

North, Sir Thomas (1535–1603?), translator, was born on 28 May 1535 in London, the younger son of the four children of [Edward North, first Baron North \(c.1504–1564\)](#), and his first wife, Alice Murfyn, formerly Brigandine, and née Squire (d. 1560). It has been thought likely that he attended Peterhouse, Cambridge, to which his father left a benefaction on his death, but his name does not survive among the college records (Walker, 1.204–5). He was admitted on 9 February 1556 as a member of Lincoln's Inn; North's manucaptors, or sureties, were his elder brother, [Roger North](#), and Richard Allington. On the following day North's special admission was recorded: it brought with it certain privileges, such as exemption from keeping vacations and serving certain offices. Average age on admission to an inn of court in the period immediately preceding North's entry was twenty or twenty-one. Whether North's special admission also exempted him from undertaking the legal exercises is unclear; in any event, he did not proceed to be called to the bar....

Some indication, however, of how North's time was spent at Lincoln's Inn can readily be inferred from the publication in 1557, by John Waylande, of his translation of Bishop Antonio de Guevara's *The Diall of Princes*. North's dedication to Queen Mary, dated 20 December, sought the queen's encouragement, the author 'beinge yonge, to attempt the like enterprise' on further occasions. North's translation, though it advertises itself as 'Englyshed oute of the Frenche', also involved recourse to the Spanish original, since it closes with a section of letters absent in the French translation 'conferred with the originall Spanishe cople' (sig. X5r). The volume's title-page, showing an elaborately staged scene of a monarch taking advice from his counsellors, and its spacious, double-columned folio format, certainly give evidence of North's ambition that his translation should (as he described it in the dedication) 'serve to hygh estates for counsell, to curious serchers of antiquities, for knowledge, and to all other vertuous gentlemen for an honest, pleasaunte, and profitable recreation' (sig. A1r–v).

As a bid for patronage, however, *The Diall*—for all that its title-page emphasized North as 'second sonne' to Mary's counsellor Lord North—was ill-, or at least unfortunately, timed. It seems likely, moreover, from comments made by North in the second, revised edition, *The Diall* (1568), that the first edition was not altogether well received for more literary reasons: 'detracting tongues', he wrote, had given out that the translation 'was no woork of myne, but the fruit of others labor' (sig. R1v). An existing translation, from an abridged French translation of Guevara by Jean Bouchier, Lord Berners, had been published in 1535 (it reached its ninth edition in 1557), but North does not seem indebted to it. How long North remained as a student is not known, though in 1568 he recalled with apparent fondness 'the woorschipfull, and my beeloved compaignyons, and fellow students of our house of Lyncolnes Inne' (ibid.).

North's father died on 31 December 1564; the will (20 March 1563) bequeathed him 'the patronage and Advowsons of the Churche Personage and Vicaredge' of Melton, Suffolk (TNA: PRO, PROB 11/48, fol. 54v). Whatever the disappointments of the reception afforded his first translation, in the years following his father's death North worked to expand its fourth book (entered to Thomas Marsh in the Stationers' register between July 1566 and July 1567), and to defend himself in the second edition, printed by Richard

Tottell and Marsh in 1568 (Marsh and Tottell registered ‘the hole boke of the Dyall of prynces’ at some point between July 1567 and 1568). In the same year North was presented with the freedom of the city of Cambridge.

North had signed his defensive ‘Epistle to the Reader’ in 1568 ‘From my lord Norths house nere London’ (sig. R1v). He seems intermittently to have been resident with his elder brother, Roger, for much of the rest of his life, and for the periods covered by ‘The booke of the howshold charges and other paiments laid out by the L. North and his commandement’, January 1575 to February 1581 and April 1582 to December 1589, he was in receipt of an annual pension of £40, paid quarterly, of his brother's ‘fre gift’ (BL, Stowe MS 774, fols. 18r, 42v). Numerous other, smaller irregular payments are also recorded: they contribute to an impression that North was never independently financially secure. His next publication, *The Morall Philosophie of Doni*, published by Henry Denham in 1570, sought explicitly to draw on his brother’s connections in its fulsome dedication to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester. North translated the much-travelled *Morall Philosophie* from the Italian; Leicester himself spoke Italian, and North attempted to turn this to his advantage, suggesting that ‘your L: that understandeth, maye at your pleasure and leysure ... be judge of the matter, as I have made your Lordship patrone and my only Mecenat’ (sig. A4r). Roger North, a close friend of Leicester, had earlier, in 1566, solicited the earl's patronage for his sister; here Thomas North delivered his own work to Leicester's ‘honorablen protection’, and himself, ‘Your Lordships humbly to commaunde’ (sig. a1r). Fifteen years later Leicester was paying £5 to those who dedicated books to him—as valuable must have been his influence about court.

Between October 1573 and December 1574 Roger North was appointed and then dispatched as ambassador-extraordinary to the French court of the new king, Henri III, then resident at Lyons. He was accompanied by Thomas, whose early return from the embassy in November was greeted with eager curiosity at the English court: he reported ‘plusieurs propos de fort grande satisfaction, du lieu d'où il venoit’ (‘many very highly satisfying reports of the place from which he came’), recorded the French ambassador, de la Mothe Fénelon (Correspondance, 6.292). The Norths’ facility with European languages (Roger North discoursed in Italian with the French court) must have recommended them to the queen and her council (CSP for., 1572–4). Bodl. Oxf. MS North a. 1 contains Roger North's official papers relating to the embassy.

On 10 December 1576 Roger North recorded the payment of £46 11s. 15d. for the purchase of ‘the Lease of A howse & houthold stuff for Mr Tho: North’, and a further £7 spent on ‘preparacions’ of the house. The location of this residence is not specified. None the less, North is likely to have been (at least temporarily) resident with his brother at Kirtling in September 1578 when Queen Elizabeth spent three days there on progress, and in March 1579 Roger North's note of ‘persons lieng in my house ordinary’ records (without punctuation) ‘my brother his wif daughter man maid’ among those present (BL, Stowe MS 774, fols. 29r, 89r). North was twice married: first to Elizabeth Rich (née Colville) of London, and second to Judith, daughter of Henry Vesey of Isleham, Cambridgeshire, and widow of Robert Bridgewater. His second marriage may be connected to the payment recorded in July 1582 by Roger North: ‘geven my brother iijli

goeng a woeng'. The dates of birth for the children of his first marriage, Edward and Elizabeth, are not known; payments by Roger North of £66 13s. 3d. to 'mr stutvile for Bess Norths marriaeg' and a further £23 6s. 8d. 'geven hir to aparrel hir self wt all', between June and October 1587, perhaps date his daughter's wedding (BL, Stowe MS 774, fols. 11r, 118r). There were no children of North's second marriage.

North's next publication is likely to have had its roots in a purchase made during the 1574 embassy, since his translation of Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, is taken from the third edition of Jacques Amyot's French translation, printed at Lausanne by François le Preux in 1574. North's translation was entered to the French refugee stationer Thomas Vautrollier on 6 April 1579; Vautrollier had earlier registered a privilege 'for .vij yeres. of PLUTARCH de vitis imperatorum' first granted to Lodwyck Lloyd in April 1573 (Arber, Regs. Stationers, 2.351, 886). North's dedication to Queen Elizabeth, dated 16 January 1579, rhetorically 'presumed to present' her with the translation, and her subjects with examples of 'honor, love, obedience, reverence, zeale, and devocion to Princes' (sig. \*2r). North also took steps to orchestrate a real presentation of the book. Leicester, at the request of Roger North, wrote to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, in August 1580, to seek his favour towards the translation: Leicester found Thomas North, he wrote, 'a very honest gentleman & hath many good things in him, wch are dround only by povertie' (Hatfield MSS 162/9; Salisbury MSS, 2.339). Burghley's reply on August 25, as well as confirming Leicester's assessment of North, 'whom I thynk truly well of for manny good partes in hym', cautiously announced an intention 'to mak his portion more by xl by yere, then hir Maty did assent, hopyng tht she will not mislyk it' (TNA: PRO, SP 12/141/39; CSP dom., 1547–80, 672). Unfortunately notice of the initial rate at which the portion was set does not survive.

The earl of Desmond's escalating rebellion in Ireland later in the year offers tangible proof of North's usefulness to his patrons. In October 1580 North was one of five captains embarking with troops at Chester to sail to Dublin, where they arrived on 11 November; later in the month, 200 of North's footmen were sent to Dundalk. He returned to England in March 1582, bearing with him a letter from Loftus to Burghley praising his 'faithful and chargeable service' and hoping that the queen would have 'consideration' of it and him (CSP Ire., 1574–85, 264–70, 352). North seems at least briefly to have considered returning, for Roger North recorded payment of £37 'geven my brother to goe in to yrland' in early April 1582; his wooing in July perhaps put paid to the intention. Five years later North was again in military service, on this occasion embarking at Yarmouth in June 1587 with 150 men from Cambridge and Ely for the Low Countries; Sir Thomas Shirley's accounts record payment to North for service until 10 October 1587 (CSP for., 1587–9). On 24 June 1588 the privy council wrote of him to his brother as 'a very meet person for the trayninge' of men in Ely against the threat of the Armada (APC, 1588, 134).

North probably continued to circulate in and about the court. On 9 January 1591 he provided for Sir Julius Caesar, perhaps as a paid legal opinion or possibly on behalf of the earl of Oxford, a statement of 'his exceptions against the sute of Surveyor of the gagers of baer & ale', the latest of Caesar's schemes for a money-making monopoly; he

signed himself, with an Italianate flourish, 'Divotissimo & affectionatissimo' (BL, Add. MS 12497, fols. 411–12). In March 1591 North purchased for 5s., secondhand, a copy of the third edition (1582) of his *The Diall of Princes* and set about revising it towards a (never published) fourth edition (CUL, Adv.d.14.4). About this time he was knighted; in February 1592 he was given a commission as a justice of the peace in Cambridge, and he was present again in the rolls in 1597 (CSP dom., 1591–5, 191).

Between September and December 1596 North served again in Ireland as captain of 100 footmen from Cambridge and Huntingdonshire stationed in Dublin (CSP Ire., 1596–7, 108, 139–40; Salisbury MSS, 6.543, 558). His conduct there was perceived by others as less than exemplary: an anonymous report accuses him of having left his men, some of 'whose feet and legs rotted off for want of shoes', 'uncared for and unrelieved', but all the while continuing to demand their pay. It was also alleged that before leaving Ireland he sold his company, now a 'piteous, forlorn band', to his son, Edward North (CSP Ire., 1596–7, 194–5). Whatever the truth, his reputation does not seem to have suffered: he was given a grant of £20 by the city of Cambridge in 1598.

Roger North's will (20 October 1600) requested that, once all debts, legacies, and charges had been settled, 'out of the Remynder with some portion my brother Sr Thomas Northe, his sonne Edward Northe, his daughter my neece Stutfeyld be reteyned' (TNA: PRO, PROB 11/97, fol. 45r). However, delaying tactics on the part of Roger North's executor, George Calfield, kept back legacies not only from North but also from the will's prime beneficiary, Roger's grandson Dudley; legal recourse having failed them through the summer of 1601, the beneficiaries petitioned the queen (BL, Add. MS 61873, fols. 1–44). In February 1600 North was charged with the watch of the Tower in a jurisdictional dispute with the City of London, and in March 1601 was paid £10 for his part in putting down 'the late attemptes made by the late Earle of Essex and his adherentes' (APC, 1600–01, 153–4, 239–40). The references to 'my great uncle Sr Tho: North (whose poore estate yor Matie hathe so graciously pitied & relieved)' (BL, Add. MS 61873, fol. 39r) in Dudley North's petitions recognize the annual pension of £40 bestowed by the queen in 1601, as did North in the dedication to *The Lives of Epaminondas* and others printed by Richard Field in 1602, and reprinted with the Plutarch, again by Field, in 1603. There North praised the queen's comfort and support for his 'poore old decaying life' (sig. a2r), and, though some minor corrections were made to the text of his Plutarch in the edition of 1603, it is likely that he died in 1603 or soon afterwards. No will is extant.

In 1658 Dudley North described his great-uncle as 'a man of courage, a man learned ... and endued with very good parts otherwise', yet suggested that he had never possessed 'a steadines comparable to his brother' (CUL, MS Ee.V.3, p. 46). North's fame, since Samuel Johnson's contention that Shakespeare had read Plutarch in North's translation (verified by Richard Farmer in 1767), has rested in the dramatist's having, among very much else, thrown (as Farmer had it) 'the very words of North into blank verse' (Farmer, 14). Shakespeare's acquaintance with North's translation probably derived from the printing house of Richard Field, whose presses may have been at work on a 1595 edition of Plutarch at the same time that they were printing Shakespeare's *Lucrece* in 1594 (entered 9 May; Arber, Regs. Stationers, 2.648). North's translation influenced

profoundly not only the larger narrative structures of Shakespeare's Roman plays but innumerable local shapings of their language; though criticism now more strongly emphasizes Shakespeare's activity, creativity, and competitiveness as a reader of North than his passive indebtedness, the importance of this single work is unargued. In 1579 North, Englishing Amyot, wrote of translation as an accommodation of voices: 'the office of a fit translater, consisteth not onely in the faithfull expressing of his authors meaning, but also in a certain resembling and shadowing out of the forme of his style and the maner of his speaking' (Lives, sig. \*7r). If the manner of his own speaking is muffled, and his identity overlaid, in his literary work, it is none the less tempting to think that a (now cropped) side note added in manuscript by North to his copy of *The Diall* may have had for him a personal biographical application: 'want of mone[y] maketh a goo[d] scoller, and makes him fa[il]l to his booke' (sig. A4r).

Tom Lockwood

Sources [BL](#), Stowe MS 744 · [BL](#), Add. MSS 12497 and 61873 · Bodl. Oxf., MS North a. 1 · CUL, MSS Ee.V.3 and Adv.d.14.4 · will, TNA: PRO, PROB 11/48 [Edward North, father] · will, TNA: PRO, PROB 11/97 [Roger North, brother] · S. Adams, Household accounts and disbursement books of Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, 1558–1561, 1584–1586 (1995) · [APC](#), 1588, 1600–01 · [CSP dom.](#) · [CSP for.](#) · [CSP Ire.](#) · Calendar of the manuscripts of the most hon. the marquis of Salisbury, 24 vols., [HMC](#), 9 (1883–1976) · W. P. Baildon, ed., The records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn: admissions, 2 vols. (1896) · P. S. Allen, 'The birth of Thomas North', [EngHR](#), 37 (1922), 565–6 · [Arber, Regs. Stationers](#) · Correspondance diplomatique de Bertrand de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, ed. A. Teulet, 7 vols., Bannatyne Club, 67 (1838–40) · H. H. Davis, 'The military career of Thomas North', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 12 (1948–9), 315–21 · R. Farmer, *An essay on the learning of Shakespeare*, 2nd edn (1767) · J. Nichols, *The progresses and public processions of Queen Elizabeth*, new edn, 3 vols. (1823) · K. A. Quinn, 'Sir Thomas North's marginalia in his Dial of princes', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 94 (2000), 283–7 · T. A. Walker, *A biographical register of Peterhouse men*, 2 vols. (1927–30)

Archives [BL](#), document in his hand, Add. MS 12497 · [Bodl. Oxf.](#), family papers · [CUL](#), annotated copy of *The diall of princes*, Adv.d.14.4