

A Very Brief Introduction

THE RENAISSANCE

The THREE 'R's

RENAISSANCE

REFORMATION

REVOLUTION

NOMENCLATURE: RENAISSANCE or EARLY MODERN?

- Tradition vs. Scholarly revision
- Modern scholars prefer "Early Modern Period":
 - Emphasizes historical **continuity**;
 - De-emphasizes negative characterization of the Mediaeval Period as "The Dark Ages";
 - Incorporates ideas of **invention** to the existing emphasis on **recovery** of the Classical past:
 - FORWARD- as well as BACKWARD-looking;
 - Posits alternative **criteria** for assessment and taxonomy.

Follow the Ancients to Perfection

"Read, then, and read again (O future poet); ... turn the leaves of your Greek and Latin exemplars, then leave aside all these old French poesies... which do corrupt the taste of our tongue, and serve not, save to bear witness to our ignorance" (Joachim Du Bellay, *The Defense and Illustration of the French Language*, 287).

Follow the Path of the Bourgeoning Nation

"To speak truly, our language [Tuscan] has also its forms of poetry so properly its own that they are not those of any other language or nation. Indeed one ought not to try to hold the Tuscan poetry within the confines that bind the Greek and Latin..." (Giambattista Giraldi, *Discourse on the Composition of Romances*, 275).

Period of Study: Choosing the Starting Point

- 1300s: translation of Classical Greek and Roman texts from Arabic to Latin (**intellectual**);
- 1435: Alberti's *De Pictura* (**artistic**);
- c. 1475: Printing Press (**technological**);
- ~1400s: "The Great Vowel Shift" (**linguistic**);
- 1490s: Humanist diaspora: Erasmus (**scholarly**);
- 1490s: revival of wool trade; "discovery" of the New World (**economic**);
- 1535: The Act of Supremacy/Protestant Reformation (**religio-political**)

**Period of Study:
Choosing an End-point**

- 1642: closing of the theatres, London (**artistic/social**);
- 1632: Galileo: *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems, Ptolemaic and Copernican* (**scientific**)
- 1660: End of the Commonwealth/Restoration of Charles II (**political**);
- 1660: Royal Society...for Improving Natural Knowledge (**intellectual**);
- 1732: Pope's "Essay on Man" (**literary/philosophical**);
- 1763: steam engine => Industrial Revolution (**technologica/economic**).

**Period of Study:
ENGLISH Early Modern Period**

~1530-1660

MEDIAEVAL-> **EARLY MODERN** -> ENLIGHTENMENT



REFORMATION: Politics of Religion

- 1534: The Act of Supremacy
 - Henry VIII declares himself the head of Church and State
 - Is excommunicated by the Pope
- England's isolation from Catholic European community;
- Destruction of the Monasteries:
 - Loss of libraries and art;
- HERESY=TREASON
 - Codified the interimplication of religion and politics

REFORMATION: Conscience

INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE: the spark of RIGHT REASON in the minds of human beings.

Protestants asserted that the devout should be able to communicate directly with God without the intercession of the priests.

Literary Consequences: ANTI-CATHOLICISM

Pronounced anti-Catholic tone of post-Reformation English literature.

“Cold is God’s way of telling us to burn more Catholics!” (Blackadder’s Puritan Auntie, “Beer”)

Priest class stereotyped as lazy, avaricious, corrupt, demonic.



Passional Christi und Antichristi
By Lucan Cranarch the Elder, 1521.
The woodcut shows the Pope selling "Indulgences."

Literary Consequences: ICONOCLASM

"1 the breaking of images; 2 the assailing of cherished beliefs or conventions" (COD).

Protestant distrust of "images" and "idols" that divert worship from the creator to the created.

Produced more wide-reaching debate over the place and function of ART and REPRESENTATION in general

See the "Bowre of Blisse" or "False Florimel" in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.



St Martin's, Utrecht, showing the defaced frieze which was then hidden behind a false wall.

Literary Consequences: HERMENEUTICS

HERMENEUTICS: a theory of interpretation based on the idea that **truth exists in the text** to be **dis-covered** by the educated reader.

- DEBATES about INTERPRETATION:
 - How is interpretive AUTHORITY established?
 - Who has the right to interpret texts, especially sacred ones?
 - What are the interpretive consequences of TRANSLATION?

REFORMATION: Language of Devotion

"I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to stablysh the laye people in any truth, excepte the scripture where playnly layed before their eyes in their mother tonge, that they might se the process, ordre and meaning of the text..."
(William Tyndale, *CE* 59).

Tyndale "Scriptural Interpretation": HERMENEUTICS

WHAT: Tyndale writes of the "literal sense" of scripture. What does he mean by the "literal sense?"

WHAT II: How does the excerpt illustrate HERMENEUTICS?

SO WHAT: Why is it so important for Tyndale to emphasize the "literal sense" of scripture, given the early Protestant context?

Tyndale "Scriptural Interpretation": THOMIST connection

THOMAS AQUINAS: INTENT

"When Scripture speaks of God's arm, the **literal sense** is not that God has such a member, but only **what is signified by that member**, namely, **operative power**"
(Aquinas, my emph).

Tyndale "Scriptural Interpretation": ICONOCLASM

WHAT: Tyndale writes of poetic figures (similitudes and allegories). What is the function of these figures, in his view?

SO WHAT: Why is Tyndale so emphatic that allegories used in Scripture are "no sense of the Scripture" and that a figure is "not the Scripture, but an example or similitude **borrowed** of the Scripture" (emph. added)? Why does he distinguish between the sacred word and the literary representation of it?

More: "Dialogue Concerning Heresies"

WHAT: In the dialogue, More and his interlocutor take opposite positions with regard to who can rightly interpret scripture. What is the ground of this dispute?

- Consider: the use of "ye" and "whole" in the passage.

SO WHAT: How does this debate about scriptural interpretation relate to broader *literary* concerns?
