

to see what I was about. So, if I'd done nothing but give special names to the governor, the river, the city, and the island, which hinted to the learned that the island was nowhere, the city a phantom, the river waterless, and that the governor had no people,³ that would not have been hard to do, and would have been far more clever than what I actually did. Unless I had a historian's devotion to fact, I am not so stupid as to have used those barbarous and senseless names of Utopia, Anyder, Amaurot, and Ademus.

Still, my dear Giles, I see some people are so suspicious that what we naive fellows have written down of Hythloday's account can hardly find any credence at all with these circumspect and sagacious persons. I'm afraid my personal reputation, as well as my authority as a historian, may be threatened by their skepticism; so it's a good thing that I can defend myself by saying, as Terence's Mysis says about Glycerium's boy, to confirm his legitimacy: "Praise be to God there were some free women present at his birth."⁴ And so it was a good thing for me that Raphael told his story not just to you and me, but to a great many perfectly respectable and serious-minded men. Whether he told them more things, and more important things, I don't know; but I'm sure he told them no fewer and no less important things than he told us.

Well, if these doubters won't believe such witnesses, let them consult Hythloday himself, for he is not yet dead. I heard only recently from some travelers coming out of Portugal that on the first of last March he was as healthy and vigorous a man as he ever was. Let them get the truth from him—dig it out of him with questions, if they want. I only want them to understand that I'm responsible for my own work, and my own work alone, not for anyone else's credibility.

Farewell, my dearest Peter, to you, your lovely wife, and your delightful little girl—to all, my wife sends her very best wishes.

1517

From The History of King Richard III

[A KING'S MISTRESS]¹

Now then, by and by, as it were for anger not for covetise,² the protector sent into the house of Shore's wife (for her husband dwelled not with her) and spoiled her of all that ever she had, above the value of two or three thousand marks,³ and sent her body to prison. And when he had a while laid unto her, for the manner sake,⁴ that she went about to bewitch him, and that she was of counsel with the lord chamberlain⁵ to destroy him; in conclusion when that no color⁶ could fasten upon these matters, then he laid heinously to her charge

3. This is of course precisely what the names do mean.

4. *The Lady of Andros*, lines 770–71.

1. This woman, made famous by More's passage on her, is always known as Jane Shore, though recent research has shown that her given name was actually Elisabeth. Wife of a London merchant and mistress of the late king, Edward IV, she was persecuted by his brother Richard, duke of Gloucester, who had been named protector (regent) during the minority of Edward's sons. After immuring

them in the Tower of London (where they disappeared forever) he ascended the throne as Richard III.

2. Greed.

3. The mark was a monetary unit equal to two-thirds of a pound; and the pound was worth far more than it is now. "Spoiled": despoiled.

4. Accused her, for form's sake (to justify her arrest).

5. Lord Hastings, beheaded by Richard.

6. Plausibility.

that natheles⁷ every man laughed at to hear it then so suddenly so highly taken, that she was naught of her body.⁸ And for this cause (as a goodly continent prince clean and faultless of himself, sent out of heaven into this vicious world for the amendment of men's manners)⁹ he caused the bishop of London to put her to open penance, going before the cross in procession upon a Sunday with a taper in her hand.¹ In which she went in countenance and pace demure, so womanly, and albeit she were out of all array save her kirtle only, yet went she so fair and lovely, namely² while the wondering of the people cast a comely rud in her cheeks (of which she before had most miss),³ that her great shame won her much praise among those that were more amorous of her body than curious of⁴ her soul. And many good folk also that hated her living⁵ and glad were to see sin corrected, yet pitied they more her penance than rejoiced therein, when they considered that the protector procured it more of a corrupt intent than any virtuous affection.⁶

This woman was born in London, worshipfully friended,⁷ honestly brought up, and very well married, saving⁸ somewhat too soon, her husband an honest citizen, young and goodly and of good substance.⁹ But forasmuch as¹ they were coupled ere she were well ripe, she not very fervently loved for whom she never longed. Which was haply² the thing that the more easily made her incline unto the king's appetite when he required³ her. Howbeit,⁴ the respect of his royalty, the hope of gay apparel, ease, pleasure, and other wanton wealth was able soon to pierce a soft tender heart. But when the king had abused her, anon⁵ her husband (as he was an honest man and one that could his good,⁶ not presuming to touch a king's concubine) left her up to him altogether. When the king died, the lord chamberlain took her, which in the king's days, albeit he was sore⁷ enamored upon her, yet he forbore her, either for reverence or for a certain friendly faithfulness.

Proper⁸ she was, and fair: nothing in her body that you would have changed, but if you would have wished her somewhat higher. Thus say they that knew her in her youth, albeit some that now see her (for yet she liveth) deem her never to have been well-visaged. Whose judgment seemeth me somewhat like as though men should guess the beauty of one long before departed, by her scalp taken out of the charnel house;⁹ for now is she old, lean, withered, and dried up, nothing left but rivelled¹ skin and hard bone. And yet, being even such, whoso well advise² her visage might guess and devise which parts how filled would make it a fair face.

Yet delighted not men so much in her beauty as in her pleasant behavior. For a proper wit³ had she, and could both read well and write, merry in company, ready and quick of answer, neither mute nor full of babble, sometime taunting without displeasure and not without disport.⁴ The king would say

7. Nevertheless. "Wist": knew.

8. Unchaste.

9. Morals.

1. The standard punishment for a harlot.

2. Especially. "Save her kirtle only": dressed only in a loose gown.

3. Lack. "Comely rud": becoming redness (i.e., blush).

4. Concerned about.

5. Way of life.

6. Motive.

7. With worthy friends.

8. Except.

9. I.e., wealthy. "Goodly": handsome.

1. Since.

2. Perhaps.

3. Asked.

4. Be that as it may.

5. Immediately.

6. Knew what was good for him.

7. Very.

8. Good-looking.

9. Common burial place.

1. Wrinkled.

2. Observe.

3. Good mind.

4. Amusement.

had three concubines, which in three diverse properties diversely excelled: one the merriest, another the wiliest, the third the holiest harlot in his realm, as one whom no man could get out of the church lightly⁵ to any place but it were to his bed. The other two were somewhat greater personages, and natheles⁶ of their humility content to be nameless and to forbear the praise of those properties. But the merriest was this Shore's wife, in whom the king therefore took special pleasure. For many he had, but her he loved, whose favor, to say the truth (for sin it were to belie the devil),⁷ she never abused to any man's hurt, but to many a man's comfort and relief. Where the king took displeasure, she would mitigate and appease his mind. Where men were out of favor, she would bring them in his grace. For many that had highly offended, she obtained pardon. Of great forfeitures⁸ she gat men remission. And finally, in many weighty suits⁹ she stood many men in great stead, either for none or very small rewards, and those rather gay than rich, either for that she was content with the deed' self well done, or for that she delighted to be sued unto and to show what she was able to do with the king; or for that wanton women and wealthy be not alway covetous.

I doubt not some shall think this woman too slight a thing to be written of and set among the remembrances of great matters, which they shall specially think that haply shall esteem her only by that¹ they now see her. But meseemeth the chance² so much the more worthy to be remembered, in how much she is now in the more beggarly condition, unfriended and worn out of acquaintance,³ after good substance, after as great favor with the prince, after as great suit⁴ and seeking to with all those that those days had business to speed, as many other men were in their times which⁵ be now famous only by the infamy of their ill deeds. Her doings were not much less, albeit they be much less remembered because they were not so evil. For men use⁶ if they have an evil turn to write it in marble; and whoso doth us a good turn, we write it in dust; which is not worst proved⁷ by her; for at this day she beggeth of many at this day living; that at this day had begged if she had not been.

ca. 1513–20

1557

5. Easily.

6. Notwithstanding.

7. Proverbial: it's wrong to lie even about the devil.

8. Imposed as punishments for crimes.

9. Appeals to the king.

1. That which. "Haply": perhaps.

2. Story. "Meseemeth": I think.

3. Without friends.

4. Supplication.

5. Who. "Speed": expedite, promote.

6. Are accustomed.

7. Illustrated.

SIR THOMAS WYATT THE ELDER

1503–1542

Thomas Wyatt made his career in the shifting, dangerous currents of Renaissance courts, and court culture, with its power struggles, sexual intrigues, and sophisticated tastes, shaped his remarkable achievements as a poet. Educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, Wyatt entered the service of Henry VIII, becoming clerk of the king's jewels, a member of diplomatic missions to France and the Low Countries, and, in 1537–39, ambassador to Spain at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. The years he spent abroad as a diplomat had a significant impact upon his writing

most obvious of poems by the Italian Renaissance writers Serafino, Aretino, Sannazaro, Alamanni, and, above all, Petrarch. Diplomacy, with its veiled threats, subtle indirection, and cynical role-playing, may have had a more indirect impact as well, reinforcing the lessons in self-display and self-concealment that Wyatt would have received at the English court.

Life in the orbit of the ruthless, unpredictable Henry VIII was competitive and risky. When, in the late 1530s, Wyatt wrote to his son of the "thousand dangers and hazards, enmities, hatreds, imprisonments, despites, and indignations" he had faced, he was not exaggerating. He probably came closest to the executioner's axe when in 1536 he was imprisoned in the Tower of London along with several others accused of having committed adultery with the queen, Anne Boleyn. As his poem "Who list his wealth and ease retain" suggests, Wyatt may have watched from his cell the execution of the queen and her alleged lovers; but he himself was spared, as he was spared a few years later, when he was again imprisoned in the Tower on charges of high treason brought by his enemies at court. His death, at the age of thirty-nine, came from a fever.

It is not surprising, given his career, that many of Wyatt's poems, including his satires and his psalm translations, express an intense longing for "steadfastness" and an escape from the corruption, anxiety, and duplicity of the court. The praise, in his verse epistle to John Pains, of a quiet retired life in the country and the harsh condemnation of courtly hypocrisy derive from his own experience. But of course the eloquent celebration of simplicity and truthfulness can itself be a cunning strategy. Wyatt was a master of the game of poetic self-display. Again and again he represents himself as a plain-speaking and steadfast man, betrayed by the "doubleness" of a fickle mistress or the instability of fortune. At this distance it is impossible to know how much this account corresponds to reality, but we can admire, as Wyatt's contemporaries did, the rhetorical deftness of the performance.

In a move with momentous consequences for English poetry, Wyatt introduced into English the sonnet, a fourteen-line poem in iambic pentameter with a complex, intertwining rhyme scheme. For the most part, he took his subject matter from Petrarch's sonnets, but his rhyme schemes make a significant departure. Petrarch's sonnets consist of an "octave," rhyming *abbaabba*, followed, after a turn (*volta*) in the sense, by a "sestet" with various rhyme schemes (such as *cd cd cd* and *cde cde*) that have in common their avoidance of a rhyming couplet at the end. Wyatt employs the Petrarchan octave, but his most common sestet scheme is *cddc ee*: the Petrarchan sonnet was already beginning to change into the characteristic "English" structure for the sonnet, three quatrains and a closing couplet. (For the Italian originals of the Petrarchan sonnets translated in our selection, as well as additional poems by Wyatt, go to Norton Literature Online.)

In his freest translations of Petrarchan sonnets, such as "Whoso list to hunt," Wyatt tends to turn the idealizing of the woman into disillusionment and complaint. For the lover in Petrarch's poems, love is a transcendent experience; for the lover in Wyatt's poems, it is obsessive and embittering. The tone of bitterness carries over to many poems less closely linked to Italian and French models, poems with short stanzas and refrains in the manner of the native English "ballet" (pronounced to rhyme with *mallet*) or dance-song. Some of the ballets, to be sure, strike a note of jaunty independence, often tinged with misogyny, but melancholy complaint is rarely very distant. Perhaps the poem that most brilliantly captures Wyatt's blend of passion, anger, cynicism, longing, and pain is "They flee from me."

Though Wyatt's representations of women are often cynical, it is clear that aristocratic women played a key role in the reception and preservation of his poetry. Women were not excluded from the courtly game of ballet-making. The Devonshire Manuscript, one of the chief sources for Wyatt's poetry, contains a number of poems that were probably by women, many more transcribed by female hands, and some male-authored poems written in a female voice, as well as any number of misogynist verses, by Wyatt and others.