

Renaissance Women Poets
Dr. Brian McFadden
British Literature I
ENGL 2323

Isabella Whitney (1546?-1624?)

- Born in Cheshire; father was local nobility and her brother Geoffrey became a noted writer of emblem books
- Worked in London until 1573; unable to make ends meet on her own and returned to family home
- Had a number of contacts in the printing industry and began to publish poetry under her own name while still in London; one of the first women, if not the first woman, to do so
- Had a daughter out of wedlock in 1576; married a physician in 1580
- Drops out of records after 1624, so probably died; no exact mention of her death date

Whitney's works (major collections)

- *Copy of a letter...by a young Gentlewoman to her unconstant Lover*, 1567
- *A Sweet Nosegay*, 1573 (modeled on Hugh Plat, *Flowers of Philosophy*)
- *Her Will and Testament*, c. 1573 – the end of her life in London
- *The Lady Beloved Exclaimeth of the Great Untruth of her Lover*, 1578
- *The Lamentation of a Gentlewoman Upon the Death of Her Late-Deceased Friend, William Gruffith*, 1578
- *Ovidius Naso His Remedie of Love*, 1600 (adaptation of Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* and reference to Dido)

Mary (Sidney) Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621)

- Sister of Sir Philip Sidney – well-connected at court
- Had a solid humanist education as well as courtly skills
- Married Henry Herbert; in charge of several estates in the family
- Husband died 1601; she had a number of interests she developed after his death – medicine, firearms, sailing, archery, falconry, alchemy, astronomy
- Wilton House – poet's retreat (Spenser, Drayton, Ben Jonson, and others)
- Her work was regarded as highly as her brother's, Shakespeare's, and Spenser's
- Devastated by her brother's death in 1586
- Dies of smallpox

Works of Mary Herbert

- Psalms 44-150 – verse adaptations completed a MS that her brother had left unfinished at his death (liked by John Donne – 17 MSS)
- Advocated for her brother's *Apology for Poetry* and *Arcadia* to be published posthumously
- Drama: *Antonius* (translation of French play about Mark Antony, 1590)
- *A Discourse of Life and Death* (1590)
- Translation of Petrarch's *Triumph of Death*
- *Doleful Lay of Clorinda*
- At least one MS of short poems
- Two praise poems for Elizabeth, "Dialogue Between Two Shepherds" and "Even Now that

Care”

Æmilia Lanier (1589-1645)

- Born Æmilia Bassano, as daughter of a court musician to Elizabeth I
- On his death, went into the household of Susan Bertie, Countess of Kent, either as ward or as a servant; received a solid humanist education, as the countess believed in female education
- Moved in later with the Clifford family (Countess of Cumberland)
- Was the mistress of Henry Carey, Baron Hunsdon, a courtier of Elizabeth (gave her a £40 pension)
- Became pregnant at 23; married her cousin Alfonso Lanier and had two children (not happy)
- 1613 Lanier dies; begins to run a school, but was arrested for not paying rent and school applications dropped off
- Not much known about her later years; won some court cases for money owed to her
- Buried at Clerkenwell

Lanier's works

- 1611 *Salve Deus Rex Iudaeorum* – unusual for a woman to publish under her own name at this time, if at all
- Influenced by Spenser, Ovid, Petrarch, Chaucer, Boccaccio, Christine de Pisan, Mary Sidney; shows knowledge of drama
- Story of Crucifixion from a woman's point of view; defense of women against the Fall and praise of virtuous women
- Shakespeare?
 - Was probably referred to in Shakespeare's sonnets, but speculation that she is the Dark Lady rests on very tenuous evidence
 - References to Emilia and Bassano in *Othello* and *Merchant of Venice*, connected to music

Elizabeth I Tudor (1533-1603)

- Daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn
- Held off the throne by Mary I
- Confirmed separation of English church from RCC; excommunicated by Pope Pius V in 1570 and declared an illegitimate ruler, but no rebellion arose against her
 - Confirmed the use of *Book of Common Prayer* and passed the Act of Uniformity
- Politically moderate in affairs of religion at home, although England did war against France and Spain in the Netherlands
- Conquered Ireland to prevent its use by the Spanish as a base
- Traded with the Barbary Empire and the Ottoman Empire
- Patron of the arts, especially drama
- Never married in order to protect her individual power against families of suitors, although she probably had several lovers

Literary works

- Translation of Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*; Psalms, esp. Psalm 13; *Meditations* of Margaret of Navarre; Seneca; Petrarch; Plutarch
- Several letters and poems during her imprisonment by Mary

- "On Monsieur's Departure" – Francois, Duke of Alencon
- "Doubt of Future Foes" – fear of conspiracies, possibly inspired by her decision to execute Mary, Queen of Scots
- Subject of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; inspiration for Titania in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*