ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **IMAGINING REDEMPTION: FICTIONAL FORMS AND SENSORY EXPERIENCE IN EARLY MODERN POETICS FROM SIDNEY TO MILTON**

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This project examines how four early modern authors—Sir Philip Sidney (d. 1586), William Shakespeare (d. 1616), Sir Francis Bacon (d. 1626), and John Milton (d. 1674)—viewed imaginative writing. I argue that all four writers see fictions as a potential instrument of cosmic redemption with the potential to mitigate the effects of the fall. Starting with Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, this dissertation traces a belief that fictions affect our often-unacknowledged assumptions about what is possible or likely in the world and the judgments we make about whether a fiction is believable or not. According to Sidney's imaginative poetics, well-crafted fictions that appear to be a mimesis of the material world but contain elements of the poet's "golden" world shift readers' presuppositions, which in turn change how they interact with the material world and make the (formerly fictional) vision of the poet into material reality. For these writers, fictions' impacts are profound but difficult to perceive because they

change us and, through our actions, the world, essentially becoming fact because we have made them so.

In four chapters this project presents a theory of Sidney's poetics and the unusual scope it granted to poets' and readers' imaginations, as well as the moral and cultural anxieties that his poetic theories provoked in his own writings and those of his literary successors. Chapter two reads Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a study of imaginative excess and its civilizational consequences, calling into question whether or not restorative fictions can indeed keep delusive, self-destructive ones at bay. Shakespeare presents a nightmare vision of civilizational collapse in which fictions retain their persuasive power but lose their architectonic impulse. In response to this threat, Bacon's poetics becomes an experiment in how rigorously we can restrain the imagination from knowledge creation while still keeping an unseen, providential, redemptive teleology in mind. Recognizing the dangers of too much or too little restraint on the imagination, Milton explores a formal solution in *Paradise Regained.* The poem's fictional mediation of Jesus' temptation and use of metaphors steers readers between excessive and deficient imaginative responses to the Son of God.

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by

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Dedication

To my wife, Kate, and our sons, James and Philip.

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members Kim Coles and David Simon provided repeated, incisive feedback that made this project stronger and helped it coalesce in its final years. Kent Cartwright served as the committee co-chair from its inception until his retirement, then agreed to remain on the committee thereafter. I have benefited immensely from his generous and challenging feedback on more drafts that I would care to admit to writing. Finally, Jerry Passannante has been unwaveringly supportive of the project over nearly eight years, providing encouragement, advice, and critique in equal measure.

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Introduction

What can we learn from fiction? This project examines how four early modern authors—Sir Philip Sidney (d. 1586), William Shakespeare (d. 1616), Sir Francis Bacon (d. 1626), and John Milton (d. 1674)—viewed imaginative writing, or "poesy," as Sidney terms it. Specifically, I am interested in exploring two questions: 1) What do these authors' evolving poetics say about how poets create knowledge and impart it in their works? and 2) How do readers and communities internalize authors' imaginative fictions and change the real world in response? Before I expand on these foundational questions, a definition is in order. For the purposes of this dissertation, "poesy," "poetry," and "fiction" are used interchangeably in keeping with their early modern usages. All three terms denote works that are avowedly imaginative in nature, though as I will argue, these authors debate the scope afforded to the imagination in creating their fictional worlds. Genre and versification, or lack thereof, are secondary distinctions within the broad category of poesy, for as Sidney contends in The Defence of Posey (c.1580, printed 1595), "it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet." Rather, poesy must combine an imaginative "matter" surpassing what can be observed in the sensible world with an attention to form that makes the poet's "matter" both delightful to read about and intellectually credible:

> …as in matter they [poets] passed all in all, so in manner to go beyond them, not speaking, table talk fashion, or like men in a dream, words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peising each syllable of each word by just proportion, according to the dignity of the subject.[1]

[1] Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 12. Unless otherwise noted, future citations of the *Defence* derive from this edition and page numbers will be cited in text using "DP" as an abbreviation.

Poetry, in other words, takes events that appear subject to chance, as well as their disordered descriptions, and imposes on both the words and matter a sense of order and "just proportion."

In addition to its imaginative origin, poesy is potentially an instrument of cosmic redemption for each of these authors. They differ on the best ways to effect this restoration, but all of them share it as a reason for writing. With the caveat that each of my chapters addresses poesy as an instrument of moral and material restoration, I will provide two brief examples. They derive from Sidney and Bacon, both of whom link imaginative writing with the creation and dissemination of knowledge that then informs our actions. Sidney writes that poesy offers "no small arguments to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is" even as "our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it" (DP 10). The "highest end" of the poet's elevated wit is "architektoniké," which concerns itself with "the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only" in the "ethic and politic consideration" (DP 13). Bacon is arguably the most forceful advocate of knowledge's redemptive purpose when he writes that his Great Instauration is "for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate."[2] He acknowledges throughout his career that humanity cannot be redeemed without elevating the imagination above the senses to envision God's ameliorative providence. In the *New Organon (1620)*, he urges aspiring natural philosophers to "restrain their sense within their duty, so far as the things of God are concerned," for "sense (like the sun) opens up the face of the terrestrial globe and closes and obscures

[2] Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 147-148. Subsequent citations of the *Advancement* derive from this edition and page numbers will be cited in text using "AL" as an abbreviation.

the globe of heaven."[3] Sensory experience alone will never suffice for understanding and enacting the will of God within the world. In order for redemption to occur, the unseen divine order must intrude on our perceptible one. This makes fiction necessary even if Bacon is suspicious of it. Poetry is fiction whose elevated style excels ordinary speech and whose vibrant worlds impart knowledge of a universe ordered by divine "just proportion;" it inspires readers to redemptive action that transforms its fictional vision into a reality. Having said, briefly, what poetry is, let us return to my two opening questions about what it does.

1. The Poetics of Presupposition: Mending Readers to "Mend Nature"

At first glance my guiding questions appear to be epistemological and formal in nature, since they address how poets imagine better worlds and how they impart those visions to readers. For these four authors, I would argue that the most profound impacts of poetic fictions are actually ontological because fictions change the world by first changing us in ways we are often unaware of. Our alteration is not purely intellectual, and may not even be something we are aware of or able to explain. This is because a well-executed fiction can modify our baseline assumptions about how the world works, and thereby direct our actions. We may not realize a change has occurred because fictions affect the "presuppositions" we use to guide and frame our thoughts, rather than those thoughts themselves. Poesy affects our often-unacknowledged assumptions about what is possible or likely in the world and the judgments we make about whether a fiction is believable or not. For instance, Sidney

[3] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24. Future references refer to this edition and use the in-text signifier of "NO."

writes that a poet "giveth a perfect picture of" a virtue or action "in someone by whom he presupposeth it was done." The poet "coupleth" the abstract philosopher's "general notion" with "the particular example" of actual (but often not redemptive) people and events recounted by historians (DP). Bacon writes in *The Advancement of Learning (1605)* that fictions make learning possible by offering new knowledge that is "not consonant to presuppositions." A poem's world can be "understood and judged," and we may someday accept its governing ideas as "trivial" or "elementary"[4] truths that have become presuppositions in their own right:

> And therefore in the infancy of learning, and in rude times, when those conceits which are now trivial were then new, the world was full of Parables and Similitudes; for else would men have either passed over without mark or else rejected for paradoxes that which was offered, before they had understood and judged. So in divine learning we see how frequent Parables and Tropes are: for it is a rule, that 'whatsoever science is not consonant to presuppositions, must pray in aid of similitudes.' (AL 236)

In other words, we revise our ideas about what is possible or likely in the real world by creating "Parables and Similitudes"—fictions and metaphors—that integrate lived experience with abstract ideals about how the world works with lived experience. This is the only way to alter what we presuppose.

In each chapter I intend to trace the rise of an imaginative poetics in which fictions attempt to shift readers' presuppositions, which in turn change how they interact with the material world and make the (formerly fictional) vision of the poet into material reality. This poetics is evident in Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale (1611) when Perdita and Polixenes famously debate the relationship between art and nature. Polixenes tells Perdita that:

[4] Bryan Vickers, "Notes," *Francis Bacon: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 644.

> …over that art
> Which you say adds to nature, is an art
> That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
> A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
> And make conceive a bark of baser kind
> By bud of nobler race. This is an art
> Which does mend nature – change it rather – but
> The art itself is nature. (4.4.90-97)[5]

The image here is one of grafting vines or fruit trees whereby a "bark of baser kind" "conceive[s]" when united with the "gentler scion," and the resulting union becomes a new creation. Branches from that new tree could someday be grafted to another tree as the interplay between art and nature continues. This means that the initial grafting becomes a mended version of "nature," which can again be modified by "art." The epistemological process of "conceiving" an idea or learning from a fiction likewise results in an ontological change when the "baser kind" of the fallen material world is redeemed in part by the "gentler scion" of the poet's well-ordered fiction.

As readers, we learn from fictions and are inspired to act and alter our world of "baser kind" because the authors have described their redeemed worlds in a way that allows us to "conceive," or imagine, that world and know it experientially. It is as though the poet has grafted a better, more moral understanding onto our minds than what we could glean from observing the sensible world. Poets do not simply describe their visions as fact or present propositions for our intellectual assent or disputation. Instead, they make us feel as if we inhabit what Sidney calls their imagined "golden" worlds, which are momentarily more real and compelling than the "brazen" one we inhabit (DP 9). This redemptive poetics is plausible in part because early modern readers did not subordinate experience transmitted by writing to experience from the

[5] William Shakespeare, "The Winter's Tale," *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 689-729.

senses. Jeff Dolven writes that "'experience' as the sixteenth century had it could be active or passive, present or past, first or third person."[6] In humanism's "culture of the book," others' experience rendered as writing, including history or fiction, could be just as convincing as first-hand observation.[7] Ironically, modern readers are perhaps more biased than early modern ones against the idea that carefully-crafted written fictions could alter our perspective on the world through the experience they impart.

The four authors in this study have been read, performed, studied, imitated, and even revised for more than three hundred years. A large part of their enduring appeal may be their capacity to overwhelm us with their works and leave us wondering how, exactly, their words have changed us. In the words of Michael Witmore, "drama and many other genres of fiction encapsulate an inarticulate 'metaphysics' or set of organizing assumptions about how the totality of events in a given world are related to some hypothetical source of order." [8] We know we can be changed by encountering them, but we cannot articulate how or why. By inspiring changes, fictions become fact and the prior state of knowledge—indeed of existence—must then be imagined if it is to be experienced. Sidney describes this process through his example of Xenophon's Cyrus, which "substantially… worketh" to "make many Cyruses" (DP 9). Bacon likewise anticipates that, should his Instauration succeed, the condition of the world would be transformed, resulting in "such an end as in the present condition of things and the present state of thought men

[6] Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 69.

[7] Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 73.

[8] Michael Witmore, *Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledge in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 40.

cannot easily grasp or guess" (NO 24). Writing of the un-fallen Adam's state of mind in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), David Carroll Simon observes that whatever side of the fall they are on, the psychology of the opposite state proves inaccessible without recourse to the imagination:

> It should come as no surprise, then, that Milton describes fallenness as a commitment to anxious calculations about better and worse, right and wrong. What Adam and Eve ultimately lose is an experience of contentment in which such questions have no place.[9]

Simon's chapter on *Paradise Lost* argues that Milton seeks to usher his readers into Adam and Eve's unfallen "experience of Paradise" and its "observational mood."[10] If Milton's fiction enables readers to experience the Edenic pair's way of perceiving paradise, then we can replicate their state of mind in our material one.

Thus far I have outlined my argument that these four writers argue to varying degrees that the material world can be redeemed through our experience of, and response to, fictions. Poesy mediates an imaginative experience that may be more intellectually and emotionally compelling than what our existing assumptions allow us to generate from lived experience. It can lead us to modify our presuppositions and interpret the world in new ways. When it occurs, such learning is difficult to perceive because it changes us and, through our actions, the world, essentially becoming fact because we have made it so. When a fiction succeeds we stop acting as though the world's governing order of causes and effects works according to what our senses perceive and start acting as though it works according to what Sidney calls the "just proportion" of the poet's imaginative causal logic.

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[9] David Carroll Simon, *Light Without Heat: The Observational Mood from Bacon to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 207.

[10] Simon, *Light Without Heat,* 176.

Before laying out my chapters I will pause to provide further framing and historical and critical context for the argument I have proposed. Most of this context can be distilled to two questions of poetics which authors have argued over long before and after Sidney, Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton. I do not claim to have definitive answers for either one. However, I would like to elaborate on why the answers I propose in the work to follow offer a compelling and original contribution to the debate. The two questions are: 1) How do we know that poetry has taught us anything? and 2) How can we be assured that what we learn will be redemptive? Any plausible, intellectually sustainable poetics needs to answer those questions. If it cannot, then it must at least show why its description of how we learn is the most useful and viable theory in the face of unanswerable questions.

2. How Do We Know that Poetry has Taught Us Anything?

Musing over a skull the gravedigger has unearthed, Hamlet imagines that the bones once belonged to a land speculating lawyer, a master of "fines…double vouchers…[and] recoveries" who sought material and religious "assurance" in the wrong kind of written word. He rejects this superficial faith in unimaginative legal documents, asking "is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt?" (5.1.97-100).[11] Hamlet's comments beg the question of whether or not there are written artifacts that offer "assurance," and how they might do this:

[11] William Shakespeare, "Hamlet," *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1337-1391. Subsequent references will be provided as act, scene, and line numbers in text.

> *Hamlet:* Is not parchment made of sheepskins?
> *Horatio:* Ay, my lord, and calfskins too.
> *Hamlet:* They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that.
> (5.1.107-09)

For Hamlet, "assurance" is an ontological state that transcends rational understanding because what is written on parchment or velum must evoke a subjective response from the reader, who is moved to perceive something beyond the material world. To become mired in language as a purely representational or transactional instrument, rather than a tool of imaginative vision, is to have one's head full of dirt. It is certainly debatable how many readers are apt to learn from texts in the imaginative way I have described. Sidney concedes that "there are many mysteries contained in poetry which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused" (DP 53). Milton describes his "audience" for *Paradise Lost* as "fit…though few" (7.31).[12] Even if some will read fictions and be moved aright it remains true that a substantial share of minds are, in Sidney's words, "earth-creeping" (DP 54).

I am indebted to several critics who have documented a pervasive skepticism about whether we can learn anything architectonic from fictions, and I view my work as an alternative to their perspective, rather than a direct refutation of it. Arthur Kinney argues that "the Tudor humanists came to an increasing certainty that they could fashion and refashion themselves and so fashion and refashion society." Their belief was founded on the hope that "being educatable, man might also be perfectible." However, he notes that by the late 1500s, humanist education "foundered because it had rested its lessons on the educatibility of men who seemed,

[12] John Milton, "Paradise Lost," *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 251-630.

after a century of lessons, to be unteachable."[13] Sidney is the major point of overlap between Kinney's *Humanist Poetics* and my own work, and he argues that "as a poet—or second maker, as he is defined in the *Defence*—Sidney turns the unexpected, incomplete, paradoxical conclusion of the *Arcadia* into an occasion for faith" in the face of its "irresolution."[14] I would suggest that the Sidneian poetics Kinney traces through the *Defence* and both versions of the *Arcadia* has a more direct bearing on the "ethic and political considerations" of the real world than he grants it.

My reading of Sidney's unfinished revisions to the *Arcadia* in light of his poetics in the *Defence* occurs at the end of chapter one. In it I offer a more optimistic argument that the poet has remained focused on architectonic instruction in this world, rather than dissolving into paradoxes that anticipate the next. Kinney identifies three phases of humanist poetics, which he argues begins with a poetics of wordplay characterized by intellectual and linguistic play, moves to a poetics of eloquence in which delusive responses are curtailed by linguistic precision, and finally morphs into a poetics of doubt and despair, in which it becomes doubtful that learning is possible. My project carries his discussion of humanism into the seventeenth century by examining the affinities between humanist poetics and an emerging focus on learning from sensory experience in natural philosophy. I am more concerned with questions of how poets use fictions as a means of understanding the world that is architectonic, empirically valid, and emotionally sustainable. My focus is less on how rhetoric and wordplay can aid or inhibit knowledge and more on how choices of form dictate what

[13] Arthur Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 5, 17.
[14] Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 287.

is learned, or knowable, and whether or not that knowledge generates a response and continues the enterprise of culture.

Like Kinney, Jeff Dolven describes a late century "loss of faith in popular forms of understanding" and details "a relentless parade of failed instruction" in late Elizabethan romance: "the most reliable fact about teaching and learning in romance is that they will go wrong."[15] He speculates in his conclusion that "the increasing imaginative purchase of experimental science, and the authority it granted to a certain kind of experience of the world over the book learning of the classics" changed the "theory of education…substantially" as empiricism supplanted imagination.[16] Sidney is the major intersection between his work and my own. In his reading of the *Old Arcadia* (late 1570's) Dolven posits that readers are never in a position to "carry away the kernel of wisdom at its heart" because we "cannot extricate ourselves from the narrative" of the characters' desires. To learn from Sidney's fiction we would need to detach ourselves from it more fully.[17] Of the *New Arcadia* (mid 1580's), Dolven writes that "the structure of knowledge that undergirds its narrative…is a new, more systematic way of organizing" its "wisdom" that "is almost like a grand commonplace book."[18] The potential problem, as Dolven see it, is that any focal point or authorial organizing principle gets lost in the sprawling, "encyclopedic" *New Arcadia*, where Sidney "absent[s] himself" and reduces his imaginative vision in favor of a comprehensive method.[19] In other words, for Dolven the two versions of

[15] Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 13.
[16] Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 240.
[17] Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 132.
[18] Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 204.
[19] Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 204-205.

Sidney's fiction contain too much, and then too little, authorial vision to offer compelling architectonic instruction. I concede his point that when it comes to teaching Sidney may have missed the mark in both versions of his *Arcadia*. However, I would also note that Sidney posits the instructional legitimacy of poets' governing fictional orders, or "fore-conceits" (DP 9) even when their works "hath not so absolutely performed it." He makes precisely this argument about Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (DP 17). By Sidney's own admission, then, the poetics of the *Defence* may still be compelling even if nothing he wrote lived up to his ideals about poetry's redemptive power.

Kinney and Dolven focus on writers who had produced their most important works by 1600. As a result, Sidney appears near the end of their works but is the point of departure for this project. My engagement with Kinney and Dolven's pessimism about Sidneian architectonic learning is counterbalanced by recent work on the intersection between science and literature, much of which argues that fiction became more closely tied to the material world over the seventeenth century. For instance, Joanna Picciotto's *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* traces how seventeenth century experimentalists appropriate Adam's prelapsarian commission to name the animals in Genesis 2. She argues that "the Baconian faith in experiment was [an]…Adamic epistemology, predicated on a new understanding of how innocence and experience might be related through productive labor and the literacies associated with it."[20] Her argument focuses primarily on Bacon's successors and how they reinvent the medieval tradition of Adam tending the garden as a form of

[20] Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 4.

natural philosophy grounded in physical labor instead of imaginative poetics.[21] Elizabeth Spiller juxtaposes early modern experimentalist texts with poetic fictions, arguing that "a belief in the made rather than the found character of early modern knowledge unites poets and natural scientists."[22] In her parallel reading of Sidney's *Defence* and William Gilbert's *On the Magnet* (1600) she writes:

> I argue that for Sidney and Gilbert artificial constructs are the consequence of an accommodation between Neoplatonic idealism and Aristotelian mimesis. Model worlds (whether poetry and experiments, the golden world of fiction or the globe-worlds of Gilbert's magnets) produce knowledge and virtue.[23]

I suggest that this reading ignores both the greater mimetic credibility and more compelling imaginative moral vision of the *Defence*, which boasts a long history of engagement from generations of readers. Indeed, it could be argued that far fewer people continue to read Gilbert than read Sidney precisely because Sidney's work more fully embodies his dictum that poesy should "teach and delight" (DP 10). For Picciotto and Spiller, the locus of poetic learning shifts from the reader's subjective, imaginative experience to the material world. My project seeks to retain a more central role of the imagination and its fictions as a means of creating knowledge and bridging the gap between the "brazen" and "golden" worlds.

3. How can we be Assured that Our Knowledge is Redemptive?

This is a central question for Kinney and Dolven, and it remains compelling for seventeenth century authors. My short answer is that, for the authors in this study,

[21] The first section of Picciotto's book, "Digging Up the Hortus Conclusis" (31-128), traces this development.

[22] Elizabeth Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

[23] Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature,* 27.

there are no guarantees of redemptive art because the reader's response is beyond the poet's control. Instead, they start by asking which fictions are indispensible to the project of redemption —of aligning a degraded material world with an ameliorative divine order. This forces them to consider how to limit the dangers inherent in engaging those fictions. For all four authors the careful modulation of form generates fictions that represent the world in a believable way. This section outlines the historical and critical case, to be elaborated in the chapters, for why my project deems poetic "lies," or at least fictional deviations for observable reality, essential to the architectonic project of early modern fiction. By definition, fiction distorts the observable world. However, as Sidney claims, poets impose a "just proportion" on the characters and events they depict to make them plausible and morally instructive. It becomes the task of readers to interpret and judge the experience mediated by a fiction, and to deliberate about whether they should internalize its values and presuppositions. I suggest that fictions' representations of material and psychological causation become a locus of readers' engagement or detachment from their worlds, and that the ultimate proof of poesy's efficacy lies in readerly action as evidence of engagement.

Bacon's adage that "a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure" encapsulates the potential for poetry to delight us while hinting at the dangers inherent in its imaginative vision.[24] In early modern poetics, the distinction between permissible, potentially redemptive fictions and delusive, misleading lies is perhaps most commonly discussed with reference to icastic and fantastic art. The terms originated

[24] Bacon, "The Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral (1625)," *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 341.

in *The Sophist*, a dialogue of Plato, and came to England through the writings of the Italian epic poet Torquato Tasso (d. 1595), after which, "like their Italian counterparts, the Tudor humanists also developed the Platonic dichotomy in their own ways."[25] Essentially, icastic art denotes art defined by "its lifelike properties, its truth, and its reliability," while fantastic art "results in unreal, freakish images."[26] There are abundant examples of the English fascination with icastic and fantastic art, and the problem of discerning one from the other by restraining the imagination elicited genuine concern about fictions and their ability to mislead. Sidney defines icastic (*eikastiké*) art as that which "figure[es] forth good things" and fantastic (*phantastiké*) art as that which "doth contrariwise infect the fancy with unworthy objects" (DP 36). George Puttenham (d. 1590) cautions readers of *The Art of English Poesy* (1589) that "the evil and vicious disposition of the brain hinders the sound judgement and discourse of man with busy and disordered fantasies, for which the Greeks call him *phantastikos*." He argues that while a fantastic mind begets "monstrous imaginations or conceits," an icastic one makes "his much multiformity uniform, that is, well proportioned, and so passing clear, that by [the imagination] as by a glass or mirror are represented unto the soul all manner of beautiful visions."[27] Because these terms were so prevalent and hard to define in practice, modern critics are just as compelled as Renaissance authors to ask what constitutes an accurate, or at least useful, mimesis according to their prevailing definitions.

[25] Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 29-30.
[26] Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 29.
[27] George Puttenham, "The Art of English Poesy," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 70-71.

The central problem of Elizabethan and Jacobean poetics could be framed as one of discernment between the Platonic categories of icastic and fantastic representation. Poets and readers are asked to weigh the degree of correspondence between art, the material universe, and the providential order that governs the cosmos. Early modern English poetic theory certainly debates the icastic-fantastic opposition and prescribes the use of reason and tradition to root out the fantastic. However, I argue that the authors in this study are concerned with questions of icastic imitation primarily as a way to balance between too clear and too delusive (and therefore unconvincing) a vision of reality. Icastic fiction has intellectual and emotional credibility as a textually-mediated experience because it is believable in light of sensory experience. Such fictions may feel as real as the physical world, but that does not mean they are devoid of imaginative content. The ideal of icastic poesy is instrumental in producing useful and credible knowledge about how the world works because that knowledge is leavened with the poet's redemptive vision of how the degraded world could be restored. It provides a basis for hope that cannot be affirmed empirically. Consider Bacon's assessment of poetic lies in "Of Truth," which opens the 1625 *Essays*:

> Doth any man doubt, that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves? One of the Fathers, in great severity, called poesy '*vinum daemonium*' [demonic wine] because it filleth the imagination; and yet it is but with the shadow of a lie. But it is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie which sinketh in and settleth in it, that doth the hurt; such as we spake before.[28]

[28] Bacon, "Essays." 341.

In this light, parsing degrees of icastic and fantastic is, to some extent, a futile exercise. Both necessarily contain elements of untruth if they are to be delightful and instructive, and the difference between them is the fact that lies in fantastic art "settleth" in the mind and breed more lies, while the lies of icastic fictions are used to illuminate deeper, more imperceptible truths.

Fantastic art is not apt to be believed, and if not believed, less likely than icastic art to offer a compelling experience that changes readers' presuppositions. This response is evident in how early modern authors, and later, critics, have viewed fictional depictions of cause and effect. If a fiction veers too far into the realm of the fantastic to be believable, it often jars audiences out of attunement with its vision. It presents an account of how the world works that is too distant from lived experience to be recognizable. The fiction could err by offering too elevated or degraded a view of human nature, making it hard to empathize with characters and take them seriously, or by presenting a world whose vision of material cause and effect is implausible. In 1693, for example, Thomas Rymer famously lampooned the outsized effects of trivial causes when he asked why *Othello* was not "call'd the *Tragedy of the Handkerchief*," and argued that no reasonable person would take the napkin as proof of Desdemona's infidelity.[29] Twentieth and twenty-first century critics continue to discuss the role of causal structures in literature. For instance, Stephen Booth argues that *King Lear* is simultaneously compelling and vexing because Shakespeare "uses pattern to do exactly what pattern usually does: assert the presence of an

[29] Thomas Rymer, "A Short View of Tragedy," *The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer*, ed. Curt Zimansky (New Haven: Yale UP, 1956), 159. A few sentences later, Rymer drives home his point: "Had it been Desdemona's Garter, the Sagacious Moor might have smelt a Rat: but the Handkerchief is so remote a trifle, no Booby, on this side Mauritania, cou'd make any consequence from it."

encompassing order in the *work*."[30] The prospect of understanding the play's world remains enticing but just out of reach. Other early modern fictions have not aged as well in terms of offering modern readers a compelling vision of the world and the laws by which it operates. Helen Cooper writes that one of the reasons romance faded as a genre after 1600 was that "its powering ideas [were] rendered obsolete by social change, market economics, and the skepticism towards ideals and towards wonder attendant on the growth of experimental science and literary realism."[31] The shared assumption among these critics is that causal relationships in literary works imply an "inarticulate metaphysics," to borrow Witmore's term. When overly-simplified or implausible causal relationships become something we can articulate about a work we cease to experience it and begin to scrutinize it. Once such skepticism takes hold, a fiction's redemptive or delusive power over our minds begins to erode.

What Sidney and the other writers in this study seek to develop is a pragmatic poetics in which fictions are accepted or repudiated based upon their perceived effects on readers' minds and, ultimately, their actions. In terms of whether or not a fiction is redemptive, the proof is in the pudding, so to speak. Despite his optimistic claims about "our erected wit" (DP 10) and exhortations to "only let Aeneas be worn in the tablet of your memory" (DP 30), Sidney must acknowledge that, even if poets like Virgil have given their readers perfect examples, they are still subject to readerly misinterpretation that could turn the icastic poetry of the *Aeneid* into fantastic art for that particular reader. Poetry's capacity to instruct depends in part on the reader's response, and Sidney concedes that the poet's fictions, however icastic, are only

[30] Stephen Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, & Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983), 27. Emphasis in original.

[31] Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40.

effective "if [readers] will learn aright why and how that maker made [them]" (DP 9). The wrong kind of reader—one not counted among Milton's "fit,…though few," perhaps—could make even the most compelling poem fantastic and deluding. Of course the cure might be to provide a straying reader with another fiction:

> For even those hard-hearted, evil men who think virtue a school name, and know no other good but *indulgere genio*, and therefore despise the austere admonitions of the philosopher and feel not the inward reason they stand upon, yet will be content to be delighted, which is all the good-fellow poet seemeth to promise, and so steal to see the form of goodness (which seen, they cannot but love) ere they themselves be aware, as if they took a medicine of cherries. (DP 24)

If the misuse of the imagination is an ever-present danger in early modern poetics, fiction's right use is the only solution. Poesy is both the poison and the antidote.

Emphasizing the reader's role in a work entitled *The Defence of Poesy* would hardly shore up the fledgling credibility of poetical fictions in the face of detractors like Stephen Gosson. More importantly, such an admission could also become a slippery slope argument for abandoning all acts of imagination. Such a repudiation would be disastrous in an intellectual climate where, as Bacon concedes in the *Essays*, poesy was seen as essential to inspire redemptive action and to sustain the emotional survival of the mind with hope that the "brazen" world could be improved. If the completely icastic poem or reader was a potentially unattainable ideal, it is one that could not be discredited. To disavow the pursuit of the icastic would confirm that fiction was either unable to represent true and redemptive worlds or fatally unconcerned with doing so. Icastic art had to persist as a goal, and, as such, the category remained a useful fiction. Lacking an assurance, however fictional, that poesy facilitates redemptive learning, readers are left to despair of their own

educability. The humanist belief in learning from fictions may have become increasingly untenable in the late 1500's, as Kinney and Dolven have argued. However, the seventeenth century solution was to try to revive it through new approaches to form and a more compelling integration with observational natural philosophy.

4. The Shape of the Argument

The arguments of my chapters, which are organized chronologically from Sidney to Milton, are summarized below. Not surprisingly, this structure also means that the second, third, and fourth chapters become, in some senses, studies of how the later writers respond to Sidney, whose poetics looms large throughout the project. I chose Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605) and the works of Francis Bacon in part because they show clear Sidneian influence. *King Lear*'s Gloucester plot is famously lifted from an episode recounted in Book II, Chapter 10 of the *New Arcadia*, and the *Advancement* echoes many of Sidney's terms and arguments. Yet the two middle chapters are most interesting to me as points of divergence from Sidney. *King Lear* is fascinating as a study of imaginative excess and its civilizational consequences, calling into question whether or not restorative fictions can indeed keep delusive, self-destructive ones at bay. Shakespeare presents a nightmare vision of civilizational collapse in which fictions retain their persuasive power but lose their architectonic impulse. In response to this threat, Bacon's poetics becomes an experiment in how rigorously we can restrain the imagination from knowledge creation while still keeping an unseen, providential, redemptive teleology in mind. Recognizing the dangers of too much or too little restraint on the imagination, Milton explores a

formal solution in *Paradise Regained* (1671) that anchors the "inward oracle" (1.463) of poets' and readers' imaginations to the "living oracle" (4.460) of Jesus' judgment as a reader of scripture and the material world. As I suggest, the poem's fictional mediation of biblical accounts and careful use of metaphors helps to steer readers between excessive and deficient imaginative responses to the Son of God.

Chapter 1: Vision, Form, and Imaginative Learning in Sidney's Defence of Poesy

Peter Herman provides an apt summation of the cultural and doctrinal quagmire Sidney would have to navigate to articulate, if unsuccessfully, a coherent Protestant poetics dependent upon a redemptive imagination:

> As a man powerfully attracted to both poetry and the more militant forms of active Protestantism, Sidney found his sensibilities being pulled in contrary directions, and as a result his writings constitute sites where Renaissance anxieties about poetry and its place in the active life are reproduced and interrogated, which is not to say they were ever resolved.[32]

Readers from Sidney's secretary, William Temple, to Gavin Alexander in his 2004 edition acknowledge the *Defence of Poesy's* shortcomings as an argument. Alexander writes that "Sidney may be more intent on winning the argument [about poetry's moral utility] than on building a viable literary theory" and describes "a common experience" in which "the *Defence* will carry you along with it, charm you into submission, and have you reaching for superlatives, but you will not be able to recount its arguments afterwards."[33] In my first chapter I suggest that viewing this text as an "experience," to borrow Alexander's term, reveals its coherence as Sidney's demonstration of how poetry fosters understanding and spurs redemptive

[32] Peter Herman, *Squitter-wits and Muse-haters: Sidney, Spenser, Milton, and Renaissance Antipoetic Sentiment* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 61-62.

[33] Gavin Alexander, "Introduction," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), lvi.

action. To read the *Defence* for its argument is to miss the point. Sidney has crafted a fiction of knowing—in this case the knowledge is the certainty that poetry can direct our actions—that readers respond to imaginatively and affectively, rather than intellectually. Instead of convincing us with rational, verifiable arguments, Sidney "conjure[s]" (DP 53) us to "presuppose" (DP 16) his claims about what poetry does, and uses our subjective response to the *Defence* as his evidence.

I argue that the treatise is a metafiction about how we read and respond to fictions that masquerades as an argument. It is itself an example of the kind of poetry it describes. Sidney fabricates the experience of, and feigns providing empirical evidence for, a causal link between poetic vision, artistic making, and restorative actions. His imaginative vision of actionable fictions becomes credible enough to reorder our perception of the material world, thereby affirming its claims through readers' lived experience of poetry's potential to shape that world. In his second paragraph, Sidney cites the power of Orpheus, mythical founding poet of ancient Greece, to draw "untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge" and "be listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people" (DP 9). He offers a vision of art's civilizing power that depends on readers' subjective responses of "admiration" and sites proof of their learning in the societies and cultural heritage they create.

Chapter 2: Architectonic Fictions and Shakespearean Disenchantment in King Lear

The problem with using subjective experience to argue for poetry's redemptive power is that it leaves readers vulnerable to self-deception. Have we really learned and tamed our baser instincts to further Sidney's architectonic project, or is society a collective illusion sustained by our desire to think well of ourselves?

Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* (1511) had long before described the songs of Orpheus and Amphion as "mutual flattery," arguing that "this same foolish desire of praise gave rise to cities, held together empires, built legal and religious systems, erected political and religious structures."[34] In this satiric view, fiction and culture are valuable because we need to flatter ourselves that we are capable of learning and self-improvement. Sidney's refusal to offer a definitive counter-argument to Erasmus is a weakness of the *Defence*. Because he cannot answer Erasmus, he relies on readers' and poets' judgments to ensure that fictions are architectonic in their conception and interpretation. As Shakespeare dramatizes, our fictions can lead us to destruction.

My second chapter reads *King Lear* as an especially robust exploration of what happens when the shared stories—or flatteries—that sustain a civilization lose their credibility. Lear's abdication ignites an epistemological and ontological crisis that is already smoldering in the play's opening lines, and Shakespeare imagines the societal consequences that ensue when a civilization's sustaining fictions implode. I argue that, like Sidney, Shakespeare uses his fictional world to produce an experience for his audience, whose sense of disorientation intensifies as we watch the characters' presuppositions decay. Readers and audiences have long seen in the play an unfulfilled promise of formal and conceptual satisfaction, which seems to lie just beyond our grasp. Stephen Booth writes of the play's many echoes and parallels that

> one cannot make sense of such correspondences, but one feels sense and order behind them….the omnipresent, never-quite-circumscribable patterns testify—as faith in a religious metaphysic might—that a governing idea for the play, a lodestone for our values, exists just beyond our mental reach, that the play is faithful to it, and that our

[34] Desiderius Erasmus, "The Praise of Folly," *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1989), 26-27.

> responses would prove similarly faithful and consistent if only we could interpret the oracular truths we feel but cannot see.[35]

Ultimately, the play leaves us with a dreadful "nothing" (1.1.87)[36] where understanding and a response should be. In a passage I read as a muted echo of the Orpheus myth, Lear condemns the survivors' silence and the world's stony indifference at the end of the play:

> …O, you are men of Stones!
> Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
> That heaven's vault should crack…(5.3.255-57)

Nothing anyone can say or think can ameliorate the play's ending. Referencing its pagan setting, David K. Anderson calls *King Lear* a "demystified and disenchanted play."[37] Unlike Orpheus, Lear cannot conjure the survivors into speech or restore Cordelia to life. Nor can the audience convert pity and fear into cathartic tragedy or otherwise comprehend Shakespeare's world and distill a lesson from it. *King Lear* exploits the paradox at the heart of Sidney's poetics: the play is a magisterial fictional experience of incomprehension, yet its effect of epistemological despair is itself a product of the characters', and our own, imaginative responses to fiction. Art can compel us to forsake meaning or affirm it, and both responses require imagination.

Chapter 3: Edenic Landscapes and the Eclipse of the Imagination in Francis Bacon's Poetics of Natural History

Bacon recognized the power of Sidney's poetics of presupposition to move his readers to enact his project of epistemological reform. He also knew the imagination's dangerous capacity to presuppose *King Lear*'s dark fiction of "nothing"

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[35] Stephen Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, & Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983), 22.

[36] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). Subsequent references will be provided as act, scene, and line numbers in text.

[37] David K. Anderson, "The Tragedy of Good Friday: Sacrificial Violence in King Lear," *English Literary History*, 72.2 (Summer 2011), 276.

with as much credibility as his vision of a world redeemed by the Great Instauration. My third chapter traces how Bacon's late career observational methods and poetics of natural history in the *Preparation for an Experimental and Natural History* (1620) evolve from the more imaginative, Sidneian poetics of the *Advancement of Learning*. In enacting his project, Bacon inherited and sought to balance the tensions—flattering fictions versus unvarnished empiricism and, as a way of mediating between them, imagination balanced with sensory experience—that both threaten and enable Sidneian poetics. Bacon's late-career poetics attempts to control narrative and desire by restraining the imagination and making language and matter indistinguishable to the point that his natural history "is used as the first matter of philosophy and the stuff and material of true induction."[38] The resulting elision of thought, writing, and matter compels him to abandon the *Advancement*'s central Sidneian myth of Orpheus taming the beasts and humanist tropes like the Erasmian treasure house of speech to describe learning and its impacts on civilization (AL 186).

In Bacon's mature poetics, the natural philosopher moves seamlessly from written natural history to action without the aid of an imaginative *nuncius*, or messenger, which is the role he gives in the *Advancement* (AL 217). However, he cannot abandon fiction as a means of writing about his project even as he seeks to excise it from his poetics of natural history. Bacon's poetics requires a new Edenic myth of Adam laboring in the garden and naming the animals to describe a state where knowledge, language, and matter perpetually reshape each other in a self-sustaining, redemptive ecosystem. For Bacon, the presupposed end of learning is no

[38] Sir Francis Bacon, "Preparation for a Natural and Experimental History," *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 224.

longer the Orphean project of a civilization upheld by our belief in shared fictions. Instead, art is anchored to the teleology of the Bible, which renders the imagination and its desires productive by circumscribing their scope. Our capacity to make and interpret fictions is governed by religious orthodoxy and isolated from our efforts to understand how the world works.

Bacon does not disavow fictions, as some of his more strident arguments suggest he plans to do. Rather, he uses poesy to provide the visionary hope to sustain experimental labors. The mysterious, seldom-discussed fifth part of his Great Instauration depicts moments of imaginative vision as inns or way stations on the journey toward enacting his project:

> The fifth part is useful only for a time until the rest is complete; and is given as a kind of interest until we can get the capital. We are not driving blindly towards our goal and ignoring the useful things that come up on the way. For this reason the fifth part of our work consists of things which we have either discovered, demonstrated, or added, not on the basis of our methods and instructions for interpretation, but from the same intellectual habits as other people generally employ in investigation and discovery. For while we expect, from our constant converse with nature, greater things from our reflections than our intellectual capacity might suggest, these temporary results may in the meantime serve as shelters built along the road for the mind to rest in for a while as it presses on towards more certain things. (NO 23)

Bacon's reference to "the same intellectual habits as other people generally employ" sanctions poesy and other humanist arts as ways of producing provisional knowledge. His image here echoes the *Defence*'s claim that the poet

> …doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice many to enter into it; nay, he doth as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard – at the first give you a cluster of grapes that, full of that taste, you may long to pass further. (DP 23)

Once Bacon's project is complete and civilization has arrived at his sixth phase, the imaginative scaffolding that provided hope for his Instauration will be pulled down. As I mentioned before, even Bacon struggles to describe what his project's completion would look or feel like. In its provisional state it therefore resembles the end of *King Lear*, where a world without imaginative knowledge creation must itself be imagined.

Chapter 4: Metaphor, Idolatry, and Milton's Poetics of Prosopopoeia in Paradise Regained

Bacon's attempt to bind imaginative vision to Christianity's cosmic teleology threatens to sunder metaphysical questions—what agency governs the cosmos?—from the realm of physics —what are the material causes of observable phenomena? Divine agency is only imputed in cases where all material causes can be conclusively disproved, as when the Father of Salomon's House declares a miracle in the *New Atlantis'* (1620's) account of how the island of Bensalem became Christian.[39] My conclusion reads John Milton's *Paradise Regained* as the most successful seventeenth century attempt to recombine the imaginative and empirical strains of English poetry and offer a plausible art that can move readers to faith. On the one hand, Milton perfects Sidney's poetics of rhetorical argument and evocative metaphors to prompt his readers to imagine Jesus as the Son of God. Yet he also sows the poem with equivocal evidence that provides grounds for doubt. He thereby forces the reader to decide how to see his Jesus and to acknowledge that either conclusion—divine or human—requires imagination.

[39] Sir Francis Bacon, "The New Atlantis," in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 464-65.

Paradise Regained confronts us with the need to choose how to interpret recurring metaphors like the oracle and, through the lens of our imaginative presuppositions, asks us to respond to the poem's climactic temptation of Jesus by Satan. By aligning us with Jesus, depriving him of the Holy Spirit's full, post-Pentecost guidance, and retelling a familiar biblical story in a contemporary literary form, Milton forces his readers to reconstruct or deny a subjective experience of the incarnate Christ mediated via the poem's juxtaposition of scriptural exegeses and *mimesis*. Marshall Grossman posits a similar view of the poem when he describes poetry as "a mimetic mediation of inward truth submitted to transcendental reason" so that "what began as inward revelation" on the part of the poet is "articulated as self-evident truth."[40] The sympathetic reader achieves an imaginative intimation of the Incarnate Son of God. Meanwhile, the reader who refuses to imagine is, like Satan hurling himself from the Temple, forced to distance himself from the possibility of belief fostered by the poem. The direct cause of Satan's fall is ambiguous. The line "Satan smitten with amazement fell" (1.45.562) could describe him as struck by his own amazement at Jesus' "Tempt not the Lord thy God" (1.45.560), in which case he falls in order to forestall a subjective response to Jesus and retains his agency throughout.[41] Alternatively, he may be amazed about being "smitten" and caused to fall by a glimpse of Jesus' authority. Milton's poem lays the observable groundwork necessary for a fleeting theophany. Like the *Defence of Poesy*, however, *Paradise Regained* prevents us from citing a single argument or event in the poem as the cause

[40] Marshall Grossman, "Poetry and Belief in *Paradise Regained*, to which is added, *Sampson Agonistes*," *Studies in Philology* 110.2 (Spring 2013): 384, 386.

[41] John Milton, "Paradise Regained," *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 635-698.

of that belief. Milton's sustained, empirically plausible and imaginatively compelling mediation of vatic and sensory experience produces the poem's encounter with the Incarnation, or the foundational presupposition of Christendom.

I: Vision, Form, and Imaginative Learning in Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*

No one is able to agree about the precise nature of Sidney's poetics in the *Defence of Poetry*, or whether he actually articulates a coherent one. In the introduction to his 2004 edition, Gavin Alexander alludes to the frustration readers might feel as they try to construct a systematic understanding of how poetry works from the treatise. He writes that "Sidney may be more intent on winning the argument [about poetry's moral utility] than on building a viable literary theory" and describes "a common experience" in which "the *Defence* will carry you along with it, charm you into submission, and have you reaching for superlatives, but you will not be able to recount its arguments afterwards."[1] Starting with William Temple, who read it in manuscript, a cadre of more skeptical critics has concluded that the *Defence*'s argument goes beyond mere slipperiness and collapses into a series of contradictions that Sidney himself could not help but notice.[2] Perhaps their best modern example is Ronald Levao, who writes that "the *Apology for Poetry* seems so derivative, and at times contradictory, that scholars have often had to resort to Sidney's predecessors and near-contemporaries in order to piece together a coherent program."[3] Levao goes

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[1] Gavin Alexander, "Introduction," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), lvi.

[2] Temple goes so far as to take issue with Sidney's famous Aristotelian definition of poesy as "an art of imitation,...a speaking picture—with this end: to teach and delight." He argues that "this is the definition…that holds the whole controversy, and on which, like a foundation, this treatise On Poetry that you teach almost entirely stands." After two long paragraphs of analysis Temple concludes that "the praise of the faculty of poetry from Aristotle's definition is null."

See: William Temple, *Analysis of Sir Philip Sidney's Apology for Poetry*, ed. and trans. John Webster (Binghamton: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1984), 81-82.

[3] Ronald Levao, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 101. Later in his chapter, Levao notes some examples: "At one moment the poets are free of the works of nature, not enclosed by its 'narrow warrant'; at another, they must rely on the 'force truth

on to argue that the work is mired in its own cyclical claims and cannot inspire its readers to act because "the apology requires another *Apology* to justify it, and so on without end."[4] For Temple and Levao, the *Defence* contains provocative assertions about how poetry works and what it is meant to do, but it does not offer an intellectually credible poetics.

If we look beyond matters of sound argument and turn to how the *Defence* inhabits its cultural context the questions of its meaning and argument—particularly surrounding the role of the potentially wayward imagination—become even more vexed. H. R. Woudhuysen contends that only four manuscripts were produced and circulated among trusted members of Sidney's circle. He speculates that even among such a sympathetic audience the reaction may have been one of "puzzlement."[5] Kimberly Anne Coles reads the *Defence* as an effort, in tandem with the Sidney-Pembroke Psalter, to "advocate an ethical role for the imagination in the context of a Protestant culture that increasingly understands reason as the sole source of man's moral activity."[6] She suggests that while the *Defence* "fails" to "marry [Sidney's] religious beliefs and his humanist training," the Countess of Pembroke's completion of the Psalter "greatly advanced his theoretical project by both bringing his thesis into

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hath in nature,' and their proper effects are endangered if the matter is 'disproportioned to ourselves and nature' (136)." He also draws attention to Sidney's penchant for affirming arguments even as he claims that poets never affirm (152-55).

[4] Levao, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*, 155. Later, Levao elaborates on this claim: "Sidney wants to direct his learning outward, to energize the will through the wit. As a prospective man of action, Sidney endorses the teleology of mental effort: 'It is not gnosis but praxis must be the fruit.' That such a transition can be made is confidently, even aggressively, proclaimed in the *Apology*. But for Sidney, there always seems to be another game to be played by the wit, yet another circuit to be made by its self-circling energies, before it can make that transition" (156).

[5] H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 234.

[6] Kimberly Anne Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 89.

public view, and…establish[ing] its central point."[7] Of course, the Sidney Psalter is just one of the types of poetry examined and defended in the *Defence*, and romance. Epic, tragedy, love lyrics, and stage drama remain problematic even if the Psalms are partially rehabilitated. Sidney wants the English to improve on *Gorboduc*, not tear down the theatres.[8] Robert Stillman acknowledges that Sidney's elevated view of the imagination was incompatible with English Calvinism, which "proved peculiarly difficult to reconcile either with Sidney's life or his literary career."[9] He contends that the *Defence* is better aligned with the more political, actionable Protestantism advocated by Sidney's continental mentor Hubert Languet and other followers of the Reformation theologian Philip Melanchthon.[10] Certainly this overview of the intellectual landscape is not exhaustive, but it gestures toward the complexity of parsing the sources and influences of the *Defence*, to say nothing of the argument itself.

Sidney purports to agree with his critics when he associates his "pitiful defence of poor poetry" with John Pietro Pugliano's "strong affection and weak arguments."[11] The gesture is disarming. Surely an author capable of recognizing and gently mocking a bad argument even as he appreciates the arguer will at least

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[7] Coles, Religion, *Reform, and Women's Writing*, 82, 111.

[8] Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 45. Unless otherwise noted, future citations of the *Defence* derive from this edition and page numbers will be cited in text.

[9] Robert E. Stillman, *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge, 2016), 16.

[10] Stillman, *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism*, xi. Stillman argues that "mediated by his mentor Languet, Melanchthon's inspiration matters as it came to Sidney because of its carefully delimited optimism about human agency—its assertiveness about the strength of reason and the cooperative power of the will—and, most significantly, because of his celebration of that agency's scope in securing freedom from the sovereignty of sin."

[11] Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 4. Unless otherwise noted, future citations of the *Defence* derive from this edition and page numbers will be cited in text.

entertain us. Yet this nod to the skeptical reader raises a question: why does Sidney begin by admitting that his argument is unconvincing, only to go through the meticulous effort of composing the rest of the *Defence*? In revisiting the problem of argument, I suggest that viewing this text as an "experience" can help readers find coherence in Sidney's claims about poetry as a way of understanding and responding to the world.[12] I propose to read the *Defence* as a fiction of knowing—in this case fictional knowledge about poetry's power to beget action—that readers respond to imaginatively and affectively, rather than intellectually.[13] Instead of convincing us with rational, verifiable arguments, it "conjure[s]" (53) us (to borrow Sidney's phrase) to affirm its claims about what poetry does as a result of our subjective response to the *Defence* itself. The treatise is a metafiction about how we read and respond to fictions that masquerades as an argument. It fabricates the experience of, and gestures toward providing empirical evidence for, a causal link between poetic vision, artistic making, and material consequences. Its imaginative world of effective fictions becomes credible enough to reorder our perception of the material world, making its claims believable through lived experience of their power.

Saying that we should treat the *Defence* as a fiction raises the question of why Sidney crafted it to resemble an empirically verifiable argument. Why, in other words, does the *Defence* feel like a study in argumentative evasion? Its style is all the

[12] Writing more generally of literary fictions as carefully crafted experiences, Elizabeth Spiller observes that in Renaissance poetry and natural philosophy "reading is almost never simply understood as the acquisition of facts (dates, data) but rather as an act of doing or becoming that is achieved through the experience in some way provided by the text." *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

[13] In using the words "poets" and "poetry" I assign them their broad, Sidneian meaning. The word "poetry" to refers to any sort of imaginative literature, or act fiction making, and the word "poet" means a creator of fictions with no regard to whether or not those fictions were written in verse.

more unusual when juxtaposed with other Renaissance formal experiments like Francis Bacon's spare, mimetic prose, with its goal of objective, communal knowledge grounded in arguments inducted from sensory experience.[14] Sidney conflates empiricism and imagination when he describes poetry as a source of subjective experience and an Aristotelian *mimesis* of material phenomena. The question is how he expects us to believe him. I argue that Sidney's epistemological goals and presuppositions require him to make the *Defence* look like the logical, empirical argument that Temple, Alexander, and Levao expect, even if he never intended to satisfy them. His fundamental assumption is that the poet's "erected wit" (10) can only ever have an *imagined* causal relationship with the material world—that the connection between fiction and reality must always be verified by the subjective experience of the reader. Even though his poetics asks us to understand the material world imaginatively rather than empirically, it at least has to seem like a *mimesis* of

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[14] Bacon's shift from a relatively traditional humanist poetics to a deep skepticism of literature and its relationship on the imagination is the subject of my third chapter. One striking example of his late-career empiricism and hostility to writing that engages the reader's imagination comes from a fragmentary text published with the *New Organon* in 1620:

> In a great work it is equally necessary to describe what is accepted succinctly as it is to cut out superfluities, though it is evident that such purity and brevity will give much less pleasure to the reader and writer alike. We must constantly repeat the point that we are merely building a warehouse or storage space; not a place in which one is to stay or live with pleasure, but which one enters only when necessary, when something has to be taken out for use in the work of the Interpreter which follows.

See: Francis Bacon, "Preparation for a Natural and Experimental History," *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 226.

One potential view of Sidney's relationship to contemporary empirical sciences comes from Spiller, who writes that "Whereas today most readers think of literary fictions and scientific experiments as very different from one another, I will show how historically both begin with the idea that small worlds were artificial representations that made it possible to create knowledge: these worlds include literary fictions, Neoplatonic and alchemical images, philosophical hypotheses, scale models, and scientific experiments." My own reading of Sidney's text will show that, while he indeed sees the *Defence* as a perceptual instrument, and views fiction as a means of generating actionable knowledge in the material world, close correspondence with his era's nascent empiricism was never his aim. Instead, he is conspicuous in his refusal to affirm that what we learn from poesy originates within, or can clearly be seen to affect, the material world that concerned experimentalists.

sensory experience undergirding a sound argument in order to win our intellectual assent. The poet "nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth" (34). For Sidney, fiction validates itself by looking like fact and making readers forget the imaginative origin of what it teaches them. Its purpose is to compel readers to make a conceptual leap by which its "golden" world alters their actions in the "brazen" (9) world they inhabit and know inductively. As a metafiction, then, the *Defence*'s feigned "golden" reality—its central fiction and elusive argument—is a world where the reader's encounter with imaginative, golden-world ideals shapes his knowledge and intentions in the real world.

1. Sidneian Non-Arguments and Gilded Fictions about Poets as Causes, Seers, and Makers

When Alexander describes the "common experience" of the *Defence*, he implies that it lacks a clear, empirical argument about what poetry does. His word choice is telling. Sidney's synthesis of empirical and imaginative "experience" reflects the more expansive early modern definition of the word, and of what constitutes a legitimate basis for knowledge. Jeff Dolven writes that "experience" had an active meaning of "trying, probing, or proving" akin to our modern sense of the word "experiment," and could also mean "experience past—experience mediated or constituted by memory, habit, or even writing."[15] In this sense, it is possible to create a compelling intellectual "experience" that has no empirical basis, but is nonetheless accepted as a valid way of understanding the world. When I say that poets like Sidney strive to produce an imaginative, affective experience, or fabricate an experience of

[15] See: Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 70-71. Pages 69-75 offer a helpful overview of the meanings of "experience."

intellectual comprehension, the idea raises the question of which of these senses—the modern one of experience as our intellectual response to sensory input, as well as the archaic ones of experience as active inquiry and the contents of text or memory—I refer to. In the *Defence*, the answer would be all three, often interchangeably. Imagination, literary forms, and actions in the physical world become elided. The fact that Sidney not only acknowledges, but prefers, imaginatively generated, textually mediated experience makes him an outlier to the more focused definition of "experience" we have inherited from Bacon and his empiricist successors.[16]

Sidney's equation of sensory and imaginative, literary experience early in the *Defence* relies on ambiguities in his language and images to produce a simultaneous impression of intellectual conviction and disorientation. He demonstrates formal mastery and psychological insight about what makes an emotionally satisfying poetics when he tries to advance historical arguments of correlation and chronology alongside more speculative, imaginative arguments of causation. For example, his nod to Horatian poetics in the second paragraph associates his claims about the history of poetry with arguments and evidence, while sidestepping the question of whether his arguments and evidence support his claims. Sidney alludes to the *Ars Poetica*'s depiction of Orpheus and Amphion as foundational poets who reshaped the world by educating humanity with their songs. Using the passive voice to introduce

[16] Bacon is particularly interesting with regard to this word since his aim is a pure, passive experience in the modern sense. He distrusts language and imagination as forms of knowledge-producing experience. As I will argue in my third chapter, Bacon does not want experiments to be so contrived by the minds of their creators that their results do not reflect and illuminate ordinary experience of the material world as a result of this manipulation. Nor does he wish his readers to resort to text or memory in a way that will skew their perception of the physical realities placed before their senses. Because he is among the first to try to circumscribe what constitutes a legitimate experience of reality, Bacon may have a significant share of the responsibility for the modern, passive sense of the word.

his claim without naming a speaker, Sidney writes how "Amphion was said to move stones with his poetry to build Thebes, and Orpheus to be listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people" whom he civilized (5). It is hard to know how to respond to this assertion since he does not name an original authority to argue with and it is unclear whether he is merely acknowledging the claim or deploying it as an argument. What Sidney offers here is more of a flattering portrait of human intellect and its redemptive powers than a logically or empirically convincing account of how our fictions elevate us. However, he constructs his treatise so that its claims at least appear plausible enough not to offend our reason, or our empirical understanding of the world, when we first encounter them.

It is tempting to dismiss the Horace reference as a humanist commonplace, but it crowns a series of statements and allusions that primes the reader to accept the Orpheus myth as historical fact. Sidney grants more credibility to this story than his contemporaries. Note, for instance, how his conceptual contortions frame his claims about Orpheus and Amphion:

> Nay, let any history be brought that can say any writers were there before [Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod] if they were not men of the same skill, as Orpheus, Linus, and some other are named, who, having been the first of that country that made pens deliverers of knowledge to the posterity, may justly challenge to be called their fathers in learning; for not only in time they had this priority (although in itself antiquity be venerable), but went before them, as causes to draw with their charming sweetness the wild, untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge. (4-5)

Sidney's challenge of "let any history be brought" implies that historians would substantiate the claim that poets are the earliest "deliverers of knowledge to the posterity," though he never cites any historians. In contrast, George Puttenham calls

the story of the two mythical poets "feigned," Bacon refers to the "feigned relation of Orpheus' theatre," and Ben Jonson's translation of Horace uses Sidney's passive "was said" without attributing the myth to an identifiable speaker or genre, but without the framing that primes readers' interpretation in the *Defence*.[17] More importantly, Sidney blends his chronological argument with one of causation when he takes the purportedly historical claim that poets are "fathers in learning" and reinterprets the paternal metaphor to mean that they are "causes" of learning—generative forces rather than merely precedents. At the same time, he introduces historical poets first by naming Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod, links them to mythical poets Orpheus and Linas, and lauds them all as founders of civilization. Finally, he

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[17] George Puttenham's 1589 treatise argues that

> The profession and use of poesy is most ancient from the beginning—and not, as many erroneously suppose, after but before any civil society was among men….Whereupon it is feigned that Amphion and Orpheus, two poets of the first ages, one of them, to wit Amphion, builded up cities and reared walls with stones that came in heaps to the sound of his harp, figuring thereby the mollifying of hard and stony hearts by his sweet and eloquent persuasion; and Orpheus assembled the wild beasts to come in herds and to hearken to his music, and by that means made them tame…"

Jonson, in his posthumously printed translation of the *Ars poetica* (1640), translates the Horatian original as follows:

> Orpheus, a priest, and speaker for the gods,
> First frighted men, that wildly lived, at odds,
> From slaughters, and foul life; and for the same
> Was tigers said, and lions fierce, to tame.
> Amphion, too, that built the Theban towers,
> Was said to move the stones, by his lute's powers,
> And lead them with soft songs, where that he would.
> This was the wisdom, that they had of old,
> Things sacred, from profane to separate;
> The public, from the private; to abate
> Wild ranging lusts; prescribe the marriage good;
> Build towns, and carve the laws in leaves of wood.
> And thus, at first, an honour, and a name
> To divine poets, and their verses came. (478-492)

See: George Puttenham, "The Art of English Poesy," in *Sidney's Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 61., and Ben Jonson, "Horace, Of the Art of Poetry," in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin, 1996), 354-372.

moves within the span of a sentence from talking about poets as "deliverers of…knowledge" to crediting them with cultivating "an admiration of knowledge." He shifts the argument from one that discusses poetry as an epistemological tool in its own right to one concerned with poetry's influence over our affective response to knowledge, which is equally important but harder to confirm or deny because our attitude toward knowledge is much more subjective than knowledge itself. Sidney's treatment of Orpheus and Amphion looks like the sort of empirical, chronological argument he will later attribute to the historian.

Sidney's elisions of history and poetic invention, and his shift from talking about knowing to responding to knowledge, threaten to ruin his credibility by the end of his second paragraph. Because of this, he prefaces these claims with yet another layer of complexity that disarms his readers by making them complicit in the *Defence*'s historicizing. The exordium, which precedes the paragraph containing his Orpheus references, promises irony rather than instruction when it declares "that self-love is better than any gilding to make that seem gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties" (3-4). The implication we are meant to carry into Sidney's appropriation of Horace (and beyond) is that if we—like Sidney—are to be convinced of poetry's power to teach, it will happen because we derive some psychological benefit from holding that opinion of it. In other words, readers' desires to think well of themselves and their own educability makes them "parties" to the *Defence*'s claims that poets are "deliverers of…knowledge." Flattery is meant to help us mistake its fiction for a sound argument. Sidney acknowledges that our participation is a condition for his success in eliding fictional and observational experience, and he asks us from the

outset to "gild" a series of leaden arguments. If "poets only deliver a golden" world, they do so exclusively for readers who choose a fiction instead of insisting on inductive knowledge of the fallen material world and affirming the moral and intellectual limitations of their brazen, embodied existence.

Sidney continues to use flattery and non-argument as the *Defence* makes a series of provocative, yet impeccably qualified claims about how poets create knowledge by seeing and making images. His virtuosic circumlocution about poetic seeing and making leads his readers to perceive a causal connection between the two activities where none has actually been argued. If it did exist, such a connection would be the empirical basis for his poetics. As Alexander notes, the *Defence* claims that the vatic poet sees a Platonic "*idea* or fore-conceit" (9) and uses words to transfer this governing image to the mind of the reader with as little entropy as possible.[18] During this process, "the idea is ambiguously both the object of philosophical contemplation created by the deity…and something created by the poet."[19] The ambiguity Alexander identifies stems from the fact that Sidney asserts poetry's paradoxically divine and human origins even though his basis for doing so is unclear. Sidney's remarks about seeing and making seem keyed to preserve this ambiguity by refusing to identify the source of poetry. It is this absence of an explanation which entices the reader to elide the "fore-conceit" with the poem itself in an imaginative, rather than empirical, way.

[18] Elaborating on the poet's relationship with images, Alexander writes that "an Elizabethan theory of poetry is a theory of how images are translated by words from the imagination of the author to the imagination of the reader." See: "Seeing Through Words in Theories of Poetry," 350.

[19] Alexander, "Seeing Through Words," 359.

By conflating the "fore-conceit" with the poem—the thing seen with the purported instrument of vision—we infer a causal connection that Sidney never actually articulates and take his gilded claims for a golden argument. In fact, seeing and making are held so scrupulously distinct from one another in Sidney's explicit statements about them that Levao posits an "ironic reading of the superstitious *vates* argument" and focuses entirely on the poet as maker.[20] Yet the language of vision and moving, of instantaneous apprehension rather than constructed empirical knowledge, pervades Sidney's text. To read the *vates* argument ironically would require readers to question every image of sight he provides. He may refuse to say whether poetry can be confirmed as the product of the author's vatic sight or the cause of readers' apprehension of the "fore-conceit," but he is careful to encourage us to make this conceptual leap by juxtaposing the *vates* and *poiein* arguments and treating them both as important commentaries on what poets do. In making the leap between them, we prove his point about learning through fiction. However, if asked to substantiate the seeing-making connection based on Sidney's argument and evidence, we find that no rereading of the *Defence* can actually reconstruct what we think we have learned without reverting to a subjective experience of knowledge that has no objective correlative.[21]

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[20] Levao, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*, 138.

[21] T.S. Eliot writes that "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." In this sense, Sidney is attempting to bridge precisely the gap between observable phenomena and subjective experience that Eliot faults Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for failing to close. Art, for Sidney, is constrained by the insurmountable subjectivity of the reader, and while literary forms can manipulate readerly acts of perception and apprehension, the results can never be as assured a result of the text as Eliot would argue. See: "Hamlet and His Problems," *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998), 58.

In another passage highlighting Sidney's "ambiguous" argument, Alexander suggests that vatic, imaginative sight in both poets and readers stems from the created artifact of the poem but is ultimately distinct from it. He writes that "Successful communication between poet/speaker and auditor…begins and ends with a kind of sight" and, a few pages later, that "literary fiction requires author and reader to inhabit together a world that can only ever be imagined."[22] The vatic poet sees an image, attempts to reproduce the experience in words as a poetic maker, and then bestows that fiction on the reader in order to prompt an analogous, actionable state of vision. However, the *Defence* always retains a grain of doubt about this process, which Sidney tries to make us overlook even as he acknowledges that readers must "gild" his leaden argument about poems as causes of vision and action. He writes that readers will imagine, act, and "make many Cyruses" from the poet's founding idea "*if* they will learn aright why and how that maker made him" (9, emphasis mine). Despite his desire for a direct connection between poetry and *architektoniké*, and his insinuations that it exists, he knows better than to declare that actions in the material world are the clear result of poetry's impact on the mind. He hedges against skeptical readers with his conditional "if," and leaves them to decide whether they have ever been similarly moved by fiction even as he tries to move them.

The distance Sidney maintains between the "fore-conceit," the poem itself, and any intellectual or material consequences is perhaps most evident in the way he writes about Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* a few pages later. Here he claims that the "fore-conceit[s]" of poets are not to blame if they should fail to enact their own visions or even express them compellingly in words: "where Sir Thomas More erred

[22] Alexander, "Seeing Through Words," 353, 356.

it was the fault of the man and not of the poet, for that way of patterning a commonwealth was most absolute, though he perchance hath not so absolutely performed it" (17). Instead of blaming More's artistry, he makes the question of whether poetry begets results a function of the readers', and even the artist's, subjective, vatic responses to that art. Neither the mimetic accuracy or causal power of the poem itself, nor the existence or divinity of its originating image, is explicitly doubted or clearly affirmed in the *Defence*. Rather, Sidney maintains a delicate, evocative balance between art and image. The creation of an Orphean causal relationship between fiction and action falls to a reader whose educability via seamless poetic seeing and making is Sidney's central fiction.

2. Imagining Causality: Sidneian Presuppositions vs. Examples and Empiricism

Sidney appears to drop the subject of seeing and making for the question of poetry's social utility when he has history, philosophy, and poetry vie for the title of humanity's most instructive art. This is essentially a discussion of poetic form and what it does to readers that philosophy and history do not do, and it revisits his claims about the imaginative process by which poets move from seeing to making, and prompt readers to do the same. The contest between art forms is the closest he comes to explaining how poetry should affect readers. It is here that he defines *poiesis* as the imaginative creation and textual representation of a specific kind of causal knowledge that poets must make as they compose, and which fictions are meant to incite in readers' minds. What distinguishes poets from philosophers and historians is not so much a proclivity for creating causal structures and imparting them, but their

deliberate use of form to make imaginative visions of causality that are paradoxically compelling as a *mimesis* of the physical world and an instructive vision for restoring that world. As Sidney insinuates in this comparison, poetry presents causal knowledge that is validated and thereby exercises its causal agency when readers respond to the material world as if it were the poet's fictional world.

Poets, Sidney writes, "range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (11). This project requires them to imbue their fictions with visions of cause and effect that are empirically plausible, emotionally compelling, and morally instructive, but not purely mimetic. By depicting a world that appears to accord with what "may be," poets satisfy our empirical criteria for knowledge, but by imagining what "should be," they modify that empiricism. This pairing of actuality and possibility differentiates them from other writers. Unlike poets, moral philosophers fail to produce interesting, instructive representations of causation because they deal in "definitions, divisions and distinctions" instead of making worlds. They teach "what virtue is, and teacheth it not only by delivering forth his very being, his causes and effects, but also by making known his enemy vice" (14). The problem Sidney sees with this philosophical approach is that it "teacheth virtue by certain abstract considerations" that yield "precept[s]" without the benefit of examples (15). Philosophers are concerned with "making" things "known" at an intellectual level but their vision of causes and effects ignores the complex experience of life, in which causal agency is ambiguous. Abstract knowledge is not compelling unless it is tied to sensory and subjective experience. Historians, meanwhile, are too tied to the sensible world to offer an

ameliorative vision. They convey only the material facts of what "may be," and make experience comprehensible by generating causal knowledge to explain material experience. For this reason, Sidney contends that "many times [the historian] must tell events whereof he can yield no cause, or if he do, it must be poetically" (20). While the historian creates causal knowledge, the realities he is forced to report do not lend themselves to any sort of moral instruction since "the historian in his bare 'was' hath many times that which we call fortune to overrule the best wisdom" (20). It is only the poet who makes engaging, instructive worlds whose causal structures are experiential and morally imaginative.

Sidney argues that the poet's "divine consideration" is a relational act by which human beings, fulfilling their role as the image of God, simultaneously imitate and reform causal structures in the fallen world of material experience. The poet's paradoxical goal is to "balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature" and "with the force of a divine breath…bring…things forth surpassing her doings" (9-10). It is only in "surpassing" the natural world that the poet can restore the "balance" of nature and imagination. The question confronting poets is how to make the causal structure that governs their worlds more moral without making it obvious that they have created fictions. This conflation of the "brazen" and "golden" worlds is possible in Sidney only because the more successful a fiction becomes in reforming the causal order of the world in its image, the more the fiction looks like the product of empirical observation rather than imagination. He has created a poetics in which the positive impact of fictions within cultures over time erases awareness that the way the world works has changed, and that fiction caused that change. The

evidence of change, if it exists, lies within the poet's, and the reforming reader's, subjective experience of instruction and consciousness of change over time. Fiction becomes history if successful. When learning takes place and the causal structure of the world is changed through human action in response to that knowledge, the way things were before has to be imagined. The reader's moral and intellectual perspective evolves as the material world is remade, and fictions become empirical fact.

For Sidney, poets are distinguished from other writers because their grasp of causality allows them to "presuppose" what happens when a philosophical "precept" inhabits a historical "particular example." Fiction produces a world where our understanding of what is and what "should be" are reconciled:

> …one that hath no other guide but [the philosopher] shall wade in him till he be old before he shall find sufficient cause to be honest. For his knowledge standeth so upon the abstract and general, that happy is the man who may understand him, and more happy that can apply what he doth understand. On the other side, the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine.
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> Now doth the peerless poet perform both, for whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in someone by whom he presupposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example. (16)

Poets "presuppose" that fictions' intertwined series of causes—characters, motives, and events—have united abstract knowledge and values with raw sensory experience, and they teach by prompting readers to make the same assumption. How this occurs is left unsaid. To imagine a "perfect" causal agency in the world and still affirm "necessary consequence" in light of lived experience requires the mind to hold empiricism and abstraction in tension. This balance of real and ideal can only succeed

through an act of presupposition in which the mind imagines the causal logic that governs the world instead of imitating only what the senses observe.

Sidney challenges traditional ideas about how fiction should represent causality when he claims that readers must conflate abstract, divine causation with observable causal relationships. One of his sources, Aristotle's *Poetics*, develops a more empirically grounded approach to art. Aristotle writes that the tragic effects of pity and fear are diminished by overwrought, episodic plots that distort causality and render fictions less believable when examined in light of sensory experience:

> Of simple stories and actions the episodic are the worst. I mean by an episodic story one in which the episodes following one another are neither likely nor necessary. Tragedies of this sort are made by inferior poets on account of themselves and by the good poets on account of the performers, for it is because they engage in competitions and stretch the story beyond its capacity that they are often compelled to twist the sequence out of shape.[23]

Elsewhere, he decrees that even characterization should be governed by an observationally-based causal logic, so that what characters do in a given circumstance appears probable in light of what the reader or audience knows of their prior motives and actions:

> Similarly, one must always seek in characters, just as one also must in the putting together of events, either the necessary or the likely so that it is either necessary or likely for him who is of a certain sort to speak or do things of that sort, and it is either necessary or likely for this to come to be after that.[24]

The Aristotelian analogy between the causal relationships we identify to explain the sensible world and those that the poets create is perhaps most sharply outlined in the *Metaphysics*, which claims that "the observed facts show that nature is not a series of

[23] Aristotle, *On Poetics*, trans. Seth Bernardete and Michael Davis (South Bend, IA: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 28.
[24] Aristotle, *On Poetics*, 38.

episodes, like a bad tragedy."[25] Sidneian fictions strain Aristotelian plausibility in a way that would be untenable if they did not succeed in changing our presuppositions about what is necessary or likely.

Sidney's imaginative poetics also diverges from the earlier English humanists, who follow Aristotle in basing causal knowledge on empiricism. *The Book Named the Governor* (1531), Sir Thomas Elyot's influential treatise on education, typifies a pre-Sidneian theory of how causal knowledge is created. Early in his third book he defines "doctrine," also called "discipline intellectife or learning," as that "which is either in writing or by report of things before known, which procedeth from one man to another." He contrasts "doctrine" with "understanding," which he defines as "the principle part of the soul which is occupied about the beginning or original causes of things that may fall into man's knowledge."[26] Understanding depends upon "things before known," rather than imagined, to make new knowledge. George Puttenham makes a similar argument in *The Art of English Poesy* (1589), which reflects the orthodoxies of mid-century English humanism despite its late-century publication:[27]

> Then, forasmuch as [poets] were the first observers of all natural causes and effects in the things generable and corruptible, and from thence mounted up to search after the celestial courses and influences, and yet penetrated further to know the divine essences and substances separate, as is said before, they were the first astronomers and

[25] Aristotle, "Metaphysics," trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 921. Bernardete and Davis note this passage, and its connection to the poetics, in their edition. See: Aristotle, *On Poetics*, trans. Seth Bernardete and Michael Davis, 28.

[26] Thomas Elyot, "The Book Named the Governor," in *The Renaissance in England: Non-dramatic Prose and Verse of the Sixteenth Century*, eds. Hyder E. Rollins and Herschel Baker (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1952), 114-115. Elyot's text had gone through at least seven editions by 1580.

[27] Gavin Alexander calls *The Art of English Poesy* "the work of a man belonging to the same generation as Sidney's father," whose "literary tastes are decidedly mid-century" and describes it as "an important repository of normative views about poetry." See: "Introduction," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, lxiii-lxiv.

> philosophers and metaphysics. Finally, because they did altogether endeavour themselves to reduce the life of man to a certain method of good manners, and made the first differences between virtue and vice, and then tempered all these knowledges and skills with the exercise of a delectable music by melodious instruments, which withal served them to delight their hearers and to call the people together by admiration to a plausible and virtuous conversation, therefore were they the first philosophers ethic and the first artificial musicians of the world.[28]

The formal differences between poetry and other mediums of expression may make poetry an especially effective kind of rhetoric for Puttenham. Poets, insofar as they "know the divine essences and substances," become the world's first astronomers, metaphysicians, and moral philosophers. However, there is no indication here that they move beyond observation of causality in order to modify causal orders as a result of their studies. Neither Puttenham nor Elyot argues, as Sidney does, that fictions offer a vision of causality whose origin differs from all other causal knowledge.[29]

Sidney's innovation is to suggest that art in which literary causality is explainable in terms of empirical causality does not fulfill the aim of fiction. Such an art argues from observation rather than presupposing a relationship between material and divine causation, which can be experienced but not fully explained. The Sidneian poet turns language into a means of generating images in the reader's mind that do not yet have material referents, but may in time if the poem and its readers are successful. This is an essential distinction. The *Defence* implies that the vatic poet

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[28] Puttenham, "The Art of English Poesy," 63-64.

[29]Barbara K. Lewalski frames this question of poetry's essential function by comparing it to rhetoric. She notes poetry's overlap with rhetoric before arguing that, for Sidney, "poetry produced a more powerful emotional effect than rhetoric." In the preceding pages she writes that he "distinguishes poetry's specific power to move in terms of two characteristics: It presents to the senses 'speaking pictures' of virtue and vice that move to emulation or abhorrence; and it constructs imaginative stories so enchanting that they hold 'children from play, and olde men from the Chimney corner' (sig. E 2)." My argument takes up her question of whether poetry can be distinguished from rhetoric, and how this distinction is to be made according to Sidney. See: "How Poetry Moves Readers: Sidney, Spenser, and Milton," *University of Toronto Quarterly* (80.3, Summer 2011), 764, 757.

sees and makes a "perfect picture" or "image" rather than fashioning a "wordish description" to represent empirical experience or abstract philosophical ideas (16). To make a "wordish description" of a fictional world's causal structure requires the reader to translate that world from the imagination, where it exists as an image, into a narrative based upon observation. The distinction hinges on whether a fiction moves the imagination to acts of independent creation or a *mimesis* of sensory experience.

For Sidney, poets presuppose a world where human beings can act in response to supersensory divine causes, but cannot fully understand their experience of those causes. Their fictions enhance the causal correlation between characters' virtues and the achievement of personal and civilizational greatness, but locate the motives for those virtues in the imagined subjectivity of their characters. Aeneas is Sidney's prime example of the inscrutability and inexpressibility of divinely imparted motives, as well as their power to reshape individual and collective destinies by redefining how the mind sees the world and acts therein:

> Only let Aeneas be worn in the tablet of your memory—how he governeth himself in the ruin of his country, in the preserving his old father, and carrying away his religious ceremonies; in obeying God's commandment to leave Dido, though not only all passionate kindness but even the human consideration of virtuous gratefulness would have craved other of him; how in storms, how in sports, how in war, how in peace, how a fugitive, how victorious, how besieged, how besieging, how to strangers, how to allies, how to enemies, how to his own; lastly, how in his inward self, and how in his outward government… (30)

When Aeneas obeys Mercury's command to leave Dido in the poem's most celebrated episode, he does so despite his own feelings ("passionate kindness") and "the human consideration of virtuous gratefulness." Sidney makes it clear that readers who consider only the observable facts of Aeneas's behavior and do not make

allowance for his experience of "divine consideration" (11) will not understand it. In fact, the *Defence* suggests that readers who find Aeneas's motives perplexing are themselves "captive to the truth of a foolish world" which "is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness" (21). Behavior, knowledge, and the way the world works are more clearly responsive to one another in fiction than they are in real life, and the Sidneian poet's task is to render a hero like Aeneas in a way that makes readers engage intellectually and emotionally with their own world based upon what has to be an inarticulate, experiential understanding of the fictional hero and his world.

In Sidney, readers must graft the moral order of imagined worlds into their own material existence. They must also internalize the motives of exemplary figures instead of simply imitating their actions. With arguments like "Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back that wisheth not it were his fortune to perform so excellent an act" (23), Sidney appears to endorse literary exemplarity like his humanist contemporaries. However, Roger Ascham refuses to distinguish between literary and real life examples. He argues that "good precepts in books" must be exemplified in real people's lives because "one example is more valiable, both to good and ill, than twenty precepts written in books." At the same time, he acknowledges the value of Homeric examples when he declares that "Ulysses and his travel I wish our travelers to look upon, not so much to fear them with the great

dangers that he many times suffered, as to instruct them in his excellent wisdom, which he always and everywhere used."[30]

Puttenham argues that "example" is effective because it resembles "a mass of memories assembled," thereby begging the question of how poets could imagine anything new if "example…is but the representation of old memories and like successes happened in times past."[31] Sidney instead builds upon Sir Thomas Elyot's argument that fictional examples make readers "so all-inflamed that they most fervently shall desire and covet, by the imitation of their virtues, to acquire semblable glory" when shown "perfectly expressed" virtues.[32] Sidney's version contends that

> If the poet do his part aright, he will show you in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned, in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses each thing to be followed, where the historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal—without he be poetical—of a perfect pattern (19).

This passage separates the world of literary example from that of historical example in a way that Elyot, Ascham, and Puttenham do not. Sidneian poetry moves its readers from what Elyot calls "imitation" to an imaginative re-envisioning of the created world that, "if the poet do his part aright," will be intellectually credible. The

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[30] See: Roger Ascham, "The Schoolmaster," *The Renaissance in England: Non-dramatic Prose and Verse of the Sixteenth Century*, eds. Hyder E. Rollins and Herschel Baker (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1952), 829, 831

[31] Puttenham writes that "experience is no more than a mass of memories assembled—that is, such trials as man hath made in time before. Right so, no kind of argument in all the oratory craft doth better persuade and more universally satisfy than example, which is but the representation of old memories and like successes happened in times past." See: Puttenham, "The Art of English Poesy," 89-90.

[32] Writing on the centrality of literary examples, Sir Thomas Elyot focuses on how readers are inspired to imitate Homeric characters:

> For in his books be contained and most perfectly expressed, not only the documents martial and discipline of arms, but also incomparable wisdoms and instructions for politic governance of people, with the worthy commendation and laud of noble princes; wherewith the readers shall be so all-inflamed that they most fervently shall desire and covet, by the imitation of their virtues, to acquire semblable glory.

See: Thomas Elyot, "The Book Named the Governor," 110-111.

goal of credibility means that presupposed exemplars of virtue need not be uniformly or implausibly perfect, since the poet is to be "liberal" of his "perfect pattern." Sidneian imitation requires readers to internalize Aeneas's motives, which in turn requires them to embrace Aeneas's vision of causality and empathize with his humanity.

The *Defence*'s focus on how imagination makes poetry a unique kind of example also distinguishes it from early modern natural philosophy as a means of constructing knowledge. However, Sidneian poetry tries to look like empirical science or historical example despite the fact that its origins and aims are different. Because of this feigned resemblance, recent critical work has equated Renaissance poetics and experimentalism in a way that would probably gratify Sidney. Elizabeth Spiller writes that "Sidney in *The Defence* is a kind of theorist for [William] Gilbert's experimental practice," that literary and material models of the world accomplish the same type of knowledge creation, and that "Gilbert's *On the Magnet*…becomes a realization of Sidney's poetic theories."[33] She concludes that poetry and experimental science are equally contrived ways of reimagining the world:

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[33] Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature*, 28. Spiller's chapter on the two writers argues that Gilbert's spherical magnets, which he writes about in *On the Magnet* (London, 1600) and which he equated with model worlds or model Englands, were seen as performing the same sort of epistemological work as Sidneian poetic mimesis (16). She summarizes Gilbert's argument and his connection to Sidney as follows:

> When Gilbert presents the globe-shaped magnets as a 'model' for the earth, on the one hand, and for his scientific practice, on the other, he is not simply engaging in familiar analogies between macro-and microcosm. Gilbert regards the globe-magnets as a material realization of the 'idea' of the earth comparable to Sidney's understanding of poetry as a 'golden world'—through art, these 'worlds' become a way of achieving ideals that are truer than what we can ordinarily see or experience. At the same time, the 'world' of the magnet is also like Sidney's poetry in defining a practice for the expression of those ideas. The globe magnets thus represent not so much a thing as a way of creating knowledge through a certain kind of doing. (46)

> …for Sidney and Gilbert artificial constructs [like poetry or globe-shaped magnets] are the consequence of an accommodation between Neoplatonic idealism and Aristotelian mimesis. Model worlds (whether poetry and experiments, the golden world of fiction or the globe-worlds of Gilbert's magnets) produce knowledge and virtue.[34]

Sidney seems aware throughout the *Defence* that any such "accommodation" of empirical and ideal can only ever be presupposed to take place, and poetry's emphasis on facilitating such acts of causal presupposition is why he favors it as the highest form of art. In eliding science and literature as epistemological tools, Spiller accepts Sidney's presupposition that Platonic idealism and Aristotelian *mimesis* can be combined to produce "knowledge and virtue."[35] Spiller argues that "by creating 'golden' worlds that exceed nature, poetry produces virtuous knowledge in its readers precisely because of its artificiality." She equates literary "virtuous knowledge" and observational knowledge. Yet the former can only arise from an act of imagination and does not correspond to what Sidney sees as our experience as material beings in a fallen cosmos. Sidneian poetry's "artificiality" has a moral significance no magnet could claim. Part of Sidney's genius in the *Defence* is to call attention to this aspect of the artifice that informs works of fiction and distinguishes them from other methods of representation like history or Gilbert's model worlds.[36]

Sidney is adamant that one can generate "knowledge" of the way the world works or be moved to "virtue" independently of that knowledge, but that inductive

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[34] Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature*, 27. A page later, Spiller elaborates that "In *The Defence* Sidney argues that disciplines such as astronomy, natural philosophy, and history which depend on nature as their 'principle object' produce facts. Poetry, by contrast, is for Sidney an art that does not attempt simply to reflect nature" (28).

[35] Spiller agrees that "both writers would insist that their 'art' works because its primary epistemological connection is with the ideal world rather than with the sensible world that is imperfect and contingent," yet she does not explain how an epistemology predicated on connection with an ideal world could, in fact, be applied to the real world without the relationship first being presupposed to exist. *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature*, 32.

[36] Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature*, 28.

knowledge can never justify virtuous behavior as defined by a transcendent moral code.[37] The distinction between empiricism and imagination, example and the imaginative reform of the self and the world, is reflected in the *Defence*'s treatment of two terms: "knowledge," which is empirical, and "learning," which is imaginative and relational. Sidney defines "learning" as a moral endeavor, whose "final end is to lead and draw us to as high perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of." He notes that "this" goal of learning, "according to the inclination of the man, bred many-formed impressions" and that "some," including natural philosophers and astronomers, "thought this felicity" of learning "principally to be gotten by knowledge" (12). Sidney ventriloquizes their view of knowledge as an end in itself, when he contends that among these arts "all hav[e]...this scope: to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying of his own divine essence" (13). He is being ironic here. The type of knowledge he attributes to natural philosophers is incomplete, and serves at best as an intellectual precondition of moral "learning."

Sidney rejects the mutually exclusive categories of matter and spirit and contends instead that the "scope" of arts dedicated primarily to "knowing" and to abstracting the soul from the "dungeon of the body" is misplaced. His corrective defines "learning" as an imaginative restoration of the mind's relationship with the

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[37] According to the *Geneva Bible* editors, the Apostle Paul writes of the Gentiles acting "without the knowledge of the Law written, which was giuen by Moses" in Romans 2.12-16:

> For as manie as haue sinned without the Law, shal perish also without the Law: & as manie as haue sinned in the Law, shalbe iudged by the Law. (For the hearers of the Law are not righteous before God: but the doers of the Law shalbe iustified. For when the Gentiles which haue not the Law, do by nature the things conteined in the Law, they hauing not the Law, are a Law vnto them selues, which shewe the effect of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, & their thoughts accusing one another, or excusing) at the day when God shal iudge the secretes of men by Iesus Christ, according to my Gospel.

material world, not an act of mastery that allows us to escape it. He insinuates that poetry is the best means of moving people to virtue, and that this type of "learning"—which he defines as "this purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit"—requires us to know and master ourselves in equal measure with the world (13). When he suggests that "by the balance of experience it was found that the astronomer, looking to the stars, might fall in a ditch, that the inquiring philosopher might be blind in himself, and the mathematician might draw forth a straight line with a crooked heart," he reiterates the idea that understanding one's material surroundings is not enough (13). Neither the astronomer, the philosopher, nor the mathematician achieves an "enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlargement of conceit" from their experience. They are unaware of their moral and intellectual limitations. In contrast, Sidney argues that the purpose of learning and "the highest end of mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called *architektoniké*,…stands…in the knowledge of man's self, in the ethic and political consideration, with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only" (13). In other words, knowledge is made meaningful only insofar as it becomes the basis for an enacted moral relationship with God, with the created world, and with other people. The state of "well-knowing" derives from careful observation and self-critique, and acts of "well-doing" presume such careful knowledge. However, the motivation to carry out architectonic actions stems from readers' responses to imaginative presuppositions, which frame their empirical understanding of the world.

3. Sidneian Seeing and Making: "Through Beholding" and "Notable Prosopopoeias"

When it presupposes poetry to be an instrument of supersensory perception that reforms the moral order of the world, the *Defence* literalizes the myths of Orpheus civilizing man and beast and Amphion founding cities with his music. Poets become visionaries and creators in the divine image.[38] Sidney argues that "in nothing [we] sheweth" that image "so much as in poetry, when, with the force of a divine breath [we] bringeth things forth surpassing [nature's] doings—with no small arguments to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam" (9-10). His clearest articulation of what poetic presupposition enables readers to perceive is his claim that they offer "all virtues, vices and passions so in their own natural seats laid to the view, that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them" (17). By means of poetic causal forms and the presuppositions to which they dispose the mind, readers "see through" "virtues, vices and passions" in a way that comprehends their significance within a moral and relational cosmos and begets virtuous actions. Human beings are not meant to derive knowledge of who and what they are solely from their interaction with the physical world, as Adam and Eve did in eating of the Tree of Knowledge. Instead, the *Defence* contends that we must privilege imaginative experience as a source of subjective, relational understanding that surpasses and contextualizes what the senses perceive and reason dictates.

[38] The idea of poetry that acted within the world was a deeply compelling one in the poetics of Renaissance England. In the Orpheus and Amphion myths, Keilen writes that "The poet can compose a city out of rocks and a people out of beasts because, in this primeval scene, time has not yet separated words from things. To compose language is therefore to compose the natural world…" While Sidney cannot possibly defend poetry on this basis, he nonetheless retains the fundamental claim of these myths when he insists that poetry has real-world efficacy through its effect on the reader. See: Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 40.

In his discussion of what sort of writing can transform a culture with through-seeing, Sidney defines "three general kinds" of poetry, which he initially distinguishes from one another (10). He is primarily interested in art as a source of religious experience. Because they both attempt to foster an imaginative, moral response to the sensible world, he conflates what he calls the first and third types of poetry. He devotes almost no consideration to the "second sort" of poetry, implying that the poet "is so wrapped within the fold of the proposed subject, and takes not the course of his own invention" (DP 11). As a result, didactic poets may not be composing poetry at all. His first type of poetry includes works that "imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God," including the *Psalms* of David, the *Song of Songs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Proverbs*, and *Job*, while the third type of poems are not limited in the subject of their imitation but depict "what may be and should be" (10). Nothing in the *Defence* denies that the third type of poetry overlaps with biblical and religious writing.

On the contrary, Roger E. Moore argues that Sidney names vatic perception as the end of both types. Moore writes that Sidney "never wavers in his basic conviction of the importance of divine inspiration to poetry," and "primarily distinguishes [secular and divine inventive poets] not by their inspiration but by their subject matter."[39] On this basis, Moore argues that the *Defence* itself is meant to be read as a form of prophetic poetry, thereby making it an example of the type of literature it advocates.[40] In support of his claims about the similarity of the two Sidneian

[39] Roger E. Moore, "Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Prophesying," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (50.1, Winter 2010), 37, 48-49.

[40] Commenting on the *Defence* as a fiction in its own right, Moore suggests that the "mysteries" Sidney attributes to poetry may mean that his treatise should be read as "an elaborate prophecy, an

categories of poetry, Moore cites the example of David as a poet who is divinely inspired and whose art is imaginatively generated rather than strictly imitating existing phenomena:

> In the *Defence*, Sidney claims that David belongs among the divine poets, where he is in the company not only of Solomon, 'Moses and Deborah in their Hymns, and the writers of Job,' but also of Orpheus, Amphion, and Homer, though he notes the latter's devotion to 'a full wrong divinity.'[41]

Like Levao, Spiller, and Alexander, however, Moore uses the language of arguments and knowing to explain what the *Defence* does to readers when Sidney himself provides us instead with a vocabulary of vatic seeing and presupposition. The problem and the promise of making Sidney's treatise into a form of prophecy, as Moore has done, is the fact that it renders the text incomprehensible as an argument in any traditional academic sense.

Sidney's own examples of poetry influencing the world highlight the fact that its teachings are not experienced by its audiences as rational, verifiable arguments. In fact, his presentation of two non-examples of instruction typifies the *Defence*'s strategy of promising an argument which never materializes. These accounts teach us

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inspired message containing arguments that 'will by few be understood, and by fewer granted.'" He elaborates that "Sidney prophesies that those able to understand his message and honor poetry will be transformed."

Moore calls the *Defence* an "inspired message containing arguments" that certain readers are expected to understand. However, Moore indirectly concedes the insolubility of those very arguments elsewhere in his essay when he claims that "the spirit of prophecy was threatening because of its unpredictability and uncontrollability" and argues that "For [Sidney], the divine Spirit [responsible for poetic or prophetic inspiration] is beyond human control or comprehension, and it confers on the inspired individual a consequent freedom from earthly constraints." The transcendent and unavoidably subjective nature of prophetic "freedom" precludes it from being satisfactorily understood via an externally verifiable argument. "Few" will "under[stand]" the *Defence*'s arguments about poets as the reformers of individuals and cultures and "fewer" will "grant" them in part because, as I have suggested, even Sidney himself has refused to argue explicitly that this is definitively the case. We are meant to be moved by his text independently of our intellectual assent to its claims and evidence. See: Moore, "Philip Sidney's Defense of Prophesying," 52, 50.

[41] Moore, "Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Prophesying," 49.

how to read Sidney's piece. Most notably, Sidney describes Christ's "through-searching wisdom" as a creator of parables that presuppose a transcendent morality behind material reality:

> Certainly, even our Saviour Christ could as well have given the moral commonplaces of uncharitableness and humbleness as the divine narration of Dives and Lazarus, or of disobedience and mercy as that heavenly discourse of the lost child and the gracious father, but that His through-searching wisdom knew the estate of Dives burning in hell and of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom would more constantly, as it were, inhabit both the memory and judgment; truly, for myself, me seems I see before mine eyes the lost child's disdainful prodigality turned to envy a swine's dinner: which by the learned divines are thought not historical acts but instructing parables. (18)

Like Sidney with his non-examples, Jesus often refuses to parse his parables into neat allegories that explain the relationship between material surroundings and unseen divinity. However, they are still perceived as instructive.[42] In his second non-example of fictional teaching, Sidney recounts Nathan the Prophet's homily to King David, in which David is made to "see his own filthiness," but only after Nathan interprets his parable (25).[43]

Neither of Sidney's examples seems like an effective way to instruct an audience, since Jesus' parables confuse even the disciples, and Nathan has to explain his fable to David. In fact, Jesus and Nathan participate in a longstanding biblical tradition in which inscrutable parables can teach or obfuscate spiritual truths.[44] This is

[42] Occasionally, Jesus does explain his parables. Two notable examples are the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13.3-9, explained Matt. 13.18-23) and the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Matt. 13.24-30, explained Matt. 13.36-43).

[43] This episode is recounted in 2 Samuel 12.1-15.

[44] Mark Chapter 4 recounts Jesus' explanation of four parables (the Sower 4.1-20, the Lamp under a Bushel 4.21-25, the Growing Seed 4.26-29, and the Mustard Seed 4.30-32) to the disciples, as well as the fact that he had to expound his parables to them: "And with many suche parables he preached the worde vnto them, as they were able to hear it. And without parables spake he nothing vnto them: but he expounded all things to his disciples aparte" (4.33-34). Similarly, it is only after Nathan accuses David in 2 Samuel 12.7 that his parable has any effect.

because the experiences provided by Jesus and Nathan's narrations add up to more than the sum of their material significance for the vatic reader, who must encounter them in an affective, imaginative way to unpack their full relational meaning. Jesus' remarks about why he chooses to teach in parables provide a scriptural basis for Sidney's poetics, his language of vatic sight, and his choice of Jesus as his arch-poet:

> Then the disciples came, and said to him, Why speakest thou to them in parables? And he answered and said unto them, Because it is giuen vnto you, to knowe the secrets of the kingdome of heauen, but to them it is not giuen. For whoseuer hathe, to him shal be giuen, and he shal haue abundance: but whosoeuer hathe not, from him shal be taken away, euen that he hathe. Therefore speake I to them in parables, because they seing, do not se; and hearing they heare not, nether vnderstand. So in them is fulfilled the prophecie of Esaias, which prophecie saith, By hearing ye shal heare, and shal not vnderstand, and seing ye shall se, and shal not perceiue. (Matt. 8.10-14)

The biblical origin and spiritual focus of Sidneian fiction also appears in his association between contemporary poet-haters and an anti-vatic type of writing. Like Jesus' unbelievers, these readers understand fictions well enough to mock them, but miss their transcendental import. He writes that they "spend a great many wandering words in quips and scoffs, carping and taunting at each thing, which, by stirring the spleen, may stay the brain from a through-beholding the worthiness of the subject"

The Old Testament contains several allusions to the difficulty of parables. For example, the Geneva Bible editors write that in Psalm 49 the psalmist "wil intreat how God gouerneth the worlde by his prouidence which cannot be perceiued by the judgement of the flesh." In his invocation, the psalmist writes "I wil incline mine eare to a parable, and vtter my graue matter vpon the harpe" (Psalm 49.4).

Psalm 78 uses a similar invocation: "I wil open my mouth in a parable: I wil declare high sentences of olde."

Ezekiel's parable of the Two Eagles, which he tells and expounds, begins: "And the worde of the Lord came vnto me, saying, Sonne of man, put forthe a parable and speake a prouerb vnto the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 17.1-2).

Mary Sidney translates "grave matter" as "riddled speech" in her version of Psalm 49.4. See: *The Sidney Psalter*, ed. Hannibal Hamlin, et. al., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 93.

(31).[45] Poets, meanwhile, array their ideas in much more deliberate narrative and formal patterns, whether in verse or prose. This limits readers' ability to retreat into a reductive, satirical skepticism. Sidney's aim in the *Defence* is to cloak his poetics of "through-beholding" in such an evocative text that it would enable no one, philosopher or otherwise, to "pick…out of the sweet mysteries of poetry the right discerning true points of knowledge" (39). He refuses to trade mysterious fictional experience that demands an affective response for writing that produces intellectual certainty but no generative perplexity.

Sidney turns once again to scripture to support the idea that poetry's "sweet mysteries" actually move readers. Given the intractably subjective nature of poetic instruction as Sidney describes it, it is not surprising that he retains a modicum of doubt in his examples. Even when he describes his own response to the parable of the prodigal son, his "me seems" maintains the gap between what poetry does to his mind, and the minds of "learned divines," and what it may or may not do to skeptical readers. A potentially more credible litmus test for attributing authentic readerly presupposition to a work of art is whether it seems to have inspired acts of imaginative feigning among its readers. The record of poetry's instructive power is thus inscribed in poetic tradition itself. When he chooses Nathan's homily to David as an example of poetic teaching, Sidney invokes the superscript to Psalm 51 as a biblical account of one fiction begetting another.[46] According to his paraphrase of it,

[45] While Alexander glosses "through-beholding" to mean "thorough consideration," I suggest that the phrase should be understood in the context of Sidney's earlier comments about seeing through words and Jesus' "through-searching wisdom." See: "Notes," in *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 31.

[46] The *Geneva Bible* translates the superscript of Psalm 51 as follows: "To him that excelleth. A psalme of Dauid, when the Prophet Nathan came vnto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba."

the note claims that the psalm was occasioned when Nathan "made David…as in a glass see his own filthiness, as that heavenly psalm of mercy well testifieth" (25). Without access to the author's state of mind, all readers can do is presuppose the accuracy of the superscript note, or assume a different cause for the psalm. In his choice of this incident, Sidney points out how scripture sets a precedent for fiction's instructive power. To deny that power is to dispute the bible's claims about its own origin.

Sidney borrows a term from rhetoric to describe how vatic presupposition and relational learning remakes readers' relationships to God and the material world. He writes that the psalmist's "notable *prosopopoeias*"—defined as the rhetorical figure by which inanimate objects and things absent or dead are given voice—are images of the material world and its creatures responding to God:[47]

> For what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable *prosopopoeias* when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, his telling of the beasts' joyfulness and hills' leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he sheweth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty, to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? (7)

The ambiguity of Sidney's prose means that "notable *prosopopoeias*" could characterize the reader's response to the psalms as an instance of apprehension analogous to the prosopopoeias depicted within the poems. In other words, do the poet's "notable *prosopopoeias*" refer to his musicianship and "often and free changing of persons" in the poems, or the way that those poems "maketh you, as it were, see God?" Just as the poet shows the material world responding to its creator, the poem becomes the instrument by which the reader's soul is moved to apprehend

[47] Alexander, "Notes," 322.

and participate in divine causation. This passage implies a subjective state of perception and an emotional response to a reality that cannot be articulated and must be attained "by faith." Sidney's state of mind as a reader mirrors David's as a vatic author.[48] The author and reader's experience of the poem can only be produced by the "eyes of the mind" as an imaginative response to God that is analogous to the leaping of hills and the joy of the beasts. The poet's prosopopoeias are here granted the same causal power as Amphion over the stones of Thebes and "Orpheus to be listened to by beasts" (5). Readers are the objects of that power.

According to Sidney, our uniquely human combination of materiality and rationality must be transformed not merely to the point of "joyfulness"—a spontaneous emotion shared with the animals—but also to understanding and emulation as "passionate lover[s]" of God. This "love" is a state that enlists knowledge and requires the application of reason in addition to perception and emotion. Such a state requires more than the simple joyous response of the beasts or the even more elemental physical response of the hills; it hinges upon the thoughtful transition from vatic seeing to reasoned making. It is not possible according to Sidney to think one's way to a vatic understanding of the world, but that vision must inevitably reshape the way that we relate to everything in the sensible world once it is achieved. Although we cannot reason our way into perceptions and presuppositions, we are nonetheless expected to reason *from* them so that vatic experience can guide our actions. Just as God created the world, poets and readers are meant to re-create it,

[48] Even here, though, David's status as a vatic prophet is not affirmed with a factual "is," but with the more ambiguous and skeptical "almost he sheweth himself." Sidney is still dealing in subjective experiences rather than irrefutable, objective facts, even as he says that David's experience of God's grace can "almost" be confirmed by outside observers through his psalms.

to order, name, and restore it as part of their imitation of the creator God. They must be rational makers as well as visionaries who presuppose God's presence in their prosopopoeias and use their art to enliven their faith. They are both the creators of prosopopoeias and the objects of prosopopoeia themselves, brought to spiritual life by their fictions.

4. Causing Prosopopoeia: Form as the Imaginative Ground Plot of Profitable Invention

Fictions must reorder readers' understanding of the world in a way that short circuits the empirical, single-minded pursuit of control and rational comprehension epitomized by the Fall. To do this, poets have to surprise their empirically biased readers with their vision, and Sidney's method for commandeering the mind in this way is also the formal strategy he uses in the *Defence*. He lulls us out of suspicion by making us think we are going to get one thing—an entertaining story or a philosophical argument—that renders the world known in accordance with reason and observation. Through poetry, supersensory vision steals upon our minds disguised as something more mundane, entertaining, and comprehensible:

> For even those hard-hearted, evil men who think virtue a school name, and know no other good but *indulgere genio*, and therefore despise the austere admonitions of the philosopher and feel not the inward reason they stand upon, yet will be content to be delighted, which is all the good-fellow poet seemeth to promise, and so steal to see the form of goodness (which seen, they cannot but love) ere they themselves be aware, as if they took a medicine of cherries. (24)

"Hard-hearted" readers expecting intellectual and narrative pleasure are instead made to "feel…the inward reason they stand upon…ere they themselves be aware"—an

experience that enables them to reform their actions according to standards that remain a mystery to them.

As shown in the parables of Jesus and Nathan's fable to David, poetic learning draws readers to new understanding by representing material phenomena that are comprehensible without a subjective response from the reader but require a moral, imaginative interpretation to be compelling and actionable. Sidney writes that "All other arts retain themselves within their subject, and receive, as it were, their being from it, the poet, only, only bringeth his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter but maketh matter for a conceit" (30). Like the Christian assurance of salvation, or Aeneas's sense of his destiny, readers' subjective experience of poetry reorders their experience of the material world, rather than being ordered by it. He elaborates on the nature of this "conceit" and its consequences when he contends that readers, "looking but for fiction…shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention" (35). In other words, the process by which readers move from seeing through poetry to their own acts of making in the physical world parallels the process by which vatic sight supposedly becomes poetic making.[49] Writing of this passage, Alexander argues that "Sidney is using the lexicon of rhetoric and poetics to describe not composition but interpretation and praxis." He directs his readers "not [to] 'treat the story as a mental outline of a useful plot', a mere circumlocution, but rather [to] 'make use of the story in building in your own mind the foundations of some useful idea or course of action'." As a consequence, "We

[49] Levao articulates a more skeptical view when he contends that Sidney does not actually believe in the vatic poet. He writes that "The poet, then, is not really inspired; his heavenly and divine nature is at best metaphorical. It is an illusion, but an understandable one, based on verbal artifice and the 'high flying liberty of conceit.' The irony is clear: inspiration is not the cause of the poet's conceit but the effect that the conceit has on the reader." See: *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*, 137.

become poets of our own lives in this dense metaphor."[50] For readers whose experience of fictions allows them to presuppose the truth of this central metaphor, their sense of their own "erected wit," its origins, and its material consequences affirms poets as moral teachers.

The *Defence* is just one of a canon of texts arguing that our experience of fiction—perhaps best defined in Sidney as writing that gestures toward an unseen, divinely ordered reality—facilitates our instruction, intellectual and spiritual growth, and the perpetuation of the vatic tradition. This tradition is less interested in producing a complete textual re-creation of the world to the last objective detail than it is in nurturing an understanding sufficient for belief, action, and redemption. Commenting on its status as a written account of Jesus' life and teachings, the last verse in the *Gospel of John* reads "Now there are also manie other things which Iesus did, the which if they shulde be written euerie one, I suppose the worlde colde not conteine the bokes that shulde be written." The *Geneva Bible* editors gloss the passage as follows: "But God wolde not charge vs with so great an heape: seing therefore that we haue so muche as is necessarie, we ought to content our selues and praise his mercie."[51]

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[50] Alexander, "Notes," 342.

[51] See: John 21.21. Moore takes up the question of what element of any sort of writing is "neccessarie" to salvation when he suggests that the *Defence* sees poets as "Prophets who foretold the future or preached or interpreted scripture with divine assistance were to instruct their hearers, to lead them out of sin and into [a] proper relationship with Christ." He asks the important question of how the prophet can "understand his inspiration and not merely undergo divine possession." What constitutes Sidneian "learned discretion" when it comes to composing and consuming poetry? How does vision become the basis for ostensibly reasoned, exemplary action? To push Moore's point a bit farther, what makes a poet or prophet's vision valuable to his or her community, or even his or her personal salvation? As I am suggesting, Sidneian fictions skirt the divine possession versus understanding question by presupposing inspiration and making fictions that are difficult to discredit intellectually. See: "Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Prophesying," 54.

For Sidney and the biblical authors, vatic instruction depends upon the ministrations of the Holy Spirit, but poets make effective texts whose form imitates and modifies causal relationships. This means that as far as it can be understood and facilitated, poetic instruction is a formal challenge. Given the poet's need to surprise readers with a flash of vatic sight rather than cajole them to it with argument, how are authors to satisfy their readers' desire for comprehension and control while moving them beyond the realm of inductive knowledge? Also, how can the poet make a fiction appear epistemologically legitimate when it does not offer readers an empirical basis for acting as they feel prompted to? Sidney's answer is to present the poet as a "maker" whose presupposing imitation of the sensible world must not give our senses or our reason any cause to question his vision of how the world works. Poetic presuppositions must be invisible to reason if they are to co-opt it as a means of enacting poets' vision in the world. As the conclusion to John's gospel suggests, actionable faith is not just a result of intellectual comprehension—the solution to an epistemological problem—but an affective response to the writer's choices of form, content, and cultural reference. Poets need to catch their readers by surprise so that perception and presupposition occur before reason and empiricism interpose themselves. Jesus makes a similar point about his own teachings in John 3.12 when he tells the literal-minded Nicodemus "If when I tel you earthlie things, ye beleue not, how shulde ye beleue, if I shal tell you of heauenlie things?"[52]

Sidney's most common metaphor for discussing the poet's generative (or ineffectual) forms is that of clothing, or appareling. The poetic apparel of a "fore-

[52] When confronted with metaphors of being "borne againe" of "water and of the Spirit," as well as Jesus' metaphor describing the mind and faith of "euerie man that is borne of the Spirit" as the wind, Nicodemus prompts this rebuke by asking "How can these things be?" See: John 3.1-21.

conceit" can include the content of a poem's mimetic representation of material and immaterial reality (the plot), the formal features and conventions of that mimesis, and its performance within a specific cultural context or literary tradition.[53] For example, Sidney argues of Plato that "in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin, as it were, and beauty depended most of poetry" (5). He writes that "poets have appareled their poetical inventions in that numbrous kind of writing which is called verse" (12). In a more detailed use of the form-as-clothing metaphor, he recounts being "moved" by "the old song of Percy and Douglas" despite its being "sung but by some blind crowder." Pondering the role of culture and poetic skill in shaping a reader's response, he wonders what the same poem would "work trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar" rather than "being so evil appareled in the dust and cobwebs of that uncivil age" (28). Later still, Sidney's rhetorical question about epic poetry describes epic virtues as beautiful, well-dressed women:

> For by what conceit can a tongue be directed to speak evil of that which draweth with him no less champions than Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, Tydeus, and Rinaldo; who doth not only teach and move to truth; who maketh magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires; who, if the saying of Plato and Tully be true, that who could see virtue would be wonderfully ravished with the love of her beauty—this man [the epic hero] sets her out to make her more lovely in her holiday apparel to the eye of any that will deign not to disdain until they understand? (29)

[53] The idea that poets modify their plots, formal practices, and performance strategies appears very early on in the *Defence*. Sidney offers a brief history of western poetry after Orpheus and Amphion in which he posits a tradition that is universal, yet culturally and temporally specific:

> So, as Amphion was said to move stones with his poetry to build Thebes, and Orpheus to be listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people, so among the Romans were Livius Andronicus and Ennius; so in the Italian language the first that made it aspire to be a treasure-house of science were the poets Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch; so in our English were Gower and Chaucer, after whom, encouraged and delighted with their excellent fore-going, others have followed to beautify our mother tongue, as well in the same kind as in other arts. (5)

His later emphasis on developing a uniquely English prosody and literary canon depends upon this view of poetic traditions as a synthesis of the universal and particular.

This passage is another notable example of the way that readerly understanding follows the condition of being moved, rather than allowing poetry to move its audiences. The language of through-beholding ("shine through") and the equation of "understand[ing]" with being "ravished with…love" surpasses purely intellectual comprehension. These effects depend upon the epic poet's ability to portray virtue in a way that speaks to his readers' intellects and desires, rather than abolishing them. In this process intellectual understanding is an aftereffect of the affective, aesthetic experience that fiction provides.

Sidney argues that well appareled fictions enable readers to employ reason, imagination (or, more commonly, "wit"), and the senses in concert with one another. Moreover, when he defines learning as "This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit" (12), the implication is that poetry enhances all of these faculties. Good poetry does not merely impose presuppositions on the mind like some sort of Ramist template for thought and deliberation; it allows the imagination, reason, and memory to grow organically alongside the reader's presuppositions so that reason and memory act as a guide and check on imagination, and vice versa. Our inductive, empirical experience of the material world works in concert with our deductively imposed imaginative presuppositions to construct a vision of reality that satisfies both ways of understanding. Citing Aristotle's definition of poetry as *mimesis*, Sidney suggests that the senses provide raw matter for whatever the imagination fabricates (10). However, he argues that they are not improved by it in the same way that imagination, reason, and memory are because they reflect the material world rather than making

imaginative presuppositions about it. Thus, the fact that learning from poetic fictions does not alter the way that the senses perceive is actually a safeguard against faulty *poiesis* for Sidney; even though the way the mind constructs reality with reference to its imaginative presuppositions might change, sensory experience does not. In this way, empirical "knowledge" serves as a constant check on the imagination and the textual experiences it produces.

For all of his Aristotelian protestations about *mimesis*, Sidney's clothing metaphor itself acknowledges a degree of artifice and a deep anxiety about such art in Elizabethan culture, as well as the role of the imagination and poetic form in maintaining the balance between imagination and the sense.[54] The risk that a poem

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[54] At one point in the *Defence* Sidney borrows the terms of Platonic poetics, which had been revived by Tasso before appearing in the English poetic tradition:

> For I will not deny but that man's wit may make poesy, which should be *eikastiké*, which some learned have defined figuring forth good things, to be *phantastiké*, which doth contrariwise infect the fancy with unworthy objects… (36).

Several prominent critics have dealt with Sidney's appropriation and redefinition of these terms in helpful ways that compliment my own project.

Arthur Kinney describes the icastic as "when the artist records simply, without an intervenient imagination," but suggests that the icastic starts to become subjective in Sidney's text. He writes that poetic veracity for Sidney lies somewhere between the correspondence between what we see imaginatively—the divinely ordained structure of the world—and what is actually accessible to our senses:

> Sidney links the infected will with fantastic art and the erected wit with icastic art because it is icastic art, truly representing God's creation through the poet's analogous creative act, which moves men to virtue. For Sidney, poets counterfeit by establishing appealing alternative, but not deceptive, worlds: poetry is truth, the poet never lieth.

In short, a lapse of mimetic credibility renders the poem *phantastiké* in a potentially sinful way, but it is not clear how a poem could escape dogged imitation of the sinful world without recourse to the imagination. See: Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 28, 30

Alexander attributes comparatively more importance to the poetic imagination when he writes that "Sidney has cleverly and quietly changed Plato's meaning, reversing its direction and adding a moral texture to it. We now have good and bad imitation not in the sense of mimetic accuracy but in the sense of moral purpose; and the greater the moral purpose, the less the representation will refer to reality…." Sidney's redefinition of good art may save poetry from charges of immorality, but he achieves this at the cost of making accuracy of imitation and morality into the creations of fallible poetic minds. Who is to decide what salvific art entails, and on what basis? Alexander recognizes this problem, but does not believe that Sidney has solved it. He writes that "Sidney and all other great

would lead overly imaginative readers to "build castles in the air" (9) or fail to inspire those with "so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry" (54) is ever present. After all, the use of cosmetics, or the practice of male actors playing kings or women generated considerable anxiety about the power of images to supplant reality or, when their artifice is revealed, a pervasive cynicism about the trustworthiness of any image that modifies what the senses perceive.

Sidney is uncannily deft in his attempt to carve out and occupy the space between a credulity that verges on idolatry and empirical skepticism that risks dismissing everything unseen. He writes that "poesy…is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture" (10). Note the way the definition moves from "representing" to "counterfeiting," and then to "figuring forth." Each of these words implies a greater level of artifice that moves from representation to an imitation that potentially replaces the original, to an act of creation that assumes a life of its own. The terms also work equally well as intransitive verbs, making it ambiguous whether Sidney is referring to the creation of experience by the author, the reader, or the poem itself. Finally, his "to speak metaphorically" reminds us that the *Defence* itself is a metafictional "figuring forth," and that his own narrative persona is an image, or "a speaking picture," which readers credit with "speaking." He vexes our categories of life and art, drawing our attention to the way his text has temporarily blurred the distinction between authorial, textual,

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writers write—as Aristotle would have them write—of characters neither wholly good nor wholly bad." While I agree with Alexander's assessment of Sidney's actual success, I argue that the *Defence*'s emphasis on facilitating readerly presuppositions about the moral power of poetry is an attempt to keep the dream of unambiguously moral and edifying fiction alive in spite of the fact that it is a fiction itself. See: Alexander, "Seeing Through Words in Theories of Poetry," 361-62.

and readerly agency as the source of our experience. Sidney nearly tips his hand here by noting the *Defence*'s status as a created textual artifact and a causal agent, a speaking representation of Sidney himself that the reader has imagined.[55]

5. Defining Profitable Inventions: Fiction, Flattery, and the Redemption of Memory

Only once it has incited an experience of vatic understanding in its readers does the *Defence* begin to explain how poetry unites reason, imagination, and the senses, in flashes of vatic sight. Readers' experience paves the way for this poetics, which is intellectually satisfying only because it reflects our experience of fiction. While many of his contemporaries discuss how written form should produce a compelling, but not impoverished or delusional, balance between the senses and the other mental faculties, Sidney is the most ambitious in actually describing how that balance works at the formal level. In particular, his remarks on the state of English poetry discuss how poets produce vatic, yet empirically credible forms. For Sidney, poetic appareling has causal power because it reorders and redeems the contents of memory rather than simply providing the raw ideas and perceptions to be assessed by reason and acted on.[56] It is by way of the memory that fictions become

[55] Recent studies of the Renaissance personal letter discuss the letter's role in mediating physical absence in order to, in Gary Schneider's formulation, "construct authority, validity, and reliability in a letter" and overcome "a deep concern with epistemological certainty" about tone and intention brought on by the writer's physical absence. Sidney plays even more openly with this idea of constructing a textual "absent presence" in *Astrophil and Stella* 60 and 106. See: Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 29.

[56] The extent to which the imagination needs to present images to reason and desire, and so translate those images into real-world actions, was a point of much debate in the sixteenth century and would become a major question for Baconian natural philosophy in the early seventeenth century, as my third chapter will argue. The consensus among mid- and late-century English humanists is that the imagination, or wit, has a prominent role to play in the creation and enactment of knowledge. Puttenham, for example, argues that not only poetry, but all worthwhile endeavors, stem from the proper mix of the icastic and fantastic, or of the imagination and reason, which together present the soul with the most beneficial sort of images. Using the image of a true versus a distorted mirror, he

presuppositions. Even the most basic fictions are also imbued with a conceptual structure analogous to the spatialized contents of the memory.[57] Yet a poem's well-

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articulates a vision of human achievement that requires both faculties to work together to produce the actions that make a society just and successful:

> There be again of these glasses that show things exceeding fair and comely; others that show figures very monstrous and ill-favoured. Even so is the fantastical part of man (if it be not disordered) a representer of the best, most comely and beautiful images or appearances of things to the soul and according to their very truth. If otherwise, then doth it breed chimeras and monsters in man's imaginations, and not only in his imaginations but also in all his ordinary actions and life which ensues. Wherefore, such persons as be illuminated with the brightest irradiations of knowledge and of the variety and due proportion of things, they are called by the learned men not *phantastikoi* but *euphantasiotoi*, and of this sort of fantasy are all good poets, notable captains stratagematic, all cunning artificers and engineers, all legislators, politicians and counsellors of estate, in whose exercises the inventive part is most employed and is to the sound and true judgement of man most needful.

Sir Thomas Elyot writes in *The Book Named the Governor* of the faculty of understanding, which oversees both deliberation and action. Here he refers to the generative "wit," or imagination, as "the instrument of understanding" because it provides the matter to be "considered" and finally acted upon by the prudent understanding:

> But to perceive more plainly what thing it is that I call understanding. It is the principle part of the soul which is occupied about the beginning or original causes of things that may fall into man's knowledge, and his office is, before that anything is attempted, to think, to consider, and prepense, and, after tossing it up and down in the mind, than to exercise that power, the property whereof is to espy, seek for, ensearch, and find out; which virtue is, as it were, the instrument of understanding.
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> Moreover, after the things be invented, conjected, perceived, and by long time and often considered, and that the mind disposeth herself to execution or actual operation, then the virtue named prudence first putteth herself forwards, and then appeareth her industry and labor; forasmuch as she teacheth, warneth, exorteth, ordereth, and profiteth, like to a wise captain that setteth his host in array.

See: Puttenham, "The Art of English Poesy," 71, and Elyot, "The Book Named the Governor," 115.

[57] Walter Ong's classic study traces the origins of Ramist method to its origins in scholastic logic and philosophy and defines the method developed by Ramus and other sixteenth century thinkers as "a cluster of mental habits evolving within a centuries-old educational tradition and specializing in certain kinds of concepts, based on simple spatial models, for conceiving of the mental and communicational processes and, by implication, of the extramental world." Faced with a vast and chaotic world whose "superfluous quantity" would "occasion annoyance," Ramism and its associated methods were meant to render all things comprehensible. For the Ramist, this "annoyance is vanquished by the conviction that some sort of spatial imagery—*loci*, *topoi*, recepticles, boxes—can serve as a means of controlling the profusion of concepts and/or things."

Ong makes the following observation about how, for some Renaissance thinkers, experience takes the form of a wild forest that must be tamed and navigated. Knowledge thus becomes an act of spatial organization even in more dialectical arts like poetry and rhetoric:

> Agricola and other Renaissance rhetoricians…tend to think of the 'matter' of discourse in terms of a woods, to be dealt with by a process of 'sorting out' or 'cutting out' or 'arranging.' In this tradition Ben Jonson uses the terms *The Forest* and *Under-Woods* (today, *Underbrush*) to designate his two verse miscellanies, which, in his own words 'To the Reader' at the

ordered knowledge and its network of *loci* has the potential to revise the world as the memory has constructed it. The structural and causal logic of any effective fiction must be more convincing, and seem more real, and more complete, than what we already believe about the universe. This emphasis on art maintaining a teleological impulse toward formal and intellectual resolution is why Sidney argues early on that prosody and diction must maintain a "just proportion"

> ...although indeed the senate of poets hath chosen verse as their fittest raiment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all, so in manner to go beyond them, not speaking, table talk fashion, or like men in a dream, words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peising each syllable of each word by just proportion, according to the dignity of the subject. (12)

Poets strive to restore a sense of justice and "proportion" to the fallen world by ordering words, ideas, and ultimately the contents of memory "according to the dignity of the subject." They try to make readers presuppose an Edenic order they never experienced by remaking the reader's memory.

Verse is Sidney's best example of fiction's ability to revise the contents of memory. He says it creates a sonic teleology, an impulse toward closure and resolution, that also spurs the mind toward conceptual resolution and on to action.[58] The sonic affinities which please the ear also jolt the mind into recalling expectations

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opening of his *Under-Woods*, consist of 'works of diverse nature and matter congested, as Timber-trees…promiscuously growing.' Even more appositely, Jonson calls his commonplace book *Timber, or Discoveries upon Men and Matter as They Have Flowed Out of His Daily Readings*—the relation of the 'woods' to the places of 'invention' is patent here. In the same vein, Francis Bacon styles his collection of miscellaneous or random remarks on natural history *Sylva sylvarum*; that is, *A Forest of Forests*.

See: Walter Ong, *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8, 118-119.

[58] Based on his arguments in its favor, one might wonder why Sidney did not compose his *Defence* in verse. Even as he creates a fiction in the *Defence* he resolutely refuses the title of poet so that none may accuse him of peddling fictions. Since he wanted it to appear to be a treatise or argument, any attempt to versify it threatens to place it in Sidney's second, didactic category of poetry, which he resolutely ignores.

or connections. As the ear awaits the completion of a sequence of words according to specific formal conventions, the memory anticipates the progression of images from one to another in the order it has already constructed:

> Now, that verse far exceedeth prose in the knitting up of the memory, the reason is manifest: the words (besides their delight, which hath a great affinity to memory) being so set, as one cannot be lost but the whole work fails, which accusing itself calleth the remembrance back to itself and so most strongly confirmeth it. Besides, one word so, as it were, begetting another, as, be it in rhyme or measured verse, by the former a man shall have a near guess to the follower. (32)

Sidney ties "remembrance," or the process by which the mind makes one idea relate to another, to art and its capacity to "beget" other words, concepts, and images according to its own ordered causal logic. Recited verse in particular promises the satisfaction of sonic, formal, and conceptual resolution, or at least memorable dissonance. The resolution either affirms or threatens to unseat the reader's carefully ordered knowledge of, and presuppositions about, the world it represents.

Sound is just one example of the formal patterns that allow the mind to augment its existing compendium of knowledge. It is the relational form, structure, or logic of poets' images—and not their icastic or fantastic qualities—that is most striking to Sidney's hypothetical reader. Both the words and ideas must follow a progressive, narrative logic whereby knowing one helps the reader to infer the other and presuppose, if only temporarily, an idealized vision of lived experience. For example, Sidney's revised geographical frame of reference in the *New Arcadia* may, as Nandini Das argues, align the princes' moral instruction with their progress across a realistic map of the Mediterranean that reflects "maps of Europe and Asia first

produced by [Gerdardus] Mercator in 1578."[59] She suggests that "Sidney "uses the cartographic emphasis of humanist pedagogy itself to posit an alternative [instructive] project that manages to merge [wandering and quest]." In the revised *Arcadia*, "narrative… functions as a mapping of this experiential process." The plotted narrative and geographical map of "youth's errant course in pursuing its 'desires'" becomes "the means to its own amendment" as the princes and the reader construct enough knowledge to orient themselves, both geographically and ethically.[60] In revising their mental map of the Mediterranean, readers of the *New Arcadia* also alter their moral presuppositions.

For Sidney, a failure of poetic form—whether it is a false mimesis, an inaccurate geography, halting rhyme, or jarring metaphors—can expose a gap between the reader's memory of the world and the poem's representation of that world. Such a lapses cause a rift between the structure of what the mind presupposes based on memory and the senses and what the poet is trying to presuppose and argue instead. They threaten to make imaginative presuppositions visible in the mind and the poem, and to expose either the poet's opus or the reader's knowledge as a fantastical fiction whose validity should be discounted. This is why Sidney writes that bad poems sound like verse without truly lending "reason" to their matter. In "proof" of his accusation, he challenges readers to:

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[59] Nandini Das, *Renaissance Romance: The Transformation of English Prose Fiction, 1570-1620* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 73.

[60] Das, *Renaissance Romance*, 77. Das's chapter on the *New Arcadia* argues that "The *New Arcadia*…combines the motifs and techniques of romance with a heightened sense of space with similar epistemological intent, using its newfound geographical consciousness to resolve the generational confrontations that had both driven and plagued the *Old Arcadia* in equal measure" (77).

> …let but most of the verses be put in prose, and then ask the meaning; and it will be found that one verse did but beget another, without ordering at the first what should be at the last, which becomes a confused mass of words, with a tingling sound of rhyme, barely accompanied with reason. (44)[61]

The act of generating and juxtaposing images without accounting for the sensible world is what Sidney cautions against when he warns his readers that "they that delight in poesy itself should seek to know what they do and how they do, and especially look themselves in an unflattering glass of reason, if they be inclinable to it" (43). His reference to flattery again acknowledges the danger that poets are most likely to create gilded, self-deluding fictions when they stray too far from their imitation sensory experience.

However much he might flinch from identifying himself as a poet during the *Defence*, the fact remains that Sidney defends poetry because he thinks *poiesis* requires imagination to be brought to bear in a way that enhances the faculty of reason. Fiction may be an act of flattery by which individuals, and even entire cultures, maintain a belief in their capacity for moral growth, yet if it modifies "the unflattering glass of reason" instead of being challenged by it, then there is no basis for discounting its vision of a better world. Sidney's vision of a poetry that incites the mind to embrace fictions, and his account of Orpheus and Amphion as the "fathers," or "causes," of learning, echoes Erasmus's Folly, who makes this claim in *The Praise of Folly* (1508):

[61] It is notable that Sidney revisits the language of "one word so, as it were, begetting another, as, be it in rhyme or measured verse, by the former a man shall have a near guess to the follower," later in the *Defence*. The difference is that in this instance, it is even clearer that the reasoning by which images beget one another is even more important than the relationships between the sounds of words. See: "The Defence of Poesy," 32, 44.

> But let me go back to a topic on which I barely started: what force do you suppose brought into civil concord those primitive men, savage as their native rocks and forests—what force if not mutual flattery [adulatio]? The lyres of Amphion and Orpheus can signify nothing else….This same foolish desire of praise gave rise to cities, held together empires, built legal and religious systems, erected political and religious structures; in fact, human life as a whole is nothing but a kind of fool's game.[62]

With this reference to Orpheus and Amphion as flatterers, Erasmus broaches the idea that poetry, along with all the achievements it is held to have inspired, is motivated by a collective desire to think well of ourselves. The idea of imaginative invention at the heart of Sidney's poetics is identical to Folly's congenial self-deception. According to Folly, what we think we learn when we experience, interpret, and write about the world is more a function of our own psychological needs—the desire to believe that we can grow, change, and ameliorate a chaotic and refractory world—than our empirical understanding of the universe or God's designs for it.

Sidney differs from Erasmus with his idea that our art and our mental faculties are constantly remaking each other. In the *Defence*'s poetics, our fictions of a better world could someday be affirmed as fact by "the unflattering glass of reason," whose reflective surface has already been honed and polished by older fictions. Certainly, Folly offers enough evidence of self-deceptive erudition to support a cynical perspective on the imaginative experience that Sidney would later elevate as the highest expression of human virtue. Folly, like Sidney, asks her audience to embrace the literary tradition of "mutual flattery" in which she knowingly participates. Yet while Sidney strives to make our belief in fiction's transformative power intellectually plausible through readerly experience of the *Defence*, Folly argues that

[62] Desiderius Erasmus, "The Praise of Folly," in *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1989), 26-27.

fictions should be embraced because there is no alternative to affirming them at the expense of our intellect:

> I'm the one, the one and only, let me tell you, who have the power to bring joy both to gods and to men; in proof of which, you can see for yourselves that as soon as I stood up to speak in this crowded hall, all your faces lit up with a sudden and quite unaccustomed hilarity, your brows cleared, and you expanded in such smiles, chuckles, and applause that I suddenly felt myself in the presence of so many Homeric divinities well laced with nectar, and nepenthe too—whereas before you sat solemn and grum-faced as if you had just been let out of Trophonius' cave. But as it happens when the sun first shows his radiant golden face over the land, or when the fresh south wind wafts a breath of spring after a bitter winter so that all things put on a new face and a fresh color, and youth itself seems to return—so when you laid eyes on me, you were quite transfigured. And thus what various mighty orators could hardly accomplish with their long and laborious speechifying—that is, to dispel the gloomy shadows of the soul—I brought about instantly just by my appearance.[63]

Folly argues that her auditors should accept her out of self-love, and this is exactly what Sidney contends when he calls "self-love…better than any gilding" to make an enterprise "seem gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties." Sidney's opening image of self-flattery uses Folly's gilding image, which takes the form of light from a transformative sunrise.

As I have shown, Sidney is so noncommittal in providing us with examples of poetry reforming individuals and communities that he can scarcely be said to rebut Folly's arguments. The *Defence* gives the experience of a strong, actionable understanding of fiction's relationship to the material world. Yet it also avoids laying out a clear, systematic explanation of that relationship that could actually refute Erasmus. It balances between inspiring and deflecting our confidence in its claims about fiction, the experience it produces, and about our understanding of what poetry

[63] Erasmus, "The Praise of Folly," 6-7.

does to us. It thereby promises more satisfaction than Folly's skepticism but leaves it up to readers themselves to "presuppose" the truth of its claims. Rather than resigning himself to Levao's argument that "our only choice is whether or not to acknowledge [fiction making's] pretense" toward icastic truth and verifiable moral utility, Sidney looks for a way to make fiction point toward an edenic world and inspire actions before we realize that it has made us act in ways that neither our senses, our minds, nor the fiction itself can explain.[64] The temporary affective experience of the *Defence*, and in particular the hopeful promise of its always-receding-yet-always-enticing vision of how we achieve transcendent knowledge from fictions, is the primary measure of its efficacy.

Subjective, fleeting experience trumps reproducible argument and historical example as the *Defence* shores up poetry's epistemological credibility and strives to keep its readers receptive to Erasmian "mutual flattery" about their capacity to unite imagined golden worlds with their material existence. This sacramental hope justifies humanist poetical feigning as an instructional exercise and helps to redeem reason, imagination, and language from the charge that they inevitably compound sin and idolatry. Sidney's hope for poetry, and humanity in general, is rooted in the even more fundamental presuppositions of his Christian faith. Poetry can only be redemptive in the way that he has described because "Christianity has taken away all the hurtful belief" that might otherwise arise from vatic seeing among pagan poets and readers (40). Yet, it is notable that Sidney also concedes that the "lies" of pagan poets about their gods are still preferable to an atheistic, strictly empirical

[64] Levao, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*, 149.

epistemology (40).[65] Just as he warns us in the exordium, Sidney tries to move his readers with "more good will than good reasons," and, citing Pugliano as his model, he argues that "the scholar is to be pardoned that followeth the steps of his master" (4). However, his real master throughout the *Defence* is not the Italian equestrian, but Erasmus, whose tradition of "mutual flattery" he revives as an experientially convincing and intellectually palatable poetics.

[65] Sidney also writes "Who list may read in Plutarch the discourses of Isis and Osiris, of the cause why oracles ceased, of the divine providence, and see whether the theology of that nation stood not upon such dreams, which the poets indeed superstitiously observed; and truly, since they had not the light of Christ, did much better in it than the philosophers who, shaking off superstition, brought in atheism" (40).

II: Architectonic Fictions and Shakespearean Disenchantment in *King Lear*

Sir Philip Sidney's central presupposition in the *Defence of Poesy* is that the ideal "golden" world of imaginative fiction has causal power to redeem the "brazen" world of sensory experience.[1] Fictional worlds can remake the empirical world, provided the poet imparts his vision with sufficient skill and readers interpret it correctly. Sidney retains the poet's hypothetical power when he claims that fiction's aim is to "bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him" (DP 9). Poetry's elevation of individual minds is a collaboration between the poet and reader, and its architectonic "end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only" grounds it in a shared space where "the knowledge of man's self" impacts "the ethic and political consideration" (DP 13). Sidney's emphasis on presupposition instead of verifiable argument makes readers' subjective experience of fiction the locus of learning and community. This is clear even in his opening myth of poesy's civilizing power: Amphion commanded stones to build the walls of Thebes, and Orpheus's power stems from the fact that he was "listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people" (DP 5). By emphasizing subjective responses to fictions and the world Sidney develops a compelling poetics, but one where inward conviction must translate to action. Both of Sidney's "proofs of the strange effects of this poetical invention" show that poesy acts not through

[1] Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 9. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 9. Subsequent references to the *Defence of Poesy* will appear in text, accompanied by an abbreviation of "DP."

solitary reading but by performance in the community. Nathan convicts David with a parable and Meninius Agrippa tells the fractious population of Rome a fable and "perfect reconcilement ensued" (DP 24-25). However, the *Defence* has no answer for when fictions cannot "holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner" (DP 23). What happens when a shared imaginative vision disintegrates through a failure of the artist or the audience? Even more ominously, what happens when individuals use their empowered imaginations to enact socially destructive visions? Sidney glosses over these questions with his claim that for fictions to act on readers' imaginations they must be empirically plausible, and provide a common standard of evidence by which imaginative worlds can be evaluated as guides for action.

William Shakespeare is foremost among the writers who would interact with Sidneian claims about the *architectonic* value of fiction, and particularly with the idea of the imagination's power to strengthen or destroy relationships. There is no conclusive proof that Shakespeare knew the *Defence*, but generations of scholars continue to posit that he did.[2] Sidneian fiction is, as I have argued, a plausible and redemptive vision that by definition erases evidence of its success by prompting readers to remake the physical world according to its fore-conceit. It is difficult to

[2] Most recently, Sarah Dewar-Watson has argued that "it is very likely that [the *Defence*] is one of the principal texts which informed Shakespeare's own sense of the theoretical landscape." *Shakespeare's Poetics: Aristotle and Anglo-Italian Renaissance Genres* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 37.

Katherine Duncan-Jones suggests that Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* "may have been inspired by Sidney's account of 'the right poet' in *The Defence of Poesy*" who "deals in moral absolutes." *Ungentle Shakespeare* (London: Thomson Learning, 2002), 76.

A. C. Bradley described the *Defence* as a "current and famous" articulation of the rules of classical and continental poetics, and argues that it is "most unlikely" that Shakespeare "refused to open this book." *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear Macbeth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 55-56.

impossible to prove its influence when it succeeds; it is more evident when its project of imaginative world building fails. More than any other Shakespearean play, and perhaps indeed than any early modern work of fiction, *King Lear* depicts the collapse of shared imaginative vision and explores the civilizational consequences of that failure. Shakespeare chronicles the implosion of the English state, which cannot be disentangled from the severing of familial bonds. Yet it is not the subject matter of the play or even the magnitude of its catastrophe that makes *King Lear* a counterpoint to Sidneian poetics. Rather, the play's structure creates an expectation of understanding akin to the experience of conviction that Sidney describes as the architectonic end of fiction. It then refuses to satisfy that expectation.

The play makes us think we should understand what we have seen and shape our actions to forestall such a catastrophe in our own communities, but also makes us aware that we can neither comprehend nor control the forces driving the play's action. It exposes a gap between architectonic, redemptive action and our capacity to effect such action. Stephen Booth's interpretation of *King Lear* resembles Gavin Alexander's claim that the *Defense of Poetry* is an "experience." Booth hints at an overarching Shakespearean non-argument woven into the play. Its incomprehensibility is made visible because our imaginations cannot presuppose a set of assumptions to understand what we have seen:

> The glory of *King Lear* as an experience for its audience is in the fact that the play presents its morally capricious universe in a play that, paradoxically, is formally capricious and *also* uses pattern to do exactly what pattern usually does: assert the presence of an encompassing order in the *work* (as opposed to the world it describes).[3]

[3] Stephen Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, & Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983), 27. Emphasis in original.

Booth is not alone in claiming that the play tantalizes us with a latent but never-quite-perceptible governing logic. Judith H. Anderson argues that we create it ourselves by seeking to construct an allegory to understand *King Lear*. The result cannot sustain Sidney's characteristic synthesis of imagination and sensory experience and thereby exposes its status as a mental construct:

> *Lear* ends with strokes of art that insistently recall a fundamentally allegorical fiction and thereby disjoin irrevocably the realism of sense and place, of a dead earth, and the realism of what we do with it—the realism of things and the realism of any meaning, including meaninglessness.[4]

Stated in Sidneian terms, Shakespeare makes us presuppose a latent conceptual order lurking beneath the play's world, but never lets our minds lay claim to that order in a way that feels sustainable as the action unfolds. Anderson's "realism" always crumbles because the play exposes a dissonance between sensory experience—"the realism of things"—and our attempts at interpretation, which produces "the realism of…meaning."

This chapter reads *King Lear* as among the early modern period's most potent explorations of the limits of Sidneian poetics, and of its power. My focus is the play's well-documented capacity to overwhelm and to elicit a strong affective response in spite of our inability to recount how it has acted upon us. Nahum Tate's Epistle Dedicatory to his 1685 rewrite famously describes Shakespeare's original as "a heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished; yet…dazzling in their disorder," and tells how he sought to "rectify what was wanting in the regularity and probability of the tale."[5] Samuel Johnson credits Shakespeare's artistry when he links *King Lear*'s emotional

[4] Judith H. Anderson, "The Conspiracy of Realism: Impasse and Vision in '*King Lear*,'" *Studies in Philology* 84.1 (Winter, 1987): 9.

[5] Nahum Tate, "Epistle Dedicatory," *The History of King Lear* (Dodo Press, 2009), i.

intensity to an intellectual experience of "perpetual tumult" that "interests our curiosity" as it sweeps the audience forward like a river in flood.[6] Modern critics also emphasize that the cumulative effect of the play surpasses the sum of its parts. Maynard Mack writes that "the bent of the play is mythic: it abandons verisimilitude to find out truth," and suggests that its action "escapes the ties that normally bind it to prior psychic causes" and their "commensurate effects."[7] Responses to *King Lear* from Tate to modern times have noted outsized effects on audiences, and the failure of our imaginations to make it comprehensible. My work explores the ways that Shakespeare's staging of contemporary poetic theories contributes to these effects while also illuminating the power and limits of Sidney's ideas.

Sidney "conjure[s]" (DP 53) his readers to affirm ideals and imagined orders much like Prospero in the *Tempest*. Conversely, *King Lear* explores the personal and civilizational consequences of a disenchanted world where characters strive to build stable, actionable presuppositions to shore up their crumbling society or distill a lesson from the chaos on stage, only to see their attempts disintegrate.[8] Like the *Defence*, *King Lear* reveals the acts of poetic feigning that sustain its characters'

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[6] Samuel Johnson, "Introduction – *King Lear*," *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (London: Scott, Webster, and Geary, 1838), 797. Johnson's summation of how audiences experience *King Lear* is worth quoting at length: "There is perhaps no play which keeps the attention so strongly fixed; which so much agitates our passions and interests our curiosity. The artful involutions of distinct interests, the striking opposition of contrary characters, the sudden changes of fortune, and the quick succession of events, fill the mind with a perpetual tumult of indignation, pity, and hope. There is no scene which does not contribute to the aggravation of the distress or conduct of the action, and scarce a line which does not conduce to the progress of the scene. So powerful is the current of the poet's imagination, that the mind, which once ventures within it, is hurried irresistibly along."

[7] Maynard Mack, *King Lear in Our Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 97.

[8] In his study of *King Lear* and John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, David K. Anderson observes that "*King Lear* is a demystified and disenchanted play, but it is a product of an era wherein Christianity was central to the major political, philosophical, and artistic battles of the Western world." My own use of the term "disenchanted" encompasses Anderson's, but with particular attention to imaginative disenchantment. See: "The Tragedy of Good Friday: Sacrificial Violence in King Lear," *English Literary History* 72.2 (Summer 2011), 276.

relationships. Unlike Sidney, whose skillful non-arguments make the *Defence*'s architectonic poetics feel sustainable, Shakespeare dramatizes a kingdom whose communal fictions of familial love and political order are unraveling and therefore visible as acts of imaginative contrivance. To return to Sidney's example of Meninius Agrippa, *King Lear* shows what might have happened in Rome had the fable not "brought forth...so sudden and so good an alteration" in the body politic (DP 25). I argue that the play dramatizes a society whose sustaining fictions become thin and frayed as the gap between imaginative, communal ideals and the sensible world yawns ever larger. The collapse of the characters' shared vision impels audiences to imagine a disenchanted world—to see the play's staged events as a basis for acknowledging the incomprehensible. Shakespeare produces an experience of "perpetual tumult" whereby audiences presuppose a state of imaginative exhaustion that, paradoxically, validates the power, but not the architectonic purpose, of Sidney's vatic poetics.

1. Fictional Worlds and Ontological Instability in the Opening Lines

A central problem with communal fictions, and one which Shakespeare takes as his starting point in *King Lear*, is the fact that people's desires, relationships, and self-conceptions are changeable. The process of building a society based on shared ideals and an understanding of how individuals relate to those ideals begins with subjective experience, which our minds are prone to distort. Erasmus equates poiesis with "mutual flattery," suggesting that our shared fictions are less concerned with *mimesis* than meeting our psychological needs and desires:

> Who denies it? And yet from these sources spring the deeds of mighty heroes, trumpeted to the heavens by the literary works of innumerable scribblers. This same foolish desire of praise gave rise to cities, held together empires, built legal and religious systems, erected political and religious structures; in fact, human life as a whole is nothing but a kind of fool's game.[9]

Sidney likewise admits our predisposition to affirm flattering fictions even when we should know better when he argues that "self-love is better than any gilding to make that seem good wherein ourselves be parties" (DP 3-4). Stories and identities that were plausible and mutually beneficial in one context may be revealed as self-flattery in the face of contradicting evidence. I begin my study of *Lear* by focusing on self-deception and shifting identities as a threat to order in the opening lines of the play. This section examines how Shakespeare intertwines characters' relationships and epistemologies in the play's opening lines by tracing two competing fictions with radically different ontologies: Gloucester's abstracted, idealized version of himself and Edmund's order of nature. Booth's reading of *King Lear* argues that the play destroys our capacity to understand it by subverting our attempts to order what we have seen. For Booth, the "kind of effect that the play achieves in many varieties and from many materials" is to erode categories or "mental boundar[ies]" essential to understanding.[10] The characters and audience must make meaning from sensory experience, but the senses themselves can be unreliable and the conceptual foundation we need to generate understanding from them unstable. From the outset the play

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[9] Desiderius Erasmus, "The Praise of Folly," in *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1989), 26-27.

[10] Booth's most effective example is the play's profusion of meanings and resonances for the word "fool," especially in Lear's "my poor fool is hanged" (5.3.304). He writes that "Each variety and each instance is one in which a mental boundary vanishes, fails, or is destroyed. An audience's experience of the word *fool*, the Fool, and the idea of foolishness in *King Lear* is like its experience of another pattern (with which, because 'a natural' is a fool, it overlaps)." *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, & Tragedy*, 33-34.

dramatizes the gap between characters' "golden" world accounts of themselves and the order of the universe and the "brazen" alternative apparent to any careful observer. The audience, like Kent, is caught between Gloucester's version of himself and the fact that he does not acknowledge Edmund, and the obvious disjunction makes us uncomfortable. Gloucester's fiction becomes visible as such because it cannot account for observable experience, and he seems at least partially attuned to its instability.

King Lear's depictions of rampant, destructive imagination and the latent threat of eroding identity and relationships have been skillfully explored, but these conversations would benefit from being more closely aligned. I say this because, taken together, they highlight the degree to which the fear of instability and loss of identity begets ever more strident fictions to preserve the community's social fabric. Gerard Passannante reads the Gloucester subplot, and particularly Gloucester's capacity to so quickly believe Edmund's ruse, as an expression of "a common Renaissance saying, to make *quidlibet ex quolibet*, or 'anything of anything.'" He traces the lineage of this disconcerting speculative turn of mind from Anaxagorean and scholastic philosophy through Shakespearean influences including Michel de Montaigne and Samuel Harsnett's *A declaration of egregious popish impostures*.[11] When Passannante examines Gloucester's imaginative leaps in response to Edmund's contrived letter, he highlights how the earl's desire for ontological stability predisposes him to an outsized imaginative response to the ruse. The impulse that lets

[11] See: Gerard Passannante, *Catastrophizing: Materialism and the Making of Disaster* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 115. Passannante argues that "Shakespeare was likewise preoccupied with the problem of bad interpretation and the willful imposition of bad interpretations upon the world" (126).

Gloucester leap to catastrophic conclusions about Edgar in Act 1, scene 2 stems from an awareness of his own vulnerability to change, which is evident in the play's first 32 lines. Jonathan Bate suggests a deep, implicit affinity between *King Lear* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and contends that within the play, "metamorphosis takes place when identity breaks down." He elaborates elsewhere that "Shakespearean metamorphoses take place within the mind: even when they are imposed from without, as with the love-juice in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the change is psychologically purposeful."[12] Passannante's *quidlibet ex quolibet* entails an Ovidian potential for the imaginer to transform himself as readily as others via an unstable mixture of self-flattery and imaginative excess. More broadly, these opening lines expose the fragility of Sidneian "golden" worlds and the increasingly unsustainable acts of self-deception required to believe we inhabit those idealized realms.

The Gloucester-Kent-Edmund exchange establishes the world of the play as one in which characters' relationships, estimations of one another, and wills are unstable. The stories that give the kingdom its shape are subject to change even if Gloucester, and later, Lear, do all they can to deny that mutability. *King Lear* begins with one of its characters registering a change in Lear's estimation of Albany and Cornwall: "I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall."[13] When Lear processes onto the stage and declares that "We have this hour a constant will to publish / Our daughters' several dowers" (1.1.42-43), the "constant will" that R. A. Foakes glosses as a "settled purpose" should already be a

[12] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 37. Elsewhere, Bate writes that "implicit internalizing, which reads metamorphosis as psychological and metaphorical instead of physical and literal, is one key to Shakespeare's use of Ovid" (28).

[13] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 1.1.1-2.

matter of doubt.[14] Anticipating the King's "Which of you shall we say doth love us most / That we our largest bounty may extend" (1.1.51-52), Gloucester's reply to Kent's opening question links the dukes' political position and their gift of land in Lear's "division of the kingdom" to "which of the dukes he values most" (1.1.3-5). Kent and Gloucester agree that the king had historically valued Albany over Cornwall, and that his actions in the present reflect a change in regard or a decision to overrule his personal preferences when dividing the kingdom. Either the King's opinions and beneficence are changeable, or his actions do not align with his affections. If the first, then his later bequests are undermined before they are spoken. Certainly, Goneril is skeptical at the close of Act 1, scene 1: "If our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us" (1.1.304-307). If Lear has not accounted for his preferences, then the love test's implicit linking of words of love with his bestowal of the kingdom, as well as Goneril and Regan's pledges of love and honor, ring hollow. In both cases, Lear's words—and the political fiction they create—appear only tenuously grounded in reality as Kent perceives it.

Kent and Gloucester's opening lines introduce an undercurrent of instability into the ceremony that follows, but their exchange about Edmund extends the play's latent mutability of affections and promises to Gloucester's sense of identity itself. The scene exposes a schism between the civilizational ideals of marriage and primogeniture, which govern a world where Edmund has no place, and the sensible world where his existence is indisputable. The stage direction says that all three characters enter together, so Edmund is present but silent for the ongoing discussion

[14] R.A. Foakes, "Notes: The Arden Shakespeare," *King Lear* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 161.

between Kent and Gloucester. As the conversation turns toward Lear's regard for his heirs, Kent has to ask "Is not this your son, my lord?" (1.1.7). From there it takes another 15 lines before either of them addresses Edmund directly, inviting him to speak. Gloucester's "His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge" (1.1.8) is usually taken to mean that Gloucester has funded Edmund's upbringing and education.[15] "Breeding" also calls to mind the more animalistic "Bringing to the birth; hatching; production of young."[16] Similarly, "charge" could also allude to Gloucester's moral obligations to Edmund and the accusation, or charge, of paternity and, by implication, lust and adultery. Gloucester's contention that "I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to't" (1.1.9-10) emphasizes his physical response to the acknowledgement, as well as his loss of shame through repeated admissions of his adultery.[17] Yet "brazing" is also an image of metamorphosis meaning to "To make of brass; to cover or ornament with brass," "To colour like brass," and, figuratively, "To make hard like brass, harden, inure," or "to harden to impudence" as brass in a fire.[18] In each of these senses Gloucester's image references the metallurgic process by which blushing reddish copper is alloyed into hard, insensible, yellow-hued brass. Gloucester admits that he has blushed to acknowledge Edmund as the manifestation of a "breeding" that overwhelmed his rational humanity and has since caused him to harden himself against shame.

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[15] Foakes glosses this line as meaning that Edmund's "birth and upbringing have been at my expense (OED charge sb. 10e)." "Notes: The Arden Shakespeare," *King Lear*, 158.

[16] "Breeding." OED 1.a.

[17] "Braze (adj)." OED.

[18] "Braze (v.1.)." OED. 1, 3, 2.a. and 2.b. The OED cites contemporary examples for definitions 1 and 2.

Gloucester's transformations continue through the end of the conversation, which is characterized by his doing all he can to extricate himself from the guilt for Edmund's illegitimacy and any obligation it might impose on him. He struggles to show that he has not been changed by what he has done, and deflects the responsibility for Edmund's birth elsewhere. Gloucester's pun on Kent's "I cannot conceive you" (1.1.11) redirects the discussion from his role in Edmund's birth to the unnamed mother, who "grew round-wombed, and had, indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed" (1.1.13-15).[19] Kent's reply of "I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper" (1.1.16-17) again gives Gloucester an opportunity to recognize Edmund while also glancing at the impropriety of his existence. Gloucester demurs for a second time by turning the conversation to the older, legitimate Edgar, whom he claims is "yet…no dearer in my account" (1.1.19). By invoking Edgar's birth "by order of law" and using a financial term he seeks to reintegrate himself into a society defined by laws, property, and accounting rather than the "good sport" (1.1.22) of errant sexual gratification that cannot be transfigured into abstractions of morality and law that supposedly govern the kingdom.

Gloucester's account of Edmund's birth is likewise perplexing. It is almost as if he wants to split his own identity between his sons so that Edgar represents his agency and subjectivity—his abstracted rational humanity—and Edmund becomes an

[19] Janet Adelman writes of this passage that "Gloucester's terms for his part in the making of Edmund ("his breeding…hath been at my charge") are so evasive that Kent does not at first understand what Gloucester means." *Suffocating Mothers* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 105.

expression of the passive natural processes that come with inhabiting a body.[20] He claims that the "knave," Edmund, "came something saucily to the world before he was sent for," which attributes to Edmund the impetus for his own birth and leaves unspoken who "sent for" him. The passive voice continues, evacuated of Gloucester's own agency or even enjoyment: "Good sport" occurred at Edmund's conception, his mother was "fair," and the "whoreson must be acknowledged" (1.1.20-23). All of these things merely happened to Gloucester, just as hair and finger nails will grow and food will be consumed, digested, and excreted. A direct address of "Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?" is the best acknowledgement Gloucester can offer, though of course the utterance only strictly acknowledges that Edmund exists and should be introduced to Kent as a conversational courtesy. From there, Edmund is cleanly dismissed and Gloucester's agency in the dismissal is glossed over: "He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again" (1.1.31-32). Like the shape-shifting Proteus striving to escape from Odysseus, Gloucester refuses to be pinned down as Edmund's father, having admitted his paternity in the most oblique way possible.

The problem is that his evasions in the face of Edmund's obvious material existence are so untenable that they threaten his carefully-constructed identity and precipitate a crisis. Gloucester's response is an act of willful blindness that borders on the absurd, except for the fact that other characters appear willing to avert their eyes as well. Gloucester seems to assume that if something cannot be perceived it cannot have any power to change individuals or society. Sins committed in secret can be

[20] Adelman observes that Gloucester's "shift from one son to the other…in effect distinguishes between Edmund as his mother's child and Edgar as his father's: if Edmund is the product of a mother's womb, Edgar is the product of patriarchal law, apparently motherless." *Suffocating Mothers*, 105.

overlooked, but have communal consequences once seen and acknowledged. For this reason, Regan later observes that:

> It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out,
> To let him live. Where he arrives he moves
> All hearts against us. (4.5.11-13)

Stanley Cavell attributes Gloucester's refusal to acknowledge Edmund to his fear of shame at being recognized as Edmund's father. His language hints at the fractured, dichotomous identity that Gloucester seeks to preserve in the face of clear physical evidence to the contrary:

> Under shame, what must be covered up is not your deed, but yourself. It is a more primitive emotion than guilt, as inescapable as the possession of a body, the first object of shame. –Gloucester suffers the same punishment he inflicts: In his respectability, he avoided eyes; when respectability falls away and the disreputable come into power, his eyes are avoided.[21]

In this scene Gloucester refuses to see what is right in front of him, and later he loses his eyes so that he literally cannot bear witness to divine or human vengeance. When he tells Cornwall "I shall see / The winged vengeance overtake such children" as Goneril and Regan, the duke responds "See't shalt thou never" (3.7.64-66). Similarly, when the intervening servant says "My lord, you have one eye left / To see some mischief on him," Cornwall's reply is "Lest it see more, prevent it" (3.7.80-82). Cornwall's logic in blinding Gloucester is the same as Gloucester's motivation in sending Edmund away and disowning Edgar. For both characters what cannot be seen or otherwise perceived cannot have psychological or material consequences. As in Sidney, the ability to envision something in a way that is empirically convincing is imbued with a proleptic power to bring the thing about.

[21] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49.

Edmund's body is the "first object" of Gloucester's shame and that which his father seeks to erase from any account of who he is and how he fits into society. Gloucester's already tenuous ability to reconcile his sustaining vision of himself with the sensory evidence explains why Edmund has been gone nine years at the beginning of the play and will soon leave again. It also explains Gloucester's susceptibility to the type of catastrophic thinking Passannante describes when he notes that "though the letter itself is hardly ambiguous, the fact that Gloucester is willing to believe its contents so quickly is disturbing."[22] Passannante notes the readiness with which Gloucester turns to astrology, using a speculative fiction to explain Edgar's treachery, which is in turn imagined:

> …we make whatever we like of the stars (or of a few words or of our own subjective perceptions) and then forget the role we played in our actions. This is one way we disavow our own thoughts and treat them as if they were somehow external to us—like natural disasters.[23]

When Gloucester demands that Edmund "wind me into" the supposedly treacherous Edgar and declares that "I would unstate myself to be in a due resolution" (1.2.98, 99-100) about his son's alleged machinations, he succumbs to the habits of thought he has long used to maintain his life's central fiction of marital fidelity and unblemished filial succession. No evidence of Edgar's loyalty would satisfy him because his habits of interpretation are based on acts of imagination that eclipse all other sources of experience. He has, as Passannante observes, forgotten the imaginative role he has played in idealizing one son and exiling another. For Gloucester, investigating and counteracting Edmund's claims against Edgar would require him to examine his abstracted visions of both of them, which he is unwilling to do. Having just witnessed

[22] Passannante, *Catastrophizing*, 128-129.
[23] Passannante, *Catastrophizing*, 130.

Lear's catastrophic abdication, Gloucester may be especially unwilling to ask Edgar for a declaration of his filial love to refute the letter.

The opening exchange between Edmund, Gloucester, and Kent introduces the latent threat of metamorphosis in which characters' imaginatively-generated identities are altered because they cannot reconcile their ideals with conflicting material realities. It explores the costs of clinging to self-flattering fictions that are vulnerable to counterevidence. The scene introduces a more sordid, mutable, "brazen" world of Sidneian history, including Gloucester's adultery, that exists alongside the mythic "golden" world pageantry of Lear's ensuing love test and its ceremonial straining for an idealized civilization.[24] By juxtaposing this seemingly perfunctory scene with the masque-like pomp that follows, Shakespeare poses an implicit question: which of these two visions represents the real world? It is easy to view the part of Act 1, scene 1 after Lear's entrance as setting the tone and expectations of the play's dramatic world. Booth says as much when he contends that "by its kind, the story of Lear and his three daughters promises a happy ending in which the virtuous youngest child proves herself so and the parent sees his error; but the play refuses to fulfill the generic promise inherent in its story."[25] Others also emphasize the play's distance from the quotidian world of chronicled history. In his introduction, Foakes writes that "the play has no past, except in general references to vague injustices and neglect of

[24] For Sidney, the historian's supposed inability to generalize from experience is a key difference from the poet. He writes that "the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine." See: "The Defence of Poesy," 16.

[25] Booth, *Indefinition*, 17.

the poor, which might apply to later times."[26] Yet *King Lear* does not, strictly speaking, begin with Lear's masque-like love test, and the opening gambit with these three characters seems more plausible as the stuff of chronicled history than fairy tale or myth. If the play has no past it is because the characters wish to ignore it in favor of a mutually flattering fiction of effortless love between parents and their children. As this fiction becomes more precarious, the characters begin to disown it in a rebuke of their constructed past and even the physical monuments that perpetuated those ideals. When Lear responds to Regan's greeting in Act 2, scene 2 he tells her: "If thou should not be glad" to see him, "I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb, / Sepulchering an adultress" (2.2.321-323). The past, even when inscribed in stone, becomes changeable again.

2: Catastrophizing, Metamorphosis, and Natural Order in Pagan Britain

Cavell writes that "the cause of tragedy is that we would rather murder the world than permit it to expose us to change,"[27] but that rage to destroy anything that defies our beliefs is only half of the problem in *King Lear*. The play's pagan setting fosters a relativism that allows its characters to evade their obligations to themselves and others indefinitely. It does not condemn acts of imaginative, interpretive, and physical violence like Gloucester's disavowal of Edmund and subsequent blinding. Gloucester's callousness is enabled in part by the fact that he believes the world and

[26] Foakes calls the play "curiously disconnected from chronicled time" and contends that "antiquity is evoked in mythic terms, while the historical past is pretty much blank." R. A. Foakes, "Introduction: The Arden Shakespeare," *King Lear* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 12-13.

[27] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 122.

its gods are capricious, and that his actions and self-deception do not violate any moral absolutes. Margreta DeGrazia contends that the play's

> …BC setting licenses *Lear* to push suffering to an extreme, to make it interminably and irreparably insufferable. The withholding of the salvational programme allows for atrocities that would in its presence have been averted or mitigated, or at least somehow rendered meaningful or redemptive.[28]

The blind Gloucester's "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport" (4.1.36-37) and Edmund's invocation to Nature as his "goddess" and binding source of "law" (1.12.1-2) presuppose a fundamentally chaotic universe. Much later, a grieving Lear kneels over the dead Cordelia and demands "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life / And thou no breath at all?" (5.3.305-06), but the world of the play has provided no basis for elevating human life over the rest of the cosmos. The threat of a savage world where all flesh is subject to change, decay, and predation with no apparent purpose or regard for our ideals of what constitutes a just universe is realized in Lear's question, but it is implicit even in Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund's opening exchange and grows more perceptible and fearsome to audiences and characters alike as the play progresses.

King Lear's cosmos is one where no human is made in the image of God, and its pre-Christian setting strips away the imaginative guardrails that Sidney considers essential for poesy and imagination to be icastic and architectonic, rather than fantastic and destructive.[29] The question facing a world where fictions are not

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[28] Margreta DeGrazia, "King Lear in BC Albion," *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents*, eds. Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper, and Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013),154.

[29] There are abundant examples of the English fascination with icastic and fantastic art, and the problem of discerning one from the other by restraining the imagination. In the *Defence of Poesy*, Sidney defines icastic (*eikastiké*) art as that which "figure[es] forth good things" and fantastic (*phantastiké*) art as that which "doth contrariwise infect the fancy with unworthy objects." George Puttenham cautions his readers in *The Art of English Poesy* (1589) that "the evil and vicious

constrained by divine absolutes is simply one of power. Can you impose your will on the world and enforce it, or are you the victim of someone else's self-justified vision of how the world should be? Gloucester's dismissal of his son and the woman who conceived him in "good sport" places them in the same position relative to Gloucester as he later claims to occupy for the "sport" of the gods. If there is no God and no created order by which all people bear a divine image, then Gloucester's relegation of Edmund to a biological process cannot be a transgression because nothing requires him to acknowledge his son's humanity. He admits shame over his sexual misdeeds and acknowledges his "whoreson" as custom dictates he must, but does not go beyond those formalities. Gloucester himself is later reduced to the object of Cornwall's wrath, which is barely tempered by their culture's laws and mores:

> …we may not pass upon his life,
> Without the form of justice, yet our power
> Shall do courtesy to our wrath, which men
> May blame but not control. (3.7.24-27)

Cornwall's claimed restraint satisfies the idealized "form of justice" regarding the Earl's life, but the blinding situates both the will of the perpetrator and the body of the victim in a visceral, lawless order of nature and predation. There can be no stable identity in such a world. The characters live under the constant threat of metamorphosis, of being treated as less than human by their compatriots in the absence of an absolute, essential human nature. Even Cornwall's concession to wrath effects a transformation, since he claims to have no rational self-control.

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disposition of the brain hinders the sound judgement and discourse of man with busy and disordered fantasies, for which the Greeks call him *phantastikos*." He argues that while an untamed mind begets "monstrous imaginations or conceits," an ordered mind makes "his much multiformity uniform, that is, well proportioned, and so passing clear, that by [the imagination] as by a glass or mirror are represented unto the soul all manner of beautiful visions." See: "The Defence of Poesy," 36, and George Puttenham, "The Art of English Poesy," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 70-71.

The world glimpsed in the opening vignette of *King Lear* is one where the value of human life is tenuous, subject to withholding, and inconsistently applied. It illuminates a dominant strain of Shakespeare's tragedy, and one which is emphasized in modern criticism: something about this play makes us imagine it as an artistic extension of the natural world that is categorically different than his other plays. DeGrazia observes that *King Lear* is Shakespeare's "only play on the history of Britain to take place entirely in BC time," and argues that Elizabethan readers would have been sensitive to the distinction.[30] Sidney in the *Defence of Poesy* imagines that a pagan cosmos degraded its adherents and their ideas of divinity when he argues that Plato "found fault that poets of his time filled the world with wrong opinions of the gods, making light tales of that unspotted essence." He writes that "Christianity hath taken away all the hurtful belief" of the pagan world, whose poets and philosophers "had not the light of Christ" (DP 39-40). Not so in *King Lear*, where nature is invoked as a goddess, the gods are "wanton boys" looking for "sport," and Lear's rage against cosmic injustice goes unanswered. As Hannibal Hamlin observes, "*King Lear* is like Job without God's voice from the whirlwind."[31] Hamlin is right that "God's answer [to Job] is no answer at all," at least in terms of rational argument, and that any reading of Job or *King Lear* that seeks to preserve God's goodness and sovereignty must do so on the basis of faith.[32] Even God's answer to Job is essentially a Sidneian non-argument, since God issues Job a challenge rather than an

[30] DeGrazia, "King Lear in BC Albion," 138.

[31] Hannibal Hamlin, "The Patience of Lear," *Shakespeare and Religion*, eds. Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 151.

[32] Hamlin compares John Calvin's "anxieties" about Job's theodicy problem to *King Lear*, noting that both works ask similar questions: "How does one distinguish between a God whose justice is inscrutable and one who is unjust? How does one distinguish between an absent God and one who simply doesn't exist? The answer for Calvin is faith, the same faith that seems to lie behind Christian or specifically Calvinist interpretations of *King Lear*." Hamlin, "The Patience of Lear," 153.

explanation. *King Lear* provides no hint of theophany. Shakespeare offers even less basis than Job for imagining a just, ordered universe, since the evidence for divine order and agency is not just inexplicable, but entirely absent.

As if to prove Sidney's point about what fiction teaches in a Christian versus pagan context, recent eco-critical approaches to the play focus on how it breaks down the human-nonhuman binary presupposed by the doctrine of *Imago Dei*. For these readers, the main focus and prime agency in the play is its especially stark and powerful vision of nature, which threatens to eclipse the characters' fictions of rationality, constant love and regard, and membership in a society built on those foundational ideals. There is no opposing hint of divinity on which to presuppose a supernatural order. As Laurie Shannon writes:

> Man normally appears as at once the condensed expression and the ultimate triumph of divine creation…. Shakespeare here does something quite different and disassociates man from this perfection. *King Lear* positions man not as the paragon of creation or even, in Hamlet's sharp-toothed variant, 'the paragon of animals' (2.2.308). Man remains exceptional, certainly, but in *King Lear* he is creation's negative exception.[33]

Andrew Bozio offers another recent example. He argues that *King Lear* shows a "transactional relationship between environment and embodied thought" by which "places become the scaffolding for complex thought." In his view imaginative vision cannot surpass the natural world because it is itself a product of that order.[34] Bozio contends that Lear's disorientation in the storm scene and Gloucester's blindness are used to "reimagine…space as coextensive with the self and less of an *a priori* sphere

[33] Laurie Shannon, "Poor, Bare, Forked: Animal Sovereignty, Human Negative Exceptionalism, and the Natural History of *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60.2 (Summer 2009), 174-175.

[34] Andrew Bozio, "Embodied Thought and the Perception of Place in *King Lear*," *Studies in English Literature* 55.2 (Spring 2015), 278.

than an ambient and strangely labile environment."[35] Thus, in the storm scene, "Lear's exposure to the elements renders him insensitive to the contours of the world around him." The King's madness is primarily a result of hypothermia, in other words, since his thoughts are a psychic extension or manifestation of material causes.[36]

The extent to which *King Lear* posits a natural order that controls the characters' actions and even dictates their thoughts is remarkable. Shannon and Bozio are alert to the way the play undermines civilization's communal ideals about who qualifies as human and what that category should mean when imposed, but they do not explore how the play's pagan presuppositions and engagement with Renaissance poetics facilitate its alignment with modern eco-critical readings. Shannon situates the play "in a countertradition on the question of species, a zoographic tradition that makes this larger fabric or 'generall throng' its frame of reference—rather than making man the measure of all things."[37] She identifies Lear's description of Edgar's Poor Tom as a "poor, bare, forked animal" as a seminal moment in which the play "exposes an abject humanity's underprovisioning in the face of the environment" as a "creature without properties."[38] Readers and audiences can overlook human agency and reason in the play because from the very first lines those powers seem to be in service to poor, perhaps underprovisioned, attempts at self-justification. Gloucester's

[35] Bozio, "Embodied Thought," 265.

[36] Bozio argues that "in repeatedly signifying cold as an effect of exposure, this link makes emplacement [within the storm] an essential element in the mind's constitution." See: Bozio, "Embodied Thought," 276.

[37] Shannon, "Poor, Bare, Forked," 170.

[38] Shannon, "Poor, Bare, Forked," 195, 196.

anti-paternal fictions are so flimsy they would never meet Sidney's standards of credibility in the face of empirical evidence.

Shakespeare threatens to overwhelm readers and audiences with a vision of what Sidney would call the "brazen" world of *King Lear*, but he leaves more room for human subjectivity, character, and agency than Bozio or Shannon allow. His characters retain substantial causal and interpretive power, and they attempt to wield that power to construct plausible communal ideals. For instance, when he attributes Lear and Gloucester's experiences of madness and displacement to exposure and blindness, Bozio discounts the subjective, psychological causes that Shakespeare also explores as reasons for the tragedy. Goneril observes that Lear "hath ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.295), and later Lear admits to being "a very foolish, fond old man" (4.760). His madness is credible even without his exposure on the heath. Similarly, Gloucester's blinding causes him to reevaluate his relationships with his sons, and prompts the admission that "I stumbled when I saw" (4.2.21). He has traded metaphorical blindness for actual blindness. Shannon's anti-humanist argument, which relies especially strongly on Lear's appraisal of Poor Tom, is undermined by that passage's context within the play. Lear's claim that Edgar is "the thing itself; unaccommodated man" (3.4.107) cannot be a complete vision of humanity in the face of nature because Edgar's nakedness is itself a disguise that reflects his rationality, his skill at survival, and his hope for reintegration into society. *King Lear* uses its characters' depicted subjectivities to explore how human thought and agency strives to surpass nature and imagine Sidneian "golden" worlds even if they cannot bring those worlds about. Even in moments when we seem most

"unaccommodated," our imagination bends toward community. The tragedy of *King Lear* stems from the collapse of communal poetics and the characters' failure to sustain shared meaning and stable identities, much less consistent, mutual relationships with one another. The kingdom's shared fictions turn out to be communal only insofar as Lear's claims are ratified and accepted by others as a basis for action. The question raised by the play's slow-burning repudiation of shared meaning is how, whether, and to what extent its pre-Christian characters, who lack Holy Spirit as an interpretive guide, can arrest the play's cycle of metamorphosis and predation.

3: Fictions of Authority and Lear's "Wrenched…frame of Nature" in Act 1, Scene 1

Modern introductions to *King Lear* routinely cite its mythic resonances, though they seldom account for how the play achieves this effect aside from noting its distant pagan setting and fairy tale borrowings.[39] The play's otherworldliness stems in part from the way it takes well-known genres and habits of mind and, by exposing how they are used to sustain the characters' private and shared fictions, renders those patterns of thought uncanny. The love test and its aftermath reveal Lear's fear of decay and show how his efforts to forestall it and preserve his fiction of undiminished

[39] Foakes quotes the first part of the Maynard Mack passage cited above in the opening paragraph of his introduction. "Introduction," *King Lear*, 1.

Mack writes that "the bent of the play is mythic: it abandons verisimilitude to find out truth" and "escapes the ties that normally bind it to prior psychic causes" and their "commensurate effects." *King Lear in Our Time*, 97.

Stephen Orgel calls the play an "overwhelming study of the tragedy of old age and the politics of the family" and notes that "though the story of Lear comes from the chronicles of ancient Britain, the action belongs more to the world of legend than history." "Introduction – King Lear," *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1480-81.

Similarly, Stephen Greenblatt writes that "though the Lear story has the mythic quality of a folktale….it was rehearsed in Shakespeare's time as a piece of authentic British history from the very ancient past (c. 800 B.C.E.)..." "Introduction – King Lear," *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2008), 2,326-27.

power precipitate a fatal crisis of his authority. I argue that Lear, like Gloucester, is motivated by a fear of change, or metamorphosis, which threatens his imaginatively-generated identity. Lear's authority as king grants him vast scope to impose his fiction of changeless power. The collapse of the communal presuppositions of his rule implicates his kingdom, frees Edmund and his daughters to create their own counter-fictions, and exposes the imaginative underpinnings of civilization.

While the *Defence of Poesy* briefly lifts the veil and winks at the imaginative origin of civilization's shared knowledge, the catastrophe that begins when Lear walks onto the stage makes his version of that sustaining fiction untenable, and therefore visible. Writing of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, Sidney reinforces the communal, architectonic end of poesy and explores the way fictions become perceivable as such when they deviate too forcefully from observable conditions and present a vision that cannot be enacted:

> But even in the most excellent determination of goodness what philosopher's counsel can so readily direct a prince as the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon, or a virtuous man in all fortunes as Aeneas in Virgil, or a whole commonwealth as the way of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*? I say the way, because where Sir Thomas More erred it was the fault of the man and not of the poet, for that way of patterning a commonwealth was most absolute, though he perchance hath not so absolutely performed it. (DP 17)

When Lear and Gloucester can impose their interpretations on others their imaginative origin is obscured, but when others reject their visions their position is akin to More's. They become purveyors of a civilizational order that cannot be seen to exist. Ironically, Lear's desperation to forestall age and decay and to preserve the belief in his power over his subjects and the material world of his kingdom exposes the fragility of his authority. His disenchantment metastasizes from a personal

experience of metamorphosis to a mythic, communal one by revealing the individual acts of imaginative affirmation or denial that maintain or destroy our shared visions.

The political, communal poetics depicted by the play are grounded in the personal bonds between the characters. Yet thinking about Lear's motives in Act 1 as a function of his desire to maintain a fictional vision of himself helps to explain the disconnect between the seemingly minor sin of Cordelia's "nothing" and the scale of Lear's anger in response. The most fearsome thing about the play may be the intensity of Lear's rage at Cordelia, which defies explanation. It prompts a rebuke from Kent, who implores Lear to "see better" (1.1.159), and an assessment from Goneril, whose comments to Regan reflect the audience's perspective as well:

> You see how full of changes his age is. The observation we hath made of it hath note been little. He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly. (1.1.290-293)

Cavell posits Lear's desire "to avoid being recognized" as his "dominating motivation" until the end of Act 4.[40] According to this hypothesis, Lear turns on Cordelia in an "attempt to avoid recognition, the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation" that would come with accepting her love, which he cannot "return in kind" or pay for with his gift of land.[41] Cordelia describes her refusal to declare her love for Lear as a refusal to flatter:[42]

> … I want that glib and oily art
> To speak and purpose not – since what I well intend,
> I'll do't before I speak – … (1.1.226-228)

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[40] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, 46

[41] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, 57-58, 61-62. For Cavell, Lear's bequest constitutes a "bribe" offered in exchange for "false love and…a public expression of love," which "a division of his property fully pays for" (61-62).

[42] Cavell paraphrases this passage as Cordelia telling the King of France that Lear "hates me because I would not flatter him." *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, 65.

Cavell's reading emphasizes Lear's refusal of love and recognition as the impetus of the play's tragedy, but it underestimates the impact of his desire for immutable authority.

Lear avoids recognition and acceptance of a love he cannot quantify or repay because he seeks to demonstrate his enduring power over his kingdom and the natural world, including the threat of old age and senility. Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*, which is commonly cited as an influence for Lear's Fool, describes aging as a metamorphosis and may introduce a mediated Ovidian subtext into the play.[43] Folly contends that senility is a benevolent metamorphosis:

> And old age would really be unendurable to everyone, were it not that I am once again at hand to take pity on its troubles. As the gods of the poets always save the perishing with a timely metamorphosis, so I come to the aid of those with one foot in the grave, and return them, if only for a brief moment, to their infancy.[44]

As if to emphasize the parallel between age and metamorphosis, Folly restates the Ovidian image a few dozen lines later: "Now let anyone who cares compare these benefits of mine with the metamorphoses worked by the other gods."[45] Goneril describes Lear's old age as a second infancy in the Quarto version, saying that "Old fools are babes again and must be used / With checks and flatteries" (1.3.20-21). As the play progresses Lear becomes increasingly focused on identity and self-possession and voices fears of decline:

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[43] Foakes writes that "the undercurrent of skepticism in *King Lear* may be related to the multiplying ironies of the Fool's role and dialogue, and the paradoxes about wisdom and folly in the play." He speculates that "such paradoxes animate Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, which Shakespeare may have known either in the Latin or in Sir Thomas Chaloner's translation (1549, reissued in 1577)." "Introduction," *King Lear*, 105.

[44] Erasmus, "The Praise of Folly," 14.

[45] Erasmus, "The Praise of Folly," 15. In both instances, Chaloner translates the original's "metamorphosi" as "transform" and "transformations." With this in mind I have chosen to quote Adams' modern translation. See: Desiderius Erasmus, *The Prayse of Follie*, trans. Sir Thomas Chaloner (London, 1577), b.vi.v. and b.viii.r.

> Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear.
> Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, or his discernings are
> lethargied—Ha! Sleeping or waking? Sure 'tis not
> so. Who is it that can tell me who I am? (1.4.217-221)[46]

Bate reads these lines as the point at which Lear "begins to lose a sense of his own self" and argues that "the image of metamorphosis" becomes "explicit" in the scene when Lear pledges to "resume the shape which thou dost think / I have cast off for ever" (1.4. 301-302). He writes that "I do not see how audiences could have avoided calling the *Metamorphoses* to mind in response to Lear's image of shape-shifting."[47] At the end of Act 1 Lear articulates his fear of madness directly for the first time:

> O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! I would not be mad.
> Keep me in temper, I would not be mad. (1.5.43-45)

The nightmare version of change Lear wants to forestall from the play's opening scene is one he can only bring himself to name as his sanity begins to crumble.

Lear's fundamental presupposition in the love test is the persistence and changelessness of his will, both in his own mind and enacted upon the physical world like the map he divides his kingdom with. Preemptively giving away his authority allows him to separate it from his aging, mortal body and to believe that his authority will survive his physical death. His anger at Cordelia is so intense because her refusal to speak as he bids her renders his claims of power demonstrably false. Her "nothing" (1.1.89) has the same effect on Lear as Edmund's physical presence had on Gloucester. Gloucester distances himself from the appetites and pleasures of his body by refusing to acknowledge Edmund. He stakes out a cerebral, legal identity as the

[46] The Folio renders the last three lines as blank verse, but as Foakes notes, "Q's extra words turn [the lines] into prose." See: "Notes," *King Lear*, 204-205.

[47] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid,* 192-193.

father of Edgar, who is both his heir and the proof of his place within an abstracted social order. Edgar is even revealed to be Lear's godson (2.1.91). It is no wonder that the first lines Edmund speaks alone pledge his "services" to Nature's physical world and his "composition and fierce quality" (1.2.12), rejecting "the plague of custom" and "curiosity of nations" (1.2.1-4). Yet while Gloucester seeks to isolate his identity from his lusts and their consequences, Lear means to separate his body, which he knows to be mortal, from his will, which he wants to believe omnipotent and immutable. This separation between Lear's body and his agency over the world is implied in his opening lines:

> Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
> In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
> To shake all cares and business from our age,
> Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
> Unburdened crawl toward death. (1.1.36-40)

He claims his "intent" is "fast," or immutable, and his division of the kingdom is meant to outlive his "age," rather than his essential identity. Responding to Goneril's pledge of love, he declares "To thine and Albany's issues / Be this perpetual" (1.1.66-67). Similar language follows Regan's speech: "To thee and thine hereditary ever / Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom" (1.1.79-80). Lear's responses to Goneril and Regan emphasize the perpetual status of their arrangement by which Lear's bequest will bind his daughters and their descendants by his authority. His body may "unburdened crawl toward death," but his "cares and business" will be passed on with his lands and therefore persist among the daughters whose love for him endures. In this light, Cordelia's later declaration of "O dear father / It is thy business I go about" (4.4.23-24) is not merely a reference to Christ's "I must go about my father's

business" (Luke 2.49).[48] It is, more importantly, a direct echo of Lear's opening lines and a sign that Cordelia seeks to enact Lear's vision of intergenerational authority from Act 1.[49] Lear intends his authority to live on through his daughters, but Cordelia's "nothing" disavows him of this wish.

Lear's investment in the love test as a means of fixing his identity and authority for perpetuity becomes clearer once Cordelia has refused to declare her everlasting loyalty. When she alludes to her impending marriage and the fact that "That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty" (1.1.101-102), she references a future in which children's obedience and love detaches from parents and moves forward in time to subsequent generations. Lear's response seeks to reassert his power and authority through all future years, disavowing Cordelia entirely in the process because she threatens his presupposition of changelessness. His reference to filial cannibalism ironically classifies Cordelia with those who literally consume their offspring, while consuming her dowry and inheritance to sustain his imaginative fantasy of immortal authority:

> Well, let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower,
> For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
> The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
> By all the operation of the orbs
> From whom we do exist and cease to be,
> Here I disclaim my paternal care,
> Propinquity and property of blood,
> And as a stranger to my heart and me

[48] *The Geneva Bible,* 1560 Edition. (GG.iiii.r). DeGrazia argues that "Lear holding Cordelia just lowered from hanging might well have recalled icons of Mary holding Christ just deposed from Crucifixion, as it has for numerous modern readers, a correspondence heightened by Cordelia's identification as the one 'who goes about her father's business' (Luke 2.49, Lear, 4.4.2324), 'who redeems nature from the general curse' (4.6.206)." See: "King Lear in BC Albion," 149.

[49] Marvin Rosenberg's compendium of performance history for this scene notes that when Lear is awake in the scene, Cordelia "addresses him formally" even though "He rejects kingship, insists on his frail humanity," and that she addresses him more warmly as a father when he is still asleep and cannot hear her. *The Masks of King Lear* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1972), 290, 284.

> Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
> Or he that makes his generation messes
> To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
> Be as well neighboured, pitied, and relieved,
> As thou my sometime daughter. (1.1.109-121)

Again, Lear's body may "exist and cease to be," but his disownment of Cordelia is "for ever." If she will not participate in the Erasmian "mutual flattery" of his political and familial ceremony his only choice to sustain the fiction of his authority is to demonstrate his power by exiling her from the world he has constructed and his other daughters have perjured themselves to validate.

Cordelia's refusal to flatter Lear, and her implication that Goneril and Regan are flattering him, threatens to upend his entire conception of himself. It forces him to disavow the part of him that loves her in order to maintain the fiction of his everlasting will. The split parallels Gloucester's fractured identity. When Kent attempts to intervene, Lear protests that:

> I loved her most, and thought to set my rest
> On her kind nursery. [*to Cordelia*] Hence and avoid my sight
> So be my grave my peace, as here I give
> Her father's heart from her. (1.1.123-127)

These lines certainly reflect Lear's sense of hurt and wounded pride, but they situate that pain within his broader efforts to preserve his authority at all costs. Note that his language highlights the relationship between his fiction of everlasting authority and his self-created identity. He says he viewed Cordelia's love and "kind nursery" as that which would enable his "rest," which seems to align with his earlier desire to crawl unburdened toward death. What he wanted was an affirmation that his power would outlive his body by being conferred to his daughters, even as she cared for and loved him in his infirmity. Cordelia's silence forces him to split the identity he had crafted

for himself and sought to secure through his ceremony of inheritance. If he renounces his everlasting authority as a fiction he can retain Cordelia as his daughter and heir, but to preserve his imaginative vision—the central presupposition of the ceremony—he must dispense with her as Gloucester does with Edmund. The supposedly immortal, authoritative aspect of Lear names his grave as his new source of "peace," or rest, and "give[s] / Her father's heart from her." Lear the king and Lear the father of Cordelia can no longer be the same person, and Lear the ruler disposes of the heart of Lear the father. Later, as Goneril begins to turn on him, Lear reflects on this moment as a cataclysm that destroyed his capacity for love and ruined his understanding of himself and his relationship to the world:

> O most small fault,
> How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show,
> Which like an engine wrenched my frame of nature
> From the fixed place, drew from my heart all love
> And added to the gall. (1.4.258-262)

Even here, however, Lear's insistence on his own passivity insulates him from any responsibility for what has happened and aligns him with Gloucester, who also uses passive voice to minimize his agency. When Lear tells Kent he thought to "set [his] rest" on Cordelia's "kind nursery" we are primed to interpret the claim as an account of his plans for managing his decline into old age. Yet it becomes increasingly clear as the play progresses that Cordelia's refusal to speak unsettles Lear's identity and understanding of his relationship to the world. His "rest" is also a "fixed place" of ontological and epistemological certainty regarding his own immutability.

Lear's new, improvised plan for Cornwall and Albany to "digest [Cordelia's] third" of the kingdom (1.1.129) while he "shall retain / The name, and all th'addition

to a king" (1.1.137) serves his need for deference even in the absence of any material power. The clearest sense of what Lear seeks to retain appears in his banishment of Kent, where he is angry not at Kent's actual arguments but at his attempt to interpose himself between Lear's verbal decrees and the world's obedience. Twice in less than 11 lines he stresses the fact that his commands, once uttered, are irrevocable:

> That thou has sought to make us break our vows,
> Which we durst never yet, and with strained pride
> To come betwixt our sentences and our power,
> Which nor our nature, nor our place can bear,
> Our potency made good, take thy reward.
> …
> …By Jupiter,
> This shall not be revoked. (1.1.169-173, 179-180)

Lear banishes Kent for the same reason he disowns Cordelia. Both of them, by their existence and continued defiance, show that Lear's authority is not absolute. Their presence is incompatible with the fiction of his power, which cannot include broken vows or revoked commands. Lear's "potency" can be "made good" only through banishment, which rids his kingdom of any who oppose his will.

The question begs to be asked: why does Lear consider his fantasy of royal power so essential he is willing to sacrifice Cordelia to preserve it? I suggest that the comfort this fiction provides him is twofold. It involves the preservation of his political power and, more personally, the hope of preserving his sense of self in his advanced age. In both cases it is his fear of decline and mutability that motivates him in this scene. Politically, Lear's bequest, as originally planned to include Cordelia, is intended so "that future strife / May be prevented now" (1.1.43-44). The effects of cutting her out of his bequest and altering his plans spark the type of civil strife he had initially sought to prevent. More personally, Lear gets to believe that his actions

in the present—"now"—will hold sway over the future, even after his bodily death. Of course, Goneril and Regan, as well as the other witnesses, are flattering Lear. Cordelia observes as much with her reference to "glib and oily art," Kent describes the ceremony as "When power to flattery bows" (1.1.150), and Lear himself comes to see his daughters' words as flattery:

> They flattered me like a dog and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything that I said 'ay' and 'no' to was no good divinity. (4.6.96-100)

It takes Lear's falling out with Goneril and Regan and his exposure to the storm to disavow him of this fiction of immutable power and expose it as an act of self-flattery.

One of the play's central questions is what happens to a society when the personal fictions of its rulers, which are unavoidably political, no longer carry a shared significance? When Sidney surveys the achievements of English poesy at the close of the *Defence*, he focuses on its plausibility, or lack thereof, and bids poets to "especially look themselves in an unflattering glass of reason" (DP 43). In a passage that invokes *quidlibet ex quolibet*, he laments the formal and conceptual disorder of English fictions:

> Our matter is *quodlibet*: indeed, though wrongly, performing Ovid's verse, *quicquid conabor dicere, versus erit*;[50] never marshalling it into any assured rank, that almost the readers cannot tell where to find themselves. (DP 44)

If a civilization has no basis for believing its fictions and recognizes poesy as contrivance rather than faithful imitation, then it has no basis for affirming a shared

[50] Alexander translates this passage as "anything I try to say will come out as poetry." Gavin Alexander, "Notes," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 44.

moral vision. At best, Sidney sees fiction reduced to the degraded entertainment of tyrants in such circumstances, bereft of its architectonic power to inspire conviction. Lear's capacity to deceive himself with fiction while ignoring the moral and communal consequences of his actions places him in this category:

> But how much it can move, Plutarch yieldeth a notable testimony of the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraeus, from those eyes a tragedy well made and represented drew abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood; so as he that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies yet could not resist the sweet violence of tragedy. And if it wrought no further good in him, it was that he, in despite of himself, withdrew himself from hearkening to that which might mollify his hardened heart. (DP 28)

In the absence of a coherent, shared understanding of the universe, fictions become subjective sources of individual pleasure with no redemptive power. When Lear's power could keep Goneril and Regan's ambitions in check his kingly authority had real material consequences even though it existed only in his mind and the imaginations of his subjects. Only when he abdicates does the shared fiction of his identity and authority collapse into an Erasmian "fools game" with no significance beyond his own mind.

4: Orphean Resonances and the Collapse of Communal Fictions

Mack's observation of disproportionate causes and Booth's contention that the play feels like it should have an underlying order align with Sidney's poetics of evocative non-arguments. In the absence of such an order I propose to use the Orpheus myth common to early modern poetics as a way of understanding Lear's role as a purveyor of fictions with civilizational import. Juxtaposing these two figures allows us to cast Lear as an Orphean figure transposed to the play's pre-Christian,

pre-Classical world, explore how his words lose their authority to avert his own and kingdom's metamorphic decline, and better understand the stakes of the play's implicit poetics. While this section traces some interesting Ovidian resonances within the play, I can produce no unequivocal evidence that Shakespeare was thinking of the myth when he wrote his tragedy. In his own work on Ovid and *King Lear*, Bate takes a similar approach. He claims that "the most profound affinities [between two texts] may be the least demonstrable precisely because they go deeper than explicit local parallel," but concedes that none of the play's Ovidian resonances "can be identified as uniquely or definitively Ovidian."[51] My main interest here is probing thematic correspondences rather than proving that Shakespeare is explicitly engaging with Ovid's arch-poet. Indeed, the play does not reference Orpheus any more than it references Christ, yet DeGrazia has argued that it is a thematically Christian play in part by virtue of its mix of allusions to the absent Incarnation.[52] With these qualifications in place, I return to my reading of the play in light of Sidneian poetics.

Like Gloucester in the play's opening lines, Lear's objective in Act 1, scene 1 is to forestall an unwanted metamorphosis by asserting an identity that may not be altered, even in death, and by imposing his will onto his children and their descendants. Unlike Gloucester, Lear is a father and a king endowed with the power to command his daughters and subordinates. His royal status and his mythic role at

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[51] *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 190-192.

[52] DeGrazia summarizes her argument on this point as follows: "*King's Lear*'s BC setting both allows for extreme suffering and obviates the need for its justification or alleviation. Its phenomenal tragic intensity is a function of its having been set so very far from the one date in Christendom that really matters, the one from which time is computed: the Incarnation. Though taking place some eight centuries before Christ, the play precipitously and programmatically anticipates endtime, as if time were to shut down long before the inaugural Advent. In BC Albion, the eschatological programme remains tightly under wraps; endtime is imminent, but not dead-ended—in the Fool's prophecy, in the catastrophic storm, and at Cordelia's death." "*King Lear* in BC Albion," 155-156.

For a summary of Christian readings of the play, see: Foakes, "Introduction," *King Lear*, 31-33.

the extreme verge of British history align him with the foundational role that Sidney attributes to Orpheus.[53] It is likely that readers would have been widely familiar with Orpheus as a symbol of poetry and values of civilization, as well as the authority of kings. Angela Locatelli writes in her survey of the Orpheus myth in early Jacobean literature that:

> …in the early modern context Orpheus is re-configured mostly in a tripartite function: as a musician-poet, as the prophet of a mystical religion, and as the founder of civil society. These three roles work both separately and jointly in different authors and in the numberless versions of the story.[54]

One example of the myth's widespread association with culture and civilization is Ben Jonson's parody of Orpheus taming the beasts in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). In that play, one of the protagonists arrives at the fair and mocks a vendor and debauched puppet show proprietor for his animal souvenirs, commenting "'Slid! Here's Orpheus among the beasts, with his fiddle and all!"[55] Finally, Sean Keilen traces the depictions of Orpheus in Geoffrey Whitney's influential *A Choice of Emblemes and other Devises* (1585-86).[56] While Shakespeare does not reference the myth in a systematic or allegorical way, *King Lear*'s titular character evokes the foundational poet's powers to command nature and build civilizations.

Shakespeare uses these telltale affinities and references to link the communal consequences of Lear's overthrow and death to his loss of credibility as a purveyor of

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[53] Regarding Sidney, Angela Locatelli writes that he "discusses the effects of his art [poesy] in relation to both the dissemination of knowledge and a salutary strategy of civil governance." "Reconfiguring Classical Myth in Early Modern England: Orpheus as a 'Tutelary Diety' of Poetry and Civilization," *Allusions and Reflections: Greek and Roman Mythology in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Elizabeth Waghall Nivre (Cambridge Scholars Publishers: Newcastle-on-Tyne, 2015), 108.

[54] Locatelli, "Reconfiguring Classical Myth," 114.

[55] Ben Jonson, "Bartholomew Fair," *The Alchemist and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 327-433, (2.5.6-7).

[56] See: Sean Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence: On the Renaissance Invention of English Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 32-88.

fictions, implicating the play more deeply in the arguments of early modern poetics. Lear's Britain does not merely lose a ruler with his fall. It loses a coherent fiction of national destiny. My use of the Orpheus myth is complicated by the fact that the story takes myriad forms and appeared in dozens of potential sources, which Shakespeare and his contemporaries could have drawn upon.[57] My interest in Orpheus focuses on the ways Shakespeare engages with Renaissance ideals about kingship, language's harmonic power to build a civilization around a shared imaginative vision, and humanity's authority over nature. It is more a question of thematic refraction than direct reflection, though there are a few telling passages where versions of the myth resurface in the play's dialogue, as opposed to its thematic undercurrents.

Sean Keilen offers the fullest treatment of the Orpheus myth and its civilizational significance, which are recalled in Lear's ceremonial attempt to orchestrate his succession and impose his authority on successive generations. He argues that English references to Orpheus initially followed Horace in making him "a placeholder for a larger claim about the epistemological value of poetry and eloquence: a way of arguing that poetry is the most authoritative modality of knowledge, because it is the most ancient form of communication."[58] In this light, Orpheus is commonly invoked as an aged foundational figure by an interpretive tradition that "traces the genealogy of eloquence—as a distinctive kind of composition—backward from modern writing to ancient speech and finally to the

[57] Syrithe Pugh's recent work describes the range of potential Orphean sources and resonances—some of which retained happy endings for the Eurydice myth well into the late Middle Ages—that Spenser likely drew upon throughout his career. Her article highlights the persistence and power of this image, as well as the difficulties of tracing borrowings from, and references to, the myth to a definitive source. See: "Orpheus and Eurydice in the Middle Books of *The Faerie Queene*," *Spenser Studies* 31-32 (2018): 1-41.

[58] Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence*, 33.

foundation of the world itself."[59] Keilen's study of sixteenth-century emblems suggests that because of his venerability, Orpheus "is associated with the artist-deities of *Metamorphoses* and Genesis and so with the power to differentiate" among objects as a stand-in for Adam in his naming of the animals in Genesis 2.[60] In either case, Orpheus's words create the world or, at a minimum, order and divide it. This makes him a figure of immense power over nature and unruly human impulses:

> The poet can compose a city out of rocks and a people out of beasts because, in this primeval scene, time has not yet separated words from things. To compose language is therefore to compose the natural world: Reality is what it is because Orpheus, like Adam, says so.[61]

Lear, as I will argue, occupies a similar role at the start of the play. Or, more accurately, he thinks he does.

Sidney, echoing a tradition by which early modern English literature conflated Orpheus' educative, material, and political power, goes so far as to name the poet as a civilizational *pater familias*—one of the "fathers in learning."[62] *King Lear* literalizes Sidney's metaphor of kingship and fatherhood by making Lear's daughters the recipients of his civilization-ordering, yet ultimately destructive, commands. The connection between Orpheus and kingly authority is latent in sources like Sidney, where he is described primarily as a father of civilization, but explicit in a medieval

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[59] Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence*, 54. Keilen's project defines "eloquence" as "what the Renaissance regarded as the literariness of ancient literature." The term "thus evokes the wider vocabulary that the period used in order to describe the superlativeness and excellence of composition in general," and ancient languages in particular (22-26). The larger claim of Keilen's argument is that vernacular writers used figures like Orpheus to appropriate this classical eloquence for their own "vulgar" languages, thereby creating a new type of "vulgar eloquence" (21).

[60] Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence*, 75.

[61] Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence*, 40.

[62] Sidney writes "Nay, let any history be brought that can say any writers were there before them, if they were not men of the same skill, as Orpheus, Linus, and some other are named, who, having been the first of that country that made pens deliverers of knowledge to posterity, may justly be called their fathers in learning…" "The Defence of Poesy," 4.

Locatelli also cites this passage as an example of the central status Sidney attributes to Orpheus. "Reconfiguring Classical Myth," 114.

romance tradition that Shakespeare would likely have known. One medieval manuscript romance, *Sir Orfeo*, derives from a Breton lay and recounts a version of the Orpheus and Eurydice story in which Sir Orfeo rescues Eurydice—named Heurodis in this version—from a hybrid classical underworld and fairyland. The story describes him as the king of Thrace, which the narrator contends actually describes the Anglo-Saxon city of Winchester.[63] It describes how Sir Orfeo abdicated and lived in the wild for years before rescuing Heurodis and returning to Winchester to test his steward, who is found loyal, and resume his rule. There is no direct evidence that Shakespeare knew *Sir Orfeo*, but there are multiple ways he could have encountered the Orpheus-as-king tradition. For instance, Syrithe Pugh has speculated that Spenser may have encountered this poem, either in manuscript, in a now-lost print edition, or Celtic oral tradition.[64] Similarly, Shakespeare may have known Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* which was printed at least once in 1508. That poem describes Orpheus as a Thracian king and recounts Eurydice's unsuccessful rescue.[65] Stanley Wells notes in his introduction to *Troilus and Cressida* that "Shakespeare would have

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[63] Anonymous, "Sir Orfeo," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume 1*, eds. Alfred David and James Simpson (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 1170.

[64] Pugh, "Orpheus and Eurydice in the Middle Books of *The Faerie Queene*," 22-23. Helen Cooper's exhaustive study of romance and England emphasizes that the paucity of print records and surviving editions belies the continued cultural importance of medieval romance in the sixteenth century:

> What is abundantly clear is that the native romances retained a popularity out of all proportion to the evidence of the printed record alone. It is as misleading to see the absence of new editions as indicating a lack of knowledge of them as it is to measure their popularity earlier in the century by the number of copies surviving.

The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 36.

[65] Robert Henryson, "Orpheus and Eurydice," *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Robert L. Kindrick (Kalamazoo: TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, 1997), 192.

known" Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*, so the playwright may well have encountered other works by the Scottish poet.[66]

The pageantry Lear has orchestrated for the play's opening scene places him in a position like that occupied by Orpheus playing for the beasts and the birds in his theatre. Consider Arthur Golding's description of the Orphean theatre from his 1567 translation of the *Metamorphoses*:

> There was a hyll, and on the hyll a verie levell plot,
> Fayre greene with grasse. But as for shade or covert was there not.
> As soone as that this Poet borne of Goddes, in that same place
> Sate downe and toucht his tuned strings, a shadow came apace.
> There wanted neyther Chaons tree, nor yit the trees to which
> Fresh Phaetons susters turned were, nor Beeche, nor Holme, nor Wich,
> Nor gentle Asp, nor wyvelesse Bay, nor lofty Chestnuttree.[67]

Orpheus sits down on a bare hill and as he plays the music summons trees to shade him. The catalog of tree species extends for 15 lines in Golding's translation. Lear's bequest to Goneril is notable as an Orphean act of ordering the material world and for its focus on trees and shade:

> Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
> With shadowy forests and with champaigns riched,
> With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
> We make thee lady. (1.1.63-66)

Like Orpheus, ordering the physical world from his hilltop vantage, Lear divides up his kingdom from the abstracted distance of the map.

Lear's opening pageant resembles the scene of Orpheus' theatre for its focus on relational harmony and order, and not just mastery over nature, as responses to the poet's song or the king's command. Citing Sidney's use of the myth in the *Defence of*

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[66] Stanley Wells, "Introduction: Troilus and Cressida." *The Oxford Shakespeare, Second Edition*, eds. John Jowett, et al., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 743.

[67] Ovid, *The xv Bookes of P. Ovidius Naso, entitled Metamorphoses*, Book X. trans. Aurthur Golding (London: 1575), R.i.v.

Poesy as her primary example, Locatelli argues that Neoplatonic readings of poetry and music "as a powerful means of social and cultural reconciliation" appear in "numerous early-modern English 'apologies' for poetry and music." She suggests that the trope symbolizes "the victory of culture and civil society over 'brutish' nature" and calls this meaning "the most important early-modern ideological appropriation of the myth of Orpheus."[68] Golding's description of Orpheus' shaded hill emphasizes his mastery over wild beasts, and the harmonization of their dissonant calls:

> Such wood as this had Orphye drawen about him as among
> The herdes of beasts, and flocks of Birds he sate amyds the throng.
> And when his thumbe sufficiently had tryed every string,
> And found that though they severally in sundry sounds did ring,
> Yit made they all one Harmonie, he thus began to sing: ...[69]

Lear explicitly references political harmony as one of his goals when he describes his "darker purpose" (1.1.43) as an effort to prevent future strife.

The Orphean themes of harmony are otherwise built into the rhythms of the scene. When Lear demands stylized declarations of love from his daughters he resembles the arch poet drawing responses from wild beasts in Ovid and myriad other versions of the story, including Sidney's assertion that Orpheus was "listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people" (DP 5). Animal imagery is woven throughout the play to an unusual extent and becomes more pronounced as it

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[68] Locatelli, "Reconfiguring Classical Myth in Early Modern England," 113-114.
These types of claims persisted throughout the seventeenth century. Katherine Butler explores numerous references to Orpheus' power over nature and human society in early modern English poetics and musicology. Many of these rely on the version presented in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, mediated by writers like Sidney and Puttenham. For instance, she cites Sir William Waller's meditation "upon hearing good music" (London, 1680) as "allegoriz[ing] the music of Orpheus and Amphion as merely representing the power of persuasion, and the taming of beasts or moving of rocks and trees as the civilizing of barbarous people." See: "Changing Attitudes Towards Classical Mythology and Their Impact on Notions of the Powers of Music in Early Modern England," *Music & Letters* 97.1 (February 1, 2016), 48.

[69] Ovid, *The xv Bookes of P. Ovidius Naso, entitled Metamorphoses*, Book X, O.viii.v.

progresses and Lear's fragile civilization falls into discord.[70] When it becomes clear that Regan will not take him in with his knights, Lear declares his intent to live among the beasts as Orpheus does after failing to rescue Eurydice:

> Return to her? And fifty men dismissed?
> No! Rather I abjure all roofs and choose
> To wage against the enmity o'th' air –
> To be a comrade with the wolf and owl –
> Necessity's sharp pinch! (2.2.396-400)

In the Quarto version, Albany chastises Goneril for her abuse of Lear. He contrasts her with wild beasts, which he claims would show reverence for the aged king and aligns him with Orpheus, who goes unharmed among the beasts:

> Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?
> A father, and a gracious aged man
> Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would lick,
> Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you madded.
> Could my good brother suffer you to do it?
> A man, a prince, by him so benefitted?
> If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
> It will come:
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
> Like monsters of the deep. (4.2.41-51)

When they kill Orpheus, Ovid describes the Thracian women as "frenzied" and "wearing the skins of beasts."[71] In the *Metamorphoses*, Bacchus does indeed visit swift vengeance on the perpetrators, but no such divine judgment is forthcoming in *King Lear*, where God is absent and Lear's suffering goes unavenged.

Even the structure of the play's opening scene emphasizes harmony between Goneril and Regan's expressions of love and Lear's bequests. Before Cordelia

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[70] Shannon writes that "Lear's catalogue of animal references astonishes" and provides an extensive summary of references. "Poor, Bare, Forked," 195.

[71] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), XI.4-5. In this case the modern translation is truer to the Latin—"ferinis / pectora velleribus"—than Golding's translation of "red deer skinnes about / Their furious brists."

objects, the daughters respond to Lear like the beasts harmonizing with Orpheus's song. Goneril's declaration is the more concrete of the two, since she describes her abstracted love in relation to the senses—"eyesight"—and the perceptible world—"Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare / No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour" (1.1.66-68). Lear's response, as quoted above, focuses on the beauty and bounty of the visible landscape and, presumably with a gesture to the map, names the "bounds" (1.1.63) of her inheritance. Regan's performance is more internalized—based on a comparison of her feelings of love with Goneril's:

> Only she comes too short, that I profess
> Myself an enemy of all other joys
> Which the most precious square of sense possesses
> And find I am alone felicitate
> In your dear highness's love. (1.1.72-76)

When Lear describes her inheritance as "No less in space, validity and pleasure" than Goneril's, he echoes Regan's comparison of her love with her elder sister's and also focuses on "pleasure" in response to Regan's "joys." Regan refuses sensory pleasures in her speech, and Lear does not allude to them in his response. Up to the dissonance of Cordelia's "Nothing, my lord" (1.1.87), the exchange unfolds as a performance of Orphic harmony where Lear bids his daughters speak and then responds to them in a way that harmonizes with the style and content of their speeches.

The storm scene is of course the most famous instance of Lear claiming (erroneously) the power to control even nature itself. Act 1, scene 1 shows Lear as an Orphean figure organizing the natural world, but in the storm he claims authority over nature in order to unmake a world after he has discovered that his children and the elements "owe me no subscription" (3.2.18):

> Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
> You cataracts and hurricanes, spout
> Till you have drenched our steeples, drown the cocks!
> You sulphrous and thought-executing fires,
> Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
> Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
> Strike flat the thick rotundity o'the world,
> Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
> That make ingrateful man! (3.2.1-9)

One might object that Lear's sanity is questionable at this point, so any claims of Orphean power over nature are a product of his madness instead of a deeply-held belief about his own authority. Yet earlier in the play he claims a capacity to command the elements when he curses Goneril:

> All the stored vengeances of heaven fall
> On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones,
> You taking airs, with lameness! (2.2.351-353)

When Oswald ignores Lear's commands and the Fool will not come when called in Act 1, scene 4, Lear yells "Ho, I think the world's asleep" (1.4.47) as if the universe were uncharacteristically neglectful. This view is so deeply ingrained in Lear's psyche that later, after Goneril has made it clear she will not honor his commands, he wonders whether this inversion of the normally-attentive world is actually a bad dream: "Ha! Sleeping or waking? Sure 'tis not so" (1.4.220-221). Lear may be mad in the storm scene, but his commandments to nature in that instant are an extension of his presuppositions in earlier scenes.

A gap between characters' actions, identities, and ideals begins to emerge in the Kent-Gloucester-Edmund exchange, but at least for the first 86 lines of the play it looks like the other characters may subscribe to Lear's vision of authority. Perhaps, we are allowed to think, this performance of harmony between family members, and

not the brutish natural order obscured by Gloucester's tattered fiction, is the governing order of the play's ancient Britain. Goneril and Regan's professions of love appear to ratify Lear's will and offer hope that a stable, sustainable political order has been established. Lear recognizes his opening ceremony as an Orphean fiction of commanding humanity and nature alike only when he realizes it was an untenable act of mutual flattery:

> When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter; then the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o'their words: they told me I was everything; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof. (4.6.100-104)

Lear seems to view his words not as commandments with power over nature and his subjects, but as a means of giving and receiving love and care.

This change, which he associates with the storm, is evident once he decides to enter the hovel to escape the wind and rain. To seek shelter is, for Lear, a psychologically harrowing admission of the storm's power over him that he initially resists. Why else would he ask "Wilt break my heart?" (3.4.4) of entering the hovel? Once inside the shelter his language turns from a (failed) instrument of power to one of sympathy for the hovel's inhabitants (3.4.28-36). After Lear and Cordelia are captured by British forces he repeatedly refuses to speak to Goneril and Regan and retreats instead to a fantasy of tender imprisonment with Cordelia: "No, no, no, no. Come, let's away to prison; / We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage" (5.3.8-9). In addition to singing in his retirement, he will use his powers of speech to ask Cordelia's forgiveness, "pray, and sing, and tell old tales," "talk of court news," and "take upon's the mystery of things / As if we were God's spies" (5.3.10-16). The scope of Lear's authority has shrunk to an imagined prison cell, and his language of

power from Act 1 has been transformed into a means of expressing love and sympathy. The blessing he refused his daughter in the opening scene he offers here: "When thou dost ask me blessing I'll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness" (5.3.10-11). By losing his authority and recovering Cordelia, Lear has undergone the metamorphosis he resisted so violently at the beginning of the play.

As he carries Cordelia onto the stage at the end of Act 5, Lear descends to bestial howling and laments the failure of his Orphean attempt to order the world and the course of his kingdom with authoritative speech. Sidney and the poetic tradition he embodies may claim the poet-king's foundational power to be "listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people" (DP 5), but Lear does not even believe his cries can pierce the stony hearts of the onlookers, any more than they can restore Cordelia to life:

> Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones!
> Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
> That heaven's vault should crack: she's gone for ever. (5.3.255-57)

Arguably Shakespeare's most direct and poignant borrowing from the Orpheus myth comes a dozen lines later, where Lear's attempts to revive Cordelia echo Ovid's depiction of Eurydice slipping back into the underworld:

> Immediatly shee slipped backe. He retching out his hands,
> Desyrous to bee caught and for to ketch her grasping stands.
> But nothing save the slippry aire (unhappy man) he caught.
> Shee dying now the second tyme complaynd of Orphye naught.
> For why what had shee to complayne, onlesse it were of love
> Which made her husband backe agen his eyes uppon her move?
> Her last farewell shee spake so soft, that scarce he heard the sound,
> And then revolted to the place in which he had her found.[72]

[72] Ovid, *The xv Bookes of P. Ovidius Naso, entitled Metamorphoses*, Book X, O.viii.v.

Three times after he carries her body onto the stage, Lear seeks a sign that Cordelia still breathes. The first two tests are whether "her breath will mist or stain the stone" (5.3.260) and if her exhalations can make a feather stir (5.3.263). Then he begs her to speak and strains to listen like Orpheus striving to make out Eurydice's final farewell:

> Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little. Ha?
> What is't thou sayst? Her voice was ever soft,
> Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman. (5.3.269-272)

Lear's descent into madness and death feels mythic precisely because he starts the play as an archetypal foundational figure. His fall, and his kingdom's ruin, maps onto Renaissance humanists' template for how civilizations are built, sustained, and—since Orpheus is murdered by the Thracian women—destroyed. *King Lear*'s Orphean resonances amplify the significance of its vision of a language that is impotent to knit society together through power alone.

5: Romance Counter-Fictions and Imaginative Exhaustion

The speed with which *King Lear*'s familial and political ties implode is dizzying, and one of the most interesting aspects of the play as an exploration of communal poetics is the way some of its characters seek to arrest the collapse of their shared political consciousness. Passannante's juxtaposition of Gloucester's imaginative contortions with Lear's captures their spiraling experience of disorientation as the play unfolds:

> The drama of *quidlibet ex quolibet* that plays out around the interpretation of the letter sets the stage for another scene of disaster. Edmund's raising of 'catastrophe' looks forward to the pathetic sight of Lear in the midst of an actual disaster in which he himself is no longer able to make of the world what he will—and his own 'atomes of nobilitie' are reduced to the stuff of a quivering body on stage.

> Here, Lear struggles to make sense of the storm, shifting rapidly between various interpretations—none of which quite hold.[73]

The characters who recognize Lear's grasping for eternal authority for the potentially catastrophic delusion that it is and hope to preserve the kingdom and its communal ideals turn overwhelmingly to the conventions of romance. This is a genre that characteristically embraces metamorphosis in the form of fluid identities, loss of agency, and intergenerational change, all of which Lear and Gloucester fear. This section examines how these characters turn to romance as a sustaining fiction and how the genre's core presuppositions of a providential order and restoration of community become untenable as the play unfolds. The problem facing the characters is not only that Lear's mythos of Orphean authority has collapsed, it is the fact that no one else is able to replace it with anything as unifying or coherent. In the end, I suggest that the failure of romance ideals to reconstitute society in some way validates—at least in the minds of the characters who adhere to and then abandon its causal vision—the fears of permanent and degrading metamorphosis that motivate Gloucester and Lear at the outset of the play.

As a means of constructing a shared identity, romance is, in many ways, the obvious choice, and Shakespeare seems keen to signal his deviation from it. *King Lear* diverges from all of its sources—both romance and chronicle—by making the British forces victorious and killing Cordelia while Lear still lives. More importantly, Shakespeare refuses to sustain any perspective that allows characters or audiences to believe in a hidden providential order. For instance, the story of Lear and his daughters functions as part of a long saga of national destiny in Spenser in a way that

[73] Passannante, *Catastrophizing,* 132-133.

echoes Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*. Sidney singles out "heroical" poetry, mainly a mix of epic and romance, as his best argument about poetry's power to articulate a national myth and traces collective identity to the foundational heroes whose virtues are imaginatively presupposed:

> For by what conceit can a tongue be directed to speak evil of that which draweth with him no less champions than Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, Tydeus and Rinaldo; who doth not only teach and move to a truth, but reacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth; who maketh magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires; who, if the saying of Plato and Tully be true, that who could see virtue would be wonderfully ravished with the love of her beauty…(DP 29)[74]

Spenser's version of the Lear story situates it in a chronicle of British royals from the mythical Brutus to Uther Pendragon. In a Spenserian nod to Sidney, reading this history leaves Arthur "rauisht with delight."[75] Judith Anderson observes that even the play's tragic ending is, for its original audiences, "a blatant fiction" that flouts the literary and historical versions of the story they would have known and Shakespeare would have drawn from.[76] Shakespeare's play also stems at least in part from the anonymous 1605 *King Leir*, in which Cordella and her husband the King of France restore Leir to his throne after routing the sisters' forces. The King of Cambria's claim that "The heavens are just, and hate impiety" (22.30), which is echoed by

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[74] Epic virtues, namely "magnanimity and justice" are among the consummate political virtues of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, which Robert E. Stillman calls "perhaps the single best-known primer for the humanistically educated of sixteenth-century Europe." Stillman argues that Sidney's architectonic vision of poetry follows the *Nichomachean Ethics* in identifying politics and public life as "the master science among sciences." *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 30.

For the relevant passages in Aristotle, see Book IV, Chapter 3 and Book V, Chapter 6 of the *Nichomachean Ethics*.

[75] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, eds. Hamilton, Yamashita, and Suzuki (New York: Pearson, 2007) II.x.69.1. The Lear story is recounted in II.x.27-36 and concludes with the extinction of Brutus' line generations after the events of Shakespeare's play take place.

[76] J. Anderson, "The Conspiracy of Realism: Impasse and Vision in 'King Lear,'" 5.

Shakespeare's Edgar in a way that feels pat and unconvincing, distills the anonymous play's prevailing and largely unchallenged causal order.[77]

Throughout the play, characters and audiences seem unusually primed to impose romance conventions on *King Lear* in order to clarify how its world works. This stems in part from the characters themselves—specifically, France, Cordelia, and, to the greatest extent, Kent and Edgar—who invoke romance conventions and narrative expectations. Consider the role that chance and the surrender of agency and control play in romance, particularly when compared to Lear and Gloucester's willingness to sacrifice everything for certainty and control. Michael Witmore writes in his study of the philosophical concept of the accident and its literary manifestations in Renaissance England that in romance "we find the full array of contingent or accidental events that were habitually attributed to Fortune" and that "here accidents and chance encounters are not an interruption of the regular order of things but rather an integral part of a landscape which is obliged to supply them for the purpose of advancing the plot."[78] France is arguably the first character to recognize a romance causal system, governed by fortune and "chance," when he announces his plans to wed Cordelia:

> Gods, gods! 'Tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
> My love should kindle to inflamed respect
> Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
> Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France. (1.1.256-259)

Kent, placed in the stocks, appeals to Fortune: "Fortune, good night: smile once more; turn thy wheel" (2.2.171). In keeping with the 1605 *King Leir* and many of

[77] Anonymous, *King Leir*, eds. Barboura Flores and Robert Brazil (London, 1605)
[78] Michael Witmore, *Culture of Accidents in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 25.

Shakespeare's sources, these characters articulate a romance perspective that ascribes causal agency to providential forces beyond their power, and which Lear and Gloucester seem unable to affirm.

Shakespeare also primes audiences to align their expectations with romance conventions, namely political restoration and generational succession under a providential order, by invoking other versions of the Lear story, which traditionally draw from romance rather than tragedy. The play takes its Gloucester subplot from Book II of Sidney's *New Arcadia* and there are echoes of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, both superficial and structural.[79] Shakespeare invokes romance tropes like an ordered universe, which are already stretched to their limits in Sidney and Spenser, only to abandon them. The effect as described by the surviving characters is not one of tragedy, which offers catharsis alongside pity and terror, but a mix of despair for older characters like Kent and Albany and confusion about how to interpret what has occurred and how to rebuild the kingdom's shared imaginative vision for Edgar. It is not the magnitude or visceral nature of the suffering the play stages that places it beyond the pale of its sources. Rather, it is the way the characters themselves abandon the generically-inflected thought patterns that could contain their suffering and make

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[79] Along these lines, Foakes contends that:

> …the most interesting connections between the play and *Arcadia* are perhaps to be found not in specific verbal or narrative links, but in thematic concerns, as in the treatment of patriarchy, of desire, of nature, of female power in Goneril and Regan, and in the articulation of a skeptical attitude towards the idea that God (or gods in Shakespeare's play) has any providential care of human beings.

He cites Shakespeare's spelling of Cordelia as a "nod" to Spenser's version of the King Leyr story in Book II, Canto 10. The most sophisticated reading of Shakespeare's debt to Spenser comes from Judith Anderson, which posits "certain pronounced elements in *Lear* to be allegorical, relying in part on [her] audience's general awareness of Spenser's work and of the climate of criticism on allegory in the past two decades or so." See: Foakes, "Introduction," *King Lear*, 102, 95-96; and Anderson, "The Conspiracy of Realism," 9.

it meaningful. Their confusion forces them to acknowledge an incomprehensible universe and thereby prompts audiences to presuppose a state of imaginative exhaustion and disorientation that is itself an imaginative response to the play.

Readers and adaptors of *King Lear* over the next two centuries seem to sense its affinity with romance even as they acknowledge that Shakespeare's tragedy is of a different order. Helen Cooper observes that English romance "incorporates an exceptionally high proportion" of stories from history and tragedy which cause "a change in expectations, towards those raised by the prose of factual chronicle, and so invited the inclusion of disasters of the kind associated with both the legendary and the real past and the present."[80] Yet even the influence of history does not explain Cordelia's death in Act 5, which goes beyond the historical bent of English romance as Cooper describes it. If the world found in histories is "brazen" according to Sidney, then is the imaginative world of Shakespeare's Albion composed of iron? Cordelia restores Lear to his throne and dies by suicide years afterward in all of the play's known sources, including Book II of the *Faerie Queene* and Holinshed's chronicle. Graham Holderness and Naomi Carter contend that Nahum Tate's seventeenth century rewrite of *King Lear* "helps to convert the dramatic action from tragedy to romance."[81] In a move that makes the revised play seem less inscrutable and more like the 1605 *King Leir*, Tate's version seeks to clarify the characters' motives and their causal power over the play's action and make both the world of the play and the

[80] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time,* 3, 363.

[81] Graham Holderness and Naomi Carter, "The King's Two Bodies: Text and Genre in King Lear," *Journal of the English Association* 45 (181): 2.

characters' interior lives comprehensible.[82] Two centuries later, John Keats' sonnet begins with an address to "golden-tongued Romance" and an imperative to "Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute."[83] The implication is that romance is antithetical to the experience of reading *King Lear*, and if Keats is to confront Shakespeare's play on its own terms then romance conventions and expectations must be put away.[84]

As a genre, Renaissance romance insists on a divinely ordered cosmos and the eventual restoration of human affairs in accordance with that providential order; *King Lear*, in contrast, sustains an experience of disorientation or irresolution. Michael L. Hays defines romance as governed by an "overarching moral idealism" that places "human experience," however tragic, within "a morally ordered universe."[85] Helen Cooper observes that the genre follows a "typical pattern of an opening disruption of a state of order, followed by a period of trial and suffering, even an encounter with death, yet with a final symbolic resurrection and better restoration."[86] These conventions offer characters and audiences a way to circumscribe and contain a play whose characteristic experience is disorientation. Their appeal may explain why

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[82] Summarizing Peter Womack, David K. Anderson writes that "what fundamentally distinguishes Tate's melodramatic rewriting of *King Lear* from Shakespeare's original is that Tate applies cause-and-effect logic to all the characters, their speeches and their motives." David K. Anderson, "The Tragedy of Good Friday: Sacrificial Violence in King Lear," *English Literary History* 72.2 (Summer 2011): 274.

[83] John Keats, "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again," *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (Boston: Wadsworth, 1995), 1217-1218.

[84] The most prominent argument that *King Lear* actually is a romance comes from Micheal L. Hays. He opens his study of *King Lear* with the claim that Shakespeare "transformed and complicated the plot lines of his major sources so that the action develops and resolves itself largely and radically in terms of chivalric romance," complete with a restoration of political order at the end. *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 191.

[85] Hays, *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance*, 19.

[86] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time,* 5. Aside from the two examples quoted here, the reassertion of divine order is a commonly cited generic litmus test for romance. Northrop Frye writes that "most romances exhibit a cyclical movement of descent into a night world and a return to the idyllic world, or to some symbol of it like a marriage." *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 54.

subsequent generations of readers and audiences have either acknowledged *King Lear*'s fundamental conflict with a world governed by romance and its causal order or sought to reinscribe it within that order. Booth contends that the play, and especially Cordelia's death, defies such comprehension. Instead it highlights:

> …our own—mental vulnerability**,** a vulnerability made absolutely inescapable when the play pushes inexorably beyond its own identity, rolling across and crushing the very framework that enables its audience to endure the otherwise terrifying explosion of all manner of ordinarily indispensible mental contrivances for isolating, limiting, and comprehending.[87]

It is interesting that the intense disorientation Booth describes requires more, not less, imaginative vision than even the most pessimistic romance. To reframe this section's argument in his terms, something about the way certain characters invoke and then abandon romance constitutes an active refusal of its implicit ideals. The question becomes how the fear and imaginative effort of sustained uncertainty could become more real to them than a congenial, if avowedly fictional, way of interpreting the world.

Something of *King Lear*'s romance sources remains, and its presence makes the play's refusal to offer a restoration all the more jarring. Especially for Kent and Edgar, romance provides the set of conventions to which their minds retreat. Edgar quotes from the popular medieval English romance *Sir Bevis of Hampton* when disguised as Poor Tom: "But mice and rats and such small deer / Have been Tom's food for seven long year" (3.4.134-35). Hays observes that this passage is one of only two known instances in which a Shakespeare play quotes a romance, and suggests that "the quotation tacitly and appropriately alludes to the protagonist of this

[87] Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, & Tragedy*, 11.

romance."[88] There are enough details elsewhere to remind us of the genre's importance to the characters' self conceptions, even if those beliefs unravel as the play progresses. Edgar's Poor Tom conflates the hero of *Le Chanson de Roland* and what Foakes calls "a familiar cry from some version of Jack the Giant-killer" at the close of Act 3, scene 4:[89]

> Childe Rowlande to the dark tower came,
> His word was still 'Fie, foh and fum,
> I smell the blood of a British man.' (3.4.178-80)

In Act 2 Kent's threats against Oswald contain what may be an obscure reference to Arthurian legend and chivalric combat: "Goose, if I had you upon Sarum plain, / I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot" (2.2.81-82).[90] Hays describes the single combat scene in Act 5, complete with challenges by Edgar, Albany, and Edmund, as "a compendium of chivalric detail."[91] His romance reading of the play even leads him to claim that:

> …when the narrative and thematic conflicts converge, when single combat resolves them, and when Edgar triumphs over Edmund and succeeds Lear as king, *King Lear* closes by ratifying chivalric romance and endorsing its idealism.[92]

Making a claim that exceeds almost every other reading of the play in its ambition, he even goes so far as to argue that Lear and Cordelia's fates are a "punishment…consistent with the retributive justice of an ordered but remorseless

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[88] The other is Falstaff's echo of the first two lines of the ballad of Sir Lancelot du Lake in *2 Henry IV*.II.iv.33, 35. Hays, *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance*, 27-28.

[89] Stephen Orgel, "Notes: The Complete Pelican Shakespeare," *King Lear: A Conflated Text* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1,587.

[90] Foakes describes this reference as "unexplained" in his Arden edition of the play. However, it is clear that Camelot refers to "the legendary home of King Arthur." "Notes," *King Lear*, 230. Stephen Orgel's notes in the *Complete Pelican Shakespeare* link Sarum Plain to Salisbury Plain, near Winchester, which was "thought to have been" the site of Camelot. See: "Notes: The Complete Pelican Shakespeare," *King Lear: A Conflated Text*, 1,587.

[91] Hays, *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance*, 204.

[92] Hays, *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance*, 192.

universe," and that the audience can "sense a triumphant moral order implied by them."[93] Lacking any clear explanation of why this "remorseless" moral order is justified on the basis of Lear's purported "vanity" and Cordelia's refusal to speak in Act 1, Hays' argument is the critical equivalent of Edgar's pronouncement that "the gods are just."[94]

If *King Lear*'s affinity with romance conventions resonates as a way of making the play comprehensible and offering its characters hope of a satisfying resolution, then this begs the question: where does the play deviate from its romance sources and influences in a way that makes it feel so uncanny? The difference cannot be attributed to plot choices, such as Cordelia's death, or even the intrusion of other genres. Cooper makes a strong case that, just like works based on chronicle histories, romances with tragic endings still fall within the category even if they strain its boundaries.[95] *Morte Darthur* is one prominent and early English example that is notable for the senseless destruction of its cataclysmic final civil war, but it maintains what Cooper calls romance's concentration on the survivors with its closing focus on the retirement, repentance, and deaths of Lancelot and Guinevere.[96] Unlike in *King Lear*, questions of succession are firmly decided and the realm moves on, though not without diminishment. Moreover, there is a sense of responsibility for tragic errors

[93] Hays, *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance*, 208, 95.

[94] Hays, *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance*, 207. See especially pages 206-210 of Hays's argument for romance motifs and causal assumptions in *King Lear*. As indicated above, I find his arguments about romance resonances throughout the play compelling and provocative, but disagree on the extent to which the play ultimately conforms to, much less affirms, romance conventions.

[95] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time,* 363.

[96] Cooper writes that "from the death of Gareth forwards, the *Morte Darthur* moves beyond moral or providential explanation." She describes the disastrous final battle, precipitated when an anonymous knight draws his sword to strike an adder that has bitten him, as replacing "the conventional combat of named knights, with its implicit promise of victory for the most righteous," with "universal carnage." See: *The English Romance in Time*, 402.

that extends the cathartic promise that suffering has fostered learning to the survivors and Mallory's readers. First Guinevere, and then Lancelot, attribute Arthur's death to "oure love that we have loved togydir" and "myn orgule and my pryde," respectively.[97] Finally, *Morte Darthur* ends with Mallory's equivocation that Arthur "changed hys lyff," which hints at the potential for restoration. It also incorporates Mallory's own moralizing on the political capriciousness of "all Englysshemen" in a direct address to his readers.[98]

Meanwhile, *King Lear* never manages to refute Lear's claim to be a "a man / More sinned against than sinning" (3.2.59-60), and Cordelia remains "dead as earth" (5.3.259). Shakespeare's play ends with Albany abdicating in favor of Kent, who refuses to rule, and Edgar, who lacks the moral gravitas to redeem their situation even if doing so were possible. There is no lesson, no chorus, and no explanation of the parallels between *King Lear* and contemporary English society. Kent's "Is this the promised end?" resolves itself into a final attempt to reunite with Lear and be recognized as the one who has "followed your sad steps" (5.3.288). He seeks to isolate Lear's bereavement from the rest of the characters:

> Lear: You're welcome hither.
> Kent: Nor no man else. All's cheerless, dark, and deadly;
> Your eldest daughters have foredone themselves
> And desperately are dead. (5.3.288-290).

For a moment it looks like the attempt might succeed. Albany steps forward with an "intent" that "What comfort to this great decay may come / Shall be applied"

[97] Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 692, 695.
[98] Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 689, 680.

(5.3.295-97). He urges his audience to envision a restored world where justice has been done:

> ...All friends shall taste
> The wages of their virtue and all foes
> The cup of their deservings. O, see, see! (3.5.301-303)

What the surviving characters and audience see immediately thereafter, however, is Lear's half mad lament for Cordelia. His question encapsulates the cosmic unfairness of his loss and renders Albany's claim of a just world governed by "deservings" untenable:

> And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life
> And thou no breath at all? O thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never. (5.3.304-308)

When Albany asks Kent to rule the "gored state" (5.3.319) with him and Edgar, Kent refuses to carry on and pledges instead to follow Lear to the grave (5.3.20-21). In the end he cannot insulate the survivors from the contagion of Lear's grief, nor can he escape the gravitational pull of his sympathy with Lear. The only community left to him is a shared grave.

Edgar also relinquishes his beliefs in a final restoration, and his transformation is highlighted even more by the lengths to which he went throughout the play to affirm his own destined redemption and convince his father to believe in an ameliorative cosmos. When he meets the blinded Gloucester and hears his father's pronouncement that "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport" (4.1.37-38), Edgar's first response (commonly rendered as an aside in modern editions to imply that he is commenting on his father's plight without addressing him) is to question the type of world that would see his father thus

wronged and require him to "play the fool to sorrow" (4.1.40): "How should this be?" (4.1.30). The question resonates as one of simple causal mechanics (i.e. "how did this happen?"), but it also implies a moral question of why their circumstances "should" be as they are. His response is to play the tempting devil to his father's suicidal intent by severing his damaged sensory awareness of the world. He makes Gloucester doubt his senses by claiming to be first too high to hear the nonexistent surf below them (4.6.20-22) and then too low to hear the "shrill-gorged lark" above the imaginary cliffs (4.6.57-59). He does this in order to replace Gloucester's misery with an imagined proposition that "Thy life's a miracle" (4.6.55). His "cure" for his father's "despair" (4.6.33-34) is to develop a fore "conceit" (4.6.43) of physical and spiritual redemption at the hands of a benevolent universe.

Edgar constructs an imagined objective vantage point for his father that resembles Lear's Orphean hilltop theatre and allows Gloucester to envision his existence as miraculous. He claims some of this supposed objectivity and authority elsewhere in glib, facile pronouncements, but the cliff scene is arguably the only time he comes close to convincing us. However, the end of the play finds him an exile from this imaginative space. He is unable to draw others to it as he attempted to do to Gloucester. Edgar reaches peak imagined objectivity when pronouncing his verdict on the defeated Edmund as the cause of his father's blinding:

> The gods are just and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us:
> The dark and vicious place where thee he got
> Cost him his eyes. (5.3.168-171)

This certainty begins to erode when Lear reenters carrying Cordelia. Edgar's response of "Or the image of that horror?" to Kent's "Is this the promised end?" (5.4.261-262)

is often taken as a reference to the Last Judgement.[99] Yet it is also an echo of Edmund describing Gloucester's supposed anger with him in the beginning of the play: "I have told you what I have seen and heard – but faintly; nothing like the image and horror of it" (1.2.173-174). Edmund claims that the reality of Gloucester's anger far exceeds what he is able to convey, and here Edgar returns to the sentiment. The "image and horror" in his mind is worse than the tableau on stage. He is admitting that his subjective experience of the play's conclusion is far worse than any experience he had been conditioned to expect from the world. It is an acknowledgement of the weight of his horror and his inability to describe it. When he speaks the play's final lines, they could be a direct response to Kent's declared intention to die with Lear:[100]

> Kent: I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;
> My master calls me, I must not say no.
> Edgar: The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (5.3.322-325)

By the time Edgar assumes the crown, he has relinquished his earlier aims of curing despair and embraced a more pessimistic outlook that is no longer capable of sustaining fictions of a benevolent world. By acknowledging what Kent and Lear have "borne" and seen, he admits the possibility of a world that could make life untenable and marvels at their strength to "live so long" therein. Edgar ratifies Kent's intended suicide as a fitting act of submission to an unjust world that would allow

[99] Foakes writes that "Edgar interprets the words for us as signifying the 'great doom's image (Mac 2.3.78), the end of the world, or the last judgement, as foretold by Christ in Matthew, 24, Mark 13, and Luke, 21." "Notes," *King Lear*, 386.

[100] In this reading and other cases where there are major discrepancies between the Quarto and Folio versions I follow the Folio, which assigns these lines to Edgar rather than to Albany.

excessive suffering. Having imagined the end of the world with Kent, he can find no basis for preventing his suicide as he did with Gloucester.

6. Metamorphosis, Seeing the World Feelingly and the Experience of Incomprehensibility

The failure of *King Lear*'s romance strains is rendered all the more devastating by the fact that the actions of its main adherents, namely Kent and Edgar, lead audiences to expect a fulfillment of the powerful tropes they self-consciously invoke. Their decision to disguise themselves stems in part from an implicit assumption that their desired order will reassert itself and their place in society will be restored. Their acts of metamorphosis are supposed to be temporary. Edgar goes through the motions of disguise, even emerging as a disinherited noble—the fair unknown of chivalric romance—via his single combat with Edmund, but the result is unsatisfying. He follows the pattern of a lost and recovered heir, yet his capacity to fulfill the duties of kingship remains tenuous at the end.[101] Cooper writes that "prowess in battle, faithfulness in marriage,...due reward of his followers, firm rule in accordance with the law, and keeping of his word" mark the divinely sanctioned and rightful king.[102] Edgar's success in battle is confirmed. His father's infidelity and his frequent references to sexual excesses in the guise of Poor Tom suggest cause for caution. Likewise, he has no followers at the play's conclusion—all of the other characters are either dead or have retreated from public life and he is unwilling to try

[101] Cooper writes that "the fair unknown, le bel inconnu or le beau desconnu, is most often a young man who undertakes a series of adventures in quest of his family identity." Frye argues that the logical beginning of romance adventures necessitates "some kind of break in consciousness" which "may be internalized as a break in memory, or externalized as a change in fortunes or social context." Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 332 and Frye, *The Secular Scripture, 102.*

[102] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 340.

to convince them to return. Even if Edgar emerged at the end of the play as the paragon of kingly virtue, he rules a society that no one appears to believe in or affirm. Similarly, Kent's assumption of disguise hinges on the belief that order and relationships will be restored, and that Lear "Shall find [him] full of labours" (1.4.7) and reward his loyalty. He protests to Cordelia that "To be acknowledged, madam, is o'erpaid" (4.7.4) and tells her of his "made intent" to remain disguised until a time of his choosing (4.7.9). Lear recognizes Kent at the end of the play, but does not acknowledge him (5.3.279-287). Kent's design is never fulfilled and our shared expectation of his redemption and acknowledgement is one more thwarted expectation hanging over the play.[103]

King Lear is not a romance, but neither can it be called a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense. David K. Anderson writes that the end of the play captures a breakdown of the logic justifying its acts of violence. There is nothing redemptive about Cordelia's murder, either for the dead or the community of the living. We might feel effects of pity and terror, but our attempts to extract a lesson from the ending do not even facilitate such postscript pronouncements as Lancelot and Guinevere's recriminations. As a result the play becomes "more than tragic," in Anderson's words, and enters the realm of incomprehensibility:

> In the last scene Shakespeare confronts the audience, not to mention the critics, with their own sacrificial expectations. It is not only a tragic hero like Othello who wants clean, aesthetically palatable violence, left shrouded behind the curtains; the audience expects much the same thing, as the sense of cleansing or purgation inherent in Aristotle's concept of catharsis would suggest. Here we have a heroine whose

[103] Kent undergoes a romance descent that parallels Edgar's, and remains in a grievously reduced state at the end of the play. Frye writes that Narcissan drowning or "disappearing into one's own mirror image, or entering a world of reversed or reduced dimensions, is a central symbol of descent." See: Frye, *The Secular Scripture, 108.*

> death is utterly without sacrificial palliatives, and the shock when the false promise of sacrificial transcendence is denied, when the audience is offered violence with no incense to perfume it, is more than tragic.[104]

Nor is our experience of disorientation restricted to Cordelia's death. Albany, whom Booth argues is "most like [the] audience," articulates this anti-tragic perspective even before Lear's final entrance carrying Cordelia: "This judgement of the heavens that makes us tremble / Touches us not with pity" (5.3.230-31).[105] He acknowledges fear, but not pity, for the dead Goneril, Regan, and Edmund. Even when confronted with Lear holding the dead Cordelia his reaction is to "resign" (5.3.297) the throne to Lear and make the empty promise that of justice (5.3.301-303). Only in abdicating to Kent and Edgar in his final lines (assuming he does not speak the play's last four lines, as he does in the Quarto version), does he start to comprehend that the action has moved beyond his capacity to understand and his power to orchestrate a morally satisfying conclusion.

Albany's attempts at order and conclusion ultimately fail, making him a final proxy for the audience's experience of disorientation. Yet his, and all other, efforts to tie up the play's action and deliver a clear, morally adequate response have been compromised almost from the beginning. Our experience of the play calls into question the causal fictions we must impose to achieve catharsis, before delivering Cordelia's death as a *coup de grace*. It erodes our certainty about how to identify with the characters and the interpretations they offer as a means of understanding the play's world. We conclude Act 5 intellectually exhausted and wary of assuming or projecting too much onto the staged action before us, or identifying overmuch with a

[104] D. Anderson, "The Tragedy of Good Friday," 274.
[105] Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, & Tragedy*, 47.

single character's perspective. At an even more fundamental level, the play itself repeatedly sets expectations only to dash them. Its depictions of time and distance are strangely warped, characters echo and mirror each other in ways that feel like they should point to an underlying web of sympathies that never comes into focus, and the only Dover Cliff we encounter turns out to be fake. We think we have been promised an Orphean foundational myth or at least a romance restoration, but neither perspective can be sustained in the face of the play's endless change. When Mack argues that *King Lear* achieves mythic effects by sacrificing recognizable causal patterns and "treat[s] of crime and reconciliation in poetic, not realistic, terms" his description of the play's impact resembles the untraceable workings of a Sidneian fore-conceit.[106] The play appears to have a unifying logic, but there is something about our experience of it that moves beyond causal plausibility as we can articulate it, or as Shakespeare's contemporaries would have known it through the lenses of genres cataloged by Sidney. If we attribute mythic significance to *King Lear*, it is only by a process of elimination that renders other genres and their hermeneutics for knowledge creation untenable. All of our other fictions of understanding we have given away.

In following the travails and imaginative metamorphoses of the play's more sympathetic characters, audiences are drawn into their experience of imaginative exhaustion in Act 5. This experience of incomprehension, created by Shakespeare's drama, demonstrates the power of poesy and the imagination. What we are left with at the end of *King Lear* is a vision of the imagination that is powerful but not necessarily architectonic or redemptive. While Shakespeare validates the power of Sidney's

[106] Mack, *King Lear in Our Time*, 97.

poetics, his play challenges the *Defence*'s claim that we can protect our imaginations from destructive fictions. Nor are we certain to maintain the fictions that stabilize our societies. The play's resonances of Orphean foundational poetics and romance myths of national destiny ring hollow and grow more conspicuous as imaginatively-created fictions as their plausibility erodes. What replaces these visions in *King Lear* is, like so much else about how the play affects us, left to the imagination. When the mad Lear tells the blind Gloucester "Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light, yet you see how this world goes," Gloucester responds "I see it feelingly" (4.6.142-145). The audience imagines what Gloucester perceives, yet we cannot articulate what the play makes us feel, or why. We are like Edgar, who promises to "speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (5.3.323) but leaves his words unspoken. As I discuss in my next chapter, Francis Bacon picks up Sidney's architectonic project at this critical moment and strives to escape *King Lear*'s Shakespearean nightmare of subjective, changeable, inarticulate imaginative vision by bypassing the imagination entirely. We end the play unaccommodated not in the physical sense, like Poor Tom, but bereft of sustainable fictions. In true Sidneian fashion, we struggle to say how Shakespeare has brought us to this place, and what it is about *King Lear* that makes us feel like we have lost something irrecoverable.

III. Edenic Landscapes and the Eclipse of the Imagination in Francis Bacon's Poetics of Natural History

The specter of civilizational decay that Shakespeare dramatizes in *King Lear* haunts Bacon's project. He writes, for instance, that "we know not whether our labours may extend to other ages."[1] This chapter argues that Bacon comes to associate the imagination and its fictions with the corruption of knowledge and the collapse of society; and as a result, *The Advancement of Learning*'s (1605) initial strain of humanism gives way to a deep pessimism about any kind of writing that can be infected by the imagination.[2] There is, in other words, a subtle but important shift in Bacon's views of imaginative writing during the last two years of his career.[3] Bacon read his humanist forbearers with care and recognized the tension between legitimate imaginative learning and imaginative excess in their poetics. The *Advancement* concedes that imagination is necessary to inspire observational knowledge creation and record findings for posterity, and Bacon never seriously considers advocating for his epistemological reforms without resorting to fictions.

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[1] Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 131. Unless otherwise noted, future citations of the *Advancement of Learning* derive from this edition and page numbers will be cited in text using AL as a signifier.

[2] Ron Levao writes that Bacon "diagnoses poeticizing as the chief disease of learning" but admits that, "safely domesticated, the imagination is harnessed for virtuous ends." "Francis Bacon and the Mobility of Science," *Representations* 40 (Autumn 1992): 5, 6.

[3] Julianne Werlin argues that "Bacon's view of interpretation, and its radical necessity for literary works of all kinds, had changed over the course of the decades between the first publication of *The Advancement of Learning* and its expanded Latin edition of 1623." Focusing on the *New Atlantis*, she contends that Bacon aims "to give little scope to individual interpretation: only his much-touted method—rule bound, constrained, and essentially collaborative—can transform the hermeneutic circle into a hermeneutic spiral." "Francis Bacon and the Art of Misinterpretation," *PMLA* 130.2 (2015): 246, 238.

More recently, David Carroll Simon writes that "Bacon's whole body of work is cumulative in a more than ordinary sense" and that he "continually recycles and develops his claims." Simon's book primarily focuses on *The Advancement of Learning*, so there is additional work to be done in tracing Bacon's theory of the imagination over the course of his career. *Light Without Heat: The Observational Mood from Bacon to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 67, 32.

Nevertheless, succeeding works are characterized by a growing unease about the imagination as he strives to limit its role in knowledge creation but still use it to produce hopeful shared visions of learning and its effects.[4] Bacon proposes a written natural history in *Preparation for a Natural and Experimental History*, which is appended to the 1620 *New Organon*. He writes that his history is "the one and only method by which a true and practical philosophy can be established" and promises that "men will then perceive, as if awakening from a deep sleep, what is the difference between the opinions and fictions of the mind and a true and practical philosophy."[5] Until that awakening, fictions are difficult to discern from fact and seem to have their uses. Indeed, William Rawley's introduction to the *New Atlantis*, which Brian Vickers dates to the 1620s, calls it a "fable."[6]

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[4] As I discuss in my introduction, there are many examples of English writers discussing icastic and fantastic art, and the problem of discerning one from the other. Such passages often concern literary acts of knowing and their ability to mislead. Sir Philip Sidney defines icastic (*eikastiké*) art as that which "figure[es] forth good things" and fantastic (*phantastiké*) art as that which "doth contrariwise infect the fancy with unworthy objects." "The Defence of Poesy," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 36.

George Puttenham cautions his readers in *The Art of English* Poesy (1589) that "the evil and vicious disposition of the brain hinders the sound judgement and discourse of man with busy and disordered fantasies, for which the Greeks call him *phantastikos*." He argues that while an untamed mind begets "monstrous imaginations or conceits," an ordered mind makes "his much multiformity uniform, that is, well proportioned, and so passing clear, that by [the imagination] as by a glass or mirror are represented unto the soul all manner of beautiful visions." "The Art of English Poesy," *Sidney's Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 70-71.

Arthur F. Kinney writes that "Representation, re-presentation, is the end of both forms of art, but the means are radically opposed. Icastic art conveys by reproducing an object; fantastic art re-creates the appearance only, not the substance; it succeeds because it allows for a subjective, or displaced, perspective. It persuades the viewer to accept the fantastic art form as icastic, to accept what seems to be for what is known to be." *Humanist Poetics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 27-28. Pages 27-30 offer a helpful summation of these two concepts in Italian and English thought.

[5] Francis Bacon, "Preparation for a Natural and Experimental History," *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 222. Unless otherwise noted, future citations of the *Preparation* derive from this edition and page numbers will be cited in text using P as a signifier.

[6] Brian Vickers, "Notes," *Francis Bacon, The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 785.

The question that Bacon leaves ambiguous in the *Advancement* and wrestles with throughout his career is whether, or when, it is appropriate for the imagination to interpose itself between sense and judgment to create knowledge from raw sensory experience. What is the difference between investiture and usurpation, and to what degree is poetic writing warranted? Bacon fears that the imagination and the fictions it generates will distort learning, which would remain mired in pleasurable imaginative falsehoods. In such cases civilization and its knowledge is at risk of being reduced to the types of untenable, self-flattering Erasmian fictions whose collapse proves so devastating in *King Lear*. As early as the *Advancement* Bacon's unease appears in his glosses of the humanist myths and tropes he uses to describe his observational method. For instance, when he uses the Pygmalion myth to illustrate his "first distemper of learning, when men study words and not matter," he acknowledges that "it is a thing not hastily to be condemned, to clothe and adorn the obscurity even of philosophy itself with sensible and plausible elocution."[7] However, he cautions against making natural philosophy too pleasing:

> …for surely to the severe inquisition of truth, and the deep progress into philosophy, it is some hindrance; because it is too early satisfactory to the mind of man, and quencheth the desire of further search, before we come to a just period…(AL 139-140)

Bacon's reading ignores Ovid's ending in which the statue becomes a living woman and instead contrasts Pygmalion's frenzy with Hercules' "disdain" for "the image of Adonis…in a temple" (AL 140). One might read the *Advancement*'s version of the Pygmalion myth without ever knowing that the statue comes to life in response to the sculptor's fervent desires. Bacon's lesson concerns the need to enjoy imaginative art

[7] Plausible can also mean "specious." See: Vickers, "Notes," 202.

without succumbing to its power. Similar omissions and alterations recur through his later works, where they become increasingly untenable in the face of readers' and writers' imaginative predilection for narrative and the desire that drives it. It turns out no one finds it "satisfactory to the mind" for the statue to remain a statue, and Bacon's poetics of the *Instauration* has to tame that poeticizing impulse to frame its narrative of progress.

This chapter outlines a theory of how and why Bacon changes the way he describes his project from the publication of the *Advancement* until his death in 1626. In doing so, it seeks to answer two interrelated questions. The first question is how Bacon's observational methods and poetics of natural history in the *Preparation* evolve from the more imaginative, less systematic, aphoristic poetics of the *Advancement*. The second question is how Bacon's changing poetics leads him to transform the tropes used by his humanist predecessors into myths describing his project and its impacts on humanity's relationship with the world.[8] In enacting his project, Bacon inherited and sought to balance the tensions—desire versus reason and (as a way of mediating between them) imagination versus sensory experience—that both threaten and enable his epistemological reforms. His late-career poetics attempts to control narrative and desire by restraining the imagination and making language and matter indistinguishable to the point that his natural history "is used as the first

[8] Scholars are beginning to explore the ways in which Bacon borrowed from and sought to co-opt the humanist traditions of sixteenth century England. For example, Pavneet Aulakh argues that "in subscribing to and reinforcing the sense of stylistic rupture [with sixteenth century humanism] Bacon's rhetoric intends to fashion, recent scholarship has effectively decontextualized his stylistic prescriptions. Excising them from their relation to the humanist voices he critiques, however, does a double disservice to his argument in occluding the extent to which those very voices animate his own arguments." Pavneet Aulakh, "Seeing Things Through 'Images Sensible': Emblematic Similitudes and Sensuous Words in Francis Bacon's Natural Philosophy," *English Literary History* 81.4 (Winter 2014): 1158-59. See also: Rhodri Lewis, "Francis Bacon, Allegory and the Uses of Myth," *The Review of English Studies* 61.250 (2010): 360-389.

matter of philosophy and the stuff and material of true induction" (P 224). The resulting elision of thought, writing, and matter compels him to abandon the *Advancement*'s central myth of Orpheus taming the beasts and humanist tropes like the Erasmian treasure house of speech to describe learning and its impacts on civilization. Bacon's mature poetics, in which the natural philosopher moves seamlessly from written natural history to action without the aid of an imaginative *nuncius*, relies increasingly on the biblical account of Adam laboring in the garden and naming the animals to describe a state where knowledge, language, and matter perpetually reshape each other in a self-sustaining redemptive ecosystem.[9]

1. Nonchalance and Aphoristic Form in the Advancement of Learning

Joanna Picciotto argues that Bacon and his successors reinvent the medieval tradition of Adam tending the Garden of Eden as a type of natural philosophy grounded in physical, rather than linguistic, labor.[10] For Picciotto the first two chapters of Genesis describe an Adamic "literacy in the language of nature—the ability to discern not reading or writing but 'exercise': the extension of working hands into the visible world" (p. 35). I agree with Picciotto about the nature of Bacon's ultimate vision of his project's fulfillment, but argue that his Edenic vision

[9] I want to be clear that I recognize that Bacon's project was incomplete when he died and do not mean to suggest that Edenic images supplant humanist ones entirely. What I argue is that the shift in how Bacon mythologizes his project is perceptible, and it aligns with his growing suspicion of the imagination and its fictions.

[10] Picciotto situates Bacon's empirical turn in Martin Luther's description of Eden: "Luther's identification of Eden as a specifically epistemological paradise, a place where man could discover the real names of things, challenged traditional models of knowledge and of literacy. Where names correspond to natures, language is knowledge; where natures can be forced to correspond to the 'names' that humanity imposes, it is power. Francis Bacon declared that 'the first Acts that man perform'd in Paradice, comprehended the two summary parts of knowledge; those that were the view of Creatures, and the imposition of names,' but it was not through language schemes that experimentalists managed to impose new names on creation (p. 35)." See: *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 31-128.

gains prominence because his theory of the imagination evolves. Moreover, his commitment to the Adamic vision is incomplete. He knows his followers must learn to inhabit a world where learning and its redemptive benefits are tenuous and dependent on written language for their propagation. He writes in the "Plan of the Great Renewal," which prefaces the *New Organon*, that the "end" of his efforts is a condition that in "the present state of thought men cannot easily grasp or guess."[11] Bacon seeks to cultivate a state of mind that can modulate between desire and satisfaction to reconcile the vision of his completed project with the need to become neither too despairing nor too optimistic about its fulfillment. David Carroll Simon describes Adam's mood in Bacon's "paradigmatic scene of understanding" as "easy 'delight.'"[12] He writes that Bacon seeks to cultivate "an experience of suspended vibrancy—a flicker of gratification that sustains interest without the promise of conclusive fulfillment."[13] The question facing Bacon is how to cultivate and sustain this state of mind in his readers without inflaming the imagination and the will. It is an epistemological question about the proper affect for knowledge creation, with implications for the form of written knowledge. His answer in 1620 differs from that of 1605.

Despite its dangers, Bacon cannot abjure the imagination or its fictions, which he deems essential to his project for two reasons. First, pleasure is the prime impetus for reading, observation, and contemplation, without which no one would be motivated to seek knowledge. He describes humanity's Edenic intellectual work as "delight in the experiment" (AL 149). He writes that "of knowledge there is no

[11] Bacon, *The New Organon*, 24.
[12] Simon, *Light Without Heat*, 69.
[13] Simon, *Light Without Heat*, 64-65.

satiety, but satisfaction and appetite are perpetually interchangeable; and therefore appeareth to be good in itself simply, without fallacy or accident" (AL 167). Borrowing from Lucretius, Bacon describes learning as a state of solitary delight:

> …it is pleasure incomparable, for the mind of man to be settled, landed, and fortified in the certainty of truth; and from thence to descry and behold the errors, perturbations, labours, and wanderings up and down of other men. (AL 167)

Bacon does not consider his invocation of Lucretius' poem to describe his project and its effects to be problematic. Later in the *Advancement* he cautions that the "use" of poetry "hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it." Poetry "submit[s] the shews of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things" (AL 186-187). He concludes that "I find not any science that doth properly or fitly pertain to the Imagination" and writes that "for Poesy, it is rather a pleasure or play of the imagination, than a work or duty thereof" (AL 218). At this point in Bacon's efforts the "certainty of truth" has not been attained. His readers must first imagine the Lucretian experience he describes and delight in the "shadow of satisfaction" it promises if they are to perceive its value and pursue it.

Bacon's second reason for licensing poetry and the imagination, however grudgingly, is because he needs fictions to make his project comprehensible to inspire future generations to enact it. The Lucretian observer's solitary knowledge must be imparted to others if it is to become cumulative. He relies on the promise of readerly delight to ensure that "images of men's wits and knowledges…in books" can "cast their seeds in the minds of others, provoking and causing infinite actions and opinions in succeeding ages" (AL 168). Nowhere is the importance of pleasure more evident

than in the *Advancement*'s paraphrase of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, which Bacon uses to depict a world where his project succeeded. Like Sidney, he produces (in this case borrows) a pleasurable, poetic appeal to the imagination to inspire future readers and overturn what he calls their "presuppositions" about how knowledge is created.:

> …those whose conceits are beyond popular opinions, have a double labour; the one to make themselves conceived, and the other to prove and demonstrate; so that it is of necessity with them to have recourse to similitudes and translations to express themselves. And therefore in the infancy of learning, and in rude times, when those conceits which are now trivial were then new, the world was full of Parables and Similitudes; for else would men either have passed over without mark or else rejected for paradoxes that which was offered, before they had understood or judged. So in divine learning we see how frequent Parables and Tropes are: for it is a rule, that 'whatsoever science is not consonant to presuppositions, must pray in aid of similitudes.' (AL 236)

He sees this recourse to fictions—described as "parables and similitudes"—as the best way to be read and understood.

Bacon is much more skeptical about poetry's role in enacting his methods by recording causal knowledge than its use in overcoming readerly presuppositions against his project of imaginative restraint. He inherits Sidney's vision of knowledge as an understanding of causal relationships that, when written down and used to guide actions, exerts a causal agency of its own. The *Advancement* declares that Natural Philosophy is "the inquiry of causes" (AL 195). He describes the creation of causal knowledge as an ascent from the mirror-like, passive sensory perception to the mind's reconstruction of causality—what he calls "the ordinances and decrees" that are "infallibly observed" across every "variety of things and vicissitude of times" (AL 123). The forms Bacon uses to describe or mythologize his methods and entice his audience are not the type of writing he prescribes for creating and recording causal

knowledge. In fact, his method of representing knowledge in writing is not described in the *Advancement*.

He hints at the need for a poetics that establishes a clear analogy between written knowledge and the material phenomena it describes, claiming that "words…are the footsteps and prints of reason: which kind of analogy between words and reason is handled *sparsim*, brokenly, though not entirely." Bacon admits that "I cannot report it [language's ability to represent knowledge] deficient, though I think it very worthy to be reduced unto a science by itself" (AL 232). His goal of a seamless representation of causality that moves from matter to thought to writing appears most forcefully in his claim that "the truth of being and the truth of knowing are one, differing no more than the direct beam and the beam reflected" (AL 142). There should not be a gap between knowledge, its representation in words, and the material world:

> …it is the perfect law of inquiry of truth, that nothing be in the globe of matter, which should not be likewise in the globe of crystal, or form; that is that there be not any thing in being and action, which should not be drawn and collected into contemplation and doctrine. (AL 273)

Letters and words coalesce into a textual world—Bacon ends the *Advancement* by describing it as a "small Globe of the Intellectual World" (AL 299)—whose structure is meant to guide humanity's intergenerational redemption. He revisits this image, and the distinction between matter and form, in the *New Organon*. There he writes that "it would be a disgrace" if the physical globe were fully explored "while the boundaries of the intellectual globe [*globi autèm Intellectualis fines*] were confined to

the discoveries and narrow limits of the ancients."[14] That world exists simultaneously in its parallel expressions in matter, thought, and writing, and the three should be in alignment.

As he begins to describe his empirical poetics and its seamless connection to the material world, Bacon faces an epistemological problem. He promises his readers a pleasurable, Lucretian experience of objective knowledge to entice them, but asks them to create and record knowledge with minimal recourse to the imagination or its pleasures. The *Advancement* begins to lay out a formal solution to the problem, which requires writing to strike a balance between aphorism and method in its *mimesis* of the world. Writing is meant to strike readers' imaginations with the redemptive outcome of his project and also restrain their imaginations when they compile a natural history. Bacon finds in the "*sparsim*," or "broken" link between words and matter a formal strategy for his natural history that keeps this brokenness foremost in readers' minds. He compares "methods," which often build faulty knowledge on a few central axioms, to the spider spinning webs. Instead he favors aphorisms, which "representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to enquire farther; whereas Methods, carrying a shew of a total, do secure men, as if they were at furthest" (AL 235). Aphorisms "cannot be made but of the pith and heart of sciences." They are too brief to expound as examples or "discourse of connexion and order." Their brevity means they cannot prematurely satisfy the mind with excessive narrative or

[14] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 69. Unless otherwise noted, future citations of the *New Organon* derive from this edition and page numbers will be cited in text using NO as a signifier.

descriptions, but only encourage farther study (AL 234).[15] Bacon's preference for aphorism becomes much more pronounced in the *New Organon* and the 1625 *Essays*. The former is a series of aphorisms and the latter eschews clear structure and easy conclusions within individual essays and between them.[16] However, even in the closing paragraph of the meticulously structured *Advancement*, Bacon claims to "propound [his] opinions naked and unarmed, not seeking to preoccupate the liberty of men's judgments by confutations" (AL 299). As described in the *Advancement*, Baconian aphorisms place a burden on the reader, who must decide whether (and how far) to license his imagination when interpreting them. In this, too, his early poetics resembles Sidney's appeal to readerly discretion.

Baconian aphorisms threaten to harden into allegory and leave us poised between curiosity and satisfaction. Simon remarks on how the aphorism's suggestive brokenness "encourages investigation" even as its "characteristically short and declarative form…also suggests conclusivity—the delivery of an authoritative pronouncement."[17] Paolo Rossi observes that Bacon's poetics of aphorism harden into allegory after 1605, yet even his combinations of allegories retain an aphoristic instability.[18] In the *Advancement* Bacon describes myths as primitive precursors to

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[15] Lewis argues that as Bacon's poetics evolved in the wake of the *Advancement*, he "moved towards probative forms of writing." He therefore "made greater use of both aphorism and 'parabolicall' poesy" in an attempt to force readers to construct knowledge by juxtaposing his fragmentary writing with sensory experience. "Francis Bacon, Allegory and the Uses of Myth," 368-369.

[16] Brian Vickers argues in his introduction to the 1625 *Essays* that "the nonlinear nature of the *Essays* will be evident on any careful reading." "Notes," *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, 716.

[17] Simon, *Light Without Heat*, 74.

[18] One need not look far for other examples of Bacon's early-career allegorical inconsistency. While some critics have argued that Bacon consistently allegorizes nature as a feminine opposite to the rational masculine mind, Catherine Gimelli Martin shows that Bacon's approach to myth is flexible. She examines Bacon's use of gender and myth for the observer's relationship to nature and concludes that nature itself "is never securely masculine or feminine" in his depiction of it. On the one hand, Protean "natural realities are…passive matter awaiting conquest, and on the other supremely active

true knowledge. By *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609) this belief in a rough correspondence between fable and truth became, in Rossi's words, "a firm belief in the allegorical significance of myths."[19] Bacon argues in *The Wisdom of the Ancients* that "beneath no small number of the fables of the ancient poets there lay from the very beginning a mystery and an allegory." He claims to find an analogical "conformity and connexion with the thing signified" in "the very frame and texture of the story as in the propriety of the names by which the persons that figure in it are distinguished."[20] At the same time, however, he admits that the fables he inherits "serve to disguise and veil…meaning, and…also to clear and throw light upon it" (WTA 79). Initially, Bacon does not seem perturbed by the potential misinterpretations wrought by readers' and writers' imaginations and even appears to welcome our interpretive struggle. However, a few recurring Baconian images

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gods or goddesses scheming to outwit the passive human mind." The empirical method of the natural philosopher is variously equated with Metis, Atalanta, and Eve, each of whom symbolizes its role as a spouse or "handmaiden" who links observation and thought and generates fruitful causal knowledge instead of confusion. "The Feminine Birth of the Mind: Regendering the Empirical Subject in Bacon and His Followers," *Francis Bacon and the Refiguring of Early Modern Thought* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2005), 70, 77.

Aulakh advances Martin's critique when he writes that Bacon's interpretations of myth "tend to introduce the historically received narrative only to then single out and mine its most iconic features" for his own illustrative ends. He shows how Bacon's pursuit of "emblematic detail at the expense of narrative" begets jarring inconsistencies in his interpretations. For instance, *Wisdom of the Ancients*' treatment of the Atalanta myth initially allegorizes Hippomenes as art and Atalanta as nature, but reverses their roles midway through the analysis. "Seeing Things Through 'Images Sensible': Emblematic Similitudes and Sensuous Words in Francis Bacon's Natural Philosophy," 1157.

[19] Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science* (London: Routeledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 88. For an overview of this change in Bacon's poetics, see Chapter 3.

Lewis also highlights Bacon's allegorical bent as an interpreter of Classical fables. He argues that, for Bacon, myths and fables "could be of assistance to the modern student of nature in his attempts to revive a version of the genuinely pristine knowledge that underwrote human domination of Eden." Specifically, Lewis conjectures that myths have the potential to "illuminate causes and are of vital preparative value to Bacon's ultimate goal, the interpretation of nature." "Francis Bacon, Allegory and the Uses of Myth," 386-387.

[20] Francis Bacon, "Of the Wisdom of the Ancients," *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Volume XIII, ed. James Spedding (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1900), 76. Unless otherwise noted, future citations of *The Wisdom of the Ancients* derive from this edition and page numbers will be cited in text using WTA as a signifier.

provide a test case for this theory of evocative aphorisms that enable readerly restraint.

2: Orpheus' Theatre, the "Rich Storehouse," and Baconian Poetics

The *Advancement* introduces two tropes to describe Bacon's reforms and outline his poetics, and they recur throughout his attempts to allegorize his project. They are the myth of Orpheus' theatre, used to depict the effects of communicated knowledge, and the Erasmian treasure house of speech, used to illustrate how knowledge should be written down. Bacon's use of myths in the *Advancement* and *Wisdom of the Ancients* is guided mainly by his rhetorical needs at any given moment. However, the themes he uses these myths to develop are more consistent, if also more vulnerable to alteration as their narrative resonances threaten to escape his allegory. First, he emphasizes the idea that knowledge is a social good. It is a cultural asset maintained and augmented over generations to improve human existence. Second, he uses myths to argue that knowledge is threatened by imaginative attempts to create meaning from textual records and sensory experience, and by written records tinged with false, pleasurable fictions. He writes in the *Advancement* that knowledge must be "solid and fruitful" (AL 148). Causal knowledge should have material consequences and transform human beings into self-aware agents who apply what they have learned to uphold God's ordained order for the world, rather than imposing their own desires. The *Advancement* declares that knowledge should be seen "not as a courtesan, for pleasure and vanity only, or as a bond woman, to acquire and gain to her master's use; but as a spouse, for generation, fruit, and comfort" (AL

148). The implication of this gendered metaphor is that learned acts of mastery over nature are as much a legacy to posterity as legitimate offspring, and that pleasure should not bastardize knowledge creation.[21]

Bacon invokes the image of Orpheus among the beasts to describe a redeemed world where knowledge checks humanity's baser instincts and facilitates our mastery over nature. Here, Orpheus symbolizes the moral and practical impacts of knowledge, which is capable of re-ordering the natural world and improving the human condition therein. His music resembles Adam's naming of the animals as an instance of the power of language over matter.[22] However, Bacon—even at this early stage of his career—acknowledges that the arch-poet could be silenced. The passage that introduces Orpheus and registers Bacon's latent concern occurs midway through Book I:

> Neither is certainly that other merit of learning, in repressing the inconveniences which grow from man to man, much inferior to the former, of relieving the necessities which arise from nature; which merit was lively set forth by the ancients in that feigned relation of Orpheus' theatre; where all beasts and birds assembled, and forgetting their several appetites, some of prey, some of game, some of quarrel, stood all sociably together listening unto the airs and accords of the harp; the sound whereof no sooner ceased, or was drowned out by some louder noise, but every beast returned to his own nature…(AL 154)

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[21] Bacon makes this claim explicit in "Of Parents and Children" in the 1625 *Essays*. Here he writes that "surely a man shall see the noblest works and foundations have proceeded from childless men; which have sought to express the images of their minds, where those of their bodies have failed." Bacon, "Essays," 325.

[22] Citing the passage quoted in this paragraph, Guido Giglioni writes that "philosophy is first and foremost an attempt to restore the life of mortal bodies" and that "Orpheus is the principal emblem of philosophy in that his music has the power both 'to propitiate the infernal powers' and 'to draw the wild beasts and the woods.'" "Francis Bacon," *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Peter R. Anstey (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 43.

In his work on Orpheus in English poetics and culture, Sean Keilen describes the foundational poet's centrality as an Adamic figure. He argues that Orpheus' song and Adam's prelapsarian naming of the animals—both important images for Bacon—are linked in early modern English emblematic traditions. *Vulgar Eloquence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 75.

In this passage the forces that could overcome the poet remain undefined. They are rendered as "some louder noise," assuming the Orphean musician did not "cease" of his own accord. Their threat to the Baconian project is described in passive voice and left to the reader to infer.

Bacon's discussions of poetry and the imagination elsewhere in the *Advancement* anticipate his latent unease about Orpheus' theatre as a symbol of knowledge creation. The problem is the otherwise useful image's long cultural association with imagination and poetry, which is highlighted in Sidney, George Puttenham, and Ben Jonson's use of it.[23] Orpheus' role as a poet is conspicuously absent from Bacon's version of the myth. He concludes his subsequent discussion of poetry by arguing that "it is not good to stay too long in the theatre" (AL 188), but at no point does he condemn Orpheus, Orpheus' theatre, poetry, or the imagination. In Bacon's wisdom of tradition, matter is transmuted into thought, which is turned into words, which inspire actions over the course of generations.[24] Although Bacon's illustrative fable comes to us as writing, Orpheus' language itself is missing from his retelling. It is the "airs and accords of the harp" (AL 154), and not any lyric or fiction in the arch-poet's verse, that subdues the theatre of nature. Elsewhere, the

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[23] Puttenham calls Orpheus and Amphion "two poets of the first ages." Puttenham, "The Art of English Poesy," 61.

Sidney describes "Orpheus, Linus, and some other who are named" as "men of the same skill" as "Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod, all three nothing else but poets." Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy,"4.

Jonson concludes his description of Orpheus in his translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* as "And thus, at first, an honour, and a name/To divine poets, and their verses came" (491-492). Ben Jonson, "Horace, Of the Art of Poetry," *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin, 1996), 366.

[24] Others have noted the unusually close relationship between words and matter in Bacon without exploring the mutual causal power implied by this relationship. Aulakh concludes his essay on Bacon's elision of emblematic similitudes and matter by suggesting that Bacon's formal preferences for emblems, similitudes, and fables are an attempt to bridge the object-referent distinction inherent to language. He writes that Bacon's prose "nearly approaches the conceitedness of metaphysical poetry in its effort to materialize an abstract principle in the concrete details of material phenomena." "Seeing Things Through 'Images Sensible'," 1165.

Advancement elides the categories of music and nature to the point that "delight" in one evokes the other, suggesting the possibility of comprehension without language:

> Is not the delight of the quavering upon a stop in music the same with the playing of light upon the water?....Neither are these only similitudes as men of narrow observation may conceive them to be, but the same footsteps of nature, treading or printing upon several subjects or matters. (AL 191)

Bacon invokes the humanist image of Orpheus as the founder of learning and civilization, but he has removed poetry from the myth. The question he implies is what form written knowledge should take to produce its promised Orphean effects.

The *Advancement* offers limited guidance on how observations should be written down for posterity. To the extent that Bacon gestures toward a poetics, his most important image is the Erasmian trope of language as "a rich storehouse, for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate" (AL 147-48).[25] Early in *De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia* (*De Copia*, 1514) Desiderius Erasmus describes the writings of notable authors as "riches piled up (*divitiae quaedam exstruendae*), so that whenever it is desirable there may be available for us a supply of words." Elsewhere, he urges his readers to create a "great…storehouse of speech" (*immensus orationis penus futurus*).[26] This image, like Orpheus's theatre, also recurs in humanist

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[25] Daniel Bender illustrates the degree to which Erasmian copia and the trope of the storehouse are associated with one another when he defines copia as "the 'storehouse' of invention and style, the focus of Erasmus's *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum*." "Copia," *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age*, ed. Theresa Enos (New York: Routledge,1996), 149

Similarly, Jay Zysk writes that "the trope of the literary storehouse—the mass gathering of rhetorical templates and syntactical variations, not to mention textual references—stands at the center of early modern aesthetics." "Shakespeare's Rich Ornaments: Study and Style in *Titus Andronicus*," *'Rapt in Secret Studies'*: *Emerging Shakespeares*, eds. Darryl Chalk and Laurie Johnson (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 271.

[26] Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, ed. and trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), 19, 96. This text is translated from a 17th century copy of *De Copia* that had been collated with the first edition (1513), the first revised edition (1514), the second revised edition (1526), and the 1540 Basle *Opera Omnia* edition representing Erasmus'

poetics. For instance, Sidney appears to borrow the Erasmian image when he describes Italian literature as a "treasure-house of science."[27] However, Bacon's ideas about how writing should transmit knowledge without pandering to the reader's imagination or aesthetic sensibilities change how he describes the Erasmian storehouse of *copia*. Baconian *copia* is less purely rhetorical and must result in action.[28] Writing is Bacon's most reliable means of influencing future ages. However, he becomes increasingly concerned that texts can be easily, even willfully, misinterpreted, causing the intergenerational transfer of knowledge to falter. He confronts the possibility of failure early in Part I of the *Advancement*, when he concedes that "we do not know whether our labours may extend to other ages" (AL 131).[29] Likewise, he commends the church's preservation of ancient learning, "which otherwise had been extinguished as if no such thing had ever been" (AL 152), because he understands that its survival was never guaranteed. When he laments that

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third and final revision of the text. The seventeenth century text has no significant differences from the 1540 edition. See: Donald B. King, "Notes," *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), 1.

[27] Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," 5.

[28] In his discussion of Bacon's appropriation of the term, Aulakh writes that the Englishman works to "identif[y] potentially fruitful lines of study that can achieve knowledge," while his predecessor "aims only to win consent" by deploying written tradition. "Seeing Things Through 'Images Sensible'," 1164.

[29] Compared to some of his contemporaries, the early-career Bacon is nonetheless relatively sanguine about the prospects of written knowledge inspiring future acts of knowledge creation and mastery of the physical world. Gerard Passannante describes this optimism in his comparison of Lucretius, Bacon, and Montaigne, though his reading of Bacon focuses primarily on the *Advancement of Learning*:

> In *De rerum natura*, Lucretius uses the word '*consociare*' (to join or make alliance) to describe the material concourse of atoms generating or not generating conglomerate matter in space. Bacon uses it here to describe the commerce of knowledge between men communicating across 'vast seas of time'—an antidote to the colonial nightmare with which Montaigne ends 'Des Coches.' Whereas readers like Montaigne had imagined tradition pulled limb from limb, full of multiplying errors and cast into an empty void, Bacon pictured a void that was full—full of meetings and coincidences, of men gathering and sharing opinions, scattering fire from one to another.

Gerard Passannante, "Homer Anatomized: Francis Bacon and the Matter of Tradition," *English Literary History 76.4* (Winter 2009): 1027.

medical knowledge has moved "rather in a circle than in progression" (AL 211), he implies that such a lack of progress need not be the case. Bacon's "rich storehouse" is meant to preserve the tradition of written knowledge and bring about the promised Orphean mastery of nature over the course of generations. It is unclear how he will keep his storehouse free of counterfeit knowledge, however.

3: Imagination, the Death of Orpheus, and the Threat of Civilizational Decay

By the time he wrote the *New Organon*, Bacon made it clear he never expected to see his redemptive work properly begun, let alone completed.[30] Ensuring that readers could interpret his incomplete description and be moved to action therefore becomes essential to his efforts. However, he grows more pessimistic about writing and interpretation after the *Advancement*. He writes about our capacity for self-deception, a concern which also changes his approach to the Orpheus myth as a symbol of his project. Bacon identifies "three vanities in studies, whereby learning hath been most traduced" (AL 138). The first two vanities —in which "men study words and not matter" (AL 139) or "vain matter" with no utility (140)—are eclipsed by "deceit and untruth," which "doth destroy the essential form of knowledge, which is nothing but a representation of the truth" (AL 142). The abuse of language and the pursuit of vain matter make it easier to unmoor knowledge from the physical world. Bacon's first two vanities therefore serve the third and most grievous—a deliberate severing of mind and matter in which the mind creates its own "essential form of knowledge" independent of the senses.

[30] Writing of the sixth and final part of his Great Instauration, Bacon concedes that "it is beyond our ability and beyond our expectation to achieve this final part and bring it to completion." *The New Organon*, 23.

While the *Advancement* grants Sidney's arguments about poetry as a vatic source of pleasure, Bacon becomes much more concerned about its potential for misuse in his later works. Distortions and misinterpretations attributed to individuals in 1605 are regarded as systemic threats to civilization by 1620. His Idols of the Marketplace are founded on the fact that "men believe their reason controls words," but "words retort and turn their force back upon the understanding" (NO 48). In the marketplace of ideas, language shapes knowledge by appealing to the popular imagination. Bacon fears poetry will inflame readers' imaginations and convince them *en masse* to deceive themselves about the causal order of the world. The *Advancement* frets that imaginatively-generated worlds are as convincing as real ones when it claims that "the ordinary face and view of experience is many times satisfied by several theories and philosophies; whereas to find the real truth requireth another manner of severity and attention" (AL 204). Our capacity to create false, but plausible representations of the world becomes more communal in the *New Organon*. The linguistic Idols of the Marketplace generate Idols of the Theatre by which "various dogmas can be based and constructed on the phenomena of philosophy." Idols of the Theatre threaten to make fictions inescapable by perpetuating the most satisfying visions of the world, drowning out the music of Orpheus' theatre. Indeed, Bacon wonders who would want to leave the "dramatist's theatre" where "narratives made up for the stage are neater and more elegant than true stories from history, and are the sort of thing people prefer" (NO 50).

Only in the *New Organon* and the 1625 *Essays* does Bacon attribute the decay of knowledge and the spread of false opinions to the corrupted desires of readers

themselves. In "Of Truth," which opens the *Essays*, Bacon posits our "natural and corrupt love of the lie itself" and observes that "a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure" (E 341). In the *Advancement*, he acknowledges the threat of "deceit and untruth," but leaves its origin unspecified. By the 1620's, Bacon attributes the degradation of knowledge to an active and innately human propensity for self-deception in acts of writing and interpretation. He observes that "the mind loves to leap to generalities so that it can rest" (NO 36). Plausible, well-written falsehoods offer an immediate jolt of aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction. The formal problem of Bacon's poetics becomes how to purge such congenial lies from tradition and make induction from sensory experience emotionally as well intellectually credible in the face of imaginative Idols of the Threatre.

The idea that we would willfully mislead ourselves about the world challenges the Sidneian claim that poetry strengthens "man's wit," rather than abusing it.[31] If actions directed by true knowledge restore a small portion of Edenic order, then false knowledge and corrupted traditions could reverse these gains. For Bacon, each willful error could leave the world more degraded and farther from redemption, diminishing humanity's mastery over creation and its own baser impulses. The accretion of error and self-deceit gets harder to correct with each successive generation. Writing of false initial observations in Book V, chapter ii of *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1625), Bacon cautions that "it is not the laborious examination of either consequences or arguments or of the truth of propositions that can ever correct that

[31] Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," 41.

error; being (as the physicians say) in the first digestion."[32] He attributes Adam and Eve's rejection of God's revealed authority to their will, rather than their intellect. All subsequent sin compounds original sin by further dividing humanity's observational and rational faculties from the faith and obedience that are meant to govern them. As early as the *Advancement*, Bacon argues that our "corrupt love of the lie itself" is rooted in a desire to impose our own causal order on the world, rather than submit to God's created order:

> As for the knowledge which induced the fall, it was, as was touched before, not the natural knowledge of creatures, but the moral knowledge of good and evil; wherein the supposition was, that God's commandments or prohibitions were not the originals of good and evil, but that they had other beginnings, which man aspired to know, to the end to make a total defection from God, and to depend wholly upon himself. (AL 150)

Unlike Adam, Bacon inhabits a fallen world where knowledge is separated from obedience. Humanity is threatened with endless subsequent opportunities to "make a total defection from God." His redemptive project needs to explain how the natural philosopher could master what Sidney calls the "infected will" and avoid compounding the effects of the fall.

Bacon's growing misgivings about the imagination and its power to corrupt the understanding are perhaps best illustrated by his evolving use of a key image—that of the mind as a mirror of the world. He writes in the opening pages of the *Advancement* that "God hath framed the mind of man as a mirror or glass capable of the image of the universal world, and joyful to receive the impression thereof" (AL 123). By the time he wrote the *New Organon*, however, he argues that the mind is

[32] Francis Bacon, "Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning," *The Works of Francis Bacon, Volume IX,* eds. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1900), 70.

like "an uneven mirror" which, "when it is affected by things through the senses, does not faithfully preserve them, but inserts and mingles its own nature of things as it forms and devises its own notions" (NO 19). In *De Augmentis*, Brian Vickers notes that Bacon modified his mirror image yet again.[33] He warns that "learned men" should be "ashamed, if in knowledge they be as the winged angels, but in their desires as crawling serpents; carrying about with them minds like a mirror indeed, but a mirror polluted and false."[34]

With few exceptions, Bacon's references to Orpheus grow more pessimistic about the poet's power and more willing to blame the imagination for false and destructive knowledge. The *Advancement* begins with an effective image of Orpheus' power but finds in its narrative resonances a troubling image of unchecked imagination and desire. As these threats creep back into Bacon's mythmaking, Orpheus turns from a symbol of natural philosophy's power to a cautionary tale of the intellect's vulnerability to imaginative excess.[35] *The Wisdom of the Ancients* blames imagination and desire for the failure of Orpheus' song. Bacon claims that the imagination empowers the Bacchae who tear the poet to pieces and figuratively dismember the civilization he symbolizes.[36] The *Advancement*'s reading of Orpheus' song as moral and natural philosophy persists. However, Bacon turns the story of his

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[33] Vickers, "Notes," 632.

[34] Bacon, "Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning," 60.

[35] It cannot be argued that Bacon achieved a coherent myth for his project, but I suggest that he was moving in that direction. Lewis notes the popularity of *Wisdom of the Ancients*, which went through at least 60 editions in five languages in the seventeenth century. He also concedes that "no account of Bacon's mythography can hope to be definitive" because Bacon was revising *Wisdom of the Ancients* and had promised "a complete description of his mythography and its significance" had he completed his planned '*Discriptio globi intellectualis*.' See: "Francis Bacon, Allegory and the Uses of Myth," 364-365.

[36] Michael McCanless writes that in the *Wisdom of the Ancients*, Bacchus becomes an "allegory" of desires and passions associated with magic and the imagination. "The New Science and the Via Negativa: A Mystical Source for Baconian Empiricism," *Francis Bacon and the Refiguring of Early Modern Thought* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 49.

founding poet's dismemberment into a warning about mortality, the collapse of civilizations, and the decay of learning:

> But howsoever the works of wisdom are among human things the most excellent, yet they too have their periods and closes. For so it is that after kingdoms and commonwealths have flourished for a time, there arise perturbations and seditions and wars; amid the uproars of which, first the laws are put to silence, and then men return to the depraved conditions of their nature, and desolation is seen in the fields and cities. And if such troubles last, it is not long before letters also and philosophy are so torn in pieces that no traces of them can be found but a few fragments, scattered here and there like planks from a shipwreck. (WTA 113)

This version retains something of the *Advancement*'s obliqueness about the cause of civilizational collapse, since the source of "perturbations and seditions and wars" is unspecified. These vague forces act on "men," who then "return" to their base natures.

The *Wisdom of the Ancients* juxtaposes the Orpheus and Dionysus myths in a way that suggests humanity's infected will and imagination could corrupt all the knowledge Bacon hopes to accrue. While he acknowledges the power of Orpheus' song, even in the underworld, he names the poet's "impatience of love and anxiety" as the reason he looks back and loses Eurydice (WTA 110). He writes that philosophy falls short of its redemptive possibilities "from no cause more than from curious and premature meddling and impatience" on the part of the desirous philosopher (WTA 112). Elsewhere, Bacon allegorizes Bacchus, or Dionysus, as "Desire, or passion and perturbation," and credits him with orchestrating Orpheus' death "in the act of striking his lyre" (WTA 139) and corrupting the Muses (WTA 140-41). Bacon once more implies that Dionysian desire can be imputed even to Orpheus in his impatient glance after Eurydice, since "the mother of all desire, even the most noxious, is

nothing else than the appetite and aspiration for apparent good: and the conception of it is always in some unlawful wish, rashly granted before it has been understood and weighed" (WTA 139). He laments that "it is true also that the Muses are seen in the train of Passion" and argues that "herein the majesty of the Muses suffers from the license and levity of men's wits, turning those that should be guides of man's life into mere followers in the train of his passions." Desire, Bacon writes, "spreads itself like ivy about all human actions and resolutions, forcing itself in and mixing itself up with them" (WTA 141). It contaminates written knowledge, which then enables generations of authors' and readers' corrupt love of pleasurable, satisfying lies.[37]

By the 1620's, Orpheus' mastery of the natural world is even more overshadowed by the manner of his death and the threat of civilizational collapse. Orpheus is never mentioned in the *New Organon*. Bacon does not cut his Orpheus' theatre passage from Book I of *De Augmentis*, possibly because it simply translates the *Advancement*.[38] However, the myth of Orpheus' power is overshadowed by the specter of self-destructive desire in later books of *De Augmentis*. There, Orpheus

[37] Passannante argues that Bacon's use of the verb "*spargere*" to translate the way that books "cast their seeds in the minds of others" (AL 168) in *De Augmentis*'s Latin translation of the *Advancement* evokes both the specter of Orpheus' dismemberment and a positive Lucretian resonance in which writing preserves and transfers knowledge across continents and generations. Yet even as Bacon argues that the words comprising intellectual traditions are preserved in writing, he acknowledges that the causal form, or understanding, different thinkers apply to the raw materials of culture changes over time. The act of creating understanding out of written tradition is "a process of critical displacement and appropriation" that requires Bacon to envision knowledge as dynamic and evolving rather than a fixed "unchanging tradition." The problem is that, for Bacon, the survival and re-knitting of our fragmented intellectual heritage is no assurance that humanity can escape the cycle in which the Orphean song subdues the passions only for a time. The poet and the civilization he represents succumb to the maddening passions of the Bacchae. Tradition may reconstitute itself and create new knowledge, but there is no guarantee that this regeneration advances our understanding or defends against future falsehoods. See: "Homer Atomized," 1023, 1026-27.

[38] When it was included as the first chapter of *De Augmentis*, the whole of Book I of the *Advancement* was translated into Latin with so few alterations that James Spedding declines to reprint it with the rest of his English translation of *De Augmentis*. Instead, Spedding refers the reader back to Book I of the *Advancement* and comments that "the Latin differs so little from the English in that book, that a translation would be little else than a reprint." See: Spedding, "Notes," 421.

features prominently in only one new passage that draws heavily on *The Wisdom of the Ancients* and describes the poet's death at the hands of Dionysus. The connection between Orpheus' desire and his death, which readers must infer from reading the myths together in *Wisdom of the Ancients*, is finally made explicit here. Even this passage's title—"The third Example of Philosophy according to the Ancient Fables, in Moral Philosophy. Of Desire, according to the fable of Dionysus"—hints at Orpheus' decline, since he no longer warrants his own allegory.[39] Dionysus remains an allegory for "the nature of Desire, or the passions and perturbations of the mind," but other subtle differences from *The Wisdom of the Ancients* show even more suspicion of the imaginative and poetic faculties that Orpheus embodies. For instance, Dionysus's subjugation of the Muses now goes beyond making them "mere followers in the train of [human] passions" (WTA 141). Instead, the arts take on a more active role in destabilizing the mind with satisfying lies. They are described in *De Augmentis* as "mere followers in the train *and* ministers to the pleasures of the passions."[40] *De Augmentis* never entirely disavows the Orpheus myth, but the two references it recycles from the *Advancement* and *Wisdom of the Ancients* strain Bacon's trope to the point that it prods the reader to construct a narrative. In this narrative, Orpheus represents both the fulfillment and the frustration of Bacon's pursuit of cumulative knowledge. Bacon wants to forestall his readers' imaginations and demonstrate his aphoristic style. Yet he seems to recognize that the narrative impulse surrounding the Orpheus myth makes it resistant to aphorism and unsuitable

[39] Francis Bacon, "Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning," *The Works of Francis Bacon, Volume VIII,* eds. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1900), 464.

[40] Bacon, "Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning," *The Works of Francis Bacon, Volume VIII,* 467. Emphasis mine.

as an image of his project. Dionysus cannot be banished from the *Advancement*'s vision of Orphean power, and the myth itself spurs the reader's imagination to dismember, recombine, and alter Bacon's version of it to tell a story of power and decline.

4: The Rich Store House, the Warehouse, and "Lead Weights" for the Imagination in Bacon's Late-Career Poetics

Bacon's views of writing and form, which are underdeveloped in the *Advancement*, are articulated more fully in the *New Organon* where they evolve alongside his theory of recorded knowledge, or "written experience" (NO 82). He argues that the written record of causal relationships must be made complete and systematic in its explanation of sensory experience. He turns to strict formal constraints, such as the tables of observations he demonstrates in Book II of the *New Organon*, to counteract the imagination's potential to adulterate written experience with pleasurable fictions.[41] The natural history Bacon proposes in the *Preparation,* and showcases in its companion piece the *New Organon*, is meant to restrict readers' and writers' imaginations as they synthesize causal knowledge from sensory and written experience. It makes thought and writing more narrowly representative of sensible phenomena. Forms of expression that he surveys with limited skepticism in the *Advancement* become anathema in the *New Organon*, where Bacon calls for an epistemology (and its supporting poetics) that applies "lead and weights, to check every leap and flight" of the understanding (NO 83). He describes his prose as an

[41] In this context "written experience," translated by the *Oxford Francis Bacon* as "literate experience," connotes written "tables" in which "the abundance of particulars has been duly and systematically laid before our eyes" for the purpose of discovery and to ease the transfer of knowledge from one application to another. See: Francis Bacon, "Novum Organon," *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, eds. Graham Rees and Maria Wakely (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 158-161, 530-531.

attempt not to "ambush…men's judgements," but to "bring them into the presence of things themselves and their connections, so that they may see what they have and what they may question, and what they may add and contribute to the common stock" (NO 11). Knowledge has become a type of "stock," or commodity, composed of written accounts of the causal "connections" between observable phenomena.

As he strives to separate knowledge creation from imagination and pleasure, Bacon extends his distrust for poetry to classical and contemporary works of natural philosophy composed in verse. Robert M. Schuler contends that Bacon is silent on didactic, scientific poetry because he "was concerned that such texts—especially the discursive, theoretical, scientific ones like *De Rerum Natura*—would be considered as Poesy at all." He argues that Bacon "eschews the epistemological implications of a didactic scientific poetry that was as capable of observation, analysis, and abstraction as was scientific prose" because it threatens to upend "his hierarchical and supposedly discrete categories of Memory, Imagination, and Reason."[42] Similarly, Levao observes that Bacon advocates a "protectionist segregation" of reason, memory, and imagination—and their associated written traditions of philosophy, history, and poesy—as "the psychological first step toward encyclopedic wholeness."[43] The imagination cannot be allowed to generate poetic fictions that sever written experience from sensory experience:

> For Bacon, the seductiveness of late-Renaissance poetics with its golden worlds and counter-realities offers not liberation but a

[42] Robert M. Schuler, *Francis Bacon and Scientific Poetry* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1992), 23-24. Schuler argues that Bacon treats poetry as a form of mimesis, so natural philosophy composed in verse is problematic for him because it highlights "a fundamental conflict in Bacon's thought at the root of such ambivalence: an unresolved tension between science and poetry, reason and imagination" (10).

[43] Levao, "Francis Bacon and the Mobility of Science," 6.

> disastrous simulation of it. It mingles the opposing extremes of idealism and skepticism, the one unmooring the mind from the confinement of the concrete and inflating claims for its power, the other morbidly fascinated by the epistemological disjunction that occurs.[44]

What Levao describes, and what poetry enables if allowed to contaminate knowledge making, is a willful retreat from observable experience to a congenial, plausible, Idol of the Theatre.

Schuler claims that Baconian natural philosophy "requires not only the exclusion of 'Imagination,' but also the impossible task of escaping the language of 'men' altogether." His conclusion finds some support in Bacon's late career writing, but Bacon is more ambivalent than Schuler acknowledges.[45] The most notable passage about restricting language occurs in the *Preparation*. Here Bacon describes language as a necessary evil, essential for communicating ideas but dangerous because it can be co-opted by the imagination. He calls for its reform:

> In a great work it is equally necessary to describe what is accepted succinctly as it is to cut out superfluities, though it is evident that such purity and brevity will give much less pleasure to the reader and writer alike. We must constantly repeat the point that we are merely building a warehouse or storage space; not a place in which one is to stay or live with pleasure, but which one enters only when necessary, when something has to be taken out for use in the work of the Interpreter which follows. (P 226)

If it is to convey knowledge, writing must become a tool rather than an ornament. Its capacity to incite pleasure in the reader and to predispose how the imagination generalizes about written experience is viewed as misleading rather than instructive.[46]

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[44] Levao, "Francis Bacon and the Mobility of Science," 8.

[45] Schuler, *Francis Bacon and Scientific Poetry*, 56.

[46] Recent critical debate highlights a controversy over the degree to which Bacon really means to abandon fiction, rhetoric, and humanist learning. One the one hand, Jeffrey Gore argues that "Bacon's proposals for the advancement of learning would not just require that learning be communicated

Bacon revises his image of Erasmian *copia* to change how his readers see written tradition. These alterations occur in parallel with his growing misgivings about the Orpheus myth and poetry as a threat to natural history. When he translated the *Advancement* as the first book of *De Augmentis*, Bacon rendered the "rich storehouse" via two Latin images—*"locuples armarium et gazophylacium"*—that translate as "opulent chest" and "treasure house," respectively.[47] Since Book I of *De Augmentis* offers an exact translation of the *Advancement* in nearly all instances, he cannot be expected to have modified this image.[48] Elsewhere in his later writings, the conventional "rich storehouse" of written knowledge in the *Advancement* and its Latin translation becomes the utilitarian "granary" or "warehouse" (*Horreum esse tantummodò & Promptuarium Rerum*) of the *Preparation* (P 226).[49] Bacon's decision to reduce the "rich storehouse" into a "warehouse" or "storehouse of things" curtails imaginative, subjective responses to writing. The natural history described in the *Preparation* limits the reader's ability to attribute outsize significance to a piece of knowledge or an experience. Accordingly, the "warehouse" image sheds the connotation of immense value attributed to the "rich storehouse" and the image of the

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differently; instead, they called for an entirely new kind of learning, different or even opposed to the rhetoric-based system of learning that dominated pedagogy in his time." Jeffrey Gore, "Francis Bacon and the 'Desserts of Poetry," *Prose Studies*, 29.3 (December 2007): 359.

Meanwhile, Lewis observes that many of Bacon's readers "have been convinced by the rhetoric of revolutionary progress that was a crucial aspect of the narrative underpinning the Baconian project, and have concluded that Bacon's gestures towards classical learning must have been lawyerly dissimulation" rather than genuine engagement. He argues instead that Bacon accorded an "illuminative role" to mythology, which imparts true learning "heuristically." See: Lewis, "Francis Bacon, Allegory and the Uses of Myth," 361, 368-369.

[47] Sir Francis Bacon, "De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum," *The Works of Francis Bacon, Volume II*, eds. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1900), 142.

[48] Spedding, "Notes," *Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, 421.

[49] In the *Oxford Francis Bacon*, Graham Rees and Maria Wakely also maintain the utilitarian resonances of Bacon's Latin. They translate the phrase as "a granary or storehouse of things." Francis Bacon, "Preparative to a Natural History," *The Oxford Francis Bacon, Volume XI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 458-459.

"granary" (*horreum*) describes a place that holds commodities instead of Erasmian treasure. Bacon writes that the "store of things sufficiently large and varied"—*Rerum Copiam & varietatem*—contained within natural histories should avoid eliciting a subjective response of pleasure from the reader but enable the formation of "true axioms" (P 224). He counsels that authors should make words and their referents as interchangeable as possible:

> Reject everything that makes for ornament of speech, and similes, and the whole repertoire of eloquence, and such vanities. State all the things you accept briefly and summarily, so that there may be no more words than there are things. For no one who collects and stores materials for buildings or ships or such structures places them prettily (like window-dressers) and shows them off to please, but only makes sure that they are good and sound, and take up the least space in the warehouse. That is just the way it should be done here. (P 225)

Words and things are meant to be seamlessly interchangeable, so that the writer's description of material phenomena and the reader's mental image of them are conveyed without distortion.[50] Even the image of the storehouse presupposes some type of governing form, or order, but that utilitarian order should not enflame the reader's desires or aesthetic sensibilities.

By the time he wrote the "Preparation," Bacon sought to align language so closely with matter that there could be no imaginative response to writing beyond what is necessary to allow the reader to reconstruct causal axioms from written experience. If a word captures the nature of its referent, and sentences and paragraphs represent the causal relationships that govern the referent's past, present, and future

[50] In his overview of Bacon's response to Erasmus, Jeffrey Gore writes that Bacon criticizes "the problem of the popularization of *De copia*" in English Renaissance pedagogy, and "its impact on English habits of thought." Specifically, Gore shows how Bacon argues that Erasmian education teaches mastery of words and rhetorical tradition at the expense of knowledge and mastery of things. Gore, "Francis Bacon and the 'Desserts of Poetry," 367-68.

significance, then there is no room for the reader to devise new meanings or consider alternative causalities. Readers are meant to take his proposed natural history as proxy for someone else's sensory experience. When an author has composed a history correctly, there can be no ambiguity about the world he describes. Even in the "Preparation," Bacon continues to treat words as "the images of matter," which are "necessary" for the "work of the Interpreter" (P 226). However, he proposes a poetics where words are so precisely tied to their material referents that writing encapsulates causal relationships without provoking the imagination to generate alternative causalities. Words and referents become interchangeable in a way that immobilizes the imagination.

Others have noted this impulse to tie words to matter as a central theme of Bacon's poetics. Aulakh argues that Bacon "attempts to surmount the ambiguities of language through the materialization of thought in the sensuous form he calls a 'lively image.'"[51] Words, in essence, are to be tied to images in a way that Aulakh attributes to Erasmus:

> Indeed the storehouse of verbal riches Erasmus's method is intended to gather (quite physically a commonplace book) renders these reifications of thought into…transferable and redeployable blocks of language passed on from writer to writer and migrating from text to text.[52]

Similarly, Gerard Passannante describes how Bacon, under the influence of Lucretius, posits an equivalence between language and matter that is rooted in a correspondence between letters and the atoms that comprise the material world. He writes that "arriving at the knowledge of subtle particles was, for Bacon, also the pleasure of

[51] Aulakh, "Seeing Things Through 'Images Sensible'," 1151.
[52] Aulakh, "Seeing Things Through 'Images Sensible'," 1152.

knowledge reduced to its most basic possible components—the *elementa* of a language that reflected and embodied the structure of the world."[53] When Bacon calls natural history "the stuff and material of true induction" (p. 224) he envisions his history as an intellectual and material causal force in its own right.

Even as he espouses an empirical poetics that "must not invent or imagine what nature does or suffers" (NO 109), Bacon acknowledges that the storehouse of written and observational experience must be interpreted in order to be used. In essence, he provides one poetics—that of the storehouse—for compiling observation in a natural history and constructing causal axioms. He licenses a second, slightly more imaginative, poetics for readers interpreting that natural history. In explaining his poetics of reading, he alters another Renaissance trope for the mind's interpretive faculties. Erasmus and Sidney each invoke Seneca's apian metaphor of readers collecting knowledge from literature and internalizing or digesting it to form their own understanding of the world, as bees gather pollen and transform it into honey. Sidney urges his readers to practice "attentive translation" of works committed to their commonplace books, and "as it were, devour them whole, and make them wholly theirs."[54] Erasmus envisions that "the student, like the industrious bee, will fly about through all the authors' gardens and light on every small flower of rhetoric, everywhere collecting some honey that he may carry off to his own hive."[55] In contrast, the *New Organon* maintains the apian trope's emphasis on digestion, but

[53] Passannante, "Homer Anatomized," 1031.

[54] Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," 49. In his notes on this passage, Alexander writes that Sidney views dogged imitation as "superficial." He attributes Sidney's use of the digestive metaphor in part to Seneca's *Epistulae morales*, which introduced the apian trope of digestion. See: Gavin Alexander, "Notes," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, (New York: Penguin, 2004), 354-355.

[55] Erasmus, *On Copia,* 90.

alters its meaning so that the mind digests ideas (both written and self-generated) only in light of sensory experience:

> Those who have treated of the sciences have been either empiricists or dogmatists. Empiricists, like ants, simply accumulate and use; Rationalists, like spiders, spin webs for themselves; the way of the bee is in between: it takes material from the flowers of the garden and the field; but it has the ability to convert and digest them. This is not unlike the true working of philosophy; which does not rely solely or mainly on mental power, and does not store the material provided by natural history and mechanical experiments in its memory untouched but altered and adapted in the intellect. (NO 79)

The mind must work to shape and "digest" the material provided by natural history and mechanical experiments. In contrast to Erasmus and Sidney, the source of that experience is observation and natural history as recorded in Bacon's "tables" or "coordination[s] of instances" (NO 109), which is composed to be imaginatively inert. The *New Organon* facilitates Bacon's poetics of reading when it presents his explanation of "the actual art of interpreting nature…not in the form of a regular treatise, but digested, in summary form, into aphorisms" (NO 25). Bacon's commitment to aphorisms requires authors to undertake digestive, interpretive work to guide and constrain their readers' imaginations.

5: Mythologizing the Material World as the Locus of Knowledge Creation

Despite rejecting Orpheus and the imaginative poetics he symbolizes, Bacon persists in his mythmaking efforts. He has a long history of invoking the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption to mythologize his empirical method, and this slowly supersedes his classical images. With this biblical imagery, he achieves a level of methodological and mythical consistency that eluded his earlier, more

traditionally humanist poetics. He holds scripture to a different standard of empirical verifiability than the rest of his culture's written tradition. As a result, the image of Adam in the garden avoids the literary associations and messy narrative undertones of Orpheus' theatre. Bacon writes in "A Confession of Faith" that the *Old Testament*'s "continual history of the old world, and Church of the Jews," is "literally true" yet also "pregnant of a perpetual allegory and shadow of the work of the Redemption to follow." The *Old Testament* situates perceptible events within a redemptive teleology that will be verified in the *New Testament*.[56] It is prolepic in that its record is a precondition for the grace of the gospels. Bacon argues that scripture is among the ways the Spirit's grace is "ordinarily dispensed."[57] Their origin and the interpretive role of the Holy Spirit promised in John 15 means that "the Scriptures, being given by inspiration and not by human reason, do differ from all other books in the author; which by consequence doth draw on some difference to be used by the expositor" (AL 294).[58] This division between heavenly and earthly knowledge persists in Bacon's later works. The *New Organon* warns readers to "give to faith only what belongs to faith" and avoid "the unhealthy mingling of divine and human" (NO 53) in the absence of conclusive sensory evidence.

Bacon writes that his project's natural history should be a "second scripture" (P 231) that both foretells and brings about a restored relationship with creation. He

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[56] Francis Bacon, "A Confession of Faith," in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 109. Scholars remain unsure of when Bacon wrote this confession, which was first printed in 1641. Spedding dates it sometime after 1603. See: Vickers, "Notes," 560.

[57] Bacon, "A Confession of Faith," 111.

[58] See John 15.26, in which Jesus tells the disciples: "But when the Comforter shal come, whome I wil send vnto you from the Father, euen the Spirit of trueth, which proceadeth of the Father, he shal testifie of me." The chapter gloss in the 1560 *Geneva Bible* describes this verse as outlining "The office of the holie Gost and the Apostles." See: *The Geneva Bible, 1560 Edition*. (NN.nn.v).

reshaped his poetics by introducing a divinely sanctioned, Edenic vision of natural philosophers setting out from the warehouse of written experience to master their physical environment like the mariners passing the Pillars of Hercules on the frontispiece of the *New Organon*. In aligning his project with the *Genesis* narrative, Bacon anchors it to a biblical story that can only end in knowledge and redemption. The *New Atlantis* and "Of Gardens" in the 1625 *Essays* herald an epistemology akin to Bacon's early-career image of the mind as a true mirror. In these texts mind and matter shape, and are continuously reshaped by, one another. The world appears as a spatially ordered series of objects—essentially a set of Ramist loci or a physical manifestation of the tables in his proposed natural and experimental history.[59] Bacon writes that these tables must provide "a coordination of instances made, in such a way and with such organisation that the mind may be able to act upon them" (NO 109). His history's end is action, but its "organisation" permits only actions that perpetuate its ordered vision. Natural history's "second scripture" is meant to shape future actions in the same way as the *Old Testament* prepares the way for the *New*

[59] In *Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue*, Walter Ong, S.J. attributes two central English examples of Renaissance *loci* and *topoi* to Bacon and Ben Jonson:

> Agricola and other Renaissance rhetoricians show the influence of the Greek concept insofar as they tend to think of the 'matter' of discourse in terms of a woods, to be dealt with by a process of 'sorting out' or 'cutting out' or 'arranging.' In this tradition, Ben Jonson uses the terms *The Forest* and *Under-Woods* (today, *Underbrush*) to designate his two verse miscellanies, which, in his own words 'To the Reader' at the opening of his *Under-Woods*, consist of 'works of divers nature and mater congested as Timber-trees…promiscuously growing.' Even more appositely, Jonson calls his commonplace book *Timber, or Discoveries upon Men and Matter as They Have Flowed Out of His Daily Readings*—the relation of the 'woods' to the places of 'invention' is patent here. In the same vein, Francis Bacon styles his collection of miscellaneous or random remarks on natural history *Sylva sylvarum*; that is, *A Forest of Forests*.

Ong, *Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue*, 118-19.

Testament. The reader's vantage point in the *New Organon*'s famous frontispiece is on a ship outside the Pillars of Hercules, watching others pass through in its wake.

In this epistemological equilibrium, the transition between literate experience of natural history and the thought and physical labor of the reader becomes seamless in a way that blurs the causal relationship between reading, writing, and action. Texts emblematize knowledge as something almost sensible, and their form mirrors the order we perceive in nature. Textual knowledge causes us to enact changes on the material world, thereby altering what we perceive and requiring a reordering of the warehouse of written knowledge. As a safeguard, Bacon stipulates that words must be able to lead the mind back to their physical referents, even to the point of describing artifacts accurately enough to reconstruct them or reproduce an experiment.[60] At the same time, sensory experience prompts us to recall ideas or other objects that are causally or conceptually related and restructure our physical and textual environment to guide others to that knowledge. In Bacon's most optimistic vision, generations of natural philosophers gradually reorder the world as a series of *topoi* that reflects their collective understanding of it, and the world itself supersedes written natural history as the record of knowledge. The replacement is possible because the natural philosopher's understanding is empirically informed and accurate. When faced with the immediate connection between the senses, natural history, and the mind's ordered conception of the world, erroneous causal or conceptual relationships become harder

[60] Michael McCanles writes that for Bacon "The truth of the theoretical recipe lies in the resultant material pudding. What the theory predicts, the experiment may (or may not) confirm. If you can reproduce the natural object using your scientific description of its make-up as the basis of reproducing it, that fact becomes the proof of the scientific description. Thus we have the standard test for new scientific formulations: can the same results be reproduced by other scientists using the propounder's 'recipe' for these results? In brief, reproducibility establishes 'truth.'" "The New Science and the Via Negativa," 67-67.

for the philosophizing mind to sustain and less likely to be ratified as knowledge. In this restored alignment of the mind and matter, cause and effect are blurred as each acts to refine the other.

Bacon's late works embody his ordered, imaginatively restrained Edenic poetics even as they mythologize its redemptive results. The *New Organon* spatializes the creation of knowledge as movement through a building, claiming that "we are clearly still hovering about the anterooms of nature and are not achieving entrance to her inner chambers" (NO 107). We get a clearer glimpse of those inner rooms in the unfinished *New Atlantis*, which depicts a society unperturbed by desire or decay and yet moved by compassion to expand its order and stability to the rest of the world. Bensalem resembles the Lucretian hill of the *Advancement*, an image which the *Essays* later repurpose as a "vantage ground of Truth" (E 342). Solamona, the king who established the College of the Six Days Works, also instituted the island's policy of self-imposed isolation to preserve its civilization from decay. As described by the narrator, his intentions in doing so are "only (as far as human foresight might reach) to give perpetuity to that which was in his time so happily established."[61] Even the name of the college gestures toward the restoration of God's perfect prelapsarian order. Furthermore, the narrator claims the Father of Salomon's House "had an aspect as if he pitied men" (NA 478). The Father bestows his account on the narrator "to publish…for the good of other nations" (NA 488). This act of self-revelation echoes Bacon's own attempt at the close of Book I of the *New Organon* to "excite the industry of others" with models for future success that "would have seemed like mere

[61] Francis Bacon, "The New Atlantis," *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 470. Future references will be cited in text using "NA" as an abbreviation.

wishes" before their "hope" of fulfillment "has been given" (NO 99). Just as Christ commissions the disciples to "Go therefore, and teache all nacions"[62] at the end of Matthew's gospel, the Father of Salomon's House sends forth the narrator with a vision of the impending redemption.

Bacon's fictional achievement in the *New Atlantis* is to make aspects of Bensalem and its denizens' habits of thought seem achievable and even mundane. This mix of the quotidian—ceremonies and cultural commentary—precedes the fantastical vision of Salomon's House and makes it seem a more plausible extension of the islanders' ways of knowing and interpreting the world. Bensalem's ceremonies and symbolic attire embody the seamless Baconian transition from the ordered knowledge of the mind to the order of the material world. Its citizens view their symbols as a reflection of natural order, and they are so precise and pervasive that few of the islanders can imagine alternatives. Clothing and marks of office are often noted by the narrator.[63] Ubiquitous ceremonial decorum structures nearly every aspect of public life, as if the islanders were living inside masque, or even the abdication ceremony at the start of *King Lear*. For instance, the final act of the Feast of the Family is the presentation of a cluster of golden, enameled grapes to the patriarch, or Tirsan. The enameling of the grapes indicates that number of daughters and sons among his descendents. This symbol is to be carried before the Tirsan "as an ensign of honour when he goeth in public" (NA 474). Similarly, the consistent refusal

[62] See Matthew 28:19-20. *The Geneva Bible, 1560 Edition*. (EE.i.r).

[63] Persons receiving this type of description include the messenger who boards the narrator's ship (NA 457), the "person (as it seemed) of place" who conducts the narrator to shore (458-459), the governor of the House of Strangers (462), and the Father of Salomon's House (478). The only exception, and the only named character with whom the narrator interacts in an unofficial capacity, is Joabin the Jew (475).

of officeholders to accept payment for their services beyond their state compensation shows that Bensalem values the integrity of its symbols. The island is a world in which it is impossible to forget whom one is interacting with, and its public symbols are said to derive from an ideal order as much as they perpetuate it. The description of the Feast of the Family claims that political officials are seldom needed to enforce the Tirsan's decrees because of the "reverence and obedience" the people "give to the order of nature" (NA 473). The *New Atlantis* takes a familiar practice of inscribing our understanding of the world into our physical environment through networks of symbols. It imagines that the allegorical habits of mind that sustain audiences' engagement with a masque or work of art could be sustained throughout all facets of life.

The *New Atlantis* is not the only act of Edenic mythmaking in Bacon's late works. "Of Gardens" is perhaps its fullest embodiment—a walled, changeless Bensalem sited securely amid the worldly political concerns of the *Essays*. In this essay, Bacon describes an environment where the observer's knowledge of the material world reflects its actual causal order. His knowledge, as inscribed on the landscape, balances aesthetic pleasure and detachment. The garden moves the mind to tend it but subordinates our desires to observational acts of knowledge creation and the upkeep of its natural order. As a place of contemplation and labor, the garden serves no purpose in the relational world of culture and politics denoted by *The Essays, or Counsels Civil and Moral*. Bacon keeps his ideal garden isolated from the world like the removed Lucretian vantage point in the *Advancement* and "Of Truth." To remind us that what we are about to read invokes the world of Genesis chapters 1

and 2, "Of Gardens" opens with the claim that "GOD ALMIGHTY first planted a Garden. And indeed, the garden is the purest of human pleasures" and "the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man" (E 430). The pleasures of Bacon's garden are unlike those afforded by Sidneian imaginative or poetical feigning, where "Of Truth" observes "a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure" (E 341). Desire has no place in this garden. Linear time, the medium in which we pursue our desires, and mortality, which threatens to end that pursuit, is likewise absent. The garden is seasonal, but otherwise it ushers us into a timeless order exempt from narrative.

Systematic, comprehensive knowledge of a thing, and not the thing itself, becomes the object of desire. Perhaps because the act resembles Eve's plucking of the fruit in the Garden of Eden, Bacon will not even license his readers to imagine picking the flowers, whose "breath…is far sweeter in the air…than in the hand." Instead, he pronounces that "nothing is more fit for that delight" of enjoying the flowers on the vine "than to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air" (E 431). The garden is a site in which the mind and body are active, but not too active, in producing a space that is paradoxically "framed…to a natural wildness." It is perfect for the enjoyment of knowledge, yet unsullied by the knower's desirous will. The "ordering of the ground within the great hedge" is left to the reader's "variety of device," but with the stipulation that "it be not too busy, or full of work" (E 433). Human labor is needed to cultivate the garden. However, it should not be distinguishable from the order of nature, which limits the scope of the gardener's imagination to what can be observed within its walls. Bacon's garden reflects a perfect blend of action and abstention. The observer who could understand it and

make it his vocation to tend it would maintain this balance and achieve a measure of redemption through his work.

What is less clear is whether the mind acts upon the landscape as a cause, imposing order, or whether the garden acts upon the mind to form its understanding and shape its desires toward restrained cultivation and knowledge creation. Do we refrain from the excess of picking the flowers because we know they sweeten the air, or is the garden's "natural wildness" to be credited as the environment that made that knowledge possible? As Joanna Picciotto writes, tending to the garden and tending to the soul become hard to distinguish:

> The blending of purgatorial labor with the pastoral retreat of the garden made a muddle of the means and ends of paradisal recovery; this was the point. Francis Bacon's call to regain paradise through experiment was brazenly circular: paradise was blissful because it was the ideal place to practice active philosophy. At once the space of progress and its goal, the purgatorial garden also scrambled the concepts of 'advancement' and return, giving spatial expression to the logic of reformation itself.[64]

"Of Gardens" offers a natural history of the site of redemptive work and inspires future acts of cultivation. In a series of essays that discuss the action, dissembling, perils, and pleasures of private and public life in an ever changing world, the garden stands apart as a place of paradoxical wild order and seasonal timelessness. Here the line between cause and effect is blurred and the gardener sheds all the markers of identity he held outside its walls.

Bacon uses this essay to illustrate his vision of a warehouse of scientific writing that moves the locus of aesthetic satisfaction from the page to the physical world in order to avoid over-stimulating the reader's imagination. As early as the

[64] Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence,* 129.

Advancement, he links the writing of empirical natural history with the creation of a garden that will someday redeem all knowledge:

> …yet if particularity of actions memorable were but tolerably reported as they pass, the compiling of a complete History of Times might be the better expected, when a writer should arise that were fit for it: for the collection of such relations might be as a nursery garden, whereby to plant a fair and stately garden when time should serve. (AL 182)

Nearly half of "Of Gardens" is a catalog of plants and their attributes and effects on the senses. These "particulars" are specific to the climate of London, though its general plan can be adapted to other climates "as the place affords" (E 431). Bacon takes great care in describing his timeless horticultural arrangement, which ensures that "things of beauty may be…in season" at any time (E 430). His garden is both the mythical place of redemption—the fullest embodiment of his project—and a site-specific "nursery" of natural philosophy that will someday escape the confines of its walls and facilitate a reordering of civilization and the world in its image.

What Bacon chooses to omit from this garden is perhaps more indicative of his project than what he leaves in. Vickers notes that "Bacon altered the text," in his spatialized calendar of London plants, "his first version having been more expansive: 'Thus, if you will, you may have the Golden Age againe, and a Springe all the yeare long.'"[65] In light of what Bacon argues in the *Preparation*, his editorial decision prevents the imagination from leaping to mythical conclusions about the year-round garden. The excluded passage risks jolting the reader back to the golden ages and golden realms of imaginative literary tradition. He writes that a true natural history—history in the pure Sidneian sense of a recitation of facts with nothing added to what the historian has observed—exists "not to serve the pleasure of the reader nor the

[65] Vickers, "Notes," 769.

immediate advantage which can be got from reports, but must find and build a store of things sufficiently large and varied to formulate true axioms" (NO 224). In disassociating his garden from the fiction of perpetual spring, Bacon adheres to his own instructions in the *Preparation*. He refuses to spur his readers to imagine a completed redemption that would justify passivity and excite unquenchable desires. Instead, he offers ongoing, pleasurable work creating new causal axioms and tending the garden.

In the *New Organon* Bacon devotes only one paragraph to the fifth part of his six-part Great Instauration, and I read this brief passage as his major late-career concession to the uses and necessity of poetry. In this vision, fictions are useful for the foreseeable future, but will be discarded when his reformation of knowledge is the processes of its creation are complete:

> The fifth part is useful only for a time until the rest is complete; and is given as a kind of interest until we can get the capital. We are not driving blindly towards our goal and ignoring the useful things that come up on the way. For this reason the fifth part of our work consists of things which we have either discovered, demonstrated, or added, not on the basis of our methods and instructions for interpretation, but from the same intellectual habits as other people generally employ in investigation and discovery. For while we expect, from our constant converse with nature, greater things from our reflections than our intellectual capacity might suggest, these temporary results may in the meantime serve as shelters built along the road for the mind to rest in for a while as it presses on towards more certain things. (NO 23)

When Bacon says that knowledge created as part of the Instauration's fifth part follows "the same intellectual habits as other people generally employ," he implicitly sanctions poesy and other humanist arts as ways of producing provisional knowledge. His image of enticements for weary travelers resembles Sidney's argument that the poet

> …doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice many to enter into it; nay, he doth as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard – at the first give you a cluster of grapes that, full of that taste, you may long to pass further.[66]

The complete absence of any extended treatment of the fifth part of the Instauration is telling, since it is necessarily the project's most imaginative part and will serve no purpose when it is accomplished. It will be taken down like the temporary forms supporting a masonry arch under construction. As theorized in Sidney and demonstrated in *King Lear*, it is the imagination and its fictions that change our presuppositions about how our world works, and once we arrive, like Edgar, in a changed world, we can no longer articulate how we came there. At that stage, the pre-Instauration fifth part would have to be imagined.

[66] Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," 23.

IV: Metaphor, Idolatry, and Milton's Poetics of Prosopopoeia in *Paradise Regained*

Each of the preceding chapters describes an early modern perspective on imaginative fictions, their uses and dangers for individuals and communities, and the presuppositions and written forms that beget redemptive or destructive habits of mind. For Sidney, Shakespeare, and Bacon, the imagination has the power to alter our understanding of the world and our place within it, often without our noticing that the ground has shifted under us until after the fact. Like Shakespeare's Edgar, we realize that our former presuppositions now seem like fictions. All three authors explore the balance between using imagination to understand the world—to produce a vision of how the universe works that is both hopeful and plausible—and using it to guide our actions to repair the ravages of our fallen nature. When it works, poiesis produces fictions that reconcile imaginative vision with sensory experience. These fictions synthesize a coherent belief system that can be imparted to others and sustain civilization's shared, architectonic progress. As I have argued, *King Lear* (1605) offers an apocalyptic worst-case scenario of misdirected, unsustainable imagination in a pagan setting. In contrast, John Milton's *Paradise Regained* (1671) is arguably the most convincing demonstration of how Sidneian imaginative vision could contribute to God's providential redemption of the world. This final chapter examines Milton's redemptive poetics as a sustained imaginative reintegration of divine and earthly causalities in the wake of Bacon's efforts to separate the two.

To assert his providential vision, Milton needs to restore the imagination to a more central role in knowledge creation than the Baconian project affords it. While

Sidney leaves the proper use of the imagination to poets' and readers' discretions, Bacon's Instauration minimizes its role in knowledge creation. For all his emphasis on observation and the need to produce natural histories that have been purged of imaginative excess, Bacon retains a powerful, if ill-defined, role for imaginative knowledge-creation as the basis of faith. The problem is that he never clarifies when and how the imagination should affirm God's presence or will in the physical world. He writes in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) that "in matters of Faith and Religion we raise our Imagination above our Reason; which is the cause why Religion sought ever access to the mind by similitudes, types, parables, visions, dreams."[1] For the study of any earthly phenomenon he argues that "heretical religion as well as fanciful philosophy derives from the unhealthy mingling of divine and human."[2] What this means for Bacon is that any credible theophany must be shown not to have an earthly cause, and any attempt to describe it must rely on similitudes and metaphors. Divine agency is only affirmed in cases where material causation can be ruled out, as when the Father of Salomon's House declares a miracle in the *New Atlantis'* (1626) account of how Bensalem became Christian. The wise man of Salomon's House, who is present on one of the boats that "stood all as in a theatre" around the pillar of light, attributes his ability to discern physical from metaphysical events to the grace of God:

> 'Lord God of heaven and earth, thou hast vouchsafed of thy grace to those of our order, to know thy works of creation, and the secrets of them; and to discern (as far as appertaineth to the generations of men)

[1] Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 217.

[2] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36.

> between divine miracles, works of nature, works of art, and impostures and illusions of all sorts….'[3]

Bacon never explains how the wise man makes this determination; we learn only that it is based on his knowledge of material phenomena and his inward response to the encounter with the pillar of flame. If you are Baconian, as the man of Salomon's House clearly is, then on what basis can you presuppose divine causation in the physical world?

Each of the works I have examined is concerned with Christianity's foundational combination of the sensible and the ineffable, and specifically the process by which God's grace enters the world and continues to redeem the lives and societies of believers. Through overt discussion or conspicuous omission, those works address the Incarnation and the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit. *King Lear*, as Margreta DeGrazia has argued, shows an avowedly pagan Britain unredeemed by Christ's teachings and crucifixion. She writes that they play's "phenomenal tragic intensity is a function of its having been set so very far from the one date in Christendom that really matters, the one from which time is computed: the Incarnation."[4] My reading of the play contends that its pagan setting thwarts the characters' attempts to ground their identities and political order in a sustainable communal vision. I explore the latent threat of imaginative disenchantment and civilizational decay that occurs in the absence of God's entrance into the workings of the world. Sidney, meanwhile, predicates his imaginative poetics in *The Defence of*

[3] Francis Bacon, "The New Atlantis," in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 464.

[4] Margareta De Grazia, "King Lear in BC Albion," *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents*, eds. Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper, and Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 155.

Poesy (1595) on the "light of Christ,"[5] and names the "*prosopopoeias*" of the Psalms as examples of "a divine poem." As I have argued, prosopopoeia becomes the means by which the scriptures, and by implication, poets, foster faith, as well as an image of the spiritual enlivening readers undergo when they encounter fictions aright. "Notable *prosopopoeias*" could refer to readers ("your"), or to the poet's rhetorical figures:[6]

> For what else is the awakening his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable *prosopopoeias* when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, telling of the beasts' joyfulness and hills' leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he sheweth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty, to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? (DP 7)

The Psalmist envisions God entering the world and describes its response so that the sympathetic reader also experiences this theophany as mediated by the scriptures. Believers are themselves quickened and animated by the Psalmist's vision and their response is a form of prosopopoeia. This is evident in Jesus' exhortations for believers to be "born of water and the spirit" in John 3.5. Jesus implies a similar prosopopoeia in Luke 19.37-40. When he approaches Jerusalem "the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty

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[5] Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin, 2004), 40. Subsequent references to *The Defence of Poesy* will appear in text, accompanied by an abbreviation of "DP."

[6] Roger E. Moore has argued that while Sidney relegates divine poets like the Psalmist and imaginative poets in his own time to his first and third categories of poet, the distinction collapses under closer inspection. He writes that

> Sidney seems to have mare a…sustained investment in prophecy. He does not consider divine poetry a feature of the dim past nor does he regard it as residing only in the Bible or in works (such as Du Bartas's Semaines) that retold biblical stories. His notion of the Spirit is more fluid and potentially more dangerous. For him, prophetic inspiration 'bloweth where it listeth' (John 3.8) and appears in unlikely places, even in the works of 'right' poets who trade in fiction.

See: "Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Prophesying," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 50.1 (Winter 2010): 37.

works that they had seen." The Pharisees demand that Jesus silence his followers and "he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."[7] For Sidney, prosopopoeia is a result of faith.

In its treatment of Jesus' temptation in the desert, *Paradise Regained* may be said to address the Incarnation more directly and comprehensively than any major early modern work. I suggest that the artistic whole of Milton's poem exceeds the sum of its arguments, using similitudes and metaphors to make readers' imaginations generate vatic, divine *prosopopoeias* that they could not be argued into affirming. Milton is simultaneously interested in both fostering, and limiting his readers' experience of their Christian faith via controlled acts of imagination, and this delicate balance is most evident in *Paradise Regained*. The poem juxtaposes a complex series of biblical and literary concepts, many of them grounded in the carefully cultivated ambiguity of Jesus' image of the "living oracle." [8] (PR 1.460). Its aim is to move readers toward sustained acts of imaginative prosopopoeia that produce experiential assurance of the Incarnation. At the same time, Milton's careful modulation of this image is also meant to prevent us from the idolatrous act of confusing the subjective "inward oracle" by which we perceive Jesus with the "living oracle" that grants our vatic perception:

> God hath now sent his living oracle
> Into the world, to teach his final will,
> And sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell

[7] Unless otherwise specified, all biblical references in this chapter derive from the Authorized Version.

[8] John Milton. "Paradise Regained." *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007) 635-698. l. 4.460. Subsequent references to *Paradise Regained* will appear in text, accompanied by an abbreviation of "PR."

> In pious hearts, an inward oracle
> To all truth requisite for men to know. (PR 1.460-64)

Milton presupposes that the "Spirit" he invokes as his muse is the same that led the newly baptized Jesus into the desert "and brought'st him thence / By proof the undoubted Son of God" (PR 1.8, 10-11). He depicts Jesus via his metaphor of the "living oracle," which acts on the reader's "inward oracle" to help us imagine the Son's divinity without eclipsing his humanity.

1. Prosopopoeia, the "Inward Oracle," and the Private Architectonics of Paradise Regained

While Milton's poem spurs our imaginative vision, his careful deployment of metaphors is meant to ensure that no single image or idea can so dominate the reader's thoughts that it becomes an idol and obscures the deity it gestures toward. He is deeply aware that language and art have the ability to deceive and facilitate acts of Erasmian self-flattery. As a result, the vision of Jesus he gives us operates like the Sidneian Psalmist's prosopopoeias by cultivating an attitude of worship that circumvents rational understanding. Just before he declares himself God's "living oracle" he rebukes Satan's offer of "advice by presages and signs" (PR 1.394) and describes pagan oracles as the ultimate example of deluding language:

> For lying is thy sustenance, thy food.
> Yet thou pretend'st to truth; all oracles
> By thee are giv'n, and what confessed more true
> Among the nations? That hath been thy craft,
> By mixing somewhat true to vent more lies.
> But what have been thy answers, what but dark
> Ambiguous and with double sense deluding,
> Which they who asked have seldom understood,
> And not well understood as good not known? (PR 1.430-437)

Jesus' pronouncement aligns with Bacon's observation that "men believe their reason controls words," but "words retort and turn their force back upon the understanding."[9] We distort our understanding of the world and our place within its order under the influence of Satan, as Bacon accuses the Scholastic philosophers of doing in their "pride":

> But as they are, they are great undertakers indeed, and fierce with dark keeping; but as in the inquiry of the divine truth their pride inclined to leave the oracle of God's word and to vanish in the mixture of their own inventions, so in the inquisition of nature they ever left the oracle of God's works and adored the deceiving and deformed images which the unequal mirror of their own minds or a few received authors or principles did represent unto them.[10]

Satan's perspective in *Paradise Regained* resembles the Scholastic rush to judgement and conclusions in his haste to understand Jesus' nature and his relationship to God:

> Who this is we must learn, for man he seems
> In all his lineaments, though in his face
> The glimpses of his Father's glory shine. (PR 1.91-93)

Like Bacon's Scholastics, Satan muddles earthly and divine. His aim in investigating Jesus is not worship but an assurance that he can continue to dominate the earth in his own version of "fierce …dark keeping."

The point of juxtaposing these two perspectives from Milton and his predecessors is to show that Milton's "living oracle" can only be known through subjective experience, not parsed like a Scholastic argument or pagan oracle. His Jesus is at different points in the poem relatable and even understandable as a human being who experiences hunger and discomfort and has a mother. Yet when he stands on the pinnacle of the temple or bids Satan to "thereby witness whence I am" (PR

[9] Bacon, *The New Organon*, 48.
[10] Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, 142.

3.107) in echo of God's greeting to Moses in Exodus 3.14, our understanding and identification cease. Readers must then respond by either Satanic imaginative denial or the spontaneous prosopopoeias akin to Sidney's joyful beasts and leaping hills.[11] One way or another, the poem demands an imaginative response from the "inward oracle" of the believer's mind.

Because it takes the form of faith, the believer's response to *Paradise Regained* is a private, personal one whose architectonic impulse is less pronounced that what we see in Sidney and Bacon. This shift reflects the gradual erosion of Milton's hopes for broad, communal redemption after the Restoration. Milton begins his career with a Sidneian optimism about the prospects of instructive, delightful fictions reforming civilization and enlivening readers' faith by elevating imaginative presuppositions. Not surprisingly, he uses the Orpheus myth to symbolize the process and its resulting prosopopoeias, as well as art and civilization's vulnerability to be overwhelmed. Barbara K. Lewalski observes that "like Sidney, [Milton] assumes that poetry has power to move even as rhetoric does, comparing it to sermons that were normally intended to both instruct and persuade." However, she argues that "after the Restoration, Milton could no longer believe that the reformation of literature and culture might help produce a free society."[12] In *Of Education* (1644, reprinted 1673), Milton assumes the persona of Orpheus to elucidate his architectonic plan for "a complete and generous education…which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and

[11] The full text of Exodus 3.14 is "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."

[12] Barbara K. Lewalski, "How Poetry Moves Readers: Sidney, Spenser, and Milton," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 80.3 (Summer 2011): 764, 766.

magnanimously all the office both private and public of peace and war."[13] He writes to his intended recipient, Samuel Hartlib, that he will:

> …conduct ye to a hillside, where I will point ye out the right path of a virtuous and noble education—laborious indeed at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospect and melodious sounds on every side that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming.[14]

Milton-as-Orpheus recurs in Book VII of *Paradise Lost* (1667) in a passage that Lewalski highlights as an example of a more pessimistic Milton who "seeks protection from his muse Urania from a Restoration audience":[15]

> But drive far off the barbarous dissonance
> Of Bacchus and his revelers, the race
> Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
> In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
> To rapture, till the savage clamor drowned
> Both harp and voice; nor could the Muse defend
> Her son…(PL 7.32-38)

Milton in "Of Education" is akin to Orpheus orchestrating his theater among the beasts, but by the 1660s he equates himself with Orpheus at the moment of his dismemberment and asks to be defended in order to continue his work for a fit audience…though few" (PL 7.31). By the end of his career, Milton traded early dreams of reform for the hope of surviving to sing for a "few" "fit" readers. Milton's pessimism about the impact of his poems resembles Sidney, who ends his discussion of the poet as seer and maker with the claim that "these arguments will be by few understood and by fewer granted" (DP 10). With this in mind, Jesus' use of "inward" to modify "oracle" suggests his focus is on private and personal faith.

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[13] "John Milton, "Of Education," *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 973.

[14] Milton, "Of Education," 973.

[15] Lewalski, "How Poetry Moves Readers: Sidney, Spenser, and Milton," 766.

Milton's depiction of Jesus also moves readers whose hearts and imaginations are properly prepared to affirm conclusions they cannot account for or argue others into accepting. The "inward" state of belief is experiential and ontological, not intellectual. One aspect of Milton's depiction presupposes and then gradually builds the case for Jesus' divinity, but it does so by aligning us with his humanity and then showing how Jesus transcends our shared constraints. Milton is forced to use this combination of presupposition followed by evidence because Jesus' divinity as God's incarnate Son is unique within the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Son brooks no direct comparison. Jesus seems aware that no analogue for his redemptive role exists in the Old Testament or pagan traditions and is moved to act on certainties he cannot account for. In his soliloquy in Book I he recounts how Mary deemed his thoughts and future deeds "above example high" (PR 1.232) and therefore beyond the possibility of comparison or comprehension because he is "no son of mortal man" (PR 1.234). We share Jesus' initial doubts and longings and progress with him toward realizing his divine nature as far as we can. When we catch glimpses of Jesus as the Son of God we are jolted out of our identification with him and find ourselves in the presence of someone we cannot fully comprehend.

At least initially, Jesus shares our human experience of bafflement in the face of divine providence and the nature of his relationship to God, and the audience is primed to identify with him and even share his perspective. Our shared experience is a mix of hope and curiosity. At the beginning of the poem Jesus does not know why "by some strong motion I am led / Into this wilderness" and speculates that "perhaps I need not know" (PR 1.290-292). In his recent work on *Paradise Regained*, David

Carroll Simon discusses the way the readers' perspective intertwines with Jesus' experience before diverging at the end of the poem. He writes that the poem's mediation of Jesus' perspective "blurs the distinction between the Son and his imitators, between extraordinary virtue and ordinary human response." This blurring "grants the poem its pedagogical efficacy" by giving readers "a repeated experience of effortlessly successful resistance" to temptation through our identification with the Son.[16] This identification in which "the experience of the readers converges with that of the protagonist" ceases in the final temptation, where "Milton does not ask his readers to share the Son's perspective."[17] Here I want to stress that the sense of identification that Milton builds between Jesus and the reader makes the poem's glimpses of his divinity—of which the temple scene is the most sustained and conclusive—experientially convincing enough to prompt an imaginative response. Were we not already primed to identify with a Jesus whose experience seems so often like a credible imitation of our own, we would be more likely to distrust Milton's intimations that he is the Son of God. The poem works on our imaginations by having its protagonist meet us in shared uncertainty and usher us forward from there.

Milton's careful modulation between instances of identification with Jesus and recognition of his divinity builds our sympathy with the Son of God and makes it easier to affirm his status as the incarnate deity. However, the gaps Milton creates between our perceptions and experiences and Jesus' also make it impossible to idolize the poem as a stand-in for, or even a means of experiential access to, God. *Paradise Regained* produces a subjective experience in the reader whose cause cannot be

[16] David Carroll Simon, "Milton's Panorama: Paradise Regained in the Age of Critique," *Criticism* 60, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 541.

[17] Simon, "Milton's Panorama," 539, 546.

explained on the basis of observable reality. It provides no doctrine or promise of certainty—only the person of Jesus. The effects of this experience on our presuppositions and actions may be sustained long after our encounter with the poem has receded into memory, but no one would mistake the poem, which is a means to worship, with the object of that worship. In the preface to *Christian Doctrine* (c. 1660, printed 1825), Milton distinguishes between accepting what a document says as true and the inward act of belief which is a subjective response: "I advise every reader…to withhold his consent from those opinions about which he does not feel fully convinced, until the evidence of the Bible convinces him and induces his reason to assent and to believe."[18] The passage describes the progress from scripture to reasoned assent to faith. It highlights the Bible's status as an instrument of faith and not a proxy for it.

Poetry, for Milton and Sidney, is at its best an expression of humanity's divine image in that it prompts a response of worship, but allows neither itself nor its author become the object of that worship. Gordon Teskey offers a related vision of the Miltonic poet as a second-hand creator who imitates God's act of creation, and makes something new as part of that imitation. For Milton, however, anything the poet creates is ultimately derivative, since God made the poet:

> [Milton] says that his poems are mediated through him by the Spirit, the creative power of God, and are fashioned by an art that is the poet's own—his own talent, his own labor—only in a secondary way.

[18] John Milton, "Christian Doctrine," *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Volume VI* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1973), 121-122. Subsequent references to *Christian Doctrine* will appear in text, accompanied by an abbreviation of "YP." There are two exceptions in which I have cited Kerrigan, Rumrich, and Fallon's abbreviated CD because COVID-19 has prevented me from obtaining a library copy of the Yale Prose edition. In those cases, the in-text abbreviation of "CD" is used with the corresponding page number in that edition.

> For the things that are the poet's own were given him by his Creator, and the very poems he writes are extensions of the original Creation.[19]

This view is evident in the invocations to *Paradise Lost*, which calls on the "Spirit" of God to "raise and support" the poet,[20] and *Paradise Regained*, where Milton asks the "Spirit" to "inspire / As thou art wont, my prompted song else mute" (PR 11-12). Milton's poetics echoes Sidney, who argues that the "highest point of man's wit" gives "right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker" and contends that the poet "goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit" (DP 9) in imitation of God's creative power.

2. The Sensible World, Idolatry, and the Role of the Imagination in Paradise Regained

Alongside his focus on poets as creators in the image of God, Milton works to subordinate the human creator to God and circumscribes our imaginative scope. His goal is to ensure that neither the poet nor the reader can sustain a presupposition of self-authorship, and that our perceptions of God and His providence can be experienced but not controlled or retained indefinitely. Just as the natural world of the first six days of creation testifies to God's power, so must the "second nature" (DP 9) of the poet's imagination draw the mind to worship and admiration. This paradigm applies in other human activities as well. When Jesus refuses Satan's offer of martial

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[19] Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006), 11.

[20] John Milton, "Paradise Lost," *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 283-630. 1.17, 1.23. Subsequent references to *Paradise Lost* will appear in text, accompanied by an abbreviation of "PL."

glory in *Paradise Regained*, he, too, epitomizes the human role as God's image, meant to reflect God's glory back to Him:

> Shall I seek glory then, as vain men seek
> Oft not deserved? I seek not mine, but his
> Who sent me, and thereby witness whence I am. (PR 3.105-107)

Milton recognizes that art and its impact on the mind must have a finite duration—the memory of the experience of the transcendent remains, but the experience itself is unsustainable. When he famously seeks to "justify the ways of God to men" (PL 1.126) in *Paradise Lost* he implores the Spirit's aid to "raise and support" his efforts "to the highth of this great argument" (PL 1.1.23-24), knowing that he cannot attain those heights himself. Tellingly, *Paradise Regained* ends not with the climactic confrontation on the temple, but with the mundane homecoming anyone could imagine with minimal exertion. Indeed, what Charles Dunster calls the "studied reserve of ornament" in Milton's narrative of earthly, sensible events would in most cases be at home in an ideal Baconian natural history.[21] This final shift in tone from the angel chorus that preceded it returns our focus to Jesus' humanity instead of leaving readers with a lingering image of the Son's divinity:

> Thus they the Son of God our Savoir meek
> Sung victor, and from Heav'nly feast refreshed
> Brought on his way with joy; he unobserved
> Home to his mother's private house returned. (PR 4.636-639)

Teskey calls this art-induced oscillation between imaginative *prosopopoeia* and the sensible world "delirium," which he defines as "the repetitive canceling and restoring of the hallucination of universal *createdness*." In a state of delirium the derivative artist's identity disappears into a self-transcendent awareness "that everything has

[21] Charles Dunster, "Notes," *Paradise Regained* (London, 1800), 276.

been created by God," temporarily eclipsing his own subjectivity and allowing him to glimpse the world as God sees it.[22]

Milton's goal of inspiring readers' prosopopoeias and concordant awareness of their status as creatures and not independent creators requires him to keep artists and readers from idolizing their imaginative creations. This necessitates a very particular approach to form, since Milton's aim is to incite a state of vatic perception which is profound but temporary. Words cannot become a substitute for what they represent. Teskey describes Milton's signature formal strategy as an endless interplay between concepts and metaphors, and I suggest that one of the effects of this Miltonic poetics is that its prosopopoeias can be experienced but not sustained or controlled. For Teskey, the delirious interplay of concepts and metaphors is especially evident in his discussion of "God's body" as "both a concept, something we can grasp but not imagine, and a metaphor, something we can imagine by releasing what we grasp and letting it fall into endless metaphorical change." In this process "poetry happens in the clash between concepts and metaphors," which explains how it operates as a limited but powerful way of evoking the ineffable.[23] By setting this oscillation between conceptual understanding and metaphoric perception that goes beyond rational understanding, Milton ensures that we are always forced to look beyond ourselves and the poem to account for its effects on us.

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[22] Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 12. Teskey's chapter on *Paradise Regained* focuses on Milton's Christology and posits that at the poem's climax a fully human Jesus experiences delirium. In this moment he "is at once acknowledging the transcendence of the Father in heaven and affirming the immanence of the Father in the Son" (175). I find Teskey's formulation provocative and insightful, but my reading focuses on readers' imaginative responses to Jesus, rather than Jesus' evolving perception of himself.

[23] Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 88-89.

Bacon's division of "the oracle of God's word" and the "oracle of God's works" illustrates the slipperiness of the oracle, which as I will discuss becomes the poem's major epistemological battlefield between Jesus and Satan. Satan invokes it at the conceptual level when he offers "oracles, portents and dreams" as tools for understanding Jesus' earthly role whereby he "may direct [his] future life" (PR 1.396), but that Jesus turns Satan's concept into a metaphor. I suggest that Milton's depiction of relatable material experience, or the "oracle of God's works," lays what Sidney calls the "imaginative ground-plot for profitable invention" (DP 35) for an act of faith. Through this "ground-plot" earthly experience becomes understood in light of spiritual presuppositions. Bacon leaves room for the possibility that our experience of the sensible world could somehow be transformed in passages like the Wise Man of Salomon's House before the pillar of flame, but he never quite shows how it takes place. Other readers identify a similar leap as a hallmark of Milton's poetics. In his juxtaposition of Milton's poetry and Immanuel Kant's concept of succession (*Nachfolge*),[24] Sanford Budick writes that "in Milton's poetry it is the negation of or within sensory representation that produces the supersensible presentation."[25] He describes Kant's fascination with Milton's "exemplary poetic representation of a line that extends beyond our tracing is effectively infinite."[26] In essence, Budick attributes to Kant and Milton an ability to start with the sensible, with an idea or experience that

[24] Sanford Budick, *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), xii. Budick takes this term, also translated as "following," from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. He favors "succession" because it "suggests far more accurately…the independence achieved in this exceeding of imitation but a special kind of imitation."

[25] Budick, *Kant and Milton*, 32-33.

[26] Budick, *Kant and Milton*, 35-36. In this passage the "infinite" line Kant perceives in Milton is Raphael's descent from heaven to earth in Book V.246-307 of *Paradise Lost*.

can be understood and imitated, and move the mind to experience something infinite that can only be known imaginatively.

Paradise Regained depicts Jesus' change from one perspective to another as he reconciles what he knows of the scriptures, his destiny, and his "strong motions" from the Spirit with his ongoing embodied experience of his full humanity. His transformation on the pinnacle of the temple is made more compelling by his skepticism about supernatural causality elsewhere in the poem. This avoidance of false prosopopoeias—which I define as the imaginative investiture of the physical world with agency it does not actually possess, as well as a corresponding idolatrous subjective response to that imagined world—is evident throughout *Paradise Regained*.[27] For instance, David Quint writes that in the false banquet temptation of Book II "Satan's devils—like the actors in Shakespeare's theater or of Milton's masque [*Comus*]—play the parts of nature spirits, and by doing so, they reveal both that they are not part of nature and that such spirits are unreal."[28] In his interpretation of the Book IV storm scene, which he reads as a similar Satanic attempt to imbue natural phenomena with supernatural import, Quint describes the world of the poem as one of imaginative "disenchantment" akin to what I have argued of *King Lear*:

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[27] In her reading of Baconian allegory in *Paradise Regained*, Catherin Gimelli Martin draws on Kenneth Gross's definition of idolatry as "the 'ironic twin' of rational or provident choice, a selfish desire [of the idolater] 'to subject a life other than its own to the reductions of idolatry,' or objectification." She writes that its "positive twin, the opposite of turning living things into reified objects, consists in endowing dead things with psychic life and thereby emulating a Creator for whom all life is a 'thou' and not an 'it' or an object. See: Catherin Gimelli Martin, "Eliding Absence and Regaining Presence: The Materialist Allegory of Good and Evil in Bacon's Fables and Milton's Brief Epic," *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*, ed. Brenda Machosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 219.

For the cited Kenneth Gross passage, see: Spenserian Poetics: Idolatry, Iconoclasm, and Magic (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 39-41, 37.

[28] David Quint, "The Disenchanted World of *Paradise Regained*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2013): 187.

> Still, this disenchantment comes at a price. In a similar storm on the heath, King Lear learns that winds do not crack anthropomorphic cheeks, and have no care, one way or the other, for human beings. Once we stop imagining a nature filled with its own animating divinity, *Paradise Regained* argues, we give demons no purchase to deceive us and we send them packing too. But then we are alone in the cosmos in which we find no kindred spirits—and its indifference may be more terrifying than the terrors that Satan directs at Jesus. The stage is now clear for true religion, but the overcompensation of the celestial communion table the angels offer at the end of the poem may be much too late.[29]

For Quint, the disenchantment of Jesus' world is so complete that the poem's depiction of the supernatural entering the natural world is no longer compelling. He inhabits a perspective akin to that of a Baconian who keeps the "oracle of Gods word" and the "oracle of God's work" disjoined. Ironically, Sidney identifies the ceasing of oracles among the pagans as a similar inducement to atheism in which divine agency is excised from human experience.[30]

Even those who imagine a connection between the poem's natural and supernatural orders must admit that that they are the ones who validate Milton's incarnational presupposition by internalizing it. Consider the fact that, for Budick, succession is an experiential concept which, in a Catch-22, requires one to achieve succession in order to confirm its existence. Budick works very hard to approximate the experience, but at the same time he acknowledges that because succession "discloses the mind's unconditioned causality of freedom, we cannot ever know, or be certain, that a particular procedure of succession has occurred." In fact, we "can

[29] Quint, "The Disenchanted World," 193.

[30] Sidney writes that "Who list may read in Plutarch the discourses of Isis and Osiris, of the cause why oracles ceased, of the divine providence, and see whether the theology of that nation stood not upon such dreams, which the poets indeed superstitiously observed; and truly, since they had not the light of Christ, did much better in it than the philosophers who, shaking of superstition, brought in atheism" (DP 40)

only demonstrate and propose its potentiality in an array of significant correspondences."[31] The problem, of course, is that affinities don't offer any sure evidence of causation since succession always moves from the observable to the unobservable, from outwardly verifiable and potentially shared sensory experience to an inward, subjective response. Succession necessarily begins in sensory experience —in this case the act of reading. It becomes the ongoing "condition of succession" in which the mind responds to the printed words and achieves a "sublime experience that…becomes original and totally different from imitation."[32] It is also notable here that Budick describes succession as a "condition," which is an ontological state rather than an epistemological one. It suggests that because fictions change our presuppositions, which enable knowledge and but are not the content of what we know, they change who we are. Who we are and what we presuppose determines what we are capable of knowing.

3. Imaginative Prosopopoeia and Milton's Temporary Displacement of Spirit and Scripture

In the temple scene Satan finally forces Jesus to declare whether he is subject to the natural or supernatural order by placing him in a situation from which his only means of escape can be supernatural.[33] Jesus and the reader are able to affirm (or, as Quint demonstrates, deny) God's agency because we have resisted the false, easy

[31] Budick, *Kant and Milton*, 49.
[32] Budick, *Kant and Milton*, 24-25.
[33] Citing John Carey's reading of the poem, Teskey argues that Milton's Jesus uses only human power to stand on the temple. Even if he can balance for a time using only human capabilities, the fact remains that the angels ultimately rescue Jesus. While none of the Gospels specify that angels rescue Jesus from the temple, the Matthew account ends with "Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, the angels came and ministered to him" (Matt. 4.11). Mark 1.13 also notes that "the angels ministered unto [Jesus]" during his temptation. By including the angelic rescue, Milton echoes the supernatural elements of his source texts.

certainties that Satan has proffered as spiritual truths about God's providence. In this sense, Jesus' messianic identity is rooted in his habits of mind as a good Baconian, yet he is still receptive to the "strong motion" (PR 1.290) of what Milton has made clear is the "Spirit" of God (PR 1.189). In the person of Jesus, *Paradise Regained* offers a unique perspective on how Milton modulated between a Baconian focus on reproducing observable phenomena and a Sidneian poetics of imaginative prosopopoeias. As Catherin Gimelli Martin observes, Milton's approach aligns with the goal and progress of learning as described in "Of Education":[34]

> The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which, being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection. But, because our understanding cannot in this body found itself but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be followed in all discreet teaching.[35]

To this end, *Paradise Regained*, depicts the action of the Spirit, which Milton argues must be imagined based on observable phenomena. He invokes the same Spirit to guide his composition and readers' subjective responses to it:

> Thou Spirit who led'st this glorious eremite
> Into the desert, his victorious field
> Against the spiritual foe, and brought'st him thence
> By proof undoubted Son of God, inspire,
> As thou art wont, my prompted song else mute,
> And bear through highth or depth of nature's bounds
> With prosperous wing full summed to tell of deeds
> Above heroic, though in secret done,
> And unrecorded left through many an age,
> Worthy t' have not remained so long unsung. (PR 1.8-17)

[34] Martin, "Eliding Absence and Regaining Presence," 219.

[35] Milton, "Of Education," 971.The Modern Library editors gloss "inferior creature" as "visible creation; the world we perceive."

The possibility that Milton's "song" will remain "mute" could imply that it would not exist without the Spirit's aid, but it also means that without the Spirit's ministrations no one would hear it aright. The poem itself moves "through highth or depth of nature's bounds"—which is to say that it depicts perceptible events that take place in the desert and, later, at the temple. Jesus' victory against a "spiritual foe" and its significance must be imputed imaginatively by the poet, the reader, and Jesus himself, all of whom presuppose the aid of the Spirit.

For Milton, poetry is the only way of making the Incarnation real to his readers, and this process requires an invocation that mere argument does not. He cannot argue readers into belief on the basis of any material evidence, and the scriptural evidence for this central tenant of Christianity requires the same sort of imaginative prosopopoeia as Milton's poem, which acts as a parallel conduit to faith. His prose writings on the Incarnation are uncharacteristically circumspect considering his capacity for prosecuting vigorous, scripturally-based theological arguments. For instance, when he argues against the Trinity in Book I, Chapter 5 of *Christian Doctrine*, Milton amasses a raft of scriptural evidence, declares that "the Father and the Son differ from each other in essence" (YP 6.262) and asserts that "anyone who is not a lunatic can see what kind of [illogical] conclusion" (YP 6.264) results from Trinitarian claims. This signature combination of careful argument and emphatically stated conclusions is notably absent when he discusses the incarnate Christ in Book I, Chapter 14 of *Christian Doctrine*. In one of a half dozen such passages, Milton avoids theological discussion and simply states, "How much better for us, then, to know only that the Son of God, our Mediator, was made flesh and that he is called and is in fact

both God and man." He follows this claim with one of several calls for caution: "As God has not yet revealed to us how this comes about it is much better for us to hold our tongues and be wisely ignorant" (YP 6.424). Milton knows he cannot argue readers to faith. Only the Spirit of God can move them.

In light of this, the compelling question becomes how, exactly, Milton attempts to be "wisely ignorant" in his art and facilitate the actions of the Spirit. In *Christian Doctrine* he calls the Incarnation "too deep a mystery for anyone to say anything definite about…" (YP 6.427). How, then, does he transform a theological term like Incarnation—which never appears in the poem itself—from the intellectual, scriptural arguments of Christian doctrinal tradition to an internalized but inexpressible idea that can offer readers assurance a transcendent reality?[36] At more than 2,000 lines, *Paradise Regained* can hardly be considered an act of holding one's tongue, but instead of arguing it starts by presupposing Jesus' divinity and creates a poem whose depiction of Jesus' humanity allows us to imagine his divinity. In his formulation of how poetry produces a supersensory, subjective experience of truth, Marshall Grossman describes its as a "mimetic mediation of inward truth submitted to transcendental reason," or the process by which "what began as inward revelation must be articulated as self-evident truth."[37] Grossman's description of *Paradise Regained* could just as easily apply to Bacon's Wise Man of Salomon's House as he stands before the pillar of flame and declares it "a true Miracle" after "having awhile

[36] John Savoie notes the absence of the "post-biblical term" "Incarnation" from Milton's poem. He contends that "Milton avoids the term that would spoil the drama with premature resolution and reduce the living mystery to theological abstraction." See: "The Point and the Pinnacle: Son and Scripture in *Paradise Regained*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 31.1 (2004): 85-86.

[37] Marshall Grossman, "Poetry and Belief in *Paradise Regained*, to which is added, *Sampson Agonistes*," *Studies in Philology*, 110.2 (Spring 2013): 384, 386.

devoutly viewed and contemplated" it.[38] For Milton, as for Sidney and Bacon before him, fiction works not by imposing an explanation, but by mimesis, or the written mediation of experience that can support imaginative vision.

In *Paradise Regained* Milton's aim is to depict Jesus' unified humanity and insinuate his divinity in a way that can then be experienced and internalized by the reader despite the fact that no explanation is provided. To make his readers encounter the Incarnation imaginatively, Milton goads them to confront the poem on its own terms as an account of deeds "unrecorded left through many an age" (PR 1.16). His work is explicitly new material, rather than a reconstruction of the biblical accounts. Even though he invokes the Spirit and the poem itself can be said to presume "the centrality of God's written Word," the way Milton depicts the Spirit and the Bible after the invocation allows their significance to Jesus to unfold organically as the poem progresses.[39] Through this strategy of artistic originality and deferral of the Spirit's influence, he (temporarily) distances the reader from the two major authorities that the Protestant tradition—namely the bible as the revealed word of God and the Holy Spirit—customarily relied upon to mediate the concept of the Incarnation. As we watch Jesus realign himself with both we are likewise drawn to see them from his perspective.

The obvious temptation would be to move immediately to a discussion of the poem's famous "Spirit of Truth" (PR 1.462) and "inward oracle / To all truth requisite for men to know" (PR 1.463-64) and use these lines as the key to grasping

[38] Bacon, "The New Atlantis," 464.

[39] Regarding the poem's emphasis on scripture, Savoie writes that "the first temptation establishes the centrality of God's written Word; the rest of the book and the poem as a whole operate from this principle." See: "The Point and the Pinnacle: Son and Scripture in *Paradise Regained*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 31.1 (2004): 95.

the Incarnation, and potentially also the poem. After all, Jesus claims that the Holy Spirit "shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16.14). Assuming that this passage describes the situation in *Paradise Regained* is putting the cart before the horse, however. Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit in John 16 makes it clear that it will not be bestowed until after he has left the disciples, and indeed Pentecost occurs after the Ascension: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him to you" (John 16.7). This chronology is important because it means that Milton, writing in the seventeenth century, can invoke the "Spirit who led'st this glorious eremite / Into the desert" (PR 1.8-9) to "inspire / As thou art wont, my prompted song else mute" (PR 1.11-12). In contrast, the "Spirit" that "in likeness of a dove / …descended" (PR 1.29-30) and the "Spirit" that leads Jesus into the wilderness (PR 1.189) are decidedly silent when it comes to "shewing" Milton's protagonist his glory or offering him any clear understanding of his purpose as the newly declared Son of God. Though Milton begins the poem by invoking the Holy Spirit on behalf of himself and his reader, he purposely withholds its nature, origin, and intentions from his protagonist, and by proxy the reader, in the poem's narrative present.

Although the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to encounter Satan "by some strong motion" (PR 1.290), it is clear that God has chosen Satan, and not the Spirit, as the direct means by which Jesus will discover his messianic identity.[40]

[40] Milton's anti-Trinitarian theology, which posits that the Holy Spirit is "a creature" which "was created …but after the Son, to whom he is far inferior, was made" (YP 6.298), may also account for the Spirit's relatively minor role in the poem's action. For Milton, the spirit is "subservient and obedient" to the Son and can "speak nothing of his own accord" (YP 6.288).

When God the Father announces his plans to Gabriel in Book I, he reveals his designs for humanity's salvation to the denizens of heaven in an instant, but in keeping with John 16 he chooses to unfold them to human beings, of which Jesus is one, in the "hereafter":

> His weakness shall o'ercome Satanic strength
> And all the world, and mass of sinful flesh;
> That all the angels and ethereal powers,
> They now, and men hereafter may discern,
> From what consummate virtue I have chose
> This perfect man, by merit called my Son,
> To earn salvation for the sons of men. (PR 1.161-167)

Milton's use of present tense in Jesus' claim that God "sends his Spirit of Truth" (PR 1.462) suggests the Holy Spirit begins to help define and glorify Jesus as soon as he mentions it in this passage. Its assistance to both Jesus and the reader may develop gradually over the course of the poem and beyond, however. The "truth requisite for men to know" (PR 1.464) could be different in the "hereafter" of Pentecost and beyond than it is in the pre-Ascension world of *Paradise Regained*.[41] In a telling departure from all three of the synoptic gospels, Milton's account of the Spirit descending at Jesus' baptism (PR 1.29-32) omits the Spirit's declaration of God's pleasure, which is rendered using the present tense "I am well pleased," in both the Authorized Version and the Geneva Bible.[42] The absence of the Spirit's expected praise of Jesus heightens the poem's dramatic tension. Evidence elsewhere in Milton

[41] Milton's Subordinationism likely plays a role here, since the Son is made of God's substance, but does not share his essence (CP 6.211-12), and could therefore conceivably deviate from the Father's will as an independent being.

[42] See Matthew 3.17, Mark 1.11, and Luke 3.22.

seems to support a provisional view of Jesus' efficacy, which God has foreknown but not foreordained.[43]

Milton and the reader occupy the poem's "hereafter" and have the benefit of the Holy Spirit as both Muse and guide. By writing a poem in which the human protagonist does not presume such guidance, he is able to shake his readers' Spirit-induced complacency so that we begin to imagine how we would confront the Gospel narratives without it. Milton writes in *Christian Doctrine* that Jesus "was not known by [the] name [Christ] from the beginning" (CD 1144), which also suggests that we are meant to watch him grow into the role in *Paradise Regained*.[44] As Book II suggests, we are also meant to identify with the disciples who "Began to doubt and doubted many days" (PR 2.11) and later struggle throughout their careers to believe in Jesus' messianic claims and miracles. Since *Paradise Regained* is not actually scripture, the reader is even farther from presuming the Holy Spirit's aid in interpreting it as he could in striving to clarify and internalize the Bible. Our predisposition to approach the poem as an art object and not a scriptural text temporarily displaces the Spirit and encourages readers to encounter Milton's vision of the Incarnation as an aesthetic experience and intellectual puzzle. By primarily aligning us with Jesus, depriving him of the Spirit's full, post-Pentecost guidance, and retelling the story in a secular form, Milton forces his readers to imaginatively reconstruct the Incarnation from available arguments and sensory experience alongside Jesus. The poem explores a concept that the Protestant reader could

[43] For Milton's distinction between God's knowledge and decrees, see especially Chapters 3 and 4 of *Christian Doctrine* in YP 6.153-202.

[44] John Milton, "Selections from *Christian Doctrine*," *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 1137-1333.

customarily presuppose via the "inward oracle," aided by the Holy Spirit. Through its mimesis, it strips the Christian reader of comfortable assumptions and lays out a series of unstable but compelling images in order to spark an act of prosopopoeia through the unfamiliar encounter it dramatizes. It is as if Milton is trying to replicate the effect of the Bible on the believer, but in a fresh way that uses new matter and unfamiliar language to recount a known story rendered unfamiliar. The Sidneian reader reacts to the Psalms with an act of imaginative prosopopoeia that enlivens his own spiritual response to God, and Milton strives to create a parallel version of this process in *Paradise Regained*.

4. Metaphor, Interpretation, and the Structure of Paradise Regained

The Spirit may be underdeveloped at the outset of the poem's depicted chronology so that Milton's Jesus can embody its workings on the reader's behalf through the "living oracle" of his argumentative acts of self-discovery. As he navigates the labyrinth of his identity, Jesus' most useful evidence is the account of his birth he received from Mary (PR 1.227-258) and his study of "what was writ / Concerning the Messiah, to our scribes / Known partly…" (PR 1.260-61). In this sense, he resembles the reader in being confronted with the need to interpret his power and purpose from the scriptural evidence, but we also get the benefit of Jesus' oracular interpretive arguments through the course of the poem as we seek to understand him. As Victoria Kahn argues, Jesus' status as a "perfect man" (PR 1.166) is itself ambiguous. It could mean that he is either "a perfectly human reader of scripture [and] one whose questions can serve as a model for any human reader" or

"an incarnate God…who will suffer on the cross to save mankind."[45] When Jesus discovers "of whom they spake / I am" (PR 1.262-63) he has all of the biblical evidence he requires and even a vague knowledge of the suffering he will endure, but he begins the poem lacking experiential knowledge of his nature and is compelled to test it. In *Areopagitica* (1644), Milton writes that "He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian."[46] Jesus' divinity can only become credible through the process of lived experience in the sensible world, which includes temptations. It is this experience, and Jesus' explicitly reasoned reaction to it, that Milton seeks to imitate for the reader of *Paradise Regained*.

The process by which Jesus rejects Satan and affirms his identity as the Son of God is internal, but Milton can narrate his arguments and the acts of interpretation that allow this to occur. Any argument requires a set of terms, and the ability to define these terms is what enables one party to convince the other. The most obviously contentious term in *Paradise Regained* is "Son of God," but this epithet is in turn argued over by means of other words and images, of which "oracle" is a particularly important one. Satan argues that "The Son of God…bears no single sense" (PR 4.517) and, as Teskey notes, he has clear interest in keeping the term vague or being the one to define it. If he fails, he risks discovering "the worst news possible: that 'Son of God' means God's 'first begot,'" and that Jesus is indeed the one who with

[45] Victoria Kahn, "Job's Complaint in *Paradise Regained*," *ELH*, 76.3 (Fall 2009): 627.

[46] John Milton, "Areopagitica," *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 939.

"his fierce thunder drove [him] to the deep" (PR 1.90) in *Paradise Lost*.[47] To this end, Satan's second temptation is an offer of "advice by presages and signs, / And answers, oracles, portents, and dreams" (PR 1.394-95) in order to help Jesus decide how to fulfill his newly pronounced role as the Son of God. At the end of the bread temptation that precedes this offer, Jesus asks "Why dost thou then suggest to me distrust, / Knowing who I am, as I know who thou art" (PR 1.355-56). His rebuke of Satan's first feint ends in a veiled declaration of his own identity ("I am") and a clearer identification of Satan, whom the poem describes as "now undisguised" (PR 1.357). Less than a fifth of the way through the poem, Jesus and Satan's respective identities have already been declared but not yet defined.

Since Jesus rebuffs Satan's appeal to the human experience of hunger, Satan realizes he cannot tempt him solely on the basis of his humanity. Instead he has to trick Jesus into prematurely defining his messiahship and thereby contradicting his providential claim that "what concerns my knowledge God reveals" (PR 1.293). This type of grasping haste, which elevates our desires above God's providence and commandments, is the same act of obedient abstention Eve has failed to carry out in *Paradise Lost*. It resembles Bacon's injunction against picking the flowers of his Edenic garden in "Of Gardens," since they are better known and enjoyed if left undisturbed.[48] As Bacon writes in *Of the Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609), "the mother of all desire, even the most noxious, is nothing else than the appetite and aspiration for apparent good: and the conception of it is always in some unlawful wish, rashly

[47] Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 159.

[48] Bacon argues in "Of Gardens" that "to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air" is the highest "delight" of the garden, and that the flowers' "breath…is far sweeter in the air…than in the hand." See: "The Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral (1625)," in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, Op. cit. p. 341.

granted before it has been understood and weighed."[49] In the face of Satan's efforts to provoke a rash declaration of his identity, Jesus resists the desire for certainty and definition with what Simon calls an "easy-going serenity" in the face of "conspicuously undemanding" temptations. Simon contends that the Son's capacity for "errantly investigating" the world, including all that Satan shows him, means that Jesus' "vision, rather than narrative, is where the action is" within the poem.[50] Because he is inured to Satan's sense of haste and trusts his future to God, Jesus has no need for Satan's proffered oracles and can investigate all he sees with an intellectual interest and emotional detachment. This is true even if Satan has directed his gaze on something.

Jesus' response to Satan's concept of the oracle as a tool enabling the Son's earthly ascent becomes instead a metaphor through which Milton provokes a fleeting apprehension of the Incarnation. We are able to see the oracle in a less utilitarian way because Jesus' affect of easy speculation enables the imaginative act of prosopopoeia by which the inert or Satanically-ventriloquized oracle is replaced by a "living" one. Milton writes that we take the same interpretive approach to the Bible, which must rely on images to convey a sufficient, though limited, description of God that must be "conceived" in the mind of the reader:

> When we talk about knowing God, it must be understood in terms of man's limited powers of comprehension. God, as he really is, is far beyond man's imagination, let alone his understanding….It is safest for us to form an image of God in our minds which corresponds to his representation and description of himself in the sacred writings. Admittedly, God is always described or outlined not as he really is but in such a way as will make him conceivable to us. (CD 1146-47)

[49] Francis Bacon, "Of the Wisdom of the Ancients," *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Volume XIII, ed. James Spedding (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1900), 139.

[50] Simon, "Milton's Panorama," 540, 539.

"Conceivable" here refers to intellectual apprehension, but conception is also the moment of prosopopoeia at which something dead comes alive. *Paradise Regained* eschews direct doctrinal argument and relies on images in order to make the reader struggle imaginatively with the poem where reason and the senses can provide no further illumination.

When Satan offers to be an "oracle," he inadvertently makes this term the locus of an argument, and indeed a poem, whose central concern for Jesus and for the reader is achieving experiential assurance of the Incarnation from sensory evidence and Old Testament scriptures. If Satan can establish himself as a legitimate "oracle" he can define "Son of God" in his own terms. Jesus rejects this offer and replies that Satan's pagan oracles are "dark / Ambiguous and with double sense deluding" (1.434-35). His authoritative response shuts down the conversation:

> No more shalt thou by oracling abuse
> The Gentiles; henceforth oracles are ceased,
> And thou no more with pomp and sacrifice
> Shalt be inquired at Delphos or elsewhere,
> At least in vain, for they shall find thee mute.
> God hath now sent his living oracle
> Into the world, to teach his final will,
> And sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell
> In pious hearts, an inward oracle
> To all truth requisite for men to know. (1.455-64)

As John Savoie has argued, the promise of an "inward oracle" is "consequent to and dependent upon the 'living oracle' whom God has now sent."[51] "Sends" implies an ongoing manifestation of the Spirit, though as discussed above, that which is requisite for us to know may change in God's "hereafter" (PR 1.164) and Jesus' "henceforth." What is immediately clear is that Jesus has supplanted Satan—and anticipated the

[51] Savoie, "The Point and the Pinnacle," 95.

Holy Spirit—by declaring himself a "living oracle" and claiming for God all future authority to offer oracles even to the pagans.

For a work in which Jesus is famously passive and inscrutable, his utterance at the close of Book I is an uncharacteristic show of power that resonates throughout the poem. Here we have an authoritative and explicit negative command along the lines of the poem's more famous "Tempt not the Lord thy God" (4.560), yet it passes without the revelatory gravitas of the temple scene. If we continue to read it is because we are intrigued, but, like Satan, not yet convinced. It is the role of the middle temptations in Books II and III to take the glimmer of divinity seen in this passage and strengthen our conviction. Savoie argues that the oracle passage establishes "the centrality of God's written Word"—and I would add, its interpretation—to the poem. He suggests that "the rest of the book and the poem as a whole operate from this principle."[52] For this reason he contends that after Jesus' "large and startling…declaration…the [poem's] dramatic tension notably slackens" from the start of Book II until the pinnacle at the close of Book IV.[53] If Satan's first temptation is one which asks the Son of God to identify his power,[54] then the middle books can potentially be viewed as less compelling interludes that develop the kingdoms temptation from "a mere four verses in Luke."[55] Yet these episodes have an important function for both Jesus and the reader because they allow Jesus to sharpen his self-knowledge and display his mastery of scripture via interpretive argument. Milton's Jesus, and ideally Milton's reader, are meant to achieve a condition of faith

[52] Savoie, "The Point and the Pinnacle," 95.
[53] Savoie, "The Point and the Pinnacle," 96.
[54] Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 159.
[55] Savoie, "The Point and the Pinnacle," 98.

in which "things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11.3). The experiential grounds for this faith appear primarily in Books II and III, where Jesus's interpretive prowess and moral perfection under temptation helps us to imagine that he could be something more than a "perfect man." Jesus has identified himself to Satan and asserted his power in an early and forthright way. The middle temptations are important not because Jesus would sin at Satan's behest, but because they contain the bulk of the poem's explicit definitional argument and develop its characters and metaphors for our benefit.

5. The Oracle as a Concept and Metaphor

It is no surprise that Jesus employs the phrase "living oracle" as a focal point of his argument about whence the "Son of God" derives his authority. The title complicates his role as an agent of God's providence, especially because it bears symbolic and typological significance in the Miltonic canon and the Reformed tradition of the 1660s. Before we examine its Miltonic resonances, it is worth admiring the ambiguity of "oracle" on its own. The Oxford English Dictionary offers eleven different definitions of the noun "oracle," and three of those include quotations from Milton as examples.[56] The verb form also includes a Miltonic example.[57] "God hath now sent his living oracle" appears under the word's first definition as "a vehicle or medium of divine communication; a person or thing which expounds or interprets the will of God, or a god; a divine teacher."[58] This is correct in one sense, but it relegates Jesus to the role of "a vehicle or medium,…a person," or "a divine teacher."

[56] OED. "oracle, n." 1a., 4a., and 5.
[57] OED. "oracle, v." 1.
[58] OED. "oracle, n." 5.

The OED's third definition refers to the specifically Christian use of the word. In that context it means "divine revelation; an instance of this, a declaration or message expressed or delivered by divine inspiration."[59] This sense of the word could also be operative in Jesus' act of self-description, since Milton argues that the Son is God the Father's first creative act of self-revelation—the logos of John 1:

> Whatever certain modern scholars may say to the contrary, it is certain that the Son existed in the beginning, under the title of the Word or Logos, that he was the first of created things, and that through him all other things, both in heaven and earth, were afterwards made. John 1.1-3: in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God, etc. (YP 6.206)

For Milton, the Son is the first of all created things, and manifests divine glory to the rest of creation, which cannot see God. Again citing John 1, Milton claims that "the Word must be audible, but God is inaudible just as he is invisible" (YP 6.239). In light of this evidence, Jesus could also be that which is imparted by divine revelation, in addition to being a speaking oracular agent in his own right.[60] This ambiguity parallels the poet's "notable prosopopoeias" (DP 7) in Sidney's *Defence*, which I have argued could refer either to the poet's attribution of leaping to hills and joyfulness to beasts or to the acts of spiritual quickening achieved by the poets' imaginative art and readers' responses to it.

Jesus is simultaneously message and messenger, and Milton hints at this complexity in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost*. There he describes the Son as the literal

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[59] OED. "oracle, n." 3.

[60] Savoie introduces this possibility when he writes that "in its singularity, 'living Oracle' may represent the peculiar yet plausible and quintessentially Miltonic translation of τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς in I John 1.1 (rendered 'the Worde of life' in the AV), which clearly refers to Jesus." He also notes that "Paul speaks of the Old Testament in terms of 'the oracles of God' (Romans 3.2), and in Acts Stephen recounts the history of salvation and how Moses mediated the 'living oracles' (Acts 7.38) between God and His people." It should be noted, however, that both the Authorized Version and the Geneva Bible render Acts 7.38 as "lively oracles." See: Savoie, "The Point and the Pinnacle," 95-96.

utterance of an "oracle" immediately after he issues the first promise of his own Incarnation—the proto-evangelium—to Adam and Eve. In this passage Jesus is the oracle predicting humanity's redemption and the eventual object of the oracular pronouncement:

> So spake this oracle, then verified
> When Jesus son of Mary, second Eve,
> Saw Satan fall like lightening down from heav'n,
> Prince of the Air; then rising from his grave
> Spoiled Principalities and Powers, triumphed
> In open show, and with ascension bright
> Captivity led captive through the air,
> The realm itself of Satan long usurped,
> Whom he shall tread at last under our feet;
> Even he who now foretold his fatal bruise…(PL 10.182-91)

Whether or not the Jesus of *Paradise Regained* remembers issuing this pronouncement is unclear, since his level of identification with the Son of *Paradise Lost* is never specified. For readers of both poems, Jesus' echo of Milton's language from a key moment of *Paradise Lost* raises questions about the extent to which his Jesus is the "oracle" pronouncing Satan's fall and to what extent he is the "living oracle" as the object of the Son's oracular pronouncement. Some readers have taken this route—which makes Jesus both the speaker and the referent of his utterance and posits a high level of identification between Jesus and the Son in *Paradise Lost*—when interpreting the poem's climactic "Tempt not the Lord thy God" (PR 4.561).[61]

In order for this line to be proleptic at the end of *Paradise Regained*, Jesus must have previously prevented Satan from defining him. Assuming his messianic identity prematurely would reduce his role to that of earthly ruler, counselor, or

[61] For a strong reading of this passage that emphasizes Jesus's status as the logos of John 1, in which Milton's Jesus is described as the "unsayable presence and words of the Word" (181), see: Ken Simpson, "Lingering Voices, Telling Silences: Silence and the Word in *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Studies*, 35 (1997): 179-95.

liberator. The initially vague definition of "living oracle" vexes Satan's epistemological aims and defers Jesus' own quest for certainty, aligning him with the Baconian natural philosopher who refuses easy certainties and orthodoxies that would allow his mind to "rest."[62] While it is ambiguous about the nature of his sonship, "living oracle" nonetheless tells us other important things about Jesus' relationship to God. The phrase has strong typological associations with the holy of holies, the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple of Solomon as recounted in 1 Kings: "And the oracle he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD" (1 Kings 6.19). Noam Reisner cites the traditional typological significance, elaborated in Hebrews 9.1-15, of the temple as the body of Christ. This is in turn based upon the claim in John 2.19-21 that Jesus "spake of the temple of his body" when he said "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."[63] While it begins with typology, Reisner's argument suggests that, for Milton, the temple, and specifically the holy of holies, becomes a type for the mind of Jesus, and not just his body. His claim centers on Milton's equation of the interior, sanctified space of the temple with the poem's emphasis on "spiritual interiority and the rejection of literalism." Thus, Jesus trusts not to "the solid foundation on which one builds any kind of earthly structure, be it temple or philosophy grounded in the phenomenal world, but to the Pauline firmness of faith in things not of this earth."[64] Throughout the poem, Jesus is laying the observable and metaphorical groundwork

[62] Bacon, *The New Organon*, 36.

[63] Noam Reisner, "Spiritual Architectonics: Destroying and Rebuilding the Temple in *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Quarterly*, 43.3 (2009): 167.

[64] Reisner, "Spiritual Architectonics," 167, 176.

for faith, and making sure that if it occurs, it points toward the creator God whose will he repeatedly claims to serve.

In a related passage that equates the holy of holies with divine presence and inspiration within the poet, Milton names this portion of the long-destroyed temple as a potential home of the "heav'nly Muse" whose aid he invokes in the opening of *Paradise Lost*. By calling upon the Muse, he asks it to inhabit his mind as God's spirit dwelt in the holy of holies:

> …or if Sion hill
> Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
> Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
> Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song… (PL 1.10-13)

Elsewhere in the religious writings of the 1660s the mind of the individual believer and the holy of holies are conflated using the term "living oracle." The phrase appears in two works, and in both cases it is a metaphor for the alignment of divine and human judgment in a human being. In the "Epistle to the Reader" that prefaces Henry Vane's *Two Treatises…,* (London, 1662) the anonymous author describes the defeated Republican statesman's mind in terms of the sacred interior of the tabernacle. He uses "living oracle" to that suggest Vane's holiness and judgment manifest a mind as attuned to the divine as the interior of the temple and its "living oracle":

> So he believed and bears his Record in Truth, having received Power and Wisdom to understand all Mysteries, Bezaleel-like, made able to know and search out the heights and depths, and all the several growths in God's House, to shew forth and to discover the cunning Works of all sorts, the curious workings in Gold, and Silver, and in Brasse; As appears in his Natural, Legal, and Evangelical Conscience….

> …Yea, were not the works of the Tabernacle so? and yet each beautiful in its place, each work and workmanship; some works of Wood, some of Stone, others of Brass, some of Silver and over-laid with Gold, the choicest of beaten Gold; and the more holy and inward, the purer, the inmost the purest of all; each room and place as it came nearest to the living Oracle (the Mercy-Seat) the narrower, the finer, the holier: and the more and the farther any thing or place was distant from thence, the larger and courser; the more outward, the less holy.[65]

The author of this epistle takes the Ramist trope of the mind and memory as a house of many rooms and argues that, for believers like Vane, the temple of memory is as sanctified as the ancient temple of Jerusalem.

The author of the Epistle in Vane's treatise may well have been picking up on the moderate Jesuit John Vincent Canes' use of the term a year earlier in his *Fiat Lux* (Douai, 1661), which advocates religious toleration on the basis of human intellectual and perceptual limitations. This treatise would go through at least three editions between 1661 and 1665 and prompt a half dozen or more Protestant responses during that time. Canes' use of the term diverges sharply from the one that appears in Vane's volume. While discussing the challenges of biblical interpretation and the potential problems inherent in the text itself, Canes suggests that even a man "that is truly learned in theologicall affairs" would require a "living oracle" to guide him to an authoritative interpretation:

> But yet notwithstanding if he, even that knowing person shall let his mind walk on yet further, and call that very autority to account, as in natural reason well he may; how it came hither, where it resided in every age since its first being, who first authorised it, and what sufficient ground he could have so to do, what marks it may exhibite that it is indeed the off-spring of such a father under whose name it goes, or that he erred not whoever he was in that particular who either first wrote or afterwards transcribed it, (and the transcribers may have been some thousands of indifferent affections and capacities) whether

[65] Anonymous, "Epistle," *Two treatises ... both written by Sir Henry Vane, Knight in the time of his imprisonment*, (London, 1662).

> nothing in reason or other autority may gainsay it; whether the words in the original character by some art or other, (whereof there be tricks good store) may not speak another meaning, or at least by some trope or scheme of rhetorick be otherwaies interpreted, &c. then I say even that knowing person shall find himself in a mist, and so thick a one too, as that except he rely upon the autority of some living oracle, whom in these and whatever such like things without further question or doubt he may beleev, he shall never be able to get out of it.[66]

In light of his association with Vane and the evident popularity of Canes' treatise, Milton may well have known both of these works and their respective claims about each believer's capacity to replicate the holy of holies within his or her mind. Vane's admirer is significantly more optimistic about the possibility of true interpretation than is Canes. Milton may have chosen this contentious term for his Jesus in order to highlight the efficacy of Jesus' judgment as the only infallible reader of scripture and, as the Vane passage suggests, to emphasize that his mind is a spiritual site akin to the Mercy Seat where the earthly and divine unite.

While Satan spends the poem trying to answer a question of power—is Jesus the Son of God who overthrew him in *Paradise Lost*?—Jesus is busy demonstrating for the reader how the "living oracle" interprets the Father's will in acts of discernment that a "perfect man" (PR 1.166) would theoretically be capable of emulating. The arguments by which the Son of God justifies his choices unfold the time-bound, sequential revelation of his messiahship. Milton's Jesus outlines the revelations of the promised "inward oracle" and ushers the reader, and the reluctant Satan, into the "hereafter." From our post-Pentecost vantage, we may "discern" his "consummate virtue" (PR 1.164-65) and align ourselves with him as Vane's admiring

[66] John Vincent Canes, S.J. *Fiat lux: or, a general conduct to a right understanding in the great combustions and broils about religion here in England. Betwixt Papist and Protestant, Presbyterian & independent to the end that moderation and quietnes may at length hapily ensue after so various tumults in the kingdom* (Douai, 1661) 122-123.

reader claims the executed statesman did. In this sense, then, Jesus' oracular claims paint him as an infallible figure who is to be followed and whose advice and revealed priorities justify his authority.

The poem's two other uses of oracle confirm Jesus' capacity to judge the world as a perfectly virtuous human being and hint at the divine judgment to come from the Son, as foretold in *Paradise Lost*. The image of the oracle recedes for most of Book II, and it is only in response to Satan's offer of David's throne that it resurfaces and goes through several rapid redefinitions that keep its meaning ambiguous. In the closing lines of Book II, Jesus rejects the idea of a satanically-funded military conquest of Judea and redefines the king as a source of spiritual wisdom—an embodiment of the "inward oracle" that can be seen and offer convincing arguments about God and the Law:

> But to guide nations in the way of truth
> By saving doctrine, and from error lead
> To know, and knowing worship God aright,
> Is yet more kingly; this attracts the soul,
> Governs the inner man, the nobler part,
> The other o'er the body only reigns…(PR 2.473-78)

Jesus' emphasis on wisdom, self restraint, and the mastery of "Passions, desires, and fears" (PR 2.467) moves Satan to echo his earlier language and reframe the argument again in terms of oracles. He suggests that the messiah is a figure of virtue whose wisdom is like the divinatory gems on Aaron's breastplate in Exodus 28.30:

> I see that thou know'st what is of use to know,
> What best to say canst say, to do canst do;
> Thy actions with thy words accord, thy words
> To thy large heart give utterance due, thy heart
> Contains of good, wise, just, the perfect shape.
> Should kings and nations from thy mouth consult,
> Thy counsel would be as the oracle

> Urim and Thummim, those oraculous gems
> On Aaron's breast: or tongue of seers old
> Infallible…(PR 3.7-16)

This exchange begins what Reisner argues is "an extended didactic sequence" that culminates in Satan's fall. The passage "shows Jesus continually rejecting earthly structures and institutions in the process of rehearsing his moment of final and total fulfillment of the Law on the top of the temple roof."[67] Like when he offered the services of his pagan oracles to Jesus in Book I, Satan's aim here is to compel the Son to define his mission in a reductive way.

In the first instance, Satan offers to choose for Jesus through an oracle, but the temptation here is more insidious, since the devil is picking up on Jesus' former claim and offering him what appears to be a scripturally-sanctioned way to fulfill his role. Reisner observes that "Satan's reference to the gems on Aaron's breastplate…ironically alludes to the messianic marriage of the Aaronic and Mosaic types within the Son's united office as the one true priest and prophet." However, he argues that Satan again rushes to suggest that Jesus use his wisdom to gain worldly power and glory. In doing so, Satan once again confuses "Jesus' wisdom and inward oracle with symbolic gems that shine brightly but give no divine light."[68] Satan is trying to make Jesus abandon his roles as king and prophet by using the image of the jewels to make him assume that of the priest instead. Jesus first responds with an explicitly reasoned rebuke of Satan's quest for glory and then aligns himself with the supposed divinatory powers of the stones in order to demonstrate his oracular role as a judge of what is to be valued:

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[67] Reisner, "Spiritual Architectonics," 174.
[68] Reisner, "Spiritual Architectonics," 174.

> This is true glory and renown, when God
> Looking on the earth, with approbation marks
> The just man, and divulges him through Heav'n…(PR 3.60-63)

As if to add impetus to his verdict on Satan's glory and complicate this status yet again, Jesus has ended his argument with another ambiguous instance of divine self-identification. Both Satan and the reader are unsure whether they are seeing God or not, but are nonetheless convinced that Jesus' power cannot be neatly equated with that of the "oraculous gems."

As a "living oracle," Jesus himself is conceptually clear and imaginatively ambiguous to the reader, and threatening to Satan in a way that resembles an inscrutable oracular pronouncement. Teskey observes that Satan has "carefully…gone over what evidence he could glean from the prophets and from Jesus' life up to now," but still wishes to know "whatever hidden thing makes Jesus more than man."[69] He wants a clear answer, but only one which Jesus would actively convey at his behest, since this lapse in his self-governance would reassure Satan that he will not be forced to encounter the Son from *Paradise Lost* again. In fact, Satan will do anything possible to avoid repeating the involuntary theophany he experienced when the Son manifested himself during the war in heaven. The tempter both longs for an answer and dreads it, and with each passing success on Jesus' part Satan moves from perplexity to wrath as every new incident renders it more probable that the "perfect man" (PR 1.166) is also divine. His final rage precipitates another unwanted encounter with the divine.

[69] Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 160-161.

6. Imaginative Prosopopoeia versus Imaginative Idolatry at the End of Paradise Regained

Just as his metaphor of the "living oracle" illustrates his authority as the speaker and object of divine revelation, Milton's Jesus proves capable of balancing on the pinnacle of the temple. He is poised in a state of physical and metaphysical indeterminacy that equates him with God without abandoning his humanity. When Jesus refuses to assert his power independently of God the Father and issues his famous proleptic command of "Tempt not the Lord thy God" (PR 4.561), Satan finally sees past his human body and encounters the Father's power in the incarnate Son in an experience of Sidneian "through-beholding" (DP 31). Milton leaves it unclear whether his fall is self-willed or externally compelled when he becomes an unwilling diviner of the "living oracle" and grasps the human perfection and divine nature of Jesus. With this ambiguity in mind, I will conclude by examining the poem's climactic passage. Specifically, I am interested what it tells us about the Miltonic (and Sidneian) distinction between idolatry and created beings' always-provisional experience of imaginative vision achieved in spite of our finitude. Satan's response is telling in terms of my project's broader arguments about a Sidneian, subjective response to written and lived experience—and as a living person and the Word, or living oracle of God, I note that Jesus could be both. I read the devil's self-willed fall from the temple as an attempt to escape from an involuntary act of imaginative prosopopoeia. His only means of avoiding a spiritual quickening in the face of the revealed Son of God is to flee, but even in isolation his delusion of authority independent of God must itself be imagined in the face of mounting contrary evidence. As Sidney claims of readers in the *Defence*, Milton's Satan

experiences a change of his presuppositions that renders his prior, delusive vision of the world a fiction which then must be imaginatively sustained.

For Milton, I suggest that idolatry is believing that one has achieved a perpetual condition of apprehension, as only God can. The idolater confuses the mind's capacity to imagine from concepts to metaphors and back with the actual possession of the divine power those metaphors represent. In other words, idolatry occurs when the mind substitutes its limited capacity to generate compelling fictions as a sub-creator with presumptive ownership of God's creative and sustaining power. This is the type of narcissistic, false, experience of Godlike generative power that Satan describes in his initial arguments favoring rebellion:

> 'That were were formed then say'st thou? And the work
> Of secondary hands, by task transferred
> From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!
> Doctrine which we would know when learnt: who saw
> When this creation was? Remember'st thou
> Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
> We know no time when we were not as now;
> Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised
> By our own quick'ning power… (PL 5.853-859)

Such acts of self assertion in the face of the Deity are strewn throughout scripture, and typically end with correction and rebuke before the human propensity toward idolatry begins anew. Satan's lines here claim the same authority and knowledge that God demands of Job:

> Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. (Job 38.1-3)

Kahn suggests that Job's accusation is an attempt to set up a "counter deity" capable of hearing his case against God, but the whirlwind silences this claim in the same way the Son's wrath forces Satan from heaven. In her study of Job's complaint and *Paradise Regained*, Kahn argues that "the Son's verbal combat [with Satan] amounts to a tacit Jobean complaint against God" like any other idolatrous challenge, but "in his complaint, Jesus functions as Job's (and his own) advocate and counter-deity."[70] Jesus is simultaneously the wrath of God and the advocate of humanity—he is both Job and the whirlwind, the "oracle" (PL 10.182) of judgment and the prophesied agent of mercy hidden within that judgment.

Like Job's whirlwind, Milton's Jesus offers sufficient evidence to justify an act of prosopopoeia on the part of those who encounter him. He also guides that imaginative vision toward the Father whom he claims to serve and represent. This is unfailingly the type of faith he seeks to foster, even in the unwilling case of Satan, who will do anything he can to avoid this particular type of delirious theophany. At the close of Book IV, Satan's final experience of God's power, as mediated through his "living oracle," threatens to shatter his idolatrous confidence in his own self-creation. Rather than embracing the Father's transcendence as revealed in the Son and admitting his own finitude—a confession which the Father has foreseen to be impossible (PL 3.125-134)—Milton tells us that "Satan smitten with amazement fell" (PR 4.562). The language describing this descent is ambiguous. Four times, Milton writes that Satan "fell" (PR 4.562, 571, 576, 581), but the reason why this occurs remains a mystery and requires readers to impute a cause. "Smitten" implies that Satan is passive and has been struck in a way that compels his fall. However, what

[70] Kahn, "Job's Complaint in *Paradise Regained*," 642.

strikes him could be his subjective response of "amazement" in the face of the Son, or, more specifically, the manifestation of the Father in the Son and the Son in Jesus. Thus, the direct cause of Satan's fall is not God the Father, but his own imaginative reaction to a sudden experience of the deity's incomprehensible totality.

Milton uses two extended similes to describe Satan's fall, and they offer the reader seemingly contradictory interpretations of its cause. The first of these—Hercules' airborne battle with Antaeus—works especially well as a spatial metaphor, since it captures the loftiness of the temple scene. It also resonates with Paul's description of the devil as the "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2.2) and describes Jesus as an active, heroic force. Milton's choice of the Sphinx image in his second simile is telling because it makes the Sphinx the agent in her fall:

> And as that Theban monster that proposed
> Her riddle, and him who solved it not devoured;
> That once found out and solved, for grief and spite
> Cast herself headlong from th' Ismenian steep,
> So struck with dread and anguish fell the fiend… (PR 4.572-76)

As with Satan's "amazement" in line 4.562, the Sphinx's own response of "dread and anguish" is what "strikes" her and causes her fall. Milton's second simile equates Satan's reaction with the Sphinx's. It could be argued that Satan also "cast [himself] headlong" rather than prolong his experience of "grief and spite" in the presence of God. Fleeing allows him to avoid an encounter that would force him to acknowledge his own createdness. If the Hercules and Antaeus simile spatializes the final temptation and its result, the Sphinx is compelling because it psychologizes Satan's fall and proposes a cause.

Other passages in *Paradise Regained* and *Paradise Lost* hint at this possibility of Satan's subjective response to Jesus as the cause of his fall. Before the temple climax, the closest thing in the poem to a depiction of Sidneian prosopopoeia is the poem's account of Satan's response to Jesus' rebuke, which occurs after the devil has claimed that God the Father is hungry for glory. The passage anticipates the Sphinx simile's use of "struck." Here, Jesus' words appear to cause Satan to experience an instant of apprehension in which he achieves an unsettling glimpse of God's righteous anger and his own sin:

> So spake the Son of God; and here again
> Satan had not to answer, but stood struck
> With guilt of his own sin, he for himself
> Insatiable of glory had lost all…(PR 3.145-48)

In the exchange that follows Satan contemplates acknowledging Jesus as "A shelter and a kind of shading cool / Interposition, as a summer's cloud" meant to quell the searing heat of the Father's anger at his apostasy. His vision of his position relative to God in lines 145-148 depicts a failure of the imaginative process of salvation, since the experience does not convict him. Satan's willed descent from the temple also parallels his choice at the end of Book VI of *Paradise Lost*:

> … the monstrous sight
> Strook them with horror backward, but far worse
> Urged them behind; headlong themselves they threw
> Down from the verge of Heav'n; eternal wrath
> Burnt after them to the bottomless pit. (PL 6.862-66)

Encountering for the first time of the Son's "'Effulgence of…glory" (PL 6.680), Satan and his rebel angels have no choice but to throw themselves to the terrors of hell if they wish to maintain their idolatry.

When inspired over the course of the poem to an act of prosopopoeia, Satan avoids such an experience at all costs. He wishes to preserve his idolatrous identity as a self-created Godlike being who acknowledges nothing sublime outside of his fantasy of self-authorship. The angelic choir's final song reiterates the idea that Satan's defeats by the Son result from the tempter's unwillingness to confront the substance of the Father as manifested in the Son. Before their final praise of the "Son of the Most High, heir of both worlds" (PR 4.633), the angels foretell the story — repeated in the synoptic gospels—of Jesus allowing terrified demons to enter into a herd of swine, at which point the unclean animals flee and drown themselves in the Sea of Galilee:

> …in all her gates Abaddon rues
> Thy bold attempt; hereafter learn with awe
> To dread the Son of God: he all unarmed
> Shall chase thee with the terror of his voice
> From thy demoniac holds, possession foul,
> Thee and thy legions; yelling they shall fly,
> And beg to hide them in a herd of swine,
> Lest he command them down into the deep
> Bound, and to torment sent before their time. (PR 4.624-32)

In a sense, Milton's masterful use of the oracle-as-metaphor in *Paradise Regained* is meant to help the reader to perceive the same divinity that compels Satan to hurl himself from the temple and the demons to seek shelter in a herd of swine. When confronted with Jesus' explicit arguments as evidence of his righteousness, and our inability to definitively pin him down as either God or man, readers must make a choice. We can either undergo an experience of imaginative prosopopoeia and find assurance of Jesus' divinity or, like Satan, nurture a false imaginative vision that would allow us to deny the Incarnation.

Coda: Keatsean Afterlives of Milton's Sidneian Prosopopoeias

I have argued that Milton's theophanic prosopopoeia in *Paradise Regained* represents a culmination of Sidney's imaginative poetics from nearly a century earlier. In that instant on the temple pinnacle the reader's imaginative vision is made flesh in the person of Jesus, and the presuppositions of Milton's Christian faith are made visible and believable in a fresh way. One question I have wrestled with in the course of this project is what came after, and how that poetics of the imagination differs from the fictions of learning, or—in the case of Milton's Satan or the characters and audiences of *King Lear*—failures of learning I have examined. Perhaps the most striking change from a twenty-first century vantage is a decay of the imaginative connections between the sensible and the ineffable as Western literature and culture grew more secular in the past three centuries. Because of this secularization, the idea of art that can make us perceive, or think we experience, the transcendent may now look more like the end of *King Lear* than Jesus balancing on the temple. The power of the experience is every bit as intense, but more uncanny in a world where early modern presuppositions of an incarnate God are waning. Our culture's experience of unseen causal orders may be closest to *King Lear*, which evokes comparisons to twentieth century Theatre of the Absurd in a way that no work of Milton, Sidney, or Bacon ever could.[1]

[1] R.A. Foakes writes that "the innovatory dramatic technique of a play that overrides implausibilities by its imaginative power and emotional intensity anticipates the twentieth-century Theatre of the Absurd to the extent that *King Lear* has been seen as a kind of parallel to Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Endgame…" R. A. Foakes, "Introduction: The Arden Shakespeare," *King Lear* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 2.

We might start with John Keats' artistic responses to Shakespeare and Milton in considering this change, as well as the possibility that *King Lear*'s imaginative vision is perhaps the least alien to modern readers because of the play's explicitly pagan world. Keats famously compares Milton and William Wordsworth in his May 1818 letter to John Hamilton Reynolds:

> He is a genius and superior [to] us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries, and shed a light in them—Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton—though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind—From the *Paradise Lost* and the other Works of Milton, I hope it is not too presuming, even between ourselves to say, may be tolerably understood by one not much advanced in years, In his time Englishmen were just emancipated from a great superstition —and Men had got hold of certain points and resting places in the reasoning which were too newly born to be doubted, and too much opposed by the Mass of Europe not to be thought ethereal and authentically divine—who could gainsay his ideas on virtue, vice, and Chastity in *Comus*, just at the time of the dismissal of Cod-pieces and a hundred other disgraces? Who would not rest satisfied with his hinting at good and evil in the *Paradise Lost*, when just free from the inquisition and burning in Smithfield? The Reformation produced such immediate and great benefits, that Protestantism was considered under the immediate eye of heaven, and its own remaining dogmas and superstitions, then, as it were, regenerated, constituted those resting places and seeming sure points of Reasoning—from that I have mentioned, Milton, whatever he may have thought in the sequel, appears to have been content with theses by his writings—He did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done…[2]

Granted, the discovery of *Christian Doctrine* and its publication in 1825 suggests that Milton was not as content with religious orthodoxies as Keats had argued. Keats' point about Catholic and, later, Protestant orthodoxies as "resting places" echoes Bacon's aphorism in the *New Organon* that "the mind loves to leap to generalities so

[2] John Keats, "Letters," *English Romantic Writers,* 2nd ed., ed. David Perkins. (Boston: Thomson/Wadsworth, 1995), 1281.

that it can rest."[3] Likewise, Keats' theory of "the general and gregarious advance of intellect" presupposes that Wordsworth has learned from Milton as part of this process. Under this model each generation's presuppositions are rooted in what prior generations envisioned and wrote down in response to their own even more distant foundational presuppositions.

For Keats, at least, *King Lear* is perhaps the most resonant work I have discussed, and the closest to forming a basis for his own aesthetic of the sublime. Certainly Milton's influence looms large as well, but his presuppositions diverge from Keats', and the result is that Keats' vision is more convincing and sustainable when he does not try to understand the uncanny and impute a cause for it. Keats set out to write a Miltonic epic—the fragmentary *Hyperion* of 1818-19—but he appears to have abandoned the project. He wrote to his brothers in December 1817 that "the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeable evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth."[4] However, the suffering of the poem's fallen titans, akin to Milton's fallen angels, is never redeemed by the beauty of its Olympian gods. *Hyperion* is entirely free of human figures, like *Paradise Lost* without Adam and Eve, or *Paradise Regained* without Milton's Jesus. Any experience of the transcendent that Keats achieves in the poem feels isolated from the reader and the poet's experience. Conversely, some readers contend that the poem's titans and Apollo are unmistakably human in their struggles and concerns.[5]

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[3] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36.

[4] Keats, "Letters," 1275.

[5] For instance, Paul Sherwin writes that in Hyperion the "impotence and anxiety of the moderns are projected onto the [ancient deities]" portrayed in the poem. "Dying into Life: Keats' Struggle with Milton in Hyperion," *PMLA*, 93.3 (Fall 1978): 391.

Keats' "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again" is a far more potent example of how an encounter with fiction begets the experience of equanimity he seeks. Here he calls the play a "bitter-sweet…Shakespearean fruit," equates it with passing through an "old oak forest," and finally casts it as a consuming fire. The poem ends with a plea to the playwright that Keats' experience would be restorative, if disorienting and exhausting:

> Let me not wander in a barren dream,
> But when I am consumed in the fire,
> Give me new phoenix wings to fly at my desire.
>
> (On sitting down, 12-14)

For Keats, Shakespeare's play burns away the orthodoxies, presuppositions, and "resting places" of the mind, freeing it for a rebirth and unencumbered imaginative flight. *Paradise Regained*, on the other hand, reverts from theophany to Jesus' journey home to his mother and insists that our experience of transcendence be anchored in the humanity of the Son. By definition, a paradox like the incarnation makes disagreeables evaporate. Keats, and indeed many other modern readers of Milton, are in a position akin to Edgar's at the close of *King Lear*. Fictions, like Edgar's Gloucester cliff scene or Keats' *Hyperion*, cannot reconcile contraries of an immense, confounding world and satisfy our subjective desire for order and transcendent meaning in a sustainable way. In this world the imagination's function becomes one of acknowledging the enormity of our struggle in the space "betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay" (On sitting down, 6) in a way that Sidney's incarnational, Holy Spirit-sanctioned poetics would dismiss as a prosopopoeia, "though in full wrong divinity" (DP 10).

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