

The Elizabethan poets

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The Elizabethan poets (Sixteenth Century and shortly after) appeared in England during a period roughly contemporaneous with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603).



Elizabeth I. The "Hampden" portrait, by Steven van der Meulen

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542),

born at Allington, Kent, and educated at Cambridge, was in and out of favor with Henry VIII, whom he served in a number of offices. He was repeatedly in jail—for associating with Anne Boleyn, quarreling with the duke of Suffolk, and on charges of treason. He was knighted in 1537 and served two years as ambassador to Charles V. He translated some of Petrarch's sonnets, as well as writing many of his own and other lyrics and songs.



Portrait of Sir Thomas Wyatt, by Hans Holbein the Younger, c. 1535–37

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-47)

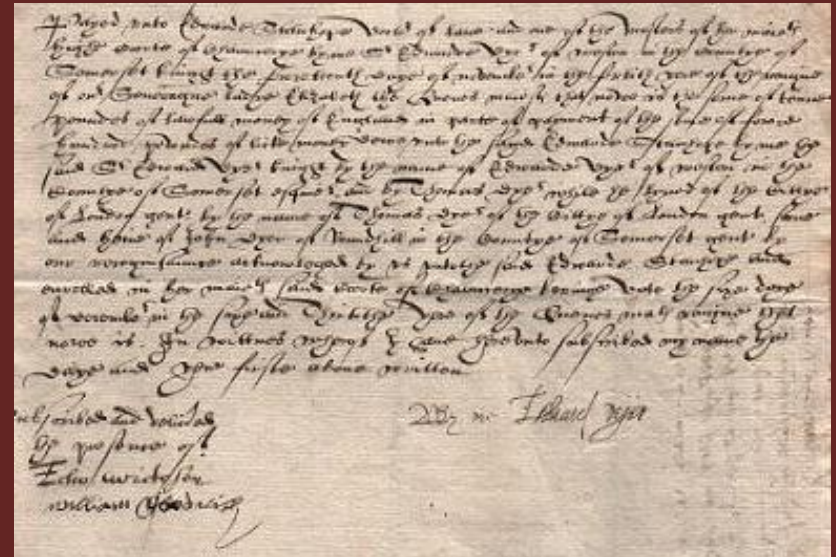
received his title when his father became duke of Norfolk. He fought in Scotland and in Flanders and became commander of a garrison of Boulogne. Quick-tempered and quarrelsome, he made many enemies and was imprisoned several times for misconduct. Arrested on false charges of treason, he was executed in 1547. As with other Elizabethans, his poetry was somewhat secondary to his other activities, but he was technically skilled and, like Wyatt, an enthusiast of the Italian sonnet.



Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey at age 29, 1546. Unknown author

Sir Edward Dyer (?-1607)

was born in Somersetshire and was educated at Oxford, but left before taking a degree. He is mentioned as one of the ornaments of Queen Elizabeth's court, and was sent by her on missions to Holland and Denmark in the 1580s. He was knighted in 1596. He was well esteemed as a poet by his contemporaries, but little of his poetry has survived.



Manuscript with a sample of Sir Edward Dyer's hand writing.

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86)

was a courtier, soldier, and poet. Born Kent, and educated at Oxford he was sent by Elizabeth I on diplomatic missions and was considered one of her favorites. He fell out of favor at one point but was subsequently appointed governor of Vlissingen in the Netherlands, taking part in an expedition aiding the Netherlands against Spain. Sidney died of wounds received in a raid on a Spanish convoy. His best known poetic works are some 108 sonnets about unrequited love (Astrophel and Stella), and a pastoral romance (Arcadia). He defended of poetry against the Puritans in An Apologie for Poetrie.



Sir Philip Sidney, by unknown artist

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)

was born in Kent and educated at Cambridge. He became connected with a company of actors for whom he wrote plays. He was also said to be a secret agent and to have led the adventurous life typical of English agents. Denounced as a heretic, he inadvertently avoided further action against him by being murdered in a tavern brawl. While he is most famous as the first great English playwright (Dr. Faustus, Tamerlane the Great, etc.), he also wrote poetry and translated some of the poems of Lucan and Ovid.



An anonymous portrait in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge believed to show *Christopher Marlowe*.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1554-1618)

was born in Devon, educated at Oxford and studied law in London. He first sailed to America in 1578 and then in 1585 attempted to sponsor the first English colony there, which failed. He became a favorite of Queen Elizabeth, who knighted him but became disenchanted with him when he secretly married one of her maids of honor.



Sir Walter Raleigh by an unknown artist

Raleigh was convicted of plotting against Elizabeth's successor, James I, and was sentenced to death—commuted to a life sentence in the Tower of London, where much of his writing was done in the 13 years that followed. This contained many poems, but most of them have been lost. He persuaded the king to release him in exchange for a fortune in gold that he would find in the Orinoco. He was unsuccessful and his son was killed when they attacked a Spanish settlement, violating an agreement with the king. James had Raleigh beheaded when he returned to England.

THE
HISTORY
OF THE
WORLD,
IN
FIVE BOOKS.

THE FIRST,

Intreating of the Beginning and First Ages of the same, from the Creation unto ABRAHAM.

THE SECOND,

Of the Times from the Birth of ABRAHAM to the Destruction of the Temple of SOLOMON.

THE THIRD,

From the Destruction of JERUSALEM to the Time of PHILIP of MACEDON.

THE FOURTH,

From the Reign of PHILIP of MACEDON, to the Establishing of that Kingdom in the Race of ANTIGONUS.

THE FIFTH,

From the settled Rule of ALEXANDER's Successors in the East, until the ROMANS (prevailing over all) made Conquest of ASIA and MACEDON.

By Sir WALTER RALEGH, Knight.

Whereunto is added in this EDITION, the
LIFE and TRYAL of the AUTHOR.

LONDON,

Printed for Tho. Basset, Ric. Chiswell, Benj. Tooke, Tho. Passenger,
Geo. Daves, Tho. Sawbridge, M. Wotton, and G. Conyers. 1687.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

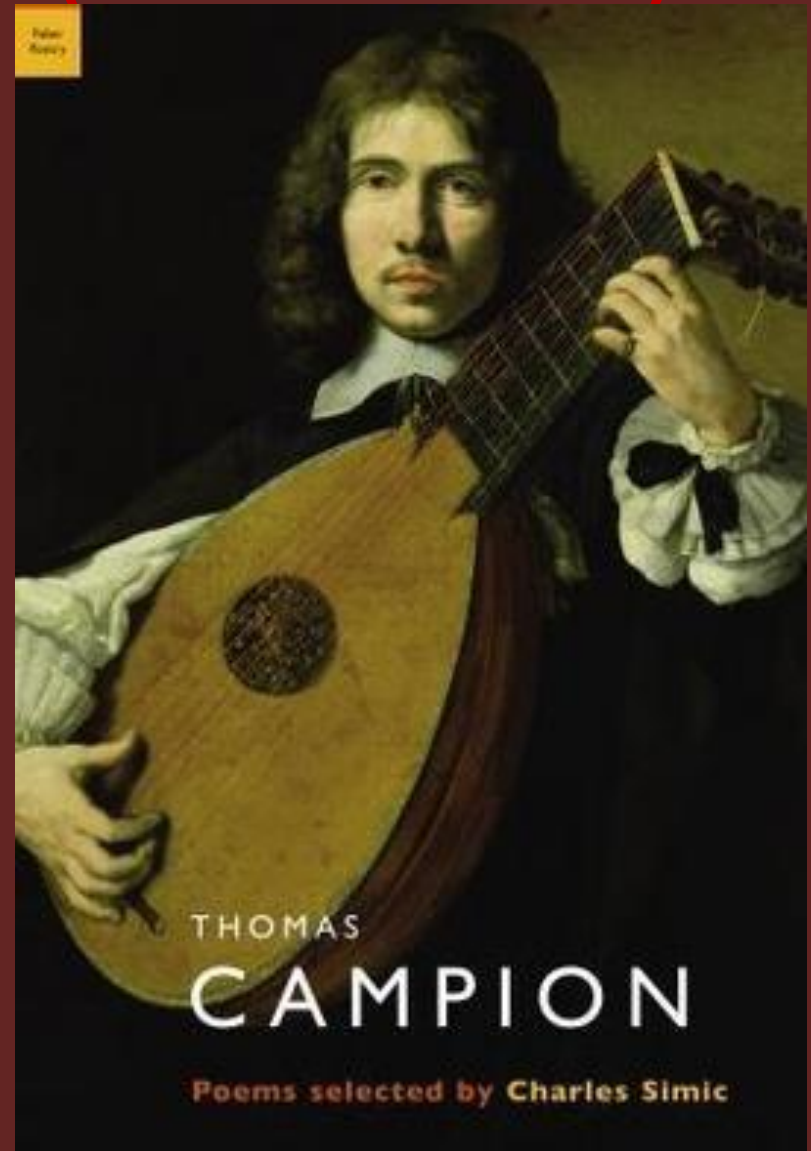
recognized as possible the world's greatest dramatist left little on record to describe his life. The poetry he used in his plays to capture character, motivation, and drama is unique and represents one of the great achievements in human expression. He also took the sonnet form that had been brought from Italy by his Elizabethan predecessors and made it his own in a sequence of sonnets that has no equal.



The Chandos portrait, artist and authenticity unconfirmed.

Thomas Campion (1567-1620)

was born in London and became a successful physician. He was a lutenist and composed lyrics, such as Cherry Ripe, which he and others set to music. His poems, also often set to music, are generally light and charming. The one selected here, however, has a somewhat earthier quality reminiscent of the Chinese Odes.



Poems by *Thomas Campion*, modern edition

Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1630)

was born in Kent and was educated at Winchester and Oxford. He wrote a play and was a friend of John Donne, but his interests appear to have been mainly scientific. He obtained a diplomatic post under the second Earl of Essex, whose downfall prompted him to leave England for Italy rather rapidly. He later traveled to Scotland to warn James VI of a plot to murder him. When James acceded to the English throne, Wotton was knighted and became ambassador to Venice. He is credited with the saying that an ambassador is a honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country. His poems were published in 1651.



Sir Henry Wotton, by unknown artist.