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### Rhodes, Neil. *Common: The Development of Literary Culture in Sixteenth-Century England*

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en suivant de près les vers originaux, compose un texte qui semble couler de source : simple, sans gallicismes ni latinismes, vif et léger.

Au-delà du public anglophone, les lecteurs francophones et les spécialistes seront touchés par la vivacité et l'actualité de cette traduction, qui va droit à l'œuvre et lui assure une réception immédiate et aisée. L'on peut espérer que ce premier contact encouragera les lecteurs à chercher le texte original, complet et en moyen français. En attendant, saluons un partage heureux d'une référence devenue lecture.

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### **Rhodes, Neil.**

***Common: The Development of Literary Culture in Sixteenth-Century England.***  
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xiii, 345. ISBN 978-0-1987-0410-2  
(hardcover) US\$74.

"Common" permeates early modern literature in England. Yet what the term denotes is not easy to pinpoint, partly because, as Neil Rhodes suggests in his ambitious study, "its various meanings depended on the context" (6). "Common" and its semantic derivations were a shared and fluid word and idea. As such, meanings oscillated between referring to "a shared culture and religion" (7), which is a universal level of usage, and denoting inclusively "the lowest in the social order" (7), specifically "the common people" (7). Between these two related but semantically and culturally different uses, which imply multiplicity rather than binary relationship and which are also built into the idea of the "commonwealth" evolving in the early modern period, "common" developed an extraordinary range of meaning in humanist culture, learning, and literature. Because of the penumbra of meaning associated with the common, the book addresses it from different perspectives and within "the more fluid social reality" (161). At times, the common is a philological property of transforming Greek and Latin knowledge into early modern vernacular response, largely but not exclusively by way of "translation [as] the art of making common" and "increasing the store of the commonwealth" (125).

By facilitating the work of the common, for instance, translation functioned as both a philological and social activity. But in the searching and at times encyclopaedically comprehensive uncovering of the texts and their arguments that motivated the development of the English Protestant literary culture, Rhodes addresses not only the common but also the medium by which it was disseminated—like the spoken word before printing expanded. In the story of the role the common played in this literary development, Italy features centrally and as a source of progressive ideas about politics, society, and religion (211). In a way, Italy is the common that keeps the strands of the humanist English currents together in the field of new literary writing in the late 1580s and 1590s.

The book's originality lies in its emphasis on the common as the defining aspect of humanism, despite the common's protean quality which is revealed in the scrupulous analysis of its cultural role. Rhodes's admirably researched and convincingly argued book—brimming with facts, details, and connections between writers, texts, and early modern cultures—uncovers the depth and density of the humanist circulation of ideas in the early modern period. Latin and Greek enabled the circulation of the common as shared property in the creative, cultural, and intellectual space, and through social and literary forms, of early modern England and Europe. Rhodes demonstrates that the common is what the English Renaissance was about through and through.

Rhodes starts his book by reading Erasmus's *Adagia*, a collection of wise sayings which, like most of his other works, take up the two "sides of the common" (7), the universal and the inclusive (7). In seven long chapters, Rhodes writes a part-philological, part-cultural history of England's classical and neoclassical foundations arising from the common. Erasmus frames the development of English literary culture at the intersection of humanism and Protestantism. In the remaining six chapters of a book that can be read as a history of early modern English literature and of the Renaissance in England through the common, Erasmus features as a key figure. Rhodes makes a compelling point when he argues that "the late Renaissance in England can be attributed to the disconnect between the work of the imagination and the work of making common in that period" (113). Critically mapping the development of the English Renaissance, Rhodes examines the cultural work of the common through some of the key literary figures that shaped the literary production in the English Protestant Reformation, like Thomas More, Thomas Tyndale,

Thomas Elyot, Thomas Smith, Francis Meres, Richard Tottel, and Thomas Wyatt, as well as William Painter, William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, George Puttenham, and Sir Philip Sidney. Other writers are afforded brief commentary that advances the argument. The breadth of names is sufficient to suggest the scope of ideas emanating from the works discussed that went into the making of the common, and of the book that traces the critical history of the common with rigour and clarity.

While the first three chapters, gathered in part 1, examine the common in the early Tudor period, the last three chapters, collected in part 3, address the development of the English Renaissance during the reign of Elizabeth I. In the first part, Greek is explored as the conditioning factor of the common in Tudor humanism. In the last three chapters, Latin performs the same role in the humanism of the Elizabethan period. The bridging part 2, consisting of one chapter, engages with the activity of translation in the construction of the commonwealth as an idea.

In the critical narrative that owes much of its originality to the tightly argued use of the common, Shakespeare features as a frequent source of examples (and not only because the common is the word and idea with which he crafts his thoughts and plots) from both non-dramatic and dramatic literatures. Rhodes offers fresh readings of Marlowe's classicism as a backdrop for Shakespeare's own response to the creative charge of the common that marked the 1590s, the golden age of early modern English literary and dramatic creativity. The chapter on Painter's 1566 collection of Italian novellas, *The Palace of Pleasure*, will inspire scholars interested in the development of imaginative fiction in English literature, both because of the links made between the contributing writers and because of Rhodes's use of the term "short story"—often associated with literature of the modern period—to write about an early modern genre.

This is an erudite and absorbing book. Rhodes has rewritten big portions of arguments about the development of early modern literary history in England, which makes his book indispensable for further scholarly exploration of this period—especially, the literary 1590s.

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