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FORMS OF IMPERFECTION IN THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation argues that the problem of perfection was central to English literary culture in the wake of sixteenth-century humanism. For English humanists such as Roger Ascham, the great authors of classical antiquity were supposed to offer perfect examples of literary excellence. But these models often survived only in fragmentary form—half a speech, an unfinished treatise, a few lines of poetry, or a work altogether lost. As English writers looked to the examples that humanism supplied to invent an English vernacular eloquence, the broken corpus of antiquity proved a sticking point. Acts of cultural imitation large and small were suspended between the fragment in hand and the ideal on its horizon. As poet Samuel Daniel complained, those who hoped to reform English writing on the model of antiquity were “told that here is the perfect art of versifying, which in conclusion is yet confessed to be imperfect.” My project illuminates the historical particulars and formal contours of this dilemma through the story of the Greek painter Apelles, whose “imperfite worke,” poet John Harington alleges, was “so full of the perfection of his art, that no man durst euer take vpon him to end it.” In successive

chapters (and a brief coda), I trace echoes of this story across the work and early reception histories of John Lyly, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, and Francis Bacon. I find that the classical visual arts supplied English writers of the period with a vocabulary for reimagining the utility of poetry when humanism's claims to perfection began to fade into irrelevance.

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The central insight into the literary and intellectual culture of the Renaissance period that emerges from this project is that thinking is always embedded in material forms and relationships. It's fitting, then, for me to acknowledge that whatever new knowledge these pages hold is ultimately the product of many conversations, debates, and workshops that I was fortunate enough to share with the members of my committee, with faculty members and graduate students at Rutgers and other institutions, and with family and friends beyond the academy. I regret that I'm able to thank only a few of them here.

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Dedication

For Tara

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Introduction: The Torment of Inquiry

It is certain that Plato everywhere calls Ideas a perfect and lucid notion, as Apelles carries in his mind the most beautiful image of the human body.
—Philip Melanchthon¹

This dissertation argues that the problem of perfection was central to English literary culture in the wake of sixteenth-century humanism. For English humanists such as Roger Ascham, the great authors of classical antiquity were supposed to offer “the true precepts and perfect examples of eloquence.”² But these models of rhetorical perfection often survived only in fragmentary form—half a speech, an unfinished treatise, a few lines of poetry, or a work altogether lost. As English writers looked to the examples that humanism supplied to invent an English vernacular eloquence, the broken corpus of antiquity proved a sticking point. Acts of cultural imitation large and small were suspended between the fragment in hand and the ideal on its horizon. As poet Samuel Daniel complained, those who hoped to reform English writing on the model of antiquity were “told that here is the perfect art of versifying, which in conclusion is yet confessed

1 Qtd. in Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, trans. Joseph J.S. Peake (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), 6.

2 Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (1570; repr., Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 161.

to be unperfect.”³ My project illuminates the historical particulars and formal contours of this dilemma through the story of the Greek painter Apelles, whose “imperfite worke,” poet John Harington alleges, was “so full of the perfection of his art, that no man durst euer take vpon him to end it.”⁴ In successive chapters (and a brief coda), I trace echoes of this story across the work and early reception histories of John Lyly, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, and Francis Bacon.

Taking inspiration from the work of Raymond Williams and Patricia Parker in particular, my first aim in telling this story is to plot the cultural coordinates of a keyword—“perfection”—that I have found to be central to the way the literary culture of the English Renaissance understood itself.⁵ The fact that this term seems so easily to collapse into its opposite—as Harington’s remark suggests and as the title of my project also acknowledges—is one of the primary observations that emerges from my research.

Early modern English writers had good cause to feel that perfection was the condition to which poetry ought most logically to aspire. Perfection, like poetry itself, has its roots in the practical art of making. The Latin *perfectus* is an adjectival use of the past participle of *perficere*: *per* (completely or thoroughly) + *facere*, meaning to do or make (OED). Among early modern English writers, this root word *facere* was understood to lie at the heart of poetry. William Webbe argues at the beginning of *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), for example, that “Poetrie, called in Greeke ποητρια being deriued from the Verbe ποιέω, which signifieth in Latine *facere*, in English to make, may properly be

3 Samuel Daniel, *A Defense of Rhyme*, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1904), 2:375.

4 Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse*, trans. Sir John Harington (London: 1591), 277.

5 Especially Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

defined the arte of making.”⁶ From this perspective, perfection names the natural fulfillment of poetry’s unique potential, rather than some elusive standard external to the art itself.

For most writers and critics of the period, the perfection of English poetry meant the conformity of English versification and prose style to classical models of decorum. Thus Roger Ascham wishes that “as Virgil and Horace . . . by right imitation of the perfect Grecians had brought poetry to perfectness also in the Latin tongue, that we Englishmen likewise would acknowledge and understand rightfully our rude, beggarly rhyming, brought first into Italy by Goths and Huns when all good verses and good learning too were destroyed by them.”⁷ Webbe similarly declares that “I am fully and certainlie perswaded that if the true kind of versifying in imitation of Greekes and Latines had been practised in the English Tongue, and put in use from time to tyme by our Poets, who might have continually been mending and pollyshing the same, every one according to their severall giftes, it would long here this have aspired to as full perfection as in anie other tongue whatsoever.”⁸ If English eloquence could be achieved by modeling English writing on Cicero and Quintilian, these writers maintain, poetry need only look to its classical forbears in order to achieve a similar “perfection.” If the “unperfect” status of these models of perfection troubled the program of cultural renewal promulgated by humanists like Ascham, it also opened up new possibilities for poetic innovation and discursive distinction.

6 William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586. Repr. in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1904), 1:278.

7 Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 145. On the association of rhyme with a Gothic history and quantitative meter with the classical tradition, see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 25-39.

8 Webbe, *Discourse*, 278.

At the same time, early modern critics also take perfection to indicate the capacity of poetry to move its readers to virtuous action. Summarizing the view of poetry inherited from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Webbe writes that "[t]he perfect perfection of poetrie is this: to mingle delight with profitt in such wyse that a reader might by his reading be pertaker of bothe."⁹ Similarly, Sidney writes that "[a] Poet, that he may be perfect, hath neede to haue knowledge of that part of Philosophy which informeth the life to good manners."¹⁰ Both critics argue that poetry, in order to achieve true perfection, must accomplish some virtuous purpose in the world. There are reasons to doubt how sincerely even Sidney himself held this view of poetry's utility in moral instruction. Nevertheless, each of the works I discuss in this dissertation starts from the stated position that the value of poetry lies in its ability to make readers more virtuous. Yet in each case the mental labor of poets and audiences alike to make meaning out of unfinished works of art, bits of text, and other cultural fragments begins to outpace moral instruction as a meaningful standard of poetic accomplishment.

Two important senses of perfection bookend this account. The first, which I derive from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, defines perfection as the coincidence of form and purpose. American philosopher Martin Foss, in a perceptive early account, writes that "[w]herever the idea of perfection emerges and starts to shape the world-view of men, we may be sure that the rational concept of end, of purpose is at work."¹¹ In the *Metaphysics*,

9 William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586. Repr. in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1904), 1:250.

10 Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie*, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1904), 1:295.

11 Martin Foss, *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 96. For an account of how the teleology of perfection has been variously applied to human beings from antiquity to the twentieth century, see John Passmore's important work *The Perfectibility of Man* (New York: Scribner, 1970).

this is one half of the definition of perfection that Aristotle provides. Aristotle writes that “things which have attained their end, if their end is good, are called perfect [*teleios*], for they are perfect in virtue of having attained their end.”¹² This external idea of perfection is linked by means of the concept of “natural magnitude” to the definition of perfection as formal completion—“that outside which it is impossible to find even a single one of its parts.”¹³ Aristotle’s assumption that all things have a natural scope, shape, or end links the idea of formal completion with ethical purposiveness (“if their end is good”). As I show throughout the dissertation, the idea of “perfection” as the fulfillment of natural, teleological ends ramifies across a wide range of cultural and intellectual practices in the early modern period. In particular, I show how English poets, playwrights, editors, and booksellers drew on this sense of the term in public debates, educational treatises, letters to readers, statements of poetics, and literary works themselves as they tried to imagine how a specifically English form of poetry ought to be fashioned and what kind of moral purpose—if any—it should fulfill.

The second definition, which I take from Spinoza’s *Ethics*, defines perfection as a mode of thinking. By the second half of the seventeenth century—the *Ethica* was posthumously published in 1677—Spinoza decisively decoupled perfection from

12 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), V.xvi. Medieval Latin commentaries on the *Metaphysics* routinely translate Aristotle’s Greek *teleios* into the Latin *perfectus*; both adjectives describe a thing that has fulfilled its purpose. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *In Duodecem libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. Cathala and Spiazzi (Turin: Marietti, 1950). Aquinas’s commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which observes the same terminological equivalence, remained popular among both Catholics and Protestants well into the seventeenth century and further supplied early modern writers with the vocabulary of “perfection” for metaphysical teleology. For the Latin, see Aquinas, *In Decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum Expositio*, ed. Cathala (Turin: Marietti, 1949); on the enduring, trans-confessional popularity of Aquinas’s commentary, see Jill Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Eckhard Kessler (Cambridge UP 1988), 303-86.

13 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V.xvi.1-3.

metaphysical teleology and defined it explicitly as a matter of individual perspective. Spinoza introduces the concept of perfection specifically as a way to rebut the Aristotelian concept of ends. “Nature,” writes Spinoza, “does not work with an end in view.” “What is called a final cause,” Spinoza writes in direct rejection of the Aristotelian model, “is nothing but a human appetite,” and as a result “perfection and imperfection . . . are merely modes of thinking [Perfectio igitur et imperfectio revera modi solummodo cogitandi sunt].”¹⁴ Because there is no ideal order latent in things that points toward any particular end, perfection vanishes from the world and retreats to the mind.

The literary, intellectual, and moral culture that I recover in my dissertation lies somewhere between these definitions. Though I do not propose anything like a strict lineage for these competing definitions, I am interested in how early modern writers, laboring in Aristotle’s metaphysical terms, consistently arrived at something approximating Spinoza’s epistemological conclusion. How did poetic practices and constructions of authorship inform the relevance of perfection as an important cultural category? And conversely, how did changing attitudes toward the project of perfection in disciplines intimately related to poetry influence poetic practices and constructions of authorship at the same time? The problem of perfection—art historian Mitchell B. Merback calls it “the crisis of perfection”—was one of humanism’s principal legacies.¹⁵ In attempting to account for this ambivalent legacy, I am influenced by Katherine Eggert’s description of the end of the humanist era from 1580-1660 as one in which

14 Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin, 1996), 114-5; *Ethica: Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*, eds. J. Van Vloten and J.P.N. Land (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1905), 113.

15 Mitchell B. Merback, *Perfection’s Therapy: An Essay on Albrecht Dürer’s Melencolia I* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 32.

English intellectual culture “acknowledged and articulated [humanism’s] problems but at the same time continued to employ it as if there were nothing problematic about it.”¹⁶ If cracks and fissures in the scheme of humanist perfectionism began to appear as early as the work of John Lyly and were close to breaking apart altogether by the time Francis Bacon addressed the subject, the period covered in this dissertation is nevertheless one in which both views of perfection—that it accurately describes the metaphysical properties of the world, and that it exists only in the mind of the observer—were routinely held at the same time.

In tracing out this line of influence, my project contributes to a growing body of scholarship on the conflicted relationship between the sixteenth-century humanist schoolroom and the English vernacular poetry that emerged from it. Scholars have long told a story about the rise of vernacular literature in the English Renaissance and the pedagogical commitments of Tudor humanism in terms that emphasize departure and critique.¹⁷ In this version of the story, the shortcomings of humanist pedagogy were obstacles that had to be overcome for English writing to flourish in the second half of the sixteenth century.¹⁸ However, scholars have lately also emphasized what Jeff Dolven calls a “double sense of debt and resentment that these poets, whose greatness depended so deeply on their education, felt toward their teachers and their teachers’ legacy.”¹⁹ Jenny C. Mann, for example, finds that the failure of vernacular rhetorical manuals to

16 Katherine Eggert, *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 17.

17 The classic account of the errancy of Elizabethan letters is Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). See also Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

18 See also Arthur Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

19 Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 63.

translate classical figures neatly into English produces “neither silence nor ineloquence, but storytelling.”²⁰ Catherine Nicholson suggests that in Ascham’s schoolroom the distance and time that separates England from the accomplishments of Rome produced the exoticism that came paradoxically to define vernacular eloquence.²¹ Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld argues the humanist pedagogical practice of figure-pointing played a crucial role in defamiliarizing the artifice of eloquence and rendering palpable the figures of speech that enabled poetic invention.²²

According to these scholars, the interval of difference between the ideals of eloquence in ancient Greece and Rome and the work of sixteenth-century English writers who labored in their shadows generated not merely shame or resentment—though it sometimes yielded those affects as well—but also a strangeness or errancy that turned out to be useful for the articulation of an eloquence unique to the English poetry. My project contributes to this ongoing conversation by showing how the legacy of classical visual art supplied key terms through which Renaissance writers sought to distinguish the value of their work. The narrative I uncover is one in which English literary culture begins to foreground accidental loss as an essential feature of artistic authority and a key to the particular kind of thinking that poetry makes available.

By emphasizing accidental loss as a critical feature of English poetry’s self-realization in the early modern period, I further engage a body of scholarly work that considers the ruin as a site both of temporal disjuncture and aesthetic potential in the

20 Jenny C. Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Renaissance England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 3.

21 Catherine Nicholson, *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

22 Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, *Indecorous Thinking: Figures of Speech in Early Modern Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

Renaissance period.²³ Alive to a similar sense of possibility as well as loss in the “imperfect” work, the early modern authors I discuss throughout this dissertation nevertheless continue to frame their work in the terms of artistic and moral perfection that continued to authorize the practice of poetry. They begin by looking back anxiously at the fragments of antiquity, and they proceed by exploring the imperfection as a model for making and a new criterion of poetic value. Specifically, I will argue that as the writers I study embraced the forms of imperfection that caused anxiety among their humanist elders, they began to find the value of literary art lies in its ability to record and represent modes of thinking, anticipating Spinoza’s redefinition of the concept.

The problem of perfection has always been intimately bound up with the problem of thinking. I want to dwell briefly on Marsilio Ficino’s “Five Questions Concerning the Mind” (1476) as an important example in the Renaissance humanist tradition that precedes the story I begin in chapter one. Ficino understands perfection in the traditional, Aristotelian sense as the fulfillment of the particular ends that are inherent to things. It is central to how he imagines the universe. “We are not in doubt concerning the ends of the motion of the elements and plants and irrational animals,” he writes. “Certainly, it must be recognized that . . . they strive toward some particular thing, are the result of some particular power and, further, that in those ends which we have described they achieve sufficient rest and are perfected as much as their natures require.”²⁴ And not only individual bodies but the cosmos itself is defined by the latent potential for perfection and

23 For example, Susan Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020) and Andrew Hui, *The Poetics of Ruin in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

24 Marsilio Ficino, “Five Questions Concerning the Mind,” trans. Josephine L. Burroughs, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 196.

a natural inclination toward its fulfillment: “If individual motions are brought to completion according to such a wonderful order, then certainly the universal motion of the cosmos itself cannot be lacking in perfect order.”²⁵ This is the essential claim that Spenser’s Dame Nature will invoke, for example, when she insists (unpersuasively, I will argue in chapter three) that “all things . . . worke their owne perfection so by fate.”²⁶

For Ficino, human beings, perched at the top of the order of creation, present a challenge for this perfectionist framework precisely because of our cognitive faculties. Ficino maintains that some end must be available toward which human being tends and in which humans can find fulfillment. Yet a conflict emerges because Ficino believes human faculties can be divided neatly into intellect and sense. The division applies to human experience alone, and it’s what makes humans nearest to God and nearest, in Ficino’s terms, to perfection. “If other things do not wander upward and downward in a foolish accidental way but are directed according to a certain rational order toward something which is in the highest degree peculiar and appropriate to them and in which they are entirely perfected, then certainly mind, which is the receptacle of wisdom, which comprehends the order and ends of natural things . . . and which is more perfect than all others, we have mentioned . . . must be directed in a far greater degree to some ordered end in which it is perfected according to its earnest desires.”²⁷ The addition of the faculties of mind to mere sensory experience is what makes humans “more perfect” than other orders of creation. But it’s also what renders the sort of perfection proper to humans more difficult to secure.

25 Ficino, “Five Questions,” 195.

26 Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2001), 7.58.2-7.

27 Ficino, “Five Questions,” 197.

More difficult because divided. Sense pursues its desires at the expense of intellect, Ficino argues. “We know by experience that the beast in us, that is, sense, most often attains its end and good. This is the case, for instance, when sense . . . is entirely satisfied with the attainment of its adequate object.”²⁸ While pure contemplation belongs to the fulfillment of intellect, sense is satisfied by material objects. These competing drives mean that for human beings alone perfection cannot be achieved in this world, but only after “the immortality and brightness of the soul . . . shine[s] forth into its own body.”²⁹ In the meantime, intellect is driven restlessly forward in the direction of its particular perfection, always hindered by sense’s contradictory and inevitable pursuit of the perfection proper to it. This, Ficino says, is “the torment of inquiry.”³⁰

In the epigraph with which I began, German theologian Philip Melanchthon draws on a version of Apelles’s story in which the painter serves as an exemplar of precision, associating the “beautiful image of the human body” in Apelles’s mind with the order of Platonic idealism such as Ficino imagines it. According to Erwin Panofsky, the remark reflects an important Renaissance revision of Plato by locating ideal forms in the mind, rather than in a transcendent metaphysical order. Ficino has the same understanding of cognition, and the firm divide he insists on between sense and intellect is what sustains this maneuver. The surprising itinerary of Apelles’s painting through Elizabethan letters that I outline in the following chapters tracks a yet another shift of emphasis for the idealistic projects of poetic making and classroom instruction that remained thoroughly intertwined in the period’s theories of poetic value. For English poets, as I will show, the

28 Ficino, “Five Questions,” 207.

29 Ficino, “Five Questions,” 211.

30 Ficino, “Five Questions,” 208.

example of Apelles's painting further removes this ideal from the heavenly spheres by locating it simultaneously in the painter's mind and in a material object: the fragmentary last work that stood as the only record of its maker's intent. My project ultimately finds that the fragmentary legacy of the classical visual arts supplied English writers with a vocabulary for reimagining the utility of poetry when the claims of humanism began to fade into irrelevance. By locating the cogitations of the artist in the fragment itself, the kind of thinking that emerges from this story is one in which Ficino's distinction between sense and intellect begins to fall apart. A kind of thinking that is not "incorporeal and simple," as Ficino would have it, but embedded in activities, relationships, and things.³¹

My first chapter, to which I now turn, shows how John Lyly appropriated the inimitability of the ancients through his rewriting of Roger Ascham's pedagogical models, with the Venus of Apelles serving as the mediating figure. Lyly in turn challenged Ascham's pedagogical idealism by adapting this figure to the errancy of romance. Chapter two shows how embracing perfect imperfection as a model of artistic accomplishment tends to center the mental labor of the poet, rather than the actions of readers, as the measure of poetic value. After the death of Philip Sidney, Sidney's supporters located in his work a stylistic inimitability analogous to that of the ancients, arguing that "Sir Philip Sidney's writings can no more be perfected without Sir Philip Sidney than Apelles' pictures without Apelles."³² By insisting on the imaginative singularity of Sidney's achievement, however, they began to discover that the value of his work in the *Arcadia* lay rather in the exercise of style than the exercise of virtue.

31 Ficino, "Five Questions," 204.

32 Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (New York: Penguin, 1977), 59.

My third chapter finds the Venus of Apelles at the heart of Edmund Spenser's relationship to Chaucer, England's closest analog to classical authorities such as Vergil. Spenser claims that the *Faerie Queene* depicts a knight "perfected in the twelve private moral virtues, as Aristotle hath devised," but allusions to the Venus of Apelles in his account of Chaucer's unfinished *Squire's Tale* reveal, at a critical moment in this project, a glimpse of the uncomfortable intimacy of decay, death, and poetic creation.³³ The "unperfite" *Cantos of Mutabilitie* cast further doubt on the characteristically Aristotelian idea that things work toward their own perfection, reserving the perfection of the *Faerie Queene* instead for the cognitive labor of the poet. The fourth chapter follows an echo of Pliny's account into the 1623 First Folio edition of William Shakespeare's work, which claims to offer Shakespeare's plays "perfect of their limbes," in effect reversing the humanist trope of corporeal loss.³⁴ But the problematic *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, co-authored with George Wilkins and pointedly excluded from the folio, embodies problems of imperfection that extend across the whole of Shakespeare's corpus. In this chapter, I draw on bibliographical as well as theatrical definitions of perfection, and I argue that the play models the making of meaning in dramatic poetry as a collaborative act between the imperfect pieces that appear onstage and the minds of the assembled audience. My story finds an appropriately inconclusive ending in the 1620s with the work of Francis Bacon, whose work I address in the project's coda. In the *Novum Organum* and the unfinished prose romance *The New Atlantis*, Bacon sought to overturn what he saw as rote devotion

³³ Edmund Spenser, "A Letter of the Authors," in *The Faerie Queene*, 715.

³⁴ William Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Jaggard for Edward Blount, 1623), sig. A3r.

to systems of learning passed down by the ancients—a mechanical habit of thought to which he gave the by-then derisive name “perfection.”

Chapter One

The Venus of Apelles from Schoolroom to Romance

The story of this dissertation begins with a mere endnote, albeit one of unusually broad scope. In canto 32 of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), the female knight Bradamante repasts at Tristano's castle. As John Harington has it in his 1591 translation from the Italian, "The boord was couerd in a stately hall, / Whose match scarce in te world was to be seene, / With goodly pictures drawne vpon the wall."¹ The paintings that decorate the hall, it turns out, are the work of Merlin, and, more than just "goodly," they depict French wars in Italy that have not yet taken place. At the beginning of the next canto, Merlin's accomplishment occasions a list of comparisons to famous painters ancient and modern—none of whom, we are duly reminded, was able to represent future events. One name stands out among those listed: the Greek painter Apelles, "plast all the rest before: / Whose skill in drawing, all the world doth note."² In the explanatory end-of-canto notes that supplement the folio edition that Harington prepared with printer Richard Field, Harington offers a brief account of Apelles's life, expanding on Ariosto's reference and emphasizing Apelles's unfinished painting of Venus rising from the sea. Where Ariosto understands Apelles to embody technical precision, Harington takes him as a metonym for the daunting allure of the unfinished masterpiece. In the note on

1 Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse*, trans. Sir John Harington (London, 1591), 264.

2 Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse*, 268. More simply in the original: "Apelle, più di tutti questi noto." Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* vol. 4 (Milan: Societa Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1813), 167.

Apelles, he writes that the painter “began the image of Venus, and dyed ear it was done, leauing the imperfite worke, so full of the perfection of his art, that no man durst euer take vpon him to end it: so as euen to this day, if any begin a worke in any kind with any felicitie, and after leaue it vnfinisht, they straight liken him to Apelles.”³ This chapter finds a kind of historical parallax between Ariosto’s reference and his Elizabethan translator’s peculiar dilation thereof. Although the scene in Ariosto’s poem is not obviously one of instruction, I will ultimately argue that the revisionary interval between source and note reflects Elizabethan romance’s creative appropriation of humanist pedagogical methods through the medium of Greco-Roman visual art.⁴

Career of a Commonplace

Harington’s claim notwithstanding, Apelles tends to appear in the history of visual art much as he does in Ariosto’s poem: as another name for supreme technical skill. Having flourished during the fourth century BC, Apelles lives on primarily through the account of his work in Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History*. None of his works survives, but Pliny’s description of Apelles’s final painting of Venus inspired many well-known imitations. Renaissance artists agreed on the strength of his reputation that Apelles “achieved mimetic perfection.”⁵ Modern art historians likewise maintain that, like Zeuxis and his

3 Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse*, 277.

4 On Harington’s “transformation” of Ariosto in the context of the social role of artists, see Clark Hulse, *The Rule of Art: Literature and Painting in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 11-25. Hulse discusses the passage above, but does not note the difference in reputation assigned to Apelles.

5 Jacob Isager, *Pliny on Art and Society: The Elder Pliny’s Chapters on the History of Art* (London and NY: Routledge, 1991), 138. The most influential account of Apelles’s association with technical accuracy is Ernst Gombrich, *The Heritage of Apelles: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976). See also Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture: The*

grapes, “Apelles’s fame was predicated on his achievements in creating a convincing illusion.”⁶ Quattrocento painters such as Michelangelo borrowed Apelles’s habit—reported by Pliny—of signing their works in the imperfect tense, but this tradition does not maintain that the pictures Apelles signed this way were actually unfinished; the practice instead reflects an obviously conventional expression of humility attached to finished works.⁷

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Harington’s note, then, is the broad cultural currency he claims for his association. “[I]f *any* begin a work in *any* kind with *any* felicitie, and efter leaue it vnfinisht,” he is immediately compared to Apelles.⁸ Harington insists that Renaissance writers used Apelles’s name—almost exclusively it seems—to signify a kind of unfinishedness. This version of the story holds that the artist’s fragmentary final work paradoxically seals the integrity of his corpus.⁹ Apelles’s achievements have become proprietary because “no man durst euer take vpon him to end” what the great painter began. In the course of unpacking this alternative reception history for Apelles and his ill-fated final painting, this chapter contributes to our

Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua, ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 104. For Alberti, Apelles serves as an example of the direct correlation between an artist’s reputation among future generations and his ability to complete—or make “perfect”—his works: “Nam omnes qui sua posteris grata et accepta fore opera cupiunt, multo ante meditari opus oportet, quod multa diligentia perfectum reddant.” Alberti’s focus is primarily on Apelles’s allegorical painting of calumny; for more on this subject, see James A.W. Heffernan, “Alberti on Apelles: Word and Image in *De Pictura*,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 2:3 (Winter 1996), 345-59.

6 Margaret A. Sullivan, “Alter Apelles: Dürer’s 1500 Self-Portrait,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 68:4 (Winter 2015): 1167-8.

7 See Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 114-5. On the rediscovery of Pliny’s *Natural History* and its influence on Renaissance visual art, see Sarah Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance: The Legacy of the “Natural History”* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

8 Emphasis added.

9 For a theoretical account of this paradox, see James Ramsey Wallen, “What Is an Unfinished Work?” *New Literary History* 46:1 (Winter 2015), 125-142; for an account based on the procedures of early modern print culture, see Stephen B. Dobranski on Renaissance omissions in *Readers and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-20.

understanding of the development of sixteenth-century English vernacular literature by showing how classical visual art supplied some of the most important terms and frameworks through which poets of the Elizabethan period would come to articulate the claim to authority in their own work.

The argument involves first identifying a major point of inflection. If Harington's version of the Apelles myth had become universally recognized by the time of the translator's *Orlando*, as Harington himself insists, it does not seem to have been a significant part of Apelles's legacy in English Renaissance literature until the later sixteenth century. Earlier Tudor writers, like their Italian contemporary Ariosto, tend to emphasize Apelles's affiliation with representational accuracy. In Thomas Elyot's dictionary, published in 1538, the entry for Apelles reads simply (if impressively): "Apelles: the moste eccellente paynter that euer was."¹⁰ (Modern encyclopedists of literary reference tell a similar story.¹¹) Elyot affirms Apelles's status as a technical master, but makes no mention of the legacy of unfinished work that, for Harington, defines the painter's cultural afterlife. Later poets such as George Turberville refer to Apelles's reputation for exemplary technique in order to leverage the mimetic capacities of poetry against those of the visual arts, in a familiar *paragone*:

Though Venus forme Apelles made so well,
As Creece did iudge the Painter to excell:
Yet let not that enbolde the Greeke to graue
Hir shape, that beauties praise deserues to haue.¹²

10 Thomas Elyot, "Apelles," in *The Dictionary of syr Thomas Eliot knight* (London, 1538).

11 Judith Dundas, "Apelles," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). Dundas writes that "what distinguished [Apelles] from the other notable painters of his time was the indefinable grace of his pictures."

12 George Turberville, "The Louer extolleth the singular beautie of his Ladie," *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets with a discourse of the friendly affections of Tymetes to Pyndara his ladie* (London: Henry Denham, 1567), 7r. For evidence of the enduring utility of Apelles's legacy in comparisons of poetry and painting, see Marguerite Tassi, "O'erpicturing Apelles: Shakespeare's Paragone with Painting in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays*, ed. Sara Munson

Praise—the coin of epideictic poetry—may do the trick when no degree of visual fidelity can suffice. In this example, the Venus of Apelles functions as the embodiment of painting’s highest level of precision—and consequently as a figure for its limitations. Yet neither does Turberville mention the fact that Apelles’s most famous painting of Venus was understood by many to be incomplete.

Some poets seem even to imply the opposite. In “Gascoignes prayse of Bridges, novve Ladie Sandes,” George Gascoigne has Nature comment on the eponymous lady: “Lo here (quod she) a peece, / For perfect shape that passeth all Apelles worke in Greece.”¹³ Gascoigne invokes “all Apelles worke” as a standard against which other instances of “perfect shape” might be measured. Contrary to Harington’s note, which refers to Apelles’s final legendary work as “imperfite,” Gascoigne evidently associates Apelles with formal completion or “perfection.”¹⁴ Yet Harington ends up with a similar evaluation of Apelles as an artist: both writers identify Apelles with an artistic standard to which few or none can attain. For Gascoigne, Apelles’s work serves as a model of excellence so imposing that only a kind of otherworldly beauty may surpass it. It’s from this ne plus ultra that his encomium to Lady Sandes gets both its rhetorical flair and its conventional flavor. For Harington, meanwhile, the particular authority of Apelles’s

Deats (New York: Routledge, 2005), 291-307.

13 George Gascoigne, *A Hundredth sundrie Flowres bound vp in one small Poesie* (London: Richard Smith, 1573), 347.

14 Elsewhere, Gascoigne bristles at the idea that the painting might be anything less than perfect. In an apologetic letter prefaced to a later volume of poetry, Gascoigne complains that a certain kind of reader will always find something to criticize, likening any attempt to find fault in the work to criticism of the Apostle’s Creed: “[A]nd when they can indeede finde none other fault, will yet thinke *Iudicare* verie vntowardlye placed in the Creede . . . or if they be not there stopped, they wil not spare to step vp higher, and say, that Apelles paynted Dame Venus verie deformed or euill fauoured.” *The Poesies of George Gascoigne Esquire* (London: H. Bynneman for Richard Smith, 1575), sig. ¶¶ iiv-¶¶ iiir.

name derives not quite from the painter's fulfillment of "perfection," as Gascoigne would have it, but from the fact that his perfect work remained, paradoxically, "imperfite."

By the later Elizabethan period, literary references tend to collect around the story that Harington's note preserves. In *Palladis Tamia* (1598), Francis Meres notes that "at his death [Apelles] left *Venus* vnfinished, neither was anie euer founde, that durst perfect, what hee had begunne."¹⁵ And in the early Stuart period Henry Peacham's *The Art of Drawing* (1606) tells a similar story, though he equivocates on just how firmly the legacy of Apelles is tied to the fate of his final table: "[A]mong his peeces," Peacham writes, "the picture of Alexander at Ephesus, and his *Venus* which he left at his death vnfinished in *Chios* were the most notable."¹⁶ A waxing and a waning, then: from Elyot's silence on the legend to Harington's insistence on complete cultural saturation to Peacham's attenuated recollection, the strange career of the Venus of Apelles in English literature serves as an index for a vision of artistic accomplishment that held particular significance for the writers of the later Elizabethan period.

So where does Harington's remark come from? And how does the inverted relationship Harington proposes between the formal integrity of a work and its status as an artistic model reflect changes in the ways English writers talked about the value of poetry? I argue that the fascination with this legend among English writers reaches its apogee with a pair of writers whose work is inextricably related: Roger Ascham and John Lyly. Comparisons that point to the unfinished Venus as a model of artistic achievement proliferate beginning in mid-1560s, around the time of Ascham's posthumously

¹⁵ Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (London: P. Short for Cuthbert Burbie, 1598), 287.

¹⁶ Henry Peacham, *The art of drawing with the pen* (London: Richard Braddock for William Jones, 1606), 6.

published *The Scholemaster* (1570), which prominently employs the figure of the unfinished painting to describe the fragmentary corpus of classical antiquity. Ascham characterizes Caesar's writing as a model of "perfect excellency" worthy of imitation by English writers, yet goes on to complain that "the little of him that is left unto us, is like the half face of a Venus, the other part of the head being hidden, the body and the rest of the members unbegun, yet so excellently done by Apelles as all men may stand still to maze and muse upon it and no man step forth with any hope to perform the like."¹⁷ In what follows, I will show how Ascham and his cohort drew not only on Pliny's accounts of Apelles's work, which are more detailed and therefore more fully accounted for in histories of visual art, but also on the testimony of Cicero's *De Officiis*, one of Tudor humanism's most beloved handbooks of conduct—newly published in a bilingual edition in 1558—which preserves the impossible "dare" that so occupies the cultural imagination inhabited by Ascham, Harington, and many other English writers of this period. In Ascham's hands, the commonplace of the Venus evokes the pathos of the humanist encounter with textual loss and underscores the difficulty of organizing programs of classroom instruction and cultural renewal around models of poetic perfection that were known to be fragmentary or otherwise incomplete.

But the story has yet another chapter. While Ascham used the comparison specifically to highlight the fragmentary authority of ancient works, it is not only classical authors who are enshrined through this comparison, as Harington duly attests ("if any begin a work in any kind"). For example, in the letter "To the Reader" that appeared with the posthumous 1593 edition of Sir Philip Sidney's unfinished *Arcadia*,

¹⁷ Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (1570; repr., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 161. This edition is hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and the designation *S*.

Hugh Sanford writes that the book he's introducing offers "the conclusion, not the perfection of *Arcadia*," noting that "Sir Philip Sidney's writings can no more be perfected without Sir Philip Sidney than Apelles' pictures without Apelles."¹⁸ (The early modern Anglo-Italian translator John Florio, although an opponent of Sanford's in print, affirmed the validity of the commonplace when he described the *Arcadia* as "perfect-unperfect."¹⁹) Another echo of Ascham's encounter with Caesar can clearly be heard in Thomas Speght's introduction to his 1598 folio edition of Chaucer, the first publication to treat an English writer's collected works like the corpus of a classical authority.²⁰ Speght writes in reference to Edmund Spenser's recent adaptation of Chaucer's unfinished *Squire's Tale* that "[i]n his *Faerie Queene*, in his discourse of friendship, as thinking himself most worthy to be Chaucers friend, for his like natural disposition that Chaucer had, [Spenser] sheweth that none that liued with him, nor none that came after him, durst presume to reuiue Chaucers lost labours in that vnperfite tale of the Squire, but only himself."²¹ In such early attempts to consecrate English vernacular authority, the legend of Apelles's fragmentary painting paradoxically signals through its physical disintegration the creative integrity of the authorial corpus. (I discuss these and other examples of how the commonplace circulated in subsequent chapters.) In the concluding section of this chapter, I trace the proliferation of the Apelles story across letters to the reader and other

18 Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (London and New York: Penguin, 1987), 59.

19 Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays: or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses*, trans. John Florio (London: Val. Sims for Edward Blount, 1603), epistle to book two. Qtd. in Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 152.

20 On Speght's Chaucer and English authority, see Misha Teramura, "The Anxiety of *Auctoritas*: Chaucer and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63:4 (Winter 2012): 544-76.

21 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Workes of our Antient and Learned English Poet, Geffrey Chavcer, newly Printed* (London: Adam Islip for Bonham Norton, 1598), c.iii.

paratexts of early modern authorial purpose to the prose romances of John Lyly, whose *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wyt* (1578) and *Euphues and His England* (1581) were as culturally influential for Elizabethan writers as they are puzzling and poorly regarded among modern readers. As I will show, Lyly borrowed the figure of the Venus of Apelles directly from Ascham and popularized it further among English writers.

At the center of the chapter, then, lies a revision of Lyly's engagement with Ascham's pedagogical writings and thus of the relationship between Elizabethan humanism and the poetics of the English romance. It's long been a truism that the relationship between the Tudor schoolroom and the prose and verse romances that came out of it in the later sixteenth century was one defined by departure and prodigality.²² Recently, scholars such as Jeff Dolven, Jenny C. Mann, Catherine Nicholson, and Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld have suggested a revision of this model, illustrating the positive debts owed by Elizabethan plots of errancy and estrangement to scenes of foreign language instruction in humanist pedagogy.²³ At the same time, scholars such as Andrew Hui and Gerard Passannante have illustrated the ways in which figures of textual fragmentation

22 The classic study of the errancy of Elizabethan fiction remains Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). See also Arthur Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986). On the opposition of market forces to humanist knowledge-making in the Elizabethan prose romance, see Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England: The Rise of Prose Fiction* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006). An important strand of this critique takes a feminist opposition to the exclusive homosociality of humanist education. See, for example, Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1994).

23 Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Jenny C. Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare's England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Catherine Nicholson, *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); and Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, *Indecorous Thinking: Figures of Speech in Early Modern Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

and decay troubled discourses of idealism in the sixteenth century.²⁴ The story of the unfinished Venus of Apelles in the English Renaissance reveals integral yet unremarked-on connections between these historical developments. The transit of this commonplace from the humanist schoolroom—where it registers faults in the idealism of Ascham’s “plain and perfect way of teaching children”—into the English prose romance illustrates how anxieties implicit in the methods of instructors became artistic resources for their students (*S* 1). Where Ascham employs the language of Cicero and Pliny to lament the imperfection of English knowledge about antiquity as well as the consequent danger to the possibility of moral perfection among his students, Lyly imports the same language into the world of his fiction to describe a fundamentally different kind of imperfection within the created world of the text. In Lyly’s hands, partially completed figures and unfinished narratives playfully claim for literary art the capacity to represent the unrepresentable perfection of virtue that so eludes Ascham’s pedagogy.

Ascham, Apelles, and the Problem of Perfection

Born c. 1515, Roger Ascham attended St. John’s College, Cambridge; studied under the famous humanist John Cheke; and began, prior to his graduation, to tutor younger students in basic Greek. He stayed on as reader at Cambridge, where he wrote the only

24 Andrew Hui, *The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). See also Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

work of his to appear in print during his lifetime, *Toxophilus* (1545), an erudite and nostalgic defense of English archery. Dedicated to King Henry VIII, the work also served as self-advertisement beyond the walls of the academy for Ascham's rhetorical mastery and his willingness to serve at court—"a signe of my good minde and zeale towarde mi countrie."²⁵ In 1548, he left Cambridge to serve as tutor to the young Princess and future Queen Elizabeth. With Elizabeth, Ascham further experimented with the elements of instruction that he learned from his mentor Cheke—especially the process of double translation, which Ascham describes in the posthumously published book *The Scholemaster* as the surest path to fluent Latin composition. Ascham's position as Elizabeth's tutor lasted less than two years, but the experience appears to have made a significant impression on Ascham's pedagogical theory: at Chelsea Palace, Ascham found—or so he claimed—the meeting of perfect instructional methods and perfect aptitude on the part of his student. The absence of this ideal elsewhere influences Ascham's approach both to Latin instruction and to the reformation of English poetry. Ascham supplies the unfinished Venus of Apelles as emblem for this problem.

The Scholemaster appeared in the year after Ascham's death. It collects in one place the concerns about Latin pedagogy, anxiety about the effects of travel abroad, and commitment to government service that were each hallmarks of the Tudor humanism associated Cheke and Lord Burghley, member of the Privy Council, secretary to the Queen, and Ascham's primary benefactor.²⁶ Richard Helgerson refers to it as "that

25 Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus*, ed. Peter E. Medine (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 37.

26 Although humanism purported to train young men for government service, its ability to deliver on this promise has been challenged most prominently in Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

handbook of mid-century humanistic attitudes,” as it draws together the ideals of perfect eloquence and moral education.²⁷ Its pedagogical idealism extends as far back as Cicero’s *De Oratore* and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, which outlines in twelve books the formation of the ideal orator (“I am proposing to educate the perfect orator”) and provided the foundation of Renaissance rhetorical education.²⁸ Ascham was also heavily influenced by the legacy among English humanists of Plutarch’s *Moralia*, which supplied Tudor pedagogical theory with many of its favorite maxims beginning least as early as Elyot’s *The Boke named the Governour* (1531).²⁹ Ascham’s prescriptions proved popular: five editions of *The Scholemaster* were printed within twenty years of its initial publication.

Situating itself alongside other such comprehensive programs of instruction, *The Scholemaster* purports to offer a “plain and perfect way of teaching children” (S 1). The work is divided up into two books. The first book is concerned with the purpose of and best conditions for learning. Modern academics might call it a statement of teaching philosophy. In addition to laying out a theory of education based on a broad notion of civic humanism, Ascham is further concerned with the personal and even physiological characteristics that signal aptness for learning. The second book of *The Scholemaster* provides a practical outline of methods for classroom instruction, from *translatio* to *imitatio* and concluding with a list of classical authors most suitable for imitation by schoolchildren. The purpose across both parts is “to have children brought up to good

27 Helgerson, *Elizabethan Prodigals*, 21.

28 Oratorem autem insituimus illum perfectum. Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.Pr.9.

29 On the importance of Plutarch to the English humanist program promulgated by Elyot and others, see John M. Wallace, “‘Examples Are Best Precepts’: Readers and Meanings in Seventeenth-Century Poetry,” *Critical Inquiry* 1:2 (December 1974): 273-90.

perfectness in learning” (S 20). But perfection poses a sense of belatedness on the schoolmaster. Ascham begins by presupposing a kind of perfection on the part of students. The first sentence of book one allows that the kind of instruction Ascham offers can be undertaken only “[a]fter the child hath perfectly learned the eight parts of speech.” Then, Ascham says, “let him . . . learn the right joining together of substantives with adjectives, the noun with the verb, the relative with the antecedent” (S 13). Here “perfection” embodies for Ascham a problem that Jonathan Goldberg has persuasively attributed to the program of humanist pedagogy more generally: “inscription must already have occurred for the subject to be (re)inscribed within the pedagogic scheme.”³⁰ The second book begins with much the same gesture: “After that your scholar, as I said before, shall come indeed, first, to a ready perfectness in translating . . . then take this order with him” (S 77). Ascham offers thereafter a list of classical authors suitable for reading in the context of classroom instruction.

Ascham attempts to account for the circularity of his program’s prerequisites in the book’s introduction. “[O]ne thing I would have the reader consider in reading this book, that because no schoolmaster hath charge of any child before he enter into his school, therefore, I leaving all former care of their good bringing-up to wise and good parents as a matter not belonging to the schoolmaster, I do appoint this my schoolmaster then and there to begin where his office and charge beginneth” (S 12-13). But the paradoxical meditations on perfection with which Ascham begins suggest a broader problem for the humanist ideal of education: it’s almost impossible to imagine someone beginning without perfection and ending by acquiring it.

30 Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 31.

Neither is this problem new for Ascham. Although primarily a brief in favor of archery, *Toxophilus*—written to help secure patronage that might supplement Ascham’s income as a university instructor—is studded with reflections on perfection as a problem for pedagogy. Like *The Scholemaster*, *Toxophilus* is divided into two parts: Book A is an argument on behalf of archery, making the case that it is a salubrious form of recreation for scholars as well as a benefit to the nation as a whole. Book B describes the equipment and procedures proper to archery. The work comprises a dialogue between Philologus (“lover of learning”) and Toxophilus (“lover of the bow”). Toxophilus maintains a practical stance against seeking perfection in any endeavor. Better to aim for something possible, he says: “Although as Cicero saith a man maye ymagine and dreame in his mynde of a perfite ende in any thyng, yet there is no experience nor vse of it, nor was neuer sene yet amonges men, as always to heale the sycke, euer more to leade a shyppe without danger, at al times to hit the prick [i.e., hit the bullseye in archery].”³¹ Philologus concedes that finally achieving perfection in any pursuit is unlikely, but that all studies should be oriented toward the perfection of the end proper to any given field: “Nowe, in euery crafte, there is a perfite excellencie, which may be better known in a mannes mynde then folowed in a mannes dede. This perfytenesse, bycause it is generally layed as a brode wyde example before al men, no one particular man is able to compasse it: and as it is generall to al men, so it is perpetuall for al time which proueth it a thyng for man vnpossible.”³² Philologus further demonstrates the absurdity of Toxophilus’s position by arguing that, if a student wanted to pursue only that which is feasible to accomplish—as opposed to the highest end of a given art or technique—then a student of archery should

31 Ascham, *Toxophilus*, 97.

32 Ascham, *Toxophilus*, 98-99.

logically try to miss the target every time. Book A concludes with the interlocutors in agreement that the pursuit perfection—though itself unattainable—should frame any course of study: “And who is he, that in learnynge to wryte, woulde forsake an excellent example, and folowe a worse? Therfore seing perfytenesse it selfe is an example for vs, let euerye man study howe he maye come nye it, which is a point of wysdome, not reason with God why he may not attaine vnto it, which is a vayne curiositie.”³³

In *The Scholemaster*, Ascham’s preferred technique for instructing Latin learning, double translation, is an exercise in a very particular kind of perfectionism. The goal is to generate the exact words Cicero uses and to place them exactly where Cicero places them. This, Ascham says, is the “fittest” method “for the speedy and perfect attaining of every tongue” (S 86). Ascham begins the second part of this work with practical advice for instructors. For younger students, Ascham recommends the instructor translate a piece of Cicero into English, give it to his pupil for translating back into Latin, and then compare the results to the Latin original: “Lay them together; compare the one with the other; commend his good choice and right placing of words. Show his faults gently, but blame them not oversharply . . . of good heed-taking springeth chiefly knowledge, which after growth to perfectness” (S 78). The ideal result is a perfect copy of Cicero’s text. The student signals that his learning is complete—or “perfected”—when he is capable of producing such an exact copy. “In double translating a perfect piece of Tully or Caesar, neither the scholar in learning nor the master in teaching can err,” Ascham writes, “[f]or all right congruity, propriety of words, order in sentences, the right imitation—to invent

³³ Ascham, *Toxophilus*, 99.

good matter, to dispose it in good order, to confirm it with good reason, to express any purpose fitly and orderly—is learned thus both easily and perfectly” (S 94).

The rest of the second book surveys other pedagogical exercises for inculcating compositional fluency in Latin, but each is found wanting. Only double translation will do. Ascham judges that *paraphrasis*—translating Latin texts into other Latin words—is “an exercise not fit for a scholar but for a perfect master” (S 88). He goes on to say that it is “not meet for grammar schools nor yet very fit for young men in the university until study and time have bred in them perfect learning and steadfast judgment” (S 94). He dismisses *metaphrasis*—translating from one form to another, as from prose to verse—in much the same terms: “This exercise may bring much profit to ripe heads and staid judgments . . . But this harm may soon come thereby, and namely to young scholars, lest in seeking other words and new form of sentences they chance upon the worse” (S 106). *Epitome*—condensing a longer text into a shorter form, as for commonplacing—is “a way of study belonging rather to matter than to words, to memory than to utterance, to those that be learned already, and hath small place at all amongst young scholars in grammar schools” (S 106). Each of these pedagogical tools introduces risk into the scene of instruction that Ascham cannot bear. Only by laboring to produce precise replicas of the forms and figures employed by select classical authors can students avoid introducing imperfections into their work. The risk accrues as well to instructors, who may judge imperfectly if they fail to rely exclusively on the perfect models already contained in Cicero and other authors. While Ascham says that these alternative pedagogical techniques may have value if certain high prerequisites—like “perfect learning”—are

met, the warning to instructors in particular clarifies that there are no real-world circumstances under which these practices may be used safely.

The last pedagogical device that Ascham discusses is *imitatio*, the treatment of which composes the lion's share of *The Scholemaster's* second book. Ascham's discussion of imitation digresses into short essays on his time at Cambridge, as well as various controversies in the reformation of English verse. Although he also argues that imitation should be limited to experienced scholars, he nevertheless concedes the value in imitation since, unlike exercises such as paraphrasis, imitation consists in trying to follow, rather than diverge from, authorities. Noting that Cicero perfected his own Latin through the imitation of Greek, Ascham writes—recalling the vocabulary and subject matter of *Toxophilus*—“Therefore thou that shootest at perfection in the Latin tongue, think not thyself wiser than Tully was in choice of the way that leadeth rightly to the same; think not thy wit better than Tully's was, as though that may serve thee that was not sufficient for him” (*S* 126). Imitation of the authors who achieved perfection in Latin, therefore, is the most reliable path toward English vernacular eloquence. In what remains the finest account of Renaissance *imitatio*, Thomas M. Greene writes—further recalling the terms of *Toxophilus*—that “[t]he valorization of precision, clarity, directness, hitting the mark in the center, was Ascham's contribution to the English Renaissance.”³⁴

But Ascham immediately runs up against a problem in his quest for precision. The models of perfection that he claimed to find in classical texts exist in imperfect, or incomplete form. Ascham is quite explicit about the challenge posed by textual loss and material fragmentation to the perfectionist program founded on the practices of as

³⁴ Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 270

translatio and *imitatio*: “One of the best examples for right imitation we lack, and that is Menander, whom our Terence (as the matter required), in like argument, in the same persons, with equal eloquence, did foot by foot follow” (*S* 117). Because we lack the whole texts, we not only lack models for imitation, we further lack a sure foundation for practices based on precise replication. Surveying the decay of the treasures of antiquity, Ascham observes that “[s]ome pieces remain, like broken jewels, whereby men may rightly esteem and justly lament the loss of the whole.”

Ascham ends his discussion of imitation—and ultimately ends *The Scholemaster* altogether—with a list of four authors who, he says, are worthy of such admiration: Varro, Sallust, Caesar, and Cicero. But each of these authors suffers from similar kinds of imperfection. Varro’s fragments had recently been printed for the first time in 1568, and Ascham notes with the pathos characteristic of the Renaissance reception of the fragments of antiquity that his works ‘be left mangled and patched unto us’ (*S* 153). He continues to lament that “if Varro’s books had remained to posterity as, by God’s providence, the most part of Tully’s did, then truly the Latin tongue might have made good comparison with the Greek” (*S* 155). Of Sallust, whose works were translated into English as early as 1522, Ascham remarks that it is “not very fit for young men to learn out of him the purity of the Latin tongue” (*S* 156). Ascham concludes with an account of the works of Caesar, comparing his lost or fragmentary orations to the unfinished Venus of Apelles: “the little of him that is left unto us, is like the half face of a Venus, the other part of the head being hidden, the body and the rest of the members unbegun, yet so excellently done by Apelles as all men may stand still to maze and muse upon it and no man step forth with any hope to perform the like” (*S* 161). Ascham implicitly contrasts

the perfect-unperfect example of Caesar's corpus with that of another model, which he understands to be fully perfect and complete: "Yet nevertheless, for all this perfect excellency in [Caesar], yet it is but in one member of eloquence, and that but of one side neither, when we must look for that example to follow which hath a perfect head, a whole body, forward and backward, arms and legs and all" (S 162). But here Ascham's text breaks off, itself unfinished and ultimately fragmentary.

Situated within the whole arc of Ascham's career, the unfinished list at the end of *The Scholemaster* yields a striking aporia. Cicero, obviously, is the figure who is meant to appear next, to fulfill the promise of a perfect example for imitation. Throughout his catalog of other, less desirable objects of imitation, Ascham holds out the possibility of "that excellent perfectness which was only in Tully, or only in Tully's time" (S 144). Later he reverses the order of this claim, narrowing the range of perfection's fulfillment further still: "In Tully's time only, and in Tully himself chiefly, was the Latin tongue fully ripe and grown to the highest pitch of all perfection" (S 151). In Cicero's work, the problem of perfection that follows Ascham from *Toxophilus* through *The Scholemaster* will finally find its resolution. But the promise of an authorial corpus that has "a perfect head, a whole body, forward and backward, arms and legs and all" remains, as Goldberg puts it, "a copious elaboration that exceeds the designs of Ascham's unfinished text."³⁵ Instead we find a missing piece, a gap, an imperfection.

The disfiguration of the classical corpus is, of course, an idea as old as Renaissance humanism. Indeed, the pathos Ascham summons in his description of Caesar's works when his quest for a "plain and perfect" method of learning Latin is

35 Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 44.

frustrated by fragmentary texts echoes a set of problems that Petrarch articulated from the moment of humanism's birth. Petrarch launched a movement centered around what historian Theodore K. Rabb calls "the obsessive recovery and study of ancient texts" and "the insistence on a mastery of perfect Latin and its use for the attainment of eloquence."³⁶ Petrarch's epistles simultaneously supplied the figure of the mangled and mutilated human body—picked up, perhaps, by Ascham in his description of Varro—as an emblem for the textual loss and decay that would invariably deprive any such perfectionist program of even the possibility of a firm foundation and sure grounding. Throughout his letters Petrarch writes plaintively of the "fragmentary and mutilated condition" of the classical texts that he has available to him.³⁷ To Quintilian he writes, "Thy work . . . has come into my hands, but alas how mangled and mutilated!"³⁸ When Petrarch read Quintilian's *Institutio*, which belongs at the heart of Renaissance pedagogical and rhetorical perfectionism, he "saw the dismembered limbs of a beautiful body." While Petrarch claimed to be happier among the dead authorities of the classical world than among his living contemporaries, Greene observes that he "was no more happy with his ghostly and imperfect intuitions of Vergil and Cicero than he was with his own Avignon and Milan."³⁹

The primary source for information on the Greek painter Apelles and his unfinished painting, which Ascham here uses to re-inscribe the Petrarchan topos of loss, is Pliny's *Natural History*. In the pathos of Pliny's almost lyrical description of the

36 Theodore K. Rabb, *The Last Days of the Renaissance and the March to Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 76.

37 Francis Petrarch, *Petrarch's Letters to Classical Authors*, trans. and ed. Mario Emilio Cozenza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), 27.

38 Petrarch, *Letters*, 84

39 Greene, *Light in Troy*, 8.

fragmentary work English writers committed to the imitation of classical models as a source for renewing English culture may have found an apt expression for the cultural loss that haunted them. Others still, as we will see in Lyly's work, would also come to find here a certain license for their attempts to fashion a new vernacular authority. In Philemon Holland's popular 1601 English translation of the *Natural History*, Pliny writes:

[T]he last peeces of excellent Painters, and namely such tables as bee left vnperfect [*imperfectasque tabulas*], are commonly better esteemed than those that bee fully finished [*perfecta*]: as wee may see by the Raine-bow or Iris which *Aristides* was entered into, the two brethren *Castor* and *Pollux*, begunne by *Nicomachus*; the Picture of *Medea*, killing the children that shee had by *Iason*, which *Timomachus* was in hand with; and the *Venus*, that as I sayd before, *Apelles* liued not to make an end of: for in these and such like imperfect tables, a man may (as it were) see what traicts and lineaments remayne to bee done, as also the very desseignes and cogitations of the Artificers: and as these beginnings are attractiue allurements to mooue vs for to commend those hands that began such Draughts: so the conceit that they be now dead and missing, is no small grieffe vnto vs, when wee behold them so raw and fore-let.⁴⁰

In this passage, Pliny attempts to make sense of the fact that a special aura of greatness surrounds the unfinished works of major artists. His claim that these "imperfect tables" are held in the highest esteem is counter-balanced by "the conceit" that their authors are "now dead and missing" which is the source of "no small grieffe." Petrarch, too, claims to experience "admiration mingled with grief" when contemplating the fragments of the past.⁴¹ But in Petrarch's letters, the loss of the fullness of antiquity threatens to consign the present age to imaginative barrenness: "O sterile-minded and wretched men of

40 Gaius Pliny Secundus, *The Historie of the World: Commonly called the Natural History*, trans. Philemon Holland (orig., 1601; repr., London: Adam Islip, 1634), 550. I give the original Latin where pertinent in brackets. For these references, see Pliny, *Natural History*, Vol. IX, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 367.

41 Petrarch, *Letters*, 84-5.

today.” Accordingly, for Petrarch and the Italian humanists who followed him such as Poliziano, any attempt to mitigate modern estrangement from classical antiquity was cause for celebration. Pliny, on the other hand, explains the appeal of the unfinished in terms that suggest its generative potential. The “unperfect” work, he says, reveals “the very desseignes and cogitations” of the artist by gesturing toward—but not completing—the figures that the artist began. A completed work is closed off, but an “unperfect” one allows us to think alongside the artist and imagine how the image might be completed. In such pictures, “a man may (as it were) see what traicts and lineaments remayne to bee done.” Even as Pliny mourns the loss on which the unfinished work is predicated, he wonders at its powerful influence over the viewer’s imagination. Referring to this doubled experience of the fragmentary work, Leonard Barkan notes “the ringing tones of the aesthetic.”⁴² As we compare the fragment we see with the ideal we imagine, the unperfect work “moove[s]” us not only to lament the death of the artist but to participate in the on-going fulfillment of the image.

Pliny has long been recognized as an important source of authority for Renaissance artists who wanted to experience and evaluate painting, sculpture, and architecture according to classical standards.⁴³ The *Natural History* is, in Barkan’s words, “the central grounding text of the rediscovery of ancient art.”⁴⁴ But scholars have paid less attention to how the famous account of classical art that began to resurface as early as the twelfth century might have served as a model for poetic making and interpretation as well. When Harington, in the anecdote that I began with, writes that “if any begin a

42 Barkan, *Unearthing the Past*, 89.

43 Isager, *Pliny on Art and Society*, 9-17.

44 Barkan, *Unearthing the Past*, 66.

work *in any kind* with any felicitie, and efter leaue it vnfinisht, they straight liken him to Apelles,” he suggests in fact that literary artists, too, looked to Pliny’s account as a source of classical authority for evaluating the works and careers of their contemporaries.⁴⁵ In doing so, Elizabethan writers invoked the sense of loss and grief that Petrarch emphasizes when he considers the fragments of the past, but they also laid the groundwork for recuperating the generative authority that lies in Pliny’s description of the “imperfect tables” of the classical painters.

Throughout early modern literary culture, we hear many echoes of Pliny’s numerous descriptions of Apelles that emphasize his reputation for mimetic accuracy. Renaissance writers often recall at length Pliny’s stories about how Alexander the Great issued a public decree that no one besides Apelles should recreate Alexander’s image, so great was Apelles’s skill, and how Alexander asked Apelles to paint his beloved Campaspe—and then gave her to Apelles when he saw the artist’s finished painting and realized that Apelles had fallen in love with her, too.⁴⁶ Such stories affirm the myth of Apelles’s artistic perfection. Renaissance texts are further dotted with references to legends that depict Apelles as the consummate craftsman. We are told that he never went a day without drawing at least one line; that the painter Protogenes identified the work of Apelles by a single line painted on a canvas. Many of these shorter references obviously come from Erasmian commonplace collections, in which Erasmus frequently added moralizing interpretations: “This saying has become proverbial, and is used of any duty

⁴⁵ My emphasis added.

⁴⁶ For example, see Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Thomas Hoby (1561; repr., London: J.M. Dent and New York: Dutton and Co., 1974), 80-1. The story also forms the basis of John Lyly’s *Campaspe* (1584), reprinted in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, Vol. 2 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1902), 302-361.

neglected,” he writes of Apelles’s mythical daily regimen.⁴⁷ Harington’s sentence likewise indicates the commonplace nature of the comparisons to the unfinished Venus—“they straight liken him to Apelles,” he says, as if describing a process of automation—and we should maintain a sensitivity to the merely common aspects of any such references. But commonplaces become common for a reason, and early modern writers seem to have picked up this one just as they were ready to mobilize its deprecatory gesture in service of an ambitious scheme to overcome the “sterile-minded” perfectionism that gripped the humanists.

Allusions such as Ascham’s description of Caesar and Harington’s note draw at least indirectly from a series of passages in Pliny that link Apelles to unfinished work. Writers of the English Renaissance frequently refer to Apelles and the unfinished Venus as a topos of artistic humility much as Pliny’s prefatory letter does. The painting enters art history immediately—almost proleptically—as a highly conventional gesture of artistic humility. Pliny writes:

I can be content, nay I am willing to bee thought in this behalfe like vnto those excellent grand masters in Greece, for Painting and Imagerie, whom you shall finde in these Reports of mine, to haue entituled those rare and absolute peeces of worke (vvhich the more wee view and looke vpon, the more wee admire and wonder at for their perfection) with halfe titles and vnperfect inscriptions, in this manner, *Apelles went in hand with this Picture: or, Polycletus was a making this Image:* as if they were but begun, neuer finished and laid out of their hands: which was done (no doubt) to this end, that for all the varietie and diuersitie of mens iudgements scanning of their workemanship, yet the Artificer thereby had recourse to make excuse; had meanes (I say) to craue and haue pardon for any faults and imperfections that could be found, as if hee meant to haue amended any thing therein amisse or wanting, in case hee had not beene cut off and preuented by death. These noble workemen therefore herein shewed right great modestie, that they set superscriptions vpon all their painted tables, pourtraitures and

47 Desiderius Erasmus, *Apophthegmata* (1531), trans. Betty I. Knott and Elaine Fantham, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 38 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 6.529. See also *Apophthegmata* 6.524-3 and 8.196-7; and *Parabolae sive similia* (1534), trans. R.A.B Mynors, in *CWE*, vol. 23 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 220 and 228, 244.

personages, as if they had beene the last peeces of their workemanship, and themselves dissabled by vnexpected death that they could not make a finall end of any one of them.⁴⁸

The “vnperfect inscription” that Holland renders here as “Apelles went in hand with this picture” reads, in the Latin original, *Apelles faciebat*: literally, “Apelles was making [this].”⁴⁹ The painter’s famous signature coordinates grammatical tense and artistic courtesy: the imperfect tense of the verb denotes continuous activity, as opposed to a completed action bounded in time. Thus *faciebat* implies that the artist did not consider the work worthy of being called “complete” or “perfect.” Yet Pliny says this imperfect verb was attached to “those rare and absolute peeces of worke . . . [which] we admire and wonder at for their perfection.” He translates this paradox of imperfect making and artistic perfection as a sign of admirable humility on the part of the great artists. But Pliny is surely being credulous or disingenuous when he goes on to say that the artists exhibited “great modestie” in signing each painting “as if they had been the last peeces of their workmanship.” In fact, the practice might be more aptly described as an artistic defense mechanism, and it was later employed by Renaissance visual artists as such. The “unperfect” *faciebat* served as a convenient excuse if “any imperfection” in the work could be found by observers.

As in the *Natural History*, echoes of the Apelles story in early modern English dedicatory letters often express an ambivalence about the problems of undertaking and finishing an ambitious work. We see this in works of translation—moments in which English writers face anxiously the challenge of bringing the past fully into the present. In

48 Pliny, *Historie of the World*, “Plinies Epistle to T. Vespasian,” unpaginated.

49 Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. Rackham, vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 16.

these cases, writers invoke the story of the unfinished Apelles in a courteous attempt simultaneously to claim and deflect authority. In the dedicatory epistle to his translation of Caesar, Arthur Golding explains that he started a new translation rather than building on an older one in order not to have “praesumed to finyshe the pycture of Venus that Appelles left vnperfect.”⁵⁰ Apelles’s “unperfect” Venus serves as a commonplace gesture of humility in a way that mimics Pliny’s preface. But poets’ use of this commonplace is rarely simple. Golding manages to invoke the authority of earlier translations without binding his own efforts to them. Facing the challenge of justifying a vernacular translation, he implies his project’s value by suggesting that older generations also thought it worthwhile to undertake such a translation into English, but at the same time he marks a break from any concrete example. In this case, the Venus of Apelles serves as an authorizing emblem as Golding negotiates the difficulty of bringing the works of the ancients into the modern vernacular, seeking both classical authority and modern originality, both continuity and rupture. The figure of the unfinished Venus allows the early moderns to adopt the position of one who carries the past into the present without presuming to “perfect” it.

When Golding says that no one “praesumed to finyshe” Apelles’s Venus, or that no one “would adventure . . . to finish” the painting, his claims can be traced to another passage in Pliny:

But to come againe vnto *Apelles*; he had begun another picture of *Venus Anadyomene*, for the inhabitants of the Island Cosor Lango, which hee minded should haue surpassed the former: howbeit, before he could finish it, surprised he was with death, which seemed to enuie so perfect workmanship: and neuer was that painter knowne to this day, who would turne his hand to that piece of worke,

50 Julius Caesar, *The Eyght Books of Caius Julius Caesar*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: William Seres, 1565). “Epistle Dedicatory” unpaginated.

and seeme to go forward where *Apelles* left, or to follow on in those traicts and liniments, which he had pourfiled and begun.⁵¹

Following Pliny's account, Golding and draws on the idea that a great unfinished work imposed a nearly insurmountable burden on subsequent artists. But this passage seems to qualify in striking ways Pliny's account of the power of the unfinished "last peeces" of great artists. As we saw earlier, Pliny writes that part of the appeal of the great unfinished work lies in the fact that, in it, "a man may (as it were) see what traicts and lineaments remayne to bee done." But if an "imperfect table" allows us to imagine completing the broken lines of a great artist, the passage above clarifies that it nevertheless warns us away from actually doing so. No one, Pliny clarifies, dared "to follow on in those traicts and liniments" that Apelles had started draw. Following this passage, Harington observes that "no man durst euer take vpon him to end" the famous work. The imperfect work invites us to see, but forbids us to follow. The unfinished work reveals "desseignes and cogitations" of great artists, but it also calls for those fragments to be preserved as such, so that it may reveal the same designs and cogitations to later viewers without suffering completion by some other hand. In this case, the authority of the work is confirmed, not cancelled, by its openness.

While Pliny's text supplies the most detailed and compelling accounts of the Venus story and his prefatory letter likely influenced similar letters, Ascham's reference seems almost certain to have come most directly from another source: Cicero's *De Officiis*. *De Officiis* was a key text in the culture of English humanism that shaped

51 Pliny, *Natural History*, 540. In the original: Apelles inchoaverat et aliam Venerem Coi, superaturus etiam illam suam priorem. Invidit mors peracta parte, nec qui succederet opera ad praescripta liniamenta inventus est. Rackham trans., Vol. IX, 328.

Ascham.⁵² The legend is often repeated that Lord Burghley, the *parens patriae* of mid-century humanism to whom *The Scholemaster* is dedicated, carried a copy of it with him at all times.⁵³ Like Ascham, Burghley studied with Cheke at Cambridge and advocated for the method of double translation that so occupies the pedagogical approach of the former. Nicholas Grimald's English translation was available in a bilingual edition with parallel Latin text by 1558; this edition, as T.W. Baldwin suggests, was tailor-made for use by country schoolmasters. Moreover, in a letter to the Countess of Pembroke, to whom he sent a copy, Ascham himself rates Cicero's work second only to the Gospels.⁵⁴ In brief, Cicero's text would have been a logical place for Ascham to go for wisdom about the precise imitation of classical authors.

In fact, imitation of a sort provides the context for the reference in *De Officiis*. In Book III, Cicero describes a lost work of moral philosophy written by the Stoic Panaetius but left unfinished at the philosopher's death. Panaetius's lost treatise, he tells us, inspired both the form and the content of Cicero's own work: "Panaetius, then, has given us what is unquestionably the most thorough discussion of moral duties that we have, and I have followed him in the main—but with slight modifications."⁵⁵ Panaetius split the subject of moral duties into three categories that map onto the three books of *De Officiis*, but he

52 On the central place of *De Officiis* in the humanist curriculum with notes on available editions, see T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1944), 2:581-93 and passim. Also Aysha Pollnitz, *Princely Education in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 53. See also John Butler Gabel, "The Tudor Translations of Cicero's *De Officiis*," PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1961.

53 See for instance Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 210. On Burghley's highly influential role in promoting the humanist cause, see Helgerson, *Elizabethan Prodigals*, 28-31.

54 Baldwin, *Small Latine*, 2: 585-6.

55 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis* III.ii, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 277. See Andrew R. Dyck, *A Commentary on Cicero, De Officiis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 17-29 and 505-7. Also helpful is Douglas Kries, "On the Intention of Cicero's *De Officiis*" *The Review of Politics* 64:4 (October 2003), 375-393.

never finished the third part. “He has treated the first two heads at length in three books,” Cicero tells us, “but, while he has stated that he meant to discuss the third head in its proper turn, he has never fulfilled his promise.” Cicero contradicts the claim (apparently made by some) that Panaetius either never planned to finish the work or realized he didn’t need to. Cicero continues:

We have also in Posidonius a competent witness to the fact. He writes in one of his letters that Publius Rutilius Rufus, who also was a pupil of Panaetius’s, used to say that “as no painter had been found to complete that part of the Venus of Cos which Apelles had left unfinished (for the beauty of her face made hopeless any attempt adequately to represent the rest of the figure), so no one, because of the surpassing excellence of what Panaetius did complete, would venture to supply what he had left undone.”⁵⁶

Perhaps the most striking thing about the appearance of this anecdote in *De Officiis* is that Cicero shows so little of the anxiety attributed by Renaissance writers to Apelles’s successors. He does not employ the topos as a gesture of humility himself. In fact, throughout the treatise he calls attention to places in which he improves the philosophy of moral duty by filling gaps in logic that Panaetius had overlooked.⁵⁷ Clearly the myth of Apelles’s unfinished Venus was in circulation in classical literary culture, but it’s not obvious (*pace* Rufus) that any actual author would have seen in it a mirror of his own encounter with the incomplete work of a predecessor.

We can be confident that this is the source text for Ascham’s use of the commonplace in *The Scholemaster* because Ascham discusses the intertextual

56 Cicero, *De Officiis*, 279. In Grimald’s translation: “like as no painter might bee founde, who coulde finish vp that parte of Uenus, which Apelles had left vnfinished: (for the beautie of her face tooke awaie the hope of coüterfetting the rest of her bodie) so those things, that Panetius had ouerpassed, & had not finished, ther was no man to prosecute: bicause of ye excelēce of those maters, which he had gone thorou withall.” Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Marcus Tullius Ciceroes thre bokes of duties to Marcus his sonne, turned out of latine into English*, trans. Nicholas Grimalde (London: Cum priuilegio ad imprimendum solum, 1556), fol. 113r-113.v.

57 Cicero, *De Officiis*, 155; 165; 265.

relationship between Cicero and Panaetius directly in his treatment of *paraphrasis* and connects this relationship back to Apelles's painting. Ascham insist that *paraphrasis*—which he defines as translation using different words and figures—is “an exercise not fit for a scholar but for a perfect master.” But he does acknowledge that it can be “very profitable” for “perfect learned men” (S 96). In support of this claim, he cites approvingly the example of Cicero paraphrasing the same passage from Panaetius in two different ways, once in *De Finibus* and again in *De Officiis*. Unfortunately, he says, the true rhetorical genius that Cicero displays in these passages will never be appreciated because we lack the original text on which his paraphrases were based:

But if we had the Greek author, the first pattern of all, and thereby to see how Tully's wit did work at divers times, how out of one excellent image might be framed two other, one in face and favor but somewhat differing in form, figure, and color, surely such a piece of workmanship compared with the pattern itself would better please the eyes of honest, wise, and learned minds than two of the fairest Venuses that ever Apelles made (S 98).

Here Ascham employs the commonplace almost exactly as Cicero: that is, to describe the relationship between the unfinished work of Panaetius and Cicero's attempt to complete through *De Officiis* what his predecessor had left undone. Even Cicero's sanguine view of this literary activity seems to inform Ascham's argument in this passage. The loss of the “first pattern of all” is significant in this account not because it could never be matched again, as humanists beginning with Petrarch insisted regarding the lost masterpieces of antiquity, but because it can no longer reveal just how far Cicero surpassed it.

That Cicero was able to fulfill effectively an unfinished model left behind by his Greek predecessor becomes important for Ascham as he digressively discusses the

reforming of English vernacular poetry in the section of *The Scholemaster* devoted to *imitatio*. Cicero's commitment to the study of multiple languages articulated from the outset of *De Officiis* licenses Ascham's own approach. Cicero's work, addressed as advice on conduct to his son, begins with the claim that studying Greek is the best path toward eloquence in Latin, a claim that Ascham returns to frequently to justify his approach to double translation not just as a path to learning Latin but to the perfection of English style as well: "though it be not impossible, yet it is very rare and marvelous hard to prove excellent in the Latin tongue for him that is not also well seen in the Greek tongue." "Tully himself," Ascham continues, was "brought up from his cradle in that place and in that time where and when the Latin tongue most flourished," yet "was not his own tongue able itself to make him so cunning in his own tongue as he was indeed, but the knowledge and imitation of the Greek tongue withal" (S 125-6). Cicero's success in achieving Latin eloquence through imitation of the Greek's provides a template for Ascham's educational project as a whole, but it also specifically provides a template for renewing English poetry, as Ascham elaborates.

Here Ascham enters, as he himself allows, into a broader debate on the subject of English versification, specifically over the role of rhyme. His prescription for English literary culture is isomorphic to his pedagogy: just as students secure perfect Latin—and from there perfect English style—by precise imitation of Latin models, so too can English literary culture more broadly secure its own claim to perfect eloquence in the vernacular by imitating Latin. "This matter maketh me gladly remember my sweet time spent at Cambridge and the pleasant talk which I had oft with Master Cheke and Master Watson" who "wished, as Virgil and Horace were not wedded to follow the faults of

former fathers . . . but by right imitation of the perfect Grecians had brought poetry to perfectness also in the Latin tongue, that we Englishmen likewise would acknowledge and understand rightfully our rude, beggarly rhyming, brought first to Italy by Goths and Huns when all good verses and all good learning too were destroyed by them” (S 145). He continues to argue that just as “poetry was never perfected in Latin until by true imitation of the Grecians it was at length brough to perfection,” English writers should “give themselves to poetry, that they, rightly understanding the barbarous bringing in of rhymes, would labor, as Virgil and Horace did in Latin, to make perfect also this point of learning in our English tongue” (S 151).

Ascham’s complaint that English verse was in want of reforming—specifically away from the “Gothic” tendencies of rhyme—anticipates efforts over the next several years by the next generation of English writers to impose Latin models of quantitative meter on English verse.⁵⁸ This ill-fated campaign is perhaps most famously documented in the correspondence between Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser. Harvey writes that he has also secured the participation of Philip Sidney in “our new famous enterprise for the Exchanging of Barbarous and Balductum Rymes with Artificial Uerses.”⁵⁹ Longing for the accomplishment of such an enterprise, William Webbe wonders “what enormities they might wipe out of English poetry . . . if English Poetrie were truly reformed and some perfect platform or Prosodia of versifying were by them ratified and set down.”⁶⁰

58 For more on sixteenth-century experiments in quantitative meter and the “Gothic” deprecation of rhyme, see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21–62.

59 Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser, *Three Proper and Wittie Familiar Letters: lately passed betwene two Universitie Men: touching the Earthquake in Aprill Last, and our English Refourmed Versifying* (London: H. Byneman, 1580), 31.

60 William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie in Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904) 1:229.

Whatever reservations writers such as Spenser may have registered, the general thrust of this effort assumed that the formal precision to which English writers of this generation aspired could be found only in classical models. “[B]ecause the providence of God,” Ascham writes, “hath left unto us in no other tongue, save only in the Greek and Latin tongue, the true precepts and perfect examples of eloquence, therefore must we seek in the authors only of those two tongues the true pattern of eloquence, if in any other mother tongue we look to attain either to perfect utterance of it ourselves or skillful judgment of it in others” (S 137-8). But the fragmentary status of the ancient models themselves left English poets in a vexed position.

Just as Ascham’s pedagogical program concludes open-endedly, with a blank space where perfection is meant to be secured through the example of Cicero, the sixteenth-century writers who labored to refashion English poetry on the model of the classics found themselves stymied by the fragmented corpus they inherited and estranged from the ideal unity of form and purpose that they projected onto the works of classical authors. The physical imperfection of the classical models to which English writers looked for inspiration and authority only increased the apparent distance between English and classical eloquence. In a certain sense, the efforts at perfecting English eloquence and poetry for which Ascham laid the groundwork were a failure. During the Renaissance, Samuel Daniel was the first to wholly reject efforts at reforming English poetry on this basis. He complains: “First we must here imitate the Greekes and Latines, and yet we are here shewed to disobey them, euen in their owne numbers and quantities; taught to produce what they make short, and make short what they produce; made beleue to be shewd such measures in that forme we haue not seene, and no such matter; tolde that

heere is the perfect Art of versifying, which in conclusion is yet confessed to by vnperfect.”⁶¹ Daniel, writing in 1603 at the tail end of the Tudor period, declares the position Ascham stakes out and that Harvey and others adopt to be merely contradictory.

But many English poets, critics, and educators who preceded him labored to uphold the perfection of classical writing as a model for imitation even as they acknowledged its physical imperfection. In the space of this cultural and conceptual antagonism, what Harington identifies as the perfect imperfection of Apelles’s fragmentary painting became a plausible rubric for the success of English vernacular writing. Greene writes that “[d]uring the crowded thirty years that followed the publication of *The Schoolmaster*, what is striking is the relative weakness of his program’s impact on the actual production of English literature . . . In actual poems, plays, and prose fiction of the mature Renaissance, the response to classical literature tended to be diffused rather than specific, and particularly so at the levels of highest quality.”⁶² But the considerable diffusion of Ascham’s central figure for the authority of unfinished works throughout the same thirty-year period—including Harington’s note in the 1591 *Orlando* that attest explicitly to its universality—might stand as evidence that, if English writers did not adopt Ascham’s program directly, they in fact remade the “weakness” of its perfectionism into a virtue for their own articulations of poetic authority.

The commonplace even finds its way back to Ascham and his own unfinished text. In 1711, James Upton published an updated and expanded version of *The*

61 Samuel Daniel, *A Defence of Rhyme* in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), 2:375.

62 Greene, *Light in Troy*, 270.

Scholemaster, providing through Ascham's correspondence what he projected to be the finished project of the famous Elizabethan pedagogue. In his note following the abrupted, fragmented ending of Ascham's text, Upton writes:

Thus are we come to the End of what is left us on this Subject, by this truly learned and ingenious Writer; whose excellent Judgment, and Abilities seem little inferiour to the ablest Masters of Antiquity: And had he lived to have perfected, what is here but a rough Draught, at best, an unfinished Work; I much question, whether any Rhetorician either Greek or Roman, would have been of more Use in the Study of Oratory, or deserved greater Esteem of learned Men. But here I must add his own Similitude, and compare him, as he did Caesar, to the inimitable face of the Coan Venus, drawn by the Hand of Apelles; unhappily left imperfect, and ever so to remain, for want of an able Artist of equal skill, to give it its just Beauty, and to add some little Colouring, and Ornament, which seem defective.⁶³

In the wake of Grimald's translation of Cicero and Ascham's *Scholemaster*, the unfinished Venus of Apelles becomes the signal among English writers for a work of authority whose perfect imperfections leave open the possibility of continuation, adaptation, and addition, while foreclosing the possibility of replacement. As I will show in the next section, Lyly is especially responsible for popularizing the association of this commonplace not just with imposing authority but with generative adaptation and iteration. Through his interventions, the sense of loss that humanists such as Ascham and Petrarch articulated becomes a generative device, rather than a sterile limitation.

Lyly and Vernacular Imperfection

John Lyly was a generation removed from Ascham and in his own family two generations removed from the accomplishments of his grandfather William Lily. The

⁶³ Roger Ascham, *The schoolmaster: or, a plain and perfect way of teaching children*, ed. James Upton (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1711), 211.

elder Lily, Ascham's predecessor in English humanist culture and Latin pedagogy, was John Colet's choice to be the first headmaster of St Paul's School in London, a post that he assumed in 1512. Lily's reputation rested then and rests still primarily on his posthumously published *A shorte introduction of grammar generally to be used in the kynges maiesties dominions* (1548), which was endorsed in royal proclamations by Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth I.⁶⁴ Given this family history and his own close, playful engagement with Ascham's pedagogical works, the younger Lyly, born c. 1554, uniquely answers to Richard Helgerson's interpretation of the cohort of early Elizabethan fiction writers as a generation of prodigal sons.⁶⁵ The work for which Lyly is best known, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wyt*, suggests a narrative of licentious departure and sober homecoming, advertising on its title page both "the delights that Wyt followeth in his youth" and "the happynesse he reapeth in age, by the perfectnesse of wisdom."⁶⁶ Criticism concerned with his fiction's humanist attachments generally maintains that conservative didacticism ultimately wins out over artistic errancy as Lyly's narrative brings about "a perfect return" to Ascham's schoolroom.⁶⁷

But in a sense neither Lyly nor his *Euphues* ever left the classroom at all. As I will show, Lyly's intense engagement with the terms of classical visual art—and especially the story of the unfinished Venus of Apelles—is evidence that he found in Ascham's pedagogical methods the proper tools for representing both reform and errancy,

64 The texts of the royal prescriptions are conveniently reproduced in Hedwig Gwosdek, "Introduction," in William Lily, *Lily's Grammar of Latin in English*, ed. Hedwig Gwosdek (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9-10.

65 On Lyly in particular, see Helgerson, *Elizabethan Prodigals*, 58-78.

66 John Lyly, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902), 1:177. This volume is cited hereafter parenthetically as *AW* with page numbers.

67 Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 85.

perfection and imperfection. Some scholars have pointed out Lyly's interest in the Greek painter, but none has commented on Apelles's association with fragmentary art or explored the consequences of Lyly's engagement with the version of the Apelles myth that embodies Ascham's pedagogical anxieties and eventually winds its way into Harington's translation of *Orlando*.⁶⁸ Furthermore, if critics have seen Euphues's prodigal return as inevitable, they have also characterized it as unearned at the level of plot. This criticism is often waged in terms that pit the narrative against the pictorial, with the suggestion that the book's narrative energy is ultimately ruined in the stasis of portraiture—"illustrating, but not developing the image of Euphues' regeneracy."⁶⁹ But Lyly playfully forestalls the criticism that his character winds up as nothing other than a static image of virtue by embracing the unfinished painting as an emblem of vernacular literary success. The iterative proliferation of the Euphues character in Lyly's own work and that of his many imitators further gives the lie to the idea that his narrative's conclusion is fully bounded and complete. Tracing this figure, then, gives us a better sense of Lyly's contribution to vernacular authorship in the 1580s.⁷⁰

The narrative that sprawls across Lyly's two Euphues books and that extends into several other, variously authored continuations indeed fails more than once to achieve

68 Andy Kesson, for instance, writes that Lyly "often uses Apelles as a means to discuss the experience of authorship." He does not explore the connection I describe. *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2014), 24.

69 G.K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 51. On the relationship between painting and narrative romance in the Renaissance, see Wendy Steiner, *Pictures of Romance: Form Against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), esp. 43-55.

70 Other scholars have avoided the question of Lyly's contribution to early modern theories and practices of authorship altogether. A notable exception is Katharine Wilson, *Fictions of Authorship in Late Elizabethan Narratives: Euphues in Arcadia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Yet Lyly, whom Jonson memorably calls "our Lyly," does not even earn a mention in Kevin Pask's *The Emergence of the English Author: Scripting the Life of the Poet in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

narrative closure or even coherence. At the beginning of the second installment—*Euphues and His England*—Philautus issues a telling complaint to Euphues: “In fayth *Euphues* thou has told a long tale, the beginning I haue forgotten, y^e middle I vnderstand not, and the end hangeth not together.”⁷¹ In what follows, I will attend to the details of Lyly’s narrative imperfection particularly as they regard the moral *bildung* of the story’s eponym. But more interesting for my purposes is the way in which this unresolved narrative finds two figural emblems for its imperfect project—two “halved” or partially completed figures that represent the artistic and moral conundrum that structures and propels the text: Euphues, of course, in *The Anatomy of Wyt*; and Queen Elizabeth in *Euphues and His England*. Both of these figures are likened to the unfinished Venus of Apelles and directly reflect Lyly’s revisions of Ascham. It’s the emerging impossibility of perfecting them that continues to generate the plot in these books and beyond. Unable or unwilling to finally bring these figures into resolution, Lyly leaves them unfinished, “shadowed for others to vernish, but begun for others to ende” (*HE* 205). In this gesture, Lyly’s authorial prerogative coincides with the paradox of figuring forth perfection, a process Ascham—as we have seen—no more realizes than his allegedly wayward poet successor.

In both *Euphues* and its sequel, Lyly’s dedicatory epistles borrow from Pliny’s account to establish a conventional gesture of humility. As Lyly’s editors variously note, Pliny’s *Natural History* ranks highly among sources for commonplaces throughout the *Euphues* books; Lyly would certainly have been aware of the versions of the story found

71 John Lyly, *Euphues His England* in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902), 2:228-9. Cited hereafter as *HE* with page numbers for this volume.

there.⁷² But other dedicatory letters such as Golding's cited above associate only their predecessors with Apelles—not themselves. They look back and see great fragmentary works to contend with, but they do not imagine themselves taking up the fragment as rubric of artistic creation. For Lyly, invoking the unfinished Venus is no longer merely a courteous signal of humility (although it may be that, too), but in fact takes on the qualities of an artistic statement of purpose. The figure not only inspires Lyly's invitations to other writers to iterate on his own work (an invitation many accepted), but also licenses the partially sketched figures and inconclusive narrative leaps within his fictions, through which Lyly playfully stakes out literary art's capacity to illustrate the limit ideal of perfect virtue that forever escaped the humanist schemes of Lyly's instructors.

In the epistles dedicatory that precede both of his *Euphues* books, Lyly employs the language of visual art to describe the “imperfect” nature of his literary creation. His letter to Sir William West in *Anatomy* begins:

Paratius drawing the counterfaite of Helen (right honorable) made the attier of her head loose, who being demaunded why he dyd so, he aunswered, she was loose. Vulcan was painted curiously, yet with a polt foote. Venus cunningly, yet with hir Mole. Alexander hauing a Skar in his cheeke helde his finger vpon it that Appelles might not paint it, Appelles painted him with his finger cleauing to his face, why quod Alexander I layde my finger on my Skarre because I would not haue thee see it, (yea sayd Appelles) and I drew it there bicause none els should perceiue it, for if thy finger had been away, either thy Skarre would haue ben seene, or my arte mislyked: whereby I gather, that in all perfect workes aswell the fault as the face is to be shoven (*AW* 179).

In this passage, Lyly uses an anecdote about Apelles that does not appear to exist anywhere in Pliny to describe an aesthetic of imperfection, whereby the most perfect

⁷² R. Warwick Bond, “Euphues and Euphuism,” in John Lyly, *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902), 1:156.

work includes the representation of imperfections that decorum might call for omitting.⁷³ Here Apelles seems to serve Lyly as a figure for a kind of courtly sprezzatura.⁷⁴ By the time his sequel comes out, Lyly seems to have honed in on the part of the Apelles story that most clearly embodies this artistic program. He begins the later epistle with a simple defense: “[A]lthough the Historie seeme vnperfect,” Lyly writes to Edward de Vere, introducing his fictional creation, “I hope your Lordship will pardon it.” Lyly continues: “Appelles dyed not before he could finish Venus, but before he durst. Nichomachus left Tindarides rawly, for feare of anger, not for want of Art. Timomachus broke off Medea scarce halfe coloured, not that he was not willing to end it, but that he was threatned” (*HE* 6). While Lyly is clearly following Pliny’s list of “unperfect works” by Apelles, Timomachus, and Nicomachus, he adds his own revisions to Pliny’s assessment: “Apelles died not before he could finish Venus, but before he durst.” In the corresponding passage from *Natural History* quoted above, Pliny says only that Apelles “liued not to make an end of” his famous painting. Elsewhere, Holland has it that Apelles was “surprised by death,” though the original simply notes that *Apelles inchoaverat et aliam Venerem*.⁷⁵ In these accounts from Pliny, the artist simply died before he could execute his plan and so the work remained unfinished. In Lyly’s revision of the very

73 Lyly editors Croll and Clemons suggest that this passage is an invention of Lyly’s. See John Lyly, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit; Euphues & his England*, ed. Morris W. Croll and Harry Clemons (London: Routledge, 1916), 3.

74 Castiglione, for instance, uses the metaphor of music to situate an aesthetic of imperfection at the heart of what it means to be a perfect courtier. Addressing the question of whether a courtier can have too much virtue, he writes that “In music, it is a verie great vice to make two perfect concordes, the one after the other . . . the countenance in the perfect tunes engendereth irksomeness . . . the which in mingling therewithall the unperfect is avoided with making (as it were) a comparison whereby our ears stand to listen and greedely attend and taste the perfect, and are otherwhile delited with the disagreement.” He continues: “They say also, it hath been a proverb among some most excellent painters of olde time, that too much diligence is hurtfull, and that Apelles found fault with Protogenes, because he could not keepe his hands from the table” (Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans Sir Thomas Hoby (New York: Dutton, 1974), 48).

75 Pliny, *Natural History*, Rackham trans., Vol. IX, 328.

same passage, he suggests instead that imperfection was to some extent a conscious choice on the part of the painter. Not that Apelles was surprised by death, but that he decided at some point not to finish his work—or “dared” not. While Golding and others lean on Cicero and Pliny’s suggestion that *no one else* dared finish Apelles’s Venus, Lyly has it that *the artist himself* dared not finish the painting. Lyly thus repurposes a rubric of interpretation and reception, imagining it instead as an artistic motive.

In the *England* epistle, Lyly goes on to compare his own imperfect work to the classical paintings he mentions earlier:

I haue not made Euphues to stand without legges, for that I want matter to make them, but might to maintein thẽ: so that I am enforced with the olde painters to colour my picture but to the middle, or as he that drew Ciclops, who in a little table made him to lye behinde an Oke, wher one might perceiue but a peece, yet conceiue that al the rest lay behinde the tree; or as he that painted an horse in the river with half legs, leaving the pasterns for the viewer to imagine as in the water. For he that vieweth Euphues will say that he is drawn but to the waist, that he peepeth as it were behind some screen, that his feet are yet in the water (*HE* 6-7).

Here Lyly brings us back to the passage in which Pliny describes imperfection as a favorable aesthetic category inasmuch as it facilitates audience involvement. By providing a partially complete picture—“I am enforced . . . to colour my picture but to the middle”—Lyly is able to suggest far more to his audience than he would be able to declare in a finished work. It remains to the audience to “conceiue that al the rest lay behind the tree.” Here he recalls Pliny’s claim that “in these and such like imperfect tables, a man may (as it were) see . . . the very desseignes and cogitations of the Artificers.” In doing so, Lyly reconfigures the generative and suggestive potential of partial figuration. He goes on to say that Euphues’s half-finished body will remind readers of “the mangled body of Hector, as it appeared to Andromache, and with half a face, as the Painter did him that had but one eye.” If the “dismembered limbs of a

beautiful body” describe in the tradition of Petrarchan loss only the limitation of a “sterile-minded” modernity, Lyly understands his disfigured eponym as an invitation to “conceiue . . . al the rest,” with all the connotations of artistic fecundity that follow.

In this passage, Lyly plays with several senses in which a work might be unfinished. If Euphues is “drawn but to the waist” or “colour[e]d . . . but to the middle,” we might imagine a painter’s canvas only half filled—literally unfinished. But Lyly also gives us several examples in which the effect of an unfinished figure might be produced even in a finished work: the Cyclops hiding behind the oak tree, the horse with its legs in the water, a figure peering out from behind a screen. In these cases, the boundaries of figuration substitute for those of the work itself. At the end of the passage, Lyly returns to the figure whose legs are hidden beneath the surface of water as an example of incompleteness along the lines of Apelles’s Venus. He suggests that even in a complete work an artist might gesture toward fragmentation or incompleteness by means of incomplete or divided figuration. The body shown without all its parts participates in a similar sort of “imperfection” as the unfinished painting that inspired it. Through the rubric supplied by Pliny, Lyly begins to develop the tools for a kind of portraiture of the unfinished, one rather different from the mode of figural representation attributed to him by his critics. It is through his incomplete figuration that Lyly establishes a meaningful precedent for early modern writers by projecting his work as an example of the kind of “imperfect table” that might inspire imitation and ward off “perfection” at the same time.

We can be confident that Lyly’s use of the Venus of Apelles trope comes from his reading of Ascham because he uses it here directly and playfully to dismantle the criteria for selecting children apt for scholarship that Ascham lays out in *The Scholemaster*, in

which Ascham especially emphasizes corporeal wholeness and figural completion. As we have seen, Ascham is anxious to secure for his hypothetical schoolmaster not just a perfect pattern for stylistic imitation but perfect material to work with among the student body. Ascham occasionally lapses into fantasies about what kind of learning would be possible if truly perfect conditions were met. “In very deed, if children were brought up in such a house, or such a school, where the Latin tongue were properly and perfectly spoken, as Tiberius and Caius Gracchi were brought up in their mother Cornelia’s house, surely then the daily use of speaking were the best and readiest way to learn the Latin tongue” (S 17). The solution is reminiscent of Elyot’s desire to appoint nurses who speak either perfect Latin or something close to it: “[It] shall be expedient that a noble mannes sone, in his infancie, haue with hym continually onely such as may accustome hym by litle and litle to speake pure and elegant latin. Sembably the nourises and other women aboute hym, if it be possible, to do the same: or at the leste way, that they speke non englisshe but that which is cleane, polite, perfectly and articulately pronounced.”⁷⁶ The ideal of the learned humanist, perfectly at ease in the Latin tongue, drives Ascham and Elyot to such strange sociological contortions. Having set their sights on nothing short of perfection, these humanist educators remain haunted by the gaps in their programs, when the young scholar will be—perhaps irremediably—exposed. As Ascham warns, “[t]hese faults, taking once root in youth, be never or hardly plucked away in age” (S 13).

In order to prevent in students the faults that he knows no schoolmaster can correct, Ascham recommends for parents a highly particular rubric for choosing apt

76 Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour* (London: JM Dent and New York: Dutton, 1966), 22-3.

students. The first category that Ascham gives us also supplies the name of Lyly's hero.

Euphues, Ascham says,

[i]s he that is apt by goodness of wit and appliable by readiness of will to learning, having all other qualities of mind and parts of the body that must another day serve learning, not troubled, mangled and halved, but sound, whole, full, and able to do their office, as: a tongue not stammering or overhardly drawing forth words, but plain and ready to deliver the meaning of the mind; a voice not soft, weak, piping, womanish, but audible, strong, and manlike; a countenance not wearish and deformed but tall and goodly; for surely a comely countenance with a good stature giveth credit to learning and authority to the person; otherwise commonly either open contempt or privy disfavor doth hurt or hinder both person and learning. And even a fair stone requireth to be set in the finest gold with the best workmanship, or else it loseth much of the grace and price, even so excellency in learning, and namely divinity, joined with a comely personage, is a marvelous jewel in the world. And how can a comely body be better employed than to serve the fairest exercise of God's greatest gift, and that is learning. But commonly the fairest bodies are bestowed on the foulest purposes. I would it were not so, and with examples herein I will not meddle; yet I wish that those should mind it and meddle with it which have most occasion to look at it, as good and wise fathers should do; yet I will not let openly to lament the unfortunate case of learning herein. For if a father have four sons, three fair and well formed both mind and body, the fourth wretched, lame, and deformed, his choice shall be to put the worst to learning as one good enough to become a scholar. I have spent the most part of my life in the university, and therefore I can bear good witness that many fathers commonly do thus, whereof I have heard many wise, learned and as good men as ever I knew make great and oft complaint: "A good horseman will choose no such colt, neither for his own nor yet for his master's saddle" (*S* 27-8).

In this passage, Ascham raises an altogether different kind of barrier to perfection. If

Elyot and Ascham alike both worry about environmental influences they can't control,

Ascham adds the further concern that the very constitution of the children in the

schoolmaster's charge is a matter out of his hands and thus to some degree beyond his

capacity to shape. When introducing this passage, Ascham suggests he will offer us a

rubric for "choos[ing] a good wit in a child," but what we actually get in this first rule is

something quite different. Instead of focusing on aptitude of mind or susceptibility to

instruction (suggested by "wit"), Ascham is concerned with the way a child is physically

formed. “[N]ot troubled, mangled, and halved, but sound, whole, full”; not “deformed”; possessing a “comely countenance” and a “comely body.” In the parable of the father with four sons at the end of the passage, Ascham complains that children who are physically less well formed are often preferred for the life of learning. The father chooses not the “well formed” sons to become scholars, but the one who is “deformed.”

Just as Ascham struggles to imagine acquiring perfect Latin outside perfect conditions, he cannot imagine shaping a perfect student who comes to him lacking perfect shape. The account of figuration available in Ascham is thus no less circular than that of education. Indeed, both point to precisely the same process and the same conceptual difficulty. The language of “forming” and “deforming” that Ascham employs to describe the physical capacities of potential students poses a conceptual interface between perfection of shape (or “form,” in Ascham’s exact terms) and moral perfection. In order to achieve the perfection in learning that Ascham’s instructional program teaches, students need to come into the schoolroom not only with perfect environmental and pre-instructional influences, but also with a perfect body.

As Ascham tells us, he derives the word for this interface—*euphues*—from Plato. The reference appears to be book five of *Republic*:

“‘Come then, we shall say to him, answer our question. Was this the basis of your distinction between the man naturally gifted for anything and the one not so gifted—that the one learned easily, the other with difficulty; that the one with slight instruction could discover much for himself in the matter studied, but the other, after much instruction and drill, could not even remember what he had learned; and that the bodily faculties of the one adequately served his mind, while, for the other, the body was a hindrance?’”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 1:445-7.

Here, εὐφύη in the Greek is translated as a man who is “naturally gifted.” Such innate abilities, Plato says, are located in “bodily faculties” as much as in the mind. (Lyly affirms this idea explicitly: “True it is that the disposition of the minde, followeth the composition of y^e body” (AW 213).) Throughout *The Scholemaster*, Ascham translates bodily powers and mental capacities using metaphors of matter that suggest varying degrees of susceptibility to form. “In wood and stone,” Ascham writes, “not the softest, but hardest, be always aptest for portraiture. Hard wits be hard to receive but sure to keep, painful without weariness, heedful without wavering, constant without newfangledness; bearing heavy things, though not lightly, yet willingly; entering hard things, though not easily, yet deeply; and so come to that perfectness of learning in the end that quick wits seem in hope, but do not in deed, or else very seldom, ever attain unto” (S 24). Ascham translates wit, temperament, or mental capacity into metaphors of material such as “wood and stone.” It is a prerequisite for perfection that one begin with perfect material. With Plato and with Ascham, the requirements of perfection are formal and material as well as temperamental. We see this in Ascham’s description of *euphues*, which uses the language of being physically “well formed” or “deformed”—being “whole” rather than “halved”—to describe the additional requirements of the scholar.

Ascham’s description further illustrates that the very idea of *euphues* unfinished, or Euphues “without legges,” as Lyly promises to deliver, is a contradiction in terms. Lyly inverts Ascham’s prescriptions using Pliny’s language in order to produce what Mentz calls “the perfect student who learns nothing.”⁷⁸ The language of formal description that Lyly borrows from Pliny’s account of the unperfect Venus directly

⁷⁸ Mentz, *Romance for Sale*, 132.

contradicts the insistence on formal perfection that lies at the heart of Ascham's project. Euphues, in Lyly's own description, remains just the kind of "halved" figure that Ascham disparages.

By the same token, when Lyly offers his half-sketched and partially formed Euphues as an emblem for his own literary output, he borrows from and undermines Ascham's account of the ideal authorial corpus in *The Scholemaster*. Before he runs through the catalog of classical authors that is destined to remain incomplete, Ascham observes that a true and reliable model for imitation should be fully formed and complete:

And as in portraiture and painting wise men choose not that workman that can only make a fair hand or a well-fashioned leg, but such one as can furnish up fully all the features of the whole body of a man, woman, and child, and withal is able too, by good skill, to give to every one of these three, in their proper kind, the right form, the true figure, the natural color that is fit and due to the dignity of a man, to the beautify of a woman, to the sweetness of a young babe, even likewise do we seek such one in our school to follow who is able always, in all matters, to teach plainly, to delight pleasantly, and to carry away by force of wise talk all that shall hear or read him, and is so excellent indeed as wit is able or wish can hope to attain unto (*S* 137).

Ascham's pedagogy and his prescriptions for the reformation of English style are predicated—hopelessly, it turns out—on the existence of a model that meets all the requirements of formal perfection, which he characterizes here in terms of portraiture—"such one as can furnish up fully all the features of the whole body of a man." Lyly, by contrast, is explicit that his version of portrait-making looks quite different, as when he promises a literary production modeled on "the mangled body of Hector, as it appeared to Andromache, and with half a face, as the Painter did him that had but one eye." Through the account of the unfinished Venus of Apelles, which Lyly shares with Ascham as a figure for the broken authorial corpus, Lyly offers instead an open-ended *bildung*

destined to preserve, rather than resolve, the fragmentary qualities of the classical authors that so haunt his humanist elder.

Lyly's narrative opens by returning to the aesthetic claim raised in the epistle: "And true it is that some men write and most men beleeeue, that in all perfecte shapes, a blemmish bringeth rather a liking euery way to the eyes, then a loathing in any way to the minde. Venus had hir Mole in hir cheeke which made hir more amiable" (AW 184). Lyly insists both in the preface and in the story that any such blemish in his fictional work is the result of the *external* imperfection of his subject: "If any fault be committed impute it to Euphues, who knew you not, not to Lyly, who hates you not." From here begins the story that Helgerson persuasively outlines: the flawed protagonist Euphues begins by going astray, and the course of the fiction is governed by the logic of his eventual reformation—or his perfection, as the title page itself promises. According to this interpretation, the internal perfection or formal conclusion of the work itself should align with the external perfection of its subject: in the beginning, there is "none more wicked" than Euphues; the story ought to end when Euphues repents of his moral failures. As Helgerson further notes, this interpretation has the virtue of affirming poetry's role in traditional humanist education, but the defect of being unconvincing upon contact with the text itself. If Lyly still engages the project of humanist perfection, he must take it in a different direction. Lyly, like the other Elizabethan prodigals, seems to enjoy the imperfections much more than the perfection that results once the former has been corrected by hard experience.

Moreover, Lyly seems to know that the audience shares his preference. In the *Anatomy*, Euphues's wayward and ill-fated lover Lucilla serves as a figure for this

response, and Euphues's own unfinished rhetorical performance at the center of the fiction serves as a synecdoche for the form of the narrative as a whole. Tasked by Lucilla with giving a speech on the virtues of love or learning, Euphues breaks off in the middle of his performance, as if overcome by emotion. But when Euphues returns to visit Lucilla, he finds that she has fallen in love with him because of just this feature of his oration: "your discourse being left vnperfect caused vs all to long . . . to haue an ende thereof" (AW 215). What appears to be a rhetorical failure turns into a kind of artistic success. The conclusion of *Euphues* is curiously similar to that of Euphues's speech. The text's formal imperfection is surprisingly coordinated with its instructive design when narrator declines to say what happened to Lucilla, whom the text names as a key didactic example: "[B]ut what ende came of hir . . . it were superfluous to insert . . . and so incredible that all women would rather wonder at it then beleue it, which euent beeing so straunge, I had rather leaue them in a muse what it should bee, then in a maze in telling what it was" (AW 245). Here Lyly directly recalls Ascham's description of Caesar's imperfect corpus: "as all men may stand still to maze and muse upon it." Instead of "perfecting" the narrative by explaining how Lucilla's didactic example may be applied for the improvement of the reader's habits, Lyly leaves both the narrative and the moral open-ended.

Euphues himself, though, is often supposed to achieve the reformation that Lyly denies to his female lead. The story itself ends with Euphues's unlikely conversion to the scholarly life. After Lucilla spurns both Euphues and his friend Philautus, the men both denounce their former love interest "as most abhominable" (AW 245). While Philautus wishes to stay in Naples—a location associated in the text with the life of the court—

Euphues expresses a sudden desire to return to Athens and the life of scholarship, “so wedded” is he “to the vniuersitie” (AW 246). The sudden volte-face of our once wanton hero will seem improbable to any contemporary reader who anticipates something like narrative realism or coherence of character. Instead of development or explanation, the book leaves us with a series of strange supplements and textual apparatus: the output of Euphues’s scholarly devotion. In many ways, these additions seem to affirm the reading that favors his eventual perfection, not least by replacing narrative development with what looks at first like textual stasis.

But a closer examination undermines any such conclusion. Euphues encourages his readers to learn from the mistakes of his own troubled and immoral romance: “If my lewde lyfe Gentlemen haue giuen you offence, lette my good counsayle make amendes” (AW 247). The key to this reading is the text that follows the “Cooling Card”: “Euphues and His Ephebus,” a pedagogical pamphlet that borrows liberally from the theories of Elizabethan pedagogy found in model texts by Plutarch and Erasmus.⁷⁹ Although the story itself leaves off without perfecting the lesson of Lucilla’s life, these documents purport to spell out in explicit detail the terms of Euphues’s reformation and so to perfect the purpose of Lyly’s fiction. But this can be true only inasmuch as Ascham’s text, too, leaves unresolved exactly how the process of moral figuration may be finally perfected.

After the account of his waywardness and debauchery, Euphues declares himself for humanist reform. But the terms in which he does so take the ideal of humanist education—perfection—to a logical extreme, exposing difficulties in the program of

⁷⁹ See John Lyly, *Euphues*, ed. Croll and Clemmons, 11.

moral training that worry humanists such as Ascham. Euphues begins his treatise on raising up children properly:

Let therefore my counsayle be of such auctoritie as it may commaund you to be sober, your conuersation of such integritie, as it may encourage mee to go forward in that which I haue taken in hande: the whole effect shall be to sette downe a young man so absolute as that nothing may be added to his perfection (AW 260).

Euphues goes on to compare his goals favorably to several more familiar projects of perfectionism: “And although *Plato* hath ben so curious in his common weale, *Aristotle* so precise in his happy man, *Tullie* so pure in his Orator, that we may well wish to see them, but neuer haue anye hope to enioy them, yet shall my young Impe be such an one as shall be perfect in euery way and yet common, if dilygence and industrie be employed to the attayning of such perfection” (AW 260). Euphues catalogs three of the idealist projects best known among Renaissance humanists: Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Cicero’s *De Oratore*. Much as Philologus does in his defense of perfection in Ascham’s *Toxophilus*, Euphues acknowledges that these models provide a target that in a sense is never meant to be hit— “that we may well wish to see them, but neuer haue anye hope to enioy them.” In purporting nevertheless to fully realize in the world the perfect ideal projected by such works, Lyly satirically doubles down on the claims advanced by humanist pedagogical programs such as Ascham’s, which not only take direction from the idealism of a model like *De Oratore* but proceed as if a “plain and perfect way” of teaching children were a fully realizable goal.

If this promise seems unlikely, Euphues’s exact prescriptions for bringing about such perfection in a young pupil begin to suggest why—namely, that the child’s parents must first show “as in a glasse the perfection of manners” (AW 283). Toward the

conclusion of Euphues's own pedagogical treatise, Lyly returns us to Ascham's anxious awareness that no pedagogical program, however perfect, can cultivate perfection where none previously existed. In a direct parody of Ascham's concerns about students' constitution and upbringing, Euphues writes of his ideal student that

[F]irst that he be of honest parents, nursed of his mother, brought vp in such a place as is incorrupt both for y^e air & manners, wyth such a person as is vndefiled, of great zeale, of profounde knowledge, of absolute perfection . . . [W]hich if it shall as it may come to passe, then doe I hope that if euer *Platoes* common weal shall flourish, that my *Ephæbus* shall be a Citizen, that if *Aristotle* find any happye man it will bee my childe, if *Tullye* confesse anye to bee an absolute Orator it will be my young youth" (AW 283-4).

In other words, in order for a young man to be made "perfect in euery way," all that is required is a bit of "dilygence and industrie" as well as his being born in conditions of "absolute perfection." Euphues's advice pamphlet points toward the paradox of Tudor perfectionism: perfection is both the goal and the precondition of the humanist program. In short, as one critic notes, "Euphues has been converted to moral orthodoxy, but he has not been converted to coherence."⁸⁰

Nor does Euphues rest in his present state of incoherence. In yet another change of heart, Euphues finally abandons the pursuit of perfection through the university. After publishing his humanist precepts on the raising of children, Euphues "gaue his minde to the continuall studye of Philosophie, insomuch as he became publyque Reader in the Uniuersitie, with such commendacion as neuer any before him" (AW 286). Euphues soon finds that he's unsatisfied. Again without any apparent causal explanation, Euphues "fell into this discourse with himself: 'Why *Euphues* art thou so addicted to the studye of the Heathen that thou has forgotten thy God in Heauen?'" "Immediatly," we are told, Euphues

80 R.W. Maslen, *Elizabethan Fictions: Espionage, Counter-espionage, and the Duplicity of Fiction in Early Elizabethan Prose Narratives* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), 250.

abandons philosophy, learning, classical models, and rhetorical eloquence (AW 288). From here, Euphues counsels his old friend Philautus to “confesse thy sinnes” and “[r]esemble the Bee which out of the dryest and bitterest Time sucketh moyst & sweet Honny, and if thou canst out of the courte, a place of more pompe than pietie, sucke out the true iuice of perfection” (AW 309). In the end, the reformation of Euphues looks more like a series of satirical self-contradictions, exercises in short-lived zeal soon traded in for another, more absurdly ascetic enthusiasm. In *The Scholemaster*, Ascham argues that the best wit for learning is made of “hard” material because, once imprinted, it bears forever the image it was stamped with. Euphues, in his break-neck series of conversions, can surely boast of no such constancy. Most strikingly, he trades in one version of perfection for another, seeking—but apparently not finding—the complete making that also eludes the mimetic and moral capacities of Lyly’s fiction.

Anatomy, then, pointedly fails to give us the model of a “man so absolute as that nothing may be added to his perfection” just as *The Scholemaster* fails to deliver a model for imitation with “a perfect head, a whole body, forward and backward, arms and legs and all.” While Ascham finds himself impeded by accidental loss, Lyly repurposes his account of accidental loss as an artistic framework. The vocabulary supplied by Pliny’s account of the unfinished Venus allows Lyly to manage the substitution in which we see how the writer, still working in the terms of moral perfection that bound the defense of poetic fictions, nonetheless seeks to preserve a kind of imperfection as well. Doing so entails not so much a break from the rigid perfectionism of the Tudor humanist schoolroom as we find it in Ascham, but rather a repurposing of the contradiction of figuration that the latter uncovers in its search for perfection through *imitatio*. The story

instead concludes by playfully suggesting that the real model of perfection to which all Lyly's readers should aspire lies outside the text and the network of humanist homosociality in which it is embedded: "I haue occasion to goe to *Naples*, that I may with more speede arriue in *Englande*, where I haue heard of a woman that in all quallyties excelleth any man" (AW 323).

And indeed, the story of *England*, Lyly's equally popular sequel, is propelled by yet another figure whose perfect imperfections Lyly describes with specific reference to the unfinished Venus of Apelles. The story this time around is descriptive, rather than prescriptive. Rather than trying to show us how to become perfect—which results in the unfinished figure of Euphues—Lyly's sequel purports to describe someone who already is perfect: Euphues's desire to see Queen Elizabeth I and faithfully describe her virtues drives the plot of the book. Here, too, Lyly borrows directly from Ascham, who claims, owing to his time spent as the future Queen's tutor, that in Elizabeth alone the problem of perfection that plagues his pedagogy found favorable resolution.

When Euphues arrives in England and describes this plan to Fidus, a hermit whom he and Philautus meet on their way to London, the old man is mortally offended. Pliny's description of Apelles supplies the language by which the text undermines its own ability to represent virtuous perfection. Fidus denounces Euphues's plan:

Besides that, *Alexander* must be painted of none but *Appelles*, nor engrauen of any but *Lisippus*; nor our *Elizabeth* set forth of eueryone that would in duety, which are all, but of those that can in skylle, which are fewe, so furre hath nature ouercome arte, and grace eloquence, that the paynter draweth a vale ouer that he cannot shaddow, and the Orator holdeth a paper in his hand, for that he cannot vtter (HE 38).

Fidus's complaint, in short, is that true perfection eludes even the most skilled artisan and instead requires an acknowledgment of humility about that which resists representation.

The conversation is not merely theoretical. When Fidus refers to the legend that Apelles was the only artist who was allowed to paint Alexander because only he had the necessary skill, contemporary readers knew that Elizabeth issued a similar decree in 1563.⁸¹ When Euphues responds, he invokes the *other* legacy of Apelles, suggesting that in fact imperfection is the mode proper to representing moral perfection:

Lastly you conclude, that neither arte nor heart can so set forth your noble Queene, as she deserueth. I graunt it, and reioyce at it, and that is the cause of our comming to see hir whom none can sufficiently commend: and yet doth it not follow, that bicause wee cannot giue hir as much as she is worthy off, therefore wee should not owe hir any. And in this we will imitate the old paynters in *Greece*, who drawing in their tables the portraiture of *Iupiter*, were euery houre mending it, but durst neuer finish it: And being demaunded why they beganne that, which they could not ende, they aunswered, in that we shew him to bee *Iupiter*, whome euery one may beginne to paynt, but none can perfect. In the lyke manner meane we to drawe in parte the prayses of hir, whome we cannot thoroughly portraie, and in that we signifie hir to be Elizabeth. Who enforceth euery man to do as much as he can, when in respect of hir perfection, it is nothing (*HE* 20).

Lyly's praise of Elizabeth is entirely conventional, and we need not take it especially seriously in order to see also how the gradual, unending attempt to capture and perfect virtue eludes both the narrative of Euphues's own life as well as his attempt to find and describe a perfect model in the world. His defense of an avowedly futile project is more interesting and even more conceptually compelling than most readers are apt to give Lyly credit for. In this passage, Lyly returns to his unique interpretation of the Apelles legend from his prefatory letter when he says here that the famous painters of Greek antiquity began paintings that they "durst not" finish. This is not, as I have shown above, what anyone else says about Apelles. Instead of taking the famously unfinished work as a model of unapproachable genius—or rather, in addition to taking it as such a model—

⁸¹ Maslen, *Elizabethan Fictions*, 279.

Lyly suggests that an artist might begin a project of representing an example of external perfection knowing full well that even an internally perfect representation will fail to do justice to the model. Instead of attempting to conclude the project, which will inevitably end in failure, he begins knowing that it will never be complete. The process of figuration that subtends moral perfection is, here, a process that ought to be left unfinished.

In his choice of object, Lyly once again inverts an account provided by Ascham, for whom Elizabeth embodies the perfect aptness in learning that he calls *euphues* and despairs of ever finding outside Chelsea Palace. “Point forth six of the best-given gentlemen of this court,” writes Ascham:

[A]ll they together show not so much good will, spend not so much time, bestow not so many hours, daily, orderly, and constantly, for the increase of learning and knowledge as doth the Queen’s Majesty herself. Yea, I believe that, beside her perfect readiness in Latin, Itallian, French, and Spanish, she readeth here now at Windsor more Greek every day than some prebendary of this church doth read Latin in a whole week. And that which is most praiseworthy of all, within the walls of her privy chamber she hath obtained that excellency of learning, to understand, speak, and write, both wittily with head and fair with hand, as scarce one or two rare wits in both universities have in many years reached unto (*S* 56).

Throughout *The Scholemaster*, Ascham goes to great lengths, it seems, to identify the imperfections in scholars that will thwart the best efforts and finest instructional methods of schoolmasters. In Elizabeth—or rather, in this highly flattering portrait of her—Ascham finds what elsewhere he describes only in terms of absence, much as he attempts to do with the “perfect” corpus of Cicero. Ascham waxes fondly regarding the perfection and rarity of Elizabeth’s aptness for learning:

And a better and nearer example herein may be our most noble Queen Elizabeth, who never too yet Greek nor Latin grammar in her hand after the first declining of a noun and a verb, but only by this double translating of Demosthenes and Isocrates daily without missing every forenoon, for the space of a year or two, hath attained to such a perfect understanding in both the tongues and to such a ready utterance of the Latin, and that with such a judgment as they be few in

number in both the universities, or elsewhere in England, that be in both tongues comparable to her majesty (*S* 87).

In Elizabeth, Ascham alleges to have found the prerequisites for perfection that could be located nowhere else in England's schoolrooms.

Lyly's second book, like his first, ends with a text produced within the diegetic world of the fiction itself. The quasi-ethnographic "Euphues's Glass for Europe" is, as I have already suggested, primarily descriptive. But the text nonetheless finds in the ladies of the English court a model for conduct. Euphues praises the English women for their devotion to the Bible and compares them unfavorably to the women of the continent who, he supposes, are rather devotees of "*Ariosto* or *Petrarck*" (*HE* 199). The centerpiece, of course, is Queen Elizabeth, the Venus whose uncontainable perfections drive a wedge into the mimetic world of the fiction and license its ceaseless imperfections. Euphues acknowledges the productive limitation of perfection once again using terms from Pliny's *Natural History*:

I will set downe this *Elizabeth*, as neere as I can: And it may be, that as the *Venus* of *Apelles*, not finished, the *Tindarides* of *Nicomachus* not ended, the *Medea* of *Timomachus* not perfected, the table of *Parrhasius* not coloured, brought greater desire to themm to consummate them, and to others to see them: so the *Elizabeth* of *Euphues*, being but shadowed for others to vernish, but begun for others to ende, but drawnen with a blacke coale, for others to blase with a bright colour, may worke either a desire in *Euphues* hereafter if he liue, to end it, or a mind in those that are better able to amende it, or in all (if none can worke it) a wil to wish it. In the mean season I say as *Zeuxis* did, when had drawne the picture of *Atalanta*, more wil enuie me then imitate me, and not commende it though they cannot amende it. But I come to my *England* (*HE* 205).

Lyly concludes this description by making the challenge of imperfection more explicit than ever. If Lyly "durst not" finish his portrait of Euphues "without legges," and if

Euphues likewise refuses or fails to “perfect” the image of Elizabeth, the challenge stands to others to try if they might. Lyly’s text thus suggests its own artistic perfection with specific reference to its mimetic imperfection and affirms its own authoritative iterability—which Lyly’s successors confirmed readily by adding limbs to the disfigured Venus he left to them.

The text seeks thus to “moove” the reader in a particular way, much as Pliny’s account of Venus describes. Lyly’s figure of moral perfection—“being but shadowed for others to vernish, but begun for others to ende”—is supposed to inspire readers either to amend or add to the text—which many did—or merely to contemplate the perfection that eludes mimesis (“a will to wish it”). In this way, Lyly’s figuration retains the whole by proliferation of parts and opens up the perfection of virtue to open-ended iteration, rather than securing it in a static portrait of the prodigal returned.

Conclusion

The popularity of Lyly’s work in Elizabethan literary culture was as widespread as it was short-lived.⁸² Twentieth-century critical assessments are disparaging or awkwardly apologetic.⁸³ But in the Elizabethan period his accomplishment was both recognized and

82 Indeed, Lyly now serves as a prime example—perhaps *the* prime example—of outmodedness in the period. See Emily Vasilias, “The Outmodedness of Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” *ELH* 82:3 (Fall 2015), 759-787.

83 Hunter writes that “[n]o modern reader can be expected to enjoy *Euphues* or the plays without some preparation in the modes of thinking and writing which they exemplify. Lyly has left no works which speak directly to the human heart of the twentieth century” (*John Lyly*, 1); C.S. Lewis that “[i]t is no kindness to Lyly to treat him as a serious novelist; the more seriously we take its action and characters the more odious the book will appear.” *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1944), 314. As a result, scholars have mostly focused on Lyly’s style. See Jonas Barish’s excellent “The Prose Style of John Lyly,” *ELH* 23:1 (Mar. 1956), 14-35. This unfortunately leaves us short of an appraisal of Lyly’s real significance to early modern literary culture.

replicated. By embracing the forms of imperfection that generated frustration in the humanist schoolroom, Lyly almost certainly left a more significant legacy for English authorship than those who, like Ascham, sought the “perfection” of English vernacular eloquence. Webbe, a contemporary, praised him in terms that recall the account of the perfect orator both in *The Scholemaster* and in *Anatomy of Wyt*:

surely in respecte of [Lyly’s] singuler eloquence and brave composition of apt words and sentences, let the learned examine and make tryall thereof thorough all the partes of Rethoricke, in fitte phrases, in pithy sentences, in gallant tropes, in flowing speeche, in plaine sence, and surely in my judgment, I think he wyll yeelde him that verdict, which Quintilian giveth of both the best Orators Demosthenes and Tully, that from the one, nothing may be taken away, to the other, nothing may be added.⁸⁴

Webbe invokes a classic definition of perfection—that to which nothing may be added and from which nothing may be taken away—to place Lyly alongside the ancient models of perfect eloquence. And yet Lyly’s successors manifestly shared the sense that something *could* be added to his work and that the possibility of such additions was not incidental to his strange genius, as imitations and continuations proliferated in the wake of *Euphues and His England*.⁸⁵ Robert Greene, for example, whose *Euphues His Censure to Philautus* (1587) purports to offer still more letters to written by Euphues, borrows from Lyly the topos of the unfinished Venus, too, describing his work as “vnpefect as the halfe formed counterfaite of Apelles.”⁸⁶ This paradox highlights the emergence of an authorial regime—the success of which Harington indicates in the sweeping endnote with which I began—in which the unfinished work, far from threatening the integrity of

“Strange as it may seem,” writes Richard Helgerson, “Lyly’s contemporaries were as much taken by the plot, the protagonist, and the moral attitude of *Euphues* as by its Euphuism” (*Elizabethan Prodigals*, 59).

84 Quoted in Kesson, *Lyly*, 2.

85 On the various continuations of *Euphues*, see Nancy R. Lindheim, “Euphues and his Golden Legacy: *Rosalynde* and *Pandosto*,” *SEL Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15:1 (Winter 1975), 3-20.

86 Greene, *Euphues His Censure to Philautus* (London: John Wolfe for Edward White, 1587), A2v-A3r.

an author's corpus, seals its authority by means of its very iterability. The story of Apelles and its changing interpretation show us how English writers consciously entered into and manipulated this tradition.

Chapter Two

Philip Sidney and the Exercise of Style

Introduction

William Alexander's "supplement" to the 1621 edition of *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* proposes to tie up some famously loose ends. It does so mainly by reuniting characters who were left separated by Philip Sidney's incomplete text.¹ After long tribulation—thirty-one years, in fact, if we measure from the first edition printed with the "defect[ive]" ending in 1590—Pamela and Philoclea finally rejoin their parents, King Basilius and Queen Gynecia. For their parts, Basilius and Gynecia are more pleased to be restored to the company of Zelmane, their shared object of desire. Perhaps most striking, though, is the reunion of Pyrocles and Musidorus. The friends embrace "like two grafts grafted into one stock" (603). Alexander's description recalls the end of the 1590 *Faerie Queene* and the hermaphroditic union of Amoret and Scudamore, who "like two senceles stocks in long embracement dwelt."² The reunion enjoyed by Pyrocles and Musidorus is no less metaphysically restorative than its Spenserian precedent: "Their souls by a divine sympathy first did join, preventing the elemental mass of the bodies" (603). With its

1 Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (New York: Penguin, 1977), 595. As I discuss further below, Evans's edition represents the composite text of 1593, with additions beyond the abrupt ending of the 1590 text. Except where early modern print editions are cited specifically, all references to the *Arcadia* come from the Penguin text, which is hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

2 Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2001), 405. The echo is especially appropriate since Pyrocles is still dressed as Zelmane and identified by the text using (mostly) feminine pronouns.

doubly emphasized pun on *graft* and *graphein* (in Greek, “to write”), the embrace between Pyrocles and Musidorus further anticipates the incorporation of Alexander’s writing into Sidney’s *Arcadia* in a rather too-hopeful vision of *poiesis* unencumbered by possessive authorship, the “elemental mass” of material texts, or what I will call the exercise of style.³

This chapter defines style as a device that enables imitation but prohibits the unimpeded incorporation of work by other hands. As a form of property, style is unique in that it is always portable but never completely alienable. Another way to put it would be to say that style is both public and private—public because it cannot exist without an audience; private because the moment it belongs to everyone it is no longer discernible as style.⁴ Much vital work on Sidney’s style has focused on the meaning of specific rhetorical figures.⁵ I am interested, rather, in style as artistic signature—style as what

3 On the seventeenth-century advent of the “bibliographical ego,” see Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2007). On material texts as the sedimentary record of literary history in the early modern period, see Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). For a discussion of the pun on *graft* and *graphein* as well as the use of “to engraft” in early modern England, see Stephen Booth’s notes on William Shakespeare’s Sonnet 15 in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 158 n.14. Booth notes “no recorded Renaissance use of the verb ‘to engraft’ where its direct object is the receiving stock and not the grafted scion,” suggesting that when the sonnet’s speaker offers to “engraft you new,” the most likely reading is that he promises to renew the young man’s legacy by joining him to a wife in marriage. With regard to Alexander’s description, Booth’s terms appear less decisive. Pyrocles and Musidorus are both “grafted scions,” suggesting that their embrace attaches them not to some other person, as in the case of the young man’s putative marriage, but to a metaphysical unity that exists prior to their individuation.

4 Style, as Jeff Dolven notes, is a concept “at odds with itself.” I am influenced by Dolven’s observation that style is both “the mark of the individual and of the group” (“Reading Wyatt for the Style,” *Modern Philology* 105:1 (August 2007), 86). On the peculiar publicity of style, see Matthew Hunter, “Measure for Measure and the Problem of Style,” *ELH* 83:2 (Summer 2016), pp. 457-488. See also Dolven, *Senses of Style: Poetry Before Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), § 260.

5 John Carey, “Structure and Rhetoric in Sidney’s *Arcadia*,” in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), 242-264; Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 173-205; Jenny C. Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare’s England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 87-117; Michael McCanles, *The Text of Sidney’s Arcadian World* (Durham, NC: Duke

allows us to ascribe a work to one maker rather than another. The incompleteness of the *Arcadia* offers an exemplary instance of style's capacity to license and restrict. In particular, Sidney's imitators imagined style both as a source of inspiration and as a site of resistance—a thing one might stumble or even fight over—by casting their encounters with style in the terms of strenuous physical activity. Sidney himself appears to court this mode of response through his famous invitation, appearing at the end of the manuscript “old” *Arcadia*, for “some other spirit to exercise his pen in that wherein mine is already dulled” (848). My purpose throughout the chapter is to show how the exercise of style emerges in the space of this encounter as a potential threat to other forms of extratextual activity that a poetic work might prompt, such as the exercise of virtue.

Unrepaired Damage

Style has its prerogatives. The 1590 edition of *Arcadia* famously ends in the middle of a sentence: “Whereat ashamed, (as hauing neuer done so much before in his life)[.]”⁶ If the blank space that follows this cryptic fragment seems to invite collaboration—as Alexander and others clearly believed—then Sidney's characteristic use of parenthesis here also calls for studied imitation as the minimum price of entry.⁷ Over the course of

University Press, 1989); and Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, *Indecorous Thinking: Figures of Speech in Early Modern Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 120-140.

⁶ Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (London: William Ponsonby, 1590), 360v.

⁷ On parenthesis as a device of syntax and plot proper to the Sidneian style, see Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric*, 87-117. For bibliographical evidence of the authorial origins and stylistic idiosyncrasy of Sidney's

the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, Sidney's editors, imitators, and literary hangers-on found special utility in both the license and limitation of moments such as this. In Sidney's revisions of the *Arcadia* as well as the variety of literary responses they provoked, I will argue, the proprietary accomplishment of style appears as a poetic value at odds with the claims to moral didacticism that structured sixteenth-century humanist accounts of poetry, including Sidney's own *Defence of Poesy*. Often subsumed happily under the auspices of humanist dialogue or the seventeenth-century print culture of continuation, Sidney's injunction to the "exercise" of poetic composition in fact poses a challenge to the notion (most famously promulgated by Sidney himself) that virtuous action alone is the measure of poetic value.⁸

I argue the battle between Zelmane and Anaxius in Alexander's continuation can be read as an allegory for the difficulty of stylistic appropriation, laying bare the seams of the text in an agonistic encounter with Sidneian style. Renaissance constructions of Sidney's singular artistic style—of which I take the battle between Zelmane and Anaxius to be one—ultimately undermine the notion that the best poetry inspires virtuous action. The unfinished Venus of Apelles serves Sidney's editors and imitators as a model for the inimitability of Sidney's artistic style as would-be imitators such as Alexander encountered it. As Hugh Sanford writes in the 1593 edition of the *Arcadia*, "Sir Philip

parentheses, see Jonathan P. Lamb, "Parentheses and Privacy in Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*," *Studies in Philology* 107:3 (Summer 2010), 310-335.

8 On the cultivation of dialogue through incompleteness, see Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney: The Literary Response to Sir Philip Sidney, 1586-1640* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006); on the seventeenth-century print culture of continuation and the "omissions" created by Sidney and his later imitators, see Stephen Dobranski, *Readers and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Sidney's writings can no more be perfected without Sir Philip Sidney than Apelles' picture without Apelles" (59).

The references to the Venus of Apelles story that collect around the culture of Sidneian adaptations and continuations—and I will adduce more—are striking in their congruencies with the brief account of Apelles offered by Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood in their history of the origin of style in the visual art of the German Renaissance. Their book *Anachronic Renaissance* describes a regime of art consumption extending from the classical period to the fifteenth century in which “the replica substituted more than adequately for the original.”⁹ This applied not just to direct copies, which if sufficiently skillful were considered just as good as the real thing, but also to adaptations and extensions: “The interpretive copy was acceptable to all parties: to knowledgeable beholders capable of distinguishing between the artistic qualities of the original preserved by the copy and the supplementary qualities added by the copyist; to somewhat less knowledgeable beholders who had no idea that they were looking at a copy or who had no interest in the concept of the original.”

Pliny's account of the unfinished Venus of Apelles stands out in their work as a counter example. When Pliny reports that no one could be found to finish what the Greek painter left undone, Nagel and Wood observe that “[t]he unrepaired damage remained as a symbol of Apelles's inimitability.”¹⁰ Accordingly, the unfinished painting was preserved as a “relic” of the great artist. “But ‘In the course of time,’ Pliny continues, ‘the panel of the picture fell into decay, and Nero when emperor substituted for it another

9 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 278.

10 Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 280.

picture by the hand of Dorotheos.”” For Nagel and Wood, the fact that Pliny even notes this substitution is critical:

It seems that the copy by Dorotheos was not considered a completely adequate substitute, as a sculptural copy might have been. It was adequate only from certain points of view; evidently not from the point of view of art experts or from the point of view of the keepers of the temple, or else Pliny might never have been aware that Dorotheos (an uncelebrated painter, unattested to beyond this passage) was involved. For if the work by Dorotheos had successfully substituted for the work by Apelles, without remainder, Pliny would simply have gone on thinking of the painting as a work by Apelles, as many less well-informed citizens no doubt did.

For Nagel and Wood, the Apelles story is the exception that proves the rule: one of the few examples from the ancient world in which the personal style of a visual artist was preserved in such a way that precluded copying, forgery, or counterfeit. In their story, then, the example of Apelles points forward to a possessive regime of style in which copying and reproduction are licit but limited—limited, that is, by the “remainder” that preserves the original as relic. This chapter similarly attends to the material trace of unrepaired damage that serves, however counterintuitively, as the signal of style’s success. Whereas the story of the Venus of Apelles served Lyly in the previous chapter as a playful invitation to completion and extension, the inheritors of Sidney’s literary legacy surveyed in this chapter make a point of preserving in the work itself the marks of accidental loss and disfiguration that points toward the writer’s inimitability.

But by thus locating the *Arcadia*’s images of virtue in the material residue of Sidney’s singular imagination, rather than in the realm of philosophical absolutes, these early modern monuments to Sidney’s style reduce Sidneian imitators to the status of the much-pitied historian in Sidney’s *Defence*, endlessly elaborating on received examples but never free to invent patterns of their own. In the final section of the chapter, I turn to

the story of Argalus and Parthenia, a tale of disfiguration and loss that lies at the heart of Sidney's additions to the "new" *Arcadia*. If Sanford associates the "disfigured face" of the text with the unfinished masterwork of Apelles, Parthenia's disfigured face anticipates this connection, serving as an emblem of the resistance to completion that characterizes Sidney's revisions. Readers are invited to participate in the fulfillment of the poet's labor not by behaving virtuously but by completing the "defects" of the text—efforts that must remain inconclusive, as Alexander's supplement discovers.

Let me begin by situating the argument within the story, since a correlative claim of my chapter will be that the story of the *Arcadia* is, in some sense, about style. By the time Alexander picks up the thread of Sidney's incomplete romance, the tyrannical Cecropia has leapt to her death and Amphialus has attempted suicide, leaving the captive princesses Philoclea and Pamela (along with Zelmane herself) subject to the vainglorious Anaxius and his notably less talented brothers, Zoilus and Lycurgus. When Zoilus forces himself on Zelmane—who is, in fact, the knight Pyrocles in disguise—Zelmane quickly slays him and Lycurgus. In Anaxius, however, she meets her match. The two warriors are equally though differently gifted in combat, and they clash without decisive advantage on either side—"like the swordfish against the whale," we are told, or "like the rhinoceros against the elephant" (593). Each deftly meets the other's every blow. Neither manages to break the stalemate, and instead the text itself breaks off, unfinished by the author, leaving Anaxius and Zelmane to continue fighting indefinitely.¹¹

¹¹ For an account of the scene as an example of the rhetorical figure of *antithesis*, see Rosenfeld, *Indecorous Thinking*, 120-140.

Alexander enters the fray as a third combatant, wrestling with the challenge of matching Sidney's ornamental virtuosity. The initial results are crabbed and anxious:

[T]he fire of rage then burning contempt out of his breast did burst forth in flames through his eyes and in smoke from his mouth, so that he was returning with a terrible madness (all the strength of his whole body transferred to the one hand for a singular service) which the resolute Zelmane did earnestly observe with a providently all-despising courage, whilst the ears of Anaxius were suddenly arrested by sound, whereof they were only capable, which since in consort with his own humour, could only of him with authority have challenged a due attendance" (595-6).

Here, as Alexander resumes what Sidney left unfinished, the battle between Anaxius and Zelmane perhaps inevitably begins to dramatize the process of stylistic appropriation.

Gavin Alexander astutely notes that there is something more than a little "compensat[ory]" in the first overwrought sentence of this imitation.¹² And yet in its obscurity both as a description of physical combat and as a structure of grammatical relations, the opening passage of Alexander's continuation effectively lays bare two of style's typically hidden prerequisites: intense labor and close observation.

In Alexander's parenthesis the scene of combat dovetails with the scene of painstaking literary imitation, as "all the strength of [Anaxius's] whole body" is "transferred to the one hand for a singular service." The challenge of reproducing Sidney's style, all too legible in the overexertion of Alexander's syntax, finds adequate representation the strained effort of Anaxius's hand. The strain of the hand wielding the sword merges with the strain of the hand wielding the pen. At the same time, Zelmane's strikingly spectatorial response figures forth the studied attention that style also demands.

¹² Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 43.

The intense physicality of Anaxius's attack nearly overpowers—both in the distribution of narrative attention as well as within the story's diegesis—Zelmane's unusual display of “courage.” Anaxius charges with flames coming out of his eyes, but Zelmane's response is merely to observe “earnestly” his performance. When Anaxius becomes distracted from his engagement with Zelmane by the sounds of a larger battle (which “could only of him with authority have challenged a due attendance”), Zelmane simply watches him go: “[s]o that vanishing away as carried in a cloud of whirlwind, Zelmane either could not, or else would not reach him.” Her peculiar act of spectatorship almost disappears amid his agonistic frenzy. What seems to be a rather ineffective strategy for combat reveals the place of earnest observation in the practice of replicating style.

I take the idea that the achievement of style requires both intense labor and careful observation primarily from Ben Jonson's collection of literary commonplaces, *Timber: or Discoveries* (1641). Under the section heading “De stylo, et optimo scribendi genere,” Jonson identifies the “required three necessities” for “a man to write well”: “[t]o read the best authors, observe the best speakers: and much exercise of his own style.”¹³ In addition to close observation of models, Jonson enjoins his audience to “take care in placing, and ranking both matter and words, and examine the weight of either.” The generation of style here is, indeed, a painstaking process: “[n]o matter how slow the style be at first, so it be laboured, and accurate.” By the end of Jonson's brief essay on style, “exercise” turns out to have exactly the physical connotation we might expect. “As we see in the contention of leaping,” Jonson says in an analogy of poetic composition, “they jump

¹³ Ben Jonson, *Timber: or Discoveries* in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin, 1988), 425.

farthest that fetch their race largest: or, as in throwing a dart, or javelin, we force back our arms, to make our loose the stronger.” In the move from leaping to dart throwing, Jonson’s analogy collapses from the distance of the third person—“they jump”—to the immediacy of the first—“we force back our arms.” Here the plural subject of “force” lays claim to the poet, too, as the strenuous work of the arm in dart throwing pulls Jonson’s examples of physical exercise increasingly closer to the “laboured, and accurate” work of the hand in the exercise of style.¹⁴ Jonson’s comment further suggests that style demands not only intense labor but a kind of physical coercion: we “force” our bodies to bend to the dictates of style, much as we find “all the strength” of Anaxius’s body transferred to his hand for the “singular service” of matching Sidney’s stylistic ornamentation.¹⁵

Yet Renaissance and modern accounts alike agree that the success of style is the concealment of the same strenuous labor that Alexander’s supplement begins to lay bare. Perhaps the most influential such theory appears in Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il cortegiano* (1528), which outlines the courtly art of *sprezzatura*. Here Castiglione famously argues “that may bee saide to be a verie arte, that appeareth not to be arte, neither ought a man to put more diligence in any thing than in covering it.”¹⁶ Art—Castiglione here uses the term quite broadly to mean any skillful activity—achieves “grace,” a particular stylistic

14 A letter of advice from Henry Sidney, the poet’s father, likewise enjoins the young poet both to the “exercise” of skillful writing and “exercise of the bodie”; the two forms of exercise begin to resemble one another here as physical exercise increases the “breath” that enables rhetorical performance. Henry Sidney, *A very godly letter made, by the right honourable sir Henry Sidney* (London: T. Dawson, 1591), sig. A2r-A2v.

15 On the strenuous, violent labor enacted both by the hand and on the hand in the humanist tradition of handwriting instruction, see Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 57-108.

16 Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Thomas Hoby (trans. 1561; repr. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1974), 46.

ideal, the more it obscures the labor of its artistry.¹⁷ “[W]hatsoever he doth and saith,” if a man aims for grace, he must “doe it without paine and (as it were) not minding it.” As an example, Castiglione tells the story of ancient orators who pretended “that they had no sight in letters, and dissembling their cunning, made semblant their Orations to be made verie simply, and rather as nature and truth ledde them, than studie, and arte.” “Paine” and “studie”: the requirements of style whose open display defeats style. “[C]ontrariwise,” Castiglione asserts, “to use force . . . giveth a great disgrace, and maketh everie thing how great so ever it bee, to be litle esteemed.” Graceful style, then, means employing force without seeming forceful.

Modern accounts find similarly that style works best when it most nearly conceals its own efforts. “Style,” Jeff Dolven writes, “is the management of the predicament of our imitative essence.”¹⁸ “Management” here may suggest long-term equilibrium with local change, rather than the static success of concealment. Yet Dolven’s point remains that style secures—at least temporarily—the opportunity to ignore the necessary unoriginality of essentially social being. This, at least in part, is what D.H. Miller means when he describes the secret of style as belonging to “the archaic authority of personal sourcelessness.”¹⁹ The formulation suggests that effective style draws in some way on the resources of the past while obscuring the effort of having done so. If style is an artistic

¹⁷Another way to put this would be to say that artistry is synonymous with secrecy. On centrality of secrecy to English Renaissance literary and visual culture, see especially Patricia Fumerton, “‘Secret’ Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets,” in *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 93-134. On secrecy’s inflection of Renaissance poetic careers, see Richard Rambuss, *Spenser’s Secret Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Anonymity may be both the most extreme and most common form of artistic secrecy in the early modern period. See Marcy L. North, *The Anonymous Renaissance: Cultures of Discretion in Tudor-Stuart England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Dolven, *Sense of Style*, 119.

¹⁹ D.H. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 59.

signature both publicly available yet irretrievably personal, Miller's pun—in Greek, *arche* means “source”—transposes this paradoxical relation onto the field of cultural historicity. That is, Miller understands style as a device whose public availability is achieved by projecting *sui generis* individuality, and whose place in history is secured to the extent that it successfully creates the illusion of having no history and needing none.

Miller gives an account of style whose relation to source and history could scarcely make sense at all to Renaissance writers, and indeed understood in these terms, Alexander's exercise in Sidneian style is plainly a failure. The seam that joins Sidney's text and Alexander's bridge shows us exactly what it ought to obscure: the material relic of Sidney's inimitability, the source that licenses Alexander's exercise in style. This failure begins to emerge alongside the threat of Anaxius's “returning with a terrible madness.” The phrase suggests that the challenge of style embodied in this scene owes to Sidney's lingering presence—indeed, the possibility of Sidney's return—in Alexander's text. More than that, it suggests a rather surprising version of Sidney's afterlife, which was so often characterized in the harmonious terms of encomium.²⁰ If Alexander's supplement constitutes a failure of style, it points in the space of its failure toward an anxiety about literary continuations in the Sidneian mode that traditional irenic accounts of Sidney's afterlife merely gloss over.

The irenic account, too, is embedded in Alexander's narrative. The death of Philisides from wounds sustained by poisoned dart during the siege of Cecropia's castle provides Alexander with occasion to rehearse many of the public pieties that attached to

20 On the “ghastly spectacle” of literary afterlives in Elizabethan print culture, see Samuel Fallon, “Robert Greene's Ghosts,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 77:2 (June 2016).

Sidney after his early death. Recalling Walter Raleigh's eulogy of Sidney as the "Scipio, Cicero, and Petrarch of our time," Philisides dies surrounded by admirers Musidorus, Pyrocles, and Clitophon, "as joyful as he left them sorrowful, who had known him a mirror of courage and courtesy, of learning and arms" (614).²¹ In a note appended to the supplement, Alexander acknowledges that the main respect in which his narrative departs from lines projected by Sidney's work is "in the death of Philisides, making choice of a course whereby I might best manifest what affection I bear to the memory of him, whom I took to be alluded unto by that name, and whom I only by this imperfect parcel (designing more) had a mind to honour" (864-5). Here Alexander claims that he understands Philisides to be an autobiographical surrogate for Sidney elsewhere in the *Arcadia*, and so he kills Philisides in order to praise his maker. Critics have generally taken Alexander at his word.²²

But Anaxius, whose violent physicality suggests the difficulty of stylistic imitation, may supply another, more perverse figure à clef for Sidney and his cultural afterlife. The "madness" of Sidney's "return" as Anaxius is an interpretive possibility that brings into view an account of literary inheritance as violent conflict and suggests something of the intense psychomachia that Harold Bloom famously attributes to encounters between poets and their literary predecessors later in the seventeenth

21 Walter Raleigh, "An Epitaph upon the Right Honourable Sir Philip Sidney, Knight, Lord Governor of Flushing," in *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh*, ed. J. Hannah (London: George Bell & Sons, 1892), 7.

22 The best recent account of Philisides as a figure for Sidneian authorship is Samuel Fallon, "Astrophil, Philisides, and the Coterie in Print," *English Literary Renaissance* 45:2 (Spring 2015), 175-204. See also Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 280; Dennis Kay, "Introduction: Sidney—A Critical Heritage," in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), 22.

century.²³ But rather than creatively misreading the Sidneian text, the agonistic version of Alexander's relationship to his famous predecessor emerges from the extraordinary exertion of stylistic appropriation and so yields an account of style itself as a problem to contend with, much as the commonplace of Apelles's painting stages stylistic imitation as a "dare."²⁴

Notwithstanding the late-Elizabethan mythology surrounding Sidney's death, for which Philisides is an obvious vessel, it's almost as if the text invites us to read Anaxius as another, alternative figure for Sidney's legacy. After all, it is the death of Anaxius to which the text's incompleteness most obviously points within the story's diegesis. At the moment in which Sidney's text lapses into silence, the narrative's momentum tends toward Zelmane's killing of Anaxius, the event whose non-occurrence most conspicuously signals the corruption of the text. Philisides's death is linked to Sidney's death because they both receive fulsome praise afterward; Anaxius's death is linked to Sidney's because both events point toward the lacuna in the text that allows Alexander to intervene in the world of the *Arcadia* in the first place. "Had [Sidney] lived," Gavin Alexander reminds us, "his works might never have been printed: only in this way—the manuscript author entering print posthumously—could the 1590s become the decade in which Sidney dominated literary culture."²⁵ Ultimately, what Anaxius's fate forecasts

23 The most well-known version of the argument appears in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

24 It is closer, then, to Misha Teramura's recent account of how early modern *auctoritas* projects "a 'fear' of inadequacy about . . . adaptation" ("The Anxiety of *Auctoritas*: Chaucer and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63:4 (Winter 2012), 546).

25 Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, xix. Qtd. also in Fallon, "Astrophil, Philisides, and the Coterie in Print," 176.

even for the beneficent Philisides is that someone has to be killed in order for the accumulation of textual supplements to proceed.

But no sooner does Alexander revive the combat between Anaxius and Zelmane than he stages yet another interruption thereof. At the moment when Alexander's text intrudes into the space of the *Arcadia*, Anaxius is drawn away from the fight with Zelmane by the sound of intruders elsewhere in Cecropia's castle. Anaxius forfeits "due attendance" to the fight at hand on account of "the violence of invaders, and distractedness of others." The intrusion of others into the scene "transport[s] the spirit of Anaxius" and "blow[s] him down the stairs and up the door" (596). Anaxius joins the battle ongoing between the followers of the slain Amphialus and the invading forces led by the Black Knight. The battle continues to unfold in terms that recall the problem of Alexander's interpolation into the world of the *Arcadia*. The first soldier whom Anaxius confronts "lift[s] up his hand to strike, and withal opening his mouth as if intending some speech, his proposition was prevented by an active answer cutting him from the lips to the ears, so by opening his mouth restraining his speech" (598). The image collapses two quintessential Sidneian devices in grotesque fashion: *prosopopoeia*—opening somebody else's mouth for him—appears as an act of violence that occasions the interruption of speech, or *aposiopesis*. When Anaxius and Zelmane finally encounter each other again, their duel appears first and foremost as discursive confrontation by other means: "[a]s if words had been to weak messengers of their wrath and swords only worthy to utter their minds, they began with that wherewith they hoped to end." Each blow struck by the knights "seek[s] to bury the remembrance of the former" (600). Appropriately for one trying to write his way into literary history by supplying the defects of a great author's

unfinished work, Alexander imagines combat as a struggle over whose voice will be heard and whose memory preserved.

If the struggle between Zelmane and Anaxius underscores both at the level of style and of narrative the challenge of writing after Sidney, it further suggests that an element of coercion lies at the heart of the cultural consecration to which Sidney himself was subject after his much-publicized death at Arnhem. This is not typically how Sidney's posthumous literary persona is thought of. Edward Berry, for example, affirms the irenic version of Sidneian authorship: "The word 'struggle' implies a view of literary activity that is alien to Sidney."²⁶ But in fact the agonistic language of struggle—of being forced into publicity—pervades the literature on Sidney's literary consecration. Alan Stewart describes how, after Sidney's death, his writings were "dragged into the light" to fulfill a mythological version of Sidney concocted in large part by the poet's uncle, the Earl of Leicester.²⁷ Sidney's posthumous reputation as the "perfect courtier-poet" was, in fact, the invention of "a master-propagandist, striving to gain English imperial glory against all the odds in the most wretched and botched of wars."²⁸ A.C. Hamilton writes that this legend was "thrust upon" Sidney by Leicester, Sidney's friend Fulke Greville, and the credulous annalists of literary history, and has prevented Sidney's life and

26 Edward Berry, *The Making of Sir Philip Sidney* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 4. However, Berry's account proceeds with a reading of letters from Henry Sidney to his son, Philip, and then to some written to Philip by Philip's mentor Hubert Languet; even as he argues for an interpretation based on self-fashioning, Berry notes that the latter offer "Languet's vision of Sidney" (31). On the limitations of telling Sidney's story through his correspondence with Languet, see Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney: A Double Life* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2000), 112. Through an analysis of the letters alongside other contextual evidence, Stewart rather notes a pattern of "Philip time and again attempting to break free of Languet's control." In the end, Berry acknowledges that "The image of Sidney that survived was essentially that of idealizing poets and biographers . . . not the image, or series of images, provided by Sidney himself" (212).

27 Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney: A Double Life* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2000), 4.

28 Stewart, *Philip Sidney*, 7.

accomplishments from emerging clearly in literary and cultural history.²⁹ Lori Humphrey Newcomb writes that “Sidney [was] constructed as exclusive by the very coproducers who dragged his work posthumously into print.”³⁰ Arthur F. Kinney remarks that Sidney has been “imprisoned by cultural myths,” and Katherine Duncan-Jones writes that Greville did “considerable damage” to Sidney’s long-term fame by shepherding the 1590 edition of the *Arcadia* through publication.³¹ Evidence, too, suggests that Sidney himself was aware of the “dangers” of the idealistic image that was being crafted for him by his famous uncle.³² In his afterlife as the “jewel of virtue and courtesy,” according to this trajectory, Sidney experiences the coercive effects of cultural preservation much as the young man in Shakespeare’s sonnets in the account given by Aaron Kunin: Sidney and the young man “resist preservation in that the procedure is difficult and painful and in that they do not want its result.”³³ In short, for Alexander to make Sidney’s death match that of his Philisides requires also an Anaxius susceptible to being dragged out and thrust upon.

I want to sum up the line of my argument so far by observing that two senses of “force” emerge in the story of how Sidney’s inheritors came to appropriate his style. The

29 A.C. Hamilton, *Sir Philip Sidney: A Study of His Life and Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1.

30 Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 27.

31 Arthur F. Kinney, “Intimations of Mortality: Sidney’s Journey to Flushing and Zutphen,” in *Sir Philip Sidney: 1586 and the Creation of a Legend*, ed. Jan Van Dorsten, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 125; Katherine Duncan-Jones, “Introduction,” in *Sir Philip Sidney, The Old Arcadia*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), ix.

32 Alan Hager, “The Exemplary Mirage: Fabrication of Sir Philip Sidney’s Biographical Image and the Sidney Reader” in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, ed. Dennis Kay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 46.

33 Edmund Molyneux, “Historical Remembrance of the Sidneys,” in *Sir Philip Sidney, The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 313; Aaron Kunin, “Shakespeare’s Preservation Fantasy,” *PMLA* 124:1 (2009), 100.

first is similar to what we mean when we say that the style of a work feels “forced.” When William Alexander attempts to inhabit Sidney’s style, the strain of poetic labor shows itself too conspicuously. On the one hand, his imitation is enabled by Sidney’s achievement in style: Alexander straightaway employs Sidney’s signature devices such as *parenthesis* and *antithesis*. And yet on the other hand style also renders conspicuous—material and tangible, even—the seams of the 1593 text, such that the proprietary nature of Sidney’s work is preserved rather than challenged by Alexander’s addition. In Nagel and Wood’s terms, the unrepaired damage done to the *Arcadia* upon Sidney’s death is what licenses Alexander’s iteration on the text, but also what prevents any effective substitution.

The second sense in which I have been talking about “force” has to do with Sidney’s somewhat stubborn presence (beginning with the experience of his style as a site of resistance) in the continuations, hagiographies, metaphrases, and other publishing experiments that borrowed on his name and reputation in the years after Sidney’s death. Sidney, published posthumously and possibly against his will, is “forced” into compliance with the image of the perfect poet-courtier in particular to clear the bad reputation of poetry itself and therefore license the production of more poetry. As Richard Helgerson observes, “[i]n making Sidney answer to their exculpating dream of a gentleman-poet, his contemporaries necessarily ignored any second thoughts that he himself may have had.”³⁴ Yet what Alexander finds is that whatever second thoughts Sidney may have had—whether about publishing his own work or about any of the other uses and causes he was made to contribute to—are not so easily dispelled.

34 Richard Helgerson, *Elizabethan Prodigs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 127.

The first act of coercion involves the publication of the *Arcadia* itself. The story is frequently told that Sidney requested his writings be burned after his death. What we know is that at some point in the early 1580s Philip Sidney began revising *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, a prose romance that had previously circulated as a completed work in manuscript form. What we don't know, ultimately, is anything else about Sidney's plans for this or any of the other works that he left unfinished at the untimely event of his death. Wounded in September 1586 at the Battle of Zutphen, Sidney died in October from gangrene. Greville immediately set about preventing the publication of what he dubbed the "old" *Arcadia*—the conventions of literary history have affirmed his nomenclature—in favor of "a correction . . . done 4 or 5 years since."³⁵ In a letter dated from November and addressed to Sidney's father-in-law Sir Francis Walsingham, Greville alleges that his copy of the *Arcadia* "is fitter to be printed than that first which is so common," apparently referring to the number and reach of the manuscript copies of the earlier version. The "old" *Arcadia*, though on its own a finished artifact, was effectively buried by Greville until its rediscovery in the early twentieth century, with multiple expanded but fragmentary versions supplanting it—each preserving, where the old *Arcadia* could not, the unrepaired damage done to Sidney's text upon the poet's death.

Neither was Greville the only one who moved quickly to intervene in Sidney's literary afterlife. Greville's edition of the *Arcadia* won out in the short term, published by William Ponsonby in 1590. But Greville's edition ended in the middle of a sentence

³⁵ Qtd. in AC Hamilton, *Sir Philip Sidney: A Study of His Life and Works* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 126.

(rendering the battle between Anaxius and Zelmane indefinite) and was soon superseded by another edition, spearheaded by Philip's sister Mary Sidney, which also claimed exclusive fidelity to Sidney's original intent. In 1593 Ponsonby put out a revised version that sutured onto Greville's incomplete text the ending of the "old" manuscript *Arcadia*.³⁶ In the "Letter to the Reader," Hugh Sanford, secretary to Mary Sidney's husband, attacks Greville's edition in much the same terms that Greville himself had used against the "old" version in his private letter to Walsingham: "The disfigured face, gentle reader, wherewith this work not long since appeared to the common view, moved the noble lady to whose honour consecrated, to whose protection it was committed, to take in hand the wiping away those spots wherewith the beauties thereof were unworthily blemished" (59). With Mary Sidney "supplying the defects" of Greville's disfigured edition, the composite text purports to offer "the conclusion, not the perfection, of Arcadia, and that no further than the author's own writings or known determinations could direct," since, as Sanford further insists, "Sir Philip Sidney's writings can no more be perfected without Sir Philip Sidney than Apelles' picture without Apelles."

Yet what exactly Philip Sidney's posthumous absence precluded and what, on the other hand, it may have licensed remains an open question. In 1587, to take an adjacent example, there appeared in print *A Worke concerning the Trewnesse of the Christian Religion*, a translation of the writing of Huguenot Philippe du Plessis-Mornay. Its title page conspicuously advertised that it had "[b]egunne to be translated into English by Sir

36 For a detailed account of the various printed editions of Sidney's works, see Joel B. Davis, *The Countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia and the Invention of English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Philip Sidney Knight” and was finished by Arthur Golding “at his request.”³⁷ Stewart now argues the work may have been entirely Golding’s.³⁸ Even before the competing editions of the *Arcadia* appeared, it seems Sidney’s heroic and early death created something of a bull market for unfinished Sidney artifacts completed by other hands.

When Gavin Alexander remarks that, for writers who brought their fictions into the world that Sidney created after his death, *Arcadia* became “a place where authorial personae detach from their bodies,” he suggests a difficulty that William Alexander’s bridge narrative renders visible at the level of narrative.³⁹ Reading Anaxius as a figure for Sidney himself makes palpable the painful labor of this detachment. Indeed, Anaxius’s death, when it finally arrives, suggests the difficulty of wrestling with the full weight of the Sidneian legacy. While Philisides’s death is easily contrived and gracefully excused by compliment, the death of Anaxius is bloody and labored. Anaxius once again charges at Zelmane, who lifts her sword just in time to “[run] him through the heart” with it—“or rather he his heart upon it” (602). He runs her through simultaneously, and they both collapse, with Zelmane just barely surviving her wounds. Anaxius falls onto his own sword hand, with part of the blade still lodged in Zelmane’s body. Struggling against the “dead weight” of Anaxius’s body, Zelmane attempts to wrest herself free. If the embrace between Musidorus and Pyrocles hopefully imagines that *imitatio* might transcend “the elemental mass of . . . bodies” to achieve some post-corporeal perfection, Zelmane’s ongoing struggle with Anaxius and his body suggest that the exercise of style and the

37 Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, *A Worke concerning the Trewnesse of the Christian Religion*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Thomas Cadman, 1587), title page.

38 Stewart, *Philip Sidney*, 256.

39 Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 268.

forceful encounter it implies ultimately frustrate the metaphysical integrity that Alexander longs for.

Alexander's text preserves Sidney's memory through the accounts of two deaths, then: not only the "joyful" and virtuous death of Philisides, which commands eulogy as the only feasible response, but also the gory slaying of Anaxius, whose will and sword, Zelmane finds, are almost as difficult to coerce in death as they were in life. As Zelmane struggles to free herself, Anaxius's sword, an image of martial authorship throughout the bridge narrative, breaks under the weight of the strain, "part remaining under him, and the rest within her" (602). The handle of the sword, in fact, remains secure in Anaxius's hand: "Thus hard it was to force Anaxius, though he was dead, and impossible while he lived." If effective appropriation of Sidney's style was "impossible while he lived," it remains no light task even in his absence to undertake the "exercise" to which Sidney issued such an enticing and yet elusive invitation at the conclusion of the 1593 text.

Images of Wit, Images of Life

Physical activity is often understood to lie at the center of Sidney's theory of poetic value, though in a sense quite different from the one I have so far discussed as the exercise of style. Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* argues for the capacity of poetry not only to inculcate knowledge of virtue in its readers, but to yield virtuous action, with "the end of

well-doing and not of well-knowing only.”⁴⁰ Throughout the *Defence*, poetry comes out ahead of philosophy and history in the organization of disciplines on the strength of its capacity not merely to teach readers what virtue is, but to move them to practice the same. Philosophy might contain knowledge of virtue, but in order to realize its fruits philosophy’s precept demands from the reader what Sidney calls “attentive studious painfulness” (*DP* 226). By contrast, the pleasing images of poetry work by “the force of delight” (*DP* 238) to lead the reader toward virtuous action in the world. “[M]oving is of a higher degree than teaching,” Sidney argues, for “what so much good doth teaching bring forth . . . as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach? For, as Aristotle saith, it is not *gnosis* but *praxis* must be the fruit” (*DP* 226). By framing style as a physically intense and materially forceful encounter, such extensions as Alexander’s perform—in effect if not intent—a substitution of the laborious act of stylistic imitation for other forms of activity that might be prompted by the text. In short, what early readers identified as Sidney’s artistic perfection leads not to the exercise of virtue but to the further exercise of style.

Sidney’s most enthusiastic early readers often articulated a positive connection between the singular stylistic accomplishment of Sidney’s work in the *Arcadia* and the rhetorical definition of poetic value that Sidney appears to articulate in the *Defence*. A particularly compelling example appears in the writing of John Hoskyns, whose manuscript *Directions for Speech and Style* insists that young men who aspired to rhetorical mastery could find all they needed in the *Arcadia* not only for the perfection of

40 Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* in *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 219. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *DP*.

their writing but for the moral perfection that must inevitably follow. For Hoskyns, then, Sidney's writing serves much the same function that Cicero's writing serves Ascham in chapter one: that is, as a peerless model for imitation. Yet as I will show in this section, by insisting on the proprietary nature of his artistic accomplishments, Sidney's cultural inheritors preserve their hero's artistic legacy at the expense of relocating the "perfect patterne[s]" of virtue from the realm of philosophical absolutes to Sidney's mind.

Hoskyns annotated a copy of the 1590 edition of *Arcadia*, illustrating for a young gentleman at the Inns of Court key points in Sidney's style as particularly worthy of imitation. The account is not limited to a list of rhetorical tropes, however, and Hoskyns is at pains to link his injunction to stylistic imitation with the cultivation of personal virtue that Sidney also calls for. In adopting Sidney as a model for vernacular eloquence, Hoskyns attributes to his work the kind of perfection—the ideal coordination of form and purpose—that earlier generations of English humanists usually attributed to the authors of classical antiquity. "The perfect expressing of all quallities," Hoskyns argues in his justification of the *Arcadia* as a manual of moral as well as stylistic instruction, "is learned out of Aristotles 10 bookes of morrall philosophy; but because as Machiavile saith, perfect virtue, or perfect vice is not seene in our tyme, which altogeather is humorous and spiriting, therefore the understanding of Aristotle's *Rhetorique*, is the directest meanes of skill to discribe, to appease, to move, or to prevent any mocion whatsoever." Hoskyns adopts from the *Defence* the notion that the poet adds precept to the "bare 'was'" of the historian (*DP* 224). "Men are described most excellentlie in *Arcadia*," writes Hoskyns. "Basilius, Plexirtus, Pirocles, Musidorus, Anaxius, etc. but hee that will truly set down a man in a figured storie, must first learne truely to set down an

humor, a passion, a virtue, a vice, and therein keeping decent proporcion add but names, and knitt together the accidents and incounters.”⁴¹

Hoskyns’s directions for imitating Sidney’s method of poetic composition are less flattering to the practice of poetry than Sidney’s own account in the *Defence*. Hoskyns suggests that the poet merely adds “names” and “accidents and incounters” to figures of virtue plucked from the abstractions of moral philosophy such as Aristotle’s. But the rhetorical poetics usually attributed to the *Defence* is not necessarily more complex. In Sidney’s account, the poet adds particular examples—Hoskyns might say “accidents and incounters”—to the abstract rules of philosophy: “whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in someone by whom he presupposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example” (*DP* 221). Hoskyns follows Sidney in particular by using the vocabulary of perfection to describe poetry’s mediation of precept and example.

Hoskyns’s striking prioritization of rhetoric over moral philosophy likewise reflects Sidney’s Reformed sense of moral depravity. Since “that first accursed fall of Adam,” Sidney observes early in the *Defence*, “our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.” It’s for this reason that poetry can serve the ends of learning in ways that neither history nor philosophy can. We might be able to perceive “perfection” through the abstractions of moral philosophy, but human nature is unlikely to submit to the “studious painfulness” necessary to reach it. If we were inclined by nature to virtue, philosophy would be the

41 John Hoskyns, *Directions for Speech and Style in Sidney: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Martin Garrett (London: Routledge, 1996), 155.

ideal discursive form; since we are not, the “force of delight” in poetry motivates where precept fails. “[T]he final end” of learning, Sidney reminds us, “is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of” (*DP* 219). Because poetry can surpass what is in favor of what ought to be, it alone bears the weight of moral instruction in a fallen universe. Since we are no longer naturally inclined to virtue for its own sake, we need the inducements of poetic ornament to render virtue sufficiently appealing.

As Hoskyns explains Sidney’s ideal scheme, the mediating function that poetry can play between precept and example derives from the poet’s capacity to imagine people or events such as might be or ought to be, and to give shape to those on the page, rather than to copy from what actually is in the world. As Hoskyns puts it, “Sir Philip Sidney’s course was . . . to imagine the thing present in his owne brayne, that his pen might the better present it to you.” The young man whom Hoskyns addresses would do well to follow Sidney’s lead: “whose example I would you durst follow till I pulld you backe.”⁴² For writers of Hoskyns’s generation, then, Sidney offers the perfect model of stylistic virtuosity whose fragmentary legacy both invites imitation and yet wards off completion. Sidney’s readers are supposed to follow in his footsteps by practicing virtue according to Sidney’s own theories. Hoskyns seems to believe this, too. But by locating the figures for imitation in Sidney’s mind rather than in the precepts of moral philosophy the kind of imitation to which he enjoins the young men at the Inns of Court begins to focus itself on an altogether different kind of object. The problem that emerges over the course of the various encounters with Sidney’s style is that locating Sidney’s signature achievement

⁴² Hoskyns, *Directions*, 156.

“in [Sidney’s] brayne” simultaneously renders the work to some degree irretrievably proprietary and redirects the activity occasioned by the text from the practice of virtue toward the exercise of style.

William Alexander’s supplement offers much same terms to describe its own engagement with the imperative to virtuous imitation. Critics have noted that Alexander understands his motives to align with the plan that Sidney lays out and Hoskyns updates: namely, in imitating Sidney’s writing Alexander understands himself to be imitating also the virtues represented therein. Gavin Alexander puts it this way: “Alexander views his supplementing of Sidney as a very Sidneian falling in love with the virtue of the ideal characters, enabling him not to be a Cyrus but to create another Musidorus who can make good Sidney’s fore-conceit.”⁴³ The supplement “works to foreground Sidney’s own theory of exemplary character and readerly praxis in *The Defence of Poesy*, and to connect this sort of imitation to his imitation of Sidney’s text.”⁴⁴ Much as Hoskyns puts forward Sidney’s poetic practice as an “example I would you durst follow,” Alexander has Pamela describe Pyrocles and Musidorus as “patterns of virtue, who in all their actions did but paint out the height of perfection, and encourage others to follow their footsteps in the way of worth” (616-7). Sidney’s unfinished work suggests “the height of perfection,” and by following along in the same spirit—that is, by depicting further the virtues and perfections not only of Pyrocles and Musidorus, but of Pamela and Philoclea as well—Alexander suggests that he is fulfilling the text’s call to virtuous imitation. Yet Sidney famously maintains in the *Defence* that the value of poetry lies in its capacity “not

⁴³ Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 281.

⁴⁴ Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 281.

only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses” (*DP* 216-7). The act of stylistic imitation—as Alexander’s text also painstakingly records—risks replacing the labor of making many Cyruses with the labor of replicating the one perfect—but also “particular”—Cyrus located in Sidney’s brain, lost to posterity yet tantalizingly suggested by the ragged edges and unrepaired damage of the text.

In sum, as writers following in Sidney’s footsteps insist on the singular nature of Sidney’s accomplishment, the “fore-conceit” of the Arcadian fiction begins to seem less like a universal ideal and more like a personal signature. Sanford’s use of the Venus of Apelles in the 1593 text as an emblem for the artistic singularity of Sidney’s accomplishment resurfaces in this context. In 1624, for example, Richard Bellings published a “sixth booke” of the *Arcadia* and encountered problems similar to what Alexander’s text reveals. A dedicatory poem from H. Delaune assures Bellings that “Thou hast therein such wittie smoothnesse showne, / As out of doubt it would be thought [Sidney’s] owne.”⁴⁵ Bellings’s friend “W. Martyn” likewise attributes to Bellings’s text the kind of metaphysical integrity that Alexander hopes for in the image of Pyrocles and Musidorus’s embrace with which I began this chapter. Martyn suggests that Bellings’s imitation of Sidney was so stylistically accurate that when both poets are dead and gone literary history will remember Sidney and Bellings as a single author:

so like in all
Was matter, phrase, and language which did fall
From thy chaste pen, that surely both being gone
Next age will write your characters in one.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Richard Bellings, *A Sixth Booke to the Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (Dublin: Societie of Stationers, 1624), sig. A4v.

⁴⁶ Bellings, *Sixth Booke*, sig. A4r.

The seamless incorporation of one text into that of another author enabled by perfect stylistic similarity—“so like in all / Was matter, phrase, and language”—carries with it the consequence that posterity may no longer discern two “characters” in two historical persons. The situation Martyn imagines is not quite as fanciful or merely courteous as it might seem. The anonymous poem “A Remedie for Love,” which first appeared in the 1655 edition of *Arcadia*, “so effectively imitates Sidney’s writing that modern editors reprinted the poem in all collections of Sidney’s works through the first half of the twentieth century.”⁴⁷ Much as Alexander, in the 1621 supplement imagines the seamless union of his own text with Sidney’s in the idealized embrace of Pyrocles and Musidorus, Martyn’s poem suggests that the goal in forming “matter, phrase, and language” to match Sidney’s is in fact to merge the identities of multiple writers into one, at least from the long perspective of literary history. Once both poets are dead, they will be remembered as a single author.

The dedicatory poem thus redistributes across the judgment of literary history the Pythagorean transmigration of souls that Renaissance writers sometimes associated with imitation and continuation.⁴⁸ But Bellings himself explicitly rejects the idea that anyone could mistake his work for Sidney’s own, using terms that recall Nagle and Wood’s account of style through Pliny’s story:

47 Stephen Dobranski, *Readers and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64.

48 For instance, in the way the “traduction” of souls between the brothers Diamond, Priamond, and Triamond in Book IV of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* mirrors the “infusion sweete” of Chaucer’s spirit, by which Spenser revives and renews the unfinished *Squire’s Tale*. I discuss this version of imitation and adaptation in the next chapter of this dissertation.

I have added a limme to *Apelles* picture; but my minde never entertain'd such vaine hopes, to thinke it of perfection sufficient to delude the eyes of the most vulgar, with the likenesse in the workmanship. No, no, I doe not follow *Pythagoras* his opinion of transmigrations: I am well assur'd divine *Sidney's* soule is not infus'd into me, whose Iudgment was only able to finish, what his Invention was only worthy to undertake. For this, courteous Reader, let it suffice I place Sir *Philip Sidney's* desert (even in mine owne esteeme) as farre beyond my endeavours, as the most fault-finding censor can imagin this assay of mine, to come short of his *Arcadia*.⁴⁹

With the opening reference to the unfinished Venus of Apelles, Bellings revives the commonplace that Sanford employed to defend the 1593 edition of the *Arcadia*. Like Sanford, Bellings insists on the proprietary nature of Sidney's accomplishment. Yet for Bellings, the ambivalent legacy of Apelles's unfinished painting captures something of the sense that Sidney's seventeenth-century imitators have of being suspended between notions of *imitatio* and response inherited from Renaissance humanism and, on the other hand, a seventeenth-century print culture of continuation that Jeffrey Todd Knight characterizes as "a cathexis on the book rather than the author as the point of origin."⁵⁰ Accordingly, Bellings conceives of "add[ing] a limb" to the picture, but never of completing or fulfilling it. His terms for the difference in these procedures are striking, especially compared to the idealized version of imitation suggested by Hoskyns and Sidney himself. Where Hoskyns asks his readers to "follow" Sidney by imagining the figures of virtue in Sidney's brain and trying to put them on paper, Bellings's version of

49 Bellings, *Sixth Booke*, sig. A3r.

50 Jeffrey Todd Knight, "Afterworlds: Thomas Middlteton, the Book, and the Genre of Continuation" in *Formal Matters: Reading the Materials of the English Renaissance*, eds. Allison K. Deutermann and Andras Kisery (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 80.

imitation highlights the problem that to do so successfully would require something like transmigration of souls. Instead, Bellings places Sidney's work on another plane altogether from his own endeavors. Limbs may be added to the picture—perhaps even indefinitely many of them—without ever fulfilling the imperfect figure suggested by the great artist's unfinished work. In Bellings's case, concatenation, rather than dialogue or completion, establishes the format and scope of response.

In saying so, I distinguish my understanding of the text from that of Gavin Alexander, who offers a dismissive assessment of Bellings's *Sixth Booke*: "Sidney had not wished to continue the *Arcadia* beyond Book V, and it was not on any view in need of a sixth book."⁵¹ Bellings, however, explicitly puts beyond his capacity the supplement of anything the *Arcadia* "need[s]" and beyond his own wit the certainty of anything Sidney might have "wished." Nor is doing so merely a gesture of courtesy. The terms that Bellings supplies for putting Sidney's vision beyond his own powers simultaneously recalls both Hoskyns's *Directions* and Sidney's own *Defence* in turn: only Sidney's "invention" is capable of fulfilling the "perfect patterne" that Sidney began to delineate. All that his cultural inheritors can do is iterate on the script that he provided. The result is a culture of print proliferation that appears increasingly focused more on adding to and replicating the book Sidney left behind—its "matter" in a literal sense, rather than in the sense of an anatomy of virtue—than on learning how and why that maker made it, an aspiration Bellings renounces. It can be no surprise, then, that Sidney's most conspicuous posthumous legacy consists largely in the proliferation of literary continuations and

⁵¹ Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 277.

supplements published throughout the seventeenth century—rather than, say, the proliferation of moderate Protestant statesmen in the Philippist mode.

But are we sure that wasn't Sidney's purpose after all, even in the *Defence*? Andrew Shifflett has recently argued for the essential fictionality of "the peerless poet" described in the *Defence*, with the corollary that the ideal poetic work should indeed "move readers to write poems and thus become poets themselves."⁵² Shifflett's article reopens an important line of critique regarding the *Defence* that was first suggested by Ronald Levao, who argues in an important early article that "[t]he entire argument for the poet as maker is not so much a justification of the wit as a demonstration of it."⁵³ Shifflett extends Levao's line of thinking while attempting to preserve the ethical valence of the *Defence*, arguing that "[t]he feigned example of the poet implies that reading and writing are themselves virtuous actions."⁵⁴

Yet if the theory is correct that the defining feature of the poet who "do[es] his part aright" (*DP* 224) is his fictionality, as Shifflett argues, then Alexander, Bellings, and the whole host of idealizing imitators who attempted to follow in Sidney's footsteps err first of all in identifying the fulfillment of "pattern[e]s of perfection" with any one author in particular, including Sidney himself. By maintaining, as Sanford does in the 1593 edition of the *Arcadia*, that no extension of the *Arcadia* should range "further than the author's own writings or known determinations could direct," Sidney's imitators reproduce the exact problem that Sidney set out to circumvent in the *Defence*—namely,

52 Andrew Shifflett, "The Poet as Feigned Example in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*," *Modern Philology* (2016), 23.

53 Ronald Levao, "Sidney's Feigned Apology," in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, 131.

54 Shifflett, "Feigned Example," 26.

the liberation of the poet from the “bare was” of history. Rather than in fact becoming the kind of poet who can range freely and invent new patterns altogether, the kind of poetry that Bellings himself says he’s making in response to the *Arcadia* is much closer to the kind of writing that Sidney deprecates as merely historical—free only to add more examples, but never licensed to reach for the realm of the ideal without presuming to finish the picture that the Elizabethan Apelles left behind.

Nowhere is this conflict more clear than in *The Life of the of the Renowned S^r Philip Sidney* by Fulke Greville, who above all others was responsible for promulgating after Sidney’s death the idea of Sidney’s singular genius. Greville dissents from the hopeful assumption shared by Hoskyns and Alexander alike that imitation will yield a realization of the Sidneian “fore-conceit” of idealized virtue. With respect to the *Arcadia* and Sidney’s posthumous publications, Greville observes that “[h]owsoever I liked them not too well (even in that unperfected shape they were) to condescend that such delicate (though inferior) Pictures of himselfe, should be suppressed; yet I do wish that work may be the last in this kind, presuming that no man that followes can ever reach, much less go beyond that excellent intended patterne of his.”⁵⁵ Greville’s rhetorical defense of the singular nature of his friend’s accomplishment carries with it important consequences for the culture of Sidneian imitation. More than any other writer after Sidney, Greville emphasizes the impossibility of “follow[ing]” the “patterne” of the great author.

Furthermore, alongside the assertion of Sidney’s unique artistic genius, Greville’s efforts to eulogize his friend’s political accomplishments have the effect of transferring

⁵⁵ Fulke Greville, *The Life of the Renowned S^r Philip Sidney* (1652), ed. Warren W. Wooden (Delmar: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1984), 253.

the universal ideal that poetical works like the *Arcadia* were supposed to make portable for readers into Sidney's truncated biography. "[I]n life," Greville observes, Sidney "exceed[ed] the pictures of [virtue] in any moral precepts."⁵⁶ Whereas Sidney's *Defence* maintains that the value of poetical figures is that they can add virtues to historical examples that no one individual could actually possess, Greville reverses the proposition. The encomium works by deprecating the pictures of virtue that Sidney's own theory of poetic composition ostensibly rests on. If Alexander and Bellings fall short of the free-ranging poet that Shifflett says Sidney's writing ought to produce by iterating endlessly over the examples Sidney provides them, Greville's response goes further still in elevating the particulars of Sidney's mind above the capacity of feigned examples to communicate virtue.

Greville acknowledges forthrightly the competition between what he calls the *Defence*'s "Characterisicall kind of Poesie," which assumes that no perfect pattern of virtue exists in the given world, and Greville's hagiographic project, which insists the pattern existed only in Sidney's person. "[I]f my creation had been equal," he writes, "it would have proved as easie for me, to have followed his patern, in the practice of reall vertue, as to engage myself into this Characteristicall kind of Poesie, in defence whereof he hath written so much, as I shall not need to say anything."⁵⁷ What sounds like deference in these final clauses turns out to further bury within Sidney's biography not only the pattern of virtue but the poetic theory it inspires.

⁵⁶ Greville, *Life*, 2

⁵⁷ Greville, *Life*, 3.

Not only is Greville unable to act as virtuously as Sidney, he's further unable to write the kind of virtue-inducing poetry that Sidney wrote. Greville claims that he took up poetry following Sidney's example. Finding in Sidney "the exact image of quiet and action," Greville says, "made me thinke it no small degree of honour to imitate or tread in the steps of such a Leader. So that to saile by his Compasse, was shortly (as I said) one of the principall reasons I can alleage, which perswaded me to steale minutes of time from my daily services, and employ them in this kind of writing."⁵⁸ Greville describes himself here as precisely the kind of fictional poet that Sidney's writing ought to produce, inspired by Sidney's example to act virtuously in the world by writing more well-intentioned poetry. But here, too, Greville feels that he has fallen short of the lofty legacy that Sidney established. "For my own part," Greville writes, contrasting his artistic method with Sidney's, "I found my creeping Genius more fixed upon Images of Life, than the Images of Wit." Greville's description of his own career recapitulates the movement realized in the broader culture of Sidneian imitation. By locating the virtuous ideals projected by characters like Pyrocles and Pamela in Sidney's own singular imagination, Sidney's imitators effect an ontological revision of the poetic image that reduces the poetic imitator to poring over the fragments of the *Arcadia* much as Sidney describes the historian and his "old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself . . . on other histories" (*DP* 220). Sidney defines the activity of the proper poet by the wit's capacity to generate images that exceed the "brazen world" of nature, but Greville's response marks a return to the contingent figures of the given world and a disavowal of the "figures of wit" that a true poet ought to produce.

⁵⁸ Greville, *Life*, 172.

Greville even adapts to Sidney's political achievements the classical frame through which Belling, Sanford, and others understood Sidney's unfinished art. For Greville, the unfinished Venus of Apelles describes not the outlines of the *Arcadia*, with which he was all too familiar, but rather the political scheme of new world conquest, in connection with a proposed voyage that Sidney prepared to undertake with Sir Francis Drake. The sole account of this abortive venture survives in Greville's words: "[A]s the limmes of Venus picture, how perfectly soever began, and left by Apelles, yet after his death proved impossible to finish: so that Heroicall design of invading and posessing America, how exactly soever projected, and digested in every minute by Sir Philip, did yet prove impossible to be well acted by any other mans spirit than his own."⁵⁹ Greville's repurposing of the same commonplace that frames the composite 1593 edition of the *Arcadia* is striking. What once signaled incomparable artistic integrity here establishes the legacy of the singular statesman, and the activity of politics supplants the activity of artistic making. It is only by fixing on images of life, rather than the images of wit to which Sidney's *Defence* directs true poets, that Greville might, in a sense, complete the trajectory suggested by Sidney's work and finally offer—as the *Life*'s publisher "P.B." referred to Greville's work—a "well-limmed piece."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Greville, *Life*, 89-90

⁶⁰ Greville, *Life*, sig. A2r.

Parthenia's Face

In 1593 Sanford was engaged—on Mary Sidney's behalf—in a war over the execution of Philip Sidney's literary legacy, and in particular over the claim to the authoritative version of the *Arcadia*. The controversy stemmed in great part from the troubled relationship between the Sidney family and Greville, who had overseen the printing of the 1590 edition.⁶¹ Rejecting the “disfigured face” of the 1590 edition, Sanford defends Mary Sidney's efforts to “supply the defects” of Greville's text while preserving the proprietary nature of Sidney's accomplishment. John Florio, who worked on the 1590 edition alongside Greville, later defended their work in terms that also recall the commonplace of Apelles, saying that “perfect-unperfect” *Arcadia* had been “marr[ed]” by Mary Sidney's 1593 text.⁶² For Sanford and Florio, the commonplace mediates a dispute over what we would today call intellectual property rights. For poets following in the wake of the English Apelles created by this publishing strategy, the problem of Sidney's intent would plague any program of idealized imitation, since, as Bellings notes, only Sidney's “Iudgment was . . . able to finish, what his Invention was only worthy to undertake.”

Critics face a similar problem in trying to discern Sidney's intentions for the revision of the manuscript *Arcadia* that he apparently began sometime between 1582 and 1584 and subsequently either abandoned or left abruptly undone at the time of his death. The question of what the ideal *Arcadia* looks like and how it might be reconstructed or

⁶¹ Davis, *Invention*, 27-30.

⁶² Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes*, trans. John Florio (London: 1603), “Epistle to the Second Book”, sig. R3r. See also *Sidney: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Martin Garrett (London: Routledge, 1996), 167-8.

imagined from existing editions has haunted the reception of Sidney's work since the earliest days after his death. While Sanford deprecates the 1590 edition supported by Greville and his allies by characterizing the conspicuously unfinished text as "the disfigured face" of *Arcadia*, he simultaneously acknowledges Mary Sidney's 1593 updated text as merely "the conclusion, not the perfection" of Sidney's work (59). Sanford nevertheless makes the case that the deficiencies—"defects"—of Greville's edition ought to be brought as close to wholeness as possible, with the caveat that Sidney's true intentions for the rest of the work will at best be seen through the dark glass of "the author's own writings or known intentions."

Instead, the work's various iterations are each marked by processes of collaboration and intervention. As Stephen Dobranski remarks, "if Sanford here evokes a notion of autonomous authorship by trying to respect Sidney's final intentions, the *Arcadia*—in its old, new, and composite forms—never existed as the work of a single man."⁶³ Critics generally agree that in Sidney's absence, and with the flourishing of multiple competing versions of the text, the true intentions of his "perfect-unperfect" work can at best be imagined or feigned, never finally secured. Speaking for the minority position in the critical debate over Sidney's bibliography, John Carey avers that "[s]tudy of the *Arcadia* is made *easier* . . . by the fact that we have got two versions."⁶⁴ The likelihood of Carey's claim is belied first of all by the fact that he underestimates the number of versions of the *Arcadia* in circulation. The best-known case in favor of the

63 Stephen Dobranski, *Readers and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68. Dobranski offers a helpful overview of the bibliographical scholarship that has illustrated these often competing layers of intentionality.

64 John Carey, "Structure and Rhetoric," 245. Emphasis added.

definitive status of the 1593 edition of *Arcadia*—that of C.S. Lewis—defaults entirely on the question of Sidney’s intent, deferring instead to facts of literary history subsequent to the poet’s death. “[T]he composite text of 1593 . . . is the book which lived; Shakespeare’s book; Charles I’s book, Milton’s book; Lamb’s book; our own book long before we heard of textual criticism.”⁶⁵ Lewis’s gesture here perhaps anticipates Gavin Alexander’s remark that *Arcadia* is the literary space where authorial personae detach from bodies: we should read the 1593 text, Lewis suggests, not because of its close connection to the person of Sidney, but because of its close connection to a host of other literary and historical figures.

But if the case for the 1593 text defaults on the question of authorial intent and textual history, there nevertheless exists a broad though by no means univocal consensus that Sidney’s revisions brought to *Arcadia* a level of artistic seriousness that the manuscript version eschews. Exemplary of this critical framework is the early account offered by A.C. Hamilton, who maintains that “[i]n revising the *Old Arcadia*, Sidney seeks to produce a much more serious work. Everywhere he adds moral matter.”⁶⁶ Sidney’s revisions, according to Hamilton, bring the fictional realm more nearly in line with the idea that true poetry ought to teach as well as to delight. The notion of the emerging seriousness of Sidney’s work in hand often appears alongside an argument about the genre of the work. Sidney editor Maurice Evans, for example, argues that “[a]s

65 C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1954), 333.

66 A.C. Hamilton, *Sir Philip Sidney*, 144. Behind the Hamilton’s judgment, in turn, lies that of E.M.W. Tillyard, who identifies the addition of Cecropia to the cast of characters and the philosophical confrontations she occasions as emblematic of the “seriousness” of Sidney’s revised work.

Sidney's art matures and he grows increasingly away from the first versions in his latest work, he becomes more intent on turning his original romance into a heroic poem."⁶⁷

Critics disagree about exactly what generic shift is attested to by the changes from the "old" to the "new" *Arcadia*, further complicating Carey's suggestion that having versions to compare makes renders the judgments of criticism "easier."⁶⁸ But even this multiplicity is taken by less orthodox readers as evidence of the work's emerging philosophical seriousness: Steve Mentz, for example, argues that "because of its structural fragmentation, the *New Arcadia* seems an extended experiment with the idea of coherence itself."⁶⁹ In the classic account of the generic eccentricity that marked Sidney's revisions, Stephen Greenblatt argues that "Sidney seemed instinctively to feel that for the world he wished to portray, there could be no unified, pure form with a single style."⁷⁰ According to this critical view, the hybridity of the revised *Arcadia*'s generic resources bespeaks a hard-won philosophical skepticism on the part of its author.

A further tradition that partially overlaps with this one holds that the emerging moral and generic seriousness that characterize Sidney's revisions to the *Arcadia* bring the work closer to Sidney's own avowedly didactic poetics. The new *Arcadia* represents a fuller commitment to instruction than Sidney was prepared to make in the earlier manuscript version. As Jeff Dolven has recently put it, "the old *Arcadia* defied the

67 Maurice Evans, "Introduction," in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maruice Evans (New York: Penguin, 1977), 27.

68 Walter Davis argues that Sidney "started out to write a pastoral romance but finished with an epic on his hands." See "A Map of Arcadia: Sidney's Romance in Its Tradition," in *Sidney's Arcadia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 168.

69 Steve Mentz, "The Thigh and the Sword: Gender, Genre, and Sexy Dressing in Sidney's *New Arcadia*," in *Prose Fiction and Early Modern Sexualities in England, 1570-1640*, ed. Constance C. Relihan and Goran V. Stanivukovic (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 77.

70 Qtd. Mentz, "The Thigh and the Sword," 78.

didactic imperative by dismantling its own authority” and “ultimately refuses to teach,” whereas Sidney’s revisions “follow[] a different course.”⁷¹ For Dolven, the structures of thinking promulgated by the sixteenth-century pedagogue Petrus Ramus supply Sidney with an “answer to the problem of how to make a book that teaches.” Here Dolven enters into a long tradition of reading the “new” *Arcadia* against the “old.” Given the somewhat loose fit between the moralistic vision of poetry that Sidney espoused in his *Defence* and the apparent disinterest of the manuscript *Arcadia* in moral instruction, the relative “seriousness” of the 1590 *Arcadia* yields a narrative in which Sidney revised the work by bringing it more in line with the ideas he expresses in the *Defence*—chiefly, that poetry ought to provide “perfect pattern[e]s” of virtue for readerly emulation (“to make many Cyruses”) and contemplation (“if he will learn aright how and why that maker made him”). “As the right poet,” Hamilton observes, the Sidney of the new *Arcadia* “satisfies his own poetic by feigning notable images of virtues, vices, and passions.”⁷²

I affirm the idea that Sidney brings the *Arcadia* closer to the vision of poetry espoused in the *Defence*, but not in the sense that Hamilton here suggests. I want to focus in particular on the story of Argalus and Parthenia. A narrative that is entirely absent from the earlier manuscript version, the story likewise features prominently in critical accounts that most insist on the “seriousness” of Sidney’s revisions. Hamilton, for instance, declares plainly that “the story of Argalus and Parthenia illustrates Sidney’s poetic.”⁷³ I argue instead that the most notable “disfigured face” to appear in the revised

71 Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 174.

72 Hamilton, *Philip Sidney*, 168.

73 Hamilton, *Philip Sidney*, 126.

version points up the realization (coincident with the generation of the text itself) that no actual poet can in fact secure the pattern of perfection, but instead can merely indicate as poetry's true lesson the limits of mimetic representation with respect to the ideals of Renaissance moral philosophy. When Walter Davis claims that the *New Arcadia* is "as complete a version of Sidney's masterpiece as exists in our imperfect world," he correctly names the emerging tendency of the revised *Arcadia* to court images of imperfection—such as Parthenia's disfigured face, the image of the tomb that she bears on her armor when she goes into battle, and the empty epitaph that she leaves behind in the 1590 edition.⁷⁴ These lacunae, aporia, and instances of *aposiopesis* point toward the fact that the moral ideals that Argalus and Parthenia are supposed to embody lie beyond the representational capacity of the text itself. The same figures of perfect-imperfection instead route the participatory energy generated by the text away from the fulfillment of virtue and toward textual continuation, narrative elaboration, and the exercise of style.

Sanford's image for the limitation of Sidney's unfinished text—the "disfigured face"—is borrowed from early in the narrative of Argalus and Parthenia's tragic history. The story of Argalus and Parthenia appears at the beginning of Sidney's revised *Arcadia*, and supplements the old *Arcadia*'s central tetrad of characters. Having recently arrived at the estate of Kalander, a nobleman in the kingdom of Arcadia, Musidorus—for the time being called Palladius—learns that Kalander's son Clitophon is being held prisoner by a rebel group known as the Helots. Pressed for an explanation, Kalander's steward explains to Musidorus first how Clitophon grew close to Argalus, cousin to Queen Gynecia.

Argalus, a paragon of moral excellence, "so manifested a most virtuous mind in all his

⁷⁴ Davis, "Map of Arcadia," 4.

actions that Arcadia gloried such a plant was transported unto them, being a gentleman in deed most rarely accomplished, excellently learned” (87). The steward ranks Aragus alongside the principal heroes of the story, the princes Pyrocles and Musidorus, for his “valour of mind and ability of body.” Through Clitophon, Aragus meets Parthenia, who likewise is set alongside the old *Arcadia*’s two models of feminine virtue, Pamela and Philoclea: “fame,” the steward alleges, would not dare to call anyone fairer than Parthenia “if it be not Helena, queen of Corinth, and the two incomparable sisters of Arcadia” (88). Her outward beauty faithfully expresses her inward accomplishments: “that which made her fairness much the fairer was that it was but a fair ambassador of a most fair mind.” With their combination of physical and mental excellence, Aragus and Parthenia take their places alongside the heroes of the old *Arcadia* as the kind of “perfect pattern[s]” that Sidney calls for in the *Defence*: attractive images that might draw readers toward love for and imitation of virtue.

The meeting of Aragus and Parthenia promises fulfillment in virtue, but it’s a promise just as quickly thwarted. “[T]hese perfections, meeting,” the steward continues, “could not choose but find one another and delight in that they found.” But Parthenia, out of her own virtuous submission to her mother’s will, was betrothed to the insidious Demagoras, whose “riches had so gilded over all his other imperfections that the old lady . . . had given her consent” to the union. When Parthenia’s mother fails to get rid of Aragus through a series of dangerous trials, Demagoras, disdaining the perfection that he realizes he cannot own, “with unmerciful force (her weak arms in vain resisting) rubbed all over her face a most horrible poison, the effect whereof was such that never leper looked more ugly than she did” (90). Parthenia’s response to this horrific incident

demonstrates the selflessness of her love for Argalus: she's so concerned for his happiness that she refuses to hold him to his promise of marriage: "so in heart she loved him as she could not find in her heart he should be tied to what was unworthy of his presence" (91). For his part, Argalus remains as passionately committed to their union as ever, demonstrating that his affections are rooted not in desires of the flesh but in sincere love of her virtue. "[H]er face," Kalander's servant remarks, "when it was fairest, had been but as a marshal to lodge the love of her in his mind, which now was so well placed as it needed no further help of any outward harbinger." By damaging virtue's facade, Demagoras hopes to reduce Parthenia to his own manifest imperfection. In the end, he succeeds only in demonstrating that the moral perfection of the new *Arcadia*'s first couple exceeds what any mere image of goodness can point to. The "loss of such a jewel" as Parthenia's beauty supplies occasion for both Argalus and Parthenia to demonstrate the even greater accomplishment of loving virtue itself so deeply as to no longer need beauty's external inducement.

In response to Parthenia's injury, Argalus demonstrates an attraction to virtue itself whose general absence in human nature animates Sidney's apology for poetic fabrication in the *Defence*. Those poets who "may justly be termed *vates*," writes Sidney, make imitations of virtue to "delight and teach": they delight readers in order "to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved" (*DP* 218). Throughout the *Defence*, the "delightful force" of poetry serves as a pleasurable inducement to the love of virtue that almost no one already possesses. Much as Cicero and Quintilian located the civilizing force of oratory at the heart of political organization,

Sidney argues that in every language and culture poetic writing precedes other forms of knowledge production because “the charming sweetness” of poetry “draw[s]” “wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge” (*DP* 213).⁷⁵ The artificial—indeed, superficial—pleasures of poetic writing educate in a quite literal sense: they “lead” not only individuals but whole cultures “out of” (L. *e-* + *ducere*) the intellectual poverty and historical invisibility of preliteracy.⁷⁶ Such is the role that Argalus and Parthenia are meant to play in Sidney’s revised *Arcadia*.

But why introduce yet another pair of heroes? After giving an account of Argalus and Parthenia’s ill-fated meeting, even the steward allows that the story was tangential to the topic at hand—namely, how Kalanders son Clitophon came to be imprisoned by the Helots. “I have delivered all I understand touching the loss of my lord’s son, and the cause thereof,” for which, he concedes, “it was not necessary to Clitophon’s case to be so particularly [t]old” (93). In the end, Argalus pursues the ignoble Demagoras into the camp of the Helots and gets himself imprisoned, with Clitophon’s misfortune rendered a secondary consequence. Not only unnecessary, Argalus’s story crowds out the narrative space Clitophon was meant to occupy. “[Y]et the strangeness of it,” the steward continues, “made me think it would not be unpleasant unto you” (93). The “particular[s]” of Argalus and Parthenia’s story are added not for their relevance but for their “strangeness,” which is here supposed a pleasure. Their story, then, bears a similar relation to the old *Arcadia* as to Musidorus’s question about Clitophon: supplied in lieu

⁷⁵ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Inventione*, trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 5-7; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 4 vols., trans. Donald Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1:373.

⁷⁶ “*ē-* *E-* *prefix2* + *duc-* , reduced grade (only attested in compounds) of the stem of *dūcere* to lead.” OED, “educate, v.”

of the narratives Sidney himself opened up for others to finish in the conclusion of the manuscript old *Arcadia*, Argalus and Parthenia stand out as both superfluous to the narrative threads that the story left hanging and yet, for their strangeness, peculiarly attractive.

In Hamilton's account, the story is singular for two related reasons. First, that the pair demonstrate, in ways neither of the main couples of the old *Arcadia* can, the virtue of perfect love. "Argalus and Parthenia," he writes, "embody an absolute state of constancy and love apparently impossible for others to attain."⁷⁷ The pair have further occasion to showcase the constancy of their commitment after Musidorus—still called Palladius here—rescues Argalus and Clitophon and defeats the Helots, whose commander turns out to be none other than Pyrocles. Returning Kalandar's house, Argalus is quickly met by a lady from "the court of Queen Helen of Corinth" bearing news of Parthenia—whom she conspicuously resembles:

[T]here came unto me the lady Parthenia, so disfigured as I think Greece hath nothing so ugly to behold. For my part, it was many days before with vehement oaths and some good proofs she could make me think she was Parthenia. Yet at last finding it certainly was she and greatly pitying her misfortune, so much the more as that all men had ever told me, as now you do, of the great likeness between us, I took the best care I could of her, and of her understood the whole tragical history of her undeserved adventure; and therewithal of that most noble constancy in you, my lord Argalus, which whosoever loves not, shows himself to be a hater of virtue and unworthy to live in the society of mankind. But no outward cherishing could salve the inward sore of her mind; but a few days since she died (104).

Argalus has already proven that once Parthenia's beauty had drawn him to love her virtuous character he no longer needed the attraction of the mere image of virtue in order

⁷⁷ Hamilton, *Philip Sidney*, 136.

to love virtue itself. But here he finds a different challenge. The lady who so nearly resembles Parthenia's former beauty—perhaps even “of the more pure and dainty complexion”—offers to marry Argalus, claiming it was Parthenia's last wish that they should be together.

Ever constant, Argalus declines. “I hope I shall not long tarry after her, with whose beauty if I had only been in love, I should be so with you who have the same beauty. But it was Parthenia's self I loved and love, which no likeness can make one, no commandment dissolve, no foulness defile, nor no death finish.” As Gavin Alexander suggests, Argalus and Parthenia appear in this early episode as “the revised *Arcadia*'s model of ideal love: they are faultless, they are constant, and their love has endured through dreadful trials.”⁷⁸ Argalus is rewarded for his constant devotion, as the lady reveals herself to be none other than Parthenia. A marriage quickly ensues. Just as Sidney's revisions appear to take a generic turn toward the heroic mode, his new central characters embody an idealized virtue; Pyrocles and Musidorus, along Pamela and Philoclea, remain compromised by their pastoral origins. It is the differential here—the interval by which Argalus and Parthenia's virtue exceeds those around them—that appears most salient to their role within the new *Arcadia*.

But there's another sense in which the story singularly represents Sidney's own fictional imagination. The narrative of Argalus and Parthenia, Hamilton argues, “impresses every reader first of all as a story in its own right, as an invented fiction rather than a true story or a *roman à clef*.”⁷⁹ *Arcadia* is a world overflowing with literary

⁷⁸ Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 25.

⁷⁹ Hamilton, *Philip Sidney*, 131.

antecedents. Perhaps alone among the many elaborate storylines pursued in the text, the story of Argalus and Parthenia is truly bound only by the zodiac of Sidney's wit. To this extent the story represents Sidney's art at its most personally sourceless, to return to Miller's vocabulary for stylistic singularity.

I want to suggest that these two much commented on features of this story—that the new *Arcadia*'s first couple bear a unique relationship to the orthodox, Sidneian poetic of virtuous imagery, and that their story embodies the originality of Sidney's verbal craft—are themselves features of the text in deep conflict with one another. The conflict becomes visible primarily through the feature of the story that neither a classic orthodox account such as Hamilton's nor an essentially rhetorical account such as Gavin Alexander's can quite explain: namely, its tragic ending. As Alexander puts it, the tale's tragic ending is the “point at which [Sidney's] text goes wrong.”⁸⁰

If the pair is meant to embody a traditional view of Sidney's poetics, their story resumes auspiciously enough with a scene of idealized reading. Amid the desultory siege of Cecropia's castle by Basilius's troops, Amphialus—hoping to win the admiration of his beloved Philoclea, whom his mother is holding prisoner—issues an open challenge to the knights of Basilius's camp, “so as divers of the valiantest, partly of themselves, partly at the instigation of Basilius, attempted the combat with him” (500). When Amphialus defeats each challenger in turn, the frustrated Basilius sends a messenger to Argalus: “The messenger made speed, and found Argalus at a castle of his own, sitting in a parlour with the fair Parthenia, he reading in a book the story of Hercules, she by him, as to hear him read; but while his eyes looked on the book, she looked on his eyes” (501). Argalus

⁸⁰ Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 25.

and Parthenia's idiosyncratic reading practices are nothing less than an extension of their ideal union: "A happy couple: he joying in her, she joying in herself, but in herself because she enjoyed him." The rhetorical device of *antimetabole*—which Puttenham calls the "Countercharge"—figures forth their devotion as readers and as spouses, though Sidney notably does not establish husband and wife as mere reflections of one another.⁸¹ The chiasmic structure is uneven. Argalus reads and Parthenia listens to him read; he takes joy in her, and she in herself because of her affection for him, reflecting both mutual service and the hierarchy of traditional gender roles. Their devotion is equal and opposite, but hers is centripetal, his outward-focused. Befitting this uneven yet interlocking structure, Argalus responds to his reading in heroic poetry by allowing himself to be drawn out into the world to exercise his virtue, while Parthenia labors to maintain the privacy of their union.

When Basilius's summons arrives, Parthenia tries to prevent Argalus from accepting Amphialus's challenge, but not even her total claim on him can supercede his active duty. But if, as Gavin Alexander suggests, "[t]he lively image of Hercules' idealized virtue . . . helps move [Argalus] to this act of well-doing, as the *Defence of Poesy* would predict," the results are nothing short of disastrous.⁸² Argalus and Amphialus wage "the cruellest combat that any present eye had seen" (505). Amphialus soon wins the upper hand, however, and Argalus begins to weaken—"as he received still more and more wounds, which made all his armour seem to blush that it had defended his master no better" (506)—Amphialus begins to second guess the justice of the battle.

81 Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 293.

82 Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 25.

“Amphialus perceiving it, and weighing the small hatefulness of their quarrel with the worthiness of the knight, desired him to take pity of himself. But Argalus . . . filling his veins with spite instead of blood . . . struck such a notable blow that he cleft his shield, armour, and arm almost to the bone.” Indeed, the “unlovely embracements” of knights inverts the image of mutual deference that Argalus and his beloved earlier present: “a notable example of the wonderful effects of virtue, where the conqueror sought for friendship of the conquered, and the conquered would not pardon the conqueror” (507).

Parthenia tries to interrupt their bloody combat, but to no avail. She is reduced from the image of perfection to the image of misery, as she herself proclaims: “How wert thou even now before all ladies the example of perfect happiness, and now the gazing stock of endless misery!” (508). Again the story undoes itself, with Parthenia rending her own face, with whose disfiguration and miraculous restoration the story began: “When she indeed found his ghost was gone, then sorrow lost the wit of utterance . . . so that she tare her beautiful face and rent her hair, as though they could serve for nothing, since Argalus was gone” (508). Even the most perfect images of virtue that the new *Arcadia* can fashion ultimately succumb to the forces of loss and decay.

The story doesn’t end there, of course. A “strange knight” soon appears at Cecropia’s castle—“strange not only for the unlooked-for-ness of his coming, but by the strange manner of his coming.” The Knight of the Tomb is so named for the decoration of his armor:

all painted over with such a cunning shadow that it represented a gaping sepulchre: the furniture of his horse was all of cypress branches, wherewith in old times they were wont to dress graves. His bases, which he wore so long as they came almost to his ankle, were embroidered only with black worms, which seemd to crawl up and down, as ready already to

devour him. In his shield, for impresa, he had a beautiful child, but having two heads, whereof the one showed that it was already dead; the other alive, but in that case, necessarily looking for death" (526). The knight challenges Amphialus and is quickly overcome. Seeking his challenger's final humiliation, Amphialus tears off the Knight of the Tomb's helmet. But "the headpiece was no sooner off but that there fell about the shoulders of the overcome knight the treasure of fair golden hair which, with the face (soon known by the badge of excellency) witnessed that it was Parthenia, the unfortunately virtuous wife of Argalus; her beauty then, even in the despite of the passed sorrow or coming death, assuring all beholders that it was nothing short of perfection." Parthenia's following her husband into death through combat effects a reverse of the transduction of souls wherein knights united in friendship pass life on from one to the next. "Argalus dies, and Parthenia follows," observes Gavin Alexander. "Sidney's plot has destroyed the only model of happy, mutual love that it could manage to create: Argalus and Parthenia are too good for their world."⁸³ Parthenia, like the live twin on her impresa, looks not to extend Argalus's life through her own but to secure the death for herself that already belongs to him.

Critics have observed that the climax of the story represents a crisis not just for virtue in *Arcadia*, but for Sidney's style as well. Annabel Patterson argues that the story's denouement signals a whole scale revision the new *Arcadia* and for Sidney's relation to Elizabethan politics: Parthenia, as the Knight of the Tomb, represents "metaphor" and "figuration," while her tragic unveiling appears as a rejection of figurative discourse itself in favor of "direct counsel."⁸⁴ For Patterson, Parthenia's avoidable death signals the

⁸³ Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 25.

⁸⁴ Patterson, "'Under . . . Pretty Tales': Intention in Sidney's *Arcadia*," in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, ed. Dennis Kay (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), 284.

inefficacy of poetic allegory for the practice of politics in the Elizabethan court. Thus the culmination of the story of Argalus and Parthenia consists mainly in the crisis where meaning emerges from figuration: the revelation of her death is the revelation that concealing direct counsel beneath layers of figurative meaning can have only tragic consequences. The central suggestion of Patterson's account is that all this might have been avoided if speaking plainly were an option to the wise counselor. John Carey finds in the same scene a recapitulation on the level of narrative of signature Sidneian rhetorical devices of reversal and opposition, highlighting in particular the figures of opposition such as *antimetabole* and *antithesis*. For Carey, "the whole linguistic atmosphere" of the *Arcadia* is "stained with circularity and self-defeat," and "the moment when [Parthenia's] helmet comes away and reveals the golden hair," turning Amphialus's moment of triumph into a stinging tragedy, fulfills at the level of narrative the self-negation characteristic of Sidney's style. "It is an epitome of Sidney's major theme."⁸⁵ Carey resolves these figures of opposition and devastating reversal into the Aristotelian tragic principle of *peripeteia*, indicating a worldview consistent with the "ironic inscrutability of human destiny." Both these accounts find in the scene an apocalyptic moment for style's relation to fiction as a moral program.

The present absence of moral perfection that Parthenia's death signals corresponds closely with the generation of textual aporia, as if Sidney himself were drawing the line directly between her disfigured face and the disfigured text that will be much commented on after the poet's death. Parthenia dies in prayer: "I come my Argalus, I come: and, O God, hide my faults in thy mercies, and grant, as I feel thou dost grant,

85 Carey, "Structure and Rhetoric," 254.

that in thy eternal love, we may love each other eternally. And this, O Lord’—but there Atropos cut off her sentence” (529). Far from securing the cultivation of virtue through figures of virtuous perfection, the new *Arcadia*’s central achievement lies in giving us Parthenia, who here acknowledges herself to be completely reliant on God’s grace to “hide [her] faults.” At a moment in which the text appears deliberately to exert maximal pressure on the claim of figuration to moral instruction, as Patterson and Carey both note, Sidney’s use of *aposiopesis* points toward the perfection that cannot be achieved in the temporal world. Inspired by Argalus’s careful searching through Homer for examples of virtue to follow, the episode winds up dispelling the possibility of connecting the logical circuit between reading good writing and performing good works in the real world.

In the 1590 edition of the text, Parthenia’s death is associated with textual interruption not merely by the figure of *aposiopesis*, but also by a literal gap in the text: her epitaph. After Parthenia dies, Basilius along with a crowd of mourners carries her body to the church where Argalus is entombed: “recommending to that sepulchre the blessed relics of faithful and virtuous love, giving order for the making of marble images to represent them, and each way enriching the tomb: upon which Basilius himself caused this epitaph to be written” (530). But no epitaph appears—not in the 1590 edition of the text, nor in the only surviving manuscript copy of the “new” *Arcadia*. For Gavin Alexander, the missing epitaph “consummates the story of Argalus and Parthenia, and enshrines their myth of perfect mutuality in the heart of the work, where it can reproach the stories around it.”⁸⁶ Just as readers like William Alexander took the inconclusive ending of the 1590 text as an invitation to supply textual prostheses, readers filled in the

⁸⁶ Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 26

empty space left for the epitaph in 1590 edition of the *Arcadia* with the text of the epitaph finally supplied in Mary Sidney's 1593 text.⁸⁷ The blank tomb that symbolizes, according to Joel Davis, "the death of chivalry" also supplies the occasion for the kind of readerly intervention that the *Arcadia* everywhere cultivates. This textual crux makes legible the exchange that Sidney's invitation to "the exercise of other pens" always risked: it evacuates the fulfillment of virtuous perfection in order to create the space for readerly intervention in the writing itself. The activity of marking up the page replaces any ethical activity—whether poetic or practical—that these figures of perfect virtue were meant to engender in readers.

Conclusion

Much as the Venus of Apelles in Ascham's *The Scholemaster* points toward the material aporia that troubles the framework of perfection that the English humanists clung to, the figure serves in Sidney's case as evidence of how the unrepaired damage that affirms Sidney's inimitable style undermines the claims to perfection that Sidney's supporters simultaneously make. As Sidney's most devoted readers insisted that the perfect patterns of virtue that Sidney left incomplete could be fulfilled only in the poet's mind, they simultaneously narrowed the possible range of their own responses to extensions, manuscript and print adaptations, and emendations in the blank spaces of published copies of the *Arcadia*. While Sidney's rhetorical mastery, according to Hoskyns, Greville, and others was supposed to pave the way for a poetic ideally suited to the

⁸⁷ Davis, *Invention*, 73-4.

instruction of virtue by “perfectly” combining the precepts of Aristotle’s moral philosophy with attractive fictional figures, Alexander’s supplement suggests that the exercise of Sidneian style supplants the practice of virtue that Sidney ostensibly holds up as the measure of poetic value in the *Defence*. By introducing Parthenia’s story into the revised *Arcadia*, Sidney himself seems to welcome, rather than abjure, such modes of readerly response.

Chapter Three

The Imperfect World of *The Faerie Queene*

Introduction

In 1598, Thomas Speght's edition of Chaucer presented England's most famous medieval poet as a model of authority no less worthy of imitation than the great writers of Greek and Roman antiquity. The folio publication prefaces Chaucer's works with apparatus that attest to his cultural nobility, concluding with a brief review of modern writers who cite Chaucer as an authority. An episode from Book IV of *The Faerie Queene* in which Spenser invokes the "lost labours" of Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* features prominently here:

In his *Faerie Queene*, [Speght writes], in his discourse of friendship, as thinking himself most worthy to be Chaucers friend, for his like natural disposition that Chaucer had, [Spenser] sheweth that none that liued with him, nor none that came after him, durst presume to reuiue Chaucers lost labours in that vnperfite tale of the Squire, but only himself: which he had not done, had he not felt (as he saith) the infusion of Chaucers owne sweete spirite, suruiuing within him.¹

I begin this chapter by connecting Speght's account of the intertextual relationship between Spenser and Chaucer in Book IV with the commonplace of the unfinished Venus of Apelles as it circulated throughout sixteenth-century English literary culture.

1 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Workes of our Antient and Learned English Poet, Geffrey Chavcer, newly Printed* (London: Adam Islip for Bonham Norton, 1598), c.iii.

When Speght writes that “none that liued with [Chaucer], nor none that came after him, durst presume to reuiue” Chaucer’s unfinished work, he adapts to the specifics of Book IV the story of Apelles’s ill-fated last work, as when John Harington records that Apelles’s “imperfite worke” was “so full of the perfection of his art, that no man durst euer take vpon him to end it.”² While recent scholarly accounts of Spenserian intertextuality in Book IV emphasize either a metaphysics of cosmological harmony or a physics of textual loss,³ the commonplace of the Venus of Apelles provides a mediating framework through which Spenser’s poem and its early modern readers both countenanced the threat of material decay and yet continued to assert, as Dame Nature herself will do at the end of the poem, that the universe of *The Faerie Queene* is one in which all things work toward perfection. Spenser’s invocation of Chaucer’s unfinished text ultimately suggests a vision of poetic authority predicated on incompleteness in which material imperfection serves, however uneasily, as occasion for artistic innovation. In the sections that follow, my aim will be to delineate the consequences of this paradoxical realization for the moral universe of Spenser’s poem. Specifically, I argue that the artistic fragments that circulate throughout Spenser’s poem as he appeals to the

2 Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse*, trans. Sir John Harington (London, 1591), 277.

3 On intertextuality and metaphysical harmony, see especially Vaughan Stewart, “Friends, Rivals, and Revisions: Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale* and *Amis and Amiloun* in *The Faerie Queene*, Book IV,” *Spenser Studies* 26 (2011), 75-109; and Patrick Cheney, “Spenser’s Completion of *The Squire’s Tale*: Love, Magic, and Heroic Action in the Legend of Cambell and Triamond,” *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 15:2 (Fall 1985), 135-155. I discuss these essays further below. On intertextuality and physical decay, see especially Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 158-72. I also discuss this work below.

authority of Chaucer's unfinished work pose a challenge to the Aristotelian ethics of virtue that the poem avows.

The Cankerworm of Writs

The circumstances of Spenser's Chaucerian "infusion" arise in Canto II of Book IV. On the way to a tournament, the false knights Blandamour and Paridell—along with their nefarious lady companions Ate and Duessa—encounter the virtuous knights Cambell and Triamond, who are "with Canacee and Cambine linckt in louely bond" (4.2.31).⁴ These groups of four mirror each other, the one representing discord and the other harmony. Blandamour and Paridell quarrel and grow jealous of one another, and they each seek the favor of another woman—the false Florimell. Ate, Blandamour's erstwhile lover, serves as a central antitype throughout this allegory of concord. The poem describes her as "the mother of debate" (4.1.9); her lair is filled with "ragged monuments of times forepast, / All which the sad effects of discord sung," including "rent robes," "broken scepters," "[a]ltars defyl'd," and "shields ytorne in twaine." (4.1.21). These emblems of material decay furnish an analogy between the ravages of time and the discord of social relations. Ate represents the "broken bands" of enmity as well (4.1.24), and her appearance prefigures the fracturing of relationships later in the book, including Scudamore's mistaken campaign against Britomart and Belpheobe's rejection of Timias. The poem is explicit about the competition between material decay and the higher bonds of friendship.

4 Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2001). Hereafter referred to parenthetically by book, canto, and stanza number.

In the Temple of Venus, the book's "allegorical core," Scudamore enjoys a vision of "all that euer had beene tyde / In bands of friendship" who live forever in the temple and "[w]hose lives although decay'd, yet loves decayed neuer." (4.10.35).⁵

Book IV leads us toward this apotheosis of friendship through the story of the knights Cambell and Triamond, whose friendship and virtuous love attest to the possibility of an emerging unity even in the face of time's corrosive unbinding. Their harmonious reunion anticipates, among other restorations, the return of Timias to Belpheobe's good graces and the revelation to Scudamore and Artegall of Britomart's "heauenly . . . perfection" (4.6.24). In telling the story of the "Telemond" brothers, the poem proposes to restore another "ragged monument of times forepast"—namely, Chaucer's unfinished text:

Whylome as antique stories tellen vs,
 Those two were foes the fellowest on ground,
 And battell made the dreddest dangerous,
 That euer shrilling trumpet did resound;
 Though now their acts be no where to be found,
 As that renowned Poet them compyled,
 With warlike numbers and Heroicke sound,
 Dan Chaucer, well of English vndefyled,
 On Fames eternall beadroll worthie to be fyled.

But wicked Time that all good thoughts doth waste,
 And workes of noblest wits to nought out weare,
 That famous moniment hath quite defaste,
 And robd the world of threasure endlesse deare,
 The which mote haue enriched all vs heare.
 O cursed Eld the cankerworme of writs,
 How may these rimes, so rude as doth appeare,
 Hope to endure, sith workes of heauenly wits

5 On the concept of the "allegorical core" in *The Faerie Queene*, see C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936; repr. Oxford University Press, 1971), 334.

Are quite deuour'd, and brought to nought by little bits? (4.2.32-3)

While Spenser insists that Chaucer is the “well of English vndefyled,” he simultaneously situates the “deface[d] monument” of Chaucer’s lost work alongside Ate’s broken scepters and torn shields as a further example of the kind of material and cultural decay that the allegory of concord ought to repair. On the analogy of Scudamore’s vision in the temple, we might say Spenser wants to ensure, by means of adaptation, that even if Chaucer’s text decays his legacy “decay[s] neuer.”

To that end, Spenser’s narrator goes on to say that he will “reuiue” the unfinished work of his influential predecessor:

Then pardon, O most sacred happie spirit,
That I thy labours lost may thus reuiue,
And steale from thee the meede of thy due merit,
That none durst euer whilest thou wast aliue,
And being dead in vaine yet many striue:
Ne dare I like, but through infusion sweete
Of thine owne spirit, which doth in me suruiue,
I follow here the footing of thy feete,
That with thy meaning so I may the rather meete. (4.2.34)

Speght’s interpretation of this passage—“as thinking himself most worthy to be Chaucers friend”—lays the groundwork for how scholars have generally understood the still somewhat troubling presence of Chaucer’s “unperfite” tale at the heart of Book IV. Speght’s comment holds out the intertextual relationship between Chaucer and Spenser as an instance of social concord capable of bridging the interval of historical loss that otherwise separates the two poets. Among contemporary critics, Patrick Cheney similarly

argues that Spenser “unites” himself with his predecessor much as the narrative of Book IV unites friends and lovers, linking Spenserian intertextuality to the discourse of love and friendship that occupies the allegorical energies of the book.⁶ More recently, Vaughan Stewart has argued that by giving a “satisfying end” to a text “replete with internal fragmentation,” Spenser effectively applies “his theory of creating stable and harmonious relationships between friends to creating stability and harmony within and between texts.”⁷ Cheney and Stewart both suggest that the poem figures the connection between Spenser and Chaucer as a paradigmatic instance of the kind of “lovely bond” that holds together friends, couples, the natural world, and the cosmos itself.

Accounts such as Cheney and Stewart’s draw an equation between Spenser’s revival of Chaucer and the songs of Orpheus and the “celestiall Psalmist,” whom Spenser’s narrator credits with bringing about reconciliation and harmony where once was sewn “confusion” and “wicked discord” (4.2.1). The revival of the unfinished Chaucerian text and the narrative of friendship that surrounds it both register Spenser’s investment in what critics have identified as a metaphysics of cosmological perfection. In his classic account of Books III and IV, Thomas P. Roche points to “the emergence of order from chaos and of friendship from enmity” as the dual concerns of Book IV: “The legend of Cambell and Telemond,” Roche observes, “is in one allegorical sense a metaphysics of friendship and in another the symbolic statement of the metaphysics of *concordia discors*.”⁸ Roche points to the original title of Book IV— “The fourth Book of

6 Cheney, “Spenser’s Completion of *The Squire’s Tale*,” 138.

7 Stewart, “Friends, Rivals, and Revisions,” 88.

8 Thomas P. Roche, *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 17. See also James Broaddus, *Spenser’s*

the Faerie Queene. Containing The Legend of Cambel and Telamond, or of Friendship”—as evidence of the poem’s interest in perfection as a social virtue and a cosmological principle. He suggests an alternate title: “Cambell and the Perfect World.” Cheney echoes Roche in arguing that “Spenser creates an allegory of the *telemond* [“perfect world”], the marriage of earth and heaven, and then he shows his participation in that *telemond* through his ‘imitation’ of Chaucer.”⁹ The unity that Spenser gestures toward by “completing” the tale, Cheney argues, “figure[s] the Neoplatonic idea that love . . . creates concord at all levels of the universe.” Cheney interprets Book IV’s intertextuality according to Roche’s insistence on Spenser’s programmatic investment in the principle of *concordia discors* and the teleological perfection of all things that lies on its horizon. According to this view, Spenser’s poem, like the work of the psalmist, is “celestial” in the sense that its formal features insist on their own metaphysical significance.

Unlike the work of the psalmist, however, the unity that Spenser’s poem hopes to restore in the Chaucerian interlude is one of a particularly textual nature. Indeed, the presence of the material text itself as an emblem of decay remains troubling, and the model of poetic authority that Spenser inherits based on the fragmented texts of classical antiquity renders Spenser’s poetic practice decidedly more terrestrial—grounded as it is in the materiality of the text and the possibility of loss—than the idealized poetics he projects onto Orpheus and King David. By placing Spenser’s Chaucer in the discursive

Allegory of Love: Social Vision in Books III, IV, and V of The Faerie Queene (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995).

9 Cheney, “Spenser’s Completion of *The Squire’s Tale*,” 155.

space of the Venus of Apelles, Speght's interpretation of Book IV shows how the attempt to liken England's great medieval poet to the writers of Greco-Roman antiquity also emphasizes the fragmentary nature of his work and its susceptibility to material decay. In the process of establishing Chaucer as an "English Homer," Speght enlists him in the same history of accidental loss that Renaissance humanists associated with the authors of the ancient world, beginning most notably with Petrarch's letters.¹⁰ While scholars have recently argued that "the unfinished label presents unfinishedness as a contamination, as something that . . . sabotages the quest for artistic perfection," it seems that for early modern writers the imperfect collapsed rather easily into its opposite.¹¹ If, as Harry Berger, Jr., suggests, Spenser's treatment of *concordia discors* requires as its precondition an original separation or disunion that can be held in dynamic harmony,¹² the image of the unfinished Venus of Apelles similarly brings into view the way in which the early modern legacy of classical authority countenances the facts of material decay and death even as it seeks to fulfill metaphysical or artistic perfection.

10 This account of Chaucerian authority is meant to supplement, not displace, the fashioning of a "father Chaucer" figure both in *The Canterbury Tales* and in Chaucer's fifteenth-century imitators. See especially Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 57-84. On the importance of Homer to Renaissance understandings of discord, see Jennifer Wolfe, "Spenser, Homer, and the Mythography of Strife," *Renaissance Quarterly* 58:4 (Winter 2005), 1220-1288.

11 James Ramsey Wallen, "What Is An Unfinished Work?," *New Literary History* 46:1 (Winter 2015), 140.

12 Harry Berger, Jr., *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 19-20.

My primary purpose in this chapter is to investigate the consequences of the antinomy of perfection and imperfection suggested by the Apelles figure for the scheme of virtues in which Spenser's poem participates. As I will show, the essentially metaphysical account of friendship provided by the most irenic theorists of the Spenserian intertextuality lies at the heart of the Aristotelian ethical scheme that Spenser avows commitment to in the letter to Walter Raleigh, where he famously claims that *The Faerie Queene* will represent in the figure of Arthur a knight "perfected in the twelve private moral virtues, such as Aristotle hath devised."¹³ I suggest that if we can find in Spenser's figures of textual imperfection a challenge to Aristotelian views about matter and the cosmos—specifically, the idea that all things tend toward their own teleological ends—then a challenge to Aristotle's ethical scheme is also legible. In saying so, I bring into conversation two important threads of Spenser criticism. Important research on Spenserian cosmology and materiality by scholars such as Ayesha Ramachandran, Gerard Passannante, and Sarah Powrie argues that forms of material imperfection in *The Faerie Queene* unsettle Spenser's hopeful vision of an ordered cosmos. Another scholarly tradition documents Spenser's troubled relationship with the traditions of moral philosophy that he invokes.¹⁴ The implication of my argument is that these critical enterprises have more common ground than scholars have so far realized.

13 Edmund Spenser, "A Letter of the Authors," in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, et al. (2001), 715.

14 Most notably, Elizabeth Fowler, "The Failure of Moral Philosophy in the Work of Edmund Spenser," *Representations* 51 (Summer 1995): 47-76.

Spenser's conviction that multiple levels of concord are at stake in the practice of friendship—from individual relations to social relations to cosmological relations—reflects the unique position that friendship occupies in the Aristotelian ethics of virtue. While the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerns itself primarily with the personal inculcation of virtue through habit, the two books that Aristotle devotes to friendship illustrate the formation of communities based on virtue. Friendship, Aristotle says, is “the bond of the state” (*tas poleis sunexein*).¹⁵ For early modern readers, these books offered what Laurie Shannon has called “a discourse of more than self-fashioning.”¹⁶ But what kind of bond does friendship make? Shannon finds in early modern figures of friendship the vision of a “volitional polity” that prefigures modern liberalism. Similarly, James Kuzner has recently argued that Book IV of *The Faerie Queene* in particular finds Spenser at his most republican since it is here that Spenser imagines vulnerable, open selfhood as a form of political association.¹⁷ Kuzner goes a step further than Shannon, arguing for the affinity of Spenserian friendship and the radical political thought of Georges Bataille and Judith Butler. Shannon's analysis proceeds from one of the adjectives most commonly linked with friendship in early modern texts: “sovereign.” Its other favorite descriptive partner in the period, of course, is “perfect.” Rather than prefiguring any particular modern political arrangement, I argue, the ideal of “perfect” friendship that we find in Spenser, Montaigne, and other early modern texts tracks the insistence that any

15 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.1.4.

16 Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 3.

17 James Kuzner, *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 39-83.

community of true friends must include a commonly held notion of the *telos* of human being.

This notion of friendship is visible in Spenser's tripartite hierarchy of love in Canto 9 of Book IV, where friendship appears as love's highest form. Spenser's organization recalls Book VIII of the *Ethics*, in which Aristotle identifies three kinds of friendship in ascending order of value. The lowest is friendship for the sake of utility: friends recognize the value that each can offer the other, and their friendship lasts only so long as it proves mutually beneficial. The second kind is friendship for the sake of pleasure, another form of friendship that is limited by self-interest. The third and highest form of friendship, according to Aristotle, is that which exists without respect to any benefits. As Aristotle puts it, "[t]he perfect [*teleia*] form of friendship is that between the good and those who resemble each other in virtue."¹⁸ It is apparently to this sense of unity of will that Francis Bacon refers to when he writes that "it is a rare Thing, except it be from a perfect and entire *Frend*, to haue Counsell giuen, but such as shalbe bowed and crooked to some ends, which he hath that giueth it."¹⁹ Here Bacon uses two possible English translations for Aristotle's term *teleia* from the *Ethics*: "perfect" and "entire" (the latter reflecting the sense of completion or fulfillment in Aristotle's definition of perfection) to describe the kind of friendship in which the wills of two individuals are united. For Bacon, as for Aristotle, perfect friendship is the only form of association in which two parties are not separated by divergent goals or ends. As Aristotle makes clear, this last and best type of friendship exists only between "good men" who are united by

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.3.6.

¹⁹ Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels* (London 1625), 160-61.

their pursuit of virtue. The ideal of “perfect” or complete friendship that Aristotle outlines also suggests that these relationships can exist only on the basis of a shared definition of the essential function of human being.

But as Barry Weller has persuasively argued, this idealized form of friendship in the Renaissance was often understood as the property of a distant classical culture that early modern writers might imitate but never fully inhabit.²⁰ Montaigne, for example claims that his friendship with La Boetie was “so entire and so perfect that certainly you will hardly read of the like, and among men of today you see no trace of it in practice.”²¹ Spenser concludes the Chaucerian interlude in Book IV on a similar note: after the fight ends and Cambina resolves the protagonists’ relationships “[i]n perfect loue,” we are told that “since their days such louers were not found elsewhere” (4.3.52). The note of pessimism that these texts sound regarding the prospects for perfect friendship suggests that early modern writers felt themselves estranged from this ideal of association. Perfect friendship, which Spenser represents as the highest form of love, is both the goal toward which all relations point and the relic of a culture obscured by the decay of time. It represents the ideal of moral telos that early modern moral philosophers projected onto the past and identified as their own goal, but also felt was unavailable to them on account of their own impoverished historical position.

20 Barry Weller, “The Rhetoric of Friendship in Montaigne’s ‘Essais,’” *New Literary History* 9:3 (Spring 1978), 503-23.

21 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald M. Frame (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2003), 165.

In my reading of Spenser's poem, perfection provides a conceptual ligature for Aristotelian natural philosophy and Aristotelian ethics. Aristotle defines perfection in the *Metaphysics*:

"Perfect" <or "complete"> means: (a) that outside which it is impossible to find even a single one of its parts; e.g., the complete time of each thing is that outside which it is impossible to find any time which is a part of it. (b) That which, in respect of goodness or excellence, cannot be surpassed in its kind; e.g., a doctor and a musician are "perfect" when they have no deficiency in respect of the form of their peculiar excellence. And thus by an extension of the meaning we use the term in a bad connexion, and speak of a "perfect" humbug and a "perfect" thief; since indeed we call them "good"—e.g., a "good" thief and a "good" humbug. (c) And goodness is a kind of perfection. For each thing, and every substance, is perfect when, and only when, in respect of the form of its peculiar excellence, it lacks no particle of its natural magnitude. (d) Things which have attained their end, if their end is good, are called "perfect"; for they are perfect in virtue of having attained the end.²²

Especially significant here is Aristotle's definition (c), which links physical wholeness or completion—referring to a thing that "lacks no particle of its natural magnitude"—with moral valuation ("goodness"). All things inherently possess a "natural magnitude" toward which they try to develop. This is the latent signature of perfection, which resides in things themselves. Then, in definition (d), this teleological orientation merges with the ethical definition of perfection: things are called perfect that have attained their end "*if* their end is good."

As a statement about the physical world, this claim became newly tenuous in Spenser's lifetime. As scholars have recently shown, new discoveries in natural philosophy in the late sixteenth century weakened the Aristotelian model of cosmic order

²² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 5.16.

according to which “each thing” and “every substance” bore a natural tendency toward perfection.²³ Critics further draw on the materiality of the unfinished text itself as an important historical vocabulary for Spenser’s ambivalent relationship to Aristotelian perfection. Indeed, the fragment would seem to refute by its very existence any teleological metaphysics. As Passannante has argued, “the history of materialism in the Renaissance is inextricably tied to a history of literature and the material text.”²⁴ Chaucer’s unfinished *Squire’s Tale* in Book IV provides one powerful example of the challenge posed by the material text to theories of metaphysical harmony, and Spenser’s own unfinished *Cantos of Mutabilitie* make the case perhaps even more pressingly clear. It is in protest of the epistemological change wrought by the new science, Powrie argues, that Dame Nature “attempts to counter Mutabilitie’s argument with Aristotelian teleology, claiming that things in nature aim to complete and perfect their being.”²⁵ Nature’s verdict that all things “worke their own perfection so by fate” aims to repair the damage to metaphysics that Mutabilitie’s rebellion enacts, but the “unperfite” status of the text itself undermines the integrity of her claim.

Figures of imperfection in Spenser’s poem signify an indeterminacy not only in the poem’s cosmology but in its ethical organization as well, since Aristotle’s ethics, no less than his natural philosophy, supposes the reality of metaphysical perfection. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is, at its core, an attempt to extend to human beings the idea that

23 Mary Thomas Crane, *Losing Touch with Nature: Literature and the New Science in Sixteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014), 94-122.

24 Passannante, *Lucretian Renaissance*, 4.

25 Sarah Powrie, “Spenser’s Mutabilitie and the Indeterminate Universe,” *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 53:1 (Winter 2013), 83.

teleological development is an inherent feature of matter and the universe. People, no less than things, naturally tend toward the fulfillment of some purpose: this idea supplies the core of Aristotle's ethics, and it remained important for early modern ethical thought as well. Just as Aristotle claims in the *Metaphysics* that a thing is "perfect"—*teleios*—if it fulfills its function, Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* argues that human beings achieve their highest purpose and potential when they fulfill their natural function. "The good of man lies in the function of man," Aristotle writes—"if he has a function."²⁶ Aristotle argues by simple analogy that, just as any craftsman has a particular purpose to fulfill, and any tool a function particular to its nature, so human beings must have a general or categorical purpose proper to their nature—namely, the development and practice of virtue.

Aristotle's ethics help frame Book IV's efforts to depict parted lovers and sometime enemies "perfectly compyled" in virtuous friendship (4.9.17). Friendship, as Aristotle suggests, both is a virtue and concerns all the other virtues. It is virtue's social ballast. Alasdair MacIntyre, one the most perceptive modern interpreters of Aristotle's ethics, has argued that the teleology of human being that sustains the Aristotelian model of virtue—the insistence that human beings have a natural function to fulfill—can operate only in the context of a community bound together by an agreed upon definition of the good. "That bond is the bond of friendship," MacIntyre writes.²⁷ This, I suggest, is what's

26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1926), I.vii.10. The Greek reads: ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ δοκεῖ τὰγαθὸν εἶναι καὶ τὸ εὖ, οὕτω δόξειεν ἂν καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ, εἴπερ ἔστι τι ἔργον αὐτοῦ.

27 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 146.

at stake in Book IV's campaign to reverse the forces of discord and decay and to restore "that great golden chaine" with which Concord has "tide" together the cosmos in harmonious relationship (4.1.30): nothing less than a holistic world-system bound together by the recognition of final causes can fully support the system of virtuous perfection that Spenser sets out to illustrate. The emblematic figure of the unfinished Venus of Apelles within *The Faerie Queene* reflects both the enduring commitment to the teleology of perfection in Spenser's poetico-ethical project as well as the multiple cultural forces that impede that project. In the concluding section of the chapter I turn to the "end" of Spenser's poem and consider the fate of perfection and virtue in the unfinished *Cantos of Mutabilitie*.

For his part, Spenser insists that friendship based on virtue establishes and strengthens the fundamental bonds that support social harmony. Book IV routinely emphasizes the bonding together of friends in virtue. If, as Roche suggests, the harmony created by Cambina between Triamond and Cambel "means" the "universal bond of harmony that sustained the world in which Spenser lived," then the repeated emphasis on social bonds throughout the book takes on a significance beyond the realm of the social. Describing the mutual accord that holds Cambel and Triamond together in friendship, the narrator notes that "vertue is the band, that bindeth harts most sure" (4.2.29); Agape, Triamond's mother and a figure for chaste love, has the power to "bind each liuing creature" to her service (4.2.44); when Triamond ceases to battle Cambel, we're told, "true friendships bond / Doth their long strife agree" (4.3.arg) and they go on to live "[i]n perfect loue, deuoid of hatefull strife, / Allide with bands of mutuall couplement"

(4.3.52); love, the narrator says, is “the band of noble minds derived from above”

(4.6.31). Through these examples, Spenser intermixes other examples of love in his narrative of friendship. Toward the end of Book IV, the narrator explicitly meditates on the problem of how brotherly love, married love, and friendship are related to one another:

Hard is the doubt, and difficult to deeme,
When all three kinds of loue together meet,
And doe dispart the hart with powre extreme,
Whether shall weigh the balance downe; to weet
The deare affection vnto kindred sweet,
Or raging fire of loue to woman kind,
Or zeale of friends combynd with vertues meet.
But of them all the band of vertuous mind,
Me seemes the gentle hart, should most assured bind. (4.9.1)

The narrator goes on to emphasize the superiority of friendship—“For naturall affection soone doth cesse, / And quenched is with Cupids greater flame: / But faithfull friendship doth them both supresse” (4.9.2). Each of these different types of bonds appears in the Chaucerian section—the bond of kinship between Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond; the bond of married love between Cambel and Camina and Triamond and Canacee; and the friendship that ultimately links the knights Triamond and Cambel. Of these, Spenser insists, the “zeale of friends combynd with vertues meet” is the superior bond because it points most directly toward eternal values: “[t]hrough thoughts aspyring to eternall fame” (4.9.2).

Spenser’s references to love more broadly show how he situates classical accounts of friendship in a Christian context. Rather than separating friendship from other forms of love completely, Spenser provides three kinds of love that broadly

correspond to the different varieties of love mentioned in the New Testament. “Deare affection vnto kindred sweet” corresponds with the brotherly form of that the New Testament generally signifies with *phileo*; the “raging fire of loue for woman kind” with *eros*; and the “zeale of friends combynd with vertues meet,” the highest and best form of love according to Spenser, corresponds with *agape*. Almost all of Christ’s teachings in the New Testament use the term *agape* and its variants to describe love. Paul in his letter to the Colossians comments on the centrality of this form of love to the practice of Christian virtue: “And above all these things put on love [*agape*], which is the bond of perfectness” (Colossians 3:14, Geneva Bible). The account of *agape* as the “bond of perfectness” develops Paul’s Christology earlier in the letter. Christ, Paul says, is the force that holds all things together. “He himself is before all things; and in him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17, Geneva Bible). Paul further comments that “And through peace made by that blood of that his cross, to reconcile to himself through him, through him, I say, all things, both which are in earth, and which are in heaven” (Colossians 1:20, Geneva Bible). From this follows also Paul’s teachings on the order of the Christian household in 3:18-25: because Christ binds together literally everything he also binds together social relations. Love—specifically *agape*, which Spenser in turns allies with friendship—is the social expression of the metaphysical bond by which Christ holds all things together. Like Cambina’s intervention in the endless struggle between Triamond and Cambel, the bond of perfection is achieved not by the work of individuals in the world but by an intervention from the heavens. Of course, the fact that the allegorical figure *Agape* in Spenser’s version is subject to rape when she conceives the Triamond

brothers gives an especially dark cast to the poem's Reformed insistence that the work of sanctification is not the result of the individual will.²⁸

At the heart of Spenser's account of friendship, then, is a language of "perfection" that embeds virtue and friendship within a broader vision of metaphysical harmony. The choice of terms here is meaningful and reflects some of the ways in which "perfection" resonated in early modern contexts. Moral philosophies rooted in a teleological understanding of human nature were common in early modern England. Commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics* remained popular throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, and although some scholars have argued for the fundamental incompatibility of Aristotelian ethics and the Calvinist Reformed theology that seems to have influenced Spenser, one of the most popular texts of the Reformed movement in England—Peter Martyr Vermigli's *Common Places*, translated into English by Anthony Marten in 1583—contained large chunks digested from Martyr's own approving commentary on the *Ethics*. Patrick Collinson goes so far as to say that "if we were to identify one author and one book which represented the centre of theological gravity of the Elizabethan Church it would not be Calvin's *Institutes* but the *Common Places* of Peter Martyr."²⁹ Paul Cefalu and others have noted how the Reformers' insistence that God grants grace to believers

28 Martin Luther's *De servo arbitrio* (1525) lay the groundwork for this theology, arguing that human beings are utterly incapable of choosing good on their own, and therefore for Christians there is no free will. We might hear in Spenser's account of the rape of Agape as well an anticipation of John Donne's Holy Sonnet 14, in which the speaker, addressing the Holy Trinity acknowledges that he will never be chaste "except you ravish me."

29 Patrick Collinson, "England and International Calvinism 1558-1640," in *International Calvinism 1541-1715* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 214. Quoted in Marvin Anderson, "Rhetoric and Reality: Peter Martyr and the English Reformation," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19:3 (Autumn 1988), 469. Not all scholars agree that Martyr's influence on the English Reformation was positive. See also M.A. Overell, "Peter Martyr in England 1547-1553: An Alternate View," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15:1 (Spring 1984), 87-104.

immediately and without respect of merit or works sits rather unevenly alongside the Aristotelian theory that individuals can cultivate virtue through practice over time.³⁰ But Martyr's work gives an important example of how Reformed theologians also embraced a Christianized version of Aristotle's ethics. Indeed, Martyr insists that "it happeneth oftentimes, that the selfe-same things are commended in Aristotles Ethicks, which are commanded in the holie scriptures."³¹

Martyr clearly connects the concept of "ends" in the *Ethics* and other sciences to the concept of perfection: "since we speake so much of ends, it shall be good in my judgment to define what an end is. The etymologie of the word is shewed two maner of waies, one is of the Greeke word τελέω or τελείω which is, I make perfect, or I finish: whereof is deriued τέλος, which is a certaine perfection of those things, which are referred to it selfe."³² Most notably, then, is the tendency to associate perfection with forms of moral thinking governed by metaphysical teleology. Nor is Martyr's commentary the only popular early modern resource that draws on Aristotle's definition of perfection to characterize moral philosophy in terms of fulfilling a metaphysical teleology. Aquinas's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which remained popular among Catholics and Protestants alike through the seventeenth century, translates Aristotle's favorite adjective for a thing that fulfills its ends—*teleios*—as *perfectus*,

30 Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 47-76.

31 Peter Martyr, *The Common Places*, trans. Anthony Marten (London 1583), 17.

32 Martyr, *Common Places*, 5.

providing early modern writers with “perfection” as a general term for the Aristotelian *telos*.³³

Many early modern texts preserve the signature of Aristotle’s teleological perfectionism even when they stray from his specific terms. For example, in *The Anatomy of the Mind* (1576), an extensive late sixteenth-century catalog of virtues that ranges far from Aristotle’s specific list of virtues, Thomas Rogers affirms the essentially Aristotelian notion that the goal of the virtuous person is “a flourishing estate” characterized by “the perfect[] . . . enjoy[ment]” of “externall, corporall, and mentall goodes.”³⁴ In a virtual paraphrase of the first chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Lodowick Bryskett writes that “[t]he end of man in this life, is happinesse or felicitie: and an end it is called (as before was said) because all vertuous actions are directed thereunto, and because for it chiefly man laboureth and trauelleth in this world.”³⁵ Like Rogers and like Aristotle himself, Bryskett understands the practice of ethical living to mean the fulfillment of “the end of man,” a teleological goal—here called “happinesse or felicitie”—toward which all virtuous action should point.

At the same time, Reformed Christians like Spenser often expressed ambivalent attitudes toward the framework of moral perfection. Many sought to maintain the structure of Aristotelian teleology while insisting that its fulfillment lies beyond the scope of this world. While Spenser clearly announces his interest in Aristotelian moral

33 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, 2 vols., trans. C.I. Litzinger (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964). On the enduring popularity of Aquinas’s among Protestants and Catholics into the seventeenth century, see Jill Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Eckhard Kessler (Cambridge UP 1988), 303-86.

34 Thomas Rogers, *A philosophicall discourse, entituled The Anatomie of the mind* (London, 1576), 62.

35 Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civil Life* (London, 1606), 40.

perfection, Jeff Dolven aptly notes in his work “a Calvinist undertow of skepticism toward the idea that the quest’s travails might add up to the perfection of its end.”³⁶

Among Spenser’s Reformed predecessors, Luther writes that “For as long as we live in the flesh we only begin to make progress toward that which will be perfected in a future life.”³⁷ Martyr writes that “our vertues are maimed and vnperfect; therefore we cannot drawe out of them anie perfect and absolute actions.”³⁸ Anticipating the restoration of all things at the apocalypse, Calvin writes that “[w]e, while we wander in this world, see by a glasse and in a darke speach: it foloweth therfore, that our loue is vnperfect.”³⁹ Calvin cites the fact of material decay presented by the human body as a particular concern: “I saye also, that there shall none hereafter be, that shall come to the marke of true perfection, vnlesse he be loosed from the burden of his bodye.”⁴⁰ Spenser picks up on this line of thinking when he contrasts the physical decay of the body with the immaterial persistence of perfect friendship in Book IV: “[w]hose lives although decay’d, yet loves decayed neuer.”

Early modern English writers likewise recognized the centrality of friendship to the perfection of virtue. In the *Anatomy of Mind*, Rogers argues that the ideal of friendship is central to virtue:

Be not drawen away with fair woords, nor seduced with wickednes, nor ouercome with iniuries, looue with all your hart vnfainedly, and then shall you be a perfect freend. This freendship hath many noteis to be knowen by. For it is a freendship for her self, it is the greatest the moste

36 Jeff Dolven, “Besides Good and Evil,” *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 57:1 (Winter 2017), 6.

37 Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), trans. Mark D. Travník (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 71.

38 Martyr, *Common Places*, 328.

39 Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1561), F41v.

40 Calvin, *Institutes*, F40r.

perfect, the best, the most surest & therefore it is the rarest freendship. It is called a freendship *Per se*, because the spring of the same is that which is only good of it self, and that is vertue. It is the gretest, because it is for the sake of that which is greatest, which is only vertue. It is the moste perfect, for what is more perfect then vertue?⁴¹

In this passage, Rogers reiterates the Aristotelian idea that the highest form of friendship is that in which friends are devoted to one another without respect to any benefits they expect to receive. Instead, they are bound together by the recognition of shared values. The circularity of Rogers's description highlights the way in which the figure of the "perfect freend" is inextricable from the concept of virtue. Virtue is the "spring" of perfect friendship, and it is also the end toward which the perfect friend always acts.

If virtue and friendship are closely linked, Aristotle is nonetheless somewhat vague regarding the precise relation between the two, writing with some ambiguity that "[f]riendship is a virtue, or involves virtue."⁴² Similarly, Peter Martyr writes in his *Common Places* that "it is requisite, that this goodwill [i.e., friendship] be stirred vp in respect of some good thing. For we doo not loue, without it be for some certeine cause: and the good things are referred either vnto profit, or vnto pleasure, or vnto honestie." Martyr then recapitulates Aristotle's three versions of friendship. "But they which are induced to loue, either of pleasure, or of profit; they loue vnaduisedlie, and accidentallie," he says, subordinating, as Aristotle does, two lower forms of friendship. "For if the cause of pleasure, or of gaine, should cease; the friendship would straitwaie be loosed. But the friendship, which vertue hath ioined together, is stedfast, & neuer dissolved: for vertue is

41 Rogers, *Anatomy*, 179r-179v

42 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.1.1.

an habit gotten by long custome, which cannot be remooued.”⁴³ Although Martyr doesn’t reuse the term “perfect” to describe Aristotle’s last, best form of friendship, he nonetheless employs the same three-fold hierarchy and locates virtuous friendship, the kind Aristotle describes as *teleia*, at the apex. In Martyr’s own words, virtue is the glue that “joins” together friends in an association that can never be “dissolved,” just like the social bonds that Book IV seems forever to be seeking.

But there also exists the tradition running from Cicero to Montaigne that friendship may just as plausibly negate some kinds of association by superseding them. While Martyr argues that friendship formed in virtue cannot be dissolved, Montaigne writes that “[a] single dominant friendship dissolves all other obligations.”⁴⁴ He says further that “the union of such friends, being truly perfect, makes them lose the sense of such duties, and hate and banish from between them these words of separation and distinction: benefit, obligation, gratitude, request, thanks, and the like.”⁴⁵ Especially influential in the Renaissance period was Cicero’s *De Amicitia*, which at one point pauses to consider whether friendship might not lead to forms of devotion that would undermine the integrity of the republic, leading people to subvert the good of the broader community out of personal devotion to friends: “Wherefore, let us first consider, if you please, how far love ought to go in friendship. Supposing Coriolanus to have had friends, were those friends in duty bound to bear arms with him against their country?” Laelius, the speaker, further raises the example of the friendship between Blossius and Gracchus, accused of

43 Martyr, *Common Places*, 385.

44 Montaigne, *Works*, 172.

45 Montaigne, *Works*, 171-72.

treasonous activity. Blossius pleads on behalf of his friend “that his esteem for Tiberius Gracchus was so great he thought it was his duty to do anything that Tiberius requested him to do. Thereupon I inquired, ‘Even if he requested you to set fire to the Capitol?’ ‘He never would have requested me to do that, of course,’ said he, ‘but if he had I should have obeyed.’ You see what an impious remark that was!”⁴⁶

While Aristotle argues that people cannot have many perfect friendships—perhaps one or two at most—Montaigne’s account of perfect friendship draws on the Ciceronian tradition to restrict perfect friendship even further, reflecting the early modern sense that friendship was not just the property of a few rarified men, but the property of a classical culture from which early modern writers felt themselves estranged. Specifically, Montaigne draws on Cicero to illustrate how the strong bonds of such agreements might preclude participation in broader political communities. Montaigne writes that “Aristotle says that good legislators have had more care for friendship than for justice. Now the ultimate perfection of society is in this.”⁴⁷ Montaigne imagines the kind of friendship that dissolves all other associations not as the rejection or destruction of society but as its perfection. If Shannon finds a kind of pre-liberal equality of association in early modern discourses friendship, the definition of the perfect friend here—in which friendship supersedes justice—cuts across such views. Montaigne further comments on the example of Blossius and Gracchus that “They were friends more than citizens, friends more than friends or enemies of their country.”⁴⁸ In this case, the “indivisible” connections of

46 Cicero, *De Amicitia*, trans. W.A. Falconer (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1923) 11.37.

47 Montaigne, *Works*, 165.

48 Montaigne, *Works*, 170.

“perfect” friendship become a form of social exclusion: “This perfect friendship I speak of,” writes Montaigne, “is indivisible: each one gives himself so wholly to his friend that he has nothing left to distribute elsewhere; on the contrary, he is sorry that he is not double, triple, or quadruple, and that he has not several souls and several wills to confer them all on this one object.” Because of its rarity, perfect friendship might well be the undoing of broader forms of association. Montaigne’s emphasis on the exclusive nature of friendship underscores the difficulty early modern writers faced in looking to perfect friendship as a model of association.⁴⁹

If friendship is the bond of the state, and if it speaks of certain kinds of bonds between individuals, Spenser additionally associates the bond of friendship with the bonds of the natural world. Each type of bond is the consequence and prerequisite of the other. In the allegory of friendship, the figure of Concord gathers together these multiple kinds of bond. We hear of her twice in this regard. For the first time in Canto I, when her mirror opposite Ate is introduced. Ate, we are told, challenges the harmonious work of “th’Almightie”:

For all this worlds faire workmanship she tride,
Vnto his last confusion to bring,
And that great golden chaine quite to diuide,
With which it blessed Concord together hath tide (4.1.30).

The image of the universe tied together by Concord’s golden chain suggests quite clearly the harmonious and hierarchically ordered structure of the cosmos that earlier

⁴⁹ Intimacy may also yield exclusion in Catherine Nicholson’s account of Spenserian marriage. See “‘Against the Brydale Day’: Envy and the Meanings of Spenserian Marriage,” *ELH* 83:1 (Spring 2016), 43-70.

critics called “the Elizabethan world picture.”⁵⁰ When Scudamore finally visits the Temple of Venus, Concord appears in person, and the poem seems to confirm the prerogatives of Concord and her chain. Here we are told that she “contained” heaven in its course and “all the world in state vnmoued stands, / As their Almighty Maker first ordained, / And bound them with inuiolable bands” (4.10.35). Because Concord holds the material world—including rivers and fires—in harmonious balance, she also “open[s] right” the gate to “Venus grace” and makes love among earthly beings possible. But the security of this “world picture” is precarious.

Indeed, Spenser’s poem reveals both the enduring commitment to the metaphysical definition of perfection in early modern ethical thinking and to the forces that began to undermine it, including the Calvinist reservation of perfection for the immaterial afterlife and the vocabulary of matter and decay that began to undermine the concept of perfection in Aristotelian natural philosophy. Scholars have broadly acknowledged that the cultural and epistemological purchase of virtue ethics—a broader, modern category to which Aristotelian ethics belongs—diminished in the early modern period.⁵¹ By the mid-seventeenth century, philosophers such as Descartes and Spinoza explicitly rejected any teleology of human being for moral philosophy.⁵² “What is called a final cause,” Spinoza writes in a direct rejection of the Aristotelian model, “is nothing but a human appetite,” and as a result “[p]erfection and imperfection . . . are only modes

50 EMW Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture: A Study of the Idea of Order in the Age of Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton* (New York: Vintage, 1959), esp. 25-82.

51 Dorothea Frede, “The Historic Decline of Virtue Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel C. Russel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2013), 123-48.

52 For an account of the lingering influence of teleology in seventeenth-century ethical thought, see Donald Rutherford, “The End of Ends? Aristotelian Themes in Early Modern Ethics,” in *The Reception of Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Jon Miller (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2012), 194-221.

of thinking.”⁵³ When Spinoza says that he rejects the notion of a “final cause,” he has in mind the Aristotelian supposition that human life tends toward some particular end. By collecting and refracting divergent understandings of perfection in ethics, *The Faerie Queene* illustrates and participates in the “shaking off the yoke of Aristotelianism” that signals a redefinition of the ethical in the early modern period even as it labors to keep the same system in place.⁵⁴

The uncertainty of social and cosmological perfection in the universe of *The Faerie Queene* is filtered through the language of the unfinished Venus of Apelles in Spenser’s Chaucerian interlude in Book IV. Spenser reflects on the virtue of friendship by establishing its pattern through his relationship with Chaucer. Spenser’s narrator, addressing Chaucer, apologizes for “[stealing] from thee the meede of thy due merit, / That none durst euer whilest thou wast aliue, / And being dead in vaine yet many striue.” It’s a faint echo of the language of the Venus topos that I began this chapter with, but an unmistakable one. While most versions of the Apelles story claim that no one dared to finish the painting after the death of the great artist, Spenser has it somewhat differently. Instead, he seems to suggest that Chaucer’s death is what allowed others to approach his work. Contemporary poets may “striue” in vain to finish Chaucer’s works, but they didn’t strive at all, Spenser implies, until he was dead. In addition to locating poetic innovation and intertextuality in discourses of harmony and friendship—as critics such as Cheney have argued—Spenser here gives us in this brief allusion an almost imperceptible glimpse of an alternative construction of literary inheritance based on accidental loss and

53 Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin, 1996), 114-5.

54 Frede, “Decline,” 124.

the irretrievable distance of the past. Book IV's invocation of the Chaucerian intertext shows how the realization of temporal distance and material decay that lies at the heart of this relationship troubles the metaphysical teleology that friendship—for Aristotle, Martyr, and others—was supposed to uphold. This reiteration of the Apelles myth countenances the uncomfortable intimacy of decay, death and poetic creation that always lay at the heart of Pliny's story about Apelles's last painting.

Something like this ambivalence is visible in Spenser's adaptation of Chaucer. Critics have widely noted that the "traduction" of spirit between the brothers mirrors the "infusion sweete" by which Spenser says Chaucer's spirit survives in him. As Cheney puts it, Spenser extends this "cosmogonic myth about the genesis of friendship" to poetic creation.⁵⁵ In Cheney's account, the possibility of intertextual continuity enables the idea of a national poetic tradition. But the kind of continuity the three brothers achieve in Canto III is not only not glorious, but in fact turns into a kind of "tragic over-living."⁵⁶ When Agape visits the "fatall sisters" to discover her three sons' fortunes, they refuse to lengthen the brothers' life threads. Agape asks instead that, when one dies, "his life may pass into the next" (4.2.52), and her wish is granted. Canto III sees Priamond killed in the tournament, but "through traduction" (4.3.13) his soul transfers to his brother's body. Then Diamond is killed and his soul enters Triamond (4.3.21). As the fight wears on, the narrator confesses, "life itself seemed loathsome, and long safetie ill" (4.3.36). As the knights batter one another into exhaustion and continued life, the narrative of Spenser's

⁵⁵ Patrick Cheney, "Triamond," *Spenser Encyclopedia*.

⁵⁶ I borrow the phrase from Emily Wilson, *Mocked With Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

Chaucerian revival works manically to deny what the invocation of the Venus briefly acknowledges: that decay and loss are not accidents that frustrate literary history, but in fact are the stuff it's made of.

Book IV begins by undoing the union of Amoret and Scudamore, and it ends—if it ends—by postponing yet another union. The *deus ex machina* of Cambina's arrival restores Cambel and Triamond in "perfect loue," but by reaching beyond the narrative to do so it simultaneously reveals a disturbing awareness—disturbing for allegory as a mode of representation, that is—that the poetic imagination might have some practical limitations as it approaches perfection. Eight of Book IV's twelve cantos explicitly defer resolution, including the final twelfth canto, which postpones the union of Marinell and Florimell: "Which to another place I leaue to be perfected," Spenser writes (4.12.35). As Balachandra Rajan puts it, the poem "seems to recognize a distance between the ideal and the actual which may make impossible" the poet's capacity to mediate between the ideal forms of imagination and realities of the given world, "thus placing the fictive centre at a point where it is divested of its negotiating force."⁵⁷ Beginning in Book IV Spenser seems increasingly aware of the burden this places on the poem's representational methods.

Book IV's uneasy relation to perfection finds its logical conclusion in the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, to which I turn my attention next. Critics have often remarked on the move from the individual virtues of holiness, temperance, and chastity in Books I-III of *The Faerie Queene* toward the social virtues of friendship, justice, and courtesy in Books III-VI—or, as Berger puts it, the "move from problems of concord within the self to

⁵⁷ Balachandra Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1985), 62.

problems of concord with others.”⁵⁸ The culmination of this movement, says Gordon Teskey, is Spenser’s “defection from metaphysics” in the *Cantos*.⁵⁹ Focusing on the consequences of this movement for the Aristotelian ethics of virtue, I argue that the failure of the second installment’s “social” allegories to secure a communal sense of the good—clearly adumbrated by Book IV’s realization that “perfection lies elsewhere,”⁶⁰ but never fully acknowledged until the bitter conclusion to Book VI—is what leads ultimately to the prayerful Stoicism of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*. As MacIntyre further observes in his history of moral philosophy, which might well be interpreted as an allegory of Spenserian ethical thinking: “when teleology, whether Aristotelian or Christian, is abandoned, there is always a tendency to substitute for it some version of Stoicism.”⁶¹

Mutability and the Problem of Perfection

The imperfection of the *Faerie Queene* is nowhere more visible than in the unfinished *Cantos of Mutabilitie*. If Book IV struggles to imagine perfection at the levels of narrative structure and individual association while gesturing toward the metaphysical significance

58 Berger, *Revisionary Play*, 35.

59 Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 175.

60 Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 6.

61 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 217.

of these problems, the poem's unfinished seventh book fully illustrates the cosmological consequences of perfection's indefinite deferral. Both these pictures of imperfection center on texts damaged by accidental loss—in Book IV, Chaucer's; in the *Cantos*, Spenser's own.

The *Cantos* tell the story of a rebellion suppressed—though perhaps just barely. Mutabilitie—whom the poem's argument names as a figure for “proud change”—rises up against the reign of Jove and claims for herself authority over all things. She presents her case to Nature, who eventually decides in Jove's favor: “being rightly wayd,” Nature concludes, “all things are not changed from their first estate / But by their change their being do dilate / And turning to themselves at length again / Do work their own perfection so by fate” (7.7.58).⁶² When Northrop Frye calls the *Cantos* “a brilliant metaphysical comedy,” he means at least that Dame Nature's judgement successfully dispels any threat posed by Mutabilitie's challenge to the orderly reign of Jove.⁶³

But the apparent finality of Nature's ruling in this episode has not lately persuaded scholars that the poem fully supports the old order of things. Indeed, as a recent collection of essays on the *Cantos* amply demonstrates, critics today are more likely to associate Spenser's posthumously published work with fragmentation, decay, and chaos, as opposed to comedic resolution or metaphysical harmony.⁶⁴ For many, the *Cantos* represent Spenser's attempt to grapple with developments in natural philosophy that undermined Aristotelian cosmology. For example, Powrie writes that “[a]s a

62 I follow Hamilton in citing the *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* as the poem's seventh book, though it should be noted that the status of the *Cantos* with respect to the rest of the poem remains uncertain.

63 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton University Press: 1957), 204.

64 *Celebrating Mutabilitie*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester University Press 2010).

representation of material substance, Mutabilitie's invasion of the celestial spheres suggests one of the ways that early modern science interrogated the Aristotelian world system."⁶⁵ Dame Nature defends this world system in her final judgment that all things tend toward perfection, but for many readers her verdict appears too little too late.⁶⁶

Moreover, once admitted into the world of the poem, Mutabilitie's challenge to metaphysical order seems to infect the poem's very representational techniques. Spenser, Teskey famously alleges, has "defect[ed] from metaphysics" by this point in the poem, and no assertion of cosmological harmony on Nature's part can reverse this reversal.⁶⁷ Mutabilitie's challenge to Jove's authority is a vision that the poem cannot unsee, and the result alters the conditions of representation for the poem itself. Powrie agrees that "Mutabilitie's indeterminateness has infiltrated not only Jove's heaven, but even the poetic properties of the text."⁶⁸ As Teskey puts it, Mutabilitie's challenge "undermin[es] the metaphysical basis of allegorical expression."⁶⁹ Berger characterizes this alteration as an "evolution" over the course of the *Cantos* toward the lyric mode. While Cantos VI and VII of *Mutabilitie* offer a rich pageant of allegorical figures debating the viability of cosmological harmony in the universe, the inconclusive, "unperfite" eighth canto leave us ultimately with a "lyric present in which the poet stands, altered yet still unreconciled—

65 Powrie, "Indeterminate Universe," 77.

66 Ramachandran phrases the conflict in terms of Lucretian materialism as against neo-Platonism; see her essay "Lucretian Metaphysics: Skepticism and Cosmic Process in Spenser's Cantos," in *Celebrating Mutabilitie*. Teskey perhaps set the tone for subversive interpretations of the *Cantos* in *Allegory and Violence*, where the terms are genealogy as against metaphysics.

67 Teskey *Allegory and Violence*, 175.

68 Powrie, "Indeterminate Universe," 84.

69 Teskey *Allegory and Violence*, 175. This sentence also cited in Powrie, "Indeterminate Universe," 87N22.

even more deeply divided, in fact, by what he has envisaged.”⁷⁰ Angus Fletcher has argued that early modern Christian allegory in particular operated on the theory that “the whole visible cosmos” was “open to the poet’s eye; it was an organized world, a world forever deprived of disorder.”⁷¹ It’s this mode of vision that dims in Spenser’s inconclusive final stanzas. In the “unperfite” cantos, the poet’s fictive powers falter because the allegorical mode on which those powers draw presupposes the cosmological perfection that Nature precariously defends. In Berger’s terms, then, the individual perspective of lyric in the eighth canto is the trace left behind by allegory’s decay.

Mutabilitie’s challenge to Aristotelian order in nature and its concomitant effects on the poem’s representational capacities also speak to the fate of the Aristotelian ethics of virtue in the poem. Powrie notes that the belief in “final, perfecting causes” that Nature expresses “was central to Aristotle’s natural science, cosmology, and ethics.”⁷² While critics have recently tracked the decline of Aristotelian structures of thinking in Spenser’s poem primarily in terms of cosmology and natural philosophy, the poem also realizes in the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* a challenge to the telos of human being that underlies the poem’s own avowed Aristotelian ethics. Meanwhile, critics who have focused on ethics in the *Cantos*—such as Christopher Burlinson and Alex Davis—have tended to associate

70 Berger, *Revisionary Play*, 248. The idea that Spenser’s allegory changes or “evolves” over the course of the poem has a long critical tradition. For an early example that attributes alteration in allegorical texture to alteration in compositional technique, see Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Evolution of The Faerie Queene* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

71 Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (orig. 1964; repr. Princeton University Press, 2012), 131. The idea that allegory as a mode of fiction-making presupposes an ordered cosmos finds support in the history of allegory as a mode of reading in the middle ages, which, as Jon Whitman argues, proceeded from the assumption that the natural world, as God’s divinely ordered creation, was structured by symbolic correspondences. See *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

72 Powrie, “Indeterminate Universe,” 83.

the ethics of *Mutabilitie* with that of Renaissance neo-Stoic thinkers like Justus Lipsius, rather than on the Aristotelian model that Spenser invokes in the letter to Raleigh and pursues in Book IV.⁷³ This is a meaningful gap, since, as I will argue, the Stoicism into which the *Cantos* resolve represents the failure of Aristotelian ethics that the poem once set out to fulfill. The retreat from Aristotelian virtue to Stoic abnegation is isomorphic with the retreat from allegory to the individual perspective of lyric that Berger and others have identified in the *Cantos*.

The *Cantos of Mutabilitie* resolve into Stoic inwardness as a consequence of the realization that “all things” might not tend toward perfection after all. In making this move, the poem recapitulates arguments between early modern Stoics and Aristotelian moral philosophers. Rajan’s judgment about the poem’s representational mode is also true of its ethical orientation: “The poem accepts what it has made of itself but on the basis of that acceptance it proceeds to occupy a future which cannot be simply an extension of what has been made.”⁷⁴ In its failure to fully secure a vision of cosmological harmony—or perhaps its inadvertent opening-up of the question—the unfinished eighth canto reimagines the perfection of the cosmos not as an absolute truth about the world but as a perspective that an individual might hold or not hold. A kind of sight that might or might not be available: “O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight” (7.8.2). Concomitantly it accepts the Stoic version of virtue as next best, though it is

73 Christopher Burlinson, “Spenser’s ‘Legend of Constancie’: Book VII and the Ethical Reader,” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie* (Manchester 2010); Alex Davis, “Between Courtesy and Constancy: *The Faerie Queene*, Books 6 and 7,” (2016). Fowler, “The Failure of Moral Philosophy.”

74 Rajan, *Unfinished*, 44-5.

decidedly not what the poem set out to defend. Spenser's quiet defection in the *Cantos* places Aristotelian teleology within the "immanent frame" of individual perspective.⁷⁵

To say that the "unperfite" status of the *Cantos* undermines Dame Nature's insistence on the immanent working of things toward "perfection" is not merely to insert meta-textual comment into the world of the poem. Throughout the *Cantos* the essential integrity of the cosmos that Nature defends finds an important metonym in the problem of textual integrity. The poem's opening stanzas appear to situate the text in a world of documentary and cultural stability. The narrator of the *Cantos* begins by offering to "rehearse that whylome I heard say." The invocation of oral tradition—as opposed to some more original muse—is appropriate, given that the poem begins with a broad gesture toward Fortune's "euer-whirling wheele," a figure that was over a thousand years old by the time Spenser came to it:

What man that sees the euer-whirling wheele
Of Change, the which all mortall things doth sway,
But that thereby doth find, & plainly feelee,
How Mutability in them doth play
Her cruell sports, to many mens decay? (7.6.1)

Here Spenser prefaces his account of Mutabilitie with reference to a common image of change borrowed from Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.⁷⁶ According to

⁷⁵ I borrow here the famous formulation of Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁷⁶ Scholars have not proved conclusively the Spenser was directly influenced by Boethius, but the text was a popular object for translation—even Queen Elizabeth translated Boethius—and was widely available in English throughout the sixteenth century. On the availability of the text to Spenser and his contemporaries, see Deborah MacInnes, "Boethius," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, 100.

Boethius, Fortune ultimately accepts a role subservient to providential order in the scheme of the universe. And indeed the stability of Boethius's image across time seems to confirm the basic argument of his text. Spenser's poem begins its defense of providential development against the depredations of "proud Change" by invoking this historically constant image of inconstancy.

But before this predictable Boethian revival, another rehearsal. This, too, the narrator informs us, is stuff of familiar lore.

But first, here falleth fittest to vnfold
 Her antique linage ancient,
 As I haue found it registred of old,
 In Faery Land mongst records permanent. (7.6.2)

This stanza states that the texts that record Mutabilitie's story are themselves impervious to decay. The essential integrity of the records that preserve Mutabilitie's own history would seem to undermine any claim to authority that Mutabilitie herself might make in the course of her rebellion.

But the longevity enjoyed by the oral testimony ("that whylome I heard say") and archival evidence ("records permanent") that frame this allegorical pageant stands in sharp contrast to the poem's own textual history. The fantasy of "records permanent" is central to Spenser's defense of constancy both as a moral virtue and as a fact about the universe. Against the claims to natural decay that Mutabilitie levels against Jove, Spenser upholds first of all the value of the preservation of texts against time and the recovery and restoration of textual fragments—both hallmarks of the humanist program beginning with

the fifteenth-century recovery, translation, and imitation of documents from Greco-Roman antiquity. But as Passannante has argued, the Renaissance encounter with the fragmented corpus of antiquity also alerted humanists to the potential of material texts to break down into unintelligible “bits” reminiscent of the meaningless atoms that Lucretius, in his *De Rerum Natura*, famously said the universe was made of. The possibility that textual records could be anything other than “permanent” further troubles Spenser’s allegory of constancy. Other critics have argued that the idea of textual materiality—because it implies the possibilities of change and decay—contradicts the metaphysical stasis that allegory lays claim to. Teskey, for example, has argued that “[a]llegorical writing negates that negation of the material world which allegorical interpretation implies.”⁷⁷ In the context of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, this formulation suggests that to acknowledge the contingent materiality of the text is also to acknowledge the chance that its own allegorical methods might not work—in other words, the possibility that allegory might not succeed in reshaping the flux of the material world into the clarity of visual form as the pageant of allegorical figures in the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* purports to do. Figures of textual integrity and cosmological constancy point at one another simultaneously throughout the *Cantos*: each signifies the other as metonym or analogy, and both are necessary to secure the representational procedures of the poem itself.

While scholars have argued that the tendency toward decay threatens the metaphysical order of Aristotelian cosmology, they have not adequately dealt with the threat to Spenser’s ethical program posed by the “little bits” of fragmented texts that

⁷⁷ Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard 2006), 30.

circulate throughout the *Cantos*. The idea that universe might be made up of tiny, meaningless particles undercuts the basic claim of Aristotelian ethics: that all living things tend toward a “perfection” that is immanent in their own being. In his *Common Places*, Martyr defends the Aristotelian notion of ethical perfection first of all by defending the notion that God created all things with an end in mind. Directly opposed to this view is the Lucretian theory of atoms: “Manie of the ancient philoosopers assigned the workmanship of things vnto rashnes and chance; seeing diuers of them in the stead of beginnings, named discord and debate, or else such little small bodies, as smaller cannot be.”⁷⁸ In his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Martyr writes further that “Nature did not show that the universe is composed of the random conjunction of atoms; this was conceived by empty speculation.”⁷⁹ To reduce the entire structure of the universe to the movement of “such little small bodies” as atoms is to undermine the foundational principle of Aristotelian ethics: that all things—including people—have a natural purpose to fulfill.

Martyr’s defense of perfection differentiates the Aristotelian account of virtue from another major source for Spenser’s ethical thinking in the *Cantos*, more widely attested to in the secondary literature: Justus Lipsius’s *De Constantia*. Like Spenser’s *Cantos*, *De Constantia* is an attempt to locate constancy in a world that appears to be characterized by change and the potential for chaos and rebellion. Lipsius’s solution to the problem of “mutabilitie” is quite different from the one Martyr proposes. While

⁷⁸ Martyr, *Common Places*, 111.

⁷⁹ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Emidio Campi and Joseph C. McLelland (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2006), 13.

Lipsius concedes mutability in the natural and political worlds and in response removes virtue to the mind alone, Martyr insists on the tendency toward perfection in the natural world as prime evidence of God's providence and as support for the Aristotelian injunction to cultivate habits of virtue through action. "For Christ sendeth vs to the fowles of the aire, and to the lillies & grasse of the field, to the intent wee should acknowledge the singular prouidence of God, in preseruing of those things which he had brought foorth."⁸⁰ For Martyr, the integrity of the natural world is necessary to secure an ethics based not merely on tempering one's passions but on practicing virtue through one's actions. The gap between the two ethical programs helps illustrate what's unique about Spenser's attempted defense of constancy by way of Nature's claim to metaphysical teleology, and highlights how Spenser's concluding "unperfite" canto poses a specific challenge to the Aristotelian teleology even as the allegorical figure Nature affirms the same. In the reading of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* that follows, I proceed by reconstructing this debate between sixteenth-century Stoics and Aristotelians in order to shed light on Spenser's ethical thinking.

The split between Lipsius the Stoic and Martyr the Aristotelian lies in the concept of habit, which is central to Aristotle's views on the practice and theory of virtue. From the Stoic perspective, virtue appears as an inward property of the soul, not as something that requires activity in the world, since any and all action might be frustrated by ever-whirling wheel of fate. Lipsius maintains that, even in the face of disaster, a truly rational mind will take refuge in the knowledge that God's Providence orders all things. At the

80 Martyr, *Common Places*, 12.

highest level, then, Lipsius insists on a kind of harmony. But the Stoic position locates this harmony beyond any observable phenomena and emphasizes decay and mutability as the fundamental state of things. “It is a natural propertie of things to fall into mutability and alteration.”⁸¹ Physical decay of matter is a key example and central to the way Lipsius represents the inconstancy of the world: “As vnto Iron cleaueth naturally a consuming rust: to wood a gnawing worme, and so a wasting rottenness.”⁸² In his *Common Places*, Martyr specifically rebuts this view, insisting that virtue cannot withdraw from the world and remain virtue. Martyr’s view needs a theory of the material world and the cosmos that rejects mutability not only as a property of the mind but as an immanent property of things. “All things doo desire good,” Martyr maintains, which “seemes to be a certeine imitation of God almightie the author of creatures. For he while he made euerie particular thing, had respect vnto a good end.”⁸³ Siding with the Aristotelians, Dame Nature upholds not simply God’s ordering of the universe but the local tendency of “all things” to “work” their way toward “perfection.” I argue that Spenser’s portrait of ethical activity after the “collapse of values” staged in Books IV-VI falls somewhere in between.⁸⁴

The story proper begins when Mutabilitie ascends from earth—where she has apparently caused original sin—to the “circle” of the moon and the other heavenly bodies. After she attempts to depose Cynthia—the moon—from her “Iuory throne,” the

81 Justus Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, trans. John Stradling (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1939), 106.

82 Lipsius, *Constancie*, 107.

83 Martyr, *Common Places*, 3.

84 Davis, “Between Courtesy and Constancy,” 656.

other gods go to Jove's palace—"fixt in heavens hight" (7.6.15)—to ask why the moon has suddenly disappeared. Jove sends Mercury "[d]owne to the Circle of the Moone, to knowe / The cause of this so strange astonishment" (7.6.16). When Mercury summons Mutabilitie on Jove's behalf, however, she replies that "shee his Ioue and him esteemed nought / No more then Cynthia's selfe; but all their kingdoms sought" (7.6.18).

Mutabilitie's attempt to rise above the sublunary realm entails a threat to Jove's rule and the ordered cosmos that it represents. Yet Mutabilitie's attempt against the moon in the *Cantos* is not without precedent, as both Spenser's narrator and Mutabilitie herself remind us. In the background of her mutiny lies that of her ancestors, the Titans. The narrator informs us straight away that Mutabilitie is "a daughter by descent / Of those old Titans, that did whylome striue / With Saturnes sonne for heauens regiment" (7.6.2). Her titanic ancestry anticipates and explains the present rebellion, but it also, from Mutabilitie's own perspective, justifies it. When Mutabilitie storms the castle and confronts Jove himself, she likewise reminds him of her lineage "[f]or, Titan (as ye all acknowledge must) / Was Saturnes elder brother by birth-right" (7.6.27). Titan once attempted to wrest Jove's power for himself not merely out of some chaotic impulse—as we might expect from the allegorical figure of "Change"—but because he believed that power to be his by right—indeed as we expect from the figure of "proud Change," one of Mutabilitie's many aliases here.

Through these references to a disruptive and violent past, both Mutabilitie and the poem that is nominally allegorizing her opposite—constancy—raise the unwholesome prospect of a world in which rebellions never cease. As Teskey writes, "titanism, or the

ceaseless mounting of genealogical challenges to any authority that declares itself permanent, was the most threatening of discursive formations in Spenser's political world."⁸⁵ If constant anxiety toward potential challengers to the absolute power of monarchical authority was characteristic of politics in the early modern period, then even raising the possibility that earthly politics might impinge on metaphysical order is tantamount to acknowledging that the allegorical representation of a harmoniously governed universe can never rest secure. Jove confidently dismisses Mutabilitie's ancestral claim, but his declaration of divine right must ring hollow because he has to make it—exactly as Nature's defense of perfection falters because it has to be made in the first place.

But wote thou this, thou hardy Titanesse,
That not the worth of any liuing wight
May challenge ought in Heauens interesse;
Much lesse the Title of old Titans Right:
For, we by Conquest of our soueraine might,
And by eternall doome of Fates decree,
Haue wonne the Empire of the Heauens bright. (7.6.33)

The "eternall doome" of the Fates may indeed support Jove's authority, but the recurring threat of titanic rebellion figured forth by Mutabilitie and her ancestral claims strongly suggests that there will always be another rival to the throne.

It's primarily through the mythical revolt of the Titans that Lipsius in *De Constantia* fashions an ethics of Stoic withdrawal from the chaos of worldly affairs. Setting Lipsius's response to titanism against Spenser's helps to articulate the ethical consequences of this strange allegory of Aristotelian matter and cosmology. Like the

⁸⁵ Gordon Teskey, "Mutability, Genealogy, and the Authority of Forms," *Representations* 41 (Winter 1993), 112.

Cantos of Mutabilitie, Lipsius's treatise begins with a rebellion. Lipsius's rebellion is rather more historical, however. The first chapter situates Lipsius's essay in the context of the Dutch Revolt—specifically, in the years after 1581, when the Dutch Provinces rejected the authority of Phillip II of Spain.⁸⁶ The English subtitle identifies the work as “A comfortable conference, in common calamities” [*in publicis malis*]. Identifying the situation of the Low Countries in the absence of a sovereign ruler as a time of “public evil,” the treatise purports to offer private “comfort” as a compensatory gesture.

In Lipsius's hands, political uncertainty reduces to cosmological uncertainty, which the treatise expresses using early modern commonplaces of natural disorder that align closely with the account of Mutabilitie's rebellion in the *Cantos*. Lipsius begins by admitting that the turbulent politics of the Low Country have caused him to flee his native country:

For (said I) who is of so hard and flinty a heart that he can anie longer endure these euils? wee are tossed, as you see, these manie yeares with the tempest of ciuill warres: and like Sea-faring men are wee beaten with sundrie blastes of troubles and sedition.⁸⁷

Lipsius's complaint begins to blur the line between political and natural upheaval. The image of the “tempest of ciuill warres” both naturalizes political conflict and politicizes natural disaster. The “troubles and sedition” of political instability threaten and disorient no less than storms at sea. Spenser's narrator similarly insists on the reducibility of

⁸⁶ For more background, see Martin van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt, 1555-1590* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. 180-6.

⁸⁷ Lipsius, *Constancie*, 72.

political and natural disorder: regarding Mutabilitie's rebellion against the "Great power" and "high authority" of Jove, the narrator observes that "Ne shee the lawes of Nature onely brake, / But eke of Iustice, and of Policie" (7.6.6.).

Like Spenser, Lipsius identifies the appearance of chaos and discord in the world as the enemy of "constancie." But while Spenser attempts to represent through allegory the kind of order that subtends such changes, Lipsius insists that such order exists beyond the level of human perception. Even the bodies of the heavenly spheres—to which Aristotelian cosmology attributes harmony—are subject to decay:

And if these great bodies which to vs seeme euerlasting, bee subiect to mutabilitie and alteration, why much more shoulde not townes, common-wealthes, and kingdoms; which must needes be mortall, as they that doe compose them? As ech particular man hath his youth, his strength, olde age, and death. So fareth it with those other bodies. They begin, they increase, they stand and flourish, and all to this ende, that they may decay.⁸⁸

Here Lipsius illustrates several different levels of what Teskey calls "the general disaster of cosmic entropy."⁸⁹ Lipsius maintains that Providence ultimately prevails, but in a very practical way he concedes the reality of decay and disorder.

Lipsius's solution to this problem is one commonly associated with the early modern revival of Senecan Stoicism. Facing a world characterized at all levels by constant flux and disintegration, the only viable option is to "imprint" constancy on one's own mind and steel oneself against the inevitable swings in fortune that living in such a volatile universe brings. Although Lipsius describes in vivid terms the personal effects of "the scorching flames of ciuill warres," including murder and rape, he ultimately argues

⁸⁸ Lipsius, *Constancy*, 39.

⁸⁹ Gordon Teskey, "Night Thoughts on Mutability," in *Celebrating Mutabilitie*, 29.

that to respond to these events in despair is simply illogical. This is a commonplace of Stoic thinking that extends back to Seneca.⁹⁰ Lipsius's fictional interlocutor maintains that "all affections that doe disturbe mans life, proceede from a minde distempered and voyde of reason."⁹¹ Here Lipsius argues that the anxiety and suffering that arise from worldly change and political decay are nothing but the effects of a mind insufficiently attuned to reason, which alone and above the senses can cling to the reassurance of Providential order.

In the *Cantos*, Mutabilitie's challenge threatens political and cosmological order, touching on each of the levels of inconstancy that Lipsius addresses. Mutabilitie is not only a figure of political revolt, but also, as the argument to Canto Seven spells out, a figure for the "alteration" of the material elements of the natural world. This makes up much of Mutabilitie's defense during the trial staged before Dame Nature in Canto Seven, in which, after challenging the "spheares of heauen," Mutabilitie lists the fundamental "Alterations" that the basic elements of the universe undergo:

Ne is the water in more constant case;
 Whether those same on high, or these belowe.
 For, th'Ocean moueth stil, from place to place;

 So likewise are all watry liuing wights
 Still tost, and turned, with continuall change,
 Neuer abyding in their stedfast plights. (7.20-1)

90 See Burlinson, "Ethical Reader."

91 Lipsius, *Constancie*, 101.

After here considering the various alterations of water and “watry liuing wights,” Mutabilitie—in surprisingly programmatic and ordered fashion—gives similar accounts of earth, fire, and air, the other elements that according to Empedocles made up the entirety of the universe.⁹² In claiming the functioning of the elements for herself, Mutabilitie reverses a commonplace of the system of analogy by which cosmology, politics, and ethics were reducible.⁹³ In the case of each element Mutabilitie finds the capacity for change and therefore claims that she herself—embodying change and alteration—rules throughout the natural world. It is against these claims that Dame Nature levels her judgment in favor of the immanent “perfection” of “all things.”

Dame Nature’s decree reflects a position that Lipsius calls “Natural Destiny.” Central to Lipsius’s defense of Providence in the face of natural decay is the argument that “Providence is in God alone, destiny is in things.”⁹⁴ Lipsius gives four examples of destiny and rebuts each in turn, concluding with a vision of Providence that lies outside any and all physical phenomena. Regarding natural destiny, Lipsius writes that “[a]ll things both mortall and immortall, heauenlie and earthly, sensible and insensible do with open mouth crie out and affirme, that there is somewhat far aboue vs that created and formed these so many wonderfull workes, which also continuallie gouerneth & preserueth the same.”⁹⁵ What Lipsius calls the “voyce of nature,” Spenser has his

92 See especially Drew Daniel, “The Empedoclean Renaissance,” in *The Return of Theory in Early Modern English Studies*, volume 2, eds. Paul Cefalu, Gary Kuchar, and Bryan Reynolds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 277-300.

93 “References to the elements in Elizabethan literature are very many and their imaginative function is to link the doings of men with the business of the cosmos, to show events not merely happening but happening in conjunction with so much else.” Tillyard, *Elizabethan World Picture*, 66.

94 Lipsius, *Constancie*, 118.

95 Lipsius, *Constancy*, 32.

allegorical figure for Nature speak directly: that things themselves really do bear the signature of perfection. Lipsius ultimately deprecates this position, which he attributes to Aristotle and his followers: “I call natural Fate the order of natural causes, which, not being hindered, by their force and nature do produce a certain and the self same effect. Aristotle is of this sect, if we give credit to Alexander of Aphrodisias, his interpreter. Likewise, Theophrastus, who writes plainly, ‘that destiny is the nature of each thing.’”

Lipsius concedes that there is some appearance of truth in the Aristotelian “voyce of nature,” but he ultimately argues that it’s incompatible with Christian Providence, which attributes the fate of all things to the sovereign will God. The Aristotelian principle of “natural fate,” Lipsius maintains, falsely attributes to things themselves what Dame Nature calls their working toward perfection. “No man,” he writes, “so speaketh of prouidence, no man applyeth it to the thinges themselues, without impietie and dirision.”⁹⁶ Natural Fate is further unnecessary to Lipsius’s ethic of Stoic self-government, which Lipsius advises precisely because things do not work toward their own perfection. “Imprint Constancie in thy mind,” he writes, “amid this casuall and inconstant variableness of all things.” Lipsius acknowledges mutability as part of the real texture of experience and in response he withdraws the practice of virtue into the mind alone. “Apply thy selfe to wisdom, which may amend thy euill maners, set at rest and beautifie thy distempered and vncleane mind: She only is able to imprint vertue, & to work the impression of Constancy in thee, and to set open vnto thee the Temple of a Good Mind.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Lipsius, *Constancy*, 33.

⁹⁷ Lipsius, *Constancy*, 69.

Martyr, on the other hand, writes directly against this Stoic tendency to locate virtue exclusively in the mind. The Aristotelian model, he says, requires bodily practice. “They declare,” Martyr writes, meaning Stoic philosophers, “that the action of vertue is whole, full, and perfect in the mind: that we denie.”⁹⁸ Martyr goes on to indict the Stoic model of virtue as insufficiently attuned to teleology—insufficiently aware, that is, that virtue must be exercised toward some end:

these men perhaps persuade themselues, that the nature of man is fulfilled, and made perfect in the soule onelie: which how far it is from the truth, your selues without me may perceiue. A poore man (say they) may be liberall, while he desireth to giue vnto them, to whom he thinketh it meet to be giuen. But I would faine learne of these Stoiks, whether they that be indued with vertue, and being hindered, doo desire to worke by it; for what cause they desire this? Doo they it not for blessednes sake? This if they shall denie, they will declare themselues to be vnwise in desiring of those things which they refer not vnto the cheefest good. But if they will grant, that they wish those works for felicitie sake, it shall be lawfull to saie that felicitie is perfectlie gotten, not in vertue, but in action. I will easilie grant, that vertue shineth, and is more glorious in the midst of flames, and in most cruell torments; and him that with a valiant courage suffereth these things, I will extoll with praises among good and wise men; but yet so, as I will denie him, in the meane time, to inioie whole and perfect felicitie.⁹⁹

Martyr argues in short that by definition virtue must be acted out in order to exist for some end other than its mere possession. Aristotle indeed affirms that virtue “will of necessity act, and act well.”¹⁰⁰ It is for this reason, ultimately, that Martyr rejects the Lucretian model of the material world in favor of one marked by Aristotelian perfection: in a world where mutability, and not some kind of perfection, remains current, the Stoic

⁹⁸ Martyr, *Common Places*, 151.

⁹⁹ Martyr, *Common Places*, 152.

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.8.9.

model of withdrawal into the mind would be the only possible solution, and in the Aristotelian framework of virtue ethics this withdrawal is untenable.

Spenser's poem walks an ambiguous line between these judgments. The seventh canto of Spenser's unfinished poem concludes with a powerful statement in favor of the idea of "Natural Destiny" that the Stoic Lipsius rejects and that the Aristotelian Martyr affirms. Here, Dame Nature weighs the evidence that Mutabilitie and Jove have respectively put forward, and finds (affirmative to Jove's claims) the immanent working of perfection in "all things":

I well consider all that ye haue sayd
And find that all things stedfastnes doe hate
And changed be: yet being rightly wayd
They are not changed from their first estate;
But by their change their being doe dilate:
And turning to themselues at length againe,
Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate:
Then ouer them Change doth not rule and raigne;
but they raigne ouer change, and doe their states maintaine. (7.58)

Here Nature appears to identify the "working toward perfection" of things as an immanent quality of things, not as the directions of order enforced by God from beyond the realm of physical nature.

But the status of Dame Nature's "doome" within the poem's allegorical program is unclear. As Teskey and others have argued, the natural order that Nature appears to reinforce remains subject to further rebellious ancestral claims. In Lipsius, the only solution is a Christian-Stoic disavowal of worldly change: one must subdue the passions by reason and acknowledge God's Providence in spite of worldly decay. The real threat

to this “immoueable order,” according to Lipsius, is our own lack of faith, which he describes in terms of the Titanic rebellion that frames Spenser’s *Cantos of Mutabilitie*:

The Auncientes haue fayned that Gyantes aduanced themselues against God, to pull him out of his throne. Let vs omitte these fables: In very trueth you querulous and murmuring men be these Gyantes. For if it bee so that God doe not only suffer, but send all these things: then ye which thus striue and struggle, what doe you els but (as much as in you lyeth) take the scepter and sway of gouernment from him?¹⁰¹

In other words, by trying to parse out how each individual case of disorder—whether it be political rebellion or natural disaster—might fit into a Providential plan, we ourselves attempt to usurp from God the power to arrange events into meaningful order. Only by refusing the attempt to discern order amidst the chaos on our own and instead giving ourselves over to faith in Providence can we avoid assuming the role of rebel against the metaphysical order. For Lipsius, the ethics of Stoic self-abnegation understood in Christian Providential terms provides the only plausible way out of this dilemma. “[I]f thou looke vnto God and his Prouidence, all things succeed in a steddy and immoueable order.”¹⁰²

Does Spenser come to a similar conclusion? On the one hand, Dame Nature’s conclusion affirms Jove’s rule, which represents both metaphysical order and the ultimate rule of the divine, by affirming first what Lipsius himself identifies as Aristotelian natural fate. On the other, *Mutabilitie*’s genealogical claims to authority in the world continue to root the possibility of disorder in the material world and its phenomena. And the

101 Lipsius, *Constancie*, 104-5.

102 Lipsius, *Constancie*, 111.

“unperfite” eighth canto—of which only two stanzas remain—casts further doubt on Dame Nature’s conclusion. It does so not by directly undermining the *telos* itself, but by recasting it as the product of thinking:

When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare,
 Of Mutability, and well it way:
 Me seemes, that though she all vnworthy were
 Of the Heavn’s Rule; yet very sooth to say,
 In all things else she beares the greatest sway.
 Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
 And loue of things so vaine to cast away;
 Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
 Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I think on that which Nature sayd,
 Of that same time when no more Change shall be,
 But stedfast rest of all things firmly stayd
 Vpon the pillours of Eternity,
 That is contrayr to Mutabilitie:
 For, all that moueth, doth in Change delight:
 But hence-forth all shall rest eternally
 With him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:
 O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight. (7.8.2)

These stanzas turn Nature’s confident prophecy in Canto VII that “time shall come” into a matter of prayerful contemplation. The first stanza begins by establishing a complete shift in narrative perspective whereby cantos six and seven appear as an object for contemplation separate from the first person perspective of canto eight’s speaker: “When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare, / Of Mutability, and well it way: / Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were / Of the heavens Rule; yet very sooth to say, / In all things else she bears the greatest sway.” Mutability is unworthy to rule over all things—this much the speaker knows. But from the limited perspective of a single observer it’s

hard to say exactly why. The second and final stanza pushes back on the first, but finds comfort not in Nature's defense of Aristotelian teleology, but in the promise of restorative eschaton that necessarily lies outside the scope of representation: "Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd / Of that same time when no more Change shall be." The speaker can't lay claim to positive knowledge of this sort of perfection, but instead can only hope to see things from this perspective. Prayer and the optative mood merge in the famous concluding plea that God "grant me that Sabaoth's sight."¹⁰³ This stanza, too, is framed as a dialectic of thought: "Then gin I thinke." The end of the poem—such as it is—is the beginning of thinking.

Conclusion

In Book IV, praise of Chaucer's immutable greatness sits alongside a lament for the mutability of the material text. In the framework of the Venus of Apelles, echoed in the Spenserian text and affirmed in Speght's interpretation thereof, these views need not be mutually exclusive, as the unfinished and unfinishable work directly attests to the greatness of the artist. But in allowing for irrecoverable loss as a condition of poetic greatness and an engine of future innovation, the story decidedly cuts across any vision of the universe oriented hopefully toward perfection. By reconfiguring the metaphysical sense of "perfection" that Nature insists on instead as a personal, delimited experience of

103 For more on prayer and the optative mood in *The Faerie Queene*, see Suzanne Wofford, *The Choice of Achilles: The Ideology of Figure in the Epic* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), 246.

thinking, the conclusion to the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* pulls the teleology of perfection out of the realm of metaphysics and into that of epistemology.

One consequence is that the poem must abandon finally Book IV's attempt to construct a community of friends united by *agape*, "the bond of perfectness." In place of this ideal community united in agreement regarding the *telos* of human being and the practice of virtue, the poet leaves us with the picture of a moral universe that is, in Teskey's formulation, "quite indistinguishable from his mind."¹⁰⁴ Teskey's remark recalls Berger's claim that "[t]he concluding stanzas move beyond the vision" of cosmic order provided by cantos six and seven and "into the mind that has unfolded it and into the lyric moment evoked by that unfolding."¹⁰⁵ In redefining perfection as a matter of first-person perspective, the *Cantos* reconfigure our sense of the poem's ethical project and its historical relation to Aristotelian ethics. The lyric moment, as Berger would have it, is one that can make of positivistic moral claims nothing more than "a Marvellian stand-off": "The reader has no real conclusion in his hands. All he has is the disappearing poem."¹⁰⁶ By recasting the perfection on offer in *The Faerie Queene* as a mode of thinking, the poem effectively abandons the "work" of perfection as a property of "all things" and reconstitutes it instead as the "labour" of the poet. Instead of the virtuous community united by a shared sense of the common good, we're left with an image of the writer laboring alone.

104 Teskey, "Night Thoughts," 27. In his years-long study of Spenserian thinking, Teskey has argued of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* in particular that "the thinking being followed is an end in itself, rather than aiming at a destination that lies outside thought . . . What wants to go on is a non-teleological, multi-thematic interweaving of continual reflections on the world" ("Night Thoughts" (26)).

105 Berger Jr., *Revisionary Play*, 268

106 Rajan, *Unfinished*, 76.

Chapter Four

The Pieces of *Pericles*

Introduction

The central story of this dissertation began with a dare that everyone refused. John Harington reports—reviving a claim first offered by Cicero and elaborated by Pliny—than no one dared to finish the painting that Apelles began after the great artist passed away, preserving in the fragmentary work the unique signature of the Greek painter’s artistic genius. The present chapter begins with a different sort of dare—the inverse of that first, perhaps, though this one, too, is frequently refused. It comes from the prologue to George Lillo’s *Marina* (1738), an adaptation of William Shakespeare and George Wilkins’s *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (1607-8). On Shakespeare’s relation to the work, Lillo remarks:

We dare not charge the whole unequal play
Of *Pericles* on him; yet let us say,
As gold though mix’d with baser matter shines,
So do his bright inimitable lines
Throughout those rude wild scenes distinguish’d stand
And show he touch’d them with no sparing hand.¹

1 George Lillo, *Marina* (London, 1738), 2.

Because Apelles achieved artistic perfection, no one dared to touch the unfinished painting he left behind; conversely, because Shakespeare achieved artistic perfection, Lillo suggests, none of his cultural inheritors dared attribute to him in full a work that—“rude” and “base[.]”—was itself notably short of perfection. But even if “the whole” cannot be Shakespearean, Lillo says, certain parts of it might be admitted. This chapter argues that imperfection, which has supplied the parameters but not the substance of *Pericles*’s critical reception, bears a strong affinity to the play’s formal structure as well as its theatrical and cognitive procedures.

The Play of Part and Whole

In a certain sense, *Pericles* stands in odd relation to the Shakespearean corpus. The play appeared in print for the first time in a 1609 quarto edition published by Henry Gosson, in which the playtext itself was famously mangled. Although the first “bad” quarto clearly identified the work as a “late, [a]nd much-admired Play . . . by William Shakspeare,” *Pericles* did not appear in print alongside the rest of Shakespeare’s works until the second printing of the Third Folio in 1664.² David Scott Kastan points out that at the time Shakespeare’s First Folio was published in 1623, the publisher Edward Blount held printing rights to “The booke of Perycles, prynce of Tyre,” and the printer, Isaac Jaggard, had printed a quarto edition of the play just four years prior for another publisher. “Whatever caused the play’s exclusion from the folio,” Kastan deduces, “it

2 William Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London, 1664), title page.

cannot be an accidental omission; indeed, as all of the principals in the folio's publication were somehow involved with the play, its exclusion may well reveal their skepticism about the play's attribution to Shakespeare."³ Philip Chetwinde, the publisher of the 1664 edition, advertised the book as including "seven Playes, never before Printed in Folio," with such works as *The London Prodigal*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and the *Tragedy of Locrine* appearing alongside *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Yet the second issue of Chetwinde's edition merely sutured the "new" Shakespeare plays onto the previous printing and changed the title page, such that there remains no mention of *Pericles* in the table of contents. The play thus finds no home in any seventeenth-century edition within the influential generic taxonomy of comedy, history, and tragedy inherited from the First Folio. Moreover, all the plays that appeared in the supplement alongside *Pericles* have subsequently been rejected as authentic works of Shakespeare's. Even in the moment of its incorporation, *Pericles* remained marginal.

In another sense, though, the sort of imperfection that marred *Pericles* for early modern editors and booksellers casts its shadow across the whole of Shakespeare's work—however "whole" it can plausibly be said to be. The cultural construction of the Shakespearean corpus centered on an idea of corporeal wholeness at odds with the increasing awareness among editors, printers, and scholars alike of the problems that attended the transit of his plays from the stage to the bookseller's stall. In saying so, I am influenced by Sonia Massai's account of the problem of perfection in *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (2007). Surveying the use of the verb "to perfect" among early

3 David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (London: Routledge, 1999), 230n27.

modern printed playbooks, Massai notes that the term could mean both to complete—to supply what is missing—and to correct, with specific reference to the activity of early modern printers: “the process of transferring a manuscript work into print involved a specific stage during which an ‘vnperfect’ work was ‘polished’ and corrected.”⁴ Massai argues that in cases in which printers were merely annotating copy, the “perfection” of the text might be undertaken “even when the author was unavailable to act as the ‘exequutor of his owne writings.’”⁵ Where “completion” comes into view, however, things get more complicated. When “‘to perfect’ means ‘to supplement’ by means of additions supplied by a different agent,” Massai observes, “then the incomplete fragment is regarded as a preferable alternative.”⁶ The collocation of these different editorial activities within the vocabulary of perfection highlights just how difficult it might be, in certain cases, to discern where responsible editorial maintenance ends and the usurpation of the poet’s authorial voice begins. It’s in this sense, then, that the problematic, co-authored *Pericles*—which Lillo worries is “mix’d with baser matter”—merely magnifies a central problem that touches all of Shakespeare’s work: namely, the problem of discerning Shakespeare’s “inimitable lines” amid a clutter of textual imperfections.

We can begin to see the broader outlines of this problem in the most famous presentation of Shakespeare’s work: the 1623 First Folio. Here the veteran actors from Shakespeare’s playing company John Heminge and Henry Condell write in a letter to the reader of their efforts to overcome the difficulties of multiple playtexts, quarto editions,

4 Sonia Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.

5 Massai, *Rise of the Editor*, 8.

6 Massai, *Rise of the Editor*, 9.

and manuscript copies in circulation and deliver a Shakespeare as “perfect” as his name deserved:

It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to haue bene wished, that the Author himselfe had liu'd to haue set forth, and ouerseen his owne writings; But since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to haue collected & publish'd them; and so to haue publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diuerse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors, that expos'd them: euen those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceiued thẽ.⁷

Here Heminge and Condell reverse the typical reluctance to “perfect” the picture of the great artist by supplying its missing limbs. In the second chapter of this dissertation, we saw Richard Bellings worry over his prose continuation of Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* that “I have added a limme to *Apelles* picture; but my minde never entertain’d such vaine hopes, to thinke it of perfection sufficient to delude the eyes of the most vulgar, with the likenesse in the workmanship.”⁸ Published in Dublin in 1624, the year after the edition of Shakespeare appeared with Heminge and Condell’s letter, Bellings’s continuation of Sidney adamantly maintains that it was the great artist alone “whose Iudgment was only able to finish, what his Invention was only worthy to undertake.” This commonplace borrows from the vocabulary of irreparable textual loss that for the first generations of Renaissance humanism marked the encounter with classical authority, as when Petrarch

⁷ William Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Jaggard for Edward Blount, 1623), sig. A3r.

⁸ Richard Bellings, *A sixth booke to the Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (Dublin: Societie of Stationers, 1624), sig. A3r.

laments that the fragmentary corpus of Quintilian resembles “the dismembered limbs of a beautiful body.”⁹ By contrast, Heminge and Condell insist that they have restored the “maimed” and “deformed” copies of Shakespeare’s writings, which are now “perfect of their limbes.” Within the sphere of their editorship, they arrogate to themselves the ability to fill in the gaps authoritatively, even “as he conceived thẽ.” Whereas Belling’s reference retains for Sidney alone the capacity of poetic “judgment,” the paratexts of the First Folio find Shakespeare’s authorial judgment somewhat more broadly distributed.

Nevertheless, restrictions apply. As Massai notes, Heminge and Condell figure their activity in annotating the copy for print as central to the value of the folio edition: “it hath bin the height of our care, who are the Presenters,” they write in their dedicatory address to William and Philip Herbert, “to make the present worthy of your H.H. by the perfection.”¹⁰ Yet even here, with the authority Heminge and Condell claim for correction, they are careful to circumscribe their interventions in the text: “But, there we must also craue our abilities to be considerd, my Lords. We cannot go beyond our owne powers.” The text remains suspended, then, between the two senses of perfection that Massai detects in the practice of early modern textual editing: confidently claiming the perfection of the copy, but only insofar as the publishing agents are able without supplying missing pieces that only the author himself could provide. The problem significantly underlies the famous legacy of the First Folio. As Emma Smith wryly observes, “the Folio’s own claims to textual and corporeal perfection have haunted its

9 Francis Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Letters to Classical Authors*, trans. and ed. Mario Emilio Cozenza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), 27.

10 Shakespeare, *Comedies, Tragedies, & Histories* (1623), sig. A2v.

subsequent history.”¹¹ As early as 1627, owners of less good copies of the book were willing to pay a premium to trade up for one that was more “perfect.”¹² Smith’s account goes on to document amply the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century quests among connoisseurs, scholars, and bibliographers to find and acquire a “perfect” copy of the First Folio—where “perfect” once again seems to mean both “with nothing missing” and “with nothing extraneous added by unauthorized hands.” As Smith observes, “perfecting the book cannot, by definition, make it perfect.”¹³ Within the bibliographical concept of perfection itself, then, lies an interval of unbridgeable distance.

Lillo’s remarks from *Marina* with which this chapter began suggest that *Pericles*—perhaps owing to the same reasons for which it was excluded from the Folio—points up the problem of perfection that no single Folio copy ever successfully dispelled: to wit, the nagging sense that its formal imperfection could never be remedied without overstepping the boundaries of mere textual correction. While unwilling to charge “the whole” play to Shakespeare’s representation owing to its unevenness, nevertheless Lillo insists that certain “inimitable lines” bear the authoritative mark of Shakespeare’s own hand. But which ones? And how should we know? Lillo’s judgment decides only that those parts belong to Shakespeare which could not have been imitated by anyone else. The manifest impurities of the play are what precisely make it, to paraphrase the attribution studies of MacDonald P. Jackson, the ideal “test case” for “defining Shakespeare.”¹⁴ Stephen Orgel affirms that it is precisely because of its “firm if

11 Emma Smith, *Shakespeare’s First Folio* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 285.

12 Smith, *First Folio*, 287.

13 Smith, *First Folio*, 299.

14 MacDonald P. Jackson, *Defining Shakespeare: Pericles as Test Case* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

anomalous place in the Shakespeare canon” that the play “offers a good index to what, historically, has been seen as authentically Shakespearean.”¹⁵ In its mixture of pure artistic accomplishment and the impurity of other hands, *Pericles* exemplifies the problems of authorship and intention that all Shakespearean texts have become subject to in the minds of booksellers, collectors, and modern scholars alike. For this broader problem, the Venus of Apelles—which in its imperfection was so full of the perfection of the painter’s accomplishments, that no one dared to finish it—serves as a fitting emblem.

Critics usually phrase the problem of *Pericles*’s imperfections in terms of part and whole. In 1709, Nicholas Rowe—long acknowledged as the first Shakespearean editor, and an important doubter of the play’s Shakespearean authorship—noted that “Mr. Dryden seems to think that *Pericles* is one of [Shakespeare’s] first plays, but there is no judgment to be formed on this, since there is good Reason to believe that the greater part of the play was not written by him, tho’ it is own’d that some part of it certainly is.”¹⁶ Defenders of the play, too, have recourse to the same terms. Victorian critic Edmond Malone—best known for identifying Shakespeare’s later works as “romances” and grouping them together based on a “mature” late style—notes of *Pericles* in particular that “the whole piece appears to me to furnish abundant proofs of the hand of Shakespeare. The inequalities in different parts of it are no greater than may be found in

2003).

15 Stephen Orgel, “Introduction,” in William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New York: Penguin, 2001), xxxi.

16 Qtd. Brian Vickers, Shakespeare, *Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford, 2004), 291.

some of his dramas.”¹⁷ G. Wilson Knight comments that “whatever we think of certain parts, the whole, as we have it, is unquestionably Shakespeare’s.”¹⁸

More recent criticism, too, assumes the play’s divisibility into worthy and unworthy parts. “Because large parts of the play, particularly the first two acts, seem to critical readers so obviously defective and crude, both in style and in dramaturgy,” writes F. David Hoeniger, “we may be surprised by the evidence that in Shakespeare’s own time and for a generation after, the play was highly popular.”¹⁹ Offering modern criticism’s most full-throated defense of the problematic 1609 Quarto edition of the play, Hoeniger goes on to claim that “although the original has been badly distorted in some places, the Quarto does not obscure for us the very character and style of large parts.”²⁰

Neither are the play’s problematic parts limited to local cruxes and lacunae. Infelicities suffuse issues of plot structure, character, and dramatic technique. George Steevens, another early critic, found in *Pericles* “little more than a string of adventures so numerous, so inartificially crowded together and so far removed from probability, that, in my private judgment, I must acquit even the irregular and lawless Shakespeare of having constructed the fabrick of the drama, though he has certainly bestowed some decoration on its parts.”²¹ Apologizing for these deficiencies on the assumption that Shakespeare was merely finishing a work begun by a different playwright, Steevens acknowledges that

17 Qtd. Vickers, *Co-Author*, 292.

18 G. Wilson Knight, “The Writing of *Pericles*,” in *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare’s Final Plays* (1947; repr. New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 75.

19 F. David Hoeniger, “Gower and Shakspeare in *Pericles*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33:4 (Winter 1982), 461.

20 Hoeniger, “Gower and Shakespeare,” 463.

21 George Steevens, “The Rebuttal,” in *Pericles: Critical Essays*, ed. David Skeeel (London: Routledge, 2000), 45.

“[p]artial graces are indeed almost the only improvements that the mender of a play already written can easily introduce.”²² For both the play’s skeptics and its supporters, then, *Pericles*’s reception history is inseparable from the problem of part and whole.

I argue that *Pericles* itself takes a keen interest in parts of things. The play routinely confronts both audiences and characters within the play with pieces of text and chunks of dramatic activity that, isolated from context, seem to demand careful discernment. Among the play’s favorite terms for part of a whole is “piece,” and that is the vocabulary I will prefer. Some examples constellate around the figure of Marina. For instance, when Marina’s birth at sea appears to result in the death of her mother, the nurse Lychorida invites Pericles to “take in your arms this piece / Of your dead queen.”²³ Later, when Marina is forced into prostitution, Bolt’s customary term of objectification for her is “piece”—as in, “Master, I have gone through for this piece, you see: / if you like her, so; if not, I have lost my earnest” (4.2.40-41). And when Lysimachus encounters Marina in a brothel, suspecting but not yet realizing her royal lineage, he remarks that “[t]hou art a piece of virtue, and / I doubt not but thy training hath been noble” (4.6.116-17). Royal inheritance and favorable lineage hover in the background as the wholes of which Marina is merely an as-yet-indeterminate piece. In these and a variety of other ways I will further illustrate, the play regularly invites us to consider what relationship the piece bears to the whole that comprises it; how and indeed whether many pieces can ultimately compose a

²² Steevens, “The Rebuttal,” 45.

²³ William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, The Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series, ed. Suzanne Gossett (London: Thompson, 2004), 3.1.17-18. All references in parentheses throughout are to this edition, other editions noted specifically when cited.

whole; how a whole might decompose into—or merely be reframed as—a number of pieces.

My goal in telling this story is not to recast bibliographical weakness as dramatic strength, a charge often leveled at critics who attempt holistic evaluations of this piecemeal production.²⁴ The play's habit of thinking in pieces may, in fact, not be an effective dramatic strategy. As Amelia Zurcher notes, "[t]he play frequently leaves contemporary dramatic representation to revert to older forms such as narration (by Gower), dumbshow, and emblematic tableaux."²⁵ Suparna Roychoudhury characterizes the effect as one near to sea-sickness: the play's "pastiche of pageants, dumb shows, riddles, and divine visitations makes for a sort of sloshing narrative rhythm."²⁶ But delineating this seriatim structure as a habit of thinking can help throw into relief some of the challenges that inhere in making sense out of this or any play. Central both to the story the play tells and the manner in which it tells it, I will maintain, is the problem of discerning larger context or meaning from mere parts or pieces—a problem that the play also suggests is essential to the work of dramatic spectatorship.

A secondary claim emerges from the method I pursue. I hope to illustrate how early modern accounts of synecdoche can help illuminate the interpretive challenge that *Pericles* poses by staging riddles, epitaphs, dumb shows, disconnected scenes, and

24 Sidney Thomas objects to Hoeniger's theory that the first two acts are largely Shakespearean; see his essay "The Problem of *Pericles*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34:4 (Winter 1983), 448-50.

25 Amelia Zurcher, "Untimely Monuments: Stoicism, History, and the Problem of Utility in *The Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*," *ELH* 70:5 (Winter 2003), 917. See also Clare Preston, "The Emblematic Structure of *Pericles*," *Word & Image*, 8:1 (Jan.-Mar. 1992), 21-38.

26 Suparna Roychoudhury, "Mental Tempests, Seas of Troubles: The Perturbations of Shakespeare's *Pericles*," *ELH* 82:4 (Winter 2015), 1028.

apparently unrelated actions. Dubbed by George Puttenham the figure of “Quick Conceit,” synecdoche is a device for suggesting wholes from parts or parts from wholes.²⁷ The figure has a storied history in the study of late Shakespeare, though not one that has been closely tied to *Pericles*. Speaking of Shakespeare’s late style in general, Russ McDonald has noted the coincidence of syntactical devices of elision and compression at the level of the sentence and, at the level of plot, the introduction of temporal gaps and geographical leaps. “We might say that Shakespeare is attempting something like a synecdochic style, one in which the whole meaning is taken from the part,” McDonald offers.²⁸ I build on this enticing observation by suggesting that *Pericles* gives us unique insight into the challenges the synecdochic style poses both to audiences and to traditional accounts of the play’s relation to moral and cultural authority. The fact that *Pericles* figures only marginally in this critical conversation owes, as Raphael Lyne explains, to the fact that “it is not included in the 1623 First Folio edition, which casts circumstantial doubt on its centrality in any account of Shakespeare’s work.”²⁹ But as I have already suggested, to exclude *Pericles* on this basis would be to exclude it for the same reason it might prove useful in thinking through the problematic relationship between pieces, parts, and wholes.

In particular, elaborating these challenges brings into view a significant revision of the role critics have assigned to Gower as the play’s official “moral interpreter.”³⁰

27 George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 315.

28 Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare’s Late Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 85.

29 Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare’s Late Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55.

30 Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 145. Felperin’s work remains highly influential. Related approaches interpret Gower as a patrician literary

Scholars have long seen in Gower an atavistic effort to reign in the semiotic sprawl of the stage. Jeffrey Masten argues that Gower's speeches "attempt to define or constrain the meaning of the spectacle he stages."³¹ Simon Palfrey similarly emphasizes the audience's "relative passivity" with respect to Gower's narrations and the dumb shows he orchestrates.³² "We watch and hear but do not participate," Palfrey continues.³³ Ultimately, construing the figure of Gower as one who effectively legislates the play's meaning conduces to a view of the play as an exercise in the genre of the morality play, in which "virtually everything . . . is subordinated to a didactic purpose."³⁴ I take a different approach, proposing to read with, rather than against, Gower's pleas for the participation of the audience, drawing on early modern accounts of synecdoche to give definition to the cognitive labor of the audience's participation. The isolated bits of text and dramatic action that Gower presents are the primary vehicle through which the play underscores the fact that it is only in the imagination of the audience that the various pieces of the drama may cohere. By deferring meaning to the judgment of the audience, the play undermines the claims to moral instruction that Gower simultaneously issues. In the final section of the chapter, the bibliographical definition of imperfection dovetails with Gower's role as cultural authority. I suggest that Gower's relation to cultural authority within the play derives not from his ability to secure meaning definitively, but

authority. On Gower as an extended literary allusion engaging the *Confessio Amantis*, see David Hillman, "Shakespeare's Gower and Gower's Shakespeare: The Larger Debt of *Pericles*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36:4 (Winter 1985), 427-37.

31 Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 76.

32 Simon Palfrey, "The Rape of Marina," *Shakespearean International Yearbook* 7 (2007), 142.

33 Palfrey, "Rape of Marina," 142.

34 Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance*, 174.

to suggest it synecdochically through fragments, pieces, bits of text, and other “indices of deterioration,” to borrow Kurt Schreyer’s evocative phrase.³⁵

Standing in the Gaps

In telling this story, the present chapter continues to develop the broader argument of my dissertation that encounters with fragments, unfinished works, and mere pieces serve as occasion for authors of the early modern period to reconsider perfection as a mode of thinking. In chapter two, Sidney’s partisans in print (especially Greville) locate the possibility of perfecting the text in Sidney’s mind, rather than in the virtuous activity of his readers as Sidney’s own *Defence* suggests they ought; in chapter three, *The Faerie Queene* retreats from the idea that an ordered cosmos provides context for the perfection of virtue, and instead locates this possibility in the mental labor of the poet. In this chapter, *Pericles* assigns this task not to the mind of a single poet—the play doesn’t have one, and neither does its approach to any of its major thematic interests suggest that sort of wholeness or singularity—but to the minds of the assembled audience. The play further takes up the question of moral cultivation and its relation to poetic value, a central obsession that Sidney and Spenser’s romances inherited from the humanist tradition in which the imitation of classical texts was supposed to confer both eloquence and virtue. In the prologue, the medieval poet Gower is revived to speak on behalf of a notion of poetic value that must seem itself somewhat stuffy—or “mouldy,” to use Ben Jonson’s

³⁵ Kurt Schreyer, “Mouldy Pericles,” *Exemplaria* 29:3 (2017), 212.

epithet for the play—in the context of the Shakespearean stage: that “[t]he purchase” of the play “is to make men glorious” (1.Chor.9).³⁶ *Pericles* refracts this old defense of poetry through the particular lens of theater. Gower concludes with a commonplace proper to the stage: the determination of value ultimately lies with the audience: “What now ensues, to the judgment of your eye / I give, my cause who best can justify.” In part by emphasizing the synecdochic substitution of eye for critical faculty, the play marks a turn from ethics to epistemology: from the cultivation of virtue to the representation of modes of thinking. The play’s synecdochic habit of thinking in pieces accords with this approach, since it defers to the perspective of the observer the activity of judging whether and how the pieces add up to a whole.

Perhaps the most famous articulation of this model of spectatorship in Shakespeare’s corpus appears in choral prologue to Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, to which I turn briefly before returning my focus to *Pericles*. Shakespeare’s *Henry V* employs the same vocabulary—not only “piece,” but also “perfection”—to talk about the collective enterprise of making meaning in the theater:

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
 The brightest heaven of invention,
 A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
 And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
 Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
 Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
 Leash’d in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
 Crouch for employment. But pardon, and gentles all,
 The flat unraised spirits that have dared
 On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
 So great an object: can this cockpit hold
 The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram

36 Ben Jonson, “Ode to Himself,” in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin, 1975), 160.

Within this wooden O the very casques
 That did affright the air at Agincourt?
 O, pardon! Since a crooked figure may
 Attest in little place a million;
 And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
 On your imaginary forces work.
 Suppose within the girdle of these walls
 Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
 Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
 The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder:
 Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
 Into a thousand parts divide on man,
 And make imaginary puissance;
 Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
 Printing their proud hoofs i'the receiving earth;
 For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
 Carry them here and there; jumping o'er the times,
 Turning the accomplishment of many years
 Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
 Admit me Chorus to this history;
 Who prologue-like your humble patience pray
 Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.³⁷

The prologue is justly famous for its reflections on the formal devices of the theater. It begins by apologizing for the meager tools of dramatic representation. The first few lines culminate in begging “pardon” for “the flat unraised spirits that have dared” to bring onto the small space of the platform stage “so great an object” as the famous battle of Agincourt. Most literally, however, the prologue apologizes for the fact that the play isn’t the world. In order to fairly represent a kingdom, the players would need “[a] kingdom for a stage”; in order for an actor to adequately Prince Harry’s “warlike” qualities, the actor would need actually to be Prince Harry; then the actor would merely have to be “like himself.” The latter problem is not strictly speaking incompatible with theater.

37 William Shakespeare, *Henry V* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Baker et al. (New York, Houghton Mifflin, Act 1, Prologue.

Granted, Prince Harry is dead by 1599. But if Shakespeare or some other playwright had chosen to depict a living monarch, it's not impossible that he could have gotten the actual figure for the role. The former problem, however, directly implicates the devices by which theater compresses the world into the form of characters, events, and staged scenes—that is, the strategies plays use to divide up the unrepresentable whole of the world into more manageable pieces. It is this problem that *Pericles* will render more palpable than any other of Shakespeare's works.

Since the theater is smaller than the whole world, it must represent the latter with parts that stand in for the whole. The prologue from *Henry V* goes on to phrase the problem of theater's relation to the world as one of scale and number. “[C]an this cockpit hold / The vasty fields of France?” the chorus wonders. At issue here is that the representational tools of the theater are fundamentally synecdochic. Early modern rhetoricians understood synecdoche to involve both the representation of wholes by way of parts as well as the opposite order of operations: synecdoche may just as well involve a whole standing in for many parts. The chorus observes the same rules for theater and is quite specific about the mental labor required on the part of the audience to fulfill this mimetic strategy. It works in two directions: both expansion and compression. Just as a “crooked figure” may “attest in little place a million,” so the audience is invited to imagine thousands of soldiers for each one who appears onstage: “into a thousand parts divide on man.” At the same time, the chorus asks the audience to “turn[] the accomplishment of many years” into “an hourglass.” Here the chorus might as well be describing the episodic structure and chronological leaps of *Pericles*: “For ‘tis your

thoughts that now must deck our kings, / Carry them here and there; jumping o'er the times." Ultimately, the chorus collects the many faults of the theater—that it is smaller than the world; that it contains fewer people; that its duration in time is far shorter than that of human history—under the category of “imperfections.” The magic of theater takes place only when the audience willingly plays along, performing the mental work of perceiving the whole that is intended by each part: “piece out our imperfections with your thoughts,” the prologue ultimately implores.

But the work required to “piece out” synecdochic figures is, after all, work. It poses challenges; it takes time; it might remain incomplete. Among early modern rhetoricians, George Puttenham emphasizes the cognitive challenge posed by rhetorical figures that require on-the-fly reconstruction of wholes from parts and vice versa. If Shakespeare's choruses routinely identify the swiftness of imagination in carrying plays from scene to scene, or from one disparate action to another—“Carry[ing] them here and there; jumping o'er the times”—Puttenham's account of synecdoche clarifies the challenge that such imaginary activities pose. “[W]e call him Quick Conceit,” Puttenham writes of this figure, “because he inured in a single word only by way of intendment or large meaning, but such as was speedily discovered by every quick wit, as by half to understand the whole.”³⁸ Puttenham goes on to worry that synecdoche introduces interpretive challenges that “encumber the mind” and thus compromise the speediness of wit that the device itself seems to call for.

38 Puttenham, *Art*, 315.

Synecdoche, on this account, is an especially good model for the making of meaning in dramatic poesy, and *Pericles* an especially synecdochic play. Critics have noted similarities between *Pericles*'s Gower and the Choral Prologue in *Henry V*, but have generally been dismissive of the idea that the two figures share a similar theory of dramatic poetry. As Howard Felperin puts it, "[i]n none of these precedents [such as *Henry V*] is the main function of the Chorus moralistic and didactic."³⁹ Felperin produces a moralistic *Pericles* in part by introducing a sharp distinction between Gower and the Henry V Chorus. By contrast, I suggest that Gower's role expands upon, rather than steps back from, the theory of drama articulated in *Henry V*'s Prologue, thereby undermining—or at least unmooring—the “moralistic and didactic” purpose that traditional accounts such as Felperin's attribute to Shakespeare's later play. *Pericles* goes out of its way to demonstrate how the kind of interpretation required by dramatic poetry is especially near to the kind of interpretation that rhetoricians from Quintilian to Puttenham attribute to synecdoche.

Pericles stages the problem of interpretation and understanding by ceaselessly introducing its own lacunae, puzzles, inscrutable dumb shows, and assorted other interpretive cruxes. Beginning with the opening scene, the play foregrounds the spectacle as well as the results of interpretive spectatorship. The play begins with a riddle, read aloud from a piece of paper that the actor can see but the audience cannot. Both Gower's prologue and Antiochus's speech and actions emphasize the potential “danger” of failing to construe this riddle correctly (1.1.2). Critics note that the presence of the heads of

³⁹ Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance*, 145.

previous suitors lining the city walls exaggerate the stakes of interpretation to an almost impossible degree: “deathlike dragons here affright thee hard,” Antiochus says, before the stage directions have him point to the heads (1.1.30). He emphasizes that Pericles’s attempt to court his daughter merely replays a scene that has taken place many times before, with bitter result: “Yon sometime famous princes, like thyself . . . with dead cheeks advise thee to desist” (1.1.35-40). With Pericles having “scorn[ed]” his advice, Antiochus reiterates the stakes of the riddle, “[w]hich read and not expounded, ‘tis decreed / As these before thee, thou thyself shalt bleed” (1.1.57-59). As Amy J. Rodgers has recently argued, the “emphasis Gower places on the grisly spectacle of the beheaded suitors coincides with his relinquishing of narrative control, imbricating the audiences first unmediated experience of the play’s action—the place where narrative and specular immersion could commence—with a visual spectacle seemingly designed to invoke horror and discipline in equal parts.”⁴⁰ Rodgers associates the framing of the opening riddle with the stern, moralistic figure that Felperin imagines.

If this is a scene of synecdochic interpretation, Pericles displays more than enough of the “quick conceit” that Puttenham says belongs to the success of this trope. Antiochus indeed attributes Pericles’s solution of the riddle to his unique cunning: “Heaven, that I head thy head! He has found the meaning” (1.1.110). Pericles recognizes the answer immediately, and his figurative language seems to suggest the audience must as well: “O you power,” he exclaims, “That gives heaven countless eyes to view men’s acts, / Why could they not their sights perpetually / If this be true which makes me pale to read it?”

40 Amy J. Rodgers, *A Monster with a Thousand Hands: The Discursive Spectator in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 90.

(1.1.73-5). Whereas Antiochus earlier placed the onus of interpretation on Pericles's "eye" in the singular, Pericles's revelation immediately opens up to the "countless eyes" of "heaven" that "view men's acts."

The metaphor of heaven's countless eyes is conspicuously metatheatrical, indicating the countless eyes of the spectators assembled in the Globe theater. By attributing to the spectators heavenly powers of discernment, *Pericles* straight away includes them in the community of those who immediately see through the riddle. Of course, the audience already knows the answer because Gower has already announced Antiochus's crime. The interpretive labor for the audience is not in solving the riddle, exactly, but the pleasure of searching within its cryptic images for where they can supply the answer they already possess. Far from "disciplining" the audience's response, the scene introduces the audience to interpretation as a collaborative—possibly even pleasurable—kind of work.

In the choral interjections interspersed throughout the play, Gower continues to invite the audience to correct the "gaps" that appear between the different scenic and narrative pieces that the play—daringly, or perhaps just casually—assembles (4.4.8). Thus it is through the figure of Gower that *Pericles* takes the apology for drama's imperfections in *Henry V*'s Prologue and distributes it across the play's entire structure. When Pericles is shipwrecked, Gower enjoins the audience to imagine what cannot be contained within the space of the stage: "In your imagination hold / This stage the ship, upon whose deck / The sea-tossed Pericles appears to speak" (3.Chor.58-60). Like *Henry*

V's Chorus, Gower consistently engages the audience in the work of piecing out what cannot spatially fit within the scope of the stage.

Gower's requests for auxiliary cognitive efforts from the audience become less specific and even more deferential as the play's temporal frame expands. At the beginning of act four, after Pericles has left his daughter Marina in the care of Cleon and Dionyza in Tarsus, Gower steps in to advance the plot ahead through the baby's childhood and young adulthood. This kind of leap is of course not unfamiliar in Shakespeare's romances. In *The Winter's Tale*, a chorus identified in the casting list as Time specifically names a "wide gap" of "sixteen years" between when Perdita washes ashore on the "deserts of Bohemia" and when she meets and subsequently marries Polixenes's son Florizel.⁴¹ But Gower is a less diligent time-keeper than Time. In *Pericles*, no time frame is specified as the play jumps forward.

After describing how Marina was "by Cleon trained / In music's letters" and gained from her education "all the grace, / Which makes her both the heart and place / of general wonder" (4.Chor.7-11), Gower advances the plot further to the point at which Marina's beauty and skill begins to overshadow the marriage prospects of Philoten, daughter to Cleon and Dionyza, thereby attracting the queen's jealous ire:

The unborn event
I do commend to your content,
Only I carry winged time
Post on the lame feet of my rhyme
Which never could I so convey
Unless your thoughts went on my way (4.Chor.45-50).

⁴¹ William Shakespeare, *The Winters Tale*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, eds. Baker et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 4.1.6-7; 3.1.2.

Much as *Henry V*'s Chorus acknowledges that the audience's "thoughts" alone "must deck our kings, / Carry them here and there" (Chor.28-9), Gower figures the "feet" of his own poetic language as that which "carr[ies]" time itself within the play, wanting the "thoughts" of the audience to make up its insufficiency every step of the way. "Lame feet" denotes the units of prosody that distinguish Gower's representational duties from the play's diegesis—since he typically speaks in tetrameter—even as it metaphorically distinguishes the plodding of poetic device compared to time's inimitable career. "Rhyme," then, performs a synecdochic function: not merely the sounds that end Gower's lines but indeed the full repertoire of representational techniques proper to dramatic poetry is found to fall short of "convey[ing]" the entirety of the events depicted in the play. Gower lays bare the unbridgeable gap between poetry and the event it mimetically records specifically by noting the temporal gap between different pieces of the play. He points out that only the audience's thoughts can supply the remainder.

As the pieces of the play grow more temporally and geographically distant, Gower's efforts to suture them together are no longer confined to the prefatory space of the choral prologue. Acts two through four begin with a speech from Gower, but in act four he appears not only at the beginning of the act but in scene four as well. Here he comments on how the play's whiplash transitions from one disparate location to another require representational techniques of compression—"Thus time we waste and long leagues make short"—consonant with synecdoche: such that "cockles" stand in for whole "seas" (4.4.1-2). Almost as if he senses the strain of attention and imagination required of

the audience has become a burden, Gower importunes the audience to “learn of me, who stand i’ th’ gaps to teach you / The stages of our story” (4.4.8-9).

At the same time, however, Gower’s figurative language suggests that the spectatorial work of piecing together the disparate elements of the story has merged with the diegesis of the play. “[T]hink his pilot thought,” he says, interpolating the thought of the audience directly into the space of the pilothouse on the ship that bears Pericles from Tyre back to Tarsus to retrieve Marina many years—possibly sixteen, possibly more—after having left her there. “So with his sternage shall your thoughts go on / To fetch his daughter home” (4.4.18-20). While Gower claims to “teach” the audience, it is their thoughts, ultimately, that fulfill the actions of the play and pilot the ship.

As Suzanne Gossett notes in the Arden 3 edition of the playtext, Gower’s description of thought’s swiftness—“long leagues make short”—recalls *Henry V*. Both plays “associat[e] imagination, theatre and swift movement.”⁴² Gossett cites in particular the Chorus to the third act of *Henry V*: “Thus with imagined wing our swift scene flies / In motion of no less celerity / Than that of thought.” Gower takes up these themes again in act five, after Pericles and Marina have recognized one another after years of despairing separation. From the coast of Mytilene, where Marina has lately been delivered from the perils of a brothel and found favor with the governor, Lysimachus, the play must swiftly bear the hero to Ephesus, where Pericles’s wife Thaisa, unbeknownst to him, has determined to live out the rest of her days serving as a vestal priestess in the temple of Diana.

⁴² *Pericles*, 343fn19.

At this point in the play, one more recognition scene awaits to restore the play's central figures. But, as Gower acknowledges, the players are running out of time to make all these things happen: "Now our sands are almost run, / More a little, and then dumb" (5.2.1-2). The swiftness of the audience's thoughts carries the play over the gap to its by-now inevitable conclusion:

The interim, pray you, all confound.
In feathered briefness sails are filled,
And wishes fall out as they're willed.
At Ephesus the temple see
Our king and all his company.
That he can hither come so soon
Is by your fancies' thankful doom. (5.2.14-20)

"Interim" here points to the same mimetic deficiencies that "gap" names above. It's up to the audience to defeat—or "confound"—the problem posed by such limitations.

"Feathered briefness" coordinates what *Henry V* calls the "imagined wing" of spectatorial participation with the temporal limit of theatrical production. Gower concludes by reminding us that all this can happen so swiftly only with the "thankful doom"—or judgment—of the assembled spectators.

Gower's role throughout the play, then, is to condense larger wholes into smaller parts and connect mere parts to coherent wholes, and he customarily invites the audience to participate in his labors. His activities in this respect can be illuminated by the rhetorical tradition of synecdoche. The classical rhetorical tradition identifies synecdoche as the figure in which a part stands in for the whole or *vice versa*. In the *Ad herennium*, pseudo-Cicero writes that

Synecdoche occurs when the whole is known from a small part or a part from the whole. The whole is understood from a part in the following:

“Were not those nuptial flutes reminding you of his marriage?” Here the entire marriage ceremony is suggested by one sign, the flutes. A part from the whole, as if one should say to a person who displays himself in luxurious garb or adornment: “You display your riches to me and vaunt your ample treasures.”⁴³

The *Ad herennium* seems to indicate that the interval of interpretation that brings the hearer from the signal of the piece of clothing to the broader interpretive understanding of material wealth and social status is one that happens almost instantaneously and automatically. At least, pseudo-Cicero does not dwell on the cognitive labor involved therein.

Later accounts of the figure begin to dwell on just this problematic aspect of synecdoche, however. Quintilian introduces some doubt about the need for the collaboration of the orator’s audience:

[W]hile *metaphor* is designed to move the feelings, give special distinction to things and place them vividly before the eye, *synecdoche* has the power to give variety to our language by making us realise many things from one, the whole from a part, the *genus* from a *species*, things which follow from things which have preceded; or, on the other hand, the whole procedure may be reversed. It may, however, be more freely employed by poets than by orators It is where numbers are concerned that *synecdoche* can be most freely employed in prose. For example, Livy frequently says, “The Roman won the day,” when he means that the *Romans* were victorious; on the other hand, Cicero in a letter to Brutus says, “We have imposed on the people and are regarded as orators,” when he is speaking of himself alone. This form of *trope* is not only a rhetorical ornament, but is frequently employed in everyday speech. Some also apply the term *synecdoche* when something is assumed which hasn’t actually been expressed, since one word is then discovered from other words, as in the sentence, “The Arcadians to the gates began to rush.” When such omission

43 *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 4.33

creates a blemish, it is called an *ellipse*. For my own part, I prefer to regard this as a figure, and shall therefore discuss it under that head.⁴⁴

Quintilian's example of the use of synecdoche to expand or condense a certain number of figures is strikingly consonant with Shakespeare's account of dramatic signification in the Prologue to *Henry V*, right down to the specific problem of designating large military units through singular figures. While Quintilian agrees with pseudo-Cicero that the signification of synecdoche in the proper sense happens with immediate force—the figure simply “mak[es] us realise many things from one”—he begins to gesture toward problems that might appear in this procedure.

Specifically, the distinction between *synecdoche* and *ellipse* at the end of the passage papers over the problem that the part and whole relation proper to synecdoche may introduce interpretive uncertainty. What happens when what is meant by the synecdochic figure “hasn't actually been expressed”? What happens when the part-to-whole conversion requires something like interpretation? For Quintilian, the figure then becomes a different device altogether and is therefore properly deferred to another place in the taxonomy of rhetoric. As we have already seen, however, *Pericles* inherits the understanding of synecdoche shared by Puttenham and others, according to which the cognitive work that Quintilian here attempts to exclude from the figure's purview are, in fact, central to its meaning-making capacities.

In fact, for Puttenham, synecdoche is at its core a figure that suggests something that hasn't actually been expressed:

⁴⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.6.19.

Then again, if we use such a word (as many times we do) by which we drive the hearer to conceive more, or less, or beyond, or otherwise than the letter expresseth, and it be not by virtue of the former figures *metaphor* and *Abaser*, and the rest, the Greeks then call it *synecdoche*, the Latins *subintellectio* or understanding. For by part we are enforced to understand the whole; by the whole, part; by many things, one thing; by one, many; by a thing precedent, a thing consequent; and generally one thing out of another by manner of contrariety to the word which is spoken: *aliud ex alio*. Which because it seemeth to ask a good, quick, and pregnant capacity, and is not for an ordinary or dull wit so to do, I chose to call him the figure not only of conceit after the Greek original, but also of quick conceit. As for example, we will give none because we will speak of him in another place, where he is ranged among the figures sensible appertaining to clauses.⁴⁵

Signifying the whole by expressing the part is a specific species of a broader rhetorical maneuver by which authors signify “one thing out of another”—that is, by which we say something other than what we mean. Puttenham’s sense of how this works in practice is somewhat difficult to pin down in this passage. On the one hand, Puttenham suggests something of the automatic nature of the signification that seems to hold in the *Ad herennium*: he says the reader is “enforced” by synecdoche to understand the part from the whole. If the work of signification is “enforced,” no mistakes can be made. No ellipse can fail to be closed, to borrow Quintilian’s alternative label for what happens if a synecdoche fails to hit home. And yet the vocabulary of “enforce[ment]” suggest a kind of difficulty in the work of piecing out the imperfections of synecdoche—in particular, the overcoming of readerly resistance or hesitation. Above all, Puttenham presents the problematic aspects of synecdoche in terms that recall the accounts of fragmentary

45 Puttenham, *Art*, 270.

authority throughout this dissertation. Synecdoche invites us to “conceive more” than the mere part, with the challenge of having to go “beyond . . . what the letter expresseth.”

Critics have commented on the importance of synecdoche and the related trope of metonymy to theories of sovereignty in Shakespeare’s plays as well as to Shakespearean tragedy more generally.⁴⁶ In further linking synecdoche to the imaginative experience of theater, I am entering into a healthy tradition of scholarship on Shakespeare’s figures of speech. Raphael Lyne in particular focuses on the importance of synecdoche to Shakespeare’s representations of cognition. As Lyne notes, “the part/whole dynamic is basic to how memory is seen to work by contemporary psychology.”⁴⁷ In Lyne’s account, the type of cognition that belongs to Shakespeare’s rhetorical figures usually resides in individual characters or at least the actors playing them. “The question that separates one cognitive critic from another is sometimes ‘whose cognition?’” The three options Lyne surveys are reader, author, and character. It is due to this framework, perhaps, that Lyne, though sensitive to the mechanisms and broad importance of synecdoche, fails to give a compelling account of the figure’s relation to theater. My reading of *Pericles* focuses more on the question of the audience’s cognition than Lyne does. Furthermore, where Lyne emphasizes the swiftness of the process by which synecdochic cognition takes place, I understand Puttenham’s account of the figure to introduce more uncertainty to the question of whether the audience is, after, all quick enough of wit to keep up.

46 Huw Griffiths, “Sovereignty, Synecdoche, and the Prosthetic Hand in *King John*,” *Exemplaria* 28:1 (2016), 21-43; Jonathan Baldo, “Ophelia’s Rhetoric, or Partial to Synecdoche,” *Criticism* 37:1 (Winter 1995), 1-35.

47 Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 33.

Indeed, Puttenham elsewhere emphasizes the potential for confusion and misinterpretation by classifying synecdoche as a kind of allegory. Synecdoche falls under the broader practice, well noted in early modern rhetoric, of saying one thing and meaning another—*aliud ex alio*. Here Puttenham expands on his earlier suggestion that synecdoche accomplishes its representational ends through a certain kind of “force”:

I will remember you farther of that manner of speech which the Greeks call synecdoche, and we the Figure of Quick Conceit, who for the reasons before alleged may be put under the speeches allegorical because of the darkness and the duplicity of his sense. As when one would tell me how the French king was overthrown at St. Quentin, I am enforced to think that it was not the king himself in person, but the Constable of France with the French king’s power. Or if one would say the town of Antwerp were famished, it is not so to be taken but of the people of the town of Antwerp. And this conceit being drawn aside and, as it were, from one thing to another, it encumbers the mind with a certain imagination what it may be that is meant, and not expressed. As he that said to a young gentlewoman who was in her chamber making herself ready, “Mistress, will ye give me leave to unlace your petticoat,” meaning perchance the other thing that might follow such unlacing. In the old time, whosoever was allowed to undo his lady’s girdle, he might lie with her all night: wherefore the taking of a woman’s maidenhead away was said “to undo her girdle.” *Virginiam dissoluit zonam*, saith the Poet, conceiving out of a thing precedent, a thing subsequent. This may suffice for knowledge of this figure Quick Conceit.⁴⁸

The “enforcement” of readerly understanding through synecdoche is certainly no longer automatic or simple; rather, Puttenham associates it with the “darkness and duplicity” of allegory. The kind of force proper to synecdoche “encumbers” the mind, suggesting labored cognition rather than the swiftness of thought that Gower and Henry V’s Chorus plead for. Puttenham emphasizes that the figure is called Quick Conceit, then, not because it operates quickly, but because it requires the reader to do so.

48 Puttenham, *Art*, 279-80.

But what if the gaps between scenes and the temporal disjunctions that riddle the play posed interpretive challenges that the audience could not keep up with? Parts that it cannot go “beyond” to discover the whole? Even as *Pericles* invites the audience to collaboratively “pilot” the ship of the drama, the play seems to recognize—and even toy with—the possibility that cognition might lag behind action. I note two scene changes in particular. Act one of *Pericles* takes the audience through a dizzying sequence of locales, from Antioch, where Pericles hears the riddle read aloud that sets the entire plot in motion, to Tyre, and thence to Tarsus in quick succession. Only, it doesn’t happen quite that smoothly. In act one scene two, in Tyre, Pericles receives advice from Helicanus that he must flee further afield to avoid capture by Antiochus. Pericles announces Tarsus as his next destination, apparently flagging the upcoming scene change: “Tyre, I now look from thee then and to Tarsus / Intend my travel (1.2.113-4). The next scene, however, begins by announcing that in fact we’re staying in Tyre awhile longer: “So this is Tyre,” says Thaliard, a goon hired by Antiochus to track down the play’s eponymous prince, “and this the court” (1.3.1). The audience expects Tarsus, but gets a different location. By supplying directions both for Pericles’s next step and then flagging that the play itself is not yet prepared to follow him, the play tacitly acknowledges the potential for misinterpretation in the gaps.

Shakespeare does this elsewhere, too, when scene changes introduce gaps of plausibility. “Thou art perfect then, our ship hath touch’d upon / The deserts of Bohemia?” Antigonus asks a mariner at the beginning of act three in *The Winter’s Tale*, such that the line registers both diegetically as a bit of dialogue and as a winking address

to the audience (3.1.1). In *Pericles*, such gaps compound. In some instances, extradiegetic signaling seems even to introduce misdirection and confusion. Later in the play this possibility is toyed with almost as if to maximize the potential for disorientation. While Pericles and Thaisa are on their way back to Tyre to reclaim Pericles's rule from those who would crown the loyal Helicanus, "[t]he grizzled north / Disgorges such a tempest forth / That, as a duck for life that dives, so up and down [their] poor ship drives (3.Chor.47-50). After Thaisa dies in childbirth, Pericles orders the ship to make for the nearest coast: "O, make for Tarsus! / There will I visit Cleon, for the babe / Cannot hold out to Tyrus" (3.1.75-5). The new scene that immediately follows this announcement, however, takes us not to Tarsus but to Ephesus, a new location altogether, as yet unfamiliar to the audience or any of the characters so far introduced within the diegesis of the play. Announcement of this shift is delayed in scene two: not until forty lines in does a gentleman clarify the location by addressing Cerimon: "Your honour has / Through Ephesus poured forth your charity" (3.2.43). While the play's opening scene drains any real risk from the interpretive challenge posed to the audience by revealing the answer to the riddle beforehand, these outlandish and misleading scene changes serve as a tool within the play for exposing the potentially cumbersome challenge of piecing together the various set pieces and time pieces that the play offers to its audience.

Neither does the play restrict its attention to this problem to the extra-diegetic margins. *Pericles*, perhaps better than any other play, exemplifies the critical commonplace that Shakespeare's later works in particular either abandon or deliberately explode the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action as prescriptions for dramatic

poetry. With its episodic temporal structure, loose concatenation of locales, and dumbshow interludes, the play is in many respects easier to view as a collection of set pieces rather than a coherent whole. While Gower's prologues provide one of the primary vehicles in the play for exposing the imperfect seams of dramatic representation, the characters too acknowledge how unlikely it is that the outlandish collection of pieces represented by their experiences over the course of the play should cohere into any sort of whole. After Marina and Pericles are restored to one another in the last act, Pericles begs to hear her story retold so he can understand where it is she's come from and how it is she got here. Marina replies, "[i]f I should tell my history it would seem / Like lies disdained in the reporting" (5.1.113-4). Marina defaults on the question because the variety of her experience exceeds the decorous prescriptions of mimetic representation, or "like[ness]."

Staging Bibliographical Imperfection

Pericles is, in the words of Barbara Mowat, an "exceedingly bookish play."⁴⁹ Various sorts of texts and textual fragments circulate throughout the play, from Antiochus's riddle read aloud from a piece of paper in the opening scene to the letters and other documents at the heart of Gower's dumb shows; from the letter of identification that Pericles buries with his wife Thaisa at sea to Marina's epitaph composed by the sinister Dionyza. These

49 Quoted in Rodgers, *A Monster with a Thousand Hands*, 88.

texts invariably give rise to interpretive challenges. “Apollo, perfect me in the characters,” prays Cerimon, when he encounters one important bit of text drifting free from its context (3.2.65-6). In *Pericles*’s almost casual collection of free-floating pieces of text, the theatrical definition of imperfection derived from *Henry V*—in which the audience must imaginatively fulfill the synecdochic figures of the stage—dovetails with the bibliographical definition of imperfection that proves central to the play’s own problematic relationship to the Shakespearean corpus. At the center of the play’s thinking about drama and theater lie pieces of paper and bits of text that it falls to the audience to organize into significance.

I suggest, then, that the play may be read as an extended meditation on the problem of discerning authoritative meaning from scraps of text and pieces of paper. The synecdochic procedures of interpretation to which the play invites its viewers apply to the bibliographical problem as well. Much as the play challenges its audience to imaginatively reconstruct a meaningful whole out of isolated sequences of dramatic action and disparate set pieces, the possibility of the integrity of the play as a text turns out to lie not with the author(s), nor with their various editors, but with those assembled to observe the action unfold. Like *Pericles* itself, the story Smith tells about the search for the perfect First Folio is a typical romance in that the restoration of something lost motivates the plot but is always, in the end, deferred.⁵⁰

Indeed, scholars of theater history have employed the term “part” to describe what *Pericles* affirms both in its dramatic structure and its performance of textual mediation:

50 On the indefinite deferral of closure in romance, see especially Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

that the whole we call “a play” is nothing other than a collection of pieces. As Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern persuasively argue *Shakespeare in Parts*, what we think of as the whole of the published playtext in fact takes shape through the concatenation of various “parts” distributed to individual actors, a practice that continued into the nineteenth century. “Jagged, reduced, apparently lacunal,” they observe, “the handwritten part offered possibilities that the full text did not.”⁵¹ In particular, they contend that Shakespeare’s “part-based understanding and experimentation led to remarkable innovations in creating subjectivity and engineering dramatic effect.”⁵² The observation that *Pericles* offers to this paradigm through its synecdochic approach to meaning as a theatrical principle and bibliographical problem is not that the play can never exist as a whole because of its piecemeal construction, but rather that the whole always exists on the horizon suggested by fragmentary texts and sketched in imaginatively by the audience.

Furthermore, *Pericles* stages again and again the way in which the mimetic imperfections of theater and the imperfections of textual fragments and pieces are more intimate than has been allowed by scholars who have emphasized the competition of theater and printed playbook. I have in mind here Lukas Erne’s influential argument that “short” theatrical texts began to compete with “longer” literary texts as the culture and marketing of printed books progressed over the course of the seventeenth century. *Pericles*, from its anomalous position in the corpus, suggests a different way to theorize the relationship between ephemeral theatricality and graphic media. Theatrical interest in

51 Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2

52 Palfrey and Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*, 12.

or investment in texts need not focus on longer texts or whole plays; rather, as *Pericles* shows, one way that texts and textuality might help constitute the mode of meaning-making particular to theater is precisely through forms of imperfection—as bits, parts, or pieces that circulate, command attention, and require interpretation or explanation precisely because they are not part of some contextual whole. Since *Pericles* itself circulated only in a “bad” quarto edition, Erne’s well-known reframing of “good” and “bad” quartos in Shakespeare’s publication as “literary” and “theatrical”—that is, as cultural objects fashioned with readership versus spectatorship in mind—leaves once again only a marginal place for the play of Shakespeare’s that is perhaps most concerned with the circulation and interpretation of texts.⁵³

The possibility of *Pericles* as a commentary on bibliographical lacunae and the mediation of literary authority is suggested from the opening prologue, in which a long-dead author is reconstituted from “ashes” with the promise of a “restorative[.]” “read[ing]” of an ancient text (1.Prol.2-9). Gower further leverages indicators of cultural authority to raise the stakes of the opening scene in which Antiochus puts Pericles’s interpretive skills on trial. Gower declares himself “ancient” (1.Chorus.2) while clearly understanding antiquity to be a cardinal feature of cultural authority, as suggested in the form and content of the aphorism *Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius* (1.Chorus.10). He further announces the mediation of his own authority through the voices of still more distant cultural antecedents: “I tell you what mine authors say” (1.Chorus. 20).

⁵³ Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp 220-44.

In the opening scene, Antiochus and Pericles both add to the frame of cultural authority that Gower has begun to construct around the problem of the riddle. Before the actress playing his daughter comes onstage, Antiochus constructs an image of her from the cloth of Greek mythology and English literary history alike, borrowing from Sidney the figure of the “senate house of planets” that “knit in her their best perfections” (1.1.11-12). These references need not have registered precisely in order for the audience to feel that the play is offering itself in this moment as a kind of text. Pericles fulfills the trajectory of these commonplaces when he calls “[h]er face the book of praises, where is read / Nothing but curious pleasures” (1.1.16-17). The idea that Antiochus’s daughter is a book to be read works in two directions simultaneously at this moment. Reaching back to Gower’s prologue, Pericles’s literary metaphor proposes an analogy between Antiochus’s daughter and the play itself—which Gower says has been “read . . . for restoratives” (1.Chorus.8). The scene thus puts the audience’s capacity to keep up with the play’s gaps and riddles on trial at the same time.

The similarity of the interpretive problems posed by play and Antiochus’s daughter is further suggested by the first person form of the riddle itself. While Pericles is handed a piece of paper to read and proceeds to read the riddle aloud, the first person subject of the riddle is Antiochus’s daughter herself—“I am no viper, yet I feed . . .” (1.1.65); “I mother, wife, and yet his child” (1.1.70). The fact that this is staged as a scene of reading is significant: Antiochus—or even his daughter—could have merely recited the riddle. What the audience sees onstage at this moment is Pericles holding and reading from a piece of paper: the “I” of the riddle indicates both Antiochus’s daughter and the

piece of paper itself. The scene of an actor reading aloud from a piece of paper that perhaps looks something like a player's part yields a further link between the diegetic crisis of interpretation that Pericles the dramatic hero faces and the extra-diegetic interpretive responsibilities of dramatic spectatorship faced by *Pericles*'s audience. In both situations, the piece of text, isolated from its broader context, invites—perhaps even imposes—the possibility of a restorative reading.

If Gower presides over those moments where the play's essential disunity yields to the imaginative labor of the audience, he further serves as a kind of index for similar crises of textual interpretation that litter the world of the play along with its pages. This happens most notably through the dumb shows that preface each act and that, by act four, begin to insinuate themselves into the center of the action. Critics disagree about his efficacy in this role. For Felperin, Gower's dumb shows revive the role of the interpreter found frequently in medieval forms of drama. His purpose is to "revive a moribund dramatic mode, whose romantic materials and didactic methods were inseparable and harmonious."⁵⁴ More recently, critics have found precisely the opposite tendency in Gower's interventions. While Amelia Zurcher acknowledges the play's investment in "earlier theatrical forms such as dumbshow," she finds a tension between the play's supposed efforts to "make men glorious" and its interest in fragments of medieval culture: "*Pericles* may have attempted to bring Gower's text momentarily to life, but the source's dumbness, its obdurate pastness, trumps any contemporary representation, turning the characters themselves toward the past and folding the play in on its own

⁵⁴ Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance*, 130

form.”⁵⁵ One claim holds that the fragments of literary history are resources that exist in essential “harmon[y]” with a pedagogy aimed at cultivating virtue. The other insists that these same fragments of cultural material resist translation to any kind of useful knowledge. As I see it, the dumb shows do instruct, and they do indicate useful knowledge, but it is the knowledge of interpretive skill—of the kind of “quick wit” that Puttenham ascribes to the success of synecdoche—that they offer to teach, rather than any didactic morality.

In the template established by the opening scene, most such instances in the play constellate around a text that is either read aloud or changes hands silently, from Antiochus’s riddle to Helicanus’s letters and Marina’s epitaph. As Jeremy Lopez has recently demonstrated, the dumb show is a technology of theater well-suited to theorizing the relationship between text and theater. Lopez argues that early modern dumb shows represent “a threshold between drama (a play as textual artefact) and theatricality (the quality of experience a play provides live and in real time).”⁵⁶ As Lopez explains, dumb shows “vividly represent not only the contest between text and performance for authority over theatrical meaning, but the tendency of each to displace this authority onto the other.” While *Pericles* does not figure into Lopez’s argument, Gower’s dumb shows vividly illustrate a tension that Lopez finds in the preservation and transmission of dumb show more broadly: namely that “this most theatrical, or most embodied, of early modern theatrical conventions is necessarily transmitted to us in densely textual form.”⁵⁷ The

55 Zurcher, “Untimely Monuments,” 119-20

56 Jeremy Lopez, “Dumbshow” in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 292.

57 Lopez, “Dumbshow,” 293.

paradox of the dumb show is that precisely because it consists of mute action it is the element of early modern theater most dependent on text. A monologue consists both in the words in the playtext as well as the actor's gestures and intonations. But a dumb show by definition exists only as a textual account of action. Because it has no words, the dumb show is all the more hemmed in by the words that record it.

At the same time, Lopez observes that "what is recorded in this densely textual form often seems to some extent redundant in . . . the words and action of the play itself." Lopez argues that because dumb shows almost always appear alongside explanations of the action contained therein, they are essentially redundant with respect to plot. The redundancy points to an effort to control meaning: Lopez locates the redundancy of dumb shows within a "super-communicative" early modern theater, in which the redundancy of dumb show distributes meaning "across a fragmented audience wherein different sections will understand only what is directed at them."⁵⁸ "The peculiar inefficiency of dumb shows—a redundancy that cannot be explained solely by the play's expository demands—is fully constitutive of their form and function." For Lopez, the inefficiency of dumb show is "born of early modern dramatists' desire to go beyond mimesis, not only sundering the link between action and word, but attempting to put them back together in the form of the theatre's shadow: the text." If the dumb show is redundant because of the text, it's also in a sense dignified by the text. Stern, for example, argues that stage directions historically "described instructions for dumb action that were too bad to be

⁵⁸ Lopez, "Dumbshow," 296.

authorial.”⁵⁹ The dumb show, then, is not just a description of action on stage, but authorial description.

The first dumb show that Gower introduces parodies dumb shows’ superfluity. “What need speak I?” Gower asks, since the “tidings” he has to share are brought directly before the viewers’ eyes, while the dumb show that follows—in line with Lopez’s claims—proceeds to demonstrate nothing more than the need for further explanation from Gower. Gower introduces the dumb show by explaining that Pericles has rescued Tarsus from famine, and he is understandably held in high regard: there “each man / Thinks all is writ he spoken can”—that is, everyone in the city accords his words an authority equivalent to that of holy scripture (2.Chor.11-2). The figure also serves, however, to point up a division between speech and the written word, and slyly points up the way action is constrained by text. Pericles can’t speak anything other than what has been written.

The citizens of Tarsus have also memorialized Pericles’s deeds with a monument: “[T]o remember what he does,” Gower says, they have built a “statue to make him glorious” (2.Chor.13-4). The citizens of Tarsus, in short, try to convert the tools of theater—words and actions—into the more durable media of text and sculpture, first by imagining Pericles’s speech as writing and then by trying to preserve his actions—“what he does”—in the form of a statue. Gower’s words further recall his description of the play from the opening prologue: “The purchase”—or value—of the play “is to make men

59 Tiffany Stern, “Inventing Stage Directions, Demoting Dumb Shows,” in *Stage Directions in Shakespearean Theatre*, ed. Sarah Dustagheer and Gillian Woods (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), 19.

glorious” (1.Chor.9). The echo suggests additional competition between the media proposed by the citizens of Tarsus for making men glorious and the one offered by Gower and Shakespeare himself.

The dumb show, when it arrives, itself is inscrutable not because action needs an explanation but because text without context means nothing. The action is hardly difficult to follow or interpret. Pericles and Cleon enter at one door; a “Gentleman” (2.Chor.19)—later revealed to be Helicanus, and presumably recognizable to the audience even here—enters from another door and hands Pericles a letter. Pericles shows the letter to Cleon, rewards Helicanus, and exits. The only piece of information that’s missing is what the text says.

Gower continues to playfully enact the competition between text and action in the conclusion of the chorus. Winding up his narrative of how Pericles has been stranded by a storm at sea, he gestures toward the actor entering the stage: “And here he comes. What shall be next, / Pardon old Gower: this ’longs the text” (2.Chor.39-40). “Longs” here provides a unique aural ambiguity. Early editors such as Steevens interpreted the phrase as a self-deprecating joke on Gower’s part: “thus long is the text,” where the deictic “thus” might point to a theatrical part that Gower could be holding in his hands on stage. Gower begs pardon because the text he holds supplies only so much information and he can offer the audience no more detailed report. His gesture indicates where the text breaks off. As the Arden 3 editor notes, the other possibility is that “longs” means “belongs to”: “text” then means not Gower’s part, but to the rest of the drama that is about to unfold. The aural crux illuminates the tendency of dumb shows’ theatrical and

textual authority to defer or collapse into one another. The unfolding of the rest of the plot does indeed belong to the rest of the play, but as Gower's joke simultaneously indicates, all the other actors are just as constrained as he is by the lengths of their respective parts.

This example illustrates significant weaknesses in the argument that Gower is the play's moral guide who centralizes interpretation, authorizes meaning, or stabilizes the audience's engagement with the play. The lacuna in the middle of the dumb show is not a dramatic gesture that requires authoritative explanation, but a text whose content and context remain unclear. While Gower himself can relate the contents of the letters, he is at pains to show also how he himself is constrained by texts in multiple directions. First, he is constrained by the fragmentary length of own part, which allows him to provide only that small portion of the play's meaning allotted to him: "thus long's the text." He is further constrained by the text that makes up the rest of the play, to which the remainder of the scene belongs: "this 'longs the text" are two illustrate two halves of the same problem. The fact that Gower's text is ultimately merely a piece of a larger whole is exactly why the remaining action and the fulfillment of its meaning will continue to belong to the remainder of the play. That "text" denotes both the part and the whole cannot be merely coincidental in this play of part and whole.

"[T]his 'longs the text" further gives way to an example of the synecdochic nature of cultural authority that the play itself might be said to embody. I refer to the fragmentary piece of armor recovered by Pericles after his shipwreck on the shores near Pentapolis. The scene, which appears immediately after the first dumb show, at the

beginning of act two, finds the play's hero in dire straits. "[B]ereft . . . of all his fortunes," with "nothing to think on but ensuing death," Pericles is suddenly adrift in human society (2.1.7-9). He hails some nearby fishermen with a bit of pleasant condescension—"Peace be at your labour, honest fishermen"—but they either fail or refuse to recognize his greeting as that of a social superior, replying in jest, "Honest! Good fellow, what's that?" (2.1.51-2).⁶⁰ When Pericles attempts to explain his dire situation, they to interrupt him with more jokes:

Pericles: May see the sea hath cast upon your coast—
 2 Fisherman: What a drunken knave was the sea to cast the in our way!
 Pericles: A man, whom the waters and the wind
 In that vast tennis-court hath made the ball
 For them to play upon, entreats you to pity him. (2.1.55-60)

Pericles's restoration comes into view when the fishermen pull a piece of "rusty armour" from the water (2.1.115). Immediately Pericles gives thanks to "Fortune" that "[t]hou givest me somewhat to repair myself" (2.1.117-8); he then hastens to court, where, bearing the newly recovered armor, he expects to be recognized as "a gentleman" (2.1.127). Despite—or perhaps because of—the armor's ill repair, Pericles immediately hails its discovery as "somewhat to repair myself." It is, as he says, "part of [his] heritage."

Pericles's identification of the armor introduces further uncertainty with regard to exactly what parts of the armor have been recovered. He says that his father called the armor "a shield" between life and death—invoking a metaphorical connotation of "shield," but one that is immediately confused by the material part that Pericles gestures

⁶⁰ In the Arden edition, Suzanne Gossett cites William Empson to the effect that "honest" here "may retain a touch of patronage." *Pericles*, 228fn51.

to onstage in the following line, when he says his father “pointed to this brace.” The dissonance between the material signifier of the prop and the metaphor of the shield is underscored by the gesture of pointing. Pericles’s father pointed to the brace, while Pericles’s the deictic “this” indicates simultaneously the actor’s gesture of pointing to a prop that, whatever it may actually be, has to look from the audience’s perspective at least as much like a “brace” as the armor itself initially looks, to the fishermen, like a fish. The ambiguous piece of armor is further obscured in its material specificity when Pericles later refers to it as a “coat of worth” and then immediately says it was “sometime target to a king,” with “target” here referring to a type of shield.

Too rusty perhaps to fend off blows, too materially ambiguous to be clearly legible by anyone in the community of the play—let alone in the audience—the piece of armor nevertheless serves its purpose in “repair[ing]” Pericles’s shipwrecked fortunes. As soon as the piece is recovered, Pericles asks the fishermen to “guide me to your sovereign’s court, / Where with it I may appear a gentleman” (2.1.136-7). Having recovered a mere “part” of his inheritance from his father, Pericles manages to leverage the piece of armor to recover the whole of his socially privileged “heritage.” The signifying function of the piece of clothing here perhaps recalls the example of synecdoche in the *Ad herennium* in which pseudo-Cicero defines the trope as, “[a] part from the whole, as if one should say to a person who displays himself in luxurious garb or adornment: “You display your riches to me and vaunt your ample treasures.”⁶¹ The idea that a piece of “luxurious garb” immediately suggests broader reserves both of

61 *Ad Herennium*, 4.33

material wealth and the metaphorical wealth of social status illustrates how clothing such as Pericles's armor may have an especially intimate affiliation with the rhetorical procedure of synecdoche.

In the play, the piece of rusty armor stands in for Shakespeare's literary inheritance as well as Pericles's royal lineage. As the Arden edition notes, the fact that the armor is rusty is crucial to the intertextual reference established in the scene. Shakespeare and Wilkins's play draws primarily on Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, last published in 1554, and perhaps more immediately on Lawrence Twine's *The Patterne of Painfull Adventures* (1576).⁶² Yet neither of these versions of the story names its protagonist "Pericles." Shakespeare's reference in the play's namesake seems to point toward Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and the various and extensions adaptations it enjoyed, including the recent play *Mucedorus*. In the *Arcadia*, Pyrocles is similarly shipwrecked; he, too, trades specifically on ruinous condition of his armor as a sign of authority. When Pyrocles appears anonymously at a tournament, he wears "armour of as old a fashion (besides the rusty poorness) that it might better seem a monument of his grandfather's courage."⁶³ The armor's fragmentary condition is precisely what renders it a figure of authority—a "monument"—both within the diegesis of the play and within the structure of the playtext as a literary object. Shakespeare bears his piece of Sidney just as Pericles bears the piece of his father's armor: as a part that stands for a broader cultural history; as

62 Jeffrey Masten notes that Twine's work was published in at least two subsequent editions, one of which was just a year before Shakespeare and Wilkins's play was registered for publication in 1608. See Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 76.

63 Quoted in Arden edition, 234n115.

a fragment whose very deterioration marks the accumulation of cultural authority. Here Pericles discovers what the play *Pericles* also broadly gestures toward: namely, the capacity of the fragment to generate the kind interpretive response proper to synecdoche.

The play's habit of thinking in pieces invites a revaluation of the relationship between the fragmentary work and the wholes of which it is a piece: the whole play, and the constant production of its meaning through set pieces, but also the whole of the authorial corpus and its production through bits of texts and cultural fragments like Pericles's armor. In this sense, the terms of classical and early modern rhetoric that illustrate the routes of cognition from part to whole help to illuminate the pervasive sense among critics that the play is plagued by fragments. Jonson, of course, referred to the play as "mouldy *Pericles*." Lytton Strachey famously deprecated it as a "miserable archaic fragment."⁶⁴ Among modern critics, Palfrey refers to the hero of the play himself as "the sharded remnant of a lacunal text."⁶⁵

Critics further note the generative potential of the play's fragmentary qualities. Commenting on the play's treatment of tombs in particular, Kurt Schreyer's recent article notes that in *Pericles* it's often the case that "indices of deterioration" function simultaneously as "prostheses of *auctoritas*."⁶⁶ Lowell Duckert describes the environment of Pericles as "a site of richness and rot at once" that might "resemble resurgence sometimes, decay the next."⁶⁷ Steven Mullaney has in fact made the case for the

64 Lytton Strachey, *Books and Characters: French and English* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922), 65.

65 Simon Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare: A New World of Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 57.

66 Kurt Schreyer, "Moldy *Pericles*," *Exemplaria* 29, no. 3 (2017), 212

67 Lowell Duckert, "Pericles's Deep Ecology," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 59:2 (Spring 2019), 369.

centrality of *Pericles* to modern notions of authorship on the basis of its fragmentary narrative qualities and representational techniques, finding in the play exemplary proof that “[Shakespeare’s] corpus is grounded not in a univocal perspective but in a multiplicity and heterogeneity of voices, an incorporation and appropriation of a wide range of alternative and marginal perspectives.”⁶⁸ For Mullaney, the play represents a signal moment in the genealogy of modern authorship because of its capacity to organize a number of disparate parts and cultural practices under the aegis of a single literary authority, thereby obscuring the economic and social embeddedness of cultural practices eager to appear timeless. The play itself is actively engaged in thinking through these possible relations.

As I have argued, the piece and the broader problem of composition it suggests bear a deep affiliation with the dramatic texture of the play itself, as well as the history of its generation as a playscript. (The difficulties that it presents for stage productions as a result are well noted.) Critics observe that the dramatic prologues common to Shakespeare’s more episodic works often originated with later print publications rather than original performances. But in the case of *Pericles* this framing device recurs throughout the play: Gower reappears in each act as if to suture the pieces of the text into some kind of whole. Building on Mullaney’s reading of the play’s synecdochic relation to its multifarious cultural roots—its tendency to condense whole traditions of popular theater into singular figures—Jeffrey Masten imagines Gower himself as a synecdochic figure, argue that “[i]f the figure of Gower works to embody the play’s numerous pre-

68 Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 180

texts under one authorial ‘habite,’ his speeches also attempt to define or constrain the meaning of the spectacle he stages.”⁶⁹ Gower’s choral interludes and the dumb shows that he frames form a crucial component of the play’s synecdochic understanding of dramatic poetry. Just as Gower synecdochically suggests many texts by one figure, Masten’s reading further opens up the possibility of a synecdochic dispersal of interpretation to achieve this effect: “Gower’s speeches . . . frequently dwell on the necessity of audience collaboration in the spectacle he ostensibly supervises.”⁷⁰

Act three’s dumb show emphasizes the congruence between dumb show itself and Gower’s broader synecdochic apology for dramatic representation by enlisting the support of the audience to reassemble the pieces of the drama into the “perfect” whole that it claims to point toward.. “Be attent,” he enjoins the audience, “And time that is so briefly spent / With your fine fancies quaintly eche [ie., eke]” (3.Chor.11-13). The dumb show here performs in miniature the same type of dramatic problem that Gower constantly reminds us the play itself suffers from: specifically, that it is too “brief” to fully contain the actions it represents, and that it requires the audience’s imaginative participation—“fancies,” here—to eke out the broader meaning. Gossett provides another echo from *Henry V*: “eke out our performance with your mind,” the chorus pleads in the earlier play (3.Chor.35).⁷¹ Gower drops his playful joke from the first dumb show and allows that “what’s dumb in show I’ll plain with speech” (3.Chor.14). But there’s another joke this time: the action is almost exactly the same as the previous dumb show. Once again, all

69 Masten, *Textual Intercourse*, 76.

70 Masten, *Textual Intercourse*, 77.

71 *Pericles*, Gossett ed., 272fn13

that takes place is that actors representing the play's characters enter the stage, exchange a letter, share its contents with one another, and then leave the stage again. What's "dumb"—that is, in need of being made "plain"—is not the show but the text. Gower proceeds to defer meaning back to the rest of the play: "action may / Conveniently the rest convey" (3.Chor.55-6). But in fact the task lies in the minds of the audience—"in your imaginations hold," Gower asks immediately hereafter—to imagine what the rest of the "text"—however construed—can convey (3.Chor.57).

In the third and final dumb show, Marina's epitaph replaces Helicanus's letters in the established pattern of Gower's dumb show presentations. This time, Gower reads the text in question aloud and in full. In doing so, he returns us to Antiochus's riddle and the opening scene of the play. The dumb show has more resonance with this scene than with the other dumb shows that precede it—in particular, because the audience already knows exactly what the text indicates even though the play seems to regard its contents as mysterious. In the first scene, any mystery about the solution to Antiochus's riddle—i.e., that he is incestuously involved with his daughter—has already been vitiated Gower's prologue, which plainly tells us what Pericles himself realizes with little difficulty. In act four, Gower promises to "reconcile" the audience's "ears" and "eyes"—that is, to complete mere spectacle with speech. But we already know what is about to happen. We know that Cleon and Dionyza believe Marina to have been killed by the assassin Leonine. We know that they have composed her epitaph and planned to cover up her murder as an accident. Moreover, we know that both Pericles's earnest "true old woe" and Cleon and Dionyza's "borrowed passion" are misplaced because Marina is, in fact,

still alive. Much as the play's opening scene appears both to heap dire urgency onto the scene of theatrical interpretation even as it evacuates any real challenge to the faculties of the audience, the final dumb show makes sport of the idea that the audience is in need of an interpreter. Instead, as the play increasingly realizes, it is the interpreter who needs the audience.

I have tried to illustrate so far how *Pericles* collects a variety of different pieces—theatrical parts, disconnected settings, bits of text—and both invites and theorizes the cognitive work required on the part of the audience to interpret them, or to “confound” the gaps between them. I further began with a survey of a variety of critics who over the long course of the play's reception history have understood the play's divisibility into parts to be both a central feature of the play and a sign of its artistic inferiority, as when Steevens called it “little more than a string of adventures . . . so inartificially crowded together and so far removed from probability” that even the “lawless Shakespeare” cannot be accused of having organized the whole even if one must allow that he “bestowed some decoration on its parts.” In the final recognition scene, Marina, Pericles, and Helicanus each remarks on the length of the string of adventures that has brought them thus far, as well as on the essentially improbability that any of these disparate pieces of experience could be linked together. Their exchange shows that the critique of the play as a collection of too-disparate pieces is embedded in the play itself.

At the beginning of act five, Pericles's ship reaches the shore of Mytilene, where Marina has lately escaped from the brothel with the aid of Lysimachus, governor of Mytilene. Lysimachus boards the vessel, and when Helicanus tells him that the king of

Tyre is aboard but unable to speak due to grief, Lysimachus wonders, “Upon what ground is his distemperature?” (5.1.25). “’Twould be too dedious to repeat,” Helicanus replies, with a nod toward the audience and the long series of adventures they have had to string together, carrying Pericles from one coast to another. The impossibility of repeating all that has transpired—all that the audience has witnessed and possibly even followed—becomes something of a running joke in the scene. Lysimachus asks again, “Yet once more / Let me entreat to know at large the cause / of your king’s sorrow” (5.1.56-8). But even to know it in brief—let alone at large—were too great work of explanation. Helicanus says he will tell the story, but welcomes with comic eagerness the entrance of Marina as an excuse to leave off: “Sit, sir; I will recount it to you— / But see, I am prevented” (5.1.58-9).

In this scene, the structure of dumb show overtakes the mimetic texture of the play. Marina and Pericles appear at the end of the play much as Gower appears at the end of the dumb show to comment on what has just transpired. Pointing out the improbability of the story the audience has just witnessed, Marina responds to Pericles’s questioning about her life story that “If I should tell my history it would seem / Like lies disdained in the reporting” (5.1.113-4). If the play worked like a didactic dumb show that could effectively constrain meaning for a fragmented audience, this would be the point at which the restoration of the lost daughter at the end of the romance would coincide with the restoration of dramatic spectacle and textual stability. Instead, both characters remark on the impossibility of taking it all in from any one perspective

Articulating the dizzying array of his own misfortunes, Pericles remarks that, if Marina's story contains "the thousandth part / Of my endurance," then she is "a man / And I have suffered like a girl" (5.1.130-2). And once she starts describing the coincidences between her personal history and Pericles's knowledge of his daughter, he calls it "the rarest dream that e'er dulled sleep / Did mick sad fools withal" (5.1.156-7), inviting a consideration of the play's own manifold improbabilities. When Pericles asks Marina for yet another confirming piece of evidence—that she supply her mother's name—he still struggles to accept the coherence of her story, although he acknowledges that "in the rest you said / Thou hast been godlike perfect" (5.1.199-200). Here Pericles names precisely the ideal condition—for its texts, characters, and assorted formal devices—that lies on the horizon of the "restorative[]" reading that the play suggests but defers to its audience to fulfill.

Conclusion

In their letter to the readers of the 1623 First Folio edition of Shakespeare's *Comedies, Tragedies & Histories*, Heminge and Condell purport to offer the late Elizabethan playwright's works "perfect of their limbes," once and for all "cur'd" of the deformities and disfigurations that so many competing editions had introduced. In doing so, they project an idealized version of the authorial corpus free from textual imperfections. In the historical vocabulary they employ, the echo of Pliny's story about the unfinished painting of Venus rising from the sea supplies an image of literary authority suspended between

the idea of a corpus as a unified whole and the contingent, fragmented matter of the text.

In this sense the painting is a fitting emblem for Shakespeare and Wilkins's play, which is everywhere plagued by the problematic relationship between part and whole, between the textual fragment and restorative reading. Its exclusion from the First Folio is indicative of this problem as well. A fragmentary text with a fragmentary hero at its center, *Pericles* dramatizes the bibliographical imperfection that must be excluded to secure the perfect whole of the Shakespearean corpus.

Coda: Further Time

In the preceding chapters I have argued that late Elizabethan and early Jacobean writers renovated for their own purposes a problem first articulated by Renaissance humanists of the early and middle parts of the sixteenth century. The problem was that the texts of classical antiquity were supposed to contain models of poetic achievement that embodied the essential unity of poetic form and moral instruction, and yet these texts themselves often proved incomplete, unreliable, or otherwise defective. To the ideal version of the text they projected onto the past, humanists gave the name “perfect”; to the fragments they held in hand, “imperfect.” The writers who emerged from the humanist schoolroom, however, increasingly observed the overlap between these categories, attaching both prohibitive authority and generative potential to the artistic fragment and attending to the epistemological affordances of decay, unfinishedness, and accidental loss. Whatever instructive potential lies in their work must proceed from the implicit realization among these writers that thinking is not, as Ficino once argued, “incorporeal and simple,” but always suspended between idea and matter—inseparable from the process of narration; attached to the materials of reading and writing; embedded in habits of spectatorship.¹

While the writers, editors, and commentators surveyed in the preceding chapters generally affirmed their commitment to the ideal of literary perfection even as they

¹ Marsilio Ficino, “Five Questions Concerning the Mind,” trans. Josephine L. Burroughs, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 204.

undermined it by embracing forms of unfinishedness, Francis Bacon's work marks a decisive break from the ambivalent response to humanism's investment in the perfection of the classical corpus that I have so far illustrated. It is to his unfinished prose romance the *New Atlantis* to which I turn as I aim, however provisionally, to bring this narrative to a close. For Bacon, perfection is not only a paradoxical ideal, fraught from within, but is in fact a deleterious framework and an impediment to thinking. I want to suggest in this brief coda that when the *New Atlantis* concludes abruptly with William Rawley's note that "[t]he rest was not perfected," this is no mere accident of bibliography but in fact congruent with Bacon's long-standing interest in overturning the humanist ideal of perfection.²

Bacon's revision of the humanist and scholastic traditions emerges as a key theme of the extensive secondary literature on Bacon's role in the origins of scientific modernity.³ Recent studies on the intimacy of Bacon's scientific and literary activities have emphasized how early modern theories of poesis, the mediation of print culture, and the insights of philology influenced Bacon's implicit critique of humanism.⁴ Scholars further note the important role that forms of the unfinished—from his aphoristic prose style to his open-ended experiments—play in Bacon's approach to knowledge making.⁵ If

2 Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum* (London: W. Lee, 1627), sig. g2r.

3 See especially, Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 168-197; Jerry Weinberger, *Science, Faith, and Politics: Francis Bacon and the Utopian Roots of the Modern Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Charles Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Julie Robin Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making: Francis Bacon and the Politics of Inquiry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

4 Jacqueline L. Cowan, "The Imagination's Arts: Poetry and Natural Philosophy in Bacon and Shakespeare," *Studies in Philology* 113:1 (Winter 2016), 132-162; Julianne Werlin, "Francis Bacon and the Art of Misinterpretation," *PMLA* 130:2 (2015), 236-251; Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 120-153.

5 Especially Stephen Clucas, "'A Knowledge Broken': Francis Bacon's Aphoristic Style and the Crisis of Scholastic and Humanist Knowledge-Systems," in *English Renaissance Prose: History, Language, and Politics*, ed. Neil Rhodes (Tempe: Arizona State University Press, 1997), 147-172.

it is no longer exactly true, as one critic has argued, that scholars have ignored the mutual influence of the *New Atlantis* and *Sylva Sylvarum*, which Rawley chose to publish together in a single volume after Bacon's death, there is still much to be said about this connection and the light it can shed on Bacon's intertwined interests.⁶ My argument here is that the bibliographical signature of accidental loss with which Rawley concludes the volume aptly registers a critique of humanism's commitment to removing time and temporality from the texts it valued as instructional models.⁷

The *New Atlantis* begins by linking—and inducing—temporal and spatial dislocation:

We sailed from Peru, (where we had continued by the space of one whole year,) for China and Japan, by the South Sea; taking with us victuals for twelve months; and had good winds from the east, though soft and weak, for five months space and more. But then the wind came about, and settled in the west for many days, so as we could make little or no way, and were sometimes in purpose to turn back. But then again there arose strong and great winds from the south, with a point in the east; which carried us up (for all that we could do) towards the north: by which time our victuals failed us, though we had made good spare of them.⁸

This opening passage raises a number of questions, beginning with its undefined plural subject. Who is this “[w]e”? What was the group doing in Peru for a year? Where did they come from before arrived in Peru? That the narrator has no intention of answering such questions becomes clear as the passage barrels ahead, joining clause after clause, each of which seems to point in a different direction or indicate a different interval of

6 Francis Wilson, “Such Words in His Things: The Poetry in Bacon's New Science,” *Language and Literature* 11:3 (2002), 197.

7 See, for instance, Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 48n77.

8 Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds. James Spedding, Douglas Denon Heath, and Robert Leslie Ellis, 14 vols. (London: Longmans, 1857-74), 3:129. Parenthetical references hereafter abbreviated *A* refer to this edition unless otherwise specified.

time. The narration spins around like a compass needle under magnetic interference, pointing east, west, south, east, and north in rapid succession. The voyagers had “good winds in the east” for five months. Then “the wind came about, and settled in the west” for “many days,” delaying their progress. Winds from the south then pushed the crew north, but also, ambiguously, “with a point in the east.” This might suggest that the ship is now pointed somewhat nearer to its westerly goal, as “winds in the east” were cited favorably above. But the next clause suggests mere frustration: “for all that [they] could do,” the travelers were forced northward.

The spatial confusion catalogued in this description dovetails with a temporal disunity that, if less pronounced, is no less puzzling. By the time the journey’s ill-fate is established, the voyagers’ supplies fail them. It’s a striking detail: having set out with “victuals for twelve months” and traveled for five, the sailors ought to have been equipped for many more months. The narrator assures the reader that they have “made good spare” of their provisions as if to underscore that no accident or imprudence affected their supply levels; the latter’s complete diminishment, then, can be only a measure of time lapsed. Even as the passage foregrounds its production of geographical disarray by jumbling cardinal directions and other contradictory positional words and phrases, it simultaneously manufactures a temporal disjunction that is not less striking for being less immediately palpable in the texture of Bacon’s prose. It seems that without mention the initial delay of “many days” has dilated to at least seven months.

In the narrative that follows, this almost imperceptible loss of time opens up into an anxiety to secure “further time”: further time for the explorers to remain on Bensalem, above all, but also further time for the various experiments performed at the House of

Salomon. While geographical ambiguity is perhaps a defining feature of the utopian tradition that Bacon enters into in the *New Atlantis*—the word “utopia” itself invokes a Greek pun on *eu topos* (“good place”) and *ou topos* (“no place”)—the temporal signature of Bacon’s work stands out among other major examples in the genre, which tend to associate utopia with time’s fulfillment. The explorers are, both temporally and geographically, “beyond both the old world and the new” (A 134). In Bacon’s version of utopia, time always threatens to run out. What the explorers need is more time. What King Solamona needed, however many centuries ago, was merely more time to elaborate the ideal society he’d instituted. And what the House of Salomon now needs, the explorers soon learn, is an indefinite period of time to make further trials in natural philosophy.

The temporal signature here is immediately visible after the travelers become stranded. As soon as they spot the island they will come to know as Bensalem, they are approached by a boat with a small party on board. The scroll they receive from this delegation announces in multiple languages (including “good Latin of the School”) that the voyagers must depart within sixteen days “except you have further time given you” (A 130). During their initial three-days’ sequestration, the narrator supposes that the Bensalemites may be testing them: “Who knoweth whether it be not to take some taste of our manners and conditions? And if they find them bad, to banish us straight away; if good, to give us further time” (A 134). The anxiety about obtaining further time on the island is soon allayed. After their probationary period is over, the explorers are visited by the Governor of the House of Strangers, who says they have been granted a stay of six weeks on the island but adds, “let it not trouble you if your occasions ask further time for

. . . I do not doubt but myself shall be able to obtain for you such further time as may be convenient” (A 135). His assurances, however, arise from a strange contingency: “the law,” says the governor, “is not precise.” If the explorers now have confidence of securing the time they need, their confidence rests on the ambiguity of Bensalem’s legal regime rather than on the society’s ideal order.

I have said that the temporal disorder of Bacon’s text is striking in the context of the utopian tradition, and Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) provides a useful contrast. In Book 2 of More’s work, Hythloday’s description of Utopia characterizes time in terms of plentitude and completion. Whereas Bacon’s adventurers are wary of time’s scarcity—they need more of it, and they worry about whether they can secure more of it—in Hythloday’s Utopia there is always enough time. Enough time for Hythloday to survey all the cities on the island and determine that they are all alike—he lived there “five full years”—and enough time for the citizens to work and play: “[t]heir working hours are ample to provide not only enough but more than enough of the necessities and even the conveniences of life.”⁹ Harry Berger, Jr., describes Hythloday’s vision of Utopia as “pure and monologic, not open to time, correction, compromise, or the interplay of perspectives.”¹⁰ Utopia represents a world in which “time has no function and history has no meaning.”¹¹ Berger draws an important distinction between Hythloday’s account and More’s fiction, but the rest of the fiction, too, shares the Utopian sense of having sufficient time.¹² In the opening letter to Peter Giles, More complains that domestic and

9 Thomas More, *Utopia* in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 2 vols., ed. Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 2006), 1:548; 1:552.

10 Harry Berger, Jr., *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 27.

11 Berger, *Second World*, 31.

12 Locating More within the continental tradition of Erasmian Humanism, Berger suggests that the fictional framework for Hythloday’s account provides the dialogic contrast to Hythloday’s monologue

professional duties hinder his ability to finish the fiction at hand—"What time do I find to write, then?"—but in fact he does find enough time: "My own time is only what I steal from sleeping and eating. It isn't very much, but it's something, and so I've finally been able to finish *Utopia*."¹³ At the end of Book 1, when More asks Hythloday to describe his visit to Utopia, Hythloday demurs that "it will take quite some time."¹⁴ The problem is easily enough solved, however: "[L]et's first go get lunch," More replies. "Afterward, we shall have all the time we want."¹⁵

The City of the Sun by Bacon's seventeenth-century contemporary Tommaso Campanella echoes the sense of temporal plentitude that characterizes More's Utopia both in its framework and in its vision of the ideal commonwealth. Citizens of Campanella's utopian society live between a hundred and two hundred years. They spend even less time working than More's Utopians do to secure the common good; their average work day is four, rather than six, hours. Comparing Campanella's utopian fiction with Bacon's, Timothy Reiss argues that Campanella aims "to create an unchanging world where all necessary knowledge has been not only acquired, but fixed for all time on its walls."¹⁶ The fact that the *New Atlantis*, by contrast, "is without a conclusion emphasizes the apparent conflict between a static literary (and philosophical) mode, and the desire for the dynamism of possession."¹⁷ In the end, Campanella's framework affirms the metaphysical harmony that underwrites the City of the Sun's imperviousness

that simultaneously allows Hythloday's insights to stand while simultaneously inviting criticism of his more "absurd" arguments (More 1:588).

13 More, *Utopia*, 522.

14 More, *Utopia*, 545.

15 More, *Utopia*, 545.

16 Timothy Reiss, "Structure and Mind in Two Seventeenth-Century Utopias: Campanella and Bacon," *Yale French Studies* 49 (1973), 93.

17 Reiss, "Structure and Mind," 95.

to time and that seems to elude Bacon's vision of the ideal society: "God gives all in his good time," Campanella's text concludes.¹⁸

The addition of a temporal problem to utopia's customary spatial anomaly in the *New Atlantis* is characteristic of Bacon's intellectual commitments throughout his oeuvre. I point to two distinct features of his program that share in his utopia's concern for obtaining further time. The first has to do with the practice of induction that Bacon promulgates as a truer method of the "interpretation of nature" throughout the various pieces of his Great Instauration, or systematic renewal of natural philosophy. The second has to do with how Bacon roots this methodology in relation to the ancients. These commitments are visible in the *New Atlantis* and fully dovetail in the *Novum Organum*, where Bacon adumbrates the ultimate—indeed, the essential—imperfection of his project.

In the *New Atlantis*, the concern for further time that characterizes the adventurers' experience when they arrive on Bensalem also forms a key part of the culture's founding mythology and serves as an explanation for the island's secrecy and reticence toward visitors. While the explorers are still restricted to the House of Strangers, they ask the governor how it can be that Bensalem possesses thorough knowledge of the languages and cultures of Europe while the island itself remains unknown to Europeans. The governor paints a picture of an early golden era of learning: "[A]bout three thousand years ago, or somewhat more, the navigation of the world . . . was greater than at this day" (A 140). On Bensalem alone this tradition of pre-modern

18 Tommaso Campanella, *City of the Sun* in *Famous Utopias: Being the Complete Text of Rousseau's Social Contract, More's Utopia, Bacon's New Atlantis, Campanella's City of the Sun*, ed. Charles M. Andrews (New York: Tudor, 1901), 317.

expertise was preserved, especially by one ruler. “There reigned in this island, about nineteen hundred years ago, a King, whose memory of all others we most adore; and not superstitiously, but as a divine instrument, though a mortal man; his name was Solamona: and we esteem him as the law-giver of our nation” (A 144). With the laws and economy so ideally arranged that Bensalem “might be a thousand ways altered to the worse, but scarce any one way to the better,” Solamona introduced strict prohibitions on the admission of strangers. The king, we are told, “thought nothing wanted to his noble and heroical intentions, but only . . . to give perpetuity to that which was in his time so happily established” (A 144). In short, Solamona looked around and saw things so well begun that the only thing missing was further time for this perfect order to persist and be enjoyed.

Although revered as Bensalem’s law-giver, Solamona’s real legacy lies in the secretive society for natural philosophy that he founded. “[A]mongst the excellent acts of that king, one above all hath the preeminence. It was the erection and institution of an Order of Society which we call *Salomon’s House*; the noblest foundation (as we think) that ever was upon the earth” (A 145). When one of the Fathers of Salomon’s House gives a rare hearing to the visitors, however, his description hews almost entirely to “the preparations and instruments” that the society possesses, with additional notes on the roles that various figures play in carrying out the experiments with which the house is occupied. “[T]he riches of Salomon’s House,” then, consist not in the achievements or inventions that the society has produced (these are glossed over for the stated reason that the visitors wouldn’t understand them without lengthy explanations—which would take too much time), but in means and tools for further discovery and invention (A 164). Some

two millennia after its founding, Salomon's House, like the ideal society first organized by King Solamona, wants only further time to fulfill its ends—in this case, to undertake “new experiments, of a higher light, more penetrating into nature than the former” (A 165).

The Father's presentation of the House of Salomon suggests how the errant energy of Bacon's utopian romance might conduce to a picture of knowledge-making. The adventurers, with thorough disregard for where they came from or where they are headed, immediately crave not supplies or particular aids for travel or for some other mission, but merely further time to explore the island and accumulate observations about its inhabitants and their customs. The House of Salomon institutionalizes this energy of indefinite investigation. Even as it is oriented toward practical knowledge—“to the effecting of all things possible” (A 156)—the House's real accomplishment is that it has secured the perfect conditions for never-ending experimentation. In its embrace of open-ended research, this picture of knowledge-making stands diametrically opposed to the mode of knowledge-making promulgated by those Bacon elsewhere derides as “the schoolmen.”

Bacon's inductive method, outlined most specifically in the *Novum Organum*, is above all contingent on obtaining further time or what the *Organum* usually calls “further inquiry.”¹⁹ Here the inductive investigation of what Bacon calls “Forms” proceeds by collecting examples that agree in nature and doing so without prejudgment or generalization. He provides as a sample an investigation into the Form of Heat. On the

19 Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds. James Spedding, Douglas Denon Heath, and Robert Leslie Ellis, 14 vols. (London: Longmans, 1857-74), 4:131. Parenthetical references hereafter abbreviated *O* refer to this edition unless otherwise specified.

heat of comets and shooting stars, Bacon remarks, “let further inquiry be made” (131); “more diligent inquiry” is needed into the heat capacity of green and moist vegetables (*O* 135); “[l]et further inquiry be made into the different degrees of heat in different animals” (*O* 139); “[l]et further inquiry be made into the different degrees of heat in the different parts and limbs of the same animal” (*O* 139); regarding the strength and weakness of different kinds of flame, “let further inquiry be made” (*O* 141); degrees of heat among ignited objects likewise “require further investigation” (*O* 142). Among these, Bacon notes many other items that “have never been diligently inquired into” (*O* 141). Bacon concludes his observations by apologizing for having to use such phrases repeatedly, but it’s clear that need for further inquiry is a feature, not a bug, of the inductive method, just as the quest for further time indelibly marks the utopian society of the House of Salomon.

Above all, Bacon proposes the inductive method as a way to circumvent what he understands to be natural philosophy’s slavish devotion to knowledge received from the ancients. Bacon derides the reliance on authority that he finds in the program of scholastic philosophy and humanist tradition—“[f]or,” as Bacon puts it in the Preface to the Great Instauration, “it is hardly possible at once to admire an author and go beyond him.”²⁰ Here Bacon takes aim at a commonplace that English literary culture inherited from the humanist admiration for the ancients the spirit of which is also clearly in preserved in Harington’s story about the painting of the great Apelles that no one dared to finish. The idea that admiration goes hand in hand with a reluctance to “go beyond” a great author runs throughout the works surveyed in this dissertation. In chapter two, for example, we saw how Fulke Greville defended his decision to publish the unfinished

20 Francis Bacon, “Preface to the Great Instauration,” in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds. James Spedding, Douglas Denon Heath, and Robert Leslie Ellis, 14 vols. (London: Longmans, 1857-74), 4:16.

1590 *Arcadia* and its fragmentary ending in the same terms, writing that “[h]owsoever I liked them not too well (even in that unperfected shape they were) to condescend that such delicate (though inferior) Pictures of himselfe, should be suppressed; yet I do wish that work may be the last in this kind, presuming that no man that followes can ever reach, much less go beyond that excellent intended patterne of his.”²¹ By the same token, even as John Heminge and Henry Condell claimed in chapter four to offer William Shakespeare’s plays “perfect of their limbes” through their First Folio edition of his work, they nevertheless acknowledged that “[w]e cannot go beyond our owne powers.”²² Bacon’s inductive method, then, is aimed just as much at the reigning view of literary authority as it is at the scholastic approach to natural philosophy. For Bacon, this view of literary authority is deleterious to knowledge because it undermines the need to spend further time in inquiry. He concludes by emphasizing that what has been missing from previous attempts to renew the study of nature has been a willingness or ability to expend an indefinite amount of time in the pursuit of further examples: “There is none who has dwelt upon experience and the facts of nature as long as is necessary.”²³

While Bacon’s reimagination of natural philosophy is usually seen as opposed to the approaches taken by ancient Greek writers such as Aristotle, this is, of course, only partially true. Bacon’s objection has to do with the way authority attributed to the ancients has a deadening effect on further inquiry; his term for this problem in Aphorism 87 is “perfection”:

21 Fulke Greville, *The Life of the Renowned Sr Philip Sidney* (1652), ed. Warren W. Wooden (Delmar: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1984), 253.

22 William Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Jaggard for Edward Blount, 1623), A2v-A3r.

23 Bacon, “Preface,” 17.

[T]his admiration of men for knowledges and arts,—an admiration itself weak enough, and well-nigh childish,—has been increased by the craft and artifices of those who have handled and transmitted sciences. For they set them forth with such ambition and parade, and bring them into the view of the world so fashioned and masked, as if they were complete in all parts and finished. For if you look at the method of them and the divisions, they seem to embrace and comprise everything which can belong to the subject. And although these divisions are ill filled out and are but as empty cases, still to the common mind they present the form and plan of a perfect science. But the first and most ancient seekers of truth were wont, with better faith and better fortune, too, to throw the knowledge which they gathered from the contemplation of things, and which they meant to store up for use, into aphorisms; that is, into short and scattered sentences, not linked together by an artificial method; and did not pretend or profess to embrace the entire art. But as the matter now is, it is nothing strange if men do not seek to advance in things delivered to them as long since perfect and complete (*O* 85).

By contrast, Bacon is at pains not to offer a competing system of “perfect science”—yet another framework to close off further inquiry by claiming authoritative access to knowledge of nature. “[A]lthough on some special subjects and in an incomplete form I am in possession of results which I take to be far more true and more certain and withal more fruitful than those now received,” Bacon writes, “yet I have no entire or universal theory to propound” (*O* 104). Instead, he explains his unique insights as the inevitable product of time. “All wonder how these considerations which I bring forward should have escaped men’s notice till now . . . which I myself esteem as the result of some happy accident, rather than of any excellence of faculty in me; a birth of Time rather than a birth of wit” (*O* 77). Just as experimental time ought inevitably to yield new results, so the discoveries of the *Novum Organum* itself were only a matter of time, not of the complete and perfect interpretation of a particular observer.

Ultimately, Bacon’s edifice for the renewal of natural philosophy would remain unfinished, just like his utopian narrative in the *New Atlantis*. Bacon adumbrates the

unfinishedness of his Great Instauration within the *Novum Organum*, deferring to others the responsibility to make further trials, and to invest further time: “Neither can I hope to live to complete the sixth part of the Instauration (which is destined for the philosophy discovered by the legitimate interpretation of nature), but hold it enough if in the intermediate business I bear myself soberly and profitably, sowing in the meantime for future ages the seeds of a purer truth, and performing my part toward the commencement of the great undertaking” (*O* 104). Bacon’s rejection of modes of knowledge-making that appear “perfect and complete”—such as scholasticism and the ideal version of *imitatio* that Ascham projects in chapter one—and his contrary embrace of “short and scattered” fragments both stem from this desire to see future generations carry on with the same work.

As for the *New Atlantis*, its unfinished form finds an appropriate defense in William Rawley’s words on the *Sylva Sylvarum*, the volume of natural history to which Rawley appended the *New Atlantis* when it appeared in print in 1627, the year after Bacon’s death. Bacon’s amanuensis and editor, Rawley justified publishing the *Sylva Sylvarum*—an “indigested heap of particulars”²⁴—in terms that recall Bacon’s own aversion to perfection, and his preference for “short and scattered sentences” as more conducive to the continued labors of others: “I haue heard his Lordship say also, that one great Reason, why he would not put these Particulars into any exact *Method*, (though he that looketh attentiuely into them, shall finde that they haue a secret Order) was, because hee conceiued that other men would now thinke, that they could doe the like; And so goe on with a further Collection: which if the *Method* had been Exact, many would haue

24 Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum* (London: Printed for W. Lee, 1627), sig. Av.

despaired to attaine by Imitation.”²⁵ Rawley’s words on the *Sylva Sylvarum* explain at least as well as his introduction to the *New Atlantis* why the latter, too, was left “not perfected” as the final words in the 1627 volume acknowledge. Real fulfillment of the project’s ends could be found only in the continued work of others.

Rawley was a careful protector of his benefactor’s posthumous reputation. He is no less jealous with regard to how the voice of his deceased author ought to be heard than Greville was toward Sidney’s legacy. In 1657, Rawley published the *Resuscitatio*, a collection of some of Bacon’s minor works prefaced by a hagiographic life. Here, for example, Rawley ascribes Bacon’s rejection of Aristotelian natural philosophy to Bacon’s earliest years at university—“Not for the Worthlesnesse, of the Authour, to whom he would ever ascribe, all High Attributes; But for the Unfruitfulnesse, of the way; Being a Philosophy . . . Barren, of the Production, of Works”—and acquits Bacon of any taint from the Essex rebellion.²⁶ Borrowing from the same commonplace tradition as those who squabbled over Sidney’s legacy, Rawley writes that he translated into English some of Bacon’s works “(as far, as my slender Ability could reach,) according to the Expressions, which, I conceived; his Lordship would have rendred it in, if he had written the same in English: Yet ever acknowledging, that Zeuxis, or Apelles, Pencill, could not be attained, but by Zeuxis, or Apelles, Himself.”²⁷

Rawley, preparing for posthumous publication Bacon’s unfinished prose romance, would have had this story as a ready defense for the fragmentary condition of the work or

25 Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum*, sig. A2r.

26 William Rawley, *Resuscitatio, or; Bringing into publick light severall pieces of the works, civil, historical, philosophical, & theological, hitherto sleeping, of the Right Honourable Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount Saint Alban according to the best corrected coppie* (London: Sarah Griffin for William Lee, 1657), sig. b2v.

27 Rawley, *Resuscitatio*, sig. br.

the haphazard state of the natural history to which it was attached, just as the story had been employed previously: best to leave it unfinished since no one else could do justice to the author's intent. Instead, his words suggest one final twist on the Apelles story.

Whereas Ascham, Bacon's great example of humanism's unthinking imitation of the ancients, found in the imperfection of Apelles's work such greatness that "no one would step forth to perform the like," Bacon's entire project exists to reverse this limitation.

Rawley suggests instead that the unfinished, unsystematic, and ultimately imperfect states of the *Sylva Sylvarum* and the *New Atlantis* alike are calibrated to encourage others to "thinke, that they could doe the like" and thus to carry on the work into the further time that eluded the author.

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