

THE WORLD DISFIGURED: PROBLEMS OF FIGURATION IN
ENGLISH RENAISSANCE POETRY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation explores moments in poetry of the English Renaissance where figurative language itself is “disfigured” in a way that reflects on the conditions of its own making. In their use of reflexive and disjunctive figures, the poets in my study attend to the problems inherent in representing a world in the process of radical change, and participate in a broad cultural concern with the status of language as a mediating device. Renaissance handbooks on poetics emphasize the need for apt correspondence between things compared in figures such as metaphor, but the poets in my study ask how conventional relationships of correspondence can be maintained in a context of historical disruption: amid royal executions and revolution, religious turmoil and profound changes in understanding the material world.

Book V of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the book that suggests the plainest relationship between history and poetry, in fact unsettles any easy sense of the correspondence between terms in the allegorical figure and problematizes the idea of analogy. Donne’s *Anniversaries* represent a world thrown into disproportion by the

passing away of an old analogical system. His figures of excess and disproportion draw attention to the limits of figures of comparison, critiquing and revising the forms with which they engage. In response to the devastations of the Civil War, the Royalist poet and pamphleteer Samuel Sheppard creates a literally ruined world where “Confusion here inthroniz’d sits” in the kingdom of Ruina. His unfinished epic poem *The Faerie King* struggles to find representational forms adequate for a historical moment of pronounced literary and political upheaval. Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House” exploits the reflexive properties of catachresis and other figures of disjunction to reflect critically on historical “progress” and the processes of figuration. “ ‘Tis not what it once was, the world,/ But a rude heap together hurled,” mourns Marvell; the world is turned upside down in strange, disorienting figures “together hurled” that offer a new, disjunctive language from the ruins of the old.

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Introduction:

The figure of the ruin/ the ruin of the figure

My dissertation takes its title from a line in John Donne's poem "The First Anniversary": "The worlds proportion disfigur'd is," Donne writes, by a cosmic drift away from correspondence and order (1.302).¹ In *The Anniversaries* Donne calls attention to the problems inherent in "figuring" a world where conventional forms of correspondence are in the process of dramatic transformation. Attending to moments where figurative language itself is "disfigured," my dissertation explores how writers in the Renaissance engaged their historical moment in poetry. This project initially began with an interest in self-reflexive poetic figures, or figures that point to the conditions of their own making, drawing attention to themselves by the use of disjunction.² By figure here I refer primarily to constructions such as metaphor, simile and allegory that propose a relationship of similitude between different terms, working from Aristotle's foundational definition of metaphor as "the application [to something] of a name belonging to something else" (57b, 7-9).

The readings in the chapters that follow explore the relationship between self-reflexive forms of figurative disjunction and the problems that attend the representation of some aspect of the present or recent historical moment. In their approach to these problems, the poets in my study thematize the search for a poetic language adequate to particular circumstances, asking how history or experience might itself be translated into language and into figure. Spenser's complex relationship to Elizabethan politics is reflected in his ambivalent representation of recent historical events in Book V of *The*

Faerie Queene; Donne records Elizabeth Drury's death and his own disconsolate search for patronage in *The Anniversaries*; Sheppard attempts to render the Civil War in allegorical form in *The Faerie King*; Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" describes the retreat of General Fairfax in the aftermath of the English Revolution and the transformation of conventional tropes under the pressure of historical change.

These poems describe particular historical moments and experiences, and also emerge against a broad historical moment of change and dislocation from the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries. Acute and violent kinds of ruptures distinguish this moment in history from Spenser to Marvell, and contribute to the urgency with which these poets meditate on the adequacy of conventional forms of representation: not only the epistemological shifts precipitated by the development of new ways of knowing the world, or the literally and figuratively violent changes of the Reformation, but also crises of political, national and linguistic identity as England shaped itself as an imperial power, and the crises of authority that resulted in the English Revolution. Something of this violence and dislocation is suggested by the way my chapters are oddly bracketed by two royal beheadings – at the beginning of my dissertation, Spenser represents the fate of Mary, Queen of Scots in the trial and execution of Duessa, in Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, and my last two chapters study poems written in the context of another regicide, this time of the grandson of that executed Queen. The profound disturbance created by the beheading of King Charles, even for some of those who were initially supportive of the Parliamentary cause, is evident in Sheppard's troubled representation of the King's death and the Civil War more broadly. Donne alone of the poets in this study lived in a time when a monarch was not executed, but his poems are

perhaps the most revealing of contemporary dislocations in language and thought. These were violent times beset by crises not only in relation to political, scientific and religious authority but also in relation to the meaning of language and its figurative expressions.

The poems I study here participate in a crisis of thinking about linguistic representation which Michael McKeon has described as a “problem of mediation” in the early modern period: a concern with the ability of language to accommodate truth in a period of epistemological, religious, political and cultural transformation. I use the term “participate” to provide a sense of how these texts both contribute to, and emerge in response to, contemporary conversations about figurative language and the way language represents the world. In various realms of discourse ranging from religious debate to the arguments of the emerging “new Philosophy,” people in the Renaissance worried about the capacity of language to represent, to persuade, and to cloud or clarify the understanding.³ The problem of representing divine truths through human, fallen, imperfect modes had long been a concern for Christian thinkers such as Augustine; this concern took on new shapes in the debates surrounding the Reformation, especially in arguments over the status of images and the interpretation of the language of the scriptures.⁴ A specifically Protestant concern with the mediating function of figurative language informs the attitude of all the poets in my study, especially in terms of their sense of the representational limits of language.

The figurative aspects of language were particularly troublesome for early modern thinkers such as Francis Bacon who sought a language of maximum transparency, since figures like metaphor and allegory have the potential to both illuminate and obscure the things they represent. This concern with language’s potential for both transparency and

obfuscation drove the seventeenth-century interest in the construction (or recovery) of a universal or Adamic language, and similar concerns would later occupy early thinkers of the Enlightenment such as John Locke. Such anxiety about the potential ambiguity of language is taken to its extreme in John Wilkins' universal language scheme expounded in *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668), which aims to eradicate "the ambiguity of words by reason of Metaphor" through an entirely new language and lettering system (17).⁵ How can language represent the "Real," Wilkins asks, when the very alphabet we use draws us towards unstable and metaphoric practices of representation? In the ideal of a universal language, words are purely tied to their referents in the way language and perception were supposed to have worked before the Fall; Bacon longingly writes of "The pure and immaculate natural knowledge by which Adam assigned appropriate names to things" and argues that one of the key paths towards clearer knowledge is through a language that tries to approach this pre-lapsarian ideal, which minimizes the seductive ornaments of art (50). Figurative language and other recognizably "rhetorical" linguistic effects came to be increasingly regarded as a disturbance in fields such as philosophy and politics over the seventeenth century, while the artistic use of figure increasingly came to define the language of poetry, along with metre.⁶ While figurative language was at home in the discourse of poetry in a way that it increasingly was not in other fields, poetry and treatises on poetics of the period continue to register concern about the proper use and interpretation of figure.

My own work concentrates on the distinctive ways in which poetry takes part in this cultural anxiety about the figurative uses of language as it engages with questions of how to represent the world. At points of marked self-reflexivity in figurative language –

places where the text seems to turn around to question its own structures of signification, such as Donne's reflections on the "disfigured" world of the *Anniversaries* – poetry calls into question the structures of correspondence that underlie the conventions of figurative language. In the readings that follow, I argue that the disjunctions of figurative language in these poems register on a formal level the dislocations of history that they describe.

These poets write from positions both central and marginal, and their attitudes to the problems of representation are inflected by the complexity of perspective produced by their positions, more or less, of literary, social and/or political exclusion. Spenser longs for a secure place at the centre of the court's literary sphere and political machinery, but writes the last three books of *The Faerie Queene* after Elizabeth's less-than-wholehearted response to the first part of the poem and his virtual exile to Ireland. Donne writes his first elegy for Elizabeth Drury in a desperate, last ditch effort to achieve patronage and rescue a place in the circles of literary and social prestige from which his disastrous marriage had all but excluded him; the last poem in the cycle of the *Anniversaries* is written from the Continent, where his successful bid for Drury's attention ironically resulted in him being separated and alienated from friends, family and society. Sheppard, as a pamphleteer, is a literary pariah, and yet ardently desires to claim literary authority as an epic poet; as an ambivalent Royalist he writes from a position of political exclusion in the Interregnum and seems unable to either finish or publish the poem upon which he had pinned his hopes of gaining literary respect. Marvell's own allegiances in the Civil War are famously complex: he wrote dedicatory poems for both Milton and Lovelace – the regicide poet-prophet and the cavalier lyricist, total opposites on the political and literary spectrum – and expresses what seems like deeply fraught

sympathy for Charles I in his “Horation Ode” on Cromwell. He wrote “Upon Appleton House” in the service of Lord Fairfax, the former leader of the New Model Army who had refused to participate in Charles’ trial, and who had just recently resigned in protest over the decision to invade Scotland, and the poem meditates on the difficult balance between engagement and retreat, action and contemplation. “Upon Appleton House” toys with the high genre of epic but does not embrace it, creating instead mock-epic set-pieces.

The second installment of *The Faerie Queene*, Books IV through VI (published in 1596 together with the first three books) bears evidence of Spenser’s disillusionment with politics and with the potential for poetry to represent and communicate effectively. Book V is distinguished from the rest of the poem by its representation of contemporary events such as the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots and is conventionally regarded as straightforward historical allegory. In Chapter One, ““The sea it selfe doest thou not plainely see?” Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Book V,” I argue that in the book where Spenser’s allegory appears most clearly tied to real-world referents, the task of reading the relation between history and figure, sign and signified, becomes more complicated. Book V, the legend of Justice, returns repeatedly to the conditions – and limits – of correct interpretation, and how we are to understand, read or judge what appears to be “plaine” in the text and in the world that it mirrors. Artegall’s early encounter with the well-known “egalitarian” Gyant reveals the problematic instability of reference within figurative language, and raises questions about the nature of “plaine” appearance. Later, the memorable figure of a court poet who has his tongue nailed to a post for spreading “rayling rymes” (V.ix.25.8) and libelous verse about the Queen dramatizes Spenser’s

anxieties about interpretation in the context of his veiled criticism of Elizabethan policies.⁷ The poet's old name, "Bonfont," is written on the wall above him, clearly visible alongside his new name, "Malfont." Although we are told that "Malfont was plainely to be red," Book V repeatedly undermines the notion of "plaine" appearance and obvious correspondence between sign and signified. It is not at all "plaine" how we are to read Malfont.

Donne's *Anniversaries*, written as elegies for the daughter of a wealthy patron, are notorious for the wild extravagance of their images and hyperbole which far exceed the bounds normally associated with genres of compliment and challenge even the limits of metaphysical "discordia concors." While many readers have acknowledged the strange and incoherent aspects of these poems, most critical accounts aim to provide a sense of coherence and consistency that the poems themselves resist. My second chapter, "Disfigured Praise: John Donne's *Anniversaries*," explores a range of contexts for understanding Donne's challenges to the convention of correspondence in figurative language, from the structures of decorum described in contemporary poetic handbooks to the significance of the "new Philosophy" ("First Anniversary" 205) and Donne's own difficult personal circumstances at the time of the poems' composition. In their disjunctive hyperbole, the poems self-consciously prompt the question of whether their subject was really worthy of the poet's praise, or rather to draw attention to the fact that she could not have been – we cannot help but recognize hyperbole here as "the Loud Lyer," as Puttenham describes the figure in his *Arte of English Poesie* (220). Donne brings the truth claims of the poetry of praise into question, unraveling the conventions that define the genre.

My third and fourth chapters move forward to poetry written from politically ambivalent but very different perspectives in response to the upheavals of the English Civil War: *The Faerie King* by Sheppard, a Royalist who started out as a supporter of Parliament and remained critical of Charles, and “Upon Appleton House” by Marvell, whose patron, Lord Fairfax, had retired from his position as leader of the Parliamentary Army following the regicide. Chapter Three, “ ‘Confusion Here Inthroniz’d’: Samuel Sheppard’s *Faerie King*,” explores how the actual experience of war disfigures epic form and figurative language in Sheppard’s little-known heroic poem. Unfinished, unpublished in the author’s lifetime and still virtually ignored, *The Faerie King* narrates the fortunes of the invented kingdom of Ruina in an obscure, fragmented allegory of the Civil War. Sheppard seems to have in mind a historical allegory based on *The Faerie Queene*, especially Book V, but his poem departs from Spenser’s model in many ways. At times King Ariodant seems to represent King Charles, while at other moments it is impossible to understand the significance of the action in these terms, or indeed at all; the poem slips in and out of historical allegory, prompting the reader to look for allegorical, political and historical significance in situations that eventually yield only confusion. The poem was begun in 1648 when the outcome of the Civil War was still uncertain, and Sheppard, like several other Royalist poets including Cowley and Davenant, was unable to finish his epic with the victorious ending he had originally hoped for. Sheppard appears to search for and ultimately fail to find figurative and narrative frameworks able to accommodate the complexities of “these most cursed Times that have Invaded/ my sense with horror, strangling my weake skill” (V.vi.1.5-6).⁸

My final chapter, “The Fate of Metaphor in Marvell’s ‘Upon Appleton House’” considers Marvell’s response to a world where the structures of figurative language themselves seem to have been destabilized by historical change. “Upon Appleton House” is filled with figures of dislocation and displacement, from the destruction of a convent to provide the bricks for Appleton House itself to the bizarre images of catachresis that populate the poem, such as the strange salmon fishers who “like Antipodes in shoes,/ Have shod their heads in their canoes” (771-2).⁹ The poem’s imagery suggests both a sense of history as terribly out of joint and the poet’s troubled reflection on how to represent this history. The retirement of Marvell’s patron Lord Fairfax creates an uneasy relationship to the tropes of Protestant sacred history that animate Marvell’s other political poems, and these tropes combine with pastoral forms in particularly disjunctive ways in the meadow of Appleton House, where Biblical pastoral allegory is violently disrupted by the Civil War. “Upon Appleton House” has been read primarily as a celebration of the Fairfax dynasty, but I argue that the poem is more critical in tone, particularly in its treatment of female figures. I extend Patricia Parker’s arguments about the sense of “violation” inherent in the figure of metaphor to explore the poem’s associations between patriarchal norms, historical progress, and figures of improper displacement. There is an alternative poetic model embedded in the puns and images of reflection associated with the virgin Maria, the poet’s happy solitude in the forest, and the river’s “crystal mirror slick,/ Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt/ If they be in it or without” (636-38). Both the figures of catachresis and slippery puns function as reflexive forms of figurative language that interrogate the terms of their own making and their own adequacy as an index of the historical moment they describe.

My interest in these issues was in fact first prompted by reading “Upon Appleton House” and wondering about the way the poem repeats little inset narratives of *translatio* or transfer that seem to allegorize the construction of figure itself: to choose one example, in the image that inspired my chapter on the poem, Maria Fairfax, the young daughter of Marvell’s patron, is described as being “translate[d]” from daughter to wife in the process of her anticipated marriage: she will remain a virgin “Till fate her worthily translates” her into a bride (747). The word “translate” engages a broad range of associations in early modern English, many of them glossed by Judith H. Anderson in her recent book on metaphor in Tudor/Stuart England (*Translating Investments* 11). Chief among them is the Latin term for the Greek metaphor, *translatio*. The use of this word likens Maria’s marriage to the making of metaphor, making it a kind of metaphor for metaphor. In my reading of the poem, Maria’s marriage is viewed with ambivalence, and the poet’s implied reservations about her impending “translation” made me want to explore further what the poem has to say about the translations of figurative language. What I found in the poem suggests a sustained reflection on the process of figuration and the means by which the material world and the processes of history are represented in – or translated into – the figures of poetic language. This kind of sustained reflection ties together the collection of very different poems grouped together in this dissertation, and shows evidence of a strong cultural preoccupation with the way figurative language works to both reveal, shape and distort the things it describes. The precise nature, purpose, and outcome of these reflections differs from text to text, but to some extent the consequences are the same, which is to prompt the reader to question or de-naturalize the relationship of

similitude between the terms of figure that are proposed in the poems – and in so doing to question the most basic conventions of poetic decorum.

I turn back now to the beginning of “Upon Appleton House” to consider an image that for me is emblematic of the way Marvell exposes or “shows” the translations of figurative language. The poem moves through the entire estate of Appleton House in its meandering journey, but the poem’s opening describes the house itself. The building is described as having been constructed from the bricks of a former nunnery whose ruins are still visible nearby:

A nunnery first gave it birth
 (For virgin buildings oft brought forth)
 And all that neighbour-ruin shows
 The quarries whence this dwelling rose. (85-8)

The old is thus made into the new; the corrupt into the pure; one thing is carried over and translated into another. This can be easily apprehended as the story of figure, in which the signifier is made to stand in the place of the signified – the old building is translated into something new, carried across and remade.

On one level the house tells a narrative of triumphant appropriation in the poem’s celebration of Protestant historical “progress” (“The progress of this house’s Fate” [84]) and the new house is shown to fulfill what was only religious pretension in the case of the nunnery: “what both *Nuns* and *Founders* will’d,” the poet tells us, “’Tis likely better thus fulfill’d [...] Though many a *Nun* there made her vow/ ’Twas no *Religious-House* till now” (282-83, 287-88). Yet Marvell draws attention to the ways in which this process involves not only the translation but the ruin of the original, just as in his representation of Maria’s translation from virgin to wife, and other images of metamorphosis, he

foregrounds the attendant conditions of loss or sacrifice – we might think of the poet figure staked down and tied like a sacrificial victim as he prepares to be assimilated into the forest greenery; or the slaughtered birds at the center of the wild figurative play in the meadows, where a mower cuts down a rail which is then subjected to several metaphorical turns; or the “sacred bud,” a metaphor for Maria’s virginity, imagined as being ritualistically “cut” (742).¹⁰

The origins of the new building in the ruins of the old are evident there in the “neighbour-ruin,” which provides a memorial hole in the landscape. If the house were built directly on top of the foundations of the nunnery this distance would be rendered invisible, but instead there is a neighborly distance between the two. There is a gap in this translation, measured by the distance between the “neighbour-ruin” and the new dwelling, and this gap or disjunction creates a space that allows us to apprehend the difference between the old and the new. Marvell has here constructed a reflexive image of translation that boldly preserves the distance between the two terms instead of attempting to close it, as in conventional uses of figure. While it is true that it is the builders of Appleton House who made the decision to separate the new dwelling from the old nunnery, it is Marvell who draws attention to the simultaneous proximity and distance of the two.

The designation of this distance or difference as that of a neighbor is also significant, and telegraphs the transfer of figure still more strongly. In conventional classical and Renaissance definitions of figure the two terms brought into correspondence must necessarily display some affinity or “conveniencie” (Puttenham, 190) with one another, a neighbourly relation undergirded by naturalized assumptions about relations of

correspondence between things in the material world, as I will discuss further below. But what are we to make of this relationship between neighbors, between the ruined and the raised, the virgin sacrificed and the newly born, especially when this relationship is exposed so emphatically to view? My reading of this passage and other figures of transformation in the poem have been influenced from the outset by Patricia Parker's work on metaphor, in which she explores the way the figure encapsulates a narrative of displacement and suppressed violence: a "sense of a transfer which is not quite proper, or a substitution which is also a displacement" and "a kind of violence or violation" (*Literary Fat Ladies* 36, 38).¹¹ Although this might be presented on the level of narrative as a proper appropriation, as in the case of Appleton House, attending to the collapsed "plot" (Parker's term) of the figure may reveal troubling power relationships at work between the original, displaced term and the term that dominates in the figure. The proper transfer of meaning in fact verges perilously close to the improper, just as metaphor constantly threatens to collapse into its improper other, catachresis or the figure of abuse.

In her theorization of metaphor, Anderson draws on Hegel and his deconstructive interpreters to describe the figure as a form of sublation or *Aufhebung* in which transcendent meaning is derived from physical ground in a process that requires the disavowal or "partial cancellation of the physical."¹² This process thus instantiates a complex relationship between the newly forged transcendent concept and the material from which it arose, as these grounds or physical "roots" can "threaten the transcendence of thought built on abstractions derived from them" (*Translating Investments* 1). The "raising" of Appleton House from the material quarry of the nunnery literalizes the very metaphor used by Paul Ricouer and Jacques Derrida to describe the process of sublation,

“raising”¹³ : “that neighbour-ruin shows/ the quarries whence this dwelling rose.” If we read Appleton House, symbol of Protestant progress and other abstractions, as an edifice “raised” by this process of sublation, then the “neighbour-ruin” stands for the physical ground it comes from, the roots of the transcendent structure, its cancelled origins. Appleton House incorporates the material of the old nunnery, all its bricks made into something new, but the material has left its trace – something of it persists, in all its difference, evoking the pathos of loss, something like a ghost that haunts the site of its own demise.

In its structure of comparison between different terms, the poetic figure mediates a complex interplay of likeness and difference, similarity and distinction, but the difference between the terms is never erased by the function of the figure, never collapsed completely into identity. Susanne Lingred Wofford describes this interplay as a conflict that leaves open an “unresolved contradiction” at the center of the poetic process:

The claims a metaphor makes at the level of ideas and at the level of its own workings as figure are always in conflict [...] for the metaphor claims an identity, while as figure it reminds us that this identity cannot be true or it would not need to be asserted in a figure. The difference between these two effects can be explained or at least covered over by a narrative – the story that would explain how both things, though opposite, can be true – but this narrative will once again return to the unresolved contradiction, and may seek to resolve it in another figure. (14)

The unresolved contradiction, if acknowledged or exposed, is the potential ruin of the figure, akin to the threat posed by the cancelled physical element of the sublation process. Marvell’s demolished nunnery stands adjacent to the building it gave birth to, not covered over; on the contrary, it actively “shows” its difference. In a similar fashion, in Book V of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the old, good name of the poet “Bonfont” is not erased by the

new, “Malfont, but remains legible, providing evidence of the old alongside its transformation into the new.

As Wofford would anticipate, the narratives of these poems “cover” the contradiction in an ideological fashion that shows the necessity, the appropriateness of these translations in the name of “progress” or power. The “raising” of Appleton House is shown to rectify and fulfill the religious destiny of the perverted nunnery, and Malfont’s treacherous literary actions are used to justify his horrendous punishment. However, the continuing presence of the erased term opens up a space from which to question the terms of this process. The continuing presence of the nunnery beside the new Appleton House operates as one of the “disjunctions in literary texts” which in Wofford’s view “make space for a challenge to the narrative celebration of power” (228). This kind of figurative disjunction in Marvell’s poem makes space for various questions about the process of representation as well as the politics of what is being represented in this patriarchal narrative of progress. The ways in which women are exchanged in marriage transactions begin to have much in common with the transfer of metaphor, which in the poem is linked with the improper transfer of catachresis. On another level, the prevalence of catachresis draws attention to the clashing representational frameworks through which the current political and historical moment is imagined, from frameworks of biblical allusion to pastoral allegories.

In Wofford’s terms, all figures make available this space of questioning – all figures contain within themselves the “unresolved contradiction” which provides the ground on which a resistant counter-narrative or “supplement” takes shape, although she makes some allowance for the distinctive power of figures of disjunction. My interest lies

with figures of disjunction and reflexivity which open up this contradiction by making it apparent, leaving open the quarry of the “neighbour-ruin” to view. The process of figuration does not produce complete ideological closure – this by now is post-structuralist orthodoxy – but if we view all figures as equally open, equally reflexive, we may lose sight of what is distinctive about figures that draw attention to their own reflexive form. What I argue in this dissertation is that these poems reflect on themselves with unique force, bringing special attention to the limits of conventional poetic language in its ability to represent the material world.

I seek to understand the critique of poetic language implied by these poems not simply as a reaction to or effect of language as an inherently unstable signifying system, but also as motivated by the special problems inherent in the representation of the contemporary or recent moment – some aspect of the poet’s contemporary material world or experience. Wofford’s study concerns itself with epics that by and large represent an ancient, foundational version of history in order to reify heroic ideology in the present – but the poets in my study represent their own historical moment, and this creates specific representational challenges as the present is translated into poetic figure. The material from which these poets make their figures is history itself, and my readings explore the ways in which this choice of material affects the way figure works in their poems. In these figures that point to the conditions of their own making, the process of representation itself is questioned and the limits of poetic figure for translating the historical and the material are exposed.

Although my primary interest is in poetic figures, I have found it both necessary and productive to consider the use of these figures in their specific generic contexts, and

the critical reflections on poetic convention that I find in these poems is not limited to the conventions that rule the construction of figure, but also extends to a critical reflection on broader generic conventions. For instance, Donne's use of hyperbole is meaningful in the context of the various genres that inform *The Anniversaries*, including the poetry of praise most broadly and the form of elegy most specifically: a certain kind of use of hyperbole defines the limits of decorum proper to the genre of encomium, and Donne's outrageous over-extension of this figure disfigures generic decorum as one of its primary effects. My reading of Sheppard's epic poem *The Faerie King* relates his use of disjunctive figures to the genre contexts of allegorical epic and also considers the strange effects of radical generic hybridity in his work, as the elevated poetry of epic mixes with the scurrilous invective of the political newsbooks for which the author also wrote. In this way the framework of literary genre or "form" emerges in my readings as coextensive with the form of the figure. The ways in which these authors wrestle with, bring together and invent the genres they work with have long been evident to critics, who have argued for instance over the confusing status of Donne's *Anniversaries* as elegy, satire, encomium, and/or meditation, or the troubled relationship of "Upon Appleton House" to pastoral, epic and the country house poem; what I hope to draw attention to is the ways in which this work with genre occurs at the level of figure as much as anything else. It is no accident that the poems in my study present disjunctions of form at the same time as they present disjunctive figures.

In many ways, the readings I propose in the chapters that follow would not be possible without the contributions of New Historicism and Marxist-oriented criticism of the relationship between literature and ideology. However, I tend to see the texts in my

study more as deliberate – though subtle – contestations of the ideology encoded in form and the “forms of power” these poets engage with, rather than as expressions of subjection to those forms or the production of totalizing solutions to ideological problems. For instance, in my chapter on *The Faerie Queene* I take issue with Jonathan Goldberg’s reading of Book V as an expression of “closure” on the levels of narrative and signification, particularly his reading of the poet Bonfont/Malfont as an icon of the complete imposition of the monarch’s power.¹⁴ In my own reading of Book V, Spenser fosters a skeptical attitude to interpretive closure at least as strong as that encouraged in other books of the poem. The seeming limits to signification in the historical allegory of Book V are ironically challenged by scenes of judgment such as Artegall’s encounter with the Mighty Gyant of Canto ii, which results in no clear model of definitive interpretation, and unmasks definitive interpretation as a dubious fiction. Within the loosely organized group of critics identified with New Historicism, the analyses of critics such as Louis Adrian Montrose who identify a critique of or resistance to power in Renaissance literary texts that seem to also celebrate those very forms of power are immensely important for my own readings. Montrose’s argument that it is “by calling attention to its own processes of *representation* that Spenser’s art calls into question the status of the authority it represents” has been foundational for the way I approach these poets who call attention to the production of poetic figure (331, *italics in original*).

In a perhaps similar way, my readings are also indebted to post-structuralist and deconstructionist modes of analysis, especially those influenced by psychoanalysis, that draw attention to the discontinuities and disjunctions that distinguish all forms of language and ultimately frustrate any dream of closure or idea of language as a

transparent signifying system. Deconstruction, however, has been typically most interested in the way language generally forgets, naturalizes or disavows its own divisions, while I am particularly interested in those moments when poets press the reader to remember them. In this introduction, borrowing from Anderson, I work with Hegel's concept of sublation or "*Aufhebung*" in a way indebted to Derrida's description of the process of metaphor; but in "White Mythology," the essay in which Derrida elaborates this argument, he is concerned not with readily obvious uses of metaphor, but rather with the "dead metaphors" strewn across all discourse whose figurative origins are no longer apparent, particularly those which aspire to "metaphysical" status and express seemingly abstract, non-material concepts (the word "grasp," used in terms of understanding a mental concept, is one of his examples, borrowed from Hegel – it is easy to forget that this is a metaphor based in the action of the hand in relation to an object [24]).

Poetry, like all discourse, is also full of dead metaphor, figurative expressions that do not seem to be figurative. But it is also arguably the form of discourse in which figurative language might be used with the most heightened and sustained degree of self-consciousness. This self-conscious use of figure must be distinguished from the dead metaphor or figure which is not recognizably figurative, in part because it is in this self-conscious use of figure that Renaissance poets attempt to work with a carefully elaborated system of decorum governing the proper uses of trope, figure and other rhetorical aspects of poetic language. In this context even the dead metaphors of language must be chosen and used according to rules of decorum – one would have to decide whether to say "grasp," "understand," "intuit," "see," "apprehend," "compass," "fathom," or some other synonym depending on the type of discourse – high, middle, low

– and other aspects of the context of address. But figures that are more recognizably figurative depend on a somewhat different aspect of decorum, particularly those versions of metaphor, metonymy and simile which depend on the assertion of likeness or contiguity between two different terms.

While the second term of figure has been forgotten from dead metaphors, it is actively present in self-conscious ones that must moderate this complex interplay of likeness and difference; most importantly, the figure must naturalize the relationship between these different terms so that the terms are perceived as being appropriately linked in the figure; a word often used in the handbooks to describe the ideal tenor of this linkage is “apt.” I will discuss some of the problems and tensions that attend this concept below, but at this stage my point is mainly to suggest that this process of naturalization, the means by which the difference between the terms of a figure is made to seem not alien but neighborly, not forced but willing, not strange but akin, has much in common with the way the material origins of the dead metaphor are erased, and this erasure is naturalized. In this way the concept of sublation or *Aufhebung* with the tension it suggests between the transcendent concept and its partially erased origins relates not only to the dead metaphor that has forgotten its material origin, but also to the self-conscious figure whose second term is not forgotten, but whose foundation in difference is minimized in favor of an idea of likeness and correspondence.

I have so far briefly made use of several recent critics and theoretical frameworks to outline my approach to figurative language, but in the readings that follow I focus on analyzing the approach of Renaissance thinkers and writers themselves to these questions. In this way my project is both historicist and theoretical; while I have claims to

make about the effect of figures such as catachresis that may apply to any use of the figure, I attempt to understand the specific effect of the figure in the literary and historical context in which it is used. This joint attention to historical context and the details of literary form has much in common with an emerging trend in Renaissance literary studies toward what some practitioners have termed a “new historical formalism,” exemplified in the work of scholars such as Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier as well as several important collections of essays over the past decade including *Renaissance Literature and its Formal Engagements* and a special issue of *MLQ* in 2000 on “Reading for Form.”¹⁵ Like these critics, I draw on the strategies of close reading developed by post-war New Criticism, and like some of them I incorporate the interest in literature as part of broader culture as a legacy of the New Historicism, and a resistance to the idea of the literary text as a unified, coherent form inherited from post-structuralism.

Here I turn to a discussion of Renaissance handbooks on rhetoric and poetics as a crucial part of the context for understanding the conventions of figurative language with which these poems engage. Renaissance thinking about figurative language derives from several important areas: firstly, from classical authorities, most importantly Aristotle’s *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, Cicero’s *De Oratore*, and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratore*; secondly, from the writings of Augustine and other church authorities such as Aquinas who thought deeply about the meaning of language, particularly as it mediated the word of God in the Scriptures. What we might call the theology of language became a significant site of contestation in the debates of the Reformation, which centered around the interpretation of the Bible and its (often figurative) language. Finally, as I mentioned briefly above, language and its figurative uses constituted an area of great interest to Francis Bacon and

other exponents of the “new Philosophy” invoked by Donne in “The First Anniversary,” particularly in its capacity to both obscure and clarify essential truths about the world. Renaissance handbooks on poetics and rhetoric bring together, re-present and build on these various realms of discourse about figurative language.¹⁶ Poetics in the Renaissance shares with rhetoric the domain of tropes and figures of speech (grouped under the category of “elocutio” in traditional divisions of rhetoric), and Renaissance handbooks of rhetoric and poetic art such as Abraham Fraunce’s *Arcadian Rhetoricke* (1588), George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), and Henry Peacham’s *Garden of Eloquence* (1593) provide insight into the rules of decorum that form an important part of the conventions called into question in the poems in my study.

In their recommendations for the performance of rhetorical decorum, the authors of these guides moderate a complex interaction of the strange and the familiar with careful degrees of distance and proximity, affinity and obscurity, likeness and unlikeness, all undergirded by a strict (if hard to articulate) sense of “aptness,” proportion and correspondence. The handbooks include detailed descriptions of the various types of figurative language and their proper use, often expressed in terms of their relationship to and special difference from ordinary speech. For Puttenham, “Figurative speech is a noveltie of language evidently (and yet not absurdly) estranged from the ordinary habite and manner of our dayly talk and writing” (171). Puttenham emphasizes the careful degree of difference or estrangement from “dayly talk and writing”: it must be “evidently (and yet not absurdly)” distinct. The significance of relative proximity and strangeness arises again in the discussion of the construction of actual figures that involve a pairing of significant terms. Metaphor, for example, is composed of both the vehicle and the tenor,

to use more modern terminology.¹⁷ For Puttenham, the figure is imagined in terms of different kinds of linguistic “signification”: he calls it “Metaphora, or the Figure of Transport” in which there is “a kind of wresting of a single word from his own right signification, to another not so naturall, but yet of some affinitie or conveniencie with it, as to say, *I cannot digest your vnkinde words*, for I cannot take them in good part” (190).

Metaphor’s Latin name, *translatio*, meaning literally “to carry across,” indicates the way this figure brings distance into play. A word’s original “signification” is moved in a rather violent way, as suggested by Puttenham’s use of the word “wresting,” from one place to another. Other figures such as allegory, metalepsis and simile also involve a similar movement between two terms, the original “signification” and the other term put into relationship with it. Puttenham’s words “affinitie or conveniencie” draw out the sense of the proper distance that should exist between the terms – the supplied terms should be close enough so that the transference of meaning at least *seems* comfortable, even if some kind of violent wrenching or forcing is inevitably suggested by the move.

This notion of “affinitie or conveniencie,” a distance that is also a likeness or closeness, is a crucial element in the concept of “decorum” in Renaissance poetic theory. Decorum governs the proper use of tropes and figures, and handbooks such as Puttenham’s devote a great deal of space to explaining its various properties. The rules of decorum fundamentally depend on the creation of relationships of proper correspondence on several levels: there must be apt correspondence between the choice of figures and the subject, bearing in mind the context; correspondence must also be established between the terms chosen for figurative language such as metaphor, where the thing signified must bear a proper relation to the thing that stands for it. Puttenham’s description of decorum

emphasizes ideals of proportion, symmetry and correspondence of things to each other, part to whole: “Now because his [Decorum’s] comelynesse resteth in the good conformitie of many things and their sundry circumstances, with respect to one another, so as there be found a just correspondencie betweene them by this or that relation, the Greekes call it *Analogie* or a convenient proportion” (269).

Without the proper relationships of correspondence, decorum is lost and language disfigures its subject rather than beautifying it. The “comelynesse” that Puttenham celebrates in decorous writing constantly threatens to give way to its other, ugliness and disproportion. But how are we to know and judge what makes a “just correspondencie”? How are we to determine when a comparison has gone too far, beyond the range of “convenient proportion”? Part of the job of the handbook writer is to demonstrate and model good judgment, to teach the reader how to produce decorous writing and avoid the inappropriate and indecorous. But decorum turns out to be strangely difficult to pin down and explain precisely. Puttenham admits the difficulty of defining the exact qualities of decorum or the “good grace” which makes figures pleasing and “decent” rather than deformed or “vicious”: “But herein resteth the difficultie, to know what this good grace is, and wherein it consisteth, for peradventure it will be easier to conceive than to expresse” (268). Context and circumstance are helpful in knowing how to fit certain aspects of style to a given situation, and the author offers advice about what types of figures are most appropriate for certain genres. For example, metalepsis or “the *farfet*, as when we had rather fetch a word a great way off than to use one nerer hand to expresse the matter” is taken to be an appropriate figure for discourse intended to please women,

“for as we use to say by manner of Proverbe: things farrefet and deare bought are good for Ladies” (193).

The context of address may help to decide which figure is appropriate to employ in one’s writing, but it offers less assistance with respect to the construction of the figures themselves. In order to achieve the desired “comelynesse,” the terms within a figure need to display a “juste correspondencie” (269) or “affinitie” which is even more difficult to judge and determine, and tricky to work out in the case of figures that all depend on “transgressions of our dayly speech” in their “wresting” or estrangement of signification. In a somewhat tautological formula, the “transgression” of figure can be recuperated into decorous “juste correspondencie” by conforming to (elusive) standards of “decency” in the mind of the audience: “if they fall out decently to the good liking of the mynde or eare and to the bewtifying of the matter or language, all is well, if indecently, and to the eares and myndes misliking [...] all is amisse, the election is the writers, the iudgement is the worlds, as theirs to whom the reading apperteineth” (269). Puttenham acknowledges that many different judgments may be passed according to different listeners and circumstances. In the final case judgment depends on the incredibly elusive notion of “discretion”: “the discreetest man” will be the best judge (270).

Puttenham has run into an issue that also arose for early theoreticians of rhetoric in their own attempts to determine rules of decorum. Some understanding of common usage ultimately determines what is appropriate and what is not, what is too far-fetched and what is close enough for proper “affinitie.” The ear will ultimately show “good liking” to figures in which it recognizes “affinitie” and “misliking” to figures in which it does not, where the “transgression” is too far beyond “daly use.” Puttenham’s example of

ladies' liking for the figure of metalepsis described above demonstrates the importance of an assumed commonality of speech and understanding: the justness of this particular "affinitie" between ladies and metalepsis is based on literally proverbial common sense: "For *as we use to say by manner of Proverbe*: things farrefet and deare bought are good for Ladies" (193, emphasis added). This expression of a common cultural assumption is a form of the rhetorical "commonplace," the storehouse of tropes, figures and forms of expression that an orator or writer can rely on as being recognizably appropriate for his audience's ears. It seems that figurative language observes decorum if it sounds right to a person of good judgment, if the correspondences proposed between terms are recognizable enough to be novel without being completely strange.

Peacham's *Garden of Eloquence* frequently refers to the legitimizing force of "common use" in determining the propriety of the terms paired in various kinds of figures, and the dangers of ignoring it. This warning is sounded most strongly for the figure of "Paroemia, or Proverbe" in which it is "necessarily required ... that it be renowned, and much spoken off, as a sentence in every man's mouth" (29). Recognition derived from common use and familiar classical authority ("antiquitie and learning") is required in order for the figure of the proverb to function at all. In the use of metonymy, terms may only be used, he warns, if they "are in known use, and may aptly be put for the things which they signifie," since "The most generall fault of all, is, when the Metonimie is not taken from the common use, and known custome of the word" (22).

For Peacham, the terms must not only be recognizable from "known use" but also, and inseparably, they must also be "apt" in their relationship. The handbooks all agree that the terms within a figure must display a transparent affinity which in

Puttenham is determined by the obscure notion of “discretion.” Recent readings of Puttenham have noted the way the terms “discretion” and “decorum” are both crucial and ultimately impossible to define.¹⁸ Puttenham’s discriminating mind struggles over the exact definition of this crucial term largely because he is seeking to make explicit a deeply naturalized sense of already-existing correspondences – a sense of “affinitie” between things in the realm of figurative language that reflects the existence of these relationships in the material world. The sense of “juste conveniencie” that distinguishes a good figure not only draws strength from conventional literary precedent or commonplaces (such as the image used above, “*I cannot digest your vnkinde words*”) but a broader array of correspondence between things. The acceptance or toleration of another’s words may be properly figured as digestion because on some level mental processes are taken to be fundamentally analogous to digestion.

The commonplace metaphor of digesting words participates in a Renaissance world-view of cosmic correspondence and analogy described in its most influential formulation by Foucault in *The Order of Things*. Foucault’s account of the paradigm shift in forms of knowledge that (he argues) accompanied the demise of this world-view has been widely challenged and revised. However, it remains a powerful way to describe the world of resemblances and correspondences that was apprehended by many Renaissance thinkers. “Resemblance,” he writes, “organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within themselves secrets that were of use to man” (17). The broad constellation of resemblances described here is the foundation for

decorous relationships between the terms of figure. The terms of a figure seem “apt” if they participate in this scheme of likeness, which has its source in a divinely-ordered nature. Peacham’s description of metonymy provides a good example of the way figurative language draws on this naturally-occurring affinity: in this figure, “the Orator putteth one thing for another, which by nature are nigh knit together” (17). The linguistic terms put into play here are not distinguished from the “things” they describe: all these “things” are both naturally and intimately connected. Analogy, for Foucault, is the most important category of resemblance (and we have seen the significance of this term for Puttenham): “through it, all the figures in the whole universe can be drawn together” (Foucault 22).

For the poems in my first two chapters, *The Faerie Queene* and Donne’s *Anniversaries*, the breakdown of traditional models of cosmic analogy and its relationship to the construction of poetic figure is especially significant. At the time of their composition, this scheme of resemblance and associated models of knowledge were being challenged by the emergence of new ways of understanding and representing the world, alongside widespread political and economic change. *The Anniversaries* describe a world where all traditional relationships of correspondence have changed, re-figured by an array of new developments in epistemology, politics, economics, and theology. The “new Philosophy cal[s] all in doubt,” (1:205) and is inseparable in its destabilizing influence from the destructive impact of Elizabeth Drury’s death on the world. Now that she is dead, “Tis all in pieces, all cohaerence gone” (1:213). As Jane Hedley observes, the poet of *The Anniversaries* “cites traumatic dislocations at every level of the universal order of things” (134). The breakdown in traditional structures of poetic decorum that

characterizes *The Anniversaries* is presented as a reflection and a consequence of the changing world and the passing away of the system of correspondence. The stars in the sky no longer offer a cosmic model of the human body as they once did. Relationships of analogy or correspondence between things appear to have failed, with profound consequences for poetry as an art that draws on these natural affinities to create decorous figures in a kind of “constellation” of different elements. If that art is lost, a different kind of art is performed by Donne in these poems in which language comments on its own disfigurement.

Some of the more bizarre analogies in “Upon Appleton House” suggest how new developments in technologies of seeing the world might destabilize old structures of comparison, as the magnifying lens of the microscope reveals a new world of strange correspondences. This is nowhere more evident than in the world of utterly strange creatures that populates the meadow, where grasshoppers loom like laughing giants in the tall grass, and cows seem to be like fleas, fleas like miniature cows:

Such fleas, ere they approach the eye,
In multiplying glasses lie.
They feed so wide, so slowly move,
As constellations do above. (461-64)

As John Carey has noted, the image of fleas that look like cows is bewildering – it obeys no traditional order of analogy or relationship – until we realize that it refers to the literature on the discoveries enabled by the newly invented magnifying lenses. He draws on J. B. Leishman’s discovery of Marvell’s reference to James Howell’s *Epistolae Ho-Eliae* (1650), in which he writes of “such glasses as anatomists use in the dissection of bodies, which can make a flea look like a cow” (Howell 2.46; quoted in Leishman 222).¹⁹ In the magnifying lens, previously unthinkable analogies present themselves, suggesting

an alien world of likeness hidden in the previously details of things. As Carey points out, cows may well look like fleas when seen from a distance, but a disorienting reversal is suggested by the notion that fleas look like tiny cows. What does it mean to add cows to the list of things that might be likened to fleas? The mind struggles to comprehend the disjunction of this analogy, which upsets all traditional ideas of how creatures might be related to each other or thought similar. The flea in the microscope is newly shown to be a monster, a cow, an engine of catachresis that brings into play the categories of both the miniature and huge. Cows may be shrunk down into fleas, fleas blown up into cows; if insects might be magnified by this microscopic process, then humans can be frightfully diminished. Marvell's evident delight in these monstrous images coexists with a kind of nervousness: delightful monsters they may be – laughing, squeaking giant grasshoppers, as we find in the fields of Appleton House – but uncanny and unsettling all the same, to be both toyed with and feared. Marvell's poetry accounts for the unprecedented possibilities of comparison, new horizons for the construction of metaphor, enabled by this new perspective.

Leishman's reading of this whole stanza notices how Marvell combines an allusion to Theocritus in the image of the cows as constellations in the sky, with images enabled by the technological advances of his own historical moment, "matters unknown to the ancients" (223). The uncomfortable disjunction suggested by this historically unprecedented combination of correspondences is unsettling to Leishman's aesthetic sensibility: "As with many other similes in *Appleton House*, one feels that they have reached, but not passed, the point where a new and exciting kind of beauty begins to turn into the merely grotesque" (223). His comment suggests the ways in which the "new and

exciting” figurative constructions enabled by new ways of seeing and knowing the world take poetic decorum to the point of disfigurement and aesthetic collapse, where “beauty” threatens to become its other, “the merely grotesque.”

The figure of catachresis is one of the most significant means by which disjunctive and reflexive effects are produced in the poems in my study: catachresis emphasizes the element of difference between the terms of the figure and exposes the element of improper transfer that distinguishes all figures. In the figure of catachresis, metaphor is taken too far, beyond the bounds of ordinary idiom, common usage or decorum. Puttenham describes it as the use of a metaphoric term that is not “naturall and proper” and lacks convenience to its partner term, creating the effect of “abuse” (191). The relationship of catachresis to metaphor is a complicated one, and, as Patricia Parker has pointed out, the two terms have historically been confused even in the earliest accounts of rhetorical figures such as Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratorio*.²⁰

Catachresis has a special status in relation to reflexive language or poetry that points to its own expressive limits and confesses the inadequacy or problematic aspects of its own figurative schemes. The shocking dissonance between elements that energizes the figure draws attention to the very processes of metaphor more intensely than more “decorous” forms. The use of catachresis always calls up and to some extent calls into question the basis of the naturalized rules of decorum described above: what makes one thing “close” enough to be a proper point of comparison in a metaphor or simile? What makes another thing “too far” away? Where does the proper end and the improper begin? As we have seen, the judgment of these careful degrees of difference depends on an unconscious, commonly unexamined sense of a natural affinity between things and a

proper measure of distance or “strangeness” that is difficult to exactly define. As Bruce Danner suggests, the confusing effect of catachresis draws attention to the way that conventional notions of resemblance or apt correspondence are conventional rather than natural: it shows that “What constitutes resemblance ... depends less on closed analogical systems than on notions of decorum and convention that figures cannot arbitrate”; catachresis, he argues, “openly demonstrates” the ease with which metaphor can slip from the proper to the improper, from natural-seeming forms of resemblance to unnatural or “monstrous forms” (34).

In Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, the analogies that the Gyant perceives between the material world and social relationships move from seeming “plaine” or natural to looking like improper comparisons, or catachresis, as they are dismantled by Artegall. The effect is to undermine the structures of comparison that undergird the representational system of allegory employed in the poem itself.²¹ Donne’s *Anniversaries* employ the figure of catachresis in a way that overextends the figure even by the standards of metaphysical poetry and calls attention to the breakdown of traditional forms of correspondence in both the material world and poetic language. The world described by Donne, disfigured by the decay of traditional systems of correspondence so that it is “Quite out of joynt” (“The First Anniversary” 192) models a kind of cosmic catachresis or disproportion. The governing conceit of the poems, the idea that the world’s decay has been triggered by the death of Elizabeth Drury, is itself an improper figure, an abuse of poetic decorum.

Both Marvell and Samuel Sheppard exploit the figure of catachresis to work through some of the problems associated with rendering the Civil War into poetry, and

the use of the figure of abuse suggests the disturbing effects of historical transformation on literary representation. In Samuel Sheppard's *Faerie King*, the disjunctions between history and the poem's allegorical figures creates an overall effect of logical confusion akin to catachresis, and the poet frequently employs the figure in his descriptions of battle, where it seems that the horror of the actual experience of war has thrown all logical categories of order and resemblance into chaos. Like Sheppard, Marvell also registers the impact of dramatic historical change on schemes of poetic representation through the use of catachresis and other figures of disjunction and reflexivity. As I have suggested in my discussion of the "neighbour-ruin" from "Upon Appleton House," the poem can be read as an extended meditation on the problems of figuration, and in his representation of the house of Fairfax Marvell blurs the lines between the proper and improper transfer of metaphor.

The figure of catachresis with its dramatic "abuse" of linguistic decorum has the potential to undermine the conventions of decorum itself, as it reminds us that all figurative language is a kind of abuse, a deviation from everyday usage. Because of the innate tendency of all figures toward abuse, the rules of decorum catalogued in handbooks of rhetoric and poetics are in large part intended to police the limits of transgression and the degree of strangeness and impropriety that will be engaged. Peacham's handbook best exemplifies the tendency of these guides to not only describe how a figure should be used, but to also warn against its improper usage. Each chapter is composed of a description of the trope or figure in question followed by a paragraph with the heading "Caution" which enumerates the various ways in which the figure may be misused. What we find in these paragraphs is that the more the figure relies on the

strangeness of terms brought into play, as in the figure of catachresis and others such as aenigma, hyperbole, metalepsis, the more strenuously the limits of strangeness must be policed. The very features that make the figure what it is – abuse, darkness, strangeness, obscurity – are the ones that need to be most controlled. In the case of hyperbole, “exceeding similitude” is used “to amplify the greatness or smalnesse of things” (Peacham 31). Peacham chiefly cautions “that yet there be not too great an excesse in the comparison; but that it may be discretely moderated” (33). That which characterizes the figure itself (excess) must be the most “discretely moderated.” This seeming contradiction – the moderation of necessary excess, or the limiting of distance in a figure that depends on strangeness – lies at the heart of the production of decorum in figurative language.

Many of Peacham’s “Caution” paragraphs are accompanied by marginal annotations that list and summarize the problems that should be avoided: these frequently warn that the figure should not be used if it is overly “strange,” “unlike,” “not in use,” and “too farre removed” – defining features of the figures themselves. The marginal list of cautions for Aenigma (a riddle or “kind of Allegory” distinguished by its obscurity) runs down the page equal to the length of the paragraph it annotates, emphasizing the many pitfalls associated with this potentially dangerous figure which can so easily, it seems, be misused and misunderstood:

1. Unfit.
2. Strange.
3. Unchast.
1. Absurd.
2. Obscure.
3. Odious.
4. Not to seduce.

5. Used among ignorant persons [is] a vanity. (Peacham, 29. The redundancy of the numbers 1-3 is in the original.)

One wonders how it would ever be possible to achieve a “discrete” use of this figure when its hazards are so numerous; part of Peacham’s intent seems to be to discourage its use. Figures which use the essential aspects of figurative language to excess – strangeness, distance, abuse – draw attention to and expose these ambivalent qualities. In so doing, they expose some of the tension in the practice of decorum, where strangeness must not only be produced but also regulated.

Puttenham begins his Chapter VII “Of Figures and Figurative Speeches,” with the striking admission that all figures can be termed abuses:

As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, **so be they also in a sorte abuses or rather trespasses in speech, because they passe the ordinary limits of common utterance**, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the eare and also the minds, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certain doublenesse, **whereby our talk is the more guilefull and abusing**, for what els is your *Metaphor* but an inversion of sense by transport; your *allegorie* by a duplicitie of meaning or of dissimulation under covert and darke intendments. (Puttenham 166, my emphasis in bold, italics in original.)

As we decorate our speech with figures, it seems, we inevitably commit abuse, trespass, lie, and conspire with Satanic-sounding powers of guile and darkness. Puttenham returns us to the sense of violence and impropriety of figurative language, especially the improper transport of metaphor. His rich description of the mechanics of figurative language exposes the morally loaded terms in which it is imagined, as trespass, falsehood and darkness. In her study of metaphor, Parker reminds us of the complex theological significance of figurative language for Augustine and his followers: “In a theological context ... the deviance or wandering of metaphor makes it the emblem of the errancy of

all language, less *a* transgression than sign of *the* transgression,” the original fall (43).

“Transgression” here is virtually synonymous with the biblical term “trespass” employed by Puttenham above. For Augustine, all figures of speech signal “the exile from God into a ‘region of unlikeness,’” (Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.x.43, XII.xiii; quoted in *Literary Fat Ladies* 43). In this way, figurative language implies a realm of mediation where the operations of language are a symptom of the fallen state of humankind, since the “unlikeness” that divides the terms of the figure replicates the distance between truth and imperfect human understanding.

Figurative language may be a feature of this fatal division, but it is also the means through which God addresses human beings in scripture, and the means by which human beings might begin to understand and accommodate divine truth, in whatever limited and provisional way possible. Augustine’s approach to figurative language holds these two ideas simultaneously, and his comments above should not be taken to signal a generalized hostility to figure in the Christian tradition. Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* (On Christian Teaching) is almost entirely devoted to establishing rules by which the figurative language of the scriptures might be translated (in the sense of translation into another language, a difficult process which always threatens to “ruin,” as Marvell might say, the sense of the words) and interpreted. The lengthy, detailed instruction necessary in order to avoid misinterpretation should itself be a signal of the strong potential for figurative language to be misinterpreted and thus distorted. The process of interpreting ambiguities in scriptural language can be fraught with danger (“periculosa,” *De Doctrina* 171; III.86) and spiritual peril, especially in the problematic area of distinguishing figurative and literal meanings of the same expression: “What the apostle says is relevant

here,” Augustine reminds his readers, “ ‘the letter kills but the spirit gives life.’ ” (141; III.20). By the time of Spenser and Donne, Augustine’s foundational ideas about the interpretation of scripture had been revised by the Reformation, and debates over the correct interpretation of scriptural figure were central to the differences between Catholic and Protestant approaches, and even differences within divergent Protestant doctrines. The concern with the provisional limits of figurative language remained in various forms, and its dangerous potential for misinterpretation and misuse remained an issue along with the worry that it would distort what it should reveal. Spenser, Donne, Sheppard and Marvell share these concerns in various but related ways as they use figurative language to represent their historical moment.

By the time General Fairfax retired to Appleton House the monarchy had been overturned by revolution and England had undergone political and cultural shifts literally unthinkable in Spenser’s time. Throughout this period, the status of figurative language in poetic accounts of historical moments registers the effects of the transformations it records, in figures of disjunction, disproportion and excess: the way the parts of a metaphor fit together, or frequently don’t, calls our attention to the representational limits of conventional tropes. Poetry confronts the problem of how to translate the changing world into language in a uniquely self-conscious way. By attending to the distinctive use of metaphor and other figures in the poetic representation of history, I suggest, we can achieve new understandings of both poetry and the history of which it is part.

¹ All quotations from *The Anniversaries* are from the *Epithalamions, Anniversaries and Epicedes* edited by Wesley Milgate and will be provided parenthetically in the text with “1” for *The First Anniversary* and “2” for *The Second Anniversary* followed by line numbers.

² My use of the term “reflexive” is more expansive than that used by Christopher Ricks in his essay on reflexivity in Marvell and David S. Reid in his recent work on reflexive figures in the seventeenth century; whereas they use it to refer to a specific kind of “self-inwoven” figure that makes explicit reference back to itself, such as Ricks’ example “its own reflection,” I use it more broadly to refer to figures that display self-consciousness about, or reflect on, their own constructed status as figures in ways that will I hope become apparent in the readings that follow.

³ Judith H. Anderson’s *Words That Matter* explores the cultural preoccupation in the Renaissance with the relationship between words and the things they represent and this is also a focus of Foucault’s *Order of Things*.

⁴ Lisa Frienkel offers an account of the theological dimensions of figurative language in poetry in her recent book *Reading Shakespeare’s Will: The Theology of Figure*, including close reading of the writings of Augustine, Petrarch and Dante as well as Shakespeare, her primary focus.

⁵ See Stillman for a discussion of Wilkins in the context of the universal language movement.

⁶ On the demise of the traditional arts of rhetoric in the early modern period, see the introduction to *The Ends of Rhetoric* by John Bender and David E. Wellbery. The authors link the decline of rhetoric directly to the rise of scientific discourse which strove for objectivity and neutrality.

⁷ All quotations from *The Faerie Queene* are from the edition edited by A. C. Hamilton and will be provided parenthetically in the text by book, canto, stanza and line numbers.

⁸ All quotations from *The Faerie King* are from the edition edited with an introduction by P. J. Klemp and will be provided parenthetically in the text by book, canto, stanza and line numbers.

⁹ All quotations from the poetry of Marvell are from *Andrew Marvell: The Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno and will be cited parenthetically in the text with line numbers.

¹⁰ The dynamic of sacrifice in the production of art fascinates Marvell in other poems too, such as “The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn,” where the faun’s death makes poetic mourning possible, and “The Garden,” where the poet dwells on the deaths of Daphne and Syrinx required to create the laurel and the reed: “Apollo hunted Daphne so,/ Only that she might laurel grow;/ And Pan did after Syrinx speed,/ Not as a nymph, but for a reed” (29-32). These images from “The Garden” are especially fascinating in the way that they try to de-sexualize these narratives of pursuit and translation, and thus revise the fetishistic aspect of the story: Apollo and Pan’s desire, he argues, was never really for the sexual object but for the thing the object would become – the leafy crown of the victor and the organic instrument of song. Rather than compensating for the lost female object, the laurel and the reed are the intended objects of the chase, making heterosexual desire into a cover story for the poet’s artistically-oriented “vegetable love.” This very Marvellian interplay between erotic desire and aesthetic production (with vegetation at the center of the story – a highly eroticized version of the relationship between nature and art) is also present in “Upon Appleton House,” which re-works and extends major themes and images from “The Garden.”

¹¹ Gordon Teskey makes an even more radical case for the origins of figure – in this case, allegory, a form of metaphor – in a narrative of sexual violence in which the feminine “matter” of allegory is displaced by the masculine “abstract” level of signification in a triumph of the metaphysical over the material (“Allegory, Materialism, Violence”).

¹² Paul Ricouer, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, 285-6, cited in Anderson (*Translating Investments* 1).

¹³ See Anderson (*Translating Investments*) on the concept of *Aufhebung* as “raising” in Derrida and Ricouer.

¹⁴ See “The Poet’s Authority” (87). For Goldberg, Book V is the authoritarian opposite of the productively unstable text; as a result of the historical allegory of the Book, the text is “limited semantically, straitened so that it speaks only the language of power” (*Endlesse Work* 168).

¹⁵ Richard Strier, *Resistant Structures* (1995); Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses* (1995) and “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? Reinterpreting Formalism and the Country House Poem” (2000); Mark David Rasmussen, ed., *Renaissance Literature and its Formal Engagements* (2002). In her introduction to the special issue of *MLQ*, Susan Wolfson traces the history of post-war formalist criticism, its recent reinvigoration and turn towards historicist questions.

¹⁶ Handbooks offering specific instruction for writers intending to write in English began to appear from the mid-sixteenth century at the same time as English poets attempted to “translate” classical and humanist standards of eloquence from Latin into English. The approach to the construction of figurative language in these instructional texts thus emerges against a background of interrelated linguistic and national fashioning, as England styled itself as an imperial power equal to European powers with a language and national literature to match (see Richard Helgerson and Charles MacEachern on this phenomenon of linguistic, poetic and national fashioning). Jenny Mann’s recent work explores the ways in which these handbooks take on the ideologically charged task of translating standards of decorum from Latin (taken to be the model of civilization) into English, fashioning models of eloquence in a language considered even by the authors themselves to be barbarous. Mann argues that the principles of disorder and barbarity that mark the English language are displaced in these handbooks and in literature itself onto rhetorical figures of disorder such as hyperbaton and metalepsis, which thus come to be marked with a distinctive, native “Englishness” which is ever more rigidly policed by such strategies as Peacham’s marginal “Cautions.”

¹⁷ The terms “vehicle” and “tenor” were first introduced by I. A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) and have become widely adopted. The vehicle is the metaphorical word (e.g. “digest” in Puttenham’s example of metaphor “I could not digest your unkinde words”) and the tenor is the thing signified by it (to happily tolerate).

¹⁸ See, respectively, Jacqueline T. Miller, David Hillman and Derek Attridge, esp 265-266.

¹⁹ Howell writes, “You look upon me through the wrong end of a prospective, or rather through a multiplying glass, which makes the object appear far bigger than it is in real dimension; such glasses as anatomists use in the dissection of bodies, which can make a flea look like a cow, or a fly as big as a vulture” (2.46, quoted in Leishman 222).

²⁰ For a discussion of the confusion between catachresis and metaphor in Quintilian and other rhetorical theorists, see Parker, “Metaphor and Catachresis”; see also Danner (32-33).

²¹ For an account of the importance of catachresis in the structure of *The Faerie Queene*, see David Lee Miller.

Chapter One

“The sea it selfe doest thou not plainly see?”: Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Book V

Book V, the legend of Justice, has been of critical interest mainly for its unusual status in *The Faerie Queene* as an allegory that bears close, sustained correspondence to contemporary events and controversial aspects of Elizabethan policy. The judgment of Duessa in Canto ix seems to represent the trial and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots in a transparent way; Artegall himself at times appears to stand for Elizabeth’s notoriously ruthless Irish deputy, Lord Grey de Wilton. However, as Spenser moves the matter of his allegory closer to recognizable historical referents in this Book, his insistence on the instability of reference intensifies. Like the Gyant’s vision of the sea cited in my title, the historical allegory of Book V presents itself as “plaine” to see. Yet the Gyant’s perspective is presented as dangerously wrong in Artegall’s forceful rejection of his “plaine” analogies. Spenser’s interrogation of the nature of “plaine” appearance and analogical signification in this scene raises significant questions for the interpretation of Book V, with its apparently self-evident correspondence between history and poetry.

In the Book where Spenser’s allegory appears most determinate, the task of reading the relation between history and figure, sign and signified, becomes increasingly complicated. Book V returns repeatedly to concerns with the conditions – and limits – of correct interpretation, and how we are to understand, read or judge what appears to be “plaine” in the text and in the world that it mirrors. In Book V Spenser’s emphasis on the instability of language seems strongly motivated by his fears about the political consequences of misinterpretation. He does not want to meet the terrible fate of Malfont,

the court poet who has his tongue nailed to a post as punishment for angering the queen. As a result, in Book V Spenser questions the kind of “plaine” correspondence he seems also to recommend, and mobilizes irony and ambiguity as a defense against potentially disastrous misreading. While this Book is in some ways a didactic demonstration of the “plaine” relationship between Faeryland and the contemporary world, it also contains its own warnings against a reading that would judge too quickly whatever is “plainely to be red” (V.ix.26).

The bluntness of Book V’s historical allegory has led readers to associate it with a sense of closure and determinate meaning on the level of narrative and poetic signification in contrast to the rest of *The Faerie Queene*. Book V can seem disappointingly reductive: whatever Britomart meant before, when she meets Radigund in Book V she is simply translated to Elizabeth in the minds of many readers. She “falls into history,” as Lauren Silberman puts it, and never escapes back into poetry (7). Post-structuralist readings of Spenser have emphasized elements of inconclusiveness and open signification in the text, but the historical allegory of Book V tends to challenge the idea of a text generated by instability. For Jonathan Goldberg, Book V is the authoritarian opposite of the productively unstable text; in his reading, narrative fragmentation is banished along with poetry itself as the text is “limited semantically, straitened so that it speaks only the language of power” (*Endlesse Work* 168). Although interest in Book V has been revived recently by new ways of thinking about the politics of Spenser’s work, it is still somehow hard to approach the complexity of the poetry, as the close correspondence between allegory and history seems to crowd out the rich, dazzling layers of imaginative possibility that characterize the poetry of other Books.²²

It is by now commonplace to acknowledge that the allegory of *The Faerie Queene* leads readers to question first impressions, as things are consistently proved to be other than what they seem. Discouraged from trusting their initial interpretations, Spenser's readers assume a form of skeptical reading, an interpretive position that actively questions the relationship between sign and signified in the allegorical figure. David Norbrook summarizes the reader's predicament in this way: "Spenser problematises the act of reading, discouraging his audience from taking the interpretations they are offered immediately on trust. It is the idolatrous magicians Archimago and Acrasia who encourage readers to take sign for reality, representation for thing represented" (*Poetry and Politics* 111). The process of active engagement with the production of meaning that is produced by this strategy is often regarded as part of the redemptive aspect of Spenser's allegory. By being encouraged to choose among several possible meanings (and choose again, and revise those choices), the reader ideally reflects on the process of making meaning in a way that is intended to produce enlightened understanding eventually, according to Maureen Quilligan's influential account. Book I provides the best example of the way the text produces a valued "self-consciousness" on the part of readers, who are forced to revise their own readings in a "process of retroactive qualification" (229, 235). There is a sense underlying these accounts that the poem will eventually offer a reading that can be qualified enough to be trusted; the poem may encourage readers to suspend or defer judgment, but not indefinitely.

Spenser's strategy takes an important turn in Book V as the recommendation of skeptical reading which has been a defining feature of the poem's figurative strategy is transformed under the pressure of the historical and political issues at stake: while the

earlier Books may demonstrate Spenser's faith in the possibility of "right" reading, the intensified level of irony and insistence on irresolvable ambiguity in Book V undermine this possibility. Quilligan notes the shift that takes place between the first and last Books of the poem, "as if Spenser had lost faith in language itself to reveal the truth" by Book VI (51). But such disillusionment with the revelatory powers of language can be found earlier, in Book V.

1. How to see the sea

The encounter between Artegall, the Knight of Justice, and the Gyant in Canto ii provides a key example of the problems of judgment and interpretation, reading and representation that arise repeatedly throughout Book V. Riding along the cliffs that border the sea, Artegall notices a crowd of people gathered around a Gyant armed with a pair of scales who is holding forth about the unjust state of the world and his plans to fix it. The Gyant suggests that the world is out of balance, which he proposes to remedy by restoring all things to their original state of equality. This plan takes on an apocalyptic cast as the Gyant threatens to level mountains, redistribute wealth and property, and destroy all distinction including that between the separate elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Artegall argues with the Gyant's arrogant assumption of such authority, invoking scripture at every line. In a torturous series of experiments Artegall demonstrates that the Gyant is incapable of using his scales to achieve true judgment due to the faulty bases of the comparisons that underlie his analysis. When the Gyant is not convinced by Artegall's arguments and demonstrations, Talus intervenes and throws the Gyant over the cliff to his death in the sea below then chases away his crowd of followers.

As this brief sketch shows, the episode with the Gyant presents itself as an important lesson in distinguishing proper and improper forms of judgment. Spenser here provides Artegall with a chance to demonstrate the correct use of the set of balances, the icon of his patron Astrea, Goddess of Justice, that has been falsely appropriated by the popular Gyant. However, it becomes difficult to distinguish between proper and improper forms of interpretation and judgment in this episode, even after Artegall's bluster of biblical citations against the Gyant and his clumsy experiments with the Gyant's pair of scales. This scene is a key text for Judith H. Anderson's study of Renaissance perceptions of the relationship between words and what they represent. As she observes, Artegall's argument with the Gyant condenses the "signs of strain in this Book between metaphorical and material dimensions of meaning [...] concept and history [...] words and things" (*Words That Matter* 167). The encounter with the Gyant turns out to be an argument over how to read or "see" what appears to be "plaine," with a special focus on the proper basis of comparison between related terms.

Spenser clearly presents the Gyant as wrong-headed, "admired much of fooles, women, and boys," (V.ii.30) and as a threat that needs to be removed. The Gyant's doctrine of social equality stands in direct opposition to the divinely-ordered hierarchy that Artegall invokes against him. However, in one of the most problematic (and remarked-upon) aspects of this episode, the Gyant also appears to echo figures of authority we recognize in the text, both Artegall and the poet-narrator himself.²³ This makes it all the more difficult to discern exactly what point is being made through the dismissal and destruction of the Gyant and his followers. The Gyant appears as something of a grotesque parody of Artegall, with his passionate desire to right all the

wrongs in the world, armed with a balance, the iconic instrument of judgment. The Gyant's forms of expression also closely recall those of the poet in the Proem to Book V in some significant ways, particularly in his use of extended analogies to describe the disordered state of the universe.

The Proem opens Book V with a series of pessimistic statements about the state of the contemporary world. The poet describes a pervasive sense of decay and disorder in the universe, generated by his comparison of an "image of the antique world" in its original state with the "state of present time":

Such oddes I finde twixt those, and these which are,
As that, through long continuance of his course,
Me seemes the world is runne quite out of square,
From the first point of his appointed sourse,
And being once amisse growes daily wourse and wourse. (V.Proem.1).

The poet's observations have much in common with the Gyant's view of things, especially his sense that things in the world have visibly fallen away from their original state of order and perfection. "Thou foolish Elfe," the Gyant says to Artegall, "Seest not, how badly all things present bee,/ And each estate quite out of order goth?" (V.ii.37).

At the heart of Artegall's argument with the Gyant is a debate over the nature of seeing and interpretation, a question of how to read or "see" what "plaine appeares" to the eye. Both the poet-narrator and the Gyant come to their conclusions about the disordered state of the world through a signifying system of resemblance that works through analogy, indicated by visible marks of correspondence.²⁴ For the poet, the disjointed state of the world is mirrored, through analogy, in the place of the constellations, widening the sphere of disorder to a cosmic level:

all things else in time are chaunged quight.

Ne wonder; for the heauens reuolution
 Is wandred farre from where it first was pight,
 And so doe make contrarie constitution,
 Of all this lower world, toward his dissolution. (V.Proem.4)

The poet's "Ne wonder; for [...] and so" establishes a relationship of obvious correspondence between these two things, the constellations and the state of the world. Most importantly, this is an analogy, and a sign, that can be clearly seen and interpreted. The poet argues that the constellations have "wandered much" from their original placement in space: "that plaine appeares" to anyone who looks (V.Proem.5). The analogy of the stars to the state of the world "plaine appeares" as much as the stars themselves.

The Gyant also finds disorder inscribed "plaine" on the world. For him as well as the poet, to see is to read and understand a system of significant analogies that are clearly apparent, and that point to cosmic disorder. The Gyant finds that all the elements have assumed "vnequall" status with each other, and this state of disorder is reflected, through visible analogy, in the inequality that dominates all the world, from topical features of the landscape to social relations of power and wealth:

For why, he sayd they all vnequall were,
 And had encroached upon each others share
 Like as the sea (which plaine he shewed there)
 Had worn the earth, so did the fire the aire,
 So all the rest did others parts empaire.
 And so were realmes and nations run awry. (V.ii.32).

"Like as ... so did ... So all ... And so": like the poet's "Ne wonder, for," the Gyant's assertion of similitude leads automatically to a world of correspondences that show the consequences of likeness.

As this stanza shows, the sea provides the Gyant's favorite example of the self-evident disorder and analogy for which he argues. The actions of this element more than any other are plainly apparent to his eyes, in the waves that wash away and erode the land and thus produce an unequal relationship between the elements: "Like as the sea (which plaine he shewed there)." In this line we hear two homophones or puns that relate elements of the landscape ("sea" and "plain" as nouns) to visual appearance ("see" as verb and "plain" as adjective). These two terms are juxtaposed again several stanzas later, in another of the Gyant's desperate appeals to Artegall to perceive the signs of self-evident disorder in the universe: "The sea it selfe doest thou not plainely see/ Encroch vppon the land there under thee?" (V.ii.37). A. C. Hamilton suggests that the Gyant's "atrocious pun determines his punishment," as he is thrown into the sea to drown (note to V.ii.37.4). The Gyant's punishment is somewhat related to this pun, but he is not punished for its lack of aptness. In fact, this pun seems highly apt. The double sense of "see" and "sea" may alert us to the reason for this element's favored status in the Gyant's range of examples. With its phonic homology to "see," the "sea" contains within itself a word for the mark of the visible that is the guarantee of analogy and "plaine" signification.

While both the poet of the Proem to Book V and the Gyant understand the world according to a vision of divinely ordered correspondence and analogy, Artegall challenges this vision in a way that questions the basis of such structures of comparison. Artegall's rebuke to the Gyant takes the form of an attack on both his system of visible analogy and his way of reading it. The sea does not simply take away from the land,

Artegall suggests, but redistributes matter elsewhere, maintaining some kind of natural equilibrium in an action that is not immediately perceptible:

Of things unseene how canst thou deeme aright...
 Sith thou misdeem'st so much of things in sight?
 What though the sea with waues continuall
 Doe eate the earth, it is no more at all:
 Ne is the earth the lesse, or loseth ought,
 For whatsoever from one place doth fall,
 Is with the tide vnto an other brought:
 For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought. (V.ii.39)

Artegall draws a distinction here between material “things in sight” and more abstract “things unseene,” and suggests that the Gyant is incompetent in judging either. In fact, the Gyant’s inability to judge the material, visible world (“things in sight”) precludes him from metaphysical judgment. Artegall’s following actions attempt to conceive the difference between the abstract and the material and how they might be compared, signified, and thereby judged.

Artegall embarks on a series of experiments to convince the Gyant of his error in comparing things that do not bear proper comparison, in what becomes a lesson in how to construct proper analogies. The two try to weigh right and wrong, true and false, but the scales fail to achieve balance. The problem seems to lie both in the Gyant’s attempt to subject non-material things to the judgment of material weight, and in his attempt to compare or balance opposing elements. At stanza 47 Artegall concludes that the scales are in fact useless: they are simply a figure which “doe nought but right or wrong betoken” (V.ii.47).²⁵ He thus rejects the figure of the scales in favor of the actual judging mind: “In the mind the doome of right must bee” (V.ii.47).

The confusion in this passage over the status of the scales as literal or metaphorical suggests a significant breakdown in the allegory, a culmination of the

tension between material and abstract categories in the episode.²⁶ Artegall argues that issues of justice are weighed “in the mind,” but if the scales are a functional sign of the mental process of judgment, then they should be able to perform within the allegorical frame. What do the scales represent, if not the weighing of issues “in the mind”?

Artegall’s rejection of the figure of the scales suggests the failure of allegory itself as a vehicle for establishing and communicating the truth. Figurative language, including allegory, depends on balancing a relationship of similitude and difference between separate elements: thus, the scales are conventionally able to signify mental judgment. Artegall’s insistence on the “the mind” as the only proper place of judgment disturbs this process of figuration. By his reasoning all figurative language might be cast, as the Gyant’s finally is, as catachresis or improper association.

The problematic status of words in this system of comparison and evaluation points to a deep concern with verbal interpretation and judgment, and one that is not fully resolved in the experiments that follow. When the Gyant first tries to measure right and wrong, true and false, these terms take the form of “words” that the scales are unable to accommodate. The Gyant throws the words into his balance, where they refuse to be weighed: “But straight the winged words out of his ballaunce flew” (V.ii.44). This angers the Gyant, and he blames the failure on the fact that the words are “light” (V.ii.45). He then tries to weigh the same concepts without the form of words: this time, he simply places “the true” and “the false” into the balance. How this new version of true and false differs from the version of them as “words” is not explained, but we must assume that they are somehow distinct. A further twist appears when Artegall explains that the “eare” must judge words like “the mind” must judge right and wrong: “And so likewise of

words, the which be spoken,/ The eare must be the ballance, to decree,/ And iudge, whether with truth or falsehood they agree” (V.ii.47). After rejecting the figure of the scales, Artegall turns to the ear as synecdoche for the mind, and then turns back to the metaphor of the scales: “The eare must be the ballance.” This new “ballance” will presumably measure words more effectively than the Gyant’s, which “doe nought but right or wrong betoken,” but how is unclear.

The Gyant’s framework for understanding the world and its signs is undermined and forcefully rejected, but the poem does not offer a clear recommendation for an alternative model of reading, judgment, and interpretation. Artegall’s use of the scales to achieve proper judgment proves even more confusing than his previous arguments against the Gyant. He is finally able to achieve results by weighing things according to a different rule: a rule of resemblance, rather than difference. Rather than weighing right against wrong, Artegall recommends that the Gyant should “put two wrongs together to be tride;/ Or else two falses, each of equall share;/ And then together doe them both compare” (V.ii.48). In this way Artegall constructs his own system of comparison that also relies on a signature or “visible mark” to signify its meaning. This visible sign is the mark of its authenticity: in a phrase that strongly echoes the Proem, we find that when Artegall’s “two wrongs [...] or two falses” are placed in the scales, “then *plaine it did appeare*, / Whether of them the greater were attone./ But right sate in the midst of the beame alone” (V.ii.48, my emphasis). The Gyant is not satisfied with this result, we are told, because “it was not the right, which he did seeke” and he does not want to contemplate the “meane” between the “extremes” to which he is dedicated (V.ii.49).

This scene can be interpreted as Artegall's enunciation of a theory of distributive justice that follows Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* 5.3,²⁷ but it remains an obscure series of arguments, "enmeshed in ironic or otherwise disturbing nuances," as Anderson suggests (*Words That Matter* 167). The Gyant's concrete instances of disorder in the world, examples of material inequality and the political abuse of power, are replaced by a highly abstract, non-material order of right and wrong which seems difficult to apply. By the time Artegall has finished his torturous series of experiments we are quite willing to be skeptical of whatever "plaine appeares" from his example. The Gyant's initial experiments, where "truth" and "right" can be both words and not words, undermine Artegall's insistence on the very unity of truth – "truth is one, and right is ever one" (V.ii.48). It has become clear or "plaine" to "see" at least, that words are hard to weigh, their relationship to what they represent is unstable, and they can be manipulated. The appearances of things, and apparent relationships of correspondence between things, are also not as stable as they seem. The adequacy of figuration itself is questioned by Artegall's initial dismissal of the scales as only useful to "betoken" right and wrong.

2. Effacing economics

At the heart of the confusion over judgment and interpretation in this episode is a struggle over forms of comparison and the proper basis of correspondence between things. The text appears to ask what kind of things can properly be compared with others, and interrogates the basis of likeness and resemblance that underlie the poem's own processes of signification. Both the poet of the Proem and the Gyant understand the world through a system of correspondences that visibly displays the disordered state of

the world. The rejection of the Gyant's analogical world view encourages a revision of the claims of the Proem and to some extent undermines the authority of the poet's voice, since their perspectives seem so closely aligned. Yet where the poet sees a state of moral decay, the Gyant's concerns are primarily political and economic. The unequal state of the elements, whereby one encroaches on another producing a state of inequality, corresponds to a social order of inequality. The Gyant sees a clear need to remedy this situation in order to produce equality between persons in the here and now: "Were it not good that wrong were then surceast,/ And from the most, that some were given to the least?"(V.ii.37). The Gyant suggests a program of political change, a radical redistribution of property, power, and wealth that will find its correspondence in the leveling of every hill and valley and the erasure of distinction between the elements.

The Gyant's political message has been persuasively connected to discourses of popular radical politics in England and Europe. Frederick Padelford's influential work relates the Gyant to the subversive, communitarian Anabaptist sect, who were persecuted in England,²⁸ while Stephen Greenblatt draws parallels with the Peasant Wars in Germany in 1525 and related aspects of "radical protest in the early modern period."²⁹ The Gyant's arguments revolve around the role of the distribution of land in the unequal state of the world he describes, echoing the arguments against land enclosure that were the basis of many revolts in England. The Gyant expresses political ideas about the distribution of wealth, power and property that were circulating in various forms, especially through radical religious sects in the late sixteenth century. In England in the late 1580s and early 1590s, food shortages and economic hardship produced a rise in

popular discontent both in the countryside and the city that could have provided a specific context for concern about rebellion.³⁰

Spenser presents the Gyant as a parody of rebellious politics that is discredited by the structures of comparison that underlie his reasoning. Greenblatt observes that the Gyant's ideas are not too far away from the poet's own as they are expressed in the Proem – close enough, as he suggests, to require some forceful distancing from the radical ideas of the Gyant through the establishment of a “firm boundary between acceptable and subversive versions of the same perceptions” (“Murdering Peasants” 21). In Greenblatt's view, this boundary is finally drawn in the construction of a poetic project that separates rhetoric from its real-world counterpart of actual, physical force. Yet the Gyant's politics appear to be already undermined from within, presented as a wrong-headed version of a theory that locates the causes of oppression in the distribution of goods and property in the material world. Fundamentally, the Gyant's mistakes are mistakes in reading, judgment, and interpretation; he is wrong because his faulty comparisons lead to the wrong conclusions.

The Gyant is very close to sounding like a contemporary peasant rebel in his suggestion of an intimate relation between the distribution of land and corresponding unequal social relations. However, his expression of this correspondence presents some strange problems. In the Gyant's rhetorical constructions, the land reflects the social relations that it grounds, but does not explain them. The problem with the distribution of land, for the Gyant, is not that some is enclosed and some common, for example, or even that some have more than others; rather, he complains that there are differences that mirror divides in social status, so that some areas of land are higher than others. He aligns

“These mountains hie,” and “[t]hese towering rocks, which reach unto the skie” with the “Tyrants that make men subject to their law” (V.ii.38). In this catalog of evils the high mountains and “lowly plaine” are neatly analogous to great divides in social status.

For all his concern about the shape and meaning of the land, the Gyant does not complain about the actual things men do with it that produce the inequalities he wants to correct. The image of the sea encroaching on the land, eating away at what belongs to that other element, is suggestive of a greedy landlord, enclosing and appropriating land that was once common to all, but the Gyant does not make this comparison explicit. In the Gyant’s view, people are high and low *like* mountains and valleys are, a reasoning that takes its cue from the “Like *x*, so *y*” formula introduced most strongly in the Proem’s similitudes. The Gyant desires to take from those that have most, and give to those that have least (V.ii.37); “*Therefore* I will throw down these mountains hie, /and make them level with the lowly plaine [...] And all the wealth of rich men to the poore will draw” (V.ii.38, my emphasis).

Why does the Gyant want to level the actual mountains, an action that will be analogous to his goal of social leveling, but will bear no material relationship to it? By his reasoning, by which things reflect each other and figural similitude has cosmic consequences, his program of social equality will logically involve leveling the mountains which reflect oppressive distinction in the social world. Like the German peasant rebels and English enclosure rioters, the Gyant sees a relationship between land and social relations; yet in the Gyant’s view, differences in social status are not caused by a material base, the distribution of land, but are instead shadowed by topical features of the landscape. The Gyant’s analogical formula reduces the causal relation between the

institution of property and the social order perceived by contemporary rebels to a logic of visible analogy that evacuates economics. The material base of social inequality is displaced onto the image of the sea wearing away the beach, while social inequality itself is allegorized, not analyzed, in the images of high mountains and low plains. The redistribution of land that would serve the Gyant's overtly stated political purpose is not the leveling of mountains but the reversal of enclosures, the undoing of feudal relations, and finally the abolition of the institution of private property (all radical demands voiced by popular rebellions in England and Europe). To put it another way, the image that would make a more materialist analogue to his arguments about economic oppression is not the sea wearing away the beach but the common field transformed by a fence into enclosed property; the squatter's fen drained for a private pasture; the longstanding forest felled for landlord's timber. "Like as ... so did ... So all ... And so."

Indeed, contemporary accounts of one significant sixteenth-century English rebellion instigated by discontent over enclosures provide a counterpoint to these images. Alexander Neville's account of Kett's Rebellion of 1549 was published in Latin in 1575 as *De furoribus Norfolciensium Ketto duce* and translated into English in 1615.³¹ Neville includes a speech in the voice of one of the rebel instigators that calls for the destruction of hedges and the eradication of ditches (the two main methods of enclosure): "We see that now it is come to extremitie, we will also prove extremity, rend down hedges, fill up ditches, make way for every man into the common pasture: Finally, lay all even with the ground, which they no less wickedly, then cruelly and covetously have inclosed" (sig. B3r). This passage suggests a complex constellation of allusions: on the one hand, the Norfolk rebels' plan to "lay all even with the ground" is a translation and appropriation of

biblical apocalyptic language in its echo of Luke 3.5 “Everie valley shalbe filled, and everie mountaine, and hil shalbe broght lowe.” Neville is an opponent of their beliefs, so we should treat his representation of their language carefully. From his perspective, their translation of biblical language could seem, like the Gyant’s, wicked and presumptuous. Nevertheless, it seems that the biblical apocalyptic language of “leveling” had been translated into material, political statement and event by sixteenth-century rebels in their accommodation of hill to hedge, valley to ditch, in the context of private versus common land. Rather than tearing down hedges and filling up ditches, actions which have the material effect of restoring common property, the Gyant wants to “throw downe these mountaines hie,/ And make them level with the lowly plaine” (V.ii.38). He returns to the biblical terms and takes them literally rather than performing the political interpretation of the rebels.³² The Gyant’s beliefs are only “materialist” in the sense that they demand change in the realm of the present material world, despite his echo of materialist popular politics.

Artegall easily points out the absurdities in the Gyant’s construct, as the Gyant’s apocalyptic plan of leveling the mountains with the plain is simply one of a string of monumental reforms that includes redistribution of wealth and power. Dismantling one of these elements of reform affects them all, strung together as they are in a chain of similitude that gives them all the meaning they have. Thus, Artegall says, “The hils doe not the lowly dales disdain;/ The dales do not the lofty hills enuy” (V.ii.41). Artegall is right to suggest that no problems would be solved by the leveling of mountains and valleys; the human, social symptoms of disdain and envy would not be affected by the Gyant’s proposed landscaping actions. The Gyant’s view of correspondence between the

material and political worlds is faulty, and yet Artegall presents no convincing alternative model of interpretation or judgment.

3. Returning to the plain

We have at least learnt through our encounter with the Gyant that there is nothing “plaine” about the way we might “see” the “sea.” In fact, the status of “plaine” appearance has itself become questionable through its association with the Gyant’s derogated, analogical episteme. The sea is not a space of transparent signification as the Gyant wishes it to be, but a far more complicated zone of meaning, “the chaotic element” as Angus Fletcher describes it (*Prophetic Moment* 246). The pun in the sound of the word seems now like a trick. Not what he thinks he sees at all, the meaning of the sea escapes the Gyant’s attempts to make it “plaine.” His final drowning in it enacts a horrible kind of poetic justice.³³

The problems of interpretation and appearance registered by the “sea”-which-is-not- “plaine” are familiar to readers of *The Faerie Queene*, and relate to the poem’s typical recommendation of skeptical reading. To the extent that anything “plaine appears” at any time in *The Faerie Queene*, its meaning must be questioned. Red Cross Knight’s early encounter with the monster of Error in Book I establishes the potential dangers of faith in “plaine” sight: when he enters Error’s cave, we are told that “he saw the ugly monster plaine” (1.1.14) even though she has deliberately shrouded herself in the cave’s darkness “where plaine none might see her, nor she see any plaine” (1.1.16). Red Cross happily thinks he has vanquished Error at the end of this scene, only to find that he is still capable of erring over and over again. We can only think that he was mistaken

when he thought “he saw the ugly monster plaine”; rather, it seems that he did not really perceive her or the truth of the situation at all. Whatever appears in “plaine” sight is potentially misleading. Allegory itself can be understood as a mode that is established against “plaine” speech, through its etymology, as described by Fletcher, from “*allos + agoruein* (*other + speak openly, speak in the assembly or market*). *Agoruein* connotes public, open, declarative speech. This sense is inverted by the prefix *allos*.” (*Allegory* 2 note 1).

“Plaine,” like the term “sea” or “see” that it is paired with, also registers a pun on space or location and an aspect of interpretation. In considering Spenser’s interest in the term “plaine” in Book V, we should not overlook a pun on the “plaine” that provides the favored landscape surface of Spenser’s poem. It offers the proper place of opening into the time and space of allegorical narrative, as indicated by its place in the first line of Book I, “A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine.” The “plaine” of Faeryland provides a clear space of open signification upon which the encounter of meaning in allegory can take place. By Book V, however, the plaine itself has become invested with meaning. It does not simply provide a blank surface, analogous to a blank page, upon which significant features present themselves (woods, caves, a fountain, a bower) and through which narrative and allegory may move forward. Instead, the landscape itself is identified with particular, actual places as a result of the move to historical specificity in Book V. This move is most visible in the use of names which are close to their “real” referents: Belge is unmistakably Belgium; Irena is clearly read as Ireland — or, at least, some aspect of that place. The plaine’s status as a symbolic surface means that it begins to lose its affinity with the “material” of allegory as Gordon Teskey describes it, “that

which gives meaning a place to occur while remaining heterogeneous to it” (303). The plaine of Book V is not heterogeneous to allegorical meaning; rather, the topical specificity of the plaine is integral to the meaning of what takes place on its ground.

The first stanzas of Canto XII that set the scene for Artegall’s climactic encounter with Grantorto emphasize the plaine’s quality of openness: “That night Sir Artegall did cause his tent/ There to be pitched on the open plaine” (V.xii.10); then, Irena waits, “Like as a tender Rose in open plaine” (V.xii.13). The open quality of the “plaine” is foregrounded, ironically, as its range of signification closes down, moving away from its status as blank matter and closer to the status of what is signified by matter. The land – the plaine – upon which Artegall’s encounter with Grantorto takes place is itself full of meaning as the material land of Ireland, suppressed in the allegorical figure of Irena. Grantorto’s execution takes place once Artegall sees his body flat against the background of this “plaine”: “when he saw prostrated on the plaine, / He lightly reft his head, to ease him of his paine” (V.xii.23). Grantorto’s body and his affective state have become pressed into proximity with the plaine: his “paine,” a rhyming word, is only one letter away from the “plaine” his body is “prostrated” upon. The immediate proximity of the plain to the allegorical figures it supports demonstrates its figurative closeness to them. The plain has become folded into the allegory.

Toward the end of Book V a confusion emerges between the two zones, “plaine” and “sea,” that in the Gyant’s imagination encroach upon each other but that should be rightfully separate. The first appearance of the word “plaine” in Canto xii engages two meanings of the word: “when as nigh vnto the shore they drew,/ That foot of man might sound the bottom plaine,/ *Talus* into the sea did forth issew” (V.xii.5). The adverbial

sense of the word is present here (i.e. “plainly” or “clearly sound the bottom”) but it may also operate as a noun, suggesting the idea of the actual bottom of the sea (so that “bottom” is an adjective modifying the noun “plaine”), drawing on the definition of “plain” as any level surface.³⁴ The poem usually refers to the plain as ground in distinction to the sea, but the idea of an underwater “plaine” paradoxically links the land with the sea that should be its border and its other. Canto xi also suggests a figural meeting of land and sea in the “green” that provides the setting for the fight with the Souldan, representing England’s naval battle with the Spanish Armada. The material “plaine” is not only folded into allegory, but folded into the “sea,” “the chaotic element,” suggesting a fundamental problem of distinction in language situated allegorically where the sea meets and is confused with the “plaine.”³⁵ The status of these two terms as ironic puns mirrors this problem of distinction: one cannot clearly “see” the “sea;” the “plaine” itself is not “plaine.”³⁶

Spenser’s complication of the “plaine” occurs where allegory meets history in the most violent way so far encountered in the poem. The folding of Grantorto into the plain that is plainly the ground of Ireland suggests the proximity of Spenser’s allegory to the contemporary world of historical compromise that it mirrors. Jacqueline T. Miller describes this sense of proximity and “congruence” that increasingly characterizes Spenser’s sense of the relation of his Faeryland to the actual world and “disturbing reality”: “The poet does not see conflict between Faeryland and actuality,” she writes, “he sees congruence; he does not so much acknowledge that ‘real life’ contradicts his art as that it defines and structures it” (*Poetic License* 99, 100, 101). Yet even as Book V suggests “congruence” with history, it also questions the exact nature of such

correspondence. The relationship between the allegorical structures of the poem and what they represent is both plain and problematic.

4. How to read “Malfont”

Spenser’s complication of the meaning of the “plaine” is an extension of his meditation, in Book V, of what “plaine” might mean, and what it might mean for something to “plaine appeare.” This concern relates to worries about the reception of his own text. “A Letter of the Authors” prefaced to the 1590 edition of the *Faerie Queene* gives a strong indication of Spenser’s anxieties about the way the poem may be misinterpreted. This document, addressed to Sir Walter Raleigh, functions as an introduction to how the poem should be read, with a defense of the choice of allegory as a device and an explanatory description of some of the narrative action. The problem of misinterpretation is a priority from the outset. Spenser opens the “Letter” “knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed” and it is immediately clear that “doubt” here indicates not only a response to the possible obscurity of the poem’s “darke conceit” but a more hostile interpretive approach (737). The “Letter of the Authors” offers not only an aid toward right reading and an explication of the poet’s “general intention and meaning” but also an attempt to defend against misreading, a device “for auoiding of gealous opinions and misconstructions” (737). Spenser addresses Raleigh, a reader imagined as being sympathetic, but also has in mind a sphere of less generous potential readers.

Hostile misinterpretation is memorably embodied in the figures of Envy and Detraction and their companion the Blatant Beast in the last canto of Book V. The description of Detraction’s special aim recalls the language of the “Letter” in telling

ways: “to misconstrue of a man’s intent” (V.xii.34). The target of Envy and Detraction here is not the poet himself but Artegall, who here appears to represent the historical person of Lord Grey, Elizabeth’s deputy in Ireland.³⁷ Their graphic abuse of Artegall stands for the criticism leveled at Grey back in England for his violent policies, particularly the notorious massacre he ordered at Smerwick. While the historical allegory of Book V invites these apparently simple correspondences (Artegall = Grey), the poem has also called that kind of reading into question. The poem’s recommendation of skeptical reading appears in the context of Book V to be a defense against a certain kind of reception. Better, perhaps, to read “doubtfully” than “to misconstrue.”

Spenser’s anxieties about the reception of his own work are most graphically dramatized in the figure of the poet Malfont, who has been cruelly punished for insulting the queen. As Artegall and Talus pass through the castle towards Mercilla’s chamber of judgment, they see:

Some one, whose tongue was for his trespass vyle
 Nayld to a post, adjudged so by law:
 For that therewith he falsely did reuyle,
 And foule blaspheme that *Queene* for forged guyle,
 Both with bold speaches, which he blazed had,
 And with lewd poems, which he did compyle;
 For the bold title of a Poet bad
 He on himselfe had ta’en, and rayling rymes had sprad. (V.ix.25)

Malfont’s place in the castle implies his prior position as a court poet. His role is now simply that of a didactic, living *exemplum*, condemned to display the punishment he received for circulating slanderous texts against the queen. The mutilated tongue offers a version of actual punishments handed out to authors of seditious or libelous literature such as John Stubbes, who underwent the mutilation of organs of communication such as

ears and hands and the public display of their suffering bodies. It also suggests the image of a verse libel or other notice pinned to a public wall or post, as verse libels often were.³⁸ In this sense, Malfont has been turned into a text that describes the consequence of his original poems and “speeches.”

Malfont presents a nightmarish image of a poet punished for his verses, a vision of the worst possible consequences of the kind of misreading Spenser dreaded. As Andrew Hadfield observes, Malfont is a type of poet like Spenser, “grimly prophetic of a never-realized but possible history” (*Irish Experience* 165). Artegall encounters Malfont immediately prior to one of the more controversial episodes in the Book: several stanzas on, Mercilla oversees the trial and execution of Duessa, commonly identified as Mary, Queen of Scots. Canto ix was understood by at least one reader as the same kind of “bold” poetry that earned Malfont his “bad” name: Mary’s son, James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) took offense at what he understood to be a representation of his mother and appealed to Elizabeth for Spenser to be punished.³⁹ This episode seems to signify Spenser’s fear that the good may well be read as bad, and that the poet’s own words may be misconstrued with disastrous consequences. The lines above suggest that Malfont has taken “the bold title of a Poet bad” upon himself, but it is not exactly clear how he might have done so. It is also far from obvious, as A. Leigh Deneef points out, who has judged Bonfont. He has been judged “by law” and so presumably by Mercilla; but the nature of this judgment suggests that it could just have easily been made by the figures of Envy and Detraction who appear later in Book V (132).

The following stanza that describes the movement from Bonfont to Malfont is further steeped in ambiguity:

Thus there he stood, whylest high ouer his head,
 There written was the purport of his sin,
 In cyphers strange, that few could rightly read,
 BON FONT: but *bon* that once had written bin,
 Was raced out, and *Mal* was now put in.
 So now *Malfont* was plainely to be red,
 Eyther for th'euill, which he did therein,
 Or that he likened was to a welhed
 Of euill words, and wicked sclaunders by him shed. (V.ix.26)

The agent of these inscriptions is absent, adding to the sense of mystery around the poet's judgments. The presence of the original name seems essential to understanding the meaning of the bad poet's new status, but "BON FONT" is the name that is hardest to decipher. The poet's "good" name is written "in cyphers strange" (although, ironically, set in capitals, the clearest of letters) and legible only by a "few." Although we are told that "*Malfont* was plainely to be red," this name itself incorporates at least two possible descriptions: "Eyther for th'euill, which he did therein,/ Or that he likened was to a welhed/ Of euill words." The poet can no longer speak to explain himself: the nail through the tongue ensures this. The organ of speech has been immobilized, leaving the hands free – oddly, in a way, since those writing hands would have been responsible for the "lewd poems" and "rayling rymes" he is punished for. The writing that explains his condition to the reader is far from clear, even when we are told it might be "plainely ... red."

Malfont's punishment has also been read as an example of the total imposition of the monarch's power and the total submission of the subject poet. However, the ambiguous terms in which his punishment is presented trouble this equation. For Jonathan Goldberg, Malfont stands as evidence of the effective imposition of the monarch's version of the truth in place of any other, an example of the "oblitative

justice” enacted in Book V “which leaves nothing but the truth – their truth – behind” (“Poet’s Authority” 87). Book V does favor a justice of obliteration: Talus is mostly employed to destroy and erase evidence of bad things such as the castle of Lady Munera. However, Bonfont’s original name is not obliterated, and the continued visibility of the name “Bonfont” unsettles any idea of the new name as a total replacement of the old.⁴⁰ Malfont stands as an example of the enactment of the monarch’s power, but the presence of his original name could indicate a failure of the monarch’s “justice” to obliterate it rather than a complete erasure and replacement.

It is possible to read the continued presence of Bonfont’s original name as necessary evidence of the monarch’s power to replace and reinscribe. Without the somewhat obscure presence of the old name, Artegall would not know that any such renaming had taken place, although this narrative could surely have been supplied in other ways. The presence of the old name is somehow necessary to the narrative that makes him an instructive example: we must know that he was once good in order to appreciate the treasonable nature of his turn toward the bad. “The purport of his sin,” as Spenser describes it, requires an evident move from the good to the bad, from “Bon” to “Mal.” But why exactly is this narrative of renaming and reinscription necessary? Malfont could conceivably have been presented simply as a bad poet. Instead, he is represented as a poet who has forfeited the good name he once owned. His status as “good” poet who turns critical of the queen emphasizes the parallel with Spenser and his poem of carefully qualified praise and counsel verging on criticism. The fact that “few could rightly read” the good in Bonfont’s name suggests that a positive interpretation is

least likely: he is read as “good” only by a “few.” This leaves open the distinctly disturbing possibility that the good poet has been misread.

Allegory’s potential for ambiguity leaves it especially open to misinterpretation, which Spenser evidently feared. In his discussion of Spenser’s *Letter*, Kenneth Gross argues that allegory’s “hiddenness of meaning ... is the very thing that leaves it open to the threat of violation by willfull or slanderous misinterpreters”; in this context, “mere semantic uncertainty becomes something potentially more dangerous” (16). However, “semantic uncertainty” can also be marshaled in the poet’s defense, here through the trope of irony implicit in the assertion that Malfont is “plainely to be read.” The reader of Book V is rightly suspicious of anything that appears to be “plaine,” a term that has come to be invested with skeptical uncertainty. This is not only an acknowledgment of the inherent ambiguity of language as a referential system, but a recommendation of the suspension of interpretive judgment in the context of controversial representations of history: a political choice. Richard McCabe asks, in the context of Spenser’s veiled criticism of Elizabeth, “Is it possible that Bonfont and Malfont are one and the same person seen from different political perspectives?” (78). Possibly, yes; the passage asks the reader at least to hold the two names as potentially valid in his or her mind. What might it mean to join, however provisionally, with those “few” who “could rightly read” the poet’s good name? Definite judgment is here symbolized by the nail through the tongue of the silenced poet: a picture of Spenser’s possible fate if he were to be read in such a way.

5. Reading Book V

After the wandering, fragmented narrative of Book IV and, to a lesser extent, Book III, Book V provides something of a sense of a return to a more linear narrative. We have one obvious (male) hero, Artegall, with a fairly clear mission. It soon begins to seem, however, that this return to linearity has a price. Artegall's way is cleared for him by the "iron man" Talus, who slaughters all who stand in the path of Artegall's progress. Any sense of fragmentation that affected the narrative of earlier Books has been displaced onto the crowds of "rabble" that populate Book V. The ruthless dismemberment, massacre, and threshing into tiny pieces of their bodies enables Artegall, and the narrative of the book, to move on their relentless way. This sense of a clear, uninterrupted line also characterizes the direction of allegorical signification in Book V, which directs us straight to mostly unmistakable historical referents. Deneef suggests that "the poet no longer trusts the reader to make the historical connection – as he does, say, with Timias and Belphebe – but makes the necessity of connection a condition of the narrative itself" (131). In a sense, we cannot help but see Mary, Queen of Scots in the figure of Duessa in Book V, and Artegall as Lord Grey in Ireland, at times. But this most transparent incident, Duessa's trial, is immediately prefaced by the figure of Bonfont, and preceded by several episodes including the encounter with the popular Gyant that demonstrate the problems that might attend our understanding of what we first see, what "plaine appeares" and what might be "plainely red."

Book V suggests that what seems "plaine" is never so, and leaves the possibility of irony always present. The very ground under our feet – "the land there under thee," the allegorical "plaine" – might always shift its meaning beneath us, becoming more like the

chaotic sea than solid ground. Duessa resembles Mary, but the poem has asked us to question the meaning of resemblance. Radigund, the Amazon Queen who represents a misogynistic vision of uncontrolled female power, is also like Mary, while Britomart, who vanquishes her, is typically taken to be one of Elizabeth's "shadows" in another allegory of Mary's defeat. But Radigund is more like Elizabeth than this account of the episode suggests: as Hadfield has observed, Radigund dies childless and unmarried, while Britomart – although she is a virgin warrior for now – has marriage and descendants firmly fixed in her future, like Mary ("Duessa's Trial" 62).⁴¹ The neat chiasmus of Radigund - Mary/ Britomart - Elizabeth is not so very stable. The way one is judged to be like the other could make all the difference, between Spenser retaining his good name or being given a bad one. But the poet's bad name is also something he apparently, boldly, takes on himself.

Where to, from the unsettled landscape of Book V? It ends with Artegall's attack by Envy and Detraction, but Artegall continues on his way "and seem'd of them to take no keepe" (V.xii.42). His refusal to acknowledge them is no protection, though; he is bitten by Envy's snake, which leaves its own physical sign. In an image that recalls Malfont's sentence, we are told that "long the marke was to be read" (V.xii.39). Artegall continues his journey to "Faery Court," and it is to the virtue of "Courtesie" that Spenser turns in Book VI. The Proem of the new Book comes as something of a shock to the reader traumatized by the harrowing violence of V. The poet's description of his "weary steps" along the "waies" of Faeryland is continuous with Artegall's steadfast movement along his "course," but these "waies" of Book VI are a drastic revision of the bloodied landscape of V: now, they are "delightfull ... sprinckled with such sweet variety,/ Of all

that pleasant is to eare or eye” (VI.Proem.1). He contemplates the flower of “comely courtesie,” which grows in the “sacred nourserie of vertue,” planted with “heavenly seeds” (VI.Proem.3-4). These positive images of gardening and growth seem like an attempt to revise the gruesome aspect of V, but how effective are they when the “plaine” of the final canto of V is fresh in the reader’s mind, itself a monstrous planter’s field of death? There the “battred” corpses of the Irish “lay scattred over all the land,/ As thicke as doth the seed after the sower’s hand” (V.xii.7). Book VI starts, in a sense, on ground poisoned not only by the venom of Envy and Detraction but also contaminated with actual blood that cannot be effectively erased.

²² Lauren Silberman’s recent work acknowledges the need to focus on the “poetic complications” in the way Spenser represents sixteenth-century history in Book V, and performs a subtle reading of the politics of the Radigund episode, but she nonetheless finds that the historical allegory of the Book closes down imaginative possibilities. Anne Lake Prescott’s reading of the Burbon episode discusses the complex relation between history, politics, and allegory in Book V.

²³ See especially Stephen Greenblatt, “Murdering Peasants” (20-21), and Annabel Patterson, “The Egalitarian Giant” (113).

²⁴ This way of understanding the world fits closely with the sixteenth-century “episteme” of resemblance described by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*, discussed in my introduction: “It was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them” (17). Resemblance could be recognized by visible “signatures”: “these buried similitudes must be indicated on the surface of things; there must be visible marks for the invisible analogies” (26). While the Proem and the Gyant conform to Foucault’s model (in fact the Gyant exceeds this model, taking analogical reading to a dangerous extreme), the outcome of Artegall’s challenge to the Gyant suggests a far more skeptical attitude to the idea of cosmic correspondence and the congruence between words and the things they represent than Foucault describes.

²⁵ Anderson discusses the ambivalence of the word “betoken,” which means chiefly that the scales “prove nothing” but also suggests that they might indicate the truth (*Words That Matter*, 182).

²⁶ Annabel Patterson describes the effect as a “blurring of registers” as Artegall forces the Gyant to “weigh abstractions...in his materialist scale” (“The Egalitarian Giant” 113).

²⁷ This is the argument of the editors of Spenser's *Works: a Variorum Edition*, (Greenlaw, et al. eds.) 5: 175.

²⁸ See Frederick Morgan Padelford for a discussion of "Spenser's Arraignment of the Anabaptists." The Anabaptists rejected infant baptism and the concept of a state church, favoring instead "voluntary congregations"; they held egalitarian beliefs and some denied the right to private property, according to Christopher Hill (26).

²⁹ M. Pauline Parker also notes references to the German peasant revolt (210, note 1).

³⁰ See Penry Williams (328-329), and John Guy (405).

³¹ Alexander Neville, *De furoribus Norfolciensium Ketto duce* (London, 1575); *Norfolkes furies, or a view of Ketts campe*. Trans. Richard Woods (London, 1615).

³² Biblical citation is primarily reserved for Artegall, who makes himself the voice of scriptural authority with a long collection of biblical paraphrases in his refutation of the Gyant. Spenser makes little or no use of the many biblical texts that could support the Gyant's views on social equality, only those that make him a presumptuous, apocalyptic agent.

¹² The sea reappears in the guise of Fortuna in Canto iv in the story of the two brothers whose disagreement is adjudicated by Artegall. The sea has worn away one brother's patch of land and deposited it upon the others, making one poor and the other rich. As a result, the poor brother has lost his fiancée to the richer brother. In a further twist, the chest containing the fiancée's dowry, lost in the process of shipping, has been deposited by the sea on the beach belonging to the poorer brother. Artegall rules "That what the sea vnto you sent, your own should deeme" (V.iv.17). On one level, this story proves one of Artegall's arguments against the Gyant, namely his suggestion in Canto 39 that whatever the sea takes from one place it puts back in another, being more of a force of redistribution than of encroaching gain or loss. The sea in this story has produced a kind of equilibrium, but only after it has engendered a situation of discord and division between brothers.

³⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "plain," n1, def. 4.c "A level (horizontal) area." The OED provides no examples of the word being used to describe the bottom of the sea.

³⁵ In Spenser's time the word "plaine" was used not only to describe flat land, but also the flat surface of the sea (OED, s.v. "plain," n1, def. 1c). However, Spenser avoids this usage in Book V, which is remarkable in the context of his interest in the term "plaine" and its relationship to the sea.

³⁶ Andrew Hadfield discusses different puns in Spenser's poetry in his work on the significance of the words "salvage" and "sacred" and their relationship to Ireland in "Sacred Hunger of Ambitious Minds." The instability that surrounds these puns indicates the powerfully destabilizing impact of Spenser's attempts to control the contradictions inherent in his position on Ireland (30-33). I have tried to show that the problems that

attend the representation of history extend beyond Ireland, even though it is one of the key referents.

³⁷ Recent critical interest in the importance of Ireland in Spenser's life and work has drawn attention to the representation of Ireland and Grey in Book V (see Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience*). Spenser believed that Grey's conduct in Ireland was justified and should not have been censured as it was by Elizabeth.

³⁸ See Alastair Bellany (291).

³⁹ See Hadfield, *Irish Experience* (165). Jonathan Goldberg also discusses James's reaction to this representation of Mary, and Elizabeth's decision not to enforce the type of punishment he called for ("The Poet's Authority" 81-83).

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Bieman, (182-85), Theresa Krier (214), and Mihiko Suzuki (193-94), all observe the inscrutability of this episode and the difficulties of interpretation it presents. Bieman and Suzuki also argue that the presence of the original name unsettles its replacement with the new.

⁴¹ Mihoko Suzuki also argues that Radigund and Britomart are not strictly distinct, and finds similarities between Radigund and Elizabeth, particularly in the representations of Elizabeth as Amazon warrior that circulated after the defeat of the Spanish Armada (177-82).

Chapter Two

Disfigured Praise: John Donne's *Anniversaries*

In 1609, John Donne saw an opportunity for the advancement he badly needed in the death of the young daughter of the wealthy Sir Robert Drury. Donne wrote the short poem “A Funerall Elegie” in her honour, and secured Sir Robert’s favour. Over the next two years Donne produced and published two more such elegies. *The Anniversaries* is the conventional collective title for the elegies for Elizabeth Drury, separately known as “A Funerall Elegie,” “An Anatomy of the World” (known as “The First Anniversary”) and “Of the Progress of the Soul” (“The Second Anniversary”).⁴² Donne did not know the young woman, which might seem strange to modern conventions of elegy and the expression of personal grief, but this was not such an odd circumstance at the time. The strangeness of the poems Donne wrote for Elizabeth is of a different kind. These remarkably reflexive pieces present an unsettling and at times bewildering perspective on the poetic conventions they participate in, critique and revise. *The Anniversaries* are notorious for the wild extravagance of their conceits and hyperbolic forms of expression, which go beyond the bounds normally associated with genres of praise and compliment. In “The First Anniversary,” the poet claims that Elizabeth’s death has actually caused chaos and disintegration in the entire world; more than this, the world itself is dead, he laments, deprived of her virtuous presence: “Sicke world, yea dead, yea putrified, since shee/ Thy’ntrinsic Balme, and thy preservative,/ Can never be renew’d, thou never live” (1.56-57).⁴³ The world here exists in a state analogous to the figure of catachresis, with every part “out of joynt” and disproportionate to the others. The poetry of *The*

Anniversaries is correspondingly disfigured to reflect this state of disproportion, awash with hyperbole and catchretic effects that reimagine the conventions of genre and figurative language.

In a world where traditional structures of correspondence are breaking down, being revised and called into question, how is it possible to continue with the old models of poetic correspondence? Donne's preoccupation with figures of disproportion, excess and disfigurement suggests a sustained reflection on the failing adequacy of those old models. On the one hand, Donne's use of figures of abuse such as catachresis draws attention to the unlikeness at the heart of any and every figure, and on the other hand suggests a disfigurement of the relationship of correspondence in the figure that is historically specific and related to historical dislocation. Language is one realm among many that is represented as subject to distortion and deforming change in *The Anniversaries*, and the figurative use of language shows those distortions most clearly.

Donne's *Anniversaries* reflect on the processes of their own making and question the capacity of conventional poetic tropes to represent the world. Elegy as a genre has developed specific tropes that thematize precisely this problem of the adequacy of language to represent the dead person. However, in *The Anniversaries* Donne over-extends and disfigures traditional tropes associated with elegy and related genres of praise in ways that suggest a significant breakdown in these conventional figures in the context of a changing world. Much criticism of the poems has either retreated from their weirdness or argued for underlying structures of coherence to recuperate the aggressive disjunction of their rhetorical strategies. In this chapter, I instead offer a reading attuned to the significance of disjunction and explore how the poems interrogate the relationships

of correspondence that not only structure a declining world-view but also define poetic decorum.

1. “if had been written of ye Virgin Mary it had been something”: the critical reception of *The Anniversaries*.

Donne’s abuse of poetic decorum in *The Anniversaries*, particularly the massive disparity between the girl’s actual status and the poet’s claims for her significance, has troubled readers since the poems’ first appearance. Ben Jonson set the tone for criticism when he famously attacked the blasphemous extravagance of Donne’s terms of praise. Jonson’s friend, the author William Drummond, recorded a conversation where Jonson reportedly said “that Dones (sic) Anniversarie was profane and full of Blasphemie; that he told Mr Donne, if had been written of ye Virgin Mary it had been something to which he answered that he described the Idea of a Woman and not as she was” (Jonson I:133). Jonson seems to be responding to the poems’ claims for the incredibly perfected state of Elizabeth Drury as an exemplar of virtue as well as the notion that she held such enormous influence over the world. His remarks on the “Blasphemie” and impropriety of the praise of Elizabeth, and Donne’s reported response – implying that the poems are indeed not intended to describe Elizabeth “as she was” – have both held enormous significance for the critical heritage of *The Anniversaries*.⁴⁴ Readers have remained discomforted by the poems’ defiance of convention and the disjunctive extravagance of the poems’ major conceits. *The Anniversaries* have had an uneven fortune in the history of Donne criticism, enjoying both favor and discredit at various points.

The restoration of Donne's reputation in the twentieth century as a premier canonical poet began with H. J. C. Grierson's edition of Donne's poetry in 1912 and T. S. Eliot's favorable evaluation. Eliot elevated the "metaphysical" school of poetry and particularly Donne as its best exponent in his 1921 review of Grierson's volume of *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* and other influential essays.⁴⁵ Donne's neatly formed lyrics, witty paradoxes and devastating irony later made him a favorite of the New Critics in the post-war years. However, *The Anniversaries* have always held an anomalous position in the Donne canon. Even his greatest admirers have been made uncomfortable by the poems' hyperbolic excess, which stands so much in contrast to the exquisite control of the shorter lyrics that have come to epitomize Donne's style. Donne's detractors have matched the excess of the poems themselves in their condemnation – to C. S. Lewis they were pieces of "insanity" (Lewis, 79, cited in Donne, *Epithalamions* xxxiii).

While Eliot famously praised Donne for his ability to record "experience" with depth, immediacy and intellectual energy (Eliot 247), it is not exactly clear what manner of "experience" is recorded in these elegies for a girl Donne did not even know, for a patron he was explicitly trying to attract – certainly not the intimate emotional impulses of Eliot's beloved *Songs and Sonets*. Some readers have been repulsed by the fact that *The Anniversaries* were so obviously written for money as an act to attract patronage, and this fact has been used to account for (discount or defuse?) the strangeness of the verse. Gosse is particularly harsh on *The Anniversaries*, and suggests that the hyperbole is connected to the status of the poems as unfeeling transactions: "a perfectly straightforward piece of business," "void and frigid" (Gosse 1:273, 278). Similarly,

Grierson argues that the poems are not exempt from “excesses of flattery” for financial reasons (*Poems of John Donne* xxxvii). In the poems themselves Donne makes no secret of the fact that they were commissioned as a service, exposing the elegy as a product written at the request of a patron. He describes the poems twice, in both the *First* and *Second Anniversary*, as “rent”: “his first yeares rent” (1:447) and “my second yeeres true Rent” (2:520), ascribing a definite monetary value to the work. The “excesses of flattery” that so offended Grierson were certainly evident in other poems of praise Donne wrote for wealthy patrons, but in those other poems the “financial reasons” that underlie the production of poetry are not referred to so explicitly.

The status of *The Anniversaries* has also been affected by the fact that they appeared in print rather than manuscript form, the usual method of circulation for most of Donne’s poetry. The poems he wrote for other patrons were almost exclusively scribally produced, limited to circulation within a “coterie” context.⁴⁶ In 1611, print was a medium still widely regarded as inappropriate for seriously literary poetry. *The Anniversaries* were thus not only clearly written at the behest of a patron, but rendered somewhat vulgar by their appearance in the commercial, commodified medium of print.

For readers from Jonson onwards, the disjunctive images and disorienting form of *The Anniversaries* have been the points of greatest complaint – although as will become clear, these points condition my own interest in the texts. It may seem strange to find a work by one of the “metaphysicals” being criticized on aesthetic grounds by Donne’s own admirers because of hyperbolic excess, an abundance of wit at the expense of feeling, and disjunctive images. These very qualities, after all, are what define metaphysical poetry, at least since Samuel Johnson made his famous statement about

metaphysical “wit” as “A kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike” in which “the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together” (348). Catachresis would seem to be the governing mood of the metaphysical conceit, in its structure of improper association in which “heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together.”⁴⁷ Donne is most famous for his conceits that imagine erotic feeling in extremely unconventional terms, drawn from the mundane world or the unromantic discourse of the new science: well-known images include the two lovers housed together in the sacralized body of a flea who has bitten them both in “The Flea,” and the parting lovers compared to the legs of a compass in “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning.” And yet the extreme distance between terms in the conceits of *The Anniversaries* is often regarded as excessive in comparison with other poems.

In his seminal essay “The Metaphysical Poets,” Eliot argued with Johnson’s assumption of “the failure of the conjunction” of the metaphysical image, “the fact that often the ideas are yoked but not united” (243). Rather, Eliot believed that the metaphysical poets created a new kind of resolution to the differences they combined: “after the dissociation, they put the material together again in a new unity” (245). Although some of Donne’s most brilliant defenders have worked hard with *The Anniversaries* to demonstrate the hidden structures of unity that would have pleased Eliot, for many readers this sense of an underlying coherence is what has seemed to be lacking from the poems, where dissonance is presented so aggressively.

Kathleen Raine voiced a common response in her admiration of the poems qualified by a sense of something “deeply wrong” (386). This sense of critical discomfort

led to major attempts in the later half of the twentieth century to right this wrong, to discover systematicity, coherence and a unified aesthetic vision in the texts. In the debate over the religious mood of Donne's writing more generally, *The Anniversaries* became a touchstone as an example of either a Catholic-influenced "poetry of meditation" (Louis Martz) or a new, distinctly Protestant "symbolic mode" (Barbara Lewalski), but both sides of the argument remained invested in finding a coherent system underneath the surface images and apparent formal structures of disjunction. Even in recent decades as critics became more comfortable with disjunction and celebrated moments of textual instability in the wake of post-structuralism, the critical drive to recuperate *The Anniversaries* from incoherence – and preserve Donne's reputation for absolute poetic mastery – has remained strong.

Criticism seems mainly devoted to analyzing the poems to produce a sense of consistency and completion; more recently there has arisen a more provisional sense of this as "process" or "progress" toward a point of stability or perfection which may not be fully achieved, but is at least anticipated with confidence.⁴⁸ According to Lindsay A. Mann, "Donne never implies that God's image has been restored in any living person. For Donne the divine image is only in *process* of being restored in the virtuous ... Donne's stress is therefore upon potentiality, upon developing and not achieved perfection" (337). But it was precisely Donne's claims for the absolute perfection of Elizabeth that were so disturbing for his contemporary readers and contributed to what Frank Kermode (echoing Jonson) describes as the poems' mood of "blasphemous allusion" (26). To choose one example among many, the poet claims that Elizabeth actually dissolved "the stayne of Eve" by means of a "a true religious Alchimy"

(1:180,182). Even though Ronald Corthell accounts convincingly for the failure of critical attempts to provide cohesive “interpretive keys” to the poem’s wild symbolic structures, his reading emphasizes a poetic project of ideological closure and resolution: “Donne’s disparities demand resolution; they engage us as readers in the work of constructing ourselves and Donne as coherent subjects through representation” (114).

Despite its emphasis on the constructed aspect of ideology and subjectivity, this reading maintains continuity with earlier responses such as that of Wesley Milgate, who suggests that while Elizabeth Drury is shown to be “incomprehensible,” as are the systems proposed by the “new Philosophy” (1:205), a reader may nonetheless finally be more impressed with the “organizing power of poetry” than with a meaningless fractured world, while an underlying sense of “moral and spiritual harmony” invoked in “The Second Anniversary” recuperates the many images of fragmentation and disillusionment (Donne, *Epithalamions*, xxxviii). “The Second Anniversary” is different in tone and organization from the other poems in the set, and is usually the point of reference for arguments in favor of a more positive vision or more confident poetic voice. My reading is more interested in the moments where mastery is disavowed or undermined, and the poet’s insistence that poetry is not capable of producing closure, unity or adequate representation. The poems’ structures and images of fragmentation and disproportion are significant, I believe, in the way they both challenge the reader to produce interpretive resolution and ultimately frustrate that impulse. The girl at the center of these poems is ultimately not reducible to a consistent symbolic key; she is beyond that, and literally beyond the ability of poetry to represent. Elegy conventionally makes this claim only to turn it around in a performance of mastery and recuperation, but in this case the turn is

highly ambivalent. My reading attempts to account the responses of readers over the centuries who have agreed with the poet that the dead girl remains “incomprehensible” to us, even with (or despite) the aid of poetry to describe and explain her.

Attending to the significance of incoherence and lack of closure in these poems is not necessarily to perform the kind of anti-historicist “deconstructionist” reading that David Norbrook criticizes for its tendency to fall on the side of a more conservative political evaluation of Donne (“Monarchy of Wit”).⁴⁹ *The Anniversaries* do conform in some ways to the model of a “self-consuming artifact” in the way they relentlessly draw attention to and undermine the conventions of genre and figurative language.⁵⁰ I try to understand this criticism of poetic form as a response not just to a problem or instability inherent in language itself as a signifying system but a) as a response to poetic language as a set of historically specific conventions and, b) a response to historical circumstances that made that set of conventions seem unstable or inadequate.

2. “not as she was”: calling truth claims into question

Donne exaggerates some features of elegiac convention and revises others, disfiguring and calling into questions the conventions that he speaks to. His praise of Elizabeth’s quasi-magical powers seems extremely disconnected from any of the individual qualities that might have distinguished her personality. Donne imagines her superlative virtue in such abstract and general terms that it seems divorced from any idea of her as a person. She is a Queen, a magnet, a compass, a book, pure gold; so perfected that she has rid herself of the taint of original sin; capable of exerting such mysteriously powerful influence on the world that it is dead now that she is gone. Most importantly,

the hyperbole that Donne employs to praise her was usually reserved for the persons of the highest social station: it was highly irregular to praise a virtually unknown person in this way (Elizabeth was the daughter of a member of the aristocracy, but not a particularly notable or powerful one). These features of Donne's terms of praise form significant departures from contemporary elegiac conventions, according to Barbara Lewalski. Donne does not claim a personal relationship with the deceased. He does not participate in the "trend toward forthrightness and specificity," where the terms of praise were fit more or less to reflect something significant about the individual's character, exemplified by the elegies of Ben Jonson. Furthermore, he upsets decorum by employing the highest forms of hyperbole, which were regarded as proper only for royalty (Lewalski, *Donne's Anniversaries* 40).

Donne's rejection of poetic decorum puts the reader in the awkward position of acknowledging the truth about conventions that should go unremarked. We know that the poems were admired to some extent when they appeared because there is evidence of other writers imitating them not long after their publication.⁵¹ However, Jonson's remark (mediated through Drummond) indicates a more critical and problematic contemporary reception; as Arthur Marotti writes, Jonson's comment "points to the obvious disproportion between the acts of praise and the supposed referent" (*Donne* 235-6). Conventional expressions of praise do not attract the same kind of questioning since they make use of commonplaces which, however outlandish, are still decorous because they are commonly recognized. We cannot help but admit the disparity between what Elizabeth might have actually been like and the claims that are made on her behalf. This response can easily turn into the kind of scoffing we hear in Jonson's remark: "if it had

been written of ye Virgin Mary it had been something.” The very terms of idealization are also the means by which Donne brings the conventions of praise into question and begins to undo them in the process: what purpose is served by glowing praise if it serves only to remind readers forcibly that the object could not have been truly worthy of it?

The use of hyperbole to question or undermine poetic convention in *The Anniversaries* extends the subversive strategy of Donne’s more excessive poems of compliment written for powerful patrons such as the Countess of Bedford: in Marotti’s account of those poems, Donne “drove the polite hyperboles of encomiastic verse to outrageous extremes, calling attention to the social and moral bases of the currency he was inflating” in order to signify his resentment at being forced into such a position of social submission (*Donne* 207). In poems written for the highest nobility, even the most extreme hyperbole can be accommodated, however uncomfortably, within convention; in the case of Elizabeth Drury, the disparity between her true status and the claims made for her makes such accommodation even more difficult. (Not absolutely impossible, for Sir Robert Drury accepted the poems as compliments enough to insist on their publication.) The reader’s necessary admission that the poet is profoundly exaggerating the qualities of the person being praised is pushed much farther in *The Anniversaries* than in earlier poems of compliment, and the effect is to amplify the subversive tone of the earlier instances of hyperbole. For if we begin to question the truth claims of this one collection of poems, might we not then turn the same awareness to others, too, and remember that hyperbole is always an exaggeration, never true, “the loud lyer” as Puttenham terms it (220)?

Critics have interpreted Donne's relationship with Sir Robert as a liberating opportunity, a relief from the oppressive constraints of his relationships with powerful women, and a cause for celebration in verse; Anne Cotterill and Marotti both suggest that the superior poetry and confidence of voice of *The Anniversaries* can be attributed to this positive change (Cotterill, *Digressive Voices* 89; Marotti, *Donne* 230). But the situation in which Donne found himself with Drury was far from ideal, and *The Anniversaries* produce a poetry even more critical of the conventions of encomia than that which he wrote for his most powerful patrons. Far from the reader of superior "intellectual and literary competence" that Marotti imagines as the impetus to write *The Anniversaries*, Sir Robert was not renowned for his intellectual might (Marotti, *Donne* 230; Bald, *Life* 238). *The Anniversaries* may chronicle personal loss and failure to advance, as Marotti suggests, but they do not present that as a problem solved or relegated only to the past. The continued criticism of poetic convention that the poems produce suggests a continued dissatisfaction with the poet's personal situation, and a continued sense of conflict with the pressures of being a poet for hire. Even in his most subversive poems written for patrons of higher social station than Drury, Donne did not go so far, as he does in both the first and second *Anniversaries*, as to refer to the poems explicitly as "rent."

From one perspective, Drury seems like a particularly difficult patron, not only insisting that Donne leave his family for several years, but also making print publication a condition of his support. Donne wrote "A Funerall Elegie" in 1610 to attract Drury's attention; the poem made a good impression on Drury and he secured Donne's services (Bald, *Life*, 240). In 1611 Drury invited Donne to accompany him on an extended trip

overseas (not much of a linguist himself, he badly needed Donne's language skills in this foreign context). It does not seem to be a position Donne took up happily but rather out of desperation (Bald, *Drurys* 86-7). Drury may have been rich, but he was perhaps as controlling in his own way as Donne's female patrons. Donne probably wrote "The First Anniversary" in London during the period of waiting to leave England, and Drury immediately pushed Donne to publish the poems, which he agreed to do. The book most likely appeared in print before he departed from London with the Drurys; "The Second Anniversary" was composed in France after their arrival in Amiens, and was published in England soon after, early in 1612 (Bald, *Life* 243, 244, 246). In subsequent letters Donne expressed his reluctance to publish and his regret that he was pushed into print, although it is difficult to know how seriously to take these expressions of regret, mixed up as they are with apologies for the actual content of the verses which offended his former women patrons. Donne did apparently agree to publish *The Anniversaries* but did so without a really free choice.

Publication transformed the poems from pieces written for coterie circulation into public commodities, with significant consequences. The appearance of these verses in print must surely have increased the sense of offense felt by Donne's most powerful female patron, Lucy, Countess of Bedford. Donne had not only praised an unknown girl in terms higher than those he had previously reserved for her (and other noble women); he had done so in print. In a well-known letter to George Garrard written while he was traveling with the Drurys, (1612) Donne writes:

Of my Anniversaries the fault which I acknowledge in my selfe, is to have descended to print any thing in Verse, which though it have excuse, even in our times, by example of men, which one would thinke should as little

have done it, as I; yet I confesse I wonder how I declined to it, and doe not pardon myself. But for the other part of the imputation, of having said so much, my defence is, that my purpose was to say as well as I could.

(*Letters* 255)

The criticism against which Donne here defends himself, that he “descended to print any thing in Verse” is directly joined to criticism of the poem’s content, specifically its hyperbole. The idea that he has “said so much” (i.e. so much more than he should have) is “the other part of the imputation” that concerns him (*Letters* 255). The problem of publication is not separable from the problem of over-praise: he has not only said too much, but *publicly* said too much.

Donne’s verse epistle “To the Countesse of Bedford, begun in France but never perfected” seems calculated to appease her jealousy at this time:

First I confesse I have to others lent
Your stock, and over prodigally spent
Your treasure, for since I had never knowne
Vertue or beautie, but as they are growne
In you, I should not thinke nor say they shine,
(So as I have) in any other Mine. (“To the Countesse of Bedford,” 11-16)

The poem apologizes for extending praise to other women which rightfully belongs exclusively to the Countess: she here holds a sole claim of ownership over the qualities of virtue and beauty that Donne has injured by saying – or even *thinking* – that these may also exist elsewhere. Drury’s patronage does not seem to have released Donne from his obligations to please powerful women such as the Countess. In a seeming attempt to recuperate damage to his relationship with the Countess, Donne in this poem deploys (with some evident strain) the same figures of conventional praise that he had

problematized in *The Anniversaries*, such as hyperbolic claims about the subject's superlative worth: "I had never knowne/ Vertue or beautie, but as they are growne/ In you" (13-15).

Donne had achieved the stable patronage he sought but he was bored and isolated in Amiens; he wrote regularly to his friends in England but heard remarkably little back from them – one letter only from Goodyer, to whom he wrote weekly, and few from others. His irritation at being so ignored is evident in a reply to a rare letter from Garrard: "I have heard from no body", he writes, and wonders whether "there be a Proclamation in *England* against writing to me" (*Letters* 262-263; Bald, *Life* 247-8). The lack of correspondence that Donne describes in the material world in *The Anniversaries* is mirrored in another sense in this aspect of his life, writing to distant friends who rarely, if ever, replied. Cotterill and Marotti both acknowledge the emphasis on disjunction in *The Anniversaries* and place the poems in the context of Donne's long and difficult struggle for political favor and stable patronage. From this perspective, the "lack of correspondence between virtue and political reward" (Cotterill, *Digressive Voices* 75) observed by the poet in his own life is as significant as the cosmic lack of correspondence evident in the changing world. Donne had successfully secured a rich patron, but whatever payment he received from Drury was not enough to discharge his debts in England to his friend Goodyer and others before he left England. Donne's letter to Henry Goodyer just prior to his departure apologizes that he is unable to pay what he owes (probably referring to financial debts as well perhaps to the figurative "debt" of friendship and service) and shows that he does not leave happily: "I speake to you at this

time of departing, as I should do at my last upon my death-bed” (*Letters* 93-95). The cost of patronage in this case seems high.

3. “proportion disfigured”: the significance of correspondence

I now turn to a discussion of Renaissance concepts of rhetorical and poetic decorum to provide a sense of context for Donne’s challenge to these conventions in *The Anniversaries*. As I argued in my Introduction, poetic decorum as it pertains to the construction of figures such as metaphor and simile was underwritten in the Renaissance by a broad notion of correspondence in the material world. In *The Anniversaries*, the perceived breakdown of this system of correspondence has literary consequences in the destabilization of poetic decorum. The most significant contextual arenas for thinking about figurative language in the Renaissance include classical accounts of rhetoric and poetics such as the writings of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian; religious debates over the proper interpretation of figurative language in scripture and the capacity of language to accommodate the divine; and the experimental new science developed by Francis Bacon and others, which sought objectivity in a language fraught with the ambiguous significances inherent in metaphor. Renaissance handbooks on poetics and rhetoric including Abraham Fraunce’s *Arcadian Rhetoricke* (1588), George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), and Henry Peacham’s *Garden of Eloquence* (1593) construct a model of linguistic decorum that derives from these several realms, and attempt to codify the conventions of correspondence in figurative language that Donne calls into question in *The Anniversaries*.

Decorum is an elusive standard used to judge whether the style of utterance is appropriate for the context in which it is used, and further to determine whether the parts of a figure correspond in a proper way to produce an apt fit. The two terms in a metaphor, for instance, must be brought together in such a way that the difference between them does not stray into “abuse.” In Puttenham’s description of metaphor, the second term must convey some sense of “affinitie or conveniencie” with the original (190). Fraunce’s description of a “Trope or turning” indicates the narrative of compulsion or force that underlies the transferral of meaning in the figure, and how it should be made to “seeme” to be otherwise: “a word is turned from his naturall signification, to some other, so convenientlie, as that it seeme rather willinglie ledd, then drive by force to that other signification” (sig.A3v). By choosing an appropriately convenient partner term, the author of the figure will produce a decorous effect, the appearance of assent within the figure.

Part of the task of the handbook author is to negotiate ultimately unresolvable tensions between distance and proximity, likeness and unlikeness, in the production of correspondence between parts of a figure. In their construction of decorous correspondence the authors rely on naturalized assumptions about relationships of correspondence in the material world itself, the cosmic model of analogy and likeness articulated most influentially by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* which regulates and produces “affinite and conveniencie” between different things. “*Convenientia*” is one of the key terms used by Foucault to describe the scheme of resemblance, echoing Puttenham’s “conveniencie” and Fraunce’s ideal of a word “turned ... convenientlie” from its natural place to a metaphorical one. The idea of adjacency between similar

things evoked by this term participates in the “semantic web of resemblance” which Foucault also imagines as a chain linking all things together in proper order (20, 21). The chain of resemblance imagined by Foucault is strikingly similar to the “golden chain” imagined by E. M. W. Tillyard in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, a chain that both links and separates, dividing and connecting all beings into their divinely assigned and naturalized relationships of authority and subjection. To continue with this metaphor of the web or chain of convenience and resemblance, the Renaissance poet seeking to produce a decorous figure would attempt to link the two partner terms in a way authorized by the linking structure of the web, rather than pulling together things not linked by “affinitie.”

The poems themselves have long been cited as both evidence of and commentary on contemporary epistemological shifts, as Donne announces that the “new Philosophy calls all in doubt” (1.205).⁵² *The Anniversaries* describe a world where all traditional relationships of correspondence have changed, re-figured by an array of new developments in epistemology, politics, economics, and theology. The fragmented state of the world is made evident by the absence of Elizabeth Drury, cast as a unifying force that was able to bring together different elements back into something like the chain of resemblance and order which has now dissolved:

She that should all parts to reunion bow,
 She that had all magnetic force alone,
 To draw, and fasten sundered parts in one,

 She, she is dead; she's dead: when thou knows't this,
 Thous know'st how lame a cripple this world is. (1. 221-238)

The things that in Foucault's web of resemblance are drawn together are here imagined as "sundered parts" that have drifted into chaos and confusion: "Tis all in pieces, all cohaerence gone" (1:213). The poem registers dislocation not only with respect to relationships in the physical world but also on a social and political level, as "Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne are things forgot" in the context of growing individualism (1:215). Chaos is found from the smallest to the largest levels of existence as

The new Philosophy calls all in doubt,
The Element of fire is quite put out;
The Sunne is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit
Can well direct him, where to looke for it. (1:205-208)

The phrase "The Sunne is lost, and th'earth" describes the disorienting effect of trying to adjust to the new Copernican system, which displaced the earth from its place at the center of the universe, and it also suggests something of the profound loss of certainty that accompanied this shift in conception. The poet has lost the sun, source of light, warmth and nourishment that defines the dependable cycle of night and day, and has also lost the earth, the solid ground on which one stands. If the relationship between these two elements, the sun and the earth, and the relationship of human beings to them, has been rendered uncertain or lost, then all other relationships necessarily also falter.

The world as Donne describes it is not only decaying (a commonplace notion of the universal decline since the time of the Golden Age) but is being disturbed by the new ways we have for understanding it. The stars no longer observe their original, perfectly round orbits, and their new, disproportionate motions seem to be a consequence of human observation or intervention:

So, of the starres which boast that they do runne

In Circle still, none ends where he begunne.
 All their proportion's lame, it sinks, it swels.
 For of Meridians, and Parallels,
 Man hath weav'd a net, and this net throwne
 Upon the Heavens, and now they are his owne. (1:275-280)

The human desire to possess and capture the movements of the stars has sadly led to imperfections in their “proportion.” The poet’s complaint here might sound like a commonplace reflection on the decaying world, but the word “For” implies a causal relationship between the weaving and throwing of the net and the disproportion he perceives in the movements of the stars. Caught within this artificial net, the stars appear to act differently, their movements impeded.

From macrocosm to microcosm: at the center of this web of resemblance imagined by Foucault lies the human body, a model of analogy for the universe (22), and in Donne’s “First Anniversary,” “An Anatomy of the World,” we see that body being literally and metaphorically taken apart, falling into lameness and disproportion, as these structures of correspondence come under challenge from new ways of seeing and representing the world. “The First Anniversary” is presented as “An Anatomy of the World,” with the human body as its central image – as in the system of analogy that Foucault describes – but the body can no longer provide a stable mirror for the disparate elements of the world. Devon Hodges has argued for a view of anatomy itself as a “transitional form” between the old paradigm of resemblance and new methods of analysis: anatomy is “a form uncertain about its relation to an older discourse of patterning or to the new analytical discourse of science that it helps bring into being” (18).⁵³ This makes it a particularly apt form for Donne’s lamentation for the passing of the old system of resemblance and the emergence of new forms.

The persistent association in the poems between the body and the stars not only draws on a commonplace analogy, but also reflects the simultaneous dislocation of modes of knowledge about both arenas. Andreas Vesalius published the foundational text of modern anatomy, *De Corporis Fabrica*, in 1543, the same year as Copernicus' *On the Motion of Heavenly Bodies*, and these texts revolutionized the way people understood the construction and ordering of human and celestial bodies: "Between them they destroyed forever ... the theory of microcosm and macrocosm" (Singer 122, cited in Hodges 3). Copernicus' theories about the movements and relationships of planets fundamentally reshaped Renaissance conceptions of cosmic order, shifting the earth from its central position in the universe. His insights combined with Vesalius' new visions of anatomy contributed to the revision of the concept that the human body as a microcosm could function as a miniature map or analogical base for the whole universe, the macrocosm.

We have seen how deeply traditional poetic decorum depends on commonly accepted structures of analogy and correspondence. The breakdown in traditional structures of poetic decorum that characterizes *The Anniversaries* is presented as a reflection and a consequence of the changing world and the passing away of the system of correspondence. In their meditation on a world of increasing disproportion, *The Anniversaries* present many images of a change in relationships of "correspondence" between things in the world and also reflect on the artist's ability to render and make sense of the correspondences that are still present, or those that are in the process of fading away. In his lament for the passing of the system of correspondence, the poet evokes the example of the "compassionate Turcoyse" whose color corresponds to the wearer's health (an example of sympathy between similar things which is an important

part of the “web of resemblance”) (1:343). The significance of this image is ambiguous: while the poet implies that the turquoise still retains this power of sympathy, the context of the image in the poem suggests that this may not be so. In the preceding line the world is likened to a ring whose “stone is gone” (1:342). If the “compassionate Turcoyse” is the stone that has fallen out of the ring, its powers of sympathetic correspondence would be unavailable. The ability to make use of the properties of correspondence offered by the “compassionate Turcoyse” and other elements of the natural world seems to have disappeared:

What Artist now dares boast that he can bring
 Heaven hither, or constellate any thing,
 So as the influence of those starres may be
 Imprisond in an Herbe, or Charme, or Tree,
 And doe by touch, all which those starres could do?
 The art is lost, and correspondence too. (1:391-96)

Donne here invokes a residual belief in the powers that are generated by the resemblances between things, the “influence of ... starres” inherent in the plants and incantations which correspond to it, and which can be tapped by those who know how to bring together or “constellate” those connections. The collocation of “Herbe, or Charme, or Tree” recalls the common Medieval medical phrase “God put his virtue into words, stones, and herbs” explored by Louise Bishop which, she says, “encapsulates integration among body, healing, words, and reading” (2). Not only “The art is lost, but correspondence too”: not only the knowledge and performance of how to “constellate” these connections, but the very relationship of resemblance or “correspondence” upon which it depends is lost. The poet’s art is not unlike that of the healer whose lost “art” is described here. The “art” of constellation, bringing elements into relationships of correspondence, evokes the process

of creating figurative language – especially in these poems that return repeatedly to images of actual stars, actual constellations, as reference points. Is the claim here that *this* artist, Donne himself, is one who might be capable of making this “boast”? The poems are, after all, comprised of images that depend on figurative constellation, however strange and disproportionate. Or rather, is Donne’s “boast” a more complex and ironic one, distinct from the one that he here seems to say is impossible – a claim to the poetic production not of the traditional forms of correspondence of the old art, but of different, self-consciously disproportionate constellations that remark upon their own disfigurement?

The poems are overtly preoccupied with the concept of proportion even as the excess of figurative language performs disproportion. Of sixteen uses of the word “proportion” and its plural in Donne’s poetry, eleven appear in “The First Anniversary” and two in “The Second Anniversary.”⁵⁴ In “The First Anniversary,” these words all appear in a concentrated cluster of just under one hundred lines in the middle of the poem (lines 250, 252, 277, 285, 302, 306, 308, 309, 318, 333, 341). We find a variant, “disproportion” at line 257. It is frequently paired with the word “world,” or “earth” and the world’s injured or lost proportion is commonly at stake in these lines: “But keeps the earth her round proportion still?” (1:285); “the worlds proportion disfigur’d is” (1:302); “had the world his just proportion” (1:341). In keeping with the more optimistic mood of “The Second Anniversary,” the word appears less frequently, but still more than in any other Donne poem (2:141 [proportions], 2:468).

In the conceit of the poems, Elizabeth’s death causes disproportion not only in the material world but also in the realm of language, which is “disfigured” by her loss. In the

passages that acknowledge the world's sick state, the disproportion, disfigurement or loss of language is a significant effect of Elizabeth's departure from the world: "thou art speechlesse growne" Donne tells the world, "Thou has forgot thy name" (1.30-31). The loss of proportion caused by Elizabeth's death affects not only the feeling of grief but also, the verse implies, the linguistic forms of expression of that grief and the proportion proper to decorum:

The world's proportion disfigur'd is

 And, Oh, it can no more be questioned,
 That beauties best, proportion, is dead,
 Since even grieffe it selfe, which now alone
 Is left us, is without proportion.
 She by whose lines proportion should bee
 Examin'd, measurer of all Symmetree

is dead. (1:302, 305-310, 325)

The word "lines" in the passage immediately refers to Elizabeth's physical features, but also suggests a reference to the lines of the poem that describes her – lines which will now, according to the poet's own argument, be without proportion, "disfigur'd" by her loss.

One of the few remaining uses of the word "proportion" in another Donne poem alerts us to the way this word both self-consciously reflects on the notion of "proportion" in figurative language and suggests a relationship to new ways of seeing the world. In the "Obsequies to the Lord Harington,"⁵⁵ closely contemporary with *The Anniversaries*, Donne makes a convoluted conceit that compares the "deeds of good men" with a telescope, which functions here as a counterpart to one of his favorite images, the notion of a reflective "glass" or mirror. Through the instruments of the new science and the "perspective" provided by them, such as the telescope, "proportion" is made evident:

Though God be truly'our glass, through which we see
 All, since the beeing of all things is hee,
 Yet are the trunkes which doe to us derive
 Things, in proportion fit, by perspective,
 Deeds of good men; for by their living here,
 Vertues, indeed remote, seeme to be nere.
 ("Obsequies to the Lord Harington," 35-40)

Milgate glosses "trunke" as "perspective trunk, telescope" (*Epithalamions* 199).⁵⁶ In response to this strange image, Johnson asked, "Who but Donne ... would have thought that a good man is a telescope?"⁵⁷ There must be some irony in the use of such a remarkable catachresis to serve as an image of the provision of "proportion fit." As an inversion, the reversal of the parts of the metaphor makes it especially hard to figure out. Uninverted, the metaphor suggests that "the deeds of good men are telescopes." In contrast, "God be truly'our glass" (37) is a more simple construction. The image of "trunks" as the "deeds of good men" is parallel to this image but reverses its order to make a chiasitic structure, God – glass – trunk – deeds of good men. It is a rather disproportionate chiasmus, since "trunke" is separated from its referent, "Deeds of good men" by well over a line. This seems to suggest that even the deeds of the most virtuous men cannot be made exactly parallel with God. The image of the "trunke" which shows us "Things, in proportion fit, by perspective," comments on the well-known phrase from I Corinthians xiii.12, later referred to by Donne in a Sermon: "Here, in this world, we see God *per speculum*, says the Apostle, by reflection, upon a glasse ... when we shall see God ... as he is, we shall see all things *sicuti sunt*, as they are."⁵⁸ Exemplars of virtue such as Lord Harington (and Elizabeth Drury) can offer a version of this divine sight through the telescopes and other models of vision they provide, but as the inverted image of the trunke suggests, it is a qualified and distorted version of true revelation.

In both poems the telescope, an instrument virtually iconic of the emerging new science of astronomy, is regarded as capable of revealing the world to the viewer, but in the “Obsequies” it reveals an ordered universe of “Things, in proportion fit,” while in “The First Anniversary” it seems to show the opposite. In “The First Anniversary,” the telescope is part of the destabilizing “new Philosophy” alongside other new means of seeing and measuring the cosmos. As such, it reveals disproportion, decay and disturbing departures from the known order of things, such as the appearance of “new starres” while at the same time “the old do vanish from our eyes” (1.260).

Among all the instances of disproportion and incoherence described by the poet, the most significant is the poems’ own outrageous central conceit: the idea that the death of one small girl could have such dramatic effects on the world. Deprived of the “Magnetique force” (1.221) of Elizabeth Drury that held all the world’s various pieces together in proper relationship, the world has fallen into disproportion: “ ’Tis all in pieces, all cohaerence gone;/ All just supply, and all relation” (1.213-214); “the world’s proportion disfigur’d is” (1.302); it is “Quite out of joynt, almost created lame” (1.192). The figure that best fits this situation and its description is catachresis, the improper usage of figurative language. In the figure of catachresis, metaphor is taken too far, beyond the bounds of ordinary idiom, common usage or decorum. Puttenham describes it as the use of a metaphoric term that is not “naturall and proper” and lacks convenience to its partner term, creating the effect of “abuse” (191). Catachresis is the governing figure of *The Anniversaries*, since the world described by the poet exists in a state of disproportion where elements no longer bear proper relation to one another; moreover,

the conceit that such disproportion is due to the death of a young girl is itself an improper figure, an abuse of poetic decorum.

In order to produce beauty in poetic figures, the relationships of correspondence in decorum must be obeyed; if those relationships are strained or overturned, the result is disfigurement. Because the exact properties of decorum and the precise nature of correspondence are impossible to define in an exhaustive or clear way, figuration always holds within it the potential for disfiguration. Metaphor is itself a form of transgression or trespass, as Puttenham reminds us (166), and its potential for abusive transgression demands rigorous policing. These problems of the inherent abuse of figurative language emerge in fascinating ways in the description of figures such as catachresis, which is marked by abuse. Although Puttenham calls for metaphor to obey the laws of “affinitie and conveniencie,” in the figure of catachresis a relationship is created that is precisely not “naturall and proper.” As Patricia Parker has shown in her analysis of the relationship between metaphor and catachresis, the two terms have been confused with one another from the very earliest instances of their codification: “even in Quintilian, then – the very source of the clear division between catachresis and metaphor – both are subsumed within the larger category of metaphorical transfer, the movement of a term from its original place to another place,” and subsequent attempts to distinguish the terms also conclude in collapse (“Metaphor and Catachresis” 63). As I argued in my Introduction, the figure of catachresis has the potential to expose the tensions between likeness and unlikeness, propriety and abuse, that underlie all figures. In its “abuse” of poetic decorum catachresis has the power to draw attention to, and thus to denaturalize, the relationships of correspondence that should go unremarked in a decorous figure.

If catachresis can return us to the idea that all figures are forms of abuse or trespass, more or less carefully executed, then it also engages the spiritual question of how figure may accommodate or distort what it intends to reveal, and how figure may operate, as Puttenham writes, “to deceive the eare and also the minds,” as well as the “sense,” “by a duplicite of meaning or of dissimulation” (166). Puttenham’s disturbed sense of the transgression inherent in figurative language echoes a longstanding Christian suspicion of figure as a lie or falsehood, possibly mediated in this case by Protestant ambivalence toward images that draw the understanding away from the truth of the unmediated Scriptural word of God. Donne’s own sense of the theological dimensions of figurative language is complex, and he did not necessarily share in the suspicious attitude to figure that I have described. In his famous “Essay in Divinity” #8 Donne attempted to recuperate figure and especially metaphor from this view:

My God...Thou art a *direct God*, may I not say a *literall God*...But thou art also (*Lord I intend it to thy glory, and let no prophane misinterpreter abuse it to thy diminution*) thou are a *figurative, a metaphoricall God too*: A *God* in whose words there is such a height of *figures*, such *voyages*, such *peregrinations* to fetch remote and precious *metaphors*, such *extentions*, such *spreadings*, such *Curtaines of Allegories*, such *third Heavens of Hyperboles...*” (*Selected Prose* 102; emphasis in original).

The list of wonderful figures in both Scripture and in the world of divine signs continues. This passage celebrates the figures employed by God, but while it performs all the rhetorical tropes it describes, the Essay does not explicitly praise the use of those tropes

by human beings. Elsewhere Donne appears to subscribe to the notion that the material world itself functions as a divine book, written and created by God, in which people may read his words and intentions. Elizabeth Drury is imagined as a reader able to apprehend God through the divine signs that constitute the book of the world (2:451-454), but with her death this skill at interpretation appears to also have disappeared alongside the decay of correspondence between elements of the natural world which underwrites this system of divine signs. Donne's figures characteristically push the limits of correspondence, making comparisons between seemingly incompatible elements (the body of a flea sacralized, made to symbolize the union of lovers); the potential for the abuse of figure is very often present to some extent in Donne's poetry, although taken to extremes in *The Anniversaries*.

4. The paradox of comparing the incomparable

In *The Anniversaries* Donne exploits the potential of figures such as hyperbole, metalepsis, and catachresis to draw attention to some of the contradictions of decorum. The figure of the *non pareil*, or the incomparable person without equal, is another figure that similarly draws attention to itself. Donne protested that he was trying to represent "the Idea of Woman, and not as she was," but Elizabeth's unwomanliness is one of her distinguishing features: it is important for the meaning of the poem that she dies while she is still a virgin and still a girl, before she has become a woman. The poet constructs this as the choice of the virtuous Elizabeth: she died,

Cloath'd in her Virgin white integrity;
For marriage, though it doe not staine, doth dye.
To scape th'infirmities which waite upone

Woman, shee went away, before sh'was one. ("A Funerall Elegie, 75-78)

On the one hand, Donne represents the girl's death as a gentle departure: she simply "went away" of her own accord, choosing according to her "modesty" to reject the continuance of her "destinee" (*F.E.* 95-96). On the other hand, in the same section of the poem, the interruption of her life is represented as a violent break in a way that conveys something of the tragedy of such an early death. Elizabeth's life is compared to an entry in "the booke of destiny," (*F.E.* 84) which a reader would think had been mutilated by having pages torn out: a reader "not knowing her sad History" (*F.E.* 83) who discovered

How faire and chaste, humble and high shee'ad beene,
 Much promis'd, much perform'd, at not fiftene,
 And measuring future things by things before,
 Should turne the leaf to reade, and read no more,
 Would thinke that eyther destiny mistooke,
 Or that some leafes were torne out of the booke.
 ("A Funerall Elegie" 85-90)

Elizabeth mostly appears as a strangely abstract figure in the poems, an "Idea" rather than a real person; however, in these lines that register the unfulfilled potential of her life, she is more than usually present. The mention of Elizabeth's exact age in these lines – "much promis'd ... at not fiftene" – contributes to this sense that a real girl is being mourned, not simply an "Idea." It is typical of the traditional consolation tropes of elegy to imagine that her death was a virtuous choice. We cannot help but see the tragedy and loss of torn out pages, the poet suggests, but instead offers a consoling argument: she decided to end her own story before its descent into "th'infirmities which waite upone/ Woman."

Donne praises Elizabeth Drury at this moment and many others precisely for her unlikeness to monstrous elements of female fecundity: because of her virginity she is

exempted from the miseries of reproduction chronicled by the poem in its images of monstrous births and association of sex with feminized death, sin with womanhood – for instance, the poet’s bitter statement, blaming Eve for humanity’s fall: ‘that first marriage was our funerall’ (1.105). Using the work of Julia Kristeva, Ronald Corthell has shown how womanhood is associated in the poems with the feminine realm of the “abject” from which Elizabeth is exempted because of her virginity and lack of corporeality (123). In Cotterill’s reading, Donne chooses the powerless Elizabeth Drury as a subject of praise in a gesture of provocation and resentment toward his powerful female patrons, including Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford (*Digressive Voices* 59-66).

Elizabeth’s status as a virgin is particularly enabling for the figurative work undertaken by Donne. The pure, uncorrupted “integrity” ascribed to her virgin body is an important element in her construction as a “*non-pareil*,” the subject of praise who is held to be without equal or beyond compare. Elizabeth is distinguished by her virgin status, set apart from other women by the fact that she died before marriage and “th’infirmities which waite upone / Woman.” The figure of the virgin girl has a special place in the poetry of praise in the way that she embodies pure self-identity or “integrity” that both frustrates all comparisons and generates endless comparisons.⁵⁹ The *non-pareil* is the subject of two major tropes of the classical discourse of praise: the trope of inexpressibility (her virtue surpasses the poet’s attempts to express it) and the trope of outdoing (she surpasses all comparisons).⁶⁰

The praise of the *non-pareil* thus generates two productive paradoxes: poetry is produced by the expression of inexpressibility, and in the statement of her unique unlikeness to anything in the world she can be compared to everything, if only to show

how incomparable she truly is – a potentially endless task. These tropes are related by their shared precondition of a stated lack of correspondence. In the case of the inexpressibility trope, the poet laments the lack of adequate correspondence between the subject and available language, or his own inability to mobilize language effectively in her representation. In this context, the production of figurative language is one aspect of the attempt to produce correspondence or accommodate the subject's transcendence. In the trope of outdoing, the poet proposes a lack of correspondence between the subject and all other things. This lack of correspondence is typically made into a form of qualified correspondence, as in the figure of pure substance which produces diluted versions of itself; the pure original which produced degenerate copies; the true type of which all other things are images or shadows; pure light which other things only reflect – recurring images in *The Anniversaries*.

The paradoxical *non-pareil* is beyond metaphor because she cannot be properly compared with anything; she is also the generator of figurative language because everything must be compared with her if only to show her transcendence of all things, as in *The Anniversaries*. In this way she is also the generator of catachresis, since all comparisons must be to some extent improper if she is truly transcendent and beyond compare. The figure of the *non-pareil* characteristically draws attentions to these paradoxes or instabilities at its center, and Donne exploits the reflexive character of the figure. The paradox of comparing the incomparable emphasizes the formal disjunction implied by the poet's lament for the disproportioned world: he mourns the incomparable Elizabeth, "Shee, after whome, what forme soe're we see, / Is discord, and rude

incongruities" (1:323-324) in forms that refer precisely to their own dependence on "discord, and incongruities."

5. Elizabeth's "incomprehensibility"

Elizabeth is a mostly non-corporeal being, an "Idea," her humanity reduced to a single syllable, "shee." She is rarely mentioned by name, and her virtual absence is a vehicle for Donne's poetic display. The poems have been frequently condemned for their lack of feeling appropriate to elegy. Apart from the moments at the end of "The First Anniversary" when the girl of "not fifteen" appears fleetingly before she disappears in flurry of torn pages, Elizabeth herself is not there. However, this reduction of the human girl to the abstract idea is extremely conspicuous. Coupled with the extreme hyperbolic excess of the poems, the abstraction of Elizabeth actually works to draw attention to the fact that the poems are not truthful representations of her, and lends some force of feeling to the poem's treatment of the traditional inexpressibility topos. She is indeed characterised, as the poet remarks, by "incomprehensibility." In the final lines of "The First Anniversary," he acknowledges that the poems do not contain her, however much he might wish that they could:

Nor could incomprehensibility deterre
Me, from thus trying to imprison her.
Which when I saw that a strict grave could do,
I saw not why verse might not doe so too.
Verse hath a middle nature: heaven keepes soules,
The grave keeps bodies, verse the fame enroules. (1.469-474)

The sprawling syllabic excess of the word "incomprehensibility" (seven syllables) itself indicates something about the awkwardness of the poems' attempts to describe the girl, in

contrast to the neat, almost monosyllabic tricolon of the last two lines. Something about her “incomprehensibleness” appears to frustrate and undo poetic control. The word is inelegant, excessive, a bizarre mouthful – language and poetic meter are stretched here to describe indescribability, an “incomprehensibleness” that is both acknowledged and ignored (defied?). The poet describes here his attempt to “emprison” her in verse, a disturbing image of a girl trapped in lines that both acknowledge the impossibility of her capture and attempt it nonetheless, the elegy her “strict grave.”

The lines preceding this passage also acknowledge the impossibility of a full account of the dead body, in a rehearsal of the central trope of poetry as anatomy: “But as in cutting up a man that’s dead,/ the body will not last out to have read/ On every part” (1:435-437). The impersonal “man that’s dead” who is read like a book here barely functions as a screen for the body really in question: Elizabeth Drury, frequently compared in the poems to a book or text of some kind that is read or copied. Accounting for Elizabeth’s “incomprehensibleness” is like this frustrated anatomy: the body decays too fast for the anatomist to analyze it, escaping his attempts at description and containment. Cut up, imprisoned in verse and anatomized in lines of praise, Elizabeth nonetheless escapes the poet’s attempts to contain her. After her death she is gone, as the poems repeatedly insist, decayed beyond legibility and beyond the possibility of full representation.

The acknowledgment of Elizabeth’s “incomprehensibleness” lends unusual force to the seemingly conventional tropes of inexpressibility or literary modesty at the opening of “A Funerall Elegie.” Here, the poet questions the ability of his utterance to do justice to the dead. The opening lines compare the marble of the girl’s tomb with a variety of

precious jewels which she conventionally exceeds in worth and beauty. “Alas, what’s Marble, Jeat or Porphyry,/ Priz’d with the Chrysolite of eyther eye,/ Or with those Pearls, and Rubies which shee was?” (*F.E.* 3-5). These images of jewels and valuable materials contrast sharply with the images of the writer’s materials which follow, in lines that again attest to the poet’s sense of her “incomprehensibleness” and inability to be contained by poetic language, this time expressed with considerably more doubt about the function of poetic memorial:

Can we keepe her then
In workes of hands, or of the wits of men?
Can these memorials, ragges of paper, give
Life to that name, by which name they must live?
Sickly, alas, short-liv’d, aborted bee
Those Carkas verses, whose soul is not shee.
And can shee, who no longer would be shee,
Being such a Tabernacle, stoope to bee
In paper wrap’t; Or, when she would not lie
In such a house, dwell in an Elegie? (“A Funerall Elegie” 9-18)

The poet’s “ragges of paper” seem remarkably ephemeral and insubstantial compared with the heavy, monumental marble and jet of the tomb. This is not a mode of memorial poetry that declares itself more eternal than brass, in the widely echoed Horatian conceit. The text itself, which at the end of “The First Anniversary” was likened to a grave that holds a body, or an account of an anatomized corpse, has now become identical with that dead body, only even more grotesque: “sickly ... aborted ... Carkas verses,” subject to the same decay, not really a vehicle which could successfully “the fame enroule” (1.474). The poet questions whether Elizabeth can in fact be successfully imprisoned or contained in such “works of hands.” The “strict grave” or tomb holds her body, as the end of “The First Anniversary” declares, but not her soul, which must also be absent from these

grave-like verses. Imprisoned in verse, she would cease to be herself – “shee, who no longer would be shee” – in a powerful acknowledgment of the distance between the dead, absent or lost object of representation and the sign that stands for it. The poem that represents her is no more identical with her than the dead body that she has left behind. The poem, previously imagined through metaphor as a grave to “emprison” her, is now reduced to the material object that it is, in the image of her “in paper wrap’t,” as if she could ever be so contained by verse, or as if that wrapped-up paper package would ever convey her true form. In his repeated questions, the poet seems to acknowledge that she would never “dwell in an Elegie.”

The poet’s immediate follow-up to the bleakness of these lines sounds hardly confident, a defeated acknowledgment of the limitations of poetry and the damaged world rather than a move toward confidence: “But ’tis no matter; we may well allow/
Verse to live so long as the world will now./ For her death has wounded it” (*F.E.* 19-21). These sentiments of inexpressibility and the sense of the impossibility or futility of the task of poetic representation exceed conventional tropes. Unlike typical formulations, the poet does not criticize his own personal poetic ability; this is not a problem of the poet himself being inadequate to the task at hand. Rather, he questions the ability of verse per se to “keepe her,” possess her, or properly present her – she who will not be “in paper wrap’t” perhaps by anyone.

Some readers have found in the concluding poems of *The Anniversaries* the conventional rhetorical movement that would be associated with this form of inexpressibility or modesty topos in elegy, where the writer’s expression of his own inadequacy or the impossibility of his task leads in fact to a performance of poetic

mastery that proves his earlier professions of doubt to be wrong, a performance or coy pretense.⁶¹ However, to find a full expression of this movement in *The Anniversaries* seems to me to discount the pervasive sense of something “deeply wrong” that so many readers have felt. Historically, many readers agreed with the poet of “A Funerall Elegie” that the poems were not full representations of Elizabeth Drury, that they did not properly reflect her. The poem’s praises and comparisons do not fit her, but seem fit for someone else – the Virgin Mary, offers Jonson sarcastically, or perhaps for a woman of more noble birth, as Barbara Lewalski argues – or for no one; for most readers, Elizabeth Drury does indeed not dwell in this elegy. In the opening lines of “A Funerall Elegie” the poet seems to acknowledge something genuinely problematic about the work of elegy, or of poetic representation more generally.

Donne’s reflections on the ultimate impossibility of representation in *The Anniversaries* suggest, as I have argued, that the conventions of praise and elegy are exhausted and in need of revision. However, *The Anniversaries* do not necessarily mark a decisive turn toward poetry that continues to interrogate its own representational conventions with the same urgent vigor. A comparison with an elegy written after *The Anniversaries* will highlight some of the more exceptional aspects of the latter, and will also show that for some reason, Donne did not continue to employ the disjunctive experimentation of *The Anniversaries*. Donne wrote the “Obsequies to the Lord Harington” in honour of the 2nd Baron Harington of Exton (1592-1614), brother of Lucy, Countess of Bedford. He seems to have written the poem in part to appease the Countess following her offence at *The Anniversaries*. Donne sent the poem to her accompanied by a letter that expressed keen hopes for her acknowledgment, implying a wish for financial

recompense. She did acknowledge the poem, but not in terms very pleasing to Donne. He later wrote to Goodyer in stark terms of his resentful disappointment in her response (*Letters* 218-219).

In the “Obsequies to the Lord Harington” the deceased is described as a perfect exemplar of virtue, as was Elizabeth Drury, but the “Obsequies” does not make such highly exaggerated claims as *The Anniversaries*: the world is not made sick or dead by the young Lord’s departure. The poem addresses the dead subject directly, and draws his attention to the immediate moment of utterance; we find ourselves at the still, magical moment of midnight, characterized by sleep and rest: “Thou seest me here at midnight, now all rest” (15). In contrast to the desperate, energetic tone of *The Anniversaries* and their images of grotesque sickness and decay, the poem is set in a peaceful moment when the anxieties of waking life have been temporarily set aside, “Time’s dead-low water; when all mindes devest/ To morrows businesse” (16-17). The contrast between “The Second Anniversary” and the “Obsequies” is clearest in the complementary images of a condemned man and a beheaded man in their opening lines. “The Second Anniversary” opens with an series of similes for the “dead world” which continues to “struggle” on after the departure of Elizabeth (2:21); unlike the restful quiet of the “Obsequies” midnight moment, these are images of a disturbing and sinister kind of movement: the world is dead, but finds no rest, for “there is motion in corruption” (2:22). The struggles of the dead world are compared to “a beheaded man” (2:9) whose body continues to move in a grotesque imitation of life:

His eies will twinckle, and his tongue will roll,
As though he beckned, and cal’d backe his Soul,
He graspes his hands, and he puls up his feet,
And seemes to reach, and to step forth to meet

His soule.

(2:13-18)

The poet has insisted that after Elizabeth's death, the world exists in a state of poor imitation of life. This image builds on that theme of imitation but incarnates it in a most revolting form. *This* is what it is to be dead and reach after our departed soul, the rolling tongue suggesting the lack of speech left to us – to the poet, perhaps, in this disjointed and injured state of being. For Cotterill, “The spectre depicts the passage from life to death to afterlife as a poet's nightmare – to be speechless with a useless tongue, head disconnected from the body” (*Digressive Voices* 57). It is difficult to imagine coherent words emerging from this contorted mouth. The beheaded man is a painful image of voicelessness, or of a voice that carries no authentic meaning, no authentic life. The beheaded man takes us back to the anatomized body of “The First Anniversary” (especially since the bodies that ended up on the anatomist's tables were most likely to be those of execution victims – although the anatomists preferred bodies that had been hung rather than beheaded, since an intact body served better.)⁶²

In the moment of temporal suspension that opens the “Obsequies to the Lord Harington,” Donne seems to have wound back the clock and stopped time before the beheaded man's execution. “The condemned man” is still alive, sleeping through the night before his execution. We meet the poet at midnight,

when the condemned man,
Who when hee opes his eyes, must shut them than
Again by death,) although sad watch he keepe,
Doth practice dying by a little sleepe.
 (“Obsequies to the Lord Harington” 21-24)

The horrible “motion in corruption” that characterizes the dead body in “The Second Anniversary” has been taken all away from the living body here in the “Obsequies,” which sleeps without motion as if it were already (quietly) dead. Death itself is imagined as something not so bad, a simple shutting of the eyes closely akin to sleep. The terrifying, twitching movements of the bleeding, beheaded corpse which are presumably to follow are far away from this image of peaceful death.

If the beheaded man is a nightmarish specter of the voiceless poet, then the “Obsequies” shows the poet deliberately clearing a space from which to speak. In this place of silence in which all other people are at rest, the poet’s voice alone sounds out. Although he addresses the dead Lord Harrington, this is also an indirect form of address to the Countess, and an attempt to recapture her attention and favor. No longer praising unknown girls in extravagant hyperbole, now the poet composes poetry of powerful dignity and decorum for the noble and virtuous dead, reminding the Countess that “his vertue being yours, the evidences concerning that belong also to you” (“To the Countesse of Bedford,” *Epithalamions* 196). The voice that sounds out at midnight may as well speak directly to and of her. In winding back the clock on the beheaded man’s execution, Donne may well be attempting to wind back the clock of his own fate of disfavor, and perhaps step back into a safer rhetorical mode of praise.

6. The residue of “putrid stuff”: Concluding with “The Second Anniversary”

From the disturbing image of the beheaded man that opens “The Second Anniversary”, the poem moves to a meditation on the corruption of the world that echoes “The First Anniversary.” The extent to which the changes in tone over the course of the

poem moderate or recuperate the pessimism and reflexive criticism of poetic convention is a crucial point in the critical evaluation of *The Anniversaries* as a whole. I will argue in this final section that the poem does not provide a convincing shift to a unified mode of representation; rather, the insistence on incoherence and disjunction that characterizes the poems qualifies the moments of order and clarity that punctuate “The Second Anniversary.”

A long passage about how the world is so corrupt that death should be welcomed exhorts the reader to imagine themselves on their own deathbed and to look forward “cheerefully” to death (2:121). The sentence then disintegrates into digression, leaving the reader waiting and wondering: “and if thou bee/ Drowsie or slacke, remember then that shee...” (2:121-122). With “shee” as the subject of this clause, we wait through twenty-five lines, including entire long, end-stopped sentences qualifying the virtues of “shee,” before we come to a recognizable verb that completes the clause: “Shee, shee embrac’d a sickness, gave it meat” (2:147). The tone is exuberant, but it is not coherent. In its defiance of traditional syntax and grammar this passage models on a rhetorical level the “disproportion” that Donne has lamented in the world at large.

Those twenty-five lines describe the remarkably “even” quality of her “complexion,” but the images that describe the equal division of all her parts soon begin to suggest a confusing mess rather than a harmonious whole. Unlike the body divided into discrete parts in the corporal anatomy, these parts (and the “lines” that are part of them) are so equal that they are indistinguishable, inseparable and, finally, incomprehensible:

And as, though all doe know, that quantities

Are made of lines, and lines from Points arise,
 None can these lines or quantities unjoynt,
 And say this is a line, or this a point. (2:131-134)

“None can these lines ... unjoynt” sounds like a comment on the reader’s difficult progress through this long passage, attempting to parse out or “unjoynt” the jumble of clauses here. With its pun on “lines” this passage returns us to “The First Anniversary”: “She by whose lines proportion should bee/ Examin’d, measurer of all Symmetree ... is dead” (1:309-310, 325). In this passage, too, the subject of the clause is separated by a long distance from its verb. “The Second Anniversary” may make less explicit use of the word “proportion” in its lament over the world’s disproportion, but rhetorical disproportion is still performed.

The images that Donne uses to imagine the corrupt body that houses the immortal Soul are an extreme version of *contemptus mundi* rhetoric: the body is “This curded milke, this poore unlittered whelpe” (2:165). In one especially disturbing image, the soul is not only imprisoned in the body but appears to have become contaminated by it: the soul is compared to a “stubborne sullen Anchorit/ Which fixt to’a Pillar, or a Grave doth sit/ Bedded and Bath’d in all his Ordures” (2:169-171). Although the poet addresses his own soul (and more generally the souls of his readers also) the word is now closely associated with the deceased Elizabeth Drury, who has been previously identified as the world’s soul. We are made to imagine this soul in uncomfortably grotesque terms as an Anchorit, a member of a ascetic religious order, covered in filth as part of a ritual religious practice of bodily abnegation. I question whether this grotesque body is really overcome or overwritten by what follows. This image of defilement and impurity could equally be said to shadow and contaminate the purified images of the incorporeal soul

that follow later in the poem. For a moment we cannot but see Elizabeth, incarnation of the world's soul, tied to a "Grave" (as we know she now is). The image itself is ambivalent: how appropriate is an image of an "Anchorit," a member of a Catholic penitential order, in a Protestant elegy?

The eventual release of the soul from the body by Death gives rise to a series of extraordinary images of the soul's meteoric rise through the heavens. The movement that characterizes this part of the poem is not the same as the twitching "motion in corruption" of the earlier part, but shares in its violence. The soul released by death is first imagined in a wrenching catachresis as an modern instrument of death itself: "Thinke that a rusty Peece, discharg'd, is flowne/ In peeces, and the bullet is his owne [soul],/ And freely flies" (2:181-184). Images of fragmentation are doubled by the punning repetition of "peece": the firearm that explodes into "peeces" is itself a kind of fragment, a "peece."

The poem moves from this violent explosion to a vision of order frequently cited as a recuperation or revision of the fragmentation of "The First Anniversary." The stars the soul passes in the sky are not wandering and confused as they are in "The First Anniversary," but are instead imagined as a delightful model of order, "so many beades/ Strunge on one string" (2:207-8). The supposedly lost world of analogy and correspondence is resurrected here, as the stars become a string of beads which then is likened to the cord that holds the bones of our spine together, "the Pith, which, least our Bodies slacke,/ Strings fast the little bones of necke, and backe" (2:211-12). It seems that the microcosm does, after all, mirror the macrocosm; our body does map the stars. The "peeces" appear to have been joined together. From here on, the word "peece" which led us into this realm of remarkable cosmic order will be used not to signify fragmentation

and disintegration, but instead is part of a movement toward wholeness: in the final use of this word, at the very end of the poem, “Shee ... Peeeces a Circle, and still keepes it so” (2:508).

However, this vision of cosmic order does not last long. The body does not belong at all in this realm of definitely incorporeal joy, even as a figurative term, and its presence here is odd. It appears in the next part of the poem not as a neat assemblage of beads on an ordering string, but a strange mess of parts and fluids whose passages and means of motion are disturbingly obscure. We have returned to the grotesque body of the corrupt world, site for the production of the “Ordures” that “Bathed” the Anchorite above:

Knowst thou but how the stone doth enter in
The bladders Cave, and never breake the skin?
Knowst thou how blood, which to the hart doth flow,
Doth from one ventricle to th’other go?
And for the putrid stuffe, which thou dost spit,
Knowst thou how thy lungs have attracted it?
There are no passages so that there is
(For ought thou knowst) piercing of substances. (2:269-276).

The movement of the soul through the heavens was speedy and clear, its passage analogous to the order of the spine’s bones. But it is almost impossible to imagine such an image of order, unity and clear motion arising from this image of the body, where “There are no passages,” no apparent paths of movement or lines of sight. It is a body composed not of symmetrical bones like identical beads, but asymmetrical organs subject to the inexplicable invasion of “stones” and abject “putrid stuffe, which thou dost spit.” Most strikingly, this passage uses a minimum of figures of speech to describe the body (only “the bladders Cave”) – it is not even so available to figures of similitude or cosmic analogy as the string of bones. Some lines later, we do find figurative language used to describe the body and its organs of perception which can produce only partial (because

human) knowledge. The body is filled with circuitous routes that produce confusion in the observer – they are unable to be known, as in the passage above – and confusion in the body itself: the “Labyrinths of eares” are capable of conveying only imperfect understanding, like the “lattices of eies” (2:296, 297).

For Cotterill, “The Second Anniversary” announces “the birth of a new voice rising to command” in full consciousness and display of its own mastery (*Digressive Voices* 55), while for Corthell “The Second Anniversary” recuperates the sense of loss and the weakness of representation in “The First Anniversary” through a “positive identification with Elizabeth as a religious master signifier of power” (110). This notion of the successful production of Elizabeth as a “religious master signifier” accords with the reading articulated most powerfully by Lewalski, who argues that the poems inaugurate a fully-realized “symbolic mode” that draws on Calvinist typology to regard Elizabeth Drury – or any person – as a living embodiment of Christ, an exemplar of virtue that in some real sense embodies divinity. Protestant typology, especially as developed by Calvin, involved a new insistence on the possibility of biblical types being lived out in “the lives and experiences of individual Christians” (*Protestant Poetics* 129). Elizabeth Drury incarnates the ultimate type of Christ in this sense, as “an image of God; on that ground the individual can be said to embody, restate or incarnate divine reality or the entire Book of the Creatures in himself” (Lewalski, *Donne’s Anniversaries* 47). Lewalski’s reading here does make sense of the many images in “The Second Anniversary” of Elizabeth as a perfected soul, “fild with grace” (2:466), who is able to commune with God in a way that will only be available to the rest of us after death, after “the lattices of eies” have been replaced by true sight. For instance, Donne praises

Shee ...

.....
 Who with God's presence was acquainted so,
 (Hearing, and speaking to him) as to know
 His face, in any naturall Stone, or Tree,
 Better then when in Images they bee. (2:449, 451-454)

Not for her the “Laberinth of ears” (2:297) that communicate imperfect knowledge to our human minds, but a clear apprehension of God’s word in all its forms. In her apprehension of God’s “face” in this passage, Elizabeth seems to have actually ascended to that state of revelation promised in I:Corinthians xiii.12, where we will no longer know God through reflected earthly images but will see him “face to face” and know things as they truly are.

For Lewalski and others, the idea of Elizabeth as a perfected type according to a Calvinist vision of typology shared by Donne, the idea that Christ is present within the souls of good Christians, moderates the hyperbolic excess of the poems. Supporting this idea, Milgate cites one of Donne’s own sermons: “every Christian truly reconciled to God ... is a beame, and an abridgement of *Christ* himselfe” (*Sermons* vi.290, cited in Milgate xviii). What seems to be an improper and excessive structure of comparison is thus recuperated as, in fact, in keeping with propriety. This symbolic view of Elizabeth shifts the ground of poetic and rhetorical decorum, making the most extreme comparisons newly “apt” for this notion of Protestant typology.

And yet, in spite of what we might be tempted to now view as Donne’s Calvinist orthodoxy, the poems appeared to Jonson to be profane and blasphemous; the idea that Elizabeth, or any “Christian truly reconciled to Christ” could be happily regarded as an incarnation of divinity did not sufficiently moderate the excessive tone of the poems for

that one reader at least. It does not seem that Donne managed, or perhaps even intended, to revise the conventions of praise to make this new kind of symbolic practice seem decorous or appropriate. Instead, it still looks and feels “profane and full of Blasphemie.” The new decorum of the “symbolic poetry of praise” does not compensate for the sense of offense suffered by the old decorum. Elizabeth is claimed as a perfect type of which the rest of humanity can only offer poor imitations or copies, but the tone of that claim is extremely complicated. Her status as a fully realized symbol of divine incarnation is qualified, chiefly by the palpable rhetorical excess of the comparisons that undermine the extent to which we might be able to seriously accept her, as the poet says, as “for life, and death, a pattern” to emulate. The poem’s sardonic final reference to the fact that they are “my second yeeres true Rent,” (2:520) written for money, as a service, and to fulfill the poet’s own desires for fame, brings a certain ambivalence to the tone of the closing lines.

The Anniversaries leave us with a sense of standing at an intersection where several modes of representation cross and bump into each other: satire is overlaid and intermixed with a tone of literal and sacred seriousness, while old modes of decorum are criticized, superceded, and provisionally revised, only to resurface again, and be undermined again. Incompatible images of the body collide and compete for our attention: decaying, bleeding, mysterious, resistant to interpretation; perfect, harmonious, transparent. The stars wander, appear, disappear; appear in order. Cosmic resemblance and the arts that exploit it are “lost”; and then, perhaps found again... “Shee” is resistant to any attempt at representation, and then, it seems, captured and caught. The poet mourns the inadequacy of language, then exults in the formal possibilities it enables.

The poems weave a web of paradox, that characteristically Donnean figure. The old order of correspondence is passing away, but we seem to see it in the moment of its passing rather than after its definite death. Its passing creates a sense that traditional poetic models are no longer adequate. But do *The Anniversaries* model the new kind of writing that might successfully stand in the place of the old? The poems may suggest the need for a new kind of verse that can account for the limits of conventional forms of representation, but they do not necessarily model that new genre in a clear way. We might regard them as provisional formal experiments that try out various answers to the problem of poetic representation (perhaps allied with the new Baconian method of experiment, concerned with related issues of knowing the world). Donne did not continue exclusively to extend the same extremes of ironic, self-reflexive criticism and disjunction exemplified by *The Anniversaries* (these qualities remained in his work, but took different forms). Rather, the apologetic verse letter written to the Countess of Bedford between the composition of the First and Second *Anniversaries*, as well as the later “Obsequies to the Lord Harington,” show that Donne continued to invest in many of the same rhetorical conventions that he questions in *The Anniversaries*. The questions and challenges presented by *The Anniversaries* appear to be ones that for whatever reason he felt able – and perhaps compelled – to articulate in this way only in this particular circumstance, after all his disappointments and in the face of more to come, under the patronage of Robert Drury, in praise of his daughter Elizabeth.

⁴² “A Funerall Elegie” was probably written shortly after Elizabeth’s burial in December 1610 and the *Anatomy* several months later. These two poems were published in 1611

with Donne's probable cooperation. They appeared again in 1612 together with "The Second Anniversary". It seems as though Donne initially intended to produce a poem every year to commemorate Elizabeth's death, or at least this is the conceit implied by the name "Anniversary."

⁴³ All references to Donne's poems are from the *Epithalamions, Anniversaries and Epicedes* edited by Wesley Milgate and will be provided parenthetically in the text with line numbers preceded by "F.E." for "The Funerall Elegie," "1" for "The First Anniversary" and "2" for "The Second Anniversary."

⁴⁴ Deborah Aldritch Larson discusses how the remarks by Jonson and Donne have shaped critical response (23-24).

⁴⁵ See especially "The Metaphysical Poets" and "Andrew Marvell" in T. S. Eliot.

⁴⁶ See Arthur Marotti, *John Donne: Coterie Poet and Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric* on the significance of manuscript and print forms of publication in Renaissance poetry.

⁴⁷ Rosamond Tuve praises the "dark" yet prickingly "sharp" character of the figure and treats it "as a foregone conclusion" that it "should be favored by the metaphysical poets" (132).

⁴⁸ Exceptions include Thomas Docherty's *John Donne, Undone* and Tillotama Rajan's "Nothing Sooner Broke," which focus on poems apart from *The Anniversaries* themselves.

⁴⁹ Norbrook singles out Rajan's "'Nothing Sooner Broke': Donne's *Songs and Sonets* as Self-Consuming Artifact," and Paul de Mans' attack on Empson in his critique of this tendency in Donne criticism ("Monarchy of Wit"). He draws attention to the way "The Second Anniversary" is often read to support the arguments of "the *contemptus mundi* school" but does not offer an alternative reading of the poem here.

⁵⁰ As described by Stanley Fish in *Self-Consuming Artifacts*.

⁵¹ See Larson (24).

⁵² See, for example, Marjorie Nicholson's important study *The Breaking of the Circle*, Jonathon Sawday and Charles Coffin.

⁵³ Jonathan Sawday's study *The Body Emblazoned* provides a detailed history of the practice of scientific anatomy and its relationship to both established and emerging systems of knowledge and analysis in the Renaissance; for a discussion of Donne's use of the anatomy as a self-reflexive, self-critical form that also engages theological questions, see 122-140.

⁵⁴ Cf entries in the Donne *Concordance*, eds. Holmes and Sullens: "proportion" and "proportions."

⁵⁵ The term "Obsequies" here refers to a poem written in praise of a deceased person, in other words an elegy. All references to *The Obsequies to Lord Harrington* are from the *Epithalamions, Anniversaries, and Epicedes* edited by Milgate and will be referred to parenthetically in the text with line numbers preceded by *Obsequies*.

⁵⁶ Milgate explains that "Donne had read of the telescope in Galileo's *Sidereus Nuncius* (1610)" (*Epithalamions* 199).

⁵⁷ *Life of Cowley* 354; cited in Milgate's note on line 37 (Donne, *Epithalamions* 199).

⁵⁸ Milgate cites this sermon in his note on lines 35-36 (Donne, *Sermons* iii. III;

Epithalamions 199).

⁵⁹ See my Chapter 4 for a discussion of the *non-pareil* in Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House."

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the significance of these two tropes in the discourse of praise, see Lewalski (*Anniversaries* 17).

⁶¹ See Peter Sacks for a discussion of the widespread presence of the intertwined tropes of modesty or inadequacy and mastery in pastoral elegy (47).

⁶² Sawday's study of the modern anatomy includes detailed discussion of how the anatomists procured bodies through executions and other situations of death.

Chapter Three

“Confusion here Inthroniz’d”: Samuel Sheppard’s *Faerie King*

In 1648, imprisoned for publishing Royalist propaganda, the journalist Samuel Sheppard began *The Faerie King*, a poem in “Heroicall Heliconian Dress.”⁶³ By this time it seemed clear to supporters of the monarchy that disorder had indeed overtaken the very foundations of society: revolution was overthrowing the very institution of monarchy, and religious difference had turned into full blown civil war. Like Donne, Sheppard’s response to his own historical circumstances resulted in a revision of literary conventions. Sheppard’s epic is disfigured by the forces of history on several levels: unfinished, unpublished, and in several places almost unintelligible, *The Faerie King* inscribes the limits of poetic language to represent what is unrepresentable. Like Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, the most obvious model for the poem, *The Faerie King* reflects on how to interpret the correspondence of poetry to the history it represents in allegorical form. In some places, the correspondence between figure and event appears stable, but the poem eventually undoes these certainties, both inviting and resisting attempts to interpret and stabilize reference to contemporary events. The instability of Sheppard’s historical allegory, the disjunction between the story we read and the historical story we know, is further augmented by his use of disjunctive figures, narrative fragmentation and the interpenetration of distinct, opposed rhetorical modes. Throughout the work, the elevated poetry of epic intermixes with the scurrilous invective of the newsbooks where Sheppard worked as author and editor. *The Faerie King* is a work of rich paradox, inconsistency and at times extraordinary imagistic power. In its representation of a world where

“confusion here/ Inthronized sits” (VI.vi.10), *The Faerie King* demonstrates the unsettling impact of the actual experience of civil war on both literary form and the figurative language of poetry.

The Faerie King is not only a difficult work, but as a manuscript rather than a printed poem it has largely escaped the attention of scholars working on the literature of the mid-seventeenth century; the poem was never published in Sheppard’s lifetime and first appeared in print in 1984.⁶⁴ Although the Postscript suggests its imminent publication, the poem does not appear to be complete in a narrative sense. It is unclear whether Sheppard intended the poem to be published in this form, died before he could make final revisions, gave up before fully completing it, or simply decided not to publish. *The Faerie King* joins Davenant’s *Gondibert* and Cowley’s *Civill Warre* and *Davideis* in the virtual sub-genre of unfinished Royalist Civil War epic: while the English Civil War seemed in the beginning to present an ideal subject for Royalist writers, the defeat of the King’s forces made it impossible to finish their epic poems with a triumphant ending. In its inscription of political and literary fragmentation, Sheppard’s poem testifies to both the challenges and possibilities inherent in writing epic poetry from a position of defeat and disillusionment in the late 1640s and early 1650s.

1. The composition of Sheppard’s epic

Sheppard is best known for his prolific work in pamphlet journalism of the 1640s and early 1650s in the extraordinary outburst of publishing that accompanied the Revolution. Initially a supporter of Parliament, he soon changed sides and became a strident Royalist propagandist by 1647. Sheppard was jailed several times between 1647 and 1650 and asserts in the Postscript to *The Faerie King* that he composed the poem,

book by book, mainly in the different prisons where he was detained (334). The poem itself narrates the fortunes of the Kingdom of Ruina, ruled by the hapless King Ariodant and his successors, in an allegorical form that mixes epic and romance narrative structures. Sheppard apparently intended *The Faerie King* to be his masterpiece, an epic memorial that would preserve his authorial name for posterity. He carefully sets it above his “fomer printed absurdities” which he dismisses in the Postscript as “spungie sarcasms” which “found birth meerly from a mercenary dizziness” (336).

The one extant manuscript exists in a clean, clear state that could indicate it was intended to be printer’s copy (Klemp, viii; Rollins 540). However, the poem’s abrupt ending casts some doubt on Hyder E. Rollins’ suggestion that it was ready for the printer but was never published because Sheppard died before he could make the final arrangements (538, 540) (Sheppard died in 1655, not long after he wrote the Postscript.) Sheppard claims to have spent four years after his final release from prison working to bring “this piece to the perfection you see,” (336) but the poem retains a fragmentary feeling in its lack of narrative coherence. Despite the long period of revision, this might be a consequence of the poem’s piece-by-piece composition, as Sheppard tells us that “this worke found its connexion of as many parts as Homers Illiades when they were set together by Lycurgus” (335). Although a finished postscript is attached to the poem, the poem itself appears to be unfinished, offering no narrative resolution to a final canto which contains a considerably smaller number of stanzas than the others (twelve compared with an average of thirty). Lois Potter agrees, and notes that the canto “breaks off as a new intrigue seems to be developing” (126). The text offers no unambiguous evidence that Sheppard intended to publish the poem as it exists in the surviving

manuscript. We cannot know whether Sheppard intended the poem to end as it does, or imagined an ending that he was unable to complete; either way, the unfinished aspect of *The Faerie King* reflects its quality of fragmentation, damage and lack.

Like the dismembered bodies that populate the text, the poem itself is both literally mutilated and broken off. We would expect the author's name to appear beneath the title and following the Postscript. Instead, both the title page and the final page of the Postscript have been "roughly torn off" toward the bottom of the page; the name "SAMUEL SHEPPARD" appears at the end of the poem itself, although an effort has been made to scratch over the name with ink (Klemp x). Whether Sheppard himself was responsible for the mutilations is unknown. We might read the torn-off pages and half-erased name as indications of ambivalence about revealing his authorship, suggestive of competing desires to be recognized as the author, and to disguise his authorship – strange to behold in an author so much otherwise at home in the print medium. Sheppard's journalism was often at least signed with the initials "S.S."; he published several editions of the comical almanac *Merlinus Anonymus* in 1653-4 under the transparent pen-name of "Raphael Desmus" (an anagram of "Samuel Shepard") and his 1651 *Epigrams* prints his name clearly on the title page (Rollins 535).

In the case of *The Faerie King*, ambivalence about identification as author would be most likely due to the Royalist politics of the work. Sheppard seems to have agreed to keep the public expression of his politics in check as a condition of his release from prison in 1650, and his published work after that date avoids direct criticism of Cromwell and the governing regime (Rollins 529). Indeed, the *Epigrams* of 1651, published while Sheppard was revising *The Faerie King*, includes a commendatory poem titled "To his

Excellency, the Lord General Cromwell.” (Book VI, 32). This public statement of support is quite at odds with the sentiments of *The Faerie King*, which includes a biting reference in the Postscript to Cromwell as “Generalissimo” (335). Sheppard refers repeatedly in the Postscript to the suffering he endured in prison “where my best musick was the ratling of cheines the gingling of Irons, & the groanes of men destind for destruction” (335) and was most probably anxious to avoid it again.

The title of Sheppard’s poem indicates his emulation of *The Faerie Queene* but the poem is a less than straightforward imitation, echoing certain formal, structural, narrative and thematic aspects of Spenser and not others. Sheppard composed *The Faerie King*, like Spenser’s epic, in six Books divided into numbered cantos. However, Sheppard rejects the complex stanza form of *The Faerie Queene* in favour of a stanza in ottava rima and limits the number of cantos to six per Book. Spenser’s ambivalent relationship to Elizabeth’s regime would have certainly made him an attractive model for Sheppard, who joins a body of seventeenth-century writers with widely differing political attitudes who emulated Spenser after the poet’s death, including Michael Drayton, Phineas Fletcher and George Wither.⁶⁵ Unlike most of these poets, who self-consciously adopted Spenser’s archaic vocabulary and syntactic effects, Sheppard does not imitate these distinctive aspects of Spenser’s style. In the catalogue of great poets in *The Faerie King*, Sheppard actually criticises Spenser’s use of obsolete words: “o how faire a Fame/ had hee not doated on exploded words/ had waited on him” (V.vi.53).

The emulation of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* in Sheppard’s title serves to emphasize the absent status of his “King.” Spenser’s Queen is elusive too, part dream-

vision, part living monarch, part intended reader. However unattainable she or her attention is, Elizabeth's shadowy presence is a powerful structuring force for Spenser's epic, written to praise, glorify and instruct her. Sheppard, on the other hand, finds himself in the strange position of an epic poet without a monarch-ruler to glorify or address. The dead and absent King creates a vacuum of address, and a vacuum of authority. Spenser writes, he tells Sir Walter Raleigh, to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" ("A Letter of the Authors" in *The Faerie Queene*, 737). Sheppard's epic describes itself as "Fashioning Love & Honour," abstract virtues without an ideal ruler/reader to embody them. The poet writes with nostalgia of a King who "Reigned, and yet (perhaps) doth Reigne" (I.i.1). By the end of the poem we are still not exactly sure to whom the Faerie King of the title refers – Ariodant or Byanor, perhaps, but neither is clearly identified in this way. This is another aspect of narrative completion or meaning withheld from the reader.

Sheppard's title prepares the reader for a poem about faeries or Faeryland, an extension of the faerie literature popular in the early seventeenth century that characteristically offered commentary on court culture in its representation of Faeryland.⁶⁶ Disappointingly, there are no faeries to be found in *The Faerie King* and the poem's connection to faeries seems limited to its imitation of certain aspects of Spenser's allegorical style. Spenser's Faeryland is a place where controversial views of Elizabethan policy may be represented (and protectively veiled) in allegorical form. Sheppard seems to have this kind of place in mind, a protected zone of historical allegory that shadows the real world, although he does not call it Faeryland in the poem. We do not find the kind of delight in the description of a miniaturised world with palaces made out of insect bodies,

bats and moonshine that distinguishes the faery poetry of Michael Drayton, William Browne, and Robert Herrick,⁶⁷ although we do encounter winding paths, forests, caves and bowers familiar from Spenser's Faeryland. Ruina is a frequently brutal landscape of war and treachery, reflecting contemporary conditions as Sheppard saw them, closer to the harsh world of Spenser's Book V, where Justice struggles to establish order with an iron sword, than the whimsical fancy of post-Spenserian English faery poetry. The remnant of whimsy in the title may reflect the ongoing appeal of escape into an fanciful world of Caroline aesthetics, but the absence of faeries in the poem suggests that this was not a viable possibility: there is no room, after all, for faeries in the world described by Sheppard.

2. "These most cursed times": Civil War epic

The translation of history into literary genre is partly an attempt to work through the problems presented by the difficult realities of regicide, revolution and civil war. Lois Potter suggests that "The assimilation of contemporary history to literary models was a way of making sense of the disturbing and unprecedented nature of much that was happening in 1640-1660" (107).⁶⁸ As Michael Wilding argues, the Civil War at first appeared to present itself as ideal material for epic, while epic seemed to be a potentially ideal genre for the kind of ideological resolution that the period required (173).⁶⁹ However, for Royalists in particular this turned out to be a complicated process that required a revision of the very terms of literary form.⁷⁰ In Michael McKeon's terms, "Genres provide a conceptual framework for the mediation (if not the 'solution') of intractable problems, a method of rendering such problems intelligible. The ideological

status of genre, like that of all conceptual categories, lies in its explanatory and problem-
 ‘solving’ capacities” (*Origins of the English Novel* 20). Sheppard’s poem is most
 interesting as a work that reflects the possibilities and (more often) the limits of this
 process, especially the difficulty of achieving full resolution to ideological problems
 through the mechanism of genre. *The Faerie King* may make the problems of Sheppard’s
 historical moment intelligible, but does so through its performance of formal collapse.

The historian John Corbet, Sheppard’s contemporary, reflects on some of the
 ways in which historical events exceeded the formal frameworks through which
 observers could understand and describe their experiences. This passage from Corbet’s
Historicall Relation of the Military Government of Gloucester is quoted by Nigel Smith
 to demonstrate some of the difficulties that presented themselves to authors who
 attempted to write about the war they were living through:

They that gather up so many divided Plots (as are now acted) into one model, are
 wont to endeavour after a smoother path, a greater harmony, and more exact
 symmetry of parts; whereas the face of things is conscious of more disproportion,
 sometimes a confusion of business, and the several scenes may easily swerve
 from the originall plot. (John Corbet 2, quoted in Smith, *Literature and
 Revolution* 53).

This evocative passage, as Smith argues, suggests some of the ways in which these
 historical conditions may have inspired a distortion of traditional literary forms
 (*Literature and Revolution* 53). Corbet’s description of his own times recalls the
 “disproportion,” chaos and confusion observed by Donne years earlier in *The
 Anniversaries*, though here “disproportion” is related to the dislocating effects of war.
 These discordances challenge attempts to assimilate them into conventional models much
 like Donne’s own observations of “disproportion” inspire him to challenge, distort and
 revise traditional generic forms and figurative language. Unlike the naïve writer imagined

by Corbet, Donne precisely rejects (and simultaneously mourns) the concept of a harmonious whole with “exact symmetry of parts” in *The Anniversaries*. Corbet’s description here gives a sense of how history may diverge in disorienting ways from the literary frameworks we have for understanding it. History is conceived of through these frameworks as a story (a “plot”) with an episodic, scenic structure like a play (“scenes” that “are now acted”), but then proceeds or “swerves” in ways entirely unanticipated by these plots and unaccountable in the terms that they offer: “the severall scenes may easily swerve from the originall plot.”⁷¹

Corbet’s reflections on the difficulties of translating the dislocations and violence of history into written form have many affinities with other kinds of writing in the period, particularly Royalist epic. *The Faerie King* approaches the representation of history through the “originall plot” of epic, but then finds that events “swerve” in radical, unsettling ways: the war is lost, the King beheaded, the monarchy overturned. The discontinuities and confusion that characterize *The Faerie King* result in large part from the disjunction of history and literary form that Corbet here describes so well. Like the author imagined by Corbet, Sheppard seems to want to resolve the material of history into a harmonious and symmetrical whole, to “gather up so many divided plots ... into one model” but finds that he is unable to do so and instead inscribes the “confusion” and “disproportion” that so disfigures “the face of things.” Much like the historian imagined by Corbet who tries to shape chaotic events into one whole, Sheppard discovers “how the pearcing subtilties of wit are broken and shattered by the course of things more knotty, rude and violent” (Corbet 3).

Like many writers of all political persuasions, Sheppard seems to have been repulsed by the violence of war, an experience that led to a new perspective on the representation of military glory in “heroic” poetry. Wilding argues that “the realities of civil war were less glorious than the literary images of heroic grandeur. Although past civil wars had later found epic treatment, the contemporary slaughter of fellow-countrymen could have little appeal”; for writers such as Milton and Samuel Butler, this disillusionment led to a rejection of the “false ethic of military heroism” (Wilding 173, 180). A similar case can be made for Sheppard’s epic, in which he tellingly sings of “Armes and *the death of Fight*” (Proem 2.7, my emphasis). Klemp suggests that the harsh realities of civil war confuse the normal, nationalist aim of the genre. The “Virgilian solution” is thus unavailable: no “one man” is able to bring “a vision of peace and unity to a fragmented nation” (xvii, xviii); the author, too, is unable to impose aesthetic or narrative unity on a fragmented work. Sheppard strongly conveys the epic poet’s disillusionment and the disabling influence of his historical moment. Apologising for the quality of his verse, he writes,

blame these most cursed Times that have Invaded
my sense with horror, strangling my weake skill,
my drooping sorrows that sit like lead
upon my soule, from whence all Joyes are fled. (V.vi.1)

Sheppard’s own explanation for the shortcomings of his verse blames the stresses of the historical circumstances in which he writes. This stanza links Sheppard’s personal problems, his “sorrows,” with the generalized evils of “these most cursed Times” in a version of the modesty trope that carries a ring of sincerity; the verse does indeed suggest the way “sense” itself has become “Invaded” with horror, especially in later sections of the poem that convey a powerful impression of the way war attacks the sensibility, to say

nothing of the evident deficiencies in “skill” such as awkward meter, strained syntax and other aesthetic issues with the poetry of *The Faerie King*. It is telling that Sheppard positions his horrified “sense” before his disabled “skill” in these lines – as “sense” is pushed to its horrified limits, “skill” is strangled, suggesting that Sheppard’s experience exceeds and defies the resources of poetic representation.

Sheppard was not alone in finding his poetic “skill” adversely affected by the “sorrows” of the times: Cowley and Davenant, most famously, failed to complete their civil war epics. Cowley began his *Civill Warre* while the war was still being fought, and he was unable to finish it with the vision of Royalist victory that he originally anticipated.⁷² Explaining his decision not to complete the *Civill Warre*, Cowley wrote in his Preface to the 1656 *Poems* that writers such as himself who had felt obligated to engage the “War of the Pen” alongside that of “the Sword” were then forced to “lay down our Pens as well as Arms” when the battle was lost – in this case, identified as the decisive battle of Newbury, which literally “stopt the work”: “for it is so uncustomary, as to become almost ridiculous, to make Lawrels for the Conquered” (*Poems* Sig.A4r). Sections of the *Civil War* were later incorporated into his poem *Davideis* – although this, too, remained unfinished, seemingly infected by the same lack of energy and desire that he felt toward his more explicitly Royalist “heroic” poem. For Royalists, the period of the Revolution turned out to be the age of the unfinished epic as the reality of war was not simple or easy to translate into literary form. For those on the losing side, as Cowley stated, “a warlike, various and a tragical age is best to write of, but worst to write in” (*Poems* Sig.A4r). Writers sympathetic to republicanism in the interregnum years had

more success – Payne Fisher, for example, wrote the heroic poem *Marston-Moor* after his turn away from Royalism in 1644.⁷³

Years later, Milton turned the condition of loss lamented by Cowley into an enabling literary device. Milton was not a Royalist and therefore wrote from a very different perspective, recording the failure of the Revolution rather than the defeat of the King's forces.⁷⁴ Yet he did write a successful epic from a position of disillusionment and loss with the Civil War as part of its subject matter, and *Paradise Lost* offers an instructive counter-example to Royalist epic poetry. Davenant, Cowley and Sheppard all began from a point where they thought victory was still a possibility and could not successfully reconfigure their work to account for defeat. In contrast, Milton not only began *Paradise Lost* from a position of irretrievable defeat but also embraced loss as a central theme in his story of the fall, connecting with the enabling theme of exile that is as central to epic as military exploits. Biblical narrative also clearly offered possibilities to Milton that it did not fully extend to Cowley; it was certainly a more successful choice than the obscure historical allegory favored by Sheppard. In David Quint's account, Milton joins with an "alternative tradition" to the Virgilian epic, inaugurated by Lucan with his republican poem of the Roman civil war, the *Pharsalia*, a form devised to give narrative voice to the "losers" of epic rather than celebrating the victors (9). This essentially republican tradition was not easily available to Royalists, although Sheppard's use of digression, disjunction and romance suggests some relationship to it.⁷⁵

3. Representing history: Sheppard's allusive mode

Set in a fictive world whose reference to actual events and persons is suggestive but not always transparently clear, *The Faerie King* is at once historical allegory and fancy, epic and romance, sublime and grotesque. At one moment Ariodant is clearly a shadow of Charles; at other moments he is less clearly so. Sheppard's allusive scheme works on something of a continuum from direct references to historical events and figures, to more ambiguous and fanciful-seeming forms. Mostly it sits somewhere in between. The poem occupies a space of slippage between modes that produces a high degree of impenetrability, and its obscurity is consistent with the culture of ambiguity that Annabel Patterson elucidates so powerfully in her work on the literary consequences of censorship (*Censorship and Interpretation*). Klemp suggests that the poem "works by allusion rather than strict allegory" (xvi). Potter comments on the problematic outcomes of Sheppard's lack of transparency and consistency: "There is, of course, an obvious resemblance between pre-war England and the situation of fictitious Ruina ... But if Sheppard is writing a coded history, he has succeeded in making it largely impenetrable" (126). Both "obvious" and "impenetrable," an unlikely and confusing combination, the poem appears to both insist on its status as political commentary and elude analysis in these terms.

The poem's sympathies essentially lie with the monarch and against the common people and forces opposed to the King.⁷⁶ However, it is certainly far from the hagiographic quality of most Royalist representations of Charles, especially in the period immediately after the regicide. At times Sheppard appears to critique Charles' policies and behavior through Ariodant; at other times it is hard to understand the significance of

events in these terms. The levels of obscurity, if historical allegorical consistency is assumed, are very deep. Sheppard's effects may be intentional, or as we might infer from Patterson, the culture of necessary disguise and obscurity may have penetrated so deeply into his literary consciousness that it became more of an unconscious habit of mind. It is not hard to imagine that the benefits of extreme ambiguity and impenetrability would have been clearest to him at the time he was writing *The Faerie King*, either in prison or in fear of being jailed.

The poem makes one direct reference to the contemporary political situation toward the end of the poem, when a mysterious mirror in the Castle of Metanoia (V.iii) shows various spectacles of war and political instability, including "our present cruell, and unnaturall Warres" (V.iii.8). Sheppard's references to popular and political rebellion in the narrative of the poem also seem to comment directly on the contemporary crisis. There is much criticism of the potentially treacherous masses, or the "Vaine/ and Vulgarre Heard" (I.i.25). As soon as Ariodant takes the throne he voices suspicions of plots against him and confesses his fears to his spiritual adviser, Papillio: he fears that the

Promoters of Disloyaltie
these black Incendiaries, think't no sin
t'Asperse & blot their Prince (clandestinely)
to boile up popularre furie to that height
for a Rebellion (1.1.24).

This remark could be taken for a Royalist attack on Charles' critics, and strongly suggests the parallels between events in the poem and historical events: rebels in the poem would seem to be representatives of rebels in England.

Another reference to contemporary rebellion uses a different allegorical mode when one of the courtier's hunting dogs kills a lion shortly before the outbreak of war:

following the kill, “the strong mastiffe stalks triumphant wise/ as if his sovereigns fall should prove his rise” (IV.iii.14). This moment appears to offer a model of transparent allegorical signification, and also a model of how to interpret the signs. Among the courtiers present, only the King recognises the sign for the bad omen it really is. He thinks to himself:

as that disloyal Curre has slaine
his Prince, so shall some Slave my Empire gaine
.....
some Subject (’mongst my People) shall conspire
and shall prevaile to my Dethronizing
will JOVE permit a Vassaile to Acquire
the Crown & Scepter, of a true borne King [?] (IV.iii.17-18)

This image of Cromwell as “disloyal Curre,” a lowly subject unfit to challenge the authority of the King, is familiar Royalist propaganda. Ariodant perceives what is to come, and in his telling of it Sheppard suggests his own perspective on the civil war that has just taken place: the inversion of naturalized power relationships between monarch and subject, and the “Dethronizing” of a legitimate monarch by a traitor reaching beyond his proper sphere. This dramatic scene of a dog killing a lion has the quality of an emblem, drawing as it does on conventional meanings of the lion as king of the animal world and the dog as domesticated animal servant. The killing of the animal king by the animal servant is readily significant as an image of treachery and usurpation.

As an allegory of the civil war, this scene and Ariodant’s reading of it would seem to offer both a model of the poem itself and a model of how it is to be read. However, this model of signification and Ariodant’s accompanying model of interpretation more effectively provides an anti-type for the kind of signification that characterizes the rest of the poem, as the reader cannot rely on events being represented with this conventional

order of significance. Ariodant interprets what he sees along clear analogical lines that may remind us of the Gyant in *The Faerie Queene*, Book V: “As that ... so shall.” The likeness between one thing and the other is presented with no further elaboration. For most of the poem the reader of *The Faerie King* is forced to look much more carefully to unravel the connection between the poem and its historical moment. Frequently, even though the poem seems to allude so powerfully to elements of the immediate historical context, analogues are impossible to clearly find.

Ariodant’s reading of the dog who kills a lion resembles the approach to historical allegory used in another Civil War publication that uses *The Faerie Queene* as a model, although in a way very different than Sheppard. The anonymous pamphlet *The Faerie Leveller* reprints the episode from *The Faerie Queene* Book V, Canto 2 where the Knight of Justice encounters a populist Gyant who seeks to level all social distinction (discussed in my first chapter). The pamphlet’s full title indicates the close relationship perceived by the editor between Spenser’s poem and the current historical moment: *The Faerie Leveller: or, King Charles his Leveller descried and deciphered in Queene Elizabeths dayes. By her Poet Laureat Edmond (sic) Spenser, in his unpareld Poeme, entituled, THE FAERIE QUEENE. A lively representation of our times.* A short introduction precedes the passage and explains its contemporary relevance, claiming that Spenser’s “verses then propheticall are now become historicall in our dayes” (3). This fascinating publication does not imitate or revise Spenser’s text, but rather treats it almost as a form of sacred prophesy, recalling the use of Biblical typology by both Royalist Anglicans and Puritans to assert the validity of their cause in the Civil War. Rather than Cromwell as Nimrod the tyrant or David the sacred King, as we might find in Royalist or Puritan

rhetoric, we are presented with Cromwell as Spenser's Gyant in a form of literary typology. *The Faerie Leveller* interprets the poem's historical analogues unambiguously for the reader, offering a "key of the work" which begins "*Arthegall (sic) Prince of Justice. King Charles*" (italics in original, 4). Although both *The Faerie Leveller* and *The Faerie King* make use of *The Faerie Queene* as a model, the two texts operate in very different modes of interpretation and reference; it is difficult to imagine a "key of the work" that could explain the complexities of significance we find in *The Faerie King*.

The most central questions about political representation concern the figure of Ariodant, King of Ruina. If Ariodant is taken to be Charles, this is not a poem of unqualified praise. For example, the poem emphasises Ariodant's lecherousness and sexual expressiveness. He falls in love with a strange warrior-maid, Olivia, who visits the court. In order to pursue this interest, he sends Olympia, his Queen, away on a diplomatic mission during the course of which she is captured by barbarians and eventually murdered. The convoluted threads of significance are characteristically impossible to tease out in this example. Charles' love for his wife, Queen Henrietta Maria, was a well-known public fact and became a point of criticism by those threatened by the erotic power of the Roman Catholic Queen. If we go beyond this level of historical allegory and consider what Olympia and Olivia may represent, the task is no easier; both women are virtuous and good and it is not clear that in his love for them Ariodant is lusting after power, or revenge, or other abstractions. Sheppard could be suggesting that Charles was too quick to give in to his own bad impulses, but this idea is strained by the choice of a narrative vehicle so unlike Charles' own very faithful behavior toward his wife.

Sheppard blames Charles' bad advisers for his eventual downfall, as well as the awesome powers of Destiny and the Devil which feature prominently. The King's evil advisers feature most strongly in the figure of Papillio, who gives a long speech of advice just after Ariodant has taken the throne. He recommends a Machivellian program of self-interest and political opportunism or "pollicie," which includes a prescription to "seeme most Religious" (I.i.29): "you must feigne/ Devotion," he instructs (I.i.31). Ariodant listens but does not seem to uncritically absorb Papillio's advice. Attacks on the king's bad counselors have an ambiguous political effect, both suggesting and deflecting criticism, and many critics of the King exploited the trope in the early 1640s.⁷⁷

The most dramatic difference from the historical record occurs in the manner of the King's death, as the act of decapitation is displaced and dispersed in several figures throughout the text. There is the soldier, for example, whose death in battle is described through an extended simile as an "Oake, King of the Wood." This tree (a favored Caroline symbol for Charles and the royal dynasty)⁷⁸ dies in "aguish martyrdom" so it can be used "to prop some crazie house that long has stood/ & 'gins to sink as it were underminde" (III.v.48) – presumably a metaphor for the rotten state of England. Ariodant, meanwhile, kills himself in despair when he realises that his army has lost the war against the rebellious forces of his evil uncle Sansonet. Sheppard's description of the King's death sits in tension with Royalist modes of Caroline martyrology which figured Charles' death as a glorious end to a saintly life. While Ariodant's suicide preserves some part of the heroic, tragic aspect which formed an important part of this representational mode, it does so in a highly qualified way. In the opening canto of the first book, the poet foretells Ariodant's death and mourns that due to malignant fate he was not able to make the

“glorious Exit” (I.i.2) that he should have otherwise had; but “glorious Exit” is exactly how Charles’ death was figured in *Eikon Basilike* and many Royalist elegies and commentaries on the regicide.⁷⁹

Sheppard’s representation of the king’s death at his own hands rather than the hands of others offers a complex perspective on Charles’ downfall. Just prior to his death Ariodant fights man-to-man with Sansonet in a grove secluded from the main battlefield and decapitates his enemy in a possible displacement of Charles’ execution (IV.vi.55). Returning to the battlefield, Ariodant is rendered speechless by the scene of devastation before him and retreats to the grove, lamenting his losses. Meanwhile, down in Hell, Beelzebub is watching and sends the “delegated Furie” named “Despaire” (IV.vi.63) to drive Ariodant to take his own life. After some convincing, Ariodant falls onto his sword in the classical tradition of noble suicide. In her speech to Ariodant, the Furie goes through a venerable catalogue of classical heroes who committed suicide (Antony, Hanniball, censor Cato) and even offers him the very weapons they used to perform the deed from her stock of “rustie Swords, Knives, Daggers, Ropes,/ boxes of Poyson, & Sharpe hookes” (IV.vi.66). This places Ariodant firmly in a line of deaths regarded as tragic and noble, but the scene retains disturbing associations because of contemporary social and religious taboos on suicide. Strong prevailing social attitudes against suicide in early modern England judged the act harshly as a form of murder, a criminal felony and a sin; penalties included the denial of Christian burial to the dead and confiscation of all their property and goods (MacDonald and Murphy, 15; 89-90). Ariodant’s act also forms a significant departure from Spenser’s treatment of despair and the temptation of suicide

in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* where they figure as significant threats to Red Cross Knight that are sternly rejected.

It is possible to understand the image of suicide in figurative terms: Charles sacrificed himself; the Royalist forces brought about their own demise.⁸⁰ It was not unusual for Royalists to portray Charles as a self-sacrificing martyr or even a Christ-like figure, and Sheppard may be connecting with a way of thinking about Christ's crucifixion as a form of suicide, an interpretation offered by John Donne in *Biathanos* as well as by church fathers Tertullian and Origen (Wymer 5; 162, note 15; MacDonald and Murphy 89). Royalist discourse also associated Charles with the maternal figure of Christ as the pelican who wounds its own breast, feeding its young with its own blood, a related image of self-sacrifice and self-destruction.⁸¹ However, there is a significant gap between the idea of Christ (or Charles) the willing victim led to a death ultimately inflicted by others, and the image of Ariodant falling onto his sword in the style of Marc Antony. This image of the king's death as direct self-killing is unique in Royalist representations of the regicide. We find something vaguely like it in one of Herrick's epigrams in *Hesperides*, where the oak tree (figuring here again as a symbol of Caroline kingship) "Droops, dies, and falls without the cleavers stroke" in a premonitory image of the King's death (H-69, lines 5-6). In these passages both Herrick and Sheppard imply an awareness of Charles' share of responsibility for his downfall even as they support his cause.

Herrick, of course, imagines a "cleaver's stroke" that had not yet actually come in 1648, although it must have seemed imminent to many. Whether Charles had died by the time Sheppard wrote his first draft of Book III is unclear. The Postscript indicates that he wrote the books one by one between 1648 and 1650, but also emphasizes the lengthy toil

of revision in the following four years. Charles' execution took place sometime in the middle of the initial writing process and must have had an enormous impact on the author. Yet the revision of the poem would all have taken place after the regicide, and it is difficult to imagine that the death of the King foreshadowed in the opening lines of Book I was completed without a consciousness of the events of 1649. Whether Sheppard wrote the suicide scene before or after the King's death, he certainly had opportunity in the revision process to create a different representation of the execution. It is understandable that Sheppard would turn away from a more literal representation of Charles' execution: it does, after all, represent the limit of what was speakable and conceivable for many contemporaries. Private, despair-induced suicide still seems a strange choice of vehicle, marked as it is by the stigma of sin and shame, however heroic the predecessors are that the *Furie* offers to Ariodant.

Sheppard's unusual choice of vehicle to represent the death of the King indicates the contradictory desires at work in the poem's treatment of the Civil War more generally: on the one hand, to memorialise traumatic recent events and on the other, to deny, forget or avoid them. Sheppard appears to be caught between the urge to create what Cowley describes in 1656 as "a kind of Artificial Memory" (the kind of writing Cowley rejects) and that which Cowley prefers, or longs for: "the Art of Oblivion" (*Poems* sig. A2v). After Ariodant's suicide Sheppard seems interested in representing a state of ignorance, echoing the poem's turning away from the facts of Charles' death. There is no scene where the King's death is announced, publicly or otherwise, or where he is mourned. His death is intensely private. After his death the narrative leaves the battle and the plot associated with it to follow Olivia and Byanor on their journeys. Just

before Ariodant's actual death, the evil magician Magorto turns one of his servant spirits into the shape of Ariodant in order to produce confusion on the battlefield. This spirit goes to distract Olivia and lead her away from the scene of battle and once she is far away, the spirit simply disappears. In one of many narrative inconsistencies Olivia does not seem to notice and simply continues on her way. In place of mourning, the narrative concentrates on characters who remain blissfully unaware of the sovereign's death, and leaves behind the traumatic battlefield for the different allegories and plots of romance narrative. In a scene of irony and pathos, Byanor tries desperately and unsuccessfully to rally the King's troops, "not knowing that he [Ariodant] lies/ a breathlesse trunke, whom now no Ills can thwart" (V.ii.8). The characters left behind by Ariodant seem happier not to know.

4. The invasion of newsbook style

With its mixture of epic and romance forms, elevated style and scurrilous invective, narrative inconsistencies and stylistic awkwardness, *The Faerie King* exemplifies the generic instability and interpenetration of rhetorical modes that have been identified as key features of Interregnum literature.⁸² Here, the hyperbolic invective that Sheppard practiced as a journalist finds its way into its supposed opposite, the elevated poetry of epic, suggesting a fertile area of crossover between the literary and the political in the production of poetry about the Civil War. In the short preface, facing the title page, a Spenserian defense against the poet's imagined, hostile audience is reproduced in obscene, hyperbolic terms. These imagined readers are not only sick but incurably diseased, an early mark of the pessimism that pervades the text:

what ever their disease is I know it is Incurable, because their Urine will never shew it, nor would I have them at any hand to bee let blood for it but rather soothe their ranke bloods & rub one another, the best counsell they merrit, from Samuel Sheppard (authors name crossed out but legible). (Facing title page)

Blood, urine and grossly rubbing bodies: following directly from the poem's lofty title page, announcing a poem "Fashioning Love & Honour In an Heroicall Heliconian Dresse," this is a somewhat rude introduction to Sheppard's epic masterpiece. This divided opening prepares the reader for the mix of rhetorical modes they will encounter along the way. Sheppard hits full invective stride in the Postscript, which like the preface is obsessed with defending against critical readers. One long sentence, comprising no less than two and a half pages, shows Sheppard's distinctive switch from the refined to the obscene: he writes of "the luminous mysteries of most sacred poesy," rails against "envious Wind-Fuckers" and explains that "Phaebus (on paine of his displeasure) has commanded, that I contemn and laugh at the Aguish Castigations of phrenzied Pedagogues, Censorious Cits, pit-pat Rhimers, Apoplexical Academics, rigid Rusticks and pittifull Pedanticks" (334). The second book of the poem, he tells us, was "perfected in Lambeth house where I scarce injoyed as much ayre as might be suckt in at a bung-hole" (335).

Prefatory and postscript material conventionally include forms of direct address to the reader, but Sheppard's rhetoric takes a remarkably vicious tone. He devotes far more energy to excoriating an unsympathetic audience than appealing to the sympathies of potentially like-minded readers. There is no attempt at persuasion, but rather a sense of an audience so politically divided and prone to attack that extreme defensiveness is a necessity. The unpublished status of the work makes the tone of the

prefatory and postscript remarks difficult to ascertain. If Sheppard really did intend to publish and be damned, his comments assume a kind of antagonistic bravado. The tone is stranger if we imagine a more ambivalent intent toward publication, an author so fearful of publication in this circumstance that he feverishly attacks readers he will never actually address.

This antagonistic mode of address is in some ways not surprising coming from a polemicist such as Sheppard who had been not only attacked in print for his published views but also imprisoned. It contrasts sharply, though, with Sheppard's 1651 *Epigrams*, where several fulsome commendatory poems provide evidence of a sphere of admiring readers. Like epic, the epigram collection is licensed to incorporate a widely divergent range of tones and styles, and the book derives much of its fascinating energy from the contrast between the pieces.⁸³ In his preface to the *Epigrams*, Sheppard admits that "I have a hope (in some measure) to satisfie all, having suted my selfe to all capacities" (8). The author of epic owes no such polite duty to his readers, and appears to serve a sterner and less compromising muse.

At a glance it seems that the elevated epic of *The Faerie King* is carefully separated from the vulgar prose of the preface and Postscript that frame it. However, the colorful rhetoric of the prose has a tendency to erupt into the poetic frame, destabilizing this distinction. As the cumulative point of poetic style the epic traditionally incorporates aspects of other genres; Cowley's *Civill Warre*, for example, contains passages of virulent satire. However, when Sheppard turns to bitter scurrility it forms an outrageously disjunctive contrast to the elevated rhetoric of the surrounding poetry. The final stanza of

the Proem shows the way that the vulgar sits side by side with the emphatically literary, and mirrors the contrasting styles that mark the prose of the Post-script:

thy name (Illustrious Prince) shall here subsist
better then were the Memphian Trophies thine
in spite of darke oblivions hyding mist
Let Beasts, & Bedlamers, belch as they list
the Sun of they cleere fame shall ever shine
in this faire firmament drawne by my hand
not fearing Momus bite, or Pasquills brand. (Proem, stanza 7)

The fifth line interrupts the stanza much like the imagined “belch” of the “Beasts, & Bedlamers,” a rude interruption in a refined setting, and the close alliteration here recalls Sheppard’s newsbook style. But the stanza returns immediately to the refined manner in which it began – now, alliteration is more of an elegant device, decorously spread over several lines (fame ... faire firmament ... fearing). The distinction between the fifth line and the rest of the stanza startles, but the line is isolated; it does not signal a sustained shift in tone but rather suggests a strangely indiscriminate intermingling of style, as though Sheppard is unable or unwilling to observe the strictures of proper literary decorum even from one line to the next. These two modes are at once distinct and made somehow equivalent.

A bodily belch interrupts this stanza from the Proem, and bodily metaphors of disease and death often mark the interpenetration of styles in the poem itself. Book V, Canto 2 introduces the character of Moira as a sign for the whore of Babylon, a conventional pejorative figure for the Roman Catholic Church – her name itself is an anagram of “I, Roma.” Like Spenser’s Duessa, she is “the Epitome of ugliness/ yet seeming Beauties Abstract” (V.ii.16.4-5). A few lines later, in a memorable example of his pungent journalistic language, the poet describes “her leproous carcassee, that did

stinke farre more/ then a dead dog, lodg'd in a Phlegmatick ditch" (V.ii.17.1-2). These two lines could be lifted straight from the pages of one of Sheppard's polemical newsbooks, suggesting a dynamic interchange between literary and political realms of discourse.

Sheppard repeatedly, obsessively, employed the figure of the "stinking carcasse" and other images of bodily disease and putrefaction in attacks on political figures in his newsbooks such the *Parliament-Kite or the Tell-tale Bird*, the newsbook he wrote (anonymously) in 1648, around the same time he started work on *The Faerie King*.⁸⁴ Cromwell's rotting corpse is gleefully imagined in a "stinking ditch" in one issue (*P-K* 2:13)⁸⁵ and in another, the author asks for "tydings of a Cromwellish Lieutenant General" rumoured to be missing for several weeks: "If any Person ... hath taken up his stinking Carcasse, let them convey it to the gods at Westminster in a Wheele-barrow" (*P-K* 6: 28). The severe gout of Lord Fairfax, the leader of the New Model Army, is a frequent basis of caricature and like Cromwell he is also imagined as a "rotten carcasse" (*P-K* 5:24).⁸⁶ The emphasis on the grotesque body as a means of diminution and ridicule is a familiar topic of Royalist satire, but Sheppard's diseased, smelly carcasses are embellished with distinctive rhetorical flair.⁸⁷

While the nation is imagined in *The Parliament-Kite* as a rotting corpse, the Parliament is also imagined in monstrous bodily metaphors. In one of the opening poems, a long extended metaphor describes a "Strange BEAST to be seen at Westminster, that some call a *Parliament*"; distorted and monstrous, "much like a man/ Thrust altogether on a heape," this beast offers an allegory of the representative body of Parliament disfigured by the actions of its members. In its jumbled confusion, "breast and back and

thighs together,/ Both Head and Feet all one” (*P-K* 6, facing page 27) this parliament-beast anticipates monstrous figures of dismemberment in the final book of *The Faerie King* that come to stand for the disfigured body politic following the regicide.

In his study of the early English newsbooks, Joseph Frank records that the *Parliament-Kite* was the last of the publications that Sheppard edited before his long spell in prison, where according to the poet’s own account he wrote most of *The Faerie King*. The *Parliament-Kite* features some of Sheppard’s most scatological and offensive writing, and Frank plays on the contrast suggested by these two activities of writing poetry and journalism (145). Although he presents these as opposed literary pursuits, the presence of Moira’s “leaprous carcassee” suggests that they are not all that different. Frank’s image of the journalist who turns away from polemic to a depoliticised realm of poetry resonates with Earl Miner’s well-known image of the Cavalier poet for whom political and military action is discreetly separated from literary pursuits (Miner 306). Subsequent work on Royalist literature has sought to demonstrate the ways in which the political and the literary are always implicated in one another. The crossover of pamphlet rhetoric into Sheppard’s epic poetry, the most elevated of literary forms, illustrates the co-constitution of these spheres.

5. Fragmentation and Restoration

As the poem continues, narrative confusion echoes the confusion of rhetorical forms and style in *The Faerie King*, suggesting a disillusioned and confused world view that finds no solution in literary form. The turn to quest romance after Ariodant’s death offers no more sense of resolution than the epic-war form of the first part. In the final

book, the narrative displays ever more inconsistencies and seems literally to lose its way. In Canto 5, Olivia and Bynor spy a young man who is led, captive, by “a sterne Gyantesse” (VI.v.19). In their attempt to follow the pair, Oliva and Bynor take “an oblique road” by mistake that leads them in the wrong direction, away from the Gyantesse and her prisoner whom we do not meet again, leaving their fate – and their significance – uncertain. Were we to meet these figures in *The Faerie Queene*, we could reasonably expect that their allegorical significance would be quickly revealed by their names and their actions. Here, emblematic possibilities are suggested by the striking situation of captivity and disproportion, but never secured or explained.

This confusion on the level of narrative and allegorical significance is mirrored on the level of both content and figure in the poem’s representation of actual fighting. Sheppard combines disillusionment with a horror at the realities of war that seems to conjoin classical literary accounts of battle with contemporary newsbook accounts, and perhaps first-hand reports. The scenes of warfare are more grotesque than heroic, and suggest a situation of terrifying irrationality and confusion, the “sense” invaded and disoriented by “horror” as the poet argued in the apology above. Sheppard uses the effect of catachresis, where metaphor is stretched to its limits, to inscribe a sense of the mind-bending violence of fighting. Soliders imagined as falling autumn leaves turn into red blood; a peaceful image of fields blanketed in snow becomes suddenly horrific when the snow turns out to be “the soul-lesse trunks, of slaughtered men” that cover the ground (III.v.31, 32).

And as in winter, JOVE sharpe Javelins throwes
Whiting with snow, the highest prominents
(the winds asleepe) it thick and gently snowes
Meadows, and Feilds that crown with most contents

that toiles of men (at which the stout Oxe lowes
 that now nor grasse, or greeny blade he sents)
 Are covered, so thick the Fields lay then
 Choak'd with the soule-lesse trunks, of slaughtered men. (III.v.32)

These images draw on elements of the natural world – leaves falling from the trees in autumn, the green fields blanketed in snow – and wrench them into images of death and warfare. The final line of the stanza above revises the peaceful scene of “winds asleepe” and snowy fields, making a disturbing contrast – Jove’s snowy javelin seems to soar over the stanza and come to land right at the end as a killing weapon. “Trunks,” which in this natural landscape should belong to trees, instead belong to the corpses of dead soldiers, an image that the reader almost literally “chokes” on in the final line of the stanza. The agricultural field in these descriptions is transformed into the field of battle in a violent inversion: these fields no longer provide bread and sustenance, but instead devour (and choke on) the men who should till them: “the Fields find bones for bread, blood for wine” (VI.vi.9).⁸⁸ This metaphor reflects an actual transformation of the English landscape, as fields were turned to battlefields in the war.

Much earlier in the poem, Sheppard imagines the conjunction of war and the natural world in a very different way in his image of a metaphorical civil war among the plants in Ariodant’s garden. At the opening of Book One, before Ariodant hears of the death of his father (which propels him to the throne), he is described lying in a grove adjacent to his palace while all around him the plants in the garden war among themselves as they vie to honour him:

A civill warre upon their fragrant beds
 they manage; which shall first obsequiously
 present a gift (Arabian Spice out-vies)
 the votive offering of their early rise (1.1.16)

Like Lord Fairfax in Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," laying out his garden "In the just figure of a fort" (286), Sheppard brings the war into the garden, suggesting ways in which the experience of conflict can infect the imagination and corrupt the most innocent of places. The *locus amoenus* of pastoral itself here seems to be invaded by the war that should rightfully take place beyond its borders (although both images may also remind us that the garden enfolds both life and death, generation and decay, war and peace, within itself). The landscape Sheppard imagines in the final cantos is not a garden of leisure infected by the imagery of war but the farmer's field actually turned into a battlefield. While the idea of war is somewhat diminished by its comparison with competing flowers in the first canto, here in Book VI war is no longer a metaphor for the action but provides the actual content of the verse. These personified fields do not simply compete for whose perfume will be most valued, but instead act like ravenous Furies. The soldiers here seem to fight not only one another but also the hungry, perverted fields they stand on; the conflict imagined here is not between personified elements of the plant world but between the bloodthirsty fields and the soldiers who die on them, displaced into synecdoches of bones and blood.

Images of dismemberment dominate the final Cantos of the poem, suggesting the political and social dislocation Sheppard perceived in Interregnum England, and the last Canto finally disintegrates into the most grotesque images of warfare and chaos. Especially after the regicide, Royalist discourse frequently exploited the allegorical significance of the dismembered or decapitated body as a sign for the unnatural Revolutionary body politic. Decapitation both literally echoes the fate of the King, and also imagines the body politic without its proper "head," while other forms of

about in ponds of blood? The power of this image comes from the difficulty of imagining one part into the place of the other. This catachresis is made ironically of body parts that are physically close together, separated only by the lower part of the leg, yet seem not meant to be interchangeable or like the other. The image does not engage the same emblematic or allegorical significance of the two other images of dismemberment nearby, the decapitated body politic and the unguided hand, but seems instead to stand for the horrible spectacle created by war, the limits to which it puts the imagination, and the improper work the imagination must do in order to make sense of what is seen.

Sheppard's representation of war participates in the haunting of the cultural imagination by the spectacle of dead and wounded soldiers during and after the Civil War described by Diane Purkiss. Her account of the disturbing loss of boundaries produced by warfare is suggestive for understanding Sheppard's representation of "confusion ... Inthroniz'd": "All battlefields, and all textual accounts of them," she writes, "are haunted by the chaos, dissolution of boundaries, filth, loss of sight, loss of control, and loss of self, which the soldier must always strive to repel both physically and psychically" ("Dismembering and Remembering" 223). This chaotic "dissolution of boundaries" suggests the perverse confusion of categories in Sheppard's images in the passage above, where "thighs" become "like feete." The dismembered body parts and other images of distracted or zombified soldiers in *The Faerie King* echo accounts of contemporary battlefields such as the one written by the Royalist officer Arthur Trevor following the battle of Marston Moor: "in the fire, smoke, and confusion of that day, I knew not for my soul wither to incline. The runaways on both sides were so many, so breathless, so speechless, and so full of fears, that I should not have taken them for men, but by their

motion which still served them well” (quoted in Peter Young 223). Like the grotesquely mobile body parts above, these soldiers retain their “motion” but no other signs of humanity.

The sense of fragmentation and disillusionment that characterizes *The Faerie King* relates to a broad theme of suicidal despair and longing for death, and a sense of a broken world whose end should come soon. Ariodant’s suicide introduces this theme, which seems to gather strength as the poem proceeds. Most unsettling are the excruciating battle scenes where the wounded living envy the dead who surround them, and beg to be put to death, an image used twice in Book III:

the Sword doth horrid Execution
thowsands (halfe dead) lie sprawling on the Marge
and some who see their fellows breath-lesse lie
Malign their Blisse, that they can’t also Die. (III.v.15)

some halfe dead, unto their fellows call
(using the winning’s speeches that they can)
to kill them quite, yet can’t their wish attaine
envying the quiet of their fellows slaine. (III.v.31)

The polished rhetorical performance of these soldiers gives a special pathos to this moment: they turn the art of persuasion to a sadly grisly end by their “winning’s speeches,” while dead silence seems to be the most enviable state, the “Blisse” that the half-dead envy. This form of articulate despair fits disturbingly well with the exhausted epic poet’s desire to finish his own “endless work” as Spenser says, or endless “paine” as Sheppard even more bitterly describes it (IV.v.1).

Despair and longing for death becomes a more general force in Book V. The idea of a nation at war with itself in civil conflict, murdering its own king and overturning its own institutions, suggested a form of national, suicidal, self-destruction to Royalist

sympathisers, even while these events heralded a new age of political possibility for supporters of Parliament. A 1647 pamphlet titled “England’s Mad Petition” claimed that the entire nation had gone crazy in a suicidal form of madness, bent on destroying all social institutions and their fellow men and women.⁹¹ The anonymous author makes the ironic argument that the mad-house Bedlam should be opened and the inmates freed so that the people of England can take their place, since those “commonly called Mad” are “nothing neere so mad as we,” as demonstrated by the people’s self-destructive behavior in the civil wars (“England’s Mad Petition” 4). Sheppard’s epic presents a disturbing sense of this collective, suicidal madness as not so much a crazed form of violence, or even an apocalyptic exultation in destruction (although there is this, too), but more of a despairing desire for death as an anesthetic device. After the fighting is over, this is an image of a nation longing sadly to be put out of its misery, like the pathetic half-dead soldiers on the field.

This image of civil war as suicide, or evoking suicidal despair, also features in Lucan’s epic of the Roman civil wars, the *Pharsalia*, which circulated in Thomas May’s popular and influential translation through the seventeenth century.⁹² Sheppard’s suicidal soldiers echo one scene in particular. In Book 6 of the poem, the witch Erictho resurrects a dead soldier in order to prophesy the outcome of the civil war. The pitiful soldier, after he has spoken as directed, asks to be killed: “Thus having spoke the carcasse did remaine/ With a sadd looke, and begg’d for death again” (sig. L4r). Sheppard’s epic is haunted not only by the ghosts of actual dismembered bodies from the fields of Civil War battles, but also by literary ghosts that help give shape to the representation of those actual bodies. Although the *Pharsalia* was especially popular with Republicans, it was an important

literary touchstone for Royalists as well.⁹³ Erictho's resurrected soldier rises again on the battlefield in Book III, defined by its "winning'st speech," calling for death. This image of the half-alive, half-dead body is a compelling figure through which Sheppard imagines the dying world, and also appears in the poet's picture of his own work. In his invocation of his muse at Canto V, he asks: "O holy Muse...must my Ideas when I'm dead be found/ halfe buried and halfe above the ground" (V.v.1). This image suggests something of the strange unintelligibility of the text itself: half visible or legible, and half obscure, its meaning "halfe buried."

In the case of Lucan's zombie-like soldier, resurrection is abject and appalling. But *The Faerie King* is a Christian epic, and Sheppard provides an intriguing description of post-apocalyptic resurrection. Olivia's religious instruction by a wise Hermit in Book III includes a description of the longed-for apocalypse, with a special focus on the way that human bodies will be resurrected. The Hermit explains that re-incorporation and resurrection is possible because of a single bone in every body that is "wondrously" resistant to decay:

a little bone
there is in each man's bark wch wondrously
(not capable of Putrifaction)
shall by an heavenly Dew find mollitie
& swell into a large Expansion,
by wondrous power collecting all its dust
this mighty miracle the sages trust. (III.ii.10)

This description presents a suitable figure for a Royalist mode of waiting: while the world decays and goes to Hell, one small part of it stays magically intact throughout it all, holding the promise of Restoration. Like the half-alive, half-dead body politic, this divided, fragmented and dispersed body nonetheless contains an inviolate piece of

wholeness within itself. This one surviving part is capable of gathering back to itself all that has been lost, in a miracle of resurrection and Restoration.⁹⁴ Tension exists between these two senses of things in Sheppard's response to the outcome of the civil war: a belief in the presence of an inviolate, interior potential for wholeness that can survive the apocalypse and look forward to full resurrection; and a disillusioned vision of a world irrecoverably fragmented and dismembered, longing for an anesthetic end to the pain of existence. No resolution is produced by the ending we have, with so many narrative threads left untied. The poem seems to postpone the ending it has longed for, to be infinitely deferred.

Balachandra Rajan's work on the aesthetics of "the unfinished" suggests a positive view of the potential of the unfinished form to gesture toward a final form that the reader will participate in creating, drawing on the numinous possibilities suggested by Keats' enigmatic "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "the unfinished is not typically an exhaustion of possibilities. It is like the urn a refraining from possibilities. It calls on the reader or viewer to become a participant in an act of completion from which the creator abstains ... an endeavour toward form" (159). Sheppard's poem suggests both of these conditions at once: on the one hand, the pathetic rhetorical performance of the half-dead soliders on the battlefield, who long only to be put out of their misery into a state of silence, exemplify "the exhaustion of possibilities" under the strain of historical contingency; on the other hand, the sheer creative energy of Sheppard's disjunctive images and disjunctive mix of rhetorical modes and styles suggests, if not "an act of completion", then at least an act of imaginative innovation. The reader is not so much invited in to participate in this process

as to stand by and be excoriated and shocked, but it is a curious and impressive performance nonetheless.

At the opening of III.2 Sheppard likens an image of God resting after the creation of the world to an epic poet just finished his work:

Like to some LAWREAT POET truly chose . . .
 having with Toile (while Knaves and Fooles oppose)
 finished his EPICK Piece, most richly drest
 hee sits him downe, & reads, praises his paines
 rejoycing much, that hee his end attaines.
 So (if small things, with great we may compare)
 sat the Almighty after all his toile. (III.ii.1-2)

This is clearly a fantasy with which Sheppard would want to identify, but it is hard to imagine this sense of triumph attendant on the ending we have to *The Faerie King*. For Milton, this image from Genesis of God the creator was to prove a profoundly enabling poetic vision. However, the kind of full completion imagined here in *The Faerie King* appears to be a task that requires literally divine powers, and conditions other than those that were available to Samuel Sheppard in Interregnum England.

⁶³ The title page reads: "The Faerie King/ Fashioning/ Love & Honour/ In an Heroicall/ Heliconian Dresse." Subsequent quotations will include Book, canto and stanza numbers for verse and page numbers for the Preface and Postscript.

⁶⁴ Substantial modern critical treatments are found in Klemp's introduction to the poem; Hyder E. Rollins, "Samuel Sheppard and his Praise of Poets" and Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing*. Paul Salzman considers the problematic status of Royalist epic, but does not include Sheppard in his "Royalist Epic and Romance" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Writing of the English Revolution*.

⁶⁵ For Spenser's influence in the seventeenth century, see John Watkins. Spenser's imitators are collected in William B. Hunter Jnr., ed., *The English Spenserians: The Poetry of Giles Fletcher, George Wither, Michael Drayton, Phineas Fletcher and Henry More*.

⁶⁶ On the role of faeries in Caroline poetry and court culture, see Joan Ozark Holmer; Diane Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden* especially Chapters 5 and 6; and Marjorie Swann; for a discussion of the complex socio-political significance of early modern faerylore see Wendy Wall.

⁶⁷ Purkiss discusses how the faery poetry of Drayton, Browne and Herrick participates in a cultural fascination with the category of the “miniature” (*Bottom of the Garden* 181-85), while Swann relates these tiny worlds of luxury to the seventeenth-century culture of “conspicuous consumption.”

⁶⁸ Epic was not the only means through which contemporaries attempted to translate history into poetry, but it does seem to have been the literary form most affected by the problem of being made incomplete by historical contingency. Romance offered a related literary framework for contemporary events (See Smith, *Literature and Revolution*). John Denham’s “perspective poem” “Cooper’s Hill,” written before the Civil War, while not unfinished, was revised twice to adjust the political references in the poem to match different persons and events. Originally published in 1642, the poem was republished in 1642, 1643, 1650 and 1668, with major revisions occurring in the editions of 1655 and 1668 (see Brendan O. Hehir, and see Bruce Boekel for a discussion of the politics of the poem.) This seems in one way like the opposite of Sheppard’s disjunctive and incomplete historical allegory: Denham’s figures not only match history but can be successfully reconfigured to account for historical change. I am grateful to Michael McKeon for suggesting the parallels between “Cooper’s Hill” and *The Faerie King*.

⁶⁹ Nigel Smith discusses the development of epic in the Civil War in his chapter 7, “Heroic Work” in *Literature and Revolution* (203-249).

⁷⁰ Gerald M. Maclean explores the problems associated with writing epic poetry about the English Civil War.

⁷¹ Corbet compensates for the chaotic aspect of the “face of things” by writing an account that offers only “one branch of the History of these times, which happily may be viewed in several Parcellls better than in one entire body,” and his sympathy with the Parliamentary forces that retained control of Gloucester enables his writing in many ways (2).

⁷² See Maclean, Chapter 4, and Salzman (216-218).

⁷³ See David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* (231-2).

⁷⁴ On *Paradise Lost* as “a commentary on the Civil War and its aftermath,” see Nigel Smith, “*Paradise Lost* from Civil War to Restoration” (254).

⁷⁵ Nigel Smith argues that the *Pharsalia* replaced the *Aeneid* in the period of the Civil War as the dominant model of epic (*Literature and Revolution* 204). Thomas May’s popular translation made the poem available in printed form in English for the first time in 1627.

⁷⁶ Although Klemp calls the poem “an ambiguous portrait of King Charles I” and suggests that “it is difficult to label the poem as pro- or anti-Royalist because the epic presents each side’s fault” (iv, xviii).

⁷⁷ Joad Raymond argues that this trope could “operate either as a means of restraining criticism by making it anodyne, or as a platform for expressing it” (55).

⁷⁸ See Roy Strong (45-7) and Ann Baynes Coiro (17-18).

⁷⁹ Raymond describes popular representations of Charles I after his death as royal martyr, saint and Christ figure (65).

⁸⁰ This is the understanding of one modern commentator on the Civil War, who describes the final battle at Naseby as a Royalist “suicide” (Ronald Hutton 178).

⁸¹ See Roland Wymer on the representation of the crucified Christ as the self-wounding pelican (5). On representations of Charles as the Christ-like pelican, see Alex Garganigo (515).

⁸² Nigel Smith has argued that “The transpositions and inversions of genre and subject matter so typical of this period, and which are usually associated with Parliamentarians ... are characteristic of Royalists too, although the results are different,” (*Literature and Revolution* 207).

⁸³ See Coiro, especially Part Two, “The Epigram Book Tradition” (47-113).

⁸⁴ Joseph Frank provides a detailed account of Sheppard’s journalistic career in *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper 1620-1660*; for Sheppard’s work on *The Parliament-Kite*, see 144-45.

⁸⁵ References to *The Parliament-Kite* will be cited parenthetically in the text from here on as *P-K* followed by issue and page number. Pages are numbered continuously from issue to issue. All issues appeared in 1648.

⁸⁶ Sheppard brings an extraordinary imaginative variety to these gout-based insults: commonly referred to as both “Black Tom” and “gowty Tom,” Fairfax is also known as “jezebel Fairfax, that that reveren’d diseased Piece of Apocrypha”; “his gowty Excellence” (*P-K* 5: 23); “his Gowtship” (*P-K* 6: 29) and (my personal favorite) “King gouty-toes” (*P-K* 8: 43).

⁸⁷ On Royalist satire of the Cromwellian body politic, see Laura Lunger Knoppers.

⁸⁸ Cowley uses a similar image in *The Civill Warre*: “Ready as was the Field to drinke their blood” (line 242).

⁸⁹ For a further discussion and examples of the dismembered, decapitated, or improperly organized body politic see Garganigo (514-24).

⁹⁰ Katherine Rowe writes that “For early modern writers ... the location of agency in relation to the body is the chief intellectual tenor of representations of the hand ... As a material sign, the hand is defined by its functional properties: its ability to gesture, touch, grip and demonstrate” (285).

⁹¹ For a discussion of *England’s Mad Petition* and representations of civil war as suicidal madness, see Jonathan Sawday, “Mysteriously Divided” (127).

⁹² On the circulation of the *Pharsalia* and its associations between civil war and suicide, see Smith, *Literature and Revolution* (206) and Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* (25).

⁹³ For the significance of the *Pharsalia* in the development of English Republicanism and Lucan as “the central poet of the republican imagination,” see Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* (24) and Chapter 1; see also Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, (204). Sheppard’s epigram “*On the probable continuance of these Civill Warrs, the Scot, and Irish not reduced*” draws a direct parallel between Lucan’s epic and the Civil War, as the battleground of “Pharsalia’s fields” in the poem is glossed simply as “Naseby” (*Epigrams*, Book 3, #43).

⁹⁴ The Hermit’s catalogue of all those who will be resurrected perhaps reflects Sheppard’s own concerns about who will benefit from the restoration of Stuart monarchy: not only great and noble figures, but “private persons who did beare/ a love to virtue” too (III.ii.12).

Chapter Four

The Fate of Metaphor in Marvell's "Upon Appleton House"

The opening stanzas of "Upon Appleton House" first propose the place as a model of order and proportion, and suggest an analogy between the carefully structured dimensions of the building and the "short and admirable Lines" of these exquisitely framed stanzas, each one like a little room in a larger piece of architecture (42). Marvell praises the building's orderly dimensions in terms that suggest a perfect resolution of art and nature: "all things are composed here/ Like Nature, orderly and near" (25-6). But as the poem proceeds in its weirdly wandering way, these neat little stanzas become home to images of wild disproportion, catachresis and poetic excess that reflect the problematic status of figurative language in relation to the historical time and place it describes. "Upon Appleton House" is filled with figures of dislocation and displacement, and populated with images of a world literally turned upside down, suggesting both a sense of history as terribly out of joint and the poet's uneasy reflection on how to represent this history. The house at first appears to offer a sense of order and retreat – a tortoise shell, discrete and protective – but it is not immune from the disordering influence of history going on outside. The immediate occasion for the poem is the uncomfortable situation of Lord Fairfax's retirement from his role in the new government, and Marvell's task is to present positive images of retreat in honour of his patron.⁹⁵ But Fairfax is a strangely marginalized figure in the poem, and Marvell seems more concerned with the present situation of Fairfax's daughter Maria, who is about to be forced out of the protective space of the estate and into the world of marriage and womanhood.

In the previous chapter, I explored the distortions of figurative language and epic form in Samuel Sheppard's *Faerie King*, a poem that takes the English Civil War as an important part of its subject. Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" was written at a time roughly contemporaneous with Sheppard, toward the middle of the years when Sheppard was writing and revising his epic. By 1651 the Civil War had been won, Charles had been executed, and Cromwell had taken control of the government. It was an uneasy moment, as the English prepared to invade Scotland and radical Leveller insurgency brewed close to the Fairfax estate.⁹⁶ Fairfax himself had recently resigned as leader of the Parliamentary army, citing his objection to aggression against Scotland as fellow Protestants, and had also refused to participate in the trial that led to Charles's execution. Marvell's use of reflexive figures and concern with the translations of metaphor in "Upon Appleton House" engage aspects of his historical moment in complex ways, drawing on the upheavals of the world turned upside down to create figures of strange distortion and disjunction. Like Donne, Marvell takes as one of his principal subjects the representation of a young girl on the brink of womanhood, and as in the *Anniversaries* some of the most significant and troubled reflections on the work of figurative language and the processes of history pertain to her – in this case Maria, Marvell's pupil and the daughter of his patron, Lord Fairfax. Sarah Monette notes the "pervasive agon" of "poetic representation" (155) in the poem and its relationship to the problems that attend the experience and representation of history: "Marvell builds this poem in order to ask questions about how history can be represented and, ultimately, how it can be endured" (169).

Usually categorized somewhat uncomfortably as a country house poem created in tribute to the poet's patron and owner of the house, "Upon Appleton House" appears to offer a rhetoric of praise in accordance with this genre. Marvell praises the house, so this reading goes, and by extension the dynastic "house" of Fairfax. The poem chronicles important chapters in the genealogies of both the actual house and the family that owns it, including the construction of the current house from the stones of a former nunnery, Nun Appleton; the marriage of the current Lord Fairfax's great-great-grandparents, Isabel Thwaites and William Fairfax; and the impending marriage of his daughter, Maria. Critics have noted the way that Marvell shapes a narrative of the Fairfax family history as a fulfillment of Protestant providential destiny (Griffin, Cousins) and A. D. Cousins points out that by making Fairfax and his estate a model of Protestant virtue Marvell reworks conventional values of the country house poem. Marvell's lengthy digressions and generic mixing make this poem exceed the boundaries of the genre in any case, but this is another way in which he revises the form. The country house poem, by this time an identifiably Royalist form, traditionally praises the abundance of the estate and the copious generosity of the owner, but Marvell celebrates moderation instead of hospitality, making Fairfax "an embodiment of Protestant heroic virtue," a soldier-gardener, not a dinner party host; "Upon Appleton House," Cousins argues, "is at once an appropriation and, theologically as well as politically a comprehensive rewriting of the country house poem" (54).⁹⁷

My own reading of the poem appreciates its renovation of the genre not only in terms of the political and theological values it celebrates, but also in terms of the discordant notes the poem sounds within that very rhetoric of praise. Heather Dubrow's

reading of the country house genre suggests some of the ways in which poems in this genre typically demonstrate some form of cracks or “ruptures and evasions” (“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” 75) which reveal the discontinuities in its ideological work; the critique of patriarchal values, historical progress and the process of figuration that I find in the poem may be taken as an example of this phenomenon, although it takes more radical form than the other examples cited by Dubrow. Marvell is famous as a poet of inscrutable tone, equivocation and equipoise who manages to balance apparently opposing viewpoints, or to make space for critical points of view within the overall framework he constructs. Blair Worden, writing on Marvell’s political inscrutability, notes that even Marvell’s contemporaries observed what they called his “amphibious” aspect, described by Worden as “an indefinable unstable quality” (83).⁹⁸ The “Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland” is a well-known case in point: this poem has invited competing interpretations because of the potential sympathy it may evoke for the executed King, a figure of “helpless right” (62) and integrity who bows down his head on “the tragic scaffold,” (55) in the midst of a poem in praise of the victorious Cromwell, the King’s nemesis. It is a troubling poem for critics who seek to recuperate Marvell as either Republican or Royalist in his sympathies.

Marvell’s remarkable skill is such that attending to one point of view does not negate the other, primary perspective, but does open it to complication and critique. This is the argument that I will make about Marvell’s representation of the “progress” or “destiny” or “fate” of patriarchal and Protestant history which, like the action of metaphor itself, destroys in order to renew. History is a compulsive force that cannot be resisted, and according to one version of the providential view of the poem it will remake

the world in God's image, as Fairfax might if he chooses to lead England back from chaos to its status as an edenic "happy isle" (321); but especially for the women metaphorically sacrificed in order to make such renovation possible, history is also, as Frederic Jameson would say, "what hurts" (102). In his telling of the Fairfax story Marvell invests it with an ambivalence that destabilizes a reading of the poem as a panegyric to the Fairfax dynasty. My reading extends recent interpretations that have attended to the way the poem "subverts" its stated project of praise, suggesting strong underlying reservations about structures of patriarchal authority, as Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker argue.⁹⁹

The poem works over several interrelated problems of translation: the displacements that occur as part of history as buildings are torn down and reconstructed, and women moved about by forces beyond their control, like pieces of property; the translation of history into poetry; and the translations involved in the construction of figurative language itself. Both women and property are moved about in a process described in the poem as "translation," suggesting an equivalence between the poetic process of metaphor and the historical "fate" of women. Maria will not only be translated into the new form of bride in order to serve destiny and dynasty when she marries, but is in the poem itself translated by the process of metaphor: what is the relationship between these two forms of cancellation and remaking? Marvell's representation of the "fate" of the Fairfax women is linked to the poem's reflection on its own poetics, and the connections it suggests between artistic production and human reproduction.

The poem negotiates tensions between two images of production and reproduction: on the one hand, a figurative framework of difference and displacement

defined by metaphor taken to the limits of “abuse” in catachresis, associated with a violent heterosexuality and the “progress” of history; on the other, a poetics of echoing, sameness, reflection and repetition, associated with a suspended moment of narcissistic autoeroticism. Marvell’s fascination with autoeroticism is familiar from poems such as “The Garden,” which celebrates Adam’s happy state before the introduction of Eve and sexual difference. Typically, this autoeroticism is situated within the natural world (in “Upon Appleton House,” the forest) and uses images of vegetable growth as a trope for poetic production imagined not as heterosexual reproduction but productive, solitary narcissism. The interconnected themes of narcissism, auto-eroticism, homoeroticism and the eroticized natural world in Marvell’s poetry have been explored by critics including Paul Hammond, and Hirst and Zwicker, who also identify an impulse to subvert the “destiny” of heterosexual reproduction and the continuation of patriarchal descent.¹⁰⁰ While the poem may offer a critique of the action of metaphor and question how it may be applied to Maria, to the creatures in the meadow, and to history itself, it does not abjure it (nor does it ultimately recommend a retreat from painful history into an idealized, timeless aesthetic realm, although it shows how this might be very desirable); rather, the poem exults in the strange possibilities of figurative language even as it invites us to reflect on some of the problems inherent in the process of figuration.

1. The progress of this house’s fate

The onward progress of history in “Upon Appleton House” exerts a kind of inevitable pressure, frequently called “fate,” represented as a force that causes traumatic displacements in the service of dynastic, heterosexual genealogy. We meet “fate” first in

its ineluctable association with “progress” in the poet’s announcement of his narrative intention, which is to “relate/ The progress of this house’s fate” (83-84) in a story that weaves together the double sense of “house” as dwelling and dynasty. The story as it is outlined in stanzas 12 to 35 tells how the original building, a nunnery, was destroyed in the widespread dissolution of church property that accompanied the English Reformation. The bricks and mortar have been reappropriated to make a new building, which is now Appleton House. The original building retains a ghostly presence beside its newer incarnation, a “neighbour-ruin” that points to the origins of the present “dwelling”:

A nunnery first gave it birth
 (For virgin buildings oft brought forth)
 And all that neighbour-ruin shows
 The quarries whence this dwelling rose. (85-8)

The “neighbour-ruin” of the old nunnery bears witness to the dramatic physical displacements of history. The image of a “virgin building” fits appropriately with the structure’s original status as a nunnery, home to virginal and virgin-worshipping nuns. The metaphor of virgin birth for the construction of Nun Appleton from the original structure both makes the old building into a version of the Virgin Mary and gives a sacred aura (however tongue-in-cheek) to the new. But the building has not been translated whole, and there is something uncanny about the continued presence of the old nunnery, a reminder that the birth of the new involved the ruin of the old.¹⁰¹

Critics long assumed that the “dwelling” described here and in the rest of the poem was the large building commissioned by Fairfax and designed by John Webb, but as Lee Erickson first observed, the Fairfaxes at the time were living in a smaller, older house that was in fact built from the materials of the nunnery, next to its ruined church (163-65). Marvell’s narrative of the house’s “fate” is in fact highly charged, as Patsy

Griffin has argued, because of the commonly held view that “the impropriation of church lands was sacrilege” and the belief that that providence would curse the new owners “especially if they built on the actual site of former monasteries” (62). Marvell works hard, Griffin suggests, to reshape the story of the property in order to show “the Fairfax possession as providential” (61), and this accounts for the shaping of the Fairfax who eventually married Isabel Thwaites as an instrument of Protestant reform. Fairfax’s defeat of the nuns and appropriation of the cloister is made into a virtual allegory of the Reformation. But in this stanza that shows us the “quarries” and the “ruin” that lie beneath, or rather alongside, the family dwelling, the poem also shows the violence of this process of reformation and suggests the losses that might attend it, not least the idea of the abbey as a place of retreat and aesthetic production.¹⁰²

The dissolution and reconstruction of Nun Appleton, while it immediately represents the dissolution of the monasteries, also echoes the widespread appropriation of Royalist property in the wake of the Civil War. Fairfax himself was awarded sequestered Royalist property when he retired, including part of estates belonging to George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. Fairfax held this property in trust and passed it back to Buckingham on the occasion of his marriage to Fairfax’s daughter Maria in 1657, several years after the probable composition of “Upon Appleton House” (Patton 84). Although the story of Buckingham’s sequestered property is not explicitly related in the poem, it haunts the text, both echoed by the “fate” of the nunnery and foreshadowed in the poem’s meditation on Maria’s impending marriage. It was not a happy marriage, and after the Duke’s death Maria was forced to sell Nun Appleton itself to pay debts accumulated by her dissolute husband.

Raymond Williams notes the several layers of “unbearable irony” in the representation of Maria’s anticipated loss of innocence and marriage to “the appalling” Buckingham; this was an alliance of complex political significance and compromise in the service of property and title, he points out: “a marriage between Villiers the Royalist and the daughter of the leading Parliamentary General” (57). The property alliance between Maria and Buckingham seems particularly laden with disturbing irony when read against the poem’s implied reservations about the legitimacy of genealogies of property and dynasty, especially the suggested symmetry between the “fate” of women and property, passed about and exchanged between powerful factions in the service of dynastic lineage. Given the unhappy outcome for Maria, Marvell’s doubts seem prescient, and her historical role as a sacrifice in the service of property interest, ideologically figured as “universal good,” is hard to bear. Maria’s marriage to Buckingham was probably not even planned at the time of the poem’s composition, and yet the “unbearable irony” that Williams notes, afforded by history, makes it very difficult to leave aside the knowledge of Maria’s eventual fate as we read. Suffering was in the end Maria’s lot, but it is not entirely a back-projection to find that experience foreshadowed in Marvell’s representation of her as a ritualistically sacrificed virginal “sacred bud” whose fate is to serve her parent’s interests – “their destiny [and] their choice” (741-44).

The next time “fate” makes an entrance, it brings with it the same issues of the genealogy of property. This time, however, heiress Isabel Thwaites is destined to meet the “fate” of the re-figured building and ensure the “progress” of the “house” of Fairfax. “Fate” visits Nun Appleton, its subversive nuns, and Isabel in the figure of

William Fairfax (the current Lord's great-great-grandfather), Isabel's betrothed, who takes her "weeping" by force away to become Fairfax wife and mother. As a rich heiress, Isabel is a valuable commodity. Described as "Fair beyond measure" in a tired phrase of praise, she is also "an heir/ That might deformity make fair" (91-92). The prioress' attempts to "suck her in" to join the community of nuns are represented as proceeding from opportunist motives: she wants Isabel's fortune to stay with, and benefit, the nunnery. The efforts of the nuns to keep Isabel within the cloister, protected from her commodification in the economy of marriage, are imagined as a gesture in brazen opposition to "fate," aligned here directly with the progress of genealogy: "Yet, against fate, his spouse they kept,/ And the great race would intercept" (247-8). The tears shed by Isabel as she is taken away by force are a crucial detail in this narrative of rescue that also looks a lot like rape. Isabel does not speak in words, but her tears are expressive of suffering; they speak to an idea of tears as the pure language of feeling, unobscured by the ambiguity of language, and they are there for us to see in the midst of all the hurly-burly of Fairfax scaling the walls, fighting the nuns and claiming his "right." She clearly does not go happily to her destined fate. How are we to manage the sympathy evoked by Isabel's tears alongside the argument that translates rape and ruin into rescue and celebrates the great role she has to play in the fulfillment of Protestant destiny?

Marvell presents an image of dynastic lineage that achieves material power through the appropriation of the property of others and a corresponding exchange of women. The connection of Maria's marriage with property is implied but not made explicit in the poem, although it was clear in the play of historical events outside the text. In the case of Isabel Thwaites, the heiress who brought a fortune to the Fairfax family,

Marvell makes the relation clearer. Marvell engages in a degree of creative license in his telling of the Fairfax story: while it seems in the poem that the dissolution of Nun Appleton happened simultaneously with the marriage of Isabel Thwaites, in fact these events probably took place at least twenty years apart (Patton 829). By pushing the two events together, Marvell emphasises the figural continuity between them; the nunnery is demolished as the woman is “rescued.” To Brian Patton, the “teleological thrust of the poet’s own narrative is obvious,” and is obviously thrust in the direction of praise (829). However, Marvell’s reinscription of the Fairfax story is also invested with its own ironic critique. The old nunnery is visible as a “ruin” and Isabel’s tears inscribe her suffering in linked scenes of displacement and pathos.

2. Maria’s metaphorical fate

It is in the representation of Maria’s “fate” that we see the association of historical progress, heterosexual genealogy, and disruption or displacement presented most suggestively. Maria’s transition into the marriage economy is made parallel with Isabel’s experience: the “fate” the nuns attempted to subvert in the case of her unhappy predecessor is destined to work through her and upon her. She will remain a virgin body “Till fate her worthily translates,/ And find a Fairfax for our Thwaites” (747-8). The verb “translates” here carries complex implications, and suggests a relationship between metaphoric “translation” and the displacements associated with heterosexual marriage and historical “progress.”

From the Latin compound “trans” (across) and “latus” (from the verb *fero*, to carry) the word “translate” suggests movement and displacement in both time and space.

As a poetic figure, *translatio* is traditionally treated as synonymous with metaphor. Renaissance treatises on poetic language build on this sense of displacement, as in George Puttenham's description of "Metaphora, or the Figure of Transport" in his influential treatise *The Arte of English Poesie*: the figure involves, he writes, "a kind of wresting of a single word from his own right signification, to another not so naturall, but yet of some affinitie or conveniencie with it" (190). Puttenham's use of the word "wresting" in his evocative description highlights the element of force that underlies the figure. More recently, Patricia Parker's work draws attention to the sense of "violence or violation" inherent in the process of metaphor, a "sense of a transfer which is not quite proper, or a substitution which is also a displacement" (*Literary Fat Ladies* 36).

Maria's "translation" carries with it the narrative of coerced displacement that Patricia Parker sees entailed in the figure. Parker's reading of metaphor as a condensed narrative of displacement highlights the figure's temporal dimension, suggesting a particular formulation of teleology and temporal progression. Maria's resemblance to Isabel evokes the force of fate and dynastic "destiny," as Maria is translated to Thwaites and in this translation has her fate foretold and prearranged. Fate, we are told, will "find a Fairfax for our Thwaites," positioning Maria as another Isabel in the place of Thwaites, the woman who will provide a Fairfax heir and the continuance of the line. This translation takes away Maria's name altogether, casting her simply as "Thwaites": in this chiasmic cross of names and places another man, Mary's suitor, takes her name and place in their arranged marriage.¹⁰³ The suggestion of violation that attaches to Maria's metaphoric translation into Thwaites is intensified by the image of sublimated sexual violence in Marvell's representation of marriage, a ritual where "the priest will cut the

sacred bud” (742). This image of heterosexual sex as an act that violates “the sacred bud” of youthful, feminine wholeness is also implicated in Marvell’s other poems that celebrate the enchanting beauty of young virgin girls – the Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn,” the child in “Young Love,” and “Pictures of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers.” What is distinctly disturbing about this image in the case of Maria is its association with the process of poetic figuration, where the girl’s violating “translation” into marriage is related to the poet’s “translation” of her into metaphor – in a poem that professes to serve the very dynastic interests that employ the priest to “cut the sacred bud.” If metaphoric translation is cast as sexual violence that thrusts Maria into the place of Thwaites, then the poet himself is somehow implicated in the process, an agent of those displacing forces of fate. The “great prelate of the grove” (592) the poet thought himself to be in the forest, serving a cult of green solitude, seems to merge with the violating druidic priest. The poet’s wish in the case of all these little girls seems to be that they would never grow up and become subject to the troubles of mature heterosexuality. But the double-sense of “translation” in the case of Maria suggests that the poet’s representation of the girl performs its own kind of displaced, sexualized, poetic possession.

3. Maria in the garden

To elaborate the significance of this metaphoric movement from Maria to Isabel, girl to wife, we must return to the moment it disrupts – Maria’s state of virgin being in the garden. The descriptions of Maria in the garden are characterized by images of likeness and analogy, stasis and reflection, that offer a contrast both with the

displacement of her translation into marriage and with forms of metaphor in other parts of the poem. Although Maria has been associated with a mode of naturalized, organic, historical progress,¹⁰⁴ her action upon her surroundings is just as well characterized in terms of temporal suspension, a radical slowing-down of time that approaches stasis and is associated with silence: in response to her,

The jellying stream compacts below,
If it might fix her shadow so;
The stupid fishes hang, as plain
As flies in crystal overta'en; (665-68)

In the process of reflecting her, the moving “stream” slows to the point of stillness, as the water goes from “jelly” to “crystal.” Maria’s effect on the world is to stop time, to arrest history. She has been read as a figure of *renovatio*, a vehicle for the regeneration of the English state through her role in ensuring the continuance of the Fairfax line in service of the “Universal good” (Cousins esp. 54, 74-79) but here the poet celebrates her not as the vehicle through which history will work, but a force of temporal arrest which resists the “Progress” of history. This moment of suspension parallels the attempt made by the nuns to keep Isabel Thwaites away from marriage, their attempt to “intercept” the reproduction of the Fairfax dynasty and the temporal movement of Fate. Through Maria, time comes to a stop, at least for the moment, creating a momentary and provisional refuge from her reproductive “destiny.”

Marvell represents Maria as a transcendent, hyperbolically imagined model of purity *non pareil* that nature can only emulate: “She yet more pure, sweet, straight, and fair,/ Than gardens, woods, meads, rivers are” (695-6). Nature finds itself a reflective surface to her, endlessly repeating displays of the qualities she herself has bestowed: “Therefore what first she on them spent,/ They gratefully again present” (697-8). She and

her pure example are associated with lines of forcefully stressed catalogs that push poetic meter, emphasizing repetition and similitude through the equivalence of each paired catalog's various elements, as at stanza 94:

Meantime, ye fields, springs, bushes, flowers,
Where yet she spends her studious hours,
(Till fate her worthily translates,
And find a Fairfax for our Thwaites),
Employ the means you have by her,
And in your kind yourselves prefer;
That, as all virgins she precedes,
So you all woods, streams, gardens, meads. (745-52)

Here, time has not only been slowed down dramatically by Maria's powerful presence as with the "jellying stream" (665) but has in one sense been turned around: she becomes a divine figure and a perfect type who "precedes" all virgins. Marvell makes available two meanings of "precedes" as both "to come before in time" and "to surpass, excel."¹⁰⁵

This power of temporal displacement is one part of what she has to teach the various elements of nature. Central to her instructive example seems to be the lesson of repetition or likeness implied in the phrase "in your kind yourselves prefer." Maria here stands for a productive autoerotic sensibility that recalls the poet's rhapsody of masochistic, creative pleasure in the earlier forest scene. But how can this be deduced from her example? The poet is surely celebrating that quality he finds so appealing about the vegetable world: its ability to reproduce itself with itself, without the mechanics of heterosexual difference.¹⁰⁶

To deduce this action from Maria's example, the poet must make her a figure of exaggerated narcissism, a contained figure that is paradoxically also split into an autoerotic self-attraction that prefers its own kind: in the case of the *non pareil*, the one without equal, this can mean only herself.¹⁰⁷ Marvell constructs the virgin Maria as a figure of self-sameness, defined by both her unlikeness to any earthly object and her pure

reflection in nature yet also divided by a difference that is a narcissistic reflection. In a symmetrical analogue to this construction, the catalog of “ye fields, springs, bushes, flowers” echoes “all woods, streams, gardens, meads.” Repeating, anticipating, approaching equivalence with and then slipping away from each other, these paired catalogs of terms frame and bracket the stanza into an enclosed unit that echoes Maria’s yet-enclosed, hymenally intact, virgin body. Within these bracketing catalogs, the lines that foretell the “translation” of Maria to Thwaites are themselves carefully bracketed off, made separate from the rest of the stanza. The “translation” anticipated in these lines is thus distinguished from the lines that praise her current state of untranslated virginity.

If metaphor is a figure of fateful difference, division and displacement, then the poetics of Maria’s being in the garden offers an alternative poetic style that is not the translation of metaphor, but something of a different order, achieved through effects of echo, repetition, doubling, reflection and slippery equivalence. This poetics can only be achieved, it seems, in an idealised, timeless world of nature where reflection works to jelly, silence, and still the world.

4. The poet in the forest

The space of the forest appears to share some continuity with the world of Maria’s garden, a “sanctuary” (482) the poet enters in the long middle section from stanza 61 to 78 that establishes the conditions of temporal suspension and alternative figurative possibilities that distinguish the representation of Maria. The forest sequence is filled with images of sensuous autoeroticism troped as pleasurable, isolated aesthetic production. Although the poet singles out the “Sad pair” of stock-doves for special praise

among the forest's creatures, their melancholy state is significant in the context of generalized misgivings about the reality of heterosexual coupling. He is more engaged by the figure of the single nightingale who sings "the trials of her voice," (stanza 65) an image of the lonely lyric poet whose mythic history of sexual violation compounds this sense of misgiving. In the stanza of initial movement into the forest, the poet praises the environment in terms that evoke the utopia of Noah's Ark but emphasise the lack of coupling inherent to this place, "where all creatures might have shares,/ Although in armies, not in pairs" (488).

The poet's encounter with the elements of the forest celebrates the productive potential of autoerotic pleasure, mapped onto the erotics of intimate natural encounter, as "ivy, with familiar trails,/ Me licks, and clasps, and curls, and haies ... Then languishing with ease, I toss/ On pallets swoll'n of velvet moss" (589-90, 593-94). The poet implores the forest to "bind" him to itself in order to continue forever in his state of ecstatic identification with the natural environment, and his "bondage" culminates in the watery place of the flooded meadow. This place seems to be co-extensive with the forest, as his masochistic trail of bondage leads in a "thread" through the woods to this destination: "But where the floods did lately drown,/ There at the evening stake me down" (623-4). Here, we find a site of exquisite figural confusion that offers the poem's most utopian image of aesthetic production in its performance of an idyllic retreat into autoeroticism.

Previously, the meadow was a place of figural chaos and disjunction (stanzas 59-60). Re-approached through the "labyrinth" of the forest, the flooded meadow appears to have been redeemed from this state. Here, now, figurative play is rendered "harmless," as metaphor presents less of a disjunctive displacement than a gentle folding of one thing

into another, the river folded into a “little Nile,” a mirror, an embodiment of self-reflexivity that can literally turn to lick its own back:

See in what wanton harmless folds
It everywhere the meadow holds;
And its yet muddy back doth lick,
Till as a crystal mirror slick,
Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt
If they be in it or without.
And for his shade which therein shines,
Narcissus-like, the sun too pines. (633-640)

Marvell imagines here a figurative framework of pure sameness or convergence in which the distance between the object and its image is rendered obscure in the endless oscillation of meaning implied in the playful, dreamy world of the watery meadow. The idea of the “fold” reconfigures the structure of metaphor: rather than a temporal process of displacement in which one thing is “wrested” into the place of another, the mirror-like “fold” imagines perfect continuity between things and their images. The water’s magical surface blurs the distinction between things and their reflections, suggesting a space of suspension where this distinction might be permanently deferred, suspended like the “sliding foot” the poet rests as he “hang[s]” in a tree over the water, playing at fishing as a figure for writing: “Or to suspend my sliding foot/ On the osier’s undermined root,/ And in its branches tough to hang,/ While at my lines the fishes twang!” (645-648).¹⁰⁸

The reliance on puns in this stanza (foot, lines) suggests a potential for figurative play with language that is an alternative to the displacement of metaphor: in the pun, two things exist at once in the one word without the triumphant substitution of one image for another, as two meanings are folded into the same word. In this way, the poetry of the pun is emblematic of the narcissistic reflection that Maria suggests to the poet. Rosalie Colie comments on the oscillation between the literal and metaphoric meanings generated

by Marvell's puns, where "metaphorical meanings are collapsed back into their literal origin" (94). The pun is the moment in which a figure can be made somehow without translation, effecting a change of meaning without a change of name: the "literal origin" is not displaced or erased, does not stand evacuated like a "neighbor-ruin" under the metaphorical meaning, but is "preserved," in a way like the nun's candied fruit.

The poet's poetically productive *otium* is not wholly recommended or embraced – he is, after all, embarrassed to be seen by Maria playing with his "idle utensils" of art (650): "'Twere shame that such judicious eyes/ Should with such toys a man surprise" (653-4).¹⁰⁹ The image of Narcissus sounds a warning: what would it mean for the sun itself, "Narcissus-like," to become truly like Narcissus, to pine away out of existence, trapped in the deceptive, reflective depths of the water? Narcissism is ultimately an image of oblivion, just as the poetry of the pun taken to its fullest extent would produce only endless, meaningless repetition or sameness – the fate of Echo, who pursues Narcissus, and is such a powerful figure in other Marvell poems.¹¹⁰ Time itself would stop – but temporal suspension and the arrest of history seems to be in part what the poet longs for, to hold still Maria's moment of perfect virginity. Annihilation itself is frequently troped in Marvell's poetry as a somehow desirable culmination of identity between an image and its reflection, the annihilation of repetition as the poet imagines "annihilating all that's made/ to a green thought in a green shade," ("The Garden" 47-48) where "shade" means not only the enabling situation of pastoral poetry, the restful shade of a tree, but also "image," like a shadow that exactly matches the contours of the original (the reflection that exactly mirrors what it reflects).

There are striking parallels between these well-known lines from “The Garden” and stanza 80-81 of “Upon Appleton House.” The “crystal mirror slick,/ Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt/ If they be in it or without” (636-9) reflects “The mind, that ocean where each kind/ Does straight its own resemblance find” in “The Garden” (43-44). In “The Garden,” “Here at the fountain’s sliding foot,/Or at some fruit-tree’s mossy root” (49-50) repeats exact words and images from the lines “Or to suspend my sliding foot/ On th’osier’s undermined root” (“Upon Appleton House,” 644-45). Marvell is surely aware of the irony of such precise parallels between sets of lines that celebrate the joy of reflection. The spectre of the sun annihilating history by collapsing into its own image, Narcissus-like, is perhaps imagined in the exhilarating annihilation of “The Garden,” as the mind’s ability to generate endless mirroring “worlds, and...seas” of reflection is a force of imaginative annihilation (46). It is an image of annihilation anticipated, but not entirely performed, by the poetry that invokes it, which after all does not destroy itself but in the case of “Upon Appleton House” generates many hundreds of lines. Here on the riverbank Marvell celebrates the productive potential of the model of repetition and echo, positioned in tension with its seeming opposite, the disjunction of metaphor as catachresis.

5. Bloody Thestylis and the metaphoric abyss

The figure of catachresis embodies the theme of disjunctive displacement in “Upon Appleton House,” and formally echoes the story of the house that has achieved its current form through the displacement of another, and a genealogical line that has propagated itself through the forced appropriation of women’s bodies. Defined as the

figure of “abuse,” catachresis takes the displacement inherent in any metaphor to the limit of “proper” signification. The distance between sign and signified is stretched to the point of dislocation, and the figure derives its energy from the shock involved in the disjunction of elements within the figure. Moreover, as I suggest in my introduction and previous chapters, the figure draws attention to the conventions and limits of poetic decorum, raising the question of just what it is that makes one thing close enough or too far away to be a proper point of comparison.

The meadow is the site most associated with disjunctive metaphors, an “abyss” of figurative contortion. With the introduction of “bloody Thestylis,” in the meadow section, the figurative frame of the poem falls into startling confusion. As a woman speaking outside her proper place (whose proper place is already highly ambiguous), she herself is a kind of catachresis. Heather Dubrow also identifies her with the figure of hyperbaton, representative of disorder and displacement on a syntactic level (“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?” 74). Thestylis is potentially part of the actual world of the estate and at the same time seems emblematic of a purely imaginative world, a character in a pastoral poem (Thestylis is a figure from Virgil’s second Eclogue). Thestylis is empowered to challenge the poet, comment on his representations, and protest the terms in which she has been figured. Sarah Monette’s study of “Speaking and Silent Women in ‘Upon Appleton House’” discusses the significance of Thestylis’ subversive interruption and the way she appears to force the poem into reflexivity: she “forces the poem backward into a space where fiction cannot pretend not to know that it is fiction” (164). While she is in some ways comic, her words nonetheless have a disturbing power, invoking as she does a

rain of verbal confusion, blood and exultant sensual excess in response to the poet's controlled (and controlling) figurative action.

Elsewhere, the poet suggests an ideal alternative to the violence of historical progress in the suspended moment of virginity or autoerotic "vegetable love" (to import a line from another Marvell poem about time and its discontents), associated with a utopic present or "now" of utterance against futurity. How, then, are we to conceive the moment of Thestylis' speech in relationship to this ideal? Thestylis is a woman worker unaccountable in the terms that characterize the Fairfax women (virgin/procreating wife), associated with a pastoral world that in Marvell's odd imagination turns around to speak back. She is associated with a significant "turn" of fate and turn between literal and metaphorical levels of signification, as her entrance is directly preceded by the stanza that describes the mower's accidental slaughter of the rail:

With Whistling Scythe, and elbow strong,
These massacre the grass along:
While one, unknowing, carves the rail,
Whose yet unfeathered quills her fail.
The edge all bloody from its breast
He draws, and does his stroke detest,
Fearing the flesh untimely mowed
To him a fate as black forebode. (395-400)

As Isabel MacCaffrey notes, with the rail's death this stanza brings to life the "dead metaphor" used to describe the mower's actions, to "massacre the Grass." In this "abrupt literalizing" of the word "massacre," "suddenly the blood is real, not metaphorical" (233). From dead metaphor to real death, back to metaphor and omen: the bird's death is re-metaphorized in the word "mowed," creating a chiasmus of massacre – grass – flesh – mowed, drawing on the Biblical maxim "all flesh is grass" and implying that all mowing can be imagined as death, all death imagined as mowing in a disorienting oscillation of

the literal and the figurative. What began as the literalizing of metaphor turns around again as the literal becomes figurative and the dead bird is immediately turned into an omen,

This is not a world like the one imagined in “The Mower to the Glowworms,” where portents are carefully disavowed and excluded – the glow worms “portend/ No war, no prince’s funeral,/ Shining unto no higher end/ Than to presage the grass’s fall” (5-8). To the mower of “Upon Appleton House,” the rail’s death is a dark portent, an omen of his own “fate” (death) by analogy. It is more like the landscape of “Damon the Mower,” where every element is significant of something else “like” it: “Sharp like his scythe his sorrow was,/ And withered like his hopes the grass” (3-4). In the Mower poems, the female figure of Juliana participates in this process of likening or analogy, as her devastating effect on the Mower is imagined in terms of his own cutting scythe: she “What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me” in the refrain of *The Mower’s Song*.

Thestylis, on the other hand, is not the mower’s lover or beloved, and initially refuses such a landscape of analogy:

But bloody Thestylis, that waits
To bring the mowing camp their cates,
Greedy as kites, has trussed it up,
And forthwith means on it to sup:
When on another quick she lights,
And cries, “He called us Israelites;
But now, to make his saying true,
Rails rain for quails, for manna, dew.” (400-408)

Thestylis turns the force of fate imagined by the mower into a different figure of consequence, where the bird “untimely mowed” becomes a vehicle for her and her fellow workers to ascend to a strange new level of figuration. The rail is first displaced from its

figurative status as omen to become simply what it is: a dead bird, good for eating. Treating the bird as a non-signifying thing (“it”), she has “trussed it up,/ And forthwith means on it to sup.” Then, she reverses this move and reifies the bird’s status as signifier, making it part of a symbolic pattern that can “make his saying true,” offering strength to the figure of the “tawny mowers” as “Israelites” from stanza 49. In a spray of blood, rhyme and linguistic play, “rails” become assimilated to “quails” and the “rain” their abundance suggests.

Bloody like the bleeding female rail (and the “edge all bloody” which enables this figurative trail), Thestylis is also, like the bird, someone that comes to exceed her proper place in the poem’s figurative framework. Thestylis stands out from the poem’s representation of women as a female figure who escapes the dichotomy of virgin/wife, refuses to be controlled by a “fate” which works through metaphor (the rail is not an omen but a bird to eat, or a figure for a quail, as she sees fit), and resists any easy placement in time, space, or figurative framework. She irrupts into a present that is not the suspended pastoral lyricism of the garden, the ecstasy of the forest, or the precious hymenal moment of virginity held in defense against its arranged fate, but an insistent, textual “now” that disrupts the narrative progression of the poem itself.

For all her incredible potential, Thestylis’ moment of voice is short. It seems as though her power as a figure is too strange to be fully engaged by the narrator. He does not respond to her indecorous interruption, but moves directly to a meditation on the relative wisdom of birds that build their nests high or low off the ground. The moment of Thestylis, then, is not presented as a preferred alternative to the violent force of history, progress and narrative temporality considered in the rest of the poem. Rather, she seems

to suggest an anarchic dystopia of figuration gone wild, in contrast to the highly controlled patterns of reflection, doubling and echo that we might associate with the figure of Maria, the utopic suspension of the forest and reflective, flooded meadow, and the contained, doubled rhyme scheme of the couplet form itself.

One way of approaching the chaos produced by Thestylis and the transformation of the meadow into a field of violent and disjunctive imagery that follows her appearance is through the collision of history with the interpretive and representative frameworks of pastoral fiction and biblical type. In a poem such as “The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn,” the effect of these multiple frames is enchantingly subtle and enigmatic, producing a lyric “saturated with the suggestive aura and immanence of English politics and sacred history” (McKeon, “Pastoralism, Puritanism” 51). The representation of Fairfax himself, creating a little Eden in his own garden, blends these frames in a way that suggests a more controlled, though uneasy, accommodation of history or nature to pastoral form. In the meadow of Appleton House, the combination is more aggressively disjunctive.

At stanza 49-50, where “the tawny mowers enter,” Marvell translates the actual workers on the estate into figures from one of his own pastoral lyrics. The mower who kills the rail seems identical with Marvell’s other mowers; his accidental mowing of the bird even recalls Damon the Mower’s accidental cutting of his own leg. Among the mind-boggling range of similes that inhabit the meadow in prior stanzas (men like grasshoppers, grasshoppers like giants, the green sea of “unfathomable grass” with its otherworldly “flowers”) the translation of the actual workers of the estate into the mowers of pastoral fiction seems more conventional, a trope typical of the country house

poem where actual economic relations of labour are obscured by their pastoral rendering.¹¹¹ Marvell's pastorals themselves hint at biblical allegory: pastoral figures are a vehicle in those lyrics for the translation of spiritual concepts, as Christ is accommodated to Pan, or the "fall" of the grass echoes the "fall" of humanity in Eden.¹¹² It comes as no surprise then to find the pastoral mower of stanza 50 following the image of the mowers as "Israelites" from stanza 49, but this association begins to approach catachresis with the introduction of Thestylis and her manipulation of the bird figure.

Donald Cameron Allen reads Thestylis as the bloody goddess of war, Mars' sister "Sanguinea Bellona," and her appearance draws the representation of the action on the field closer to what he calls "an allegorical masque of the recent civil disorders" (208, 191). At stanza 53, the field seems "wrought" into a battlefield, recalling the perverse transformation in *The Faerie King* of the fields that should sustain men into fields of war where they die. The mower, ambivalent harvester/soldier/Israelite/killer, is the new ruler of this new field:

The mower now commands the field,
In whose new traverse seemeth wrought
As camp of battle newly fought:
Where, as the meads with hay, the plain
Lies quilted o'er with bodies slain:
The women that with forks it fling,
Do represent the pillaging. (417-424)

While Allen's reading seems right in one sense, it also seems to oversimplify the ways in which metaphors of violence and war play out here, shadowy and suggestive of multiple frames of reference. The interjection of the words "seemeth" and "represent" complicates the effect of the images here, reminding us that the poet is constructing metaphors out of what he sees. If the passage holds up a mirror to recent events, it is a multiple and

distorted reflection that also reflects on the limits of such a construction. In this way we might be reminded of Spenser in Book V of *The Faerie Queene* and more recently, Samuel Sheppard, both intimating and problematizing the parallels between history and poetry, literal and figurative aspects of metaphors that seem undeniably rooted in the present moment but not completely determined by it.

This passage in “Upon Appleton House” invites or gestures toward an allegory of the Civil War but then offers something more complicated. A. D. Cousins suggests that it offers instead a “twofold postscript” (71) to the allegory it withholds. In this double-postscript, the labor of the mowers “parodies warfare” but is not equivalent to it; it “seems distantly to mirror the greater and tragic violences of recent history, and to indicate that (relatively) harmless violences of more familiar kinds have supplanted them. On the other hand ... the apparently parodic, military perspective seems also to suggest that the mowers’ labour – harmless or not – is unavoidably overshadowed by recent history (Cousins 71). Even the terms in which one kind of violence might supplant another, though, is complicated by this passage’s layering of literal and figurative elements. The mower’s “massacre” might be an innocent version of the “massacre” of war; but it quickly becomes an actual massacre, although of bird, not human life; then the massacred grass and the bird as omen call back the idea of human death and suffering. Figuration, here available in its most compulsive aspect, makes it hard to imagine any supplanting of real violence with less harmless (figurative) forms: figuration itself is a process of violence that ruins what it translates, just as the mower’s “massacre” of the grass “destroys in order to create” (Cousins 71).

The range of shadows cast onto the mower's field by literary and historical allusion are confusingly multiple, and like dappled shade the effect is shifting and difficult to account for. The mower is both a mower and a figure of death, providing a Biblical image of the harvest of all flesh and a classical image of war as harvesting,¹¹³ and not only ancient war but recent or contemporary conflict, the Civil War; all of these things and the sum of them which is more than its parts.¹¹⁴ To separate these layers of allusion into their separate constitutive parts is to give what seems like an over-simplified account of the effect of this layering. For it is not only ambiguous in the sense of suggesting two (or more) possible meanings or levels or signification, but in a more ineffable sense of combination. In his recent work on Wyatt's poetry and the difficulty in interpreting the syntactical confusions that are a signature of the poet's style, Jeff Dolven suggests how hard it is to "parse" multiple layers of this kind: "Parsing ambiguities is one way of bringing such problems to attention ... but to say that a given preposition means either *x* or *y*, or both *x* and *y*, let alone trying to specify the relation between the alternatives, risks obscuring something more impressionistic or evasive or reckless in their disposition on the page" (71).

The ambiguous status of the mowers and the indecorous interruption of Thestylis suggests a confusion of frames related not simply to the problems of representing history in unstable figurative language but also to the contemporary invocation of Protestant typology in contemporary history. At this historical moment, biblical resonance was not only claimed by poets for pastoral images of mowers, but was also consciously claimed and articulated by religious sectarians and those involved in the Civil Wars who saw themselves as "God's people" (a phrase used by Cromwell to identify his party with the

Israelites). The True Levellers mentioned in stanza 57, for example, drew on scriptural authority to assert the legitimacy of their program of social “levelling” and saw themselves as living realizations of biblical types.¹¹⁵ The poet calls the mowers Israelites; but in the world of history referenced by the poem, actual mowers were calling themselves Israelites, or something like it, “to make his saying true.”

At stanza 53 the field of grass has become the field of battle, the bloody figure of Thestylis dispersed into many women imagined as “pillaging” soliders, and the mowers as commanding army. The biblical/classical image of the solider as harvester and the biblical maxim “all flesh is grass” is horribly embodied in an image that seems possibly derived from reports of an actual battlefield, the plain “quilted o’er with bodies slain.” The mowers that turn into reapers of death and soldiers show the interpenetration of a pastoral mode resonant with biblical allegory with a typological reading of the current historical moment that sees Biblical history being re-enacted in the present. The historical moment is so saturated with Protestant typology, and Marvell seems to be in a position of such heightened ambivalence toward Cromwell’s political course, that the pastoral framework is not sufficient to contain it without figurative disjunction. The excess is precisely the violence of war, by which fields of grass are not only figuratively turned into fields of death, but also literally by the fighting that happens on them, the actual bodies of Royalist and Parliamentary soliders “untimely mowed.” The “unfathomable grass” becomes not only the “green sea” of the Israelites; it also becomes a “camp of battle,” as Levellers and Parliamentarians all think of themselves as “God’s people,” Israelites. The instability of typological interpretation is suggested here by the way the images of war suggest parallels with recent history and Biblical events that are suggestive

rather than programmatic; it is impossible to map actual historical events directly onto these images.¹¹⁶

In Marvell's political poems written before and after "Upon Appleton House," most famously his poems celebrating Oliver Cromwell, he engaged directly with the problem of representing history in poetic form that also recognized the typological significance of the present moment. The project of "Upon Appleton House" presents issues of representation distinct from the creation of the fictional "green world" of the pastoral lyrics. McKeon suggestively describes Marvell's poetic experimentation in the Cromwell poems in terms of a "problem of mediation" informed by distinctively Protestant concerns with the ability of language or artistic forms more generally to "accommodate" sacred truth – in this case, the truth of a history imbued with sacred aura by Protestant typology. From this perspective, the events of the English revolution could be taken to reflect similar moments in Biblical history, whether seen as a potential millennial fulfillment of those types or as another installment of type awaiting millennial fulfillment – thus, Cromwell can be seen as another Moses or Gideon or David, as he indeed was in Marvell's poem on "The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector."

The occasion for the composition of "Upon Appleton House" is not so easily assimilable to the model of writing sacred history that was available for the poems in praise of Cromwell, as the status of this historical moment in relation to Protestant typology is less stable. For if the protagonists and events of the Revolution fulfill or at least typologically anticipate millennial anti-type then what does it mean that Fairfax has walked away from the onward progress of Revolution (described so powerfully in the

Cromwell poems as an inevitable, rushing force of time and history)? The problems of mediation that attend the representation of sacred history seem doubly complicated by the case of Fairfax's retirement. The trope of pastoral retirement, the celebration of the life of contemplation against the life of action, offers an uneasy solution. The trope of retirement is made especially problematic at this moment by its close association with Royalism.¹¹⁷

In retirement, Fairfax creates his own sacred type, fashioning a garden that is a version of Eden. This little garden ironically recalls the events of history that Fairfax has stepped back from, reminding us that sacred history continues out there without him: while he creates a type of Paradise within the estate of Appleton House, where the only forts are flowers, out there beyond the bounds of the estate other types are being forged with actual guns, actual forts.¹¹⁸

Fairfax is a kind of artist as well as a soldier-gardener, fashioning pleasing images or figures: he has "laid these gardens out in sport/ In the just figure of a fort" (285-86). Like the poet who turns the field of grass into the battlefield, Fairfax translates flowers, bees, plants into guns, forts, wars, soldiers – or is it the other way around? Ironically, Fairfax's military garden suggests to the poet the idea of a pre-lapsarian state before war and before the doubleness of metaphor, that time when "the nursery of all things green/ Was then the only magazine" (339-40). The innocent green of Fairfax's garden is overrun or contaminated by history, by war, just as the field of grass is transformed into the battlefield: "But war all this doth overgrow; We ordnance plant and powder sow" (345). The Civil War gives a particular shape and significance to this garden fort, but the military garden also draws on older and deeper associations of the garden with war, its seeming opposite (the Arcadian place of both the laurel and the reed, Apollo and Pan, the

god of war and the god of pastoral song, both invoked in Marvell's poem "The Garden"). In "Garden Agon," Susan Stewart points out the connection of these ideas in the model of the garden as a place where art vies with nature in a kind of war, and all growth depends on death in a process of both destruction and renewal: "The garden is linked to other means of ordering life: codifying and ritualizing social time and space, creating political orders and social hierarchies – including the organization of military order: or structures of force. In this latter feature resides the long-standing connection between making gardens and making war" (111).¹¹⁹ Stewart's comments may help to explain the special pathos of Fairfax's gardening, his agonistic and compulsive imitation of war even in his retirement: "Who, when retired here to peace,/ His warlike studies could not cease" (283-4). The garden is linked to war, Stewart writes, but

war is as well the antithesis of the garden, for the ends of war are the destruction of life and undoing of order ... War short-circuits nature; it is the outcome of acts of human will that risk the destruction of human time and, increasingly in this century, the destruction of Nature itself. The harvest of war is early death; the garden as *lachrymae musarum* is dedicated to the shepherd, hunter and poet stricken by war. (111)

While on one level the garden celebrates the military values that Fairfax is unable to give up, its representation as a fallen place of conflict and death also indicates this status of *lachrymae musarum*, which is here extended into a lament for the loss of Eden, the original garden which knew no war, "When roses only arms might bear" (334). Fairfax's garden is an ambivalent monument to his identity as soldier, and one that he scarcely seems to choose (he "could not cease" his obsession with war). While it is the sign of his retirement from military life – now his only forts are flowers – it is also the means through which he remains engaged with "warlike studies," and his vaguely obsessive

engagement with those studies suggests that he may wish to “cease,” to see a flower only as a flower and not as a figure, but cannot. The relationship between the garden and the war, the soldier and the gardener, the real and the figure, the war and the “warlike” seems endlessly complicated, and Fairfax appears to be trapped in a zone of compulsive figuration where the likeness of flowers to forts is impossible to escape.

A note of pathos may be sounded by Fairfax’s inability to “cease” his “warlike studies” but this representation of Fairfax’s continuing military mind-set is also a way in which Marvell recuperates his decision to retire from political and military life, with retirement itself imagined as military action on another plane, in an accommodation of the competing ideals of action and contemplation. The poem’s narrative of Protestant “progress” is another important part of this recuperation: Fairfax may have stepped aside from participating in the sacred history of Cromwell’s Revolution, but the Fairfax family has a role to play in the unfolding of sacred history, through the narrative of the participation of the Fairfax dynasty in the Reformation and the ongoing Providential unfolding of history. The dissolution of the monasteries is allegorized in the story of the house itself, constructed from the bricks of a former nunnery. When William Fairfax “rescues” Isabel Thwaites from the cloister, it is represented as a fulfillment of Protestant “destiny.”

6. The nuns: preservation, translation, ambivalence

I have suggested that Fairfax’s military gardening sounds a note of pathos in tension with the celebration of his heroic status. I now return to the other major note of discordance that interests me in the poem, the questions it raises about the relative values

of virginity and procreation, especially as they relate to forms of aesthetic production. In tension with its stated celebration of marriage and procreation, Marvell's narrative of "the progress of this house's fate" also figures the institution of heterosexuality as a violent and violating process, associated with the displacing narrative of metaphor. In a retreat from the world of political uncertainty, potential upheaval and material displacement, Marvell idealizes a figurative world of aesthetic production, a place of temporal suspension distinguished from the material world of production and heterosexual reproduction. He thus turns to several interrelated, alternative economies: autoeroticism, sensuous virginity and a "chaste" image of female homoerotics. These non-procreative models of sexuality or erotic experience propose an alternative economy of production and reproduction based on Maria's dictum of narcissistic similitude ("in your kind yourselves prefer"), and a poetics of figurative folding, repetition, echo and reflection.

We might return, then, through the poem's circuitous routes to the "subtle nuns" (94) and their cloistered gynosomal space of creative production, described so seductively by the prioress in her attempts to woo Isabel into staying. In the nun's promise of nightly pleasures we find the most striking and eroticized example of the narcissistic order I have already associated with Maria. The nun's projected offer of multiple, interchangeable bedfellows from among those women who are all "sisters" imagines a space where it is possible to be a "virgin bride" and indulge in almost-auto-erotic pleasures:

Each night among us to your side
 Appoint a fresh and virgin bride;

 Where you may lie as chaste in bed,
 As pearls together billeted,
 All night embracing arm in arm
 Like crystal pure with cotton warm. (185-6, 189-192)

The pairing of two “arms” and the dominant color of white emphasizes the similitude of the two imagined women, working in tension with the sensuous effect of the coldness and transparency of crystal paired with the soft tactility of cotton’s warmth. The seductive power of this scene is apparently effective for Isabel; only six lines later we find that “The nun’s smooth tongue has sucked her in” (200).

Most critics have accepted an exclusively negative reading of the prioress and the pleasures of the cloistered life she describes to Isabel. The nuns are Catholic, idolatrous; they interfere with the “progress” of Protestant destiny, or “fate.” In this reading of the poem as a celebration of the Fairfax dynasty, we cheer the arrival of Fairfax senior as he scales the walls of the nunnery to claim his bride; but this heterosexual triumphalism comes at the cost of Isabel’s tears – those tears which provoke our sympathy with Isabel and the life she is removed from. Monette notices the significance of Isabel’s tears and the “small pinprick of disruption in Fairfax’s heroic destiny,” they represent (161), but seems to regard this as an accidental or supplemental detail that escapes the poet’s patriarchal agenda. Although her reading celebrates the “disruptive” power of the nun’s speech, her assessment of the poem does not allow for the space of critique that might be opened by this disruption; instead, she argues, “the poem nowhere suggests that the nun’s alternative Eden is anything but evil” (160). In her reading, the poet appears to be entirely complicit with the forces of metaphorical violence that massacre the female rail. I have tried to suggest that the poet presents not only complicity with these forces but also some kind of critical awareness of them, and that in his construction of poetic reflexivity he opens up the possibility of questioning the values that underlie poetic translation and the fate of women to be made to serve dynastic interests. Why is it that the nuns are not

included in Marvell criticism's generally strong interest in and valuation of ambiguity? How does it come about that they are construed as not "anything but evil" by anyone? However much it may be negatively marked by the opportunism and deceit of the prioress, the cloister shares continuity with valued images in the rest of the poem, especially in its special status as a space of productive virginity and a site of artistic production and sensuous pleasure aligned with the poet's own creative practice.

If Isabel's narrative mirrors that of Maria, then her state of being in the cloister prior to becoming Fairfax wife and mother is a type of Maria's idealised state of virginity eulogised by the poet. The nun's promise of a chaste yet pleasure-filled bed, with its images of paired embraces creates a sharp contrast to the imagery of sublimated sexual violence used to imagine Maria's impending hymenal rupture: she, "like a sprig of mistletoe/ On the Fairfacian oak does grow;/ Whence, for some universal good,/ The priest shall cut the sacred bud" (739-42). The parallels between the chaste bed and Maria's edenic garden are emphasized by verbal echoes and repetition: the nuns are pictured as "embracing arm in arm/ Like crystal pure with cotton warm" (191-92), while the river that reflects Maria (and elsewhere embraces or "holds" the meadow in its "wanton harmless folds") is also made "crystal pure" (694) by her purifying effects. In part, this argument – that the continuity of the nunnery with valued aspects of productive virginity should enable us to see value in it, too – is made slippery by the meaning of continuity or parallel in a poem so clearly interested in the significance of historical repetition, Protestant providential destiny and typology more broadly. Echoes and parallels do not guarantee symmetry, and a foreshadow of a good thing might itself be basically bad. If the nunnery is parallel with other parts of the poem, then it may be

construed as an opposing version of what comes later, an anti-type. Catholicism may be construed as rotten and deformed rather than simply unenlightened or misguided, and the representation of the opportunistic, subtle nuns certainly fits with this version to a huge extent. But they are not only vicious and covetous: they are also creative. They make beautiful things, and not everything about this is bad from the poem's perspective.

The image that emerges most strongly from the descriptions of life in the cloister is one of intense productivity and artistry. Not only praying, the nuns spend their time embroidering, weaving, sewing, singing, and engaging in other aesthetic pursuits. Especially fascinating is the description of their skill at cooking and the creation of preserved fruit: "So through the mortal fruit we boil/ The sugar's uncorrupting oil:/ And that which perished while we pull,/ Is thus preserved clear and full" (174-78). We can find here an image of ideal reincarnation that *preserves* as it *translates*, a process that suggests both continuity with and difference from the metaphoric displacement fated to Maria. The transformation of the fruit from one thing (fruit) to another (preserved fruit) necessarily enacts a kind of death or perishing, but one that is recuperated and magically erased by the process of preservation: transparency and wholeness characterize this new amalgam, "clear and full" (recalling again the transparent "crystal pure" of the virginal bed and reflective river). This is an image of perfect mediation, a process of translation in which nothing appears to be lost, ruined or betrayed.

These are, after all, Catholic nuns, whose modes of artistic process are in this sense automatically suspect. The sweet, seductive beauty of their arts is imbued with problems that we might understand in terms of Protestant questions about the dangerous seduction of beautiful figures. It cannot be a coincidence that it is "fruit" they are

preserving, recalling that terrible apple, the truly “mortal fruit.” They claim that their processes of preservation have a magical ability to take away corruption (the corruption of humanity by sin, the Fall?) by the power of “the sugar’s uncorrupting oil,” but this seems like a prideful and mistaken claim, suggesting the redemptive power of an aesthetic and sensual process. Is it possible for the sweetness of sugar – the sweetness of art – to produce the clearness of sensual (and spiritual) perception that is unavailable to fallen humans?

In Marvell’s poetry these questions are raised most explicitly in “The Coronet,” where a serpent lies hidden among the beautiful flowers that stand for poetic images. “The Coronet” works as an anti-pastoral that preserves its pleasing aesthetic qualities, however much it explicitly rejects them.¹²⁰ However, “The Coronet” is distinguished by the poet’s dramatic performance of self-interrogation, and the poem’s aesthetic dangers seem to be defused and redeemed by this self-criticism. Unlike the poet of “The Coronet,” the nuns do not hold their own aesthetic pursuits in doubt, and this may be finally their most problematic aspect from Marvell’s Protestant perspective. But the line between Marvell’s and the nuns’ art is not as clear as most readers have assumed; what is it, we might ask, that actually redeems art in this spiritual context? Is self-consciousness enough to save the process of aesthetic creation from the taint of idolatry? These are complicated questions engaged repeatedly and not entirely resolved by committed Protestant poets in the seventeenth century including George Herbert most intensely, and by Marvell himself.

Lewalski identifies “The Coronet” as a “special sub-genre of seventeenth-century meditative poetry, poems in which the speaker strives to present a wreath or crown of

poetic praises to God and in so doing confronts problems arising from Protestant convictions about the worthlessness of all human acts or arts or works in God's sight, and Protestant anxieties about adulterating divine truth and humble devotion by human art and artfulness" ("Marvell as Religious Poet" 254). For Lewalski, the poem "resolves the dilemma" of whether art can be redeemed through the speaker's "uncompromising stance of sacrifice" (257). At the end of the poem, the poet offers the poem to Christ so that he can "shatter ... my curious frame" and kill the serpent that lies within (22); the poem originally designed as a redemptive "crown" for "My Saviour's head" is at the end regarded as only fit to be stepped on, although even in this state it will still be a kind of inverted crown: it "May crown thy feet," he says. But although the speaker declares his willingness to sacrifice the poetic crown he has fashioned from words, metaphorical "flowers," he does not in fact sacrifice it in as much as the poem remains to be read and appreciated as a work of art, and is not destroyed. The poem remains a beautiful, artful artifact; it has only metaphorically been sacrificed and the sacrifices it performs are necessarily compromised, provisional and incomplete.

The nun's aesthetic creations would seem to be illustrations of the kind of deforming "human and artfulness," that Lewalski identifies as the object of Protestant disdain, but part of the argument of "The Coronet" is that even self-examining Protestant art does not completely overcome these problems. In this way, Marvell's own art has some continuity with the nun's aesthetic work, and however vexed the appeal of the aesthetic may be, it is not entirely rejected even when it appears most to be so. Even "The Coronet," the anti-pastoral that dismantles itself, presents itself to the reader as a beautiful object, and remains a stunning aesthetic achievement in part because of its very

provisional answer to those questions. The very functional necessity of humility and self-doubt in this context (without it one would fall straight into pride) means that the Protestant poet can never be absolutely confident that art has been redeemed in this way. The questions remain to be posed, over and over again, for they can never be answered with complete confidence, but remain worth asking and answering in necessarily provisional ways that do not completely resolve the dilemma.

In thinking about how to evaluate the nun's sphere of artistic production we might also consider it in relative terms from the perspective of the woman torn "weeping" away from it. In the cloister, Isabel could make art; as a wife, she will make children instead. (For a woman who wanted to make art and not babies, the cloister was one of the few socially sanctioned options available, at least prior to the Reformation when even that option closed down). Maria's choices are more ambiguous. In the forest she is constructed as the mistress of all languages and all the flowers. Although she is not an artist, her effect on nature has something like the effect of an artwork, as the river stills itself into crystal like a frozen image. But her role is rather to be the subject than the maker of art, the thing represented by the poet. Like Isabel, Maria's fate is to be a wife and mother, to supply children in service of the "universal good" and the Fairfax dynasty. But it is difficult not to reflect on the fact that Marvell himself chose (or was fated) the path of artistic production, not parenthood. From the perspective of Marvell's own personal destiny or choice, Maria's and Isabel's fated marriages look a little different. Virginity looks sterile from a perspective that puts the highest value on human reproduction, but from another perspective it has its own kinds of compensating fertility.

7. tortoise-like

The final stanza of the poem puts the problematic relationship of figuration, displacement and substitution into stark yet inscrutable relief. The layering of figures in the poem's closing lines impresses the strong thematic significance of the figure of catachresis or improper substitution, as the limits of figurative expression are twisted literally upside down and around again in images of distorted and disturbing "likeness":

But now the salmon-fishers moist
 Their leathern boats begin to hoist,
 And like Antipodes in shoes,
 Have shod their heads in their canoes.
 How tortoise-like, but not so slow,
 These rational amphibii go!
 Let's in: for the dark hemisphere
 Does now like one of them appear. (769-776)

The stanza repeats the word "like" three times. Deliberate simile here combines with the catachresis of "shod their heads in their canoes" to produce figurative overload: the salmon fishers are like the Antipodes, their heads imagined as feet, canoes as shoes, the combination like a tortoise, the sky a "dark hemisphere ... like one of them." These images push the terms of likeness to extremes.

"Tortoise-like," the salmon fishers recall the tortoise that appears in the poem's second stanza. Unlike the salmon-fishers, whose makeshift headgear is clearly an odd fit, the tortoise of the second stanza is celebrated for its exact coincidence with its shelter.

The beasts are by their dens expressed:
 The birds contrive an equal nest;
 The low-roofed tortoises do dwell
 In cases fit of tortoise shell:
 No creature loves an empty space;
 Their bodies measure out their place. (12-17)

This animal that dwells in an extension of itself appears to be an ideal figure of expression. If the beasts are literally “expressed” by their “dens,” the tortoise is a perfect example of natural, organic continuity or “fit” between a thing and its expression, a figure that recalls the “folds” of positively-conceived likeness embodied by Maria and the nature she reflects. The salmon-fishers, on the other hand, are a monstrous inversion of the ideal of the animal they resemble, figuratively inverted with their heads in shoes. These “rational amphibii” are capable of crossing between the land and water, recalling those creatures that stare into the mirroring water and wonder if they be in or without – but these amphibii seem to concretize that dreamy, figurative confusion and carry it out of the water with them as they go, bearing strangely terrifying metaphoric distortion.

The poetry of the pun, in which metaphor is condensed into one word that requires no “translation” into another word is, in a way, the opposite of catachresis, in which the terms of signification are impossibly far apart. Yet in the image of the tortoise in a case of tortoise shell, the sense of immediate proximity inherent in the pun also engages the energy of catachresis in its weird disjunction: the tortoise shell is at once a shell and little “case” made of tortoise shell. Rosalie Colie comments on the strange effects produced by redundancy in the lines where the tortoise is expressed by and/or housed in itself:

of their natural condition, a metaphor seems to be made, although in fact the poet tautologically describes their shells. Nonetheless, because of his wording, which applies to the artificial cases for other things made of tortoiseshell, he succeeds in confounding for a moment the natural with the artificial world. By these means, the process of metaphor is exposed to the reader’s examination.” (93-94)

For Colie, the tortoise in its tortoise shell is an example of the metaphor that undoes itself, as Marvell “unfigures and unmetaphors” (94). Here it is clear that catachresis

shares with the pun this self-reflexive quality of being a figure that exposes its own making and reflects on the conditions of likeness and comparison, proximity and proper distance that underlie poetic figuration. In this way the poem's seemingly opposed schemes of figuration – the distant disjunction of catachresis on the one hand, and proximate, punning reflection on the other – both make sense as self-reflexive devices that draw attention to, and interrogate, the processes of figuration.

The oddly-shod salmon-fishers are in a way the most fit occupants of the improper estate of Appleton House, in their condition of dwelling in a form of expression that does not fit. Not only them, but the environment outside the house appears to have become contaminated by a sense of catachretic displacement as everything becomes something it is not and the enveloping sky itself takes on the qualities of these wrong-seeming creatures: "Let's in: for the dark hemisphere/ Does now like one of them appear" (769-776). This final analogy is especially uncanny, as the curved canoe that first shrank to the size of a shoe now expands, huge and infinite, to become the evening sky.¹²¹ The quality of threatening distortion seems to be in part a consequence of the removal of Maria's influence, as the final stanzas that follow the meditation on her "fate" imagine a progressively disjointed world. In the penultimate stanza it is difficult to avoid hearing a nostalgic lament for a world not only decayed since the far-off Golden Age, but more immediately changed and disrupted by the recent Civil War:

Tis not, what once it was, the world,
But a rude heap together hurled,
All negligently overthrown,
Gulfs, deserts, precipices, stone. (761-764).

The estate of Appleton House is explicitly presented as a place distinguished from this chaos outside, a place of "more decent order" (766), recalling the praise of order in the

poem's opening stanzas. Yet the estate is also filled with images of disjunction, figurative frameworks "together hurled" in both playful and threatening disorder.

"Let's in:" the poet turns away from the unimaginable strangeness of the "dark hemisphere" to the house in the poem's first movement inside. In this final invitation that also takes the form of a command, the poet assumes for the first time a form of self-reference that is plural, not singular, although it is difficult to tell exactly who is included in the truncated "us" of "Let's." This invitation which is also a farewell is characteristic of the poem's playful love of paradox and the value of uncanny returns. The only movement out of this labyrinthine poem seems to be offered by a movement back inside, into the house, folded back into its strange double, the poetic text.

⁹⁵ Fairfax's resignation was preceded by earlier misgivings about the direction of the English Revolution after the capture of the King. He refused to participate in the trial of King Charles, and resigned rather than lead the army in an invasion of Scotland. For accounts of his resignation and the way it was perceived by contemporaries, see Markham 359-360 and Allen 187-88.

⁹⁶ On the uneasy summer of 1651 and potential threats close to the Fairfax estate, see Hirst and Zwicker, "High Summer at Nun Appleton."

⁹⁷ By contrast, Heather Dubrow's recent reading of "Upon Appleton House" in her study of the country house genre makes no note of these two distinctive aspects of the poem that differentiate it from the conventional Jonsonian model and the matched social and "literary conservatism" that defines the genre, and focuses only on the poem's continuity with, rather than its striking departures from, its generic models ("Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?"). Dubrow's account of the way the genre as a whole includes "ruptures" is useful for understanding the way Marvell subverts his project of praise (see below), but underestimates the ways in which the poem itself is a dramatic "rupture" of the genre in both political and formal terms.

⁹⁸ Worden cites von Maltzahn (156) for the word "amphibious." The appeal of the amphibian as a creature at home in dual realms, both on land and in water, appears in "Upon Appleton House" in the final stanza, where the "tortoise-like" salmon fishers are described as "rational amphibii" (773, 774).

⁹⁹ See for example Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (57); Hirst and Zwicker, "Andrew Marvell and the Toils of Patriarchy: Fatherhood, Longing, and the Body Politic"; John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*; Anne Cotterill, "Marvell's Watery Maze: Digression and Discovery at Nun Appleton."

¹⁰⁰ Paul Hammond notes the “disturbances created by homoerotic subtexts within apparently heterosexual or homosocial narratives” in “Marvell’s Sexuality” (101). Hirst and Zwicker argue that the overall “program” of the lyrics “deconstructs the very bases of heterosexuality and patriarchalism alike” and challenges “the very ideology of dynastic continuity” (“Marvell and the Toils of Patriarchy,” 631, 634). Their recent work on “The Unfortunate Lover” discusses the significance of the “varieties of asexual desire and reproduction” alluded to in the lyrics, and their relationship to “disturbing” forms of heterosexuality (“Eros and Abuse” 384, 388).

¹⁰¹ My introduction offers a reading of the reconstructed building as a figure for the ruin and translation inherent in the process of poetic figure itself.

¹⁰² Chambers discusses the contemporary preoccupation with England’s lost Gothic past as a significant historical context for thinking about the kinds of losses that might be suggested by the destruction of the old abbey. He points out that the antiquary Roger Dodsworth was visiting Appleton “under the patronage of Lord Fairfax and was compiling what was to become the greatest of monastic histories, the *Monasticon Anglicanum*,” at the same time that Marvell was there writing “Upon Appleton House” (143). The politics of antiquarianism were at this point in time very complicated: while Republicans looked to England’s Gothic past to establish originary claims for pre-Norman political freedoms, Royalists deplored the destruction of the monasteries including their status as repositories of manuscripts and places for retreat, and espoused a form of “reactionary and antiquarian Gothicism” associated with the Laudian project of repairing damaged church buildings (Chambers 144). In this context, Fairfax’s own interests in Gothic antiquarianism seem fraught with political tensions. In my reading, Marvell’s approach to the “ruin” of the cloister is more ambivalent than the one suggested by Chambers, in which the abbey is simply false and perverted, and redeemed by its Protestant renovation with no suggestion of meaningful loss.

¹⁰³ Anne Cotterill comments on “the early modern usage of ‘translation’ – a word that literally means to convey, transfer, or transport property and language from place to place” and its association with “counterfeit and theft, implicating Maria’s ‘glad parents’ in the exploitation of their daughter for the sake of their dynastic interests” (“Marvell’s Watery Maze” 113).

¹⁰⁴ Rogers (79).

¹⁰⁵ OED, “precede,” v. Def.1, 5.

¹⁰⁶ John Carey, for instance, notes that for Marvell “the chance of becoming a vegetable” was an attractive means of “escaping sexual complications” (151, 152). Hirst and Zwicker also attend to the eroticization of the natural world as one of the ways in which Marvell turns away from potentially wounding forms of heterosexuality (“Eros and Abuse”).

¹⁰⁷ See Paul Hammond for a discussion of the significance of the figure of Narcissus (discussed further below) and its relationship to both the autoerotic and homoerotic in Marvell (especially 101-103).

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Ricks describes this idea of something finding its own resemblance or reflection, and then becoming identical with that reflection, as “a characteristic figure of speech” in Marvell’s poetry (108).

¹⁰⁹ In her reading of this section of “Upon Appleton House,” Anne Cotterill finds a more negative tone of “caricature and tortured self-mockery” that disparages the idea of aesthetic production as unmasculine idleness (“Marvell’s Watery Maze,” 104).

¹¹⁰ See Rosalie Colie on the idea of echo in Marvell’s work, and Hammond on the relationship between Echo and Narcissus (101).

¹¹¹ Raymond Williams argues that “Upon Appleton House” represents a new kind of country house poem in its representation of “a working landscape” rather than the idealized and mystified forms of Jonson’s *To Penshurst*; despite the distancing effect of the many metaphors used to represent the landscape, he argues, it is “still . . . *seen*” rather than idealized, ignored or repressed (56). While I agree to an extent, in my view the pastoral frame and other metaphors used to represent the workers qualify the extent to which they might be said to be represented as they are seen.

¹¹² For a discussion of how Marvell’s pastorals address spiritual problems of “accommodation,” see McKeon, “Pastoralism, Puritanism,” esp 49-50.

¹¹³ On the war-as-harvesting motif in classical literature and its invocation in the meadow sequence, see Allen (203).

¹¹⁴ Some battles of the Civil War were actually fought on ground not far from Appleton House, bringing this topical allusion even closer to home. I am grateful to Hyunyoung Cho for drawing my attention to this point.

¹¹⁵ There is also a confusion suggested here between the True Levellers or Diggers, led by Gerard Winstanley, and the rebellious Army Levellers, led by John Lilburne. The Army Levellers themselves rejected the title of “Levellers” and claimed that they were not interested in a program of social leveling; their demands were mostly restricted to calls for fair process and fair treatment within the army ranks. Fairfax was closely involved in the ruthless repression of the Army Leveller rebellion just prior to his retirement. See Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*.

¹¹⁶ Thomas Luxon explores the idea of typology as an unstable and figurative framework at this moment in history in *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation*.

¹¹⁷ See Wilding (163).

¹¹⁸ Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker describe the immediate context of potential military threats near the Fairfax estate in the summer of 1651 (“High Summer.”)

¹¹⁹ Stewart’s article is mainly devoted to the art of the modern Scottish poet, sculptor and garden artist Ian Hamilton Finlay. His work engages the garden as a site of complex historical reference and a site that intertwines ideologies of militarism, violence, and revolution, and exhibits some fascinating affinities with Marvell’s poetry. The Arcadian gods Pan and Apollo are repeatedly invoked in his work, particularly Apollo in his multiple aspect as warrior and musician, with both bow and lyre: at the entrance to one of Hamilton’s major works, the “Garden Temple” in the large sculpture garden titled “Little Sparta,” an inscription reads “To Apollo, His Music, His Missiles, His Muses” (Stewart 119).

¹²⁰ For a discussion of how “The Coronet,” deals with the problems of representing sacred subjects in aesthetically pleasing form, see also Michael McKeon (“Pastoralism, Puritanism” 49) and Annabel Patterson (“Marvell’s Protestant Poetics” 490-496).

¹²¹ In her response to an earlier version of this chapter Judy Barbour suggested a reading of the “dark hemisphere” as both the dark side of the sickle moon rising in the sky and an image of Maria’s pregnant body, the consequence of her translation into wife that Marvell here imagines and turns away from as an unbearable prospect.

Conclusion

The new ruins of old song

Marvell's brand of reflexivity exerts a particularly uncanny power, and one of its effects is to turn me back to the figure of poetic ruin discussed in my introduction (a version perhaps of the spiralling motion back inside the house which ends "Upon Appleton House.") The notion of poetic figuration as a translation that also ruins, violates and destroys what it represents was to preoccupy Marvell for years after the composition of "Upon Appleton House." We find a version of it in his dedicatory poem "On Mr Milton's *Paradise Lost*," published in the second edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1674. The poem opens by describing the poet's initial concerns about Milton's project, his worry when he first "beheld the poet blind, yet bold,/ In slender book his vast design unfold" (1-2) that he would "ruin" the matter of his poem by translating it into poetic language:

the argument
 Held me a while misdoubting his intent,
 That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)
 The sacred truths to fable and old song
 (So Sampson groped the Temple's post in spite)
 The world o'erwhelming to revenge his sight. (5-10)

These "causeless, yet not impious" (24) concerns, the poem tells us, were eventually overcome, but this awesome, initial vision of a whole world wrecked by poetic overreaching resonates through the rest of Marvell's poem. The "ruin" that might result from the poetic representation of "sacred truths" is imagined graphically here as Samson's destruction of the temple (and by extension "The world"), a gesture that effects only destruction, a profanation that results in no new version of what it translates but only a repetition of old, inadequate versions: "fable and old song."

The equation of Sampson's destructive gesture with poetic ruin here seems both hyperbolic and deadly serious. The reduction of "sacred truths to fable and old song" doesn't sound so threatening – it is possible to think of it as reduction, not destruction – until it is made to correspond with Samson's vengeful attack on the Temple and the entire world, giving a delayed but terrible dimension to the prospect of "ruin." In his edition, Nigel Smith lessens the ultimate force of this word by citing only the first part of the OED's definition 1.1.a, "to reduce," without citing the rest: "to reduce (a place, etc.) to ruins." Elizabeth Story Donno also gives also the single word "reduce" in her note on the word "ruin." But to reduce and to reduce to ruins are surely two different things. Milton's strength as a poet ("I saw him strong") is in fact such that in his hands, such an attempt, if it failed, could be truly disastrous.¹²² In his hands, "The sacred truths" would not only be reduced by their translation to "fable and old song" but terribly disfigured or destroyed. By implication Marvell argues that Milton has managed to fashion something incredibly impressive, a form of new song able to accommodate "sacred truths" to human form without ruining them. (Here we might be reminded once more of Augustine's preoccupation with the accommodation of divine truth to fallen modes of representation and both the dangers and possibilities inherent in the ambiguities of the written word.)

Marvell fashions his own kind of new song in these lines, not through blank verse but through disjunction, and as we might expect it is one that ruins a little as it creates. These lines that describe a potentially destructive disjunction between tenor and vehicle, truths and fable or old song, also perform a syntactic disjunction of their own, a slant reflection of the process they describe. The parenthesis "(for I saw him strong)" interrupts the clause that imagines this process of ruining, and dilutes but doesn't do away with the

syntactic strangeness and compression which is produced by the use of the word “to” in these lines: “he would ruin ... The sacred truths to fable and old song.” How does one “ruin” something *to* something else? Something seems to be elided and replaced here: “ruin ... the sacred truths [with the result that they became] fable and old song” ? The use of “ruin” seems to begin with the more usual transitive use of the verb, in which it takes an object (“sacred truths”), a sense prolonged by the parenthesis, but then appears to take on a more unusual sense when the preposition “to” is added. None of the quotations supplied by the OED for the word use the preposition “to.”¹²³ The use of the verb with a preposition here is so unexpected that I find myself wanting to replace it, most immediately with the word “turn,” a verb whose meanings include the metaphorical “turn” of poetic figure (“[turn] the sacred truths to fable and old song”). But the turn of figure, the turning of matter into poetic language, is imagined here not as the more neutral “turn” but emphatically as “ruin.”

Marvell’s lines here perform a kind of ruin of their own in their vague perversion of syntactic sense. Like Milton’s convoluted syntax in *Paradise Lost* which turns the reader back to revise what they have just read (as Stanley Fish famously argued in *Surprised by Sin*), the word “to” here turns us back to reconsider the operation of the word “ruin.” This is one of many instances in the poem in which Marvell echoes the language of *Paradise Lost*. Either the word “ruin” or the word “to” appears to be wrongly used here, overstretching convention, something like a catachresis in the way that it makes a new and strange verbal construction. This construction is ambivalent: is it a wrenching that makes something valuable – rich and strange – in its estranging effects, or does it produce only a wreck? In Marvell’s skilled hands the effect is clearly brilliant and

exemplifies the potential of poetry to forge new meaning from the compression and estrangement of ordinary language – ruin as fruitful invention rather than spiteful or “vain” (34) destruction.

This is a poem of praise, delicately balanced in tone and tinged with irony, particularly in the way that Marvell uses rhymed couplets to defend Milton’s own abandonment of rhyme; Marvell insists that Milton has found a way to avoid the “ruin” that should attend poetic translation and has instead found a language that “preserves ... inviolate” (34) the sacred things he represents. Here we recognize the fantasy of translation without ruin or violation that finds expression in “Upon Appleton House” in the nun’s creation of fruit “preserves” and the poet’s attempts to find a way around the ruin of metaphor via the pun, a figure that effects a change of meaning without a change of name. Marvell here ponders the problems attendant on the representation of explicitly “sacred truths” rather than the representation of the material world or recent history such as concerns him in “Upon Appleton House.” But “sacred truths” are not the only matter subject to poetic translation in *Paradise Lost*, and Marvell would have recognized the ways in which Milton’s poem as an allegory represents not only “Rebelling angels” and primordial “chaos” (3, 4) but also rebelling English subjects and the “chaos” of a world overwhelmed by civil war. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton attempts to find a language to describe the recent Civil War and the failure of the revolution while also inscribing the “sacred truth” of Biblical story. All these things might be ruined or reduced by their translation into poetic language and poetic figures.

Milton’s unique genius appears to be his defense against this possibility of profanation, and we are reminded that in a “less skillful hand” (18) the vast scope of his

poem could be reduced to meaninglessness, as Marvell suggests it is in Dryden's dramatic adaptation of *Paradise Lost* which included the translation of Milton's blank verse into rhyme (35-40). Marvell praises Milton's poetic invention in a poem that preserves the rhyme that Milton had rejected, and it was Marvell's (or Dryden's) rhyming couplets that proved to be the dominant form of poetry in the century that followed. In the English Renaissance, as poets came to fully embrace and overgo classical poetic forms and to forge distinctively English versions of them in this turbulent historical time, their use of poetic figure became fraught with a peculiarly forceful kind of reflexivity. Reflexivity in poetic language is not limited to the poetry of the Renaissance, and not limited to poetry that reflects on the representation of the poet's own historical moment, but it seems to me to be concentrated in the poetry of this time, focused on these issues, in a unique and fascinating way.

There have been, and will continue to be, attempts to account for the prevalence of reflexivity in poetic language in the period that refuse the significance of contemporary historical disruptions: David S. Reid's recent article, focusing on Crashaw, is a case in point. Crashaw's distinctive use of inwoven, reflexive metaphor, Reid argues, reflects religious sentiments that are profoundly individual and divorced from history: "these turnings of the world upside down are extravagant expressions of religious feeling, not responses to the Civil War" (416), and Marvell's own use of reflexive figures is held to be a form of idiosyncratic personal expression seemingly unrelated to history. Reid rejects not only the context of the Civil War but virtually any other political context for Crashaw's writing. Just how religious or personal feeling and its rendering in language might possibly be separated from the contemporary moment, when politics, religion, and

literature intermixed so profoundly, is a mystery that Reid does not explain – although he is clearly in critical dialogue with critics such as David Norbrook and Nigel Smith who stress the impact of political events on literature and not only seek to re-value the writings of Republicans and other Revolutionaries but also appear to share political sympathy with them.

Reid's approach shows the continuing power of a desire in some criticism to separate literature and affect from history, and the aesthetic from the political. This could be one direction of a "new historical formalism" that may seek to historicize formal aspects of literature only in order to divide and separate them from history more broadly conceived as a complex interplay of forces – to make a "literary history" that is interested in Crashaw's poetry as expression of Catholic religious feeling, for instance, but not what it meant to be a Catholic poet in the mid-seventeenth century and how that might relate to the use of reflexive metaphor; or in the case of Heather Dubrow's reading of the country house genre, to focus only on how he is a continuous part of a literary tradition rather than how he remakes it in a particular historical moment, from a particular and complex perspective. Although Dubrow attends to the way the country house genre as a whole shows evidence of "ruptures" and "discordant elements," ("Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" 75, 72) the relationship of these to the radical ruptures of history is not part of her concern, which may explain something about why "Upon Appleton House" does not present itself to her as more of a "discordant element" in the very genre that she considers. Part of Reid's intent seems to be to avoid the kind of reductive analysis for which he appears to criticize Christopher Ricks (although this is itself a reduction of Ricks' sophisticated reading) which would argue that historical events directly cause and

determine the shape of poetic language, so that a poet's aesthetic creations are no more than a response to the disruptions of history. (A critique of New Historicism is also implied by Reid's desire to rigidly separate the aesthetic from the political and to regard Crashaw's poetry as an expression of "feeling" that seems to transcend its historical moment.) I have tried to avoid such oversimplifying in my own attempts to explore the relationship between history and the representation of history and experience.

The task of establishing the relationship between historical context and the formal properties of literature is extremely challenging: context multiplies into contextual realms that bleed into each other, each competing for significance, and attempts to first separate them, and then analyze how literature relates to them and is in fact a part of them, feel provisional at best, especially in a period when spheres so separate in the modern world – religion and the state, for instance – are so closely interwoven. In my understanding of the relationship between history and literature, I have tried to think about the ways in which language itself and its figurative aspects were not exactly impacted by historical events and shifts but rather were a central component of them. The Protestant reformation is such a case, where debates over how to translate the Bible, how to legislate ways of reading scripture (allegorical, metaphorical), and how to understand the metaphorical significance of the Eucharist were central not only to the Reformation as a division between Catholic and Protestant but also in terms of competing forms of Protestant doctrine, between Anglican and Puritan, and many more divisions within those fields. Also in the field of developing scientific enquiry, the search for an adequate descriptive language was an integral part of new methods of acquiring and imparting knowledge.

These separable historical phenomena are also part of a broader shift in thinking with which these writers engage, related to the ways in which things relate to and correspond to each other on a profound, mysterious level. Inventions such as the telescope and the microscope were creating new ways of seeing both the microcosm and the macrocosm, and unsettling previously accepted notions of the relationship between them. The writers in my study worry over how to render the concept of likeness when all forms of correspondence previously taken for granted seem to be in the process of mutating. As I argue most explicitly in my chapter on Donne, these naturalized ideas of correspondence or analogy underlie the most basic conventions of poetic decorum such as those which legislate whether the two terms in a comparison are put together in an “apt” way or not. Donne’s *Anniversaries* explore the consequences for poetic language when those structures of correspondence are unsettled.

There is no doubt much more to say about these framing questions of the relationship of literature to history, and why it is the case that these writers reflected on the problems of figuring (and disfiguring) the world with such intensity at this particular historical moment, or set of moments, from Spenser to Marvell. Psychoanalytic accounts of the relationship between the split subject and the divisions of language, or post-structuralist accounts of the reflexive properties of all language, while they are mostly convincing to me, have a limited utility when it comes to explaining why these particular forms of reflexivity emerged with such urgency at this historical juncture. It seems to me that it must have something to do not only with the construction of the human psyche or the construction of language (if they are really separable). Metaphor, for example, is an apparently universal feature of language and perhaps of cognition itself; our dream life

testifies to the deep and “unfathomable abyss” of the role of metaphor in the way the mind works and represents itself to itself. But the way people think about metaphor and the ways in which they produce, use, interpret, and reflect on metaphor are socially, culturally and historically specific; loosely put, figures have an ideological dimension that assumes specific forms in time and that may be reflected upon in poetic language.

Exploring how theorists of poetic language in the early modern period reflected on the construction of figurative language has helped me to understand some of these historical specificities, and I believe that the work of Puttenham and others provides a sense of the conventions against and through which poets worked with figurative language. In my introduction I tried to show how these conventions are not entirely stable categories, but are themselves troubled by paradoxes and problems that they try to resolve. These conventions show continuity with very old concerns with figurative language such as those expressed by ancient rhetoricians including Cicero, Quintilian and church fathers such as Augustine, and also take historically specific form by reflecting specifically Protestant concerns about the translations of spirit to matter, meaning to form, and specifically early modern English concerns about the construction of positive models of eloquence and poetic art in a basically barbarous language.

But what I am working around to explaining is that while these framing questions will hopefully give a sense of the context for the readings in this dissertation, my real arguments rest with the readings themselves and my real interest lies in the smallest details of these poems, in their puns and hyperboles, their distinctive disjunctions and “incomprehensibleness,” their ruins and strange compensatory creations. This dissertation could not have been written without an enduring delight in the artful forms by which

these poems question their own art. These poems are all in their own way elegiac, mourning the passing of an imagined time when wholeness, not disjunction, ruled the poetic universe, a time before “Ruina” was ruined – in Spenser’s case, a time when Duessa refracted a thousand possible meanings rather than being reduced to Mary, Queen of Scots; in Donne’s poems, a moment when artists could conjure the magical constellation of connections between things; for Sheppard, when history could sensibly correspond to the victorious narrative of epic; in Marvell, a linguistic representation that could preserve what it translates. But as Donne knew especially well, elegies compensate for the death of what they mourn by making art, and these poems do that too. Sheppard’s unfinished poem presents the strongest challenge to the idea that these poems create positive forms of disunity and disjunction, but even though it is unfinished and largely incomprehensible (and will probably never become a popular text) *The Faerie King* is still a substantial achievement of the imagination.

T. S. Eliot and his followers celebrated the ways in which Donne and his contemporaries pulled disjunctive elements back together in a new “unity” of “discordia concors” – for exactly this reason, he was not able to admire the “discordia” of *The Anniversaries*, almost unrelieved by “concors,” which I find so attractive. It is post-structuralist fashion to admire disjunction and to find in early modern moments of textual reflexivity a reflection of one’s own modern or post-modern subjective experience of discontinuity and dissonance, and it is hard to know how to escape from that, or work with it knowingly. But as I have tried to show, the peculiar forms of disjunction in these poems – ugly and beautiful, bitter and exultant, knowing and strange – are entirely of and about their own historical moment.

¹²² Blind, bitter, and betrayed, Milton's identification with the figure of Sampson is intensified by the odd placement of the closing parentheses that begin "(So Sampson...". The following line, "The world o'erwhelming to revenge his sight" could apply equally to both Milton and Sampson, and seems to be outside the parentheses where it should belong, both inside and outside the simile. But how far can the simile be taken in any case, and how should we take it exactly? After all, the temple ruined by Sampson is not truly "sacred" but is a pagan temple, more proximately equivalent with "fable and old song."

¹²³ This use of "ruin" with a preposition recalls the unusual intransitive use of the word, which the OED notes often uses the preposition "in" although their quotations do not provide an example of it (OED II.5, for which a line from *Paradise Lost* is quoted as an example: "Hell saw Heav'n ruining from Heaven," [VI.868]).

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