

'From Brian Shaw (1901-1992)', *Master Drawings*, vol. 3 (1965), 35-6
'Sir Karl Polak (1894-1992)', *Master Drawings*, vol. 1 (1963), 71-3

Published lectures



DENYS HAY

Denys Hay 1915–1994

DENYS HAY was an historian who made important contributions to the study of the Renaissance period and a brilliant teacher who inspired many generations of students. He was born at Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 29 August 1915. His father, a graduate in history from St John's College, Cambridge, had entered holy orders and—a combination not uncommon in that era—was employed as a schoolmaster at Newcastle's Royal Grammar School. But he died still young, and as a result of the difficulties then facing the family, Hay, an only child, at the time just one year old, was to grow up under the care of his maternal grandparents. The grandfather, Thomas Waugh, hailed originally from the other side of the border and was a staunch Presbyterian. It was he whose nightly readings from the Bible, sometimes attended with boyish impatience, introduced Hay to Christian culture. In those years the companionship of his uncle, Herbert Waugh, some thirty years older but in spirit almost an elder brother, brought much happiness; memories of his gifts as a story-teller and of their walks together in the Northumbrian countryside were long treasured. Throughout his life Hay would remember the hills and dales around Corbridge, the *Corstopitum* of the Romans, behind Hadrian's Wall. He would claim this land of the frontier as part of his inheritance, and would link it metaphorically to those intellectual frontiers with which his studies were concerned.

From his ninth year, assisted by a scholarship, Hay had, as he put it, 'the great good fortune' to attend the school at which his father had taught, the Tudor foundation of the Newcastle Royal Grammar School.

© The British Academy 1996.

Here was still preserved something of the old humanist education. In particular Hay was to recall the high quality of the teaching of history. (A future Chichele Professor of History, Sir Richard Southern, three years his senior, also received his early education there.) One teacher of note was Sydney ('Sammy') Middlebrooke, Head of History, a name still well-remembered in the North-East, who would on occasions reprove his best pupils with the words: 'You are being merely clever'. Another, keenly remembered, was 'a remarkable teacher called R. F. I. Bunn'. Mr Bunn would, in a technique frequently to be employed by Hay in his teaching career, seize the attention of his pupils with dramatic gestures. A class would open with his writing on the black-board the words: 'AD 410. Foundation of the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries', a formula introducing the Roman withdrawal from Britain, the decay of the Wall, and the work of those who were attempting to recreate its past. It was Mr Bunn who first advised him, aged sixteen at the time, to read Burckhardt's *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, that mid-nineteenth-century classic which, if not inventing the idea of the Renaissance, has proved the starting-point for most interest in it. In his last year at school Hay received a copy, the finely-illustrated, 1929 edition of Middlemore's translation, as a prize. He retained it all his life and, whatever the different feelings the book was later to provoke, he was never to forget the sense of excitement which it roused in him at that time.

In 1934, with the aid of a Horsley scholarship, awarded by the governors of the Royal Grammar School, Hay went on to Balliol College, Oxford, there to read for the degree in Modern History. There was at that time an Italian Renaissance 'Special Subject' in the curriculum, but when Hay suggested to his tutor, V. H. Galbraith, that he might take it, he was strongly discouraged ('only for girls') and instructed to enrol instead in the course of the Regius Professor, F. M. Powicke, on 'Church and State under Edward I'. Hay knuckled under, bent his mind to manly matters, and was rewarded with a First. He might well have gone on to have become an English historian. In July 1937, a month after taking his Finals, he read a paper to the local historical society at Hexham on the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the Diocese of Durham (a diocese which included Newcastle), a work which gives evidence of researches, undertaken while still an undergraduate, in the Public Record Office and in Bishop Cosin's Library in Durham.

Yet it was at this point that Galbraith was to suggest a wider theme

for postgraduate study. Presumably offered in response to his pupil's interest in Burckhardt, it could at the same time be seen as appropriate for a British historian. This was the *Anglica Historia*, a history of England by the Italian cleric, Polydore Vergil, written in England and in Urbino at the beginning of the sixteenth century. What Galbraith probably hoped for from this was something close to what his own edition of the *Anonimale Chronicle* had provided, a work which would throw light on various incidents in English history. Hay was granted a War Memorial Studentship by Balliol and then won a Senior Demysip (a research fellowship, at that time awarded by examination) at Magdalen College, Oxford. In default of Galbraith, who at this point moved to a Chair at Edinburgh, C. A. J. Armstrong of Hertford College was assigned to be his supervisor. It must have seemed an appropriate choice in that, although without any overwhelming interest in Italy, he had, some years before, edited the chronicle of Domenico Mancini, another fifteenth-century Italian who had written in Latin about English history.

Other, informal, advisers at this time were the self-exiled Italian scholar, Roberto Weiss, who was then working on his book on humanism in fifteenth-century England, and the American Professor W. E. Lunt, who had, what was comparatively rare in the Oxford of the day, worked extensively in the Vatican archives. Maurice Powicke, who in later life would on occasions lament that he had devoted his scholarly life to the thirteenth rather than the sixteenth century, looked with particular favour on Hay's project, securing, for example, the financing of 'rotographs' (today's 'photostats') of the Vatican manuscript of Polydore's history for his use. The confidence bred of this academic support was at the same time, and above all else, reinforced by Hay's marriage to Gwyneth Morley, whom he had met at Newcastle, to whom he had become engaged in his final year as an undergraduate, and who was to be throughout his life his constant and indispensable inspiration, companion, and helpmate. The newly-wed couple, defying the comparative poverty of the research student's life, bought first one car, replaced it with another (each for under £10), and settled to domestic life and the search for a permanent job.

Despite the powerful patronage links over which Powicke presided at that time, this was not as easy as might have been anticipated. The difficulty lay in the character of Hay's research-subject, a chronicler whose life spanned the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. 'I recall', Hay wrote, 'applying successively for posts in two universities

in 1938 and being told by each that I could not be considered—in the one case because I was a medievalist, in the other case because I was a modernist.’ In June of that year he was appointed (at a salary of £300) to a temporary lectureship at Glasgow University, where the redoubtable Professor Andrew Browning, a great friend of Galbraith, required a substitute for a member of staff on leave of absence. That ended in May 1939, and despite Browning’s testimonial (‘in particular,’ Hay was to reminisce, ‘I recall the phrase “class discipline good”’), and despite some five articles published or in the press, it seemed that no post was available. For the moment a Bryce Studentship sustained him at Oxford; eventually, in the same year, he was appointed to a first permanent job as an assistant lecturer at the University College of Southampton.

The College did not, at that time, possess anything like the range of buildings and the numerous and distinguished staff that the University of Southampton boasts today. Hay was the kindest of men but was always amused by all forms of anything which might be interpreted as pretension. Later he would tell of his being greeted on arrival by some dignitary with an offer of sherry. ‘We like to think,’ this worthy announced, as they gazed together through an office window at a waste of Nissan huts in muddy fields, ‘that we preserve here something of the spirit of Oxford’. As it happened, an all too imminent future was to offer him very many more such landscapes, without any such ambitious claims. In the tumultuous days of July 1940, he was deemed to be no longer in a ‘reserved occupation’, was called up for military service, and inducted—the result, it may be assumed, of those second-hand cars—into the Royal Army Service Corps. A married man, already a father, Hay, however anxious to do his duty, may be supposed to have found it difficult to adapt wholeheartedly to the role of ‘the happy warrior’. He himself was to write of relieving the ‘lengthy boredoms’ of army life by reading history, while in periods of leave he is on record as turning eagerly to those rotographs with which he had been provided in earlier days. Only after two years of lorry-convoys and the like was more stimulating work to be found for him.

In 1941 Professor W. Keith Hancock had been appointed to be the ‘Supervisor’ of a series of official ‘civil histories’ of the war commissioned by the War Cabinet. At that time A. D. Lindsay, Master of Balliol, a friend of Hancock, was aware of the underemployment of Hay’s abilities, while his patron and friend, Maurice Powicke, had become a member of the enterprise’s advisory committee. No doubt on their recommendation Hay was appointed in the summer of 1942 to

the team of some twenty-four historians serving in London as 'first narrators' of the non-military aspects of the war. The three years which followed gave a most valuable experience in his craft. In his article on the civil history, Hay has described how, together with J. D. Scott, he was commissioned, under the general supervision of the eminent economic historian, M. M. Postan, to study the design and development of weaponry. This gave, he explained, 'an insight into government at the highest policy-making points of power which would have been hard to acquire in any other way', and it showed the frequent unreliability of records and memories. Above all, he continues, with that openness which was typical of him, it offered:

training of a very high order in honest history and sensible techniques of research. . . . I owe much to the critical and imaginative commentaries on my own work by Professor Postan, to whom I would like to express my thanks. At the time I found it hard to be told, as Postan slapped the table sharply with the back of his hand, that my first effort (on the design and development of the 25 pdr gun) was "Hamlet without the prince of Denmark". But I suppose that the *dramatis personae* were more evident in later work and have perhaps survived into other and remoter fields than those I associate with the blacked-out London of the last years of the war and the first years of teaching at Edinburgh, where a large filing-cabinet full of my War History notes used to glare reproachfully at me as I kept a couple of lectures ahead of my class.

Days of work on history were punctuated by frequent nights as part of the famous St Paul's Cathedral fire-watching squad. On this duty he formed a lifelong friendship with another member of the civil history's team, Richard Titmuss, in his time an influential writer on social policy, and one who, like Hay's own Polydore Vergil, was to find his writings frowned on by some government officials. Before the war ended Hay was to write an article for the *Economic History Review* on the official history of the Ministry of Munitions which had been compiled during the First World War, and here he emphasised the political risks, 'the gauntlet of high-level scrutiny in the Cabinet-Office', to which many of the volumes produced by academics at that time had been exposed.

Twenty years later the book, 'ground out', as Hay put it, by himself, Scott, and Postan, eventually reached print. Meanwhile, with the end of hostilities, the post at Southampton remained open to him. He was called from there however through the good offices of B. Humphrey Sumner. Sumner had taught Hay in his undergraduate years, and had just relinquished a briefly-held position as Professor of History at

Edinburgh in order to become Warden of All Souls. In the interest of Richard Pares, his successor in the Edinburgh chair, Sumner wrote to Hay, successfully urging the advantages of the Scottish capital and its university. Denys Hay arrived in January 1946, to be joined by Gwyneth, with their children, Sara, aged eight, and Richard, aged four. Four years later another daughter, Jenny, was to be born to them. After some early changes of residence, they became established in the pleasant area of Fountainhall Road, where Hay was amused to learn (all land-tenure under Scots law being feudal) that his feudal superior ('a Scottish gentlewoman who never, I am glad to say, called on me for knight-service') lived in Florence.

In Edinburgh Hay was committed to teaching of a great range and variety. In his first two terms he gave sixteen lectures on German history between 800 and 1806, and lectured three times a week on European history between 476 and 1500 and between 1715 and 1920 respectively. Subsequently he was to fill in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interval. In later days, when undergraduate teaching became increasingly specialised, Hay's remark to incredulous junior members of staff that he had lectured and held seminars on a time-span 'from the Merovingians to Bismarck' was, in fact, understated. Shortly after, he went on to deliver lectures on the whole history of medieval Britain, to offer an optional European honours course, and Special Subjects on Anglo-French history in the later Middle Ages. (Because very few students at that time were willing to tackle Italian, Hay was some twenty years at Edinburgh before offering an undergraduate course on the Renaissance.)

However daunting the extent of this teaching may have appeared to others, it was clear from the beginning that the then slim young man, bounding through the door to address the class, had found his *métier*. To students who were accustomed to a distant and formal relationship with their teachers, Hay brought deflation of pomposity, enthusiasm, and immense stimulation. This was in no way associated with any dropping of standards but the reverse. In the Scottish four-year honours system the classes of the first two years, which were shared with students reading for a general degree, were often considered at that period as occasions of undemanding and passive learning. Hay's first shock to undergraduates was to announce that they should not hope to pass exams on their lecture-notes alone, for they would not do so. In the place of exam-fodder they were offered incentives to read and think and a vast widening of horizons in historical study. Frequent were the

dramatic openings, reminiscent of the classes of his old schoolmaster, Mr Bunn. Hay would stride to the lectern with an enormous Bible clutched in his hands, bang it down with a great dusty crash, and then hold forth on the central role of the scriptures in the understanding of medieval culture. Or the class might open with a map pinned upside down on the blackboard so that his audience could consider how Europe looked from Byzantium or then again how Dante conceived of Italy. And in place of the wearying cruces of constitutional history which had hitherto so often formed their staple pabulum, he would talk to his classes about Marc Bloch and *mentalités*, not in terms of uncritical acceptance, for, as we will see, he was often cool towards them, but in an attempt to broaden the meaning of what historical study might mean.

By general consent the best teaching of his early years at Edinburgh was in his European Honours course covering the years 1324 to 1449. Here again, much was expected of his pupils. They were confronted with extracts from Platina's *Lives of the Popes* and with the difficult Latin of Marsiglio of Padua's *Defensor Pacis*. At that time, Hay thought of this immersion in Latin as an essential part of the undergraduate's experience of medieval history. When an English translation of the *Defensor Pacis* came to be published he changed the prescription to the untranslated *Defensor Minor*. Later, like everyone else, he had to come to terms with the modern world, though students were still called upon to tackle foreign books not available in translation. He himself remained as stimulating as ever. 'His lectures,' wrote one pupil, 'reminded me of a Catherine Wheel, shooting off sparks in different directions, and above all, they were trying to make the students think for themselves. . . . I have the feeling that his teaching involved a continuous sacrifice of sacred cows, often with an irreverent (but completely commonsense) manner, in order to provoke the class into seeing a subject with fresh eyes.' At a time when many universities were marked by a notable stuffiness, the irreverence stood out. In one story Hay is found asking one of his pupils, the staidest product of Edinburgh's genteel Morningside, to write a paper on: 'To what extent was Boccaccio a humanist in *The Decameron*?' The student asked whether this should be read in an expurgated or unexpurgated edition. 'Good God, man, unexpurgated!'. When the student returned with a predictably stern denunciation of the work's immorality, Hay, assuming a fine Jean Brodie accent, commented gravely, that in comparison with the fabliaux tales of the *Decameron* should provoke 'nothing more than a *refained titter*'.

At the same time that Hay was first developing those teaching skills that were to mark out his academic life, he was embarking, with the remarkable energy which characterised these early years, on many projects. He gave classes for the Workers' Educational Association, taking the bus to the mining village of Ormiston. Again, at the time of his arrival the University of Edinburgh provided no common-room for members of its academic staff. Hay persuaded the Lecturers' Association to back a campaign to secure one. As a result this amenity was finally if grudgingly conceded, a move which could be seen as a first step towards the provision of that commodious Staff Club which now stands in Chambers Street. Above all, it was at this time that he brought to completion those studies on Polydore Vergil which had been interrupted by the war and which were now to establish him securely as an authority of the Renaissance. In 1950 the Camden Society published his text of Books XXIV–XXVII of Vergil's chronicle covering the years 1485–1537. Based upon the collation of a surviving autograph manuscript with the first three sixteenth-century printed editions, it was accompanied by an English translation of the Latin original. This was followed two years later by a definitive study of its author, *Polydore Vergil: Renaissance Historian and Man of Letters*. Hay considered here the career of one of the last foreigners of the Middle Ages who, as Papal Collector and Archdeacon of Wells, made a life in England. He examined those humanist literary writings produced by Vergil in Italy before his arrival in England (writings which constituted his main claim to fame throughout Europe in the sixteenth century); and he set out the importance of Vergil's *Anglica Historia* (much of whose substance passed on through Hall's *Chronicle* to Shakespeare) in creating a long-enduring image of the English past. Hay was not blind to the prosaic character of his author's mind; what appeared in his works, he recognised, was an unoriginal but industrious application of humanist scholarship. Yet in one sense it was this that constituted Polydore Vergil's principal interest: he provided a 'clear mirror of the age', marking the meeting of Italian and Northern traditions of learning and intellectual life. This study provides the foundations for almost all Hay's major historical interests henceforth: the Italian Renaissance, its spread to the Northern world, historiography, and the personnel and character of the Renaissance Church.

In these years, however, Hay was still experimenting with a variety of historical interests. Willing to turn his hand to any task, he saw through the press and supplied index and bibliography for an edition,

published in 1951, of *The Letters of James V*, a book which, already for the most part in galley proof, had been left uncompleted at the death of Robert Kerr Hannay in 1940. The lectures which he delivered to his students formed the basis for his short textbook, *From Roman Empire to Renaissance Europe* (1953; reissued under the title, *The Medieval Centuries*, 1964). Again, he published two articles, based in part on searches in the Public Record Office and the manuscripts of the British Museum Library, on the divisions of the spoils of war in Anglo–French conflicts, and on the Scottish Borders. The theme of the borders in itself was congenial to him and one to which in general terms he would occasionally return in later life. Yet he was to admit to a certain weariness with the detailed archival researches into documentary sources which that type of enquiry demanded and he made a conscious decision to abandon them. More congenially for one who liked to paint, on a wide canvas, he gave notice of a new preoccupation with his lecture to the 10th International Historical Congress, held at Rome, in September 1955. This was dedicated to a subject on which he had been gathering materials for some years and which was to form the theme of his *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (1957; revised edition 1968). This brief but most original and brilliant of his books, an exercise in what Marc Bloch had called ‘historical semantics’, sought to chart the growth in the later Middle Ages of ‘a gradual consciousness of Europe as more than a geographical term’. It detailed that process by which, eventually, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the term ‘Christendom’ decayed and that of ‘Europe’ took its place. It was written, he was to explain, in response to that mood of the 1950s which welcomed the birth of ‘the European idea’. In Britain, of course that sentiment, was, as it still is, muted and confined to limited circles. But in harmony with it, he offered a cautious prophecy: ‘the reluctant patriotism of the Briton, compared with the warmer loyalties of the Englishman, the Scot, and the Welshman, may perhaps offer a model for continental development within a United States of Europe’.

By that time the progressive muscular atrophy, which had already begun to afflict Richard Pares during the war, had tragically reached a stage where he was compelled to resign his appointment. It was precisely then, in 1954, that the University had decided to create two Chairs of History in place of the existing one. That of modern history went to the diplomatic historian, David Horn; that of medieval history to Hay. Under the Pares regime the Honours degree had already been restructured. As Hay was to put it: ‘The next fifteen years were to see

even more radical changes in the department: more staff, more specialities, more subdivisions and greater variety of all kinds'. These were the heady years of the Robbins Report and university expansion, with all the advantages and disadvantages that these brought. For the History Department both might seem to be symbolised by the move in 1967 from a corner of Robert Adam's late-eighteenth-century 'Toun's College' to a new, very 1960s, building in George Square.

In those and subsequent years Hay's ability to attract the finest medievalists to his staff, in particular those specialising in European subjects, and the constant sympathy, support, and inspiration he offered them, were to play an important part in securing the reputation of the Edinburgh History Department as one of those pre-eminent in Britain. His sincerity and innate sense of justice made him the ideal head of department, senior colleague, and mentor of students. With this went always fun and conviviality. At Fountainhall Road the Hays offered an hospitality in which the eminent visitor and junior lecturer met and were firmly persuaded to socialise. At the same time the novice was guided to attaining the standards of the department, largely by being encouraged to recognise his own virtues and defects. One such, now very senior, tells of how Hay attended one of his own prentice classes: 'maintaining a fixed expression through what, even by my indifferent standards, was a wretched lecture, an attempt to catch up with my programme. Afterwards he asked me to see him later in his room. I believed my lecturing career would be brief. He made one comment: "When you are lecturing, remember to pause between sentences."'

In the meanwhile, Hay was being drawn deeper and more widely into European cultural history. He was to write the introduction, and to complete the editorial revision of the first volume, *The Renaissance 1493–1520*, of the *New Cambridge Modern History* (1957), and to write chapters on 'Literature: the printed book' and 'Schools and Universities' for the second volume (1958). Invited to give the British Academy's Italian Lecture in 1959, he returned to the theme of Renaissance historiography with a discussion of Flavio Biondo's *Decades*. It was against the background of these studies that Hay was preparing what is still the most influential of his works, *The Italian Renaissance in its Historical Background* (1961). In 1957 Cambridge University Press had invited Hay to write a volume on the Italian Renaissance. It was, as Hay believed, 'a desideratum of our day', something designed to meet a clear need both in the academic world and among general readers. With typical tolerance Hay described John Addington Symonds's diffuse and

highly coloured *Renaissance in Italy* (in seven volumes, 1875–86) as ‘a remarkable and neglected work’. That excluded, however, there was, before Hay’s book, no other study in English, from the time of the translation of Burckhardt, in which an historian considered together the political history and the history of Renaissance art and ideas: ‘I cannot think of any place where the questions are treated in a general way, where the whole question is reviewed’. By this time there were several claims that the Renaissance had never taken place, arguments concerning its relation to other earlier Renaissances—the Carolingian, Ottonian, Twelfth-Century Renaissances—and often among many cultured laymen a confused and generalised hostility to the whole theme, the contention of C. S. Lewis, for example (repeated in an essay by W. H. Auden), first that the Renaissance had never existed and secondly, that it was, at the same time—the influence of Ruskin lingered here—a deplorable and evil development. It was essentially as a well-written explanatory filling of a gap that Hay’s book, despite, perhaps because of, its brevity, acquired importance.

Given that the one thing all seemed agreed on was that Burckhardt was no longer adequate, Hay might, like his friend, Roberto Weiss, have abandoned any definition of the Renaissance as a period and returned to the eighteenth-century notion of a purely cultural phenomenon, of a ‘rebirth of polite letters [i.e. the classics]’, combined with various changes, as interpreted by Vasari, in the development of the fine arts. This was not possible for him, partly because, as he would proclaim, not just occasionally and in unbuttoned mood but seriously and consistently, there were whole areas of that classical literature which the humanists so revered which he himself regarded with distaste. (‘I would readily concede that most Latin prose writers are ineffably boring, being pompous to please their pompous readers’.) But also, and much more than this, because one of his strongest convictions was that there was an intermediate period between modern and medieval history which it was convenient to call the Renaissance. One writes here ‘Renaissance’ rather than ‘Italian Renaissance’, in that, despite the book’s title, it is made clear from the start that what is to be dealt with is ‘a phase in Italian and European history . . . the Renaissance in Europe as a whole’.

The introductory pages, in fact, consist of a reiteration of what Hay had advanced for many years, and which was to remain central to his historical periodisation: namely that the years 1300–1700 in European history had their own particular unity and inner coherence. Already, in

an address to the Anglo–American Conference of Historians in 1951, in arguments honed, we are told, in discussions with Richard Pares, he had sought to justify this concept. This was a period of ‘enormous innovations’. It was ‘an age of kings’, in which an overwhelming community of political and economic interest united these kings to ‘the town’, this at a time when town and country were almost evenly matched in economic importance. In intellectual life it was ‘essentially lay and yet essentially Christian’. Lay domination of Christianity produced an epoch ‘marked by a series of heresies and schisms’, matched by ‘a remarkable growth of patriotic sentiment which at times verges on nationalism’. These broad generalisations, whose formulation was perhaps facilitated through the writing of the wide-ranging lecture courses demanded by the Edinburgh system, could be seen as gaining momentum from personal experience. In view of the way he had been rejected, back in 1938, when applying for posts both as a medievalist and a modernist (occasions frequently to be reinvoked), it is not surprising to find that among the claims made for the advantages of the schema which he proposed is the consideration that it would ‘protect the student of the no-man’s land around 1500, enabling young historians to expand their interests on both sides of this date; the present division unfortunately almost compels them to gravitate to a recognisable and marketable “medievalism” or “modernism”’. This periodisation occurred again in the preface to his textbook of European history of 1953, where Hay wrote of ‘three epochs [AD300–800; 800–1300; and 1300–1700] each of which seems to possess a coherence of its own’. With some blurring at the margins, this time-span remains in his *Italian Renaissance*, where it is explained that nearly all that was to be unique in this European period ‘was first and most purely expressed in Italy’.

In fact, the work soon makes plain that very little of what is comprised by the Renaissance, now defined or redefined as ‘a new educational programme and a new attitude to literature and morality . . . a new art and a new place for art in the life of the individual and the community’, was to be found within the peninsula before the 1380s. ‘Italy was not ready for the novelties hinted at by some of her sons.’ At this point Hay unveils the principal influence behind his thought, the ‘masterly, indeed epoch-making’ writings of the German-American historian, Hans Baron, whose principal work, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, had been published in 1955. Hay, who always particularly appreciated the wide overview and daring synthesis, fol-

lowed Baron in seeing the birth of true Renaissance values as springing from a group of men writing between 1380 and 1440 in defence of Florentine republican 'liberty' against threats from the aggressive princely powers of the Duchy of Milan and the Kingdom of Naples. Learning, directed at that time to immediate and pressing political problems, lost its 'medieval', its 'unworldly' character; a new morality was born which praised civic pride and the 'active' life, embraced rather than rejected wealth, developed a secularised view of wisdom. As a result political thought, literature, art, history, and attitudes to education were all challenged.

From Florence these values were then, Hay argues, carried to the rest of Italy, where, if the Republicanism that produced them did not generally exist, they at least made an appeal to similar civic environments. Here he seeks to distinguish the different forms of the Renaissance as expressed in the principates, Venice, and the Papacy. In Florence itself—here resting largely upon the interpretation of the Florentine intellectual historian, Eugenio Garin—the rise of the Medici, who sapped the republican ideal 'led to airy abstraction and to art for art's sake', to, at least, a dilution of true Renaissance ideals. Hay then goes on to consider the transfer of the Renaissance from Italy to the Northern world, a northern Europe seen as 'ripe for the adoption of the new attitudes and the new manners', and where therefore the principal problem is to explain why their arrival was delayed until the sixteenth century. Finally he reaffirms the periodisation he started out with by indicating a terminus for the movement or period with that *Crise de la Conscience Européenne* which Paul Hazard had detected at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Since the writing of the book, thirty-five years ago, there has, of course been a great deal of thought and a great deal of research devoted to this subject; and even at the time of writing this was a very large theme to be elaborated within a small frame (some 80,000 words). A particular difficulty, not perhaps resolved, might lie in reconciling the two parallel periodisations found within it: 'the European Renaissance' (1300–1700) and 'the Italian Renaissance'; the one, to take just one example, 'an age of kings', the other supposedly triggered by a republican response to a monarchical threat. Again, by 1966, Baron's thesis, on which Hay had drawn very deeply, was the subject of strong controversy. In that year Hay passed a sabbatical at the Newberry Library in Chicago, where Baron was Distinguished Research Fellow, and, it is said, was to some extent

distracted from his own studies by the need in these circumstances to offer moral support to Baron. None the less, anyone who believes with Hay that 'periodisation as such is admittedly artificial and arbitrary but it is necessary for practical purposes' will find merit in a work which will continue to provide a concise and skilfully written point of view, a focus for discussion on what has established itself as a perennial historical problem.

Certainly on publication it was received with enthusiasm by the learned world. As a result, in the years to follow, Hay—who took his role as a teacher, in the widest sense of the word, with great seriousness—wrote or edited a large number of works on the theme with an educational or popularising purpose (*The Renaissance Debate*, *The Age of the Renaissance*, etc.). In the same spirit he took on the general editorship of Longman's very successful *A General History of Europe*, a series which has been of use to many generations of undergraduate students, he himself writing the volume *Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. Later too he was to edit the *Longman History of Italy*, for which series, together with John Law, he wrote *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1380–1530*. In addition to these textbooks he published several articles on aspects of, above all, the interaction of Italian and European culture (one may single out here in particular the studies on the reception of the Renaissance in England and in Scotland). At the same time as an antidote to what he may have felt to be the high level of generality in these writings, he also published an edition and translation (1967), prepared in cooperation with W. K. Smith, of the *De gestis Concilii Basiliensis commentariorum libri ii*, written by the humanist and future pope, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolominus.

In the ten years which followed that work Hay's scholarly interests were principally directed to a consideration of the Italian Church in the Renaissance period. At that time, surprisingly enough, this had not yet been the subject of any general study. Much had been written on the papacy and the Papal Curia and much on particular aspects of it, such as, for example, Franciscanism. But the humdrum world of parish and diocese, the lived everyday world of the Church, had passed very largely ignored. It was this lacuna which Hay's *The Church in Italy in the Fifteenth Century* (1977, a book based upon the 'Birkbeck Lectures' which he had delivered in Cambridge in 1971) sought to fill out. It considered such themes as diocesan and parochial organisation, the state of clergy and laity, and (a subject on which he could

write, of course, with particular authority) 'The Italian Renaissance and the Clergy'. Here, once again, Hay ambitiously tackled a very large theme, and elected to write of it in quite short compass. As a pioneering work it has an immense usefulness, and, until, and perhaps beyond, such time as a series of local diocesan investigations have come to provide a closer look at the ground, its generalisations are likely to offer a stimulating introduction. No one was more convinced than Hay himself of the need for others to continue the task he had begun. Writing in the *Festschrift* for Eugenio Garin, published two years later, on 'Historians and the Renaissance during the last Twenty-Five Years', Hay was to state his belief that 'intensive research' still remained to be done on three themes (the three which had always most fascinated him in his studies in this area): education; the effects of the Renaissance on Italian archaeology and historiography; and the 'cultural and spiritual history of the Church in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries'.

On historiography in fact, though not simply within the compass of the Renaissance, he published, in the same year as *The Church in Italy*, a concise, and entertaining overview, *Annalists and Historians: Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Centuries*. Based upon his teaching over a long period in Edinburgh, the first general survey of the subject since Fueter's book of 1911, it is a work which enshrines those historical values in whose defence he had long argued. These were conservative, perhaps even, in some respects, old-fashioned. For Hay — and in this he felt himself at times fighting against the tide — history was a branch of literature. Writing in 1962 as editor of the *English Historical Review*, he observes:

The greater the technical complexity of the problem discussed in Article or Note the greater the need for clarity in exposition. It is tiresome to read a contribution — dealing with new ideas or based on new material — which is confused or ill-written, or both. There is no virtue in being difficult to understand and a hard question is no more significant for being investigated obscurely. . . . The advice I have been bold enough to give in this paragraph is addressed, it may be felt, only to beginners; it is not.

Hay's enthusiasm for lucidity and order in historical writing was reinforced by his recognition that his own apprenticeship in the art had not been effortless or unaided. Over forty years later, with a generosity which made him willing to acknowledge what many would be all too anxious to forget, he recalled the experience of submitting an article to the *English Historical Review* in 1938, describing how the

then editor, Sir George Clark, 'rewrote it, to my anger and mortification, and in doing so must have spent the best part of three days, turning my turgid incoherence into something more or less reasonable'. During his own time as editor, Hay was, in that tradition, to assist many young historians in the same way.

The insistence on intelligibility formed a part of his resistance to the idea of history as an arcane science. It is a theme he touched on in the course of a presidential address to the Historical Association in 1969:

Articles are of interest to those who write them and to those who read them. I think sometimes that they are almost the same people, so technical are the subjects discussed, so rebarbative the style, so absent the general inferences. Snooks writes an article which only Snooks can appreciate. It was not always so. Members of the generation which saw the birth of the *English Historical Review* had been brought up to regard history as one of the several 'literary' genres, and they read it in the pages of the general magazines of the day.

Turning from style, Hay's attitude to the substance of history was traditional. If he acknowledged the inspiration of Marc Bloch, he was generally indifferent to the preoccupations of most of Bloch's post-war followers:

And what (I hear you say) about *Past and Present*? I believe we should all take our hats off to *Past and Present*. And then put them on again. It is our British *Annales*—though, thank God, it is only a tenth the size of that monstrous publication. In *Past and Present* we do have broad surveys, brilliant reappraisals of big topics, and kites flying briskly in the breeze. . . . Yet I suspect that in twenty years time scholars young and old will still be turning up the dreary old *EHR* rather oftener than they refer to the files of *Past and Present*. The solid, highly particularised and annotated articles in the *EHR* are the hard, gritty bricks from which the Great Wall of history is steadily if slowly built.

He was, as those words might suggest, and as appears clearly in *Annalists and Historians*, essentially a positivist, one who believed that historical understanding developed through a process of accretion. And in other ways too he recalled the Oxford of the 1930s. He spoke often of 'the primacy of politics'. 'Politics are, so it seems to me, infinitely more significant than *conjuncture*.' Contemporary developments in historical study often provoked scepticism. 'Demography is guess-work before the nineteenth century and even then it is not very clear how far population variables were (or are?) a significant index of public priorities or pressures.' Economic theory was to be approached

with extreme scepticism: 'a "model", meaning, I take it, "a fiction"'. Family history was (he seems here to be thinking of such aspects as infanticide and birth control) 'a rebarbative subject', and (inserted, it may be suspected, as a proud boast) 'I have never been trained in the techniques and terminology of modern sociological concepts regarding the family'. Confronted with a discussion about the inventor of that 1960s theory that 'the medium is the message' (something which might have been expected to interest one versed in the history of printing), he merely commented: 'I had always thought that Marshall McLuhan was one of Napoleon's generals'.

Beyond his teaching and publications, Hay's urbanity and energy gave him an easy entrée and smooth passage through many offices in academic life. He was a president of the Edinburgh branch of the Association of University Teachers, Dean of the Faculty of Arts in Edinburgh from 1961–2, and trustee of the National Library of Scotland from 1966. From 1958, together with Goronwy Edwards, then from 1959–65 alone, he was editor of the *English Historical Review*. 'One reason', he was to observe, 'why the learned quarterlies are such good value is that they are directed and managed by a group of fanatics who are prepared to ruin their careers and imperil their marriages by acting as editors'. He calculated the time involved in the editorship as sixteen hours a week including the entirety of every fourth weekend, and gives an autobiographical vision of wife and children involved in 'cutting up the lengths of articles, reviews and short notices required to fill up the predetermined number of pages'. Again, he served in many offices in the Royal Historical Society (of which he was Literary Director 1955–8; a Vice-President 1961–5 and 1971–5; and from 1981 an Honorary Vice-President). He was unfailingly active in the Historical Association from 1967–70, in which period he was responsible for the act which united it with the Scottish Historical Association. Everyone asked: 'How can he possibly find the time?' It seemed a punishing schedule. Whether or not as a result, his health began to suffer and in 1969 he had a first heart attack.

The doctors successfully urged him to banish his pipe, but were less successful in persuading him to slow down. From 1971 to 1975 he served as Vice-Principal. These were still the days before the party had ended, when the university limousine waited upon its senior officers to bear them to receptions and banquets. Hay enjoyed this aspect of his role, but much more than that the sense of continuity which came from sitting in the Old Senate Room under Raeburn's portrait of the great

Enlightenment historian, Principal William Robertson (pictured with Muratori's *Annali* on his desk), like him, and like the Florentine Scholar-Chancellors of the Renaissance, Salutati and Bruni and Poggio, uniting the contemplative and active life. Thereafter, he did indeed begin to take things more easily, though still taking on new tasks: from 1978 as joint editor of the Oxford Warburg series, and in 1980–1 as President of the Ecclesiastical History Society. Meanwhile many honours came to him. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1970, a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1974, and Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1977. He received honorary doctorates from Newcastle in 1970, from Tours in 1982, and was appointed *Commendatore al Ordine del Merito della Repubblica Italiana* in 1980. He was the recipient of two *Festschriften*, and will, posthumously, be honoured with a memorial volume, the triple crown.

On his retirement from Edinburgh in 1980, after a time as Visiting Professor at the University of Virginia, which like all his American visits (Cornell in 1963, and, as we have seen, Chicago in 1966) he much enjoyed, he held from 1980–2 a temporary post as Professor of History at the European University Institute at the Badia Fiesolana outside Florence, a less happy experience. The Hays were unfortunate enough to be lodged with a landlady who embodied true Florentine *durezza* (there were great conflicts about the permissibility of putting up a card-table to work on, and so on), while his colleagues had different historical interests from those which he pursued. Return to Edinburgh was a relief. Here his studies still continued, and he still published, though less prolifically. And hospitality continued: assessments of new restaurants were to be tested at first hand; he would still turn up at 'The Denys Hay Medieval and Renaissance History Seminar' and at any other historical treats which were going. Very common was the experience of the visiting speaker who found the form before him vividly coming alive, belying all appearance of sleep, and interjecting a penetrating question opening with the deceptively modest words: 'I seem to remember having read somewhere . . .'. His death, on 14 June 1994, at the age of seventy-eight, came at the end of a life which was fruitful and active almost to the last.

In appearance Hay was of middle height, broad of countenance and, from middle age, of ample frame, with a suggestion of bagginess, wispy hair which gave him a wind-blown look, appropriate enough for one who always brought with him great gusts of fresh air. His habitual

expression was vivacious and benevolent, the eyes quick to light up with amusement, the face bending forward keenly in conversation to signify enjoyment or to act out scorn on hearing of unpalatable opinions or displeasing neologisms. (These loomed large. Friends received offprints of his review of an American book on historiography signed 'From one historicist to another'.) His voice was cultured yet unaffected, loud but both sonorous and firm. His speech was frequently enlivened by faintly archaic, often alliterative, colloquialisms; he would speak of (it could be rather austere or superior) people as 'sweeties'; would observe that 'those chaps have been living high off the hog'; would describe a compliant external-examiner as 'a biddable buddy'; would hope to meet soon 'the lucky lady' whom a friend had married. His manner was bluff, patrician, salted with impishness. His wit has been described as 'conspiratorial'; it had the effect of making his listeners feel joined with him in an alliance against all the follies of life. Very common was the expression of (a quite feigned) fear of authority-figures ('Of course, Smith is scared stiff of Richard [Pares].') Pause. 'But then we're all scared of Richard.')

He had a natural kindness and many stories are told as examples of this by those who knew him. He approached the world with an optimism tempered by realism. ('Historians are relativists. By understanding the past they become understanding, or at any rate some of them do.') Though doubt always struggled with belief, each Sunday he attended mass at the Episcopalian Church of St John in Princes Street. His happiness was rooted above all in his family, in his children, and Gwyneth, his wife, 'who has counted bishops, typed chapters, corrected my English, listened to endless diatribes and encomia, and sometimes lived in the cold discomfort of Roman winters'. Outside that domestic circle, Denys Hay would have wished to be remembered as an historian, a scholar, friend, and above all, as a teacher. In one of his last essays he debated whether politics had changed as a result of Renaissance humanism, whether Burckhardt's famous 'state as a work of art' had ever really come into existence. Certainly, he concluded, the style of politics had altered, because now those who were to run the world had been educated in the humanities. At which point his mind turned to Balliol. *Floreat domus de Balliolo*—ugly Latin, but it recalled the tradition of that college in which education was seen as intimately bound up, as function or justification, with public service. 'Humanists,' he ended, 'if

I may quote myself, are all educators. I do not believe there is a nobler calling.'

JOHN LARNER

University of Glasgow

Note. I am indebted to discussion with and information from Dr David Chambers, Dr Robert Donaldson, Professor A. A. M. Duncan, Professor A. Goodman, Miss Alison E. Harvey Wood, Mrs Gwyneth Hay, Mr Richard Hay, Mr John V. Howard, Dr Maurice Keen, Mr J. F. X. Miller, and Professor J. A. F. Thomson. Miss Harvey Wood has provided a 'Bibliography of the works of Denys Hay' in *Renaissance Studies*, 2, 2 (1988), 347–55.