the introduction of a new set of coinages, which expiated the lack of clarity or depth in the original English vernacular.

Elyot was aware that he was trying to remedy the weaknesses of English. In *The Governor* he affirmed that his aim was to augment the English language since he intended to allow Englishmen to articulate their views and ideas more fully by providing a set of words suitable to properly express their purposes. This array of new words would also facilitate translators in their task to produce adequate texts which could properly render the richness of the original composition. Although Elyot was a neologiser with utilitarian aims, he did not devote his time only to the coinage of technical terms. Like some other Renaissance neologisers, he also coined elegant new words from the classical tongues with the purpose of achieving a high style and magniloquence. As far as the ideals pursued by neologisers were concerned, Richard Mulcaster distinguished two different reasons to introduce a great number of loan words in the English language. The first reason was pure necessity in new matters which constituted the utilitarian motive. The second reason was mere bravery connected with the wish to garnish the idiom for itself. It was associated with love of finery and pure ostentation. This embellishment of the language is described as aesthetic motive.

It is important to consider that the inkhorn controversy derived from these contrasting views concerning the formation of a national and powerful language. The coining of words for fine effects and to attain magniloquence of style could easily lead to linguistic abuse and excess. The risks which bravery and pride could have brought about in this linguistic enterprise were obscurity, affectation and pomposity. In Thomas Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* when he dealt with the notion of style in a literary composition, he firmly recommended plainness as an essential quality to cultivate. He also attacked a conspicuous number of affectations in the language suggesting that all strange inkhorn terms should be avoided since the best way to communicate was to use a language which

could be commonly received and not complicated by obscure linguistic *arzigogoli*. A key value he supported was "measure" as a synonym of restraint, property and control (Strier, p. 112). The strenuous work on the language should not be intended as an activity carried out in order to cavil at any detail or to sew an intricate net of convoluted expressions but to refine an idiom which needs clarity and precision. This can be achieved by eliminating superfluous material and refining form and style in order to provide poignant contents through a rigorous and suggestive language. Despite the fact that many inkhorn words were rare terms belonging to the Latin tradition, Wilson did not condemn all learned loan words. On the contrary, he recognised that both Greek and Latin words were generally accepted as literary words since they definitely contributed to the enriching of the English language.

The formation of new words was propelled by favourable conditions and the coinage of innovative terms was certainly not pursued only by one single brilliant individual but by groups of intellectuals, poets and playwrights who shared the same views and values concerning the urge to operate in a network. Indeed, working in a network could permit both individual experimentation and collective confrontation. Ordinary everyday words - including auxiliaries, conjunctions, determiners and prepositions - were often of Germanic origin. On the other hand, lexical words - such as adjectives, nouns and verbs - appeared to be Latin and French loan terms. Many of these terms had been borrowed between the thirteenth and fourteenth century and then naturalised by the sixteenth. It is certainly most likely the case that the majority of the fifteenth-century borrowings were from Latin. However, it should be taken into account that the majority of the words which were considered inkhorn terms had been coined during the first half of the sixteenth century. A relevant number of these words were recorded in the OED before 1553 including bizarre and extravagant-sounding terms. In the sixteenth century, it was acceptable to find unusual and aloof nouns in literary works on the condition that they were not mindlessly juxtaposed one after the other filling up a whole piece of writing and thus creating a glutted and confusing effect.

As far as the inkhorn controversy developed, a certain number of Renaissance English poets could openly manifest their care and enthusiasm for learned loans. George Pettie certainly belongs to this group. In *The ciuile conuersation* (1581) he highlighted his belief that borrowing from Latin was highly profitable since "it is in deed the ready way to inrich our tongue, and make it copious, and it is the way which all tongues haue taken to inrich them selues" (Barber, p. 59).

At the same time, he also admitted that he was not able distinguish between French loans and Latin loans since detecting the exact origin of a term had become almost impossible. Then he added that the language had become so imbibed with Latin terms that he could not express any concept without using words deriving from Latin. The acceptance of a term depended on the fact that it had been received or not. Pettie pointed out that all loan words that were "received" in the sixteenth century had, at some time, been considered new.

There were many examples of attacks and counter- attacks between intellectuals and writers during this inkhorn controversy. It was common to observe how humanist writers argued against each other in order to demonstrate that their practices and principles were the best to adopt. Two relevant examples of these linguistic debates were provided by the dispute between Thomas Nash and Gabriel Harvey called the "pamphlet warfare" in the 1590s and the controversy between Ben Jonson and John Marston known as "the war of the theatres" in 1600. It is interesting to notice how all the disputants used neologisms to ridicule the other's arguments. The coining of new words literally pervaded the cultural and literary scene during the early modern period showing how this practice emerged – as Mulcaster believed - both out of "necessity" and "bravery". Thanks to the incorporation of a highly Latinate vocabulary and to the imitation of French and Italian elegant styles and melodic patterns, the English language finally managed to acquire that eloquence which had been desired for a long period of time. By the end of the sixteenth century, it had acquired a noticeable number of valuable features which rendered it worthy of esteem. For instance, one of the greatest virtues English could boast was copiousness. In addition to that, variety was another

indisputable quality the language acquired. Despite the conservative position held by the Purists, the multifaceted nature of the English language was much appreciated by subsequent generations of writers. As a matter of fact, William Lisle - who was a fervent supporter of Old English – in his *Saxon Treatise* (1623) sustained that the English language should not be discredited because of the mixed origins of its vocabulary since all continental languages had been generated by different ancestors. Together with copiousness and heterogeneity, the emphasis was also on richness and eloquence.

It should be borne in mind that all the qualities that English had acquired were the outcomes of a long and scrupulous work on the language. In the seventeenth century, many authors would acknowledge and underline the great enterprise carried out by their predecessors. Indeed, the lexicographer Thomas Blount in the preface to his *Glossographia* (1656) proclaimed,

> our best modern Authors…have both infinitely enriched and enobled our Language, by admitting and naturalizing thousands of foreign Words, providently brought home from the *Greek, Roman and French Oratories*; which though, in the untravel'd ears of our Fathers would have sounded harsh, yet a fewe late years have rendred them familiar even to vulgar capacities (Barber, pp. 61-62).

It is interesting to notice that the writer adopted capital letters when he desired to stress his pride for the achievements of his mother tongue since by choosing this subtle technique he intended to display the greatness of the poets who undertook such an enterprise.

He implicitly stressed the fact that time and use were necessary to get accustomed to the new terms. In addition, the introduction of different words in the language brought about an inevitable and natural reaction. At first, the new words sounded weird and this unsettling response bore witness to the fact that usually phonological and lexical changes do not occur without facing hindrances and, what is more, they require a period of adaptation in order to become part of the pre-existing linguistic body.

Another powerful metaphor to define the role of inkhorn terms was introduced by Dryden in the dedication prefixed to his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1697) wherein he compared imported terms to coins. He asserted that if these terms were good enough, they would then circulate. He anticipated what would reveal itself to be the right compromise – if not the key to the solution of the inkhorn controversy – between the principles held by the Purists and the Archaisers and those defended by the Neologisers. Since Dryden himself "traded both with the living and with the dead", he decided to borrow both from the classical languages and from living idioms to contribute to the enrichment of English. Indeed, he alleged that:

Our old Teuton monosyllables are all right for necessity but if we want magnifience and splendour we must borrow words from abroad (Barber, p. 62).

Whenever he came across an elegant term or expression in a classical text he immediately adopted it in his composition and then, if his audience accepted it, the word or idiom gradually became naturalised. Dryden distinguished himself both from Purists and Neologisers by asserting that English only needed borrowings to achieve magnifience since the language was already perfectly adequate for utilitarian purposes. By asserting this, he unconsciously formulated the justification that every defence written during the Renaissance actually meant to state.

In order to understand how the real hub of the English language was cherished and preserved despite the innumerable external influences, it is worth exploring the influx that the Purists and the Archaisers managed to exert on their mother tongue. First and foremost, it must be borne in mind that the Purists opposed the introduction of loan words. They sustained that the vocabulary should be expanded only by adopting the already existing resources of the language. This could be achieved through different valuable techniques such as compounding and affixation or by conferring new meanings to original English words. According to the Purists' views, English terms were self-evident in meaning. On the contrary, loan words were definitely opaque to the unlearned.

The Purists also had a certain tendency to appeal to principles of linguistic purity and naturalness in order to arise patriotic feeling. The Greek scholar Sir John Cheke was the most eminent representative of the movement during the early Tudor age. His rejection of loan words was exemplified in a letter he wrote in 1557 to Thomas Hoby and which appeared at the end of Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *The Courtier* (1561). Indeed, he stated,

I am of this opinion that our own tung shold be written cleane and pure, vnmixt and vnmangeled with borrowing of other tunges, wherein if we take not heed bi tijm, euer borrowing and neuer paying, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt (Barber, pp. 62-63).

However, it would be quite utopic to believe that what Cheke was promoting could become the dominant attitude toward the language. His ideal was quite in contrast with an idiom which had been subjected to numerous foreign influences throughout several centuries. Cheke finally acknowledged the numerous hindrances in the pursuit of his principles so subsequently admitted that the presence of a certain number of loan words in the English tongue could not be avoided. However, he never abstained from supporting the idea that his native language should only allow borrowings from other idioms when its existing resources could not provide material to supply for the lack of an adequate English word or expression.

Notwithstanding the obstacles he encountered in fully applying his inflexible and conservative precepts to the English language, he was certainly a figure of great eminence and his ideas influenced many other Renaissance writers who recognised and sustained the importance of preserving the original features of the language from loss or corruption. One of them was Ralph Lever who definitely shared the same beliefs Cheke stubbornly held. As a matter of fact, when he had to provide English with new technical terms suitable to express the concepts in the field of logic, he did not modify the Latin terms he was familiar with but he generated innovative compound words in English.

Every single compound word was created from two current English terms. Subsequently, he substituted traditional Latin expressions with English terms. He defended his technique of word formation by maintaining that the art of reasoning could be also conveyed in English without being stilted or obscure. Indeed, he underlined several times that English had powers of rational discrimination and, that like any other nation, England could adopt its own language in order to express all the principles and ideas its inhabitants conceived in their minds. He was convinced that English had achieved a stage in which technical terms could be coined and displayed to the world. He never promoted "straunge and inckhorne termes" that could create chaos in the neat and precise network of the English language. However, their presence in the language did not denote any deficiency in English itself. He pointed out that there were ostensibly more things than words but he underlined that this was true even of Greek, which was the most copious of all languages in ancient times. What is more, the lack of vocabulary could be remedied by adopting several different solutions. For instance, one word could be associated with diverse concepts, one language could be inspired by another in the creation of a brand-new word, or individuals could rely on their imagination and freely invent new lexicon or match existing short words to forge compound nouns.

Whenever a concept comes to life, the task of the writer is to discover an innovative mean to articulate it. The English language was considered suitable for creating new compounds since a large number of English words were made up of only one syllable. For this reason, two or three monosyllabic words could easily join and fit together. Lever himself introduced perfectly-matching compound words. The reason that underlies this technique is intelligibility which, combined with familiarity and comprehensibility, rendered the access to the English language even more rapid and straightforward.

Unlike many other "imitative" writers who relied on ancient models and continental patterns to enrich and change their native language in order to elevate it to a status symbol, Lever was fundamentally convinced that:

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An arte is to be taughte in that toung, in whiche it was neuer written afore. […] to make them Englishe words […] simple vsual words, to make compounded termes, whose seuerall partes considered alone, are familiar and knowne to all English men? […] I wish you to aske of an English man, who vnderstandeth neither Greek nor Latin, what he conceiueth in his mind […] he doth vnderstande nothing at all […] We therfore, that deuise vnderstandable termes, compounded of true and auncient English woords, do rather maintain and continue the antiquitie of our mother tongue: then they, that with inckhorne termes doe change and corrupt the same, making a mingle mangle of their natiue speache, and not obseruing the propertie thereof (Barber, pp. 64-65).

Lever consciously drove the attention of the reader towards his new technical terms and subsequently highlighted the fact that they were compounded of true English words. He then compared them with the inkhorn terms taken from weird and foreign languages and he indicated that they were manipulated to sound like authentic English words. The essential difference he wished to clarify was that the English compounds – unlike loan words - were self-evident in meaning. When he referred to "true English words" he also hinted at the principle of linguistic purity, consequently making allusion to a dutiful patriotic sentiment. Furthermore, he clearly distinguished between the two categories of writers who opposed each other during the inkhorn debate. He was absolutely convinced that the practice he was adopting was the most productive and honest in order to enrich his own mother tongue without leaving it at the bereft of unsettling influences from abroad. He invoked faithfulness to the *autochthone* origins of his language. He intended to scrupulously observe the practice and rules typical of the history of his idiom and he invited his fellow writers to defy from neologisers and to work hard on the English language in order to let it become more clear and graspable.

In addition, Lever sustained that it was useless and senseless to invent a new word when an adequate term was already in use. On this particular point, he shared the same views that the group of the Archaisers held. Archaisers supported the adoption of any existing English word instead of the elaboration of a new one deriving from foreign idioms. They advocated the revival of obsolete and dismissed terms from regional dialects and they were unquestionably in tune with the Purists' attitude toward the language. Literature was the only field where these terms were highly

considered and recommended so it constituted the best source to consult in order to aggrandise and refashion the language without sounding exotic and without compromising national identity.

The most renown and appreciated practitioner of the movement was Edmund Spenser. He has been deeply influenced by the dialects of northern England but, notwithstanding this, he also conceived new terms that derived from the regional vocabulary.

A defence of archaisms can be detected in the preface to *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579). This preface was composed by E. K. (probably Edward Kirke) who was one of Spenser's closest friends. He started the text by referring back to Chaucer as the greatest English poet of the past. In the seventeenth century, many purists would be frequently hostile to Chaucer, considering him to be a corrupter of the language since he imported into the English language a great amount of loan words from continental idioms. On the contrary, this view was not common during the sixteenth century. In fact, E. K. presents Spenser's use of archaisms as the most adequate way of glorifying the language. He acknowledged that several archaisms that Spenser adopted could appear to be quite weird and unusual terms at a first glance because they were considerably ancient to the point that they were often dismissed or exceptionally rare to find. However, he specified that despite conveying the impression of being hard and unused, these terms were adopted by the most refined poets and excellent minds of the time.

What is more, he considered archaisms to be in possession of the right degree of *rusticall rudenesse* that old and obsolete words often brought with them and which allowed them to be closer to the working-class part of the population and thus conveying, paradoxically, a certain concreteness, authority and respectability to the verse. In this way, he inaugurated a sort of metaphorical bridge between poetry and the vernacular thus allowing these two domains to merge and interpenetrate. Archaisms were justified because they were genuine English words and they were finally revived

and made praiseworthy by the most refined literary experts of the time. They evoked the reverence

and solemnity that English lacked but also the remoteness that antiquity had the power to confer[21].

In another engaging passage, E.K. expresses his personal view concerning the function that poetry

has in enhancing and empowering the language. It is clear that he meant to prevent banal attacks to

Spenser's technique by invoking patriotic feelings when he elaborated the following reasoning

> For in my opinion it is one special prayse, of many which are dew to this Poete, that he hath laboured to restore, as to theyr rightfull heritage such good and natural English words, as haue ben long time out of vse and almost cleane disherited. Which is the onely cause, that our Mother tonge, which truly of it self is both ful enough for prose and stately enough for verse, hath long time ben counted most bare and barrein of both. Which default when as some endeuoured to salue and recure, they patched vp the holes with peces and rags of other languages, borrowing here of the French, there of the Italian, euery where of the Latine, not weighing how il, those tongues accorde with themselues, but much worse with ours: So now they haue made our English tongue, a gallimaufray or hodgepodge of al other speches" (Barber, p. 68).

He did not only appeal to national sentiment but he subtly highlighted the concept of naturalness. In

addition, E.K. pertinently pointed out that at the time there were several critics who argued about

what the English language should look like and attacked those who actually knew less notions about

their mother tongue than about other idioms. As a result, whenever they came across an ancient

word they straightforwardly condemned it as gibberish. He sustained the position that, in addition to

being unforgivably alien to both their own country and natural speech, they also had such a base

regard and a bastardised judgement of their own idiom that they could not properly labour their

mother tongue in order to both garnish and embellish it.

On the other hand, he indicated that the appeal deriving from his verses was intended to inspire

patriotism and to evoke naturalness and he underlined how Spenser perfectly managed to beautify

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[21] However, he reminded that the principle of moderation should always be followed. For this reason, he warns the reader that archaisms should always been inserted in a composition with discretion and not "stuffed in" everywhere. Indeed, if used in moderation "those rough and harsh termes enlumine and make more clearly to appeare the brightnesse of braue and glorious words" (Barber, p. 68).

the English language both by producing notable literature in English and by extending its lexical resources.

Finally, considering the field of linguistic evolution, both E. K. and Lever maintained that everyone who objected to new words had not properly taken into account both the mechanisms according to which "speache groweth" and the *leitmotif* which guides bright writers to devise it. Interestingly enough, Lever acknowledged that the individual alone cannot change the language since he firmly believed that no man had the power to invent or modify an idiom whenever it most pleased him. On the contrary, he sustained the view that it was only when appropriate nouns were displayed and spoken that they forced the audience to appreciate them and thereby leading them to be adopted into the English language. Indeed, it is thanks to the consent of the many that a communal speech is able to grow and become a national language. For its age, Lever was an acute and perceptive observer and he could wisely notice how linguistic innovations spread when they met the needs of the speech community and, by consent of the many, they ultimately turn into accepted rules.

The purist and the archaic movements would have a relevant influence on the way the evolution of the language was conceived up to the seventeenth century. In particular, they exerted a great ascendance on the antiquarians - those intellectuals who cultivated Anglo-Saxon studies in literary prestigious circles and who inherited their literary taste and principles from learned humanists like Cheke and gifted poets like Spenser. However, the successful practice which allowed the great expansion of the English vocabulary through loans from classical and Romance languages proved that another path was meant to be followed in order to achieve the triumph Renaissance writers were devising for the English language.

CHAPTER 8

The final triumph of the English language

8.1 English as an eloquent language

Unity is a mark of the early modern nation-state, diversity is another. (...) Individual and communal identity are constructed at their intersection.

R. Helgerson

The poetic achievements of a worthy, dignified and powerful language derived from the adoption of a successful strategy which involved linguistic creativity and innovation both based on the incorporation in the language of advanced and prestigious foreign literary models. Indeed, this has shown itself to be the secret of the new leading power the English language acquired. Enrichment, copiousness and inclusion became the main characteristics that the idiom could boast. These features were provided by a mixture of inkhorn terms and borrowings from Greek, Latin, Italian and French in addition to *autochthone* terms deriving from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The creativity of the neologisers who shaped an innovative but trustworthy language and the uncorrupted principles of the purists who kept the distinctive original features of the English embryonic tongue inaugurated the new qualities the English language could present at the end of the sixteenth century. Among the main features the language possessed, Renaissance poets included: simplicity, familiarity, straightforwardness, richness, copiousness, resourcefulness and variety. They supported the affirmation of the vernacular as a means of creating the feeling of belonging, specifically to the same nation, in order to be part of the same community. The English vernacular was conceived as a bridge between the Queen and the population. The military and social interests behind the adoption of the vernacular as an effective and direct means of communication between the ruler and its subjects were certainly the crucial factors that enhanced the process of development and improvement of the language. Enrichment and copiousness were the result of the incorporation of

many elements belonging to the languages spoken by other European nations. In this way, many different European citizens could both familiarise and empathise with the English language. This allowed the emergence of the "expressive potential" of English which gradually proved to be far above continental languages. Recent research on nationalism has shown that "nations more often follow states than precede them" and that a nation eventually makes claims of its own. This allows it to become a "semi-autonomous source of identity and authority" which, however, cannot subsist without the "ordering principles of its original culture" (Helgerson, pp. 296-97).

A liminal and controversial distinction could be detected between what was actually considered as a borrowing and what was intended as *autochthone* and original. According to a chronological perspective, if we consider the *evolution* of the English language as a *continuum*, all the invaders of the land should be considered as rightful ancestors. As a matter of fact, the Anglo-Saxons, the Romans and the Normans all gave their contribution to the building, shaping and enrichment of the English language throughout the centuries.

The Anglo-Saxons provided the original *nucleus* of the idiom from Germanic descendants. The Romans introduced Latinate words into the language and, considering that Latin derived from Greek, they bestowed a further noble and prestigious ancestor to it. The Normans who derived their French from Latin refined and confirmed this lineage in the evolution of the English language.

However, if we consider a firm ideological cut between the Anglo-Saxons and the other minor invaders - who were seen by the English Renaissance purists just as a threat to the genuine roots of the English language, it is possible to conceive another perspective. Indeed, if the Romans and the Normans are considered as foreigners to English people and their influence is judged as irrelevant to the formation of the national identity, the attempts that romance languages exerted on English were considered pointless and even dangerously polluting for the original English idiom. This is why French and Italian words are labelled as inkhorn terms and some archaic technical terms are defined as loan words or borrowings from Latin and Greek. It is by means of differing perspectives

and differing attitudes towards the languages in question which characterised two different currents of thought among intellectuals in the Renaissance. This issue engendered endless debates between numerous groups of writers who fervently animated the cultural and linguistic scene throughout the sixteenth century. However, a solution was finally found when a compromise between the original heritage and a foreign ascendance on the language was established on temporal grounds. The excesses were generally rejected from both perspectives. Finally, in his *Forms of Nationhood* Helgerson pointed out that "every discourse of nationhood is also a discourse of self" (p. 294). As a consequence, the authority and identity of every individual is inextricably intertwined with the social and political body of the nation. As Hobbes wisely affirmed, all national self-writing is simultaneously a form of self-alienation and a medium of self-aggrandisement (Helgerson, p. 294).

8.2 Edmund Spenser and English as a "reinvented" language

Spenser was particularly concerned with the issue of the authenticity of the language. He lived in an epoch in which the literary debate was centred on imitation and originality and linguistic changes were inextricably involved in the discussions of intellectuals and writers. Spenser chose to look back at what the language originally offered and extrapolated a number of dismissed words which could convey the real essence of English. Chaucer was certainly a model for Spenser who was fascinated by his ability to enrich the language through a variety of ancient, eloquent terms. A parallel could be drawn between Spenser's reference to Chaucer as his fellow-citizen model and the procedure adopted by Renaissance poets which consisted in the adoption of Petrarch's texts as perfect patterns for their works in the Italian cinquecento. Spenser had to face all the hindrances deriving from the blending of peculiar and rare terms with his contemporary idiom in the composition of *The Faerie Queen*. He managed to naturalize archaisms and forge neologisms by elaborating a very personal style as well as including a variety of sound figures, alliteration and assonance. However, thanks to his work on meter, he achieved the highest level of naturalness.

Indeed, he introduced the pronunciation of *e* and *ed* at the end of words thus creating a more fluent and musical outcome. In addition, Spenser employed the rhetorical figure of rhyme, inserting it in his texts in many different combinations in order to incorporate unusual lexicon to the existing vocabulary. The peculiar nature of the English spelling allowed Spencer to blend a great number of archaisms into the language in a rather easy and natural way. Indeed, he managed to conceive his compositions with a certain *sprezzatura*, giving the impression of making no effort in the expression of the subject matter (Strier, p. 195).

Spenser was acute enough to notice that when the reader saw English written on a blank page immediately recognised it to be different from Latin or Italian spelling. Indeed, the idiosyncrasies displayed by English reminded him of the history of the language and of the individuals who used to speak it. The spelling was the first revealing factor which showed the antique origin of an idiom whose roots were as remote as those of any other respectable language. The visual aspect of the English language was held in high esteem by Spenser since he was convinced that it evoked a national feeling of belonging to a unique civilization. This is why the idea of adopting very peculiar archaisms which had been generated by his nation and which thus represented the prerogative of English people had always been appealing to him. This set of words also allowed him to compose a kind of poetry which reflected an epic intent in the construction of a national celebration of values through literary forms. The imperfect phonetic spelling of the English language incredibly favoured the mingling not only of archaisms and neologisms but also of Romance lexicon, Germanic vocabulary, regional words and sixteenth-century terms. The heterogeneity of English accorded Spenser the freedom to produce a kind of poetic composition which prevented the readership formulating the impression of it being particularly bizarre or unnatural. Monosyllabic English words played a crucial role in the combination of alliterative sounds and rhymes in verse. This was a distinctive factor to emphasise in the language especially if compared with the Romance polysyllabic sound system. What is more, Spenser soon realised that English monosyllabism could

provide semantic density and it could create sharp metaphorical and vivid images. A certain *gravitas* typical of epic high style was provided by the seriousness of the themes and by the poetical form of the stanzas. Archaisms and rare terms also conferred a certain weight to the composition. Moreover, on the one hand, the unusual displacement of some portions of the dialogues in *The Faire Queene* and, on the other hand, the abundant use of connectives throughout the text engrossed the reader, subsequently keeping his or her awe and engagement at an acceptingly high level. The *stupore e meraviglia,* conveyed by the immensely refined and elaborate grammatical system, conferred to the verses an unprecedented power. The idea of generating an epic poem which could equal the works of the ancient and respectable tradition of Greek and Latin literature inflamed Spenser's spirit and enhanced a masterpiece worth of notice and respect. The visual effects that Spenser's poetry was able to generate derived from the Latin principle of *ut pictura poesis* which he intended to incorporate in the English language to embellish it in an even more natural, visual and vivid way. The different layers that constituted the composition were reading keys of his work and the enigma created by the many allegories he inserted definitely produced an aura of aloofness which was typical of the literary high style at the time. All this had been conceived and orchestrated by Spenser in order to change the attitude English humanists had towards the ability of the English language in order to achieve a superior standard. The highness the language and its nation were looking for lied in what poetry alone embodied. The classical and the continental literary traditions were certainly the catalysts of Spenser's inspiration, but the ability to play with a language which was considered particularly inapt in producing poetic masterpieces proved that century-old beliefs were wrong. Spenser managed to overcome the prejudices and the scepticism which had affected and prevented his mother tongue from expressing its potential. He skilfully and gracefully contributed to place English in a pedestal which certainly suited in the *tour d'ivoir* of the world's leading languages.

8.3 George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*

I have resolved my self to employ my time in Studyes and with conferens with the greatest lerned men I can fynde.

George Puttenham

A Justificacion of Queen Elizabeth in Relacion to the Affair of Mary Queen of Scottes

J.W. H. Atkins in his *English Literary Criticism: The Renascence* expressed, in a very succinct but revealing way, the purpose and character of the Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* when he observed,

> For whereas Sidney had beheld in poetry an inspiring revelation of human ideals and universal truth, Puttenham, no less convincingly, emphasizes the relation between life and letters, representing poetry as an exalted form of intellectual activity, a valuable addition to the joys of life, and a natural response to human needs, both social and individual.

(Atkins, p. 177).

Puttenham, more than any other humanist writer, attempted to establish a unified and theoretical approach to English poetry. Some critics define him as "one of the most alert and flexible of Elizabethan minds" (Byrom, p. 81). He managed to confer complexity and sophistication to the language through a creative process which reflected an intellectual analysis both of the context and of the most adequate forms available to describe it. He displaced an ordered set of ideas, thereby bequeathing them with a certain flexibility of form and style. Through his writings, he unseated all those preconceptions that labelled poetry as a mere frivolity as well as unseating those preconceptions which implied that English verse could not equal the classic standards of eloquence and perfection. Puttenham slightly disagreed with Plato's ideas of poetry as the direct outcome of divine *furor*. On the contrary, he attributes a great importance to craft considering it an essential means to toil and polish the English verse.

Puttenham's practical aim can subtly be detected between the lines[22]. Puttenham has always appreciated the order and rationality employed in the ancient Greek and Latin texts and he intended to proceed in the adopting of the same rigorous and scrupulous methods ancient writers were devoted to. However, his compositions showed themselves to be much more complex and elaborated in the final outcome. This was due to the other relevant elements which influenced Puttenham's *Arte*. Tudor humanism, civil law, continental science and culture and the Elizabethan court certainly exerted a great ascendance on his poetry and bestowed that degree of literary uniqueness and cultural richness which had never been developed by earlier Renaissance authors. Puttenham managed to incorporate the past threads of the English tradition in a gilded and enduring poetic tapestry which exemplified the salient traits of what he conceived as an enriched Englishness.

Puttenham's background certainly shaped his personality and his taste. His experiences abroad influenced his way of perceiving the environment in which he operated and consequently his peculiar style by mirroring it in his compositions. He spent most of his youth travelling around Europe and frequenting the French, Spanish and Italian courts. His cosmopolitan spirit is reflected in Book III of the *Arte* in which references to foreign models confer a lively and multifaceted dynamicity to his verses. In addition, all throughout his work he proved to be more than acquainted with both continental languages and the ancient idioms. Indeed, the knowledge of a certain number of foreign tongues enabled him to get closer to the original essence of the texts and this ability allowed him to develop a more acute and wise criticism towards poetic compositions and enhanced a sense of reverence, honesty and faithfulness towards the external sources which inspired the pieces of writing which he conceived. An example of this influence can be detected when, in 1535, Sir Thomas Elyot dedicated his treatise *Education or Bringinge up of Children* to Puttenham's

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[22] …we have in our owne conceit devised a new and strange medell of this arte, fitter to please the Court then the schoole, and yet not unnecessary for all such as be willing themselves to become good makers in the vulgar, or to be able to judge of other mens makings… (s4v)

mother Margery Elyot in order to train the spirit of his nephew according to the principles of Plutarch. Puttenham had the opportunity to frequent Elyot's personal library which was one of the finest nests of humanism. He acquired the rudiments of rhetoric, philosophy and classicism and he developed them at Cambridge, under the supervision of Sir John Cheke - Professor of Greek - and Roger Ascham who was Professor of Classics. Puttenham certainly enjoyed his elitist education and benefited from the linguistic and literary studies he undertook. Several chapters of his *Arte* reflect the humanist doctrine and the cultivated teaching in which he was imbibed. Moreover, his training in law constituted another non-negligible aspect of his identity. However, the most interesting and fruitful aspect of his background is the fact that it favoured the merge between a refined eclectic poetry and national service. His genuine admiration for the political and artistic power of language was the hub of Puttenham's outlook on society and literature. His love for formal order was likely a reflection of his opposition to a chaotic anarchy of the state. A nation – exactly like any successful piece of poetry conceived by a bright mind - must be conceived according to some harmonious proportion (Doherty, p. XIV). The *Arte* could also be read as a compendium of the influxes which humanism, continental criticism and courtly life had on the English language and letters.

Puttenham had always been fascinated by the figure of the poet laureate that he discovered in Italy and France, and he wished to incarnate that role at Elizabeth's court. He carried on his enterprise while working in close contact with the vortex of power helping and advising the Queen during her political sessions held to wisely govern the country. In this position, he could devote himself to the cultivation of the main precepts a poet laureate used to follow, thereby justifying the praise of the monarch, advising the ruler and composing verse to celebrate his master and establishing taste.

The evolution of Puttenham's approach to the language is concisely and powerfully summarised in his *Arte*. Indeed, in Book I he is completely confident in the magisterial model of the Classics and he relies upon the force of tradition. In Book II, he explores and adopts both the principles of logic and reason in order to build a kind of poetry which could be clear enough to build up a sense of

severity and stability. However, in Book III he manages to achieve the goal of his admirable enterprise. His entire personality and mind are absorbed in his attempt to convey a more genuine and ambitious purpose. As a matter of fact, the last book exposes the struggle of a talented author who was trying to convey to his audience his immense sensitivity to poetry and his vast knowledge on poignant, cultural and literary issues in order to forge a creditable language which could embody both the national spirit and a more personal ideal of taste and virtue. He was searching for common acknowledgement and appreciation of a kind of refinement and beauty which should unmistakably and solely belong to the English nation.

Keeping in mind this aspiration, he addressed the Elizabethan court by explaining,

> …our chiefe purpose herein is for the learning of Ladies and young Gentlewomen, or idle Courtiers, desirous to become skilful in their owne mother tongue, and for their private recreation to make now and then ditties of pleasure, thinking for our parte none other science so fit for them and the place as that which teacheth beau semblant, the chiefe profession aswell of Courting as of poesie.

> (Byrom, s4v).

The meeting point between the spoken language of the community and the written language of the erudite is considered by Puttenham to be the best outcome to promote a national idiom. Despite being very close to the elitist circles of the Elizabethan court, he never lost touch with the society around him and the sense of collectiveness which could be enhanced by a powerful and sophisticated idiom.

He was officially encouraged by the Queen not to abandon his enterprise and to instead apply his skilled poetic soul to a relentless work on the language. Indeed, the Queen, being very aware of the persuasive power of a crafted and poignant language, sustained and promoted the poet's project. For all these reasons, in the presence of an assembly of scholars and students at Cambridge, she celebrated the poet's talented work by proclaiming,

I will have all of you bear this one thing in mind, that no road is straighter, none shorter, none more adapted to win the good things of fortune or the good will of your Prince, than the pursuit of Good Letters; which, may you continue diligently as you have begun, I pray and beseech you

<div align="right">

Elizabeth Tudor, 1564

(Smith, p. 501)

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Since eloquence and learning were held in high esteem by the Queen, those who managed to please her with an attentive and glorious toil of the language could rise to favour, wealth and power at her court. Puttenham was not simply persuaded by these appealing incentives. He truly distinguished himself from a common utilitarian flatterer when he allowed his genius to acquire a definite shape on the blank page. He was genuinely nurtured by the deep knowledge he absorbed from the classicism and rhetoric propelled by Erasmus, Elyot, Ascham and Cheke to produce his prominent work.

Aeneus Silvius Piccolomini (who would later become Pius II) interpreted the Queen's speech by espousing the subtle intensions hidden in this supportive assertion which represented what was inferred by the Renaissance writers who were listening to her words,

Hold fast and increase the eloquence you possess; consider it the most honourable thing possible to excel your fellows in that whereby you excel other living creatures. Great is eloquence; nothing so much rules the world. Political action is the result of persuasion; his opinion prevails with the people who best knows how to persuade.

<div align="right">

(Aeneas Silvius in Einstein, p. 9)

</div>

The way in which poetry started to interact with politics on effective and manifested grounds really enhanced humanist writers and rulers in their ability to work in close contact towards a common goal. The principles of eloquence, persuasion and power were the keys to create a solid and impressive national linguistic *apparatus* to exhibit and export to the world.

The language was adopted to stimulate "new" learning. In this renovated context, Puttenham managed to build the link which connected politics and the court to society. Indeed, even if his eclectic *genius* allowed him to produce high and elaborate verses, he conceived himself as a

<div align="center">164</div>

"popularizer". He was also a keen observer and his awareness that a global and international approach should be included in the language to widen its usability was certainly applied to his poetry.

Differently from his contemporaries, he did not only include the literature of France and Italy in his body of works but he also took into account the literatures of Spain, China, Persia, America, Wales and Scotland. His conception of an ancient and majestic past did not only refer to Greek and Latin but also to Caldean, Hebrew, Gothic, Anglo-Saxon, Norman and Middle English.

Puttenham was perfectly aware of the factors which had to be developed in the English language in order to supply for its stylistic weaknesses, its paucity of vocabulary and its lack of elegance and refinement. He never pretended not to see the drawbacks of its mother tongue. On the contrary, he adopted a rational and objective approach to the English vernacular. He was perfectly conscious of the fact that the language should undergo a process of toil and enrichment. Notwithstanding this, he never underestimated the potential of its mother tongue. He focussed on the peculiarities of the English language and, on the base of the poetic forms and traditions he appreciated, he worked on the distinctive qualities English already presented. He had the same concerns about inkhorn terms, linguistic purity, didactic aims and imitation of the classics which had previously been faced by Cheke, Elyot and Ascham. Puttenham, despite being aware of his debt towards earlier authors, decided to insert the terms he personally coined in italics starting from the very beginning of Book I. In this way, when he dealt with Book III, he presented the same words in normal characters as if by then the reader had learned their meaning and assimilated them in his mother tongue. This presumable familiarity which the reader was expected to experience while he or she was reading Puttenham's work represented the turn of the screw of a composition which aimed at introducing a universal method of vocabulary expansion through a careful and subtle linguistic induction.

As he learnt from his sources[23], the key was to work on linguistic identity. Puttenham's treatise was wisely heralding the emergence of a national literature which also took into account the huge paramountcy pertaining to important lessons of the past. Indeed, together with his neologisms, he provided several examples of classical expressions and foreign vernaculars. However, his final aim was always to draw a parallel with his own language. Puttenham's principle of authority traced its origins back to ancient and foreign traditions but the poet's actual challenge was to forge a new respectable identity for his nation in which a civilizing language could shape a civilized man.

The precision and carefulness which characterised Puttenham's attitude towards the language could be testified by the technical and critical vocabulary he derived from mathematical models of proportion. Indeed, if Puttenham *the Tudor Humanist* "collected" materials, Puttenham *the poetic scientist* instead sought after elaborate functional distinctions. For instance, he adopted geometrical and musical proportion, monosyllabic and polysyllabic prosody, caesura and terminal rest, rhyme and rhythm, accent and duration, like-orthography and metric scheme all throughout his work (Doherty, p. LXX).

T. S. Elyot, in his *Tradition and the Individual Talent,* asserted,

The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

- [23] P. Virgil, *De Rerum Inventibus* (1499)
- Agricola, *De Inventione* (1515)
- Vives, *De Disciplinis* (1531)
- Elyot, *The Governour* (1532)
- Sebillet, *L'Art Poétique* (1548)
- Du Bellay, *La Deffence et Illustration de la Langue française* (1549)
- Peletier, *L'Art Poétique* (1555)
- Ronsard, "Preface" to *Odes* (1555)
- Minturno, *De Poeta* (1559)
- Scaliger, *Poetices* (1561)

(Bate, pp. 525-6).

Puttenham sincerely believed - as he showed in the original conclusion to Book I when he adopted a different tone in tune with a new critical awareness - that what he was going to tackle in Book II opened a renovated approach to the English language and identity. Indeed, he posited,

> The part that next followeth to wit of proportion, because the Greeks nor Latines never had it in use, nor made any observation, no more then we doe of their feete, we may truly affirme to have bene the first devisers thereof our selves, as "autodidaktos", and not to have borrowed it of any other by learning or imitation.

(Doherty, p. LXIX).

The key term "autodidaktos" which he deliberately and acutely chose to write in Greek bore witness to the fact that he had learnt the lesson. Indeed, the education he received, which had its roots in the Greek didactic tradition, taught him that the best way to write and, at the same time, to forge a nation with a distinct and superior personality and power was to create its own peculiar and unrepeatable traits. The writer had to be the first to elaborate his own work by adopting the best tools available around him and by learning from his masters, but finally concluding by building something with his own hands. The Renaissance poets operated to offer eminent models to society. Their works were not only examples of utmost literary prestige, eloquence and intellectual refinement but they also offered a powerful means – the language – and a *modus operandi* to elevate the English nation to a well-founded awareness of its concrete possibility to achieve supreme dominance.

Several times Puttenham composed his poems being perfectly conscious of being perceived as – implicitly - the spokesman of Queen Elizabeth. His verses spoke to the nation on the Queen's behalf. He certainly showed a certain familiarity with the Queen, her interests and her political position. Whenever he addressed her, his loyal devotion could be inferred from the words he inserted in his verses. The fact that he was an honest supporter of her majesty and of her reign conferred a great impact on the way he conceived his poems. He was in contact with the most

influential individuals at the Elizabethan court. As a man of law, he could also prove to possess an intimate knowledge of the political events of his time. As a consequence, the *Arte* is the work of a poet who felt confident with his ability to play the part of man of affairs as well as of man of letters.

The *Arte* perfectly bore witness to the copiousness of vocabulary which would characterise the English language from the early modern period onwards. The great number of neologisms listed in the three books of the *Arte* - many of which would become ordinary English words (e. i. negotiate, multiformity and disproportion) – would augment the possibility of being able to express a wider range of notions with a precision which was inconceivable for pre-Renaissance writers. In addition, Puttenham noticed that many of the words he introduced could be unfamiliar to the average English reader thus he provided an explanation of their meaning to clarify and justify their adoption. He often italicised his neologisms to attract his readers' attention, subsequently allowing them to both realise that the terms were not in current circulation and to ensure that they kept in mind the new words in order to subsequently memorise them. Puttenham was considered a "stickler for linguistic exactness" since he both kept several habits of speech from his youth and, at the same time, he developed a linguistically-minded attitude thank to which he was able to absorb and produce new lexicon (Magnus, p. XLI).

Towards the end of the *Arte,* he proves himself as having the ability to compose glorious English verses without quoting or imitating any classical ancestor or continental predecessor. Puttenham was intimately convinced that what was natural was right. Indeed, he sustained a very peculiar principle among a great number of Renaissance authors and critics who were still attached to ancient canons and who displayed imitation as the only possible means of achieving success and respectability. The fact that the *Arte* was never signed indicated a certain sobriety and dismissal of public search for fame. The *Arte* was not originally intended as a printed form conceived in order to gain a degree of reward outside Elizabeth's courtly circle and thus it was composed with a certain ease and intimacy.

The *Arte* was a rather peculiar work which certainly distinguished itself from other Elizabethan texts. Puttenham would not resign himself to the position that only Greek and Latin authors could have both the right and the privilege of writing an Arte related to their language. He firmly believed that there could be an *Arte* of his own beloved English Poetry which could bestow a similar grandiosity upon and within English civilization.

Puttenham was greatly absorbed by the stylistic and lexical toil of his poems and he was aware that the advancement of the language in the Renaissance world was proceeding very quickly. Since language was his master-interest, he believed that it was crucial to enhance a word-and figure-loving community. The interpenetration of life and literature at court convinced him that an aesthetic approach to poetry was not sufficient any longer. This is the reason why he included didactic, moralistic and utilitarian hints in his compositions. However, he never produced constraint and stilted texts since his natural and serene mastery of a language, which was highly above the standard to which his contemporaries were accustomed to, allowed him to promote both a persuasive and convincing English.

Finally, it can be noticed that Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* represented a landmark for his century. He was not just promoting an art of writing in a new advanced world, but he was displaying an art of living a virtuous existence. The combination of both these arts sealed the English identity and allowed it to herald itself as a proud nation that had ascended through the world to new, impressive positions.

Conclusion

As virtue is the most excellent resting place for all wordlie learning to make his end of: so Poetrie, beeing the most familiar to teach it, and most princelie to move towards it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman.

Philip Sidney

The Defence of Poesie

A language that is intended to elevate a nation above the others could not be toiled and refined by a group of common individuals. Its embryonic hub should be conceived in a privileged and secluded environment and should be generated and raised up by a few brilliant intellectuals who perfectly master the key components and who know exactly how to assemble them. During the Renaissance, humanists were aware of the fact that the most precious and well-shaped products inevitably derived from the work of a few talented agents who possessed the right *know how* to give birth to an exceptional outcome. In order to create powerful striking innovations, they must know what had come before. The excellence of the past played a relevant ascendance on the new refinement and elevation of their mother tongue. The classic authors bestowed their idiom with poignant and eminent words which could evoke many different shades of meaning. The ruling class was aspiring to an elitist enrichment that could prove to the continent their majestic godlike political and literary domination.

The way of asserting power during the Renaissance in a persuasive and subtle way was not through coins or weapons but through the elegant combination of letters and the mystical rapture of sounds. It was an intellectual competition that the English intended to win. They were second to none and, moreover, they perfectly managed to balance humility and ambition as well as patience and alacrity. They were eager to find an array of terms that could be combined in a rich and elegant canvas in order to evoke awe and admiration.

Unfortunately, they soon had to confront the international *scenario* around them and they had to acknowledge the backward position of their language when dealing with literary issues. They became aware of the fact that if they intended to adopt their mother tongue to express their salient traits and their admirable achievements they necessarily needed to toil their vernacular. The competition was hard because the continental languages were much more developed and advanced. They could boast a century-old tradition which elevated them to a higher and prestigious position. The sense of helplessness and frustration that often pervaded many English writers at the first stage of their work on the language were certainly disheartening factors. Renaissance authors were often discomforted and disillusioned about the concrete possibility of raising their humble and rude vernacular to a noteworthy and dignified status.

However, their stubborn confidence in the potential of their mother tongue enabled them to overcome this initial feeling of disadvantage and belittlement. They managed to focus their attention on the qualities that their language possessed. They emphasised clearness, straightforwardness and simplicity in the composition of their texts and they simultaneously adorned them with the expressive and graceful poetic devices which the other European languages had majestically developed. Furthermore, they relentlessly toiled and polished their idiom and they carefully selected the best terms from the most graceful continental tongues in order to introduce them in their vernacular.

Notwithstanding all the obstacles connected to their experience, English poets kept their quills well anchored to their pages and roots. Their ancestors provided them with an original and peculiar language which deserved to be cherished and exalted in order to underline the pure and authentic descent of all English citizens. The idiom represented the hallmark of their civilization and this was the reason why Renaissance writers felt a duty to defend their language and to raise it to a dignified position. They attentively studied and analysed the masterpieces of the Greek and Latin tradition to confer wisdom, persuasiveness and eloquence onto their mother tongue. They imitated and re-

elaborated the Italian and French texts which were models of elegance and musicality. Above all, they understood that every language had its own virtues and that it was crucial both to recognise their value and to challenge their prominence with new traits that could be equally powerful and noteworthy. Renaissance English poets were acute observers and tasteful selectors as well as bright critics and creative talents. They were innovators and conservative writers at the same time. They knew what needed to be changed, updated, enriched and embellished but they also managed to keep the original core of their native vernacular without altering those traits which made the English language so unique and impressive to the eyes of the world. The times when the main adjectives to describe their language were "rude" and "barbarous" were only a distant reminiscence. The paramount importance of their enterprise actually consisted in their ability to change the attitude towards their language. First, they transformed the approach their fellow-citizens had towards their vernacular and, as soon as they were confident and proud enough of it, they displayed it on the world's stage. The wit and acuteness of English writers' compositions was finally conveyed through the English verses they so firmly and passionately defended from the most fierce detractors and sceptical opponents. It is definitely admirable how they first silently read, studied and imitated the works of superior authors and languages and how, in a comparatively short period of time, they managed to reverse the situation and to forge a language which was able to include all the marvellous achievements of many different authors and traditions. The kind of language they forged was far more rich, copious, expressive and awe-inducing than all the other languages taken singularly. They patiently and discreetly waited until their mother tongue was ready to be elevated, celebrated and displayed to the world. They changed its "ID" from "beggar" to "sovereign". This was the most powerful way of portraying their identity and to transform the national glorious deeds and virtuous principles and behaviour into a means which could simultaneously enchant and rule the world.

The following centuries bore witness to the success and triumph that both the English language and nation eventually achieved. English writers no longer needed to revere and imitate. They were now revered and imitated themselves. And this was undoubtedly the best reward for their praiseworthy work on a language that previously had no place on the Olympus of the great ruling and praiseworthy idioms. The prophetic words that Sir Philip Sidney wrote in his *Defence* were finally revealing their truthfulness,

"For Poesie, must not be drawne by the eares, it must bee gently led, or, rather, it must lead".

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