

**DISCIPLINDE WITH HOLESOME REEDE:  
Edmund Spenser, Robert Burton, and the Profits of  
Reading**

**Luke Sonny Velji Prendergast**

**UCL**

**Submitted for the Award of PhD in English Literature**



**I, Luke Prendergast, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.**



## ABSTRACT.

*Discipline with Holesome Reede: Edmund Spenser, Robert Burton, and the Profits of Reading* offers an extended comparative reading of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96) and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621-50), taking as its cue these texts' shared claims to bibliotherapeutic possibilities: that Spenser's is intended to 'fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline', and that Burton hopes his writings will 'medicinally worke upon the whole body [... and] not only recreate, but rectify the minde'. Reading these claims in light of medical, philosophical, and theological contexts, I explore how Spenser and Burton conceptualise the potentially profitable (and, conversely, pernicious) possibilities of reading in medicinal, economic, and recreative terms. Central to the thesis is the idea that such claims to reformative efficacy depend on the authors' shaping and inculcation of certain kinds of readerly habits, and that, correlating to the contiguous nature of world and text, the fashioning of a reader constitutes the fashioning of an ethical and healthy subject: in short, the thesis follows early modern thought in eliding the hermeneutic and the therapeutic. As such, the thesis will throughout explore how both *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy* encode, challenge, and frustrate their own interpretive practices. Shaping a readership trained in careful attention and profound memory constitutes the work of reading that is both laborious and edifying. At the same time, whilst celebrating each work's complex particularity, the thesis demonstrates how comparative work on texts rarely – and only ever fleetingly – drawn into conversation might shed new light on the ways in which intellectual traditions span and develop across form, genre, and period.



## **IMPACT STATEMENT.**

The ‘impact’ of this thesis lies predominantly in its scholarly contribution to medical, theological, and ethical understandings of the history of reading, and, of course, to the critical study of both Edmund Spenser and Robert Burton.

As a doctoral candidate in London, a visiting researcher at Yale University, and through participation in symposia and conferences across the UK, I have had the opportunity to discuss and debate my ideas across a range of academic communities. Particular parts of my research have been presented at conferences in London, Cambridge, and New Haven. Over the course of teaching undergraduates at UCL, as well as at Widening Participation summer schools, I have also developed models of research-based teaching.





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## A NOTE ON THE TEXT.

Original spellings have been retained in all quotations, with the exception of s/j, which has been modernised. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from the following texts are to the stated editions: Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is given with book, canto, stanza, and line numbers, from *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow: Longman, 2007); Spenser's shorter poems are given with line numbers from *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999); Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is given with volume and page numbers, from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 6 vols, eds. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989-2000); Bible references are to *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, intro. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). Full citations for all sources are to be found in the bibliography.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there are a handful of page references that remain unverified. These have been indicated with the placeholder 'TBV', and will be amended for final corrections when it is safe to access the appropriate materials.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.**

First and foremost, my deepest thanks go to Eric Langley, whose support, intellectual stimulation, and enthusiasm outstripped anything I could have hoped for in a supervisor. All that was exciting, inspiring, and challenging in the doctoral experience was thanks to you. To Angus Gowland, my secondary supervisor, for his keen eye and just the combination of scepticism and encouragement that my project needed. I am indebted, also, to Chris Stamatakis, and to the members of the HDSC panel – Susan Irvine, Rachele De Felice, and Peter Swaab – for reading various pieces of submitted work, and their rich and helpful suggestions.

I also want to thank previous teachers for their support over the years, and for their significant parts in my own intellectual development: Katie Murphy, Sarah Bennett, and Rhodri Lewis. Thank you also to the Oxford Graduate Scholarship for my Masters funding, and to the LAHP for funding the doctorate – without which backing, of course, this could not exist.

Many thanks to the UCL English Department, and particularly to those members who attended the Early Modern English Reading Group, an initiative whose atmosphere of intellectual experiment and collaborative discovery I consider a rare gift. Thank you to the UCL Doctoral School and Yale University for funding and facilitating my months spent in New Haven. Particular thanks to Catherine Nicholson, David Kastan, and the members of Pomerium in the Yale English Department for welcoming me into the fold of their enriching community.

Special thanks to Harvey Wiltshire, Rachel Benoit, and Jordan Waller: for reading drafts, for solidarity, for enduring me.

To my parents, Chris and Shellina, and Lily, the best sister a boy could ask for: thank you for loving me, and letting me do my thing.



## INTRODUCTION.

### DISCIPLINDE WITH HOLESOME REEDE:

#### *The Profits of Reading*

When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare,  
Of *Mutability*, and well it way:  
Me seemes, that though she all vnworthy were  
Of the Heav'ns 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.

(Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, VII.viii.1)

So we rise and fall in this world, ebbe and flowe, in and out, reared and dejected, lead a troublesome life, subject to many accidentes and Casualties of fortunes, Variety of passions, infirmities as well as from our selves as others. [...] Be content and rest satisfied, for thou art well in respect of others, be thankfull for that thou hast, that God hath done so much for thee, he hath not made thee a monster, a beast, a base creature, as he might, but a man, a Christian, such a man; consider aright of it, thou art full well as thou art.

(Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, II:129-30)

### **I: This Temporal Dispensation: On Error and Mutability**

'In this mortal life we are like travellers away from our Lord', writes Augustine in his great handbook of Biblical exegesis, *De Doctrina Christiana*, but 'if we wish' we can 'return to the homeland where we can be happy':

To enlighten us and enable us, the whole temporal dispensation was set up by divine providence for our salvation. We must make use of this, not with a permanent love and enjoyment of it, but with a transient love and enjoyment of our journey [...] so that we love the means of transport only because of our destination.<sup>1</sup>

The ‘whole temporal dispensation’ – the dilated time between the Fall and the Apocalypse – is identified not as a period of punishment for sin but as a crucial phase in the providential scheme of salvation.<sup>2</sup> Participation in the postlapsarian world and the corruption of the human subject both ‘enable’ accession to the Kingdom of Heaven, and, ‘enlightening us’, are instrumental to our final, fortunate revelation. The metaphor of history as a journey from and return to an eternal paradise, one in which ‘a transient love and enjoyment of our journey’ guides us on our way to ‘our destination’, figures the Fall, and the materiality and mutability attendant upon it, as a cause of love and celebration so long as an eye is kept on their soteriological utility. For Augustine, however, concerned as he is with ‘teach[ing] how to understand scripture’, the ‘temporal dispensation’ is not only time spent in the world, but time spent reading the holy book. The Fall precipitates textuality, giving rise to the Biblical books intervening between Genesis and Revelation, occasioning acts of reading in the primal scene of narrative dilation.<sup>3</sup> In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine identifies hermeneutics – the negotiation of the rift between ‘signs’ and ‘things’ triggered by the Fall, a rift discernible both in the material world and in the material word – as the means to salvation.<sup>4</sup> Reading has not only reformative, but salvific power.

*Discipline with Holesome Reede* argues that Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96) and Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621-51) respond to the fallen condition and, consequently, to reading’s role in moral and spiritual reformation in terms strikingly similar to those described by Augustine. Reading, as an active, participatory activity, can be redemptive, restorative, and recuperative, and helps, in Augustine’s terms, to bring both spiritual and exegetical travellers home: to

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: 1995), pp.17, 49.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of history as temporal ‘dilation’, and its relation to Neoplatonic concepts of emanation from and return to the One, see: Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: 2015), p.57.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, 1995, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, 1995, p.15.



God, to meaning, and to health. In bringing together two canonical works which are rarely – and only ever fleetingly – drawn into conversation, this thesis sheds light on the ways in which an intellectual tradition of profitable or therapeutic reading might span and develop across form, genre, and period.<sup>5</sup> Its overarching claim is that the reformatory capacity of these texts depends on their shaping and inculcation of certain kinds of readerly habits, and that the contiguous nature of world and text means that fashioning a reader constitutes the fashioning of an ethical and healthy subject. This introduction is dedicated to explaining the pairing, describing the particular conditions of each text’s production – their obvious but crucial differences – at the same time as illuminating their remarkable similarities. The first and most profound of these similarities is the way in which the reformatory efficacy of reading *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy* is embedded, by both authors, in a philosophic outlook and theological anthropology akin to Augustine’s, which sees fallenness, mutability, and materiality, of both world and text, as a help rather than hindrance in the economy of salvation.<sup>6</sup> ‘[N]ot praising the euill, but praising him who draweth light out of darknesse’, the French Reformist Theodore Beza describes the *felix culpa*: ‘O hapie fal which hath brought vs higher: o most happie darknesse without which this truly great light, had neuer appeared vnto vs.’<sup>7</sup> This paradoxical response to the Fall, and the temperament of ambivalence it gives rise to, is the theme of this thesis. This fortunate Fall, and its associated ambivalence, is captured in reading practices in slips of error, misprision, double-entendre, and mistake.

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<sup>5</sup> Spenser and Burton have occupied separate chapters in monographs, usually on the topic of melancholy. See: Adam H. Kitzes, *The Politics of Melancholy from Spenser to Milton* (New York & London: 2006); Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: 2004). In a now dated article, Merritt Hughes explores Burton’s reading of Spenser as a source of poeticisms and romance tropes, but concludes that ‘there is not a jot of literary parallelism between them’: Merritt W. Hughes, ‘Burton on Spenser’, *PMLA* 41:2 (1926), p.546.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Grene has described the ‘distinctive doctrines of Christianity expounded to professing English Christians’ of early modernity as summed up by ‘Augustinianism’, and an affirmation of ‘the fact of original sin’: Donald Grene, ‘Augustinianism and Empiricism: A Note on Eighteenth-Century Intellectual History’, *Eighteenth Century Studies* 1 (1867), p.42. For an account of early modern Augustinian revivals and transformations, see Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: 2007), chapter 2. For an account of Augustine’s profound impact on early modern textual hermeneutics and their relation to spiritual reformation, see Katrin Ettenhuber, *Donne’s Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* (Oxford: 2011), pp.1-21.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Beza, *Master Bezoes sermons vpon the three chapters of the canticke of canticles...*, trans. John Harmar (London: 1587), p.225.

In the eighth, ‘vnperfitte’ canto of Spenser’s ‘Mutabilitie’, his narrator reflects upon Nature’s ‘put[ting] downe’ of the rebellious Titaness Mutabilitie, whose claim to universal dominion is neutralised and subsumed by Nature’s ‘rul[e]’ over change (VII.vii.59.2-6). These cantos, which occupy an ‘uncertain relationship’ to Spenser’s epic, forming a fragment of a putative seventh Legend of Constancy, are nonetheless fittingly described by William Blissett as a ‘retrospective commentary on the poem as a whole’.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the penultimate stanza of the incomplete *Faerie Queene* crystallises an attitude and poetics of ambivalence that characterises the entire poem. The verse seems to offer a melancholic renunciation of Nature’s triumph at the end of the previous canto: whilst Mutabilitie ‘all vnworthy were / Of the Heavn’s Rule’, the experience of the poet testifies to ‘the greatest sway’ that she nevertheless holds over ‘all things’ outside heaven’s sphere. This sense relies upon a reading of the syntax of lines six and seven – ‘Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle, / And loue of things so vaine to cast away’ – in which the object of the verb ‘loath’ is ‘this state of life so tickle’, and the object of ‘to cast away’ is ‘loue of things so vaine’. A competing reading of the syntax, however, which takes the object of ‘loath’ to be the infinitive phrase ‘to cast away’, transforms the meaning of the lines: the uncertainty of earthly life and the love of things is not something to be despised but rather held onto and cherished. ‘Time’ and his ‘consuming sickle’ – metonymical variants of Mutabilitie herself – do not render the ‘flowring pride’ of the material world meaningless, but all the more prized, for its ephemeral ‘fading’. The stanza is animated by an ambivalence, even an internal contradiction, which simultaneously bemoans and celebrates mortality and change.

A reading of this stanza as one which contests the downfall of Mutabilitie in the previous canto, but considers this contestation a source of joy rather than (only) despair, counters a critical tradition that identifies Nature’s ‘doome in speeches few’ as a triumph and affirmation of an authoritarian and conservative order opposed to

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<sup>8</sup> Sheldon P. Zitner, ‘The Faerie Queene, Book VII’, in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: 1990), p.287.; William Blissett, ‘Spenser’s Mutability’, in *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age*, ed. Millar MacLure and F. W. Watt (Toronto: 1964), p.26. For an account of the provenance of the ‘Mutabilitie Cantoes’, see J. B. Lethbridge, ‘Spenser’s Last Days: Ireland, Career, Mutability, Allegory’, in *Edmund Spenser: New and Renewed Directions*, ed. J. B. Lethbridge (Madison: 2006), pp.302-336.

the threat of disorder represented by Mutabilitie (VII.vii.57.9).<sup>9</sup> Nature's verdict diagnoses the change of 'all things' as a 'dilat[ion]' of 'being' rather than metaphysical alteration, with the consequence that 'ouer them Chaunge doth not rule and raigne / But they raigne over change' (VII.vii.58.2-9). But whilst Nature's 'doome' denies Mutabilitie the cosmic throne, it does not deny or even diminish her power. Rather, change is recognised as integral to the process of beings 'work[ing] their owne perfection' – moral, soteriological, and ontological – to the extent that even eschatological deliverance, when 'none no more change shall see' – a telling double negative – rather than merely vanquishing mutability, is facilitated by it: 'time shall come that all shall changed bee' (VII.vii.58.7, VII.vii.59.4-5). Mutabilitie is not only beautiful – 'her louely face / In which, faire beames of beauty did appeare' aligns her with the 'angels face [...] Like to the ruddie morne' of Britomart and other beautiful icons of virtue – but is claimed by Nature as her 'daughter' (VII.vi.31.1-2, IV.vi.19.5-6 VII.vii.59.1). As Joanne Field Holland notes, 'Spenser's Titaness is responsible for the equivalent of the Fall of Man', a Fall which engenders death and change, but which in Spenser's poetry is incorporated into a natural cosmic vision and an economy of salvation.<sup>10</sup> Mutability, occasioned by the Fall, is transformed into a sign of the processional aspiration towards 'perfection'.

Comparable concerns regarding mutability and the fallen condition lie at the heart of Burton's *Anatomy*. Melancholy, his advertised subject-matter, is in no uncertain terms identified as a sign and symptom of the Fall: 'Man, the most excellent and noble creature of the World', Burton laments, has suffered a 'pittifull change! is fallen from that he was' and has become 'one of the most miserable creatures of the World' (I.121-22). The marks of this change are evident all around, in our 'rise and fall in this world', the 'ebbe and flowe, in and out' of human affairs, in the 'accidents and Casualties of fortunes, and the 'passions' and 'infirmities' which humankind are condemned to suffer, which include melancholy. But this description

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<sup>9</sup> For this critical tradition, see: C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: 1977).; Michael O'Connell, *Mirror and Veil: The Historical Dimension of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Chapel Hill: 1977).; Thomas Bulger, 'Platonism in Spenser's "Mutabilitie Cantos"', in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. Anita Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: 1994), pp.126-38. For an account of how the metaphysical debate relates to a genealogical contest that speaks to Elizabethan power, political ascendancy, and violence, see Gordon Teskey, 'Mutability, Genealogy, and the Authority of Forms', *Representations* 41 (1993), 104-122.

<sup>10</sup> Joanne Field Holland, 'The Cantos of Mutabilitie and the Form of *The Faerie Queene*', *ELH* 35:1 (1968), p.21.

of the world's uncertainty, and the burden of a 'troublesome life', appears in Burton's 'Consolatory Digression', and is followed by a Stoic command to 'rest satisfied' and 'be thankfull for that thou hast'. In the face of melancholy and mutability, God's creation of the reader as 'man, a Christian, such a man' rather than 'beast' is a source of hope. This hope is not passively experienced, but relies upon the reader assuming the correct interpretive attitude: with a phrase which, we shall see, he returns to frequently, Burton urges his reader to 'consider aright' that 'thou art full well as thou art'. This encouragement exceeds a recognition that '[t]hy lot is false', and so to 'make the best of it'; rather, it entertains a dual perspective in which humankind is both fallen and whole, wretched and 'full well' (II.130). '[S]hadowed' by 'fabulous poets [...] in the tale of *Pandoras* box', the Fall unleashes 'all manner of diseases', but also occasions Hope (I.122-23).<sup>11</sup> In the *Anatomy*, the consequences of the Fall, encapsulated in melancholy, are a sign of future redemption: '[b]odily sicknesse is for his soules health' (I.124). Burton's description in his 'Consolatory Digression', like Spenser's contemplation of Nature's verdict of Mutabilitie, does not negate or deny temporal and fateful ebb and flow, the fact of change and its attendant cares, but rather insists on the coexistence – even the coextension – of suffering and salvation.

Understanding the Fall as a necessary or even beneficial stage in the process of salvation was a common doctrine of early modern theology. In a sermon given in Oxford, George Abbott, the Archbishop of Canterbury, celebrates mankind's experience of 'a happy fall, to shrinke once and stand long for it; to sinke a while, and rise againe.'<sup>12</sup> The Fall's happy promise is the opening up of a space for Christ's intercession as the redeemer of sin. John Salkeld, a Protestant clergyman and theologian, argues that:

[By] the bloud of the lambe of God, which onely washeth away the sinnes of the world [...], we are to be restored, not onely into a more high participation of God, and his grace, then we possessed before our fall; but also into a more

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<sup>11</sup> In Hesiod's rendition of the myth in *Works and Days*, the word 'Ἐλπίς' is regularly translated as 'Hope', but ambiguously implies anticipation of both good and bad. This bivalence suggests that the consolatory promise of fall narratives is a matter of perspective or interpretation. See: Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: 2006), p.92.

<sup>12</sup> George Abbott, *An exposition vpon the prophet Ionah Contained in certaine sermons, preached in S. Maries church in Oxford*. (London: 1600), p.402.

perfect Paradise, then that was, from which we were banished, for our first sinne, and fall[.]<sup>13</sup>

Christ's 'bloud' sacrifice not only cleanses 'the sinnes of the world', but enables humankind to attain a greater enjoyment of God's 'grace' than did prelapsarian Adam and Eve. Christ's redemption does not return us to a lost Eden but transports us to 'a more perfect Paradise', which outstrips the Garden of our original parents. Michael Edwards identifies these 'ternary patterns' – from Creation, to Fall, to a better perfection; from Eden, to the fallen world, to Paradise – as characteristic of a Christian 'poetics' dedicated to both theodicy and consolation.<sup>14</sup> Within this poetics, history – envisioned as 'dialectical' in a Hegelian sense – incorporates 'wretchedness' into a benevolent providential vision: 'from one perspective, it closes off a past, but from another, it opens to a future. It signifies destruction, yet at a climactic moment it changes sign, and signifies a possible recreation. It marks a fall and gives rise to possibility.'<sup>15</sup> The dual perspectives disclosed by these ternary patterns have a number of objects. Both great and depraved, humankind assumes a paradoxical nature, but one sanctified by Christ's similar combination of divinity and humanity. The material world figures as both divine punishment and road to retribution, its inchoate or illegible qualities able to be overcome by, for example, hierarchic cosmological schemas or scientific investigation. And the corruption of language, the gap between sign and thing, is both a symptom of original sin and an invitation, in different discursive realms – scientific, philosophic, poetic – to bridge the gap.

A theological framework that locates a utility or even dispensation in the fallen condition underpins this thesis' exploration of the profits of reading in *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy*. Both texts' formal allegiances demonstrate a wish to triumph over the corruptive effects of the Fall. Allegory, which attempts to make an idea legible within an image, is animated by a fantasy of semiotic convergence, an aspiration towards the unity of sign and signified. Anatomy, likewise, attempts to gain epistemological mastery over the disordered matter of the world, to transform a physical body into, as Jonathan Sawday describes, 'a new 'body' of knowledge and

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<sup>13</sup> John Salkeld, *A treatise of Paradise*. (London: 1617), p.20.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Edwards, *Towards a Christian Poetics* (London: 1984), p.6.

<sup>15</sup> Edwards, 1984, p.7.

understanding'.<sup>16</sup> But both texts, as witnessed in this introduction's epigraphs, and as will be confirmed frequently over the course of this thesis, affirm and celebrate fallenness and mutability. As a consequence, they exhibit – just like the postlapsarian human, world, and word – a divided nature and contradictory impulses, yearning to resist the effects of the Fall at the same time as celebrating them for their potential to be ethically and spiritually edifying.<sup>17</sup> Spenser's friend and mentor, Gabriel Harvey, writes that 'Nature herself is changeable and most of all delighted with vanitye; and art, after a sort her ape, conformeth herself to the like mutabilitye.'<sup>18</sup> Contending with an ever-changing nature, *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy* both fall prey to, exhibit, and revel in a corresponding mutability, which frustrates and facilitates their reformative projects by turns. When defeated in the first episode of *The Faerie Queene*, the monster Error expels 'vomit full of bookes and papers': fallenness gives birth to textuality (I.i.20.6). Patricia Parker observes that Error leaves 'her trace in the serpentine progress of the poem itself, the *vestigial* the reader must follow in order to thread the labyrinth', and it is progress through the poem, the errant questing of both knights and readers, that paves the way to reformation.<sup>19</sup> Disclosed by their shared etymology, the twin aspect of error and errancy reveals an ambivalence at the heart of the Fall and power of the word to reform subjectivity. Each chapter of this thesis, in pursuing a different aspect or strategy of these writers' reformative projects, confronts this intrinsic ambivalence in the human subject, the nature of the world, and the capacity of literature to profit readers. Each argues, in its own terms, that a recognition and celebration of this ambivalence – moral, ontological, and linguistic – lies at the heart of these texts' abilities to provide ethical and spiritual profit to their readers.

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London & New York: 1995), p.2.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Teskey recognises this divided quality of both *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy*, what he terms a twin response of 'melancholy' and 'exuberance'. His description in Barthesian terms of Burton's style as 'proceed[ing] out of a carefully managed dialectic between a 'readerly' dream of perfect control over rational exposition and a 'writerly' fascination with the spirited proclivity of writing to take hold of the bit and run where it will', is a useful way to think about the relationship between order and disorder in both texts. G. L. Teskey, review of Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse*, in *Renaissance and Reformation* 9:2 (1985), pp.122, 125.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriel Harvey, *Letter Book*, ed. E. J. L. Scott (Westminster: 1884), p.87.

<sup>19</sup> Parker, 2015, p.69.

## II: 'Fashioning' Spenser's and Burton's Readers

*The Faerie Queene* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* explicitly declare their intended aim to benefit the reader. In the 'Letter from the Author to Sir Walter Raleigh', appended to the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser promises to 'expound [...] his whole intention' for the poem, in order to provide 'the better vnderstanding' to the Reader, and this intention or 'general end [...] is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline' (714).<sup>20</sup> As Judith Anderson points out, this discipline concerns training in both virtue and reading, as the poem 'teaches us at once how to read and how vital this process is.'<sup>21</sup> Learning to read the poem thus relates to learning to read the world – hermeneutics and ethics are brought into alignment – but Spenser's need to frame his poem with the letter's guidance – 'knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed' – only underscores how uncertain and ineffectual that enterprise might be (714). When Burton writes that his 'earnest intent is as much to profit as to please' by his writings, he invokes the Horatian dictum of poetry combining the sweet and the useful in order to instruct a reader in virtuous behaviour (III.5). He also figures the *Anatomy* as medically efficacious, hoping his words 'shall take like gilded pilles', leading critics such as Mary Ann Lund to explore the workings of what she terms Burton's 'bibliotherapy' (III.5).<sup>22</sup> But Burton, too, is aware of how difficult it is to ensure that reading will have beneficial effects, warning the 'present or future Reader' that 'hee may trouble or hurt himself' in his reading,

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<sup>20</sup> This Letter continues to be a subject of critical contention: its textual history muddies its authority, disappearing from Spenser's second instalment of the poem in 1596 and all subsequent editions until the folio of 1611, and its vow to assist in elucidating 'the general intention and meaning' of the 'continued Allegory, or darke conceite' comes unstuck in the face of the glaring inconsistencies between its descriptions of episodes of *The Faerie Queene* and the actual narrative content of the poem (714). Critics are, however, generally in consensus that Spenser's stated intention to provide reformation to the reading subject should be taken at face value. See eg. Hester Lees-Jeffries, 'From the Fountain to the Well: Redcrosse Learns to Read', *Studies in Philology* 100:2 (2003), p.136.

<sup>21</sup> Judith H. Anderson, 'What I Really Teach When I'm Teaching Spenser,' *Pedagogy* 3:2 (2003), p.178. Catherine Nicholson has recently described this 'discipline' as the 'iterative, looping, dialectical process of understanding – the reading of reading'. See Catherine Nicholson, *Reading and Not Reading The Faerie Queene: Spenser and the Making of Literary Criticism* (Princeton: 2020), p.3.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Cambridge: 2010), p.6.

‘and get in conclusion more harme then good’ (I.24). The ‘discipline’ of ‘reede’ – a word which evokes counsel, reading, and the ‘Oaten Reed’ of the poetic pipes (‘The Shepherds Calender’, 56) – referred to in the title of this thesis, is the subject of its chapters; but the pun of the title’s ‘holesome’, which ironically points to a vacuity or ‘hole’ in reading’s ‘wholesomeness’, acknowledges these texts’ constant and discomfiting recognition of the uncertainty of that discipline.

A great deal of work has been done to broaden, historicize, and complicate our understanding of the activity of reading in early modernity. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton have emphasised its disciplinary nature, showing how reading ‘was always goal-orientated – an active, rather than a passive pursuit’.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, scholars of humanist pedagogy, like Jeff Dolven, have demonstrated the intensive instruction in reading both classical and vernacular texts in grammar schools.<sup>24</sup> A number of important contributions have been made to our understanding of reading and its relation to commonplacing, positing reading practices characterised by fragmentation, abridgement, and excision.<sup>25</sup> Others, such as Peter Mack, have balanced this with a demonstration of an early modern culture of ‘reading texts as a whole’.<sup>26</sup> Erasmus’ instructions for ‘going over a lesson’, reprinted in Lyly’s standard Latin grammar to be used in English grammar schools, offer meticulous processes of close reading, involving ‘observ[ation of] points of grammar’, ‘attention to points of rhetorical technique’, ‘examin[ation]’ of syntax, ‘analy[sis of] the author’s purpose’, and rereading for further revelation.<sup>27</sup> Anthony Grafton, on the other hand, relates an account of Machiavelli’s ‘treat[ing] ancient poetry as a pastime’ for casual ‘read[ing] about love’, and observes that right reading was a ‘complex and protean

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<sup>23</sup> Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, “Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy’, *Past and Present* 129 (1990), p.30.

<sup>24</sup> Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago & London: 2007), chapter 1. For teaching vernacular language reading in humanist schooling, see Catherine Nicholson, *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance* (Philadelphia: 2013), chapter 1.

<sup>25</sup> See: Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: 1993); Peter Mack, ‘Renaissance habits of reading’, in *Renaissance Essays for Kitty Scouler Datta*, ed. S. Chaudhuri (Calcutta: 1995), pp.1-25.; Eugene R. Kintgen, *Reading in Tudor England* (Pittsburgh: 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Peter Mack, ‘Rhetoric, ethics and reading in the Renaissance’, *Renaissance Studies* 19:1 (2005), p.4.

<sup>27</sup> Erasmus, ‘On the Writing of Letters’, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol 5, trans. Charles Fantazzi (Toronto: 1985), p.194.



enterprise'.<sup>28</sup> The rich picture of different kinds of reading current during early modernity supplements this thesis' exploration of the ways in which Spenser and Burton conceptualise the reformatory potential of their texts. Copious as *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy* both are, they self-consciously invite and concede different kinds of reading, from deep engagement to lighter interaction, extended experiences to brief, consultative reference, fascinated attention to bored frustration.

Just as both texts invite different kinds of reading, so are they both directed towards a range of different readers. Spenser's 'Letter to Raleigh' describes the 'shadow[ing]' of 'our soueraine the Queene' in various of the poem's characters, and the direct and oblique addresses to 'my soueraigne Queene' in the proem of each book cast Elizabeth as 'a kind of Prime Reader postulated within the poem' (716, IV.proem.4.2).<sup>29</sup> But this explanatory 'Letter', as we have seen, is not only addressed to Walter Raleigh, but directs the poem towards 'a gentleman or noble person', an aristocratic and masculine audience whose distinction from the Queen herself is nonetheless entangled with the gendered politics of the Elizabethan court. And Spenser's poem, indentured as it is to 'the pillours of Eternity', is mindful of its enjoyment by future readers (VII.viii.2.4). Recent scholarship such as that of Catherine Nicholson, who traces the reception of Spenser's epic throughout the last four centuries by different readers including women, children, scholars, and active dissenters, links the abiding challenge of *The Faerie Queene*, its readings and misreadings, to the development of literary criticism as a discipline.<sup>30</sup>

The *Anatomy*, too, has received much critical attention regarding the nature and experience of its readership. In large part due to its unwieldiness, Burton's text

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<sup>28</sup> Anthony Grafton, 'The Humanist as Reader', in *A History of Reading in the West*, eds. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Cambridge: 1999), p.183.

<sup>29</sup> Theresa Krier, 'Spenser and Gender Studies', in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (Oxford: 2010), p.764. Scholarship on the role of Elizabeth as reader and subject of the poem is extensive. Impelled by the New Historicism, some have demonstrated the complex dynamics of subject formation and fashioning at work in the representation of femininity in the poem (see: Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* [Baltimore & London: 1981]; Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* [Ithaca & London: 1983]; Louis Adrian Montrose, 'The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text', in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, eds. Patricia Parker and David Quint [Baltimore & London: 1986], pp.303-340.) Other work has broadened notions of female readership beyond the Queen (see: Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* [Cambridge: 2000], esp. chapters 1 & 8.; Caroline McManus, *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Reading of Women* [Newark: 2002]).

<sup>30</sup> Nicholson, 2020, *passim*.

garnered a number of reader-response studies in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> More recent critics, responding to the ahistorical tendencies of such an approach, have contributed to the historicization of Burton's readers. His text is directed towards the cure of melancholics, but this demographic has been shown to be exceedingly broad or even totalising, given that Burton not only considered it 'so universall a malady, an Epidemicall disease', but equates the condition with fallenness (I.110).<sup>32</sup> Mary Ann Lund has argued that 'Burton creates a rhetorical construction of the reader as an unknowable and invisible figure' in order to cultivate as broad a readership as possible, and so provide therapy to all.<sup>33</sup> But the variegated textures of the *Anatomy* suggest that different parts are aimed at different kinds of readers: lengthy (and misogynistic) sections of the partition on Love Melancholy are directed towards men, whilst the subsection on 'Symptoms of nuns, maids, and widows' ostensibly invites female readership; that the majority of the text is written in the vernacular suggests an authorial hope for a broad audience, but sections written entirely in Latin are rendered inaccessible to all but the most highly educated. In such a vein, Angus Gowland has demonstrated the way in which Burton conceives of a reader similar to himself, and the *Anatomy* as an opportunity for 'a community of learned readers to put their humanist education into practice.'<sup>34</sup> The *Anatomy*, like *The Faerie Queene*, welcomes and resists different kinds of readers at different times.

The above discussion reveals a set of methodological contexts that coalesce around questions regarding reading. In thinking about the readership of these texts (both imagined and actual, intended and accidental), we are forced to consider not only the relationships between author, text, and reader along the broad axes of historicism and formalism, but also the role of the modern literary critic and literary criticism in general. Whilst attending to the historical contingency of both language and literary texts, I am minded, throughout this thesis, not to efface or conceal the critical mediation at work in any scholarship, nor to assume that an 'intended' or

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<sup>31</sup> Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (Berkeley, LA: 1972), chapter 6.; Ruth A. Fox, *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Berkeley, LA: 1976); Martin Heusser, *The Gilded Pill: A Study of the Reader-Writer Relationship in Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy* (Tübingen: 1987)

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of early modernity's melancholic epidemic, see Angus Gowland, 'The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy', *Past & Present* 191 (2006), 77-120.

<sup>33</sup> Lund, 2010, p.24.

<sup>34</sup> Angus Gowland, 'As Hunters find their Game by the Trace': Reading to Discover in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, *The Review of English Studies* 70:295 (2019), p.440.

historical reader is necessarily the ‘best’ reader or the one most worthy of attention: in keeping with the process philosophy suggested by Augustine’s salvific hermeneutics, the activity of literary criticism is as valuable as its results. Both *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy* are unusually self-conscious about their textual status and the uncertainty of their interpretation at the hands of readers. As such, this thesis attends to the ways that these texts encode, challenge, and frustrate their own hermeneutic practices, negotiating readers as distant as a Tudor queen and a twenty-first century literary critic. As we shall see, these hermeneutic codes are embedded in the expectations and dynamics of the text’s forms – allegory and romance, anatomy and *cento* – and challenged by moments of resistance and rupture in their content, revealed through close reading. My approach, as a consequence, is akin to what Stephen Cohen has described as an ‘historical formalism’ which attends to how ‘a text’s form shapes and is in turn shaped by its raw materials – when ideologies of form and content meet’:

[This] historical formalism [... treats] every text as a complex and unique interaction of historically specific formal and contextual ideologies [...] accounting for the literary text’s relative autonomy from its informing discourses and rooting any consequent subversive potential not [...] in post-facto ideological analysis but in audience expectation and its frustration or complication.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Cohen, ‘Between Form and Culture: New Historicism and the Promise of a Historical Formalism’, in *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*, ed. Mark David Rasmussen (New York & Basingstoke: 2002), pp.32-33. Cohen’s ‘historical formalism’ expresses a hope for the reconciliation of formalist and historicist approaches, whose disciplinary and political battle is longstanding. For accounts of this contest in early modern studies and in the context of the ‘new formalism’ of which Cohen is a part, see: Marjorie Levinson, ‘What Is New Formalism?’, *PMLA* 122:2 (2007), 558-569.; Ellen Rooney, ‘Form and Contentment’, *Modern Language Quarterly* 61:1 (2000) 17-40. My critical ethos follows Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Ben Burton’s description of an historical formalism’s desire to look ‘less for the uniqueness of a particular artefact than for its ability to mobilize aesthetic features from literary tradition’, and one which considers how literature ‘would have been created by early modern readers as well as what it means to us now, without implying that we can know what an early modern reader would have thought, nor homogenizing modern or early modern readers.’ Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Ben Burton, ‘The Work of Form’, in *The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Ben Burton (Oxford: 2014), p.6.

By exploring the workings of a reformatory reading grounded in learning *how* to read – a heuristic process – this thesis will demonstrate how these texts set up, complicate, and frustrate interpretive expectations, leading to moments of irony, internal contradiction, even self-effacement. At the heart of its argument is the notion that Spenser and Burton train the reader to be critical and wary of the ideology of form – the epistemological, political, and ethical principles of allegory and anatomy – through alert and attentive close reading. It is therefore useful, before outlining the focus and scope of the chapters, to map out the dynamics and ideological significance of Spenser’s and Burton’s formal choices.

### III: Dark Conceits and Purly Hunters: On Allegory and Anatomy

In his ‘Letter to Raleigh’, Spenser describes *The Faerie Queene* as a ‘continued Allegory, or darke conceite’ with its meaning ‘clowdily enwrapped in Allegoricall deuises’ (714, 716). The words echo Quintilian’s designation of allegory as a species of rhetoric ‘consist[ing] of a succession of Metaphors’, an extended and moving performance of literary figuration, at the same time as evoking the veil of mystery conferred by allegory’s ‘other-speaking’ (Gk, *allos-goria*).<sup>36</sup> The title of Burton’s text, meanwhile, proclaims its status as literary anatomy, and the subtitle of its frontispiece describes the form’s structural features, with ‘several Sections, members & subsections, philosophically, medicinally, historically opened & cut vp’ (I.lxiii). Like a ‘Purly hunter’ – one who must hunt at the margin, or purlieu, of a forest – the anatomist ‘break[s] into the inner roomes’ of the body of ‘this Microcosme’ in search of visceral knowledge (I.372). Whilst identifying as allegory and anatomy, both of these texts nonetheless contain, exhibit, and play with features and qualities of a range of modes and genres: Spenser’s poem is also a romance, and an epic, with moments that invoke the range of lyric and dramatic forms; and Burton’s anatomy is a *cento*, with passages of satire, sermon, and encyclopaedia.<sup>37</sup> In particular, the question of what

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<sup>36</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A Russell (Cambridge, MA: 2014, III.451.

<sup>37</sup> For a theoretical study of genre, which takes Burton’s *Anatomy* as a case study but which is equally useful for thinking about Spenser’s synthetic, syncretic text, see: Susan Wells, ‘Genres as Species and Spaces: Literary and Rhetorical Genre in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*’, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 47:2 (2014), 113-136.

allegory is (a ‘distracting and tricky question’, according to Anderson) continues to be a matter of debate, and it has variously been described as a ‘genre’, ‘mode’, or ‘form’.<sup>38</sup> I use the term ‘form’ here for a number reasons. Appearing as they do in key paratexts, these words frame these texts just as form might be considered to frame content, emphasising the meeting and conflict of the two described by Cohen. The word evokes both forms of writing and forms of reading, underscoring how readers approaching the texts are met with a set of traditions and expectations regarding their structural, discursive, and epistemological qualities – their legibility. Finally, thinking of them as forms brings into focus an association, central to this thesis, between allegory, anatomy, and philosophical idealism, broadly Platonic in nature. Allegory and anatomy share with idealism a need for and manner of negotiating between the material world of particulars and intellectual world of ideas, or Forms. Whilst theoretical accounts of the two are numerous and regularly in conflict with each other, in moving through some of them now I wish to suggest that allegory and anatomy share some cognate dynamics, and outline the ethical, political, and epistemological ideologies that accrue around these dynamics, crucial as they are to these writers’ conceptions of the reformative possibilities of reading.

In *Allegory and Violence* (1996), Gordon Teskey proposes that ‘the cultural purpose allegory serves is to call forth from the reader, through interpretation, a continual translation of human experience into an arrangement of visual forms, an ideology.’<sup>39</sup> The ‘continual translation’ – a phrase which recalls Quintilian’s ‘succession of Metaphors’ (Lat. = *translatio*) – of ‘experience’ into ‘forms’ is effected, in literary allegory, in the translation, through constant interpretation, of verbal images into ideas or concepts. These figurative dynamics, whereby a sensual image (be it visual, verbal, or material) represents an immaterial concept, mirror an essentially Platonic worldview in which material forms are mere shadows of the Ideas

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<sup>38</sup> Judith H. Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton* (Ashland, OH: 2008), pp.6, 1.; Deborah L. Madsen, *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre* (London: 1995); Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Princeton: 1964). Allegory’s nebulous nature issues, as Deborah L. Madsen explains, from a duality in its history: on the one hand, its ‘classical usage’ as a term that ‘referred to a style of interpretation that imported to a text some external and extrinsic meaning’, and, an ‘equally resilient definition of allegory [...] developed by early Christian interpreters of the Bible’, who considered it ‘an aspect of the text itself.’ (Madsen, 1995, p.3.)

<sup>39</sup> Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca & London: 1996), pp.xi-xii.

of an immaterial, eternal realm.<sup>40</sup> Spenser's allegory proposes (whilst, as we shall see, it also exceeds) a 'fundamentally Platonic account' of allegory whereby its literal narrative invites 'an anagogic ascent from its imagery towards a still point of luminous truth somewhere above and beyond its fictive multiplicity.'<sup>41</sup> Teskey argues that allegory – the interpretive activity of moving through a series of significant images towards an overarching structure of meaning – has at its heart a violence, native to Platonic ideology, based on the abnegation of the sensual and material and the primacy of the Idea. His key example of this violence is the figure of personification, which 'capture[s] the substantiality of beings and raise[s] it to the conceptual plane', transforming a material being – teeming with plural semantic potential and ambiguous multivalence – into the singularity of 'instrumental meaning, meaning not as a representation of what already is but as the creative exertion of force.'<sup>42</sup> In this account, the imposition of form onto matter, or of meaning onto image, is the site of a violence which subjugates multiplicity and materiality beneath unity and ideology.

Teskey's account of allegory, whilst illuminating in many ways, has its drawbacks, most deriving from what Anderson describes as the discussion of 'allegory as if it were simply identical with abstraction per se and therefore *other* to narrative'.<sup>43</sup> What it does do, however, is emphasise how allegory – or what we might term the 'allegorical imperative', its abstracting impulse – exists in conflict with mutability and materiality, and therefore with life. The translation of image into idea involves the disposal of the literal meaning – the image – and the retention only of the meaning gleaned through interpretation; but, through the metonymic relationship

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<sup>40</sup> For an extended discussion of the relationship between allegory and Platonism, see Jason Crawford, *Allegory and Enchantment: An Early Modern Poetics* (Oxford: 2017), chapter 1. See also: Mindele Anne Treip, *Allegorical Poetics and the Epic: The Renaissance Tradition to Paradise Lost* (Lexington: 1994), p.74.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Suttie, 'The Lost Cause of Platonism in *The Faerie Queene*', *Spenser Studies XXIV* (2009), p.415.

<sup>42</sup> Teskey, 1996, pp.18, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, 2008, p.7. Competing understandings of allegory by theorists speak to the form's elusive nature: readers find it easier to sense allegory than to define it. Anderson, describing literary allegory, sees narrative – and therefore change – as an essential part of its dramatization of the tensive relationship between concept and embodiment. I am also alert to this tensive, often conflictual relationship, but articulate it as one between the allegorical imperative towards stasis and unity, and the mobile, multiplying force of romance narrative. For the relationship between narrative movement and emblematic stasis in allegory, see: Stephen A. Barney, *Allegories of History, Allegories of Love* (Hamden, CT: 1979), p.29.

between literal word and flesh, this also involves the disposal of the living body. Walter Benjamin observes the deathly nature of allegory when he explains the death of characters at the end of the *Trauerspiel*, ‘because it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory’; and it is no coincidence that *Paradise Lost*’s only overt allegory concerns Sin and Death at the mouth of hell.<sup>44</sup> As Jason Crawford observes, ‘[t]he ancient separation of eternal form and temporal matter dictates, after all, that a body cannot both mean and live.’<sup>45</sup> The integrity of the allegorical agent’s meaning is threatened by its every movement and action. Carolyn Van Dyke suggests that we might think of these agents ‘as a vertical space, dominated at the top by the abstract noun that designates its essence and grounded in an embodiment that engages in the action.’<sup>46</sup> But each action that this embodiment engages in throws it further away from the vertical plane of the abstract noun. An abstract *is*, it does not *do*: the process of becoming and its temporality is incompatible with the being and essential meaning enshrined by allegory.

But allegory – and Spenser’s allegory in particular – does not always work like this. Much of this thesis’ attention to Spenser’s poetry focuses on the way in which the image, the sign, or the word, is not easily disposed of after interpretation, but lingers and calls attention to itself. Paul Suttie has usefully described the phenomenon of ‘allegory’s two kinds’, observed by many commentators in various terminology, as ‘this *for* that’ and ‘this *and* that’ allegory.<sup>47</sup> The former describes a conservative notion of allegory as its abstracting imperative, privileging the concept over the image. But the latter allows for the image’s abiding power: an allegorical agent is always both its abstract noun and its temporal embodiment, no matter how far from alignment these two may stray. The latter, whilst courting transcendental

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<sup>44</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London & New York: 1977), p.217.; Milton’s engagement with allegory is of course much more widespread and complex than this single example. For Milton’s Benjamin-esque conception of allegory, see Catherine Gimelli Martin, *The Ruins of Allegory: Paradise Lost and the Metamorphosis of Epic Convention* (Durham & London: 1998); for Milton’s allegoric inheritance from Spenser, see Anderson, 2008, pp.280-320.; Treip, 1994, p.95.

<sup>45</sup> Crawford, 2017, p.16.

<sup>46</sup> Carolyn Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth: Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory* (Ithaca & London: 1985), pp.39-40.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in The Faerie Queene* (Cambridge: 2006), p.20. Paul Suttie draws these terms from: Charles S. Singleton, ‘Dante’s Allegory’, *Speculum* 25:1 (1950), 78-86. The terminology also resonates with Van Dyke’s description of allegory as a ‘synthesis of deictic and nondeictic’ codes: Van Dyke, 1985, p.41.

interpretation, simultaneously resists it through the privileging of the abiding sensuous and ethical claims of the material word, the embodied sign, the living body. When Nature demands that Mutabilitie '[c]ease [...] further to aspire, / [...] For thy decay thou seekst by thy desire', she describes something more pressing and percipient to the ethical dimension of Spenser's allegory than the tired paradox that the only thing that doesn't change is Change (VII.vii.59.1-3). Rather, she warns that in 'aspiring' to the seat of transcendent power, Mutabilitie risks neutering her own embodiment of creative change, 'seeking', as Ayesha Ramachandran notes, 'to ossify [herself] in a single, totalizing idea of world-order instead of embracing [her] own suppleness and generativity.'<sup>48</sup> Allegorical hypostasis is directly opposed to mutability. Endless becoming, represented by the Titaness but threatened by her aspiration, is privileged over being. Spenser's governing lesson for the reader is the same as Nature's: to mitigate the totalising, transcendent impulse of allegory with an attention to the mutability and materiality that populate the world of the poem.

In contrast to slippery and ill-defined allegory – both in its theoretical description and textual manifestation – giving an account of what anatomy is and what it does is a slightly easier enterprise. In 1543, the Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius' publication of *De humani corporis fabrica* brought the twin arts of dissection and medical anatomy to the forefront of the early modern cultural imagination, its ornate, neoclassical depictions of anatomical systems heralding a renewed interest in the working of the body's interior. In dissecting the body into its separate parts, the anatomist promised to gain an understanding of the whole body through knowledge of its particulars. Richard Sugg, however, describes how prior to the advent of Vesalius, 'the human organism studied by elite medical professionals had been composed not of bone, muscle, and tissue, but of books', drawing attention to anatomy's status, throughout classical antiquity, as a textual endeavour.<sup>49</sup> Specifically, the process of anatomy – the division of a whole into parts as an epistemological

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<sup>48</sup> Ayesha Ramachandran, 'Mutabilitie's Lucretian metaphysics: scepticism and cosmic process in Spenser's *Cantos*', in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester: 2010), p.238.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Sugg, *Murder After Death: Literature and Anatomy in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: 2007), p.1. For a discussion of the historical and epistemological relationship between anatomy and rhetoric, see: Stephen Pender, 'Between Medicine and Rhetoric', *Early Science and Medicine* 10:1 (2005), 36-64. For a particular discussion of Galen – the father of anatomy – and rhetoric, see Heinrich von Staden, 'Anatomy as Rhetoric: Galen on Dissection and Persuasion', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50:1 (1995), 47-66.



enterprise – originates in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates describes the activity of ‘bring[ing] things which are scattered all over the place into a single class’ and then ‘cut[ting] things up again, class by class’.<sup>50</sup> These acts of collection and division comprise the process of *diairesis*, a form of classification central to Platonic logic that seeks definition through the subdivision of generals into their particular elements. During early modernity, a burst of literary anatomies were published, which took as their subjects both medical and non-medical themes, from Thomas Nashe’s *The Anatomie of Absurditie* (1589) to James Hart’s *The Anatomie of Urines* (1625).<sup>51</sup> What these publications attest to is the currency of a logic of division, inherited from Plato, and applied as an epistemological method in a variety of disciplinary fields.

My first chapter deals at length with the particular qualities of Burton’s own anatomical cut, but for now I want to highlight two characteristics that anatomy shares with allegory. The first is that they are both directed towards the difficult negotiation between generals and particulars. Where allegory dramatises this negotiation in the troubled relationship between idea and material instance, anatomy posits a corporeal metaphor that theorises taxonomy via synecdoche. But the problem is similar: when Burton attempts to list the symptoms of melancholy, he grapples with bridging the gap between the immaterial category of melancholy and its particular manifestations. In his great sceptical essay ‘Of Experience’, Michel de Montaigne describes how the ‘art of Physicke is not so resolute, that whatsoever wee do, we shall be void of all authority to doe it’: individual cases of diseases are unlike and unpredictable, so that the ‘diversity of physicall arguments and medicinall opinions embraceth all manner of forms.’<sup>52</sup> As Gowland explains, for Montaigne ‘the infinity of signs that learned physicians acknowledged as the basis of the medical art undermined the credibility of their semiological procedures.’<sup>53</sup> Francis Bacon recognises the same problem in the methodology of the medical arts, and anatomy in particular, in which he finds ‘much deficiencie: for they enquire of the *Parts*, and their

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<sup>50</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: 2012), pp.55-56. For a discussion of Plato’s formulation of anatomical rhetoric, see: Christopher E. Cosans, ‘The Platonic Origins of Anatomy’, *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 38:4 (1995), 581-596.

<sup>51</sup> For a list of published ‘anatomies’ between 1575 and 1650, see Sugg, 2007, pp.213-216.

<sup>52</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Montaigne’s Essays*, vol 3, trans John Florio (London: 2006), p.TBV.

<sup>53</sup> Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: 2006), p.102.

*Substances, Figures, and Collocations*; But they enquire not of the *Diuersities of the Parts*.<sup>54</sup> Bacon's criticism, which is framed as a failure to observe 'the diuersitie of parts', which are 'full of difference', in 'the view of many', questions a scientific rationalism that ignores or elides particulars: instead, he demands a return to 'the auncient and serious diligence of *Hippocrates*, which vsed to set downe a Narratiue of the special cases of his patientes and how they proceeded'.<sup>55</sup> Where Montaigne suggests that the manifold difference of particular medical cases frustrates the possibility of asserting general rules with any certitude, Bacon describes how medical anatomy's positing of universals risks a dangerous deviation from the lived experiences of individual cases. The structure of anatomy attempts to paper over the rift between the order of its theoretical account and the disorder of its mutable and multifarious subject.

Bacon's argument here reveals the anatomy's second affinity with allegory: just as allegory's idealism dictates that bodies cannot both mean and live, so too does the rationalising impulse of anatomy oppose mutability and living matter. Jonathan Sawday points out that, in the anatomy theatre, as 'the physical body is fragmented, so the body of understanding is held to be shaped and formed': the process of medical anatomy depends literally upon a corpse, whose corporeal integrity is inversely related to the anatomy's textual integrity.<sup>56</sup> In transforming the flowing, physical body into a textual one, the anatomist captures, kills, and preserves it, a latent violence actualised in Burton's metaphor describing himself as a 'hunter' who 'breaks into' the building of the body. But Burton's *Anatomy*, as this thesis will regularly demonstrate, adopts the structural apparatus of an anatomy only to critique it, exposing the epistemological and ethical failings of both medical learning and Platonic logic. In his preface, Burton writes that he is 'by my profession a Divine, and by mine inclination a Physitian', driven 'not with an intent to practise, but to satisfy my selfe' (I.23). The *Anatomy* is not designed predominantly as a compendium of medical learning (though this is not to say it is not one), but rather as the ministration of 'a Spirituall Physitian', who 'amends [...] *corpus per animam*' (I.22). This 'amendment' is the discipline of reading which is the subject of this thesis, and which comprises a recognition of the diverse and changeable nature of melancholy – and

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<sup>54</sup> Francis Bacon, 'The Advancement of Learning', in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol. 4, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: 2000), p.99.

<sup>55</sup> Bacon, 2000, p.99.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the human body in Renaissance culture* (London & New York: 1995), p.2.

therefore the human condition. Just as Spenser's poem teaches its readers to mitigate against the totalising impulse of the allegorical imperative, so too Burton's text teaches its readers to embrace the plurality, materiality, and mutability of melancholy, in spite of the rationalising force of its anatomical superstructure.

#### **IV: Chapter Summaries**

Each chapter of this thesis adopts a different framework for exploring the reformative capacities of reading *The Faerie Queene* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The first – 'Reading for a Cure' – examines how the intrinsically ambivalent power of reading – its power to help and power to harm – is conceptualised during early modernity in medical terms, and how a model of medical reading informs Spenser's and Burton's own understandings of the possible profitable and pernicious effects of their texts on their readers. The chapter frames its discussion in terms of the Platonic *pharmakon* – that which is both poison and cure – which appears in Socrates' myth on the invention of writing in the *Phaedrus*. For a number of reasons, the *pharmakon* will become the thesis' dominant and recurring image of reading's power. On one hand, the Platonic original concerns the written word's ambivalent utility, an ambivalence to which Spenser and Burton remain acutely sensitive. On the other, its paradoxical fusion of poison and cure usefully speaks to – even emblemizes – a number of the paradoxes at the heart of my argument: the burden and blessing of the Fall (and, consequently, melancholy); humanity's dual nature as saved and depraved; and an accommodation of both 'this *for* that' (poison *or* cure) and 'this *and* that' (poison *and* cure) accounts of allegorical semiotics. Focusing on the Legend of Holiness, the chapter explores the pharmaceutical nature of reading in Spenser's poem, arguing that its salvific effects are intimately involved in an experience of suffering. Burton, in similar fashion, embraces reading as a profitable but even painful activity: in a melding of allopathic and homeopathic models of medicinal therapy, he attempts to use pharmic revolutions to redeem both language and melancholy from the corruptive effects of the Fall.

Chapter 2 – 'Economies of Reading' – confronts the economic dimension of the Horatian demand that poetry combine profit with pleasure. It situates Spenser and Burton within a climate of fervent debate regarding literature's economic status

and practical utility for the commonwealth, which witnessed the publication of antipoetic treatises and apologetic responses, critiques and defences of learning. I argue that in entering this debate, Spenser and Burton find in the money-form's transactional and representational dynamics a fertile analogue for thinking through the similarly representational dynamics of writing and semiotics, reformative economies and allegory. I focus on Spenser's engagement with money in two episodes of *The Faerie Queene* – Guyon's descent into Mammon's Cave in the Legend of Temperance, and the tale of Malbecco in the Legend of Chastity, whose cupidity and sexual possessiveness warn against the dangers of jealousy – before turning to the more widespread reticulation of money-thought in Burton's *Anatomy*. In thinking about the money form, both writers find the opportunity to meditate upon the relationship between signs and things, the nature of idolatrous reading, and the values of their own texts and the interpretive processes they enshrine.

Chapter 3 – 'The Work of Reading' – is both an exploration of the ways in which Spenser and Burton conceive of reading as work – arduous and gruelling, but salutary – and an extended demonstration of that work. It co-opts Burton's description of his writing task as a 'playing labour' to describe the hermeneutics solicited by *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy*, which, whilst necessarily different, both locate in the work of reading a kind of interpretive play that is ethically salubrious (I.7). This hermeneutics embraces – and encourages the reader to embrace – the semantic pluralism of signs, beings, and the world. The work is difficult, demanding attention to detail, sensitivity to difference, and pliancy from the reader; but it is in cultivating this admixture of close reading and interpretive openness in readers that Spenser and Burton identify the reformative potential of their texts. The chapter begins with an extended reading of the complex poetics of Spenser's epyllion, 'Muiopotmos', before turning to how this poetics informs *The Faerie Queene's* Legend of Justice, which explores the ends – as both purpose and limit – of a flexible hermeneutics founded upon early modern concepts of judicial equity. It then turns to Burton's representation of the *Anatomy* as an onerous work both to write and read, a textual labyrinth of disorientation and error. It argues that the salutary work solicited by the *Anatomy* is a recognition of the labyrinthine text and the labyrinthine world as a reason not for despair, but for wonder. Both Spenser and Burton locate in the labour of reading an opportunity to transform the curse of work conferred at the Fall into a blessing, and route to salvation.

The final chapter – ‘On Digression’ – confronts the digressive impulse so characteristic of both Spenser’s errant romance and Burton’s winding, distracted text. In the face of the arduous work posed by both texts – the work of writing them, and the work of reading them – both writers offer up digression as an opportunity for respite and recreation. At the same time, digression is recognised as a potentially dangerous form of dallying, distraction, and dissipation. This chapter, then, explores the ambivalent profits offered up by digression, focusing predominantly on Spenser’s *Legend of Courtesy* and the various digressions that weave through the body of Burton’s *Anatomy*. In opposing the claimed *telos* and intended aims of both texts – the forward thrust of allegorical epic and the tight structure of anatomical display – I argue that the digressive impulse forms a critique or abandonment of the utility of allegory and anatomy within each writer’s reformatory projects, at the same time as comprising the final, uncertain part of those projects. ‘On Digression’ bears witness to the possible failings of Spenser’s allegory and Burton’s *Anatomy* to fashion a reader, but also glimpses these texts’ alternative promises.

For clarity of argument and to pay due care to the particularities and differences between *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy*, each chapter treats Spenser and Burton consecutively. However, just as Spenser’s and Burton’s texts proceed teleologically but invite or give the impression of non-linear reading, with episodes mutually reshaping each other (I am reminded of Holland’s sense in *The Faerie Queene* ‘that everything is happening at once’), so these chapters and their sections are intended to reshape, inform, and **resonate fractally** with each other.<sup>57</sup> I emphasise this as a final note only because it relates to the methodological attitude that underpins the pairing of these two radically and reputedly different writers. In ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), T. S. Eliot writes that ‘as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism’, we must recognise that ‘what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it.’<sup>58</sup> His distinction between aesthetic and historical criticism here indicates the importance of comparative reading outside of any notion of imitation or influence (Burton read Spenser, and quotes him a handful of times, but by no stretch can be deemed to have been significantly influenced by him). Rather, these two writers exist together in the domain of literary publications, shaping each other’s

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<sup>57</sup> Holland, 1968, p.27.

<sup>58</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, *Perspecta* 19 (1982), p.37.

meaning as they are read side by side by readers throughout history, but also by early modern literary critics today. In exploring them together in this thesis, I hope to uncover something that already exists in the critical imagination, latent but unarticulated. Whilst remaining attuned to the historical contingency of their creation, I hope that this typically unusual pairing might foreground the realities of how we come across, receive, and experience texts, broadening the possibilities of literary criticism as a discipline.

# 1.

## SALVATION AND SUFFERING:

### *Reading for a Cure*

#### **I: Reading Prescription: The Case of Philaretus**

In an autobiographical manuscript entitled ‘An Account of Philaretus during his Minority’ (1648/49), a young Robert Boyle provides a record of the formative experiences of his youth, since ‘men’s native Dispositions are clearest [sic] perceive’d whilst they are Children & when they are Dying.’<sup>1</sup> The future natural philosopher and member of the Royal Society observes from the outset his ‘Studiosness’ and the profound influence of reading on the development of his character; indeed, writing of himself in the third person, he describes how his schoolmaster:

soone created in Philaretus so strong a Passion to acquire knowledge, that what time he could spare from a Schollar’s tasks [...] he would usually employ so greedily in Reading; that his Master would be sometimes necessitated to force him out to Play; on which, & upon Study, he look’t as if their natures were inverted.<sup>2</sup>

The child’s inordinate enthusiasm for study poses a concern for this schoolmaster, who must enforce upon him the physical exercise and mental diversion of ‘Play’, but later in the ‘Account’ Boyle relates another anecdote in which it is reading itself that is recommended as part of a medical prescription. At around the age of eight, and as

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Boyle, ‘An Account of Philaretus during his Minority’, in *Robert Boyle by Himself and His Friends*, ed. Michael Hunter (London: 1994), p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Boyle, 1994, pp.4, 6-7.

a consequence of a series of traumas including the death of his mother and a nearly fatal experience suffered by his brother and himself beneath a falling wall, Boyle returns to Eton College suffering from ‘Melancholy’, which ‘to divert [...] they made him read the stale Adventures of Amadis de Gaule; & other Fabulous & wandering Storys’.<sup>3</sup> The physicians, however, got it wrong, for rather than diverting Boyle’s melancholy as intended, these romances

much more prejudic’d him by unsettling his Thoughts [...] for meeting in him with a restless Fancy, then made more susceptible of any Impressions by an unemploy’d Pensiveness; they accustom’d his Thoughts to such a Habitude of Raving, that he has scarce ever been their quiet Master since.<sup>4</sup>

The ‘roving wildness of his wandering ~~hazard~~ Thoughts’, spurred on and lexically associated with the errant wandering of the heroes of chivalric romances such as *Amadis de Gaule*, eventually finds alleviation in his scientific vocation: his ‘Volatile Fancy’ is ‘fetter[ed]’ by mathematics, ‘the Extractions of the Square and Cubits Rootes, & specially those more laborious Operations of Algebra’.<sup>5</sup> In bittersweet fashion, the permanent troubling of the young Boyle’s mind through melancholy leads to the discovery of his talents and their application in his remarkably successful professional life.

Boyle’s account of being prescribed literature as a treatment for melancholy neatly captures a number of the main interests of this chapter, and indeed of the whole project, concerned as it is with the profitable or curative possibilities of reading. It affirms the early modern understanding of reading as a psycho-physiological, embodied experience, having palpable effects on the body’s passionate balance and the functioning of mental faculties, as scholars such as Adrian Johns have demonstrated.<sup>6</sup> As such, reading might be prescribed to address pathological imbalances through the habituation of the passions of the mind and the humours of the body. Indeed, the therapeutic potential of both the written and spoken word has been a central premise, and even a *raison d’être*, for philosophy since the Hellenistic

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<sup>3</sup> Boyle, 1994, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Boyle, 1994, p.8.

<sup>5</sup> Boyle, 1994, pp.8-9.

<sup>6</sup> See Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: 1998), pp.380-408.; Adrian Johns, ‘The Physiology of Reading and the Anatomy of Enthusiasm’, in *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, eds. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot: 1996), pp.136-170.



period: Martha Nussbaum observes that uniting major Hellenistic schools – Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Scepticism – is the ‘broad and deep agreement that the central motivation for philosophizing is the urgency of human suffering, [...] that the goal of philosophy is human flourishing’, and that this form of therapy is ‘concerned with desire and emotion’, or passionate control.<sup>7</sup> Yet the error of Boyle’s doctors attests to the potentially indeterminable effects of such reading: books intended to heal might equally exacerbate a disorder, a paradox that invokes the Platonic *pharmakon* – that which is both poison and antidote – and its original relation to the written word in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>8</sup> Reading might offer help, harm, or, paradoxically, both.

This chapter takes the case of Philaretus and the implications it unearths as an entrance into the ways in which both Edmund Spenser and Robert Burton – and writers and thinkers of early modernity more generally – conceptualise the therapeutic or profitable possibilities of reading. For whilst each author’s avowed intent to offer up their texts to their readers as vehicles of reformation suggests a committed allegiance to a Horatian poetics of profit and pleasure, throughout both *The Faerie Queene* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* we find a more ambivalent attitude towards the effects of books, reading, language, and rhetoric. These effects, moreover, are consistently represented in medical terms. The hermit of Spenser’s Legend of Courtesy, for instance, himself analogises the psychotherapeutic capacity of the word with the corporeally restorative power of medicine, affirming that ‘[t]o rule the stubborne rage of passion blinde: / Giue salues to euery sore, but counsel to the minde’ (VI.vi.5.8-9). Similarly, where on one hand Burton observes that there is no activity ‘so fit & proper to expell [...] Melancholy, as that of Study’, he elsewhere affirms the opposite, that rather ‘the common cause [of melancholy] is overmuch study’ (II.84, I.303). As we shall see, just as the romances prescribed to Boyle have unforeseen consequences for his health, so too in both Spenser’s and Burton’s understandings, the word can have healthful or harmful impacts depending on the intention and disposition of both the source and patient.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: 1994), pp.15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: 2002), pp.68-69.

<sup>9</sup> For the classical roots of this understanding of rhetoric’s efficacy, see Pedro Lain Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven: 1970), pp.178-80.

The chapter suggests that, immersed in a culture in which the benefits of language, writing, and literature were ambivalent at best, Spenser and Burton are both concerned with the medical possibilities of the word when considering the implications of their own aspirations to provide therapy through reading. This is not to say, however, that they are unquestioningly positive about language's effects, but rather that in navigating the shifting dynamics between writer, text, and reader, they are both invested in formulating and communicating to their readers ways of reading, or hermeneutic processes, that might ensure their texts work in the reformatory and restorative ways in which they intend. The chapter will begin, then, by outlining some of the interlocking early modern contexts of what Mary Ann Lund describes as 'bibliotherapy': the physiological understanding of the activity of reading; humanist rhetorical culture's investment in the moving power of language, both for good and bad; and how exegetical ideas and practices shaped an understanding of the salvific potential of scripture in a culture in which textual interpretation was at the centre of reformed faith.<sup>10</sup> In mapping out such a history of reading, which will naturally be selective, I aim to foreground how early modern theoreticians and writers repeatedly affirm the essential ambivalence of the word, whether it be the word of an orator, of a romance writer, or of scripture. Elucidating such a theory of language's healing efficacy in terms of the Platonic *pharmakon*, we find that in early modernity the word's medicinal capacities were regularly thought to depend not upon the substance or content of that word but upon readerly approach and disposition. I will then turn to consider how these ideas inform and influence Spenser's and Burton's own work. Focusing predominantly on Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, I argue that for Spenser, reading is a specifically passionate activity, in the sense both that it stimulates a physiological, passionate reaction, and that the salutary effects of reading are deeply involved in an awareness and experience of suffering.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, I follow Joseph Campana's claim that 'the primary virtue of the [...] *Faerie Queene* is vulnerability.'<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, scenes of reading, scenes of healing, and scenes of suffering,

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Cambridge: 2010), p.6. For the medieval and early modern contexts of medicinal language, see Louise M. Bishop, *Words, Stones, Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York: 2007).

<sup>11</sup> 'Passion, n.' *OED Online*, September 2019, [oed.com/view/Entry/138504](http://oed.com/view/Entry/138504). Accessed 12 November 2019. Senses 3, 4a, 6a.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: 2012), p.23.

epitomised in Red Crosse's experience in the House of Holinesse, are coextensive. I argue that Burton, in similar fashion, embraces reading as an affective and even a painful activity. In anatomising the melancholic body, Burton reproduces a melancholic text, yet finds a redemption for such melancholic textuality in a melding of allopathic and homeopathic models of medicinal therapy. For both Spenser and Burton, reading's edifying possibilities emerge out of and respond to the Platonic *pharmakon*, the inexorably ambivalent yet powerfully generative image of simultaneous poison and cure.

## II: Pharmaceutical Reading in Early Modern England

Towards the end of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates offers up an origin myth for the *techné* of writing. The god Theuth, inventor of such arts as geometry, astrology, and the game of dice, has amongst his creations the act of inscription. Desiring that this invention might be of benefit to the people of Egypt, he presents his shop of arts to the great god and king of Egypt, Thamus, and, extolling the virtues of the written word, promises that it will 'increase the intelligence of the people of Egypt and improve their memories. For this invention is a potion [*pharmakon*] for memory and intelligence.'<sup>13</sup> Thamus, however, responds with dissent, suggesting instead that writing 'will atrophy people's memories':

Trust in writing will make them remember things by relying on marks made by others, from outside themselves, not on their own inner resources, and so writing will make the things they have learnt disappear from their minds. Your invention is a potion [*pharmakon*] for jogging the memory, not for remembering.<sup>14</sup>

In Socrates' myth – which begins a series of arguments that promotes the spoken word of the dialectic method over the written word of rhetoric – writing's utility is double-edged, able to be considered both enhancer and corroder of memory. There is, moreover, as Jeffrey T. Nealon describes it, an 'undecidable opposition inscribed

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<sup>13</sup> Plato, 2002, p.68.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, 2002, p.69.

in the very word *pharmakon*, which can mean both poison and remedy.<sup>15</sup> The pharmaceutical quality of language – that it might be read as itself and its opposite – is expressed in the punning and polysemous possibilities of the word *pharmakon* itself. The *pharmakon*, as Eric Langley observes, ‘figures as a metaphor which captures the radical alterity inherent in all things, employed to fundamentally destabilize our attempts to distinguish’, a power which Jacques Derrida explores when he writes that, ‘with all its ambivalence’, the *pharmakon* is recognised ‘as antistuff itself: that which resists any philosopheme, indefinitely exceeding its bounds as nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance’.<sup>16</sup> The *pharmakon* therefore, Langley continues, presents itself as:

suitable to both Plato’s dialectical method (i.e. poison *contra* medicine, either/or), and, antithetically, to Derrida’s wholesale rejection of Platonic binaries (i.e. poison *and* medicine simultaneously) in that it is ‘always turning against itself in itself, defeating itself’.<sup>17</sup>

Langley’s depiction of the *pharmakon*’s dynamics here is one of endless collapse: ouroboros-like, the image consumes itself. Considered differently, however, the ‘radical alterity’ inherent in the *pharmakon* might be self-correction rather than self-defeat, a continuous form of self-moderating cure.

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<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Double Reading: Postmodernism after Deconstruction* (Ithaca & London: 1993), p.16. For an extended study of pharmaceutical drugs in Hellenistic culture and philosophy, see Michael A. Rinella, *Pharmakon: Plato, Drug Culture, and Identity in Ancient Athens* (Plymouth: 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Eric Langley, *Shakespeare’s Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications* (Oxford: 2018), p.111.; Jacques Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, in *Disseminations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: 1981), p.70.

<sup>17</sup> Langley, 2018, p.114. Langley’s chapter, ‘Shakespeare’s Pharmacy’, usefully provides a history of how the *pharmakon* is incorporated, via Paracelsian medicine, into early modern thought and into the potentially pathological implications of sympathy in Shakespeare’s drama (see chapter 3). My interest in the *pharmakon* here follows more strictly its legacy in the understanding of language and writing, than as a wider metaphor. Langley writes that he ‘suspect[s] that the early modern usage both appreciates what Derrida may think of as the intrinsic instability of any word, while generally depicting the transformations of poison-to-medicine in broadly contrapuntal therefore Platonic terms’ (p.115). Whilst wary of retroactively imposing a Derridean understanding of the *pharmakon* on early modernity, in what follows I do suggest that whilst alert to the threatening implications of the bitter-masquerading-as-sweet, both Spenser’s and Burton’s understanding of the medicinal – and therefore salvific – efficacy of the word lies in an embracing of its ‘intrinsic instability’, its ability to be both itself and its other.

It is with such delicately ambivalent valences – hovering between poison and/or remedy, between inevitable self-defeat and the potential for self-cure or self-regulation – that the Platonic *pharmakon* is absorbed into early modern understandings of language’s power. The influence is broad and regularly works to capture language’s capriciousness in medical terms. Erasmus, in his instructions ‘On the Writing of Letters’, recognises the importance ‘of comforting our friends with consoling words’ in the face of mortal life ‘full of misfortunes’.<sup>18</sup> Such consolation he describes as a ‘strong medicine’, one, however, which must be applied ‘skilfully, lest like unskilled doctors we aggravate rather than alleviate a wound that is still raw and fresh.’<sup>19</sup> Erasmus’s words suggestively straddle the literal and figurative: whilst friends might act ‘like unskilled doctors’, language nonetheless *is* a ‘medicine’ whose capacity to ‘aggravate’ or ‘alleviate’ a ‘wound’ is, whilst often unpredictable, nonetheless real. Stephen Gosson, in his antipoetic tract *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), recruits similarly medicinal imagery to affirm not the potentially beneficial power of language but its inevitable tendency towards dissimulation, corruption, and moral harm. ‘The deceitfull Phisition’, he writes:

giueth sweete Syropes to make his poyson goe downe the smoother; [...] Many good sentences are [...] written by Poets, as ornamentes to beautifye their woorkes, and sette their trumperie too sale without suspect [...] but] pul off the visard that Poets maske in, you shall disclose their reproch, bewray their vanitie, loth their wantonnesse, lament their follie, and perceiue their sharpe sayings to be placed as Pearles in Dunghils, fresh pictures on rotten walles.<sup>20</sup>

Poets are once again doctors in Gosson’s invective, but here they are full of malintent: the pharmic image here refigures the Lucretian image of the bitter medicine of poetry wrapped in a sweet coating into the pernicious tendering of ‘poyson’. Gosson’s attack also insists upon a treacherous gap between outward shows and inward states: poets wear ‘visards’ which ‘mask’ their cruel intentions, which, when ‘disclosed’, reveal their sweet sayings to be mere ‘Pearles in Dunghils’.

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<sup>18</sup> Erasmus, ‘On the Writing of Letters’, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 5, trans. Charles Fantazzi (Toronto: 1985), p.148.

<sup>19</sup> Erasmus, 1985, p.148.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse and A Short Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse*, ed. Edward Arber (London: 1868), p.20.

The poets' 'honey' covers a dangerous 'gall'.<sup>21</sup> Two centuries before, on the other hand, Petrarch had recruited the same language of the bittersweet to defend eloquence, describing how through reading he is 'freed from the burden of the weightiest and most bitter troubles', affirming the transformative power of words that 'caress my ears and gradually flow into me, stimulating me through the force of their innate sweetness [...] and with their hidden barbs transfiguring me deep within.'<sup>22</sup> Petrarch's metaphor of 'hidden barbs' evokes the intimacy of pain and pleasure within the reading process, sad words expunging 'bitter troubles' with their 'innate sweetness'. And Philip Sidney, too, describes the reformatory capacities of poetry as operating 'even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste.'<sup>23</sup> Wholesomeness is implicitly equated with that which is distasteful, help with harm. Here, the gall becomes a necessary element within the salubrious operation of the honey.

The ability to harness language for good or bad becomes a particularly urgent issue within early modern inheritance and reformulation of classical theories of rhetoric, melded as they are with a pharmeric understanding of language. In the 1570s, John Rainolds, reader in Greek at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, gave a series of lectures on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. These talks, which survive in the form of lecture notes, focus on Aristotle but incorporate the broad range of classical texts that became the foundation of humanist rhetorical culture. As their modern editor and translator Lawrence D. Green observes, these lectures comprise 'one of the only detailed theoretical studies of rhetoric from sixteenth-century England, and the only detailed study from the university tradition,' a tradition with which both Spenser and Burton, as students of Cambridge and Oxford respectively, would have been familiar.<sup>24</sup> As such, these lectures afford a unique insight into the reception and reformulation of classical rhetorical theory in the humanist circles of the sixteenth-century academy, and what they evidence is that, for early modern thinkers, rhetoric's power lay in its ability to move listeners or readers through affective stimulation.

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<sup>21</sup> Gosson, 1868, p.20.

<sup>22</sup> Petrarch, 'Letter to Tommaso da Messina, Concerning the Study of Eloquence', in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca & London: 2000), p.17.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, eds. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: 1973), p.92.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence D. Green, 'Introduction', in *John Rainolds' Oxford Lectures on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. Lawrence D. Green (Newark: 1986), p.9.

From the outset of these lectures, what appears as a central concern for Rainolds is a grappling with the role that the passions play in the exercise of rhetoric.<sup>25</sup>

Considering Aristotle's 'fault[ing of] the rousing of emotions' in Book 1 of the *Rhetoric*, he defends the position in terms of the abuse of such rousing in 'judicial inquiry' since it 'clouds the mind' with the effect that 'very many bonds of law are broken' by 'envy or loosened by pity, severed by anger or bound by hatred'.<sup>26</sup> Much of the second lecture, however, is devoted to a rehabilitation of the passions, arguing that the appetitive faculty, the seat of the passions, is designed to aid the performance of 'things which the mind [the rational faculty] has determined'.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence, Rainolds avows that '[e]motion, therefore, is a natural commotion of the soul, implanted by God for following good and fleeing evil', leading him to reject 'that absurd etymology of the Stoics', whereby emotions are so named 'πάθη because they are diseases', instead following what he sees as the Peripatetic viewpoint of Cicero who suggests that 'emotions were given to our minds for our benefit'.<sup>28</sup> Passions, he concludes, can 'correct' as well as 'corrupt'.<sup>29</sup>

Such an awareness of the equally beneficial and damaging power of the passions colours practically all aspects of early modern considerations of moral psychology and ethical formation. As Susan James observes:

perhaps the most striking fact about the images [of early modern passions] is their equivocality: on the one hand the passions are functional characteristics essential to our survival and flourishing; on the other hand they are painful

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<sup>25</sup> Entralgo observes that passionate involvement is a defining aspect that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* brings to a classical tradition of the therapeutic word: 'a 'rhetorical syllogism,' the 'enthymeme,' whose name by itself (*en* and *thymos*, 'in the spirit') already indicates that its psychological operation is more 'cordial' than 'cerebral,' that it is oriented more toward the emotions than toward the intelligence' (Entralgo, 1970, p.172.). For an extended exploration of the reception of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and early modern emotional theory, see Lawrence D. Green, 'Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Renaissance Views of the Emotions', in *Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. Peter Mack (New York: 1994), pp.1-26.

<sup>26</sup> Rainolds, 1986, pp.125, 129.

<sup>27</sup> Rainolds, 1986, p.141.

<sup>28</sup> Rainolds, 1986, pp.143, 145.

<sup>29</sup> Rainolds, 1986, p.149. For broader discussion of pharimic understandings of language in early modern rhetorical culture, see James S. Baumlin., *Theologies of Language in English Renaissance Literature: Reading Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton* (Lanham: 2014), pp.5-12.

and destructive impulses which drive us to pursue the very ends liable to do us harm.<sup>30</sup>

Allowed free reign by reason, the passions, Walter Charleton warns, rise up within the body, figured as a body politic, and ‘aspire to unbounded license and dominion’.<sup>31</sup> But Thomas Wright, in *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1601-4), observes that passions ‘may, by vertue be guided, and many good men so moderate and mortifie them, that they rather serve them for instruments of vertue, than foments of vice, and as an occasion of victory, rather than a cause of foyle’; they might be ‘stirred vp for the service of vertue’.<sup>32</sup> Burton acknowledges the experience of passions as a universal condition, writing that ‘*No mortall man is free from these perturbations*: or if he be so, sure he is either a God, or a blocke’ (I.248). Far from espousing a Stoic recommendation ‘*[t]o be immoueable*’ – since to be free from passions would be a delusion of divinity or a loss of humanity – passions have a place within the healthy human body.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Spenser’s allegorical tableau of the idealised human body in the Legend of Temperance’s House of Alma incorporates the passions: in the heart’s chamber, we find ‘a louely beuy of faire Ladies’, representative of the nine concupiscent affections (II.ix.34.2). Where, for example, Christopher Tilmouth sees Spenser as articulating a Stoic attitude that considers the passions to be inimical to virtue, requiring eradication from the body, the presence of the passions in the House of Alma refutes this reading.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, as Catherine Gimelli Martin has observed, these passions are not only domesticated but humanised, unlike the intemperately passionate men transformed into animals in the Bower of Bliss, or the ‘saluage beasts’, representative of unruly passions, that Belphoebe slays (II.iii.29.4).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: 1997), p.14.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Charleton, *A Natural History of the Passions* (London: 1669), p.58.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (London: 1604), pp.15, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Justus Lipsius, *Two Bookees of Constancie*, trans. John Stradling (London: 1595), sig.C3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion’s Triumph Over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford: 2007), p.37.

<sup>35</sup> Catherine Gimelli Martin, ‘Spenser’s Neoplatonic Geography of the Passions: Mapping Allegory in ‘The Legend of Temperance,’ *Faerie Queene*, Book II’, in *Spenser Studies XXIV* (2009), p.286.



For both Spenser and Burton, then, the role of passions is essentially ambivalent, and their necessary place within the healthy subject recognised.<sup>36</sup>

It is, moreover, this psycho-physiological anthropology that informs the impact that reading might have on the human subject. As Adrian Johns reminds us ‘human beings perceived letters on a page through the mediation of their bodies; the passions were the emotional, physiological, and moral responses of the human body to its surroundings, and thus played an unavoidable part in the reading process.’<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as Gail Kern Paster shows, emotional response was a specifically embodied experience, ‘the passions or perturbations of the mind [being] fully embedded in the order of nature and [...] part of material being itself.’<sup>38</sup> In Philemon Holland’s 1603 translation of Plutarch’s *Moralia*, just this affective nature of reading poetry and its reformatory efficacy is observed. After reading, Plutarch advises, a young man

must enter into his owne hearte and examine himselfe when he is alone, how he was mooved and affected [...] whether he find any turbulent passions of his minde thereby dulced and appeased; whether any grieffe or heavinesse that trouble him be mitigated and asswaged.<sup>39</sup>

Reading, then, can settle and alleviate ‘turbulent passions’ through the ‘movement’ and ‘affecting’ of ones more conducive to the healthy subject. Yet Plutarch also warns against poetry’s inverse capacities: poems that offer ‘singular delight’ rather than instruction ‘do spread and swell unmeasurably, readie to enter forcibly into our conceit’.<sup>40</sup> Richard Rainolde, clergyman and teacher, recognises the thin line between rhetoric’s power to mollify and to inspire violent emotional reaction, in that it ‘dilateth and setteth out small thynges or words, in soche sorte, [...] that the moste

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<sup>36</sup> For an exploration of the early modern contestation of the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*, or freedom from passions, on account of its unfeasibility and incompatibility with Christian doctrine, see Jill Kraye, ‘Ἀπάθεια and Προπάθειαι in Early Modern Discussions of the Passions: Stoicism, Christianity and Natural History’, *Early Science and Medicine* 17 (2012), 230-253. Richard Strier argues for the importance of affect in a vibrant field of early modern anti-Stoicism: Richard Strier, ‘Against the Rule of Reason: Praise of Passion from Petrarch to Luther to Shakespeare to Herbert’, in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, eds. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: 2004), pp.23-42.

<sup>37</sup> Johns, 1998, p.386.

<sup>38</sup> Gail Kern Paster, ‘The Body and its Passions’, *Shakespeare Studies* 29 (2001), p.45.

<sup>39</sup> Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie called, the Morals*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: 1603), sig.E4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Plutarch, 1603, sig.B4<sup>r</sup>.

stonie and hard hartes, can not but bee incensed, inflamed, and moued thereto.<sup>41</sup> Thomas Wright similarly warns how ‘corrupted Bookes’ might have a particularly harmful effect on the imagination: these books, the ‘of-springs of vngodly affections’, ‘corrupt extreemely all good manners, and with a silent perswasion insinuate their matter vnto the chiefe affection and highest part of the Soule’.<sup>42</sup> Wright, however, does have an antidote to offer: ‘agaynst these Pamphlets, I oppose thousands of spirituall Volumes, the holy Scriptures, sermons, exhortations, homilies, meditations, prayer-bookes’.<sup>43</sup> Such prescription of scriptural reading for spiritual and passionate amelioration was prolific in the period: the preacher Edward Vaughan describes scripture as ‘spirituall Manna, the food of your soules’; William Vaughan, polymathic writer, extols ‘the holy Scripture’ as ‘the most soveraigne and comfortable water of life, which cooleth and allayeth the fiery stings of unlawfull love’; and William Rankins, condemning theatre in *A Mirroure of Monsters* (1587), advises that a better cure for melancholy than play-watching lies in the ‘reading of the Scriptures [...] whose worde (sweeter then hony of the hony combe) calmeth vs that are greeued’.<sup>44</sup> Nourishing, alleviating, and consoling, reading the Scriptures is regularly recommended to achieve and to habituate psychic, physiological, and spiritual health.

It is not, however, simply the case that the content of the reading material dictates its healthful or harmful effect, that the reading of Scriptures is necessarily ameliorative or virtue-forming, and the reading of romances, poetry, or the attending of theatre necessarily imaginatively distracting and corruptive. Rather, as Katharine A. Craik points out, the ‘literary environment’ of early modernity, including the reading of poetry, fictional literature, and holy texts, ‘appears neither static nor separate from the minds and bodies of those who encountered it, emerging instead as a series of transactions between material language and the material bodies of readers and writers.’<sup>45</sup> Reading material does not exist in isolation; rather, its moral status and influential efficacy depends upon and is shaped by its transactional

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Rainolde, *A booke called the Foundation of Rhetorike* (London: 1563), sig.I<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Wright, 1604, pp.333-334.

<sup>43</sup> Wright, 1604, p.334.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Vaughan, *Ten Introductions: How to read, and in reading, how to vnderstand, and in vnderstanding, how to beare in mind all the bookes, chapters, and verses, contained in the holie Bible* (London: 1594), sig.Avi<sup>v</sup>. William Vaughan, *Directions for Health, Naturall and Artificiall* (London: 1633), p.131.; William Rankins, *A Mirroure of Monsters* (London: 1587), sig.G4<sup>f-v</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Katharine A. Craik, *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: 2007), p.3.

relationship with the reader. In his exegetical *Enchiridion militis christiani* (1503), for example, Erasmus observes how modern Philistines might ‘twist the gospel teaching to serve earthly appetites’, and expands upon the dangerous implications of such interpretive wresting in a river metaphor, describing how such distortive exegetes ‘throw earth into [a pure source] and stop up the source by some corrupt interpretation’, and ‘so befoul the water with mud and filth that he who drinks from it gets more dirt and filth than liquid.’<sup>46</sup> Invested as he and other Reformation theologians are in correct Biblical exegesis and its relationship to the formation of doctrine and ecclesiology, it might be no wonder that Erasmus considers the dissemination of skewed or incorrect interpretations of the Bible to be a source of danger or depravity.<sup>47</sup> But later in *Enchiridion* he acknowledges, recruiting familiar imagery, that the unmediated words of the Bible itself might be a source of harm to readers:

in the mean time remember that you must approach the sacred Scriptures with washed hands, that is with the greatest purity of mind, so that the antidote to your ills does not turn into poison and the manna become rotten if it does not pass immediately into the bowels of the emotions.<sup>48</sup>

Erasmus invokes the *pharmakon* itself in observing that the words of the Bible can operate as both ‘antidote’ and ‘poison’, the deciding factor being the quality of the reader’s mind, who must approach with ‘clean hands’ or ‘the greatest purity of mind’. It must also be noted that the reader who approaches Scripture with a pure mind will achieve the desired effect of having meaning entering ‘immediately into the bowel of the emotions’: holy writing is meant to work upon the reader’s passionate faculties. It is crucial to ‘have an opinion of these writings that is worthy of them’: ‘you will feel that you are inspired, moved, swept away, transfigured in an ineffable manner by the divine power if you approach them with respect, veneration, and humility.’<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Erasmus, ‘The Handbook of the Christian Soldier: *Enchiridion militis christiani*’, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 66, ed. John W. O’Malley (Toronto & London: 1988), pp.12-13.

<sup>47</sup> For an extensive discussion of the exegetical practices of the Reformation, and their impact both on the ensuing philosophies of language and the production of literature in the following centuries, see Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Erasmus, 1988, p.34.

<sup>49</sup> Erasmus, 1988, p.34.

Reading's reformatory or therapeutic efficacy – whether of scripture or other material – lies in the negotiated space between author, text, and reader, between the material word and the embodied mind.

Erasmus's attempt to describe the correct approach to exegesis is also deeply invested in the separation of word and spirit, and so the necessity to read scripture figuratively or allegorically. 'Of the interpreters of divine Scriptures', he writes, 'choose those especially who depart as much as possible from the literal sense, such as, after Paul, Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine', denigrating those who 'stick to the letter and give their attention to sophistic subtleties rather than to the elucidation of the mysteries'.<sup>50</sup> He refigures the imagery of consumable text, of Scripture as 'poison', 'antidote', and 'manna', in recommending that you 'will have more savour and nourishment, if you break through the husk and extract the kernel'.<sup>51</sup> Recruiting figuration itself to recommend a figurative hermeneutic, Erasmus aligns the mere word of the scripture with the empty 'husk', and the allegorical interpretation – the signified rather than the sign – as the nutritive 'kernel'. 'The holy Scripture', writes John Smith, 'is not barren of, but abounds with tropes and figures'; the Bible, he continues:

is like a pleasant garden, bedecked with flowers; or a fruitful field, full of precious treasures; I apprehended it a work worthy the undertaking, to dig into those sacred Minerals for the better finding out the Metaphors, Metonymies, Synecdoches, &c. which lie hid there, and have given Scriptural examples pertinent to each of the Tropes and Figures: For the bare reading of the Scripture, without searching into its heavenly mysteries and meaning, is like the coming into a Treasury, wherein we see many costly things folded up, and some ends appearing out, but when they be all unfolded, then doth their glory more affect us for the present, yea, and leave in us a deep impression of their excellency.<sup>52</sup>

Scripture, in Smith's manual, offers up fertile source material for the demonstration of rhetorical tropes, the 'Metaphors, Metonymies, Synecdoches, &c.', whose forms demand figurative interpretation. The ideal garden of eloquence, its figures disclose 'treasures', 'heavenly mysteries and meanings', which like 'costly things' require 'unfolding' for their true worth and value to be discovered.

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<sup>50</sup> Erasmus, 1988, p.34.

<sup>51</sup> Erasmus, 1988, p.35.

<sup>52</sup> John Smith, *The Myserie of Rhetorique Unvail'd* (London: 1657), sig.A5<sup>r-v</sup>.

Yet Smith is still aware of the pitfalls associated with unbridled allegorical interpretation of scriptural passages: ‘we must beware’, he cautions:

that we take not those things literally which are to be understood spiritually, that we goe not out to a figurative acceptation of any place of Scripture, where we have not a sufficient reason (grounded upon some word of truth) why the proper sense or significance of the words may not be adhered unto.<sup>53</sup>

Identifying the figurative with the spiritual meaning, he makes clear that equally as dangerous as taking the literal words for the spiritual, the words of the Bible are not to be unduly wrested from their literal significance without the assurance of ‘some word of truth’ that a metaphorical meaning is required. Herein, of course, lies the trouble at the heart of exegetical – and other hermeneutic – practices: how to recognise what kind of reading is called for by a given text. For Smith, it is ‘the teachings of the Spirit of Truth’, ‘a good gift of God’, that guides the way to the ‘unfolding and right understanding of the Figurative and Tropical Elegancies of that blessed Book’.<sup>54</sup> This is the same question that Spenser and Burton must respond to when considering and defending their claims that their texts have reformative efficacy: how to guide and train a reader in health-giving hermeneutic practices, when the same passage, text, or world of words might equally figure poison and cure.

### **III: The Iron Pen: Painful Lessons in the Legend of Holiness**

Midway through the first book of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser’s Legend of Holiness, Prince Arthur rescues the Red Crosse Knight from his fall and incarceration in the dungeons of the giant Orgoglio, accomplice to Duessa. For his beloved but forsaken Una, the Knight’s appearance is bittersweet: ‘to see him made her glad, / And sad’ (I.viii.42.2-3). His ‘sad dull eies deepe sunck in hollow pits’, his ‘bare thin cheeks’, and ‘his flesh shronk vp like withered flowres’ startle and dismay Una, who considers him ‘berobbed’ of ‘[him]selfe’, but she welcomes him ‘in wele or woe’, cursing the

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<sup>53</sup> Smith, 1657, sig.A6<sup>r.v</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, 1657, sig.A6<sup>r</sup>.

‘wrathefull wreakes’ of Fortune that have kept him from her for so long (I.viii.41.1-9; 42.8; 43.1-4). Red Crosse is too famished to reply. Instead, Arthur speaks to Una:

Faire Lady, then said that victorious knight,  
The things, that grieuous were to doe, or beare,  
Them to renew, I wote, breeds no delight;  
Best musicke breeds delight in loathing eare:  
But th’only good, that growes of passed feare,  
Is to be wise, and ware of like agein.  
This daies ensample hath this lesson deare  
Deepe written in my heart with yron pen,  
That blisse may not abide in state of mortall men.

(I.viii.44)

This stanza introduces a number of the valences of learning, healing, and suffering germane to the following discussion of reading’s efficacy in *The Faerie Queene*. Arthur’s words, which we will return to a number of times, appear somewhat incongruous here. For one, they fail to adequately respond to what Una has been saying: far from ‘renewing’ ‘things, that grieuous were to doe, or beare’, Una has rather been celebrating the ‘treble good’ that has issued from her reunion with Red Crosse (I.viii.43.6). They are also no prophylactic apology, since the knight does not go on to recount past ills experienced. Jeff Dolven considers this an important moment of instruction, of Arthur teaching Una, and considers her lack of response and the fact that ‘it is very hard to say how this lesson is received’ indicative of ‘a scepticism or even despair about the very possibility of teaching’ that he diagnoses in Renaissance romances more widely.<sup>55</sup> Yet it is not Una who appears to be the recipient of the ‘lesson’, but rather Arthur himself: ‘deepe written in *my* heart’, Arthur’s words are a description of his own experience of learning the ‘daies ensample’, the image of the ‘yron pen’ making vivid the visceral pain associated with the act of inscription and the process of learning. Words, here, are painful.

This is not always the case. Throughout *The Faerie Queene*, the capacities of the written and spoken word are as diverse as the words themselves. Words can be ‘wounding’, ‘percing’, and ‘bitter byting’; but they can also be ‘louely’, ‘piteous’, and

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<sup>55</sup> Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago & London: 2007), pp.5, 3.

‘gentle [and] perswading’ (I.ix.29.4, II.v.37.5, I.xii.29.1, I.iii.30.1, I.iii.38.1, IV.ix.32.9). Guyon’s ‘dolefull tale’ of Amavia and Mordant’s deaths induces both ‘pitty’ and, in its narrative mastery, ‘delight’, and leads Medina to observe that “[i]ll by ensample good doth often gayne’ (II.ii.45-46). But the syntactic ambivalence of this sententia – that the ‘ensample’ might equally belong to the ‘ill’ or the ‘good’ – discloses the pharomic ambivalence of words. The pernicious and exploitative counterpart to Guyon’s morally instructive tale is found in Paridell, the consummate rhetorician of Book III, whose ‘speeches’ lead Hellenore, the wife of jealous Malbecco, to hang ‘[v]pon his lips with ‘dew attent, / Fashioning worldes of fancies euermore / In her fraile witt’ (III.ix.52.1-5). Montaigne, in ‘Of the vanitie of Words’, decries ‘how pernicious the profession and use [of rhetoric] was’, used upon those with frail faculties ‘to be managed, perswaded, and led by the eares, by the sweet alluring and sense-entrancing sound of this harmonie, without duely weighing, knowing, or considering the trueth of things by the force of reason’.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Paridell takes advantage of rhetoric’s ability to prey on the imagination of others: with ‘amorous delights / And pleasing toyes he would [Hellenore] entertain’, ‘making layes of loue and louers paine, / Bransles Ballads, virelayes, and verses vaine [...] With which he fed her fancy, and entysd / To take with his new loue’ (III.x.8). In *Amoretti*, the seductive charms of such amorous language are inverted, and it is instead the beloved who with ‘one word’ can ‘sauē or spill’ the speaker’s lifeblood (XXXVIII.11). In the opening canto to Book I, we meet Archimago, whose ‘[m]agick bookes and artes of sundry kindes’, initially mistaken for the Bible but eventually revealed to contain necromantic ‘mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy minds’, identify, as John N. King notes, ‘this variation of Ariosto’s magician-hermit with reformist stereotypes concerning Roman Catholic hypocrisy and superstition’ (I.i.36.8-9).<sup>57</sup> Yet these magic books, the evil tools of the legend’s great enemy to holiness, are counterpointed by the ‘antique rolles’ kept in the Muses’ ‘euerlasting scryne’, which contain the whole matter of *The Faerie Queene* and provide Spenser’s narrator with inspiration (I.Proem.2.3-4). Books and words, spoken and written, cut both ways.

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<sup>56</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Montaigne’s Essays*, vol. 1, trans John Florio (London: 2006), pp.331-32.

<sup>57</sup> John N. King, *Spenser’s Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton: 1990), p.47.

This phenomenon is part of a poetic and heuristic strategy of repetition through difference, endemic to *The Faerie Queene* and characteristic of each of its formal and stylistic units, from plot events and character types to images and words. As A. Bartlett Giamatti describes it, '[s]ome of the most interesting patterns in the poem result from the repetition of similar episodes or images, with the further result that the poem (and reader) acquire ever expanding perspective, increasingly dense versions of experience.'<sup>58</sup> Such '[d]oubling and division', Linda Gregerson observes, 'may work oppositionally, testing virtue's constancy. But they also work analytically, unfolding the complex nature of virtue by articulating its constituent parts: they are the poet's tools as well as the tools of his villains.'<sup>59</sup> These 'major patterns of parallelism' include the emblematic houses and castles that appear in each book; encompass the *simulacrum* qualities of Fair and False Florimell in Book III; are evoked by the similar appearance of the evil Archimago and the healing hermit of Book VI; and, in Book I, are embodied in 'false *Duessa*', the princess of deceit and doubling who appears to be that which she isn't (I.ii.37.9).<sup>60</sup> Indeed, these patterns are particularly crucial to the texture and heurism of Spenser's Legend of Holiness, to which the Book of Revelation, as its major template, bequeaths a poetics of typological symbolism and promised apocalypse. As Harry Berger Jr explains,

In Johannine theology, apocalypse [...] is effected through a historical process, called *kerisis*, in which the gradual separation of the good from the evil leads to a final moment of encounter and judgment when, at the end of time, the two armies stand face to face. [...] To experience, to recognize, to reject, to draw oneself apart is not only to fulfill oneself, but also to expose the enemy and so help articulate the *condordia discors* of God's plan.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, one of the major lessons that both Red Crosse and the reader must learn is to distinguish good from seeming good, and – in the words of Arthur's lesson – 'to

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<sup>58</sup> A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Play of Double Senses: Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Englewood Cliffs: 1975), p.69.

<sup>59</sup> Linda Gregerson, 'The Faerie Queene (1590)', in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard McCabe (Oxford: 2010), p.209.

<sup>60</sup> Giamatti, 1975, p.71. For a comprehensive account of how numerological patterns of parallelism and juxtaposition structure *The Faerie Queene* on macro- and microcosmic levels, see Alastair David Fowler., *Spenser and the Numbers of Time* (London: 1964).

<sup>61</sup> Harry Berger Jr., *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: 1988), p.52.



be wise, and ware of like agein'. Yet alongside the process of moral distinction that such similarity solicits from the reader, likeness in *The Faerie Queene* also exposes the potentially more troubling fact of 'the chronic intimacy of type and antitype.'<sup>62</sup> Like and unlike might be comprised in the same thing, like the two faces of a coin.

The implications of this complicate Arthur's iron pen speech. Campana, discussing this episode, proposes that 'Arthur avoids the distasteful suffering of the Redcrosse Knight hauled up from the dungeon [...]. The body is replaced with the moral lesson it teaches, allowing Arthur to avoid an encounter with the pain of others.'<sup>63</sup> Yet the stanza's language and imagery resist this simple understanding of learning's circumscription of affect and pain. Spenser's description of the 'deare' lesson recalls the same word's use five stanzas previously when, confronted with the Red Crosse Knight's plaintive calls from inside Orgoglio's cell, 'with percing point / Of pittie deare [Arthur's] hart was thrilled sore' (I.viii.39.1-2). In both cases, Spenser puns on the contranym 'deare', both etymologically – meaning both valued or costly – and sonically with 'dire'.<sup>64</sup> Antiphrastic wordplay evokes the *pharmakon*; the verse impresses upon us that suffering is to be cherished and learning involves pain. Dolven's identification of 'the first risk Arthur's pedagogy encounters, the risk that the act of instruction will merely repeat the pain it is meant to transmute' might be better reformulated as the act of instruction *necessarily* repeats the pain it transmutes.<sup>65</sup> For where words in *The Faerie Queene* might be harmful or helpful, what is remarkable about Arthur's metaphor is that it represents them as both: the reformatory efficacy of language is concomitant with, or relies upon, its infliction of suffering. The visceral iron pen image is drawn from Jeremiah 17:1, where the 'sinne of Judah is writen with a penne of yron, & with the point of a diamonde, & grauen vpon the table of their heart', to suggest the indelible nature of knowledge in starkly somatic terms (Jeremiah 17:1). But it also recalls Job 19:23-24, in which the speaker wishes that his words might be 'writen euen in a booke! And grauen with an yron pene in lede'. The allusion to the Book of Job, concerned as it is with faith in a providential

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<sup>62</sup> Gregerson, 2010, p.210.

<sup>63</sup> Campana, 2012, p.66.

<sup>64</sup> 'Dear, adj.1, n.2, and int.' OED Online, December 2019, [oed.com/view/Entry/47737](http://oed.com/view/Entry/47737). Accessed 15 January 2020. Senses 2 and 6.

<sup>65</sup> Dolven, 2007, p.4. Elsewhere, Dolven acknowledges the pedagogical necessity of pain in this episode: 'The lesson must be written on the heart with an iron pen, and the pain lost in translation [...] is renewed in the violence of the act of inscription.' Jeff Dolven, 'The Method of Spenser's Stanza', *Spenser Studies XIX* (2004), p.21.

benevolence in the face of worldly suffering, is particularly fitting to this episode's painful lesson. Indeed, Job's iron pen image is preceded by a bewailing of his 'persecut[ion]' and immediately succeeded by a faithful insistence that 'I am sure, that my Redemer liueth, and shal stand the last on the earth' (Job 19:25). Arthur's image, then, evokes an understanding of human suffering and future salvation as intimately implicated in each other.

This is not, however, exactly the tenor of the lesson which Arthur reaches. The conclusion that 'blisse may not abide in state of mortall men' is a rather more morbid recognition of the contingency and frailty of worldly good, like to the narrator's observation when confronted with the House of Alma that 'no earthly thing is sure', an observation which adumbrates the arguments of Mutabilitie in the poem's addended cantos (II.ix.21.9). The friction of *non-sequitur* felt in Arthur's response to Una, moreover, might be ascribed to his desire to override and reconfigure the moral lesson that she extracts from the situation. Una, in response to Red Crosse's plight, articulates something closer to Job's insistent faith in redemption: 'And for these wronges shall treble penaunce pay / Of treble good: good growes of euils priefe' (I.viii.42.5-6). Where Arthur's lesson gains prosodic gravitas from the expansive concluding alexandrine, Una's rendition remains relatively hidden at the centre of the Spenserian stanza, just as she, at the opening of the Book, 'did hide / Under a vele' (I.i.4.3-4). Implied here is that Prince Arthur, who, as David Lee Miller recognises, is 'not yet the figure we know from romance, chronicle, and myth, but who shows us that legendary magnificence in the making', is as yet unable to recognise the teachings of the true, Reformed Church which Una represents.<sup>66</sup> Their two equally legitimate responses to Red Crosse's fall into sin – that all joy is fleeting, or that the path to bliss is paved with suffering – not only recognise that good and evil rely dialectically upon each other for existence, but render the situation itself pharmaceutical, able to be read in terms both dark and light. As the iron pen image recognises, the word is reformatory only insofar as it involves pain. But what this episode discloses in Arthur and Una's competing 'lessons' is two different models of reading. Arthur's recognition of worldly woe

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<sup>66</sup> David Lee Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies* (Princeton: 2014), p.128. For Una's progressive revelation as the true Church, see Kathryn Walls, *God's Only Daughter: Spenser's Una as the Invisible Church* (Manchester: 2016).

tends towards despair. But Una's, undergirded as it is by faith, appreciates the salutary quality of suffering, insists on seeing, effectively, the poison as the cure.

#### IV: Words and the Will to be Healed

The two models of reading evinced in Arthur's and Una's responses to the pitiful sight of the fallen knight, demonstrating the pharmaceutical legibility of signs within the semiotic dynamics of *The Faerie Queene*, have significant bearing on the understanding of Red Crosse's – and the reader's – own learning in the protocols of right-reading across Spenser's Legend of Holiness.<sup>67</sup> Before returning to an extended reading of Book I, however, I want to attend first to two of the poem's major scenes of reading and healing, which shed further light on the therapeutic efficacy of the word. The first is perhaps *the* exemplary account of reading in *The Faerie Queene*, where, in the Legend of Temperance's House of Alma, Guyon and Arthur 'chance[]' upon two volumes in Eumnestes' chamber. The second occurs in the middle of Book VI, where the mortally wounded Serena and Timias are afforded succour in the house of a hermit.

Eumnestes' chamber in the turret of the brain in the House of Alma is the seat of memory, wherein national, cultural, and personal histories are recorded in 'rolls', 'records', 'books', and 'parchment scrolls' (II.ix.59.5, II.ix.57.6-8). This variety of written documents 'seems designed almost as a redemption of the *Phaedrus*', representing memory in a post-printing press world as constituted and aided, rather than impaired, by the written word; as Elizabeth Mazzola has it, 'the nation assumes its shape by reading, not remembering'.<sup>68</sup> Yet Spenser's verse permits a sustained

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<sup>67</sup> That the Red Crosse's journey through Book I might be understood as an education in hermeneutics is widely agreed, see for example: Hester Lees-Jeffries, 'From the Fountain to the Well: Redcrosse Learns to Read', *Studies in Philology* 100:2 (2003), 135-176.

<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth J. Bellamy, *Translations of Power: Narcissism and the Unconscious in Epic History* (Ithaca & London: 1992), p.222.n46.; Elizabeth Mazzola, 'Apocryphal Texts and Epic Amnesia: the Ends of History in *The Faerie Queene*', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 78:1 (1995), p.138.

ambivalence regarding the reliability of the ensuing historiographies: these ‘incorrupted’ pages are nonetheless ‘worm-eaten, and full of canker holes’ (II.ix.56.7, II.ix.57.9).<sup>69</sup> In this ‘Library’ of ‘antique Regesters’, apparently unbidden ‘to the Princes hand [did] rize, / An auncient booke, hight *Briton moniments*’, wherein is written the sovereign history of Britain up until Arthur’s own accession (II.ix.59.3-6). Similarly, Guyon is met with ‘another booke, / That hight, *Antiquitee of Faery lond*’, in which ‘[t]h’offspring of Elues and Faryes there he fond’ (II.ix.60.1-4). The two knights, ‘[t]heir countreys auncestry to vnderstand, / Crau’d leaue of *Alma* [...] / To read those bookes’, and the ensuing canto relates the contents of both *Britons moniments* and *Antiquitee of Faerylond*.

This canto is unique in *The Faerie Queene*, in that with metapoetic reflexivity, reader and character are simultaneously offered up the same reading material. In this book-within-a-book moment, the readerly gaze is temporarily aligned with the knightly gaze and, as Catherine Bates points out, this equivalence ‘positions *us* as heroes: if heroes can be engrossed in an act of reading, by the same token the act of reading can be taken as a heroic task’.<sup>70</sup> In the same way that Arthur and Guyon might garner self-knowledge through an understanding of ‘auncestry’, consolidate their epic narratives, and gain momentum for their own virtuous progress, so too might early modern readers yield similar instructive value from the reading of *The Faerie Queene*. Indeed, the identification of the texts that the knights happen upon with Spenser’s poem is made explicit by the lexical resonance of Eumnestes’ ‘immortal scrine’ and the Muses’ ‘euerlasting scrine’ from which the poet proclaims he gains inspiration in the opening stanzas of *The Faerie Queene* (II.ix.56.6, I.Proem.2.3). Paying close attention to the nature of Arthur and Guyon’s reading in the House of Alma, Spenser implies, might give a singular insight into the poet’s conception of the reading of his own book.

It is important to note the obvious but crucial fact that this major scene of reading occurs within the allegory’s idealised tableau of the healthy human body, ‘[o]f all Gods workes’ the most ‘faire and excellent’ (II.ix.1.1-2).<sup>71</sup> The *Moniments* and

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<sup>69</sup> For this episode’s engagement with and complication of Renaissance historiographic practices, see Bart van Es, *Spenser’s Forms of History* (Oxford: 2002), pp.21-24, 37-48.

<sup>70</sup> Catherine Bates, ‘*The Faerie Queene*: Britain’s national monument’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed. Catherine Bates (Cambridge: 2010), p.134.

<sup>71</sup> For Alma’s house epitomising the yearning for transcendental unity courted by allegory, see Leonard Barkan, *Nature’s Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the*

*Antiquitee* are afforded the status of what Bart van Es has described as ‘moments of transcendental vision’, analogous to Merlin’s prophecy of Britomart’s progeny in Book III, and to Red Crosse’s vision of the New Jerusalem in Book I, with which it shares parallel placement in the tenth canto of their respective legends.<sup>72</sup> Yet whilst this transcendental quality establishes Eumnestes’ chamber as the site of cultural memory and Alma’s House as a kind of body politic, the corporeal allegory foregrounds reading as a specifically somatic activity, which the individualised experiences of Guyon and Arthur corroborate. Guyon looks ‘greedily’ into his book, and the knights approach the texts ‘burning both with feruent fire’ (II.ix.60.3-6). Having finished the chronicles, both are piqued with passionate pleasure, ‘[b]eguyld thus with delight of nouelties’ (II.x.77.1). Yet in each case such ‘feruent’ passion is legitimised as healthy – their ‘desire of countryes state’ is ‘naturall’ (II.x.77.2) – and permitted by the governing presence of Alma, ‘who gladly graunted their desire’ (II.ix.60.9). Steward of ‘the forte of reason’, Alma represents the rational soul, which ‘doth rule the earthly masse, / And all the seruice of the bodie frame’ (II.xi.1.3, IV.ix.2.6-7).<sup>73</sup> The force of reason, she not only licenses the knights’ desire to read but also curtails it, when, ‘seeing it so late, / Perforce their studies broke, and them besought / To thinke, how supper did them long awaite’ (II.x.77.5-7). We might recall Guyon’s recent fainting spell from hunger after his journey through Mammon’s cave, and, observing an alternative derivation of her name from the feminine form of the Latin *almus* (‘that which nourishes’), recognise Alma’s role here of managing reading within an holistic regimen of health.

In the final book of *The Faerie Queene*, the Legend of Courtesy, we find another major expression of the relationship between reading and healing. Having been bitten by the slanderous teeth of the Blatant Beast, Serena and Timias seek redemptive care in the house of a hermit. As Kenneth Gross observes, the pair’s ailment consists of ‘a texture of secret and not so secret *verbal* wounds’: the canto opens with a description of the ‘poysnous sting, which infamy / Infixeth in the name of noble wight’, more ‘sore’ than that ‘which warlike hand of enemy / Inflicts with

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*World* (New Haven: 1975), pp.117-164. Others have developed this position to consider how Alma’s perfection is utilised to further imperialist ideologies and anxiously occlude threats of sexuality and sensuality: see Miller, 2014, ch.4.

<sup>72</sup> van Es, 2002, p.22.

<sup>73</sup> Walter R. David observes that ‘Alma’ is a poetical contraction of the Latin and Italian *anima* (‘soul’), of common contemporary usage: Walter R. David., ‘Alma, castle of’, in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: 1990), p.24.

dint of sword' (VI.vi.1.1-4).<sup>74</sup> The Blatant Beast has been described by Jacqueline T. Miller as 'the many-tongued beast who epitomizes the most explicit form of the abuse of language in Book VI', marring knights, maidens, and eventually 'this homely verse', the poem itself, with its disfiguring defamation (VI.xii.41.1).<sup>75</sup> These wounds nevertheless manifest physically 'in the bodies of that Squire and Dame', impelled by a 'poysnous humour', and, in 'ranckling', recall the wound of love melancholy that 'ranckleth' in Britomart's 'fleshy mould', as well as Redcrosse's 'sore [that] ranckle[s]' of '[i]nward corruption, and infected sin', which requires treatment in the House of Holiness after his brush with Despair (VI.xii.42.2-8, III.ii.39.3; I.x.25.2-4). As Serena and Timias slip into melancholy inspired by infamy, the hermit declares the wounds 'past helpe of surgery', instead requiring 'discipline[...] / With holesome reede': the suffering prompted by slanderous language and manifested as a disorder of 'passion blinde' is alleviated not through 'medicines meete' but through counteractive verbal 'counsell' (VI.vi.5.5-9, VI.vi.2.7). Words are both trauma and treatment.

The hermit, accordingly, adept as he is in 'the art of words', 'fit speaches gan to frame', but unexpectedly he tells the pair that '[i]n vaine of me ye hope for remedie' (VI.vi.6.2-8). Instead, he transfers the power of remedy to them:

For in your selfe your onely helpe doth lie,  
To heale your selues, and must proceed alone  
From your owne will, to cure your maladie.  
Who can him cure, that will be cur'd of none?

(VI.vi.7.1-4)

The hermit presents healing as a collaborative enterprise, requiring the assent and effort of the patient as well as the encouraging words of the spiritual physician. Yet, in referring to the 'will' and its role in Serena's and Timias's recoveries, Spenser introduces a theologically charged vocabulary which momentarily makes strikingly clear the profound soteriological implications that the hermit's remedy has on our understanding of the reformatory efficacy of the word. Luther stressed the incapacity of all functions, reasonable and moral, of the postlapsarian mind, writing in his *Lectures on Genesis* that as a consequence of the Fall, 'the will is impaired, the intellect

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<sup>74</sup> Kenneth Gross, 'Reflections on the Blatant Beast', *Spenser Studies XIII* (1999), p.108. (emphasis added)

<sup>75</sup> Jacqueline T. Miller, 'The Courtly Figure: Spenser's Anatomy of Allegory', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 31:1 (1991), p.57.

depraved, and the reason entirely corrupt and altogether changed': 'just as leprosy poisons the flesh, so the will and reason have become depraved through sin.'<sup>76</sup> Such a theological anthropology, inherited via Augustine, underpins both Luther's doctrine of *sola fide* and Calvin's more insistent emphasis on predestination: the corrupted will makes redundant the role of meritorious works within the operation of salvation. As Luther explains in *On the Bondage of the Will*, whilst the will might have the capacity to

achieve something – good works, let us say, or the righteousness of the civil or moral law – yet it does not attain to the righteousness of God, nor does God regard its efforts as in any way qualifying it for his righteousness, since he says that his righteousness functions apart from the law. But if it does not attain to the righteousness of God, what will it gain if by its own works and endeavors (if this were possible) it achieves the very sanctity of angels?<sup>77</sup>

Grappling with the dynamics of God's righteousness – the very word that was the subject of the 'textual revolution' that inspired his reformatory thought<sup>78</sup> – Luther insists that the 'works and endeavours' of the will have no influence on the subject's attainment of 'God's righteousness', 'not the justice which judges man, but that by which man is justified.'<sup>79</sup> The hermit's words here, then, are startlingly voluntarist, verging even on the Pelagian: rankling with a wound metonymically related to the wound of 'infested sin', Serena and Timias are taught that they might be saved through their own will. Whilst Carol V. Kaske notes that such a claim may be explained by the distinction between holiness and courtesy as private and public virtues respectively – 'the malady in question is a public one, slander', and so the immediate consequences are social rather than soteriological – she nonetheless recognises that 'the phraseology [...] momentarily and formally destabilizes' Reformed conceptions of the incapacitated will.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the repetition of the word

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<sup>76</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: 1958), pp.165-66.

<sup>77</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 33, ed. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: 1972), p.264.

<sup>78</sup> Cummings, 2002, p.6.

<sup>79</sup> Cummings, 2002, pp.51-52.

<sup>80</sup> Carole V. Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (Ithaca & London: 1999), p.143. It is also possible that the conflation of public virtue with such theologically charged language might be an instantiation of the kind of ambiguity described by Annabel Patterson as used as a defence strategy to mask heterodox or politically controversial ideas. See Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: the Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: 1984), p.18.

‘will’ here cannot fail to arouse its theological implications, and indeed, the word’s polyptotic transformation from noun to verb – from ‘ones owne will’ to ‘will be cur’d’ – underscores the sense of volitional power it describes.<sup>81</sup>

The hermit’s insistence on the necessary role of the will within reformative and, by implication, soteriological economies, brings into sharper focus a similar suggestion in the House of Alma. As noted, the episode’s allegorical plane telescopes between the individual and the universal: invested as it is in a cosmology that sees man as a little world, Alma’s House can be seen simultaneously as individual body, body politic, or a ‘goodly diapase’ of harmonic cosmic order (II.ix.22.9). Whilst acting as the repository of national memory in Eumnestes’ attic, the House also comprises a radically individualised space, as when Guyon and Arthur have their ‘mirror-stage experience’ of self-recognition when meeting their respective governing passions of Shamefastnesse and Praysdesire in the chamber of the heart.<sup>82</sup> Alma also assumes a shifting role, another ‘shadow’ of ‘our soueraine the Queene’ within the body politic, a principle of universal harmony, or the personal faculty of reason within a psychomachic allegory (Letter to Raleigh, 716).<sup>83</sup> James Ross Macdonald notes that ‘in a Calvinist allegory’ representations of reason ‘should prove to be worse than useless’.<sup>84</sup> Alma’s successful government of the castle, however, and her management of the knights’ reading implies the efficacious working of reason within a healthful body and soul.

## V: Written in Blood: Reading in the House of Holiness

In the preceding discussion of the therapeutic capacity of language in *The Faerie Queene*, a number of threads have been unpicked whose implications will weave

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<sup>81</sup> Spenser’s treatment of the will remains ambiguous and elusive throughout. What are we meant to understand, for instance, by his description of his wife’s acquiescence to marriage bonds in *Amoretti*, as ‘by her own will beguil’d’, the same verb used to describe the serpent’s temptation of Eve (LXVII.14)? See, ‘the serpent beguyled me’ (Genesis 3:13).

<sup>82</sup> Grant Williams, ‘Phantastes’s Flies: The Trauma of Amnesiac Enjoyment in Spenser’s Memory Palace’, *Spenser Studies XVIII* (2003), p.233.

<sup>83</sup> It is worth noting here that during this episode the Palmer, the Legend of Temperance’s more morally dubious personification of right reason, is absent.

<sup>84</sup> James Ross Macdonald, ‘The Redcrosse Knight and the Limits of Human Holiness’, *Spenser Studies XXX* (2015), p.120.



through the following reading of Spenser's Legend of Holiness. Firstly, words in the poem have ambivalent power, able both to harm and to heal. This ambivalence is in keeping with structures of repetition and parallelism, doubling and duality that are endemic to the poem in general and Book I especially. With respect to the word's power to teach, Arthur's iron pen metaphor demonstrates that harming and healing go hand-in-hand, and that moments of reformation involve and inhere in suffering. The essentially ambivalent legibility of the word is expressed also in two modes of reading, or two hermeneutics, articulated by Arthur and Una, and which may be considered to be hermeneutics of despair and faith respectively. Finally, in the House of Alma and the hermit episode of Book VI, a perhaps surprising emphasis on the role of human mental faculties within the processes of subjective reformation through acts of reading or listening is disclosed.

This constellation of ideas provides the frame for a consideration of the ending of Book I, and especially Red Crosse's experience in the House of Holiness, which is both a scene of healing and, as Tamara A. Goeglein observes, 'a scene of reading'.<sup>85</sup> The house is both a 'schoolehouse' of 'learning' and 'an holy Hospitall', and Kenneth Borris has suggested that the 'surgical aspect of Redcrosse's cure evinces typically close Spenserian interconnection of bodily and spiritual states, or the purviews of nature and grace' (I.x.18.4-5, I.x.36.1).<sup>86</sup> The kind of reading that Red Crosse learns in the House of Holiness has profound soteriological implications, since, having fallen into despair, his experience here comprises the saving of his soul and the realisation of the virtue of holiness upon which all of the other moral virtues of the poem are founded. Whilst it is not my aim here to attempt to discern or define Spenser's doctrinal allegiances or to ascribe a coherent theology to this most radically syncretic and synthetic of poets, it is worth reviewing some of the scholarship

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<sup>85</sup> Tamara A. Goeglein, 'The Emblematics of Edmund Spenser's House of Holiness', *Spenser Studies XXV* (2010), p.22.

<sup>86</sup> Kenneth Borris, 'Flesh, Spirit, and the Glorified Body: Spenser's Anthropomorphic Houses of Pride, Holiness, and Temperance' *Spenser Studies XV* (2001), p.30. Borris' distinction between orders of nature and grace here enters into an ongoing debate regarding the relationship between Book I and the following books of the poem, initiated by A. S. P. Woodhouse and his assertion that the former follows the order of grace and the rest nature alone: 'the Redcross Knight is indeed *microchristus*, but Guyon, and each of the other heroes of individual books, *microcosmus* alone.' A. S. P. Woodhouse, 'Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*,' *ELH* 16:3 (1949), p.198. For a discussion of the position of subsequent scholarship in response to Woodhouse's seminal article, see Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: 2004), pp.49-50.

surrounding this vexed issue, not only because the content of Red Crosse's learning consists '[o]f God, of grace, of iustice, of free will', but because an appreciation of its very vexedness lends something to an understanding of the Book as a whole.

The canto begins with an uncompromising disavowal of the efficacy of the human will in the workings of salvation:

Ne let the man ascribe it to his skill,  
That thorough grace hath gained victory.  
If any strength we haue, it is to ill,  
But all the good is Gods, both power and eke will.

(I.x.1.6-9)

However, as James Schiavoni has noted, this 'most Calvinistic stanza in *The Faerie Queene*' is followed by 'the most Roman Catholic images of the poem': the 'seuen Bead-men', for example, 'doing *godly* thing' (I.x.36.3-5, my emphasis).<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Darryl J. Gless considers the House of Holiness to 'insistently [...] invite readers to construct a variety of potentially incompatible meanings'.<sup>88</sup> Critics have consequently perceived tensions in Spenser's position regarding the extent of human autonomy: Macdonald, for example, sees Red Crosse as 'the continual recipient of grace', and the poet as consequently 'emphatically dismissing any lingering Pelagian conceptions of the saint', but equally concedes that, 'envisioning [grace] supplementing and complementing, instead of opposing and replacing, the saint's own efforts, Spenser also seems to resist a Calvinist understanding of human depravity and powerlessness'.<sup>89</sup> There are obvious theological frictions and paradoxes at play here, reflecting what Paul Cefalu describes as an early modern inability 'to incorporate a coherent theory of practical morality into their soteriological accounts of justification and sanctification'.<sup>90</sup> Rather than attempting to determine coherence here, however, Kaske suggests that, in his knottiness, ambiguity, and outright internal contradictions, 'Spenser performs a doctrinal balancing act, embodying simultaneously [...] conflicting theories about how we obtain heaven', the poem effectively able to be

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<sup>87</sup> James Schiavoni, 'Sacrament and Structure in *The Faerie Queene*', *Reformation* 6:1 (2002), 115-118. This unsettling admixture of Reformed theology and Roman imagery is regularly observed, see: James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: 2009), p.86.

<sup>88</sup> Darryl J. Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser* (Cambridge: 1994), p.146.

<sup>89</sup> Macdonald, 2015, p.114.

<sup>90</sup> Cefalu, 2004, p.2.

read both ways.<sup>91</sup> This simultaneity of competing meanings on both global and local levels is an essential element of Spenser's therapeutic poetics. Red Crosse's education in the House of Holiness comprises a recognition of such competing interpretations – of language, of suffering, of the allegorical sign, and of himself – and it is this recognition that paves the way to a realisation of holiness.

Having rescued Red Crosse from Orgoglio's dungeon, Prince Arthur parts ways with the Knight of Holiness and Una. Before he rides off, however, the two knights, 'fast friendship for to bynd, / And loue establish', exchange 'goodly gifts' (I.ix.18.6-8):

Prince *Arthur* gaue a boxe of Diamond sure,  
Embowed with gold and gorgeous ornament,  
Wherein were cload few drops of liquor pure,  
Of wondrous worth, and vertue excellent,  
That any wovnd could heal incontinent.  
Which to requite, the *Redcrosse* knight him gaue  
A booke, wherein his Saueours testament  
Was writt with golden letters rich and braue;  
A worke of wondrous grace, and hable soules to save.  
(I.ix.19)

Arthur's diamond box recalls his 'warlike shield [...] all of Diamond perfect pure and clene', symbolically identified with unconquerable faith (I.vii.33.1-5). Yet as A. C. Hamilton's note to this stanza in the Longman edition suggests, no clear reading of this gift has been given, and it has been variously associated with divine grace, the healing unction of Christ's anointment, and Christ's blood which cleanses mankind of sin. The elaborate beauty of this 'gold and gorgeous ornament' and tantalisingly translucent 'liquor pure' seem, rather, deliberately designed to invite allegorical reading at the same time as evading it; the sense of enclosure, bestowed both by box and the verb 'embowed', is invested in the allegorical trope of veiled mystery. As James Kearney writes, the gift appears to signify 'not a specific referent or many possible referents but the possibility of reference', the potential for allegorical polysemy itself.<sup>92</sup> Red Crosse's gift stands in direct contrast to Arthur's: it saves 'soules' whilst Arthur's heals physical 'wounds', and, where the diamond box invites

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<sup>91</sup> Kaske, 1999, p.116. For an extended discussion of Spenserian contradiction regarding free will and justification, see pp.141-58.

<sup>92</sup> Kearney, 2009, p.120.

interpretation, the 'booke, wherein his Saveours testament / Was writt', renders interpretation unnecessary. The book remains, both within the fiction of the allegory and outside of it, the New Testament. The two gifts signify the two poles of signification itself: on the one hand, the sign that could mean many things, and on the other, the book that can only be itself.

In his study of the 'crisis in representation and language' sparked by a Reformation simultaneously invested in a doctrine of *sola scriptura* yet suspicious of 'the carnal dimension of texts and the problems that that [...] caused for those who wished to repudiate the flesh', Kearney reads this gift exchange between Arthur and Red Crosse as the key to understanding Red Crosse's fall into despair and subsequent saving.<sup>93</sup> In this exchange, he argues, 'the Redcrosse Knight has given away a book. In the dream logic of the poem, however, he subsequently acts as if he has given away a text.'<sup>94</sup> Conflating word and spirit, Red Crosse forgets the content of the New Testament when he parts way with the material object, succumbing to the 'charmed speeches' of Despair who dis-pairs the unity of the Christian Bible, 'consistently ignor[ing] the idea of the new Covenant', decontextualizing the Old Testament so that it is understood without the salvific dispensation of New Testament grace (I.ix.30.9).<sup>95</sup> The implication here is that what Red Crosse undergoes in the House of Holiness is a repudiation of the word and flesh in favour of the spirit. Spenser's poetry, however, troubles these distinctions: in keeping with Borris' observation of the Spenserian 'interconnection of bodily and spiritual states', the invitation to abstraction and transcendental meaning solicited by allegory is countered by the irresistible claims of the poem's textual surfaces. Just as God's 'fatall deep foresight' is identified with Arthur's 'fresh bleeding wound' which impels him forward, 'following his [God's] behest', *The Faerie Queene* insists upon recognising the imbrication of desire, suffering, and a merciful providence (I.ix.7.1-5).

In the House of Holiness, the Red Crosse Knight comes upon another book that responds to and revises the one he gave to Arthur. The House is overseen by Caelia, '[w]hose onely ioy was to relieue the needes / Of wretched soules', and her

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<sup>93</sup> Kearney, 2009, pp.2-3.

<sup>94</sup> Kearney, 2009, p.122.

<sup>95</sup> Ann E. Imbrie, 'Playing Legerdemaine with the Scripture': Parodic Sermons in *The Faerie Queene*, *ELR* 17:2 (1987), p.148. For this understanding of Despair's rhetoric, see also Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca & London: 1979), p.36.;

three daughters, Fidelia, Speranza, and Charissa (I.x.3.6-7). Fidelia, who as ‘the eldest’ affirms the primacy of faith within Reformed religion, appears

araied all in lilly white,  
And in her right hand bore a cup of gold,  
With wine and water fild vp to the hight,  
In which a Serpent did himselfe enfold,  
That horroure made to all, that did beholde;  
But she no whitt did chaunge her constant mood:  
And in her other hand she fast did hold  
A booke that was both signd and seald with blood,  
Wherein dark things were writ, hard to be vnderstood.  
(I.x.13)

This initial description of Fidelia and its prodigality of reference creates a set of competing and often surprising significations. The ‘cup of gold’ containing ‘wine and water’ refers to the cup of the sacrament filled with the sacrificial ‘blood and water’ which issued from Christ’s side, and also travesties Duessa’s ‘golden cup’ from which ‘[d]eath and despayre did many thereof sup’ (John 19:34, I.viii.14.1-3). The serpent within acts as both a symbol of Aesculapius, god of medicine, and a symbol of Christ the redeemer, dovetailing physical and spiritual healing.<sup>96</sup> Yet the serpent, ‘enfolded’, also evokes Satan in the Garden and lexically recalls Errorr’s ‘folds’ (I.i.16.3). Hidden in the cup, the snake also references the apocryphal story of St John in which, as Berger describes, ‘the poison given to John by the Emperor Domitian miraculously condensed into a serpent and left the cup.’<sup>97</sup> With manifold symbolism, Spenser presents Fidelia bearing a chalice filled with the *pharmakon*, both water and wine, Christ and devil, healing ointment and poison. Faith herself – ‘hable, with her wordes to kill, / And rayse again to life the hart, that she did thrill’ (I.x.19.8-9) – displays a pharomic legibility.

The ‘booke’ Fidelia holds in her other hand, ‘signd and seald with blood’, reveals itself as the New Testament. In the pseudo-Pauline letter to the Hebrews, 9:14-22, ‘the blood of the Testament’ is written with ‘the blood of Christ’, affirming how ‘all things are by the Law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is

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<sup>96</sup> As Hamilton notes (I.x.13.2-5n), the serpent acts as symbol of Christ through a typological interpretation of the ‘serpent of brass’ raised by Moses which might save a snake-bitten man, and Christ raised on the cross. See Numbers 21:9.

<sup>97</sup> Berger Jr, 1988, pp.51-52.

no remission' (Hebrew 9:14-20). Yet it is also, more specifically, the Book of Revelation, 'sealed with seven seals' which 'no man in heaven nor in earth [...] was able to open', but only the Lamb worthy to open it 'because thou wast killed, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood' (Revelations 5.1-9). Spenser associates Fidelity's text with the bittersweet 'little book' revealed to St. John, which pharmaceutically 'shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth as sweet as honey' (Revelations 10.9). The book, being the New Testament, is the same text that Red Crosse gives away to Arthur, but crucially the 'golden letters rich and braue' of the previous book are replaced by those 'with blood yrwitt' (I.x.19.1). Spenser impresses upon us metonymically through bloody lines the body of the suffering Christ and his Passion, replacing the troublingly Catholic iconography of the crucifixion with the image of scripture written in blood.<sup>98</sup> Fidelity's book testifies to the intimacy of suffering and salvation.

As might be expected, the serpent curling in Fidelity's cup provokes 'horror' in all who 'beholde' it. Fidelity, however, remains stalwart, maintaining her 'constant mood'. This distinction sets forth the unwavering nature of faith in the face of evil, but it also implies two models of response to the symbolism of the cup and snake. Recalling the models of faithful and despairing reading performed by Una and Arthur, we find that Fidelity is also a teacher of interpretation. In her 'schoolehous', she provides Red Crosse with a lesson:

her sacred Booke, with blood ywritt  
 That none could reade, except she did them teach,  
 She unto him disclosed euery whit  
 And heauenly documents thereout did preach  
(I.x.19.1-3).

Playing again with the psychomachic dynamics of allegory, Fidelity is at once preacher and internal, personal faculty, a Spenserian invitation to the reader to awake their own faith. One element of such faithful reading is the reunification of the scripture as a reformation of the sinfully misleading exegetical practice of Despair: after Fidelity's tutelage, Despair's argument for Red Crosse's necessary perdition, based on

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<sup>98</sup> For Spenser's 'poetic compensation for the diminishing importance of the figure of the suffering Christ in the early modern Protestant imaginary', see Campana, 2012, p.49.

the ‘blood-shed, and auengement’ of knightly enterprise and the Old Testament justice that ‘life must life, and blood must blood repay’, is reimagined on the Mount of Contemplation as the possibility of ‘wash[ing] thy hands from guilt of bloody field’ (I.ix.43.4-6, I.x.60.8). The intercession of faith comprises a Lutheran hermeneutic awakening, a recognition of God’s righteousness as mercifully cleansing rather than punitive. As Åke Bergvall, explicating the Legend of Holiness through Augustine’s theory of the sign, observes, ‘[a]s Christ the Savior is the theological bridge from alienation to wholeness, so Christ the Word, dispensed by Fidelia, is the linguistic bridge from confusion to comprehension’.<sup>99</sup> In the unification of the two testaments of the Bible, achieved through reformed faith, lies a realisation of human wholeness and a deliverance from utter depravity.

The interpretive lesson of faith is not, however, a recognition of one meaning at the expense of the other, or, in pharmaceutical terms, of the antidote rather than the poison, but a simultaneous appreciation of the two. The snake in Fidelia’s cup is still – is always – able to be read both ways: Spenser’s verse remains ineluctably material, the claims of its surfaces remaining in spite of allegoresis. After his instruction by Fidelia, we are told, Red Crosse ‘grew in litle space [...] To such perfection of all heauenly grace’ (I.x.21.1-3). Yet immediately, such perfection is shattered as Red Crosse slips into despair again: he ‘mortall life gan loath, as thing forlore, / Greeud with remembrance of his wicked wayes’ (I.x.21.5-6). Later, after healing in Charissa’s hospital, we are told that ‘so perfect he became, / That [...] His mortall life he learned had to frame / In holy righteousness’, yet later entertains suicidal thoughts in wishing that he’d not ‘turne againe / Backe to the world, whose ioyes so fruitlesse are’ (I.x.45.6-9, I.x.63.1-2). What are we to make of this vacillation between perfection and imperfection in Red Crosse’s experience in the House of Holiness? Luther, Scott Hendrix explains, argued that

before justification, sin was a real power that enslaved the intellect and the will, and that even after grace had come and the will had been liberated, real sin remained in the baptized to the extent that they could be called simultaneously righteous and sinful (*simul iustus et peccator*).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Åke Bergvall, ‘The Theology of the Sign: St Augustine and Spenser’s Legend of Holiness’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33:1 (1993), p.35.

<sup>100</sup> Scott Hendrix, ‘Luther’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, eds. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: 2004), p.50.

Righteous and sinful, flesh and spirit, man assumes paradoxical nature. In the end, it is this that Red Crosse must recognise, himself that he must learn to read. Despair, in accounting him 'faries sonne', only reveals his inability to identify clearly; it requires contemplation after faith for the knight to discover his changeling nature, sprung 'from ancient race / Of *Saxon* kings', and named '*Georgos*', patron saint of England (I.ix.47.9, I.x.65.1-2, I.x.66.6). Just as the body of the poetry refuses to be ignored, so too must Red Crosse recognise that his path to holiness is not an abnegation of the flesh for the spirit, but an incorporation of the two.

This complicity between the nature of language and the nature of man – both fallen, but both holy, both spirit and flesh – discloses the reformatory power of *The Faerie Queene* itself. For Fidelity's book 'wherein dark things were writ, hard to be vnderstood' is not only the text of the New Testament, but allegory itself, Spenser's 'darke conceit' (Letter to Raleigh, 714). In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, it is under the auspices of 'faith, hope, and love' that the passage from seeing 'through a glass darkly' to seeing 'face to face' is achieved (1 Corinthians 13:12-13). Faith unfolds allegory just as it does scripture, and just as Fidelity teaches Red Crosse to recognise the bloody testament of Christ's sacrifice, so too *The Faerie Queene* beseeches us to attend to its material surface and, by relation, our own embodied, suffering existence. Close reading becomes a model for ethical reformation if practised faithfully. A hermeneutics of faith asks us to see the cure in the poison, the spirit in the flesh, the simultaneity of suffering and salvation, of righteousness and sin. The romance wanderings of knights in Faery Land mirror our own wanderings around a postlapsarian world, a world characterised by salutary error and errancy, wherein we might work out our 'own salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12).

## **VI: *The Anatomy of Jolly Melancholy***

In 1628, the third edition of Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* was published, not only expanded by some fifty-thousand words on the second edition, but accompanied by a range of new paratextual material which made this version significantly different from its predecessors. Inserted in front of the text was the engraved title page by Christof Le Blon, presenting a series of emblems and arcane



symbols associated with melancholy, as well as an engraving of the author himself; and, following this frontispiece, two poems, the Latin ‘Democritus Junior ad Librum Suum’, and the English ‘The Authors Abstract of Melancholy’. This latter poem, subtitled ‘ΔΙΑΛΟΓΙΚΩΣ’ (Gk, debate), provides two contrapuntal voices describing opposing views of the melancholic disorder, voices that, as Gérard Genette observes in his theorising of the function of paratextual material, are ‘at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it’.<sup>101</sup> The ‘phantasmes sweet’ of genial melancholy’s imaginative stimulation, the power of the melancholic mind to ‘build Castles in the aire, / Void of sorrow and voide of fear’, is set in contrast with the melancholic ‘[y]ing] waking all alone, / Recounting all I have ill done’, and the ‘[f]eare and sorrow’ attendant on such ‘thoughts [...] tyranni[e]’ (I.lxix). The pleasure of solitude by ‘a brooke side or wood so greene / Unheard, unsought for, or unseene’ is juxtaposed with the ‘discontents and Furies’ of loneliness in ‘a darke grove, or irkesome denne’; ‘[s]weete musicke, wondrous melodie’ with ‘[g]hostes, goblins, feinds’ (I.lxix-lxx). The poem’s refrain by turns presents the delight and desolation brought on by the disease:

All my griefs to this are jolly,  
None so sour as melancholy.  
[...]  
All other joys to this are folly,  
None so sweet as melancholy. (I.lxix)

Finally, the polarised responses reach an eschatologically-oriented climax when, in the last two stanzas, melancholy is first considered ‘divine’, since it offers ‘pleasant toys time to beguile’, and then, the speaker requesting ‘a halter or a knife’, ‘damn’d’ (I.lxx). Melancholy might pave the way to heaven or hell.

Burton’s interest in paradox – and his text’s formal, stylistic, and thematic exemplification of it – has long been recognised by critics. Ever since Rosalie L. Colie’s inclusion of the *Anatomy* in her study of the Renaissance tradition of paradox – in which she points out that ‘cases of melancholy display contradiction: the same thing may, in different cases, be cause and symptom, cause and cure’ – Burton scholarship has sought to describe, explain, and reconcile these ‘contradictions and

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<sup>101</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: 1997), p.2.

paradoxes'.<sup>102</sup> According to Devon Hodges, '[a]nimated by a struggle between reason and madness, order and fragmentation', these paradoxes indicate melancholy's evasion of 'a rational order'; others have suggested that they are legitimated by the stylistic habits of late humanist *copia*, or the patchwork poetics of the *cento* form.<sup>103</sup> With remarkable clarity, however, this prefatory poem impresses upon us not only that paradox is an inherent element of Burton's melancholy subject, but that he understands it in relation to the *pharmakon*: melancholy is 'sweet' and 'sour'. The two voices articulate competing interpretive responses to melancholy's pharmonic legibility in terms – 'divine' and 'damn'd' – remarkably similar to the hermeneutics of faith and despair explored in *The Faerie Queene*. Leading the sufferer into suicidal imaginings, melancholy courts perdition; but equally, as a potential source of pleasure, melancholy might indicate divine dispensation and a route to salvation.

Paradox was widely held to be an intrinsic quality of melancholy within the early modern cultural imagination.<sup>104</sup> The understanding of the disorder was informed by two major traditions, somewhat at odds with each other: the Galenic tradition of pathological, humoral imbalance, and the competing conception of genial melancholy, inherited via pseudo-Aristotelian writings which 'construed the spark of genius to be generated by a moderately inflamed melancholy humor.'<sup>105</sup> In the fusion of these two strains of thought, melancholy came to signal both a pernicious physiological disorder and the mark of creative genius: as Douglas Trevor has it, many learned writers of the period seek 'to proclaim themselves as

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<sup>102</sup> Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxica Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: 1966), pp.431, 453.

<sup>103</sup> Devon Hodges, *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy* (Amherst: 1985), pp.108, 113.; Mary Murphy Schmelzer, 'Tis All One: The Anatomy of Melancholy as Belated Copious Discourse' (New York: 1999), pp.14-15.; Angus Gowland, 'Rhetorical Structure and Function in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 19 (2001), pp.33-34.

<sup>104</sup> For the multifarious and competing understandings of melancholy during early modernity, and how this relates to its pandemic aspect and indiscriminate affliction, see Angus Gowland, 'The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy', *Past and Present* 191 (2006), pp.96-105.

<sup>105</sup> Noel L. Brann, *The Debate Over the Origin of Genius During the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: 2002), p.3. For an account of the intellectual history of melancholy, its derivation from classical sources, and its absorption into medieval and early modern culture, see Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl., *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy and Art* (London: 1962), esp. pp.3-112.

melancholic: both gifted and sick.<sup>106</sup> Something of this is registered in Burton's poem in his description of the melancholic's 'phantasmes sweet', and it also informs his entertainment of melancholic suffering as divinely ordained. Indeed, David Harley points out that under Calvinist understandings of providence, 'sickness did not come by chance but was sent as a fatherly correction by God either to punish human wickedness or as a trial of faith.'<sup>107</sup> 'Worldly tribulation, moreover,' George M. McClure observes, 'can also be a vehicle for divine correction, and thus ultimately an adversity such as illness can be salutary, recalling the afflicted back to piety.'<sup>108</sup> As Calvinist bishop Lewis Bayly writes in *The Practise of Piety* (1613), '[b]y affliction and sicknesse, God exerciseth his children, and the graces hee bestoweth vpon them', later invoking the *imitatio Christi* in suggesting that affliction 'makes vs conformable to the *Image of Christ* his sonne, who [...] *was made perfect through sufferings*.'<sup>109</sup> Such an attitude is corroborated by Burton in the opening subsection of the main body of the *Anatomy*, when he admits that 'these chastisements are inflicted upon us for our humiliation, to exercise and try our patience here in this life, to bring us home' (I.124). Suffering and salvation – the anticipated heavenly homecoming – are once again imbricate.

Just as melancholy exhibits a pharmaceutical legibility, so too the activity of reading, as Burton presents it, bears an ambivalent efficacy in the treatment of the disorder. With wry reference to his own writerly method, and with the ironic implication that his writing only fuels the fury of his melancholy, Burton writes that '[a]mongst so many thousand Authors you shall scarce finde one by reading of whom you shall be any whit better, but rather much worse'; people are 'rather infected then any way perfected' by reading (I.10). Elsewhere, in a subsection on the 'Love of Learning, or overmuch Study' as a source of the disorder, Burton writes that 'too much learning (as *Festus* told *Paul*) hath made thee mad' (I.303). Excessive 'contemplation', bedfellow of reading, 'dries the braine, and extinguisheth naturall heat', leaving the body overrun with the 'black blood and crudities' of melancholia (I.303-4). To dedicate oneself solely to

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<sup>106</sup> Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: 2004), p.5.

<sup>107</sup> David Harley, 'Spiritual physic, Providence and English medicine, 1560-1640', in *Medicine and the Reformation*, eds. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (London & New York: 1993), p.101.

<sup>108</sup> George W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton: 1991), p.9.

<sup>109</sup> Lewis Bayly, *The Practise of Piety* (London: 1613), pp.829, 837.

matters of the mind leads to a ‘want of exercise’, yet in the partition on the cure of melancholy, Burton considers that ‘amongst those exercises, or recreations of the minde within doors, there is none [...] so fit & proper to expell Idleness and Melancholy, as that of *Study*’ (I.304, II.84).<sup>110</sup> ‘So sweet is the delight of study’, writes Burton, ‘the more learning they have [...] the more they covet to learne’, a logic that discloses the possibility of perniciously excessive reading as much as it affirms its edificatory potential. Ironically displaying his own learning, study is identified as part of a healthful regimen – ‘saith *Seneca* as meat is to the body, such is reading to the soule’ – as well as of specifically medicinal power, as when ‘*Cardan* calls a Library the Physicke of the Soule’ (II.90). ‘Scripture’ figures a panacea, ‘an Apothecaries shop, wherein are all remedies for all infirmities of minde, purgatives, cordialls, alteratives, corroboratives, lenitives’, yet his writings too, including the *Anatomy* itself, are intended to ‘take like guilded pilles, which are so composed as well to tempt the appetite [...] as to helpe and medicinally worke upon the whole body’ (II.91, III.5). A word’s ‘medicinal’ power, here, is intimately associated with its ability to appeal to the appetite, to inspire passion, and to satisfy desires. Reading, in the *Anatomy* – even reading of the *Anatomy* – is represented as an ambivalent activity, able to harm or to help.

The ambivalent character of both melancholy and language is not only a theme of the *Anatomy* but a crucial element of Burton’s therapeutic aim. There have been a number of studies on the curative qualities of Burton’s text. The idea that it might offer a cure for melancholy was first proposed by Martin Heusser, who observes, through a reader-response methodology, the sense of ‘reanimat[ion]’ from reading the *Anatomy*.<sup>111</sup> More recently John Miller has argued that Burton’s purpose ‘is to help its melancholy reader not by educating or informing only, but by changing him. Specifically, the *Anatomy* tries to change the way he reads’.<sup>112</sup> Mary Ann Lund

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<sup>110</sup> Reading as a form of labour or exercise in the *Anatomy* is treated at length in chapter 3, below.

<sup>111</sup> Martin Heusser, *The Gilded Pill: A Study of the Reader-Writer Relationship in Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy* (Tübingen: 1987), p.3

<sup>112</sup> John Miller, ‘Plotting a Cure: The Reader in Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*’, *Prose Studies: History, Theory and Criticism* 20:2 (2008), p.42. Whilst in agreement with Miller on the *Anatomy*’s transformation of its reader’s hermeneutic protocols, I disagree with his foundational assumption that the text provides a linear reading experience. With digressive set-pieces and encyclopaedic qualities, the text invites numerous reading approaches, including reference consultation, and cannot be reduced to one experience.

has also explored ‘the relationship between reading and cure’ through a consideration of the reader-writer relations constructed in the *Anatomy*.<sup>113</sup> What follows contributes to this conversation by arguing that the *Anatomy*’s therapeutic efficacy might best be understood in terms of a specifically pharmic ambivalence, of world and language, text and subject. Burton explicitly invokes the *pharmakon* to describe ‘[o]ur whole life’ as ‘a *Glucupicron*, a bitter sweet passion, honey and gall mixt together’ (II.127). The text’s insistence on observing, exhibiting, and maintaining paradox is part of an overarching reformative scheme that asks, and indeed teaches, the reader to do the same. As a ‘summary or abridgement’ of the text that follows, ‘The Authors Abstract on Melancholy’ both exemplifies the synecdochic logic of anatomy and expresses in miniature the pharmic nature of Burton’s therapeutic method in the remainder of the *Anatomy*.<sup>114</sup> Throughout Burton’s tome, melancholy is presented both as divine punishment, the consummate article of human suffering – ‘Melancholy in this sence is the Character of Mortalitie’, writes Burton (I.136) – and, considered differently, ‘a most delightsome humour’, able to treat itself in the cyclical dynamics of pharmic self-regulation. In this respect, and diverging from the above readings, I argue that Burton’s literary therapeutics provide not a cure for melancholy but a form of palliative care, an ongoing management of the disorder. This therapeutic management issues out of the author’s particular sense of the anatomist’s art, to which I turn next, before concluding the chapter with a discussion of how the *Anatomy* locates its therapeutic efficacy in a surprising melding of competing early modern models of pathology and cure.

## VII: Written in Bile: Burton’s Cutter’s Art

To the fourth edition of the *Anatomy*, in 1632, another poem, ‘The Argument of the Frontispiece’, was inserted before Le Blon’s title page, offering a series of short verses complementing and explicating the emblematics of the engraving, the ‘[t]en distinct Squares heere seene apart [...] joyn’d in one by Cutters art’ (I.lxii). This initial couplet appears at first to refer to the engraver himself, who etches the ten panels

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<sup>113</sup> Lund, 2010, p.2.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Abstract, adj. and n.’ *OED Online*, December 2019, [oed.com/view/Entry/758](https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/758). Accessed 17 February 2020. Sense 2a.

which comprise the text's frontispiece. Yet the motion of separating 'distinct' things 'apart' and 'joining' them 'in one' again, draws analogy with the process of anatomy, the dissection and collection of the 'physical body' into a 'body of understanding'.<sup>115</sup> Burton thus ironically figures himself as the cutter – linking engraver's burin to anatomist's scalpel – and, accordingly, figures the textual *Anatomy* as the aesthetically coherent and intellectually informative art-piece, bringing together and setting forth the wide range of medical, philosophical, and theological learning on melancholy. Indeed, it is just such an enterprise that Burton states in the preface to the *Anatomy* as his 'purpose and endeavour [...] in the following Discourse to anatomize this humour of melancholy, through all his parts and species' (I.110). Later in 'The Argument of the Frontispiece', however, a less successful artistic endeavour is entertained, as Burton asks his reader to '[*m*]arke well: *If't be not as't should be, / Blame the bad Cutter and not me*' (I.lxii). The lines participate once again in the metonymic relationship between artistic engraver and medical anatomist, and Burton's dismissal of responsibility regarding the quality of the frontispiece extends itself ironically to the aesthetic and practical character of the text that follows. In this figurative extension, however, Burton's roles begin to fracture, as the lines open up a gap between the narrator of the *Anatomy* and the anatomist, who is both Burton himself and some distinct 'bad Cutter'. Burton uses this prefatory poem simultaneously to figure his anatomical endeavour as an aesthetic one and to distance himself from it.

Burton's playful disavowal of responsibility for his text's failings is a recurrent trope in the *Anatomy*. He disowns the content of his text, pleading rather that the 'method onely is myne owne'; he claims it was not his 'intent to prostitute my Muse in *English*', but that he could not get it printed in Latin; and uses the *cento* form, 'collected from others', as a method of denying authority, since it is 'not I, but they that say it' (I.11, I.16, I.110). But Burton's most pervasive and powerful distancing technique of this kind in the *Anatomy* is his adoption in the preface of the persona of Democritus Junior, the 'Anticke or Personate actor [...] arrogating another mans name' of whom Burton mockingly assumes his reader 'wilt be very inquisitive to know', 'whence hee is, why he doth it, and what he has to say' (I.1). The range of critical responses to these questions demonstrates just how useful and versatile a device Democritus Junior is, perfectly suited to the variety of Burton's philosophical

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<sup>115</sup> Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London & New York: 1995), p.2.

and rhetorical aims.<sup>116</sup> Burton uses Democritus Junior as an excuse for the content and expression of potentially deleterious material: '[i]f I have overshot my selfe in this which hath been hitherto said,' he writes in the concluding pages of 'Democritus Junior to the Reader', 'tis not I, but *Democritus*, *Democritus dixit*: you must consider what it is to speake in ones owne or anothers person, an assumed habit and name' (I.110). But just sentences later he invites the censure of his reader, goading, '[o]bject then and cavill what thou wilt, I ward all with *Democritus* buckler, his medicine shall salve it' (I.111). Burton's comments again effect the evasion of criticism through the 'buckler' of his guise, guarding against the wound of potential reproach, but the metaleptic transfer to a 'medicine' recalls his therapeutic concerns and intimates that the salvific qualities of his text lie in part in his choice of persona. Democritus Junior becomes both the source of stylistic vice and a locus of safety, error and salve.

But the original Democritus presents a particularly suitable template for Burton's persona because, as well as pharmaceutically transforming despair into laughter, the philosopher represents a forerunner in the attempt to anatomise worldly folly. Narrating a tale 'which *Hippocrates* relates at large in his Epistle to *Damagetus*', Burton describes how the ancient physician

found *Democritus* in his garden at *Abdera*, in the Suburbs, under a shady Bowre, with a booke on his Knees, busie at his study, sometimes writing, sometime walking. The subject of his booke was Melancholy and madnesse, about him lay the carcasses of many severall beasts, newly by him cut up and anatomized, not that he did contemne Gods creatures, as he told *Hippocrates*, but to finde out the seat of this *atra bilis* or Melancholy, whence it proceeds, and how it was engendred in mens bodies, to the intent he might better cure it in himselfe, by his writings and observations, teach others how to prevent & avoid it.

(I.5-6).

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<sup>116</sup> Angus Gowland observes that Democritus Junior signals the 'transferral of authority from medical science, represented by Hippocrates, to moral philosophy and psychology, represented by Democritus', as well as an incorporation of a suggestive Epicureanism. In his choice of persona, Stephanie Shirilan sees Burton 'rejecting contemporary exhortations to confessional transparency, modeling instead [...] a privileged melancholic style that takes aim at popular Puritan and Neostoic ideals of rhetorical temperance and affective melancholy', and 'substituting sociable laughter for solemn introspection' in the satirical Democritean response to the world's folly (Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* [Cambridge: 2006], p.11.; Stephanie Shirilan, *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy* [Farnham: 2015], pp.5, 39.).

The ‘carcasses of many several beasts’ and the ‘booke’ in which Democritus is found ‘writing’ present him in the process of producing an anatomy, the conversion of physical bodies into textual ones. The point of this process, moreover, is revealed to be curative or at least medicinally useful: Democritus seeks both to ‘cure’ the infliction of melancholy ‘in himselfe’ and also, in producing his ‘writings’, ‘teach others how to prevent & avoid it’. As the inheritor of Democritus, ‘*Democritus Junior*’ is therefore bold to imitate, & because he left it unperfect, & it is not lost [...] to revive againe, prosecute and finish in this ‘Treatise’ (I.6). Burton, through his personate actor, explicitly seeks to complete the work Democritus began.

The great deal of scholarly work done on the body and dissection in early modernity attests to the hold that anatomy had over the cultural imagination of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>117</sup> As David Hillman points out:

[The] period witnessed remarkable advances in the scientific comprehension of human anatomy and physiology from Vesalius to Harvey, and at the same time saw an extraordinary level of attention directed to the body’s interior by, among others, artists as different as Leonardo da Vinci and Hieronymus Bosch[.]<sup>118</sup>

The anatomical cut, however, finds its origin in classical rhetoric, in fact in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the same dialogue, we might recall, in which we find the *pharmakon*.<sup>119</sup> Here, Socrates contrasts the truth-seeking endeavour of dialectic with empty sophistry, describing the two motions of establishing knowledge. The first, collection, involves ‘bringing things which are scattered all over the place into a single class by gaining a comprehensive view of them, so that one can define any given thing and so clarify

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<sup>117</sup> The seminal texts in this branch of early modern studies include: Sawday, 1995; the essays collected in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York & London: 1997); Hodges, 1985; David Hillman, *Shakespeare’s Entrails: Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body* (Basingstoke: 2007).

<sup>118</sup> David Hillman, ‘Visceral Knowledge’, in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York & London: 1997), p.83.

<sup>119</sup> It is worthwhile noting that even Galenic medical anatomy involves a specifically rhetorical process: Heinrich Von Staden identifies that ‘Galen frequently [...] characterizes public dissection and vivisection not as ‘demonstration’ (apo-deixis, a word which Galen freely uses in logical, particularly in syllogistic, and mathematical contexts), but as ‘exhibition’ or ‘display’ (epi-deixis).’ See Heinrich Von Staden, ‘Anatomy as Rhetoric: Galen on Dissection and Persuasion’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50:1 (1995), p.53.



the topic one wants to explain at any time'; the other, division, is the process of '[b]eing able to cut things up again, class by class, according to their natural joints, rather than trying to break them up as an incompetent butcher might.'<sup>120</sup> The division of the collected textual body into parts (crucially, 'according to their natural joints', without 'breaking them up') thus operates through what R. Grant Williams usefully terms 'synecdochic logic', where each of the parts relates coherently to the unified whole.<sup>121</sup> Operating through the principle of the *discordia concors*, the cut works through 'discerning a natural unity and plurality'.<sup>122</sup> Anatomy during early modernity comprised not only a medical exploration of the body's interior, but a celebration of cosmic harmony and order, 'the design, plan and workmanship of the Creator in the highpoint of His creation, the body of man'.<sup>123</sup>

In tension with this idealised yearning for clarity and order through the process of anatomy, however, early modern thinkers and writers remained aware of the scalpel's sharp edge, the violence and destruction attendant upon anatomy's construction. Such a violence is registered in John Donne's 'The First Anniversary: An Anatomie of the World', in which the poet writes that 'in cutting vp a man that's dead, / The body will not last out to haue read / On euery part'.<sup>124</sup> Anatomy provides Donne with an apt metaphor to contemplate the disintegration of the world following the death of Elizabeth Drury, the daughter of one of his patrons: the world '[i]s crumbled out againe to his Atomis. / 'Tis all in pieces, all cohærence gone.'<sup>125</sup> 'Thou knowst how vgly a monster this world is', Donne concludes, 'And learnst thus much by our Anatomee'.<sup>126</sup> Burton, too, acknowledges the potential disfigurement caused by the anatomical cut:

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<sup>120</sup> Plato, 2002, pp.55-56.

<sup>121</sup> R. Grant Williams, 'Disfiguring the Body of Knowledge: Anatomical Discourse and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*', *English Literary History* 68:3 (2001), p.593. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio describe early modernity as 'an age of synecdoche': David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, 'Introduction', in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Hillman and Mazzio (New York & London: 1997), p.xiv.

<sup>122</sup> Plato, 2002, p.56.

<sup>123</sup> Ole Grell and Andrew Cunningham, 'Introduction', in *Medicine and the Reformation*, eds. Grell and Cunningham (London & New York: 1993), p.3.

<sup>124</sup> John Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 6, ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: 1995), pp.16-17.

<sup>125</sup> Donne, 1995, p.12.

<sup>126</sup> Donne, 1995, p.14.

If hereafter anatomizing this surly humor, my hand slip, as an unskilful  
Prentise, I launce too deep, and cut through skin and all at unawares, make it  
smart or cut awry, pardon a rude hand, an unskilful knife[.]

(I.113)

Burton's anatomising pen is replaced metonymically by the anatomist's knife, the metaphor allowing the potentially mutilating violence of 'launcing too deep' and 'cutting awry' to be realised. Similarly, in the First Partition, when moving from external causes of melancholy to those that issue from inside the body, Burton informs us that he 'will now break into the inner roomes, and rip up the antecedent immediate causes which are there to be found' (I.372). The architectural metaphor once again figures Burton's rhetorical endeavour as an act of brutality, a ripping of the body as it is transformed into text. Burton's metaphors disclose the same conflict between the anatomical method and a destructive violence observed by Montaigne at the opening of his essay, 'Of Experience': '[w]e open the matter, and spill it in distempering it.'<sup>127</sup>

Plato submits that the anatomical method might deliver a clear body of knowledge if the cut is performed 'according to their natural joints', but at every level, global and local, we find the texture of Burton's *Anatomy* doing the opposite. Separated into Partitions, Sections, Members, and Subsections, Burton's text purports to exemplify the classical *divisio* that Plato recommends, what Ruth Fox has described as 'diversity through the unity imposed upon multiplicity by the structure of anatomy'.<sup>128</sup> But as John Miller observes, '[a]lmost immediately [...] problems in the method arise. At each level, as parts proliferate *ad infinitum*, categorical borders inexorably recede over the horizon.'<sup>129</sup> Causes reappear as symptoms and cures, resisting neat taxonomic definition, exhibiting spillage rather than containment. Indeed, Burton's expansive, digressive text is everywhere characterised by such excess, in both its stylistic prolixity and Burton's revisionary habits of textual accretion.<sup>130</sup> Burton's lists – one of the favoured rhetorical figures of the *Anatomy* –

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<sup>127</sup> Montaigne, 2006, vol. 3, 316.

<sup>128</sup> Ruth A. Fox, *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Berkeley, LA & London: 1976), p.9.

<sup>129</sup> Miller, 1997, p.45.

<sup>130</sup> Burtonian revision and the textual history of the *Anatomy* is treated in greater detail in chapter 3.

exemplify a kind of lexical excessiveness unrestrained by syntax, as when he describes the qualities of the melancholic man:

stupid, angry, drunken, silly, sottish, sullen, proud, vainglorious, ridiculous,  
beastly, peevish, obstinate, impudent, extravagant, dry, doting, dull,  
desperate, harebraine, &c. mad, phrantike, foolish, heteroclites[.]  
(I.110)

This list is representative of the kind that litters Burton's text, a figure that appears to attempt division or enumeration, but that with each attempt spills uncontrollably, epitomising a lack of subordination, unresolvable parataxis perverting the synecdochic logic which the anatomical cut aims to achieve. The '&c.' – a character that functions so regularly for Burton as an aposiopesis that simultaneously truncates the syntax of the list whilst also suggesting the possibility of endless lexical progeneration – here fails to even mark the end of the list, with words continuing to proliferate in spite of the punctuation. At each level, from the structural to the syntactic, we find Burton's text spilling over its boundaries: '[e]ven syntactical and rhetorical forms', writes Stanley Fish, 'sentences, paragraphs, sections [...] lose their firmness in this most powerful of all solvents'.<sup>131</sup> Burton's anatomical cut functions not along 'natural joints' but as a form of disfigurement, leading Williams to assert that the '*Anatomy* is not a body of knowledge but that which both Plato and Quintilian exorcise from rhetoric: a monster of knowledge.'<sup>132</sup>

These stylistic and structural qualities of the *Anatomy* – the book's monstrosity – are explained not only by the incompetence of Burton's anatomical cut, but by the subject of his anatomy. In anatomising the melancholic body, he treats both his own – 'I have layd my selfe open (I know it) in this Treatise, turned mine inside outward', he writes, and later, 'I have anatomized my own folly' – and his reader's: 'Thou thy selfe art the subject of my Discourse' (I.13, I.112, I.1). As 'so universall a malady, an Epidemicall disease', melancholy accommodates all people and Burton's cut is one of both self-harm and harm to the reader (I.110). Translating the melancholic body into a textual one, we find that, in its excesses and irreverent overflowing of boundaries, the text not only figures a monstrous body of knowledge

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<sup>131</sup> Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, LA & London: 1972), p.329.

<sup>132</sup> Williams, 2001, p.600. For Williams, this monstrous body of knowledge comprises a satirical comment on the decay of humanist culture.

but also comes to exhibit the qualities of the melancholic physical body, characterised as it is by an excess of black bile. As Mark Breitenberg has it, in the *Anatomy*, ‘subject matter and textual matters are dialectically poised: either the body of the text valiantly tries to *contain* the over-flowing nature of the disease or, failing that, comes to *resemble* the psycho-physiological body of the melancholic.’<sup>133</sup> Burton himself acknowledges such an isomorphism between the textual body of the *Anatomy* and the melancholic physical body, both in the form of pun – he laments his ‘affected stile’ (I.100) – and in the imagery he applies to his book: he figures the therapeutic efficacy of writing as a form of textual evacuation, writing of his wish ‘to ease my minde by writing, for I had *gravidum cor, fœtum caput*, a kind of Impostume in my head, which I was very desirous to be unladen of, and could imagine no fitter evacuation then this’ (I.7). The language of pregnancy – ‘*gravidum*’, ‘*faetum*’ – with its association of generative potentiality is replaced with a pathologized abscess, an ‘impostume’. In his desire to expel the waste product of melancholic humour from his body, Burton translates it into textual form, and his writing appears not to heal but rather to imitate his pathological body. Rather than exercising order or control over his melancholy subject, Burton, wielding the anatomist’s scalpel, rather succumbs to a form of mimetic attraction, stylistically taking on the condition of the excessive, melancholic body.

### **VIII: A Mixt Malady, A Mixt Cure: Homeopathic Permutations in the *Anatomy***

The isomorphism between physical and textual bodies in the *Anatomy* – the mimetic relationship displayed by his paratactic, digressive stylistics and the similarly seeping and permeable character of the melancholic physiology – has led Williams to claim that this monstrous textuality imperils Burton’s therapeutic aspirations. He writes that ‘[w]hereas a body of knowledge exposes itself to the gaze of the anatomist who knows, a monster of knowledge thwarts visual mastery. It does not allow a subject to identify with it.’<sup>134</sup> Williams’ understanding of the *Anatomy*’s therapeutic utility,

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<sup>133</sup> Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: 1996), p.35.

<sup>134</sup> Williams, 2001, p.605.

however, is limited to a pursuit of self-knowledge in the vein of the Delphic maxim and fails to account for a specifically medicinal claim. For whilst it is true that establishing knowledge of melancholy – to ‘teach others how to prevent & avoid it’ – is one of Burton’s aims, we might remember that he also means the very textual fabric of his writing, his ‘lines’, to ‘medicinally worke upon the whole body’ like ‘pilles’. This medicinal simile joins a host of other images that figure Burton’s text as consumable – ‘writings’ as ‘Dishes’ that might be ‘digest[ed]’ (I.13, I.11) – but, given the metonymic relationship between Burton’s text and the melancholic body, we might remain suspicious of his claims to therapeutic efficacy. How might a text that embodies melancholy serve to treat melancholy? Or does the *Anatomy*’s claim to a cure crumble beneath its monstrous textuality, exacerbating rather than alleviating the disease?

Directly after figuring his writings as an ‘impostume’ of melancholy to be evacuated from his troubled ‘minde’, Burton expands upon the therapeutic operations of the activity of writing:

I was not a little offended with this maladie, shall I say my Mistris *Melancholy*, my *Ægeria*, or my *malus Genius*, & for that cause as he that is stung with a Scorpion, I would expel *clavum clavo*, comfort one sorrow with another [...] make an Antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease.  
(I.7)

Burton’s double personification of his disorder reinscribes immediately the pharmic duality of melancholy: it is both a ‘maladie’, a ‘Mistris’ that ‘offends’, and his *Ægeria*, a Roman goddess of healing and inspiration, regularly associated with the Muses. Genial and pathological melancholy are entwined, a doubling reaffirmed by the description ‘*malus Genius*’, as melancholy’s power to heal as much as to harm is disclosed. Burton then directly identifies the ‘sorrow’ of melancholy as the *pharmakon*, ‘an Antidote’ made out of the ‘cause’ of ‘disease’, referring to the sting of the scorpion that is treated with the same poison. Later, however, in the Second Partition on cures for melancholy, Burton invokes the same Latin proverb, *clavum clavo repellere* (‘one nail drives out another nail’) to describe a different curative dynamic:

it will not be amisse [...] *clavum clavo pellere, to drive out one passion with another, or by some contrary passion*, as they doe bleeding at nose by letting blood in the arm, to expell one feare with another, one griefe with another.

(II.111)

Linguistic parallels between these two passages – between ‘comforting one sorrow with another’, for example, and ‘expelling one fear with another’ – are misleading, belying their different medicinal attitudes. The former’s pharmaceutical prescription is replaced with an allopathic one: it is ‘*some contrary passion*’ that drives out the unwanted one, a relationship of contrariety rather than similitude.

Burton’s repeated references to this maxim, then, betray a curious confusion of competing models of medicine. Indeed, Angus Gowland observes that the *Anatomy* purports to provide ‘a kind of literary-poetic ‘homeopathy’ working on the principle of *similia similibus curantur* and in obvious tension with conventional Galenic ‘allopathy’ based on the contradiction of opposites.’<sup>135</sup> It is just such a tension registered in the twin valences of ‘*clavum clavo repellere*’, of a conception of the humoral body in ‘therapy consisted in ‘adding what was lacking’ and ‘withdrawing what was in excess’’, and a competing model of pharmaceutical homeopathy famously propounded during early modernity by Paracelsus.<sup>136</sup> This model evolved in direct challenge to humoral physiology: ‘Follow after me, Avicenna, Galen, Rhasis, Mongagnana’, Paracelsus writes in *Das Buch Paragranum* (1529-30), referencing humoralists regularly quoted by Burton, and calls on physicians to ‘abandon [...] grades, complexions, humours, and qualities’, the conceptual apparatus of Galenic medicine.<sup>137</sup> Instead, Paracelsus recognises the inherent pharmonic bivalence of all things, writing in *Volumen Medicinae Paramirum* (c. 1520) that ‘everything is [...] both a poison and a benefit to another’, as when ‘man eats a piece of meat, in which is both bad and good. When the meat reaches the stomach, there is the alchemist who divides it.’<sup>138</sup> Paracelsus goes on to emphasise that this bivalence does not operate simply in the sense of one man’s meat being another man’s poison:

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<sup>135</sup> Gowland, 2006, p.2.

<sup>136</sup> Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel: 1982), p.129.

<sup>137</sup> Paracelsus, *Paracelsus: Essential Readings*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (Wellingborough: 1990), pp.73, 75.

<sup>138</sup> Paracelsus, 1990, pp.50-51.

A poison is concealed beneath the goodness in everything which man takes as his nourishment. That is to say, there is an *essentia* and a *venenum* in everything: the *essentia* supports him, the *venenum* causes him illness [...]. For sometimes the alchemist does his work imperfectly and does not divide the bad from the good thoroughly, and so decay arises in the mixed good and bad[.]<sup>139</sup>

‘Poison’ and ‘goodness’ subsist in the same material substance and improper alchemical division in the body leads to ‘mixed good and bad’ effects. All things are both meat *and* poison.

This, the pharmonic nature of all substance, leads, within medicine, to a principle of homeopathy. In the words of Robert Bostocke – a sixteenth-century translator of Paracelsus – ‘there is nothing so good, but that it hath in it some impure thing and unholsome [...] so also there is nothing so unholsome, perilous nor venomous, but it hath [...] vertue and power to cure.’<sup>140</sup> The Paracelsian homeopathic principle, according to Charles Webster,

was consistent with his Neoplatonic cosmology, particularly the idea that the macrocosm and the microcosm were bound together by a complex network of congruities, which constituted the hidden causes of all manner of phenomena, including health and disease.<sup>141</sup>

Within this system of similitude or congruity, Paracelsus finds the possibility for homeopathic therapy, arguing that ‘it is in its anatomy that the remedy is identical with the agent that caused the disease’, and evidencing this with an example Burton explicitly draws upon: ‘Hence a scorpion cures scorpion poisoning, because it has the same anatomy; arsenic cures arsenic poisoning, the heart the heart, the lungs the lungs, the spleen the spleen.’<sup>142</sup> Given that ‘[p]oison is in everything, and no thing is without poison’, within a Paracelsian conception of homeopathic therapy, it is the ‘dosage that makes it either a poison or a remedy’.<sup>143</sup> As Bostocke observes, even the

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<sup>139</sup> Paracelsus, 1990, p.51.

<sup>140</sup> Robert Bostocke, *The Difference Betweene the Auncient Phisicke, first taught by the godlyforefathers, consisting in unitie peace and concord: and the latter phisicke proceeding from idolaters, ethnicks, and heathen: as Gallen, and such other consisting in dualitie, discorde, and contrarietie* (London: 1585), sig.B5<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>141</sup> Charles Webster, *Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic and Mission at the End of Time* (New Haven: 2008), p.148.

<sup>142</sup> Paracelsus, 1990, pp.74-75.

<sup>143</sup> Paracelsus, 1990, p.107.

‘food and nourishments for mans body’, when ‘man doe take them out of measure’ cause ‘the seedes of diseases’ to ‘take roote’.<sup>144</sup> Pharmaceutical therapies might help or heal patients, depending both on the ‘alchemical’ workings of the recipient’s body and mind, and the ‘dosage’ of substance administered.

The therapeutic dynamics of Paracelsian medicine might help shape our understanding of Burton’s paradoxical claim that the melancholically-mimetic *Anatomy* might serve as a cure for melancholy. Some way into ‘Democritus Junior to the Reader’, Burton compares himself to the fifteenth-century Hussite warlord and martyr, Zisca:

[Just] as that great captaine [...] would have a drumme made of his skinne when he was dead, because he thought the very noise of it would put his enimies to flight, I doubt not, but that these following lines, when they shall be recited, or hereafter read, will drive away Melancholy (though I be gone) as much as Zisca’s drumme could terrify his foes.

(I.24)

Just as Zisca has his physical body transformed into an instrument, so too Burton hopes that, even posthumously, his textual *Anatomy* might stand in for his physical body. The materiality of the book and its metonymic relationship to the body is made all the more visceral, as Lund usefully points out, in that ‘[t]he skin stretched across the drum recalls the animal hides tightened across frames to make parchment for manuscripts.’<sup>145</sup> While the *Anatomy* was printed on paper, the network of veins and hair follicles that patterned parchment would nevertheless have been brought to the minds of early modern readers. Affirming a fungibility between the author’s melancholic body and the book he leaves behind, the text’s capacity to ‘drive away Melancholy’ invokes both a charm-like magic and the homeopathic dynamics of Paracelsian medicine. Immediately, however, Burton qualifies his offering, giving ‘one Caution [...] to my present or future Reader, who is actually Melancholy, that hee read not the Symptomes or prognostickes in this following Tract’ lest it ‘aggravat[e]’ the condition and cause ‘more harm then good’ (I.24). Burton recognises the importance of dosage in his reading prescription, especially for those

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<sup>144</sup> Bostocke, 1585, sig.B5<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>145</sup> Lund, 2010, p.1.



who, ‘actually Melancholy’, might receive dangerous amounts of melancholic influence. An ‘[a]ntidote’ is only conducive to cure given that there is ‘moderate and seasonable use of it’ (II.67).

Burton’s *Anatomy* thus entertains and espouses two competing models of therapy, one based on the allopathic ‘recreat[ion] of thy minde by some contrary object’, and the other on a homeopathic model that transforms ‘cause’ into ‘antidote’ (II.102). This melding of two apparently inconsistent models partakes of the intrinsically antithetical nature of the disorder – that ‘delightful melancholy, a friend in shew, but a secret divell, a sweet poyson’ (II.102) – and bestows upon the text the sense of confusion, contradiction, and paradox so regularly experienced by readers of the *Anatomy*. For it is in keeping with this ‘compound mixt Malady’, one which displays such ‘variety and confused mixture, of Symptomes, causes’, that therapy should equally be mixed in nature (I.23, I.171). The cycling complicity of cause and cure reflects the inexorable revolutions of the pharmonic dynamic, one embodied by melancholy and text. The mimetic stylistics of the *Anatomy* – the isomorphic relationship between the textual body and the melancholic body – do not undermine the therapeutic efficacy of reading the text but rather become an integral part of Burton’s healing enterprise. As Zisca submitted his bodily remains to protect his army, so Burton enarms his reader with a melancholic textuality, metonymically related to both the author’s and the reader’s own suffering bodies, as a shield against melancholy. In keeping with the paradoxical cycles of the *pharmakon*, and shaped by a Paracelsian understanding of homeopathy, melancholy is recruited to ward off melancholy. Suffering and salvation are not only intimately bound, but identical.

The issue, of course, remains – and, indeed, can never fully be escaped – that whilst melancholy might act as a cure against itself, the delicate pharmonic balance might at any moment shift to reassert its pernicious power. As ‘The Authors Abstract of Melancholy’ demonstrates, whilst melancholy’s pharmonic legibility permits its identification with the divine, it also always permits its identification with damnation. The melancholic *Anatomy* might ‘drive away Melancholy’, but equally it might ‘aggravate’ and exacerbate the disease. How are we meant to tread this high wire, ensure we gain help rather than harm through reading? In the partition on cures, in a subsection entitled ‘Perturbations of the Mind Rectified’, Burton acknowledges that ‘all men are subject to passions, and Melancholy above all others, as being distempered by their innate humors’: “[t]is a naturall infirmity, a most

powerfull adversary' (II.101). Yet, he admits, whilst 'I may not deny but our passions are violent, and tyrannize over us, yet there bee meanes to curbe them', if people 'will but use their honest endeavours' (II.101). Burton observes the unavoidable suffering of the melancholic, writing 'you may as well bid him that is diseased, not to feele pain, as a melancholy man not to feare, not to be sad [...]. But he may choose whether he will give way too farre unto it' (II.103).<sup>146</sup> Just as Spenser's hermit suggests, here Burton asserts the volitional power of the human will in managing and navigating economies of damnation and salvation. In no uncertain terms, he writes, 'whatsoever the Will desires, shee may command; no such cruell affections, but by discipline they may be tamed' (II.103).

The nature of this 'discipline', invoked also in the title of this thesis, is the subject of the ensuing chapters. Each takes up this chapter's demonstration of the pharmaceutical nature of the word, writing, and reading, and explores the means and ends by which both Spenser and Burton shape reformatory, profitable reading experiences. In asserting the efficacy of the will – with all of the flirtation with Pelagian heresy that such an assertion involves – Burton, like Spenser before, implies that reading's efficacious operations do not occur passively but require the active participation of the reader: to consider melancholy as damning or divine is, in essence, a question of perspective, and more specifically of hermeneutic perspective. The pharmonic revolutions of the melancholic condition partake in the ineluctable mutability of the world, the certainty that good will be followed by bad, but also bad by good. Whilst melancholy might be the 'Character of Mortality', identified with sin and fallenness, Burton nonetheless acknowledges this physical suffering as the partner and even route to spiritual salvation: '[b]odily sicknesse', he writes, 'is for the soules health' (I.124). Suffering and salvation, health and harm, cannot be disentangled but rather must be recognised as mutually dependent, even interconstitutive. The twisting *pharmakon*, whose dynamics can be found in the bittersweet experience of both world and text, is not to be lamented, but celebrated.

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<sup>146</sup> The utility of the will, and its relation in this subsection to heeding the counsel of friends, is deeply influenced by Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, in which he writes that 'once [the mind] is willing to be healed, and heeds the precepts of the wise, it does indeed find healing'. See Cicero, *Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4*, trans. Margaret Graver (Chicago & London: 2002), p.5.





## 2.

### READING FOR PROFIT:

#### *Economies of Reading*

#### **I: A Golden World: The Price of Poetry in Early Modern England**

In 1579, Stephen Gosson's octavo pamphlet entitled *The Schoole of Abuse* was published in London by Thomas Woodcock. In it, the erstwhile playwright and actor condemns in the harshest terms playwriting specifically, and poetry more generally, as that which leads its audiences and readers into a vicious spiral from pleasure to perdition: 'playing', Gosson writes, leads one 'from play to pleasure, from pleasure to slouth, from slouth too sleepe, from sleepe to sinne, from sinne to death, from death to the deuill'.<sup>1</sup> The publication provoked a range of direct rejoinders, most famously by Thomas Lodge – 'I fynd it the oftscome of imperfections, the writer fuller of wordes then iudgement,' he wrote of the pamphlet – and kindled widespread debate regarding the status of literature and its moral impact upon its consumers and on society more generally.<sup>2</sup> Dedicated to Philip Sidney, *The Schoole of Abuse* is also believed to have inspired a response in the *Defence of Poesy* (first published 1595), in which Sidney reverses Gosson's anti-*climax* to advocate a poetics based on literature's ability to incite the reader to emulate virtue: poets 'make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger'.<sup>3</sup> Poetry's end in virtue and vice, in

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse and A Short Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse*, ed. Edward Arber (London: 1868), p.24.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Lodge, *A Defence of Poetry, Music, and Stage-Plays* (London: 1853), p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, eds. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: 1973), p.81.

this debate, finds itself articulated around the Horatian dictum that poetry ought to combine the *dulce* and the *utile*.<sup>4</sup>

Yet in both Gosson's pamphlet and Sidney's apology, poetry's moral status is linked to a concomitant concern for poetry's specifically economic value. Gosson's attack regularly finds fuel in characterising poets and their creations as sources not only of moral decay but of national impoverishment: far from being useful, he contends, the abuses of poets, whom he describes as 'unprofitable members', 'discredit them selues, and disperse their poyson through all the worlde', merging the anatomical and the financial in a rhetoric that insists upon poetry's threat to both the commonwealth and common health.<sup>5</sup> As Russell Fraser describes it, 'crucial' to much antipoetic invective during early modernity is a focus on the need for 'profitable activity' as opposed to 'the fruitless cultivating of poetry and plays'.<sup>6</sup> This climate of suspicion regarding poetry's value extended into the seventeenth century: moral treatises variously lambasted reading anything other than scripture, Robert Hill in *The Pathway to Prayer and Pietie* (1609) describing the 'Reading of vaine Bookes' as the first of 'tenne sinnes which like so many Monopolizing ingrossers, doe take up all the houres of mans life', and Richard Rogers, in *The Practice of Christianitie* (1618), condemning 'vaine, idle, unsauory and vnprofitable bookes and Pamphlets'.<sup>7</sup> Many of the arguments that Sidney puts forward in support of poetry in the *Defence* are also couched in money-thought: famously, the poet envisions a 'golden world' in contrast to Nature's 'brazen' one; narration represents a 'ground-plot of profitable invention' for the poet; and, as Catherine Bates has recently observed in her study of Sidney's economic and counter-economic thought, the poet's ability, in 'bestow[ing] a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruces', suggests the mechanical reproduction of a

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<sup>4</sup> Horace, *Epistles, Book II; and, Epistle to the Pisones ('Ars Poetica')*, ed. Niall Rudd (Cambridge: 1989), p.70.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, in his work on disease and mercantilism in Shakespeare and his contemporaries, has observed that in this period '[p]athology and economy [...] were interconstitutive domains of discourse.' See Jonathan Gil Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia: 2004), p.3, passim.

<sup>6</sup> Russell Fraser, *The War Against Poetry* (Princeton: 1970), p.5-6, passim.; Peter C. Herman, *Squitter-nits and Muse-haters: Sidney, Spenser, Milton and Renaissance Antipoetic Sentiment* (Detroit: 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Hill, *The pathway to prayer and pietie* (London: 1613), p.67; Richard Rogers, *The Praticte of Christianitie, Or, an epitome of Seven Treatises...* (London: 1618), p.345.

Weberian model of profit.<sup>8</sup> Readers, through emulation, become the raw material in the supply chain of moral subjects.

Where, in the previous chapter, I explored the ways in which both Edmund Spenser's and Robert Burton's claims to provide healthful profit for their readers are grounded in reading as an embodied activity, and the ways in which period thinking about anatomy and faculty psychology inform an explicitly pharmaceutical model of reading's edifying or harmful effects, this chapter will confront the economic valence of Horace's injunction, and how it feeds into Spenser's and Burton's thinking on the worth or worthlessness of reading. For both writers, in *The Faerie Queene* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* respectively, articulate their apparent commitment to an Horatian poetics in similarly economic terms. As we have seen, in his 'Letter to Raleigh', appended to the first edition of *The Faerie Queene* in 1590, Spenser declares that his 'general end [...] is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline' (714). Later in the letter, Spenser defends his 'Methode' of delivering 'good discipline [...] thus clowdily enwrapped in Allegorical deuises' rather than 'plainly', because, he writes, 'much more profitable and gratious is doctrine by ensample, then by rule', an invocation of a Horatian poetics that reshapes it into a distinctly economic mould (714). The same language is recruited by Burton as he writes 'mine earnest intent is as much to profit as to please', and it is worth revisiting his medicinal simile of his 'writings' which 'shall take like gilded pilles', and the way in which the honey-coating of the Lucretian image is replaced by the glistening allure of gold-leaf (III.5).<sup>9</sup> Just as Spenser's 'discipline' and 'doctrine' are 'enwrapped in Allegorical deuises', the *Anatomy's* reformatory capacities are proffered in gilt casing to make them all the more appealing: poetry, for both writers, finds its power in providing the reader not only with pleasure, but profit.<sup>10</sup>

The central claim of this chapter is that both Edmund Spenser and Robert Burton, in asserting the therapeutic efficacy of reading, enter into the ongoing debate regarding poetry's (un)profitability. The money-form, we shall see, as a system both of transaction and representation, offers itself up as a fertile analogue for thinking

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<sup>8</sup> Sidney, 1973, pp.78, 103, 79. Catherine Bates, *On Not Defending Poetry: Defence and Indefensibility in Sidney's Defence of Poesy* (Oxford: 2017), pp.vii-ix.

<sup>9</sup> See: Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald Melville (Oxford: 2008), I.936-42.

<sup>10</sup> I use the term 'poetry' in much the same way as the term 'poesy' was used throughout early modernity, to encompass all forms of literary writing. Any qualitative distinctions between prose and verse are made explicitly.

through the similarly transactional and representational dynamics of writing, semiotics, and allegory. Considering first Spenser's engagement with money, predominantly in two episodes of his allegorical poem – Sir Guyon's descent into Mammon's Cave in Book II, and the fabliau-inspired tale of Malbecco, whose neurotic possessiveness over both his wife and his cash warns against the destructive force of jealousy – before turning to the more widespread reticulation of money-thought throughout Burton's *Anatomy*, we will see that both writers find in thinking about the money-form an opportunity to meditate upon the relationship between signs and things, the dangers of idolatrous reading, and to deliberate self-reflexively on the hermeneutic processes propounded in and encouraged by their own texts. Catherine Bates discerns in Sidney's *Defence* two opposing argumentative positions held in tension throughout the essay: the first, an idealist position which attempts to defend poetry on the grounds of its profitability to the individual and commonwealth; and second, a countervailing voice that admits poetry's unprofitability and yet defends its un- or even anti-economic value, a voice she describes as a 'radical, 'queer', aesthetic Sidney'.<sup>11</sup> Whilst I do not go so far as to suggest that Spenser and Burton are each attentive to an opposing strain in Sidney's text – the importance of profit, and the paradoxical profitability of the unprofitable – Bates's distinction is a useful one in articulating the different conclusions that Spenser and Burton reach about poetry's ability to benefit the reader. For, as we shall see, in *The Faerie Queene* Spenser advocates an allegorical poetics that participates in an economy of plenitude, something akin to what Peter Holland has described in relation to Shakespeare's poetic language as 'a pleasurable excess within the tightly defined claustrophobia of language that can often look superficially to be also merely adequate but which we know to be excessively, delightfully more than that.'<sup>12</sup> Burton's text, on the other hand, foregrounds the written word's status as melancholic waste product; yet, in the final consolatory gesture of the Third Partition, introduces the possibility of a new way of reading – of 'consider[ing] aright' (III.440) – which revels in the pleasure of waste, inviting the reader to enjoy the benefits of excess itself through a reformation of their reading habits.

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<sup>11</sup> Bates, 2017, *passim.*; p.xi.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Holland, "Musty Superfluity": *Coriolanus* and the Remains of Excess', *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare* 25 (2007), p.90.



## II: The Money Form in Early Modern England

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a web of contexts and influences came together to inform thinking about money and its relationship to literary value, literary representation, and hermeneutic processes. The first concerns the structural implications of the money-form itself. Herodotus, in his *Histories*, attributes the invention of money, in the form of coinage, to Lydia during the reign of Gyges or his son, sometime during the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, an introduction that it is generally agreed inaugurated a ‘new *order*’ or ‘new logic’, an ideological revolution symptomatized in the birth of Western philosophy.<sup>13</sup> The transition from a model of measuring value through direct exchange of goods to one in which trade is mediated through money heralds two key and related conceptual shifts. The first is that the money-form, for the first time, comprises the representation and therefore the abstraction of value. It does this by becoming what is termed a ‘general equivalent’, what Aristotle calls ‘in a manner a middle term’, something that is identified and isolated as marking the value of all other commodities.<sup>14</sup> Second, and consequently, in having their worth approved at the mint – conventionally through the stamping of the face of the Prince on the coin’s own face – the money-form distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic values: the actual value of its bullion content, and the accredited worth stamped upon it (for example, a penny) at the mint. In principle, these intrinsic and extrinsic values should be identical, but this second act of representation, in the stamping of a value upon metal, reveals the possibility of a rift opening up between extrinsic and intrinsic values, between ‘face’ and ‘actual’ value, an ontological rift between form and content, and, in essence, a rift in the relationship between sign and signified. What the invention of money introduces, then, is a specifically semiotic anxiety over the loss of substantial value: that something is not worth what it seems, that something is not what it looks like, that something does not mean what you think.

During early modernity, such an anxiety over the loss of value was realised on an unprecedented scale during what historians term the Price Revolution, a period

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<sup>13</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: 2003), p.44.; Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtis Gage (Ithaca: 1990), p.92.; Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore & London: 1978), p.11.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: 1926), p.283.

of massive inflation that occurred across Europe between the end of the fifteenth and middle of the seventeenth centuries.<sup>15</sup> In *A Discourse of the Common Weal of this realm of England* (1549), a dialogue commonly attributed to the diplomat and political theorist Thomas Smith, one character summarises the realities of inflation across only a single lifetime in England:

a payer of shooes costethe me xijd. now, that I have in my dayes bought a better for vjd. Then I can get never a horse shodde under xd. Or xijd. nowe, wheare I have sene the common price was vjd [6 pence].<sup>16</sup>

This extended period of inflation, as Gerard de Malynes, an early English mercantilist, observes, was caused by the glut of gold and silver entering the European economy from the New World mines:

According to the plentie or scarcitie of the monie then, generally things become dearer or good cheape, whereunto the great store or abundance of monie and bullion, which of late years is come from the west Indies into Christendom, hath made every thing dearer according to the increase of money, which like unto an Ocean deviding her course into severall branches in diverse countries, hath caused a great alteration and inhauncing of the price of every thing.<sup>17</sup>

Malynes' assessment of the proportional relationship between the 'plentie or scarcitie' of money in circulation and the price of goods reveals an emerging grasp of a quantity theory of money, whose purchase on the English understanding was still hindered by the prevailing medieval understanding of the 'just price'.<sup>18</sup> counterintuitively, an increase of currency did not signal an increase in the wealth of individuals but rather an increase in the value of commodities, a paradox suggested by the strangeness of the simile of rivers of gold that cultivate and 'inhaunce' 'price' rather than wealth. It is the same phenomenon to which the Knight of Smith's

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<sup>15</sup> D. M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England under the later Tudors* (London & New York: 1992), pp.152-154.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Smith, *A Discourse of the Common Weal of this realm of England* (Cambridge: 1893), p.33.

<sup>17</sup> Gerard de Malynes, *A Treatise of the Canker of Englands Common Wealth* (London: 1601), pp.10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Bell, *The speculation of usurie* (London: 1596), sig.C2<sup>v</sup>.; See also Palliser, 1992, p.154.

*Discourse of the Common Weal* refers when he complains that ‘there is a wounderfull dearth in all thinges’ despite plenty of corn and cattle being domestically produced, where ‘dearth’ means not scarcity of product, but excess of currency.<sup>19</sup>

In England, the economic consequences of the Price Revolution were compounded between 1544 and 1551 when Henry VIII carried out an extensive debasement of the English currency in an attempt to rescue the failing economy. This comprised two different fiscal policies that had a similar effect: on the one hand, a process of enhancement meant existing currency was ordered to circulate at a higher face value without a change of substance; on the other, a process of debasement produced coins with a reduced bullion content.<sup>20</sup> ‘They blush for shame’, wrote John Heywood in an epigram, describing the testons whose increased copper made them shine with a reddish hue, a transformation that realised in starkly literal terms the movement from a golden to a brazen world.<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth I’s restoration of the currency between 1560 and 1561 was to be recognised as one of her greatest regal achievements – ‘*Moneta ad iustum valorem reducta*’ [Money restored to its just value] was inscribed upon her tombstone commissioned by James I – yet D. M. Palliser suggests that the restoration of the currency, whilst making the English economy the envy of Europe, continued to have damaging effects on the economic security of the greatest part of the population, limiting the amount of small change in circulation for smaller transactions, and continuing to drive the instability of commodities.<sup>22</sup> These fluctuations in the money-form that characterised the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England raised, on a conceptual level, questions regarding not only the ascription or identification of value, but because of the changing material nature of coinage, questions of ontology, of how matter might change, and, through socioeconomic impact, the ethics of such ontological and symbolic transformations.

Money’s participation in forms of symbolic transformation and value ascription have led theorists such as Jean-Joseph Goux and Marc Shell to observe and explicate structural parallels and a cultural interrelation between the money form and the similarly abstracting instincts of Western philosophy, particularly

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, 1893, p.17.

<sup>20</sup> Palliser, 1992, p.157.

<sup>21</sup> John Heywood, *The Proverbs, Epigrams, and Miscellanies of John Heywood*, ed. John S. Farmer (London: 1906), p.253.

<sup>22</sup> Palliser, 1992, pp.162-163.

philosophical idealism. Indeed, as observed above, both writers consider the invention of money to have launched a new ideology that developed with or alongside a Western philosophy signalled by Platonism. Goux describes the correlation between Platonic thought and money-thought:

It would be difficult to emphasize more plainly the solidarity between the process of economic exchange which leads to a *scission* between two worlds – the material world of commodities and the ideal world of value and money – and the process leading to the separation, realized in Plato’s philosophy, between the tangible world and the intelligible world.<sup>23</sup>

The two cultural phenomena, he suggests, if not causally linked, ‘coincide, in a *logico-historical simultaneity*.<sup>24</sup> In each case, that which displays disparity, instability, and imperfection (material goods, the material world) are, through abstraction and symbolisation, sublimated into idealised forms that boast integrity, universality, and perfection (the general equivalent of minted money, the intelligible realm of Ideas). Shell similarly observes the link in Platonic philosophy between the money form and Platonic dialectic, observing how ‘[i]n the Platonic dialogues, *kermatidzein* means both ‘to make small change’ and ‘to divide by dialectically improper (and in the later dialogues, perhaps, proper) *diairesis*.<sup>25</sup> Division, collection, abstraction, sublimation: these processes and principles central to both Platonic epistemology and metaphysics are equally properties that govern the dynamics of the money form.

They are also principles that underpin – even comprise the very nature of – allegory and anatomy. We have seen, in the previous chapter, that rhetorical anatomy originates in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in which the dialectic process of division and collection are described.<sup>26</sup> Anatomy thus operates through *diairesis*, the division of the general into particulars, just as Burton’s *Anatomy* attempts to divide the generality of melancholy into sections and members, but also the process of collection of taxonomy, as in Burton’s collation of causes, symptoms, and cures. Such collection necessarily involves the flattening of particularity, the sublimation of difference into larger categories of similarity, just as the particular differences of goods are made

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<sup>23</sup> Goux, 1990, p.97.

<sup>24</sup> Goux, 1990, p.97.

<sup>25</sup> Shell, 1978, p.48. For the relation between idealism, the money form, and semiotics, see pp.39-50.

<sup>26</sup> See Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: 2002), pp.55-56.

equal through the general equivalence of money. Allegory, too, shares dynamics of abstraction and sublimation with the money form and Platonic idealism. Observing the same subsuming of particularity into greater systems of meaning performed by Platonic metaphysics, Goux describes how the '*idealist optical illusion* consists in viewing the visible material world as the reflection of general equivalents, whereas general equivalents constitute the focused reflection, the specular image, of the visible world's multiplicity and differentiation.'<sup>27</sup> He points out the parallel between '[g]old fetishism' and 'concept fetishism': 'what is the Platonic *idea*, if not the *fetishized meaning of a word*?'<sup>28</sup> The description reveals the process of fetishization at play in allegorical personification and allegoresis, a process whereby an 'image is killed and the word takes the place of the image.'<sup>29</sup> Allegory, with processes found in idealist philosophy and in the equalising force of the money form, sublimates particularity into a hierarchical superstructure of meaning in order to construct an exemplary poetics. Just as money represents a variety of goods in the form of a general equivalent, allegory represents variety in the form of abstract images.

Mapping out the similarities and correspondences between the forms of allegory and anatomy and the form of money – similarities born out of each form's association with philosophical idealism – allows us to witness the profound implications that money-thought has for the way in which both Spenser and Burton conceive not only of the value of their writing, but of the semiotic, epistemological, and reformative models with which they engage. The anxieties of valuation unleashed during the Price Revolution, for example, mirror or even stimulate anxieties of meaning within Spenser's poem or Burton's treatise, and such anxieties bring into question the efficacy of the text's reformative aims: if allegory or melancholy fails to signify, then the ability for these texts to achieve their stated aims is jeopardised. It is this worry that both writers must confront in their treatment of money and money-thought, as they seek to ensure that their writing provides profit to the reader.

### III: Idle Offers in Mammon's Cave

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<sup>27</sup> Goux, 1990, pp.94-95.

<sup>28</sup> Goux, 1990, p.103.

<sup>29</sup> Goux, 1990, p.104.

Halfway through the second book of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's Knight of Temperance, Sir Guyon, escapes from the Idle Lake, and from the seductions of dissipation offered by Phaedria, whose 'wandering ship' that floats 'Withouten oare or Pilot it to guide' exemplifies the kind of aimless carelessness that is anathema to the militantly forward progress of this knight's journey (II.vi.10.2, II.vi.5.3). But along the way, Guyon has lost his 'trustie guyde' the Palmer, who represents the reasonable dimension of Guyon's psyche, and Spenser's epic simile comparing Guyon, now, to a Pilot tossed upon 'perilous waue', whose 'stedfast starre' has been occluded by 'foggy mistes' recalls something of the waywardness of Phaedria's own lack of direction (II.vii.2.1, II.vii.1.1-3).<sup>30</sup> Thus wandering through Faerie Land alone in search of adventure, Guyon happens upon a 'gloomy glade', where he finds the money-god, Mammon, whose 'smoke [...] tand' face and 'cole-black hands [that] did seeme to haue been seard / In smythes fire-spitting forge' (II.vii.3.1-9) associates him with Book IV's personification of Care, whose 'blistred hands emongst the cinders brent', 'a blacksmith by trade, / That neither day nor night, from working spared' (IV.v.35.2-6). At the centre of his legend, Guyon finds himself slung between the two poles of carelessness and over-care; but the lesson that both Guyon and the reader must gather from both episodes is similar, and concerns the hazards of idleness.

Mammon's appearance in his gloomy glade introduces a number of the vectors central to Spenser's thinking about the money form:

in his lap a masse of coyne he told,  
 And turned vpside downe, to feede his eye  
 And couetous desire with his huge threasury.

And round about him lay on euery side  
 Great heapes of gold, that neuer could be spent:  
 Of which some were rude owre, not purifide  
 Of *Mulcibers* deuouring element;  
 Some others were new driuen, and distent  
 Into great Ingowes, and to wedges square;  
 Some in round plates withouten monument:  
 But most were stamp, and in their metal bare

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<sup>30</sup> For the role of the Palmer as right reason, see Robert Hoopes, *Right Reason in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: 1962), p.152.

The antique shapes of kings and kesars straung and rare.  
(II.vii.4-5).

Mammon's Cave is the ultimate site of hoarding: the 'huge treasury' he collects forms 'a masse' and 'great heapes', and they appear in a host of material forms, from ore, to coins and ingots and ornamental plates.<sup>31</sup> But crucially, we are told, this treasury 'neuer could be spent': the coins that surround Mammon are stamped not with the face of the current Prince, but instead with 'antique shapes of kings' that have become 'straung and rare' in their consignment to ancient history. Mammon might have riches, but he has no currency. The episode recalls Horace's first satire, in which he asks the hoarder, 'What's the good to you of a vast weight of silver and gold, if you stealthily dig a hole in the earth to bury it there in your nervousness? [...] if you don't spend it, what's the attraction in a piled-up heap?'<sup>32</sup> 'These great piles of wealth *in their very heaped-up nature* undermine their own utility and so their meaning.'<sup>33</sup> But the shortcomings of the Horatian hoarder's understanding of money's utility is compounded here through Spenser's play with what David Landreth describes as money's 'oxymoronic' ontological status as both form and matter.<sup>34</sup> On the one hand, the coin is the form which the matter of liquid gold takes on; on the other hand, in its status as general equivalent, it is the potentiality, the 'matter' of wealth, that can be converted into anything the user desires. But here, that use-value is short-circuited: the plates and wedges can no longer move through a market as money

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<sup>31</sup> David T. Read notes that the succession of gold materials dramatizes 'the whole procedure of rendering gold into usable currency' in its transmission from New World mines to European mints. See David T. Read, 'Hunger of Gold: Guyon, Mammon's Cave, and the New World Treasure', *English Literary Renaissance* 20:2 (1990), pp.212.-213. Kasey Evans, too, has demonstrated the relationship between Mammon's Cave and New World gold-mining, arguing that the episode marks Temperance's complicity in oppressive colonial enterprises: Kasey Evans, 'How Temperance Becomes 'Blood Guiltie' in *The Faerie Queene*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 49:1 (2009), 35-66.

<sup>32</sup> Horace, 'Satire 1', in *Satires and Epistles*, trans. John Davie (Oxford: 2011), p.4.

<sup>33</sup> Spenser's recognition of the practical utility of money is evidenced in a Latin poem addressed to Gabriel Harvey, 'Ad Ornatissimum virum', itself modelled on the Horatian epistle, in which he recommends that never, 'if you are prudent, should you over zealously condemn [...] the offer of gold [...] nor, on the other hand, should you seek such delights excessively', but instead advocates 'chart[ing] a midcourse' between the two extremes. Quoted from Richard A. McCabe's prose translation in *The Shorter Poems* of ll.66-77 (160-161, 578).

<sup>34</sup> David Landreth, *The Face of Mammon: The Matter of Money in English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford: 2012), p.56.

does, and the coins have lost their currency. The consequence of such a piled-up hoard, of forgetting the instrumentality of money as vehicle for a mobile economy, is that the gold stagnates: Mammon's treasure is '*hore*', rather than bright, 'ouergrowne with rust' and 'darkned with filthy dust' (II.vii.Arg, II.vii.4.1-3).

In spite of all the rust, Mammon nonetheless spends his time obsessively counting his piles of gold, whose numbers could never reasonably be counted, and his 'feeding' of his 'couetous desire' while fondling at his 'lap' suggests an image of onanistic self-sufficiency, linking him once more to the sensual narcissism of Phaedria's 'Making sweete solace to her selfe alone' (Ii.vi.3.2).<sup>35</sup> This kind of solipsism is the governing principle of these twin vices of care and carelessness: when asked by Guyon who he is, Mammon replies 'God of the world and worldlings I me call', the syntactical reflexivity epitomising this ipseic involution (II.vii.8.1). Yet it is important to note that it is not only his desire that Mammon feeds, but also 'his eye'. The image of eye-feeding resurfaces throughout the canto as a motif for Mammon's avarice and a central element in his rhetoric of temptation:

Wherefore if me thou deigne to serue and sew,  
At thy command lo all these mountaines be;  
Or if to thy great mind, or greedy vew  
All these may not suffise, there shall to thee  
Ten times so much be nombred francke and free.  
*Mammon* (said he) thy godheads vaunt is vaine,  
And idle offers of thy golden fee;  
To them, that couet such eye-glutting gaine,  
Proffer thy giftes, and fitter seruaunts entertaîne.  
(II.vii.9).

The final temptation of Jesus, where according to Matthew 4:8 Satan offers him 'all the kingdomes of the worlde, and the glorie of them', here becomes Mammon's opening gambit. Guyon's response, however, takes each of Mammon's rhetorical flourishes and turns them on their heads. Mammon's vision of an endlessly multipliable fountain of wealth in his pledge to offer 'ten times so much' is a fantasy of stores of credit that may be given 'francke and free'. Yet Spenser's pun on 'francke' as both free and suggestive of the French gold coin is exploited by Guyon,

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<sup>35</sup> The description of Mammon 'telling' his gold directly directly recalls that of Avarice from the House of Pride, who 'in his lap an heap of coine he told' (I.iv.27.5).



and Mammon's promise refigured as a 'fee', something that is, despite the god's claims, costly. Similarly, Mammon's synesthetic appeal to Guyon's 'greedy vew' is, in Guyon's reformulation of 'eye-glutting gaine', emphatically associated with the deadly sins of gluttony and greed.

In his description of Mammon's 'idle offers', moreover, Guyon calls into play a pun that will pattern the entire discussion, one which weds the static idleness of Mammon's money that has fallen out of useful circulation with a form of idolatry. In hoarding gold, Mammon both builds and becomes a false god, glutting his own eyes on the dazzling golden surface and inviting others to do the same, rather than appreciating, on a socio-economically more expansive level, what that gold means, and what it can do. The knight uses the same pun in his most ardent rebuttal of the money-god's offers:

Suffice it then, thou Money God (quoth hee)  
That all thine ydle offers I refuse.  
All that I need I haue; what needeth mee  
To couet more, then I have cause to vse?  
(II.vii.39)

In his *Ethics*, Aristotle describes money as 'a sort of representative of need; and this is why it has the name 'money' (*nomisma*) – because it exists not by nature but by law (*nomos*) and it is in our power to change it and make it useless.'<sup>36</sup> Guyon's rejection of Mammon is couched in a similar understanding of money's social rather than inherent value: he pits sufficiency, need, and use against the excessive, idolatrous love of wealth. For the Knight of Temperance, 'need' denotes all that the body requires in order to remain on the physiologically and moral straight-and-narrow of the Aristotelian mean, balancing between asceticism and overindulgence. What Mammon's riches represent, Guyon insists, are *too much* rather than *just enough*: he variously describes the god's wealth as 'superfluties', 'surplusage', positions it as that which 'exceed[s] [...] need' (II.vii.15.5, 18.7, 16.8-9). Conceived of in bodily terms, this overflowing excess is figured forth as excremental, as 'worldly mucke' (II.vii.10.5). Rebecca Zorach, in her study of gold in Renaissance visual arts, observes this metaphorical equivalence between muck and money:

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<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, 2009, p.89.

As money, the value of gold is entirely a matter of abstract convention, but its conventionality must be forgotten in order to accept it as a measure of value. Gold thus may oscillate between appearing as the paradigm of naturalness and appearing as its opposite. As it had in the Middle Ages, Renaissance gold served not only as a symbol of magnificence and exaltation but also, conversely, of material degradation and filth, appearing as excrement in critiques of the vice of avarice.<sup>37</sup>

The golden hoards of Mammon's cave have fallen from their status as valuable abstraction, and their useless materiality is thrust to the fore. Gold that cannot circulate is tantamount to excrement, for all the good it can do for the body. The needs of the mouth, here, are placed in opposition to the idolatrous wants of the eye.

By insisting 'All that I need I haue', however, Guyon displays the same solipsistic self-sufficiency that has already been associated with the vices of too much and too little care. The conflict between sustaining the internal hygiene of the temperate body and participating in the ecology and affective claims of the external world is one that has dogged Guyon throughout his legend. He first appears to us as 'A goodly knight, all armd in harnesse meete, / That from his head no place appeared to his feete' (II.i.5.8-9). His 'harnesse meete', both appropriate and tight-fitting, discloses Guyon's commitment to an imperviousness and invulnerability that he will be careful to maintain throughout his legend.<sup>38</sup> As this same imperative towards imperviousness raises its head once more in Mammon's Cave, Guyon begins to exhibit other symptoms of the vice of care. In 'Areopagitica', Milton famously writes that Spenser 'describing true temperance under the person of *Guyon*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon [...] that he might see and know, and yet abstain.'<sup>39</sup> Milton's misreading of the passage extends beyond his forgetting that the Palmer is conspicuously absent from this episode; for although Guyon does avoid succumbing to Mammon's temptations, what he displays in the Cave is not abstinence. Having condemned Mammon's eye-glutting behaviour,

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<sup>37</sup> Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance* (Chicago & London: 2005), p.194.

<sup>38</sup> For the Legend of Temperance as a lesson in neutralising the threat of affective sympathy through allegoresis, see Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago & London: 2007), chapter 4.

<sup>39</sup> John Milton, 'Areopagitica', in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton – Volume II: 1643-1648*, ed. Ernest Sirluck (New Haven: 1959), p.516.

Spenser tells us that ‘th’Elfin knight with wonder all the way / Did feed his eyes’ (II.vii.24.3-4). Guyon too displays the idolatrous eye.

It is this conflation of the needs of the body and the desire of the eye that is Guyon’s eventual moral failure and leads to his subsequent fainting spell at the end of the canto.<sup>40</sup> When Guyon arrives at the Garden of Proserpina, the central, emblematic arena of Mammon’s Cave, what he encounters is the erroneous blurring of the categories of money and food.<sup>41</sup> At the centre of this garden sits ‘a goodly tree, / With branches broad dispredd and body great’, which ‘did bring forth fruit of gold’ (II.vii.53-4). These golden fruit embody an ontological ambiguity regarding the money-form that concerns its nature as a vehicle for transaction. Resonating with the myth of King Midas and his golden touch, these fruit impress upon us, as David Landreth notes, ‘gold’s ability to *buy* food and its inability to *be* food’.<sup>42</sup> Just like antique coins hoarded in caverns, or gold amassed in the form of ornamental platters, unable to serve the purpose of trade, these golden apples short-circuit the cycle for which they were intended. What ought to be an abundance of fleshy, nourishing fruit are instead superfluous gold that can sustain no life nor participate in natural circulatory systems of birth, nutrition and death. When Mammon suggests to Guyon ‘Why takest not of that same fruite of gold’ (63), Guyon refuses the fruit, but nonetheless experiences ‘deadly fall’ both moral and literal, since he falls in a faint ‘[f]or want of food’ (II.vii.64.3). Guyon commits, in the end, the same misconception that he had initially observed: that glutting one’s eye might satisfy ones need.

#### **IV: Malbecco’s Flight: Cupidity and Capture in the Legend of Chastity**

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<sup>40</sup> For an overview of critical attitudes towards Guyon’s faint, see Geoffrey A. Moore, ‘The Cave of Mammon: Ethics and Metaphysics in Secular and Christian Perspectives’, *English Literary History* 42:2 (1975), pp.157-158.

<sup>41</sup> David T. Read observes that the pursuit of gold at the expense of keeping well-fed by Spanish conquistadors was attested to in English translations of accounts of New World explorations. In his translation of Peter Martyr’s *Decades de Orbe Novo* (1555), for instance, Richard Eden writes how ‘Owre men [...] wente forward laden with golde, but sore afflicted with hunger.’ Quoted Read, 1990, p.217.

<sup>42</sup> Landreth, 2012, p.75.

In Mammon's Cave, Spenser demonstrates the importance of bearing in mind money's instrumentality, its utility in circulation. As long as it remains in motion – participating in the flowing sense of 'current' – money's transactional nature is active, and the system is productive – of things, of food, of commodities bought. Those who hoard money, however, commit the mistake of treasuring its intrinsic value as metal, rather than its extrinsic value as transactional vehicle. In their case, gold becomes static, idle, its ability to be traded and its productivity cease, and its worshipper falls into the trap of idolatry. In Book II, the consequence of this idolatry is the privileging of the eyes over the gut, which harms the internal balance of the body that is so important to the virtue of temperance. When Spenser revisits the money-form in his Legend of Chastity, the same issues of idolatry, and of an opposition between mobility and stasis, reappear in the story of the jealous husband Malbecco, and such idolatry becomes associated with a disorder of the readerly gaze.

The episode begins with Spenser's defence of the pedagogical benefit of 'th'ensample of the bad [...] for good by paragone / Of evill, may more notably be rad, / As white seemes fayrer, macht with blacke attone' (III.ix.2.1-4). This bad example, the reader is told, is 'of a wanton Lady' (II.ix.1.6), but immediately the poem appears to forget this detail and instead offers a picture of a 'cancred crabbed Carle' (III.ix.3.5):

But all his mind is set on mucky pelfe,  
 To hoord vp heapes of euill gotten masse,  
 For which he others wrongs and wreckes himselfe;  
 Yet is he lincked to a louely lasse,  
 Whose beauty doth her bounty far surpasse  
 (III.ix.4).

The 'mucky pelfe' that absorbs Malbecco's mind recalls the similarly excremental imagery of Mammon's hoarded treasures. But the reflexive solipsism of the god Mammon's mind – we recall his 'God of world and worldlings I me call' – is revealed as self-harm for the man who 'wreckes himselfe', and the onanistic eroticism of Mammon's lap-fiddling is replaced here by an erotic attachment to a 'louely lasse', his wife Hellenore. For Malbecco, cupidity combines with the enchantments of Cupid. 'Two thinges he feared', we are told, 'but the third was death: / His money, which he lou'd as liuing breath; / And his faire wife, whom honest long he kept vneath' (III.x.2.6-9). Spenser's simile linking Malbecco's avarice to his need of 'liuing breath'

discloses a cruel irony akin to the golden apples' conflation of greed and need, for to hold his breath as he does his gold, Malbecco would serve himself his own third fear, death. His suspicions regarding his wife's 'wilful wandring feet' lead him to keep 'continuall spy / Vpon her' with a 'blinked eye', such that he 'in close bowre her mewes from all men's sight' (III.ix.7.6, 5.5-8). Again, the consumptive potential of the gaze is foregrounded as a threat to the individual's sense of ownership; but Malbecco, with his 'blinked eye' and another 'blind eie' suffers himself from an impaired sight, and this blindness, we are made to know, is his inability to see what is important about both money and gold (III.ix.27.6). For, as Linda Gregerson points out:

Malbecco is in both his loves an idolater. His hold on money and his hold on Hellenore are based on a single misconception: in both cases he stifles the internal distance that governs the nature of signs, that makes money a sign of value and a medium of trade, that makes eros a sign of longing for the world beyond the bounded self and a medium for the progressive reformation of subjectivity.<sup>43</sup>

Uxoriousness and cupidity, for Malbecco, are both expressions of hermeneutic failure, an idolatrous adoration of the thing itself rather than what that thing might signify.

Augustine, in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, explicitly links similar concerns over idolatry to the practice of Biblical exegesis, and to the activity of reading more generally. For him, the kind of blinkered gaze displayed by Malbecco is directly opposed to the loving impulse of the good Christian.

By love I mean the impulse of one's mind to enjoy God on his own account and to enjoy oneself and one's neighbour on account of God; and by lust I mean the impulse of one's mind to enjoy oneself and one's neighbour and any corporeal thing not on account of God.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Linda Gregerson, 'Protestant Erotics: Idolatry and Interpretation in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*', *English Literary History* 58:1 (1991), p.7. Gregerson too links Malbecco's behaviour to exegetical reading frameworks espoused by Augustine, but her focus rests on erotic hermeneutics, and mine on the patterns of money thought that work their way through Spenser's allegorical poetics.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: 1995), p.149.

For Augustine, rich with the influence of Platonic ontology, the objects of the physical realm – oneself and one’s neighbour – should be enjoyed as a means to an enjoyment of God, what lies beyond, rather than in and of themselves, as Malbecco does. Moreover, Augustine identifies the person who enjoys ‘any corporeal thing’ on its own account as perpetrating a specifically semiotic error: ‘It is, then,’ he writes, ‘a miserable kind of spiritual slavery to interpret signs as things, and to be incapable of raising the mind’s eye above the physical creation so as to absorb the eternal light.’<sup>45</sup> Understood in these terms, Malbecco’s error in his over-much possessiveness of wife and money constitutes an allegory of allegorical wrong-reading: he mistakes the sign for the thing itself, collapsing the semiotic gap and eliding the distinction between earthly and heavenly pleasures.

In spite of his jealous worries over his wife and his money, Malbecco is pressed under the demands of courteousness to allow a group of knights to seek shelter and sustenance in his home. Under the fearful gaze of his blind and blinking eyes, he witnesses the particularly predatory Paridell seduce Hellenore, but, having ‘filcht her bells, her vp he cast / To the wide world, and let her fly alone’ (III.x.35.7-8). Instead, Hellenore takes up home with a group of wild and sexually decadent satyrs. Malbecco, pursuing his escaping wife, but ‘most opprest / With burden of great treasure’, buries his riches in the ground, an action reminiscent of the parable of the talents, the false assumption that ‘hid[ing] talents in the earth’ will protect or increase their value (III.x.41.4-5, Matthew 25:25). Finding Hellenore *in flagrante delicto* with the satyrs whose horns make a mockery of his own cuckold’s horns, Malbecco’s ‘hart with gealousy did swell’ (III.x.48.6). It is only, however, on discovering that his ‘treasure [which] he entombed had’ – the verb once again linking hoarded wealth with death and decay – has been stolen, that his overstrained psyche begins to fragment under the weight of ‘extreme fury’ and he ‘ran away, ran with him selfe away’ (III.x.54.2, 5-6). Consumed by jealousy, Malbecco psychologically and physically disintegrates, fleeing to a cave by the sea, where he transforms into the abstract form of Gelosy to live out the rest of eternity.

This transformation is unique in *The Faerie Queene* in being the only time we witness a character metamorphosing into an allegorical abstraction. Paul Alpers has described this transformation as ‘not a change in him, but a terrible remaining of what he is’, but this observation flattens the complexity of the Spenserian conception

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<sup>45</sup> Augustine, 1995, p.141.

of the human and its relation to allegorical character.<sup>46</sup> The ontological status of the entities that populate *The Faerie Queene* varies, existing on a spectrum between pure abstraction and something that cannot help but impress upon us its complex humanity. Some are characters like the titular knights, Guyon, Artegall, Calidore, who whilst acting as avatars for their virtues of temperance, justice, and courtesy, rarely if ever achieve them, and never without limitations. Others are found as abstract personifications, usually identified through their name, such as Appetite, Care, or Occasion. For Spenser, the human is not identifiable with this latter category of personification; indeed, psychomachic episodes of the poem evidence at the most basic level how the subject is regularly constituted out of numerous allegorical figures. Malbecco's transformation, rather than being a 'terrible remaining' is rather a pitiable reduction. For the stanza describing his flight permits and sustains numerous possibilities for his final form:

High ouer hilles and ouer dales he fledd,  
 As if the wind him on his winges had borne,  
 Ne banck nor bush could stay him, when he spedd  
 His nimble feet, as treading still on thorne:  
 Grieffe, and despight, and gealosity, and scorne  
 Did all the way him follow hard behynd,  
 And he himselfe himselfe loath'd so forlorne,  
 So shamefully forlorne of womankynd  
 That as a snake, still lurked in his wounded mynd.  
 (III.x.55)

Colin Burrow observes the 'centrifugal opportunities for [Malbecco's] eventual metamorphosis'.<sup>47</sup> On a physical level, the description of his 'nimble feet' implies a transformation prescribed by the etymology of his name (*mal becco* – 'evil goat'). This possibility, however, is countered by the description of his flight 'as if the wind him on his winges had borne', where the ambivalence of grammar and image – are the 'winges' Malbecco's or the wind's? are they figurative or literal? – introduces the possibility of his becoming a birdlike creature, one reinforced by a later description of his 'crooked claws' (III.x.57.8). The same is true on a psychological level: as

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<sup>46</sup> Paul Alpers, *The Poetry of The Faerie Queene* (Columbia & London: 1982), p.389.

<sup>47</sup> Colin Burrow, 'Original fictions: metamorphoses in *The Faerie Queene*', in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian influences on literature and art from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge: 1988), p.114.

Malbecco flees across hills and dales, the reader is presented with something that looks uncannily like a chase. The string of emotions – ‘griefe, and despight, and gealousy, and scorne’ – hover ambiguously between abstract nouns and allegorical entities themselves, personified and ‘following hard behynd’. Malbecco flees from a series of possible personifications, what we might think of as forms *in potentia*, awaiting, or aggressively pursuing, matter that they might shape.

Augustine’s conception of idolatry in terms of ‘interpreting signs as things’ illuminates Malbecco’s fate. For this stanza dramatizes not only the violence latent in the process of allegorical personification, but also in a sense gives Malbecco a taste of his own medicine.<sup>48</sup> In being unable to shed himself of the vice of jealousy, whose chief idolising symptom is the conflation of signs and things, Malbecco is himself consigned to the status of sign. Loving golden lucre instead of what it might be transformed into, and indulging in *eros* with no thought to transcending the self, Malbecco’s fetishistic gaze is reflected back on him in the final and most disturbing expression of the idolater’s self-consuming solipsism, until he too is a sign that, lamely, might only refer to itself. This reduction of semantic potential is also attended by a shift from dynamism to stasis. The rapid movement of Malbecco’s flight, during which he ‘runs’, ‘flees’, ‘speeds’, ‘flies’ and ‘throws himself’ forwards, gradually slows, as his metamorphosis progresses, to a ‘flit[ting]’, ‘crall[ing]’ and ‘creep[ing]’, until he finds his permanent dwelling in a cavern at the bottom of the cliff, where he ‘Forgot he was a man, and *Gelosy* is hight’ (III.x.57-60). Passing out of the generative, mobile dynamics of the allegory, Malbecco in the end becomes melancholic, identified with that ‘humour rancorous’ whose excess requires voiding from the body (III.x.59). He is the mucky waste of the meaningless sign, and there is nothing left for the poem to do but shit him out and leave him behind.

## V: Spenser’s Economy of Plenitude

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<sup>48</sup> Gordon Teskey’s theory of allegory as an essentially violent mode forms a foundation for much of my own thinking. See Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca & London: 1996), esp. chapter 1. For an extended discussion of how Malbecco’s transformation might be read in conjunction with Teskey’s theory of personification as ‘capture’, see Louise Gilbert Freeman, ‘The Metamorphosis of Malbecco: Allegorical Violence and Ovidian Change’, *Studies in Philology* 97:3 (2000), 308-330. For a psychoanalytic analysis of Malbecco as dramatizing a crisis of identity, see Kelly Lehtonen, ‘The Abjection of Malbecco: Forgotten Identity in Spenser’s Legend of Chastity’, *Spenser Studies XXIX* (2014), 179-196.



The hermeneutic lessons learnt in Mammon's Cave and in the face of Malbecco's frenzied demise concern the hazards of idolatry, whose semiotic shortcomings are conveyed through the dangers of money-thought, the conflation of extrinsic and intrinsic values, and the depiction of an economy that is unproductive of meaning and value. There is another magical realm of Faerie Land, however, which figures the antithesis of Mammon's Cave, a place in which Spenser pictures and enshrines a more productive economy of the sign. The Garden of Adonis, where Venus nurtures Amoret, the image of chaste sexuality circumscribed by the union of marriage, is described in the central canto of Book III, mirroring the Cave of Mammon's identical placement in Book II. This 'first seminary / Of all things' (III.vi.30.4-5), however, is in many ways the opposite to Mammon's underground realm, a place of endlessly fecund generation, where the the 'Infinite shapes of creatures' and the 'formes' of 'soules' are 'bred', enter the material world and then return (III.vi.30.4-5, 35.1-5). This process of birth, death, and regeneration is figured, too, in economic terms:

Daily they grow, and daily forth are sent  
 Into the world, it to replenish more.  
 Yet is the stocke not lessened, nor spent,  
 But still remaines in euerlasting store,  
 As it at first created was of yore.

(III.vi.36.1-5)

The emanation of souls into the material world is compared to the passing of money out of a store, but paradoxically in this economy, 'the stocke is not lessened, nor spent', but is 'euerlasting'. The language of finance here bleeds and blurs through pun into the language of sexuality, linking the everlasting stock that cannot be spent to Venus's endless revivifying of Adonis in the centre of the Garden in a perpetual cycle of sexual pleasure. The limitations implied by Spenser's modal verb in his description of Mammon's riches that 'neuer could be spent', where 'spent' denotes utility, is here replaced by a 'store' that 'is... not... spent', that is not depleted or used up. Recalling the language of excess used to describe Mammon's cave – the 'superfluity', and the 'surplusage' whose tautological etymology itself represents a linguistic excess – in the Garden of Adonis this is replaced with a sense of 'replenishment', a place where 'all plenty, and all pleasure flows', where the etymon

*plenum* instead connotes a fullness (III.vi.41.4). In the Garden, abundance never exceeds its bounds, unlike the branches of the tree in the Garden of Proserpina which “Did stretch themselves without the utmost bound / Of this great garden” (II.vii.56). Plenitude replaces excess.

The Garden’s ability to facilitate this endless stock that is never spent is due to, Spenser tells us, the relationship between form and matter:

That substance is eterne, and bideth so,  
Ne when the life decayes, and forme does fade,  
Doth it consume, and into nothing goe,  
But changed is, and often altdred to and froe.  
(III.vi.37.6-9)

The eternal nature of matter, or ‘substance’, that which underlies and is imposed upon by form, is not in spite of but rather *thanks to* its mutability. Death does not end life, but allows rebirth.<sup>49</sup> Plotinus, founder of Neoplatonic thought, writes in his *Enneads*:

the preservation of the form in the changing of the elements and the passing away of the living beings on earth may perhaps make us think that the same happens with the All, that God’s will is able as the body continually fleets and flows to impose the same form now on one thing and now on another, so that it is not the single individual thing which lasts forever but the unity of form[.]<sup>50</sup>

For Plotinus, matter’s mutability – the ‘changing of the elements and the passing away of living beings’ – serves to signal and underscore the persistence of the ‘unity of form’, so that the ‘fleeting’ and ‘flowing’ particularities of the earthly realm point to and reflect the eternal nature of the world of Ideas. In Spenser’s remarkable rendition, however, whilst the dynamics of change are maintained, the emphasis is reversed: ‘substance’ is ‘eterne’ and ‘forme does fade’. Matter’s protean qualities, its ability to assume different forms, and its subsequent power to persist, are its

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<sup>49</sup> The presence in the Garden of ‘wicked Tyme, who, with his scyth addrest, / Does mow the flowring herbes and goodly things’ (III.vi.39.3-4) is sanctioned by this system of material regeneration. Spenser observes the power and potential of mutability without flattening or eliding the associated pain and pity of death and decay.

<sup>50</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, vol. 2., trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: 1966), p.9.

promise. With all its sensuous particularity, matter is not a fleeting trifle, but rather a gift that endures through its labile nature.<sup>51</sup> It is the same idea on an ontological level that Augustine celebrates on a linguistic one when he asks, ‘Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift than the possibility of understanding the same word in several ways [...]?’<sup>52</sup> A celebration of the material world in all its variety finds its correlative in an enjoyment of the sensuous surfaces of Spenser’s poem. Just as Augustine recognises in polysemy the mark of God’s grace, Spenserian allegory revels in the dynamic relationship between form and content sanctified through divine and sexual love. Here, in the Garden of Adonis, we find the plenitude of the mobile economy.

## VI: Dea Moneta and the Treasure in Minerva’s Tower: The Golden *Anatomy*

Robert Burton is as suspicious of money and its effects on moral character as is Spenser. Midway through his introductory ‘Democritus Junior to the Reader’, an extended satirical diatribe – framed anaphorically through the repeated question, ‘How would *Democritus* have been affected to see these things?’ (I.52) – is aimed variously at ‘our Religious madnesse [...] so many professed Christians’, the corruption of ‘all matters of state: holy men, peacemakers’, ‘the common people [who] follow like so many sheep’, ‘bloody battles’, and the existence of ‘so many Lawyers, Advocates, so many Tribunals, so little Justice’ (I.39, 41, 49). His diagnosis of corruption, hypocrisy, and vice spares no corner of contemporary society. Finally, he comes to the climax of his vitriol: ‘What’s the market?’ he asks (I.50). And the answer: ‘the Theater of hypocrisie, a shoppe of knavery, flattery, a nursery of villanie’ (I.52). After railing against the evils of money-grabbing, Burton paints a sketch of human bondage, enslaved to money and the market in images that both recall the

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<sup>51</sup> Spenser’s materialist position here echoes the first book of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, in which the poet describes the eternity of matter (*materies aeterna*): Lucretius, 2008, I.239. For Spenser’s Lucretianism in the Garden of Adonis, and more broadly in the poem, see Ayesha Ramachandran, Mutabilitie’s Lucretian metaphysics: scepticism and cosmic process in Spenser’s *Cantos*, in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser’s Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester: 2010), esp. pp.224-227.

<sup>52</sup> Augustine, 1995, p.171.

thinking of Spenser on the religious and moral implications of money-mindedness and adumbrate Burton's own thinking throughout the *Anatomy*:

In a word, every man for his owne ends. Our *summum bonum* is commodity, and the Goddess we adore *Dea moneta*, Queene mony, to whom we daily offer sacrifice, which steeres our hearts, hands, affections, all: that most powerfull Goddess, by whom we are reared, depressed, elevated, esteemed, the sole commandresse of our actions, for which we pray, runne, ride, goe, come, labour, and contend as fishes doe for a crum that falleth into the water. It is not worth, vertue, (that's *bonum theatrale*) wisdom, valour, learning, honesty, religion, or any sufficiency for which we are respected, but money, greatnesse, office, honour, authority; honesty is accounted folly.

(I.51)

Notwithstanding an initial ironic nod to his own prolixity ('in a word', he lies), Burton, like Spenser, immediately equates money fetishism with idolatry: money is figured as 'that most powerfull Goddess', eclipsing both God and royalty (she is both '*Dea*' and 'Queene mony') in the attention and worship of England's subjects. Yet the promise of wealth offered by 'commodity' turns out to be but 'a crum that falleth into the water', over which the fishes 'contend'. Gold's insufficiency as food is once again foregrounded, its apparent surfeit negated by the paucity of sustenance and nutrition it can actually offer. The passage is also animated by the same fears over the widening or unstable gap between intrinsic and extrinsic values, a disconnect between how things appear and what they really are. The '*summum bonum*' of 'commodity' is ironically set against the performative '*bonum theatrale*' of actual 'vertue': qualities which denote essential moral worth – 'wisdom', 'valour', 'honesty' – are valued less than outward shows – 'money', 'office', 'honour'. Indeed, 'honesty', that quality which seeks to make commensurate internal state and external expression, appearance and essence, is 'accounted folly', with a punning gesture to Mammon-like counting of (social) currency. Burton continues to characterise these worshippers of Dea Moneta as 'like so many turning pictures, a lyon on the one side, a lambe on the other', displaying 'so much difference betwixt words & deeds, so many parasanges betwixt tongue and heart' (I.52).

Previous studies have explored the various social, political, and economic contexts for Burton's treatment of money in the *Anatomy*. William M. Mueller has argued that Burton's ambivalence regarding money's status within the polity – exemplified by his emphasis on its corruptive influence, on the one hand, and its

centrality to his utopic vision of the ideal state in ‘Democritus Junior to the Reader’ on the other – signals his position strung between the changing moments of feudalism and capitalism: ‘he wishes for capitalism without capital, and seeks a thriving, rich trade, yet condemns the wealth of the merchants who sponsor it.’<sup>53</sup> Recently, Claire Crignon-De Oliveira has refined this work to suggest that Burton sees the potential alleviation for a specifically political form of melancholy in certain mercantile practices and reforms.<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, Angus Gowland has shown how changes to systems of patronage between Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline rules resulted in the ‘marginalisation of the intellectual elite’, whereby the ‘relationship between the university educated scholar and political life was increasingly exemplified by the figure of the isolated virtuous philosopher – excluded from office in the autocratic state, but participating in a *respublica literaria* that positioned itself over and above the depravity and bloodthirstiness of aristocratic elites and court-centred politics.’<sup>55</sup> What follows contributes to this critical interest in Burton and money, attending to the issues of idolatry, sufficiency, and semiotic (in)stability raised by the *Dea Moneta* passage. For, consistently concerned as he is with the ‘profit’ his own text might supply to the reader, we find that Burton’s thinking about the value of wealth and treasure tends to be contrasted with the value of reading and learning. Equivocal as ever in assessing the value of something – its propensity to be harm or cure, or, here, profit or loss – for Burton money (and its dark correlative, waste) constitutes a metaphor for thinking through the fruitfulness of the activity of reading.

Shortly after his criticism of the widespread, idolatrous worshipping of money, Burton draws on two stories out of mythology to refine his attitude towards the proper role of wealth. He writes:

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<sup>53</sup> William R. Mueller, ‘Robert Burton’s Economic and Political Views’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 11:4 (1948), p.345.

<sup>54</sup> Claire Crignon-De Oliveira, ‘Mercantilisme et utopie dans la ‘Preface’ de *L’Anatomie de la Mélancolie* de Robert Burton’, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 3 (2003), 345-363.

<sup>55</sup> Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: 2006), p.248. For how this manifests itself in Burton’s utopia and digression on the misery of scholars, see chapter 5.

In former times, they had but seven wise men, now you can scarce finde so many fooles. *Thales* sent the golden *Tripod*, which the Fishermen found, & the oracle commanded to be *given to the wisest*, to *Bias*, *Bias* to *Solon*, &c. If such a thing were now found, we should fight for it, as the three Goddesses did for the golden Apple.

(I.60)

After expressing contempt for the pretensions of the foolish to make claims to wisdom in the current age, Burton refers to the myth of the golden tripod, which Plutarch in his *Lives* records was thrown into the sea by Helen in the aftermath of the Trojan War and which, having been found by fishermen, led to war between various Greek city states in contest for its possession.<sup>56</sup> Plutarch goes on to relate how the conflict was resolved by the intervention of the Pythian oracle, which decreed that ‘the tripod must be given to the wisest man’, a decision that resulted in the passing of the tripod from hand to hand in recurring acts of modesty:

Thales declared that Bias was a wiser man than he, and the tripod was sent to Bias. From Bias, in his turn, it was dispatched to another, as wiser than he. So it went the rounds and was sent away by each in turn, until at last it came to Thales for the second time.<sup>57</sup>

The procession of the tripod from hand to hand enacts a symbolic, circulating economy whose result is peaceful reconciliation. In contrast is the hoarding, possessive impulse of the ‘three Goddesses’ who vie for Paris’s ‘golden Apple’, in an act of treasuring gold for its ornamental quality: for what it *is* rather than what it might *do*. Burton observes the ‘Avarice, Envy, Malice’ caused by the money-grabbing impulse, the desire of man ‘to spoile one Country to enrich another and himself’ (I.35-36). Indeed, in the Third Partition he once again reaches for the myth of the ‘golden apple’, which ‘sets all together by the eares’, with the result that ‘[f]ather and sonne, brother and sister, kinsmen are at oddes [...] the Graces are turned to Harpyes’ (III.19). Here, ‘love is turned to hate, mirth to melancholy: so furiously are we most part bent, our affections fixed upon this object of commodity and upon money’ (III.19). Where possessiveness over the material wealth of the golden apple leads to the breaking of political, social, and kinship bonds, and the conversion of

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<sup>56</sup> Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 1, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.413.

<sup>57</sup> Plutarch, 2014, p.413.

harmony to strife, the mobile economy enshrined in the tale of the golden tripod instead acknowledges the ideal utility of circulating currency.

Indeed, much of Burton's hostility towards wealth and money focuses on the human propensity for hoarding. Early on in the *Anatomy*, as part of his explanation for assuming his Democritean persona, Burton translates almost verbatim the Hippocratic 'Letter to Damagetus', which details the account of the meeting between the two ancient philosophers. The townsfolk of Abdera, worried by Democritus' incessant laughter, are led to think he is mad, and send for Hippocrates to treat him; Hippocrates, however, having heard Democritus' diagnosis of the world's folly, concludes rather that 'the World had not a wiser, a more learned, a more honest man, and they were much deceived to say that hee was mad' (I.37). Notable here is that Burton retains and expands upon much of the original letter's identification of money-mindedness – the 'search[ing] for gold and silver, seeking out tracks and scrapings of dust, gathering sand from here and there and excising earth's veins for profit, ever turning mother earth into lumps' – as the root and cause of the world's degradation.<sup>58</sup> Recalling both the Horatian hoarder and the parable of the talents, Burton observes how 'they seeke riches, and when they have them, they doe not enjoy them, but hide them under ground' (I.34). Instead, he considers '[i]f men would attempt no more then what they can beare [...] they would perceave then that Nature hath enough without seeing such superfluties, and unprofitable things' (I.35). Burton identifies in the natural world an experience of satisfaction: '[w]hen a Boore is thirsty, hee drinkes what will serve him, and no more, and when his belly is full, hee ceaseth to eate' (I.36). Again, Nature's plenitude, her 'enough', is presented as exemplary, and the ready metaphor that Burton reaches for to further an ideal model of sufficiency is nutritional: the boar that 'when his belly is full [...] ceaseth to eate' is better than the glutton that exceeds the needs of the body. As Catherine Bates points

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<sup>58</sup> Hippocrates, 'Hippocrates to Damagetus', in *Pseudepigraphic Writings: Letters – Embassy – Speech from the Altar – Decree*, ed. and trans. Wesley D. Smith (Leiden: 1990), p.81. Much of the Hippocratic epistles surrounding this event focus on the damaging impact of money on the medical profession and human moral character and health – all things palpably of influence in the *Anatomy*. In his response 'to the Senate and the People of Abdera', Hippocrates chastises their offer of payment: 'neither god nor Nature would promise me silver for coming, whence do not you, men of Abdera, force it on me, but leave free the work of a free science.' Discussing the Abderan letter in one addressed 'to Crateuas', he wishes for the ability to 'cut the bitter root of love of money so as to leave nothing behind, [...] and so] purge the sick minds of men along with their bodies.' See Hippocrates, 1990, pp.61, 71.

out, ‘when *sufficiency* is positivized as modelling the best and most rational form of behaviour, then its opposite is no longer dearth [...] but, rather, surfeit’.<sup>59</sup> Evidenced in his linking of ‘superfluities’ with ‘unprofitable things’, Burton recognises that the endless, excessive accretion of wealth – of *things* – is not a net gain, but rather a waste.

If Burton is sceptical about money and material wealth, and the vices of greed and callousness that cupidity and hoarding might breed, he instead identifies true value in the wealth of common learning. ‘I am not poore, I am not rich’, he observes at the beginning of ‘Democritus Junior to the Reader’, ‘I have litle, I want nothing: all my Treasure is in *Minerva’s Towre*.’ Signalling the paucity of his own wealth and his even more meagre lust for it, Burton figures his extensive knowledge as ‘Treasure’, aligning himself with the goddess of wisdom, Minerva, rather than Dea Moneta. ‘*Minerva’s Towre*’ becomes a metonym for the *Anatomy* itself, as the textual embodiment of Burton’s capacious learning; what Northrop Frye famously described as the text’s ‘encyclopaedic form’ rendering the book an object of more value than any amount of material wealth.<sup>60</sup> Burton remains nevertheless anxious about the perceived value of his scholarly enterprise: recognising the material support given him by Oxford University, he echoes Gosson’s language of ‘unprofitable members’ as he admits that he is ‘loth, either by living as a Drone, to be an unprofitable or unworthy Member of so learned and noble a Society, or to write that which should bee any way dishonourable to such a royall and ample Foundation’ (I.3). But time and again we find him associating books with wealth, as when, relating how ‘*Alexander* when he was presented with that rich and costly Casket of King *Darius* [...] reserved it to keepe *Homers* Workes, as the most precious Jewell of humane wit’

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<sup>59</sup> Bates, 2017, p.73.

<sup>60</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: 1990), p.311. For a tracing of Burton’s extensive reading in natural philosophy, divinity, and history, see E. Patricia Vicari, *The View from Minerva’s Tower: Learning and Imagination in The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Toronto: 1989). For the *Anatomy* as a transformation of the encyclopaedic impulse into a therapeutic strategy, see Samuel G. Wong, ‘Encyclopedism in *Anatomy of Melancholy*’, *Renaissance and Reformation* 22:1 (1998), 5-22. For the *Anatomy* as an instantiation of failed encyclopedism, see Christopher Grose, ‘*Theatrum Libri*: Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and the Failure of Encyclopedic Form’, in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, eds. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: 2002), pp.80-98. Kathryn Murphy troubles such generic categories in pointing out that the encyclopaedic genre did not arise until after the *Anatomy* was published; see Kathryn Murphy, ‘Robert Burton and the Problems of Polymathy’, *Renaissance Studies* 28:2 (2014), p.287.



(I.64). ‘What vast Tomes are extant in *Law*, *Physicke*, and *Divinity*, for profit, pleasure [...]?’ he asks elsewhere. Alongside Burton’s widespread criticism of money-mindedness in the *Anatomy* is a countervailing rhetoric that figures learning as an incomparable fortune, elevating those who invest in wisdom to a position of greater spiritual and intellectual affluence than the worshippers of Mammon.

### VII: The Excrements of Authors: Waste in the *Anatomy*

Burton’s investment of learning with the metaphorical richness of wealth is associated almost exclusively with the ancient, mythic domain: whilst the *Anatomy* teems with references and quotations from diverse authors both ancient and neoteric, it is the world of ancient Greece that signals wisdom’s proper home. When considering the publishing output of the seventeenth century, on the other hand, Burton is less glowing in his appraisal of these storehouses of knowledge. Burton catalogues, for instance, the

vast confusion of Vowes, Wishes, Actions, Edicts, Petitions, Law-suits, Pleas, Lawes, Proclamations, Complaints, Grievances, [that] are daily brought to our Eares. New bookes every day, Pamphlets, Currantoes, Stories, whole Catalogues of Volumes of all sorts, new Paradoxes, Opinions, Schismes, Heresies, Controversies in Philosophy, Religion, &c[.]

(I.5)

The seemingly compulsive listing embodies the profusion of printed material it describes. The disorder – both material and, presumably, epistemic – triggered by the excesses of learning is a motif he returns to recurrently, referring to the ‘vast *Chaos* and confusion of Bookes’ he sees being produced (I.11). The sheer volume of material published during the early seventeenth century leads him to label the period ‘this scribbling age’ (I.8).

Burton is by no means alone in this observation. Decades before, when defending his decision to write a similarly lengthy text, John Foxe writes:

Seyng the worlde is replenished with such in infinite multitude of bookes of all kinde of matters, I may seeme (perhaps) to take a matter in hand superfluous and needles, at this present to set out such Uolumes, especially of histories, considering now a days the world is so greatly pestered, not only with superfluous plenty therof, but of all other treatises [...]. In which multitude of bookes I doubt not, but many do perceiue, and inwardly bewayle this insatiable boldnes of many now a days both in writing and printing[.]<sup>61</sup>

The beginning of this passage from Foxe exhibits a tension between a kind of nourishing cornucopia of books and the inconvenient underside of that same ‘multitude’: it both ‘replenishes’ the world and ‘pesters’ it with its potential ‘needlessness’, until such a tension coalesces into the oxymoronic ‘superfluous plenty’.<sup>62</sup> When such a threshold is breached, the relationship between product and consumer necessary for an economically healthy publishing industry is subverted: ‘books now seeme rather to lacke Readers,’ he writes, ‘then Readers lacke bookes.’<sup>63</sup> Rebecca Zorach notes that ‘[i]nflation operated not only as specific price inflation but as a larger cultural topos that we might call increase.’ This ‘excessive increase in quantities of goods’ exerts financial stress on the market, and it is this same stress that motivates Burton’s treatment of the volume of contemporary publishing.<sup>64</sup> The ‘Catalogue of new bookes’ produced yearly is the product of people’s attempt to ‘stretch [their] wits out & set them to sale’ (I.10). Supply, however, outdoes demand: punning repetition creates an ironic *tautologia*, a figure which encapsulates the endless sameness of printed material, when he writes that ‘*the number of Bookes is without number [...] Presses be oppressed*’ (I.8).

As a consequence of this sheer surplus of books, in the *Anatomy* the imagery of treasuries of learning becomes inverted. In excess, the golden world of books turns to muck, and Burton figures textual material as excremental waste. This newly

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<sup>61</sup> John Foxe, ‘The vtilitie of this Story’, in *Actes and monuments of matters most special and memorable...* (London: 1583), p.1. For further discussion of the practical difficulties, and management responses, to the sheer about of published information produced during early modernity, see Ann Blair, ‘Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload, ca. 1550-1700’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64:1 (2003), 11-28.

<sup>62</sup> The image of a textual cornucopia evokes Erasmus’ abundant style. The relationship between the *Anatomy* and *copia* is explored in the following chapter.

<sup>63</sup> Foxe, 1583, p.1.

<sup>64</sup> Zorach, 2005, p.192.

emerging image cluster centres around contemporary writing methods: Burton writes how modern writers

pilfer out of old Writers to stuffe up their new Comments, scrape *Ennius* Dung-hils, and out of *Democritus* Pit, as I have done. By which means it comes to passe, *that not only Libraries and Shops are full of our putrid Papers, but ever Close-stoole and Jakes.*

(I.9)

Burton not only calls attention to the habit of printed pages being used as toilet paper – ‘close-stoole’ and ‘jakes’ being historic slang for chamber-pots and latrines<sup>65</sup> – but identifies books themselves as bodily waste, ‘Dung-hils’ and ‘Pits’, ‘putrid Papers’ that line library walls. Elsewhere, Burton describes how ‘our Poets steale from *Homer*, he spewes, saith *Aelian*, they lick it up’ (I.11). Of course there is a significant irony at work here in Burton’s figuration of literary borrowing as scavenger-like thieving or saprotrophic recycling. His own text, with two thirds of its material constituted as it is from references, paraphrases, and quotations from other authors, displays this very method of pilfering – indeed, he describes this kind of intertextuality as a process of emesis and ingestion via quotation of *Aelian*.<sup>66</sup> Such an irony he explicitly acknowledges, both in the confessional ‘as I have done’ in the passage quoted above, and when he apologises for the ‘Rapsody of Rags gathered together from several Dung-hills, excrements of Authors’ (I.12). The *Anatomy* itself, then, is complicit in the metaphorical relationship between the textual and the excremental that Burton appears to denounce.

This method of writing, entailing the stitching together of quotations from other sources into new textual fabrics, belongs specifically to the *cento* form, with which Burton himself identifies the *Anatomy* (I.11). Originally a technique of Greek comedy, the *cento* became a Latin verse form that rebuilt lines and quotations, predominantly out of *Virgil* or *Homer*, into new, decontextualized, patchwork forms.<sup>67</sup> Burton’s word ‘rapsody’, with its Greek etymon *rhaptein* (‘to stitch’), observes

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<sup>65</sup> ‘Close-stool, n.’ *OED Online*, July 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/34624](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/34624). Accessed 11 October 2018.; ‘Jakes, n.’ *OED Online*, July 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/100668](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/100668). Accessed 11 October 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Vicari, 1989, p.3.

<sup>67</sup> For a history of the *cento* form, see Scott McGill, *Virgil Recomposed: The Mythological and Secular Centos in Antiquity* (Oxford: 2005).

the reconstituted nature of such a patchwork. In a prefatory letter to his *Cento Nuptialis* – a re-formation of the *Aeneid* into a pornographic epithalamium, in which blood spilt on the battlefield becomes the hymenal blood of the marriage bed – fourth-century poet Ausonius outlines a poetics of the *cento* form. In terms that anticipate Burton’s own ironic self-deprecation, Ausonius initially dismisses his text as ‘a trifling and worthless little book, which no pains has shaped nor care polished, without a spark of wit and that ripeness which deliberation gives.’<sup>68</sup> He goes on to describe how the centonist works ‘to gather up scattered tags and fit these mangled scraps together into a whole, and so is more likely to provoke your laughter than your praise’.<sup>69</sup> The letter figures the *cento* as caught between being a haphazard, extemporaneous form and being an intricately woven aesthetic object, a split that George Hugo Tucker notes characterises the *cento*’s reputation throughout history, on the one hand considered the ‘pauper parasite of literary verse’, and on the other ‘a compositional technique or form with its own rules, aesthetic and conventions’ which might demonstrate ‘the highest degree of compositional ingenuity and wit.’<sup>70</sup> It is the tension between these two visions of the *cento* that undergirds Ausonius’s identification of the form’s aesthetic. The ironies that arise from self-effacing claims of amateurism combined with complex intertextual games make the *cento* a fundamentally ludic form, ‘an écriture’ involving ‘parody, travesty, contrafacture, and pastiche’, ‘more likely to provoke your laughter than your praise’.<sup>71</sup>

Burton’s descriptions of the *Anatomy* as a *cento* are motivated by similar tensions and ideas as those that were discernible in Ausonius. On the one hand, he makes claims to have ‘an extemporean stile’, to being ‘a loose, plaine, rude writer’, more interested in *res* than *verba*, ‘rather what, then how to write’ (I.17). Yet elsewhere he describes the careful craft required to stitch together his book successfully: ‘[a]s a good hous-wife out of divers fleeces weaves one peece of Cloath, a Bee gathers Wax and Hony out of many Flowers, and makes a new bundle of all [...] I have laboriously collected this *cento* out of divers Writers’ (I.11). Both of these images highlight the recombinant poetics of the *cento*, the former drawn from the etymology

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<sup>68</sup> Ausonius, ‘Cento Nuptialis’, in *Ausonius*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.371.

<sup>69</sup> Ausonius, 2014, p.373.

<sup>70</sup> George Hugo Tucker, ‘From Rags to Riches: The Early Modern *Cento* Form’, *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 62 (2013), pp.4, 13-14.

<sup>71</sup> Theodor Verweyen & Gunther Witting, ‘The Cento: A Form of Intertextuality from Montage to Parody’, in *Intertextuality*, ed. Heinrich F. Plett (Berlin: 1991), p.172.

of *cento* as woven tapestry, and the latter from a common Renaissance image of *imitatio*.<sup>72</sup> But it is also important to note that these images of craft as a productive form of recycling are taken from the realm of domesticity, or, in the vocabulary of the seventeenth century, the economical (from Greek *oikos*, ‘household’).<sup>73</sup> Here, the act of writing a *cento* – which is, of course, in its allusive and referential operations an act of reading as well – is represented as economical, not only in the sense that moving from ‘divers fleeces’ to ‘one peece of Cloath’ or from ‘many Flowers’ to ‘a new bundle’ describes a certain economics of production, but in direct relation to domestic handiwork.

A few sentences later, however, Burton employs a different image to represent his creative process:

The matter is theirs most part, and yet mine, *apparet unde sumptum sit* (which *Seneca* approves) *aliud tamen quàm unde sumptum sit apparet*, which nature doth with the aliment of our bodies, incorporate, digest, assimilate, I doe *conquoquere quod hausit*, dispose of what I take.

(I.11)

Again describing the manner in which ‘matter’ is reformulated by the centonist, Burton here replaces the image of productive, domestic craft, a venerable form of *imitatio*, with a metaphor of the digestive body. The analogy between reading and eating is a familiar one, used by Bacon, for example, in his essay ‘Of Studies’, in which he writes that ‘[s]ome books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.’<sup>74</sup> Burton’s rendition of this analogy, however, appears as a grotesque travesty of the Baconian version: where Bacon’s emphasis is on taste and nutritional edification, Burton’s verbs ‘incorporate’ and ‘assimilate’ figure reading and writing as almost violently phagocytic activities, which, ‘disposing’ of what they ‘take’, use up their sources and reading materials and void them as excrement.

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<sup>72</sup> Frederick M. Rener notes that the bee *imitatio* image finds its roots in Seneca’s *Epistle ad Lucilium*, 84: ‘Apes debemus imitari’. See Frederick M. Rener, ‘Robert Burton’s Tricks of Memory’, *PMLA* 88:1 (1973), p.143.

<sup>73</sup> This is the meaning with which Burton himself uses the word economical, referring to the domestic household as the ‘Oeconomical body’, as opposed to the ‘Political’ (I.97).

<sup>74</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: 1985), p.209.

Burton's use of the *cento* form, and its association with intertextual recycling and the scatological, have a number of implications for his representation of the profitability of reading in general, and reading the *Anatomy* specifically. The processes of cutting and restitching the works of previous authors recall those of division and collection central to the rhetorical figure of anatomy: to write a *cento* is, essentially, to anatomise other books. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates explains how these processes might lead to truthful clarity: the process of division, he explains, works by '[b]eing able to cut things up again, class by class, according to their natural joints, rather than trying to break them up as an incompetent butcher might.'<sup>75</sup> In discussing his institution of 'an unusual kind of genre, in which I could truly say that everything is mine, and nothing', the language of Justus Lipsius's *Politica* (1589), the famous *cento* of the early modern period's foremost neo-Stoic, recalls in the same terms the recombinant poetics of Burton's *Anatomy*.<sup>76</sup> Lipsius goes on to describe how he does not give 'scarletted maxims' which move like 'mortar without limestone', but rather has 'connected them fittingly' or 'here and there joined them together with the cement, so to speak, of my own words': 'In short, just as the Phrygians make one single tapestry out of a variety of coloured threads, so I make this uniform and coherent work too of a myriad of parts'.<sup>77</sup> Lipsius's tapestry of high artistry, 'uniform' and 'coherent', is at marked contrast with Burton's 'Rhapsody of Rags', and it is clear that whilst the former considers his *cento* stitched together at 'natural joints', this description from Socrates appears unsuitable for describing Burton's *cento*, which involves deliberate and often radical methods of decontextualization and refiguration, what Augustine describes as the centonist's tendency to 'collect[...] at will short passages suitable to my purpose, like a patchwork of verses taken from a long poem found to have been written not on the same subject, but on something quite different.'<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Burton discloses to his Latinate readers such decontextualizing gestures of the centonist's process: '*apparet unde sumptum sit* (which Seneca approves) *aliud tamen quam unde sumptum sit apparet*' (I.11). The result of this fragmentation and distortion is figured forth by Burton excrementally: both the consumed texts of others and his own book are characterised

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<sup>75</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: 2002), p.56.

<sup>76</sup> Justus Lipsius, *Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*, ed. and trans. Jan Waszink (Assen: 2004), p.233.

<sup>77</sup> Lipsius, 2004, p.233.

<sup>78</sup> Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: 1998), 17.15.

as waste.<sup>79</sup> It is worth recalling that within the Galenic system of bodily humours with which Burton's *Anatomy* engages, the melancholic disorder is caused by an excess of black bile, which constitutes a waste product that requires purging from the sick body. So we see again, as we saw in the previous chapter, Burton's physical, melancholic body, and his textual body with its excessive listing, its recourse to parataxis, and its tendency towards tautology, existing in isomorphic relation to each other. And the result here is that the possibility of 'profit' or 'value' issuing from the reading of the *Anatomy* is undermined by its status as waste product. The reader is left not with Homeric gold in a casket, but with an anatomy of excrement.

All is not lost, however, for the book's profitable usefulness. Erasmus, in his 'Adage' 3.7.1, treats the scatological in terms particularly useful when considering Burton's own thinking about it. In this short essay, he observes of the dung beetle that '[t]he fact that it uses the droppings of animals is a matter of praise, not accusation. As if doctors do not do exactly the same, not only making ointments with a variety of animal and even human excrement, but prescribing it in medicines for the sick.'<sup>80</sup> Later, he writes that it is 'also true that men are offended not so much by excrement itself as by the current view of it; to the earliest mortals this substance was not so disgusting as it is to us, for they called it by the very auspicious name of *laetamen*'.<sup>81</sup> Erasmus's dung beetle presents itself as a suggestive analogy for the recycling reader, producing something useful out of that which is old or waste, and it is equally suggestive that he points out the medicinal uses of excrement. Moreover, he observes that a Latin word for excrement, *laetamen*, which etymologically derives from *laetare*, 'to gladden', and which might more usefully be translated as 'manure', connotes the potentially productive or fertile possibilities of dung. Burton makes no direct reference to Erasmus's adage here, but the text – as well as the rest of the humanist's oeuvre – is a major influence and source for much of the *Anatomy*. He, too, is attuned at times to excrement's potential productivity: 'much manure', he writes, might make 'a barren Soyle to be fertile and good, as Sheepe, said *Dion*, mend

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<sup>79</sup> For an extended discussion of the *Anatomy* as a self-conscious system of waste, designed as a satirical critique of the civilising enterprise of rhetorical humanism, see Robert Grant Williams, 'Heterological Rhetoric: Textual Waste in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Western University, 1995), passim., esp. pp.26-69.

<sup>80</sup> Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus*, ed. William Barker (Toronto: 2001), p.297.

<sup>81</sup> Erasmus, 2001, p.298.

a bad pasture' (I.77).<sup>82</sup> What is disclosed by the Erasmian dung beetle, and by Burton's agricultural metaphor, is the ambivalent – again, pharmaceutical – nature of dung: both deathly detritus, waste product, and a site of fecundity, the possible nurturer of new life. Here are the seeds of Burton's redemption of waste, of the potential and paradoxical profitability of unprofitable books.

### VIII: Melancholy and the General Equivalent

In the face of huge overproduction – of coinage, of textual matter, of published volumes – time and time again, these circulated commodities, rendered worthless by their excess, are reduced to the status of excrement, losing any useful or nutritive value they might have had. Melancholy itself, as Drew Daniel has argued, is deeply culturally associated with such overproduction, not only as a physiological manifestation of such excessive overflow, a ready excremental metaphor in itself, but in the way 'the crowded scene of melancholic representation tends to be characterized not by the disappearance of meaning but by its manic overproduction.'<sup>83</sup> He writes:

[a]t once a form of madness, a sign of genius, a symptom of sickness, and a fleeting mood of sadness, melancholy made itself available to the men and women of early modern England in a promiscuously variable cluster of modes, some overlapping with one another, some contradicting one another.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The editors of the Clarendon edition scan 'manure' here as meaning 'cultivated by hand'. The sense of 'manure' as excrement or compost, however, was current, and the addition of the sheep analogy – providing fertility through droppings or footfall – permits either (or both) readings. See 'Manure, n.' *OED Online*, June 2020, [oed.com/view/Entry/113791](http://oed.com/view/Entry/113791). Accessed 11 June 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: 2013), p.5.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel, 2013, p.5. As the name of his book suggests, Daniel employs Deleuzian ontology to argue that early modern melancholy is not a static or readily definable concept but shifting and fluid in its social and cultural manifestations. Whilst agreeing with his assessment of melancholy's ontological plurality, I suggest here that symbolic economies and ideas of exchange and equivalence provide a clearer way of thinking through the *Anatomy's* reformative poetics. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: 2013).



Indeed, Timothie Bright, author of *A Treatise on Melancholie* (1586), opens his text with the preliminary warning and observation that ‘the name of melancholy [...] being one, is applied diuerslie’; it might signify amongst other things ‘a certayne fearefull disposition of the mind’, or ‘an humour of the body’.<sup>85</sup> Such overproduction or proliferation of objects, species, qualities, behaviours, and appearances that signify melancholy is clearly identifiable in Burton’s representation of the disorder. ‘[W]ho is free from Melancholy?’ he asks. ‘Who is not touched more or lesse in habit or disposition?’ (I.25). And melancholy’s ubiquity is not restricted to the physiological pathology of the individual, but takes in social, political, and domestic institutions, as well as all manner of species and creations: ‘you shall find that Kingdomes and Provinces are Melancholy, Cities and Families, all Creatures, Vegetall, Sensible, and Rationall, that all sorts, sects, ages, conditions, are out of tune [...] before they come into the World, they are intoxicated by Errors Cup, from the highest to the lowest, have need of Physicke’ (I.24-25). Diagnosing melancholy as the condition of the fallen world, all that Burton observes around him becomes infected with its taint: ‘thou shalt soone perceive that all the world is mad, that it is melancholy’ (I.24).

Whilst such passages from the *Anatomy* confirm melancholy as a substance that manifests itself plurally and diversely, Daniel’s term ‘overproduction of meaning’ deserves a little critical pressure. For Burton’s lists of melancholy’s seemingly innumerable symptoms and expressions appear rather to impress upon us its radically appropriative nature, consuming difference, bringing everything into the remit of its signification. What is overproduced here is not ‘meaning’, but rather *signs*, whose referents are all identical. Melancholy is, for instance, a social leveller, transforming people of varying social status into ‘a vast multitude and a promiscuous [...] like so many Hives of Bees’ (I.32). It is also that which comprehends all pathological categories: ‘Folly, Melancholy, Madnesse, are but one disease’ (I.25).<sup>86</sup> Its ubiquity even threatens to render the anatomical process, the attempt to ‘divide and subdivide’, redundant, since ‘few men are free’ (I.32). Indeed, at one point Burton explicitly identifies melancholy as a kind of universal signified within a cosmic semiology: ‘take Melancholy in what sense you will,’ he writes, ‘properly or

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<sup>85</sup> Timothie Bright, *A Treatise on Melancholie* (London: 1586), p.1.

<sup>86</sup> Angus Gowland has suggested that the high incidence of melancholy registered during early modernity may be partially explained by the term referring to a number of distinct disorders, or being used as a catch-all. See Angus Gowland, ‘The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy’, *Past & Present* 191 (2006), p.82.

improperly, in disposition or habit, for pleasure or for paine, dotage, discontent, feare, sorrow, madnesse, for part, or all, truly, or metaphorically, 'tis all one' (I.25). Here, the verb 'take' figures melancholy as eminently interpretable, and indeed the ways in which it might be interpreted vary: as fear, or madness, or sorrow, as pleasure or pain (which the prefatory poem 'The Author's Abstract of Melancholy' confirms), as literal or metaphorical. Immediately, however, interpretive possibility is foreclosed: 'tis all one', and melancholy subsumes the lot. In Burton's *Anatomy*, everything is melancholy, and the text offers a potentially hopeless vision of an irredeemable world.

Considered within a framework of symbolic economies, the representation of melancholy as the universal signified reveals it as something akin to a general equivalent. It is of course Mammon's version of the general equivalent, the flattening, abstracting uniformity that sees all things as the monetary value they signify, the melancholy they represent. Just as Midas's damning touch turns all it meets to gold, Burton's damning gaze – and the gaze, by association, of all those suffering from melancholy – comprehends all of the world as melancholy. This is the condition, by and large, of the first two partitions of the *Anatomy*. Unable to contain melancholy, to keep it checked within its various anatomical members and sections, confidently to divide cause from cure, the text and the world that it describes appear incorrigibly marred by the disorder. When turning to the final section of the text, on religious melancholy, and specifically to the final subsection on the 'Cure of Despaire', however, Burton performs a final consolatory gesture for the reader in the face of the despair brought on by melancholy's ubiquity. Both Angus Gowland and Mary Ann Lund have recently shown the anti-Calvinist bent of these final pages of the *Anatomy*, in the author's resistance to both the pastoral emphasis on particularity and rigid Calvinist predestinarianism, indicating almost Arminian sympathies.<sup>87</sup> In attending to the symbolic economies of both grace and reading espoused in the 'Cure of Despaire', I suggest, in line with these readings, that Burton's final advice to the reader constitutes a semiotic flip, a way of reading the world not despairingly but optimistically, and one which not only suggests potential salvation for all, but implies once again that human will has a role to play in achieving this salvation.

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<sup>87</sup> See Gowland, 2006, p.107.; Mary Ann Lund, 'Reading and the Cure of Despair in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*', *Studies in Philology* 105:4 (2008), 533-558.

The ‘Cure of Despaire’ is structured dialogically as a conversation between Burton as pastoral counsellor and his ventriloquised reader or interlocutor, whose sense of their own formidable depravity – ‘I daily and houely offend in thought, word, and deed, in a relapse by mine owne weaknesse and wilfulnesse, my *bonus Genius*, my good protecting Angell is gone, I am false from what I was, or would be, worse and worse’ he laments (III.427) – and certainty of damnation fills them with despair. There is a sense in which the hyperbolic sinfulness of this postulated reader is exaggerated so as to throw any actual reader’s comparative virtuousness into sharp and reassuring relief.<sup>88</sup> But this extensive depravity also serves to allow Burton to emphasise the respective limitlessness of divine mercy. Worldly wickedness, he writes, is to God’s mercy ‘[a]s a drop of water is to the Sea [...] nay there is no such proportion to bee given, for the Sea though great, yet may be measured, but Gods mercy cannot be circumscribed’ (III.427). The offender’s ‘irremissible sinnes, sinnes of the first magnitude’ are nonetheless comprehensible in language, written as they are ‘with a penne of iron, engraven with the point of a diamond’, whilst God’s mercy, eluding circumscription, is not (III.431). Vocabularies of measurement – ‘proportion’, ‘measure’, ‘magnitude’ – construct an economy of salvation in which God’s mercy unequivocally outstrips the amassment of human sin. A similar economy is conceived of by George Herbert in ‘Faith’, in which the speaker admits ‘I owed thousands and much more’ yet ‘did *beleeve* that I did nothing owe [...] my creditor / Beleeves so too, and lets me go’.<sup>89</sup> Faith, in both Herbert’s poem and Burton’s ‘Cure of Despaire’, sublimates the debt of depravity: ‘Conferre the debt and the paiment, *Christ* and *Adam*, sinne and the cure of it,’ Burton tells the reader, ‘& thou shalt soone perceave that his power is infinitely beyond it’ (III.428).

Apprehension of God’s grace and its salvific workings, however, is not bestowed upon a purely passive or receptive believer. Throughout this final consolation, Burton insists upon the necessity of active repentance, which he describes as ‘a soveraigne remedy for all sinnes, a spirituall wing to ereare us, a charme for our miseries, a protecting Amulet to expell sinnes venome, an attractive loadstone to draw Gods mercy and graces unto us’ (III.428). He goes on to argue that repentance is in itself the achievement of grace, a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy,

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<sup>88</sup> Mary Ann Lund also links this fear of reprobation to a growing suspicion regarding the doctrine of assurance: Lund, 2008, p.553.

<sup>89</sup> George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: 1941), p.50 (emphasis added).

writing that God ‘accepts the will for the deed: so that I conclude, to feele in our selves the want of grace, and to be grieved for it is grace it selfe’ (III.431). Two things are of particular note in this argument. The first is the explicit, Laudian affirmation of the role that human ‘will’ plays in in the operation of divine grace, that there is a volitional element to salvation. Secondly, Burton paradoxically aligns privation – ‘want of grace’ – with possession – ‘is grace it selfe’. ‘Grief’, he puzzlingly tells us, is in fact its opposite. This paradox is taken up again a few pages later:

A smal sicknesse, one lash of affliction, a little miserie many times will more humiliate a man, sooner convert, bring him home to know himself, than all those parænetical discourses, the whole Theory of Philosophy, law, Physick and Divinity, or a world of instances, and examples. So that this, which they take to be such an insupportable plague, is an evident signe of Gods mercy and justice, of his love and goodnesse [...] a blessed and an happy state, if considered aright, it is, to be so troubled.

(III.440)

In a surprising about-turn, Burton calls into question the utility of everything, all the content which the *Anatomy* has comprised, the ‘parænetical discourses’, the ‘Philosophy, law, Physick and Divinity’, the ‘instances, and examples’.<sup>90</sup> Instead, greater reformatory power is attributed to grief and suffering, ‘sicknesse’, ‘affliction’, and ‘miserie’. The ‘insupportable plague’ of melancholy, the cause of such despair, is instead reimagined as a ‘blessed and an happy state’, but, importantly, only ‘*if considered aright*’.

What Burton advocates here is a change in the reader’s hermeneutic attitude, a way of reading differently both the melancholy of the world, and the melancholic textuality of the *Anatomy*. And this hermeneutic shift is specifically a change of semiotic directionality: where throughout the *Anatomy* melancholy acts as a universal signified, drawing everything into its meaning, here it is reconceived as a ‘signe’. Where before everything was read as melancholy, now melancholy might be read as denoting something else: here, as divine deliverance, and, elsewhere, as the teeming diversity of the world. The ‘blacke cloud of sinne’ that ‘obnubilates thy soule’, its colour connoting the bile of melancholy, may ‘conceave a rainbowe at the last’: from

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<sup>90</sup> This rescinding of all that came before might be considered the final, unacknowledged palinode that David Renaker identifies in Burton’s *Anatomy*. See David Renaker, ‘Robert Burton’s Palinodes’, *Studies in Philology* 76:2 (1979), 162-181.

melancholy itself may issue not only God's dispensatory covenant but the wonderful variety of the full spectrum of colour (III.430). Melancholy comes to resemble Spenser's Garden of Adonis, but a queer, ironic, scatological version of it. Choosing to revel in the excremental excesses of melancholy itself – in the expansive and ever-expanding pages of Burton's own text – becomes the seat, paradoxically, of profit itself.

### IX: Coda: Penetrating Echo

The reader who comes to the *Anatomy's* conclusion, and comprehends Burton's appeal to read the chaos of world and text productively, will find references to melancholy's diverse legibility, hints of its promissory potential, and sites for possible profitable reading scattered throughout its previous hundreds of pages. In the First Partition, for example, discussing symptoms arising from custom or education, Burton asks:

Who can sufficiently speake of these symptomes, or prescribe rules to comprehend them? as *Eccho* to the painter in *Ausonius*, *vane quid affectas &c.* foolish fellow what wilt? if you must needs paint me paint a voice, & *similem si vis pingere, pingere sonum*; if you will describe melancholy, describe a phantasticall conceipt, a corrupt imagination, vaine thoughts and different, which who can doe? The foure and twenty letters make no more variety of words in divers languages, then melancholy conceipts produce diversity of symptomes in severall persons. They are irregular, obscure, various, so infinite, *Proteus* himselfe is not so divers, you may as well make the *Moone* a new coat, as a true character of a melancholy man; as soone finde the motion of a bird in the aire, as the heart of man, a melancholy man.

(I.407)

Ostensibly, as with much of the material that concerns the causes of melancholy in the First Partition, Burton here appears to bemoan the overwhelmingly myriad forms of this elusive and excessive disorder. Yet this passage displays none of such complaints' typically desperate tone. Indeed, it is hard to overlook the sense of marvel that characterises this passage, in the playful synaesthetic analogy of painting sound in his reference to Ausonius, in the series of allusive images of Proteus, moons, and birds in flight, and in the Lucretian metaphor of the surprising

relationship between the strict finitude of alphabetical letters and the wonderful variety of the words they compose.<sup>91</sup> Enshrined in the vacillation of Burton's argument here, and the prevarication of his syntax, is the essentially ambivalent legibility of melancholy: on the one hand, 'a corrupt imagination, vaine thoughts', and on the other a source of wonder-inducing variegation, 'various' and 'so infinite'. And the texture of Burton's writing, already identified metonymically with the melancholic humour, emulates this ability to induce wonder in its prodigality of reference, its sprung syntax, and the particularity of its images. In its excesses, it spends too much, but does so to the delightful profit of the reader.

This celebration of melancholy's diverse signifying power, however, rewards deeper probing, yielding further profit to the reader, especially one willing to explore further the text's allusive qualities. The reference to Ausonius, the great ancient *centonist* discussed earlier, is specifically to his eleventh epigram, in which he ventriloquizes Echo, the nymph cursed by Juno only to be able to repeat others' words:

Foolish painter, why do you attempt to put a face on me and importune a goddess whom eyes do not see? I am the daughter of Air and Language, the mother of useless information, who sport a voice without a mind. Going back over the final sounds from their dying cadence, I follow on other people's words which are thus mocked by mine. I, penetrating Echo, live in your ears; if you want to paint my likeness, paint sound.<sup>92</sup>

Considering the epigram's subject matter of attempting to 'paint sound', on the surface Burton's analogy appears to be informed by the equally impossible task of articulating melancholy's many symptoms. But on closer inspection the epigram is a particularly pertinent one for Burton to choose: like Echo, Burton himself claims to offer, through 'Air and Language' – mere words – 'useless information', but for both speakers, Echo and Burton, this claim is laced with irony. The epigram plays with the concept of artistic imitation, of capturing sound in language, but the question arises of how Echo is even speaking in this epigram. Claiming that she 'follows on other people's words', she nonetheless wittily articulates this through her own original language. The preeminent expressive power of language is attested to, moreover, not

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<sup>91</sup> Lucretius, 2008, 1.192-98.

<sup>92</sup> Ausonius, *Epigrams*, ed. and trans. N. M. Kay (London: 2001), p.94.

only by this paradox of Echo's autonomous communication, but by the neighbouring irony that language might, ekphrastically, 'paint sound' far better than a painter might.

Echo's self-fashioning seems an equally appropriate description for the centonist as well, one who 'follows on other people's words', and as a consequence 'sports a voice without a mind'. Such a disavowal of creative skill and expressive efficacy mirrors Ausonius's description of his own *Cento Nuptialis*, which he labels 'the jumble made by the unskilled', 'grotesque', and is later recalled by Burton's figuring the *Anatomy* as a 'Rhapsody of Rags'.<sup>93</sup> But what the ironies evident in Ausonius's epigram rather reveal is the existence of the 'mind' behind the 'voice', the wit of an Echo who succeeds rather than fails to express herself through the words of others. In this sense, Echo becomes the latest image of the Democritean (or Burtonian) persona. Where elsewhere the recycling mechanics of the *cento* form – and of literary and intellectual borrowing more generally – found figuration in excrement, such recycling is reimagined here as Echo, a synergetic patchwork with all of the intelligence of Ausonius's epigram. The echo of 'penetrating' Echo in Burton's text invites us as reader to penetrate her, demands that we work to uncover and unstitch the mysteries of allusion and play that characterise the *Anatomy*. Such is the edifying potential of reading, present in both Spenser's poem and Burton's prose, that forms the subject matter of the next chapter: the demands and pleasures of reading as work.

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<sup>93</sup> Ausonius, 2014, p.375.





### 3.

#### PLAYING LABOUR:

##### *The Work of Reading*

#### I: Playing Labour: Introducing Readerly Work

‘Man was created not for leisure, but for work, even in the state of innocence’, writes Martin Luther in his *Lectures on Genesis*.<sup>1</sup> Invoking the work of Adam and Eve as ammunition in his rhetoric of reformation, he condemns by contrast ‘the idle sort of life, such as that of monks and nuns’.<sup>2</sup> Evidence of such prelapsarian labour comes from Genesis 2:15, where it is written that God put man ‘into the garden of Eden, that he might dresse it and kepe it’, a verse John Milton adopts in Book IX of *Paradise Lost* when Eve describes how ‘well may we labour to dress / This garden; still to tend plant, herb, and flower’.<sup>3</sup> Their work is both aesthetic and delicate, comprising of ‘dressing’ and of ‘tender’ care. Their prelapsarian labour in the garden is mirrored and travestied after the Fall as God punishes Adam for eating from the Tree of Knowledge: ‘cursed *is* the earth for thy sake: in sorrow shalt thou eat of it [...]. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth’ (Gen. 3:17-19).<sup>4</sup> The tenderness of gardening is replaced with the sweat of toil, as the happy garden state is lost and man is sent ‘to till the earth, whence he was taken’ (Gen. 3:23). As a common proverb describes, ‘Adam delved and Eve span’, identifying the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: 1958), p.103.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, 1958, I:38.

<sup>3</sup> John Milton., *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow: 2007), IX.205-6..

<sup>4</sup> Medieval Bible translations make emphatic that work is a form of punishment. The Wycliffe, for example, gives ‘only after much travail, *or much labour*, shalt thou get food’ from the earth. *Wycliffe's Old Testament*, trans. John Wycliffe and John Purvey, ed. Terence P. Noble (Vancouver: 2010), Gen. 3:17.

soil and the loom as the archetypes of human labour.<sup>5</sup> The work of digging and weaving is both penalty for and sign of original sin, but implied in Luther's recognition of prelapsarian labour, and in Biblical support such as '[t]he labor of the righteous *tendeth* to life', it might also be the route to paradisaal recovery (Prov. 10:16). Work, within reformed theology, is both burden and blessing.<sup>6</sup>

Work and the conceptual vectors adumbrated in the above discussion – its relation to sin and salvation, but also its formal manifestations of gardening, delving, weaving, and wandering – form the subject-matter of this chapter. Edmund Spenser and Robert Burton are both acutely aware of the arduousness of writing and reading their copious texts. Invoking his muses, Spenser characterises *The Faerie Queene* as a 'worke of labour long, and endlesse prayse', and, elsewhere, an 'endlesse worke' to 'haue [...] in hand' (I.xi.7.6, IV.xii.1.1). Burton similarly describes *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as so 'great a taske', comparable to 'Hercules labours' (I.106, I.55). Exploring the way in which they respond to their burdensome tasks – and the corresponding tasks they bequeath to their readers – this chapter argues that Spenser and Burton rehabilitate labour, in the form of reading, as a reformatory project and route to Eden. In her study of the experimentalist tradition following Francis Bacon, Joanna Picciotto describes how during early modernity 'the doctrine of the curse of labor was overpowered by a conviction in the paradisaal origins of work once Adam's sovereignty over creation became identified with the labor he invested in it': 'paradise became identified with the defining feature of human existence under the curse: work. Reimagined as a spur to exertion, curiosity was redeemed from its primary association with original sin.'<sup>7</sup> Spenser and Burton's texts become the ground-plot upon which this reformatory work of readerly curiosity and care might be performed. When Belphoebe appears in Spenser's Legend of Temperance, her first words – 'Abroad in armes, at home in studious kind / Who seekes with painfull toile, shal

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<sup>5</sup> 'When adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?.' *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, eds. Simpson, John, and Jennifer Speake (2009). *Oxford Reference*. Date Accessed 19 Jun. 2020.<<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199539536.001.0001/acref-9780199539536-e-17>>.

<sup>6</sup> Luther's theology of work provides the foundational material of Max Weber's concept of the Protestant work ethic and its propulsion of the spirit of capitalism. See: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York & Oxford: 2011)

<sup>7</sup> Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, MA: 2010), pp.40, 35.

honor soonest fynd' (II.iii.50.8-9) – transform the curse of labour into an opportunity to resist the Fall, identifying knightly exploits in virtuous training with the 'studious' reading of the poem itself. Burton and his reader, engaged together in the task of anatomising melancholy, take on the work of 'Democritus in his garden at *Abdera*', a reimagining of the Edenic garden wherein one might recover the Adamic knowledge that was lost there (I.5). The work of reading becomes a process of ethical, epistemological, and spiritual reformation.

Specifically, this chapter co-opts Burton's description of his task of writing as 'this playing labour' to describe the hermeneutics solicited by *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy*, which – whilst necessarily different – both locate in the work of reading a kind of interpretive play that is ethically salubrious (I.7).<sup>8</sup> This hermeneutics of playing labour embraces, and encourages the reader to embrace, the semantic pluralism of signs, beings, and the world. The work is difficult, demanding attention to detail, sensitivity to difference, and pliancy from the reader; but it is in cultivating this admixture of close reading and interpretive openness in readers that Spenser and Burton identify the reformative potential of their texts. The chapter begins by demonstrating how a hermeneutics of playing labour is enshrined and elaborated in Spenser's garden poetry – in the Garden of Adonis and in the complex poetics of his epyllion 'Muiopotmos', which combines the laborious tropes of gardening and weaving to reimagine a salvific form of postlapsarian work couched in reading.<sup>9</sup> It then explores the way in which this poetics informs *The Faerie Queene's* Legend of Justice, which promotes – and demonstrates the limits of – a flexible hermeneutics

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<sup>8</sup> Burton's description evokes the rhetorical strategy of *serio ludere* ('playing seriously'). For this strategy's confrontation with 'transformation', the 'continual negotiation of significance', and the 'impossibility of fixing either form or meaning' – literary and ontological phenomena with which this chapter is concerned throughout – see Thomas Healy, 'Playing Seriously in Renaissance Writing', in *Renaissance Transformations: The Making of English Writing 1500-1650*, eds. Margaret Healy and Thomas Healy (Edinburgh: 2009), p.18. For *The Faerie Queene's* 'mixed mode of romance' as a form of 'serious play', see Harry Berger Jr., *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamic* (Berkeley: 1988), p.55.

<sup>9</sup> Significant work has been done on Spenser's engagement with the georgic, as the classic poetry of labour and form of postlapsarian toil. Focusing on 'playing labour' as a hermeneutics, discussion of the georgic does not fall within the remit of this chapter. For Spenser's georgic spirit, see Antony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: 1985), chapter 2.; For reimagining of georgic economies, see Jane Tylus, 'Spenser, Virgil, and the Politics of Poetic Labour', *ELH* 55:1 (1988), 53-77. For his potential resistance to the georgic form, see Louis Adrian Montrose, 'Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form', *ELH* 50:3 (1983), p.427.

founded upon early modern concepts of judicial equity. As Linda Gregerson writes, the worlds of Spenser's poetry stand in 'oblique and permeable likeness' to our own, 'so that its realm is one of opportunity rather than entrapment': it 'flatters and empowers its readers [...] by giving us copious work to do.'<sup>10</sup> I then turn to Burton's representation of his *Anatomy* as a '*Magni laboris opus*, so difficult and tedious' both to write and read (I.19). Issuing from the etymological entanglement of 'labour' and 'labyrinth', this chapter argues that the onerous work of reading the *Anatomy* is explored and defended through its self-identification as – and imitative mirroring of – a labyrinth of disorientation and error. The salutary work that the *Anatomy* solicits is the recognition of the labyrinthine text and labyrinthine world as a reason not for despair, but for wonder. Both Spenser and Burton seek to fashion readers who respond to their texts in the same marvelling terms that the Neoplatonist Pico della Mirandola's responds to the 'work' of 'reading' the Bible: 'How great the perplexity, the ambiguity, and the variety of the whole work is! See how great a labor I have conceived, (May I be equal to it)!'.<sup>11</sup>

## **II: Transformed Oft and Changed Diversely: The Forcing Gardens of Adonis**

The previous chapter's discussion of Spenser's Garden of Adonis demonstrated the way in which the fecundity of that site is celebrated in economic terms. The 'stock' that is 'not lessened, nor spent / But still remains in euerlasting store' figures this garden as a site of economic plenitude (III.vi.36.1-5). This plenitude is founded upon a dynamic metaphysical relationship between form and matter, whereby the 'etern[all]' nature of 'substance' undergirds the 'chaung[ing]' and 'fad[ing]' of 'forme' (III.6.37.6-9). Uncannily presaging the doctrine of conservation of matter, Spenser's Garden enshrines the cycles of generation and corruption, life and death, sanctioned by marital sexuality and the laws of nature.<sup>12</sup> Supported by the etymological relation

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<sup>10</sup> Linda Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant Epic* (Cambridge: 1995), p.20.

<sup>11</sup> Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, trans. Jessie Brewer McGaw (New York: 1977), pp.15, 20.

<sup>12</sup> For an account of the philosophically syncretic metaphysics of Spenser's Garden of Adonis, and this syncretism's relation to the canto's emphasis on vitality and decay, see Berger, 1988, pp.134-46. For an account of how Spenser's narrative and formal dynamics of dilation and restraint are complemented by a philosophy of the

between ‘treasury’ and ‘thesaurus’, this storehouse of souls, figured as a treasury of gold, is also a linguistic plenitude, and this *locus amoenus* becomes a site that puts forward, among other things, an idealised vision of readerly interpretation.

The figurative relationship between gardens and poetry was ubiquitous in early modern thought. Encouraged by the etymology of the poetic ‘anthology’ (Gk, *antho-logos*, flower collection), this relationship is exemplified both in the names of poetry volumes – such as George Gascoigne’s collection, printed first anonymously as *The Hundredth Sundry Flowres* (1573) and then with his name as *The Poesies* (1575) – and in the names of rhetoric manuals such as Henry Peacham’s *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577, rev. 1593). The rhetorical flourishes that might ornament poetry were regularly conceived of in floral terms. In the prefatory epistle to *The Garden of Eloquence*, for instance, Peacham describes how he was ‘mooved to take this little Garden in hande and to set therein such Fyguratyve Flowers, both of Grammer and Rhetorick, as doe yelde the sweete savour of Eloquution’.<sup>13</sup> With the phrase ‘Fyguratyve Flowers’, Peacham creates a dizzying metaphoricity, the superfluous qualification that these flowers are figurative serving to foreground that that which the flowers figure forth are figures themselves. In George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), the metaphor is developed whilst representing the poet as ‘the cunning gardiner that vsing nature as a coadiutor, furdurs her conclusions & many times makes her effectes more absolute and straunge’.<sup>14</sup> An uneasy resolution to the debate regarding the relationship between art and nature is found in the image of ‘coadiutor’, a bishop appointed to assist, and often to succeed, another. The fruits of poetic invention, here, issue from a cooperative partnership between the garden of nature and the activity of the gardening poet.

The Garden of Adonis is embedded in a tradition that sees flowers as a metaphor for language. The term originates from the Ancient Greek ritual of Adonia, involving, as Barbara Goff explains, ‘adult women, who planted seeds of lettuce and herbs in broken pots and bits of crockery, and took these, once they had sprouted, up onto the rooftops where they quickly withered and died’.<sup>15</sup> These seeds,

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conservation of matter, see Debapriya Sarkar, ‘Dilated Materiality and Formal Restraint in The Faerie Queene’, *Spenser Studies XXXI* (2017), 137-166.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence: 1577* (Menston: 1971), sig.A2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: 1589), sig.L12<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women’s Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: 2004), p.174.

in their forcing gardens of Adonis, bloom and wilt with preternatural speed, aligning them with the prematurely killed youth who bequeaths them his name. Erasmus, in his *Adages*, consequently observes that the phrase ‘gardens of Adonis’ was ‘applied to trivial things, which served no useful purpose and were suitable only for giving a brief passing pleasure.’<sup>16</sup> In the *Phaedrus*, Plato draws on similar associations of passing pleasures in his discussion of the gardens. ‘So here’s another question for you’, says Socrates to Phaedrus:

Consider a sensible farmer who cares for his seeds and wants to see them come to fruition. Do you think he’d happily spend time and effort planting them in the summer in gardens of Adonis, and watch them grow up in eight days, or would he do this, if at all, as a diversion for the sake of a festival? Don’t you think that for seeds he was serious about he’d draw on his skill as a farmer, sow them in the appropriate soil, and be content if what he sowed reached full maturity in the eighth month?<sup>17</sup>

In the distinction between the ‘sensible farmer’, who plants seeds which come to maturity in eight months, and the forcing gardener who sees the same seeds grow in eight days, Plato draws a contrast between a kind of productive fertility associated with Demeter and the ephemeral and weightless flourishing associated with Adonis. Marcel Detienne further sees this opposition as one between ‘what is serious – purposeful activity (*spondè*) – and [...] frivolity – the holiday spirit and amusement (*paidiâ*).’<sup>18</sup> In Plato’s rendition, the gardens of Adonis are a site of non-nourishing and unnatural play, opposed to fruitful labour.

Plato invokes the gardens in the *Phaedrus* as an analogy to explore the merits of the spoken word over the written, which is a ‘mere image’ of the ‘living, ensouled speech of a man of knowledge’. Socrates, promoting the dialectic method as the means to truth, explicates the analogy by asking whether a man would

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<sup>16</sup> Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus*, sel. and ed. William Barker (Toronto: 2001), p.31.

<sup>17</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: 2002), pp.70-71.

<sup>18</sup> Marcel Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Hassocks: 1972), p.103.

spend time and effort writing what he knows in water – in black water – and sowing them with his pen by means of words which can neither speak in their own defence nor come up with a satisfactory explanation of the truth. [...] No. He'll probably sow and write his gardens of letters for amusement, if at all [...]. He'll happily watch these delicate gardens growing, and he'll presumably spend his time diverting himself with them rather than the symposia and so on with which other people amuse themselves.

For Plato, the 'gardens of letters' – the broken clay pots of the Adonia whose plants are ephemeral and barren – are the written words whose truth-seeking efficacy dies upon inscription, leaving them only useful for delicate diversion. The weakness of the written word, according to Socrates, is that when pressed, it 'maintain[s] an aloof silence': 'if you want an explanation of any of the things they're saying and you ask them about it, they just go on and on for ever giving the same single piece of information.' The consequence of this kind of petrification issuing from inscription, the written word comes under threat of 'rudeness and unfair abuse' of those who misunderstand, misinterpret, or distort its meaning. In contrast to this, Socrates identifies the spoken words of the 'symposia', the fora for the lengthily gestating truth of the dialectic method. The 'expert dialectician', he explains, 'uses his knowledge to plant and sow the kinds of words which are capable of defending both themselves and the one who planted them'. The emphasis is once again on the spoken word's ability to defend itself – or for the speaker to defend the word against pernicious misinterpretation from listeners or readers – to develop and mature over time as a plant does through the repeated breath of the speaker, which 'makes them capable of giving everlasting life to the original seed'.<sup>19</sup>

The combined celebration of vegetal life and the mourning of its decline performed during the Adonia festival – and an understanding of these processes as cyclical and mutually dependent – are mirrored in Spenser's Garden, where Adonis is 'subject to mortalitie / Yet is eterne in mutability', and where 'wicked *Tyme*, who with his scyth addrest, / Does mow the flowring herbes and goodly things', is incorporated into the cycles of Nature (III.vi.47.4-5, III.vi.39.3-4). Yet the moral tenor of the Garden in Spenser is decidedly more positive than the kind of triviality and mere amusement suggested by Plato and Erasmus: this Garden evokes the

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<sup>19</sup> Plato, 2002, pp.70-72.

eternal rather than the ephemeral, the productive rather than the barren. In Marsilio Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*, the Neoplatonist observes:

[The] Gardens of Adonis are those cultivated for the sake of flowers, not of fruits or produce [...]. Whoever entrusts doctrines to letters may suppose he is cultivating such gardens as if he were playing a game, a game that is the most beautiful of all games.<sup>20</sup>

An opposition is once again established between 'flowers' and 'fruits', Adonis and Demeter, vain aesthetic pleasure and nutritive yield. The act of writing – the entrusting of doctrines to letters – is figured as a 'game', recalling the *paidia* associated with the gardens of Adonis. But Ficino's concession that this game is 'the most beautiful of all games' is an important and transformative comment upon Plato's original if we consider the centrality of beauty to Plato's aesthetic and epistemological theories.<sup>21</sup> In Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*, beauty acts as the conduit between love and truth: 'by focusing on physical beauty' one may ascend to an appreciation of 'the vast sea of beauty, and in gazing upon it [ones] boundless love of knowledge becomes the medium in which he gives birth to plenty of beautiful, expansive reasoning and thinking'.<sup>22</sup> Given Plato's recurrent insistence on beauty, goodness, and truth being linked as 'a universal law', Ficino's language in his commentary on the *Phaedrus* betrays an ambivalence regarding the utility of the

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<sup>20</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato: Phaedrus and Ion*, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen (Cambridge, MA: 2008), p.191. Ficino's translations of and commentaries on Plato were readily available to scholars of Pembroke College in Cambridge during Spenser's time there and had clear influence on his poetry; see Valery Rees, 'Ficinian Ideas in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser', *Spenser Studies XIV* (2009), p.102.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that where Ficino uses the word '*pulcherrimus*' here, Plato's word for beauty throughout dialogues such as *Hippias Major* and *Symposium* is '*kalos*'. Arthur Pontynen suggests that the distinction between these two words might be between a material, sensuous pleasure, or aesthetics (*pulchrum*), and a supernatural, edifying beauty (*kalos*). However, he demonstrates how as Plato becomes Christianised, particularly in the works of Augustine, whose writings would have shaped much of Ficino's own understanding of Platonic philosophy, the relationship between *pulchrum* and *kalos* is reconciled: the 'gap between the low, the world where evil lurks (*pulchrum* uninformed by truth), and the high, where divine Goodness reigns (*bonum*), is bridged by the Incarnation. *Pulchrum* thus informed by truth bridges the gap between the base and the divine.' The realm of beauty is thus made possible in a fallen world. See Arthur Pontynen, *For the Love of Beauty: Art History and the Moral Foundations of Aesthetic Judgment* (New Brunswick, NJ: 2006), pp.152-153.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: 2008), pp.53-54.



written word.<sup>23</sup> Whilst flowers as delicate but essentially useless ornamentation are opposed to the nourishment of fruit, figuring writing as a ‘beautiful game’ – another rendition of ‘playing labour’ – implies the possible fruitfulness of such seemingly fruitless flowers. Given the utility of beauty within a Platonic schema, Ficino’s comment, ironically or not, concedes the edifying potential of the play of written words.

Whether or not Spenser considers the written word as a kind of interlocutor, capable of the virtues of dialectic that Socrates enshrines only in the spoken word, or whether he stages an active defence of the utility of written word, in the Garden of Adonis the poet combines *spoudē* and *paidiā* to promote poetic language as a productive form of play. The ‘gardins of *Adonis*’ make an earlier appearance in *The Faerie Queene*, in the Faerie Chronicles that Guyon reads in Eumnestes’ chamber in Book II’s House of Alma (II.x.71.4). Here, Spenser plays on the supposed etymological link between Adonis and Eden to represent these Gardens as the site of the Creation of Faeriekind – where ‘first *Prometheus* did create / A man, of many partes from beasts deriued’ (II.x.70.5-6) – linking them once again with progeniture. As Richard T. Neuse notes, the Faerie lineage – ‘*Elfnell* [...] *Elfant* [...] *Elfar* [...] *Elfinor*’ (II.x.73.1-7) – that these Chronicles relate ‘is based largely on a series of puns, jokes, and rhetorical variations on the name Elf.’<sup>24</sup> Such puns might be considered the most crystallised rhetorical embodiment of the subsistence of matter beneath everchanging form that energises the metaphysics of Book III’s Garden of Adonis. In this flowery *locus amoenus*, Spenser celebrates the very kind of verbal play – as variety born out of formal dynamism – that Socrates maligns in the *Phaedrus*. *The Faerie Queene*’s Gardens of Adonis enshrine the written word and the flashing of interpretive play not as meaninglessly ephemeral but rich and fruitful, a labour sanctified by Genesis 1.22’s injunction, ‘the mighty word’ of ‘th’Almighty lord, / That bad them to increase and multiply’ (III.vi.32.4-5).

The moral import of such play – which relates to the ethical dimension of interpretation in general – is also hinted at in Spenser’s Garden in the Legend of Chastity. The formal dynamism of souls, of material progeny, and of semantic possibility that the Garden of Adonis celebrates depends both on the ‘huge eternal

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<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: 2008), p.18.

<sup>24</sup> Richard T. Neuse, ‘Adonis, gardens of’, in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: 1990), p.8.

*Chaos*, which supplyes / The substaunces of natures fruitfull progenyes' and on processes of change which permit such activity (III.vi.36.8-9). The personification of change is, of course, Time, who 'with his flaggy winges / Beates downe both leaues and buds without regard, / Ne euer pittie may relent his malice hard' (III.vi.39.7-9). Just as in the Legend of Friendship's Temple of Venus, true Concord depends on the coexistence of both Love and Hate (IV.x.32-34), here Time's 'malice hard' and lack of 'regard' are imagined by Spenser as integral to the cosmic vision of the Garden as a whole. But Time's presence here and his want of 'pittie' are ironically balanced in the following lines:

Yet pittie often did the gods relent,  
 To see so faire thinges mard, and spoiled quight:  
 And their great mother *Venus* did lament  
 The losse of her deare brood, her deare delight:  
 Her hart was pierst with pittie at the sight  
 (III.vi.40.1-5)

It is the ravages of time, the compassion elicited by a recognition of the destructive processes of alteration, that arouse 'pittie' from otherwise pitiless gods. As Venus takes on the role of 'great mother' who 'laments' the pains of her creation, the aesthetic response to 'thinges mard, and spoiled' is sympathetic engagement with suffering. Whilst Time's devouring of worldly things is something to be grieved, it nonetheless operates here as the stimulus of pity and ethical action.<sup>25</sup>

Pity in the face of suffering might, unmitigated, lead to despair, just as the litany of misfortune rehearsed by the character Despaire in Book I – 'Feare, sicknesse, age, losse, labour, sorrow, strife, / Paine, hunger, cold, that makes the hart to quake' – and authored by the violent 'fickle fortune [who] rageth rife' draws Red Crosse into despondency (I.ix.44.6-8). Spenser's Garden of Adonis canto, however, concludes on a final image of dynamic change that rescues the reader and Venus herself from this fate. Adonis, who 'subiect to mortalitie, / Yet is eterne in mutabilitie', is:

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Wadoski, in a comparative study of gardens and work in Spenser and Milton, reminds us that the Garden of Adonis 'situates itself most avowedly in the post-Edenic world': in *The Faerie Queene*, ethics is both predicated upon and stimulated by the circumstances of the Fall. See Andrew Wadoski 'Milton's Spenser: Eden and the Work of Poetry', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 55:1 (2015), p.176.

by succession made perpetuall,  
Transformed oft, and chaunged diuerslie:  
For him the Father of all formes they call  
(III.vi.47.6-8.)

Locked into cycles of perpetual change, the suffering Adonis paradoxically achieves eternal life through endlessly recursive death, becoming the 'Father' of the formal dynamism enshrined in the Garden.<sup>26</sup> And the aesthetic effect of this perpetual change is, here, 'eternall blis' and 'euerlasting joy' (III.vi.48.1, III.vi.49.1). Adonis remains strung in mortal immortality, accompanied by the divine Cupid, who, having 'la[id] his sad dartes / Asyde', becomes emblematic of cosmic harmony, his 'trew loue faire *Psyche*', and their 'chylde, / *Pleasure*, that doth both gods and men aggrate' (III.vi.49.8-9). Just as Adonis experiences bliss through perpetual change, the wedding of *eros* and the human soul or mind (Gk. *psyche* = soul/mind) is located in a site of mutative generation and gives birth to Pleasure. This nexus of ideas, which brings together a hermeneutics of semantic play and an interpretive ethic grounded in the dovetailing of pity and pleasure, is elaborated in another of Spenser's garden spaces, in a poem written at a similar time to the first instalment of *The Faerie Queene* and which tells the tale of a butterfly's demise at the hands of a vengeful spider.

### III: 'Muiopotmos': The Butterfly Reading

In the opening stanza of Spenser's 'Muiopotmos: or the Fate of the Butterflie', published in *Complaints* (1591), an allusion to the beginning of *The Iliad* elevates the poem's miniature protagonists – the butterfly Clarion and the spider Aragnoll – to the status of epic heroes:

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph Campana sees the suffering Adonis as the reformed image of a masculinity open to vulnerability and a sympathetic engagement with alterity. For an extended discussion of the role of Venus, Adonis, and Time in these terms, see Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: 2012), pp.218-223.

I sing of deadly dolorous debate,  
 Stir'd up through wrathfull Nemesis despight,  
 Betwixt two mightie ones of great estate,  
 Drawne into armes, and proofe of mortall fight,  
 Through prowde ambition and hartswelling hate,  
 Whilest neither could the others greater might  
 And sdeignfull scorne endure; that from small jarre  
 Their wraths at length broke into open warre.

(1-8)

At the same time as establishing the playful tone of the mock-heroic, these lines invite allegorical interpretation: divided through 'debate', metonymic descriptions of these 'two mightie ones', spider and butterfly, as 'prowde ambition, and hartswelling hate' not only create the interpretive lure of anthropomorphic representation, but draw moralising divisions that suggest the kind of emblematic significance evinced in allegory. Later, Spenser's invocation of 'the mournfulst Muse of nyne' to '[r]eueale to me, and all the meanes detect' recruits the rhetoric of revelation associated with allegorical poetics, and he solicits analogy between the entomological and human realms when asking 'is there then / Such rancour in the harts of mightie men?' Consequently, the beast fable has been variously read as an allegory concerning the fate of the rational soul, exploiting the pun on the Greek word *psyche*, meaning both butterfly and soul; on the ambitious nobleman in the court of Gloriana; on the failure of the imitative artist, Aragnoll, to 'capture' in representation the Platonic form, Clarion; and of the scholar who 'gets caught in the spider-web of extraneous antiquarian, historical, and philosophical learning.'<sup>27</sup> As the diversity of these competing interpretations attests, the poem permits but cannot be reduced to a definitive allegorical reading, and a countervailing trend in criticism denies the aptness of such interpretation and chooses instead to read the poem as a 'delicious

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<sup>27</sup> Don Cameron Allen, 'On Spenser's Muiopotmos', *Studies in Philology* 53 (1956), 141-158.; R. A. Brinkley, 'Spenser's Muiopotmos and the Politics of Metamorphosis', *English Literary History* 48 (1981), 668-676.; Craig Rustici, 'Muiopotmos: Spenser's 'Complaint' against Aesthetics', *Spenser Studies XIII* (1999), p.169.; Hallett Smith, 'The Use of Conventions in Spenser's Minor Poems', in *Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Nelson (1961), 122-145. For an account of the full critical history of 'Muiopotmos', see Eric C. Brown, 'The Allegory of Small Things: Insect Eschatology in Spenser's *Muiopotmos*', *Studies in Philology* 99:3 (2002), pp.247-249.

*jeu d'esprit*.<sup>28</sup> Treating the poem as a simple surface, however, fails to observe the important moral and aesthetic questions it appears to raise.

In what follows, I suggest that this conflict – the way in which ‘Muiopotmos’ invites and evades allegorical reading – is one of Spenser’s primary poetic strategies and constitutes the central interpretive challenge of the poem, a challenge which is borne out in the similarly allegorically-open yet insistently plural *The Faerie Queene*. Indeed, the hermeneutic lessons to be learnt in the epyllion provide a key to perfecting forms of reading demanded by the epic. As we shall see, nothing in the ‘Muiopotmos’ is as neatly allegorical as the reading of the above lines suggests. The first stanza intimates the inadequacy of such divisions and distinctions: initially held apart by their denominative ‘ambition’ and ‘hate’, the final lines bring Clarion and Aragnoll into moral complicity, as they share ‘might’, ‘scorne’, and ‘wraths’. Similarly, the categorical boundaries demanded by allegoresis are undercut by images of explosion, frustrating the confines of hermetic interpretation. Aragnoll’s ‘hartswelling hate’ tends towards rupture; and, in the final lines describing how from small jarre / Their wraths at length broke into open warre, Spenser puns on ‘jarre’ both as a disagreement and a small container fit for insects, suggesting how the poetic entities of ‘Muiopotmos’ break their boundaries. The poem asks the reader to move from the simplicity of allegorically emblematic signification to a moral, aesthetic, and interpretive complexity, a complexity that we will find reinforced in its concern with competing cobwebs and tapestries.<sup>29</sup> This is the readerly training that ‘Muiopotmos’ advocates, urging the reader to resist simplifying or totalising readings but instead insisting that they allow multiple planes of signification to coexist.

Having assembled his anatomy in the manner of a classical epic hero – his ‘breastplace first, that was of substance pure’, the ‘two deadly weapons’ of his antennae, and ‘[l]astly his shinie wings’ (57, 81, 89) – Clarion, ‘being readie dight [...] began to take his steady flight: / Over the fields, in his franke lustinesse’ (145-48). His flight mingles difference ambiguously: his ‘lustinesse’ suggests a moral

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, 1961, p.131. See also Judith Dundas, ‘Muiopotmos: A World of Art’, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 5 (1975), 30-38.

<sup>29</sup> Contra the swathe of competing political and moral allegorical readings that ‘Muiopotmos’ has accrued, Andrew Weiner has argued against any such readings, suggesting instead that the poem instead parodies allegorical readers in its Chaucerian narrator’s misguided attempts to allegorise his own narrative. Andrew D. Weiner, ‘Spenser’s *Muiopotmos* and the Fates of Butterflies and Men’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 84:2 (1985), 203-220.

shortcoming, yet the measured nature of his ‘steadie flight’ and the ‘franke’ nature of his forwardness mollify the harshness of this judgement. The word ‘dight’ refers not only to his self-armament but can mean to ‘kill, slay’, so that Clarion’s epic foray is interwoven with his own demise.<sup>30</sup> In another punning valence, ‘dight’ suggests ‘to set down in writing’, wryly observing Clarion’s status as fictional creature and recalling the etiological myth of Astery’s transformation into a butterfly by a jealous Venus that is related in the preceding four stanzas.<sup>31</sup> The myth, Ovidian in nature, is Spenser’s original, and tells how Venus ‘[b]ad her damzels [...] / To gather flowers’, and how as a consequence Astery, being ‘more industrious’ than the rest, became the victim of their ‘secret harts envying’ (116-17, 122-24). The vengeful nymphs feed Venus the fabrication of the ‘secret aide’ offered to Astery by Cupid and, in a bout of jealousy, the goddess ‘turn’d [Astery] into a winged butterflie’ (127, 138). The myth concludes with ‘all those flowres’ that Astery had gathered being ‘placed in her wings, for memorie / Of her pretended crime, though crime none were’ (140-44). As the butterfly’s creation tale, the myth ‘dights’ Clarion’s origins, but also in these final moments appears to ‘dight’ his end: his colourful wings that signify the butterfly’s mistaken innocence will find external manifestation in the flowers of the pleasure garden.

Clarion’s passage through the pleasure garden, where Art contends with ‘lavish Nature [...] / T’excell the naturall with made delights’ (163-66), recalls both the romance snares of the Bower of Bliss – where ‘Art, as halfe in scorne / Of niggard Nature, like a pompous bride / Did decke her, and too laushly adorne’ (II.xii.50.6-8) – and the celebrated generative fecundity of the Garden of Adonis, where ‘all the goodly flowres, / Wherewith dame Nature doth her beautifie, [...] / Are fetcht’ (III.vi.30.1-4). Ayesha Ramachandran observes that this ‘recurrent trope of Nature and Art contending with each other to produce an ideal *copia* - a favorite figure used by classical writers on poetics to praise (rather than to condemn) extraordinary artistry - suggests that Spenser may be concerned with more than just unseemly artistic striving.’<sup>32</sup> Ramachandran not only insists upon the moral complexity of Spenser’s garden *topoi* – they all, including the Bower of Bliss, evade

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<sup>30</sup> ‘Dight, v.’ OED Online, December 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/52604](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/52604). Accessed 10 February 2019. Sense 5b, 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* sense 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ayesha Ramachandran, ‘Clarion in the Bower of Bliss: Poetry and Politics in Spenser’s ‘Muiopotmos’, *Spenser Studies* XX (2005), p.86.

easy identification as ‘bad’ sites or ‘good’ – but demonstrates how gardens are metaphorically linked to the *copia* and *figurae* of rhetoric and poetry. In this sense, then, the garden might be understood as a site of poetry, and Clarion’s experience a metapoetic commentary upon readerly activity. In the prefatory letter to Lady Carey, to whom the poem is dedicated, Spenser engages just such a floral metaphor in offering ‘these fewe leaues as in recompense, [which] should be as to offer flowers to the Gods for their diuine benefites’ (p.290), with the pun on ‘leaues’ realised in the verse in the description of the flowers’ own ‘silken leaues’ upon which Clarion lands (175).

The butterfly’s behaviour in the garden is characterised by the same moral ambiguity as that of his flight there. His ‘vnstaid desire / Him wholly carried’, but with the innocent effect ‘to refresh his sprights’ (160-61); he sinfully ‘casts his glutton sense to satisfie’, ‘on their pleasures greedily doth pray’, and destructively ‘spoyle[s] the pleasures of that Paradise’, but such activities are resolved in the summation ‘[w]hat more felicitie can fall to creature, / Than to enioy delight with libertie [...]?’ (179, 204, 186, 208-9). Clarion’s activity is defined as ‘play’, but recollecting that Astery’s metamorphic fate was a consequence of the nymphs’ envy of her industry, and their slanderous revenge took the form of an accusation of supplication to Eros, the poem intimates that Clarion’s own floral industry might here be refigured as erotic dissipation: to accuse the butterfly of indulgence would align the censorious reader with the envious and slanderous nymphs. For Clarion ‘tasteth tenderly’ the flowers, ‘bathing his tender feete’ in their dewy surfaces, minding that ‘none of them he rudely doth disorder’ (173-4, 182). The treatment is cautious, and within a metaphoric of reading, his activity explicitly does not perform the disordering violence Gordon Teskey observes as inherent to allegory.<sup>33</sup> Clarion’s ‘curious busie eye’ that surveys the flowers partakes in the same ongoing ambiguity (171). Picciotto describes the ‘etiology of sin [whereby] the fall occurred when innocent curiosity degenerated into idle curiosity – when, instead of investing *cura* [care, or worry] to produce knowledge for the body of humanity, the first couple attempted to consume it.’<sup>34</sup> The same distinction is illuminating here: the mixing of the senses of touch and taste throughout descriptions of Clarion’s tasting of the garden recalls Guyon ‘feed[ing] his eyes’ in Mammon’s Cave (II.vii.24.4) in an image of appetitive

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<sup>33</sup> See Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: 1996), chapter 1.

<sup>34</sup> Picciotto, 2010, p.8.

intemperance, but Clarion's 'tender' tasting suggests a more innocent curiosity. The *cura* that is curiosity's *etymon* hovers between 'care' as harm and 'care' as laborious attention.

#### IV: Envy and Anti-Allegorical Poetics

The two models of reading offered up by Clarion's garden antics are advanced through the poetic vehicles of antithesis, juxtaposition, and pun. His tendency towards greedy harm or delicate labour – a distinction which 'Muiopotmos' asks us not to reconcile – may be reflected back on the poem's own reader, who might fall on one side of the interpretive fence, and so limit the poem's plural potential, or who might instead hold aloft different possibilities, different planes of meaning, simultaneously. The dynamic here is a paradoxical one: the poem at once distinguishes between different hermeneutic possibilities, drawing them apart, and then – rather than collapsing these possibilities into one unitary meaning – both affirms how these meanings issue from the same subject and demands that they coexist. Clarion is both a 'glutton' *and* 'tender': Spenser insists upon a hermeneutics of complexity.<sup>35</sup> This hermeneutic manifests itself variously throughout the poem. What might we understand, for instance, by Clarion's appearance like 'Alcides with the Lyons skin' being recalled in the final stanza of the poem as Aragnoll is described as '[l]ike a grimme Lyon rushing with fierce might' to kill the butterfly (71, 434)? Or by the 'manifolde' fair colours of Clarion's wings echoing in the 'net with manie a folde' that Aragnoll weaves to seal his fate (104, 357)? These lexical repetitions create unexpected links and resonances between different poetic entities – here, the insects whose difference the poem's opening insists upon – suggesting a complicit or interconstitutive relation between these characters. Repetition through difference implies that web and wing are one.

Such attention to lexical, imagistic or narratological repetitions and resonances was a central tool of Renaissance Biblical exegesis, based on typological

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<sup>35</sup> I use the word 'complexity' here deliberately, whose Latin etymology *com-plectere* (to twine together), evokes the webs and tapestries that feature in 'Muiopotmos'. I also use it in distinction to George Steiner's term 'difficulty', which, whilst comprehending complexity, attempts to say something more broadly about 'difficult' poetry and does not put a fine point on the weaving and unweaving that characterises Spenserian poetics here. See George Steiner, 'On Difficulty', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36:3 (1978), 263-76.



relation between Old Testament prefigurations or foreshadowings which are reflected and fulfilled in New Testament events and teachings. As Barbara Lewalski argues, in her exploration of the influence of Biblical poetics on the Protestant religious lyric of the seventeenth-century, ‘the characteristic Protestant approach takes the Bible [...] as a complex literary work whose full literal meaning is revealed only by careful attention to its poetic texture and to its pervasive symbolic mode – typology.’<sup>36</sup> Donald D. Dickson adds that in this sense, ‘the Bible also provided its own hermeneutic key through the collation of one text with another to recover its meaning’: observing typological correspondences proved a way of reconciling ambiguity and accessing, as if through excavation, meaning that lay beneath the surface of scripture.<sup>37</sup> In the second of his sonnets on ‘The Holy Scriptures’, George Herbert celebrates this kind of exegetical practice through the figuration of the Bible as a ‘book of starres’, whose ‘lights combine’ to create ‘configurations’ and ‘constellations’, whereby, like marking out astrological shapes in the night sky, one ‘verse marks that [other]’ and reveals the ‘eternall blisse’ encoded in scripture.<sup>38</sup> Carol V. Kaske has demonstrated the centrality of such exegetical practice to Spenser’s own poetics in *The Faerie Queene*: observing the great number of sixteenth-century Cambridge students who owned Biblical concordances, reference databases which ‘constituted a statement about the common threads with which God had stitched his book together and about the proper way to read it – a hermeneutics’, she calls for the application of such ‘concordantial reading’ on Spenser’s poetry.<sup>39</sup> Her discussion notes that Spenser’s more radical adoption of Biblical typological poetics involves both ‘unifying strategies’ and ‘those that are agonistic and thus hermeneutically unsettling.’<sup>40</sup> Internal contradiction, she suggests, becomes in Spenser’s poetry a

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<sup>36</sup> Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: 1979), p.117.

<sup>37</sup> Donald D. Dickson, ‘The Complexities of Biblical Typology in the Seventeenth Century’, *Renaissance and Reformation* 11:3 (1987), p.254.

<sup>38</sup> George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: 1941), p.58. Elsewhere, Herbert describes this ‘diligent Collation of Scripture with Scripture’ works through ‘Truth being consonant to it self and all being penn’d by one and the self-same Spirit, it cannot be, but that an industrious and judicious comparing of place with place must be a singular help for the right understanding of the Scriptures.’ See Herbert, 1941, pp.228-29.

<sup>39</sup> Carole V. Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (Ithaca: 1999), pp.21, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Kaske, 1999, p.3. Kaske makes no mention of ‘Muiopotmos’ in her study, but I consider the poem to be an extended experiment in this form of hermeneutics.

deliberate strategy of tergiversation, sanctioned by or borne out of scriptural reading, rather than inconsistency that demands to be fixed or smoothed out.

Lexical repetitions and unexpected metonymic relations – those which have already been noted and more that will be illuminated over the course of the following discussion – are principal poetic strategies in ‘Muiopotmos’. Any attempt at providing an exhaustive catalogue of such patterning requires more space than available here, but a representative example might serve to demonstrate how this reticulated poetics shapes the poem both structurally and thematically. The opening lines proclaim that the conflict between spider and butterfly is motivated by ‘wrathfull Nemesis despight’ (2), the goddess of divine retribution against mortal perpetrators of hubristic pride. In Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, *nemesis* refers to righteous indignation, an emotion distinguished from both envy, *phthomos*, and malice, *epichaireskakia*, but Edward B. Stevens observes how across Aristotle’s writings and in Greek philosophy more widely, both *nemesis* and *epichaireskakia* might be subsumed by *phthomos*.<sup>41</sup> Presided over as it is by Nemesis, whose ‘despight’ suggests a contemptuous rather than righteous form of indignation, much of the action of the poem is motivated by envy. The word itself appears in different grammatical forms four times in its course: the ladies at court ‘secretly envide’ the beauty of Clarion’s wings (105); Venus’s nymphs, witnessing Astery’s industrious flower collecting, are found ‘in secret harts envying sore’ (124); later, the narrator insists that ‘none did [Clarion] envie’ for feeding bounteously on the garden’s pleasures (152); and finally, Arachne’s tapestry is a so ‘goodly worke [...] Such as Dame Pallas, such as Envie pale [...] Could not accuse’ (300-303). But envy appears in different manifestations throughout. Clarion’s wings, ‘farier manifolde’ than Cupid’s own, figure a source of envy for the archer god; and the tale of Astery ‘gather[ing] flowers with Cupid causes Venus to ‘gather[...] jealous feare’, the sister emotion to envy (117, 129). Envy is also the stimulus for Arachne’s transformation into a spider: deviating from the Ovidian original – which has Arachne hang herself for shame and Pallas, ‘pitying her estate’, transform her into ‘shape of spider’, continuing ‘[t]he spinner’s and the

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<sup>41</sup> Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese (Cambridge, MA: 2014), pp.230-31; Edward B. Stevens, ‘Envy and Pity in Greek Philosophy’, *The American Journal of Philology* 69 (1948), p.171. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle observes that *nemesis* is the mean between the polar vices of *phthonos* and *epichairekakia*.

webster's crafts of which of which she erst had skill<sup>42</sup> – in Spenser's poem, Arachne's 'blood to poysonous rancor turne[d]', and her metamorphosis, much like Malbecco's in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, appears autonomous, or at least narratologically rather than divinely bound.

What are we to make of this proliferation of envy, its promiscuous attachment to almost every major character and figure in both the main plot and the etiological myths that comprise 'Muiopotmos'? And how might Spenser's use of envy and its patterning through the verse inform our understanding of the kind of hermeneutic protocol the poem attempts to develop? When, in Shakespeare's eponymous play, Coriolanus admits to 'envying' Aufidius, and declares 'were I any thing but what I am, / I would wish me only he', the Roman general invokes the congruence between envy and emulation that exists throughout both classical and early modern thought.<sup>43</sup> As Lara Dodds describes it, 'envy and emulation, both expressions of a persistent competitiveness that characterizes all social life, are morally distinct but structurally equivalent.'<sup>44</sup> The distinction and complicity between envy and emulation is first expressed in Hesiod's *Theogony*:

[T]he one fosters evil war and conflict – cruel one, no mortal loves that one, but it is by necessity that they honor the oppressive Strife, by the plans of the immortals. But the other one gloomy Night bore first; and Cronus' high-throned son, who dwells in the aether, set it in the roots of the earth, and it is much better for men. It rouses even the helpless man to work. For a man who is not working but who looks at some other man, a rich one who is hastening to plow and plant and set his house in order, he envies him, one neighbor envying his neighbor who is hastening toward wealth: and this Strife is good for mortals.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding, ed. Madeleine Forey (London: 2002), VI.169-180.

<sup>43</sup> William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. Peter Holland (London: 2013), I.i.225-227. René Girard has argued for envy, or its euphemistic designation of 'mimetic desire' or 'mimetic rivalry', being a primary dynamic of Shakespearean drama; see René Girard., *A Theatre of Envy* (Oxford: 1991), passim. For an extended discussion of the relationship between envy and emulation in early modern thought, to which my potted history is indebted, see Lynn S. Meskill, *Ben Jonson and Envy* (Cambridge: 2009), chapter 2.

<sup>44</sup> Lara Dodds, 'Envy, Emulation, and the Gendering of the Passions in *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*', *English Literary Renaissance* 48:3 (2018), p.371.

<sup>45</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: 2006), pp.87-89.

Hesiod's aetiological myths for these two 'Strifes' ambivalently mingle envy as a source of conflict and pain and a source of virtuous emulation. In a subsection on 'Æmulation, Hatred, Faction, Desire of Revenge Causes', Robert Burton uses 'Envy' and 'emulation' interchangeably, and his translation of Hesiod's subsequent lines confirms the fungibility of the terms in early modernity: 'A Potter emulates a Potter; / One Smith envies another: / A beggar emulates a beggar; / A Singing man his brother' (I.265-67). Envy ignites a desire to be like, or become, the envied one; it is the dark flipside of the kind of edifying emulation upon which Hesiod's functional society is founded – as is, we might remember, the Sidneian poetics, whereby poets 'bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses', and with which Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is explicitly in dialogue.<sup>46</sup> But as Coriolanus's subjunctive and conditional moods suggest, envy might violate distinction but it cannot entirely collapse it: it suspends the sufferer between desiring to be other and remaining nonetheless self.

In his essay 'On Envy', Francis Bacon figures envy as 'like to infection. For as infection spreadeth upon that which is sound, and tainteth it; so when envy is gotten once into a state, it traduceth even the best actions thereof, and turneth them into an ill odor.'<sup>47</sup> Here, metaphors of pathology emphasise both envy's pandemic reach and its influence of moral decay, but Bacon's words also disclose how envy might 'traduce' or translate the multiplicity of 'actions' into 'an ill odor', a miasmatic metaphor that enfolds distinction into a single and pervasive smell. Elsewhere, Bacon invokes the same language of contagion to describe how envy 'emitteth some *Maligne* and *Poysonous Spirits*, which taketh hold of the *Spirit* of Another [...]. But yet if there be any such *Infection* from *Spirit* to *Spirit*, there is no doubt but that it worketh by *Presence*, and not by the *Eye* alone'.<sup>48</sup> Envy's transmission from '*Spirit* to *Spirit*' works not only through its status as the evil eye, but through '*Presence*': it is a pathology both ocular and physiological, contaminating both its sufferer and 'the *Spirit* of Another' as it goes. This association between contagion and envy is mirrored in 'Muiopotmos': when describing Arachne's 'goodly worke [...] Such as Dame Pallas, such as Envie pale [...] Could not accuse', personified Envy is styled as that which 'al good things with venomous tooth devowres', and as the mortal weaver metamorphoses into the

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<sup>46</sup> Philip Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, eds. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: 1973), p.79.

<sup>47</sup> Francis Bacon, 'On Envy', in *The Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: 1985), p.86.

<sup>48</sup> Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum: Or, A Naturall History* (London: 1651), pp.205-206.

envious spider, ‘her fine corpes to a bag of venim grewe’ (302, 352).<sup>49</sup> At the centre of this lexical and semantic web of envy, and at the centre of the web in the poem, lies Aragnoll who, ‘mindfull of that olde / Enfested grudge, the which his mother felt’, upon seeing Clarion ‘with vengefull malice inly swelt’ (353-54, 356). Like the toxic and pulsing heart of the poem, genealogies and poetics of envy in ‘Muiopotmos’ issue from and return to Aragnoll’s venomous body, in which the poem’s final collapsing of distinction is effected in the subsuming of the butterfly’s body into the spider’s.

Spenser’s primary source and model for the myth of Arachne and Minerva’s contest is the opening of Book VI of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and in his engagement with and reimagining of this source material we see how he foregrounds and develops some of the ideas about envy outlined above. Spenser follows Arthur Golding’s translation of this episode of the *Metamorphoses* closely, departing from the original in two major ways: firstly, the order of tapestry weaving is flipped, with Arachne performing first and her creation depicting only Jove’s rape of Europa rather than a litany of the gods’ abuses; secondly, Arachne’s transformation seems the automatic result of envy rather than Minerva’s piteous intervention that prevents her suicide.<sup>50</sup> In Ovid, it is Minerva’s ‘poison [that] had such power’, made ‘with juice of Hecate’s flower’ that transforms Arachne into a spider.<sup>51</sup> In Spenser’s rendition, this poison is transferred from the goddess’s potion-craft into the body of the metamorphic victim, whose ‘fine corpes to a bag of venim grewe’ (352). There is another episode of the *Metamorphoses*, however, critical to understanding the complex hermeneutics of ‘Muiopotmos’, that is generally overlooked, another episode that involves metaphors of poison, the machinations of envy, and Minerva’s intervention into the lives of mortals. In Book II, Mercury, flying over Athens, falls in love with the beautiful Herse who is taking part in the festival celebrations of Pallas Athena;

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<sup>49</sup> For the specific relationship between envy and venom in early modern iconographic and lexicographic traditions, see Yan Brailowsky, ‘The sweet which is their poison’: of venom, envy and vanity in *Coriolanus*, in *Lectures d’une œuvre: The Tragedy of Coriolanus de William Shakespeare*, eds. Charlotte Coffin and Lætitia Coussement-Boillot (Nantes: 2006), pp.145-148.

<sup>50</sup> For a summary of Spenser’s reworking of this myth, see Judith Dundas’ entry in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*: Judith Dundas, ‘Complaints: Muiopotmos, or The Fate of the Butterfly’, in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: 1990), pp.186-187.; For his use of Golding’s translation of the *Metamorphoses*, see Michael L. Stapleton, *Spenser’s Ovidian Poetics* (Newark: 2009), chapter 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ovid, 2002, VI.174-175.

Herse's sister, Aglauros, however, bars the god's entrance to her sister, admitting him access only in exchange for 'a mighty mass of gold'.<sup>52</sup> Aglauros has previously aggrieved the Athenian goddess by looking into the casket of Erichthonius against her wishes, and Minerva, witnessing Aglauros's interaction with Mercury, finds opportunity to exact punitive justice. To do this, she visits the personification of Envy, with whose 'bevenomed' tongue she asks to '[i]nfect thou with thy venom one of Cecrops' daughters three'; Aglauros, thus poisoned with envy for her sister's amorous advantage, refuses Mercury access to her, for which she is turned to stone by the god.<sup>53</sup>

On the surface, we can see how Spenser's toxic imagery, and the description of Envy's 'venomous tooth', is lifted from Ovid's Book II. On a more deeply structural level, the relationship between the Ovidian tales of Minerva in Book II and the goddess' contest with Arachne in Book VI opens up another way of understanding the typological poetics, lexical structure, and hermeneutic complexity of Spenser's epyllion. In Ovid, Minerva is 'touch[ed ...] to the quick' because 'the lewdness of the gods was blazed so' in Arachne's tapestry: as Patricia Klindienst rightly points out, 'Arachne's daring rashness is only apparently her pride in her own artistry (which is justified: she wins the contest).'<sup>54</sup> In unpicking the misogyny of a male literary tradition and its suppression of female voices that are instead articulated through the loom and shuttle, Klindienst suggests that Arachne's true crime is the depiction of the ritual violence performed by metamorphosed gods upon mortal women – 'she tells a threatening story'.<sup>55</sup> Alongside this, however, we might consider a Minerva motivated by envy, a motivation that finds its inception in the goddess's proximity to the embodiment of Envy earlier in the epic narrative. Indeed, Spenser seems aware that in Ovid's tale Minerva is motivated by envy, for when he comes to rework the myth, he rewrites Ovid's 'Not Pallas, no, nor spite itself could any quarrel pick / To this [Arachne's] work' as 'Such as Dame Pallas, such as Envie pale [...] / Could not accuse' (301-2).<sup>56</sup> Replacing spite specifically with envy, Spenser both foregrounds the latter's thematic relevance in 'Muiopotmos' and denies its role in his

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<sup>52</sup> Ovid, 2002, II.937.

<sup>53</sup> Ovid, 2002, II.970, 979.

<sup>54</sup> Ovid, 2002, VI.162-164.; Patricia Klindienst, 'The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours', in *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World: Readings and Source*, ed. Laura K. McClure (Oxford: 2002), p.275.

<sup>55</sup> Klindienst, 2002, p.275.

<sup>56</sup> Ovid, 2002, VI.161-162.

own Pallas's motivations: inverting the order of tapestry weaving, the envy is transferred – or, to use Bacon's word, traduced – from the goddess to the mortal, who conceives its poison in her gut. Not only is the link between envy and promiscuous infection in 'Muiopotmos' drawn from the *Metamorphoses*, but Spenser's very method of *poesis* – creating a tapestry of inter- and intra-textuality that reveals itself only through the careful labour of exploration and deep analysis – is also drawn from his Ovidian template. The *Metamorphoses* represent another primary source for the creative and hermeneutic complexity exhibited by Spenser's entomological poem.

Such complexity not only serves to solicit readerly work supported by engaged memory and creative curiosity, but contributes to the critique of allegorical poetics elaborated in 'Muiopotmos'. As envy courses through the poem like venom through the veins, infecting various poetic entities – Venus, Cupid, the nymphs and court ladies, Arachne, Aragnoll – as it goes, these entities lose moral and representational distinction, begin, in a sense, to emulate each other. How are we meant to distinguish between a cast of characters made ubiquitous by the same poison? This poison participates in a metaphoric of swelling and spreading, initiated with the broken jar of the opening stanza and resolved in Aragnoll's 'heart [which] with vengefull malice inly swelt', which also suggests an unboundedness, threatening seepage beyond categorical divisions both ontological or moral. It is no coincidence that another of the poem's lexical repetitions is 'secret', often also collocated with envy: the court ladies 'secretly envie' Clarion; the nymphs 'in secret harts envying' Astery; Psyche bears 'secrete love' for Cupid (131); and Aragnoll's delight at Clarion's blundering flight is expressed as a 'secrete joy' (393). Spelt both 'secret' and 'secrete', Spenser's orthographical pun unites the frustrations of lifting the allegorical veil with the secretory, circulatory transmission of venom, envy, and meaning throughout the text; throughout the poem, the hermetic, secret meaning is constantly prone to secretion.

## V: Curious Networks: The Complexity of 'Muiopotmos'

Tracing the reticulated pattern of envy throughout 'Muiopotmos' not only demonstrates the existence of a typological, concordantial poetics, but even conceptually informs such a poetics: the word 'envy', in keeping with period thought regarding the pathological workings of the sin itself, spreads like a venom throughout the verse. Mirroring the imputed structural parallelism between envy and emulation, this coursing venom blurs ethical and ontological distinctions between characters and confounds attempts at clear allegorical reading. Richard Danson Brown, in a structural analysis of the poem, observes that its 'symmetrical structure' of chiasmatically interwoven entomological narrative and etiologial myth makes this 'diptych' poem formally similar to Clarion's wings.<sup>57</sup> But the patterns of lexical repetitions outlined above also render the text formally like the webs and tapestries of Aragnoll, Arachne, and Minerva. Just as the beginning and end of the poem relate the butterfly and spider respectively to the common referent of the lion, the manifesting of different concrete forms within the structure of the poem serves to identify the insects metonymically with each other: in Spenser's poetic tapestry, web and wing are one.

The association between web-like structures, venom, and a resistance to allegorical readings, which coalesce in the seething and seeping stomach of Aragnoll, that 'wicked wight' and 'foe of faire things', might appear to suggest that such hermeneutic complexity is a source of anxiety or despair (243-44). Aragnoll, pertinently named 'th'author of confusion', exudes a poison that renders interpretative reading a fool's errand (244). But elsewhere in Spenser's work, an identification between his own poetic craft and the web-making of the spider complicates this assessment of the writer's attitude toward complex poetics. In Sonnet XXIII of *Amoretti*, for example, he reimagines the myth of Homer's Penelope, who '[d]euiz'd a Web her woovers to deceaue: / in which the worke that she all day did make / the same at night she did againe unreaue' (XXIII.2-4). In Spenser's sonnet, Penelope's role is split: the poet himself becomes the 'weaue[r]' of both amorous advance and, metonymically, the poetic tapestry which is the vehicle for that advance, whilst his beloved's Petrarchan disdain for his wooing attempts is

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Danson Brown, *The New Poet: Novelty and Tradition in Spenser's Complaints* (Liverpool: 1999), p.219.



figured through metaphors of unstitching: ‘she spills that long I sponne, / & with one word my whole years work doth rend’ (XXIII.7, 11-12). The final couplet envisions the futility of the narrator’s both amatory and literary ‘labour’ as ‘like the Spydres web [...] whose fruitlesse worke is broken with least wynd’ (XXIII.13-14). Later in the sonnet sequence, the spider image returns as the speaker witnesses his beloved’s ‘drawen work’, in which she her ‘selfe vnto the Bee [...] compare[s]; / and me vnto the Spyder that doth lurke’ (LXXI.1-3). The speaker’s successful ‘catch[ing]’ of his beloved is here articulated through the ambivalent imagery of romance entrapment: affirming the aptness of the insect image, the speaker describes how the beloved is ‘caught in cunning snare / of deare foe’, ‘in whose streight bands ye now captiued are’ (LXXI.5-7). The image of entanglement, however, is suggestively transformed into the potential for edifying marital bonds: the ‘prison’ may turn out to be ‘sweet’, ‘with many deare delights bedecked’, proving ‘eternall peace [...] between the Spyder and the gentle Bee’ (LXXI.11-14).

Whilst neither of these sonnets conceals poetry’s ambivalent, pharmaceutical quality – presented oxymoronically in its Petrarchan rendition ‘deare foe’ – the identification of the poetic vocation with the weaves of web and tapestry, and of the poet with the spider, troubles an easy understanding of ‘Muiopotmos’ as a poem that offers a one-sided critique of complexity. Indeed, Robert Brinkley points out that the spidery Arachne, weaving episodes from the *Metamorphoses*, ‘is an Ovidian poet’, aligning her with Spenser, who also writes a poem containing Ovidian etiologies.<sup>58</sup> The poem is replete with tapestries and weaving, both literal and figurative. Alongside Minerva and Arachne as competitors at the loom, Clarion’s ‘cruell fate is woven even now / Of Joves owne hand’, behind which providential image hovers both the Moirai, or Fates, who determined mortal life by the threads of their spinning wheel, and Protestant anxieties regarding predestination (235-36). And in the final stanzas of the poem, Aragnoll’s web is described as a ‘so curious networke’, a description which cannot help but metapoetically evoke Spenser’s own reticulated poetics and which mingles once again the competing meanings of *cura*: careful design, woeful threat, potential cure.

These webs and tapestries connote and figure forth the tropes and poetics of romance, from the web’s ‘manie a folde’ – recalling the ‘folds displaid’ of Errour from *The Faerie Queene*’s Legend of Holinesse (I.i.16.3) – to the interlaced knitting of

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<sup>58</sup> Brinkley, 1981, p.672.

tapestry, to Aragnoll's 'deceitfull traine', which again evokes '*Errours* endlesse traine' (398, I.i.18.9). This generic association – and the deep likenesses between Clarion's pleasure garden and the Bower of Bliss, Spenser's consummate Circean romance creation – has led Ramachandran to argue that 'Muiopotmos' comprises a meditation upon genre, gender, and Elizabethan court politics. The poem, she contends, dramatizes the incapacity of the epic hero to function in a world governed by the laws of romance, and links this to a royal court ruled by a woman and operating through forms of seduction and erotic favour.<sup>59</sup> Where Guyon's destruction of the Bower of Bliss figures the violent triumph of 'the epic imperative over the seductions of romance', the epyllion 'negates and reverses that victory' in having Clarion, as parodic epic hero, fall prey to the 'lurking' romance villain of Aragnoll (358).<sup>60</sup> Ramachandran's reading is compelling, except that her mapping, essentially, an allegory of genre onto 'Muiopotmos' – whereby Clarion represents the demise of epic and Aragnoll the coup of romance – risks the kind of reductively identificatory allegorical reading that we have seen the poem resisting. That is not to say that for much of the poem such generic identifications and their implications are not apt and pertinent, but that a close inspection of the final stanzas of the poem frustrates this reading and instead furthers a caution against such hermeneutic practices.

When Aragnoll spies Clarion approaching, he weaves 'a net with manie a folde', that 'curious networke' whose 'cunning' exceeds both the work of the 'damzell' Arachne and 'anie weaver' else (357, 367, 361-63). The narrator then goes on to compare 'that same subtil gin' to the net which 'the Lemnian god framde craftilie, / Mars sleeping with his wife to compasse in' (369-371). Vulcan, forging a net to trap the unfaithful Venus and war god Mars on his own marital bed, is a conventional classical figure of jealousy, forming another link in the poem's envious web. But Aragnoll's web has another analogue from within the Spenserian corpus, recalling the net that the Palmer forges in the Bower of Bliss to trap Acrasia:

sudein forth they on them rusht, and threw  
 A subtile net, which only for that same  
 The skilfull Palmer formally did frame.  
 (II.xii.81.3-5)

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<sup>59</sup> Ramachandran, 2005, pp.77-106.

<sup>60</sup> Ramachandran, 2005, p.79.

Both the Palmer's and the spider's nets are 'subtil', and are characterised by the skill of their craftsmanship, their 'form' and 'framing'. Ramachandran argues that since the allusion to Vulcan is 'drawn from the two major classical texts that stand against the totalizing voice of martial epic – Homer's *Odyssey* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', the comparison aligns spider and sly Palmer with crafty romance entrapment. There is, however, another implication suggested by this triangulation of spider, Palmer, and god of the forge.<sup>61</sup> Throughout Spenser's Legend of Temperance, the Palmer's virtuous instruction of Guyon can be understood as a training in methods of *allegoresis* that foreclose the pathological threat of sympathetic engagement, a gesture exemplified by transforming Amavia's affective claims in the first canto, which almost compel Guyon to 'die with [her] in sorrow', into the 'ymage of mortality' (II.i.48.9, II.i.57.2).<sup>62</sup> In this way, the Palmer's net might be seen as the final instrument of allegory's militant force throughout Book II. Given this, we might note that in 'Muiopotmos' Spenser writes that Vulcan's motivation for trapping Venus and Mars in the net is '[t]hat all the gods with common mockerie / Might laugh at them, and scorne their shamefull sin' (372-73). Vulcan's gin is similarly used to create an emblem or spectacle whose moral lesson – of 'shamefull sin' – provokes a reaction, here of derision, from the onlooking gods.

This connection between nets and allegorical interpretation presents a key to a reconsideration of the conclusion of 'Muiopotmos'. Spenser invokes two epic similes to describe Aragnoll as Clarion approaches and is caught in his web. The first, which likens him to 'a wily fox', figures him as an animal connoted with *mētis*, the 'power of cunning and deceit' associated with romance and epitomised by the crafty

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<sup>61</sup> Ramachandran, 2005, p.99.

<sup>62</sup> Critical conversation around this understanding of Book II is extensive. For an account of the Palmer's instruction of Guyon in such kinds of allegorical reading, see Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago & London: 2007), chapter 4.; For how Spenser responds to the threat of sympathy upon agency and identity through the violence of the 'allegorical turn', see Cynthia Nazarian, 'Sympathy Wounds, Rivers of Blood: The Politics of Fellow Feeling in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and *A View of the State of Ireland*', *Modern Philology* 113:3 (2016), 331-352. Underlying these studies are questions of the role of sympathy and pity in *The Faerie Queene*. For an account of how the poem is designed to discourage pity in England's sovereign, see Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: 1993), chapter 5. For an opposing view of how the poem attempts to reform masculine virtue to be open to sympathy and vulnerability, see Campana, 2012, esp. chapter 3. For a wider understanding of the pathological and potentially damaging effects of sympathetic engagement, see Eric Langley, *Shakespeare's Contagious Sympathies* (Oxford: 2018).

Odysseus (401).<sup>63</sup> But the second refigures the spider as '[l]ike a grimme lyon', a 'greisly tyrant' that exhibits brute force and 'fierce might' (433-34). The cunning of the lurking spider is replaced here by startling violence – though the poem permits the continuation of the spider's romance stealth with the description of his 'weapon slie' (437) – and in the final lines of the poem Clarion's 'deepe groning spright [...] fled into the aire, / His bodie left the spectacle of care' (438-40). As with the lovers caught in Vulcan's net, the butterfly trapped in the web is transformed into an emblem, a tidy and univalent spectacle of the allegorical sign. But cautious readers might query the aptness of 'care' as the butterfly's final meaning. For in the preceding stanzas, Clarion has instead emphatically been described in antithetical terms as 'the careles Clarion', who 'wandred too and fro' and came 'flying careleslie' towards the web (375, 379, 391). What are we to make of this careless butterfly who becomes the spectacle of care? Answers lie on different diageitic planes. On the one hand, Aragnoll's attack conveys not only the violence of allegorical hermeneutics but its error. On the other hand, the 'care' referred to is not that which Clarion emblematises, but is rather the reader's: just as the effects of Time in the Garden of Adonis rouse Venus's pity, here the poem requests pity for the butterfly's fate. Pivoting around the ambiguous genitive 'of', we are asked not to accept uncritically the web's rendering of Clarion as 'care', but rather to exercise care ourselves. Spenser's poetry asks that we attend to the smallest of things, be that insects or words. This is final gift and lesson that 'Muiopotmos' leaves the reader: that in close and careful reading might lie the cure for error.

The form of careful reading elaborated through 'Muiopotmos' has implications for Spenser's generic and modal poetics more widely. Just as at the start of the poem, Clarion appears both tender and greedy in his garden ventures, so the poem continues such ambivalences to its final moments: Clarion is both careless and care itself; Aragnoll is both fox and lion. This ambivalence inheres too in the generic connotations of the spider's web: as Aragnoll 'weav[es] straight a net with manie a folde', Spenser puns on 'straight' so that it might both mean 'immediately' or 'linear', and be in tension with the 'folds' associated with romance (357). Similarly, the web's 'subtill loupes' which suggest romance's winding ways are also 'lymie snares'

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<sup>63</sup> Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Hassocks: 1978), p.21.; For how *mētis* further informs the characterisation of Aragnoll, see Ramachandran, 2005, pp.91-95.

suggesting a stickiness (429). The juxtapositions are subtle here, and they begin to question a paradox that is inherent in romance as a genre or mode. For romance in one sense involves divagation and errancy, the motions of wandering; in another sense, it involves entrapment and embowerment. The previous chapter witnessed how Spenser enshrines generative motility in the Garden of Adonis, and how Malbecco's allegorical ossification is articulated through tropes of stasis. Camille Paglia observes that '[t]he rule of *The Faerie Queene* is: keep moving and stay out of the shade. The penalty is embowerment [...], a limbo of lush pleasures but stultifying passivity.'<sup>64</sup> Similarly here, in Clarion's journey from fluttering plurality to stuck univalence, there is a sense in which Spenser asks us to disentangle these two dynamics of romance, errancy and embowerment, and highlights the semantic productivity of the former.

In a lecture on Chaucer and Spenser, William Hazlitt speaks of readers who express intimidation in the face of *The Faerie Queene*:

They are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them.<sup>65</sup>

In a remarkable blurring of modes, Hazlitt disdains people's fear of allegory through associating it with tropes more commonly linked to romance: the 'bite' and 'painted dragon' with 'shining folds' is clearly influenced by Spenser's Error, whose very name aligns it with romance wandering. Here, though, it is as if entrapment were qualities not of romance, but of allegory itself, which seems to capture something of what Spenser is articulating through the hermeneutic complexity of 'Muiopotmos'. Through interpretation, Hazlitt appears to say, the reader fears getting stuck, falling into the error of incorrect interpretation. Such fear, he continues, is 'idle', the opposite of effortful work. His final injunction for readers 'not to meddle with the allegory' so that it 'will not meddle with them' need not be as flippant as it might at first appear. The careful labour solicited by 'Muiopotmos' – and, as we shall see, *The Faerie Queene* too – is to work to see the various competing and coexisting planes of

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<sup>64</sup> Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* (London, New Haven: 1990), p.188.

<sup>65</sup> William Hazlitt, 'Lecture II: On Chaucer and Spenser', in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, vol. 2, ed. Duncan Wu (London: 1998), p.199.

meaning that poetry generally and allegory in particular might generate, and then not only to let them be, but to let them *all* be.

## VI: Tempering the Rigour of the Law: Early Modern Equity

Spenser's *Complaints* volume was published in 1591, a year after the publication of the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*, but the plate preceding 'Muiopotmos' offers 1590 as the poem's personal date of imprint. It is not unreasonable to assume, then, that Spenser wrote the shorter poem during or directly after completing the draft of the first instalment of the epic, and before commencing the writing of the 1596 instalment. Indeed, this chapter contends that the epyllion bridges a gap in Spenser's thinking about the reformatory capacities of reading between the two volumes of *The Faerie Queene*, and in particular between the Legend of Temperance and the Legend of Justice.<sup>66</sup> The contiguities between Clarion's and Guyon's epic trajectories, between the butterfly's antics in the pleasure garden and the knight's journey through the romance Bower of Bliss, and between the Palmer's gin and Aragnoll's web, suggest that in 'Muiopotmos' Spenser is reworking and reimagining the aesthetic, generic, and ethical implications of Book II. After the Ariostan romance narratives of the interceding Books III and IV, in Book V Spenser returns once again to the epic *telos*, with a linearity and apparently tight allegorism that Judith H. Anderson considers 'are made to look and feel like the forceful, artificial imposition of order that they are', with 'the strains of their reimposition [...] both everywhere evident and essential to interpretation.'<sup>67</sup> The 'order' of Book V – the order of allegory, the order of justice – is performed with a violence many critics have found challenging, and Artegall's legend and the litter of bodies he leaves in his wake have regularly

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<sup>66</sup> Studies of the way in which Spenser's Legend of Justice reworks or responds to his Legend of Temperance are numerous. Jeff Dolven centres the two legends in his account of violent hermeneutics in the poem; see Dolven, 2007, chapters 4, 6. Paul Cefalu reads the Palmer of Book II as instructing Guyon in a 'supernal law' that presages the merciless justice associated with Talus; see Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: 2004), p.76. For structural correspondence between Palmer and Talus see also Joe Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures: The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England* (Oxford: 2014), p.138.

<sup>67</sup> Judith H. Anderson, 'Spenser's Faerie Queene, Book 5: Poetry, Politics, and Justice', in *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, vol.1 (Oxford: 2007), pp.263-264.

been read as a defence and commendation of the aggressive militancy of the British colonial project in Ireland, and specifically of the bloody and controversial enterprises performed there by Lord Grey de Wilton, under whom Spenser acted as private secretary between 1580 and 1582.<sup>68</sup> Whilst not denying Spenser's complicity in Elizabethan foreign policy, what follows attends to the 'strains' against the imposition of order sensed by Anderson, as we see the concerns unearthed in 'Muiopotmos' regarding the ethics of interpretation translated into Spenser's Legend of Justice. In this legend, Spenser dramatises an extended analogy between legal and poetic hermeneutics, in which the ethical dimensions of reading are equated to the dispensation of justice.<sup>69</sup> Specifically, in exploring the contours and procedure of equity – that which common lawyer and legal writer Christopher St. German defines as 'a ryghtwysenes that consideryth all the pertyculer cyrcumstaunces of the dede' – Spenser attempts to fashion a hermeneutics, similar to that espoused in 'Muiopotmos', that attempts to mediate between universal rules, or abstracted interpretations, and the particularities of circumstance.<sup>70</sup>

In the proem to the fifth book, Spenser laments that the world has degenerated 'from the golden age' and instead has 'become a stonie one', a degeneration mirrored in a translation of 'men themselues', who once 'framed / Of earthly mould, and form'd of flesh and bone, / Are now transformed into hardest stone' (V.Proem.1-5). The mineral imagery at once reverses the Ovidian myth of a regeneration of 'a stonie race' of man from rocks and recalls the language of the Coverdale Bible's account of the divine inspiration of man, when 'the Lorde God shope man even of the moule of the erth and brethed into his face the breth of lyfe.'<sup>71</sup> It also evokes the laws described by Spenser in *A View of the Present State of*

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<sup>68</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (New York: 1958), p.340.; Pauline Henley, *Spenser in Ireland* (Cork: 1928), pp.138-141.; Michael O'Connell, *Mirror and Veil: The Historical Dimension of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Chapel Hill: 1977), pp.155-156. For an account of Book V's critique of Elizabeth's failure to handle the Irish occupation effectively, see Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Salvage Soyl* (Oxford: 1997), pp.149-155.

<sup>69</sup> For an extended discussion of the relation between Renaissance hermeneutic and legal practice at the Inns of Court, see Andrew Zurcher, *Spenser's Legal Language: Law and Poetry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: 2007), chapter 2.

<sup>70</sup> Christopher St. German, *St. German's Doctor and Student*, ed. T. F. T. Plucknett and J. L. Barton (London: 1974), p.95.

<sup>71</sup> Ovid, 2002, I.494.; *The Bible, that is the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament, faithfully translated into English.*, trans. Miles Coverdale (London: 1537), Genesis 2:7.

*Ireland* (1596) as ‘like to stony tables, playne, stedfast, and ymmoveable’.<sup>72</sup> The decline from ‘the antique world’ to one ‘runne quite out of square’ exceeds Ovid’s account of the declension from golden to iron ages, positing a current age of stone characterised by hardened hearts and rigorous legalism (V.Proem.1.2-7). Instead, the narrator declares his intent to fashion justice according ‘to the antique vse’ in Artegall, who ‘in justice was vpbrought [...] / And all the depth of rightfull doome was taught’ by the goddess of justice, Astraea (V.Proem.5, V.i.5.1-3):

There she him taught to weigh both right and wrong  
 In equall ballance with due recompence,  
 And equitie to measure out along,  
 According to the line of conscience,  
 When so it needs with rigour to dispence

(V.i.7.1-5).

The description of Artegall’s discipline here introduces many of the terms and ideas central to both Spenser’s legend and the following discussion. The ‘weighing’ of ‘right and wrong’ in the first line appears to be a description of positive justice, what James E. Phillips has described as ‘the absolute, measure-for-measure equation of exact reward and punishment according to the letter of the law’.<sup>73</sup> The flex of enjambment, however, introduces a corresponding legal flexibility in equity’s ‘equall ballance’, which ‘measures’ cases according to their particular circumstances in deviating from the strict words of the law. Set in contrast to the ‘the common line / Of present dayes’, equity follows the ‘line of conscience’, a word that weds moral sensitivity and a legal jurisdiction of early modern England associated specifically with the flexibility of equity (V.Proem.3.3-4). But Spenser is careful not to suggest that equity spills into an imprudent leniency, the ambiguity of the verb ‘dispence’ implying that equity may be used either to do away with ‘rigour’ or to enforce it. It is in equity’s relation to flexibility and firmness, the gap of interpretation that opens up between the writ of law and its equitable application, that Spenser fashions a just hermeneutics.

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<sup>72</sup> Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland, From the first printed edition*, eds. Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: 1997), p.TBV.

<sup>73</sup> James E. Phillips, ‘Renaissance Concepts of Justice and the Structure of *The Faerie Queene*, Book V’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 33:2 (1970), p.105.



The nature of equity, and its relation to justice and the law, was a vexed issue in both ancient and early modern thought. In the fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle differentiates between the lawful and the fair or equitable (Gk, *epieikeia*), a difference issuing from an essential problem he identifies with legal justice, that ‘law is always a general statement, yet there are cases which it is not possible to cover in a general statement.’<sup>74</sup> The tension between the generalisation of the law and the particularities of individual cases is echoed by Montaigne in ‘Of experience’, in which he asks sceptically, ‘[w]hat have our lawmakers gained with chusing a hundred thousand kinds of particular cases, and adde as many lawes unto them? That number hath no proportion, with the infinite diversity of humane accidents.’<sup>75</sup> Equity responds directly to this ‘infinite diversity’ of ‘accidents’, the particular circumstances of cases: Aristotle describes how ‘the essential nature of the equitable [...] is a rectification of law where law is defective because of its generality.’<sup>76</sup> This rectification of the law – a correction or straightening – is expressed paradoxically through the metaphor of ‘the leaden rule used by Lesbian builders; just as that rule is not rigid but can be bent to the shape of the stone, so a special ordinance is made to fit the circumstances of the case.’<sup>77</sup> Equity mitigates the rigidity of the law, its pliancy counterintuitively straightening out the law’s errors of inflexibility. But Aristotle is keen to affirm that equity still resides within the remit of justice: ‘while the equitable is just, and is superior to one sort of justice, it is not superior to absolute justice, but only to the error due to its absolute statement.’<sup>78</sup>

From Aristotle’s earliest discussions of the nature of equity, then, the concept has exhibited a sense of internal contradiction or paradox, a conceptual pliancy and errancy befitting its own flexible utility: ‘[e]quity is a roguish thing’, writes Mark Fortier in a survey of the term’s pervasiveness in early modern culture, ‘because it is inherently a wanderer.’<sup>79</sup> Its roguishness is compounded by its rich knot of competing etymological claims: the term combines both the Greek *epieikeia*, with its senses of pliancy and leniency, and the Latin *aquitas*, with its senses of equality and

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<sup>74</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: 1926), p.315.

<sup>75</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Montaigne’s Essays*, vol. 3, trans John Florio (London: The Folio Society, 2006), p.315.

<sup>76</sup> Aristotle, 1926, p.317.

<sup>77</sup> Aristotle, 1926, p.317.

<sup>78</sup> Aristotle, 1926, p.315.

<sup>79</sup> Mark Fortier, *The Culture of Equity in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: 2005), p.1.

sameness.<sup>80</sup> Cicero, in *De Officiis*, follows Aristotle in observing the law's tendency towards rigidity, writing that when 'principles [...] are modified under changed circumstances, moral duty also undergoes a change, and it does not always remain the same.'<sup>81</sup> But Cicero also acknowledges the advantage that may be taken of the power to interpret the law flexibly: '[i]njustice often arises also through chicanery,' he warns, 'that is, through an over-subtle and even fraudulent construction of the law.'<sup>82</sup> A freely interpretable law may easily lead to miscarriages of justice through error or deliberate exploitation and distortion. Cicero's response to this is to invest in *aquitas* the sense of equality or similitude, whereby like cases are treated in the same way: in the *Topica*, for instance, he writes that '[w]hat is valid in one of two equal cases should be valid in the other [...]. Equity should prevail, which requires equal laws in equal cases.'<sup>83</sup> The consequence of this grouping of like cases, however, is that equity adopts an homogenising quality in direct conflict with its sensitivity to circumstance.<sup>84</sup> A knot of contradictions accrues around equity as thinkers attempt to mediate between its power to bend and its tendency to err.

During the middle ages and into the sixteenth century, equity's power to mitigate strict legalism came to be associated with the court of Chancery, a prerogative court presided over by the royal deputy of Lord Chancellor, and which oversaw an equitable jurisdiction known as 'conscience'.<sup>85</sup> As Andrew Zurcher explains:

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<sup>80</sup> Fortier, 2005, p.3.

<sup>81</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: 1913), p.33.

<sup>82</sup> Cicero, 1913, p.35.

<sup>83</sup> Cicero, 'Topica', in *On Invention, Best Kind of Orator, Topics*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: 2015), p.397.

<sup>84</sup> Artegall's swift rejection of this kind of Ciceronian *aquitas* occurs in his encounter with the egalitarian Giant of canto ii, who holds a 'huge great paire of balance in his hand' with which he hopes to weigh the unweighable and compare the incomparable, and who 'all things would reduce vnto equality' (V.ii.30.3, V.ii.32.7-9). The insistence on the flexibility of Aristotelian *epieikeia* here demonstrates how, for Spenser, legal and interpretive pliancy might be conscripted equally to further ethical sensitivity and to promote prejudicial inequality. For an account of how equity both performed and exposed the way in which legal 'objective truth' is 'subjectively constituted', and so might be recruited to ideologically absolutist purposes, see Lowell Gallagher, *Medusa's Gaze: Casuistry and Conscience in the Renaissance* (Stanford: 1991), p.147.

<sup>85</sup> The publicity surrounding the following discussion of sixteenth-century judicial conflict, and Spenser's own experience of working as registrar for the Chancery in Ireland, would have made him highly literate in the intricacies of legal theory. See Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: 2012), pp.174-176.

the common law of the sixteenth century admitted no impediment to the ancient forms of process of the established remedies. The Chancery, physically and conceptually distanced from the royal courts, provided equitable relief through the injunction, a jurisdictional stop that could, by the Chancellor's prerogative, remove a pending case from the remit of the common law; once the case was before the Chancery, the jurisdictional claims of competing fundamental 'rewles and groundes' could be examined and resolved.<sup>86</sup>

As such, the diplomat and political theorist Thomas Smith explicates contemporary understanding when he writes, '[t]he court of the chauncerie is called of the common people the court of conscience, because that the chauncellor is not strained by rigour or forme of wordes of lawe to judge but *ex aequo* and *bono*, and according to conscience as I have said.'<sup>87</sup> The court of conscience is thus associated with equity's power to 'mitigate the exactness and rigour of the lawe written'.<sup>88</sup> Echoing ancient sources, the lawyer Edward Hake observes in the unpublished treatise *Epieikeia: A Dialogue on Equity in Three Parts* (written 1587-91) that 'yt is a thing ympossible for any lawe to provide a full and perfecte dyrection in all particularities that may happen'.<sup>89</sup> Rather, in response to 'lawe pursuant uppon the very stricte and expresse wordes of the lawe', one must have 'regard to the *Equity* or hidden signification thereof, as withowte the which the harder and closer yow sticke to the letter of the lawe, the farther of yow are in deede from the lawe'.<sup>90</sup> In a paradox that recruits the distinction between word and spirit – encountered in the first chapter as central to both Biblical and allegorical hermeneutics – an adherence to the 'stricte and expresse wordes of the lawe' in fact leads one 'farther in deede from the lawe'.<sup>91</sup> Equity is identified with the 'hidden signification' that subtends the 'letter of the lawe'.

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<sup>86</sup> Zurcher, 2007, p.136.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. Mary Dewar (Cambridge: 1982), pp.93-94.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, 1982, p.93.

<sup>89</sup> Edward Hake, *Epieikeia: A Dialogue on Equity in Three Parts*, ed. D. E. C. Yale (New Haven: 1953), p.9.

<sup>90</sup> Hake, 1953, p.17.

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion of how equity was transformed by patristic writers to inform the distinction between the Old Dispensation of Jewish law and the New Dispensation of the spirit, and thus the dynamics of Christian exegetical practice, see Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy & Its Humanist Reception* (New Haven: 1997), chapter 3.

The distinction between letter and signification of the law – and Hake’s identification of this signification as equity, which substantively partakes of the law – reflects a series of judicial reforms that took place at the beginning of the sixteenth century, led by the lawyer Christopher St. German. St. German’s dialogue *Doctor and Student* (1523) initiates a number of rhetorical manoeuvres which, over the course of the following century, would have profound effects on the understanding of equity and its status within the judicial system. The first is that he collapses the distinction between equity – associated explicitly with the court of conscience – and the common law in just the way Hake demonstrates, in order to divest the Chancery of power. Where Aristotle exalts equity not over ‘absolute justice’ but above the absoluteness of the written law, St. German reframes the terms by suggesting that ‘yf thou take all that the wordes of the law gyueth then thou shalte somtyme do agaynst the lawe’, emphasising a conflict between the words of the law and intention of absolute justice.<sup>92</sup> Instead, he claims that ‘[l]awes couet to be rewlyd by equity’, incorporating equity into the governing intention, even the desire, of the common law: equity is ‘not ordayned agaynst the cruelnes of the lawe [...] but equitye folowyth the lawe’.<sup>93</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century, Hake could write ‘where before I ever tooke your Common lawe to have byn severe, sharpe and inflectible, I nowe see moste playnely that it [...] is altogether guided and dyrected by *Epieikeia*, which (as I have read) signifieth sweetnes, gentlenes, goodnes, myldnes, moderation and such like.’<sup>94</sup> The common law no longer requires correction by an external source of equity, but is instead itself motivated by the spirit of equity.

Hake’s description of equity as signifying ‘sweetnes, gentleness, goodnes, myldnes’ points to the other major rhetorical shift enacted in St. German’s treatise, which associates equity with an ethical clemency. Following from his classical sources in observing that equity ‘consideryth all the pertyculer cyrcumstaunces of the dede’, he adds that it ‘also is temperyd with the swetnes of mercye.’<sup>95</sup> He goes on to write that ‘it is good and even necessary to leue the wordis of the lawe [...] to that intent equitye is ordeyned that is to say to tempre and myttygate the rygoure of the law’.<sup>96</sup> Asserting that a departure or deviation from the ‘wordis of the lawe’ is regularly the

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<sup>92</sup> St. German, 1974, p.97.

<sup>93</sup> St. German, 1974, pp.95, 97.

<sup>94</sup> Hake, 1953, pp.103-104.

<sup>95</sup> St. German, 1974, p.95.

<sup>96</sup> St. German, 1975, p.97.

route to ‘good’, the interpretive leniency of equity is explicitly wedded to an ethical leniency suggestive of kindness, mercy, and care. Zurcher explains St. German’s political agenda ‘in assimilating conscience and equity’ through ‘a fusion of the two hitherto independent vocabularies of mercy and equity’ in order to ‘subordinate conscience in Chancery to the rule of common law’, but for our purposes it also associates equitable interpretation with the kind of careful hermeneutics evinced in ‘Muiopotmos’.<sup>97</sup> Mitigation, leniency, gentleness, even, according to Hake, ‘pity’, might be accommodated by equity as an antidote to rigour, and ‘yet therein not to transgresse the lawe’.<sup>98</sup> Interpretive flexibility, enshrined in the dynamics of legal equity, becomes a sign of commendable mercy, and, paradoxically, an errant path to the moral and legal right.

Whilst St. German and his followers represented equity’s leniency as a source of good, there nonetheless remained commentators wary of its interpretive flex and the opportunity this presented for exploitation or chicanery. The Dean of Worcester, Richard Eedes, in a sermon given in 1596, decries equitable flexibility as ungodly:

how many sleights thei witlesse wittie, and learnedly vnlearned age hath deuised to make the rules of good and euill like that *leaden rule of Lesbia*, pliable to purposes, and to serue turnes: how many plees iniustice hath found out to iustifie it selfe out of iust lawes; how many shadowes vngodlinesse to shroud it self vnder the law of God[.]<sup>99</sup>

Eedes invokes the equitable image of the Lesbian rule, but in his rendition equity is not the spirit that exerts its influence or governs an inadequate law; rather, its pliability is exploited and used to ‘serue’ the ‘purposes’ and ‘turnes’ of the ‘learnedly vnlearned’ and ‘witlesse wittie’, oxymorons that disclose the pretensions and deceit of wilful perverters of justice. Reversing the paradox of an equity that corrects law by deviating from it, equity here becomes a tool of ‘iniustice’ to ‘iustifie it selfe’. Equity in its flexibility is unavoidably maverick: the inverse of its power to work as antidote to too strict a law is its constant power to distort and poison it further. Indeed, the legal writer William West draws on a now familiar metaphor to describe this dual aspect of equity:

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<sup>97</sup> Zurcher, 2007, p.133.;

<sup>98</sup> Hake, 1953, p.48.

<sup>99</sup> Richard Eedes, *Six learned and godly sermons...* (London: 1604), p.92.

[Equity is] an Apothecaries shop stored with all kind of drugs, fit for all the maladies & diseases of men. Which notwithstanding, in case they should be unskilfully compounded together, would in stead of healing, work present death to the patient that should receive them: for it requireth the industry and exquisite art of a good Physitian, to make a right composition, discerning and tempering by just proportions good venims from evil.<sup>100</sup>

The appearance of the *pharmakon* here befits the status of law as a written document, recalling Plato's myth, and speaks to the irreconcilable ambivalence of equity's power. The 'Apothecaries shop' can provide 'healing' in the hands of a 'good Physitian', or 'present death' in the hands of an unskilful interpreter who cannot discern 'good venims' from 'evill' – and the law's power for good or bad is, here, not an innate quality but dependent on the production of the 'right composition'. West's pharmaceutical metaphor underscores the intrinsically equivocal nature of equity: both within and outside of the law; both attendant on circumstances and exploiter of them; both seeker and bender of truth. With equity – as with interpretation – ambivalence and plurality can be helpful or harmful.

## VII: Spenser's Iron Man: Equity and Envy in the Legend of Justice

The relation between common law, equity, and mercy has long been recognised as a central thematic and structural concern of Book V. Phillips posits (perhaps somewhat reductively) that the legend comprises three sections dealing with these three concepts consecutively, 'arranged to develop analytically the idea of justice'.<sup>101</sup> Zurcher has more recently traced the actions of Artegall, Britomart, and Mercilla, and suggested the legend offers 'not merely historical allegory, but prescriptive political philosophy'.<sup>102</sup> Contributing to work on the legend's ideological promulgation, Andrew J. Majeske has argued that, in response to 'the crisis of feminine authority in late sixteenth century England', Spenser exploits the flexibility of *epieikeia* to forward a political agenda that 'requires women publicly to subjugate themselves to male

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<sup>100</sup> William West, *Symbology. The art, description or image of instruments* (London: 1590), p.174.

<sup>101</sup> Phillips, 1970, p.104.

<sup>102</sup> Zurcher, 2007, p.148.

rule’, as when Britomart puzzlingly ‘[t]he liberty of women did repeale [...] and them restoring / To mens subiection, did true Iustice deale’ (V.vii.42.5-7).<sup>103</sup> There is little extended discussion, however, of the way in which these different forms of legal justice – which essentially comprise hermeneutic models – inform Spenser’s thinking about the political and ethical implications of his own allegory, and how it might be best interpreted. For, as the following discussion will explore, the dispensation of justice in Book V links strict legalism to the allegorical method, a form of ‘poetic justice’ via emblem construction which, according to Dolven, ‘imposes an allegorical clarity where before there was only [...] moral ambiguity’.<sup>104</sup> Opposing this totalising force of law and allegory, the Legend of Justice solicits from the reader a form of equitable reading resembling the hermeneutics of complexity elaborated in ‘Muiopotmos’ and advanced through the interpretive flexibility and sensitivity to particularity described in this chapter as ‘playing labour’.<sup>105</sup> These two ways of reading – the strict allegorism of common law and the flexible poetics of equity – coalesce around the figure of Talus, the ‘yron man’ left to Artegall by Astraea ‘to execute her stedfast doome’ (V.1.12.2-3). Talus poses the great hermeneutic challenge of Book V, teaching the reader to find equity where it is least expected.

The ‘poetic justice’ meted out by Artegall, and linked to the imposition of allegory on the previously inchoate matter of narrative, is demonstrated by the knight’s response to the first figures he encounters. When, in the first canto, Artegall identifies Sangliere as the culprit of murder, his sentence of doom is to ‘beare the burden of defame; / Your owne dead Ladies head, to tell abroad your shame’ (V.i.28-8-9). Sangliere’s penalty here, in being forced to carry the severed head of his

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<sup>103</sup> Andrew J. Majeske, *Equity in English Renaissance Literature: Thomas More and Edmund Spenser* (New York: 2006), pp.93-94.

<sup>104</sup> Dolven, 2007, p.210.

<sup>105</sup> Equity’s absorption into models of literary reception and interpretation is signalled by its recruitment in paratextual requests for fair and kind treatment: the Catholic priest Thomas Harding ‘besech[es] the discrete Reader to interpret that I saye with equitie’; John Bridges, bishop of Oxford, ‘referre[s] himself ‘to the equitie of the reader’ and their ‘fauourable interpretation’; and John Marston addresses the preface to *Parasitaster* to ‘my equall Reader’ (Thomas Harding, *A confutation of a booke intituled An apologie of the Church of England* [Antwerp: 1565], p.161.; John Bridges, *A defence of the government established in the Church of Englande for ecclesiasticall matters* [London: 1587], pp.1, 5.; John Marston, *Parasitaster, or The favvne* [London: 1606], p.1.). The 1596 *Faerie Queene*, of course, begins and ends with an anxiety regarding the poem’s inciting of ‘a mighty Peres displeasure’, a reference presumably to Lord Burghley who ‘[m]y looser rimes [...] doth sharply wite’ (VI.xii.41.6, IV.Proem.1.3).

victim around his neck, transforms him into a spectacle in which the crime is legible within the punishment: the ‘burden’ he must bear is not ‘shame’, but rather the ‘defame’ of others, so that the ‘head’ becomes a readily scrutable emblem of his wrongdoing. This form of justice finds its root in Ovid’s myth of Arachne’s transformation into a spider, performing ‘[t]he spinner’s and the webster’s crafts of which she erst had skill’.<sup>106</sup> Where in ‘Muiopotmos’ this metamorphic myth is invoked to depict the damaging effect of envy and malice, here Spenser rather invests Artegall with all of the punitive power wielded by Minerva in Ovid’s original. But in the Sangliere episode, Spenser reveals a tension between Artegall’s process of justice and competing claims of the poetry through a form of emblematic competition. Prior to his fashioning into an emblem by Artegall, Sangliere is associated with another emblem, ‘a broken sword within a bloodie field’ that is depicted upon his shield (V.i.19.8). On the one hand, this image ‘express[es] well his nature’ – a degenerate knight on a bloodthirsty rampage – but R. J. Manning links this image to an emblem in Valeriano’s *Hieroglyphica* (1556), in which Justice drags around a woman carrying a broken sword, an image of ‘over-rigorous severity’ (V.i.19.9).<sup>107</sup> Straining against the reading assigned by Artegall, Sangliere’s shield and the Spenserian stanza offer up a competing emblem as a mirror to the knight’s punitive legalism. Poetic justice in the form of allegory becomes associated with excessive judicial severity.

The tension between Artegall’s form of justice and competing claims of meaning – a tension, essentially, between the abstraction of allegorical signification and the sensuous particularities of poetic surfaces – is deepened in the following canto’s Lady Munera episode. The episode treats ‘the evils of aristocratic violence’: Munera and her father are engaged in the twin crimes of ‘poll[ing] and pil[ling]’, the extortion of money in exchange for ‘passage’ over a bridge or the penalty of a shaven scalp (V.ii.6.4-8).<sup>108</sup> Munera (from Lat. *munus* = gift) uses the ‘reuenue of her plenteous meedes’ as bribes, and her ‘golden hands and siluer feete’ symbolise her cupidity and recall the ‘sinners’ of Psalm 26 whose ‘right hand is full of bribes’ (V.ii.9.8, V.ii.10.2, Psalm 26:10). As Artegall and Talus approach and break into her

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<sup>106</sup> Ovid, 2002, VI.180.

<sup>107</sup> R. J. Manning, ‘Deicefull Sights: Spenser’s Emblematic Practice in *The Faerie Queene*, V. 1-3’, *Spenser Studies V* (1985), p.68.

<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Healy, ‘Munera, Pollente’, in *The Spenser Encyclopaedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: 1990), p.481.



castle, Munera ‘entreat[s]’ and ‘pra[ys]’ for mercy, so much that ‘*Artegall* him selfe her seemelesse plight did rew’ (V.ii.22.5, V.ii.23.2, V.ii.25.9). But he remains unyielding:

for no pittie would he change the course  
Of Iustice, which in *Talus* hand did lye;  
Who rudely hayld her forth without remorse,  
Still holding vp her suppliant hands on hie,  
And kneeling at his feete submissiuelly.  
But he her suppliant hands, those hands of gold,  
And eke her feete, those feete of siluer trye,  
Which sought vnrighteousnesse, and iustice sold,  
Chopt off, and nayld on high, that all might them behold.  
(V.ii.26)

Artegall’s momentary ‘rew’ is quashed as, ‘for no pittie’, he continues with violence: equity’s association with leniency and clemency is briefly entertained before being dismissed and distinguished from the militant ‘course / Of Iustice’. This course involves the same erecting of emblems witnessed above: without ‘remorse’, Talus severs the golden hands and silver feet representative of Munera’s crime, which, ‘nayld on high’, become an eminently legible warning sign for others to ‘behold’, just as Sanglier’s punishment affords him ‘defame’. But whilst the *telos* of justice and of allegory impels Munera’s punishment, the language of the stanza resists this impulse and petitions pity for Munera. Described twice as ‘suppliant’ – the etymology of which (Lat. *sub-plicare*, ‘bend down’) evokes the pliancy associated with equitable treatment – her hands are transformed from symbols of greed to sites for gestural articulation of pity. The moral opprobrium signalled by her silver feet is outdone by Talus’ own ‘feete’, who remains implacable despite Munera’s ‘kneeling submissiuelly’. And the stanza’s ringing repetitions – ‘her suppliant hands, those hands of gold’, ‘her feete, those feete of siluer’ – create an incantatory rhythm that turns the poetry into a moving lament for Munera’s fate. Anderson argues that ‘our pity is frustrated by [Munera’s] metal hands and feet’, but Spenser’s poetry submits the reverse, that in fact the significance of her metal hands and feet is frustrated by our pity: the strict allegory demands that we read only her criminal limbs, but the particularity of Spenser’s verse emphasises Munera’s pitiable voice and flesh.<sup>109</sup> Talus’ final job is to

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<sup>109</sup> Judith H. Anderson, “Nor Man It Is”: The Knight of Justice in Book V of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, *PMLA* 85:1 (1970), p.67.

destroy all evidence saving the emblematic remnants of Munera's body, razing the castle '[t]hat there mote be no [...] memory thereof to any nation' (V.ii.28.4-5). But as Talus takes her by her 'sc slender wast' and throws her body in the river, we are afforded in that extraneous description of her trunk – what Dolven calls Munera's 'unallegorical middle' – a momentary, fleshly glimpse, a detail for which the allegory has no use (V.ii.27.1).<sup>110</sup> And for a reader moving carefully enough to notice, Spenser is not above a pun on allegorical 'waste' to underscore the pity of Munera's violent disposal by the emblemizing imperative of justice. Just as Venus in the Garden of Adonis and the reader at the end of 'Muiopotmos' are mollified by pity, in the Legend of Justice pity – the affective ground of equity's leniency – gives the reader pause, and demands deviation from the 'course' of Justice and of allegorical clarity.

Throughout these early encounters of Artegall's, it is Talus who is accountable for the forcible imposition of allegoric meaning and the ruthless removal of extraneous matter. As a consequence, a large contingent of critics have read him as the poem's 'dark centre', 'a vision of machine life anchored to retribution', a '[w]rathful and impetuous but also stubborn and unfeeling' parody of Stoic ideals of *ataraxia*, who executes an 'ethics that is perversely grounded in brute force and terror.'<sup>111</sup> In the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Minos*, Talos is a guardian of Crete who 'thrice a year made a round of the villages, guarding the laws in them, by holding their laws inscribed on brazen tablets'; in the *Argonautica*, Apollonius of Rhodes merges Talos' function and constitution to describe a 'body and limbs [...] of bronze and invulnerable'.<sup>112</sup> As the unshakable guardian of the indelibly inscribed law, Talus has been identified with 'the common law', the opposite of equity.<sup>113</sup> Spenser introduces him in such terms:

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<sup>110</sup> Dolven, 2007, p.214. Nazarian too, whilst arguing that the genuine threat of sympathy in *The Faerie Queene* is overcome through acts of violence, nonetheless recognises that Munera's 'pleas for mercy' register the 'costs' of such violence: Nazarian, 2016, p.344.

<sup>111</sup> Richard McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford: 2002), p.4.; Jonathan Sawday, *Engines of the Imagination: Renaissance Culture and the Rise of the Machine* (London: 2007), p.192.; Jessica Wolfe, *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: 2004), p.209.; Elizabeth Fowler, 'The Failure of Moral Philosophy in the Work of Edmund Spenser', *Representations* 51 (1995), p.66.

<sup>112</sup> Plato, 'Minos', in *Charmides. Alcibiades. Hipparchus. Lovers. The Ages. Minos. Epinomis.*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: 1927), p.417.; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, trans. William H. Race (Cambridge, MA: 2009), p.461.

<sup>113</sup> Zurcher, 2007, p.138.

His name was *Talus*, made of yron mould,  
 Immouuable, resistlesse, without end.  
 Who in his hand an yron flale did hould,  
 With which he thresht out falshood, and did truth vnfold.  
 (V.i.12.6-9)

These are the lines that critics point to as straightforward evidence for Talus' violent, one-dimensional nature. But these lines in fact exhibit a charged semantic ambivalence, and invite competing interpretations that trouble such reductive readings. Talus, 'made of yron', is incorporated into the metallic order, with its connotations of industry and weaponry; 'mould' might be read as noun or adjective, the latter possibility bolstering the verb 'made' to foreground Talus' nature as a moulded instrument. But 'mould' recalls the Coverdale Bible's account of humanity's creation from the 'moulde of the erth' and links Talus to the 'earthly mould' of golden age humans described in the proem. Talus is suggestively incorporated into the human constitution, leading critics such as Tiffany Jo Werth to suggest that what 'troubles us [...] is not his *inhumanness* but rather his *humanness*.'<sup>114</sup> The adjectives of the following line appear to characterise his implacability, but their apophatic quality suggests Talus' evasion of description; 'resistlesse', moreover, is a contranym, both 'irresistible' and 'without resistance', linking the automaton to Clarion as 'resistles pray' (436). The surprising ability of his 'yron flale' to 'thresh out falshood' and 'truth vnfold' figures him as a reader of allegory and discloses again the violence of that hermeneutic. But it also reminds us that Talus exists within the allegory, is both reader and figure to be read, as much a victim of the allegorical *telos* as its executor. The poetry demands pity for Talus.

This pity issues from and points towards an equitable hermeneutics. In attending to the particularities of language, its alternative possibilities and pharmlic potentialities, the reader settles upon a reading that deviates from the dominant allegorical signification as the Lesbian rule deviates from the upright, with an

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<sup>114</sup> Tiffany Jo Werth, 'Degendered: Spenser's 'yron man' in a 'stonie' age', *Spenser Studies XX* (2015), p.398. Werth is representative of a group of critics who have recently foregrounded Talus' humanity and sympathy. See also: Lynsey McCulloch, 'Antique Myth, Early Modern Mechanism: The Secret History of Spenser's Iron Man', in *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Wendy Beth Hyman (Farnham: 2011), pp.61-76.; Abraham Stoll, 'Spenser's Allegorical Conscience', *Modern Philology* 111:2 (2013), 193-204.

accompanying ethos of pity and care. When Talus travels to seek help from Britomart following Artegall's capture by the Amazonian queen Radigund, he is struck by a bout of speechlessness which associates him explicitly with equity:

The yron man, albe he wanted sence  
And sorrowes feeling, yet with conscience  
Of his ill newes, did inly chill and quake,  
And stood still mute

(V.vi.9.4-7).

These lines prove an obstacle to readings, such as Jessica Wolfe's, that Talus exhibits a 'lack of capacity for human feeling'; rather, they reveal what Abraham Stoll has described as Talus' 'contradictory inwardness', his 'own inner life of feeling'.<sup>115</sup> As the verse struggles to mediate between an automaton who 'wanted sence' and lacks 'feeling', and the 'inly chill and quake' which betrays affective response, Spenser performs a momentary undoing of personification, as the unyielding 'yron' gives way to a sensate – even suffering – experience of 'conscience'. The word, at the same time as suggesting a 'consciousness' of 'ill newes', cannot help but evoke the English jurisdiction, aligning Talus with equity. St. German describes the moral psychological and legal operations encapsulated in conscience, which is both 'an habyte of the mynde dyscernyge bytwyxt good and euyl' and 'the Jugement of *practical* reason Jugyng on the partyculer actes of man', but he also observes that conscience is '*a natural act [...] not only cognitive but also motive, and inclines the soul to pursue good and eschew evil.*'<sup>116</sup> Conscience's legal and ethical dispensation lies in its stimulation of movement, will, and desire; it bends or 'inclines' towards good. Malbecco's allegorical ossification is reversed in Talus as immoveable metal gives way to motion, rigidity to inclination, rigour to equity. Talus' bending from his allegorical role mirrors and exemplifies the bending of equity from rigorous legalism. *The Faerie Queene* and its inhabitants move and change, entertaining multiple possible meanings, soliciting from readers an equitable sensitivity to such multiplicity.

Equity, however, remains a roguish wanderer, a pharomic physician – to recall West's metaphor – who might just as easily kill as cure. In Isis Church, the temple of '[t]hat part of Iustice, which is Equity', Isis is associated with 'shade', 'cunning', and

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<sup>115</sup> Wolfe, 2004, p.203.; Stoll, 2013, pp.193, 201.

<sup>116</sup> St. German, 1974, pp.89, 87.

‘enfold[ing]’, words evoking the romance tropes of *mētis*, embowerment, and inscrutability (V.vii.3.3, V.vii.6.3, V.vii.6.9).<sup>117</sup> Wandering might provide a welcome antidote to legal and allegorical rigour, but Spenser remains aware of the risk that a productive errancy might easily slip into foul error or chaos, that the free interpretation represented by equity and romance might be exploited by malicious or blind readers. In the final canto of Book V, having slain Grantorto and liberated Irena – the embodiment of Ireland as Elizabethan subject – from his tyranny, Artegall is abruptly called back to Faerie Court midway through ‘reform[ing] that ragged common-weale’ (V.xii.26.4). *En route*, they encounter ‘two old ill fauour’d Hags’ (V.xii.28.4). The first is Envy, holding in her hand ‘a snake with venime fraught’, recalling the envious, circulating venom of ‘Muiopotmos’ (V.xii.30.5). Her sister, Detraction, the image of wilful misinterpretation, is skilled in ‘inuent[ing] / How to depraue, or slanderously vpbrayd, / Or to misconstrue of a mans intent’ : ‘what euer euill she conceiued, / Did spred abroad, and throw in th’open wind’ (V.xii.34.2-4, V.xii.33.6-7). With her ‘mouth distort / Foming with poyson’ she too participates in the toxic imagery of envy, and in her hand she holds a ‘distaffe’ with which she ‘faynes to weaue false tales and leasings bad’ (V.xii.36.1-8). This distaff – for which Jane Aptekar finds no iconographical analogue, suggesting the image is Spenser’s original – links Detraction to romance weaving, and casts her as the dangerous, destructive extreme of interpretive leniency in the form of slander.<sup>118</sup> Detraction’s ‘spin[ning]’ suggests that both equity and romance, taken to an extreme, share an inclination towards mistruth and misrepresentation. Both equity and Spenser’s poetry, it implies, might easily slip from the unfolding of truth into what Richard Eedes terms the ‘sleights’ of ‘injustice’ and ‘ungodlinesse’.

In the closing canto of the Legend of Justice, then, we find the limits of equitable reading and of the hermeneutics of complexity with which this chapter has been concerned. The embodiment of censorious readers of Artegall’s (and Lord Grey’s) actions, Envy and Detraction are central to the legend’s rhetoric of imperial apologism.<sup>119</sup> But they are also the unassailable underside of a flexible and open-

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<sup>117</sup> Equity’s pliancy (*plīcare* = to bend or fold) is etymologically related to *plectere* (to plait or weave), the etymon of the complexity and perplexity associated throughout this chapter with tapestries, labyrinths, romance, and Spenserian poetics.

<sup>118</sup> Jane Aptekar, *Icons of Justice: Iconography & Thematic Imagery in Book V of The Faerie Queene* (New York & London: 1969), p.251, n4.

<sup>119</sup> In *A View of the State of Ireland*, Eudoxus describes how ‘that good Lord Grey, when after long travel, and many perilous assayes’ had ‘made [Ireland] ready for

ended hermeneutics that embraces plurality, the result of an interpretive permissiveness that, running away with itself, becomes malicious distortion. Whilst errancy might mitigate the rigour of both law and allegory, it also courts transgression, meaninglessness, and chaos. '[C]ombynd in one', Error and Detraction give birth to the Blatant Beast, the scourge of Book VI who 'barke[s] and bay[s]' with 'fell contention', and whose association with the abuse of language and errancy are the concern of the following chapter (V.xii.37.1, V.xii.41.2-3). Confronted with the limits of complexity, equity, and interpretive play, Spenser's Legend of Justice hands over the inexorably pharmonic nature of language to the Legend of Courtesy, which must contend with the impossibility of 'discerning and tempering by just proportions good venims from evill'.

### VIII: Be Not Idle: Walking the *Anatomy*

In the final sentences of the *Anatomy*, Robert Burton declares his last and lasting advice to readers hoping to avoid the melancholic disorder:

Onely take this for a corollary and conclusion, as thou tenderest thine owne welfare in this, and all other melancholy, thy good health of body and minde, observe this short precept, give not way to solitarinesse and idlenesse. *Be not solitary, be not idle.*

(III.445)

As a closing gesture, Burton hands over the responsibility of self-care – the 'tendering' of 'thine owne welfare' – to the reader. The whole matter of the 'Cure of Despair' subsection, with its insistence on the necessity of an active and militant form of faith in God's mercy – 'as Satan labours to suggest' writes Burton, 'so we must strive not to give consent' (III.434) – is condensed to a 'short precept': '*Be not solitary, be not idle*'. These imperatives recall the language and advice given in the Second Partition's 'Exercise Rectified of Body and Minde', which begins with a similar acknowledgement of the importance of controlling melancholy through

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reformation [...] like complaint was made against him, that he was a bloodie man, that regarded not the life of her subiects no more than dogges, but had wasted and consumed all' (103).

moderate forms of activity: there is a ‘great inconvenience’ Burton observes, ‘which comes on the one side by immoderate and unseasonable exercise’ and on the other ‘too much solitarinesse and idlenesse’, to which must be applied the ‘Antidote [of...] a moderate and seasonable use of it’ for ‘the generall preservation of our health’ (II.67). In keeping with the Galenic model of the body and the associated Aristotelian model of virtue that underpins the moral and physiological anthropology of the *Anatomy*, there exists a happy mean of exercise that might be undertaken to sustain a healthy ‘body and minde’ (II.67). Taking as cosmic and terrestrial guides the sun that ‘riseth and sets’, the moon that ‘increaseth and decreaseth’, the ‘Starres and Planets [that] keep their constant motions’, and ‘the waters [that] ebbe and flowe’, Burton acknowledges a regimental tradition that enjoins ‘labour and exercise [...] to prevent those grievous mischiefes that come by idlenesse’ (II.67). Meteorological motions, the processes of perpetual change, become a model for salutary human activity on earth.

The recommendation of exercise was a common feature of early modern texts directed towards the care of the body and soul, those anatomies of passions, health regimens, consolatory treatises, and works of philosophy, which Sorana Corneanu, observing their shared aim of offering medicine to minds described as ‘diseased’ or ‘distempered’ or ‘disturbed’, has recently grouped within the tradition of the ‘*cultura animi*’, or cultivation of the mind.<sup>120</sup> The opening book of Marsilio Ficino’s *De Vita Libri Tres* – which, in its fusion of the Galenic, pathological conception of melancholy with the idea of melancholic genius, figures as a prime source for Burton’s own understanding of the disorder – is directly concerned with such regimental upkeep: ‘too little physical exercise’, he notes, prevents the exhalation of ‘thick, dense, clinging, dusky vapours’.<sup>121</sup> Within the British corpus, on the first page of *The Castell of Helthe* (1534), Thomas Elyot lists ‘Mevying and rest’ along with the other non-naturals – ‘Ayre’, ‘Meate and drinke’, ‘Slepe and watch’, ‘Emptinesse and repletion’, and ‘Affections of the mynde’ – recommended by Galen for the health of the body.<sup>122</sup> William Vaughan, in *Directions for Health, Naturall and*

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<sup>120</sup> Sorana Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern Cultura Animi Tradition* (Chicago & London: 2011), p.4. For an account of this early modern tradition, see chapter 2.

<sup>121</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, eds. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Binghamton, NY: 1989), p.115.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Elyot, *The Castell of Helthe* (London: 1539), p.1.

*Artificiall* (1633), observes that exercise is required in order to sustain the correct humoral balance and quality, since it ‘maketh the body light, increaseth natural heate, forcing the colour to become sanguine, and consumeth superfluous humours, which otherwise would clotter and congeale within the body.’<sup>123</sup> And Thomas Wright, in *Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1601-4), notes the efficacy of exercise for both body and mind, since ‘[a]s the Physitian of the bodie ordaineth not onely medicines for his patients maladies, but also prescribeth his diet, rest, or exercise, sleepe, or waking [...] so about the passions of the mind, which are certaine diseases of the soule, like care and diligence must be vsed’.<sup>124</sup> ‘Our diet consisteth not onely [...] in meate, and drinke’, Timothie Bright urges in *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586), ‘but in whatsoever exercises of mind or bodie: whether they be studies of the braine, or affections of the hart’.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, in ‘Exercise Rectified’, Burton also affirms the need for both physical and mental exercise. A short way into the subsection, he turns from a focus on physical to intellectual exertion, claiming that ‘mongst those exercises, or recreations of the minde within doors, there is none so general, so aptly to be applied to all sorts of men, so fit & proper to expell Idleness and Melancholy, as that of *Study*’ (II.84). Keeping the mind in motion is as important to health as the motion of the body.

In the *Anatomy*, however, Burton differs from his contemporaries in his treatment of exercise as part of regimental health by not only prescribing such movement but by appearing to offer it up in textual form. Having outlined the physiological benefits of physical exercise, Burton insists that

the most pleasant of all outward pastimes [... is to] walke amongst  
Orchards, Gardens, Bowres, Mounts and Arbors, artificiall wildernesses,  
greene thickets, Arches, Groves, Lawnes, Rivulets, Fountaines & such like  
pleasant places, like that *Antiochan Daphne*, Brooks, Pooles, Fishponds,  
betwixt wood and water, in a faire meadow, by a river side  
(II.72).

Kathryn Murphy, observing that this subsection ‘is also concerned with the broader semantic and epistemological field to which ‘exercise’, *exercitatio*, experience and *experimentum* belong’, considers such descriptions to constitute Burton’s turn to

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<sup>123</sup> William Vaughan, *Directions for Health, Naturall and Artificiall* (London: 1633), p.59.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (London: 1604), p.88.

<sup>125</sup> Timothie Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie* (London: 1586), p.242.



experiential rather than informative modes of writing: ‘This is no longer pragmatic advice. Burton’s ‘*amoena loca*’ are the pleasant places of literature.’<sup>126</sup> Indeed, Burton’s lists which recruit the full ekphrastic force of *enargeia* to make vivid to his readers the sights and sounds, the pleasures of a rural walk, make his text a kind of proxy for the actual experience. Elsewhere, encouraging readers ‘to read, walke and see Mappes, Pictures, Statues, Jewels, marbles’, Burton’s verbal slippage between reading, walking, and seeing implies the contiguity, or even fungibility, of text and world; and the following pages that render the fruits of his own learning in elaborate prose again suggest this substitutability (II.84). In both recommending and providing a form of exercise, Burton’s text – in keeping with his hope that his words ‘shall take like guided pilles’ (III.5) – acts as both prescription and medicine.

This isn’t the first time that Burton allows his writing to resemble stylistically, and as a consequence to stand in for, a type of experience that he recommends or promises. In the prefatory ‘Democritus Junior to the Reader’, under his personate guise, Burton invites the reader to walk with him:

if thou vouchsafe to read this Treatise, it shall seeme no otherwise to thee, then the way to an ordinary Traveller, sometimes faire, sometimes foule; here champion, there inclosed; barred in one place, better soyle in another: by Woods, Groves, Hills, Dales, Plaines, &c. I shall lead thee *per ardua montium, & lubrica vallium, & roscida cespitum, & glebosa camporum*, through variety of objects, that which thou shalt like and surely dislike.

(I.18)

Burton’s travelling metaphor linguistically enacts the ranging topography he describes: figures of repetition and alliteration – ‘barred’ and ‘better’, ‘faire’ and ‘foule’ – stand in opposition to figures of juxtaposition and antithesis, syntactically mimicking the shapes of ‘Hills’, ‘Dales’, and ‘Plaines’. At these moments style becomes mimetic of content, and the act of reading becomes experiential. Of particular note here, however, and immediately available to readers of Latin, is the

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<sup>126</sup> Murphy demonstrates the way in which the unmanageable plurality of the world, and the seemingly insuperable challenge it poses to particularly Aristotelian forms of epistemology, leads Burton to turn towards ‘the mediation of experience’ rather than ‘the longing to know’, and her work here will inform my thinking throughout this chapter. Kathryn Murphy, ‘The Anxiety of Variety: Knowledge and Experience in Montaigne, Burton, and Bacon’, in *Fictions of Knowledge: Fact, Evidence, Doubt*, eds. Yota Bataski, Subha Mukherji, and Jan-Melissa Schramm (New York: 2012), pp.118, 120.

vocabulary of difficulty or labour that characterises the landscape of Burton’s Latin quotation, which, unusually, the author leaves unidentified and untranslated: ‘*ardua montium*’ (steep, or difficult, hills), ‘*lubrica vallium*’ (slippery valleys), ‘*roscida cespitum*’ (sticky, or damp, turf), ‘*glebosa camporum*’ (cloddy fields). Readers deeply familiar with classical literature, or those with the determination to unearth the source of the allusion, will discover that it is lifted from Apuleius’s picaresque novel *Metamorphoses* (also known as *The Golden Ass*).<sup>127</sup> This prose text’s opening sentence confirms its generic allegiances: ‘I would like to tie together different sorts of tales for you’, writes Apuleius, ‘so that you may be amazed at men’s forms and fortunes transformed into other shapes and then restored again in an interwoven knot.’<sup>128</sup> The metaphors of weaving and binding invoke the narrative *entrelacement* of romance plots, and the subject matter of formal and fateful transformations positions Apuleius’s text within the tradition that includes Ovid’s more famous *Metamorphoses*. Buried in Burton’s allusion, then, is his alignment of the difficulties and rewards of reading the *Anatomy* with those of reading romances, concerned as they are with wondrous transformation, and often dangerous complexity.

These various unpicked threads will form the touchstones of the following discussion of the work of reading Burton’s great tome: labour and exercise, the mimetic relationship between world and text, protean poetics, and complexity. Extolling the benefits of study in ‘Exercise Rectified’, Burton directs the reader to Cicero’s *Pro Archia Poeta*: ‘*Studia senectutem oblectant, adolescentiam alunt, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium & solatium praebent, domi delectant, &c.* finde the rest in *Tully pro Archia Poeta*’ (II.84).<sup>129</sup> In this speech, which comprises in essence a defence of poetry, the orator asks, ‘Do you think that I could find inspiration for my daily speeches on so manifold a variety of topics, did I not cultivate my mind with study, or that my mind

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<sup>127</sup> This is an example of what Angus Gowland has recently described as the *Anatomy*’s ‘plethora of unattributed quotations and allusions, which if they could be recognized or traced to their origins would potentially unlock other layers of textual significance — whilst providing, one presumes, bursts of pleasure from successful discoveries.’ See Angus Gowland, ‘As Hunters find their Game by the Trace’: Reading to Discover in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, *The Review of English Studies* 70:295 (2019), p.440.

<sup>128</sup> Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. J. Arthur Hanson (Cambridge, MA: 1989), p.3.

<sup>129</sup> See Cicero, ‘Pro archia poeta’, in *Pro Archia. Post Reditum in Senatu. Post Reditum ad Quirites. De Domo Sua. De Haruspicum Responsis. Pro Plancio*, trans. N. H. Watts (Cambridge, MA: 1923), p.25.

could endure so great a strain, did not study too provide it with relaxation?<sup>130</sup> Here, then, lies a clue to the ‘antidote’ to the twin dangers of immoderate exercise and idleness that Burton seeks at the opening of the subsection: ‘study’, according to Cicero, in pharmaceutical fashion, provides both ‘cultivation’ and ‘relaxation’. Burton corroborates Cicero’s claim here, but in writing that the *Anatomy*’s purpose is to provide means to those who are ‘over-toiled on the one part to refresh: over idle on the other, to keepe themselves busied’, the experience of reading Burton’s text is once again represented as having therapeutic value, and is articulated in terms of labour (II.83). How Burton’s writings are offered up as a source of textual refreshment will be the remit of the following and final chapter; this chapter will rather explore how the *Anatomy* comprises a form of work for both writer and reader. For in the face of the difficulty of managing such an unwieldy text, the *Anatomy* solicits a readership involved in the kind of ‘playing labour’ with which this chapter opened, offering itself up as both ‘labour or imployment’ and ‘honest sports’ through which we might ‘revive our bodies & recreate our Soules’ (II.83).

### **IX: Herculean Labour: the Work of *Anatomy***

In ‘Democritus Junior to the Reader’, Burton quickly reveals that his text is intended to offer therapeutic effects not only to his reader, but to the writer as well. ‘I write of Melancholy, by being busie to avoid Melancholy,’ he writes, before predicting the language of ‘Exercise rectified’: ‘There is no greater cause of Melancholy than idlenesse, *no better cure then businesse*’ (I.6). He goes on to claim that ‘I write [...] *but to exercise my selfe*’ and recommends such exercise to others as ‘good for their bodies, and much better for their soules’ (I.6). Here he invokes the image that opened this chapter, ‘bus[ying] myself in this playing labour’ since, according to ‘that divine *Seneca* [...] better doe to no end then nothing’ (I.6). Regardless of how seriously we take Burton’s claim to be ‘doing to no end’, he is nonetheless acutely aware of the sheer ardour involved in both writing and reading the fruits of his labour. Complaining of the great mass of printed matter produced at the presses, he is alert to the irony of his own reader’s material and physiological engagement with his text as he describes how ‘our eyes ake with reading, our fingers with turning’ (I.10). Elsewhere, he

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<sup>130</sup> Cicero, 1923, p.21.

acknowledges the need to ‘refresh a weary Reader’, and, again, to ‘refresh my muse a little, and my weary Readers’ (I.249, III.4). He repeatedly compares his writing enterprise to ‘Hercules labours’ or ‘taske’, and compares so ‘great a taske’ to such impossible endeavours as ‘reconcil[ing] those Chronologicall errors in the Assyrian monarchie, [and] find[ing] out the *Quadrature* of a Square’ (I.55, I.85, I.106, I.23).

A recognition of hardship, boredom, and lethargy is hardly surprising given the *Anatomy*’s sheer size and the history of its development. Over the three decades following its publication in 1621, the text appeared in five further editions until the sixth and final one, published posthumously in 1651. The already expansive and winding first edition, of some 353,369 words, underwent a considerable and recurrent process of authorial revision characterised by textual expansion, with the sixth edition coming in at 516,384 words.<sup>131</sup> That the length of the text increases by a third is a testament to the governing nature of Burtonian revision: his process is largely one of accretion, with each new edition containing added words, sentences, and entire paragraphs throughout the body of the text, as well as various new paratextual material at different stages.<sup>132</sup> The apparently unwieldy growth of the *Anatomy*, as well as its stylistic excesses and exuberances – its lengthy paratactic sentences, its author’s tendency towards extensive listing, its persistently digressive nature – have led some critics to consider Burton a helpless, compulsive, and haphazard accumulator of material, to the structural detriment of his text.<sup>133</sup> These

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<sup>131</sup> Rhonda L. Blair, Thomas C. Faulkner and Nicolas K. Kiessling, ‘Textual Introduction’, in Burton, R., *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 1, eds. Blair, Faulkner and Kiessling (Oxford: 1989), p.xxxviii. The expansion was not only textual but material: whilst the first edition of the *Anatomy* was published in quarto format, subsequent editions were too large and were consequently published in folios, whose size and bulk led to obviously different kinds of reading experience.

<sup>132</sup> For an extended bibliographic description and statistical analysis of the growth of the *Anatomy*, see Blair, Faulkner and Kiessling, 1989, pp.xxxvii-xliv. Given the *Anatomy*’s singular genesis, remarkably little bibliographic scholarship has been done on Burton’s revisionary practice or the *Anatomy*’s textual development. Kiessling has performed the impressive task of providing an enumerative bibliography; see Nicolas K. Kiessling, *The Library of Robert Burton* (Oxford: 1988). Blair has observed a pattern of lexical revision in a short article; see Rhonda L. Blair, ‘Robert Burton’s ‘agony’: A Pattern of Revision Made for the Sixth Edition of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*’, *The Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America* 78:2 (1984), 215-18.

<sup>133</sup> See eg Roger Pooley, *English Prose of the Seventeenth Century* (London: 1992), p.197. Much of this kind of scholarship follows psychoanalytic or what Richard Strier has named ‘new humoralist’ readings (essentially conservative understandings of the early modern body indebted to the methodologies of both ‘old’ and ‘new’ historicisms) that take a literalist view of the *Anatomy*’s excesses as an anxious or inadvertent

arguments regularly recruit the slipperiness of the categories of cause, symptom, and cure in the *Anatomy* to indicate the way that Burton's amassing of competing sources leads not to a clarity of knowledge but to an obfuscation of it.<sup>134</sup> Others have attempted to accommodate the structural confusion of the *Anatomy* into an overarching and deliberate artistic vision, with Ruth A. Fox most notably describing the text as a 'tangled chain' in which we might see 'diversity through the unity imposed upon multiplicity by the structure of anatomy'.<sup>135</sup> The 'structure of anatomy' that Fox refers to is key to understanding the formal and aesthetic qualities of Burton's text, since it is this classical *divisio* that is its structural paradigm. But, as we have seen, throughout the *Anatomy* this method falters beneath the proliferation of particulars and the dissolution of categorical boundaries. This proliferation of parts is even rendered visible in the synoptic tables introducing each partition, which, ostensibly designed to aid the reading process by graphically outlining the process of division in the text, instead just confound and confuse, as their branches devolve into a jumble of repetition and excessive furcation.<sup>136</sup> As what Stanley Fish has described as Burton's 'double game [...] the impulse to anatomize and the impulse to assimilate' leads to a disruption of the possibility of discerning clear knowledge, the rapidly expanding *Anatomy* appears to fall into structural and aesthetic confusion.<sup>137</sup>

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expression of the psychophysiological melancholic subject. Christopher Tilmouth, 'Burton's "Turning Picture": Argument and Anxiety in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*', *The Review of English Studies* 56:226 (2005), p.543.; Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: 1996), p.35-68. See Richard Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton* (Chicago: 2011), p.7. Such readings also suffer from generalising remarks regarding the nature of Burtonian revision: whilst the text expands, it is indicative that the editors of the Clarendon edition observe that the most pervasive revisionary act is the careful deletion of apparently superfluous conjunctions and phrases. See Blair, Faulkner and Kiessling, 1989, p.lii.

<sup>134</sup> See, for eg: R. Grant Williams, 'Disfiguring the Body of Knowledge: Anatomical Discourse and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*', *English Literary History* 68:3 (2001), 593-613.

<sup>135</sup> Ruth A. Fox, *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Berkeley, LA & London: 1976), p.9. Sawday has also argued that the *Anatomy* 'may be thought of as a cathedral, but gothic rather than baroque – a vast creation continually evolving as new architectural forms come into vogue and are incorporated into the larger structure.' See Jonathan Sawday, 'Shapeless Elegance: Robert Burton's Anatomy of Knowledge', in *English Renaissance Prose: History, Language, and Politics*, ed. Neil Rhodes (Tempe, AZ: 1997), p.178.

<sup>136</sup> For these synopses as an indication of a decayed Ramism, see David Renaker, 'Robert Burton and Ramist Method', *Renaissance Quarterly* 24:2 (1971), 210-20.

<sup>137</sup> Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, LA & London: 1972), p.322.

Burton, however, not only admits to such confusion, but openly plays with it, colouring the *Anatomy* with a depth of ludic irony often not adequately accounted for. Appearing to bemoan the required haste of delivering his manuscript to the printing press, Burton apologises for the state of his work:

Another maine fault is, that I have not revised the Copie, and amended the stile, which now flowes remisly, as it was first conceived, but my leasure would not permit [...]. I confesse it is neither as I would, or as it should be. [...] Or as *Alexander* the Physition would have done by *Lapis Lazuli*, fifty times washed it before it be used, I should have revised, corrected, and amended this tract; but I had not (as I said) that happy leasure.

(I.16-17)

Yet this apology for his style which ‘flowes remisly’, and which he elsewhere describes as his ‘extemporanean stile’, is laced with irony, not least the fact that this very passage underwent extensive correction, revision, and augmentation in all five editions subsequent to its first publication (I.17). In referring to his unedited ‘Copie’, a word connoting all of the abundance enshrined by humanist rhetorical culture, Burton also invokes the father of that abundant style, Erasmus, the opening dedicatory epistle of whose *De copia* (1512) begins with a similar ‘regret that the present work has not received the careful revision it should have had.’<sup>138</sup> Such an allusion to the consummate handbook celebrating rhetorical copia – and an allusion that itself enlists not a little of the modesty *topos* – suggests that Burton’s discussion of his stylistic failures in the *Anatomy* is more ironic than genuine. Indeed, after figuring himself as ‘enforced, as a Beare doth her whelps, to bring forth this confused lumpe, I had not time to licke it into forme’, he claims that as a consequence

I doe ordinarily speake, without affectation of big words, fustian phrases, jingling termes, tropes, strong lines, that like *Acesta’s* arrowes cought fire as they flew; straines of wit, brave heats, elogies, hyperbollicall exornations, elegancies, &c. which many so much affect.

(I.17)

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<sup>138</sup> Erasmus, ‘*Copia: Foundations of the Abundant Style / De duplici copia verborum ac rerum commentarii duo*’, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 24, trans. Betty I. Knott (Toronto: 1978), p.285.

Initially claiming that he writes in a plain or ‘ordinary’ style, the logic of Burton’s list collapses in on itself as not only the trope of *synathrosemus* but the very language it concludes with – ‘elogies, hyperbollicall exornations, elegancies’ – exemplify the ‘fustian phrases’, ‘jingling termes’, and ‘tropes’ which he disavows. Denying his own stylistic ‘affectation’ whilst observing the ‘affect’ of others draws attention to the pun, whereby the affectation might be either a performance or the condition of being afflicted by a disease. The identification of the textual body of the *Anatomy* with the melancholic humour with which it concerns itself is something that is constantly and wryly observed within the book: in insisting that he writes to ‘avoid Melancholy’ or ‘exercise’ himself, puns on voidance and exorcism figure the textual product as melancholic, waste material.

Throughout his self-conscious commentary upon his own style, then, Burton maintains an ironic ambivalence regarding whether the structural and aesthetic qualities of his *Anatomy* are a deliberate performance – an extended rhetorical play – or the unintended but unavoidable consequences of a labour too great and unwieldy to control or carry out effectively. As his ‘affected’ style hovers ambiguously between isomorphically resembling the chaotic melancholy which he attempts to anatomise, or else deliberately and playfully ‘usurp[ing]’ the Democritean ‘habite’ for rhetorical effect, we begin to witness how a poetics of playing labour might come to embrace or even promote incoherence or indeterminacy within its aesthetic vision (I.3). As Anna K. Nardo suggests, this nature of play ‘is paradoxical because players are never what or where they are. Play creates self-referential paradoxes [...] and it locates players in a double position as actors and definers of their actions.’<sup>139</sup> Of particular note in Burton’s ‘self-referential paradoxes’ is the way that they recurrently involve the experientially mimetic nature of his textual stylistics observed above: as he performs the excesses and confusion metonymically associated with his melancholic subject, the *Anatomy* begins to embody those very qualities. The distance between player and performance becomes obscure; how might we know the dancer from the dance? The game playing, then, works against the impulses of his professed anatomical labour: as one attempts to establish epistemological, structural, and aesthetic clarity upon a melancholic world, the other tends towards disruption and distortion. And as a consequence of the irreconcilable nature of paradoxes, the

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<sup>139</sup> Anna K. Nardo, *The Ludic Self in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (Albany: 1991), p.146.

*Anatomy* comes to be seen as a text that both ludically and anxiously – summarily encompassing the twin aspects of the Democritean *persona* – refutes clear understanding.

### **X: *Per Ambages*: The Labyrinthine Text**

Burton's claim to write in the plain style – 'without affectation of big words' – runs throughout 'Democritus Junior to the Reader'. He self-deprecatingly identifies himself as 'a loose, plaine, rude writer' who 'call[s] a spade a spade': distinguishing between *res* and *verba*, the things and words whose relationship forms the conceptual core of classical rhetorical *inventio*, Burton affirms 'I respect matter not words [...] rather what, then how to write' (I.17). Quintilian, in the *Institutio Oratoria*, writes that '[w]hat I want is *care* [*curam*] for words, but *deep concern* [*sollicitudinem*] for the subject [*res*]. Most commonly, the best words are bound up with the subject, and are discovered by their own light'.<sup>140</sup> Quintilian's comments mirror the sense of the primacy of '*res*' that, on the surface, Burton also affirms: words, 'bound up' as they are with things, ought to issue organically and plainly from their subject matter, and the distinction between '*curam*' and '*sollicitudinem*' recruits the pharmaceutical ambivalence of '*cura*' – both care and caution – to warn against 'the translucent and many-coloured style' of writers who prioritise vain words over things.<sup>141</sup> As Terence Cave has demonstrated, however, during early modernity, and borne particularly out of Erasmus's *De copia*, 'the classic mimetic model [whereby] words copy or represent the objects of thought' is 'disturbed, if not inverted. *Res* do not emerge from the mind as spontaneous 'ideas'; they are already there, embedded in language, forming the materials of a writing exercise.'<sup>142</sup> The implications of this are twofold: on the one hand, verbiage as *copia* becomes the source of invention itself; on the other, words, unanchored as they are from prior objects, become either worryingly indeterminate or 'a true plenitude' based in 'inventive and imaginative richness.'<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.318-319.

<sup>141</sup> Quintilian, 2014, vol. 3, 319.

<sup>142</sup> Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: 1979), p.19.

<sup>143</sup> Cave, 1979, p.21.



This modified conception of the relationship between words and things, and how this semiotic relationship is fundamental to an understanding of literary and rhetorical style, helps expose the playful yet serious ironies with which Burton discusses his own writing. For in spite of his pretensions to ‘*expresse my selfe readily & plainely as it happens*’, Burton’s excessive, regularly tortuous, occasionally startling and abrupt prose, rich as it is with rhetorical ornamentation, pushes back against such claims (I.18). Describing his writing, Burton enlists the classical trope of style as a river:

So that as a River runnes sometimes precipitate and swift, then dull and slow; now direct, then *per ambages*; now deepe, then shallow; now muddy, then cleare; now broad, then narrow; doth my stile flow: now serious, then light; now Comicall, then Satyricall; now more elaborate, then remisse, as the present subject required, or as that time I was affected.

(1.18)

Burton’s often ‘muddy’ and sometimes ‘cleare’ river travesties the ‘magnificent and impressive’ ‘speech of man’ described by Erasmus, which ‘surges along like a golden river, with thoughts and words pouring out in rich abundance.’<sup>144</sup> But it equally travesties the imagery of neo-Stoic philosophers such as Justus Lipsius, who writes in his *Two Bookes of Constancie* that ‘[a]s some riuers are said to runne through the sea and yet kep their streame fresh: So shalt thou passe through the confused tumultes of this world, and not be infected with any brynish saltnes of this Sea of sorrowes’.<sup>145</sup> Burton’s pronouncement that he writes ‘as the present subject required’ suggests the sense of decorum with which words naturally follow subject-matter, but immediately Burton puns once again on ‘affected’ to suggest that this might all be an act – elsewhere, apparently apologising for the various ‘faults’ of his style, he wryly and parenthetically admits ‘(?tis partly affected)’ (I.12). Inverting Lipsius’s clear streams devoid of passionate corruption, his image also suggests a style propelled if not characterised by passionate overflow. As verbal style itself becomes Burton’s subject, the sentence, replete with figuration, parataxis, and juxtaposition, appears to instantiate the priority of words over things, propelling itself on with its own *copia*. The description exhibits the kind of dizzying reflexivity characteristic of Burton’s

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<sup>144</sup> Erasmus, 1978, p.295.

<sup>145</sup> Justus Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, trans. John Stradling (London: 1595), p.14.

games: as language comes to be mimetic of Burton's melancholic subject, with both content and form mirroring the chaos and mutability of melancholy itself, does plain style in which things are described clearly in befitting language cave in upon itself in a moment of expressive failure? Or is it all simply for play?

Implied and embedded in Burton's river simile is the hint of another self-referential image cluster that seams the *Anatomy*, one which helps to answer these questions about the relationship between mimetic stylistics and the therapeutic efficacy of the text. As he describes his sometimes meandering style as '*per ambages*', he recruits a vocabulary that, within classical literature, specifically connotes the winding ways of labyrinths.<sup>146</sup> With its Greek root *ambi-* (both, or around), the word describes both circuitous and winding passages, digressive or evasive circumlocution, and mental confusion or uncertainty.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, Burton invokes the labyrinth explicitly as a metaphor for his own textual enterprise:

To insist in all particulars were an *Herculean taske*, to reckon up *insanas substructiones, insanos labores, insanum luxum*, madde labours, mad bookes, endeavours, [...] stupend structures, as those *Ægyptian* pyramids, Labirinth and Sphinges, [...] it would aske an expert *Vesalius* to anatomize every member.

(I.106)

The process of anatomization – the detailing of 'particulars', whose difficulty calls for the skill of that great early modern anatomist, Vesalius – is once again analogized as a '*Hercluean taske*', a 'madde labour' that is compared to the divagations and riddling conspiracies of labyrinths and sphinxes, tropes associated with romance. Indeed, in moving from the Latin '*insanos labores*' to the image of the labyrinth, Burton puns on the folk etymological derivation of 'laborintus' – the common medieval spelling of the word – from *labor* (Lat. = hardship, work, fall, perish, or err) and *intus* (Lat. =

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<sup>146</sup> See Virgil, 'Aeneid', in *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid: Books 1-6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.534 [6.29.]; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 1, trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.416. [8.157-175]. Ovid, describing the '*ambages*' of the labyrinth, likens the course to the 'watery Meander [... which] flows back and forth in doubtful course', a collocation of imagery that likely influenced Burton's metaphors here. Ovid, 2014, p.417.

<sup>147</sup> Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: 1990), p.53.

into, within). The labyrinth thus becomes for Burton a site of labour – even a textual labour – which dovetails a difficult yet salutary process with the dangers of errancy, fallenness, and death.

This paradox disclosed by its etymology – that it might equally be considered edifying work or a scene of postlapsarian perdition – is just the first of a number of such contrarities that the image of the labyrinth has contained throughout its cultural history. Penelope Reed Doob, tracing the development of the idea of the labyrinth from the ancient world to the Middle Ages, observes ‘one major paradox inherent in the labyrinth image: its status as simultaneously a great and complex work of art and confusing place of interminable wandering – the labyrinth as order and as chaos, depending on the observer’s knowledge and perspective.’<sup>148</sup> The aesthetic or affective response that the labyrinth stimulates is equally twofold: on the one hand, its demonstration of elaborate aesthetic accomplishment provokes wonder or delight; on the other, its impression of confusing and inscrutable disorder might provoke rather anxiety, fear, or despair. There are, moreover, two competing models of labyrinthine structure, each paradigm having its own moral psychological and epistemological implications attendant upon it. In the unicursal model, a single, circuitous path leads to the centre of the maze and back out again. The destination is invisible, and the journey laborious, but there are no choices to be made. In the multicursal model, on the other hand, the traveller is met with bifurcations and crossroads, demanding both the necessity for choice and the very real danger of getting lost. Ovid, describing the famous Cretan multicursal labyrinth, narrates how its architect Daedalus ‘confused the usual passages and deceived the eye by a conflicting maze of divers winding paths [*errorum variarum ambage viarum*]’ to the extent that he himself was ‘scarce able to find his way back to the place of entry’.<sup>149</sup> The winding paths – the very ‘ambages’ that Burton refers to – come to represent both diversity and a consequent unnavigability. The variety exhibited by the multicursal labyrinth – of pathways, of choices – is a signal not only of aesthetic complexity, but also of moral and epistemological difficulty.

The association between labyrinths, variety, and epistemology led the elaborate maze to become an apt image for the teeming plurality of the natural

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<sup>148</sup> Doob, 1990, p.18. Doob’s thorough history of the labyrinth in Western culture informs much of the following discussion.

<sup>149</sup> Ovid, 2014, pp.417-419.

world. Aelian, whom Burton regularly cites, observes how ‘poets celebrate certain labyrinths in Crete. They have yet to learn of the elaborate tracks with their mazy windings dug by ants in the earth.’<sup>150</sup> Invoking an analogy between the entomological and the human, the ‘tortuous’ dwellings of the ants are proof both of their artistic skill and of the practical power of their artifices ‘to render access difficult or totally impossible.’<sup>151</sup> Implicit in this comparison, too, is the macrocosmic architect, the creator whose ingenuity and cosmic brilliance is testified by the layers of labyrinths visible in the world. As we move into early modernity, however, the valence of the labyrinth image and its association with natural complexity changes. Francis Bacon, for instance, in the preface to *The Great Instauration*, writes:

the universe to the eye of the human understanding is framed like a labyrinth, presenting as it does on every side so many ambiguities of way, such deceitful resemblances of objects and signs, natures so irregular in their lines, and so knotted and entangled. And then the way is still to be made by the uncertain light of the sense, sometimes shining out, sometimes clouded over, through the woods of experience and particulars[.]<sup>152</sup>

Complaining of the waywardness of knowledge, and its urgent need for reform, Bacon couches the shortcomings of ‘human understanding’ in the image of the ‘labyrinth’ and describes epistemological error in the language of romance errancy: the ‘ambiguities of ways’, ‘deceitful resemblances’, nature ‘knotted and entangled’, and the wandering ‘woods of experience and particulars’. As Peter Harrison has demonstrated, the experimentalist tradition, of which Bacon is considered the founder, was ‘deeply indebted to Augustinian views about the limitations of human knowledge in the wake of the Fall’.<sup>153</sup> For Bacon, the theological anthropology attendant upon the Fall comprises the disturbance of the natural faculties – the understanding’s ability to correlate ‘objects and signs’, the ‘uncertain light of the sense’ – and the resultant natural world is labyrinthine, an elaborate aesthetic object made a mystery to humanity in its postlapsarian state.<sup>154</sup> He hopes, however, that the

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<sup>150</sup> Aelian, *On Animals*, vol. 2, trans. A. F. Schofield (Cambridge, MA: 1958), p.61.

<sup>151</sup> Aelian, 1958, p.61.

<sup>152</sup> Francis Bacon, *The New Organon and Related Writings*, ed. Fulton H. Anderson (New York & Indianapolis: 1960), p.12

<sup>153</sup> Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: 2007), p.8.

<sup>154</sup> For a thorough account of the Augustinian influence on early modern understandings of theological anthropology and its relation to the emergence of the

inauguration of the new experimental method might result in ‘the opening of the ways of sense and the increase of natural light’: in the labyrinthine world, experimental knowledge might offer up ‘a clue’, the thread that leads the wanderer out of error.<sup>155</sup>

Bacon’s use of the labyrinth within this context provides an enlightening parallel to Burton’s own use of the image in the *Anatomy*. On the one hand, he plainly acknowledges that ‘the world it selfe is a maze, a labyrinth of errors’ (I.273). Elsewhere, observing once again the sheer difficulty of his task, Burton writes:

In this Labyrinth of accidentall causes, the farther I wander the more intricate I finde the passage, *multæ ambages*, and new causes, as so many by-paths offer themselves to be discussed: to search out all, were an *Herculean* worke, and fitter for *Theseus*: I will follow mine intended thred; and point onely at some few of the chiefest.

(I.356)

Yet again, Burton collocates Hercules and Theseus as classical archetypes of labourer and labyrinthine escapee, explicitly associates ‘*ambages*’ with mazes, and invokes the language of romance wandering. Of particular note here, though, is that just as for Bacon the paths of the ‘woods’ are ‘of experience and particulars’, the ‘by-paths’ of Burton’s maze are of ‘accidentall causes’. What both writers are registering here, as Murphy has demonstrated, is the sceptical trope of ‘the anxiety of variety’: whilst Bacon complains of the ‘deficiencies of metaphysics’ in their moving too far from particularity, such particularity presents its ‘own epistemological problems’, namely how any kind of schematic generalities might be drawn out of such abundant variety.<sup>156</sup> Elsewhere, Burton describes this proliferation of ‘accidental causes’ as the ‘obscurity therefore, variety, and confused mixture, of Symptomes, causes’, where the difficulty of making ‘any certainty or distinction among so many casualties, distractions’ renders both melancholy – and, as the anatomy of that very subject,

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New Science, see Harrison, 2007, chapter 4. We might also recall the final lines of *Paradise Lost* – ‘They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way’ – in which Milton invokes the trope of labyrinthine, romance wandering to describe the fallen state: Milton, 2007, XII.648-49.

<sup>155</sup> Bacon, 1960, pp.15, 12.

<sup>156</sup> Murphy, 2012, p.110-11. See also Kathryn Murphy, ‘A Disagreeing Likeness: Michel de Montaigne, Robert Burton, and the Problem of Idiosyncrasy’, in *Montaigne in Transit: Essays in Honour of Ian Maclean*, eds. Neil Kenny, Richard Scholar, and Wes Williams (Cambridge: 2016), pp.223-238.

Burton's textual body – a 'Labyrinth of doubts and errors' (I.171). Confronted with such variety of paths, Burton is forced to 'follow mine intended thread': to 'extricate [him] selfe' from the labyrinth, he 'will adventure through the midst of these perplexities [...] led by the clue or thread of the best Writers' (I.171).

It is in the nature of each writer's 'clue or thread' that we find the major difference between Bacon's and Burton's (attempted) resolutions to this problem of variety. In *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (1690), Bacon celebrates how 'beautiful again is that allegory of the labyrinth; under which the general nature of mechanics is represented', an allegory which, he explains, is based on 'their subtlety, their intricate variety, the apparent likeness of one part to the other, which scarcely any judgement can order or discriminate, but only the clue of experiment'.<sup>157</sup> Both he and Burton might be understood as grappling with the dialectic method of 'ordering' and 'discriminating' like and unlike phenomena. But for Bacon, the natural world and the laws of 'mechanics', just like the labyrinth, might be 'ordered' or mastered by the empirical method, a turn to the particularities of the world revealed through experiment. Burton's 'thread', on the other hand, is not experiment upon the book of nature but rather upon books themselves, the clue 'of the best Writers'. The metaphor of the 'thread' that weaves through Burton's library exposes, here, a series of interlinked lexical clusters that combine tropes of labyrinths and tapestries with textuality: 'perplexity' (Lat. *plectere* – to twine), entanglement, text (Lat. *textere* – that which is woven). In early modernity, thanks to the resemblance of their names and their association with threads, the figure of Arachne – treated in the above discussion of 'Muiopotmos' – was regularly linked or conflated with that of Ariadne, as in the famous crux from *Troilus and Cressida* in which Shakespeare refers to 'Ariachne's broken woof', the name sonically merging both the spidery tapestry-weaver and the possessor of the labyrinth's clue.<sup>158</sup> Issuing from this complex of images, both labyrinths and, as we saw before, tapestries, become metonymic for complex textuality.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Francis Bacon, 'De Sapientia Veterum', in *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. John M. Robertson (London: 2013), p.843.

<sup>158</sup> William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. David Bevington (London: 2015), V.ii.159.

<sup>159</sup> We might also recall from the previous chapter that Burton considers his text a kind of tapestry – a 'Rhapsody of Rags' (I.12) – which also informs a poetics of complexity throughout the *Anatomy*. For the relation of the tapestry image to the commonplace tradition, see Walter Ong, 'Commonplace Rhapsody: Ravius Textor,

What we find, then, is that the labyrinth image becomes not only a metaphor for Burton's route through the 'vast *Chaos* and confusion of Bookes' that comprises his library, but – with Burton as both reader and author, his text as both glorified commonplace book and coherent whole – an image for the *Anatomy* itself, a confusing mass designed to befuddle human understanding, where the synoptic tables become an apt graphic representation of the dizzying *bivia* of the textual maze (I.11). Indeed, the experience of reading the *Anatomy* – the confusion, the confrontation with incoherence, the temptation of epistemological despair – offers, by proxy, the experience of the fallen world in textual form. At the very start of the First Partition, Burton identifies melancholy and fallenness as synonymous: 'Man', he writes, 'the most excellent, and noble creature of the World [...] is fallen from that he was, and forfeited his estate, become *miserabilis humuncio*, a cast-away, a catiffe, one of the most miserable creatures of the World' (I.121-22). Just as his textual style mimics the excesses and the disorder of the melancholic physiological body, so does it, by extension, mimic the excesses – the variety – and disorder of the fallen world. Yet again we come upon the paradoxical incompatibility between Burton's epistemological intent to anatomise melancholy and the therapeutic process of mimetic textuality and experience-by-proxy. A further irony for Burton, and for his anatomical method, is the fact that his authors, who provide his 'thread or clue', are equally subject to the debilitating effects of the Fall. The labour of traversing the mazy library – which, by metonymy, stands true also for the mazy world – is thwarted by the postlapsarian condition, the sceptical insistence on the inadequacy of language, human nature, and epistemology to bring into order the world's teeming multiplicity. The result of this confrontation with the bewildering and confusing world is terror and despair: we 'run earnestly on in this labyrinth of anxious and solicitous melancholy meditations' (I.243).

## **XI: *Ostomachia*: Burton's Kaleidoscopic Poetics**

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Zwinger and Shakespeare', in *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 1500-1700*, ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge: 1976), pp.91-126. For Burton's engagement with this trope as 'a tribute to Montaigne and the waning tradition of humanism', see Eric M. MacPhail, *Dancing Around the Well: The Circulation of Commonplaces in Renaissance Humanism* (Leiden: 2014), p.91.

‘No quality is so universall in this surface of things, as variety and diversity’, Montaigne writes in ‘Of experience’, the concluding piece in his *Essayes* (trans. John Florio, 1603).<sup>160</sup> In similar terms, Erasmus celebrates the variety of verbal copia, writing that

[v]ariety is so powerful in every sphere that there is absolutely nothing, however brilliant, which is not dimmed if not commended by variety. Nature above all delights in variety; in all this huge concourse of things, she has left nothing anywhere unpainted by her wonderful technique of variety.<sup>161</sup>

As we witnessed in the preceding chapter, it is just this kind of language that Burton uses to describe melancholy itself, that affliction so ‘various, so infinite, *Proteus* himselfe is not so divers’ (I.407). Elsewhere, describing love melancholy in similar terms, he observes that ‘the Symptomes of the minde in Lovers, are almost infinite, and so diverse, that no Art can comprehend them’, they are so ‘faire, fowle, and full of variation’ (III.148). Yet, here as in the first chapter, we find that the ‘infinite variety’ of melancholy’s manifestations – and the associated ‘infinite varieties’ of a fallen world characterised, or rather defined, by melancholy – frustrate the attempts of the anatomist to establish order over a disordered world and so aid the human condition in the manner recommended by the Delphic inscription *nosce teipsum* (I.243). Such radical variety, in the paradoxical manner implied by the juxtaposition of Montaigne’s ‘universall’ and ‘diversity’, is also a form of ubiquity that resists division and categorisation. The resultant text, like the world it resembles, is not so much a clarifying anatomy as a disorientating labyrinth.

Within this paradigm of the textual labyrinth, however, it is necessary to remember the various roles that Burton plays. For, with a shapeshifting playfulness befitting his Democritean *persona*, Burton inhabits numerous parts in this performance: he is Theseus, tracing clues through the labyrinth; he is Ariadne, leading his own readers, as we have previously seen, through the winding landscapes of the *Anatomy*; and he is Daedalus himself (whose name, etymologically meaning ‘cunning one’, recalls the *mētis* of the romance hero and romance writer), the master-architect of elaborate and terrifying artistic complexity.<sup>162</sup> If we consider the *Anatomy*

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<sup>160</sup> Montaigne, 2006, vol. 3, p.314.

<sup>161</sup> Erasmus, 1978, p.302.

<sup>162</sup> ‘Daedalus, n.’ *OED Online*, September 2019, oed.com/view/Entry/46841. Accessed 3 October 2019.



not an anxious, unintentional instantiation of fallen knowledge, but rather a deliberate imitation of the fallen world, then Burton's therapeutic offering of 'exercise' or labour through the mimetic qualities of his text not only works against but in fact subordinates his (apparent) epistemological agenda. For he might by turns lead his reader through the textual labyrinth, or, Theseus-like, play the part of the fellow, lost traveller, all the while presiding over the *Anatomy* as an aesthetic whole. The *Anatomy* as labyrinth provides an edifying reading experience since it takes only the well-trained, actively engaged reader – the Theseus of readers – to access and enjoy its benefits.

This work of reading comes in various forms. The Clarendon edition of Burton's work, with its three appended volumes of commentary, notes, translation, and source identification, attests to the extensive bibliographic and interpretive work the *Anatomy* demands. Angus Gowland has recently demonstrated how such textual labour is just the kind of reading that Burton, with his humanist education, would have expected from a particularly learned audience:

Such readers were expected to exercise their memory and literary discernment, and to appreciate the skilful deployment of quotations and bibliographical references, particularly by identifying changes of meaning generated by their transposition from old to new settings; and then, as they had been trained, to set such manoeuvres within an expansive web of literary references and intertextual allusions, using their ingenuity to supply the subtle and potentially multiple meanings that could arise from the appropriation of sources previously quoted or paraphrased by other authors.<sup>163</sup>

Gowland's work in this article of correcting mistakes, expanding the notes, and filling in holes in the commentary left by the Clarendon editors – and his account of the difficulties and 'bursts of pleasure' of that task – displays both the process and the payoff of such readerly labour.<sup>164</sup> In a similar vein, Stephanie Shirilan describes how reading Burton is 'necessarily an exercise in bibliography' which turns his 'bibliotherapy' into 'a game' of unravelling the 'complex interplay between source and citation' in the text.<sup>165</sup> Both Gowland's and Shirilan's comments upon the nature

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<sup>163</sup> Gowland, 2019, p.440.

<sup>164</sup> Gowland, 2019, p.440.

<sup>165</sup> Stephanie Shirilan, *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy* (Farnham: 2015), pp.24-25.

of carrying out scholarship on the *Anatomy* confirm the intimate relationship between work and pleasure, and figure reading the text as much as a form of playing labour as Burton represents the writing of it.

The forms of readerly work outlined above – the discovery of sources and subsequent textual interpretation, requiring profound memory and deep erudition – are part of a grander pedagogical enterprise on Burton’s part to shape his readership. Gowland concludes his essay with the provocative reminder that ‘we should not lose sight of the transformative potential of reading, which suggests another possibility: that engaging with the book might turn each of us into a different kind of reader’.<sup>166</sup> One such ‘transformative’ effect of reading – one which involves both a change in how one reads the book, and as a consequence how one reads a world (in other words, a hermeneutic change effects ethical change) – is disclosed through just the kind of bibliographic work Gowland and Shirilan describe. In the prefatory letter to *Cento Nuptialis*, Ausonius – the fourth-century poet whose writings, as we saw in the previous chapter, were foundational for Burton’s own understandings of his *cento*’s aesthetic qualities – conjures a simile to describe how the *cento* form operates:

[S]o that you may say it is like the puzzle which the Greeks have called *ostomachia*. There you have little pieces of bone, fourteen in number and representing geometrical figures. [...] By fitting these pieces together in various ways, pictures of countless objects are produced: a monstrous elephant, a brutal boar, a goose in flight, and a gladiator in armour, a huntsman crouching down, and a dog barking – even a tower and a tankard and numberless other things of this sort, whose variety depends upon the skill of the player. But while the harmonious arrangement of the skilful is marvellous, the jumble made by the unskilled is grotesque.<sup>167</sup>

Articulating once again the *cento*’s recombinant poetics – the way that its author ‘has to gather up scattered tags and fit these mangled scraps together into a whole’ – this image also represents the text as a game in which players compete to create ‘numberless’ images out of a finite number of pieces.<sup>168</sup> The game works through a kaleidoscopic aesthetic: variety is celebrated in the face of relative paucity of matter. This variety, however, is specifically not the product of infinite and thoughtless

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<sup>166</sup> Gowland, 2019, p.466.

<sup>167</sup> Ausonius, ‘Cento Nuptialis’, in *Ausonius*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.375.

<sup>168</sup> Ausonius, 2014, p.371.

combinations of pieces of bone. The need for skilfulness makes this game another rendition of ‘playing labour’, and ‘marvel’ might only be inspired through talent, and not through the ‘grotesque’ products of a ‘jumble’.

This kaleidoscopic image recalls Burton’s adoption of the Lucretian image of the ‘four and twenty letters [that] make [...] variety of words in divers languages’ to describe the sheer variety of melancholy’s legibility, an image that, we might recollect, he invokes simultaneously with a reference to Ausonius’s epigram on Echo (I.407). The mathematical puzzle *ostomachia*, which it is generally agreed finds its first written record in some fragments by Archimedes, can also be found in Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, in which the poet describes ‘a square, / A single shape, [that] may be made up of parts / Of different shape and form.’<sup>169</sup> Burton is, of course, keen to ward off any suspicion of atheism that might be aroused by his Democritean persona and its association with Epicureanism: on the first page of the *Anatomy*’s preface, he disavows the atomic theory of ‘Democritus [...] Epicurus, and their Master *Leucippus* of old’, alluding directly to Lucretius’s image of atoms colliding like ‘Motes in the Sunne’ (I.i).<sup>170</sup> Yet lurking in allusions beneath his text, Lucretian physics and a *centonist* poetics drawn from Ausonius repeatedly surface hand-in-hand.

In the same way that Ausonius co-opts the image of the game of *ostomachia* from Lucretius in order to express the kind of playing labour associated with the *cento*’s poetics, so too Burton draws on a string of Lucretian images to construct a kind of reading, which we might understand as a hermeneutics, with which to approach his own text.<sup>171</sup> Gerard Passannante observes that one of the most powerful ideas bequeathed to the Renaissance via the Lucretian doctrine of matter – that the teeming diversity of the world is made up of a finite number of essential

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<sup>169</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald Melville (Oxford: 2008), II.777-779. For a brief history of the *ostomachia* and its presence in Lucretius’s poem, see H. J. Rose, ‘Lucretius ii. 778-83’, *The Classical Review* 6:1 (1956), pp.6-7.

<sup>170</sup> Lucretius, 2008, II.114–22

<sup>171</sup> Burton’s knowledge of Lucretius’s poem is profound: he quotes Lucretius over twenty times, and a copy and translation of a fragment of the poem in Burton’s own hand have been found on a flyleaf between two titles in the Library of Christ Church, Oxford; see Nicolas K. Kiessling, ‘Two Notes on Robert Burton’s Annotations: His Date of Conception, and a Fragment of Copy for the *Anatomy of Melancholy*’, *The Review of English Studies* 36:143 (1985), 375-379. Treatments of Burton’s Epicureanism, whilst brief, have tended to focus on his Stoicism: see Jeremy Schmidt, ‘Melancholy and the Therapeutic Language of Seventeenth-Century Thought’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65:4 (2004), 583-601.

particles – is ‘the use of multiple interpretations of a word or passage’.<sup>172</sup> For the alphabetical metaphor is at its essence not a metaphor, but a call to attention of the very fundamentals of written linguistic communication, the construction of a plenitude of words and meanings from a finite set of graphemes, which finds its structural correspondent in an atomist conception of physics. Shirilan suggests that ‘Epicurean physics and theories of mutability’ undergird ‘Burton’s broader interest in and understanding of the creative and curative powers of transformation,’ and, indeed, the ludic dynamics of the *ostomachia* provide a useful model for conceptualising how Burton’s text inhabits such mutability.<sup>173</sup> The *Anatomy*’s state of ongoing incompleteness and repeated revision, and its representation of radical indeterminacy – both in terms of its refusal or inability to happily separate cause, symptom, and cure, and in its own generic instability (‘I did sometime laugh and scoffe with *Lucian*, and Satyrically taxe with *Menippus*, lament with *Heraclitus*’ he knowingly jokes (I.5)) – enshrine a transformist philosophy in which all things exist in a state of mutable becoming.<sup>174</sup>

In this sense, within Burton’s therapeutic enterprise, the *ostomachia* supplants the labyrinth as the prevailing emblem of his book. Where radical scepticism and the attendant fear and despair in the face of unnavigable variety haunt the labyrinthine text, the inducement to marvel and play in plurality represented by the game of bones transforms – in Epicurean fashion – fear into wonder and despair into hope. Where we have seen Burton, from the beginning of the First Partition, identify melancholy with the postlapsarian state, he simultaneously identifies this consequence of the Fall as the vehicle to redemption. Melancholy is visited upon humanity ‘[t]o punish therefore this blindness and obstinacy of ours, as a

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<sup>172</sup> Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago & London: 2011), p.109.

<sup>173</sup> Shirilan, 2015, p.148. Shirilan’s consideration of Burton’s Epicureanism focuses on the ‘Digression of Air’ and the spiritual evacuation of melancholy, whereas here my contention is that atomist structures and the Epicurean consolation of turning pain into pleasure inform and inspire Burton’s understanding of his own textual dynamics and its relation to its therapeutic efficacy. For the relation of Lucretian physics to the Renaissance interest in textual criticism and material textuality, see Passannante, 2011, introduction.

<sup>174</sup> The way in which texts’ ‘mobile structure embodies the prevailing transformist philosophy’ is just one of the ways in which Michel Jeanneret sees the Renaissance celebrating mutability rather than despairing of it. See Michel Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion: Transforming Shapes in the Renaissance from da Vinci to Montaigne* (Baltimore & London: 2001), p.2, passim.

concomitant cause, and principall agent’ and ‘to chastise us [...] for our sinnes, and to satisfie Gods wrath’, but ‘these chastisements are inflicted upon us for our humiliation, to exercise and try our patience here in this life, to bring us home, to make us knowe God and our selves, to informe, & teach us wisdome’ (I.123-24). The Fall is, from the off, recognised in all of its pharmaceutical legibility as both curse and path to homecoming. In no uncertain terms, Burton notes melancholy’s role in the providential vision of a benevolent God, since ‘[b]odily sicknesse is for his soules health [...] *for the Lord correcteth whom he loveth, even as a father doth his childe*’ (I.124-5). Yet it is not merely the recognition of this that is the key to the condition’s alleviation: the emphasis is on the pedagogical value of labour, on the ‘exercise’ and ‘trial’ to ‘teach us wisdome’. Burton’s labyrinthine text mirrors the fallen world in order to provide for his readers a proxy ground on which to learn the means to a salvific homecoming. The lesson learnt is a hermeneutic one: in the face of both the fallen world and Burton’s *Anatomy*, the reader must learn not to quail at the prospect of unmanageable disorder, nor to impose fixed order on a world animated by mutability. Rather, like the *ostomachia*, which momentarily entertains temporary fixity and significance before reordering itself into a marvellous, new, and equally temporary fixity, they must allow world and text to remain in a wondrous state of continuous becoming.

## **XII: Coda: Everything is Being Cleansed**

The hermeneutics of playing labour elaborated in Spenser’s and Burton’s writing – and exhibited in the generative semiotic freedom of language, in the flexibility of equity, in the kaleidoscopic dynamics of the *ostomachia*, in the endless transformation of matter and its cycling adoption of different forms – seeks to inure the reader to the world’s mutability. More than that, it seeks to demonstrate that mutability – and its associations of error, inscrutability, decay, and death – is not a cause of despair but of celebration, a sign of the beauty and wonder of divine creation. Mutability is the condition of humankind and of the fallen world, and a recognition of this – in an embracing of semantic and ontological complexity, in the cultivation of a philosophy of care and sympathy, and in an appreciation of the salutary aspects of work – is the path to ethical and spiritual reformation. Elucidating the Parable of the Leaven –

‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman taketh and hideth in three pecks of meal, till all be leavened’ (Matthew 13:33) – Luther observes the intrinsically processional, even arduous, nature of reformation:

This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly; not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.<sup>175</sup>

Recalling the quotation with which this chapter started, and his identification of humanity’s created purpose as work and not leisure, Luther once again endorses ‘exercise’ rather than ‘rest’. This work is aligned with the pursuit of ‘godliness’ and ‘health’. The fallen world and the labour with which it tasks us is not figured as punishment, but as the promise of redemption: ‘we are on the way’. Just as the leaven resides invisible in the dough, so too perfection is immanent in the fallen subject, though as yet unperfect. ‘Becoming’ is exalted over ‘being’, and as we ourselves are subject to the tides of change, the destination is not perdition but the realisation of ourselves, through work, as refined and ‘cleansed’ gems, gleaming and sparkling. Reading the parable in this way, Luther implies, is part of that very work.

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<sup>175</sup> Luther, 1958, vol. 32, p.24.



## 4.

### RECREATION AND RAVISHMENT:

#### *On Digression*

#### **I: Expatiating in Delightful Fields: The Digressive Impulse**

Spenser and Burton begin their endings in remarkably similar ways. At the opening of the proem to the Legend of Courtesy, the final completed book of the 1596 *Faerie Queene*, the narrator describes the relief and refreshment which this book, and its final excursion into Faerie Lond, provide him:

The waies, through which my weary steps I guyde,  
In this delightfull land of Faery,  
Are so exceeding spacious and wyde,  
And sprinckled with such sweet variety,  
Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye,  
That I nigh rauisht with rare thoughts delight,  
My tedious trauell doe forget thereby;  
And when I gin to feele decay of might,  
It strength to me supplies, and chears my dulled spright.

(VI.Proem.1)

Critics have regularly recognised in this stanza – and in the proem to the Legend of Courtesy in general, which in verdant terms describes the ‘sacred nursery / Of vertue’ wherein grows the ‘flowre’ and ‘bloosme of comely courtesie’ (VI.Proem.3.1-2, VI.Proem.4.1-2) – a tonal ‘return to the pastoral mode which the poet had formally relinquished in the Proem to book I’, one which prefigures the ‘small repose’ of the pastoral interlude which the legend’s knight, Calidore, enjoys in the



final cantos of the poem (VI.ix.31.9).<sup>1</sup> Yet this pastoral retreat is also figured as a kind of narratorial wandering: the ‘exceeding spacious and wyde’ ‘waies’ offer refreshment and lead the narrator’s ‘weary steps’ away from the narrow path, recalling both Clarion’s flitting through the pleasure garden in ‘Muiopotmos’ and the errant, erotic trajectories of the knights in the Ariostan romance narratives of Books III and IV. Ever since Patricia Parker’s seminal work on the dilatory poetics of romance, digression has been seen as a central narrative quality of *The Faerie Queene*, each book of which ‘provides a variation on the tension between premature end and indefinite extension.’<sup>2</sup> Parker observes that ‘[d]elay and deferral as moral categories are in Spenser’s poem almost uniformly bad’, yet in this proem we find a potentially beneficial aspect to delay.<sup>3</sup> The distraction causes the narrator to forget his ‘tedious trauell’ – where the pun on ‘travail’ links the epic foray with tiresome work – and instead provides renewed imaginative inspiration in ‘rare thoughts delight’, a Platonic ‘goodly fury’ (VI.Proem.2.6).<sup>4</sup> Pastoral *otium*, narrative digression, and poetic inspiration meet in the winding paths of ‘this delightfull land of Faery’.

In the first pages of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*’s Third – and final – Partition, in the section on love melancholy, Burton expresses a similar wish. He opens the section presuming that ‘[t]here will not be wanting [...] one or other that will much discommend some part of this Treatise on Love Melancholy’, deeming it ‘*too light for a Divine, too Comical a subject* to speake of Love Symptomes’ (III.1).<sup>5</sup> He continues with his ‘taske’, however, first because ‘Love is a species of melancholy, and a necessary part of this my Treatise’, and, later, in order to offer the following defence (III.2):

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Bates, *The Rhetoric of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature* (Cambridge: 2009), p.169.; For an extended account of the Legend’s pastoralism, see Humphrey Tonkin, *Spenser’s Courteous Pastoral: Book Six of The Faerie Queene* (Oxford: 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: 2015), p.88.

<sup>3</sup> Parker, 2015, p.62.

<sup>4</sup> For Spenser’s adoption of and engagement with Platonic poetic *furor*, see Kenneth Borris, *Visionary Spenser and the Poetics of Early Modern Platonism* (Oxford: 2017), pp.38-44.

<sup>5</sup> Love melancholy was in fact regularly included in discussions of the disorder throughout the Middle Ages and early modernity, as Burton later admits; see Marion A. Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance* (Stanford: 2007), pp.1-3.

Being to speake of this admirable affection of love (saith *Valleriola*) *there lies open a vast and philosophical field to my discourse, by which many lovers become madde: let me leave my more serious meditations, wander in these Philosophicall fields, and looke into those pleasant Groves of the Muses, where with unspeakable variety of flowers, wee may make Garlands to our selves, not to adorne us only, but with their pleasant smell and juyce to nourish our soules, and fill our mindes with knowledge, &c.*

(III.4)

Burton quotes from French physician François Valleriola's account in *Observationum Medicinalium* (1588) of love melancholy, invoking the same imagery of pastoral delight in nature and imaginative inspiration as Spenser: the 'philosophicall field' and 'Gardens of the Muses', the 'unspeakable variety of flowers' which not only offer decorative but sensual and cerebral nourishment. Burton represents this excursion as a welcome distraction and digression from the previous, increasingly tortured content of the *Anatomy*:

After an harsh and unpleasing discourse of Melancholy, which hath hitherto molested your patience, and tired the author, give him leave [...] to recreate himselfe in this kind after his laborious studies. [...] Give me leave then to refresh my muse a little, and my weary Readers, to expatiate in this delightsome field [...] to season a surly discourse, with a more pleasing aspersion of love matters[.]

(III.4)

Like Spenser's 'tedious trauell', Burton recognises the 'laborious studies' of the *Anatomy* have tired both author and reader, and that this, the final partition, might offer relief from this 'surly discourse'. 'Expatiation' (from Lat. *spatiāri*, 'to walk about') suggests both unfettered ambulation, a wandering at will, but is also used to describe the act of writing copiously, 'to expatiate a litle in discourse' as Jesuit writer Lawrence Anderton has it, and recalls Burton's strategies of mimetic textuality explored in the previous chapter.<sup>6</sup> The *Anatomy*, in this moment, becomes a 'delightsome field' wherein Burton might digress at large and refresh himself and his readers.

Both writers' descriptions of their digressive impulses, however, and the profits and pleasures promised by them, are layered with a countervailing recognition

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<sup>6</sup> 'Expatiate, v.' *OED Online*, March 2020, oed.com/view/Entry/66440. Accessed 9 April 2020. Senses 1a, 2.; Lawrence Anderton, *The Non-entity of Protestancy* (London: 1633), p.257.

that such digression might pose a threat of dissipation, of dangerous distraction, and potential damage to their literary enterprises. That Spenser is ‘nigh rauisht’ suggests both enchantment and sexual violence, that the diversion might well mystify or ‘seize’ him.<sup>7</sup> The ‘waies’ that replenish Spenser’s narrator are those of that ‘delightfull land of Faery’, but it was just those paths, one surmises, that caused his ‘weary steps’, ‘decay of might’, and ‘dulled spright’ in the first place. The ‘tedious trauell’ recalls the language of both sonnets from *Amoretti* that treat the experience of writing *The Faerie Queene*. In the first, he laments ‘not finishing her [Elizabeth’s] Queene of faëry’, which he describes as ‘tædious toyle’ (XXXIII.3). The octet of the second is as follows:

After so long a race as I haue run  
 Through Faery land, which those six books compile  
 giue leaue to rest me, being halfe fordonne,  
 and gather to my selfe new breath awhile.  
 When as a steed refreshed after toyle,  
 out of my prison I will breake anew:  
 and stoutly will that second worke assoyle,  
 with strong endeuour and attention dew.

(LXXX, 1-8)

The poem appears once again to complain of the exhaustion of poetic labour: the ‘race’ through ‘Faery land’ is tiring, and requires that he ‘rest’. Yet the ‘prison’ from which he would then hope to ‘breake anew’ – which initially might be expected to be the ‘toyle’ of his epic enterprise – is rather wherever he is resting, that is his poetic inactivity. Both the *Amoretti* sonnet and the first stanza of the Legend of Courtesy sustain an ambivalence regarding the trouble and joy of writing *The Faerie Queene*. Is Faery Lond the source of respite, or that which the narrator needs respite from?

Burton’s description, too, grants the possible danger of such divagation, observing that the ‘*vast and philosophical fields*’ of his discourse on love have been that ‘*by which many lovers become mad*’, a kind of readerly appropriation of melancholic symptomology directly at odds with the intention to cure and delight.<sup>8</sup> His

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Ravish, v.’ *OED Online*, March 2020, oed.com/view/Entry/158684. Accessed 24 April 2020. Sense 3a.

<sup>8</sup> The cleric Thomas Walkington observes the melancholic’s propensity imaginatively to emulate objects that are the focus of their attention, telling such strange stories as ‘one possest with this humour, that tooke a strong conceit, that he was changed into

recruitment of Valleriola is in aid of a defence of diversion, a defence which necessarily acknowledges rival claims, and indeed the first handful of pages of the Third Partition is dedicated to authorities with competing attitudes to whether love melancholy is an appropriate or useful subject to be included in such a treatise. This doubt is sustained until Burton dismisses the issue with a quotation from Martial – ‘*Lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba est*’ – which he renders ‘[h]owsoever my lines erre, my life is honest’ (III.6).<sup>9</sup> Translating ‘*lascivia*’ – where the sense of the licentious is not inappropriate to the subject of erotic melancholy – as ‘erre’, however, augments the sexual image with one which links Burton’s ‘lines’ to errancy and wandering. This acknowledgement, and the consolation that his ‘life’ is more ‘honest’ than his writing, dovetails moral and stylistic deviance, calling into question the utility of that ‘expatiation’ for both himself and his readers.

This chapter pursues the benefits and potential dangers of the digressive impulse, as a recreative and reformatory force, as it is observed in the above discussion of both Spenser’s and Burton’s ‘endings’.<sup>10</sup> It is both a culmination of the preceding chapters, gathering up a number of their trailing threads, and, in keeping with the nature of the digressive impulse, a diversion from them. In the essential ambivalence of digression’s benefit – the always-present possibility that it might as readily harm as provide help – it explores once again the inexorably pharmaceutical nature of the written word, the *pharmakon*, which, in its polysemy, as Derrida observes, invites ‘the going or leading astray.’<sup>11</sup> For both writers, digressivity offers a response to or release from what is registered as an increasingly burdensome work, both of writing and of reading. Indeed, as we shall see, the recreative possibilities of reading treated in this chapter issue directly as a response to the hermeneutic challenge of remaining open to the infinite variety of the world’s particularity, a work

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an earthen vessell, who earnestly intreated his friends in any case not to come neare him, peradventure with their jostling of him, he might be shakt or crusht to peeces.’ See Thomas Walkington, *The Optick Glasse of Humors* (London: 1607), sig.69<sup>v</sup>. For an extended account of melancholic sympathetic delusion, see Stephanie Shirilan, *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy* (Farnham: 2015), chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Martial, *Epigrams*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: 1993), p.44.

<sup>10</sup> For a history of the recreative possibilities of reading in the Middle Ages and early modernity, see Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca & London: 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, in *Disseminations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: 1981), p.71.

explored in the previous chapter. This recreation, moreover, involves to a greater or lesser extent an abandonment of the intended purpose or *telos* of the texts: the erosion of faith – witnessed incrementally in previous chapters – in the usefulness of allegory and anatomy to Spenser and Burton’s reformatory endeavours reaches its peak in the material considered here. Focusing predominantly on the final book of *The Faerie Queene*, I argue that in its radical ambivalence, the virtue of courtesy becomes for Spenser a medium through which to enact, in Jacqueline T. Miller’s phrasing, ‘an anatomy of his own allegory’.<sup>12</sup> A virtue which exposes the possibility of an utter divergence in appearance from essence, action from intent, exposes the same possibility in the semiotics at the heart of allegory, undermining a faith in the dynamics of that mode and the hermeneutics it enshrines. Burton’s errant text, we shall see, also erodes the structures of systematic knowledge which are the aim of anatomy. But his digressions, and the divertive therapy they provide, offer relief to the melancholic reader at the expense of anatomy, through the revivification of the imagination and the inducement of pleasure.

## II: Forward/Froward: The Caprice of Grace on Spenser’s Acidalian Mount

Calidore, the Knight of Courtesy, disappears for almost half his Legend. When he reappears, having ‘[g]reat trauell [...] [a]nd toyle endured [...] [s]ewing the *Blatant beast*’, he has chanced upon a shepherd’s village, where he seeks ‘leauw awyle’ from Melibœ and his daughter Pastorella, ‘[t]o rest my bark [...] and] some small repose obtaine’ (VI.ix.2.1-3, VI.ix.31.3-9). Thus using the sweet language of courtesy on the old sage ‘to insinuate his harts desire’, he exchanges his ‘former quest’ for ‘[a]nother quest’, displacing his duty to Gloriana with the pursuit of ‘the loue of the faire *Pastorell*’ – court with courtship – whom he woos ‘[w]ith all kind courtesies [that] he could inuent’ (VI.ix.27.2, VI.x.2.1-2, VI.ix.46.2, VI.ix.34.6).<sup>13</sup> Calidore’s truancy here

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<sup>12</sup> Jacqueline T. Miller, ‘The Courtly Figure: Spenser’s Anatomy of Allegory’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 31:1 (1991), p.53.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the perceived displacement of the sovereign queen for objects of amorous courtship in Spenser’s late poetry – conceived of as a conflict between Neoplatonic and Petrarchan discourses of questing – see J. Christopher Warner, ‘Poetry and Praise in “Colin Clouts Come Home Againe”’, *Studies in Philology* 94:3 (1997), 368-381. See also John D. Bernard, *Ceremonies of Innocence: Pastoralism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (Cambridge: 1989), pp.109-110.

has been seen through various lenses as a virtuous failure – an ‘error’, according to William Nelson, of ‘deserting his royal duty for pastoral seclusion’; or, in David Lee Miller’s rendition, an abandonment of the epic and poetic quest that, in ‘turn[ing...] back on Gloriana’s court’, entails ‘a shift in the poet’s [...] understanding of his own artistic purposes’.<sup>14</sup> Even Spenser seems to call attention to Calidore’s lapse, asking:

Who now does follow the foule *Blatant Beast*,  
Whilest *Calidore* does follow that faire Mayd,  
Vnmyndfull of his vow and high beheast,  
Which by the Faery Queene was on him layd,  
That he should neuer leaue, nor be delayd

(VI.x.1.1-5).

The irony of Spenser’s reprimand here is that, in following Calidore’s amatory quest, he too has foregone the pursuit of the Blatant Beast: the ‘delay’ is as much the narrator’s as Calidore’s. Such an identification has led other readers to see Calidore’s escape into the pastoral more positively, his decision to ‘set his rest amongst the rusticke sort, / Rather then hunt still after shadowes vaine / Of courtly favour’ as a Spenserian indictment of the ‘excessive artificiality, deceit, fraud, and frivolity’ of court culture.<sup>15</sup> Almost a century ago, C. S. Lewis warned against the ‘mistake’ of supposing that Calidore’s truancy signals a ‘truancy of Spenser’s from his moral intention. On the contrary, the shepherds’ country and Mount Acidale in the midst of it are the core of the Book, and the key to Spenser’s whole conception of Courtesy’.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as Clare Regan Kinney notes, Calidore’s ‘apparent truancy paradoxically permits him to bear witness, on Mount Acidale, to the most sublime manifestation of Courtesy.’<sup>17</sup> In Calidore’s pastoral delay – just as in the proem to the

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<sup>14</sup> William Nelson, *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (New York: 1963), p.291.; David Lee Miller, ‘Abandoning the Quest’, *English Literary History* 46:2 (1979), pp.182-183.

<sup>15</sup> David Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton: 1978), p.132..

<sup>16</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: 1977), p.350.

<sup>17</sup> Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Eliot* (Cambridge: 1992), p.81. For other accounts of the ambivalence of Calidore’s truancy see: J. C. Maxwell, ‘The Truancy of Calidore’, *English Literary History* 19:2 (1952), 143-149.; Harry Rusche, ‘The Lesson of Calidore’s Truancy’, *Studies in Philology* 76:2 (1979), 149-161.

Legend – digression from the epic quest leads to a moment of supreme poetic vision.<sup>18</sup>

It is significant, then, that Calidore's vision of the Graces on Mount Acidale, so regularly conceived as 'the symbolic centre' to the Legend of Courtesy and the key to the poetic vision of *The Faerie Queene* as a whole, contains a famous textual crux that at the very least calls into question the efficacy of the virtue and of Spenser's poetic enterprise.<sup>19</sup> Calidore witnesses a group of women dancing, 'raunged in a ring' and 'in the midst of them / Three other Ladies did both daunce and sing' (VI.x.12.1-3). The circular structure of this image recalls the Legend's first image of Elizabeth's sovereign courtesy – 'from the Ocean all riuers spring, / And tribute back to repay as to their King' (VI.Proem.7.3-4) – and links the Graces' dance and the Elizabethan court to the 'bands of ciuilitie' that are the ends of courteous virtue (VI.i.26.6). The description of the three central Graces, who 'on men all gracious gifts bestow, / Which decke the body or adorne the mynde', is given in the Longman edition as follows (VI.x.23.1-2):

And eeke them selues so in their daunce they bore,  
That two of them still forward seem'd to bee,  
But one still towards shew'd her selfe afore;  
That good should from vs goe, then come in greater store.  
(VI.x.24.6-9)

The Graces are positioned here in the same manner as in Botticelli's *Primavera* and the gloss provided by E.K. to the April eclogue of *The Shepherds Calender*, 'the one hauing her backe toward vs, and her face fromwarde, as proceeding from vs: the other two toward vs, noting double thanke to be due to vs for the benefit, we haue done' (p.69).<sup>20</sup> Within the courteous economy of giving, receiving, and requiting, liberality is met with a return of even greater plenty.

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<sup>18</sup> The consummate account of the vision on Acidale as a representation of the free and idealised play of the poetic imagination is Harry Berger Jr., 'A Secret Discipline', in *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: 1988), pp.215-242.

<sup>19</sup> Lila Geller, 'The Acidalian Vision: Spenser's Graces in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*', *The Review of English Studies* 23:91 (1972), p.267.

<sup>20</sup> The identity of E.K. continues to be a point of scholarly dispute, whether a separate figure and friend of Spenser and Gabriel Harvey, or Spenser himself. See: David R. Shore, 'E.K.', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: 1990), p.231. That the critical apparatus of E.K.'s commentary makes *The Shepherds Calender* 'a text that has already been read' is germane to this discussion of 'reading'

So read the lines in the first two editions of the final *Faerie Queene*, of 1596 and 1609. But in the 1611 and subsequent editions – with a variant retained, as the note to the Longman observes, by many modern editors – the word ‘forward’ is replaced with ‘froward’, a contraction of the word ‘fromwarde’ (‘turned away’) that E.K. uses in his gloss to describe the Grace with her back toward the viewer.<sup>21</sup> The new structure sees the Graces positioned with one facing the viewer and two turned away.<sup>22</sup> The change in word renders a change in the syntax and meaning of the final quoted line too: the ‘then’, which in the ‘forward’ rendition is adverbial, becomes with ‘froward’ a conjunction (as in: good should from vs goe, *than* come in greater store). Suspended on this textual crux and the orthographical ambivalence of the word ‘then’, the position of the Graces and thus the economy of liberality can be read in two ways. On the one hand, the grace given by the beholder is returned with ‘double thanke’; on the other, the giver suffers diminished returns. The ‘iolly Shepheards lasse’ who dances in the middle of the Graces, and who Colin Clout says that no one ‘can aread’, becomes, through allegorical hypostasis, not a single figure but in Harry Berger Jr.’s words ‘a richly complicated knot of all the figures the poet has ever meditated on – Rosalind, Elizabeth, Amoret, Belphoebe, Florimell, Britomart, Venus, Psyche’ (VI.x.16.1, VI.x.25.3).<sup>23</sup> In its hazy legibility, the dance gathers into its midst all of the female characters that Spenser’s poem has contemplated upon throughout its length. The ambiguity regarding the position of the Graces, as a consequence, participates in a number of covert critiques: of Elizabethan favour, praising her prodigality at the same time as suggesting she could give more; and of the value of erotic and aesthetic muses within the operation of poetic creativity. The double legibility of the Graces here is all the more significant given that this is not the first but the second ‘reading’ we receive of them, not Calidore’s vision itself but Colin Clout’s mediated gloss or interpretation of them

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the graces; see Jane Tylus, ‘Spenser, Virgil, and the Politics of Poetic Labour’, *English Literary History* 55:1 (1988), p.53.

<sup>21</sup> The original reading – ‘forward’ – is supported not only by the Longman edition but by Thomas Roche Jr. in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas Roche Jr.

(Harmondsworth: 1978). The subsequent reading – ‘froward’ – is supported by, amongst others, Tonkin, 1972, pp.248-59.; Robin Headlam Wells, ‘Spenser and the Courtesy Tradition: Form and Meaning in the Sixth Book of *The Faerie Queene*’, *English Studies* 58:3 (1977), 221-229.

<sup>22</sup> Lila Geller observes the ‘froward’ reversal is in agreement with Pico della Mirandola’s description of the Graces in his *Commento*. See: Geller, 1972, pp.273-274.

<sup>23</sup> Berger Jr., 1988, p.241.



after the vision fractures. In this moment of interpretation – both Colin Clout’s and the reader’s – the intrinsically pharmonic nature of signs once again appears. Spenser’s ultimate emblem of courteous conduct and poetic power displays and irresolvable ambiguity, painting courtesy as both liberal *and* exploitative, painting poetry as both rewarding *and* costly.

### III: Outward Shows and Inward Thoughts: Spenserian Courtesy

Douglas A. Northrop has described courtesy as that most ‘uncertain’ and ‘problematic’ of virtues.<sup>24</sup> More than any other of Spenser’s legendary subjects, courtesy has found critics attempting to pin down its meaning through paraphrase: in a startling recognition of the word courtesy’s elusiveness, A. C. Hamilton writes of Book VI that ‘Spenser fashions a virtue that may best be called civility’, and others have described it as ‘culture’, or ‘empathy’.<sup>25</sup> Its evasion of definition is registered even by Spenser who, in the first stanza of the Legend proper, seeks to define it through etymology – ‘Of Court it seemes, men Courtesie doe call’ (VI.i.1.1). The futility of the endeavour is immediately signalled by the Spenserian ‘seemes’, and it is no coincidence that Calepine, the knight who stands in for Calidore during his disappearance, shares his name with a well-known Renaissance lexicographer.<sup>26</sup> From the outset, the sixth book of *The Faerie Queene* seems concerned not so much with how to act courteously, but with what courtesy *is*.

Courtesy’s nature, however, is more than simply nebulous. The ambiguity – or indeed, the sense of internal contradiction – displayed in the dynamics of giving and receiving in the dance of the Graces is endemic to considerations of the virtue throughout the Legend. In the proem, Spenser’s likening of courtesy to a ‘flowre’ in

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<sup>24</sup> Douglas A. Northrop, ‘The Uncertainty of Courtesy in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*’, *Spenser Studies XIV* (1999), p.219.

<sup>25</sup> A. C. Hamilton, ‘General Introduction’, in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow: 2007), p.15.; Gordon Teskey, ‘And therefore as a stranger give it welcome’: Courtesy and Thinking’, *Spenser Studies XVIII* (2003), p.352.; Joshua Philips, ‘Monasticism and Idleness in Spenser’s Late Poetry’, *Studies in English Literature* 54:1 (2014), p.60.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Fried writes that Calepine’s dictionary ‘became popular enough in England that ‘calepine’ was for a time used as a synonym for ‘dictionary.’ See Daniel Fried, ‘Defining Courtesy: Spenser, Calepine and Renaissance Lexicography’, *The Review of English Studies* 58:235 (2007), p.230.

a ‘sacred nursery’ that ‘brancheth forth in braue nobility, / And spreads it selfe through all ciuilitie’ ties the sacred and the civil in an image of ecological and social harmony, prefiguring the imagery of interpersonal ‘bands’ that pattern the legend (VI.Proem.4.1-5). The floral tendrils link individuals into a social web of the *discordia concors* described in Peter’s first epistle as being sustained by love and sympathy: ‘be ye all of one mind: one suffer with another: love as brethren: *be* pitiful, *be* courteous’ (1.Peter 3:8). In the same stanza, however, Spenser observes how courtesy might be deemed ‘all but fayned shoves’: in the fall from the Golden Age, the virtue has ‘indeed’ become ‘nought but forgerie’ (VI.Proem.4.8, VI.Proem.5.3). As Kenneth Borris observes, in the early modern imagination courtesy both comprised a ‘secular code of behavior involving etiquette, affability, and humanity’ and carried ‘theological implications’, linking it to ‘the perfections of the divine order.’<sup>27</sup> The former was associated with both the court and courtship – a pairing that became intricately entangled in the Elizabethan court, where erotic and political favour was played out through oblique behavioural strategies – but these codes and their expression of human graces linked through structural sympathies to the grace of God and the cosmos. The ‘forgerie’ that Spenser diagnoses issues from the estrangement of earthly from divine courtesy.

This estrangement, and courtesy’s risk of being merely ‘fayned shoves’, issues from a question of whether it is a virtue of essence or accident, of character or behaviour. Spenser equivocates on this matter, insisting in the proem that ‘vertues seat is deepe within the mynd, / And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd’, an assertion undermined elsewhere by the admission that ‘[t]he gentle minde by gentle deeds is known’ (VI.Proem.5.8-9, VI.iii.1.2). This dissatisfying paradox – that courtesy does not reside in actions but nevertheless must be displayed in them – betrays Spenser’s almost obsessive scrutiny of the location or origin of virtue within the moral subject, an obsession also manifested in the legend’s recourse to romance tropes of lost issue and recovered offspring, as in the changeling baby rescued from the bear and the return of Pastorella to her royal parents, Bellamour and Claribell, in the final canto. There is similar equivocation in Spenser’s initial description of Calidore, in whom ‘gentlenesse of spright / And manners mylde were planted naturall’, but to which he must nevertheless ‘add’ the external markers of ‘comely

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<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Borris, ‘Courtesy’, in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: 1990), p.194.

guize' and 'gracious speach' (VI.i.2.3-6). Arguing with circular logic that 'gentle blood will gentle manners breed', but that such blood is 'descryde' by 'example of [...] courteous deed', the poem paces around the question of courtesy's seat (VI.iii.2-4).<sup>28</sup> Again and again – and with little success – it attempts to conceive of courtesy as a virtue both natural and artificial, essential and performed.

Calidore's first confrontation in Book VI – the first display of his courteous behaviour – neatly captures the paradoxical heart of courtesy. He comes across a squire who 'thorough some more mighty enemies wrong, / Both hand and foote vnto a tree was bound' (VI.i.11.3-4). Since courtesy is a gift freely given, 'for no demaunds [Calidore] staide, / But first him losde' (VI.i.11.8-9). The squire then relates the story of his misfortune: in a castle nearby a couple, Crudor and Briana, perform 'a custome lewd' of shearing the beards of knights and hair of ladies as a form of toll; the squire himself had been tied to the tree by their henchman whilst he 'pursued' the squire's own fleeing 'faire Damzell' (VI.i.13.3, VI.i.16.2-7).<sup>29</sup> As he finishes his tale, 'a ruefull shriek / Of one loud crying' rings out, and the henchman and fleeing maiden erupt from the thickets of the wood (VI.i.17.1-2). 'Which haynous sight when *Calidore* beheld,' the poem then relates, 'Eftsoones he loosd that Squire, and so him left [...] to pursue that villaine' (VI.i.18.1-4). The squire, already once 'losde' before his story is told, is 'loosd' once again afterwards. This 'glitch', Jeff Dolven suggests, 'lights up an unresolved conflict between the counsels of courtesy and justice', namely of freely extending courtesy at the same time as ensuring courteous behaviour is extended only to those who justly deserve it.<sup>30</sup> But it also dramatises the practical troubles of discerning courteous behaviour in that it both must and must not depend on the evidence of outward display and performance. The double unloosing reveals the two kinds and costs of courtesy: an innocent courtesy that risks being gullibly deceived, and a suspicious courtesy that risks discourteous offence.

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<sup>28</sup> Spenser's emphasis on 'blood' and natural virtue, it must be remembered, also reflects Courtesy's role in furthering a colonial ideology: as Stephen Greenblatt reminds us, '[c]ivility is won through the exercise of violence over what is deemed barbarous and evil', involving 'a ruthless policy of mass starvation and massacre' and 'the destruction of the native Irish identity.' Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More To Shakespeare* (Chicago: 1980), pp.186-187.

<sup>29</sup> The couple's lewd custom recalls the polling and pilling performed by Pollente and Munera in the same canto of Book V.

<sup>30</sup> Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago & London: 2007), p.222.

This capacity for courteous action to be deceptive – that ‘outward shows’ might not reflect ‘inward thoughts’ – led, during early modernity, to the behavioural codes of affability and etiquette to be instead considered strategies of dissimulation in aid of political and social self-furtherment. As David Javitch notes, by the end of Elizabeth’s reign, ‘Englishmen began to lose their faith in perfect courtliness [...] now more often seen to be the corruption than the cultivation of beautiful manners’.<sup>31</sup> In a recognition of the difference between a virtue and its performed manifestations, Spenser wryly describes the court as the site ‘where courtesies’ – but notably not ‘Courtesy’ – ‘excell’ (VI.Proem.7.9). For with a virtue unique in that it is fulfilled by display, a semiotic gap opens between appearance and essence, action and intent. In Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, Hereford’s courtesy is a form of seductive guile, ‘seem[ing] to dive into their hearts / With humble and familiar courtesy’, ‘[w]ooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles’.<sup>32</sup> The same rhetorical prowess characterises Calidore, a knight who on the face of it ‘loued simple truth and stedfast honesty’ but also who has the suspect verbal power to ‘steale mens hearts away’ (VI.i.3.9, VI.i.2.6). Andrew Hadfield points out that courtesy books, that proliferated during the early modern period, essentially provided a ‘semiotic guide to gesture, utterance, and behaviour.’<sup>33</sup> The most famous of these, Baldassarre Castiglione’s *The Courtier* (1528), is concerned throughout with affirming the uncompromised relationship between good action and good character, writing:

Therefore it behoueth oure Courtyer in all his doinges to be charie and heedull, and that what so he saith or doeth to accompany it with wisdom, and not onely to set his delite to haue in himself partes and excellent qualities, but also to order the tenour of his life [...] so that euerye deede of his may be compact and framed of al the vertues[.]<sup>34</sup>

Castiglione considers that properly courteous ‘qualities’ and ‘deedes’ must be underpinned by ‘wisdom’ and ‘vertues’, but that these qualities might be hollowly performed led others, such as Antonio de Guevara, in *A Dispraise of the Life of a*

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<sup>31</sup> Javitch, 1978, p.16.

<sup>32</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Charles Forker (London: 2002), I.iv.24-27.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Hadfield, *Lying in Early Modern English Culture: From the Oath of Supremacy to the Oath of Allegiance* (Oxford: 2017), p.206.

<sup>34</sup> Baldassarre Castiglione, *The courtier of Count Baldessar Castilio diuided into foure bookees*, trans. Thomas Hoby (London: 1561), sig.Liiii<sup>v</sup>.

*Courtier* (1548), to consider the court the site of ‘dissembling folly’, and the ‘perfect examples’ of ‘euil’.<sup>35</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1532) formalises this deceit and deception into a code of conduct for a leader: a prince should seem ‘merciful, trustworthy, humane, upright and devout’, virtues whose display will further his power, but ‘having and always cultivating them is harmful, whereas seeming to have them is useful.’<sup>36</sup> Courteous behaviour and courteous intent – gentle deeds and gentle minds – need not correspond; that which seems good may belie evil machinations, rendering it in Jane Grogan’s words a ‘sham-virtue’ with ‘palliative poetics’.<sup>37</sup> As Spenser writes in ‘The Ruins of Time’, ‘the courting masker’ might deceive with ‘painted faces and smooth flattering’ (200-202).

In ‘Colin Clouts Come Home Again’, Spenser describes the ‘fair dissembling curtesie’ that hides ‘a guileful hollow Heart’ (699-700). This semiotic gap that opens up between appearance and essence has a number of implications not only for how far we might see its avatar, Calidore, as embodying virtue or a Machiavellian kind of deceptiveness, but for the reformative enterprise of *The Faerie Queene* itself.<sup>38</sup> The ‘gentle deeds’, ‘gentle minds’, ‘gentle blood’, and ‘gentle manners’ that Spenser associates with courtesy cannot help but recall the language of the ‘Letter to Raleigh’ and Spenser’s avowed intent ‘to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline’ (Letter to Raleigh, 714). But the letter, which as we have seen articulates Spenser’s allegiance to a broadly Sidneian reformative poetics, is absent from the 1596 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, an omission which may well signal an abandonment of or scepticism towards such a poetics. Indeed, Maria R. Rohr Philmus has argued of the poem’s claim to a didactic poetics that in the Legend of Courtesy Spenser ‘unfolds in effect a thoroughgoing, lucid deconstruction of this construct of Renaissance thought.’<sup>39</sup> Both exemplary and hortatory poetics – ones aiming at moving readers towards virtuous emulation – are jeopardised by a virtue

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<sup>35</sup> Antonio de Guevara, *A Dispraise of the Life of a Courtier, and a Commendacion of the Life of the Labouryng Man*, trans. Francis Bryan (London: 1548), sig.Di<sup>r</sup>, sig.F3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, eds. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: 1988), p.62.

<sup>37</sup> Jane Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene* (Farnham: 2009), p.175.

<sup>38</sup> For an account of the Legend of Courtesy’s Machiavellianism, and Calidore’s association with Machiavellian *virtù*, see Bruce Danner, ‘Courteous *Virtù* in Spenser’s Book 6 of *the Faerie Queene*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38:1 (1998), 1-18.

<sup>39</sup> Maria R. Rohr Philmus, ‘*The Faerie Queene* and Renaissance Poetics: Another Look at Book VI as ‘Conclusion’ to the Poem’, *English Studies* 76:6 (1995), p.512.

whose performativity exposes a potential disjunction between interior state and external act.

Calidore's first attempt to rectify vice – upon the couple, Crudor and Briana, responsible for the discourteous hair-toll – serves to demonstrate the spurious effectiveness of courteous reformation. The incident recalls Artegall's first exercise of justice in Book V upon Munera, whose 'hands of gold' and 'feete of siluer' embody her similar crime of extortion through tolling (V.ii.26.6-7). Where Artegall, as we saw in the previous chapter, exacts a violent punishment upon Munera, turning her metallic limbs into emblems of her offence, Calidore's approach is different. Having overcome Crudor in armed combat, he heeds his pleas for mercy where Munera's fell on Artegall's deaf ears, and offers the following speech:

For nothing is more blamefull to a knight,  
That court'sie doth as well as armes professe,  
How euer strong and fortunate in fight,  
Then the reproch of pride and cruelnesse.  
In vaine he seeketh others to suppressse,  
Who hath not learnd him selfe first to subdue.  
[...]  
Who will not mercie vnto others shew,  
How can he mercy euer hope to haue?  
To pay each with his owne is right and dew.  
Yet since ye mercie now doe need to craue,  
I will it graunt, your hopelesse life to saue;  
With these conditions, which I will propound:  
First, that ye better shall your selfe behaue  
Vnto all errant knights, whereso on ground;  
Next that he Ladies ayde in euery stead and stound.

(VI.i.42-43)

Advocating self-restraint and the control of 'pride and cruelnesse' – advice Artegall might have done well to follow – 'court'sie' mollifies justice, replacing punitive destruction with 'mercie' and civility. Such a correction of the shortcomings of one virtue by its successor is a familiar Spenserian strategy, as when Britomart unhorses Guyon at the beginning of Book III, remedying temperance's militant affective self-isolationism with chaste sexuality (III.i.6). Calidore too meets Artegall at the beginning of his Legend, but their interaction displays none of the virtuous surety that Britomart's ascendancy over Guyon does. Instead, having heard the (decidedly

revisionist) tale of Artegall's 'whole exploite, and valorous emprise', Calidore responds with an admission of the comparative difficulty of his quest, his requirement 'to tread an endlesse trace, withouten guyde, / Or good direction', 'to issue forth in waies vntryde, / In perils strange, in labours long and wide' (VI.i.5.4, VI.i.6.2-5). The imagery of romance wandering and lack of direction recalls that of the narrator's wandering 'waies' in the proem and figures the 'trace' not only of the Blatant Beast but of 'true curtesie' as decidedly unclear, 'strange', and arduous (VI.Proem.5.1). The linear epic enterprise of justice, for all of its ethical dubiousness, is nonetheless straightforward; the 'waies vntryde' of courtesy, on the other hand, involve all of the mystery, difficulty, and uncertainty of romance.

The trickiness of exercising courtesy is evinced in Calidore's speech to the prostrate and pleading Crudor. The symbolic rings of proffered and requited 'mercie' in the second quoted stanza imply the bands of civility, extended in mutually sustaining harmony. But the word 'mercy', when it is repeated, is spelt differently, and this minor orthographical variance betrays an imbalance in the economy of liberality represented. For the language of finance reveals that, unlike true courtesy, Calidore's is not freely given, but rather 'paid' when it is 'dew' and 'graunted' when it is 'craued'. It also depends on 'conditions', which, aside from being almost ludicrously platitudinous (to 'better behaue'), do not comprise the 'gracious speech' of 'ciuill conuersation', but rather a more legalistic reliance on contractual obligation (VI.i.2.6, VI.i.1.6). The reformatory process is a far cry from the kind of inspirational 'faire [...] patterne' of Elizabeth, the 'soueraine Lady Queene' exalted as the exemplar of courtesy in the proem, whose 'pure minde, as in a mirrour sheene' displays courtesy and in a process of specular reflection 'with her brightnesse doth inflame / The eyes of all', and from whom 'all goodly vertues well / Into the rest' (VI.Proem.6.2-7, VI.Proem.7.6-7). Calidore's conditions here in fact directly invert Spenser's claim in the 'Letter to Raleigh' to lead 'by ensample, then by rule' (Letter to Raleigh, 716). In spite of declaring to act through courtesy rather than strength of 'armes', Calidore's verbal tactics nonetheless operate through control, and not the subtle control of rhetorical cunning but through a brutal force of command.

With a virtue as liable to counterfeit as courtesy, moreover, it is impossible to ensure that reformation is effected rather than simply pretended. Crudor, who had been 'dwell[ing] / In dread of death', receives Calidore's conditions 'gladly', and 'promis[es] to performe his precept well' (VI.i.43.1-3). His promise, the reader

cannot fail to sense, might be as empty as his performance, and the poetry intimates as much, as he swears ‘true fealty’, ‘however lief or loth’ (VI.i.44.3-4). Similarly, Briana is ‘overcome with infinite affect, / For [Calidore’s] exceeding courtesie’, but the pun on ‘affect’ leaves the verse hovering ambiguously around whether Briana is moved to change, or simply affecting to be moved (VI.i.45.2-3). The conclusion to the episode is pervaded with a sense of too-easy and too-complete resolution:

So all returning to the Castle glad,  
Most ioyfully [Briana] them did entertaine,  
Where goodly glee and feast to them she made,  
To shew her thankfull mind and meaning faine

(VI.i.46.1-4).

The superlative happiness of the three, so recently bound in mortal combat, cannot help but strike a note of parodic performance. The zeugmatic linking of both ‘glee’ and ‘feast’ to ‘made’ implies the practised, crafted quality of Briana’s joy. The ‘shew’ of her ‘thankfull mind’ recalls the ‘fayned showes’ of false courtesy; so too does her meaning ‘faine’, a word which might be an adjectival qualification of ‘meaning’ denoting gladness, or a verb applied to ‘meaning’ and suggesting dissimulation (VI.Proem.4.6).<sup>40</sup> Here as before, the potential ambivalence of both pun and zeugma (the noun ‘meaning’ might partake of the verb ‘shew’ *or* the verb ‘faine’) creates an interpretive indeterminacy that both conveys and mirrors the deceptive possibilities of courtesy. Spenser’s reformatory project, the first canto of the Legend of Courtesy suggests, comes loose at the seams.

#### IV: Unknightly Knight: Courtesy, Irony, and the Ends of Allegory

Crudor’s name issues etymologically from the Latin ‘*crudus*’, meaning ‘bloody’ or ‘cruel’, but also ‘raw’, and gives rise to the word ‘crude’. In this sense, it fits both his violent nature and, in the word’s sense of being unrefined, his susceptibility to reformation. But Crudor’s reformation – a strange occurrence in *The Faerie Queene*, in

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Feign, v.’ *OED Online*, March 2020, oed.com/view/Entry/69014. Accessed 23 April 2020. Sense II.; ‘Fain, adj. and adv.’ *OED Online*, March 2020, oed.com/view/Entry/67666. Accessed 23 April 2020. Sense A1a.



which characters embodying vice are generally vanquished and disposed of – is troubling. If Crudor *is* reformed, that reformation, as Humphrey Tonkin observes, ‘shatters even the logic of allegory’, since what remains is a man called Cruelty who is no longer cruel.<sup>41</sup> The alternative – that his reformation is a hoax, a deceitful pretence, and his newfound courtesy simply a mask for ongoing discourteousness – is more troubling still, introducing what Jacqueline T. Miller describes as a ‘sinister notion of allegory in which the figure who is ‘cruel’ may well speak a language that dissembles its nature.’<sup>42</sup> In the first case, the structure of allegory cannot support reformation; in the second, the dark side of allegorical other-speaking (Gk, *allogoria*), a covert form of expression described by David Lee Miller as ‘hieratic doubletalk’, reveals itself, one which does not consist of a ‘darke conceit [...] cloudily enwrapped in Allegoricall deuises’, but a kind of sustained antiphrasis that vexes rather than solicits interpretation (Letter to Raleigh, 714-716).<sup>43</sup> Of course, the pharmaceutical nature of allegory has been the subject of much of the preceding chapters, which have variously demonstrated the ways in which the nature of the written word as expressed in the myth of the *pharmakon* is a cause of celebration for Spenser, an opportunity to revel in the plurality of allegory and the world. But as this chapter has started to suggest, the intrinsically paradoxical nature of courtesy – what Richard Z. Lee has termed ‘the virtue’s authentically dialectical nature’ – introduces not only the possibility of ethical deceit but an aesthetic deceit that erodes both Spenser’s reformatory and allegorical enterprises.<sup>44</sup> If Book I’s lesson, as we saw in the first chapter, is that holiness lies in the recognition that one’s hole-ness is part of one’s wholeness, then Spenser’s Legend of Courtesy is the scourge of that, suggesting that pharmonic ambivalence might ultimately lay waste to practical ethics and a reformatory poetics. Spenser’s courtesy heralds the ends of allegory.

The structural and stylistic similarities between courtesy and allegory adumbrated in the previous discussion, based as they both are on figuration and concealment, are recognised in George Puttenham’s *The Arte of Englishe Poesie* (1589).

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<sup>41</sup> Tonkin, 1972, p.40.

<sup>42</sup> Miller, 1991, p.57.

<sup>43</sup> David Lee Miller, *The Poem’s Two Bodies* (Princeton: 2014), p.16.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Z. Lee, ‘Wary Boldness: Courtesy and Critical Aesthetics in *The Faerie Queene*’, *Spenser Studies XXXIII* (2019), p.5.

Described by Louis Adrian Montrose as ‘the central text of Elizabethan and courtly poetics’, the rhetorical handbook directs itself to use by members of the court:<sup>45</sup>

our chiefe purpose herein is for the learning of Ladies and young Gentlewomen, or idle Courtiers, desirous to become skilful in their owne mother tongue, and for their priuate recreation to make now & then ditties of pleasure, thinking for our parte none other science so fit for them & the place as that which teacheth *beau semblant*, the chiefe profession aswell of Courting as of poesie[.]<sup>46</sup>

Pleasant ‘ditties’ are deemed ‘fit’ for courtly men and gentlewomen, for the express reason that their very prettiness, poetry’s ornamentation, currency with metaphor and deception, and playfulness resemble the artifice practised and encouraged in court. None more so than ‘the courtly figure *Allegoria*, which is when we speake one thing and thinke another, and that our wordes and our meanings meete not.’<sup>47</sup> The figure of allegory – which, like all figures, is considered an ‘abuse[] or rather trespass[] in speech’, creating ‘a certaine doublenesse’ – Puttenham personifies as ‘the figure of *false semblant* or *dissimulation* [...] the chief ringleader and captaine of all other figures’.<sup>48</sup> Allegorical dissembling, sustained through the same verbal tactics associated with the courtier, works ‘vnder couert and darke termes’ and operates ‘aswell when we lye as when we tell truth.’<sup>49</sup>

Allegory’s relationship with dissimulation, however, the ‘doubleness’ whereby we ‘speake otherwise then we thinke’, becomes a site of conflict and confusion in Puttenham.<sup>50</sup> Describing this ‘dissimulation’ as ‘speech wrested from his owne naturall signification to another not altogether so naturall [...] because the wordes beare contrary countenance to th’intent’, Puttenham then prevaricates:

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<sup>45</sup> Louis Adrian Montrose, ‘Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form’, *English Literary History* 50:3 (1983), p.421.

<sup>46</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie. Contriued into three Bookes: The first of Poets and Poesie, the second of Proportion, the third of Ornament* (London: 1589), p.132.

<sup>47</sup> Puttenham, 1589, p.155.

<sup>48</sup> Puttenham, 1589, pp.128, 155.

<sup>49</sup> Puttenham, 1589, p.155.

<sup>50</sup> Puttenham, 1589, p.155.

But properly & in his principall vertue *Allegoria* is when we do speake in sence translative and wrested from the owne signification, neuerthelesse applied to another not altogether contrary, but hauing much conueniencie with it[.]<sup>51</sup>

Puttenham vacillates here on the nature of the semiotic rift courted by allegory. Specifically, he attempts to describe allegory as participating in a system of metaphor and metonymy (a ‘sence translative’ that nonetheless displays ‘much conueniencie’ between sign and signified), but not in antiphrasis (that which is ‘altogether contrary’).

The same question dogs Puttenham’s chief source text, the *Institutio Oratoria*, in which Quintilian writes that ‘[a]llegory [...] presents one thing by its words and either (1) a different or (2) sometimes even a contrary thing by its sense.’<sup>52</sup> What is registered here, in the distinction between relation through difference (metonymy) and contrariety (irony), is as Gordon Teskey points out, ‘Quintilian’s uncertainty as to the inclusion of irony in allegory’, a question which ‘turns on whether antiphrasis, as absolute opposition, is a sport or irony or its radical essence.’<sup>53</sup> The question issues, essentially, from the distinction between irony as trope and irony as figure. Quintilian distinguishes between trope and figure thus:

A Trope [...] is language transferred from its natural and principal meaning to another for the sake of embellishment [...]. A Figure, on the other hand, as its very name shows, is a configuration of language distinct from the common and immediately obvious form[.]<sup>54</sup>

For Quintilian, metaphor, metonymy, and similar modes of figuration fall within the ambit of trope, the ‘transference’ of meaning. Figure, however, does something stranger and more undecipherable to language. Irony can exist as trope or figure:

the Trope is more open and, although it says something different from what it means, it does not *pretend* something different, for the whole context is generally quite straightforward [...]. In the Figure, on the other hand, the pretence involves the whole meaning, and is transparent rather than openly

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<sup>51</sup> Puttenham, 1589, p.155.

<sup>52</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.451.

<sup>53</sup> Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: 1996), p.57.

<sup>54</sup> Quintilian, 2014, vol. 4, p.13.

avowed, so that, whereas in the Trope the contrast is between words and words, here it is between the meaning and the words, and the Figure can cover whole passages and sometimes the entire shape of the Cause. Indeed a whole life may be held to illustrate Irony[.]<sup>55</sup>

The distinction between irony as trope and irony as figure lies in two main but interrelated things: the first is that the trope contrasts ‘words and words’ and the figure contrasts ‘meaning and words’, the latter of which produces an effect that Quintilian recognises as or compares to a ‘pretence’; the second is in the potentially unending extension of the figure of irony. With both of these, the figure of irony takes on a closedness, an inscrutability, not present in the trope. He considers the two to be connected – ‘just as a continued series of Metaphors produces Allegory, so a sustained use of the Trope Irony will give rise to the Figure’ – but observes that ‘some types of this Figure have no connection with Tropes, for example the primary type, which derives from negation, and which some call *antiphrasis*’.<sup>56</sup>

In *Allegory and Violence* (1996), Teskey uses the confusion over the genetic relationship between allegory and irony evinced in Quintilian – whether irony is a species of allegory, or vice versa – to stage a primal battle between the two as vying philosophies of language. Quintilian’s complex querying of irony’s status as trope and figure, and its relation to antiphrasis, lies at the heart of this battle:

If antiphrasis is irony’s essence, then all moods of irony, from affectionate teasing to *saeva indignatio*, must threaten the very existence of what allegory has to affirm: the logocentric coherence of its meanings, grounded in the material unity of signs – in a word, polysemy [...]. A polysemous sign can mean different things in different contexts because all such signs are supposed to belong to one truth toward which they collectively tend.<sup>57</sup>

Allegory and irony are thus opposed and entangled in an unending cycle of dominance and submission. Allegory insists on a polysemy that incorporates chaos into a hierarchical structure of meaning that tends towards a transcendental unity; irony as antiphrasis, on the other hand, disrupts this hierarchy, positing utter negation and the non-coincidence of signs. Allegory, which solicits interpretation through metonymic and synecdochic relations within a structure of polysemy, is

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<sup>55</sup> Quintilian, 2014, vol. 4, pp.59-61.

<sup>56</sup> Quintilian, 2014, vol. 4, p.61.

<sup>57</sup> Teskey, 1996, p.57.

opposed to irony which displays a ‘resistance to interpretation’ since it is always at any moment liable to be that which it is not.<sup>58</sup> Irony disturbs the very grounds of allegory, since ‘[n]othing in an allegory is absolutely opposed to anything.’<sup>59</sup>

The conflict between irony and allegory described by Teskey helps elucidate a similar battle staged between the two in Spenser’s Legend of Courtesy, for courtesy participates in them both. As Puttenham observes, allegory and courtesy both unfold themselves obliquely, signifying in coded, complex, and often mysterious ways; but in *The Faerie Queene*, courtesy’s obliqueness might turn so far that it no longer simply deviates from its true meaning but opposes it, embodying irony’s most threatening form, antiphrasis. Discourtesy might masquerade as its opposite; as Walter Raleigh writes, ‘[s]ome vertues and vices are so nicely distinguished, and so resembling each other, as they are often confounded, and the one taken for the other.’<sup>60</sup> As allegory and irony meet in courtesy, the dubiousness of allegory’s claim to truth-telling through a poetics of dissimulation is exposed. Since, as Puttenham observes, dissimulation operates both ‘when we lye as when we tell truth’, then, as Miller points out, allegory ‘cannot escape from the duplicity it may aim to condemn, but which it also may embody and propound.’<sup>61</sup> Within a pharmeric worldview, in which courtesy, virtue, and even allegory itself might rather be its dangerous opposite, each thing enfold its own undoing.

The undoing of allegory is played out across the Legend of Courtesy. When Turpine refuses to offer Calepine help in ferrying the wounded Serena across a river, the ‘discourteous Knight’ instead ‘laugh[ing]’ and ‘mock[ing] to see him like to swim’, Calepine accuses him of being an ‘[v]nknightly Knight, the blemish of that name’ (VI.iii.34.1-4, VI.iii.35.1). The words of the oxymoron – a figure that the poetry indulges to an unprecedented extent in this final book – eat at each other, eroding the meaning of ‘Knight’ until the ‘blemish’ on that ‘name’ leaves it illegible. The oxymoron does not allow the sustaining of competing possibilities so much as hollow out the semantic content of language so that ‘Knight’ no longer holds any value; Turpine not only besmirches the reputation of chivalrous knights but irreparably damages the signifying capacity of that word. Despite being recognised as discourteous, the poem can still later describe the ‘false’ Turpine as ‘comming

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<sup>58</sup> Teskey, 1996, p.61.

<sup>59</sup> Teskey, 1996, p.57.

<sup>60</sup> Walter Raleigh, *The Historie of the World: In Five Books* (London: 1614), p.321.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, 1991, p.56.

courteously', with little indication of whether the phrase is replete with or empty of irony (VI.vii.4.1). Calepine, too, is drawn into the confusion: his name (from Gk, καλλι-επής: 'beautiful-speech') suggests the 'gracious speech' of courtesy, but the 'speeches sharpe and fell' that break from him in 'vengeaunce' against Turpine fail to display such eloquent control (VI.iii.34.8-9). Instead, his name seems a portmanteau of both 'Calidore', the true but absent knight of courtesy, and 'Turpine' (meaning turpitude, or cruelty) himself. This surrogate knight, then, is slung between the two poles of courtesy and discourtesy, partaking of both, an interpretive hurdle suggested by a final possible derivation, offered by James Nohrnberg, of his name: 'χαλεπός' (Gk, 'difficult').<sup>62</sup> Calepine's name oscillates between different possibilities with the same rapidity that Turpine oscillates between a knightly and an unknighly nature. The possibility of coherent allegory appears to come apart under the centrifugal forces produced by the legend's combination of opposing forces.

The erosion of allegory's signifying power here, manifested in the paradox of the unknighly knight, issues from the illegibility of a virtue whose behaviours might be mimicked by the vicious, an illegibility that comprises an epistemological and interpretive crisis. But there is another kind of erosion in the Legend of Courtesy, hinted at in Calepine's onomastic participation in turpitude, which is more akin to the anti-allegorical poetics of 'Muiopotmos' explored in the previous chapter, based in the linguistic and imagistic complicity between entities apparently distinct or mutually exclusive, like butterfly and spider. The crisis here is not simply interpretive but ontological, implying that the structures and methods of courtesy and discourtesy, virtue and vice, do not only *appear* the same, but *are* so. The 'chronic intimacy of type and antitype' which Linda Gregerson identifies as characterising the poetics of *The Faerie Queene* at large might be rephrased in Book VI as the chronic *identity* of type and antitype.<sup>63</sup>

Nowhere is this more troubling than in the blurred representation of Calidore, the Knight of Courtesy, and the Blatant Beast, the scourge of it. The monster, in whose mouth 'were a thousand tongs empight, / Of sundry kindes, and sundry quality', is a polyglottal menace, whose many voices are spoken mostly by 'tongues of mortall men, / Which spake reproachfully, not caring where nor when'

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<sup>62</sup> James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: 1976), p.xiv.

<sup>63</sup> Linda Gregerson, 'The Faerie Queene (1590)', in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard McCabe (Oxford: 2010), p.210.

(VI.xii.27.1-9). The offspring of Envy and Detraction, his malicious tongues are associated with ‘infamy’ and slander, and as Kinney recognises ‘[h]e is the brutish version of the wilfully unsympathetic reader’ and their ‘distortions of meaning’ (VI.vi.1.3).<sup>64</sup> The indiscriminate ‘poysnous gall’ of the beast’s ‘defam[ing]’ bite, which ‘doth whet / Gainst all, both good and bad’ is in direct contrast with the ‘gracious speech’ and love of ‘simple truth and stedfast honesty’ characteristic of Calidore (VI.vi.12.3-6). Yet the first description we get of the Blatant Beast, given by Calidore to Artegall, aligns him suspiciously with courtesy: the ‘darksome den’ within which the beast was ‘fostred [...] Till he to perfect ripenesse grew’ recalls the proem’s ‘siluer bowre’ wherein the flower of courtesy blooms, ‘[t]ill it to ripenesse grew, and forth to honour burst’ (VI.i.8.2-5, VI.Proem.3.3-9). Later, when Calidore ‘chaunst’ upon Calepine and Serena solacing in a ‘couert shade [...] far from enuious eyes’, his interruption into their privacy is made analogous to the Blatant Beast ‘sodainely out of the forrest nere [...] rushing vnaware’ to seize and wound Serena (VI.iii.20.2-7, VI.iii.24.1-2). Whether or not it is ‘fortune’ or ‘fault’, Calidore’s transgression ‘gainst courtesie’ implies the ineluctability of virtue’s slippage into vice (VI.iii.21.5-9).

Calidore’s fault here is also registered as a form of linguistic transgression. In between his stumbling into Calepine and Serena’s glade and Serena’s ravaging by the Blatant Beast, Calidore attempts to ‘allay’ Calepine’s ‘conceived displeasure’ with ‘gentle words and goodly wit’, and so ‘with delightfull pleasure / His long aduentures gan to him relate’ (VI.iii.22.1-8). This long ‘discourse’ evokes the dilatory poetics Parker identifies as characteristic of romance, but their distraction also ‘dilates’ the space which allows Serena ‘[a]llur’d’ by the ‘pleasaunce of the place’, to ‘wand[er] about the fields’ and ‘make a garland to adorne her hed’ of ‘diuers flowres distinct with rare delight’ (VI.iii.23.1-8). Serena’s wandering recalls Clarion’s ambivalent floral antics in the pleasure garden of ‘Muiopotmos’, but also recalls the narrator’s enjoying of Faerie’s rare delights in the Legend’s proem; all are made analogous to Calidore’s ravishing tale to Calepine, his ability to ‘steal mens hearts away’ with his speech,

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<sup>64</sup> Kinney, 1992, p.91. Peter Hardie describes the Beast as the ‘energetic embodiment of perverted language; see Peter Hardie, *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge: 2012), p.400. For similar accounts of the Beast as linguistic corruption and derailing of Spenser’s fashioning project, see Isabel G. MacCaffery, *Spenser’s Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination* (Princeton: 1976), pp.357, 402.; Philmus, 1995, p.512.; Corey McEleney, ‘Spenser’s Unhappy Ends: The Legend of Courtesy and the Pleasure of the Text’, *English Literary History* 79:4 (2012), pp.812-14.

which in turn foreshadows the literal ravishment of Serena by the nonetheless symbolic tongue of the Blatant Beast. The links here are not causal; neither are they easily morally decipherable. Rather, a web of lexical and imagistic resonance and inter- and intratextual allusion links romance wandering, narrative dilation, and damaging slander, implicating each in the other. Calidore's entertaining storytelling appears to be an antidote to his discourteous interruption, but its effects are worryingly close to those of discourteous language. The Blatant Beast's name issues from the French verb *blatter* ('to speak or prate volubly'), and his relation to the Questing Beast of Arthurian legend reminds us that Calidore's quest is etymologically related not only to pursuit, but to the 'bark' and 'yelp' of the Beast himself.<sup>65</sup> Spenser's allegory attempts to distinguish knight and beast and name them, but the relentlessly pharimic nature of courtesy makes virtue and its monstrous other essentially indistinguishable.

The Blatant Beast finally emerges not as a single, definable allegorical entity, such as Slander - whom we meet in the Legend of Friendship, '[p]ouring out streames of poyson and of gall / Gainst all' - but rather an amalgamation of all of the abuses of language visited in *The Faerie Queene*, the offspring of Envy and Detraction 'combynd in one, / And linckt together', and the instrument of Despetto, Decetto, and Defetto 'conioyned' and 'conspiring [...] now in one compound' (IV.viii.24.6-7, V.xii.37.1-2, VI.v.14.5-7). His eruption 'vnaware' as Calidore is regaling Calepine demonstrates the rapidity with which language may turn harmful, either actually or perceived, just as the poet Bonfont is abruptly renamed Malfont, '[e]yther for the'euill, which he did therein, / Or that he likened was to a welhed / Of euill words' (V.ix.26.7-8). And Calidore's interruption of the hidden lovers and its dire consequences reveal how even inadvertently courtesy might become discourteous, in the negotiated space between actor and witness, writer, reader, and text. The malign language of the Beast gathers everything into itself, appearing unexpectedly and unannounced, promiscuously attaching to all forms of utterance, including Spenser's poem. The distortive interpretive antics of the Beast, performed through the 'interlacing [of] many a forged lie', relates him metonymically to the romance *entrelacement* and fiction-making of Spenser's own plots. This alignment, as

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<sup>65</sup> R. B. Bond, 'Blatant Beast', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: 1990), p.97.; 'Quest, v.1.' *OED Online*, March 2020, [oed.com/view/Entry/156334](http://oed.com/view/Entry/156334). Accessed 29 April 2020. Sense 1a.



Adam Spellmire observes, ‘impl[ies] that the monster himself is one of the poem’s origins.’<sup>66</sup> The Beast, the poem’s consummate other-speaker, in that he speaks other than the truth, is not only Calidore’s ‘shade’ but the shadow of other-speaking allegory itself. The poison of his thousand tongues ripples through the characters and words of the Legend of Courtesy, making them seem other than they are, disturbing polysemic coherence. The pharomic nature of language, a quality which the textures of Spenser’s poetry have always courted and defended, in the final book materialises as the Blatant Beast, everywhere and nowhere, turning all virtue to vice, all honey to gall.

### **V: Broken Chains: The End of *The Faerie Queene***

The Blatant Beast – who ‘spat’ and ‘spake licentious words, and hatefull things / Of good and bad alike’ (VI.xii.28.3-6) – is a terrifying and monstrous incarnation of language’s distortive and destructive power. But, almost as if the poem proliferates with self-referential metonyms, he is associatively linked with Calidore, Calepine, each of the titular knights, Colin Clout, Talus, Envy and Detraction, the narrator, and the reader; in short, anything burdened with the task of interpretation. His ‘thousand tongs’ are the tongues of every reader in *The Faerie Queene* and every reader of *The Faerie Queene*, for whom the line between careful reading and ‘wicked [...] backebit[ing]’ is a fine one (VI.xii.41.5). As such, Calidore’s famously short-lived victory at the close of his legend, when he ‘tooke a muzzell strong / Of surest yron, made with many a lincke’ and ‘mured vp’ the Beast’s ‘mouth’ and ‘blasphemous tong’, is doomed because it entails the task of stopping all linguistic and interpretive expression (VI.xii.34.2-5). The ‘vomit full of bookes and papers’ that Error ‘spew[s] out of her filthie maw’ is, in one respect, the engendering of the romance errancy and textual challenges of *The Faerie Queene* itself: the ‘Body of Error’, as Patricia Parker describes, “dilate[d]’ to fill out the remainder of the narrative’, is the first of the poem’s self-referential metonyms, along with the ‘wandering wood’ in which she resides (I.i.20.1-6, I.i.13.6). But by the end of the poem the material text is replaced with ‘tongs’: the potential danger initially identified in books is ultimately transferred

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<sup>66</sup> Adam Spellmire, ‘The Blatant Beast and the ‘Endlesse Trace’ of Spenserian Romance’, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 87:1 (2019), p.30.

to readers themselves (I.i.20.1-6, I.i.13.6). This danger is inevitably unleashed when Calidore leads the Beast through ‘all Faery land [...] / As if he learned had obedience long’, so that ‘all the people [...] / Out of their townes did round about him throng, / To see him leade that Beast in bondage strong’ (VI.xii.37.1-5). This ‘ticker-tape parade’, described by Berger Jr as ‘the most triumphant and ridiculous of all Elfin homecomings’, only serves to expose Calidore to the eyes and tongues of the multitude and the self-defeating nature of his performative victory, implied by the poem’s final ‘*as if* he learned had obedience’, is confirmed as the Beast breaks his chains.<sup>67</sup> Exposure to opinion, even when the crowds ‘admyr’d the Knight’, leads in only a matter of lines to censure, and the Beast’s release (VI.xii.37.9).

Breaking its chains, the Beast’s emancipation symbolically sunders many of the links that hold together Spenser’s reformatory and allegorical poetics. On one hand, the ‘yron chaine’ with which Calidore muzzles the Beast associates him with Hercules who, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, ‘with triple cheyne made new / Of strong and sturdie Adamant’ captured ‘the currish Helhounde *Cerberus*’ (VI.xii.38.8).<sup>68</sup> In Lucian’s *Heracles*, the narrator describes a curious depiction of Hercules seen in Gaul, in which the great hero was an ‘extremely old’ man who ‘drags after him a great crowd of men who are all tethered by the ears’ with ‘delicate chains fashioned of gold and amber’.<sup>69</sup> His puzzlement is only resolved when the picture is explained by a folklorist: ‘[w]e Celts do not agree with you Greeks in thinking that Hermes is Eloquence: we identify Heracles with it’.<sup>70</sup> Hercules Gallicus thus becomes a humanist model for rhetorical might, a befitting model for Calidore’s representation here as the civilising force of language upon the barbarous tongue of the Blatant Beast.<sup>71</sup> But whilst the allegory submits this reading, the poetic surface resists it: the ‘repin[ing]’ of the Beast at ‘those / Straunge bands’, his ‘chauff[ing]’ and his ‘trembl[ing] [...] like a fearefull dog’ render him not the grateful beneficiary but the

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<sup>67</sup> Berger, 1988, p.221.

<sup>68</sup> Ovid, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding, ed. Madeleine Forey (London: 2002), VII.522-524. The Blatant Beast, of course, is given in one of Spenser’s etiologies as the offspring of Cerberus and Chimera (VI.i.8).

<sup>69</sup> Lucian, ‘Heracles’, in *Lucian*, vol. 1, trans. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: 1913), pp.63-65.

<sup>70</sup> Lucian, 1913, vol. 1, p.65.

<sup>71</sup> For a history of Hercules Gallicus within classical and early modern culture, see Robert E. Hallowell, ‘Ronsard and the Gallic Hercules Myth’, *Studies in the Renaissance* 9 (1962), pp.242-250.

victim of the imposition of culture.<sup>72</sup> The scene assumes something of the quality of a reversible figure, in which the Beast is both victim of a colonial enterprise, and, breaking the ‘straunge bands’ and bursting back into the world where he ‘rageth’, ‘[b]arking and biting’, a monstrous aggressor (VI.xii.40.1-5).

The Beast’s chains, then, ironically expose the violence at the heart of eloquence’s fashioning of civilisation out of noise and chaos. They recall the ‘[g]oodly golden chayne, wherewith yfere / The vertues linked are in louely wize’, the ‘golden chaine of concord’ whose ‘inuiolable bands’ sustain cosmic harmony, earthly virtue, and allegorical poetics (I.ix.1.1-2, III.i.12.8, IV.x.35.4). The Beast, as master ironiser, spreader of untruth, and symbol of linguistic and interpretive errancy, violates the ‘bands of ciuilitie’, the chain of concord, and the harmonising bands of polysemy that keep the superstructure of allegorical signification intact. His errancy exceeds even that sanctioned by romance: in breaking his chains and attacking Spenser’s own book, the Beast severs the ‘continuous thread’ and ‘continuous chain’ that Italian poet Giraldo Cinthio describes as correctly linking ‘digressions so that one depends on another and so that they are well linked’.<sup>73</sup> For, as Parker reminds us, ‘romance itself is a bower’, and the bands so prolifically broken by the Beast in the Legend of Courtesy include the ‘couert shades’ that lovers seek to hide from ‘enuious eyes’.<sup>74</sup> At the end of the poem, the Beast’s escape signals the breaking of *The Faerie Queene*’s proposed ends: the fulfilment of the quest narrative, and the fashioning of a reformatory poetics couched in allegorical and romance coherence.

The question that remains at the end of *The Faerie Queene* is what readers are meant to learn, what they are meant to take away from a poem that only seems to sing of the futility of its own interpretation. Are we supposed to register the poem as

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<sup>72</sup> The Beast’s resistance to his allegorical function here resonates with Joe Moshenska’s reading of the dragon of Book I as ‘less like a malevolent foe than like a dog bouncing with excitement’, a moment characteristic of Spenserian ‘play’. Spenser’s verbal games trouble our readings of even the most monstrous and satanic of the poem’s incarnations. See Joe Moshenska, ‘Spenser at Play’, *PMLA* 133:1 (2018), p.28.

<sup>73</sup> Giovanni Battista Giraldo, *Giraldo Cinthio on Romances*, trans. Henry L. Snuggs (Lexington: 1968), p.23.

<sup>74</sup> Parker, 2015, p.112. The covert shades of Book VI refigure the original ‘coole shade’ of Book I, in which the Red Crosse Knight dallies with Duessa, a site of sexual dissipation and dangerous delay (I.ii.29.2). Embowerment’s threat, encountered in the previous chapter and associated with romance enchantment and semantic stagnation, is replaced in the final book with the bower’s fragile promise of safety from slander.

a failure, and the Beast's backbiting at the poem as an admission of the poet's corresponding failure and an abandonment of the project? Does courtesy's intrinsic doubleness, its courting of antiphrasis and deception, put paid to any faith in virtue and the practical power of the poetry of *The Faerie Queene* to cultivate it? These questions enter in on the unresolvable ambiguities surrounding the conclusion of *The Faerie Queene*, on the nature of its tone, of its state of completion, and of the consequent status of the Mutabilitie Cantos that may comprise a coda to the epic, a portion of a purported seventh legend, or have no intended relation to the long poem at all. These questions remain unresolvable as a consequence of Spenser's death and the lack of evidence for the next instalment of the poem, but partly because the poem, as ever, is committed to the positing and sustaining of ambivalence.

The commitment to irresolvable ambivalence, however, signals the poem's promise to contemporary and future readers, and the redemption of its power to fashion ethical subjects. When Calidore, 'wondr[ing ...] / And rapt with pleasaunce' at the sight of the dancing Graces, 'resolu[es], what it was, to know' and erupts onto the scene, prompting the vision's sudden disappearance, his desire to 'know' is both erotic and interpretive. The impulse to read, or discover, or know, appears once again to be inimical to true courtesy, which remains shrouded or embowered in an inscrutable dance before disappearing from sight forever. Instead, Book VI compels us to set aside this impulse to resolve ambiguity or mystery through interpretation. It solicits another kind of communion with otherness untainted by a hermeneutics based on identification or naming; a communion, in Teskey's words, which lies in 'mov[ing] into nearness with the otherness of the stranger.'<sup>75</sup> The ethics courted in all of Spenser's poetry, but polemically in the Legend of Courtesy, is to relinquish the impulse to name, or interpret. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Philip Sidney describes the 'many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused', a description recalled by Spenser's 'darke conceit' and one which figures poetic truth – and particularly allegorical truth – as apocalyptic,

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<sup>75</sup> Teskey, 2003, p.344. Teskey's reading is governed by a broadly Heideggerian philosophy based on his dialogue *Gelassenheit*, which outlines a mode of meditative thinking that does not try to seize or grasp its object. See Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking: A Translation of Gelassenheit*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York, Evanston & London: 1969).

esoteric, and accessible only to those with interpretive power.<sup>76</sup> Truth lies through and behind the allegorical image: ‘nourishment’, in Erasmian terms, is yielded ‘if you break through the husk and extract the kernel’.<sup>77</sup> But Spenser’s allegory in general, and the poetry of Book VI in particular, reverses this concept and contends that allegory’s reformatory dispensation lies not in the meaning elicited through interpretation but in a recognition and engagement with the sensuous particularities of its surfaces, its moments of resistance, its disclosure of sympathy and suffering. The greatest discipline that *The Faerie Queene* bequeaths lies not in a normative or didactic theory of poetry, but in a wandering from it, not in the power to name, but in the ability to feel.

## VI: The Spaniel and the Hawk: Burton’s Animal Imagination

At the beginning of ‘Democritus Junior to the Reader’, Robert Burton offers an explanation for the apparently jumbled and haphazard nature of his text:

This roving humor (though not with like successe) I have ever had, & like a ranging Spaniell, that barks at every bird he sees, leaving his game, I have followed all, saving that which I shoud [...]. I have read many Bookes, but to little purpose, for want of good method, I have confusedly tumbled over divers Authors in our Libraries, with small profit, for want of Art, Order, Memory, Judgement.

(I.4)

Aligning himself with intellectual predecessors who equally shared ‘a running wit, an unconstant, unsettled mind’ – Plato and Aristotle, the French scholar Adrian Turnebus, and Michel de Montaigne – whilst nonetheless disowning any ‘like successe’ with characteristic self-effacement, Burton finds the cause of his own easily-distracted attention to be his melancholic disposition, his ‘roving humour’ (I.3). At the centre of the word ‘distraction’ is the suggestion of the ‘track’ or ‘trace’, a way or path, but also the act of following the scent of ‘game’, which reveals Burton’s

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<sup>76</sup> Philip Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, eds. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: 1973), p.121.

<sup>77</sup> Erasmus, ‘The Handbook of the Christian Soldier: *Enchiridion militis christianæ*’, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 66, ed. John W. O’Malley (Toronto, London: 1988), p.35.

spaniel to be the perfect parody of the bloodhound, ‘barking at every bird he sees’, unable to trace the hunt, or keep on track. Such roaming, unmoored attention is linked directly to poor reading practices: as we have seen before, not with a little irony Burton acknowledges that his rapacious yet ‘confusedly tumbling’ reading habits lack ‘good method’ – a word whose etymology *meta-bodos* (Gk, ‘through-way’ or main road) associates a diversion from the *telos* of a systematic approach with a metaphoric of divagation – and are in want of the ‘Art, Order, Memory and Judgement’ that signal both healthy cognitive faculties and clear rhetorical display. The spaniel image here discloses not only a genuine anxiety regarding the threat that distraction might pose both to the well-ordered mind and to successful literary productivity, but a mutual incompatibility between the digressive impulse and systematic epistemology, whether that be reading or anatomy.

Later in the *Anatomy*, Burton fashions another animal analogy for digressive distraction. In the Partition on Cure, after some lengthy discussion of various dietary, physiological, and pharmacological cures, Burton affords both himself and his reader some release in a ‘Digression of the Ayre’, which begins with a departure:

As a long-winged Hawke when hee is first whistled off the fist, mounts aloft, and for his pleasure fetcheth many a circuit in the Ayre, still soaring higher and higher, till hee bee come to his full pitch; and in the end when the game is sprung, comes downe amaine, and stoopes upon a sudden: so will I, having now come at last into these ample fields of Ayre, wherein I may freely expatiate and exercise my selfe, for my recreation a while rove, wander round about the world, mount aloft to those æthereall orbes and celestiall spheres, and so descend to my former elements againe.

(II.33)

The epic simile signals a remarkable change in register for this Partition’s increasingly knotted, technical prose; suddenly devoid of the lists, the mounting references to other works and authors, and the proliferating parataxis typical of Burton’s prose in the section directly preceding this digression, the syntactic dilation here offers welcome relaxation of the heavy demands which the text makes on the reader’s concentration elsewhere. The long-winged hawk’s flight also represents a pleasant distraction for the writer, an ecstatic ascent whose ‘mounting’ and ‘soaring’ is pleasurable, wedding dilation and delight, and whose opportunity to ‘expatiate’, ‘exercise’, and ‘wander’ in ‘ample fields’ for ‘recreation’ recalls exactly the same

language with which Burton describes his digressive impulse at the start of his tract on love melancholy. As an image of distraction, the thrilling and restorative flight of the hawk appears to stand in direct contrast to the more deleterious divagations of the spaniel, yet such an easy dichotomy is troubled when the hawk must return to the ground over twenty pages later: '[b]ut', writes Burton, 'my melancholy spaniels quest, my game is sprung, and I must suddenly come down and follow' (II.58). The spaniel, previously the embodiment of dangerous distraction, is refigured here, unexpectedly, as a summons to attention, a return to the teleological, goal-oriented 'quest' of the medical treatise. The canine image enfolds ambivalence: in the first case, despite Burton's fears that his wandering mind and unmethodical reading might pose some real problems, the dynamic playfulness of the spaniel cannot fail to convey some of the exuberance associated with waywardness; in the second, the symbol of melancholic distraction is inverted, becoming the sign of melancholic attention.

In these animals, a number of cultural and conceptual touchstones meet, which underpin the relationship between Burton's digressive style and the operation of the *Anatomy's* therapeutic efficacy. The 'roving humour' of melancholy, which Burton figures as 'a ranging Spaniell', recalls the 'kinde of raving fancie-full behaviour' described by Montaigne in 'Of three commerces or societies', the essay in which he describes both the 'comfort' and 'solace' offered by reading and the operation of this solace through distraction or 'diver[sion]'.<sup>78</sup> Montaigne's 'fancie-full behaviour', in turn, invokes the imaginative faculty, or 'fancy', the 'corruption' or 'distemper' of which Burton representatively recognises as a prime cause of melancholy: it is in 'melancholy distempered phantasies' that the disorder's most pernicious form, despair, most readily manifests (I.388, III.433). And both the spaniel and hawk have cultural associations with the imagination. A metaphor linking the hunting dog to the inventive imagination appears in the Spanish doctor Juan Huarte's book on psychology *The Examination of Mens Wits* (1575):

The second grace which may not be wanting in a perfect Orator, is to possesse much inuention, or much reading, for if he rest bound to dilate and confirme any matter whatsoeuer, with many speches and sentences applied to the purpose, it behooueth that he haue a very swift imagination, and that

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<sup>78</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Montaigne's Essays*, vol. 3, trans. John Florio (London: 2006), pp.33, 38.

the same supplie (as it were) the place of a braach, to hunt and bring the game to his hand[.]<sup>79</sup>

The imagination, like a dog, sniffs out the matter of true ‘invention’ to provide the material for rich oratory. As Karl Josef Höltgen has recognised, Huarte stood at the forefront of affirming the power rather than corruption of the imaginative faculty:

Following Cardano, Telesio, and Campanella, he showed that imagination is basically not something fantastic, abnormal, or pathological but that it has its place in the hierarchy of normal mental functions and is a necessary requirement for orators, for poets, and for every artistic and creative activity.<sup>80</sup>

The influence of such thinking can be tracked through major English texts on poetics. In the *Defence*, rich with Neoplatonic understandings of poetic fury and imaginative potency, Philip Sidney describes how the imaginations of poets ‘range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be.’<sup>81</sup> And by the middle of the following century, in the dedicatory epistle to *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), John Dryden describes ‘*the faculty of imagination in the writer, which, like a nimble spaniel, beats over and ranges through the field of memory, till it springs the quarry it hunted after*’.<sup>82</sup> The hunting dog, or ‘nimble spaniel’, becomes a recognisable trope for the poetic imagination.

In the *Anatomy*, the spaniel of the imagination is melancholic. Burton’s conception of the imaginative faculty, as Stephanie Shirilan has shown, was, like Huarte’s, heavily influenced by Italian Neoplatonists including Ficino, Campanella, and Telesio, as well as being informed by pseudo-Aristotelian understanding of genial melancholy, both of which contribute to a redemption, as we shall see, of the melancholic imagination.<sup>83</sup> But the spaniel has broader associations with melancholy in Renaissance culture. In Albrecht Dürer’s 1514 engraving *Melencolia I*, for instance,

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<sup>79</sup> John Huarte, *The Examination of Mens Wits*, trans. Richard Carew (London: 1594), p.131.

<sup>80</sup> Karl Josef Höltgen, ‘Clever Dogs and Nimble Spaniels: On the Iconography of Logic, Invention, and Imagination’, *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 24 (1998), p.4.

<sup>81</sup> Sidney, 1973, p.81.

<sup>82</sup> John Dryden, ‘Annus Mirabilis’, in *The Poems of John Dryden*, vol. 1, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: 1958), p.46.

<sup>83</sup> Stephanie Shirilan, *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy* (Farnham: 2015), chapter 3.



the angelic figure of melancholy rests beside an emaciated, sleeping dog. Alice A. Kuzniar observes the multifarious symbolism of this dog, from the torpor and malnourishment of the melancholic, and associations of insanity, to links to scholarship and prophecy via the hunting analogy: the dog, she suggests, links ‘these very opposites of the madman and the prophet’.<sup>84</sup> But *Melencolia I* contains another set of melancholic symbolism germane to Burton’s animals. Carla Mazzio has identified ‘the all-too-ubiquitous element of air in the engraving’, from the ‘winged and air-born but now stationary’ figure, ‘the motionless bell; the idle bellows’, to ‘the eerily empty but still imbalanced scale’ that appears to weigh the air.<sup>85</sup> Burton’s hawk has similar aerial associations, of course, appearing in the ‘Digression of the Ayre’, and journeying through ‘æthereall orbes and celestiaall spheres’. As Mazzio observes, ‘terms involving ‘Air’ included ‘ghost’ (an English term for ‘breath’) and ‘spirit’ (from the Latin *spiritus*)’, but the air, or *pneuma*, as ‘the instrument of the soule [... and] a common tye or *medium*, betwixt the body and the soule’, had a central role in psychophysiological accounts of the imagination in classical and early modern thought (I.141).<sup>86</sup> Both of Burton’s digressive animals, spaniel and hawk, communicate and celebrate the inventive power of the melancholic imagination.

It almost goes without saying that digression is one of the *Anatomy*’s principal stylistic and structural qualities. A cursory glance at the contents page reveals five overtly named digressions – on anatomy; on the nature of spirits; on the misery of scholars; a digression of air; and a consolatory digression – but the entire text exhibits digressive tendencies, from excursive subject-matter, to dilatory revisionary practices, to a textual style characterised by the figures and tropes of *amplificatio* in pursuit of *copia*, the ‘Extemporanean stile’ and ‘Tautologies’ which Burton ironically identifies as his text’s ‘faults of Barbarisme’ (I.12). Ruth Fox observes that ‘[t]o read the *Anatomy* on its own terms is to deal with structure – to assess, that is, the relationship between the matter of the book and the shape which informs that matter with meaning.’<sup>87</sup> As such, all criticism that has contended with the text’s structure and style has necessarily treated its digressiveness, and these treatments, as we have

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<sup>84</sup> Alice A. Kuzniar, *Melancholia’s Dog: Reflections on Our Animal Kinship* (Chicago: 2006), p.17.

<sup>85</sup> Carla Mazzio, ‘The History of Air: Hamlet and the Trouble with Instruments’, *South Carolina Review* 26:1/2 (2009), pp.165-166.

<sup>86</sup> Mazzio, 2009, p.154.

<sup>87</sup> Ruth A. Fox, *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Berkeley, LA & London: 1976), p.2.

seen before, tend to fall into two major camps: those who, like Fox, are able to comprehend the text's apparent waywardness as operating within an holistic aesthetic and intentional whole; and those, of which Stanley Fish's *Self-Consuming Artifacts* is both epitome and representative, for whom Burton 'unbuilds the superstructure of his great work until finally it stands for a failure to effect a declared intention.'<sup>88</sup> Mediating between this critical divide, this chapter enters into the dialogue surrounding Burtonian digression by arguing that the 'unbuilding' of Burton's systematic superstructure of anatomy does not lead to a 'failure' of 'intention', but rather advances his therapeutic aims. In this sense, it follows previous chapters' suggestion that Burton's epistemological enterprise is subordinated to his therapeutic one, following Ross Chambers' account of digressive literature as advancing a 'criticism of the disciplined and the orderly, the hierarchical and the stable, the methodical and the systematic, showing them to be unpleasurable, that is, alienating.'<sup>89</sup> Embracing the various strands unearthed by Burton's animals – the psychological benefits of diversion, the circulation of air, the power and pleasure of the melancholic imagination – what follows explores the crucial place of Burton's digressions in his literary-therapeutic enterprise. Just as both spaniel and hawk archetypes convey the pleasures of distraction, the *Anatomy's* '*Digressions doe mightely delight and refresh a weary reader*' and are '*most willingly use[d]*', inducing delight at the expense of the superstructure of anatomy as a salve to the melancholic reader (I.250).

## VII: Diverting the Spirit: Distraction and the Melancholic Imagination

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<sup>88</sup> Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, LA & London: 1972), p.350.

<sup>89</sup> Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln & London: 1999), p.10.

In his essay ‘Of diverting and diversion’, Montaigne describes his employment ‘in comforting of a truly-afflicted Ladie’, a lady whose ‘torment’ he alleviates in an apparently unconventional manner:

I attempted not to cure it by strong and lively reasons: either because I want them, or because I suppose I might otherwise effect my purpose the better. Nor did I cull out the severall fashions of comfort prescribed by philosophy: That the thing lamented is not ill, as *Cleanthes*: or but a little ill, as the Peripatetikes: That to lament is neither just, nor commendable, as *Chrysippus*: Nor this *Epicurus*, most agreeing with my manner, to translate the conceit of yrkesome into delightsome things: Nor to make a load of all this masse, dispensing the same, as one hath occasion, as *Cicero*. But faire and softly declining our discourses, and by degrees bending them unto subjects more near; then a little more remote, even as shee more or lesse enclined to mee. I unperceavably removed those dolefull humours from hir: so that as long as I was with her, so long I kept her in cheerefull countenance; and untroubled fashion, wherein I used diversion.<sup>90</sup>

Montaigne lists and dismisses a range of remedial and consolatory responses to a patient’s melancholic condition: the opposing of disturbed emotion with ‘reason’; the diminishment of the object of despair through the frameworks of Stoic and Peripatetic thought; and the transformist philosophy of Epicurus (which Montaigne observes is ‘most agreeing’ to him) which turns the ‘yrkseome’ into the ‘delightsome’. Instead, he opts for the practice of ‘diversion’, a process whereby a gentle changing of ‘discourses’ by ‘degrees’ distracts the afflicted attention and replaces ‘dolefull humours’ with ‘cheer’.<sup>91</sup> The shared etymon of both the ‘declining’ discourses and Montaigne’s consequently ‘enclining’ patient (Lat. *clināre*, ‘to bend’) suggests both the pliancy of the woman’s mental state, linking it to the similar deviation or ‘bending’ of the digressive speech, and invokes the *clinamen*, the word Lucretius gives to the unpredictable atomic swerve of Epicurean atomistic philosophy.<sup>92</sup> Aleatory cosmology is aligned with digressive verbal tactics, but the atomic swerve also functions here as an image of the passionate and ethical sympathy central to effective rhetorical persuasion, the ‘enclining’ of the patient ‘to mee’ mirroring the inclination

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<sup>90</sup> Montaigne, 2006, vol. 3, 45-46.

<sup>91</sup> For an extended discussion of the continental thought surrounding *divertissement*, see Chad A. Córdova, ‘Pascal and Melancholy’, *Modern Intellectual History* 16:2 (2019), pp.352-357.

<sup>92</sup> See Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald Melville (Oxford: 2008), II.216-224.

and contact of atoms. The artfulness of language is at full display in Montaigne's diversion, insinuating itself carefully and 'unperceavably' working its effect. Pleasant discourse provides distraction for the troubled mind.

The importance of diversion – and its etymological relation, *diversity* – to the healthy functioning of the mind was stressed by ancient authorities and absorbed into early modern regimens of health. Seneca, in *De tranquillitate animi*, recommends that the 'mind should not be kept continuously at the same pitch of concentration, but given amusing diversions.'<sup>93</sup> Cicero, in the *Tusculan Disputations*, 'agree[s] with Epicurus' in the manner of 'tear[ing] someone away from 'distress' by 'bring[ing] in a harpist' and 'burn[ing] a platter of sweet balsam' in order to 'recall' a melancholic patient from 'mourning'.<sup>94</sup> In his *Treatise of Melancholie* (1586), Timothie Bright identifies diversion as a useful antidote to melancholy induced by too much study:

studies haue great force to procure melancholie: if they be vehement, and of difficult matters, and high misteries: & therefore chiefly they are to be auoyded, & the mind to be set free from all such trauel, that the spirits which before were partly wasted, might be restored: and partly employed vpon hard discourses, may be released, to the comfort of the hart, and the thinning of the bloud.<sup>95</sup>

Bright describes the physiology of a melancholy caused by study: the 'spirit', the pneumatic substance of the imagination linking the body and the cognitive faculties, becomes 'wasted' by overwork. But the mind being 'set free' from 'trauel' stimulates a literal dilation, as the 'thinning of the bloud' effects a 'comfort of the hart', and the 'restoration' of the sufferer to good health. As a consequence, he recommends the reader to 'aboue all, abandon working of your braine by any studie, or conceit: and giue your mind to libertie of recreation'.<sup>96</sup>

In contrast to Bright, in 'Of three commerces or societies', the essay directly preceding 'Of diverting and diversion', Montaigne locates in books not the cause for melancholy but a source of edifying diversion. This essay opens with the injunction

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<sup>93</sup> Seneca, 'De Tranquillitate Animi', in *Four Dialogues*, ed. C. D. N. Costa (Warminster: 1994), p.95. It might be noted that the recommendation of 'amusing diversions' directly follows Seneca's encouragement to imitate Democritus rather than Heraclitus.

<sup>94</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J. E. King (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.281.

<sup>95</sup> Timothie Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie* (London: 1586), p.243.

<sup>96</sup> Bright, 1586, p.243.

to ‘not cleave so fast unto our humours and dispositions’ but instead ‘to apply our selves to divers fashions.’<sup>97</sup> ‘Reading’, he later observes, ‘serves mee especially, to awake my conceit by divers objects’, before distinguishing between ‘studie’, the excessive and stultifying focus of attention on one object, and ‘[b]ookes [which] are one of those businesses that seduce [the mind] from studie.’<sup>98</sup> He describes the great variety of emotional responses ‘rouze[d]’ in him by reading books, the way it ‘exerciseth’ his thoughts ‘sometimes toward force, sometimes towards order and comelinesse, it rangeth, moderates and fortifieth.’<sup>99</sup> By presenting his imagination with a variety of stimulating objects of contemplation, reading offers mental recreation through diverse wandering. In ‘Of diverting and diversion’, this mental activity and recreation is not described but effected. Having described his therapeutic strategy of ‘softly declining our discourses’, Montaigne’s essay does just that, moving through different examples of diversion: the myth of Atalanta and the distracting golden apples; the ‘diver[sion] and remov[al]’ of ‘the rheume’ when doctors cannot ‘purge’ it; the ‘vehement diversion’ of ‘love’; the kidney stone, trapped ‘in the yard’, that ‘so stopped my urine, and brought me so neare deaths doore’ for lack of diversion and expulsion.<sup>100</sup> As Lawrence Kritzman observes, ‘[t]he essay is constructed around a series of displacements framed by repetitions of the diversion topos’; this ‘topological displacement’ effects the subversion of death – the mourning of the female patient, the threat of Montaigne’s kidney stone – through diversion.<sup>101</sup> ‘[A] violent imagination holdeth me’, he writes, and ‘I finde it a shorter course to alter and divert, then to tame and vanquish the same’. The digressive path of diversion is, paradoxically, ‘shorter’ and less arduous than the method of direct cure.

The reworking of Epicurean and Stoic practices in Montaigne’s divertive treatments is absorbed quite explicitly into the *Anatomy* – as E. Patricia Vicari opines, ‘[t]he therapy of choice for Burton is distraction: curing melancholy by thinking hard

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<sup>97</sup> Montaigne, 2006, vol. 3, p.32.

<sup>98</sup> Montaigne, 2006, vol. 3, p.33.

<sup>99</sup> Montaigne, 2006, vol. 3, p.33.

<sup>100</sup> Montaigne, 2006, vol. 3, pp.47-53.

<sup>101</sup> Lawrence D. Kritzman, *The Fabulous Imagination: On Montaigne’s Essays* (New York: 2009), pp.106-107. For how Montaigne’s diversion exalts the ‘incidental happening’ over the ‘main subject’, see Margaret M. McGowan, ‘Caesar’s cloak: diversion as an art of persuasion in sixteenth-century writing’, *Renaissance Studies* 18:3 (2004), pp.437-448.

about something else.<sup>102</sup> ‘Many and sundry are the meanes, which Philosophers and Physitians have prescribed to exhilarate a sorrowfull heart,’ writes Burton in his Partition on cure, ‘to divert those fixed and intent cares and meditations’ (II.112). Versions of this same observation recur throughout. Quoting Italian physician Montanus, Burton writes that melancholy ‘*beginnes with sorrow [... but] must be expelled with hilarity*’ (II.123). ‘[S]et prosperity against adversity’, he writes when recommending how to allay melancholic perturbations: ‘as wee refresh our eyes by seeing some pleasant meddow, fountaine, picture, or the like: recreate thy minde by some contrary object, with some more pleasing meditation divert thy thoughts’ (II.102). Just as Montaigne’s declining discourses keep his patient in ‘cheereful countenance’, so too Burton observes that diversion ‘exhilarates’ through ‘hilarity’ (shared etymon, Lat. *hilaris*, ‘cheerful’). He also recognises that the divertive therapy works upon ‘those vaine, false, frivolous Imaginations, absurd conceits, fained feares and sorrowes’ which afflict the melancholic phantasy, ‘affect[ing] or trouble[ing] him’, and requiring ‘exp[ulsion]’ (II.102). Even though the melancholic might be ‘habituated unto such phantasticall Imaginations’, deliverance remains possible: ‘let him oppose, fortify, or prepare himselfe against them, by premeditation, reason, or as we doe by a crooked staffe, bend himself another way’ (II.101-2). Like Montaigne, Burton observes that opposition with ‘reason’ might offer suitable opposition for ‘phantasticall Imaginations’, but then, like Montaigne again, settles finally on an image of pliancy, a ‘crooked staffe’ that diverts an imagination ailed by ‘fixed and intent cares and meditations’.<sup>103</sup> Diversion, regularly in the form of ‘[s]tudy’, might be offered up to those ‘carried headlong with vaine thoughts and imaginations, to distract their cogitations’ (II.90).

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<sup>102</sup> E. Patricia Vicari, *The View from Minerva’s Tower: Learning and Imagination in The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Toronto: 1989), p.16. For the shared Stoic and Epicurean conception of allopathy in treating melancholic disturbance, see Jeremy Schmidt, ‘Melancholy and the Therapeutic Language of Moral Philosophy in Seventeenth-Century Thought’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65:4 (2004), pp.583-590.

<sup>103</sup> Burton’s ‘crooked staffe’ image is lifted directly from Thomas Wright’s *Passions of the Minde in Generall*: ‘if thou perceiue a vehement inclination to the one extreame, procure to bend thy selfe as farre to the other; for so thou shalt with more facilitie come to the middest: as commonly the Philosophers declare, by the example of a crooked staffe, the which to make straight, we bend to the other side, and make it as crooked contrariwise as it was before.’ Wright’s rendition makes clear how the image is recruited to further a specifically allopathic remedy in keeping with conventional Aristotelian and Galenic paradigms of psycho-physiological anthropology. See: Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (London: 1604), p.82.

Diversion poses such an attractive recourse for Burton because of the prominent role he gives to the imagination within his faculty psychology. As Sorana Corneanu and Koen Vermeir remind us, '[t]he early modern 'imagination' is a complex and shifting historical product resulting from the accretion of several traditions of thought, mainly Aristotelian and Platonic, but also Stoic'.<sup>104</sup> In the Aristotelian account of ventricular cognition, the *phantasia* is the least powerful of the inner senses of the *sensus communis*, passively receiving sense data from the external senses, whilst the *imaginatio*, separate from the *phantasia*, evaluates and judges this data. In the Stoic account, however, these two functions are collapsed, as 'the mind is presented with an impression or image-like imprint in the material soul (*phantasia*) to which it gives its assent (*sunkatathesis*).'<sup>105</sup> Burton's description of the 'Phantasie, or Imagination' – the 'inner sense, which does more fully examine the Species perceived by the common sense, of things present or absent', 'recalling them to mind againe, or making new of his owne' – reflects such collapsing (I.152).

According to Burton:

In *Melancholy* men this faculty is most powerful and strong, and often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things, especially if it be stirred up by some terrible object, presented to it from common sense, or memory. In Poets and Painters *Imagination* forcibly workes, as appears by their several fictions, Antickes, Images.

(I.152)

The imagination is, then, the source of the melancholic's artistic genius and, because of its intrinsic impressionability and perviousness, vulnerable to pain and impairment. In Burton's broadly Stoic account, the imagination exceeds its place in the medieval ventricular system and embraces the roles both of receiving and producing cognitive images, and judging or responding to them. The Italian Neoplatonist Pico della Mirandola, whose writings influence Burton's more radical understanding of faculty psychology, writes:

[S]ince desire itself depends on cognition [...] we must admit that knowledge [...] stimulates the motive force, by means of which the animal gratifies its

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<sup>104</sup> Sorana Corneanu and Koen Vermeir, 'Idols of the Imagination: Francis Bacon on the Imagination', *Perspectives on Science* 20:2 (2012), p.187.

<sup>105</sup> Corneanu and Vermeir, 2012, p.187.

desire. Further, inasmuch as cognition originates from sense [...] and inasmuch as sense, when informed with the likeness of a sensible object, immediately has recourse to phantasy [...] we must infer that the behavior of all animate being arises from the nature of the phantasy – the imagination.<sup>106</sup>

Explicating a direct link between the phantasy and the behaviour of the human subject, Pico's description discloses the intimate relationship between the health of the imagination and the correct functioning of the subject's cognition, moral psychology, and mental health.

Stephanie Shirilan has demonstrated the profound ways in which Burton's conception of the imagination is shaped and influenced by an early modern absorption of the theory of *pneuma*.<sup>107</sup> *Pneumatology*, codified by Galen and essentially Stoic in nature, describes how vital spirit (*pneuma zōotikon*) is transported by the blood to vivify the organs. In the brain, Koen Vermeir explains, 'it is rarefied and combined with air to yield the animal spirit (*pneuma psychicon*), which consists of the most subtle matter,' providing a material connection between the body and the soul; over these spirits, 'the imagination was master'.<sup>108</sup> As *pneumatology* was adopted and reformulated by Renaissance Neoplatonists and Paracelsian writers – who described how the activities of perception and cognition, as well as phenomena such as magnetism and occult healing, operated through the passage of atoms and spirits across a pervasive and animated field of *pneuma* – the material change of the imagination during cognition was emphasised. Campanella, for instance, describes how pneumatic perception operates through *immutatio*, a process which 'emphasi[s]es the identity between the knowing soul and the known object.'<sup>109</sup> This process of 'cognitive assimilation' means the imagination not only registers the object of perception but experiences 'a real transformation of soul into object'.<sup>110</sup> Paracelsus makes such a

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<sup>106</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *On the Imagination*, trans. and ed. Harry Caplan (New Haven: 1930), p.39.

<sup>107</sup> Shirilan, 2015, chapter 3. I am indebted to Shirilan's discussion of Burton's inheritance of *pneumatology* throughout this chapter. See also: John Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism* (Cambridge: 1998), pp.21-49. For an account of the intelligible species in the Neoplatonic New Philosophy, see Leen Spruit, *Species intelligibilis: from perception to knowledge*, vol. 2 (Leiden: 1994), pp.195-221.

<sup>108</sup> Koen Vermeir, 'The 'physical prophet' and the powers of imagination. Part I: a case-study on prophecy, vapours and the imagination (1685-1710)', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 35:4 (2004), pp.570, 572. My discussion here follows Vermeir's account of *pneumatology* provided in this article.

<sup>109</sup> Spruit, 1994, vol. 2, p.220.

<sup>110</sup> Spruit, 1994, vol. 2, p.220.



sympathetically mimetic process explicit as he describes how man ‘has a mind that flies out and does not remain in him; for mind is spirit. If he intends to experience heaven, his spirit is in heaven; if herbs, his spirit is in herbs, also in air, also in water.’<sup>111</sup> During the cognitive processes, the imagination is brought – even materially transformed – into sympathetic relation with its object of attention.

This understanding of the imagination has a number of implications for the therapeutic efficacy of the *Anatomy*’s digressions. The impressionability of the imagination – even its material malleability – is registered in both Burton’s and surrounding writers’ recourse to images of pliancy and sympathetic inclination to describe divertive therapies, and in Burton’s description of the imagination’s susceptibility to being ‘stirred up by some terrible object’. The opposite, however, is also true, and the imagination might be stirred up or alleviated by a wonderful object, bringing it into sympathetic alignment with a source of joy, exuberance, or exhilaration. In this respect, diversion is not merely an allopathic tool to ‘drive out’ unwanted passions, but something more akin to a magnetic force that draws other things into itself. Indeed, Burton uses just such a metaphor to describe ‘eloquence’ as ‘a most forcible loadstone to drawe the favours and good wills of mens eyes, eares, and affections unto them’ (III.10). Indeed, all of the kinds of diversion that Burton describes in the *Anatomy*, from game-playing, to music, to the counsel of friends, operate through pneumatic transfer – both music and speech being metonymically and actually related to ‘air’ – and imaginative transformation. And nowhere do we see more clearly this understanding of divertive allopathy, *pneumatology*, and imaginative transformation than in Burton’s ‘Digression of the Ayre’.

### **VIII: On Air: Energy, Pleasure, and the Ends of Anatomy**

At the beginning of the ‘Digression of the Ayre’, Burton releases himself from the increasingly onerous task of anatomy, via the simile of a long-winged hawk, ‘into these ample fields of Ayre’, where he may ‘expatiate’, ‘recreate’, and ‘exercise’

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<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Walter Pagel, *Joan Baptista Von Helmon: Reformer of Science and Medicine* (Cambridge: 1982), p.30.

himself. What follows is an extended flight of speculative knowledge, one that asks questions regarding the natural world, cosmology, and heterodox theological issues. From the hawk's vantage point, Burton wonders if he 'could, observe what becomes of Swallowes, Storckes, Cranes, Cuckowes, Nightingales, Redstarts, and many other kinde of singing birds' (II.36). He speculates on the existence of fantastical creatures in 'the depth', the 'Sea monsters and fishes, Mare-maides, Sea men', before turning, with an enquiry befitting the title of Democritus Jr, to the possibility of a multiverse, 'a plurality of worlds' (II.38, II.52). Throughout, he is concerned with the world's endless 'variety of complection, colours, plants, birds, beasts, metals, peculiar to almost every place', the operations of earthly and cosmic mutability and diversity, and the murky theological questions they might unearth: 'If God be infinitely and only good,' he asks, 'why should he alter or destroy the world?' (II.42, II.57).<sup>112</sup> Aerial flight offers Burton the opportunity to indulge in an ecstatic speculation about the teeming variety of the world, but when his 'melancholy spaniels quest' brings him back to his 'former elements', Burton writes once again of air, though with the more prosaic focus on its physiological utility for alleviating melancholy: 'no better Physicke for a melancholy man then change of ayre and variety of places' (II.64). Noting the division in register in the digression, Michael O'Connell asks, 'What do the ample fields of knowledge have to do with the air we breathe?'<sup>113</sup> The answer lies beyond simply a recognition of the shared theme – air – and also beyond the 'vast scholarship' of encyclopaedia described by Samuel G. Wong, the 'playful work and purposeful distraction that becomes a means of controlling melancholy.'<sup>114</sup> Rather, in a similar fashion to his production of a labyrinthine text to mimic the experience of the fallen world, Burton here provides a salubrious rectification of the air, or vital spirits, through a digressive stimulation of pleasure.

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<sup>112</sup> The world's infinite variety is a regular theme of Burton's digressive sections: his 'Consolatory Digression', which comprises a collection of consolations out of other writers, focuses largely on the 'errant planets' and the 'rise and fall in this world, ebbe and flowe', with the consolation that such mutability breeds a variety of 'many pleasant sports, objects, sweet smells, delightsome tasts, musick, meats, hearbes, flowres, &c. to recreate your senses' (II.129, II.132). In the 'Digression of the Ayre', as we shall see, the pleasure of variety is not only described but induced, in a manner that extends beyond the rational capacity of consolation to a therapy of the imagination.

<sup>113</sup> Michael O'Connell, *Robert Burton* (Boston: 1986), p.64.

<sup>114</sup> Samuel G. Wong, 'Encyclopedism in *Anatomy of Melancholy*', *Renaissance and Reformation* 22:1 (1998), p.17.

Indeed, whilst the textual strategy is similar, Burton's digressive therapy is the inverse or alternative to the beneficial work of reading explored in the previous chapter. Where Burton aligned the 'Herculean worke' of navigating the textual labyrinth with the figure of Theseus, who escapes from the labyrinth by following the thread or clue, in the 'Digression of the Ayre', Burton instead aligns himself and his reader with 'Icaromenippus wings in *Lucian*' (I.356, II.48). In this dialogue, Menippus 'constructed wings, patterned after Daedalus' clever invention' to fly to the heavens for a guided tour with Zeus, providing the nominal prefix associating him with Icarus.<sup>115</sup> Unlike his mythical forebear, however, whose flight ends in hubristic tragedy, Menippus' wings 'were innocent of wax', rather made by 'taking a good large eagle and also a strong vulture and cutting off their wings, joints and all'.<sup>116</sup> Icarian flight presents itself as the alternative to Theseus' labour to escape the 'Labyrinth of worldly cares' through the 'lightn[ing]' of the 'minde by reading of some inticing story, true or fained' (II.85). But Lucian's tale is germane to Burton's digression in another way: Menippus, struck by the variation of the cosmos, 'scattered haphazard about the sky', the 'peculiarities of the moon' and 'her multiplicity of shapes', seeks enlightenment from philosophers, but to no avail: 'they were so far from ridding me of my old-time ignorance that they plunged me forthwith into even greater perplexities by flooding me every day with first causes, final causes, atoms, voids, elements, concepts, and all that sort of thing.'<sup>117</sup> Extending a Cynic's doubt towards the efficacy of earthly natural philosophy, instead the heavenly flight delivers Menippus his 'fill of kaleidoscopic pleasure' in allowing him to witness that the cosmos is more akin to the description of poets – teeming, inexplicable – than the explanations of philosophers.<sup>118</sup> A flight of fancy replaces a desire for philosophical knowledge with the invigoration of pleasure.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Lucian, 'Icaromenippus, or the Sky-Man', in *Lucian*, vol. 2, trans. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: 1915), p.273.

<sup>116</sup> Lucian, 1915, p.273.

<sup>117</sup> Lucian, 1915, pp.275-277.

<sup>118</sup> Lucian, 1936, p.287.

<sup>119</sup> Burton's increasing emphasis on the profitable possibilities of pleasure is registered in the change of the *Anatomy's* epigraph in the 1628 and all subsequent editions from a quotation from Macrobius – *Omne meum, Nihil meum* – which foregrounds the *cento's* gathering of authorities, to one from Horace – *Omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci* – which foregrounds the usefulness of sweet things. (I.lxiii).

The digression induces pleasure through the active stimulation of the imagination. Burton's voice throughout is a torrent of curious wonder, his grammar characterised by the conditional tense – '[a]s I goe by *Madagascar* I would see that great Bird [...] I would observe all those motions of the Sea' – and the interrogative – 'Is it from those *Etesian* windes, or melting of snow [...]?' – syntaxes that don't register doubt or the difficulty of knowledge but rather exuberant possibility (II.35). His prose exhibits a sonorous and metrical musicality, ascending in climactic clauses and resolving in figures of repetition and parallelism. The digression inspires spiritual rejuvenation. In keeping with theories of *pneumatology*, in *Directions for Health, Naturall and Artificiall* (first pub. 1600), physician William Vaughan reminds readers that 'the body of man is not without good reason accounted a *little world*:'

for even as clouds, vapours, and exhalations, are carried up from the earth, to the high and middle region of the ayre, and from thence doe use their natural power; so excrementall Meteors, or moyst humours, are drawne up from the stomacke, as vapours and exhalations, there gathered by the bloud and nourishment of the body, to the head, where they passe thorow divers emunctories or conduits.<sup>120</sup>

Vaughan observes an intimate relation – even a substantial identification – between the 'clouds, vapours, and exhalations' of meteorological activity and the 'vapours and exhalations', the *pneuma*, that course through the body's 'emunctories' – its waste channels – and 'conduits'. And later in his health regimen, he advises that in cases of passionate disturbance, physicians 'must invent and devise some spirituall pageant, to fortifie and help the imaginative facultie [...] hee must endeavour to deceive, and imprint another conceit.'<sup>121</sup> Burton's 'æreall progress' through 'this diversity of Aire' is just such a 'spirituall pageant', the evocation of travel and aerial motion stirring up the animal spirits to exhilarate the imagination and vivify the body (II.48, II.44).

It is this combination of the vividness of an imaginative impression or 'conceit' and the sense of vitality and motion in Burton's 'Digression of the Ayre' that inspires such a profound sense of exhilarating pleasure: a series of stimulating images of the natural world or cosmos, or of theological speculation, are brought to the reader's imagination in rapid succession. The combination evokes the concepts

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<sup>120</sup> William Vaughan, *Directions for Health, Naturall and Artificiall* (London: 1633), pp.58-59.

<sup>121</sup> Vaughan, 1633, p.130.

of *enargeia* (vividness) and *energeia* (vitality), figures with a tangled history in classical rhetoric.<sup>122</sup> *Enargeia* describes the quality of vividness in writing whereby, according to Quintilian, the thing described is ‘brought out and displayed to [the] mind’s eye’, or, according to Longinus, ‘inspired by strong emotion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience.’<sup>123</sup> *Energeia*, on the other hand, from which we get the word ‘energy’, describes a sense of vitality characterised by motion or immediacy. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle suggests a relationship between vividness and vitality, stating that ‘things are set before the eyes by words that signify actuality [*energeia*].’<sup>124</sup> In his study on the place of pleasure in early modern aesthetics, Ulrich Langer describes ‘the Aristotelian link between freedom and pleasure for Renaissance theory and intellectual culture’:

pleasure as free activity derives from an anti-Stoic position on the question of the nature of the highest good. Whereas the Stoics exclude pleasure from the supreme good, other schools of thought incorporate pleasure in some way, or even define the highest good as pleasure itself. For Aristotle, pleasure needs to be part of the supreme good, of happiness (*eudaimonia*), for the highest good is the unimpeded activity of our highest faculties.<sup>125</sup>

This phrase ‘unimpeded activity’ is drawn from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which in the Greek is *energeia anempodistos*.<sup>126</sup> Langer explains how, in literature, the description of ‘[c]opious, effervescent variety, designed to amaze the spectator/reader’ stimulates and encourages ‘the unimpeded activity of the highest human faculties’, ‘captur[ing] this pleasure as free movement.’<sup>127</sup> Effervescent variety, teeming plurality, advanced through *enargeia* and conveying the quality of *energeia*, compels ethical and imaginative excellence by means of pleasure.

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<sup>122</sup> For an account of this entanglement and an attempt to outline the meaning of *energeia*, see Monica Westin, ‘Aristotle’s Rhetorical *Energeia*: An Extended Note’, *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 20:3 (2017), pp.252-261.

<sup>123</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.377. Longinus, ‘On the Sublime’, in *Aristotle: Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe (Cambridge, MA: 1995), p.215.

<sup>124</sup> Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese (Cambridge, MA: 2014), p.405.

<sup>125</sup> Ulrich Langer, ‘Pleasure as Unconstrained Movement in Renaissance Literary Aesthetics’, *French Studies* 64:1 (2010), pp.15-16.

<sup>126</sup> Langer, 2010, p.20.

<sup>127</sup> Langer, 2010, pp.19-20.

It is just these aesthetic strategies that Burton uses in the ‘Digression of the Ayre’ to induce pleasure. With exuberance he describes the ‘creatures, corne, wood, stones, wormes, wooll, blood, &c. lifted up into the middle Region by the Sunne beames, as *Baracellus* the Physitian disputes, and thence let fall with showres’ (II.46). With an excited curiosity and the pleasure of repetition and personification, he contemplates ‘*infinite Worlds [...] in infinito athere [...] the infinite starres visible in the Firmament to be so many Sunnes*’ with ‘subordinate planets, as the Sunne hath his dancing still round him’ (II.52). His prose ranges with the unimpeded movement of his flight, a movement into which he magnetically draws his reader’s imagination. Indeed, that the digression grows with each edition to incorporate emerging scientific and cosmological speculation and research only demonstrates and sharpens the sense of an energetic, mobile mind in action.<sup>128</sup> At every turn, Burton revels in the ‘perpetuall motions’ of the natural world and the cosmos (II.46). In his *De la sagesse* (1601), a codification of Neostoic thought, Pierre Charron describes how the spirit of man is in ‘a perpetuall motion without rest, without bound’, a ‘perpetuall agent’ that ‘forgeth false and phantasticall subjects’ and ‘runs riot into a world of imaginations’.<sup>129</sup> In Charron’s account, ‘perpetual motion’ of the spirits impels imaginative dysfunction. Burton too sees dysfunction issue out of ‘melancholy distempered phantasies’, but finds a remedy in the *energeia anempodistos* of digression, in the labile nature of the world and the imagination. Transforming divertive allopathy to digressive homeopathy, the exhilarating motions of the imagination cure themselves: ‘[a]s some are so molested by phantasie’, he writes ‘so some againe by Fancie alone, and a good conceit, are as easily recovered’ (I.253).

In the celebration of salubrious perpetual motion in the ‘Digression of the Ayre’, we find Burton’s critique of the beneficial possibilities of anatomy. Corneanu and Vermeir relate how Francis Bacon, in his discussion of the imagination, observes a disturbance of the faculty involving ‘the tendency of the mind to hurriedly leave behind the facts of nature and become involved in its own speculation (the ‘flight’ of the imagination)’, thus avoiding ‘the comprehensive and rigorous examination of

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<sup>128</sup> For an account of Burton’s survey of natural philosophy, see Vicari, 1989, chapter 1. For a discussion of how this section incrementally develops across editions as Burton assumes new cosmological knowledge, see: Robert M. Browne, ‘Robert Burton and the New Cosmology’, *Modern Languages Quarterly* 13:1 (1952), pp.131-148.

<sup>129</sup> Pierre Charron, *Of Wisdome Three Bookes*, trans. Samson Lennard (London: 1606), p.58.

particulars'.<sup>130</sup> Bacon's imagination is properly equipped to carry out the experimental method of inductive science, and an imaginative 'flight' jeopardises this epistemological process. Burton's fantastical 'flight' also exists in conflict with the epistemological aims of his stated anatomical method, interrupting and digressing from the ordered structure of the text. But for Burton, the healthful benefits of pleasure in such divagation extend beyond and supersede those offered by anatomical epistemology. Burton's digressions exhibit just the qualities that Chambers observes in what he terms 'loiterature': 'the secret of both its art – a realization of the poetics of pleasure – and of its critical impact, as the enactment of an epistemology of the unsystematic.'<sup>131</sup> The pleasures of digression, and of speculative knowledge – even ecstatic contemplation and wonder – displace the epistemological utility of anatomy, which rather leads to an increase in melancholy torpor.<sup>132</sup> And 'ayre', of course, is the perfect medium through which to advance this critique, associated as it is with the *pneuma* of imaginative transformation, and in, as Mazzi points out, its 'resistan[ce] to instruments of apprehension and representation', its evasion of empirical methods of knowing.<sup>133</sup> At the beginning of the preface to the *Anatomy*, Burton admits that 'I never travelled but in Mappes or Cards, in which mine unconfined thoughts have freely expatiated, as having ever been especially delighted with the study of *Cosmography*' (I.4). It is just such 'expatiation' of his 'unconfined thoughts', the *energeia anempodistos* of speculative contemplation, that Burton enjoys himself in the 'Digression of the Ayre', and bequeaths to his reader, inspiring and urging health-giving pleasure and imaginative brilliance.

### **IX: Melancholy By-Streams: Redeeming the *Anatomy***

'What have I to doe with Physicke? [...] why should I meddle with this Tract?', Burton asks in 'Democritus Junior to the Reader' (I.20). And, confronted with the

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<sup>130</sup> Corneanu and Vermeir, 2012, p.188-189.

<sup>131</sup> Chambers, 1999, p.10.

<sup>132</sup> In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle associates *energeia anempodistos* with the act of contemplation, in which 'pleasure perfects the activity [...] like the bloom of health in the young and vigorous.' Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: 1926), p.597.

<sup>133</sup> Mazzi, 2009, p.165.

author's response to his 'laborious studies', the 'harsh and unpleasing discourse of Melancholy', with a turn to the pleasures of digression at the expense of his anatomical method, readers might be tempted to agree (III.4). With the apparent abandonment of the book's epistemological and reformatory aims, the vast majority of the *Anatomy's* three partitions are rendered redundant, identified as an unfortunate cause rather than cure of melancholic stagnation, boredom, and languor.

Burton, however, has an answer for the imagined reader suspicious of a doctor of divinity wading in on matters of medicine. Collecting up censorious detractors with commanding oratorical *gravitas*, he writes, 'Heare me speake:'

There be many other subjects, I doe easily grant, both in humanity and Divinity, fit to be treated of, of which I had written *ad ostentationem* only, to shew my selfe, I should have rather chosen, and in which I have beene more conversant, I could have more willingly luxuriated, and better satisfied my selfe and others; but that at this time I was fatally driven upon this Rocke of Melancholy, and carryed away by this by-streame, which as a Rillet, is deducted from the maine Channell of my studies[.]

(I.20)

Burton acknowledges that a subject in the humanities or in divinity would have been more suitable to his profession, to his ability to 'shew' himself off, and even to achieving a sense of 'satisfaction', mastery, or completion. He describes, however, through the image of a river and its slipstreams, how he was compelled to take on his subject by his suffering, 'fatally driven upon this Rocke of Melancholy'. Melancholy is figured as digressive, a 'by-streame' and 'rillet' that distracts Burton from 'the maine Channell' of his 'studies'. But the image equally relates to his new melancholic subject, and the matter of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* itself: it suggestively casts the entirety of Burton's text as a diversion from the 'maine Channel'. On the one hand communicating melancholy's pernicious power to 'distract and detaine' the sufferer, 'hinder[ing] their ordinary taskes and necessary businesse', it simultaneously assimilates the whole of the *Anatomy* into the economies of digressive pleasure witnessed above (I.243).

This identification of Burton's whole text as intrinsically digressive not only rescues the *Anatomy* from redundancy, but works to adumbrate an ideal manner of reading that privileges beneficial pleasure. Chambers' recognition of digressivity's inauguration of a 'poetics of pleasure' evokes Roland Barthes' narrative theories of



desire. In *The Pleasures of the Text* (1973), Barthes recognises the relationship between digression and delight as he describes the figure of *tmesis*, a recurring distraction and return to the subject, as the ‘source or figure of pleasure’.<sup>134</sup> *Tmesis* is not, however, only a textual structure, but an unanticipated yet nevertheless pleasure-inducing reading model or experience:

tmesis is a seam or flaw resulting from the simple principle of functionality; it does not occur at the level of the structure of languages but only at the moment of their consumption; the author cannot predict tmesis: he cannot choose to write *what will not be read*. [...] what I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again.<sup>135</sup>

Barthes describes the source of pleasure in narrative not in ‘content’ or even ‘structure’, but as issuing from the point of contact, or ‘seam’, between reader and text, a contact that is characterised by an oscillation between attention to the text and distraction from it: the ‘abrasions’ that each reader leaves on a text’s ‘fine surface’ result from the reader’s ‘skipping’, ‘looking up’, and ‘dipping in again’. Pleasure is kinetic, proceeding through the quick movement of the eyes and of thought, just as the unimpeded movement mimetically performed and encouraged by Burton’s digressiveness counters the torpor of unbroken attention, the ‘ak[ing]’ of the ‘eyes [...] with reading’ (I.11). In its collection of sources ancient and neoteric, the *Anatomy* is not simply a compendium of knowledge, but an inducement to wider reading: ‘I referre you to the voluminous Tomes of *Galen, Aretus, Rhasis, Avicenna, Alexander, Paulus, Ætius, Gordonius, Guianerius*’, he writes, ‘[a]nd those exact Neotericks, *Savanarola, Capivaccius, Donatus Altomarus, Hercules de Saxonia, Mercurialis, Victorius Faventinus, Wecker, Piso, &c.*’ (I.130). Demonstrated by his own extensive library, and embodied in his *centonist* poetics, Burton encourages a reading practice shaped by energetic movement and digressive tendency, whereby readers dip in and out of his and others’ texts in a vivifying state of intellectual inspiration. The *Anatomy*’s final injunction to ‘*be not idle*’ is directed as much to the kind or methodological quality of reading as it is to a general urging of activity (III.445). The reader, like Burton, finds profit in embracing the dynamics of both spaniel and hawk, barking at every bird she

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<sup>134</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: 1975), p.11.

<sup>135</sup> Barthes, 1975, p.11.

sees, rising up into the air of speculative and imaginative liberation, the combination springing the quarry of melancholic regulation. The *Anatomy*, in its enactment and offering of digressive, energetic reading experiences, becomes, for reader and writer alike, a site of salubrious and unimpeded intellectual activity, an ‘imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention’.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Sidney, 1973, p.103.



## IN CONCLUSION.

This thesis has explored the operation of reformatory reading, the profits – medicinal, ethical, and soteriological – offered up by the reading of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Such profits are not only promised by the authors themselves, but are attested to by the experiences of readers throughout history. In a short poem entitled ‘*To the same Lady upon Mr Burtons Melancholy*’, published in 1657, Henry King, Bishop of Chichester, describes Burton’s tome as a ‘Glass of Humours’ in which the reader might ‘find / The Passions or diseases of your mind’, and wherein ‘you safely may endure, / Though not to suffer, yet to read your cure’.<sup>1</sup> Almost three hundred years later, C. S. Lewis describes *The Faerie Queene* as ‘like a growing thing, a tree [...] with branches reaching to heaven and roots to hell’: ‘between these two extremes comes all the multiplicity of human life [...]. To read him is to grow in mental health.’<sup>2</sup> Both of these responses evoke a central facet of the model of reformatory poetics which this thesis has elaborated: King’s poem recognises – even as it circumscribes – the contiguity of suffering and cure in the reading of the *Anatomy*; and it is in *The Faerie Queene*’s display of the multiplicity of life, of variety and diversity, that Lewis locates the poem’s gift of psychological therapy. These are the central conclusions of the thesis: that both Spenser’s and Burton’s understanding of the particular profits of reading their texts lie in the recognition that healing and harm, suffering and salvation, are two sides of the same coin, and that in the face of the fallen world’s teeming and disorderly variety, an embracing of such variety is the route to health and ethical edification. Both texts train readers in habits and hermeneutic practices that encourage sensitivity to semantic and moral complexity and ambiguity, but such

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<sup>1</sup> Henry King, *Poems, elegies, paradoxes, and sonets* (London: 1664), p.4.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: 1977), pp.358-359.

sensitivity often runs counter to the demands and principles of the forms of allegory and anatomy. This tension between form and content in both *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy*, whilst central to their projects of readerly reformation, also always threatens these projects' success, just as the possibility of readerly misreading jeopardises the texts' capacity to provide help rather than harm.

The first chapter concerned both writers' engagement with a specifically physio-psychological understanding of reading's ameliorative effects, taking as its central image the Platonic *pharmakon*, which figures the written word as simultaneously poison and cure. Focusing on Spenser's Legend of Holiness and on the commingling of allopathic and homeopathic models of therapy in Burton's *Anatomy*, the chapter demonstrated that, for both writers, their text's recuperative possibilities lay in their emphasis on the coexistence – even coextension – of suffering and salvation, help and harm, poison and cure. The second chapter confronted the economic aspect of both writers' commitment to a Horatian model of combining profit and pleasure, exploring how the money form offered up a ready metaphor for thinking through the transactional and representational nature of language and literature, and the economies of reformation the texts theorise. It concluded that Spenser's poem, eschewing the idolatrous implications of money fetishism, enshrines an economy of semantic plenitude that embraces the fertile gap between sign and signified. Burton's text, on the other hand, identifies melancholy's promiscuity as a despair-inducing general equivalent, transfiguring everything into a sign of melancholy just as Midas' finger turns all it touches to gold. In the face of such all-consuming despair, however, an interpretive *volte-face* affirms and celebrates melancholy not as an all-consuming signified, but a wondrous and labile sign of the world's variety.

In the third chapter, I considered the ways in which Spenser and Burton conceive of reading their texts as a difficult but ultimately salutary form of work. Elucidating a poetics of complexity in Spenser's epyllion 'Muiopotmos', this chapter argued that Spenser's poetry solicits a sensitivity to semantic plurality and ambivalence that corresponds to an ethical recognition of the individual's capacity for moral ambiguity and change. It then demonstrated how this complex poetics illuminates Spenser's conception of justice as equitable interpretation in *The Faerie Queene*: in shaping readers alert to particularity and circumstance, the Legend of Justice ironically discloses the ethical shortcomings of allegorical hermeneutics, its

tendency towards totalising and inequitable readings. For Burton, the text of the *Anatomy* becomes a proxy for the chaos, confusion, and disorder of the fallen world, conceptualised through metaphors of labyrinths and Thesean labours. Whilst this mimetic textuality initially constitutes a cause for fear and despair – the sense of disorientation and frustration so often felt by Burton’s readers – this chapter argued that the chaos of the labyrinth is refigured as a wondrous kaleidoscopic poetics, in which errancy and diversity are accommodated into a providential vision of salvific becoming.

The final chapter responded to the prospect of the work of reading becoming too arduous, or failing in its reformatory operation, by considering how both Spenser and Burton turn to digression as a form of readerly and writerly recreation and respite. Focusing on Spenser’s Legend of Courtesy, it argued that the virtue of courtesy, in its intimacy with forms of deception and antiphrasis, frustrated allegory’s signifying power and jeopardised its effectiveness within an exemplary or hortatory poetics. Instead, the chapter considered how the digressive impulse signals a critique of allegorical hermeneutics, instead entertaining the possibility of an alternative kind of reformatory hermeneutics, one that invites errancy, ambivalence, and open-endedness. The chapter then explored the way in which Burton’s digressions frustrate the structure of anatomy to which his text appears committed, but that this frustration or departure from anatomical form involves mental activity and motion that both diverts the torpid imagination and provides salubrious recreation. For both *The Faerie Queene* and the *Anatomy*, the texts’ forms prove to be inimical to their claims to readerly reformation. It is this tension, ever-present but irresolvable, that animates these texts, as they encode and frustrate reading practices in an attempt to provide profit to their readers.

I want to stress, as a final conclusion, that neither *The Faerie Queene* nor the *Anatomy* comes to any firm conclusions regarding the workings or effectiveness of their reformatory power. These are not prescriptive, didactic texts, recording forethought or preconceived models of readerly discipline, but are rather experimental, searching, and syncretic, erring, revising, and discovering as they unfold. In keeping with the processional nature of salvation, healing, and ethical formation which this thesis has always emphasised, these texts are also in process, negotiating not only contested matters of theology, morality, and philosophy, but also the contested space between reader, writer, and text, the inevitability of

misprision and misreading. What this thesis has demonstrated are the ways in which this processional quality, the uncertainty of reading and misreading, the inevitability of error, and the fact of the Fall, are incorporated by both Spenser and Burton into an understanding of the profitable – even dispensatory – possibilities of literature.

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- The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, ed. Jennifer Speake (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

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