

## The Renaissance: An Introduction

### The Public Sphere

Renaissance means 'rebirth' – of what? Culture, civilised values. The term refers broadly to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when humanist thinkers were positing the idea of a rebirth of values they felt had been lacking in the Middle Ages, often popularly referred to even now as 'the Dark Ages'. The Middle Ages was characterised as a period of superstition and ignorance beginning with the fall of Rome and all the values Rome embodied and running right up to the Renaissance.

Of course this conveniently ignores all the artistic and literary achievements of the Middle Ages – Chaucer's work is perhaps the best known today. There were also significant religious thinkers such as Aquinas (13thc).

The values Renaissance thinkers sought to recapture were those of Classical Greece and Rome (virtue, nobility, justice etc). Rome was a great imperial power and Elizabethans liked to see it as an image of England. This is one of the reasons Shakespeare uses Rome as a medium for discussing politics and justice in Renaissance England – think of the Roman plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*.

We tend to look back to the ancient Britons to understand our history (King Arthur, Boadicea, later popular heroes such as Robin Hood). Renaissance thinkers looked to ancient Greece and Rome for the roots of our cultural history, to Aristotle, not *Beowulf*.

We see this in the form of Renaissance drama, for example the five-act play (borrowed from an ancient Roman model) and the use of terms coined by the ancients, 'comedy' and 'tragedy'. Renaissance drama is heavily influenced by Aristotelian theories of tragedy, and Seneca in particular (often violent tales, with an emphasis on politics and the state, not psychological exploration of character).

This emphasis on the Classical extended well into the eighteenth century, where poets were valued not for their originality (which as you know came to be valued after the challenge of the Romantics) but for their ability to imitate classical models, in particular epic, satire (which Derek will be talking to you about next term) and the pastoral (which Graham will be talking to you about). We still have a powerful classical legacy in the form of Greek and Roman myths and gods.

In the Renaissance classical myths and gods provided a rich and colourful store of images and narratives for writers to use. Any educated person would have been familiar with them and so they operate as shorthand for values or images which the writer wants to conjure up eg Diana, goddess of chastity, renowned for her beauty. When writers use Diana as an image of Elizabeth I they don't need to explain the significance to their readers.

This use of classical imagery extends right through the 18thc in Pope and Fielding and even the Romantics on occasion - think of Keats's odes eg the figure of Psyche.

We need to remember that in early modern England the language of education was Latin, not English and so the ancient world felt much more familiar to them than it does to us.

Gordon Campbell in his introduction to the Macmillan *Renaissance Anthology* notes the importance of Latin as the shared cultural language of Renaissance Europe and the inevitable cross-fertilization of ideas eg Machiavelli's political ideas and the poetic achievements of Dante and in particular Petrarch.

Renaissance writers who chose to write in English sought to appropriate classical models but to rework them, to construct a rich culture in their own language – pretty radical.

Petrarch is a particularly important figure in Renaissance culture. Campbell argues that ‘Petrarch was responsible for the idea of romantic love which was celebrated in Renaissance poetry’ and goes on crucially to explain, ‘An emotion which began as a literary attitude in Petrarchan poetry has become a real emotion in modern western culture’. I think it’s a bit ambitious to argue that Petrarch invented romantic love (it’s clearly referred to in ancient writings such as *The Old Testament*, for eg) but he’s absolutely right to stress the idea of romantic attitude.

Campbell summarises Petrarch’s influences helpfully: ‘From the cult of the Virgin Mary the Petrarchans adopted the veneration of the lady as a figure of spotless purity and virtue; from the neo-Platonic [Plato ie classical] tradition they adopted the idea of love as an ennobling emotion which raised the mind above mere physical attraction’.

Sidney, Shakespeare and indeed Donne write sonnets which assume familiarity with Petrarchan tradition but which interrogate it and at times subject it to subversive wit. We do find conventional Petrarchan imagery such as bleeding hearts and rose-like cheeks but Shakespeare uses them for his own ends, for eg in the famous sonnet no 130 (Norton p.1040):

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun...  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks.

Shakespeare and Donne expose popular Petrarchan images of female beauty to common sense – taken literally, it is ludicrous to speak of roses in a woman's cheeks or to speak of her as a goddess. Donne's *Elegy* no 8 provides an example of extreme anti-romantic method: ‘And like a bunch of ragged carrets stand / The short swolne fingers of thy gouty hand’.

Campbell also points out the competing tradition of ‘Ovidian eroticism’ which emerged towards the end of the 16thc. Shakespeare admired Ovid and we certainly find his influence in the poetry of Donne and Marvell in their frank eroticism. Love is a perennial literary concern but its expression in Renaissance literature is complicated by reactions to Petrarch, Ovid and other traditions eg Plato and even religion.

Italy was a powerful influence in Renaissance thinking (the Renaissance was of course born in Italy). While Italy was known in Shakespeare’s England for its artistic achievements, it was also notorious for its politics, summed up in the Elizabethan and Jacobean imagination in the figure of Machiavelli, a statesman and political theorist (1469-1527). In *The Prince* (1513) Machiavelli discussed appropriate strategies for those in power who wanted to retain authority at all costs. Machiavelli embodied the devil to many Elizabethans and Jacobeans.

Campbell points out interestingly that the image of the stage ‘Machiavel’ in Renaissance England was based only loosely on Machiavelli’s writings and was heavily influenced by popular French attitudes to Machiavelli; they regarded him as a figure of evil.

Renaissance England saw in Machiavelli an image of power-hungry, devious, manipulative politicians who would stop at nothing to gain or maintain power. This kind of cunning, corrupt and murderous political world was seen as characteristically Italian, specifically Machiavellian.

Machiavelli replaced the traditional princely virtues (justice, prudence, temperance, fortitude, mercy) advocated in political treatises by Aquinas and other religious thinkers with moral pragmatism.

Machiavelli argues, 'every prince ought to desire the reputation of being merciful, and not cruel; at the same time, he should be careful not to misuse that mercy ... A prince, therefore, should not mind the ill repute of cruelty, when he can thereby keep his subjects united and loyal; for a few displays of severity will really be more merciful than to allow, by an excess of clemency, disorders to occur, which are apt to result in rapine and murder; for these injure a whole community, whilst the executions ordered by the prince fall only upon a few individuals'(ch 17, p.64).

He goes on, 'it is much more safe to be feared than to be loved ... For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful and fickle, dissemblers, avoiders of danger, and greedy of gain'; he insists, 'mankind is bad'(p.65).

Machiavelli's view of human nature is deeply cynical: 'above all things, abstain from taking people's property, for men will sooner forget the death of their fathers than the loss of their patrimony'(p.65). He advocates the need for cunning, 'A prince should be a fox, to know the traps and snares; and a lion, to be able to frighten the wolves'(ch 18, p.67). Cynically he insists, 'as men are naturally bad, and will not observe their faith towards you, you must, in the same way, not observe yours to them ... the prince should know ... how to be a great hypocrite and dissembler. For men are so simple, and yield so much to immediate necessity, that the deceiver will never lack dupes'.

He sums up his advice to princes: a prince will 'often [be] obliged, for the sake of maintaining his state, to act contrary to humanity, charity and religion. And therefore it is necessary that he should have a versatile mind, capable of changing readily, according as the winds and changes of fortune bid him ... not to swerve from good if possible, but to know how to resort to evil if necessity demands it' (p.68).

The early 17thc saw a crisis in values: conflict between the religious traditions of the Middle Ages and the secular bias of the Renaissance, between social order and individualism. A general corruption of social values seemed to have set in, a universal egotism confirming the dark legacy of Machiavelli. Francis Bacon commented in 1605: 'We are much beholden to Machiavel and others...that write what men do and not what they ought to do.'

In *The Tempest* Prospero's use of magic to manipulate his political enemies may be a comment on the theatricality of the pomp and circumstance which accompanies political power, particularly royal power. We see this in the court of both Elizabeth and James, exploiting thrones, robes, language, symbolic representation for political effect, keeping people in awe and demonstrating power. Royal robes in particular symbolise power, as of course does the sceptre (Prospero has a magic staff). Of course Elizabeth died in 1603 so when *The Tempest* was first performed in 1611, James I was on the throne. Shakespeare's company name changed to reflect the change in patronage, to 'The King's Men' or 'King's Company'.

Monarchs ruled in this period by divine right, believing that they had been placed in their position by God. This was famously challenged by Cromwell and Parliament in the mid 17thc, resulting in the beheading of Charles I and reinstated, albeit in less powerful form, at the Restoration, when Charles II came to the throne. The Restoration refers to the restoring or restoration of the monarchy in 1660 (Restoration literature, rather confusingly, covers the period 1660 – 1700 ish).

Blackstone, writing a legal history including the reigns of Elizabeth and James (*Commentaries On The Laws of England*, 1765-9), articulates the difference in political style between Elizabeth and James: 'Queen Elizabeth ... had almost the same legal powers, and sometimes exerted them as roughly, as their father King Henry the eighth ... She probably, or her able advisors, had penetration enough to discern how the power of the kingdom had gradually shifted its channel [giving Parliament more power] and wisdom enough not to provoke the commons to discover and feel their strength ... Such, in

short, were her circumstances, her necessities, her wisdom, and her good disposition, that never did a prince so long and so intirely ... reign in the affections of the people.'

His account of James is markedly different: 'the claim of a more absolute power inherent in the kingly office than had ever been carried into practice, soon awakened the sleeping lion'. The people 'examined into the divinity of this claim, and found it weakly and fallaciously supported ... The leaders felt the pulse of the nation ... and accordingly resisted and opposed it, whenever the pusillanimous temper of the reigning monarch had courage to put it to the trial'.

The monarch's power extended to determining the official religion of the nation. Had to attend church by law. Couldn't choose the church one attended – had to be the local parish church. Had no right to be atheist – would have been dangerous to acknowledge it in public.

Considerable political tension between the two dominant faiths, Protestantism and Catholicism.

Primary theological differences

Catholic Practice

Transubstantiation – the belief that the bread and wine taken during Mass literally and mystically become the body and blood of Christ. Protestants regard communion as a SYMBOL of the body and blood of Christ.

Praying to Mary and the Saints (seen as icon worship by Protestants)

Confession to priest

Celibate priesthood

Penance – the *Chambers Dictionary* defines it as 'an act of mortification undertaken voluntarily or imposed by a priest to manifest sorrow for sin'.

Purgatory (a state after death when souls are purified from venial sins through suffering). Priests could be employed to pray for the soul of a departed loved one to ensure a quicker passage through Purgatory. Protestant theology argues that on the cross Christ took the punishment for the sins of those who believe on him; it is this alone which ensures their place in Heaven – not works, not suffering)

Religious relics – an object associated with a saint eg cup, part of their clothing, deemed to have healing powers

Pilgrimages – to places where miracles have occurred, to the birthplaces of saints etc

Canonization – under very particular circumstances (association with miracles etc) the Pope can canonize a person ie they will be referred to as a saint (Protestants don't have saints)

Early Modern Protestant fear and criticism of Catholicism

Superstition (icons, transubstantiation, pilgrimages, relics)

Corruption eg black market in relics (exposed humorously by Chaucer in the 14thc in *The Canterbury Tales*) the selling of pardons

Catholicism was associated with foreign powers (Spain, Italy France) and thus seen as a political threat Spanish Inquisition – powerful in Europe during the Renaissance and active until the eighteenth century. The Inquisitors would arrest and try those accused of heresy. Heresy was defined as anything against the principles or interests of the Catholic faith, as interpreted by the Inquisitors, a quasi-political offence. The Inquisition constructed a powerful almost mystical image of its members, calculated to instil fear in the people and keep them from opposing the principles or interests of the Catholic church. They even arrested princes so we shouldn't underestimate their power. Scott describes the Inquisition torturer as 'an extraordinary, awesome apparition. Clothed from head to foot in a black garment, with his head and face covered, except for two eye-holes, with a black cowl, he presented a most diabolical and satanic appearance'(p.67). For centuries they terrified people across Europe and operated in the popular imagination as a powerful symbol of inequity, even evil.

## **The Reformation**

Catholic theology was challenged in the 14thc by John Wycliffe and his Lollard supporters but the most significant challenge occurred in the 16thc with Martin Luther, a monk and professor of theology at Wittenberg in Germany. *The Norton* editors summarise his work helpfully: Luther argued 'that the [Catholic] church had degenerated into a corrupt, worldly conspiracy designed to bilk the credulous and subvert secular authority', insisting that the answer lay in 'enabling all of the people to regain direct access to the word of God by means of vernacular translations'. The Protestant Reformation was characterised by insistence that the Bible, not church ritual or clerics, should have the ultimate authority in individual lives.

This was radical in that it meant that the individual had access to God's truth for him or herself. Church tradition (Catholic at the time) stressed the importance of church rituals and the priest, as confessor, advisor and teacher: since the Bible and religious works were written in Latin, only the well educated (and therefore well off) could read religious works for themselves; ordinary people had access to religious narratives through morality plays, which dramatised the creation story, the fall of man, parables etc, religious art and primarily through the priest.

Henry VIII famously broke with Rome with the Act of Supremacy in 1534, which declared the King, not the Pope, to be the head of the church in England. This came about partly because he refused to be subject to anyone on earth and refused the authority of the Pope, arguing that England (ie Henry) should be able to make decisions relating to English interests. Of course he also wanted to be able to divorce in order to remarry in the hope of producing a legitimate male heir; divorce was not possible under Catholic law.

Henry's break with had nothing to do with the religious convictions of the Protestant reformers such as Luther and Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English and who, as *The Norton* editors remind us, was driven by Henry into exile, where he was arrested and killed. *The Norton* editors refer to Henry VIII rather nicely as 'an equal-opportunity persecutor'(p.476) in that he had both Catholics and Reformist Protestants burnt at the stake.

Incidentally, history shows that creating martyrs usually backfires. The Reformation saw a strengthening of the Protestant faith partly as a response to the public displays of faith by those dying at the stake; the early church exploded in numbers when Christians were being publicly fed to lions, burnt etc – that and the fact that the resurrection was in living memory – thousands of people had either seen Christ walking around after He'd been crucified or knew someone who had and this had a huge impact for a couple of centuries after it happened - Roman and Jewish (ie anti-Christian therefore for academic historical purposes to be preferred to Christian accounts which may be accused of bias) historians such as Tacitus, Josephus and Gamaliel record the sightings.

## **The Private Sphere**

*The Bible* is fundamental to understandings of gender and morality in early modern England; as Shuger points out, 'The Bible remained the central cultural text in England, as in the rest of Europe, through the seventeenth century'. Religion was part of the social structure on a cultural, if not necessarily an individual spiritual level. Church attendance was obligatory in England until the Civil Wars in the late seventeenth century and was an established pattern in eighteenth-century society.

Protestantism stressed the importance of the sermon, the teaching of biblical precept, over the ritual associated with Catholicism. As a result of Henry VIII's Injunction of 1536, an English translation of the Bible was available in every parish church, ensuring access to biblical truth to all who could read.

In 1547 the *Book of Homilies* was published, providing royally sanctioned sermons for use by the clergy. While this was partly to counter the problems of poor, sometimes ill informed preaching, it also testifies to a desire to have some state control over preaching, a powerful cultural medium.

The Bible was often regarded as dangerous in the wrong hands ie those of the common people – it teaches that all men are equal, that all have sinned – didn't go down well with the aristocracy, who justified the class system on Biblical grounds ie you were born into this class so it must be God's will. If you rebel against your class position and its role then you'll be rebelling against God. Monarchs certainly weren't keen on the idea that in God's eyes they were no more important (or less) than a peasant. The Bible was a powerful tool in controlling people but its insistence on equality was deemed subversive of social order.

This strong emphasis on teaching, applying biblical tenets to everyday life, had a significant role in establishing cultural norms of behaviour and values, particularly in the domestic sphere but the denomination of the church had less impact on domestic life than one might expect. Crawford sums up the position: 'Protestant writers remained deeply critical of what they believed was unquestioning obedience exacted by the nuns' clerical superiors. Ironically, Protestants themselves favoured similar unconditional obedience from wives to husbands'(pp.46-7). She notes the concern with which 'unmarried women who lived outside patriarchal control' were regarded in the seventeenth century: 'Typically, a woman without employment "found masterless" in 1616 was ordered to the House of Correction for a whipping'(p.48).

The family was the expression of patriarchal authority in microcosm; order in the family was essential to order in the public sphere and so the law sought to regulate family conduct, in particular that of the wife, whose responsibility it was to raise children to be religious and obedient to parents and by extension to church and state. The family is the intersection between the public and private sphere, the locus of values and behaviours essential to the social order. Disorder within the family, be it wives questioning their husbands' authority or daughters refusing arranged marriage, indicated the possibility of subversive individualism which, if unchecked, had potential implications for public authorities such as church and state.

The law regarded women as the property of fathers, transferred to husbands through marriage. Sheridan's eighteenth-century dictionary defines 'property' not simply as an object but as a 'right of possession'. His definition of 'to possess' is particularly useful: 'To have as an owner, to be master of; to enjoy; to have power over'. It is in this sense that it was applied to women.

Given women's subordinate position in both law and religious teaching, as daughters and then wives, the choice of marriage partner was particularly significant but often not in their hands. Houlbrooke notes that although many parents were prepared to take children's' wishes into account, property was inevitably an important consideration in upper class marriage transactions: 'Strict settlements of the seventeenth century commonly made payment of daughters' portions conditional on their compliance with parental wishes', a practice which appears to have continued into the eighteenth century. Watt refers to the commercialisation of marriage, 'Newspapers carried on marriage marts, with advertisements offering or demanding specified dowries and jointures'.

The extent to which masculine property rights were ingrained in early modern society is clear: if a woman tried to dispose of her property before marriage without her future husband's knowledge, it could be regarded as fraud. He could bequeath it by will without her consent but she could only bequeath it if he agreed. The Statute of Wills (1540), first allowed men but not married women to make wills concerning real property. Prior to this, the common law simply followed primogeniture and feudal customs. A woman had no automatic claim to her husband's property after his death.

The notion of woman as property supported an ethos of obedience to masculine control. The influential Catholic writer Vives insisted, 'You have beauty in your body, woman, but your husband has your beauty and you in his possession'. He goes so far as to argue that a man 'cannot possibly be ugly if he has a beautiful wife', betraying anxiety at the potential power of female beauty: 'the body of a woman, however beautiful, is nothing but a dung heap'.

The notion of female subjection to the male is found in Aristotle, who argued, 'The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying'. He regarded the birth of female children as a 'monstrosity' of nature, viewing them as imperfect or defective males.

Vives, who lectured at Oxford and wrote the first study addressing the universal education of women in depth in 1523, echoes Aristotle, arguing that physical subjection, even to violence, is rooted in natural law: 'In all races of animals, the female obeys and follows the male; she fawns upon him and allows herself to be beaten and punished by him, and nature has taught that this is the way things should be'. He advises beaten women, 'consider that you are being corrected by God, and that this is happening to you because of some of your sins, which are expiated in that way', representing the husband as the corrective instrument of God and placing the blame on the women themselves, 'good and prudent wives are rarely beaten by their husbands'(p.204).

The issue of 'domestic chastisement', be it by incarceration or beating, was debated by legal, religious and literary writers throughout the early modern period and continued to cause concern into the nineteenth century. Since the late seventeenth century, courts regarded chastisement as admonition or confinement to the house, not physical punishment. This power was, according to Blackstone, 'confined within reasonable bounds', the husband being 'prohibited from using any violence'(I,p.444). Yet in 1782 Sir Francis Buller made the famous and outrageous ruling that a husband could beat his wife if the stick was no thicker than his thumb. He was dubbed Judge Thumb thereafter but some took the ruling seriously.

Whatley addresses the problem of wife-beating in *A Bride-Bush: Or, a Direction for Married Persons* (1617). He argues that wife-beating is a legitimate part of the husband's role in ensuring his wife's good behaviour, declaring, 'some reproofs and corrections are just and causeful, even such as the faultiness of an inferior doth deserve and call for'. His advice is uncompromisingly harsh, 'if a woman be so yoked, she must keep her place and show patience. It is not for a prisoner to break prison at his pleasure because he hath met with a rough Jailer'(p.270). Marriage is often referred to critically as a prison by writers in this period (think of Behn, Astell and Defoe later). It's interesting to see how some 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> theorists on marriage don't object to the label, regarding it as part of the man's necessary control of his wife.

The figure of the silent domestic woman is an Aristotelian ideal, not a biblical one, although it had considerable currency in early modern England. Robert Cleaver argued in his 17<sup>th</sup> sermon, 'A Godly Form', 'silence is the best ornament of a woman'. The biblical ideal of womanhood found in *Proverbs* 31, provides a very different model, a composite of different roles including domestic skills but also those of a shrewd businesswoman. She is a strong, hard-working and charitable figure characterised by nobility, wisdom and trustworthiness, qualities which early modern culture regarded as masculine.

Phyllis Mack suggests that in spite of the dominant ideology of the silent woman, there were contesting voices: over 300 women prophets during the period of the Civil Wars and the Interregnum and that there were over 240 women preachers and writers in the Quaker movement in the period 1650-65. Female preachers faced the dangers facing all dissenting preachers (ie people who weren't part of the Church of England) but their position was further problematised by their gender. In 1653 Elizabeth

Williams and Mary Fisher preached in Cambridge. The mayor punished them by ordering them to be publicly scourged [whipped]. In 1654, Elizabeth Fletcher and Elizabeth Leavens preached at Oxford. Penney recounts: 'the black tribe of scholars...dragged them first through a dirty pool, afterwards had them to a pump, and holding their mouths to the pump, endeavoured to pump water therein with other shameful abuses; after threw the said Elizabeth Fletcher down upon a gravestone...and bruised her so sore that she never recovered it'(pp.258-9).

There was an appeal to Parliament to stop women preaching; in 1646 Parliament voted that only ordained men could preach. This did not stop women preaching since most preachers in the sects, where women had such opportunities, irrespective of gender, were not ordained.

Woman was defined in the early modern period by her weakness, a view which had the advantage of a strong classical heritage: Roman women had more freedom than their Athenian counterparts, enjoying education and some social freedom but they were still regarded as inferior (leaving a baby girl to die of exposure was not uncommon). Aristotle famously concluded that bees, being led by one individual, must be led by a 'king bee': 'the male is by nature fitter to command than the female'.

Aquinas (13thc theologian and philosopher), whose teachings continued to be influential in the early modern period, followed Greek tradition in regarding woman as the source of evil, a tradition which influenced readings of Eve for centuries to come. Tertullian wrote in 'On the Apparel Of Women' 'woman...do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? ... You are the devil's gateway'. Augustine of Hippo argued, 'it is still Eve the temptress that we must be aware of in any woman'.

This somewhat hysterical view of women is related to a fear of female sexuality which characterised Greek culture and informed early modern English church teaching. The Greek Stoics taught that female sexuality could distract men from their studies and that sex was only acceptable for procreation; they valued celibacy and asceticism. Such teaching influenced Augustine, who believed that if Adam and Eve had not fallen, sex would never have been necessary for procreation. Aquinas believed that sex is sinful if it is enjoyed, since sexual desire causes man to behave in a way akin to animals, encouraging him to give in to base instincts. Milton's actually being pretty radical in representing Adam and Eve enjoying a sinless sexual relationship before the Fall.

The *New Testament* does not gender 'good works' but early modern theology does: women are called to suffer cheerfully in the domestic sphere. *The Homily Of the State of Matrimony* articulates this theology of female suffering: 'if thou canst suffer an extreme husband, thou shalt have a great reward therefore'(p.29). While Mary and female saints provided positive figures for Catholic women in particular to relate to, their significance was often related to their suffering rather than their strengths.

Suffering was viewed as women's part of Eve's curse and so any attempt to avoid it was deemed to be disobedient, an attempt to escape divinely ordained pain, thus controverting divine law. This applied particularly to childbirth; well into the nineteenth century, it was argued that alleviating the pain of childbirth would be to alleviate the curse and therefore to defy God.

Certain forms of piety were particularly associated with women, for example self-denial. Vives celebrates feminine self-denial in the form of his mother-in-law, Clara Cervent, who was married to a husband twice her age and only discovered his syphilis on their wedding night. Vives recounts enthusiastically her nursing her husband's 'cadaverous body'(p.202) for ten years: 'she anointed his ugly sores; bandaged daily his foul-smelling legs dripping with purulent matter...dressed his wounds as if she were handling musk instead of fetid sores'(p.201) and even gave birth to his children.



Fantazzi notes that Vives' popular and influential *Education of A Christian Woman* (1523) 'was generally regarded as the most authoritative statement on this subject throughout the sixteenth century, especially in England, where it found favour with Catholics and Protestants alike.'

It was assumed that women were weaker and less intelligent than men, and therefore better suited to a life of piety, suffering and submission. Luther argued, 'Men have broad shoulders and narrow hips, and accordingly they possess intelligence. Women have narrow shoulders and broad hips. Women ought to stay at home; the way they were created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon, keep house and bear and raise children.'

John Sprint articulated the views of Church patriarchy in *The Bride-Woman Counsellor*, first preached as a wedding sermon in 1699. He exhorted, 'woman...should be careful and diligent to content and please [the husband], otherwise, she doth wickedly pervert the end of her creation'. Sprint is one of many clergymen to convince themselves that women are responsible even for male misbehaviour and cruelty, taunting, 'this may be a memento to her of her original sin', telling women to 'thank your mother Eve'(p.16) for suffering in marriage.

William Whatley regarded authority not only as a prerogative but as a condition of masculinity: 'two things also be required of him: one, that he keep his authority; the other, that he do use it.' Vives goes so far as to advocate 'a wife must obey her husband's commands as if they were the law of God. The husband takes God's place on earth'. We see such thinking in *Paradise Lost*, where Milton represents Adam as 'for God only' and Eve 'for God in him'.

Gender also determined qualities of character in early modern thinking. Whilst women's sexuality was regarded as dangerous and in need of rigid control, Crawford notes that 'Prior to the Reformation...the church believed that men's powerful sexual impulses needed to be accommodated, and so the existence of brothels had been condoned'(p.42). The Protestant Reformers regarded such attitudes as sinful, a consequence of the doctrine of a celibate priesthood; they ended legal prostitution in 1546. However, while some preachers reflected biblical teaching in preaching chastity for both sexes, the double standard remained culturally entrenched for centuries to come.

Whatley insists, 'the wife, being resolved that her place is the lower, must carry herself as an inferior', arguing that she should be in 'fear (not slavish but loving)'(p.260) of her husband. Thus 'her speeches to himself must neither be cutted, sharp, sullen, passionate, tetchy, nor yet rude, careless, unmannerly, and contemptuous, but all such as carry the stamp of fear upon them, testifying that she well considers who herself is and to whom she speaketh'(p.261). He criticises women who 'chase and scold with their husbands, railing upon them and reviling' as 'Stains of womankind, blemishes of their sex, monsters in nature, botches of the family, rude, shameless, graceless, next to harlots if not the same with them'. The hysterical language testifies to intense anxiety about the dangers of female insubordination.

Silence and obedience are celebrated as feminine virtues; the unrestrained female voice is defined as monstrous, a threat to the natural order, symbolised as a disease, a 'festering sore'(p.262) as Whatley phrases it. Texts such as Behn's *The Rover* (17thc) provide a welcome antidote to such attitudes, empowering women but we shouldn't confuse the world of *The Rover* with early modern England as it was experienced by most women.

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