



Vanishing Points: Perspectival Metaphysics in the English Renaissance

Citation

Plunges, Craig. 2016. Vanishing Points: Perspectival Metaphysics in the English Renaissance. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences.

Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:26718764>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

Vanishing Points: Perspectival Metaphysics in the English Renaissance

A dissertation presented

by

Craig Plunges

to

The Department of English

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

English

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

January, 2016

© MMXVI
Craig Plunges

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Dissertation Advisor: Professor Marjorie Garber

Craig Plunges

Vanishing Points: Perspectival Metaphysics in the English Renaissance

ABSTRACT

Taking as its starting point the *ut pictura poesis* tradition of artistic theory, this dissertation examines how the poets and dramatists of the English Renaissance transformed mimetic strategies originally developed in the fields of art and architecture into unprecedented literary *topoi* and figures in their own right. The project focuses primarily on the practice of linear perspective, which simulates visual experience by subordinating abstract space to the artificial logic of the “vanishing point.” It demonstrates how English writers developed the initial idea of linear perspective as an artificially arranged, delimited point of view into a body of descriptive practices that constitute what I term “perspectival metaphysics.” Experiments in perspectival metaphysics in the works of Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Andrew Marvell reveal the assumptions that underlie normative vision, and vision’s relationship to subjective experience and its interpretation. *Vanishing Points* concludes that the rhetorical strategies of spatial description developed by early modern English writers are an integral part of the broader epistemological shift from renaissance humanism to the increasingly complex modes of scientific and philosophical rationalism that characterized the European seventeenth century.

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1* Attributed to Guillim Scrots (Guillim Stretes or William Scrots); oil on panel, anamorphosis, 1546. NPG 1299, © National Portrait Gallery, London.
- Figure 2* Albrecht Dürer, “Draftsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Woman”; Etching, 1525. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- Figure 3* Giulio Romano, “Sala dei giganti,” 1532-1535. Palazzo Te, Mantua, Italy.
- Figure 4* Sebastiano Serlio, “Study for a Tragic Scene” in *Architettura*, Toledo, 1552. Harvard Fine Arts Library, Digital Images & Slides Collection 2004.H05.00790.
- Figure 5* Andrea Palladio, Teatro Olimpico. 1580-1585. Vicenza, Italy.
- Figure 6* Pere Borell del Caso, *Escapando de la crítica*. 1874. © National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 7* Woodcut prefacing the October eclogue in *The Shepheardes Calendar*, 1579.
- Figure 8* John Keats’s personal copy of John Hughes’s 1715 edition of Spenser’s works. Engraving by Louis du Guernier. Courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- Figure 9* Giuseppe Archimboldo, “Water” from the *Elements* series, 1566. © Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.
- Figure 10* Giotto di Bondone, Cappella degli Scrovegni di Padova, 1300-1305.
- Figure 11* Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Sagrestia Nuova*, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence (1521-1524). Personification of the *Vita Activa*
- Figure 12* Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Sagrestia Nuova*, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence (1521-1524). Personification of the *Vita Contemplativa*
- Figure 13* Illustration from *Della pittura e della statua di Leon Battista Alberti*. Milano: Società Tipografica dei Classici Italiani, contrada di S. Margherita, No. 1118. Anno 1804.

- Figure 14* Illustration from Abraham Bosse's *Maniere universelle de Mr. Desargues pour pratiquer la perspective*. Paris: De l'Imprimerie de Pierre Des-Hayes, 1648.
- Figure 15* Fresco from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, 50/40 B.C. Roman. © Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.
- Figure 16* The Ideal City, attributed to Fra Carnevale (1445-1484). © The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore MD.
- Figure 17* Giorgio de Chirico, *The Song of Love (Le Chant d'amour)* 1914. Oil on canvas, 73 x 59.1 cm. © The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- Figure 18* Nicolas Poussin, *Et in Arcadia Ego* (alternative title, *Les bergers d'Arcadie*), 1637-1638. © Musée du Louvre.
- Figure 19* Detail from Abraham Bosse's engraved frontispiece to the 1651 edition of Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or, The matter, forme, & power of a common-wealth ecclesiasticall and civill* (London: Printed for Andrew Crooke, 1651).
- Figure 20* Vredeman de Vries, Hans, Engraving from *Variae Architecturae Formae*, 1601. The Image Gallery, University of California, San Diego; Provided by ARTstor.
- Figure 21* A View of the Ideal City, attributed to Fra Carnevale (1445-1484). © The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore MD.
- Figure 22* Leonardo da Vinci, "Le proporzioni del corpo umano secondo Vitruvio," 1490. © Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.
- Figure 23* Jan Vermeer, *The Artist in His Studio*; alternatively titled *The Art of Painting (Di Schilderkonst)*, 1665-66. © Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
- Figure 24* Fernando Botero, *Vermeer's Studio*, 1964. Harvard Fine Arts Library, Visual Collections - Slides and Digital Images; 1992.14146.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	viii

CHAPTER	PAGE
1 INTRODUCTION	
<i>Ut pictura poesis: Intersections of literary and pictorial theory in the European Renaissances</i>	1
2 CHAPTER TWO	
<i>Illustrating Darkness: Perspectival Snares in Spenser’s Allegory</i>	32
2.1: The Allegorical Tableau.....	33
2.2: Edmund Spenser: The Most Painterly of Poets.....	42
2.3: “Dreadfull pourtraicts of deformitee”.....	54
3 CHAPTER THREE	
<i>Disruptive Sublimity and the Structures of Perception in Shakespeare’s Later Plays</i>	87
3.1: Insubstantial Pageantry.....	88
3.2: <i>Othello</i> : “Ocular Proof” and the Resolute Perspective.....	100
3.3: <i>King Lear</i> : “Deficient Sight” and Rhetorical Compensation.....	115
4 CHAPTER FOUR	
<i>Braving Aesthetic Transience: Ben Jonson’s Poetic Theory and the Legitimation of the Court Masque</i>	132
4.1: “At the hard-handed mercy of Mychanitiens”: The Fate of the Performed Text.....	133
4.2: Regulating Spectatorship: Samuel Daniel’s <i>Vision of the Twelve Goddesses</i> and Ben Jonson’s <i>Hymenai</i>	154
4.3: After the Word.....	179

5 CHAPTER FIVE

“How eels now bellow in the ox”: Andrew Marvell’s *“Upon Appleton House”*
and the Imaginative Boundaries of the English Country House Poem.....182

5.1: Precedents in Jonson, Lanyer, and Denham.....185

5.2: *“To the abyss I pass”*: Marvell’s Competing Points of View.....199

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....223

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful for the support that I've received from the Harvard English Department over the years. The Term Time and Dissertation Completion Fellowships were extremely helpful to me on my voyage through the strange bogs and deserted forests of a project as expansive and peculiar as this one. I am particularly indebted to Professor Marjorie Garber, whose insight and encouragement has meant a great deal to me over the years. Working with Professor Gordon Teskey was a privilege, and I want to thank him for his direction and impeccable style. Professor Leah Whittington's comments and advice have been invaluable to me during this process and I appreciate how available she has been throughout.

I also want to express my gratitude to Lino and Anna Pertile for warmly welcoming me to Villa I Tatti and making my time there as a Graduate Fellow so enjoyable and productive. I love Bernard Berenson's library, and I am very pleased to know that young scholars will continue to have access to it through the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies.

I owe a great deal to my friends and colleagues in the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. I want to thank William Baldwin for his sense of humor, for it's fair to say that without his friendship this would have been a rather dark road. I am also especially grateful to Maria Devlin for her friendship and professional acuity. Her feedback on my work was invaluable and helped me through many a writerly bind. Finally, warm thanks to Joanna Grossman, Chris Barrett, Sabrina Sadique, Seth Herbst, Rhema Hokama, Cassandra Nelson, Max Freeman, Steve Hequembourg, Sara Gorman, John Radway, Alexis Becker, Steven Tardif, Helen Cushman, and Leo Gertner for being the wonderful people they are.

Finally, I want to thank my parents for their patience and understanding. This dissertation is dedicated to them, William Henry Plunges and Petula Owen Plunges.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Ut pictura poesis: *Intersections of Literary and Pictorial Theory in the European
Renaissances*

In *Vanishing Points: Perspectival Metaphysics in the English Renaissance*, I consider how English poets and dramatists imported techniques of representation originally developed in the fields of art and architecture and the effect that this importation had on their work. Despite Edmund Spenser's relative isolation from painterly trends on the continent while living in Ireland and composing *The Faerie Queene* in the 1580s, he draws on the ancient tradition of *ut pictura poesis* to heighten suspense and illustrate the complex play of deceptive appearances that threaten the progress of his protagonists. On the stage, William Shakespeare's character Edgar in *King Lear* (first performed in 1606) reconstructs a landscape along distinctly vertical and horizontal axes for his blind father, thereby suggesting an awareness of foreshortening techniques. How does this moment of rhetorical homage to the art of painting challenge our understanding of theatrical art and the performance of *King Lear* specifically? Throughout his later plays, Shakespeare returns again and again to the contrasting representational practices of the arts and transforms them into philosophical metaphors for perception, transience, and illusory desire. Writing for the Jacobean (1603-1625) and Caroline (1625-1649) courts, Ben Jonson competed with Inigo Jones to assert the primacy of the poetic text in contrast to the architecture of its enactment. Drawing on neoclassical architectural precepts and vanishing points, Jones's lavish stage designs celebrated the hierarchical structure of absolute monarchy, while Jonson strove to instruct by delighting and moving his audience with parables and mythological allegories of governance and rectitude. Jonson's insistence on the centrality of the text in what had traditionally been a marginal, light genre of entertainment marks the culmination of a theory of poetics adopted from Sir Philip Sidney and a genuine attempt to reestablish on

the Roman model the poet or *vates* as a source of political and spiritual insight. In “Upon Appleton House,” written two years after the execution of Charles I in 1649, Andrew Marvell invokes the tradition of the court masque, rendering in quadrate, lapidary verse the dynamism of sudden scene changes by drastic shifts in perspective and scale. Ingeniously playing with the possibilities of transitory re-focalization, Marvell’s country house poem self-consciously draws attention to the visual aspect inherent to poetic expression. Instead of describing space in a way that confirms a viewer’s normative perceptual habits, however, Marvell demonstrates that a reader’s sense of perspective within a text is arbitrary and contingent upon spatial cues, thereby shedding light on the restricted quality of subjective experience. The question of space, be it *physical* or *imaginary* and thus *metaphysical*, and how these authors describe and otherwise include it in their texts reveals not only the excitement of a rapidly broadening conception of the world in the period between the reign of Elizabeth I and the Restoration, but also anxiety over the possibility of losing one’s orientation in relation to classical cultural ideals, both Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian. By investigating the manner in which each poet manages the economy of space within his texts, new insights onto the literary craft, its artistic and cultural context, and the range of aesthetic effects and their meaning in late sixteenth and seventeenth century English literature.

The development of single-point perspective, articulated in Leon Battista Alberti’s *costruzione legittima*, marks the beginning of a new interest and heightened awareness of the idea of space in art. Alberti translated a set of practices that Brunelleschi was already employing in fifteenth-century Florence into treatise format, which allowed these practices to spread throughout Europe and eventually to England. His treatise

initiated a flood of theoretical literature concerned with the spatialization of space, which was a new way of conceiving the world and representing it on canvas. Alberti's perspective scheme "marked the effectual beginning of the substitution of visual for tactile space awareness," writes William M. Ivins, Jr. This novel procedure "not only automatically brought parallel lines together in logically determinable vanishing points, but provided a basis for the hitherto missing grammar or rules for securing both logical relations within the system of symbols employed and a reciprocal, or two-way, metrical correspondence between the pictorial representation of objects and the shapes of those objects as located in space."¹ Comparable in its revolutionary import to contemporary advancements in printing, such as moveable type, which makes of the book an abstract space, and cartography, which similarly spatializes the known world, the development of perspective played a major role in the way that early modern Europe understood the relationship between art and science.² Perspective was both product and producer of the ambitious culture of discovery that aimed at nothing less than a complete understanding of the workings of the world.

As the Roman Catholic Church lost its hold over a large part of northern Europe, and the dispensation through its priesthood waned, it left a power vacuum that the nation state rose to fill. Although a Latinate culture of cosmopolitan learning continued to influence developments in the arts and sciences, writings in the vernacular entailed the

¹ William M. Ivins, Jr., introduction to *On the Rationalization of Sight: with an examination of three renaissance texts on perspective* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1973).

² Gordon Teskey. "Literature," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance Literary History*, ed. Cummings and Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

translation and conceptual reinterpretation of new ideas and techniques. As a result, technical and theoretical developments of wide-reaching consequence flourished anew in local and national contexts decades after their original formulation. Attempts by English writers to translate the techniques of foreshortening, which by the late sixteenth-century had become commonplace in Europe, into the verbal medium of literature indicated a persistent interest in the Horatian dictum *ut pictura poesis* and a penchant for baroque wordplay and wittiness.³ Medieval treatise writers and Renaissance humanists alike had celebrated this dictum, which translates “as in painting, so in poetry,” and it fit particularly well into an epistemological culture that, as Foucault has argued, valued correspondence and analogy as powerful instruments in the pursuit of knowledge.⁴

The relative belatedness of the English Renaissance makes its reception of perspectival practices an especially compelling topic, for every reception entails the conceptual reevaluation and creative expansion of seminal ideas. Between the reign of Elizabeth I and the Restoration single-point perspective enjoyed a peculiar afterlife in

³ The literature documenting the importance of Horace’s dictum in the Renaissance is extensive, but see Richard Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); Alison Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking through Language* (New York, NY: Macmillan Press; St. Martin's Press, 2000); Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958); David Evett, *Literature and the Visual Arts in Tudor England* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990); Wesley Trimpf, *Muses of One Mind: The Literary Analysis of Experience and its Continuity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Lucy Gent, *Picture and Poetry, 1560-1620: Relations between Literature and the Visual Arts in the English Renaissance* (Lemington Spa, Warwickshire: J. Hall, 1981); Clark Hulse, *The Rule of Art : Literature and Painting in the Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400-1700* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Norman E. Land, *The Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1994), 17-45.

English artistic and literary culture. I say “afterlife” because as early as 1533 anamorphic experimentation had already reached the English court in the work of Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* and William Scots’s portrait of Edward VI (fig. 1).



Figure 1. attributed to Guillim Scots (Guillim Stretes or William Scots)
oil on panel, anamorphosis, 1546. NPG 1299
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Although anamorphosis demonstrates an artist’s mastery of foreshortening techniques, it also brings the practice of single-point perspective to its theoretical limit. The distorted images that result, which only become recognizable as representations when the viewer stands to the side to assume a predetermined viewpoint, attest to the illusory and conditional nature of perspectival compositions. Anamorphosis playfully mimics imitation itself, undercutting and even parodying the neoclassical ideals of balance and proportion. Similarly, the movement known as Mannerism, which prioritized what Vasari called “la bella maniera” over strict adherence to the dictates of perspectivalist geometry, flourished as early as the 1520’s in Italy, as we see in the paintings of Pontormo and Parmigianino, to give two examples.⁵ All of this indicates that Alberti’s *costruzione legittima* had by the reign of Elizabeth lost some of its legitimacy, that is, its singular claim to artistic perfection by convincingly capturing the external world within the

⁵ Cf. Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 103-159.

boundaries of a frame, as the painting were a “window.” So why did single-point perspective rise to new rhetorical prominence in English literature between 1580 and 1660, and why did the term “vanishing point” only come to be associated with single-point perspective in 1600?⁶

Challenging the dominant narrative established by Roy Strong and others of a “revolution in visual perception” under the Stuarts, Alison Thorne claims that the period from 1590 to 1613, during which Shakespeare’s plays were written, “was, from an art historical standpoint, a transitional phase that tended, Janus-like,⁷ to look as much to the past as to the future”:⁸

If [perspective’s] intellectual rigour and powerful mimetic effects were enthusiastically embraced in some instances, they were disregarded or rejected in others....And even where the desire to assimilate this new technique is clearly paramount, its meaning and function are necessarily altered through contact with a foreign environment in ways that make Albertian norms, in their pure, ordinary form, largely inapplicable. Even once absorbed and domesticated, perspective retained its foreign accent.⁹

⁶ James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 8: “The concept of a vanishing point was explicated only in 1600...and references to vanishing points can creep unnoticed into our assumptions and descriptions.” This observation provides Elkins with a powerful instrument of critique against works like Norman Bryson’s *Vision and Painting* and Brian Rotman’s *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*.

⁷ Thorne may have Elkins in mind: “‘Perspective space’ is a Janus figure, half Renaissance, half modern.” See Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, 14.

⁸ Alison Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking through Language* (New York, NY: Macmillan Press; St. Martin's Press, 2000), 40.

⁹ Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare*, 41. The attribution of a “foreign accent” to perspective is Martin Kemp’s, from his book *Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

It is only from our position in modernity that perspective appears as a unified practice, an established set of techniques that operate towards a common mimetic end. Yet it is perhaps more accurate to think of perspective as a paradigm capable of many different declensions, just as a Latin noun in its paradigmatic state declines into many different but related forms. As James Elkins puts it: “we have welded perspective into a single subject,”¹⁰ and “as perspective has become simpler it has become more rigid, so that the perspective we now possess is a fossil: an opaque, obdurate remainder of something that was once a brilliant ‘science’.”¹¹ If it is useful to keep in mind the variety of different perspectival practices that coexisted in renaissance painting, it is crucial to acknowledge the range of possible meanings that perspective can be made to assume in literature, where one must take into account both the temporal dimension of reading and literature’s tendency to metaphor.¹² Thus my approach to the literary texts I discuss here does not prioritize analogical speculation about how perspective operates similarly in literature and painting. Rather, I single out instances of authors who self-consciously render visual experience verbal in early modern English texts in order to accomplish specifically *literary* ends. The specifically literary effects that result from English authors’ preoccupation with space in this period reveal a changing understanding of the moral purpose and ideological potential of poetry and drama as they conceived it in the period.

¹⁰ Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, 13.

¹¹ Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, 219.

¹² See Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979); and Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology” in *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982).

To give a better sense of what I mean by the translation of techniques into the verbal medium of literature, and to demonstrate this question's enduring appeal, let us turn to Roland Barthes claim in *S/Z* that "every literary description is a *view*."¹³ His statement suggests that both literary description and pictorial depiction are processes that presuppose a theoretical, metaphysical ground upon which their content may be displayed.¹⁴ Alluding to Alberti's suggestion that the painter begin by constructing a "frame" (*quadrangolo di angoli*) which should serve him as an "open window" (*mi server per un'aperta finestra*) from which he will be able to see his "story" (*istoria*) or subject matter,¹⁵ Barthes continues: "It could be said that the speaker, before describing, stands at the window, not so much to see, but to establish what he sees by its very frame: the window frame creates the scene":

¹³ Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Miller (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1974), 54.

¹⁴ This "ground" is both theoretical and physical, for there is of course a material reality to the paper and canvas of writing and poetry respectively. It is the presupposition of theoretical ground, however, that proves most useful here because it addresses the questions of interpretation and meaning in the visual and literary arts.

¹⁵ Citations of Alberti's Italian text are from Leon Batista Alberti, *Della Pittura*, printed by La Societa' Tipografica de'Classici Italiani al Governo della Repubblica Italiana, 1804. "La prima cosa nel dipingere una superficie, io vi disegno un quadrangolo di angoli retti grande quanto a me piace, il quale mi serve per un'aperta finestra dalla quale si abbia a veder l'istoria" (28).



Figure 2: Albrecht Dürer, “Draftsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Woman”; Etching, 1525.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Albrecht Dürer’s “Draftsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Woman” (fig. 2) illustrates the restrictions to which the painter must submit in order to render accurately the object of his gaze. Those same restrictions, however, are passed on to the viewer of the finished work of art, who must occupy a certain position before the canvas if he or she is to view it from the perspective of its creator. The theoretical ground that makes a common aesthetic experience possible entails an agreement between the artist and the person who views the work. The theory of perspective aligns quite well with T.S. Eliot’s description of an “objective correlative” in “Hamlet and his problems”:

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.¹⁶

¹⁶ T.S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems” in *The Sacred Wood; essays on poetry and criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1920).

Instead of conveying emotional experience, however, what a composition in perspective intends to convey is perceptual, a simulation of normative visual habits. Both rely on a *formula* that appeals to the mind and makes it possible for the spectator to anticipate and imaginatively complete the work. This ‘filling in the gaps’ or elision is an essential part of aesthetic experience, and both poets and painters ask this of their audiences and observers. Indeed, what Coleridge writes of poetry is equally applicable to painting, for both arts strive to present a “semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment.”¹⁷

In what ways, then does a literary text presuppose and structure a reader’s experience of it? What does it mean, for instance, that a poem like Andrew Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House,” which I discuss in my fifth chapter, presents not so much a sustained narration as a succession of scenes, which come into view by a turning motion reminiscent of the *machina versatilis* of the court masque?

This scene again withdrawing brings
A new and empty face of things;
A levelled space, as smooth and plain,
As cloths for Lely stretched to stain.¹⁸

It is highly suggestive that as one poetic tableau recedes an empty space appears as a canvas (“cloths”) for the painter Sir Peter Lely, an artist known for his portraits of Charles I, Cromwell, Charles II, and even Marvell himself. Since literature unfolds in time, it has a unique ability to create new, while partially effacing old, imaginary spaces

¹⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia literaria, or, Biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions*, ed. Engell and Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), chapter 14.

¹⁸ Andrew Marvell, “Upon Appleton House” in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Smith (Harlow, England; New York, NY: Pearson Longman, 2007), ln. 441-444.

within which its action (Alberti's *istoria*) occurs. When Marvell explicitly invokes a pictorial scene, which he does in a number of his poems, such as "The Gallery," "The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers," and his advice-to-a-painter poems, he does so knowing that the temporal aspect of literature will replace the scene or image, however vivid, with another "new and empty face of things." The strategy of creating pictorial compositions in verse and setting them up as a sequence that is unfolding in time, which Marvell develops nowhere more thoroughly than in "Upon Appleton House," raises questions about *parataxis* and *hypotaxis* which translate into the analysis of paintings only with difficulty. One might consider triptychs, altarpieces, and full-scale room or church decorations, as in Mantegna's "Camera degli sposi" or Giulio Romano's "Sala dei giganti," in which the work is observed as a whole only with difficulty and requires the viewer to consider their many details individually and in time (fig. 3).



Figure 3: Giulio Romano, “Sala dei giganti” (1532-1535)
Palazzo Te, Mantua, Italy.

Marvell treats the idea of painting within poetry as a poetic *topos* in its own right, and by establishing a series of perspectives onto changing landscapes of shifting scale, he examines the individual's ability to perceive the world in a stable, objective way and casts doubt on the Protagorean axiom of man as the measure of all things.

In his "An Expostulation with Inigo Jones," Ben Jonson gives a humorous performance of tongue-in-cheek praise for Inigo Jones's stage design. His competitive relationship with Jones is well documented, but I propose we read Jonson's comments as part of a broader theoretical conflict between the literary and the plastic arts. Jonson suggests that the literary text of the performance and the manner in which "Dame Architecture" frames and adorns it for the stage can result in one medium speaking over and cancelling out the other:

O shows, shows, mighty shows!
 The eloquence of masques! What need of prose,
 Or verse, or sense to express immortal you?
 You are the spectacles of state!¹⁹

Jonson's association of the political sphere with spectacle recalls the adage from Juvenal's imperial Rome *panem et circenses*, the invocation of which is mordantly ironic when applied to an entertainment exclusively staged for a monarch and his court. What Jones contributes to the masque, Jonson suggests, is merely physical, impermanent "painting and carpentry" as opposed to poetic insight and lasting truth. What the material "trappings" of the performance offer is a frail body as opposed to its textual soul, and the

¹⁹ Ben Jonson, "An Expostulation with Inigo Jones" in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Parfitt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), ln. 39-41.

aesthetic effects it yields are only superficial: “ ‘Tis true / Court hieroglyphics, and all arts afford / In the mere perspective of an inch board!”²⁰

Despite the resentment Jonson expressed towards Jones, it was Jones’s neoclassical architectural stage design, influenced by Sebastiano Serlio and Andrea Palladio (fig. 4 and 5), coupled with the clever mechanisms employed during the masque such as turning machines and sliding panels, that pushed him to adapt his verse to the conditions of its performance. His theory of poetics, as I argue in chapter three, reflects a persistent anxiety about what he perceived to be the diminished role of the text, in both its quality and import, in the English theater. Jonson’s comments about dramatic performance in the public and private theaters indicate a concern that the content of the performance would ultimately prove ancillary to ever more impressive stage designs and special effects.



Figure 4: Sebastiano Serlio, study for a tragic scene in *Architettura*. Toledo, 1552.

²⁰ Jonson, *The Complete Poems*, *ibid.*



Figure 5: Andrea Palladio, Teatro Olimpico (1580-1585). Vicenza, Italy.

Inigo Jones’s stage designs for masques performed at court, for instance, not only framed the dramatic action specified by the text but also influenced the seating arrangement, imparting to it a particular symbolic significance, as Stephen Orgel explains:

After 1605, when perspective settings were introduced—and they were used *only* at court or when royalty was present—the monarch became the center of the theatrical experience in another way, and the aristocratic hierarchy grew even more apparent. In a theater employing perspective, there is only one focal point, one perfect place in the hall from which the illusion achieves its fullest effect. At court performances this is where the king sat, and the audience around him at once became a living emblem of the structure of the court.²¹

Whether we are, like Jonson and Jones both likely were, biased toward either the literary or the visual aspect of the work, both contribute to the unified aesthetic experience that performed a distinct cultural function in Stuart England. Considering the masque in its historical context, which was overshadowed by the intensifying Puritan dissent that would ultimately result in the English Civil War, it is not accidental that a “total artwork” (*Gesamkuntswerk*) came into vogue in the private theater, one which employed dance, music, poetry, costume, art, architecture, and even sugary desserts to celebrate a conception of monarchy that found itself increasingly under fire. A perspectival schema

²¹ Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), 10.

may bring a world into existence around a vanishing point, but what vanishes here is the world external to the private theater and peripheral to the privileged view. The imaginative experience of art depends upon eliding gaps in the fiction, which results in a fundamental blind spot: “the real and the fictive world are interlocked by the perspective structure of the experience,” writes Ernest Gilman, and “the illusion incorporates the real into itself.”²²

The question of how English authors in this period worked within the constraints of their medium to create and sustain an illusion of the real turns our attention the difficult topic of how rhetorical constructions evoke three-dimensional space and what such evocations mean within the context of a given text. It is precisely this difficulty, however, that makes a writer’s importation of, or, in Jonson’s case, reaction against, techniques developed by painters and architects worthy of sustained investigation. Indeed, what remains of enduring interest to scholars today is not how Horace’s dictum succeeded in bringing the “sister arts” closer together but how the pursuit of a general artistic theory in the Renaissance failed. Part of the reason for this failure was terminological. Art theoretical writing tended to appropriate much of its descriptive vocabulary from the tradition of classical rhetoric, as we see in book two of Alberti’s *De Pictura* and in the treatise writers of the Italian *cinquecento*, such as Giovanni Andrea Gilio, Francesco Bocchi, Gian Paolo Lomazzo, and Federico Zuccaro,²³ a tradition that

²² Ernest Gilman, *The Curious Perspective: literary and pictorial wit in the seventeenth century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 64.

²³ Cf. Giovanni Andrea Gilio’s *Due dialoghi* of 1564: “Veramente una bella, proporzionata e bene intesa figura piglia tanto l’occhio, piace tanto, che i riguardanti non se ne possono partire. E quanto più uno mira, tanto più gli piace. Così fa anco un bel poema, una bella comedia, una bella istoria: quanto più si legge, quanto più si vede,

even later works such as Emmanuele Tesauro's *Il Cannochiale Aristotelico* (1654) and Dryden's translation of Charles du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica* (1695) continue. This dependence on rhetorical terminology obscured irreconcilable differences between the poetic and pictorial arts, a point that did not go unnoticed by Renaissance poets and scholars of rhetoric. Edmund Spenser expresses his doubts about the supposed equity between the arts of painting and poetry in his proem to the third book of *The Faerie Queene* and acknowledges the limitations of mimetic art generally:

But liuing art may not least part expresse,
 Nor life-resembling pencill it can paynt,
 All were it *Zeuxis* or *Praxiteles*:
 His daedale hand would faile, and greatly faynt,
 And her perfections with his error taynt:
 Ne poets witt, that passeth Painter farre
 In picturing the parts of beauty daynt,
 So hard a workemanship aduenture darre,
 For fear through want of words her excellence to marre.²⁴

The “zodiac” of the “poets witt,” to borrow a phrase from Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*, was of greater range than the painter's, for the poet could work in both spatial and temporal dimensions.²⁵ Furthermore, the poet enjoyed unique access to dialogue and a vocabulary of interior experience and subjective emotion that eclipsed the painter's dependence on line, color, arrangement, facial expressions and bodily gestures. Poetry, as

quanto più si sente, tanto più la voglia cresce di leggerla, di vederla e di sentirla. E sí come il poeta deve osservare le regole de la poesia, cosí il pittore de la pittura.” Printed in Paola Barocchi, *Scritti d'Arte Del Cinquecento*, Vol. 1 (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1979), 312.

²⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton; textual editors Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki, Shohachi Fukuda (Harlow, England; New York, NY: Pearson Longman, 2001).

²⁵ Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, introduction by R.W. Maslen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 85.

Sidney put it echoing the classical *topos*, was a “speaking picture” while painting necessarily remained mute.²⁶ In his *Faerie Queene*, which I discuss in my second chapter, Spenser treats the visual arts, indeed visual perception generally, with suspicion. Evil characters, such as Duessa, routinely don the appearance of goodness to achieve their own ends, while stately displays and pageants, such as those performed at the House of Pride, rest upon prisons crowded with the victims of vanity, deceived and consumed by worldly concerns.

When Sir Philip Sidney writes that the poet “doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a *prospect* into the way as will entice any man to enter into it” (my emphasis), he appropriates a term associated with painting and stresses the word’s etymological significance of “looking forward.” The poet “doth as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard, at the very first, give you a cluster of grapes that, full of that taste, you may long to pass further.”²⁷ Unlike the painter, who can only invite one to gaze through his frame at an otherwise inaccessible world, Sidney suggests that poetry allows one to pass through the frame itself to inhabit a fantastical world unfolding in time that engages more than just the visual sense. His mention of taste, for example, is a good example of a sensory experience most difficultly conveyed on canvas. Pere Borell del

²⁶ For a genial counter-argument in defense of painting, see Anton Francesco Doni’s *Disegno* of 1549, printed in Barocchi, *Scritti d’arte del cinquecento*, 554:

N. Michelagnolo, o un buon giudizio senza passione, che dell’una e dell’altra parimente s’intenda: la qual cosa mi cred’io che sí truovi di rado.

A. I poeti sarebbono eglino il proposito?

N. Non mi credo io, perché o son fondati d’opinione sopra la filosofia morale o naturale, o sopra il lor capriccio, il quale termina m’aviluppono sí oscuramente la cognizion del vero con gl’argomenti, che gl’è piú il fastidio a sentirgli che la fatica a fare una figura a concorrenza da due valenti uomini, una di scoltura e l’altra in pittura, e poi rimetterle nel giudizio degl’uomini generalmente.”

²⁷ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, 83-4.

Caso's famous trompe l'oeil *Escapando de la crítica* nicely captures Sidney's idea of art as the beginning of a journey, even if del Caso's figure is actually more concerned with evading those who would judge him (fig. 6).



Figure 6: Pere Borell del Caso, *Escapando de la crítica*. 1874. © National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Sidney's use of the term "prospect" is furthermore significant because it suggests that the aesthetic experience poetry offers begins where a painting drawn in perspective ends. Sidney invokes the Italian term for perspective – *prospettiva*²⁸ – to situate his treatise in the tradition of the *paragone*, the long-running debate between poets and

²⁸ "The Latin term *perspectiva*, which Boethius had chosen as a translation of the Greek *optikē*, was used in the fifteenth century to denote the art of representing spatial panoramas or objects graphically on two-dimensional surfaces. Some four decades after Alberti wrote his works on perspective, Piero della Francesca would use the variant *prospettiva* in his treatise, *De prospectiva pingendi*. Alberti, however, does not use either Latin term, nor either of the corresponding Italian terms (*perspettiva* or *prospettiva*), in *Elements of Painting* and *On Painting*, two texts that are, nonetheless, clearly focused on methods for drawing in perspective." From *The Mathematical Works of Leon Battista Alberti*, translations and commentary by Kim Williams, Lionel March and Stephen R. Wassell; foreword by Robert Tavernor; with contributions by Richard Schofield and Angela Pintore (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010), 154.

painters that sought to determine one art as superior to the other. In his dedicatory letter to Miguel de Silva, Bishop of Viseu, Baldassare Castiglione employs painterly perspective – or, in Thomas Hoby’s 1561 English translation, “Prospective” – as a metaphor for accurate representation while admitting his inability to express the virtues of the Duchess of Urbino:²⁹

I send unto you this booke, as a purtraict in peinctinge of the Court of Urbin: not of the handiwoorke of Raphael, or Michael Angelo, but of an unknowen peincter, and that can do no more but draw the principall lines, without settingfurth the truth with bewtiful colours, or makinge it appeere by the art of Prospective that it is not. And wher I have enforced my self to setfurth together with the communication the propeties and condicions of such as are named in it, I confess I have not only not fully expressed, but not somuch as touched the vertues of the Dutchesse. Bicause not onelye my stile is insufficient to express them, but also mine understanding to conceive them.³⁰

Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* was available in English and well known to the Elizabethan court. Spenser’s assertion in the proem to book III that “Poets witt, that passeth Painter farre / In picturing the parts of beauty” represents a challenge to Castiglione’s praise of the painter’s art. But putting questions of authorial intention aside, what stands out here is the potential of painterly perspective to operate as a literary metaphor. Although James Elkins claims in *The Poetics of Perspective* that “the metaphorology of perspective is not a renaissance phenomenon,” it becomes clear that in the mid-sixteenth century, as the Italian Renaissance came to a close, perspective enjoyed

²⁹ Elisabetta Gonzaga, 1471-1526

³⁰ Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano, from the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione: done into English by Sir Thomas Hoby, anno 1561. With an introd. by Walter Raleigh* (New York: AMS Press, 1967).

a remarkable afterlife as a literary metaphor in the English Renaissance, which was distinguished above all by its poetry and drama.³¹ Shakespeare's sonnet 24 reads:

Mine eye hath played the painter and hath steeled,
 Thy beauty's form in table of my heart;
 My body is the frame wherein 'tis held,
 And perspective that is best painter's art.
 For through the painter must you see his skill,
 To find where your true image pictured lies,
 Which in my bosom's shop is hanging still,
 That hath his windows glazed with thine eyes.
 Now see what good turns eyes for eyes have done:
 Mine eyes have drawn thy shape, and thine for me
 Are windows to my breast, where-through the sun
 Delights to peep, to gaze therein on thee;
 Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art,
 They draw but what they see, know not the heart.³²

Writing of Erwin Panofsky's essay *Perspective as Symbolic Form* but equally applicable to the matter at hand, Elkins explains: "Perspective in contexts like these is no longer a strategy for making pictures, an artist's or mathematician's tool. It is a sign signifying a mental state, a culture, or an expressive language. Perspective has become a metaphor."³³

What makes Shakespeare's use of the term *perspective* interesting here is how it alludes to this visual practice only to transform the idea behind it into a poetic figure suited to his own literary ends. Shakespeare's use of the term is a good example of what I have termed perspectival metaphysics, for, far from acknowledging linear perspective's Euclidean geometrical foundation developed to reproduce accurately the three-dimensional physical world on a two-dimensional surface, his invocation of the practice

³¹ Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, 16.

³² William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Methuen Drama, 2010).

³³ Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, *ibid.*

furnishes him with new ways to describe the relationship between his poem's speaker and his beloved. Perspectival metaphysics is thus a rhetorical practice that imports the idea of a set of practices associated with painting and originally developed as a way of representing the physical world, and transforms it from a technical, mimetic practice into a metaphor for visual, cognitive, or emotional experience. There is great openness and variety as to how an author may employ perspective's many concomitant ideas, such as vision, space, scale, proportion, distortion, illusion, surface, depth, enchantment, insight and deception, but in the literary works considered here one finds that instances in them of perspectival metaphysics tend towards investigations of the more abstract qualities of experience, such as moral and spiritual conduct, love, desire and jealousy, time, mortality and futility, the idea of the soul versus that of the body, and the interrelatedness of mankind, nature, and the universe. In this way, poets and dramatists of early modern England make a unique contribution to culture of comparison and competition between the literary and pictorial arts.

Leonardo da Vinci's *Paragone*, "the first important contribution to the Renaissance debates on the preeminence of the visual arts," contends that "the 'universal language' of painting is based on the geometric science of perspective."³⁴ In the twenty-seventh chapter of his treatise, Leonardo tells of a poet and painter who both offer gifts to King Matthias on his birthday. The poet offers a poem celebrating the day "the world was

³⁴ Claire J. Farago, introduction to *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone: A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992) 1, 5.

favored with the king” and the painter offers a portrait of the king’s beloved.³⁵ In this humorous anecdote, the king uses the poem to support his elbow while he holds the painting before his eyes with both hands.³⁶ King Matthias explains his preference as follows:

I judge for myself that the proportion between the science of the painter and that of the poet is just like the one between their sense and the objects made for those senses. Do you not know that our soul is composed of harmony, and that harmony is only generated in those instants when the proportionality of objects is seen or heard? Do you not see that in your science proportionality is not created in an instant, rather one part is born successively after another, and the successor is not born is the antecedent does not die. Therefore, I judge your invention to be greatly inferior to the painter’s solely for the reason that it does not compose any harmonic proportionality. [Poetry] does not content the mind of the listener, or viewer, as does the proportionality of very beautiful members, components of divine beauties in this face in front of me. These [components], which are joined together at one and the same time, give me so much pleasure in their divine proportions that I judge that nothing else on earth made by man could give me greater pleasure.³⁷

Stunning the court, one imagines, with this off-the-cuff disquisition on artistic theory, King Matthias deftly alludes to the legend of Zeuxis and the Crotonian maidens – a commonplace of early modern Italian art treatises – and argues that the perceptual immediacy of painting grants more pleasure than the gradually unfolding, imaginative experience of reading. Singling out proportionality, and thus the practice of linear perspective in painting, Leonardo tosses an Albertian gauntlet to his literary contemporaries.

³⁵ Da Vinci, *Paragone*, ch. 27, ln. 4-5: “un opera fattagli in laude del giorno ch’esso re era a benefitto del mondo.”

³⁶ Da Vinci, *Paragone*, ch. 27, ln. 15-17: “E no biasmare la mia ellettione de l’havermi io mess la tua opera sotto ‘l gomito e questa del pittore tengo con due le mani, dandola alli miei occhi.”

³⁷ Da Vinci, *Paragone*, ch. 27, ln. 19-36.

An interest in honing the distinction between art and life is one of the characteristics common to the diverse European renaissances, and the various developments in perspective, from Brunelleschi and Alberti's *costruzione legittima* to Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*,³⁸ reflect the different modes in which artists addressed the paradox of translating transient life into enduring form.³⁹ The concept of a perspective or point of view in English literature did not develop in isolation from these developments in art and architecture, nor did art develop in isolation from literature. Ernst Robert Curtius reminds us that "L.B. Alberti advised painters to familiarize themselves 'with the poets and rhetoricians', who could stimulate them to discover (*inventio!*) and give form to pictorial themes" (sic).⁴⁰ When perspective's initial vogue had passed by the end of the *quattrocento* and a more skeptical attitude arose towards naturalistic representation in the sixteenth century, the practice of describing spaces in literature obtained a new valence of signification.⁴¹ "The idea that perspective

³⁸ In today's terminology, Alberti's *costruzione legittima* would be termed single-point or linear perspective. Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait* would be termed five-point perspective. Drawing today lists the types of perspective from zero-point to six-point; the first is for landscapes, the last is actually two drawings done in five-point perspective in order to give a 360° view.

³⁹ See Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, introduction and 39 in particular: "Essentially the question we need to ask was posed this way: Should the world be considered a single objective thing deduced from our individual points of view, or are those views subjective and their aggregate no more than a jumble of irreconcilable fragments? It is possible to soften these alternatives, but doing so weakens the intrinsic energy of perspectival thought, which thrives on this quandary and on the ways it can be argued."

⁴⁰ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Trask (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1953), 77.

⁴¹ See Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004); also Anthony Blunt, "The Council of Trent and Religious Art" in *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1962),

could *inform* perception,” writes Hubert Damisch in *The Origin of Perspective*, “*orienting* it so completely that it shed its polymorphic character to become “euclidean,”⁴² encourages one to think that the model’s power could not be measured by the visible effects it has left in the field of art, any more than by its explicit impact in the realm of verbal discourse.”⁴³ The Reformation’s distrust of images, as formulated by Luther - “Christ’s kingdom is a hearing-kingdom, not a seeing-kingdom”⁴⁴ – likely encouraged attitudes towards mathematical empiricism as that voiced by Anthony à Wood in *The History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*: “Sure I am that such books wherein appeared Angles or Mathematical Diagrams, were thought sufficient to be destroyed because accounted Popish, or diabolical, or both.”⁴⁵ Those resistant to Alberti’s use of Euclidean geometry could argue that his theory of painting blurred the boundary between

103-137; and Ernest Gilman, *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down Went Dagon* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁴² Alberti’s decision to title one of his works on painting *Elementi di Pittura* attests to his indebtedness to Euclid’s project in *Elements*. Sir Henry Billingsley’s translation of Euclid’s *Elements* was published in 1570 with a lengthy preface by John Dee, advisor to Queen Elizabeth I. See Frances Yates, introduction in *The Theatre of the World* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1969), xi: “John Dee’s Preface to the English translation of Euclid, published in 1570, contains long quotations from Vitruvius and Alberti in praise of the supremacy of architecture among the mathematical sciences. Dee’s Preface connects with the scientific movement of late Tudor England which is thus shown to owe something to the stimulus of the Renaissance of Vitruvius.”

⁴³ Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 31.

⁴⁴ Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, 41.

⁴⁵ Wood, Anthony à. *The History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*, vol. II, part I, ed. J.Gutch (Oxford: [s.n.], 1792-1796), 107-8. Cited in Yates, *The Theatre of the World*, note to page 15.

life and art; that it valorized the pleasant experience of an uncritical gaze at the expense of scriptural exegesis.

The cultural context in England unsurprisingly encouraged English writers to contribute to the discourse of the *paragone* in defense of poetry and the written word. Sidney and Spenser, and Jonson to some extent, aligned themselves with literary theorists such as Geoffrey of Vinsauf, whose treatise *Poetria Nova* (ca. 1210) spurred the revival of vivid illumination in medieval poetics,⁴⁶ and Guarino da Verona, who argued that ekphrastic descriptions in poetry granted more vivid images to the mind than images “presented by means of the brush.”⁴⁷ In Lucian’s *Imagines* (Εἰκόνες),⁴⁸ a dialogue between Lycinus and Polystratus, the latter concludes that writing produces “the most accurate kind of portrait”:

So, if you are willing, let us put our portraits together, the statue that you modeled of her body and the pictures that I painted of her soul; let us blend them all into one, put it down in a book, and give it to all mankind to admire, not only to those now alive, but to those that shall live hereafter. It would at least prove more enduring than the works of Apelles and Parrhasius and Polygnotus, and far more pleasing to the lady herself than anything of that kind, inasmuch as it is not made of wood and wax and colours but portrayed with inspirations from the Muses; and this will be found the most accurate kind of portrait, since it simultaneously discloses beauty of body and nobility of soul.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*, trans. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967). Cited by Farago, *Paragone*, 47.

⁴⁷ Guarino da Verona, “Letter to Iohannis Quirinus,” cited by Michael Baxandall in “Guarino, Pisanello and Chrysoloras,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 183.

⁴⁸ Commonly known in English as *Essays in Portraiture*

⁴⁹ Lucian of Samosata, Vol. IV of *Works*, trans. A.M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1913-1967), 295.

Polystratus affirms that only writing may capture what lies beneath the physical surface, those intangible qualities that constitute the “soul” of the subject. His argument has much in common with the theory of poetics developed by Ben Jonson over the course of his career, as chapter four demonstrates. In the tenth canto of the *Purgatorio*, Virgil and Dante encounter a cornice containing sculpted compositions so vivid that each seems to express its *istoria* in real time. We read: “He who on no new thing has ever looked / Was the creator of this visible language, / Novel to us, for here it is not found.” This art is irreducible to the temporal and spatial terms that distinguish literature from the plastic arts:

People appeared in front, and all of them
In seven choirs divided, of two senses
Made one say "No," the other, "Yes, they sing."

Likewise unto the smoke of the frankincense,
Which there was imaged forth, the eyes and nose
Were in the yes and no discordant made.⁵⁰

Dante’s pursuit of a “visible language” achieves its full intensity in the extremely complex language of the *Paradiso*, and his interest in transcending the very means of his art has inspired countless writers and theorists. Francesco Bocchi, for example, in his 1571 treatise *Eccellenza del San Giorgio di Donatello*, praises Donatello’s ability to impart *liveliness* to his work, making his marble statue of Saint George seem as if it were about to come to life:

San Giorgio, il quale non come qualche artificio, ma come la natura stessa, non come umana invenzione, ma divina, ne come statua marmorea, ma come cosa viva e che con vivacità adoperi si dimostra. Muovonsi le gambe, le braccia son preste, la testa è pronta.

⁵⁰ Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

[Donatello's] Saint George is not like some work of art but like nature itself, a product not of human invention but divine; it is less like a statue of marble than a living thing that shows itself striving towards liveliness itself: his legs are moving, his arms are poised, and his head is at the ready.⁵¹

Not only does Donatello's statue seem about to move, it also seems "to be completely ready and set to speak and let loose with its voice all the noble thoughts he holds contained within his heart."⁵²

In the early modern period, and especially during the fifteenth century, the idea that the highest form of artistic achievement lay in producing a work of art capable of convincingly simulating life gained currency as more painters and writers produced treatises explaining their work, methods, and aims. The anecdote about a contest between the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* became a commonplace in this genre of theoretical writing:

[Parrhasius] it is said, entered into a pictorial contest with Zeuxis, who represented some grapes, painted so naturally that the birds flew towards the spot where the picture was exhibited. Parrhasius, on the other hand, exhibited a curtain, drawn with such singular truthfulness, that Zeuxis, elated with the judgment which had been passed upon his work by the birds, haughtily demanded that the curtain should be drawn aside to let the picture be seen. Upon finding his mistake, with a great degree of ingenuous candour he admitted that he had been surpassed, for that whereas he himself had only deceived the birds, Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.⁵³

⁵¹ My translation. Francesco Bocchi, *Eccellenza del San Giorgio di Donatello in Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento, fra manierismo e Controriforma*, ed. Barocchi (Bari: G. Laterza, 1960-62) 164.

⁵² My translation. Bocchi, *Eccellenza del San Giorgio di Donatello*, 167: "di esser tutto pronto e presto a favellare et a sciorre con la voce tutti gli alti suoi pensieri, che nel cuore è tiene ascosi"; ("sciorre" meaning "sciogliere").

⁵³ Pliny the Elder, "Artists who Painted with the Pencil" in *Natural History*, trans. Jones and Eichholz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938-63), book 35, ch. 36.

Valorizing naturalistic representation above all else, Pliny's account equates painterly skill with the ability to seamlessly blend art and nature. The result is surprise and astonishment, and this variety of aesthetic experience would remain highly prized throughout the English Renaissance. However, what English writers sought to add to the delight of this experience was a context in which such astonishment could prove instructive as well. When Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* leads Leontes to see a "statue" of his late wife, Hermione, she prefaces her drawing back of the curtain with the following lines:

As she liv'd peerless,
 So her dead likeness, I do well believe,
 Excels whatever yet you look'd upon
 Or hand of man hath done; therefore I keep it
 Lonely apart. But here it is: prepare
 To see the life as lively mock'd as ever
 Still sleep mock'd death: behold! and say 'tis well.⁵⁴

Paulina points out that the "carver's excellence" even accounted for the sixteen years that have passed since Leontes last saw Hemione by including how she would have aged and portraying her "as she lived now." Leontes's response to what he believes is a work of art sums up the affective and morally instructive potential of such an encounter:

And now she might have done,
 So much to my comfort, as it is
 Now piercing to my soul. O! Thus she stood,
 Even with such life of majesty,—warm life,
 As it now coldly stands,—when first I woo'd her.
 I am asham'd: does not the stone rebuke me
 For being more stone than it? O, royal piece!
 There's magic in thy majesty, which has
 My evils conjur'd to remembrance, and
 From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,

⁵⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Pafford (London: Arden, 1963), 5.3.14-20.

Standing like stone with thee.⁵⁵

Shakespeare thus incorporates a work of sculpture into the final scene of this late romance to demonstrate that the astonishment resulting from a powerful encounter with a work of art – “what fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath?” – is capable of changing a character’s heart. In *The Winter’s Tale* Shakespeare evokes the theoretical idea of naturalistic art to precipitate his play’s dénouement.

As Vasari puts it, excellence in painting leaves one “struck with astonishment,” for such works can arrest one’s steps and conscribe one’s gaze.⁵⁶ The following discussions of works by Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Andrew Marvell consider how and to what end these writers adapted their literary art to participate in a broader conversation about imaginative experience, its aims, its limits, and its cultural and philosophical meaning. Engaging with the array of new signifying possibilities created by developments in painting and architecture, the manner in which these writers experiment with perspectival metaphysics attests to a distinctly modern conception of the potential of texts to kindle and contain essential significance in spite of their artificial nature.

⁵⁵ *The Winter’s Tale*, 5.3.32-42.

⁵⁶ Giorgio Vasari, “The Life of Francesco Mazzuoli [Parmigianino], Painter of Parma,” vol. 2 in *The Lives of the Artists*, translated with an introduction and notes by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

CHAPTER TWO

Illustrating Darkness: Perspectival Snares in Spenser's Allegory

2.1: *The Allegorical Tableau*

“Since the introduction of printing, and the fatal development of the habit of reading amongst the middle and lower classes of this country,” writes Oscar Wilde in *The Critic as Artist*, “there has been a tendency in literature to appeal more and more to the eye, and less and less to the ear which is really the sense which, from the standpoint of pure art, it should seek to please, and by whose canons of pleasure it should abide always.”⁵⁷ The “tendency” Wilde isolates here is not one unique to his time but the result of an historical process driven largely by developments in the technologies of print. It is the result of a transition, writes Walter Ong, from a “radically oral culture, such as that of the ancient world,” to a “more fundamentally manuscript culture, such as that of the Middle Ages with its special commitment to textual commentary.”⁵⁸ Finding its modern expression in “the typographical culture which emerged with the Renaissance,” this “aural-to-visual shift” suggests an evolving relationship between space and meaning in the early typographical age.⁵⁹ Ong singles out the “allegorical tableau” as representative of how these changes in the technology of printing and reading were leading “European

⁵⁷ Oscar Wilde, *Selected Prose of Oscar Wilde* (London: Methuen and Co., 1914) 36.

⁵⁸ Walter J. Ong, “From Allegory to Diagram in the Renaissance Mind: A Study in the Significance of the Allegorical Tableau,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 17, No. 4 (1959): 423-440.

⁵⁹ Walter J. Ong, “From Allegory to Diagram in the Renaissance Mind: A Study in the Significance of the Allegorical Tableau,” pp. 423-440; also Walter J. Ong, “System, Space, and Intellect in Renaissance Symbolism,” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 18, No. 2 (1956): 222-239.

man more and more to think of his own thought processes by analogy with operations in space”:⁶⁰

By the term “allegorical tableau” I refer to a type of graphic representation which was not new in the Renaissance but was more widely exploited then than at any earlier or later period. In the typical allegorical tableau, the governing principles may be considered to be more or less naturalistic pictorial representation on the one hand, and on the other some kind of organization in space which is not naturalistic but artificial, schematic, or diagrammatic.⁶¹

The allegorical tableau straddles the aural and visual worlds by appealing to the mind in both word and image. Francis Quarles prefaced his 1634 collection *Emblems, divine and moral, together with Hieroglyphicks of the life of man* with the suggestion that all the phenomena of the world were hieroglyphics, emblematic of God’s glory:

AN Embleme is but a silent Parable. Let not the tender Eye checke, to see the allusion to our blessed SAVIOUR figured, in these Types. In holy Scripture, He is sometimes called a Sower; sometimes, a Fisher; sometimes, a Physitian: And why not presented so, as well as to the eye, as to the eare? Before the knowledge of letters, GOD was knowne by *Hieroglyphics*; And, indeed, what are the Heavens, the Earth, nay every Creature, *Hieroglyphicks* and *Emblemes* of His Glory?⁶²

The vogue for these tableaux reached its peak in the seventeenth century, in the period of early copper engraving, but gained initial popularity in the medium of woodcuts.

Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calendar* was first printed in 1579 with a woodcut tableau preceding each of the twelve eclogues, which follow the progression of the twelve months from January to December. The book’s layout was likely influenced

⁶⁰ Ong, “From Allegory to Diagram in the Renaissance Mind,” 435.

⁶¹ Ong, “From Allegory to Diagram in the Renaissance Mind,” 425.

⁶² Francis Quarles, *Emblems, divine and moral, together with Hieroglyphicks of the life of man / written by Francis Quarles. In the Savoy, Printed by J. Nutt, and sold by E. Nutt, [17--?]*, p. 17, preface dated 1634. Early 18th Century Collections Online (GALE).

by Jacopo Sannazzaro's *Arcadia*, which included a variety of illustrating material by Francesco Sansovino.⁶³ Though not explicitly allegorical, these woodcuts situate the ensuing poetic discourse within the temporal frame of a year's passage, which encourages one to project the attributes of the month and season onto the subject matter of each poem or poetic dialogue. In *October* (fig. 7), we see Cuddie walking away from a generic architecture of civic order, his poetic endeavors yielding no harvest in spite of the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness".⁶⁴



Figure 7: Woodcut prefacing the October eclogue in *The Shepheardes Calendar*, 1579

⁶³ Thomas H. Cain, introduction to *The Shepheardes Calendar* in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Oram (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁶⁴ John Keats, "Ode to Autumn" in *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. Barnard (London: Penguin, 1973).

Piers, I haue pyped erst so long with payne,
 That all mine Oten reedes bene rent and wore:
 And my poore Muse hath spent her spared store,
 Yet little good hath got, and much lesse gayne.

The Faerie Queene, however, did not feature tableaux of the *Shepherd's Calendar* variety, though both the 1590 and 1596 editions included printers' marks and an engraving of St. George killing the dragon, and indeed attempts to depict scenes from this evocative epic romance have met with limited success.⁶⁵

Rudolf Gottfried speculates that "Spenser's poetry is not easy to illustrate, presumably for reasons inherent in the poetry itself," and yet this unobjectionable observation comes in 1952, at the end of a long tradition of reading Spenser as the most "pictorial" of poets.⁶⁶ What is it about *The Faerie Queene* that simultaneously suggests and resists representation in visual terms?⁶⁷ Can one cast light upon, that is, literally illustrate the darkness of Spenser's "continued allegory, or darke conceit," and what would this tell us about the operation of allegory and Spenser's poetic project as a whole? Description in *The Faerie Queene* resists translation into the visual mode because Spenser's imagery, like the language that fosters it, is polysemic: passages that appear to reproduce the experience of vision do so only to transform visual experience into a

⁶⁵ Rudolf Gottfried, "The Pictorial Element in Spenser's Poetry," *English Literary History* 19, No. 3 (1952): 203-213.

⁶⁶ Gottfried, "The Pictorial Element in Spenser's Poetry," 208. Cf. William Butler Yeats, "Edmund Spenser" in *The Cutting of an Agate* (New York, NY: MacMillan Company, 1912).

⁶⁷ Gottfried, "The Pictorial Element in Spenser's Poetry," 212: "The truth is that nine-tenths of Spenser's imagery is addressed to the ear rather than the eye, and therefore the picture galleries which some would-be curators have gathered from his work inevitably misrepresent the character of the whole."

metaphor of ethical development in time. Less concerned with technically accurate depictions of interior (architectural) and exterior (geographical) space, Spenser's poem emphasizes the importance of how individuals respond to the environments they encounter, and in this sense the places where the poem's action occurs remain auxiliary to the progressive development of each book's protagonist.

In his lecture notes, Samuel Taylor Coleridge remarks of *The Faerie Queene*: "The marvelous independence or true imaginative absence of all particular place & time—it is neither in the domains of History or Geography, is ignorant of all artificial boundary—truly in the Land of Faery—i.e. in mental space—."⁶⁸ There are, however, identifiable places within the "mental space" of reading where decisive encounters occur. Spenser's descriptions of these places reveal more about his poem than merely its episodic structure, for in the oscillation between open wandering and decisive encounter resides a broader truth about the imaginative experience of literature and the poetic operations that engender it. Examining Spenser's descriptions of space casts light on the "aesthetics of temporality" by which the poem stages "an encounter with meaning as a process in time."⁶⁹ If, as Susan Stewart writes, "to read allegory is to live in the future," anticipating "closure beyond the closure of narrative," then how do the static spaces we

⁶⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. R.J. White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), vol. 6.

⁶⁹ Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 22.

encounter in the present time of reading participate in the economy of Spenser's allegory?⁷⁰

In *The Faerie Queene* it is noticeable that many of the poem's iconic encounters occur in places that seem as metaphorically rich as the actions that occur there.⁷¹ In the proem to book six, Spenser describes the world he has created in terms of variety and openness:

The waies, through which my weary steps I guyde,
In this delightfull land of Faery,
Are so exceeding spacious and wyde,
And sprinckled with such sweet variety,
Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye,
That I nigh rauisht with rare thoughts delight,
My tedious trauell doe forget thereby;⁷²

This "tedious trauell" is the experience of moving between what C.S. Lewis once termed the poem's "allegorical cores" and their demonic counterparts, a motion that lends a tentative geography to the otherwise uncharted "mental space" of the reading process.⁷³ Phrasing his insight in terms of "margin" and "core," Lewis comments at once on the general structure of the poem's books and on the quality of their subject matter. He

⁷⁰ Susan Steward, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 3.

⁷¹ A short list of the locations where the action of *The Faerie Queene* takes place might read: The house of pride, Orgoglio's dungeon, Despair's cave, and the house of Holiness in Book I; Mammon's house, the house of Temperance, and Acrasia's bower of bliss in Book II; Castle Joyeous, the loci amoeni of cantos V and VI (Garden of Adonis), and the house of Busyrane in Book III; the house of care, Venus's temple, and Proteus's hall in Book IV; Munera's castle, Isis Church, and Mercilla's palace in Book V; Pastorella's fields, the "open greene" on Mount Acidale where Colin Clout pipes to the graces, and the monastery and church despoiled by the Blatant Beast in Book VI.

⁷² *F.Q.* IV.i.1

⁷³ C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 334.

explains that the “central or focal cantos” of each book reveal the true nature of Spenser’s characters because their actions here illustrate the governing virtue of their respective books (holiness, temperance, chastity, friendship, justice, and courtesy).⁷⁴ Lewis’s critical gesture is important because it attempts to recuperate the spaces of the poem’s action as allegorically significant features of the poem in their own right. Centrality, however, does double duty in Spenser’s poetics, for false centers and deceptive sights feature in many of the poem’s best-known passages, and certain books reserve their most significant encounters for the final canto, thereby challenging the dichotomy of margin and core. It is telling that *Error* is the first enemy Redcrosse, Una, and the reader encounter, followed soon after by Archimago and Duessa. Furthermore, Spenser tends to emphasize the act of seeing in his description of these focal points, which is often quite lavish and singularly enchanting, as when we read of Despair’s cave, the Bower of Bliss, and the interior of Busirane’s castle. The key to understanding how these marginal, false “cores” work within the broader, ethical project of *The Faerie Queene* lies in how the poet describes them as self-contained spaces. They are artfully managed, metaphysical environments that tend to align the protagonist and reader’s perspectives, thereby creating a powerful sense of enclosure and impending dramatic resolution.

Attempting to situate the action of *The Faerie Queene* has proven a productive strategy for critics, and this is because the openness of the poem’s world creates a meaningful contrast between the “plaine,” to which the poem always returns, and the delimited spaces where confrontation occurs. The question of *where* a Renaissance romantic epic poem occurs, however, is a perilous line of inquiry. Some critics have

⁷⁴ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 336.

responded to Coleridge's remarks about *The Faerie Queene's* "marvelous independence or true imaginative absence of all particular place & time" by looking for vertical and horizontal indicators and interpreting them figuratively. Wayne Erickson in *Mapping the Faerie Queene* discerns "a horizontal dimension of spatial and temporal geography and a vertical dimension of topographical and cosmological geography":

The horizontal—the earthly setting in the fallen world—intersects the vertical—and ontological spectrum extending from heaven to hell—on the plain in Faeryland where much of the action of the poem occurs. In general, vertical shifts in the setting—up a mountain, down into a valley or cave, up or down into a building—reflect changes in the ontological status of the events portrayed, usually accompanied by an increase in allegorical intensity roughly proportional to the distance of a particular setting from the plain.⁷⁵

Erickson, following Isabella MacCaffrey, makes a valid point here, and it is one that is worth bearing in mind as Spenser's knights deviate from the neutral "plaine" of the poem. However, as a theory of interpretation it derives largely from the Christian hermeneutics of *The Divine Comedy* and the epics of antiquity that inspired it and first opposed the descent to the underworld against an ascent to the heavens as a literary *topos*. Many episodes in *The Faerie Queene* "reflect changes in the ontological status of the events portrayed" without any change in altitude per se, as when Redcrosse and Una take shelter in a "shadie grove" and wander into "*Errours den*,"⁷⁶ or when Britomart and Satyrane pursue Ollyphant only to introduce unexpectedly the tale of Scudamore and Amoret:

The wood they enter, and search euerie where,

⁷⁵ Wayne Erickson, *Mapping The Faerie Queene: Quest Structures and the World of the Poem* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996) 5.

⁷⁶ *F.Q.* I.i.7

They search diuersely, so both diuided were.⁷⁷

In both cases straying from the openness of the plain is what precipitates the encounters of the poem that stand out as events of notable allegorical density, as Spenser writes of Redcrosse and Una:

Led with delight, they thus beguile the way,
 Vntill the blustering storme is overblown;
 When weening to returne, whence they did stray,
 They cannot finde that path, which first was showne,
 But wander too and fro in waies vnknowne,
 Furthest from end then, when they nearest weene,
 That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne:
 So many pathes, so many turnings seene,
 That which of them to take, in diuerse doubt they been.⁷⁸

Wandering in *The Faerie Queene* clears the slate, as it were, and allows the poet to create a new encounter *tabula rasa*. Indeed, there is something sublime in the idea of the open plain to which the poem returns again and again. “A level plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea,” writes Edmund Burke, “the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean.”⁷⁹ The sublime “terror” of this openness generates a dialectic between it and the formal spaces within which the poem’s decisive encounters occur. These encounters are distinct scenes, end points that entail confrontation and meaningful action. They are, if one was to illustrate *The Faerie Queene*, the moments an artist would depict, instances when the progress of the verse in time crystallizes into an iconic tableau of suspended action. The “complete suspension of action,” writes John

⁷⁷ *F.Q.* III.xi.6

⁷⁸ *F.Q.* I.i.10

⁷⁹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Basil: printed and sold by J. J. Tourneisen, MDCCXCII. [1792]), Part II, section II (“Terror”).

Bender in *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism*, “frames a Focused image,” a strategy which, he contends, is more pictorial than descriptive.⁸⁰ There are many such instances in the poem when the warring temporalities of Spenser’s historical, mythological, and eschatological palimpsest briefly resolve into an iconic crisis, a moment seemingly better suited to the plastic arts than the literary.

2.2: Edmund Spenser: The Most Painterly of Poets

John Hughes prefaced his 1715 edition of Spenser’s works with an essay on allegorical poetry in which he revived Plutarch’s definition of allegory as a “Poetical Picture, or Hieroglyphick, which by its apt Resemblance conveys Instruction to the Mind by an Analogy to the Senses; and so amuses the Fancy, whilst it informs the Understanding. Every Allegory has therefore two Senses, the Literal and the Mystical; the literal Sense is like a Dream or Vision, of which the mystical Sense is the true Meaning or Interpretation.”⁸¹ Hughes’s use of the term “Hieroglyphick” is noteworthy, for in 1715, eighty-four years before the discovery of the Rosetta stone, hieroglyphics still retained in Europe their mystical status as signifiers severed from an arcane system of signification. Hieroglyphic inscriptions yielded to the European eye an array of symbols organized according to an order so recondite that only baroque polymaths and madmen, such as Athanasius Kircher, might attempt their explication. They were pictures of things one might recognize, such as eyes and cats, but whose grammar and syntax

⁸⁰ John Bender, *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972) 63.

⁸¹ John Hughes, *The Works of Mr. Edmund Spenser : in six volumes: with a glossary explaining the old and obscure words* (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1715).

remained indecipherable. That Hughes likens the reading of hieroglyphics to the reading of allegory is significant, for it indicates that both forms of writing operate in appearances whose meaning lies elsewhere.

Plutarch, Hughes and Coleridge all speak of allegory as speaking in pictures that conceal the key to their own decipherment. The idea that poetry may place an image “before the eyes”⁸² is a commonplace of classical rhetoric (*enargeia* or *evidentia*), but to suggest that allegorical poetry is more visual in nature than other modes of writing and speech is misleading. Rather, it should be said that allegory sketches its “poetical picture” only to have the reader discard it as a husk after divining its meaning. Thus what allegory offers to the mind is a descriptive scenario unfolding in time towards a conceptual unity. According to Coleridge, allegorical writing operates by creating and sustaining a “correspondent” difference between the literal elements of a poem and their significance:

We may then safely define allegorical writing as the employment of one set of agents and images with actions and accompaniments correspondent, so as to convey, while in disguise, either moral qualities or conceptions of the mind that are not in themselves objects of the senses, or other images, agents, actions, fortunes, and circumstances so that the difference is everywhere presented to the eye or imagination, while the likeness is suggested to the mind; and this connectedly, so that the parts combine to form a consistent whole.⁸³

When Sidney writes in the *Apology for Poetry* “that there are many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be

⁸² Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 3.11.1-4 [1411b].

⁸³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge’s Miscellaneous Criticism* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999) 30; Discussed in Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964) 19.

abused,” he emphasizes the importance of interpreting a poetic conceit correctly, especially a “darke” one.⁸⁴ The idea that the true order of things lies concealed behind a superficial play of images derives from Plato, but Sidney’s attribution to the poet of the power to veil a work’s true meaning and thereby protect it from distortion bears the mark of his age.⁸⁵ Anxious to safeguard poetry’s validity as a means to knowledge both earthly and divine, “sixteenth-century poets, like their medieval counterparts, were reluctant to detach the poet’s golden worlds from the actuality of the divine Creation or to claim absoluteness for poetic creativity.”⁸⁶ The poet may create a fictional world, but the value of his creation lay in its ability to adumbrate a divine order, which would remain otherwise inaccessible to human intelligence.

This distinction between allegory as conceptual and allegory as imagistic, however, did little to stem the critical tradition that regarded Spenser as an essentially pictorial poet, one whose greatest accomplishment lay in the vivid images his poetry brought before the mind’s eye. There is something very valuable to this critical approach but one will not find it by comparing Spenser to European painters or searching his

⁸⁴ Philip Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney’s An Apology for Poetry and Astrophil and Stella: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2004), 125.

⁸⁵ Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, cited by Shepherd, introduction to *An Apology for Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

⁸⁶ Isabel MacCaffrey, *Spenser’s Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 22: “The notion of making, making-up, or feigning opens a Pandora’s box of fraudulent visions—fictions that mislead deliberately or inadvertently, prove deceptive or self-deceiving. To ground poetic fiction in an ideal realm—ordinarily obscured by the waywardness of the infected will and the opaqueness and hostility of the fallen environment—is to insure its validity. In a sense, therefore, all valid art is imitative or vision, though, as Sidney suggests, the objects of imitation are inaccessible to any but an erected wit.”

verses for traces of artistic schools or styles. One of the only allusions to painters in *The Faerie Queene* is found in the proem to book three and it is not flattering, for not even the poet's wit, "that passeth Painter farre," could do justice to Queen Elizabeth I's "excellence." If in Spenser's evaluation the greatest painters of antiquity would fail to portray Elizabeth's virtues adequately, it is unlikely he considered contemporary painters up to the task, products as they were of a degenerate age that "growes daily wourse and wourse."⁸⁷ The poet remains, as Sidney puts it, the "monarch" of all sciences: the painter may place a fine prospect before an observer, but only the poet can invite him to enter the frame and engage senses other than vision: "For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it."⁸⁸

That allegory as a poetic mode appeals to the visual faculty with what Coleridge called its "picture-language"⁸⁹ does not necessarily align it with the trajectory from aural to visual described by Walter Ong. Instead of externalizing poetic content in an accompanying picture, as in the allegorical tableau, allegorical writing's "pictures" refer only to each other and the concealed logic that governs them. "The constitutive duplicity of the allegorical sign," writes Marshall Grossman, "the truth of which depends on its not being itself – opens an interior or "inward" space that belongs at once to the reader and the text, or to the always belated coming together of the reader and the text within the

⁸⁷ *F.Q.* V.Proem.2

⁸⁸ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, 83-4.

⁸⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. R.J. White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), Vol. 6.

unity of ‘the nature of things’.”⁹⁰ Gordon Teskey in *Allegory and Violence* had earlier characterized the inward space Grossman refers to in perspectival terms:

The practice of allegory from late antiquity to the Enlightenment was made possible by suppressing antiphrasis in favor of polysemy, drawing the grid inward so that it would look like a perspectival regress to an origin that remains out of sight. As a result, the temporality of reading was experienced in the subject as movement within what Coleridge, speaking of *The Faerie Queene*, calls “mental space.”⁹¹

John Hughes’s influential edition of 1715, however, brought *The Faerie Queene* into the aural-to-visual current described by Ong, for it included a series of beautifully executed engravings by Louis du Guernier III. Instead of directing readers to an “inward,” “mental” space, Hughes’s edition encouraged pictorial externalizations of Spenser’s world, only it was Spenser’s world reimaged in the Enlightenment. When one opens the book, one is struck immediately by an engraving depicting an allegorical personification on her throne, holding a portrait of Elizabeth the Faery Queen. The figure is ensconced in neoclassical architecture that would have been virtually unrecognizable to Spenser and his English contemporaries.⁹² Du Guernier’s treatment of space strictly adheres to the conventions of linear perspective, and the orthogonals of the composition appear as rays of light converging upon, or emitting from, the head of the allegorical figure (fig. 8).⁹³ In

⁹⁰ Marshall Grossman, *The Story of All Things: writing the self in English Renaissance narrative poetry* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 125.

⁹¹ Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*, 61.

⁹² See David Evelt’s entry “Architecture” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. Hamilton. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1990); On the arrival of Vitruvian principles in England see Yates, *Theatre of the World* and John Summerson, *Inigo Jones* (Harmondsworth, England; Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1966).

⁹³ Du Guernier’s use of perspective unifies this visual representation of *The Faerie Queene* in an ideal sense, as if Spenser’s poem were a complete work when in fact “its

his remarks to the reader, Hughes writes that “*Spenser’s fable...is...always emblematical,*” and his edition helped to establish a branch of Spenser criticism that proclaimed him the “Poet of Painters.”⁹⁴ Critics in this vein sought analogies between Spenser’s poetry and the *entire* tradition of European Renaissance painting. Spenser has been compared to Carpaccio, Fouquet, Paolo Uccello, Botticelli, Lippo Lippi, Masaccio, Mantegna, Raphael, Durer, Titian, Coreggio, Primaticcio, Veronese, Michelangelo, Giulio Romano, Guido Reni, Salvator Rosa, Albano, Rubens, Rembrandt, Turner, Poussin, and Claude Lorraine.

centre, the seat of its highest life, is missing” (Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 337). The technique of perspective operates by giving an impression of artificial completion, allowing the work of art to masquerade as a product of natural perception.

⁹⁴ Hughes, *The Works of Mr. Edmund Spenser*, lxii.



Figure 8: John Keats's personal copy of John Hughes's 1715 edition of Spenser's works. Engraving by Louis du Guernier. Courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Many critics participated in the generation of this unsightly list, but the most notorious offenders in Rudolf Gottfried's evaluation were Hippolyte Taine and Leigh Hunt, the latter of which "chucked the whole Louvre into the Spenserian hopper."⁹⁵ The advent of New Criticism occasioned a push back against such loosely impressionistic criticism, and yet the strain of pictorialist criticism survived, finding its most convincing expression in John Bender's *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism*. Influenced by the work of E.H. Gombrich and James J. Gibson, Bender analyzed Spenser's treatment of imagery to isolate poetic techniques such as "framing" and "focusing," which he argued were more uniquely Spenserian than the classical blazon, emblem or ekphrasis. Terms and distinctions borrowed from the field of psychology, such as the "visual world" vs. the "visual field," allowed for a reevaluation of vision in *The Faerie Queene*. Thinking in terms of a "visual field," that is, the "pictorial mode of visual perception,"⁹⁶ which is "singular, fixed in time, bounded by margins, and governed by perspective,"⁹⁷ allowed for a new way of interpreting the visual and spatial cues of Spenser's verse. Bender's suggestion of "framed" images complements Jonathan Kamholtz's discussion of perspective in *The Faerie Queene* in his article, "Spenser and Perspective,"⁹⁸ but as Judith Dundas observes in her response, "Fairyland and the Vanishing Point": "In poetry,

⁹⁵ Gottfried, "The Pictorial Element in Spenser's Poetry," 204.

⁹⁶ See James J. Gibson, "The Visual Field and the Visual World," *Psychological Review*, 59 (1952): 149-15; James J. Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1950). Also E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Second edition. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 328.

⁹⁷ Bender, *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism*, 70.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Z. Kamholtz, "Spenser and Perspective," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 39, No.1 (1980): 59-66.

it is not enough to find directional signals – such as up and down, near and far – to conclude that a writer is concerned with space in a pictorial sense. The poet has no need to fit a three-dimensional experience to a two-dimensional surface, or indeed any surface at all.”⁹⁹

Yet the sensation of encountering a sequence of pictorial surfaces, a “gallery of pictures,” has been remarked by many of Spenser’s readers. The suggestion that Spenser’s poem operates like a “gallery” of pictures originates with an anecdote recorded by Joseph Spence (1699-1768). Upon hearing a passage of *The Faerie Queene* read aloud, a listener responded that she had been shown “a collection of pictures.”¹⁰⁰ There are conflicting accounts of this anecdote, some claiming that Joseph Spence was reading to his mother, another claiming that Alexander Pope was reading aloud to *his* mother, and another claiming that Alexander Pope was reading aloud to Spence’s mother. In any case, each telling of the myth attributes the “collection of pictures” remark to a sibylline maternal figure of about seventy years of age. William Cowper may have been alluding to this tradition when he wrote that Alexander Pope’s “The Alley. An Imitation of Spenser” progressed with “the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who

⁹⁹ Judith Dundas, “Fairyland and the Vanishing Point,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 40, no. 1 (1981): 82-84.

¹⁰⁰ See John Bender, “Pictorialism” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*; Joseph Spence, *Observations, anecdotes, and characters of books and men: collected from conversation*, ed. Osborn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), I.182; Paul J. Alpers, ed., *Edmund Spenser: A Critical Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 96; Jane Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene* (Burlington and Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 4.

draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness.”¹⁰¹ Writing of Spenser’s celebratory verses in the sixth book, when Colin Clout pipes to the Graces, and of his *Epithalamium*, William Butler Yeats concludes that “his genius was pictorial, and these pictures of happiness were more natural to it than any personal pride, or joy, or sorrow.”¹⁰² Yeats’s evaluation of the poetic method of *The Faerie Queene*, however, is particularly incisive:

He drew a complicated web of inhuman logic out of the bowels of an insufficient premise—there was no right, no law, but that of Elizabeth, and all that opposed her opposed themselves to God, to civilisation, and to all inherited wisdom and courtesy, and should be put to death.¹⁰³

What Yeats discerns here may not be a unique feature of Spenser’s poem but pertains to allegory in general. “A successful allegory,” explains Richard Blackmur in *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, “requires the preliminary possession of a complete and stable body of belief appropriate to the theme in hand.”¹⁰⁴

One of the distinct ways *The Faerie Queene* mirrors its “complete and stable body of belief” is by calling into question the reliability of the visual sense. Throughout the poem, Spenser’s knights do not rely on the world as perceived by the senses to divide truth from falsehood; rather, they do so by relying on faith and principles of character. It is in this sense that Spenser is a “pictorial” poet: the vivid scenarios that his protagonists

¹⁰¹ William Cowper, “Letter to Rev. William Unwin, January 5, 1782” in Robert Southey, *Volume 1 of The Works of William Cowper, Esq., Comprising His Poems, Correspondence and Translations. With a Life of the Author by the Editor, Robert Southey* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1836).

¹⁰² William Butler Yeats, “Edmund Spenser,” *The Cutting of an Agate* (New York, NY: MacMillan Company, 1912), 222.

¹⁰³ Yeats, *The Cutting of an Agate*, 221.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Blackmur, *The Lion and the Honeycomb* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), 131; cited in MacCaffrey, *Spenser’s Allegory*, 22.

encounter are tests of their virtue, and when a knight is successful the seductive if insubstantial pageant vanishes. *The Faerie Queene* valorizes a visionary or sublime experience of divinity while stressing the limitation and danger of worldly sensibilities. “Spenser’s poem,” writes Jane Grogan, “mercilessly exposes the fallacies engendered by earthly vision and denies the reader this same dream of perfect sight: the narrator explicitly withholds details of Redcrosse’s divine vision of the New Jerusalem, and shows only vicious travesties of divine visions at the Bower of Bliss or House of Busirane and beyond.”¹⁰⁵ Opting for *occupatio* over *descriptio*, Spenser’s verse offers an alternative to the supremacy of vision theorized by Leonardo in the *Paragone*: “The eye is the window of the human body, the way it speculates and enjoys the beauty of the world. On account of this the soul is content in its human prison, and without this the human prison is its torment.”¹⁰⁶ In *The Faerie Queene* it is by contemplation, not vision, that one perceives most clearly:

Great grace that old man [Contemplation] to him giuen had;
 For God he often saw from heauens hight,
 All were his earthly eien both blunt and bad,
 And through great age had lost their kindly sight,
 Yet wondrous quick and persaunt was his spright,
 As Eagles eie, that can behold the Sunne:¹⁰⁷

The prisons of *The Faerie Queene* are metaphysical, and allegory thus proves an effective mode for their description. The poem instructs the reader not to take the “agents and images” of the poem at face value and operates according to a dialectic of appearance and reality, of presence and vanishing. “For if it is true that the Idea is in its purity too

¹⁰⁵ Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene*, 80.

¹⁰⁶ Da Vinci, *Paragone*, 239.

¹⁰⁷ *F.Q.* I.x.47

brilliant to be comprehended by human intelligence,” writes Donald Cheney, “it is equally true that every attempt to filter this brilliance through the veil of concrete imagery will bring with it the risk of confusing tenor and vehicle, of mistaking the image for the thing imaged. From this danger arises the incessant conflict of Appearance and Reality which dominates so much of the poem.”¹⁰⁸

Augustine writes that “there is no principle of unity but that alone from which all unity derives,” and it is helpful to think of Spenser’s poem and its treatment of vision in these terms.¹⁰⁹ The principle of unity that governs the allegory of *The Faerie Queene* remains outside of the text: Elizabeth’s rule and Britain’s providential destiny supply the “complete and stable body of belief” that orients interpretation. Early modern theories of painting, however, emphasized the relationships of objects to one another and thus to the enclosed space that contained them. Alberti stresses in the second book of *Della Pittura* that “bodies are part of the *istoria*, members are parts of the bodies, planes part of the members. The primary parts of painting, therefore, are the planes.”¹¹⁰ The painter’s goal was the lifelike representation of objects, but the principle that made this possible was a mastery of the theoretical space that organized them. According to this way of thinking, a successful painting should direct the viewer’s attention into its fictive world, implicating him in the process and eclipsing considerations of the periphery. “For this reason,” writes

¹⁰⁸ Donald Cheney, *Spenser’s Image of Nature: Wild Man and Shepherd in The Faerie Queene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 149.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, trans. J.H.S. Burleigh (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1959), xxxiv; cited in Harry Berger, Jr., *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 17.

¹¹⁰ Leon Battista Alberti, *Della Pittura, edizione critica*, a cura di Luigi Mallè (Firenze: Sansoni, 1950), libro secondo.

Alberti, “I say among my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting. Since painting is already the flower of every art, the story of Narcissus is most to the point. What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?”¹¹¹

2.3: “*Dreadfull pourtraicts of deformitee*”

“Movement,” notes Oscar Wilde, “that problem of the visible arts, can be truly realised by Literature alone. It is literature that shows us the body in its swiftness and the soul in its unrest.”¹¹² Poetic imagery develops in time and takes root in the imagination gradually, and in this sense it seems more appropriate to discuss Spenser’s poem as a succession of *scenes* instead of a gallery of paintings. These are situations when there is a temporary alignment, or at least confusion, of narratorial viewpoint, which causes a scene to appear in vivid relief before vanishing back into the poem’s “endlesse world.”¹¹³ As John Bender notes, Spenser “does not preserve a strictly limited point of view through the eyes of a single character,”¹¹⁴ but there are nevertheless situations that are overwhelmingly focalized through a chosen protagonist, such as Redcrosse in Despair’s cave, Guyon in the Bower of Bliss, and Britomart in the House of Busirane. The narratorial viewpoint of *The Faerie Queene* oscillates between an external, objective

¹¹¹ Alberti, *Della Pittura*, Book II.

¹¹² Wilde, *Selected Prose*, 40-41.

¹¹³ “But through the endlesse world did wander wide” (IV.viii.18).

¹¹⁴ Bender, “Pictorialism” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, 543.

point of view and an internal, subjective point of view. This alternation is a significant aspect of Spenser's poetics and, acknowledged or not, it influences a reader's interpretation of many of the poem's most vivid episodes.

When Spenser describes, as he regularly does, the encounter of two knights in battle, his description situates the reader at a distance from the action, as if he or she were observing these events from outside. Arthur's engagement with Geryoneo's "Seneschall" in book V illustrates this commonplace in *The Faerie Queene*:

They both encounter in the middle plaine,
And their sharpe speares doe both together smite
Amid their shields, with so huge might and maine,
That seem'd their soules they would haue ryuen quight
Out of their breasts, with furious despight.¹¹⁵

The two "encounter in the middle plaine" with respect to the eyewitness because without this visual point of reference "middle" would be meaningless. Deictic language here implicates the reader as an observer and grounds the action of the scene as a dramatic event. Once Spenser's poem locates its action in a presupposed viewer, the play of plural nouns ("sharpe speares," "shields," "soules," and "breasts") and paired alliterations ("sharpe / speares," "smite / shields," "might / maine," "seem'd / soules") increases the intensity of the encounter's symmetrical violence to a literal breaking point. "Both" spears make contact in the center of ("amid") each fighter's shield, and the converging force of lateral impact seems powerful enough to rive the balanced composition of the stanza. Spenser enlists the formal qualities of his stanza to dramatize description, raising the tension in the fifth line to a point where it "seem'd their soules they would haue ryuen quight / Out of their breasts." What is most hidden and protected here – "their soules" –

¹¹⁵ *F.Q.* V.x.32

threatens to escape “out” from both men. This detail marks a formal and conceptual pivot: this end-stopped line finishing in “furious despight” marks the tipping point of the encounter, for its violence must find a point of release.

Out of their breasts, with furious despight.
 Yet could the Seneschals no entrance find
 Into the Princes shield, where it empight;
 So pure the mettall was, and well refynd,
 But shiuered all about, and scattered in the wynd.¹¹⁶

The Spenserian stanza’s oddly numbered nine lines are particularly apt for this sort of encounter, and the caesura placed in the midst of the concluding alexandrine announces the triumph of form over subject matter. The “furious despight,” tempered by the pure “mettall” of the “refynd” stanza, comes to rest like a perfectly balanced pair of scales, the weight of three iambic feet set against their metrical counterweight. Noting how Spensersian stanzas almost invariably conclude with hard punctuation, what William Empson called the “fixity” of the form,¹¹⁷ A.C. Hamilton remarks that the interlocking rhymes “make the stanza *stand*, fixed for the moment as a globe for our contemplation, or as a painting to be read in spatial terms.”¹¹⁸

What is significant about Spenser’s description of action here is not so much what he includes in the sense of descriptive detail but what he excludes in order to make his stanza speak with such immediate power. His linguistic concision and metrical economy ensure that every syllable serves a purpose in the dramatic development of the encounter.

¹¹⁶ *F.Q.* V.x.32

¹¹⁷ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Second edition. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947), 33-34; discussed in Bender, *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism*, 70.

¹¹⁸ Cited in Bender, *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism*, 70.

Writing within such restrictions allows the poet to marshal all of his resources and make each detail, such as the off rhyme “wynd,” significant for an interpreter. In this stanza opposing forces are brought under sway metrically and rhetorically but the off rhyme quibbles on “wynd” (v.) so that both *wind* (n.) and *wind* (v.) are understood and “more is meant than meets the Ear.”¹¹⁹ The first is upheld by the syntax, the second by the rhyme scheme, and this is how Spenser winds up the encounter. Although “wynd” accomplishes formal closure, the inertia of narrative leads us into the next stanza to learn how Arthur’s spear fares: “Not so the princes, but with restlesse force, / Into his shield it readie passage found, / Both through his haberieon, and eke his corse.”¹²⁰

E.H. Gombrich stresses in his essay “Standards of Truth: The Arrested Image and the Moving Eye” that the “eye-witness principle” “enables the artist to conform to [a] negative standard of truth,” and this is true for poetry as much as it is for painting.¹²¹ A convincing representation need not concern itself with what lies beyond the peripheral limit of human perception, and thus a realistic or naturalistic prospect depends upon the privileging of the visual field over the visual world. In order to determine these parameters, painters attempting to depict a scene determine what they will include with reference to an imaginary viewer, whose point of view one assumes in encountering the painting. The theoretical presence of this viewer determines not only the boundaries or “frame” of the painting but also the internal spatial relationships of the depicted objects,

¹¹⁹ John Milton, “Il Penseroso” in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Revard (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

¹²⁰ *F.Q.* V.x.33

¹²¹ E.H. Gombrich, “Standards of Truth” in *The Image and the Eye: further studies in the psychology of pictorial representation* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982).

and in this sense the logic of representation depends upon an absent viewer assumed to be forever present and entirely immobile. The realism of such a prospect is remarkable for its unreality, because the lifelike view it proffers hinges upon the negation of life and the denial of change over time.

Detailed attention to passages in *The Faerie Queene* that strongly appeal to the visual sense reveals an equation of immobility and danger in the poem. Arresting images lurk throughout the poem and it is the manner in which individual characters respond to these images that reveals their moral standing and spiritual health. When Malbecco, concealed as a “Gote emongst the Gotes,” watches Helenore sport with “a *Satyre* rough and rude, / Who all the night did minde his ioyous play,” his punishment is to lose his being as a mortal character and become the archetypal personification of Jealousy, which cannot die:¹²²

Yet can he neuer dye, but dying liues,
 And doth himselfe with sorrow new sustaine,
 That death and life attonce vnto him giues.
 And painefull pleasure turnes to pleasing paine.
 There dwels he euer, miserable swaine,
 Hatefull both to him selfe, and euery wight;
 Where he through priuivy grieffe, and horreur vaine,
 Is woxen so deform'd that he has quight
 Forgot he was a man, and *Gelosy* is hight.¹²³

Malbecco’s metamorphosis here is an attempt, as Leonard Barkan writes, “to turn language into image or, to put it another way, to turn words into things”:

The metamorph / metonym is not just the image of a word; it is the image of a whole narrative process. Ovidian transformation turns poetic narrative into image and thereby trumps the painter at the unplayable game of capturing temporality in

¹²² *F.Q.* III.x.47-8

¹²³ *F.Q.* III.x.60

a picture. A painter cannot paint time, and a poem cannot be a picture; those are the impossibilities on which Ovid's invention rests.¹²⁴

Despair is another figure who cannot die, though we are never given a back-story as we are with *Gelosy* or the allegorical personification once known as Malbecco. Redcrosse's situation in this episode is perilous because he risks transformation from one pole of exemplarity, holiness, to its opposite, faithlessness, and Despair angles to catalyze the reaction. When Trevisan, who has just narrowly escaped Despair's cave, describes the predator's method, he emphasizes its aural quality, recalling simultaneously Homer's sirens and the book of Proverbs – “the lippen of a strange woman drop as an honie combe”:¹²⁵

His subtile tong, like dropping honny, meal'th
 Into the heart, and searcheth euery vaine,
 That ere one be aware, by secret stealth
 His powre is reft, and weaknes doth remaine.¹²⁶

Trevisan's lines indicate Despair's power lies partly in his speech and partly in some other “secret stealth” that affects the hearer. “Stealth” derives from the Old English for “to steal,” and thus Trevisan's lines suggest the actual means by which Despair steals his victims' power remain concealed and somehow beyond reportage in language.

Stanzas thirty-three to thirty-five not only recount the physical arrival at and entrance into Despair's cave, but also the increasing isolation of Redcrosse. After stanza thirty-five Trevisan has no further role in the story and Una is gestured to in stanza forty-six only as an example of Redcrosse's failings. The description of the landscape that

¹²⁴ Leonard Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 51.

¹²⁵ Proverbs 5.3

¹²⁶ *F.Q.* I.ix.31

frames the entrance to the cave creates a sensation of forward motion into an increasingly confined space from which one may not return:

Ere long they come, where that same wicked wight
 His dwelling has, low in an hollow caue,
 Far vnderneath a craggy clift ypight,
 Darke, dolefull, dreary, like a greedy graue,
 That still for carrion carcases doth craue:¹²⁷

Further progress brings the party through the mouth of the cave, to the “deadly face” that

Trevisan vowed not to look upon again:

That darksome caue they enter, where they find
 That cursed man, low sitting on the ground,
 Musing full sadly in his sullein mind;
 His griesie lockes, long growen, and vnbound,
 Disordered hong about his shoulders round,
 And hid his face; through which his hollow eyne
 Lookt deadly dull, and stared as astound.¹²⁸

Despair’s “deadly face” here remains partially hidden; and indeed this stanza is less concerned with introducing a new character than it is with revealing to Redcrosse his own reflection. When removed from Orgoglio’s dungeon in Canto eight we read that “His [Redcrosse’s] sad dull eies deepe sunck in hollow pits, / Could not endure th’vnwonted sunne to view.”¹²⁹ This moment of self-recognition initiates a series of rhetorical maneuvers that eclipse central concepts of Christian theology, namely mercy and grace, while illustrating with great force the vanity of human life and the inevitability of retributive justice after death. Redcrosse’s response to Despair’s argument consists of four lines:

¹²⁷ *F.Q.* I.ix.33

¹²⁸ *F.Q.* I.ix.35

¹²⁹ *F.Q.* I.viii.41. Cf. A.C. Hamilton’s annotation.

The terme of life is limited,
 Ne may a man prolong, nor shorten it;
 The souldier may not moue from watchfull sted,
 Nor leaue his stand, vntill his Captaine bed.¹³⁰

Despair echoes Redcrosse's sentiment but, like a reflection, reverses its meaning: the idea remains the same but its interpretation is inverted. If Alberti casually suggests Narcissus as representative of the art of painting, the anagogical dimension of literary hermeneutics casts doubt on the validity of echoes and inversions:

did not he all create,
 To die againe? All ends that was begonne.
 Their times in his eternall booke of fate
 Are written sure, and haue their certain date.
 Who then can striue with strong necessitie,
 That holds the world in his still changing state,
 Or shunne the death ordaynd by destinie?
 When houre of death is come, let none aske whence, nor why.¹³¹

Redcrosse not only sees his own reflection in Despair's partially concealed visage, but also hears his arguments echoed back to him. "The lenger life, I wote the greater sin, / The greater sin, the greater punishment," Despair continues, demonstrating that even actions undertaken in pursuit of virtue lead back to sin. "The further he doth goe, the further he doth stray," ends stanza forty-three; "Then doe no further goe, no further stray" begins stanza forty-four. Despair's speech urges surrender and release, an end to *movement*, an end to wandering:

The knight was much enmoued with this speech,
 That as a swords point through his hart did perse,
 And in his conscience made a secrete breach,
 Well knowing trew all, that he did reherse,
 And to his fresh remembraunce did reuerse,
 The vgly vew of his deformed crimes,

¹³⁰ *F.Q.* I.ix.41

¹³¹ *F.Q.* I.ix.42

That all his manly powers it did disperse,
 As he were charmed with inchaunted rimes,
 That oftentimes he quakt, and fainted oftentimes.¹³²

The parallelism of the word “oftentimes” in the alexandrine stresses the reflexive nature of Redcrosse’s alienation from God. When “fresh remembraunce” brings to his mind’s eye nothing but an “vgly vew of his deformed crimes,” the parameters of his visual field are set and he can see only an image of his own death. Ovid uses a similar technique in his telling of the Narcissus tale; the difference is that Narcissus does not see death lurking beneath the surface and Redcrosse does.

It is at this point in the encounter that the episode reaches its climax, and we witness the “secret stealth” by which Despair undoes his victims. The uncanny view of his own unworthiness immobilizes the knight and renders him vulnerable:

In which amazement, when the Miscreant
 Perceiued him to wauer weake and fraile,
 Whiles trembling horror did his conscience daunt,
 And hellish anguish did his soule assaile,
 To driue him to despaire, and quite to quaile,
 He shewd him painted in a table plaine,
 The damned ghosts, that doe in torments waile,
 And thousand feends that doe them endlesse paine
 With fire and brimstone, which for euer shall remaine.

The sight whereof so throughly him dismaid,
 That nought but death before his eies he saw,
 And euer burning wrath before him laid,
 By righteous sentence of th’Almighties law.¹³³

The introduction of the “table plaine,” a painting depicting the torments of hell, completes a three-fold reflection encompassing what Redcrosse has been, what he

¹³² *F.Q.* I.ix.48

¹³³ *F.Q.* I.ix.49-50

currently is, and what he will be. The snare that Despair sets for him works by effacing all possible futures besides damnation, canceling them from the visual field that rules the knight's perception in these final moments of enchantment. "Despair's attempt upon the hero," writes James Nohrnberg, "falls into place as an attempt upon the very nature of the quest—upon its continuous and prospective orientation."¹³⁴ The painting negates all alternatives outside its frame to offer him a view of enduring stasis. Compelled to become the reflection something else has cast for him, Redcrosse moves to fulfill the only destiny then imaginable, and the "table plaine" replaces the "endlesse world" of the poem's open plane.¹³⁵ The eye here is not what makes "the soul content in its human prison"; rather, it becomes the prison itself.¹³⁶

~

In the proem to Book II Spenser voices a concern that the history therein recounted will be dismissed as "painted forgery."¹³⁷ Though this is a common variety of understatement or *meiosis*,¹³⁸ Spenser often employs this trope in terms of surface appearances, which lack genuine substance. For example, in the proem to Book VI, he speaks of the current state of courtesy in similar terms:

Yet being matcht with plaine Antiquitie,
Ye will them all but fayned showes esteeme,

¹³⁴ James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 203.

¹³⁵ *F.Q.* I.i.1; "But through the endlesse world did wander wide" (IV.viii.18).

¹³⁶ Da Vinci, *Paragone*, 238-9.

¹³⁷ *F.Q.* II.Proem.1

¹³⁸ Meiosis ("to make smaller") or, specifically, Tapinosis ("a demeaning or humbling")

Which carry colours faire, that feeble eies misdeeme.¹³⁹

“Painted forgery” sets the tone for the story of Guyon and the Palmer and foreshadows the strategems of the “enemies of Temperance” that are to come. In Book II, canto eleven, Spenser describes the House of Alma as a “forte of reason” under continuous siege by enemies that assail the five senses in an attempt to “bring the sowle into captiuity.”¹⁴⁰ Each sense here is a bulwark capable of resisting such offensives but nevertheless vulnerable to specific varieties of attack. Enemies “against the bulwarke of the *Sight* / Did lay strong siege, and battailous assault, / Ne once did yield it respitt day nor night,” and Spenser singles out beauty and money as most capable of corrupting this sense.¹⁴¹ Vision appears first in Spenser’s list of the senses and it is the only sense against whose defenses the onslaught is continuous. With regard to the other four senses, Spenser qualifies their weaknesses in quite specific terms: *Hearing*, for example, falls prey to “Slaunderous reproches, and fowle infamies, / Leasings, backbytinges, and vaine glorious crakes, / Bad counsels, prayses, and false flatteries.”¹⁴² *Sight*, however, is vulnerable to “each thing, by which the eyes may fault, / But two then all more huge and violent, / Beautie, and money they against that Bulwarke lent.” The lines suggest that visual perception is particularly prone to error, for each object encountered thereby proves potentially deceptive. Theresa M. Krier observes that “sight (like the other senses) in this book is intromissive,” noting: for Guyon “to protect himself from the power of these

¹³⁹ *F.Q.* VI.Proem.4

¹⁴⁰ *F.Q.* II.xi.1

¹⁴¹ *F.Q.* II.xi.9

¹⁴² *F.Q.* II.xi.10

penetrating sights [Mammon's house and the Bower of Bliss], he makes a barrier out of his own noble ideal, expressed in a visual idiom: 'Another blis before mine eyes I place' (II.vii.33)."¹⁴³ Guyon's distrust of the sensory world, however, illuminates not only the ethical idea of temperance, but also the aesthetic operations of art itself.

Spenser's treatment of sensory experience in Book II underscores a theory of knowledge that sets worldly perception and truth at odds. What the senses offer the mind is an impression of the world artfully arranged according to their physiological limitations. As such, sensory experience is a system of signs whose relationships and ultimate meaning depends on reasoned interpretation; or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "perception is a nascent *logos*."¹⁴⁴ In this model, the relationship reason bears to the sensorial world recalls that of a reader confronting allegorical writing: in both cases, the reasoning intellect encounters signs that may be construed truly or falsely according to the temperament of the individual. In *The Allegorical Temper* Harry Berger writes: "Book II involves tempering the temperament within in accordance with the climate—the exterior temperament—surrounding earthly existence."¹⁴⁵ Sustained wariness towards the senses in their role as mediators between the interior and exterior worlds characterizes Guyon and the Palmer's progress through Book II. Their interpretations and responses provide moral instruction by means of example so that the reader, in Milton's words,

¹⁴³ Teresa M. Krier, *Gazing on Secret Sights: Spenser, Classical Imitation, and the Decorums of Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 83.

¹⁴⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception, and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history and politics*, trans. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 25.

¹⁴⁵ Harry Berger, Jr., *The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 65.

“might see and know, and yet abstain.”¹⁴⁶ “The acts of seeing and knowing,” writes Jane Grogan in *Exemplary Spenser*, “are not always distinguished within the language of renaissance epistemology, and between them lies the contested ground of moral formation.”¹⁴⁷

When Guyon leaves the Castle of Alma he begins a sea voyage to confront Acrasia in the Bower of Bliss. The argument and first stanza of canto twelve introduce a pair of parallel constructions:

*Guyon through Palmers governance,
through passing perilles great,
Doth ouerthrow the Bowre of blis,
and Acrasy defeat.*

Though the repeated word “through” is typographically identical on the page, its usage in each instance is slightly different. In both cases “through” appears as a preposition, but in the first it introduces the agency *by which* Guyon defeats Acrasia; and in the second it indicates the actual passage through space necessary to arrive in the place where Acrasia dwells – the *Bowre of blis*. Their physical or geographical trajectory requires them to overcome “passing perilles great,” while the governance that guides them is an intangible, or literally “metaphysical” doctrine. Although the word is the same, its repetition here conjoins the physical and metaphysical aspects of the allegory. The first stanza reinforces this conjunction but does so by using different words to indicate a single concept:

Now ginnes this goodly frame of Temperaunce
Fayrely to rise, and her adorned hed

¹⁴⁶ John Milton, *Areopagitica*, ed. Wolfe, vol. 2 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82), 516.

¹⁴⁷ Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene*, 5.

To pricke of highest prayse forth to aduaunce,
 Formerly grounded, and fast setteled
 On firme foundation of true bountyhed;
 And this braue knight, that for that virtue fightes,
 Now comes **to point** of that same perilous sted,
 Where Pleasure dwelles in sensuall delights,
 Mongst thousand dangers, and ten thousand Magick mights.¹⁴⁸

A.C. Hamilton explains that “pricke” is a term for the bull’s eye, the mark aimed at in shooting, and that “point” and “pricke” are variants of single metaphor. If we note that the semi-colon at the end of line five divides the stanza neatly in two, the appearance of these synonyms as part of a single metaphor becomes particularly significant. The first part of the stanza describes *Temperaunce*, the overarching, abstract virtue, and the second part describes its champion and representative in the fictive world of *The Faerie Queene*. In this way the verse further entwines the physical description of Guyon’s journey to the Bower with its allegorical significance. By opening the canto with this elaborate arrangement of parallel constructions, one so subtle and artfully embedded as to be passed over at the speed of reading, the poet frames the culminating challenge of the second book in interpretive terms.

The sequence and structure of the journey to Acrasia’s bower seems straightforward; yet for all Spenser owes here to Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, he transforms the sea voyage *topos* into a commentary on artistic form and interpretation. The party consists of Guyon, the Palmer, and the Ferryman, and their passage to the Bower comprises eight distinct obstacles or encounters. In sequence in which they appear in the poem is as follows:

1. Gulfe of Greedinesse

¹⁴⁸ *F.Q.* II.xii.1; my emphases

2. Rock of Reproch
3. wandring Islands
- 3a. Phaedria (solitary)
4. quickesand of Vnthriftyhed
5. Whirlepoole of decay
6. Chaos of the deep
- 7a. dolefull Mayd (solitary)
7. Theatre of Mermayds (five in total representing the five senses)
8. Chaos of the air

Parallel structure and repetition directs their progress through these “passing perilles great,” and I have included the order of stanzas to provide a sense of how carefully Spenser has crafted this episode. First, they pass between the *Gulfe of Greedinesse* (stanzas 3, 5 and 6) and *The Rock of Reproch* (4, 7 and 8) to enter the realm of the *wandring Islands* (11-13) where they encounter Phaedria (14-17), whom we have already met in canto six. Second, they pass between the “quickestand of *Vnthriftyhed*” (18-19) and the “*Whirlepoole of decay*” (20-21). Their progress unexpectedly stalls here as a sudden swell rises and a “hideous hoast” of sea monsters erupts from the deep (21-26). We read in stanza 22 that “The waues come rolling, and the billowes rore / Outragiously, as they enraged were.” These roaring billows must be the result of fierce winds,¹⁴⁹ and yet: “For not one puffe of winde there did appeare, / That all three thereat woxe much afrayd / Vnweeting, what such horroure straunge did reare.”

This “horroure straunge” results from the sudden disjunction of the external world – what Berger calls its “climate” – and the interpretive logic by which the Palmer and the Ferryman have made sense of it until now, thereby tempering it in relation to the internal world. Spenser’s use of “*Out-ragiously*” and “*en-raged*” in the same line suggests as

¹⁴⁹ Billow, n. A great swelling wave of the sea, produced generally by a high wind. (Oxford English Dictionary)

much, for these both refer to the non-existent “billowes” and confuse the world as perceived and the world as it is. Up to this point, symbolic and metaphorical interpretation has neutralized each danger the party has faced by reducing it to an exemplum:

The Palmer seeing them in safetie past,
 Thus said, Behold th’ensamples in our sightes,
 Of lustfull luxurie and thriftlesse wast:
 What now is left of miserable wightes,
 Which spent their looser daies in leud delightes,
 But shame and sad reproach, here to be red
 By these rent reliques, speaking their ill plights?¹⁵⁰

The mode of interpretation practiced here recalls the allegorical tableau, for it turns a verbal image – “that perilous Rocke, / Threatening it selfe on them to ruinate” – into a moral lesson. This exemplary method of reading keeps a tight grip on the significance of images in the text, subordinating each one to its role as prescribed by doctrine. The “ensamples in our sightes” are not examples until the Ferryman, who rows, and the Palmer, who steers, temper them with “discursive fire.”¹⁵¹ Until this sudden eruption, the passage reads very much like “a gallery of pictures” dramatically described and readily made comprehensible by the Ferryman and Palmer, whose function is oddly analogous to the audio guides available in museums.

Stanzas twenty-one to twenty-six introduce a terrifying profusion of alien life forms – “All dreadfull pourtraicts of deformitee” – into what is otherwise a rather

¹⁵⁰ *F.Q.* II.xii.9

¹⁵¹ Cf. George Chapman, *Ovids Banquet of Sence*, 1595, which uses an analogous meaning for “discursive”: “For first conceiued in her mentall wombe,
 And nourisht with her soules discursiue fire,
 They grew into the power of her thought.”

stringent poetic economy. They disrupt the parallel structure of the party's progress and postpone their encounter with the "dolefull Mayd" and the five sirens or "Mermaidys":

Most vgly shapes, and horrible aspects,
Such as Dame Nature selfe mote feare to see,
Or shame, that euer should so fowle defects
From her most cunning hand escaped bee;
All dreadfull pourtraicts of deformitee:
Spring-headed *Hydres*, and sea-shouldring Whales,
Great whirlpools, which all fishes make to flee,
Bright Scolopendraes, arm'd with siluer scales,
Mighty *Monoceros*, with immeasured tayles.¹⁵²

A second and third wave of chaotic disruption, one from the air and one from the land, will envelop them after they encounter the mermaids and make landfall at the Bower. In these episodes, a swarm of aberrations frightful to "Dame Nature" herself overwhelms the party and stalls its progress. Unlike the earlier obstacles, which the Palmer could disarm with interpretation, these passages introduce a sublime pandemonium, one which defies sensory perception *in toto* and consequently metaphorical translation: "All these, and thousand thousands many more, / And more deformed Monsters thousand fold, / With dreadfull noise, and hollow rombling rore, / Came rushing in the fomy waues enrold."¹⁵³ This is a fascinating moment in the poem because, despite the profusion of individual forms, the stanza has more in common with the sublime terror of the open plain than it seems, for poetically Spenser has taken us full circle. Since there are simply too many individual forms to make sense of, and even those that the speaker manages to name cannot be fully gauged in their shape and size ("with immeasured tayles"), they collectively convey an overwhelming sense of dread. Although I doubt *dread* was what

¹⁵² *F.Q.* II.xii.23

¹⁵³ *F.Q.* II.xii.25

Giuseppe Arcimboldo was attempting to achieve in his composition *Water*, there is something undeniably dreadful about it (fig. 9). The profusion of creatures from the depths fill and threaten to overflow the boundaries of the human profile in this composition, just as they threaten the formal limits of Spenser's stanza:



Figure 9: Giuseppe Archimboldo, “Water” from the *Elements* series, 1566.
© Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

The Palmer dismisses these profusions as illusory threats, a teeming surface without depth or significance: “For these same Monsters are not these in deed, / But are into these fearefull shapes disguiz’d / By that same wicked witch, to worke vs dread, / And draw from on this journey to proceed.”¹⁵⁴ In this way, the poet underscores Acrasia’s skill in

¹⁵⁴ *F.Q.* II.xii.26

forgery, and it becomes clear that her ability to imitate and intensify the natural world renders its interpretation as an emblem or “hieroglyphick” of divine creation impossible.

The eruptions of “immeasured” chaos from the deep and from the air serve to frame our party’s encounter with the sirens or “Mermaids,” in whose presence the sea calms and “a solemne Meane vnto them measured.”¹⁵⁵ The disorder of the previous stanzas recedes to reveal an inviting port, which the poet likens to a theater:

it was a still
 And calmy bay, on th’one side sheltered
 With the brode shadow of an hoarie hill,
 On th’other side an high rocke toured still,
 That twixt them both a pleasaunt port they made,
 And did it like an halfe Theatre fulfill:
 There those fiue sisters had continuall trade,
 And vsd to bath themselues in that deceitfull shade.¹⁵⁶

Spenser specifies five sisters instead of the traditional three so that all five senses are represented here.¹⁵⁷ The landscape is complicit in their appeal to Guyon’s senses, for it not only amplifies their “pleasaunt tunes” by projecting them outwards to the travelers but also creates a sense of visual enclosure. Their appeal to Guyon recalls that of Despair to Redcrosse, for they offer him an end to labor and strife: “Here may thy storme-bett vessel safely ryde; / This is the Port of rest from troublous toyle, / The worldes sweet In, from paine and wearisome turmoyle.”¹⁵⁸ The sea is steady and calm here, and even the

¹⁵⁵ *F.Q.* II.xii.33

¹⁵⁶ *F.Q.* II.xii.30

¹⁵⁷ A.C. Hamilton attributes this idea to Natale Conti, *Mythologiae sive explicationum fabularum libri decem* (Padua, 1567).

¹⁵⁸ *F.Q.* II.xii.32

wind contributes “a straunge kinde of harmony” to the environment.¹⁵⁹ This carefully composed scene, much like Despair’s “table plaine,” functions in the text as a false destination – the “pricke” or “point” of the target – one which appeals to the death drive as an alternative to life’s continuous travail and disappointment: “These circuitous paths to death, faithfully kept to by the conservative instincts, would thus present us to-day with the picture of the phenomena of life.”¹⁶⁰ By alluding to the sirens’ ill-fated competition “with the *Heliconian* maides for maystery,” Spenser emphasizes the difference between the muses of poetry and these singers who would pass off enchantment and false promise for inspired insight.¹⁶¹

Ficino writes that beauty “attracts the soul to itself through reason, sight, or hearing”: Apollo attracts by music; Venus enraptures the eye; and Mercury acts through intellect.¹⁶² Spenser aligns the Palmer with Mercury, for we read that his staff “of that same wood it fram’d was cunningly, / Of which *Caduceus* whilome was made, / *Caduceus* the rod of *Mercury*,”¹⁶³ and his prominence in the twelfth canto as a hermeneutist indicates that whatever appears beautiful to the eye or ear must remain subordinate to the intellect. The harmony that Guyon finds so alluring depends on an idea

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, trans. Edward Fairfax (London, 1600), 16.12: “sia caso od arte, or accompagna, ed ora / alterna i versi lor la musica òra. (“Thus were it hap or cunning, chance or art, / The wind in this strange music bore his part.”)

¹⁶⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1961), 46.

¹⁶¹ *F.Q.* II.xii.31

¹⁶² Marsilio Ficino, *De Amore*, trans. Jayne (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1944), II.iii; discussed in Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene*, 464.

¹⁶³ *F.Q.* II.xii.41

of measure derived solely from the senses, and this is why the Palmer “from that *vanity*, / With temperate advice discourseled.”¹⁶⁴ The preceding episode, with its cacophony of both sound and image, makes the mermaids’ appeal to the senses even more charming and their offer of peace and rest even more attractive. The party’s progress to the Bower of Bliss thus concludes with a forceful statement on the vanity of the world as experienced through the senses. By prioritizing *logos* over *aesthesis*, Spenser’s Palmer embodies the lesson of the *Phaedrus* as the party makes landfall on a deadly course cloaked in mimetic art.¹⁶⁵

Spenser’s description of Acrasia’s island comprises four parts, and the party’s progress to the Bower itself is one of successive enclosures, each one more closely contained than the last. Outside its ornate gates rove wild beasts, former victims of Acrasia’s temptations. Neither fully human nor animal, their corrupted nature relegates them to this marginal existence. Their presence here acts as a bridge connecting the monsters of the sea and air to the land and thus to Acrasia’s power, which sustains this band of perverse nature around her dwelling. As with the monsters of the sea, who generate a strong contrast between their onslaught and the “calmy bay” of the mermaids,

¹⁶⁴ *F.Q.* II.xii.34; my emphasis

¹⁶⁵ “Let us note that in every one of us there are two guiding and ruling principles which lead us whither they will; one is the natural desire of pleasure, the other is an acquired opinion which aspires after the best; and these two are sometimes in harmony and then again at war, and sometimes the one, sometimes the other conquers. When opinion by the help of reason leads us to the best, the conquering principle is called temperance; but when desire, which is devoid of reason, rules in us and drags us to pleasure, that power of misrule is called excess.” Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1961), sections 237-8. In the Nehamas and Woodruff translation, temperance and excess are translated more literally as “being in your right mind” and “outrageousness.” *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. Cooper (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 516-7.

these beasts, “gaping full greedily, / And rearing fiercely their vpstarting crests,” precede the serene landscape on the other side of the gates.¹⁶⁶ The Bower of Bliss is situated in “A place pickt out by choyce of best alyue, / That natures worke by art can imitate”; that is, it is a location chosen by artists for the demonstration of their skill.¹⁶⁷ All that is “pleasing vnto liuing sense” is “*made there* to abound with lauish affluence.”¹⁶⁸

Unlike the Garden of Adonis, from which “All things...doe their first being fetch, / And borrow matter, whereof they are made,”¹⁶⁹ all things in this artificial *locus amoenus* have been arranged, for nothing originates here. Whatever one perceives within the gates is a copy vying to outdo in beauty and grace the thing it represents in the living world. “But Spenser does not let us forget that the true Cyrenaic garden is a real garden,” writes Harry Berger: “real flowers and ponds, real ivy and grapes, lust in action rather than lust suspended, fulfillment of touch rather than of sight. The Bower of Bliss only pretends to such fleshly dynamism: it puts on that classical surface to deceive Guyon into thinking that this is real nature, that *physis* herself tempts him.”¹⁷⁰ Transcending what is physical or natural, Spenser depicts Acrasia’s island as a metaphysical landscape cunningly created to elicit a particularly powerful aesthetic response from the observer. Spenser’s treatment of the art versus nature dichotomy explores the extent to which mimetic art can

¹⁶⁶ *F.Q.* II.xii.39

¹⁶⁷ *F.Q.* II.xii.42

¹⁶⁸ *F.Q.* II.xii.42; my emphasis

¹⁶⁹ *F.Q.* III.vi.37

¹⁷⁰ Berger, *The Allegorical Temper*, 68.

manipulate the senses and undermine the intellect's ability to govern the soul.¹⁷¹

Although nothing within the gates is original, the poem shows us how the pleasures of the Bower affect its victims in the wild beasts wandering outside. They are, incidentally, Acrasia's only original creations—not beings created *ex nihilo*, but monsters made so by perversion of the senses and corruption of the soul.

The party's passage through the gates recalls their approach to the mermaids' "halfe Theatre" and illustrates the process of recurrence and affective intensification that characterizes the entire canto. The landscape that creates the bay and the space where the mermaids dwell melds geology and architecture to form a semi-circle or partially enclosed space. Entering Acrasia's island, however, Guyon and the Palmer find themselves completely encircled: "goodly it was enclosed rownd about, / Aswell their entred guests to keep within, / As those vnruely beasts to hold without."¹⁷² In the mermaids' theater, natural features and artificial design appear to cooperate; here, Art's lavish adornments eclipse "niggard Nature" and even the weather settles into unchanging stasis: "Therewith the Heauens alwayes Iouiall, / Lookte on them louely, still in steadfast state."¹⁷³ The word for "weather" and "time" in French and Italian is identical – *le temps*,

¹⁷¹ Cf. Cheney, *Spenser's Image of Nature*, 142: "Acrasia's Bower presents Nature as an image of the human condition, and pretends that it is a complete picture. To do so is to deny man's superiority to the beast; and for this reason the acceptance of Acrasia's image of life leads toward an animal metamorphosis."

¹⁷² *F.Q.* II.xii.43

¹⁷³ *F.Q.* II.xii.51; Cf. John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror":
The surface is what's there
And nothing can exist except what's there.
There are no recesses in the room, only alcoves,
And the window doesn't matter much, or that
Sliver of window or mirror on the right, even

il tempo – and the appeal of the landscape depends upon the cessation of time and becomes most powerful when the traveler stays his progress to take it in. As in the sea voyage, invitations to rest prove dangerous temptations; looking forward and passing forth is the only way to resist the Bower's beauty:

Much wondred *Guyon* at the fayre aspect
 Of that sweet place, yet suffred no delight
 To sincke into his sence, nor mind affect,
 But passed forth, and lookt still forward right,
 Brydling his will, and maystering his might:
 Till that he came vnto another gate.¹⁷⁴

This stanza expresses concisely a theory of aesthetics deeply indebted to the philosophical and rhetorical traditions of the West. The affective triad of classical rhetoric, which specified that a persuasive speech should move, instruct, and delight its hearer (*movere, docere, delectare*), was first formulated by Cicero but adopted by Horace and Quintilian to become a pedagogical commonplace in medieval and early modern Europe.¹⁷⁵

When Spenser writes that *Guyon* “suffred no delight / To sincke into his sence, nor mind affect,” he subordinates the emotive and affective functions of the triad to the operations of the rational mind; and yet the lines nevertheless suggest that the longer one

As a gauge of the weather, which in French is
 Le temps, the word for time, and which
 Follows a course wherein changes are merely
 Features of the whole. The whole is stable within
 Instability, a globe like ours, resting
 On a pedestal of vacuum, a ping-pong ball
 Secure on its jet of water.

¹⁷⁴ *F.Q.* II.xii.53

¹⁷⁵ Brian Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 77.

gazes upon an object of beauty, the more susceptible one becomes to its charms. The intellect relies upon the will to stay the course: “Brydling his will, and maystering his might” recalls Plato’s charioteer, the model of the soul and the passions, set forth in the *Phaedrus*.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Ludovico Dolce in his 1557 treatise *Dialogo della Pittura: intitolato L’Aretino*, suggests that the intellect is ultimately responsible for making sense of what the eye reports:

L’occhio non si può ingannar nel vedere, se non è infermo, o losco, o impedito da qualche altro accidente. S’inganna bene, e molto spesso, l’intelletto, essendo adombrato da ignoranza, o da affettione. L’uomo desidera naturalmente il bene: ma può errar nella elettione, giudicando bene quel che è male.

[The eye cannot deceive itself in the process of seeing, unless it is infirm, deceived, or hampered by accident or circumstance. The intellect, however, deceives itself well, and very often, being as it is overshadowed by ignorance or by affection. Man naturally desires the Good; but can err in its election, mistaking for good what is actually bad.]¹⁷⁷

The language Spenser uses to describe Guyon’s passage into the bower is one of sensory enrapture and pleasant entrapment. The gate through which he passes is “no gate, but like one,” a reminder of the fundamental disjunction between the appearance and actual significance of all he encounters here.¹⁷⁸ The “bowes and braunches” that form the gate “dilate / Their clasping armes, in wanton wreathings intricate,” and bunches of fruit hang down from an “embracing vine.”¹⁷⁹ Acrasia’s bower is a landscape in which much of

¹⁷⁶ “There abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul.” Plato, *Phaedrus*.

¹⁷⁷ Mark Roskill, *Dolce’s Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1968), 102. My translation.

¹⁷⁸ *F.Q.* II.xii.54

¹⁷⁹ *F.Q.* II.xii.54-5

what one encounters is likened to something else. There is no hierarchy of creation, no sense of what is natural and what is derivative or artificial. As this regards language, one notices that the order of priority between literal description and metaphor, between tenor and vehicle, dissolves, and what results is a world governed by delight and wonder instead of reason. Noting that Spenser models Acrasia on Homer's Circe brings the deceptive and contradictory nature of the canto's imagery into perspective: the "clasping armes" at once signify the promise of erotic embrace and the members of those victims already entrapped and upholding the very structure of the illusion that undid them. The eye alone, with its tendency to err in the election of the good, cannot be relied upon within this artificial world.

Acrasia's bower is haunting not because it is simply artificial but because it implicates and subordinates the natural order to its own purpose. If it is art to conceal art – proverbially *ars est celare artem* – then the bower is a masterpiece:

There the most daintie Paradise on ground,
 It selfe doth offer to his sober eye,
 In which all pleasures plenteously abownd,
 And none does others happinesse enuye:
 The painted flowres, the trees, vps shooting hye,
 The dales for shade, the hilles for breathing space,
 The trembling grouse, the christall running by;
 And that, which all faire workes doth most aggrace,
 The art, which all that wrought, appeared in no place.¹⁸⁰

When one enters the Scrovegni or Sistine chapels the effect is one of complete immersion in a world of art (fig.10). Consecrated to the worship of God, the architecture and frescoes, as well as the hymns and rituals performed within, are uniformly intended to direct one's mind towards the contemplation of divinity.

¹⁸⁰ *F.Q.* II.xii.58



Figure 10: Giotto's Cappella degli Scrovegni di Padova, 1300-1305

Such sacred places attempted to strike a balance between these arts, which appeal to the various senses, and their meaning as set forth in the scriptures. In theory, art should prove a gateway to truth: although it is manmade its creation could be inspired and conducive to spiritual insight. Spenser's protestant suspicion of non-literary art forms, however, leads him to interpret art's ability to mimic reality in a different light. The Reformation led many Christians in the countries of northern Europe to believe that art could be made to serve and embellish anything, even perverse and misguided interpretations of the scriptures. Unless brought under the sway of sound reason and interpretation, art's affective potential was too powerful to control, and it is this very conflict that canto twelve of book two allegorizes.

Art is at its most alluring when it successfully effaces the distinction between itself and the thing it reproduces. The line, "the art, which all that wrought, appeared in no place," attests to the skillful creation of this landscape while suggesting a connection

to utopian literature (Greek: *ou* ‘not’ + *topos* ‘place’). The unsituated, metaphysical quality of Acrasia’s bower reminds us that the rules governing it are capricious and exceptional. In Immanuel Kant’s late essay “On the Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy,” he considers the possibility of an “aesthetic” representation of “the moral law within us” while cautioning that a “sensible” presentation of this law could only ever be “analogical” and thus liable to become “an exalting vision [schwarmerische Vision], which is the death of all philosophy”:

But the didactic procedure of bringing the moral law within us into clear concepts according to a logical methodology is the only authentically *philosophical* one, whereas the procedure whereby the law is personified and reason’s moral bidding is made into a veiled Isis (even if we attribute to her no other properties than those discovered according to the method above), is an *aesthetic* mode of representing precisely the same object; one can doubtless use this mode of representation backward, after the first procedure has already purified the principles, in order to enliven those ideas by a sensible, albeit only analogical, presentation, and yet one always runs the danger of falling into an exalting vision [schwarmerische Vision], which is the death of all philosophy.¹⁸¹

This is an interesting passage because it outlines an order of operations for making sense of the world *philosophically*, by “a logical methodology,” and *aesthetically*, by analogical presentation. Kant observes that an aesthetic presentation of the moral law should occur only secondarily – “after the first procedure has already purified the principles” – and remarks that even then, on account of its analogical relationship to the thing it represents, the possibility of confusing philosophy with a sublime, “exalting vision” cannot be ruled out.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Immanuel Kant, “On the Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy” in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 71.

¹⁸² Cf. Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, Book II, Chapter V: “Thus they cautiously limit pleasure only to those appetites to which Nature leads us; for they say that Nature leads

Severing the link between nature and its representation results in a variety of disorientation not unlike schizophrenia, a propensity for complete immersion in a disordered fantasy. Having refused the intoxicating liquor offered him upon entering the bower, the perverse dynamic that underlies its sensorial manifestation becomes apparent to his examining eye:

One would have thought (so cunningly, the rude
And scorned partes were mingled with the fine,
That nature had for wantonnesse ensued
Art, and that Art at nature did repine;
So striuing each th'other to vndermine,
Each did the others worke more beautify;
So diff'ring both in willes, agreed in fine:
So all agreed through sweet diuersity,
This Gardin to adorne with all variety.¹⁸³

In appropriately chiasitic syntax, Spenser stages a dynamic struggle between nature and art. As each vies to “vndermine” the other, the result is phantasmagoric, their hybridity producing a landscape of “sweet diuersity” in which what is natural cannot be disentangled from what is artificial. This creative adulteration greatly complicates one’s attempt to interpret the *nature* of the garden’s features:

And ouer all, of pureset gold was spred,
A trayle of yuie in his natiue hew:
For the rich metal was so coloured,
That wight, who did not well auis’d it vew,
Would surely deeme it to bee yuie trew:¹⁸⁴

us only to those delights to which reason, as well as sense, carries us, and by which we neither injure any other person nor lose the possession of greater pleasures, and of such as draw no troubles after them.”

¹⁸³ *F.Q.* II.xii.59

¹⁸⁴ *F.Q.* II.xii.61

Not knowing what is real and what is simulated imparts simultaneously rare pleasure and deep anxiety. As Guyon ventures further into the bower, the poem creates a sense of increasing enclosure as the sounds of the landscape are “consorted in one harmonee, / Birdes, voices, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.”¹⁸⁵ What in a less menacing scenario might seem a harmless pathetic fallacy is here an alarming indication that one is trapped in a *motivated* landscape. What seems to be natural “harmonee” is the effect of artful manipulation attuned to the predilections of the human ear, and it stands in direct contrast to the “dreadfull pourtraicts of deformitee” arising from the deep in stanza twenty-six. Acrasia demonstrates the versatility of her witchcraft in her ability to appeal to the full spectrum of human perceptions, from horror on the one hand to harmony on the other.

The aural harmony Spenser describes in stanza sixty-one is representative of how Acrasia’s bower operates on the senses generally. It is a landscape that envelops and debilitates its victims by anticipating the various modes of perception and their relationship to fear and desire. As the canto draws to its conclusion, the poem appeals to the visual sense with increasing intensity, and stanzas sixty-two to sixty-nine are devoted to Guyon’s encounter with “two naked Damzells” in a fountain. Spenser’s description here is remarkable for its dynamism as the girls stage a game of erotic peek-a-boo with Guyon:

Sometimes the one would life the other quight
 Aboue the waters, and then downe againe
 Her plong, as ouer maystered by might,
 Where both awhile would couered remaine,
 And each the other from to rise restraine;
 The whiles their snowy limbes, as through a vele,

¹⁸⁵ *F.Q.* II.xii.70

So through the christall waues appeared plaine:
 Then suddainly both would themselues vnhele,
 And th'amarous sweet spoiles to greedy eyes reuele.¹⁸⁶

The girls' play here simultaneously offers and refuses the kind of sustained focus granted by sexual embrace. The alternating play of exposure and concealment – “And her two lilly paps aloft displayed, / And all, that might his melting hart entyse / To her delights, she vnto him bewrayd: The rest hidd vnderneath, him more desirous made”¹⁸⁷ – aligns the pleasure of possession with stasis, and Guyon predictably “gan relent his earnest pace; / His stubborne brest gan secret pleasaunce to embrace.”¹⁸⁸ The poem at this point draws an important distinction between competing notions of focus, one of which is visual and grounded in the sensory world, the other of which is spiritual and integral to the allegory of temperance. The continual movement of the two girls in the fountain frustrates the viewer's attempt to sustain a singular gaze while making such visual consummation seem always possible, even imminent. When the Palmer intervenes, however, we read that “he much rebukt those *wandring* eyes of his,”¹⁸⁹ thereby stressing the difference between the “pricke” or “point” of the voyage and the false focal points that vie for Guyon's attention.

Although the canto culminates in the destruction of the bower, the central image with which it leaves us as readers is that of Acrasia and Verdant locked into a fatal, ocular embrace. Yet it is an image presented in the text with accompanying verses sung

¹⁸⁶ *F.Q.* II.xii.64

¹⁸⁷ *F.Q.* II.xii.66

¹⁸⁸ *F.Q.* II.xii.65

¹⁸⁹ *F.Q.* II.xii.69; my emphasis

by an unnamed figure. What is remarkable about this emblem of love embedded in the text is the dissonance between text and image. As Verdant lies in Acrasia's lap exhausted after "long wanton ioyes," Spenser's description reads:

And all that while, right ouer him she hong,
 With her false eyes fast fixed in his sight,
 As seeking medicine, whence she was stong,
 Or greedily depasturing delight:
 And oft inclining downe with kisses light,
 For feare of waking him, his lips bedewed,
 And through his humid eyes did sucke his spright,
 Quite molten into lust and pleasure lewd;
 Wherewith she sighed soft, as if his case she rew'd.¹⁹⁰

The ingenuous verses sung in accompaniment partake of the *carpe florem* tradition and are highly generic:

The whiles some one did chaunt this louely law;
 Ah see, who so fayre thing doest faine to see,
 In springing flowre the image of thy day;
 Ah see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee
 Doth first peepe foorth with bashfull modestee,
 That fairer seems, the lesse ye see her may;
 Lo see soone after, how more bold and free
 Her bared bosome she doth broad display;
 Lo see soone after, how she fades, and falls away.

So passeth, in the passing of a day,
 Or mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre,
 Ne more doth florish after first decay,
 That earst was sought to deck both bed and bowre,
 Of many a Lady', and many a Paramowre:
 Gather therefore the Rose, whilest yet is prime,
 For soone comes age, that will her pride deflowre:
 Gather the Rose of loue, whilest yet is time,
 Whilest louing thou mayst loued be with equall crime.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ *F.Q.* II.xii.73

¹⁹¹ *F.Q.* II.xii.74-5

At this point in the canto the distinction between what is actually happening in the bower and the art that introduces, embellishes and conceals it becomes absolutely apparent. Acrasia's "greedily depasturing delight" stands in stark contrast to the image of the "Virgin Rose" blushing with "bashfull modestee." Spenser here inverts the relationship between the image and its explanatory gloss: unlike the Palmer's interpretations of the deceptive and enchanting landscape, the singer's lay blatantly distorts the matter at hand as his words gloss over Acrasia's vampiric nature.¹⁹²

Thus Spenser brings Book II to an end by illustrating the extent to which art may obscure truth. His allegory of the bower of bliss demonstrates how both an artist's motivations and an observer's fears and desire inform the aesthetic experience of what one encounters. The interactions between Guyon and the Palmer throughout this final canto operate as a gloss to the many fantastic landscapes, transformations, creatures and monstrosities therein, orienting the reader well enough that he may pass through unharmed and not desire, like Gryllus, "to be a beast, and lacke intelligence": "Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*, and haue his hoggish minde; / But let vs hence depart, whilest wether serues and winde."¹⁹³

¹⁹² A.C. Hamilton cites A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 279.

¹⁹³ *F.Q.* II.xii.87

CHAPTER THREE

Disruptive Sublimity and the Structures of Perception in Shakespeare's Later Plays

“A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears.”

King Lear, IV.vi.146-7

3.1: *Insubstantial Pageantry*

Among the arts literature is perhaps the one best suited to exploring the limitations of imaginative experience. The imaginative experience granted by a written or performed text implies a tacit acknowledgment of the work's form, for it is the work's boundaries – its length, the variety of its characters, the time over which its action occurs – that gives rise to its unique variety of aesthetic enjoyment. Aesthetic experience requires a temporary suspension of disbelief, a willingness to substitute the imaginary for the real while the work progresses in time. In his later plays William Shakespeare explores the complex relationship between one's experience of the world as *real* and one's experience of a play as *fictive*, and challenges the distinction in what have become some of his best known and oft-quoted passages:

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(*Macbeth*, 5.5.24-28)

Our revels are now ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

(*The Tempest*, 4.1.148-158)

“Shadow” play, ultimately insignificant passions, “spirits,” a “baseless” vision that “dissolves,” a “pageant” lacking substance – Shakespeare invites us to take our pick of

wistful designations for the vanity of the world. Less vain, however, is the point that these lines make about the vanishing quality of dramatic art, for in its transience lies a more durable truth about the passage of time and the personal and cultural fictions that allow one to make sense of it.

When grief sends Hamlet spiraling into a crisis of authenticity, even the most fundamental systems of order and orientation in the world prove baseless, insane, and prone to error. Both time (“the time is out of joint”)¹⁹⁴ and space (“something is rotten in the state of Denmark”)¹⁹⁵ fall victim to corruption, casting doubt on the common assumption of providential order:

What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous and we fools of nature
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?¹⁹⁶

Incomprehensible thoughts, and intuitions that reason cannot subordinate, unsettle and unmoor the witless spectator, whose narrative of the world falters and reveals its poor quality. Hamlet’s “disposition,” which denotes “an arrangement or order and the relative position of the parts or elements of a whole,” proves “antic” well before he gives it license to be so in the subsequent scene. “Antic,” which is equivalent in meaning to the Italian *grottesco*, that is, said of a grotto, “a cauerne or hole vnderground,” and literally means “absurd from fantastic incongruity; grotesque, bizarre, uncouthly ludicrous,” cannot reasonably pair with the noun *disposition*, for their meanings are directly

¹⁹⁴ *Hamlet*, I.v.197

¹⁹⁵ *Hamlet*, I.iv.90

¹⁹⁶ *Hamlet*, I.iv.51-6

opposed.¹⁹⁷ When Shakespeare has Hamlet tell Horatio that he “perchance hereafter shall think met / To put an antic disposition on,”¹⁹⁸ he offers an example of what Samuel Johnson writing of the metaphysical poets would call *discordia concors*: “a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike.”¹⁹⁹ What Shakespeare suggests here is that the idea of self-conscious order (“disposition”) is inherently grotesque, for it relies on the concealment of unwelcome truths, those facts in being that do not square with an individual’s subjective notion of identity or expectations.²⁰⁰ The individual gains a modular sense of situation in time, space, history, culture and language only by attributing to these modes of being a veracity that denies their relative and fictional nature. While Alberti’s *costruzione legittima* assigns to the mode of visual experience in the physical world a set of rules or “grammar,” Shakespeare’s experiments in perspectival metaphysics bring to light an even more complex and difficulty regularized ontological grammar, one which derives from the patterns of language, *pathos*, historical consciousness, and literary form.

In these opening scenes of *Hamlet* Shakespeare explores a dramatic scenario that he will revisit in much greater detail in *King Lear* five years later, that of a “dreadful” cliff overlooking the sea and upon which a character will face a decisive test of character.

¹⁹⁷ As defined in the Oxford English Dictionary

¹⁹⁸ *Hamlet*, I.v.179-80

¹⁹⁹ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁰⁰ Cf. Wallace Stevens, “The Idea of Order at Key West” in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990): “For she was the maker of the song she sang. / The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea / Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.”

The scenario recalls the temptation of Jesus as recorded in the gospel of Matthew: “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple.”

Poised to fall, Satan begins to persuade Christ by reasoning with him:

If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.²⁰¹

Substituting an imperative (“cast thyself down”) for what should be the second term in a syllogism, Satan reasons by enthymeme. An instance of rational perversion by substitution within an otherwise sound logical form, it is very similar to how Shakespeare depicts the vitiation of Othello’s reason as his fears overwhelm him: “If she be false, O then heaven mocks itself, / I’ll not believe’t.”²⁰² When Hamlet attempts to pursue the beckoning figure of his father’s ghost, Horatio stresses the perils of persuasive, false reason and its ability to make things seem other than they are:

Ham. Why, what should be the fear?
Hor. What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
 Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
 That beetles o’er his base into the sea,
 And there assume some other horrible form
 Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
 And draw you into madness? Think of it.
 The very place puts toys of desperation,
 Without more motive, into every brain
 That looks so many fathoms to the sea
 And hears it roar beneath.²⁰³

What threatens to deprive Hamlet of his “sovereignty of reason” is not necessarily a corruption of formal logic but what Horatio imagines to be the ghost’s ability to assume

²⁰¹ The Gospel of Matthew, 4:5-7

²⁰² *Othello*, III.iii.283-4. Note how in lieu of the second premise Othello inserts an exclamation of passionate disbelief.

²⁰³ *Hamlet*, I.iv.51-6

“some other horrible form.” What *should* “be the fear” is a potential encounter with the unimaginable, something that cannot be reconciled to the conventions of reason or perception. I suggest we read “some other horrible form” as denoting both physical and rhetorical forms, for indeed what Horatio imagines is a situation similar to that of Redcrosse when he encounters *Despayre* in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. The hero whom horrifying creatures such as *Errour* and *Orgoglio* fail to intimidate is brought to his knees by an unkempt hermit armed with eloquence. Rhetoric dictates that a speaker give his invention a *disposition*, that is, an order or form that renders it more effective for the task at hand, and some of these forms, as Spenser demonstrates, can have quite horrible effects on a figure’s otherwise reasonable disposition.

But to discuss Horatio’s warning in broader terms, what lies at the core of the scenario he imagines is the fear of being overwhelmed by sublimity: the “roar beneath” sends up an inarticulate and inexhaustible sound, while “so many fathoms” prove darkly complicit in this fearful tableaux. It is a scene upon which no order may assert itself, and as such “the very place puts toys of desperation, / Without more motive, into every brain.” In Chapter One, I discussed Burke’s example of the “level plain” as an “extensive prospect.” As overwhelming to the sense as an open plain may be, however, Burke asks: “but can it ever fill the mind with anything so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes; but it is owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror.”²⁰⁴ To convey the greatness and terror of the ocean, Burke draws on a pair of rhetorical devices. The first is a rhetorical question by which he makes an assertion without having to state his argument positively or explicitly. The second is *litotes* in the

²⁰⁴ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, part II, section II (“Terror”).

expression “an object of no small terror,” in which “no” and “small” negate one another to amplify the terribleness of the ocean and depict it as uncontainable.²⁰⁵ But it is Burke’s description of the *effect* that the sublime has on an individual that is particularly interesting here:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force.²⁰⁶

Horatio’s characterization of the sublime – “might deprive your sovereignty of reason”; “The very place puts toys of desperation, / Without more motive, into every brain” – is uncannily similar to Burke’s, for both passages emphasize *stasis* and *astonishment* (“motions are suspended”; “without more motive”) and an overthrow of reason (“the sublime...anticipates our reasonings”; “might deprive your sovereignty of reason”).

The “soul” is arrested in its motion and yet the imagination, released from reason’s rein, “hurries us on by an irresistible force.” Burke’s choice of words allows him to differentiate varieties of experience according to the faculties that produce them. When the “motions” of the soul are suspended and the object of consideration overwhelms the mind, the imagination takes over and “hurries” onward. The “degree of horror” this experience lends us has much to do with a loss of control resulting from the disjunction of reason, which is disposed to order (or at least to the neurotic repetition of what it

²⁰⁵ Etymology: Greek λιτότης, < λιτός smooth, plain, small, meagre. (Oxford English Dictionary)

²⁰⁶ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, part II, section I.

deems familiar), and the wayward aspects of a world indifferent to human perceptual and cognitive norms. Reason draws on empirical experience to anticipate the world and make sense of what it encounters; in the case of Burke's sublime, however, the world anticipates reason and *motivates* it, making a mockery of its "sovereignty."

It is the latter situation, one in which a subject struggles to retain control in spite of his inherent limitations and the indifference of the greater world, that occasions Shakespeare's experiments in perspectival metaphysics in his later plays. He repeatedly invokes the openness and variability of the ocean or sea as a dramatic strategy that allows him to frame the action of his narrative against a vague, uncontainable force lying beyond the boundaries of his art, much as Spenser does with the "endlesse world" of the open plane. *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale* all include the sea or ocean as a source of disorder, which proves integral to, or figuratively illustrative of, the central dynamics of the plot. The way he invokes the sea in the *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* is particularly interesting, for he subordinates its metaphorical power to emphasize the intensity of feeling that will drive the plot to its conclusion. Act three of *The Merchant of Venice* opens with the news that Antonio "hath a ship of rich lading wracked on the narrow seas; the Goodwins, I think they call the place; a very dangerous flat, and fatal, where the carcasses of many a tall ship lie buried."²⁰⁷ Here, the "narrow seas" trap and annihilate "many a tall ship," indicating the leveling power of time and chance in human affairs. This "dangerous flat" is a landscape of unpredictable outcome, and Shakespeare uses it to demonstrate the uncertainty of wealth and economy, and the risk inherent to the idea of possession itself. This loss

²⁰⁷ *The Merchant of Venice*, III.i.2-6

occurs at the precise midpoint of the play and marks the turning point or *peripeteia* of the plot, when the dynamic of social and cultural power suddenly shifts. It seems appropriate that the aftermath of the shipwreck results in an intense preoccupation with the theory and practice of the law, for the unregulated sea and the statutes that govern social exchange contrast sharply. Shakespeare employs the idea of the sea as an emblem of the formless and thus lawless world outside the work of art, and it informs *The Merchant of Venice* both narratologically and formally. What I want to stress is how the sublime quality of the unpredictable sea triggers a formal resolution within the diegesis of the play, as if the awareness of its terrible presence were enough to occasion the construction of alternative perspectives that portray a world governed by some kind of logical system. The retreat to quibbling law – a distinction between blood and flesh – that resolves the cruel tension at the heart of *The Merchant of Venice* is about as purely formal and intellectually hollow as can be. When Portia in the final passage of the play says “It is almost morning, / And yet I am sure you are not satisfied,” I for one will not disagree with her.²⁰⁸

The narrative action of both *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* begins with a storm – either ongoing or recently past – and the shipwreck that ensues from it. *Twelfth Night* is particularly interesting in this regard because the play establishes the metaphorology of the sea *before* we learn of Viola and Sebastian’s shipwreck. The play begins not with a concrete event but with a commentary on the transient quality of the beauty of music’s harmonies:

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that surfeiting,

²⁰⁸ *The Merchant of Venice*, V.i.295-6

The appetite may sicken, and so die.
 That strain again! it had a dying fall:
 O! it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
 That breathes upon a bank violets,
 Stealing and giving odour. Enough! no more:
 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
 O spirit of love! how quick and fresh are thou,
 That, notwithstanding thy capacity
 Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
 Of what validity and pitch so'er,
 But falls into abatement and low price,
 Even in a minute: so full of shapes is fancy,
 That it alone is high fantastical.²⁰⁹

Melancholy disposes one to contemplation, not action, and so Orsino's situation is one of waiting while the beauty of the world flourishes and fades. When Orsino likens the "spirit of love" to the sea, which indiscriminately receives all that runs towards it and levels even that which seemed most exquisite in the anticipation to "abatement and low price," he draws a metaphorical connection between longing and being lost at sea that establishes *Twelfth Night's* romantic tone. Love, longing, loss, and death swirl throughout the play and create delicate configurations and sentimental arabesques. We learn of Lady Olivia's mourning in the opening scene:

The element itself, till seven years' heat,
 Shall not behold her face at ample view;
 But, like a cloistress, she will veiled walk,
 And water once a day her chamber round
 With eye-offending brine: all this, to season
 A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
 And lasting in her sad remembrance.²¹⁰

In this fashion the play begins, introducing us to two noble but lonely and lost individuals, both consumed by their own private and "high fantastical" rituals of

²⁰⁹ *Twelfth Night*, I.i.1-14

²¹⁰ *Twelfth Night*, I.iv.51-6

suffering. The second scene introduces Viola, and we hear the ship's captain's account of her brother during the shipwreck and learn that there is a possibility that he has survived:

Cap. True, madam: and, to comfort you with chance,
Assure yourself, after our ship did split,
When you and those poor number sav'd with you
Hung on our driving boat, I saw your brother,
Most provident in peril, bind himself,—
Courage and hope both teaching him the practice,—
To a strong mast that liv'd upon the sea;
Where, like Arion on the dophin's back,
I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves
So long as I could see.

Vio. For saying so there's gold.
Mine own escape unfoldeth to my hope,
Whereto thy speech serves for authority,
The like of him.²¹¹

“Provident in peril,” that is, literally looking forward, Sebastian stands a chance because “courage and hope” have taught him the *practice* of confronting and surviving adverse circumstances. The word “provident” from the Latin verb *prōvidēre* is etymologically close to the Italian term for perspective – *prospettiva* – which dovetails with the English word *prospect* in the sense used by Philip Sidney in *The Defense of Poetry*. Though Sebastian was awash in the debris of the shipwreck and the tumultuous sea, the Captain's words to Viola suggest that he may have survived on account of his foresight and determination. The perspective the Captain offers Viola by his description is one of hope for the future, and for that she thanks him, for indeed such was her own escape. As twins, Viola and Sebastian's dispositions, actions, and final circumstances reflect one another throughout the play, a point that Orsino cleverly makes in the Act V, Scene I: “One face,

²¹¹ *Twelfth Night*, I.ii.7-19

one voice, one habit, and two persons; / A natural perspective, that is, and is not!"²¹² Both Viola and Sebastian are individuals engaged with the world on account of the hope they possess for the future, and they reflect one another even as they complement Orsino and Lady Olivia's romantic expectations. Thus *Twelfth Night's* four main characters pair off symmetrically (as soon as, that is, the gender trouble created by cross-dressing is resolved): Sebastian and Viola are forward facing and engaged with the practice of living (*vita activa*), while Orsino and Olivia are melancholic, preoccupied with the past, and overwhelmed by life in the theoretical (*vita contemplativa*; fig.11 and 12). As the two couples pair off, they form paired emblems of experience that look, like the god Janus, both forward and backward. The statues of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* in Michelangelo's Sagrestia Nuova (below) face one another, the allegorical figures of Dawn and Dusk, Day and Night, that recline to the left and the right of each central figure. The positions of the allegorical figures suggest, from the center of the room, a complete circle of time's passage and, like Sophocles's riddle, summarize the life of man in the course of a single day.

²¹² *Twelfth Night*, V.i.226-227



Figures 11 and 12: Michelangelo's *Sagrestia Nuova*, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence (1521-1524). Personifications of the *Vita Activa* and the *Vita Contemplativa* face one another in the chapel, resting above figures representing Night and Day, Dawn and Dusk.

The sea, that force that either propels one onward or swallows one up, plays an important role in *Twelfth Night* to introduce the qualities of the play's main characters and establish *in nuce* the formal, perspectival pairing that will ultimately dispel and resolve the pleasant confusions and erotic tensions of the tale.

3.2: “Ocular Proof” and the Resolute Perspective in *Othello*

Tempestuous emotions, partial knowledge and fearful suspicion drive the plot of *Othello*, which features the sea in storm not in its opening act or at its midpoint, but at the beginning of the second act, when the setting changes from Venice to Cyprus. The first act is devoted to illustrating Iago's character and his motivations in the social and political context of the Venetian republic. The opening scene of the play shows Iago and his “fool” Roderigo disrupting the peace of the slumbering city as they wake Brabantio to taunt him of his daughter's involvement with Othello. “And now in madness, / Being full of supper and distempering draughts, / Upon malicious bravery dost thou come / To start my quiet?” asks Brabantio from his window.²¹³ In the same way that he will later transform the possibility of infidelity into an object of sublime horror for Othello, one which anticipates his “reasonings” and rushes him onwards towards his destruction, Iago plays on Brabantio's fears of miscegenation: “you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have coursers for cousins and jennets for germans!”²¹⁴ His words indeed set Brabantio in motion and he quite fantastically accuses Othello of using “foul charms” to “enchant” his daughter and bind

²¹³ *Othello*, I.i.97-100

²¹⁴ *Othello*, I.i.109-112

her in “chains of magic.”²¹⁵ In the next scene, a Venetian senator describes the Turkish fleet’s stated intention to move on Rhodes, as opposed to the contested Cyprus, in language that nicely captures the dynamic of false appearances that courses throughout the play: “‘Tis a pageant / To keep us in false gaze.”²¹⁶ His words lend the reader an appropriate précis of *Othello* as a dramatic work, for what it stages is the pageantry of fears of that result in tragic, mistaken actions.

When the setting shifts from Venice to Cyprus, Shakespeare complicates the commonplace of the “calm after the storm” by repurposing the description of the sea offered by Montano and two Gentlemen as a harbinger of the tragic events still to come. Since these events result not from any actual wrongdoing but from imaginations afflicted with violent fears and desires, the description offered at the opening of this act proves emblematic of the play’s psychodrama:

Mon. What from the cape can you discern at sea?
1 Gen. Nothing at all, it is a high-wrought flood:
 I cannot ‘twixt the haven and the main
 Descry a sail.
Mon. Methinks the wind hath spoke aloud at land,
 A fuller blast ne’er shook our battlements:
 If it hath ruffianed so upon the sea
 What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them,
 Can hold the mortise? What shall we hear of this?
2 Gen. A segregation of the Turkish fleet:
 For do but stand upon the foaming shore,
 The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds,
 The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane,
 Seems to cast water on the burning bear
 And quench the guards of th’ever-fired pole.
 I never did like molestation view
 On the enchafed flood.

²¹⁵ *Othello*, I.ii.63-73

²¹⁶ *Othello*, I.iii.19-20

Mon. If that the Turkish fleet
Be not ensheltered and embayed, they are drowned.
It is impossible to bear it out.²¹⁷

I include this exchange in its entirety because it is remarkable how the language here implicates Iago, Roderigo, and Othello. In the opening scene, Iago says to Brabantio “you think we are ruffians,” a term that generally denotes lawlessness and specifically suggests bawdry.²¹⁸ While the term originally denoted a pimp or panderer, it acquired the sense of “flatter, one who ingratiates himself,” which is particularly illustrative of Iago’s character as a go between or “mediator” who will not relinquish his suit. It is a remarkably odd choice of words on Shakespeare’s part, yet it captures the conception of language that informs *Othello* – what Iago calls “bombast circumstance” in the opening scene²¹⁹ – as the means and medium of pursuing one’s hopes, frustrating the hopes of another, disturbing one’s calm and, ultimately, engendering one’s revenge.²²⁰ That the “wind hath spoke aloud at land” and shaken “our battlements” implies that its blasts are having an

²¹⁷ *Othello*, II.i.1-19

²¹⁸ From the Oxford English Dictionary: Etymology: < Middle French ruffian, rufian, ruffien, rufien (French (now literary or archaic) ruffian, rufian, rufien) (noun) pander, pimp (early 14th cent.), lecher, degenerate, bawd (end of the 14th cent.), general term of abuse (1449), (adjective) bawdy (1496 of the Devil), probably < Italian ruffiano pander, pimp (1st half of the 13th cent.), flatterer, one who ingratiates himself.

²¹⁹ Cf. Iago: “Three great ones of the city, / In personal suit to make me his lieutenant, / Off-capped to him, and by the faith of man / I know my price, I am worth no worse a place. / But he, as loving his own pride and purposes, / Evades them, with a bombast circumstance / Horribly stuffed with epithets of war, / And in conclusion / Nonsuits my mediators.” (I.i.7-15)

²²⁰ Cf. Brabantio: “Upon malicious bravery doest thou come / To start my quiet?” (I.i.99-100); Iago: “After some time to abuse Othello’s ear... The Moor is of a free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, / And will as tenderly be led by th’ nose / As asses are. / I have’t, it is engendered! Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light.” (I.iii.394; 398-403)

even fiercer effect upon the *un-moored* vessels afloat upon the violently agitated sea. From their point of view, Montano and the two Gentlemen know that there are vessels upon the main, but they are obscured from sight by tumultuous waves and rain. What these observers “discern at sea” is “Nothing at all” because the very boundary separating the sea from the sky has been effaced: “it is a high-wrought flood: I cannot ‘twixt the haven and the main / Descry a sail.” The anthropomorphic description of a ship – “What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them, / Can hold the mortise?” – renders the metaphorical undertones of this passage overt, for it offers an image of an individual at the mercy of an overwhelming force or passion and thus adumbrates the trajectory of Othello’s demise. By contrast, it also, rather amusingly, makes Roderigo’s repeated and petulant threats to “drown himself” in Act I, Scene III, seem very silly and insignificant indeed – “drown thyself? drown cats and blind puppies.”²²¹

The imagery of the sea in a storm in Act II, Scene I, is thus a harbinger of things to come in the tragedy of *Othello*, and Shakespeare gets considerable poetic mileage out of the idea of profound disorder issuing from conflicting passions. He establishes in this description of the sea a conflict between perception and cognition, for even though Montano and company know that there are ships upon the sea, they cannot perceive them through the maelstrom. Yet it is not the disorder of the sea and the idea of not knowing that proves dangerous and tragic in *Othello* – it is Othello’s conviction of knowledge founded on false proofs and the decisive course of action that it leads to. In Act III, the idea arises of being “satisfied” with regard to knowing whether or not Desdemona is in fact unfaithful, and the question of how this could be discerned proves pivotal:

²²¹ *Othello*, I.iii.335-6

Iag. I see, sir, you are eaten up with passion.
I do repent me that I put it to you.
You would be satisfied?

Oth. Would? nay, and I will!

Iag. And may – but how? how satisfied, my lord?
Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?
Behold her topped?

Oth. Death and damnation! O!

Iag. It were a tedious difficulty, I think,
To bring them to that prospect. Damn them then
If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster
More than their own. What then? how then?
What shall I say? Where's satisfaction?
It is impossible you should see this
Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
As ignorance made drunk. But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances
Which lead directly to the door of truth
Will give you satisfaction, you may have't.²²²

Although it “is impossible you should see this,” “imputation and strong circumstances” should be enough to give Othello a fairly convincing vision of what it would be like. Iago’s quibble on “impossible” is actually very funny: since, as far as we can tell, Desdemona and Cassio are not actually involved it is literally impossible to see them physically in bed together. As blind as the puppies destined for the riverbed, however, Othello is unable to see anything external to the “prospect” of his fears, which is purely imaginary, purely metaphysical. This much, at least, Othello and Brabantio have in common.

Overtly “painterly” or anamorphic passages in Shakespeare have received much critical attention, but Shakespeare’s peculiar use of single-point perspective as a metaphor eliding visual experience and knowledge in this particular passage has gone

²²² *Othello*, III.iii.394-411

unnoticed.²²³ As we saw in Durer's illustration of a perspective machine in the Introduction, the relationship between the viewer and his subject, and the manner by which this visual relationship comes to be captured on canvas, depends on the painter's spatial proximity to his subject as determined by an arbitrarily chosen frame or *window*. The frame allows the painter to subjugate three-dimensional space to a two-dimensional surface without losing the sense of depth. This *sense of depth* is an aesthetic effect of the work of art and holds the viewer's gaze by in effect enchanting him or her. The world sketched on the surface of the canvas appears to be one that may be entered, one that may yield real possibilities and result in various consequences. By suspending temporality while simultaneously suggesting a history and immediate future for the figures portrayed, mimetic art compels of its viewer an imaginative and affective investment. I know of no finer passage to convey this than the following from John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve:
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!²²⁴

²²³ Shakespeare's indebtedness to painterly techniques in Lucrece's ekphrastic descriptions of the fall of Troy in "The Rape of Lucrece," Bushy's description of Richard II ("Each substance of grief hath twenty shadows" (2.2.14-24)) in *Richard II*, and Cleopatra's description of Antony ("Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon, / The other way's a Mars" (2.5.116-7)) in *Antony and Cleopatra* is well known. Cf. Gilman, *The Curious Perspective: literary and pictorial wit in the seventeenth century*; Christopher Pye, *The Vanishing: Shakespeare, the subject, and early modern culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Allan Shickman, "'Turning Pictures' in Shakespeare's England" in *The Art Bulletin*, 59, no. 1 (1977), 67–70; Lucy Gent, *Picture and Poetry 1560-1620* (Lemington Spa: James Hall Publishing, 1981).

²²⁴ John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. Barnard (London: Penguin, 1973).

Though Keats is not writing about single-point perspective, he nevertheless beautifully captures the ideal after which many theorists and painters have striven, one which Alberti aggressively pursued in his famous treatise *De Pictura*. Alberti determined that there must be a practical science, a system of rules or logical grammar, that could simulate visual experience, and that by employing certain geometrical techniques the painter would be able to render his art ever more convincing and realistic.

There is something of an unexamined dark side to Alberti's fascination with realistic *mimesis*, however, for as it exalts the suspension of time and disbelief, it also imprisons one in a fiction that "anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force."²²⁵ In Book I of *De Pictura*, Alberti explains the limitations of the visual field in terms of "extreme rays" and the "quantity" of space that these rays delimit:

With the extreme rays quantity is measured. All space on the plane that is between any two points on the outline is called quantity. The eye measures these quantities with the visual rays as with a pair of compasses. In every plane there are as many quantities as there are spaces between point and point. Height from top to bottom, width from left to right, breadth from near to far and whatever other dimension or measure which is made by sight makes use of the extreme rays.²²⁶

"For this reason," he concludes, "it is said that vision makes a triangle. The base of [this triangle] is the quantity seen and the sides are those rays which are extended from the quantity to the eye. It is, therefore, very certain that no quantity can be seen without the triangle." This first step yields a basic strategy to represent distance and maintain

²²⁵ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. part II, section I.

²²⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. with introduction and notes by John R. Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 1956), 46-47.

proportion within the confines of the frame, which artists would develop into the now familiar treatment of space below (fig. 13).

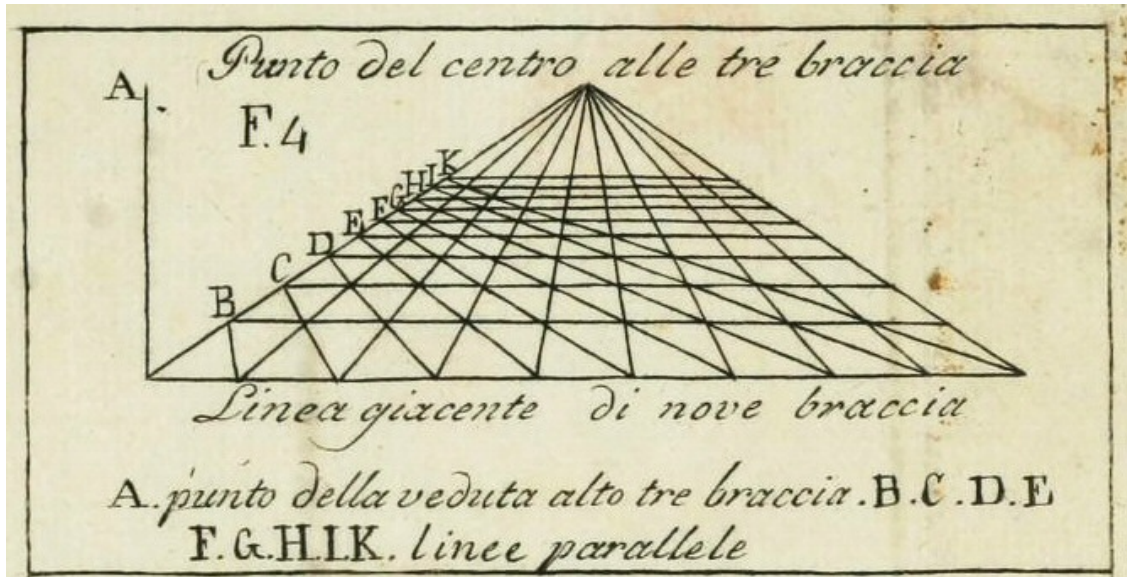


Figure 13: Illustration from *Della pittura e della statua di Leon Battista Alberti* (Milano: Società Tipografica dei Classici Italiani, contrada di S. Margherita, No. 1118. Anno 1804)

This triangular model, however, was only part of a broader and more immersive theorization of space, which utilized the triangle as part of a visual pyramid, a three-dimensional geometric figure whose sides were triangles culminating in a vertex, which was located in the eye of the viewer, and a polygonal base, which determined the “quantity” of space treated within the frame of the canvas. Alberti writes:

The extrinsic rays, thus encircling the plane--one touching the other--enclose all the plane like the willow wands of a basket-cage, and make, as is said, this visual pyramid. It is time for me to describe what this pyramid is and how it is constructed by these rays. I will describe it in my own way. The pyramid is a figure of a body from whose base straight lines are drawn upward, terminating in a single point. The base of this pyramid is a plane which is seen. The sides of the

pyramid are those rays which I have called extrinsic. The cuspid, that is the point of the pyramid, is located within the eye where the angle of the quantity is.²²⁷

The French mathematician, Gérard Desargues (1591-1661), further developed Alberti's idea into a system of "projective" or perspective geometry. The engraving below, from Abraham Bosse's edition of Desargues's works, offers an excellent example of Alberti's original idea of a visual pyramid (fig. 14). What one notices immediately is that the experience of sight is intimately bound up with and dependent upon *position* and *limitation*. The confined quality of the figures' gazes is exaggerated in order to regularize the phenomenon of visual experience, for both Alberti and Desargues are more interested in rationalizing the operations underlying focused sight and than they are in those producing peripheral vision. What one takes away from this is that rationalizations of sight have a compulsive quality, one which blocks out certain external features and qualities of the world and reduces visual experience to a plane regulated by the laws of geometry, optics, and perspective.

²²⁷ Alberti, *On Painting*, *ibid.*

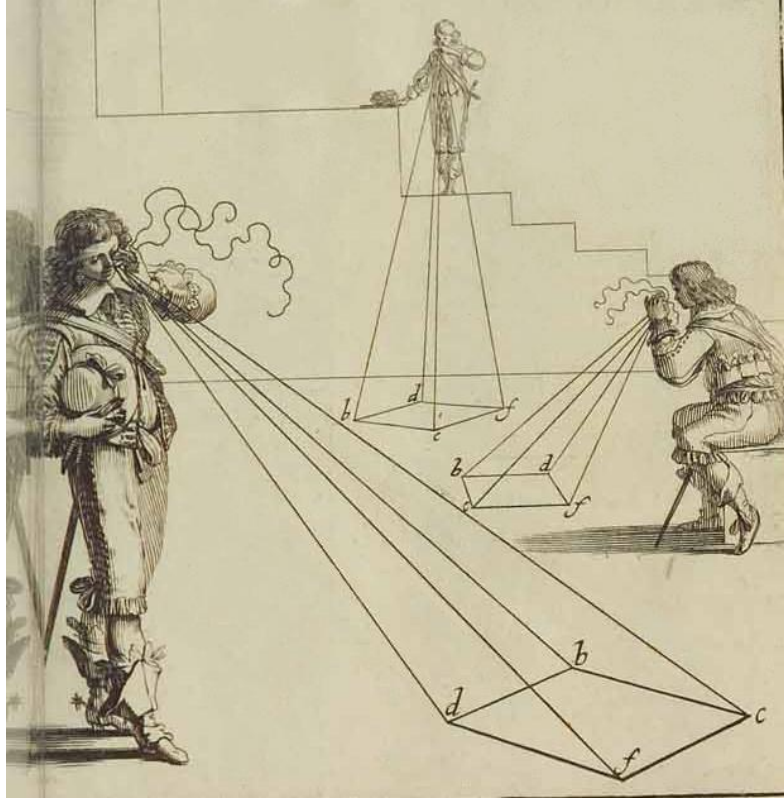


Figure 14: Illustration from Abraham Bosse's *Maniere universelle de Mr. Desargues pour pratiquer la perspective*. Paris: De l'Imprimerie de Pierre Des-Hayes, 1648.

In *Othello*, Shakespeare experiments with how the imagination operates on partial knowledge, and how such partial knowledge fuels both fear and desire. Once Iago has planted the seed of suspicion in Othello's mind, it engenders a variety of irrational "reasonings" that are both repetitive and compulsive. Perplexed by behavior that is unpredictably aggressive and withdrawn, Desdemona goes to Emilia for insight:

Emi. But jealous souls will not be answered so:
 They are not ever jealous for the cause,
 But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster
 Begot upon itself, born on itself.

Des. Heaven keep that monster from Othello's mind!²²⁸

Emilia's observation captures the essence of neurotic thinking, for it produces a view of the world founded upon irrational anxieties that restrict an individual's interpretation of events unfolding in real time. Jealousy, a "monster begot upon itself, born upon itself," undermines the thought process by shifting it towards a suspicious interpretation of what are otherwise ordinary events in daily life. *Monster* derives from the Latin *monēre* meaning "to warn," and the manner of thinking Emilia associates with jealousy is one of anticipation informed by fear of what the jealous individual has already accepted as a foregone conclusion. This already drawn conclusion subjugates all objects and actions within one's ken to its own perverse logic, arranging of them a tableau that confirms one's worst fears.

When Iago says to Othello that "it were a tedious difficulty, I think, to bring them [Desdemona and Cassio] to that prospect [the act of coitus]," and damns "them then If ever mortal eyes do see them," he underscores the imaginary nature of Othello's fear. This fear so imagined, however, proves nevertheless powerful enough to overwhelm Othello's reason and hurries him forward by an irresistible force. It is impossible that Othello should see this, of course, but Iago furnishes him nevertheless with four vivid scenarios of lust to frame and imprison his focus – "were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys, / As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross / As ignorance made drunk." "Like the willow wands of a basket-cage,"²²⁹ these scenarios cooperate to capture Othello's mind and direct its force to a single point. "A train of thought such as this,"

²²⁸ *Othello*, III.iv.159-163

²²⁹ Alberti, *On Painting*, 47.

writes Freud of Dora, “shows its pathological character, in spite of its apparently reasonable content, by the single peculiarity that no amount of conscious or voluntary effort of thought on the patient’s part is able to dissipate or remove it.”²³⁰ “Imputation and strong circumstances” lead the imagination “directly to the door of proof,” and it is peculiar that Iago should use the image of a doorway, for it had long been a strategy of artists to conceal the convergence of perspectival orthogonals – a phenomenon known as the *punto di fuga* or vanishing point – behind a doorway (Fig. 15 and 16).



Figure 15: Fresco from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, 50/40 B.C. Roman.

© Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. There are multiple ‘vanishing points’ in this composition but all of them depend on doors, doorways or arches to achieve their effect.

²³⁰ Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, ed. Rieff (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1963), 47. Also: “My experience in the clearing-up of hysterical symptoms has shown that it is not necessary for the various meanings of a symptom to be compatible with one another, that is, to fit together into a connected whole. It is enough that the unity should be constituted by the subject-matter which has given rise to all the various phantasies. (46)



Figure 16: The Ideal City, attributed to Fra Carnevale (1445-1484).
 © The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore MD. Notice the nearly invisible, dark door into which all orthogonals recede.

Since Iago cannot provide Othello with the “ocular proof”²³¹ of Desdemona’s infidelity, he relates a dream of Cassio’s, overheard whilst sharing a bed with him, in a manner that is actually very funny, the humor of which Othello cannot see and the content of which his blindness allows him to interpret only as “monstrous”:

Iag. In sleep I heard him say ‘Sweet Desdemona,
 Let us be wary, let us hide our loves,’
 And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
 Cry ‘O sweet creature!’ and then kiss me hard
 As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
 That grew upon my lips, lay his leg o’er my thigh,
 And sigh, and kiss, and then cry ‘Cursed fate
 That gave thee to the Moor!’

Oth. O monstrous! monstrous!²³²

²³¹ *Othello*, 3.3.363

²³² *Othello*, 3.3.421-429

Othello leaps in to complete the pentameter line, rushing past its formal boundaries to a monstrous eleven-syllable line. So caught up is he with his fear that he accepts this fabrication as “proof” of Desdemona’s infidelity:

Iag. Nay, but this was but his dream.
Oth. But this denoted a foregone conclusion.
Iag. ‘Tis a shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream,
 And this may help to thicken other proofs
 That do demonstrate thinly.²³³

These “proofs” “demonstrate thinly” because they are as superficial as a deceptive image sketched skillfully upon a canvas. Iago directs Othello’s mind to a suggestive scenario culminating in a supremely artificial “door of truth,” then substitutes metonymically the material object of Desdemona’s handkerchief in lieu of what the door purportedly conceals. Of course he does so in a characteristically cruel and amusing way: “I am sure it was your wife’s, did I today / See Cassio wipe his beard with.”²³⁴

Iago’s cleverly wrought case against Desdemona and Cassio reintroduces the imagery of the sea and the power of water, only now its force acquires a violent current and destination. Unlike the sea in storm as described by Montano and the Gentlemen in Act two, a description in which the water’s tumult confounded axes both vertical (“The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane, / Seems to cast water on the burning bear / And quench the guards of th’ever-fired pole”) and horizontal (“Nothing at all, it is a high-wrought flood: / I cannot ‘twixt the haven and the main / Descry a sail), Othello’s resolve rushes him towards a violent conclusion:

Oth. Like to the Pontic sea
 Whose icy currents and compulsive course

²³³ *Othello*, 3.3.430-433

²³⁴ *Othello*, 3.3.441-2

Ne'er keeps retiring ebb but keeps due on
 To the Propontic and the Hellespont:
 Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace
 Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love
 Till that a capable and wide revenge
 Swallow them up.²³⁵

His “compulsive course” recalls Tarquin’s in “The Rape of Lucrece” – “Now is he come unto the chamber door / That shuts him from the heaven of his thought, / Which with a yielding latch, and with no more, / Hath barred him from the blessed thing he sought”²³⁶ – and Macbeth’s approach to Duncan’s chamber – “With Tarquin’s ravishing strides, towards his design / Moves like a ghost.”²³⁷ The “heaven” of one’s thought proves demonic in its realization, and Othello’s course is annihilatory, swallowing up his design at the moment of its culmination. When Britomart forces her way through the door out of which issues the spectral masque of Cupid in the House of Busirane and discovers the source of its choreographed pageantry, Spenser offers us a glimpse of the primal violence that underlies “monstrous” interpretations of the world, those which are motivated by blinding fear and desire (Cupid is blind for a reason):

So soone as she was entred, rownd about
 She cast her eies, to see what was become
 Of all those persons, which she saw without:
 But lo, they streight were vanisht all and some,
 Ne liuing wight she saw in all that roome,
 Saue that same woefull Lady, both whose hands
 Were bounden fast, that did her ill become,
 And her small waste girt rownd with yron bands,
 Vnto a brasen pillour, by the which she stands.

²³⁵ *Othello*, III.iii.456-463

²³⁶ William Shakespeare, “The Rape of Lucrece” in *The Narrative Poems*, ed. Evans. (London: Penguin, 1989).

²³⁷ *Macbeth*, 2.1.55-6

And her before the vile Enchaunter sate,
 Figuring straunge characters of his art,
 With liuing blood he those characters wrate,
 Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart,
 Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart,
 And all perforce to make her him to loue.²³⁸

There is a dark sublimity to passion, one which the writers of the early modern period understood quite well. Beneath the artificially constructed perspective of the mind, of which the masque of Cupid is an allegory, lie the originary fears and desires that threaten violence when the fantasy and the real do not align. The Narcissistic desire to bend the will of the world and make it reflect one's own ideals and desires underlies many a creative impulse, but the artists and writers who could remove themselves from this dynamic and manipulate it to their own ends, captured in their work exquisite insights to the nature of time, mortality, vanity, and worldly motivation.

3.3: “Deficient Sight” and Rhetorical Compensation in King Lear

“Quite early in the Renaissance,” writes Heinrich Wöfflin, “the theory was formulated that the sign of perfection in a work of art was that it could not be changed, not even in the smallest details, without destroying the beauty and the meaning of the whole.”²³⁹ What I attempted to demonstrate in my reading of *Othello* is that the same values underpinning “perfection” are those that can be perverted to fuel compulsive thinking and encourage delusional, obsessive behaviors. The rationalization of sight by means of linear perspective reveals the fundamental limitations that give rise to mimetic

²³⁸ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xii.30-31.

²³⁹ Heinrich Wöfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), 65.

representation and provides a compelling analogy for a hermeneutic system driven by desire. The inclination to put everything in its right place derives from a belief system that assumes such order is, firstly, possible, and secondly, desirable. “I shall define beauty,” writes Alberti in *De re aedificatoria*, “to be a harmony of all the parts, in whatsoever subject it appears, fitted together with such proportion and connection, that nothing could be added, diminished or altered, but for the worse. A quality...noble and divine.”²⁴⁰ Yet as Nietzsche demonstrates in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the “noble and divine” quality of such beauty arises from a dialectical tension between form and disorder that he terms “Apollonian” and “Dionysian” respectively. What Nietzsche calls the “Apollonian dream state” is one “in which the daylight world is veiled and a new world—clearer, more comprehensible, more affecting than the first, and at the same time more shadowy—falls upon the eye in ever changing shapes.”²⁴¹ As I discussed above, the effect Alberti describes as culminating in a “harmony of all the parts” requires that the viewer assume the position of the artist and observe the work *as if outside of time*. The reason Nietzsche describes the Apollonian world as falling “upon the eye in ever changing shapes” is that the individual shapes are only *formal* attempts to contain “Dionysiac insights and powers,”²⁴² which resist form. “We have come to interpret Greek

²⁴⁰ Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, book VI, ch. ii. Cited in Wöfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, 66. Cf. also book IX, ch. v: “we may conclude beauty to be such a consent and agreement of the parts of a whole in which it is found, as to number, finishing and collocation, as congruity, that is to say, the principal law of nature requires.”

²⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Golffing (New York, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956), 58.

²⁴² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 57.

tragedy,” he writes, “as a Dionysiac chorus which again and again discharges itself in Apollonian images.”²⁴³ The artificial maneuvers that underlie Alberti’s conception of beauty as a unified, harmonious whole, are cleverly manipulated by De Chirico, who employs a collage of shapes, with each possessing its own internally consistent logic of space and proportion (fig. 17).



Figure 17: Giorgio de Chirico,
The Song of Love (Le Chant d'amour)
1914.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 59.1 cm
© The Museum of Modern Art, New
York

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* stands out amidst his mature tragedies as the play most anxious about and self-conscious of its fictive nature and the effect that its descriptive language has on both the characters within the play and the playgoers who experience it. The ““glib and oily art”²⁴⁴ of rhetorical performance takes center stage in the play’s opening scenes, alerting us to language’s ability to make the false seem true and the true seem false. “Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty” Goneril professes her love to be,

²⁴³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 56.

²⁴⁴ *King Lear*, I.i.226

introducing these central ideas to the play and suggesting a link between them.²⁴⁵

Eyesight allows one to gauge distance and conceptualize space, and liberty, the lines imply, is the ability to make decisions and operate actively within physical space. It is a faculty closely bound up with the “sovereignty of reason,” of which Horatio fears Hamlet may be deprived by the ghost and tempted “toward the flood” or “to the dreadful summit of the cliff.” This sinister prolepsis anticipates the blinding of Gloucester and Edgar’s attempt to restore vision to him (and thus space and liberty) by describing an imaginary view from Dover Cliff. Yet here too, even though Edgar’s description is adequately convincing to his father – and just as Goneril’s description of her love convinces Lear – acting upon what was set forth in words leads only to cruel deception and profound confusion. By divorcing language from truth in these initial exchanges between Lear and his daughters, Shakespeare casts doubt on the very medium by which we, as spectators, must experience the play.

When Goneril says to Albany in the fourth act “No more, the text is foolish,”²⁴⁶ she alludes to the Bible, as in Medieval Latin the term *textus* was used to refer to the scriptures. Quintilian, however, used the term figuratively for any arrangement in speech, as in that which is woven, a web, or texture, for the word itself derives from the Latin verb *texere* meaning “to weave.”²⁴⁷ Although a play script in Shakespeare’s time would not have been referred to as a text, the term carries both the sense of religious scriptures that set forth a divine truth in language and rhetorical performances invented

²⁴⁵ *King Lear*, I.i.56

²⁴⁶ *King Lear*, IV.ii.38

²⁴⁷ See the etymology provided for *text* in the *Oxford English Dictionary*

and disposed, that is, woven together to produce a certain effect. *King Lear* is full of “foolish” texts, from the misleading speeches of Goneril, Regan, Edmund, and Edgar, to the fool’s jokes and songs, which contain some of the most sensible statements in the play. What these competing texts collectively demonstrate, however, is that the link between language and what it claims to signify is no more reliable than that between the heavens and the destiny of man. “This is the excellent foppery of the world,” exclaims Edmund, “that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars.”²⁴⁸ A play marked by deceptive appearances and frustrated expectations, *King Lear* suggests that language and eyesight are not trustworthy indicators of truth. By showing that both language and vision may be manipulated by artifice – the first by rhetorical skill, the second by linear perspective’s simulation of depth – Shakespeare reveals humanity’s susceptibility to, and desire for, deception.

In the Dover Cliff scene, which will be our primary focus here, Edgar’s description of a view down to the beach and out over the sea recalls the perspectival techniques characteristic of Renaissance painting. His attempt to construct in language a convincing substitute for vision itself is emblematic of Shakespeare’s project or “argument” in *King Lear*. Stephen Orgel writes:

If the drama’s reality is infinitely adjustable, if drama for Shakespeare does not create a world, what then does it create? What it creates, I would like to suggest, is something the Renaissance would have recognized as an argument. This is what critics from Horace to Castelvetro and Sidney mean when they say that mimesis is

²⁴⁸ *King Lear*, I.ii.118-121

only the means of drama, not its end. Its end, they assume, is the same as the end of poetry and the other verbal arts, to persuade.²⁴⁹

King Lear is a very persuasive tragedy. It persuades us that language is as capable of accurately describing what is real as it is of departing from the truth. It argues that power is arbitrary, fortune is fickle, appearances are deceiving, and that one's fate as an individual depends not on the stars but on the ability to manipulate others. In this sense, *King Lear* is more remarkable not for the formal argument it offers as such but for how it debunks the arguments of others, many of which are taken for granted in everyday life. The play exposes the fictive nature of even the most precious personal narratives, and seems to delight in doing so. It presents an argument *ex nihilo*, which, since it has nothing to prove, proves successful by proving nothing.

King Lear is generally known as a play about ingratitude and rash decisions, about cruel ambition, futile rage and nothingness. It is perhaps less commonly known as a play about *placelessness*. It might be surprising but many of its most remarkable moments, like Lear's furious provocation of the skies and the blind Gloucester's agonized progress towards Dover, do not occur anywhere. Henry S. Turner explains, "For nearly two hundred years Shakespeare's editors had proposed a location for these scenes that had come to seem self-evident: this place is the 'heath'."²⁵⁰ This "so-called 'heath'," Turner reminds us, "appears nowhere in either the 1608 Quarto or the 1623 Folio editions of Shakespeare's play. No single line in any of the early texts records any such place." The omission of stage directions specifying a location, as well as the general absence of

²⁴⁹ Stephen Orgel, "Shakespeare Imagines a Theater," *Poetics Today*, 5, No. 3 (1984): 549-561.

²⁵⁰ Henry S. Turner, "King Lear Without: The Heath," *Renaissance Drama*, 28 (1997): 164.

spatial description from the dialogue in these scenes, raises the question of the aesthetic and dramatic function of “placelessness” in *King Lear*. Turner writes:

Perhaps it will be impossible for us to imagine *King Lear* “without the heath,” especially when as readers the idea of imagination itself so quickly assumes a spatial dimension and when the very conventions of literary analysis – citation by act and scene, for instance – make it difficult to separate a modern idea of space and location from the idea of dramatic structure.²⁵¹

The temptation to situate the action of the storm scenes of Acts III and IV on “the heath” is a good example of how readerly desire structures one’s experience of a text and effectively situates the unfamiliar within familiar parameters. Providing a location for these scenes may be an act of convenience for a director or reader, but it is also an act of resistance, a refusal to confront the defamiliarization experienced by Lear and Gloucester in the second half of the play. In his rage, Lear wanders across territory that used to belong to him, an irony foreshadowed by his use of a map to divide his kingdom in Act I, Scene I.²⁵² Once able to exert his will upon a miniature representation of his realm, drawing boundaries as he saw fit, Lear now becomes a subject to the natural phenomena that escape cartography. In Gloucester’s case, the loss of his sight requires him to sense his surroundings in a profoundly new way, left as he is to “smell his way to Dover.”²⁵³ A reading of *King Lear* that situates these scenes on “the heath” re-familiarizes what the early texts of the play leave undefined and purposefully unsettling.

Acknowledging placelessness clarifies the significance of Dover in the play, which is never actually reached and exists only as a possibility, a desired destination.

²⁵¹ Turner, “King Lear Without: The Heath,” 183.

²⁵² “Give me the map there.” *King Lear*, I.i.36

²⁵³ *King Lear*, III.vii.92-3

Stirring hopes for restoration and reconciliation, Dover suggests a return of what has been lost politically and personally; as a concrete geographical location, it also suggests the return of place and orientation. Jonathan Goldberg views Dover as at the center of a dramatic “counterforce” rallied in the third and fourth acts. He explains: “as the place where Lear will see Cordelia or the place where Gloucester will have the satisfaction of suicide—in these reiterations of “Dover,” the word names a site of desire, of the hope for recovery or at least repose.”²⁵⁴ Though Dover is only discussed and not reached in the play, Gloucester comes nearest, virtually experiencing his destination by way of a remarkable rhetorical performance by his son in disguise, Edgar. What is the importance of this virtual experience within the larger context of *King Lear*, how does it work, and what does it tell us of artistic representation more generally?

After being blinded at the hands of Regan and Cornwall, Gloucester’s servant delivers him into the care of “Poor Tom,” who agrees to guide him to Dover. Taking his arm, Edgar physically leads Gloucester across a topography “all dark and comfortless.”²⁵⁵ He is guided by a combination of physical support and verbal description: language becomes a supplement for sight, positing a tenuous link between the actual topography encountered by the characters and a *topographia* or landscape represented in human speech. Having been given a basic description of Gloucester’s anticipated destination – “There is a cliff whose high and bending head / Looks fearfully in the confined deep” – Edgar begins to depict a landscape consonant with what he imagines his father’s

²⁵⁴ Jonathan Goldberg, *Shakespeare’s Hand* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 134.

²⁵⁵ *King Lear*, III.vii.84

expectations to be.²⁵⁶ As he announces their approach “to the top of that same hill,”²⁵⁷ the physical and rhetorical topographies bifurcate:

Edgar:	You do climb up it now. Look how we labour.	
Gloucester:	Methinks the ground is even.	
Edgar:		Horrible steep.
	Hark, do you hear the sea?	
Gloucester:		No, truly.
Edgar:	Why then, your other senses grow imperfect By your eyes’ anguish.	
Gloucester:		So may it be indeed.
	Methinks thy voice is altered and thou speak’st In better phrase and matter than thou didst.	
Edgar:	You’re much deceived; in nothing am I changed But in my garments. ²⁵⁸	

If Edgar’s speech improves in anticipation of their arrival, it is because he is trying to convince Gloucester of his location by speech alone. His line, “in nothing am I changed / But in my garments,” cleverly refers to his disguise as Tom O’Bedlam while invoking the common notion of rhetoric as the clothing or ornament to “figureless” (*aschematistos*) speech.²⁵⁹ His appeals to Gloucester’s senses – “look how we labour” and “do you hear the sea?” – are strategic because they lead him to doubt the veracity of his perceptions, believing them to have been vitiated by his “eyes’ anguish.”

Edgar’s vivid description or *enargeia* of the view from atop Dover cliff begins with a rhetorical question that effectively evokes the sublimity of this inimitable view – “How fearful / And dizzy ‘tis to cast one’s eyes so low.” This is one of only two

²⁵⁶ *King Lear*, IV.i.76-7

²⁵⁷ *King Lear*, IV.vi.1

²⁵⁸ *King Lear*, IV.vi.2-9

²⁵⁹ Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), book nine.

moments *in the entire play* that relieves us from what is implicitly flat ground ordinarily perceived from a quotidian perspective. The other is Lear's division of his kingdom in Act I, when he looks down upon a representation of his domain with god-like prominence. Here in Act IV, Edgar's rhetorical performance conjures an image of the earth below and before him that is no less artificial than Lear's map in Act I. I will discuss this description in two parts – vertical and horizontal. The vertical description reads:

Edgar: Come on, sir, here's the place. Stand still: how fearful
 And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low.
 The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
 Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half-way down
 Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade;
 Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
 The fishermen that walk upon the beach
 Appear like mice.²⁶⁰

The casting of one's eyes “so low” produces an effect of vertigo – “how fearful and dizzy” – because the unqualified space overwhelms the visual sense. By beginning his description not with individual details but with the opposite of detail, with a rhetorical exclamation of wonder, Edgar reminds Gloucester of the sensations one experiences in presence of the sublime. To feel “dizzy” is a sensation that blurs the outlines of individual physical objects and makes it impossible to establish a stable relationship between the viewer and the landscape. In his initial rhetorical gesture, Edgar chooses to describe the experience of standing at height and looking down instead of providing a detailed description of the cliff and the landscape below. Doing so prioritizes the affective potential of the landscape over the features of the landscape itself. What Burke would

²⁶⁰ *King Lear*, IV.vi.11-18

term “vast in their dimension,” these cliffs, if the dizzying sensation is anything to go on, drop vertiginously and dreadfully to the sea, dwarfing their spectator.²⁶¹ Edgar anticipates, even before he begins to elaborate upon the view, Gloucester’s fear of the edge, for “Think of it. / The very place puts toys of desperation, / Without more motive, into every brain / That looks so many fathoms to the sea / And hears it roar beneath.”²⁶²

Though an effective reminder of the awe inspired by such a place, this initial exclamation refuses to establish a firm sense of location and withholds a detailed description of the immediate surroundings. Once he has established the affective potential of the view, however, he devotes the next six lines to rendering the drop graphically by establishing consistent spatial relationships between the scene’s constitutive elements. If the samphire gatherer, located halfway down the cliff, appears the size of “his head,” then the comparison of fishermen on the beach to “mice” suggests a remarkably consistent rendering of space. In the third book of his *Ten Books on Architecture*, Vitruvius writes the following of the perfectly proportioned human body:

The human body is so designed by nature that the face, from the chin to the top of the forehead and the lowest roots of the hair, is a tenth part of the whole height; the open hand from the wrist to the tip of the middle finger is just the same; *the head from the chin to the crown is an eighth*, and with the neck and shoulder from the top of the breast to the lowest roots of the hair is a sixth. (my emphasis)²⁶³

If we accept the length of the head from the chin to the crown as one-eighth the length of the body, then the diminution of the samphire gatherer to the size of his own head

²⁶¹ Burke, Edmund. *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, printed in the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York : Norton, 2001, p. 550.

²⁶² *Hamlet*, I.iv.57-61

²⁶³ Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morgan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 72.

indicates a one-eighth ratio of reduction “half-way down” Edgar’s imaginary cliff. If we apply this ratio to what already appears the size of a human head over the remaining distance to the beach, a mouse is an excellent approximation of what a head reduced to one-eighth its size, or a man reduced to one-sixteenth his size, might look like. The comparison of the “crows and choughs” flying below to “beetles” enriches Edgar’s vivid description by maintaining its careful proportions. The “midway air,” as opposed to the explicit “half-way down,” is purposefully less specific, for the birds are not relatively static like the gatherer but in motion. Their reduction to “beetles” seems compatible with the one-eighth reduction ratio already established; and just to make this description even more forceful than it already is, the association of the color black with both organisms is preserved. There is great persuasive power to the textual description that Edgar has woven so well, partly because it is internally consistent and partly because it matches, as well as he can approximate, what he imagines Gloucester’s expectations of this view would be.

The manner in which Edgar’s lines posit and sustain consistent spatial relationships suggests an indebtedness to the techniques of perspectival painting, a suspicion that is confirmed when we turn to the horizontal aspect of these lines. The inclusion of this second axis imbues the scene with a more realistic sense of depth, which consequently intensifies a sense of precipitous openness inches away from our speaker’s feet. The passage continues:

Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring barque
 Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy
 Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge
 That on th’unnumbered idle pebble chafes,
 Cannot be heard so high. I’ll look no more,
 Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight

Topple down headlong.²⁶⁴

The double reduction of the size of the “barque,” first to “her cock” then to a “buoy,” may seem analogous to the previous likening of a man to his “head” and fishermen to mice; but here the consistent shrinking and reformulation of the same object until it is “almost too small for sight” creates an effect analogous to that of the vanishing point in Renaissance painting. Jonathan Goldberg claims that this effect of depth occurs by way of “a kind of algebra that expresses a verbal version of a formula of proportion, a:b::b:c” (A is to B as B is to C), but such a formula overlooks the fundamentally different tropological relationships at work here. The reduction of the “tall anchoring barque” to the “cock-boat” she tows behind her initiates a sequence of metonymic displacement and implicit reinscription. That is, to substitute the small boat towed behind the “tall anchoring barque” for the large ship itself implies *another* even smaller “cock-boat” behind it and so on. The relation is one of contiguity and not one of metaphorical likening. The relation of B to C, however, of the cock-boat to a buoy, is *metaphorical*, and it is the shift from metonymic to metaphorical relation that checks a theoretically infinite regression and marks the boundary of human vision—“almost too small for sight.”

Buoys demarcate boundaries and limits for navigators, but they are also used to indicate danger. In Edgar’s description the “buoy” functions as the vanishing point in a landscape drawn in single point perspective. It also warns that the very conventions that make a rhetorical performance’s argument *convincing* operate within limits of

²⁶⁴ *King Lear*, IV.vi.18-24

plausibility, for any attempt to pass through the vanishing point could only result in the exposure of an otherwise believable fiction. Goldberg writes:

Intimated, then, in Edgar's lines is the notion that the creation of illusionistic space and a belief in it depend upon acts of annihilation. To make the scene plausible, it must draw toward the limits of visibility. Illusionistic representation depends upon reductions. The illusion of continuous space rests upon what cannot be seen, on exhausting the limits of sight and arriving at what is "too small for sight." Vision depends upon both blindness and invisibility; it rests upon a vanishing point.²⁶⁵

Edgar's retreat from the limits of the visual to the auditory – "the murmuring surge / that on th'unnumbered idle pebble chafes" – effectively keeps the artifice of his landscape concealed. Yet it is the manner in which Edgar's description concludes that proves particularly illuminating to this discussion of verbal description as a substitute for vision: "I'll look no more / Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight / Topple down headlong."

The word "trope" literally means "a turn" or "to turn." Do tropes "turn" not only literal meaning but, as here, the "brain" itself to a new way of figurative seeing, a faculty of "deficient sight"? A common argument for the superiority of painting over poetry in fifteenth and sixteenth century debates was the claim that the object of poetic description was not perceived directly but could only be conceived of in what Leonardo da Vinci called "l'occhio tenebroso" or the shadowy eye.²⁶⁶ Indeed, the line "Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight / Topple down headlong" is ambivalent, for although Edgar claims that the sublimity of the scene renders his sight "deficient," thereby concluding his speech in a circular fashion (sublime to vanishing point to sublime), "sight" could easily refer to the verbal description itself as a piece of oratory, an art object, a limited exercise

²⁶⁵ Goldberg, *Shakespeare's Hand*, 138.

²⁶⁶ Da Vinci, *Paragone*, 200.

in perspectival metaphysics. This second sense reminds us of the fragility of mimetic art's affect, and invites the observer to see in Gloucester an image of his or her own status as a spectator engrossed in a fiction. One might link the circularity of Edgar's description – beginning with the sublime, moving to the specificity of the vanishing point and concluding with the sublime – to the persistent presence of the word “nothing” in *King Lear*, to the use of the letter O to suggest both a crown and its loss (as the Fool tells Lear, “Now thou art an O without a figure”),²⁶⁷ and even to the “wooden O” in the prologue to *Henry V*, perhaps Shakespeare's most overt acknowledgement of the limitations of the stage and artistic representation. With Edgar as his mouthpiece, Shakespeare shows his audience just how powerful language can be: when reading this passage or seeing it performed, do many of us not experience a moment of forgetfulness and begin to envision the white cliffs of Dover alongside the blind Gloucester?

In its effective blending of the incalculable and the measured, Edgar's *enargeia*²⁶⁸ is an exemplary combination of the tropes and figures of language (*lexis*) and thought (*dianoia*). Quintilian devotes Book IX of his *Institutio Oratoria* to such combinations

²⁶⁷ *King Lear*, I.iv.183

²⁶⁸ The Latin equivalent of *enargeia* is *evidentia*, meaning “to put before one's eyes.” In Greek, it means “bright, shining.” In the context of Gloucester's blinding, it is interesting to note that George Puttenham classifies *enargeia* as primarily an auricular trope. Cf. Whigham and Rebhorn's commentary to George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Whigham and Rebhorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 227: “For the ancients generally, then, *enargeia* involved the use of ornamental figures to make the listener see something vividly in the mind's eye. Thus, Puttenham's declaration that *enargeia* is a matter of giving satisfaction and delight to the ear is either a misunderstanding of the term, or, since the etymology he presents here is quite clear, a deliberate transformation of it in keeping with his idiosyncratic conception of figures of speech as falling into three categories: those that affect the ear, those that affect the mind, and those that affect both.”

with an eye to the persistent difficulty of separating tropes from figures. A trope, according to Quintilian, is “language transferred from its principal meaning to another for the sake of embellishment,” while a figure, “as its very name shows, is a configuration of language distinct from the common and immediately obvious form.”²⁶⁹ Acknowledging the limitations of such a definition, Quintilian reminds us that “the force of things does not depend on their names” and points to the common cooperation of tropes and figures, which are “often combined in the same sentence, because metaphorical words can contribute to a Figure just as much as literal ones.”²⁷⁰

The figure, or literally *schema*, of speech is a “shape” or “some sort of attitude” in which a thought is expressed, “a purposeful deviation...from the ordinary simple form.”²⁷¹ I have argued here that the dominant figure or schematic structure of Edgar’s rhetorical construction of space is a translation into language of the fundamental representational techniques of single-point perspective summed up with stylistic circularity. We might say that if Lear is “an O without a figure,” Gloucester is an O *with a figure*, conjured out of “airy nothing” by his son’s description. The tropes employed *within* this figure, such as *admiratio*, the hyperbolic utterances of “so low” and “so high,” and the metaphorical likening of fishermen to mice and birds to beetles, are woven into the figure and cooperate in generating the desired effect. Gloucester, convinced by the fiction, gives Poor Tom a jewel for his troubles, renounces life before the “mighty

²⁶⁹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, book IX, p. 15.

²⁷⁰ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, *ibid.*

²⁷¹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, book IX, p. 16.

gods,”²⁷² and falls. Has Edgar managed to “cure” Gloucester of his despair? Can a virtual experience of “the site of desire” satisfy desire itself? Ultimately it seems that what Edgar offers Gloucester is a cathartic experience parallel to our own as spectators of the play. Yet as we witness and are made complicit in this act of staging, the artifice supporting theatrical experience is exposed in an unsettling way. By problematizing the division of the visual and the verbal against a background of placelessness, Shakespeare’s Dover cliff scene is the most elaborate and ambitious of his experiments with perspectival metaphysics as a literary mode.

²⁷² *King Lear*, IV.vi.34

CHAPTER FOUR

Braving Aesthetic Transience: Ben Jonson's Poetic Theory and the Legitimation of the Court Masque

“In all plays, even *Hamlet*, the scenery is the best part.”

~John Ashbery, “Cliffhanger”

4.1: “*At the hard-handed mercy of Mychanitiens*”: *The Fate of the Performed Text*

In what has become a classic essay of film criticism, Tom Gunning described cinema before 1906-7 as the “cinema of attractions,” an approach to the cinematic medium that prioritized visual effects over linear narrative or plot. Films by Méliès and Lumière exploited the camera’s potential to bring time and space under artistic control, giving rise to an “exhibitionist” cinema. This kind of film was more invested in showing than telling, and operated on a paratactic model: by bringing together visually striking tableaux, the cinema of attractions eschewed the constraints of conventional diegesis.

Gunning explains:

The trick film... is itself a series of displays, of magical attractions, rather than a primitive sketch of narrative continuity. Many trick films are, in effect, plotless, a series of transformations strung together with little connection and certainly no characterization... The story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema.²⁷³

“The magical possibilities of the cinema,” however, were not unprecedented, for cinematic experimentation owed much to theatrical traditions. Spectators have always been drawn to the magical possibilities of performance, but the changing technologies of its presentation have informed their experience in unique ways. “Every change in film history,” writes Gunning, “implies a change in its address to the spectator, and each period constructs its spectator in a new way.”²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Tom Gunning, “The cinema of attractions : early film, its spectator, and the avant-garde,” *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

²⁷⁴ Gunning, *ibid.*

As the technologies of production became more elaborate in the early seventeenth-century English theater, playwrights inevitably considered the effect these changing conditions had on the performance and reception of their work. Proscenium arches, perspective curtains, “traverses,” and backdrops, machinery under and on the stage, *periaktoi* or triangular pillars on either side of the stage space that revolved to reveal entirely new scenery – all of these appeared in the English theatre with increasing frequency, reaching their most elaborate employment in the Stuart court masque. Such technologies appealed to the sense of sight, and as Isaak Wake put it in his 1607 *Rex Platonicus*, they operated “to the amazement of all.”²⁷⁵

Authors, however, were often less amazed than annoyed with such developments because they drew attention away from the written text, subordinating the literary aspect of performance to the visual. What was at stake was a question of perspective in a broad sense: what should be at the center of a playgoer’s experience and consideration, and how should one theoretically establish a relationship between visual and verbal elements of a performance? Should the visual elements be understood as constituting a frame for the playwright’s action or plot (Alberti’s *istoria*) or are they more integral to the performance as a whole? One way to think of the relationship between a performance’s visual and verbal elements was as body and soul. Thomas Dekker, for example, complained that though “the soule that should give life and a tongue” to a work issued from “out of Writers pens,” “the limnes of it ly at the hard-handed mercy of Mychanitiens.”²⁷⁶ The

²⁷⁵ Cited in Alardyce Nicoll, *Stuart Masques and the Renaissance Stage* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1980), 63.

²⁷⁶ Nicoll, *Stuart Masques and the Renaissance Stage*, 23.

introduction of new visual effects to the theater thus required writers to rethink their role in dramatic performance and led some authors to assume quite radical positions against the ascendance of the visual, what Henry Wotton would call in his 1624 *Elements of Architecture*, “the Royaltie of Sight.”²⁷⁷ In this way, changes in the technology of presentation and the shifting tastes of the English audience spurred new thinking about poetics, the dissemination of printed texts, and the purpose of art.

Although, as Stephen Orgel observes, Elizabethan theatres were essentially “theaters not of setting and scenic machines, not of illusions, but of actors,” changes were already occurring in the theatrical culture of sixteenth-century England.²⁷⁸ An expanding theoretical vocabulary of the arts heralded a new conception of the stage and the kind of aesthetic experience it was capable of providing. The rediscovery of Vitruvius’s *Ten Books on Architecture*, with its descriptions of classical stage design and performance, ignited a new interest in the possibilities of the theater. In her book *Theatre of the World*, Frances Yates refutes the “widespread conviction” among scholars that “the Renaissance ‘idea of the architect’ must be discounted in studies of Elizabethan England as likely to have been unfamiliar to the general public.”²⁷⁹ Examining the catalogue of John Dee’s library, she argues that well before Inigo Jones would be credited with bringing Vitruvianism to England, many of the concepts central to his architectural theory were already in circulation. Dee incorporated many ideas from Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria*

²⁷⁷ Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture. A facsimile reprint of the first edition (London, 1624)*, ed. Hard (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1968).

²⁷⁸ Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), 5.

²⁷⁹ Frances Yates, *Theatre of the World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 21.

and *De pictura*, from Durer's *De symmetria humani corporis*, and from Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* in his widely-circulated preface to Henry Billingsley's 1570 English translation of Euclid. As Yates explains: "Nearly fifty years before Inigo Jones, the 'Vitruvius Britannicus', began belatedly to initiate neoclassical building in England, John Dee was teaching the middle-class Elizabethan public, through his popular Preface, the basic principles of proportion and design, and demonstrating that all the mathematical arts subserve Architecture as their queen."²⁸⁰ As difficult as it is to discern the extent of Dee's influence on the literary and artistic culture of Elizabethan England, Yates's point is important because it reminds us that the late-humanist discussions of rhetorical balance and proportion, the culture of commonplaces or *topoi*, had a counterpart, albeit less commonly acknowledged, in the architectural discourse about the properties and potential distributions of space, in the related discourse about mapping and topography, and in the rising interest in illusionistic techniques in painting and stage design.

As seventeenth-century playwrights turned increasingly to a dramatic mode anchored by the unities of time and place, stage designers began to experiment with new ways of physically structuring the visual space of the stage. Conventional wisdom had it that art should reflect life, and some commentators on the arts took this sentiment to highly inventive extremes. For Leone di Somi, as Allardyce Nicoll writes, the justification of a fivefold structure for drama "was to be found in the fact that drama should form a mirror of life, and that man, the perfect creation of nature, has five fingers, five toes, five extremities, and five senses."²⁸¹ Classical rhetoric specified five canons of

²⁸⁰ Yates, *Theatre of the World*, 21.

²⁸¹ Nicoll, *Stuart Masques and the Renaissance Stage*, 5.

speech (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and actio*), and indeed Jonson defined “poet” in his commonplace book, *Discoveries*, as a “Maker, or a fainer: His Art, an Art of imitation, or faining; expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony, according to *Aristotle*...not hee which writeth in measure only; but that fayneth and formeth a fable, and writes things like the Truth. For, the Fable and Fiction is (as it were) the forme and Soule of any Poeticall worke, or *Poeme*.”²⁸² One earned the name of poet only by achieving that rare harmony of *fabula* and measured form, the former breathing life into the latter, rendering it visible in the imagination. Of speech, Jonson writes:

Language most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the Image of the Parent of it, the mind. No glasse renders a mans forme, or likenesse, so true as his speech. Nay, it is likened to a man; and as we consider feature, and composition in a man; so words in Language: in the greatnesse, aptnesse, sound, structure, and harmony of it.²⁸³

Mind is the parent of speech, and speech is the image of the mind: it is precisely this kind of closed model of expression that characterizes Jonson’s conception of language.

Jonson’s claim that speech “shewes a man,” mirrors his “forme,” and essentially provides a true “Image” of the mind is significant because it attributes to language an image-making power that displaces and transcends the “graven images” of other artificers.²⁸⁴

As the most celebrated writer of court masques during the reign of James I, Ben Jonson was intimately involved in the lavish culture of dramatic spectacle, and he

²⁸² Ben Jonson, *Timber, or, Discoveries* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999), sect. 255.

²⁸³ *Timber, or, Discoveries*, sect. 230.

²⁸⁴ Exodus 20:4: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

brought his theory of language and poetics to bear on this increasingly important art form. His involvement with the masque does much to explain his conception of poetry both dramatic and lyrical, for the conditions of the masque's performance and the culture of the court required him to refine his ideas about the relationship between visual and verbal elements on the stage. His earliest plays express skepticism towards the inclusion of visual elements, and in their prologues or inductions he routinely mocks the use of scenery to frame or enhance the imaginative potential of the playwright's descriptions. Indeed, he openly mocks the inclusion of special effects that distract the audience from the primacy of the performed text. "Away, wag; what wouldst thou make an implement of me?" exclaims one of the boys fighting for the right to deliver the prologue to *Cynthia's Revels*: "Slid, the boy takes me for a piece of perspective, I hold my life, or some silk curtain, come to hang the stage here! Sir crack, I am none of your fresh pictures, that use to beautify the decayed dead arras in a public theatre."²⁸⁵ The boy's joke hinges on a distinction between the material accoutrements of the stage and the actors who animate the script in their performance. While the "decayed dead arras" presents the same scene to the audience regardless of the play on stage, the actors engage their audience actively, inviting them not merely to gaze upon the work as a removed spectator but to enter it imaginatively and follow its lead. Jonson's induction here requests that the audience redirect their attention from the way the theater frames the play to the lively unfolding of the play itself.

²⁸⁵ Ben Jonson, induction to *Cynthia's Revels* in *Ben Jonson*, ed. Herford and Simpson, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963-70).

Jonson's many comments about stagecraft and poetics prescribe that one should not merely contemplate a dramatic work as a "dead" object but should instead experience it as a living thing from the moment the curtain is drawn. In this he agrees with Aristotle, whose comments on unity in the mimetic arts are foundational to Jonson's conception of dramatic poetry:

Just as in the other mimetic arts an imitation is unified when it is the imitation of a unified object, so in poetry the plot, since it is the imitation of an action, must be the imitation of a unified action comprising a whole; and the events which are the parts of the plot must be so organized that if any one of them is displaced or taken away, the whole will be shaken and put out of joint; for if the presence or absence of a thing makes no discernible difference, that thing is not part of the whole.²⁸⁶

The prologue appended to *Every Man in his Humour* (1616), which was likely composed well after its run in the theatre (1598), is a classicist manifesto for dramatic production.

Ridiculing Shakespeare's liberal use of the chorus in *Henry V*, the prologue dismisses special effects and other such additions as unnecessary to a coherent plot, for they "make no discernible difference." The prologue states that the author:

...prayes, you will be pleas'd to see
 One such, to day, as other playes should be.
 Where neither *Chorus* wafts you ore the seas;
 Nor creaking throne comes downe, the boyes to please;
 Nor nimble squibbe is seen, to make afear'd
 The gentlewomen; nor roul'd bullet heard
 To say, it thunders; nor tempestuous drumme
 Rumbles, to tell you when the storme doth come;
 But deedes, and language, such as men do use:
 And persons, such as *Comoedie* would chuse,
 When she would shew an Image of the times,
 And sport with humane follies, not with crimes.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. Hutton (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 53-54.

²⁸⁷ Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, ed. Harp (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 346-7.

The word “crimes” does double duty here, for it denotes both subject matter inappropriate to the stage and the use of sensory cues intended to catch the spectator’s attention and inform his or her interpretation. He suggests that a “unified action comprising a whole” should be able to stand on its own without superfluous additions. By this unusual series of nouns paired with awkward adjectives, Jonson illustrates the fundamental disjunction between aural and visual effects, which appeal only to the senses, and “an Image of the times,” which comes into critical focus only gradually through the complex interactions of characters appropriately drawn.²⁸⁸ A synecdoche for royalty shouldn’t *creak*, nor should a bullet *roll*; a drum cannot be *tempestuous*, nor can a “squibbe” – a firecracker or other form of pyrotechnic – be *nimble*. The point is that these vulgar effects do not contribute to the critical appreciation of “humane follies” but appeal instead to the desires – “the boyes to please” – and the fears – “to make afear’d the gentlewomen” – of the audience.

Jonson’s choice of the word *nimble* is particularly sardonic, for it literally means “quick at grasping, comprehending, or learning; (hence) clever, wise”; yet the only comprehension he attributes to the gentlewomen is the simple titillation of hearing something go *bang*. Highly nuanced verbal play characterizes Jonson’s work as a playwright, so it is no surprise that he expected his audience to pay close attention to the quality of his language and make a good faith effort at comprehension before publicly

²⁸⁸ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 49-50: “Comedy...is an imitation of persons worse than the average”; “Epic poetry followed tragedy to the extent of being an imitation of good men in the medium of metrical language.”

denigrating his work. In the prologue to *Cynthia's Revels*, which is not to be confused with the induction, Jonson writes:

If gracious silence, sweet attention,
Quick sight, and quicker apprehension
(The lights of judgment's throne) shine anywhere,
Our doubtful author hopes this is their sphere,
And therefore opens he himself to those,
To other weaker beams his labors close,
As loth to prostitute their virgin strain
To every vulgar and adulterate brain.²⁸⁹

To put it in Gunning's terms, the spectator that Jonson wanted to attract or at least participate in shaping was one of "quick sight, and quicker apprehension," one whose experience of the work at hand would yield rarer fruit than the scraps of piecemeal interpretation. "It is the solemn vice of interpretation that deforms the figure of many a faire *Scene*, by drawing it awry; and indeed is the civill murder of most good *Playes*," declaims a boy in the chorus of Jonson's late play *The Magnetic Lady*.²⁹⁰ That Jonson describes the "vice of interpretation" in terms of draftsmanship is revealing, for it suggests that interpretation transforms the poet's "virgin strain" into a rude sketch approximating the original. It also reinforces Jonson's opinion of the text's imaginative independence from its scenery and other special effects. As Socrates says to Ion, speaking about poetry is "not a subject you've mastered...it's a divine power that moves you, as a 'Magnetic' stone moves iron rings" undiminished in its original force:

This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does—pull other rings—so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from

²⁸⁹ Ben Jonson, "Prologue to *Cynthia's Revels*" in *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, 347.

²⁹⁰ Ben Jonson, *The Magnetic Lady* printed in *Ben Jonson*, ed. Herford and Simpson, vol. 6.

one another. And the power in all of them depends on this stone. In the same way the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended.²⁹¹

Jonson's elevated conception of his own work, which the publication of his *Works* in 1616 underscored, made him an easy target for ridicule among his contemporaries. It does explain, however, why he seemed so ready to call those who did not understand his work "fitter spectators for the bears than us, or the puppets."²⁹²

Given Jonson's stated preference for the verbal over the visual, his anti-visual bias, it is ironic that he would come to play such a major role in the development of the English court masque. Of dramatic forms, the masque relies most heavily on the very practices that Jonson elsewhere ridicules. If "no glasse renders a mans forme, or likenesse, so true as his speech," is there not a potential or even inevitable conflict between the physical, visual elements that shape and inform a spectator's relationship to the action on the stage? For Jonson's theory of language and poetics to prove relevant to the genre of the masque, he would have appropriate terms and themes central to the artistic theory behind the visual arts, which were achieving a new prominence in England at the beginning of the sixteenth century. "In the visual arts," writes Ernest Gilman, "England had barely felt the impact of the Renaissance before the end of the sixteenth century, and when it did the succession of continental styles were more or less simultaneously available as options."²⁹³ Central to these styles, however, from

²⁹¹ Plato, *Ion* in *Plato: The Complete Works*, ed. Cooper (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 941.

²⁹² *The Magnetic Lady*, II.Chorus, ln.69-79.

²⁹³ Gilman, *The Curious Perspective*, 52.

mannerism to linear perspective and anamorphosis, is the awareness that the practices of visual representation are as capable of bringing forth a convincing appearance as they are of demonstrating that appearance to be transient, artificial, and illusory. What Jonson cleverly seized on is the temporal quality of such aesthetic experience, and he set against this vanishing quality of spectacle the enduring significance of the poetic text.

Jonson's perspective on the masque derives from his conception of dramatic poetry, which, in the tradition of Sir Philip Sidney and George Puttenham, viewed poetry as capable of bringing forth imaginative landscapes in which characters could interact and moral situations could develop and evolve in time. Of the operation of the imagination or "fantasy" in the first book of the *The Art of English Poesy*, George Puttenham writes:

And this fantasy may be resembled to a glass, as hath been said, whereof there be many tempers and manner of makings, as the perspectives do acknowledge, for some be false glasses and show things otherwise than they be indeed, and others right as they be indeed, neither fairer nor fouler, nor greater nor smaller. There be again of these glasses that show things exceeding fair and comely, others that show figures very monstrous and ill-favored. 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.²⁹⁴

The fantasy of man ("if it be not disordered") is likened here to "perspectives" that present the world either worse than it is, equal to what it is, or better than what it is. The kind of poetry to which Sidney and Jonson aspired was one which could bring forth a glimpse of a golden or ideal world. Like Xenophon's Cyrus or Homer's Achilles, such a glimpse of the ideal could have a real and positive impact on its hearers, who then might

²⁹⁴ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 110.

be inspired to be become greater than they are. In the context of Jonson’s masques, this idealized conception of poetry’s lasting impact is important to understanding the dichotomy that Jonson envisioned between the intellectual and moral content of a work – the “soul” of the text – and the visual elements that temporarily served to frame its enactment before the court.

Jonson’s interest in publication is crucial to understanding the relationship between the visual and verbal elements of performance as he conceived it. In *Oberon*, for example, he translates Inigo Jones’s scenery into a description that reads partly like a stage direction, and partly like one of Spenser’s descriptions in *The Faerie Queene*:

*There the whole scene opened, and within was discovered the frontispiece of a bright and glorious palace whose gates and walls were transparent. Before the gates lay two sylvans, armed with their clubs and dressed in leaves, asleep. At this, the satyrs wondering, Silenus proceeds.*²⁹⁵

As soon as the scene is set, Jonson proceeds to treat it as part of his poetic fiction, projecting meaning onto it and explaining what this “bright and glorious palace” signifies:

Look! does not his palace show
Like another sky of lights?
Yonder with him live the knights
Once the noblest of the earth,
Quickened by a second birth,
Who for prowess and for truth
There are crowned with lasting youth,
And do hold, by Fate’s command,
Seats of bliss in fairyland.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Ben Jonson, *Oberon* in *Jonson: Selected Masques*, ln. 97-100

²⁹⁶ *Oberon*, ln. 101-109

Silenus's use of simile transforms the setting into a literary element by rendering it metaphorical and significant within the poetic economy of the text. It is only one of many such examples available in the printed masques, but it reveals Jonson's determination to keep the physical qualities of the setting subordinate to the imaginative or metaphysical unfolding of his fiction in time. His treatment of these settings suggests that they were significant not in themselves, but on account of their figurative significance within the masque; even their evanescent, "vanishing" quality was more important as a literary effect than a visual one, as he suggests when he describes in terms of oblivion the disappearance of the "hags" in *The Masque of Queens*:

*In the heat of their dance on the sudden was heard a sound of loud music, as if many instruments had made one blast; with which not only the hags themselves but the hell into which they ran quite **vanished**, and the whole face of the scene altered, **scarce suffering the memory of such a thing**. (my emphases)²⁹⁷*

By including descriptions of how things were made to appear and establishing what they meant within the performance of the masque, Jonson's printed text offers a clear demonstration as to how he interpreted such visual elements as primarily illustrative of his masque's progression and its central themes. Settings, Jonson suggests, were significant on account of their impermanence; the text, however, was what endured, the imperishable soul of the work.

One finds scattered throughout Ben Jonson's later writings a number of reflections upon his career as the chief masque writer to the Jacobean court. In an essay entitled "Of Worthless Aims" preserved in his commonplace book, *Discoveries*, he writes:

²⁹⁷ Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* in *Jonson: Complete Masques*, ln. 334-337.

Have I not seen the pomp of a whole kingdom, and what a foreign king could bring hither also to make himself gazed and wondered at, laid forth as it were to the show, and vanish all away in a day? And shall that which could not fill the expectation of few hours, entertain and take up our whole lives, when even it appeared as superfluous to the possessors, as to me that was a spectator? The bravery was shown, it was not possessed; while it boasted itself, it perished. It is vile and a poor thing to place our happiness on these desires. Say we wanted them all: famine ends famine.²⁹⁸

The desire for lasting significance voiced here structures the whole of Jonson's unique approach to the masque. He argues that the aim and purpose of the literary arts is to provide its addressee with a "bravery" that endures after aesthetic experience has ended. "Wanting," that is, lacking the culture of entertainment by spectacular "pomp" puts an end to a more significant lack – the famine of the mind. Jonson chooses the word "bravery" because in this period it bore two oppositional meanings that reflected, in their tension, the distinction he sought to make between lasting art and vanishing spectacle. On the one hand, it invoked the positive values of daring, courage, virtue and fortitude, as Sir Philip Sidney uses it in his *Apology for Poetry*: "He receiued more brauerie of minde, by the patterne of Achilles, then by hearing the definition of Fortitude."²⁹⁹ On the other, it denoted superficial appearance, material finery, and ostentatious embellishment, as Jonson himself applies it to the foppish courtier Sir Diaphanous Silkworm in *The Magnetic Lady*.³⁰⁰ Sir Walter Raleigh employs it similarly in his *Remains*: "Exceed not in

²⁹⁸ *Timber, or, Discoveries*, sect. 184.

²⁹⁹ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, 91.

³⁰⁰ *The Magnetic Lady*, II.iii.71-2: "The bravery pricked out, / To make my dainty charge a viscountess!"

the humour of rags and bravery.”³⁰¹ In his caricature of Sir Diaphanous Silkworm, Jonson depicts bravery as a humoral condition tending to the overvaluation of finery. After a skirmish, for example, Sir Diaphanous stoically declares: “There’s nothing vexes me, but that he has staid / My new white sattin Doublet.”³⁰²

That the “bravery” of a work of art could be either mere show *or* conducive to a lasting possession of virtue indicates an important aspect of Jonson’s critical disposition, helping to situate his conception of literature within the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions of Western thought. In its battle against Sophism, Platonic philosophy established the dialectic of permanence and change as preeminent, thereby supplanting *mythos* with *logos*.³⁰³ This meant that one could access truth only by means of rational argument and not by reference to a set of interlocking and mutually affirming narratives, myths or opinions (*doxa*). This fundamental development ensured the centrality of logic in the trivium of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and established skepticism towards the power of seemingly persuasive but ultimately empty speech.³⁰⁴ “Where [rhetoric’s] force

³⁰¹ Sir Walter Raleigh, *Remains* (1644): “Exceed not in the humour of rags and bravery” (offered as an example in the Oxford English Dictionary)

³⁰² *The Magnetic Lady*, III.iii.7-8

³⁰³ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 26.

³⁰⁴ Cited in Thomas Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (New York, NY: Longman, 1990), 18: “Sophism advocated its own variety of skepticism, but it was a skepticism towards the possibility of exact knowledge (episteme). Incapable of accessing truth with absolute certainty, mankind’s best course of action was to exercise prudence within the sphere of opinions and conventions, as Isocrates writes in his *Antidosis*: ‘It is not in the nature of man to attain exact knowledge (episteme) by which, having it, we can discern clearly what we should do or say. From what is left, I would say that those who are wise are those who are able by opinion (doxa) to hit upon what is for the most part the best course of action.’”

is greater,” writes Cicero in *De Oratore*, “there it is all the more to be united with probity and the greatest prudence; if we hand over the means of speaking eloquently to people who lack such virtues, we will not really make them orators, but will put arms in the hands of madmen.”³⁰⁵ Similarly, the Judeo-Christian tradition extended Plato’s skepticism towards appearances both rhetorical and mimetic, entrenching and radicalizing an anti-materialist aspect: “It is written,” one reads in the Gospel of Matthew, that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”³⁰⁶ The word or *logos* thus came to occupy a privileged status as the vehicle of truth while experiential knowledge, the world as experienced through the senses, was relegated to an inferior position: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.”³⁰⁷

In his overview of Western philosophy’s relationship to visuality, Martin Jay reiterates the central distinction between “alternating traditions of *speculation* with the eye of the mind and *observation* with the two eyes of the body,” claiming that this fissure separates the “varieties of ocularcentrism that have so deeply penetrated Western culture.”³⁰⁸ What Jay calls “speculation,” “construed as the rational perception of clear and distinct forms with the unclouded eye of the mind,” would be for Jonson the surest

³⁰⁵ Cicero, *De Oratore*, III.xiv.55; cited by Juan Luis Vives in *On the Causes of the Corruption of the Arts*, IV.ii. Printed in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. Rebhorn. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

³⁰⁶ Matthew 4.4.

³⁰⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:12

³⁰⁸ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 30.

way to bravery possessed. “No glass renders a man’s form or likeness so true as his speech” Jonson writes in *Discoveries*; similarly, in “Of Writing Well,” he states: “The conceits of the mind are pictures of things, and the tongue is the interpreter of those pictures.”³⁰⁹ Neither statement is particularly original but both are central to understanding Jonson’s attitude towards the visual components of the masques and, consequentially, the manner in which he conceived of his own role within the generic confines of this multifaceted, synesthetic art form.

Jonson’s conception of poetry reflects the varied literary influences to which he was exposed while a student at Westminster school. His mentor, the humanist William Camden, that “most reverend head, to whom I owe / All that I am in arts, all that I know,”³¹⁰ was, as Ian Donaldson observes, “a man absorbed as much by the achievements of modern Britain as by those of classical antiquity.” Under Camden’s guidance Ben Jonson received a rigorous education not only in the classics of Greek and Latin but also in the native tradition of English verse. While Jonson was a schoolboy at Westminster, Sir Philip Sidney’s fame was at its height. Camden, who had known Sidney personally at Oxford, called him the “all in all for prose and verse,” “the miracle of our age,” and his enthusiasm rubbed off on his protégé.³¹¹ In his prefatory Epistle to *Volpone*, Jonson reveals a debt to Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* when he writes of “the impossibility of any mans being the good *Poet*, without first being a good *Man*.” In the *Apology* Sidney

³⁰⁹ *Timber, or, Discoveries*, sections 45, 56.

³¹⁰ From Ben Jonson, *Epigrams*, 14.1-3; cited in Donaldson, Ian. *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 78-9.

³¹¹ Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, 77.

recuperated the model of the classical orator and conflated it with the contemporary poet at a time when poetry had fallen into disesteem. The *Apology*, as Wesley Trimpi writes, is “Christian and humanistic, it combines its arguments into a synthesis remarkably similar to the portrait of the ideal orator which Cicero derives from Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates.”³¹² It is no wonder, then, that Jonson would invoke this same argument when the theater came under increasingly vituperative attacks for blasphemy and immorality. Despite his youthful run-ins with the law, Jonson was able to claim a kind of moral high ground by asserting that the poet, whether writing lyric poems, masques, or plays, must always possess, as Quintilian puts it, that “quality...which is in the very nature of things the greatest and most important, that is, he must be a good man.”³¹³

This appeal to the ethical function of literature was central to Jonson’s theory of poetry because it supported the idea that genres often dismissed as common (theater) and spectacular (the masque) could prove, in the right hands, vehicles for the exposure of vice and the instantiation of virtue. The establishment of this close relationship between art and ethos was similarly essential to Jonson’s aesthetic theory, for it laid the foundation for an art that retained its relevance even after aesthetic experience had ended. Sidney defends comic, tragic, lyric, elegiac, and heroic poetry in his *Apology*, and it is fair to say that Jonson considered these modes simply as different formal aspects of a common wellspring. In the conception of the poet developed by Sir Philip Sidney, prophetic or

³¹² Wesley Trimpi, “Sir Philip Sidney’s An Apology for Poetry,” *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Glyn P. Norton, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989-) 195.

³¹³ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), XII.1.1.

vatic musings were not of themselves sufficient means of accessing the Hippocrene spring; insight had to be tempered by prudence if poetry was to do more than “infect the fancy with unworthy objects.”³¹⁴ Just as Sidney acknowledges that poetry can be used for good or ill, that when abused “it can do more hurt than any other army of words,” so Jonson stresses the ethical function of the author as a way of raising imaginative literature to a new height, of granting it a dignity not only of thought but of action, or as Sidney puts it following Aristotle “not *gnosis* but *praxis* must be the fruit.”³¹⁵

Jonson was personally acquainted with the Sidney family, whose lineage and ancestral home he famously celebrated in “To Penshurst.” It is illustrative that in a poem written as a New Year’s gift in 1600 to Sir Philip Sidney’s daughter, entitled “Epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland,” Jonson presents himself as Sidney’s poetic successor and heir, a unique figure amongst the “poets, poet’accios, poetasters,” and “poetitoes”³¹⁶ of the age:

There like a rich, and golden pyramid,
Borne up by statues, shall I rear your head,
Above your under-carvéd ornaments,
And show, how, to life, my soul presents
Your form impressed there: not with tickling rhymes,
Or commonplaces, filched, that take these times,
But high, and noble matter, such as flies
From brains entranced, and filled with ecstasies;
Moods, which the godlike Sidney oft did prove,
And your brave friend, and mine so well did love.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, 105.

³¹⁵ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, 94.

³¹⁶ *The Magnetic Lady*, Induction, ln. 9

³¹⁷ Ben Jonson, “Epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland” in *The Forest*, printed in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*, ed. Parfitt (London: Penguin, 1975), ln. 83-92.

Reiterating the emphasis that Sidney places on the vatic nature of the poet in his *Apology for Poetry*, Jonson's lines suggest that poetry is visionary and ecstatic in its invention yet lasting in its disposition; it is an art of translating flashes of insight into lasting forms that endure, like works of sculpture or architecture, in their monumentality. In the fourth book of his *Odes*, Horace writes of those who have perished for want of a sacred poet – “sed omnes inlacrimabiles / urgentur ignotique longa / nocte, carent quia vate sacro”³¹⁸ – and Jonson incorporates this sentiment into his poem:

It is the muse, alone, can raise to heaven,
And, at her strong arms' end, hold up, and even,
The souls, she loves. Those other glorious notes,
Inscribed in touch or marble, or the coats
Painted, or carved upon our great men's tombs,
Or in their windows; do but prove the wombs,
That bred them, graves: when they were born, they died,
That had no muse to make their fame abide.³¹⁹

Although Jonson likens poetry to the other representational arts, its relationship to them is only metaphorical. That the muse “hold[s] up, and even, / The souls, she loves,” demonstrates that the formal qualities of a poem cannot change or decay – that is, become uneven, faded, or otherwise worn – with the passage of time.

Rayna Kalas, writing of Puttenham's theory of poetry developed in *The Arte of English Poesy*, observes that the poetic image “is not so much a visual picture as a material imagining.” Her use of the term “material” is significant and nicely

³¹⁸ Horace. *Carmina. Liber IV*. Cambridge [England] ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2011, Book IV.ix.26-8.

³¹⁹ “Epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland,” ln. 41-48.

complements Jonson's comments about the formal qualities of poetry and his notion of speech as the glass that renders "mans forme":

To contend that there is a particular materiality to poetic phantasy distinguishes it from purely speculative contrivings of thought on the one hand and from the visual spectacle of performance or graven imagery on the other. Poesy is characterized therefore not as a spectacular display but as an actual spectacle, an eyeglass that artificially reproduces in an altered medium the natural activity of sense perception.³²⁰

The "form impressed" in verse is able to endure because the poem's material, language, is not prone to decay. In his opening comments to *Hymenai*, Jonson claims that had the entertainment not possessed a form or argument that appealed to its spectators' understanding, "the glory of all these solemnities had perished like a blaze and gone out in the beholders' eyes."³²¹ I discuss this passage in the larger context of *Hymenai* below, but I include it here because it offers a clear example of the theory of literature that recurs throughout to Jonson's oeuvre. The disposition of language, which largely qualifies a piece of writing as 'poetic,' imparts to the mind a form unchanged since its original moment of invention. In this way, reading or reciting can be said to *reanimate* a poem's native spirit long after its author has passed away.

"In all speech," Jonson writes in *Discoveries*, "words and sense are as the body and the soul. The sense is as the life and soul of language, without which all words are dead."³²² By uniting sense and its material representation in language, poetry passes on to posterity something which does not alter in the way that inscriptions in stone wear away

³²⁰ Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 138.

³²¹ Ben Jonson, *Hymenai* in *Jonson: Complete Masques*, ln. 4-5

³²² *Timber, or, Discoveries*, section 41.

and colors on painted coats fade. Word and sense combine to create a poetic image that is both mimetic and philosophical, as Sidney writes:

For whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, [the poet] giveth a perfect picture of it in some one by whom he presupposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example. A perfect picture I say, for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth.³²³

While the architect and painter appeal to the vision of the eye, the poet appeals to the vision of the mind, “the sight of the soul.” If the philosopher speaks abstractedly and the historian speaks particularly, the poet combines these two modes, as Trimpi explains: “As Cicero insists that the ideal orator negotiate between generic and specific issues, so Sidney insists that the poet combine in his *imago* the philosopher’s abstract proposition [*thesis*] and the historian’s particular case [*hypothesis*].”³²⁴ What makes a literary work distinctly poetic is its ability to furnish a conception or *imago* that renders what is otherwise ideal comprehensible and thus capable of being possessed long after aesthetic experience has ended.

4.2: *Regulating Spectatorship: Samuel Daniel’s Vision of the Twelve Goddesses and Ben Jonson’s Hymenai*

Although Ben Jonson sought to gain new credibility for the masque as a form of dramatic poetry, his high opinion of the genre was anomalous. “Jonson was a special case among masque writers,” notes Stephen Orgel, “because he treated the form seriously as

³²³ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, 90.

³²⁴ Trimpi, “Sir Philip Sidney’s An Apology for Poetry,” 192.

literature.”³²⁵ The Tudor and Elizabethan masque had been a form of light entertainment, a variety of spectacle characterized by music and dance in which the literary text played an ancillary role. The masque as Jonson inherited it was a genre of poorly defined boundaries that derived from Italian *intermezzi*, originally light diversions of music and dancing between the acts of a play. What he left behind him was a collection of unique, occasional dramatic works that showcased the versatility of the English language across a wide range of subjects, from the historical to the fantastic. In the vagueness of the genre as it was then understood, Jonson detected an opportunity to shape the masque to a poetic vehicle of his own purposes.

Jonson was keen to distance himself from other writers of masques, whose work did not aspire to the higher function of poetry as he conceived it. *Love Restored*, for instance, opens with a “Masquerado” telling the spectators that their expectations of a “device” this evening will be disappointed:

A pretty fine speech was taken up o’ the poet too, which if he never be paid for now, it’s no matter; his wit costs him nothing. Unless we should come in like a morris-dance, and whistle our ballad ourselves, I know not what we should do: we ha’ no other musician to play our tunes but the wild music here, and the rogue play-boy that acts Cupid is got so hoarse, your majesty cannot hear him half the breadth o’ your chair.³²⁶

Plutus soon enters to chase this amateur clown off the stage, exclaiming: “What makes this light, feathered vanity here? Away, impertinent folly! Infect not this assembly.” A clever way to begin the night’s entertainment, a comedic figure clashes with a tragic one,

³²⁵ Stephen Orgel, *Ben Jonson: Selected Masques* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 2.

³²⁶ Ben Jonson, *Love Restored* in *Ben Jonson: Selected Masques*, ed. Orgel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 116-7.

and what is at stake in their dispute is the nature of the genre in which both participate. “I tell thee, I will have no more masquing,” states Plutus, “I will not buy a false and fleeting delight so dear.” These private entertainments were not just taxing for the many individuals involved in making them happen; they were also incredibly expensive.³²⁷ Considering the resources devoted to these entertainments, making them worthy of remembrance seemed a desirable and achievable goal. From Jonson’s comments about the masque it seems that it was not the ratio of duration to expense that concerned him, but the lack of poetic and philosophical content worth further contemplation. A “false and fleeting” work remarkable for its “vanity” is the opposite of what Jonson intended to stage before the sovereign, and in his more elaborate masques one remarks a distinct gravity and insistence on the solemnity of the occasion.

In his attempt to establish the masque as a literary form worthy of publication and critical consideration, Jonson was going against a trend supported by some of England’s most renowned poets. In Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, for instance, Spenser has the enchanter Busirane employ the masque as a device to stall Britomart’s passage through his chambers and frustrate her quest. Busirane chooses this form of entertainment because he intends it to distract and beguile Britomart, thereby buying time for himself as he attempts to break Amoret’s resolve. Busirane’s use of the masque is strategic and self-interested, and one can infer from this scenario that Spenser did not consider the masque a particularly instructive or virtuous art form:

And forth yssewed, as on the readie flore

³²⁷ Orgel, *Ben Jonson: Selected Masques*, note to p. 3: “It was not uncommon for the king to spend £3,000 (the equivalent of several hundred thousand dollars today) on a production that would be performed one or twice, and witnessed by a thousand people.”

Of some Theatre, a graue personage,
 That in his hand braunch of laurel bore,
 With comely haueour and count'nance sage,
 Yclad in costly garments, fit for tragicke Stage.³²⁸

The figure that comes forward to announce the masque does so adorned in all the insignia of tragic dramatic poetry. Bearing laurel and apparently celebrated for his gravity and wisdom, the figure moves to center stage to command the attention of his audience:

Proceeding to the midst, he stil did stand,
 As if in the minde he somewhat had to say,
 And to the vulgare beckning with his hand,
 In signe of silence, as to heare a play,
 By liuely actions he gan bewray
 Some argument of matter passioned;
 Which doen, he backe retyred soft away,
 And passing by, his name discouered,
 Ease, on his robe in golden letters cyphered.³²⁹

The parallel similes “As if in the minde he somewhat had to say” and “as to heare a play” suggest that something does not quite add up. It is *as if* he were a poet, but what he presents here “by liuely actions” – not words – remains unclear: although we gather that his subject matter is *supposed to be* serious, all we can conclude is that we are to witness “some argument of matter passioned.” The phrase *argument of matter passioned* is delightfully satirical as it deflates the bombast characteristic of the “vulgare” Elizabethan stage. What we have here is not a celebrated poet as he would present himself but a poetaster named *Ease*, from whom we should expect a leisurely entertainment for easily amused spectators.

Spenser’s masque of Cupid may perhaps qualify as an “argument of matter passioned” in its broadest sense, but it is actually little more than a procession of

³²⁸ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xii.3

³²⁹ *F.Q.* III.xii.4

personifications with a single image or vision in tow. The performance operates according to a peculiar logic by which a series of malicious and destructive affections are “enranged orderly” and presented as if they constituted a harmonious vision:

The noble Mayde, still standing all this vewd,
 And merueild at this straunge intendiment;
 With that a ioyous fellowship issewd
 Of Minstrales, making goodly merriment,
 With wanton Bardes, and Rymers impudent,
 All which together song full chearefully
 A lay of loues delight, with sweet concent:
 After whom marcht a iolly company,
 In manner of a maske, enranged orderly.

The whiles a most delitious harmony,
 In full straunge notes was sweetly heard to sound,
 That the rare sweetnesse of the melody
 The feeble sences wholly did confound,
 And the frayle soule in deep delight night drownd:
 And when it ceast, shrill trompets lowd did bray,
 That their report did far away rebound,
 And when they ceast, it gan againe to play,
 The whiles the maskers marched forth in trim array.³³⁰

The orderly arranged “iolly company” consists of *Fansy* and *Desyre*, *Doubt* and *Daunger*, *Feare* and *Hope*, *Dissemblaunce* and *Suspect*, *Griefe* and *Fury*, *Displeasure* and *Pleasaunce*, *Despight* and *Cruelty*. To call this a company *jolly* and have them proceed forth in “trim array” indicates a fundamental disjunction between the formal and aesthetic qualities of the performance and its content. At the center of the procession is a “dolefull lady” bearing “Deathes owne ymage figurd in her face,” and behind her follows Cupid himself, who surveys his “goodly company” and marshals “the euill ordered trayne.” Although Cupid is conventionally depicted as mischievous and cruel, the

³³⁰ *F.Q.* III.xii.5-6

treatment of his victim here melds the figurative pains of love and desire with literal rape and torture:

Of her dew honour was despoiled quight,
 And a wide wound therein (O ruefull sight)
 Entrenched deep with knyfe accursed keene,
 Yet freshly bleeding forth her fainting spright,
 (The worke of cruell hand) was to be seene,
 That dyde in sanguine red her skin all snowy cleene.

At that wide orifice her trembling hart
 Was drawne forth, and in siluer basin layd,
 Quite through transfixed with a deadly dart,
 And in her blood yet steeming fresh embayd:
 And those two villeins,³³¹ which her steps vpstayd,
 When her weake feete could scarcely her sustaine,
 And fading vitall powres gan to fade,
 Her forward still with torture did constraine,
 And euermore encreased her consuming paine.³³²

Spenser's use of the masque here underscores this art form's ability to conceal, beguile and misrepresent; yet the disguise is purposefully thin and its allegory transparent. That the enchanter Busirane employs a masque to cloak his cruelty beneath a harmoniously ordered tableau suggests an association of the art form with decadence and petty despotism.

Unlike the Jonsonian masque, Spenser's masque of Cupid does not build towards a balanced resolution. There is no dialectical logic at play to govern this procession of unruly affections, which only tends towards increasing disorder at the masque's conclusion:

And after them a rude confused rout
 Of persons flockt, whose names is hard to read:

³³¹ Despight and Cruelty

³³² *F.Q.* III.xii.20-21

Emongts them was sterne *Strife*, and *Anger* stout,
 Vnquiet *Care*, and fond *Vnthriftyhead*,
 Lewd *Losse of Time*, and *Sorrow* seeming dead,
 Inconstant *Chaunge*, and false *Disloyalty*,
 Consuming *Riotise*, and guilty *Dread*
 Of heauenly vengeance, faint *Infirmity*,
 Vile *Pouerty*, and lastly *Death* with infamy.³³³

Jonson's comment about the transient extravagance of the masque resulting in "famine" is worth recalling here, for what began with the promise of poetry ("in his hand a braunch of laurel bore") ends in infirmity, poverty, and death. Spenser's masque of Cupid offers a perspective not of love as a transcendent union, as Jonson will do in *Hymenai*, but of a violent and corrupt form of desire that extinguishes itself in death. At its culmination, the spectral figures in the masque vanish behind a door, only to begin anew and in exactly the same way the following day. Instead of a complex interplay of romantic tensions, the perverse resolution and repetition compulsion of the enchanter is largely what the masque allegorizes, and this become apparent the moment Britomart forces her way through the doorway or vanishing point of the performance.

Spenser's masque of Cupid, however, may be situated within a different tradition of poetry, that of Petrarch's *Trionfi*. The *Trionfi* are a series of poems that revolve around a central figure, such as Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, or Eternity. Robert Coogan notes that "in the Renaissance" the *Trionfi* "had such stature that, like the *Divina Commedia*, it was considered an epic even though both poets make love, not war, the central issue."³³⁴

The poem's popularity led Roger Ascham to remark in *The Scholemaster* (1563-1568)

³³³ *F.Q.* III.xii.25

³³⁴ Coogan, Robert. "Petrarch's *Trionfi* and the English Renaissance," *Studies in Philology*, 6, no. 3 (1970): 306-327.

that “Italianate Englishmen have more reverence for the *Triumphs* of Petrarch than for the Genesis of Moses.”³³⁵ What is particularly compelling about the *Trionfi* is their singularity of focus, for each poem explores the attributes of its subject and subjects its content entirely to its governing theme. Each poem in the sequence proves subordinate to its successor, as Love to Chastity, Chastity to Death, Death to Fame, and Fame to Eternity. The work thus progresses according to a conceptual hierarchy, but it lacks the dynamism of the dialectical approach Jonson would develop in his masques. The masque of Cupid and Petrarch’s *Trionfi* are artistically similar in that the first offers a culminating perspective of final disorder, confusion, and death, and the second a transcendent perspective of hierarchical order. In both, a presumed, unitary point of view confers order and meaning to each work’s constituent elements. In the Jacobean era, however, Jonson would develop the masque into an art form of competing voices and perspectives in order to demonstrate that truth lies not in appearance but in a multifaceted, dynamic process of complex resolutions. In contrast to the singularity of focus displayed in the masque of Cupid and the individual *Trionfi*, Jonson’s masques sought to delight and instruct by resolving and unifying conflicting forces beneath an aegis of noble ideals.

In her 2009 publication *The Jonsonian Masque and the Politics of Decorum*, Alison Scott attempts to break something of a critical deadlock between Orgel and Strong’s absolutist model of the masque and Martin Butler and David Lindley’s emphasis on the masque’s occasional and local function:

[The masque] is, then, constant and evolving, fixed and flexible in its meanings at the same time; able therefore to appear to affirm basically the same thing on each masquing occasion as Orgel contends, at the same time as attending to

³³⁵ Cited in Coogan, Robert. “Petrarch’s *Trionfi* and the English Renaissance,” p. 308

political work specific to each individual context as Lindley and Butler have argued. The politics of the Jonsonian masque are thus always at once engaged with Platonism and Sophism, the affirmation of immutable truth and the adaptation to contingent truth; and they invoke and construct a Ciceronian decorum that unites political unity with ethical discrimination and honesty.³³⁶

Aurelian Townshend notes as he describes the scene for his 1631 masque *Tempe Restored* that “indeed these showes are nothing else but pictures with Light and Motion,” and until the second half of the twentieth century many literary critics agreed with him.³³⁷ Since the work of Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong in the 1960’s, however, the masque has received more attention as an innovative form of dramatic poetry, proving uniquely revelatory of both the power dynamics undergirding Stuart society and of the relationship between architecture, painting, and poetry in early modern England. Yet Jonson’s theory of poetry and his use of the masque form as a poetic vehicle sets his works apart from his major rivals, such as Samuel Daniel, Thomas Campion, George Chapman, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Carew and Aurelian Townshend, if only by his insistence that poetic invention and not visual splendor was the “soul” of the masque.

A year before Jonson received his first royal commission for *The Masque of Blackness* in 1605, he and his friend Sir John Roe were forcibly removed during the performance of the year’s Twelfth Night masque, which was very likely Samuel Daniel’s *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*. “The identification is probable though not certain,” writes Ian Donaldson: “Daniel’s masque, originally scheduled for performance on Twelfth Night (6 January) 1604, was actually performed two nights later, on 8

³³⁶ Alison Scott, *The Jonsonian Masque and the Politics of Decorum* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³³⁷ Aurelian Townshend, *Tempe Restored* (Cambridge, MA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1994).

January.”³³⁸ Even though Sir John Roe’s poem reflecting on the event is dated 6 January, Donaldson observes that “the only event performed that night, a Scottish sword dance, is unlikely to have been the cause of the trouble.”³³⁹ Voicing his dissatisfaction in a manner reminiscent of Wyatt’s “Mine owne John Poynz” and “Stand whoso list upon the slipper top,” Sir John Roe’s poem accuses the court of substituting flattery for virtue and proving unworthy of the goodness shown by the king and queen:

If the Queen masque or King a-hunting go,
 Though all the court follow, let them. We know
 Like them in goodness that court will ne’re be,
 For that were virtue, and not flattery.
 Forget we were thrust out; it is but thus,
 God threatens kings, kings lords, as lords do us.³⁴⁰

Roe sets virtue in opposition to flattery, drawing a distinction between the nobility of the rulers and the feckless character of the court. He implies that if an artist is to present the king and queen with a work worthy of their consideration, he should not appeal to the ever-shifting trends of court fashion but aim to reflect the rare “goodness” of sovereignty, which holds itself accountable only to the divine. But what was it about Daniel’s masque that Roe, and presumably Jonson as well, found objectionable?

In his dedication of *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, Samuel Daniel acknowledges that it was the “present pompe and splendor” that observers “found most regardfull in these Shewes.”³⁴¹ As Daniel explains to the Countess of Bedford, however,

³³⁸ Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, 473.

³³⁹ Donaldson, *ibid.*

³⁴⁰ Cited in Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, 473.

³⁴¹ Samuel Daniel, *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses: A Royall Masque*, ed. Ernest Law (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1880), 63.

his masque features a certain perspectival technique intended to maintain the balance between poetic invention and the visual splendor of its performance. After Night and Sleep appear on stage, they “produce a Vision” for the audience, “an effect proper to their power, and fit to shadow our purpose, for that these apparitions & shewes are but as imaginations, and dreames that protend our affections.”³⁴² Yet it is how Daniel’s entertainment proceeds within this dreamscape that is of particular note, for the unfolding of its successive action may be taken as a critical statement about the respective roles of sight and word in the performance of poetic invention:

And in this action did [Sleep] here use his white Wand, as to infuse significant Visions to entertaine the Spectators, and so made them seeme to see there a Temple, with a *Sybilla* therein attending vpon the Sacrifices; which done, *Iris* (the Messenger of *Iuno*) descends from the top of a Mountaine raised at the lower end of the Hall, and marching vp to the Temple of Peace, giues notice to the *Sybilla* of the comming of the Goddesses, and withall deliuers her a Prospectiue, wherein she might be hold the Figures of their Deities, and thereby describe them; to the end that at their descending, there might no stay or hinderance of their Motion, which was to be carryed without any interruption, to the action of other entertainments that were to depend one of another, during the whole Shew.³⁴³

The task of narrating the scene falls to a sibyl who watches it unfold through a “Prospectiue,” which here denotes a “prospective glass” or rudimentary telescope.³⁴⁴ Doing so allows Daniel to prevent the spectacular descent of the twelve goddesses from overshadowing his poetic description of their attributes. It is a dramatic technique

³⁴² *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, 62.

³⁴³ *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, 62-3.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 136: “But in the sixteenth century, “perspective” referred both to a set of geometrical techniques for rendering three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional surface, and to optical instruments such as lenses, mirrors, and panes of glass. Insofar as Renaissance poets are perspectival poets, they are so primarily in this latter sense. For optical instruments showed transparency as a material attribute.”

designed to manage the aesthetic economy of the masque in such a way “that the eyes of the Spectators might not beguile their eares, as in such cases it euer happens, whiles pompe and splendor of the sight takes vp all the intention without regard what is spoken.”³⁴⁵ Daniel thus anticipates the visually striking goddesses of his masque with an interpretive frame (“prospective”), which establishes their significance but does not distract from their actual stage presence.

Daniel’s use of a sibyl with a “prospective” glass is a formal strategy that divides his masque into two halves, one devoted to introduction and explanation, the other to visual splendor, music and dance. The sibyl’s expressions of wonder are intended to stir anticipation among the curious observers while her description situates the elements of the coming scene within an interpretive framework, thereby rendering explicit the iconology of this parade of mythical goddesses. Initiating her speech with the familiar convention of the inexpressibility *topos of occupatio*, the sibyl attests to the “admirable powers” of the unfolding spectacle:

What have I seen? where am I? or do I see all? or am I any where? was this *Iris*, (the Messenger of *Iuno*) or else but a fantasmie or imagination?...But what Prospective is this? or what shall I herein see? Oh admirable Powers! what sights are these?³⁴⁶

She then describes each of the twelve goddesses individually in rhyming quatrains (ABAB), and the resulting effect is that of an emblem book in which the poems precede their *picturae*. Jonson found such forced “narrations” insufferable, and he blasts the

³⁴⁵ *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, 63.

³⁴⁶ *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, p. 68.

practice of having figures explain who they are and what they represent in *The Masque of Queens* (1609):

For to have made themselves their own decipherers, and each one to have told upon their entrance what they were and whether they would, had been a most piteous hearing, and utterly unworthy any quality of a poem, wherein a writer should always trust somewhat to the capacity of the spectator, especially at these spectacles, where men, beside inquiring eyes, are understood to bring quick ears, and not those sluggish ones of porters and mechanics that must be bored through at every act with narrations.³⁴⁷

Daniel may have introduced a “prospective” to *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* in order to strike a harmonic balance between the “inquiring eyes” and “quick ears” of his spectators, but its ultimate effect for a critical observer like Jonson was forced and tedious. We gather from Jonson’s comment that how an author manages narration and the explanation of a figure’s attributes is one way to measure the success or failure of a masque and determine whether it is worthy of the “quality of a poem.”

From its opening passages *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* is in a hurry to establish itself as a dream vision and introduce the procession of goddesses, who were played by the Queen and her ladies. Daniel seem keenly aware that for many observers at court, the real function of the masque was a social one, an opportunity for the participants to be seen and admired. In the establishment of his scenario, the passages featuring *Night* and *Sleep* are difficult to take seriously. When “Mother *Night*” wakes *Somnus* from his slumber and calls him forth from his grotto because she “doth here [his] shadowing operations craue,” Daniel makes himself an easy target for ridicule, for he is literally awaking *Sleep* in order to put the audience to sleep:

And therefore wake my Sonne, awake, and come
Strike with thy Horny wand, the spirits of these

³⁴⁷ Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* in *Ben Jonson: Selected Masques*, ln. 87-99.

That here expect some pleasing novelties:
 And make their slumber to beget strange sights,
 Strange visions and unusual properties.
 Unseen of later Ages, ancient Rites,
 Of gifts divine, wrapt up in mysteries,
 Make this to seem a Temple in their sight,
 Whose main support, holy Religion frame:
 And 1 *Wisdom*, 2 *Courage*, 3 *Temperance*, and 4 *Right*,
 Make seeme the Pillars that sustaine the same.³⁴⁸

Daniel's language – “some pleasing novelties,” “Strange visions and unusual properties,” “ancient Rites,” “wrapt up in mysteries” – is chosen more to accommodate a wondrous spectacle than to deliver an erudite lecture on the classics. He gently invokes the arcane mysteries of ancient Greece and Rome, which would have interested his audience, without boring them through with literary and historical allusions. Daniel's approach to his commission is radically different from Jonson's, as the latter would eventually publish his masques with copious notes explaining each allusion and its historical and cultural significance. Daniel, on the other hand, readily admits that pleasant entertainment is the primary purpose of the masque.

By grounding his masques so thoroughly in scholarship, Jonson sought to offer the most educated among the audience an experience that was truly transformative, bringing to life the strange and mystical rituals they had read about in Virgil and Horace. Daniel aimed above all to please and entertain the court in a light and endearing way, and when Shakespeare in *The Tempest* wanted a scenario in which Prospero could “Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple / Some vanity of mine Art,” he has Prospero and Ariel

³⁴⁸ *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, p. 66.

stage a masque modeled on Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*.³⁴⁹ Daniel's masque, although generally regarded as unsuccessful, is remarkable for its light touch, and this is interesting in itself: the airy quality of dream-like, vanishing visions says much about his theory of performance and the role of the performed text.³⁵⁰ In the context of the masque, where literature joins the other arts in the service of a splendid, passing spectacle, Daniel's approach indicates that his verse is not central but ancillary to the larger function of entertainment, which was above all social in nature. In this sense, Daniel's aptly named *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* was concerned above all with giving the queen and her ladies a pretense to dress up and be admired. Its performance was essentially *visual*, and the text of the entertainment, while well-written and interesting enough, was never meant to withstand critical scrutiny. Rather, like the settings of the masque, which were often destroyed in the post-performance bacchanalia, dissembled for souvenirs, or simply discarded, the text of the performance was never really meant to be much more than a trifle, an amusing novelty.

³⁴⁹ Cf. Frank Kermode, "Introduction" to *The Tempest* (London: Methuen & Co., 1954), lxxii: "It had become fashionable to include some masque-like entertainment in Blackfriars and Globe plays in order to satisfy the growing desire of the audience for novelty and spectacle." Kermode acknowledges Enid Welsford's suggestion "that *The Tempest* was influed by certain particular masques, including Jonson's *Hymenai*, *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty*. The dances and music she takes to be reflections of masque influence, and the Caliban-plot a Jonsonian antimasque translated into dramatic terms." However much Jonson's masques may have influenced the larger plot of *The Tempest*, Prospero's masque within the play begins with Iris, who proceeds to catalogue the descent of the goddesses Juno and Ceres, and in this way it maps quite neatly onto the main action of Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* before being interrupted.

³⁵⁰ See Stephen Orgel's notes to *Hymenai* in *Jonson: Selected Masques*, 315.

Daniel, in fact, makes it clear in his dedication that he views the masque as a light entertainment, and he dismisses those who would expect this genre to reveal deeper poetic truths. It is a telling point of contrast between him and Jonson, and a point of disagreement that occasioned considerable bitterness between the two. “These things be but toys,”³⁵¹ wrote Francis Bacon in his essay “Of Masques and Triumphs,” and indeed Daniel agrees:

And whosoever striues to shew most wit about these Puntillos of Dreames and shewes, are sure sicke of a disease they cannot hide, and would faine haue the world to thinke them very deeply learned in all misteries whatsoever. And peradventure they thinke themselves so, which if they do, they are in a farre worse case then they imagine; *Non potest non indoctus esse qui se doctum credit*. And let us labour to shew neuer so much skill or Arte, our weaknesses and ignorance will be seene, whatsoever couering we cast ouer it. And yet in these matters of shewes (though they be that which most entertaine the world) there needs no such exact sufficiency in this kind. For, *Ludit istis animus, non proficit*.³⁵²

Drawing this last line – “the mind plays with these things but does not profit from them” – from Seneca’s *Moral Epistles*, Daniel plays an erudite joke on those who would look for lasting meaning in the trifling poetry of a passing entertainment.³⁵³ In this epistle, Seneca attempts to provide his addressee Lucilius with a Latin equivalent of the Greek term *sophismata*. He proposes Cicero’s term *cavillationes*, and then says a few words about those reviled practitioners of specious reasoning, the Sophists:

³⁵¹ Bacon, Francis. *The Major Works*, ed. Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁵² *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, 64-65.

³⁵³ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Moral Epistles in Works. English and Latin*, ed. W. Heinemann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917-1972), CXI.4.

If a man has surrendered himself to them, he weaves many a tricky subtlety, but makes no progress toward real living; he does not thereby become braver, or more restrained, or loftier of spirit.³⁵⁴

By invoking this Senecan epistle Daniel suggests that the masque is as grandiose in presentation as it is short-lived in consequence – “the bravery was shown, it was not possessed.” Ostentation, one gathers, is incompatible with the humble path of philosophical progress, and it is this very argument that Seneca develops in the course of his letter:

He, however, who has practised philosophy to effect his own cure, becomes high-souled, full of confidence, invincible, and *greater as you draw near him*. This phenomenon is seen in the case of high mountains, which appear less lofty when beheld from afar, but which prove clearly how high the peaks are when you come near them; such, my dear Lucilius, is our true philosopher, true by his acts and not by his tricks. (My emphasis)³⁵⁵

Daniel’s allusion thus places the masque and philosophy in direct opposition. Philosophy reveals its sublime quality the closer one draws to it, while the masque, though seeming lofty from one’s seat in the audience, proves to be little more than a play of surface images and contrived visual effects. Unlike a mountain range, the scenery that evokes an alluring, fantastical world loses its power over one’s imagination as soon as one examines it more closely.

In *Hymenai*, which Jonson wrote for the occasion of the marriage of the Earl of Essex and Lady France Howard and was performed on January 5th and 6th of 1606, Jonson celebrates the union of marriage by grounding it in ancient Roman customs, or as he puts it, “upon antiquity and solid learnings; which, though their voice be taught to sound to present occasions, their sense or doth or should always lay hold on more

³⁵⁴ Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, p. 277.

³⁵⁵ Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, *ibid.*

removed mysteries.” This is a direct challenge to Daniel’s criticism of those who would attend a masque “to thinke them very deeply learned in all misteries whatsoever.” Jonson sets out to demonstrate that the masque can be grounded in scholarship and that the spectacle it offers forth can be deeply embedded in a historical and cultural tradition. In *Hymenai* he attests to the permanence and enduring significance of the solemn ritual of marriage, and it is on this theme of permanence that Jonson prefaces his work:

It is a noble and just advantage that the things subjected to understanding have of those which are objected to sense that the one sort are but momentary and merely taking, the other impressing and lasting. Else the glory of these solemnities had perished like a blaze and gone out in the beholders’ eyes. So short lived are the bodies of all things in comparison to their souls. And, though bodies ofttimes have the ill luck to be sensually preferred, they find afterwards the good fortune, when souls live, to be utterly forgotten.³⁵⁶

Jonson was insistent in his view of the masque’s text as the “soul” of the work and the soul versus body distinction recurs throughout his work. It is on this point that he sarcastically concedes to Inigo Jones in his “Expostulation” that “painting and carpentry are the soul of masque.”³⁵⁷ In the preface to his first performed masque, however, *The Masque of Blackness* “personated at the court at Whitehall on the Twelfth-night, 1605,” Jonson offers his evaluation of the respective material and literary arts in entirely unambiguous terms:

The honor and splendor of these spectacles was such in the performance as, could those hours have lasted, this of mine now had been a most unprofitable work. But, when it is the fate even of the greatest and most absolute births to need and borrow a life of posterity, little had been done to the study of magnificence in

³⁵⁶ *Hymenai*, ln. 1-9

³⁵⁷ Ben Jonson, “An Expostulation with Inigo Jones” in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems*.

these, if presently with the rage of the people, who, as a part of greatness, are privileged by custom to deface their carcasses, the spirits had also perished.³⁵⁸

By “carcasses” Jonson intends the sets that were built for the occasion. “Jonson’s one brief allusion to this customary ritual,” writes Patricia Fumerton in *Cultural Aesthetics*, “recalled the rage of the people, who, as a part of greatness, are privileged by custom to deface their [masques’] carcasses.” Particularly suggestive is Jonson’s term for the masque body: “carcass.” Even before it was made void by the all-consuming “rage” of the public audience, the private masque was in a sense dead, a decaying corpse.”³⁵⁹ Fumerton’s concept of the “void” here is compelling, for it draws attention to the emptiness that underlies the temporary aesthetic experience of dramatic art. Those who were fortunate to witness the performance attempt to make the experience last not by reflecting upon the content of the text but by breaking off parts of the scenery and taking it home with them. Much like he who would mistake a sophist for a true philosopher, their approach to what seemed wondrous from afar results only in disappointment. The audience’s relation to the material setting that gave rise to the “bravery” of the performance is telling, for their desire to possess physically a piece of the performance underscores Jonson’s complaint that many were missing the point: “It is not my fault if I fill them out nectar and they run to metheglin.”³⁶⁰ Like the ephemeral effect of alcohol, the visual impression these sets made on the audience would fade quickly once the

³⁵⁸ Ben Jonson, prologue to *The Masque of Blackness* in *Ben Jonson’s Plays and Masques*, ed. Harp (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 314.

³⁵⁹ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance literature and the practice of social ornament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 161.

³⁶⁰ *Hymenai*, ln. 26-7

performance had ended. Jonson's attitude towards the masque reveals his belief in the value of the performed text, which would ideally impart to the observers a lasting intellectual or moral impression. The image that poetry should impart, to cite Kalas's phrase once again, "is not so much a visual picture as a material imagining," and the material out of which it is made, in Jonson's view, should be impervious to the passage of time.

Jonson very well may have viewed this practice of dismantling the scenery, which Fumerton likens to the Greek notion of *sparagmos*, as a sacrilegious ending to an otherwise spiritual experience. He is at pains in the opening moments of *Hymenai* to consecrate the space of the stage, and the first stage direction informs us:

the scene being drawn, there was first discovered an altar, upon which was inscribed in letters of gold,

**IONI. OIMAE. MIMAE.
UNIONI
SACR.**

The first thing the audience sees on the stage is not a performer or an intricate backdrop but a simple altar, commanding their attention and proclaiming its association with Juno, the Roman goddess who presided over marriages.³⁶¹ As the bride and bridegroom enter attended by pages, the god Hymen, musicians, and two "auspices," "one of which bore the water, the other fire," it become clear that a ritual is beginning:

SONG

Bid all profane away;
None here may stay
To view our mysteries

³⁶¹ Orgel comments that this denotes "Iunoni Optimae Maximae, to best and greatest Juno." *Jonson: Selected Masques*, note to page 48.

But who themselves have been,
 Or will in time be seen
 The self same sacrifice.
 For Union, mistress of these rites
 Will be observed with eyes
 As simple as her nights.³⁶²

“Fly then, all profane, away,” responds the chorus, and we notice that Jonson has begun his masque with an act of purification, one which claims for his performance a space distinct from that of the audience. The figures who appear on stage do so by their privilege of place within the orderly unfolding of the ceremony. There is nothing guileful or deceptive about this opening scene, and Jonson underscores this by stating that “Union, mistress of these rites / Will be observed with eyes / As simple as her nights.” By beginning the performance in this fashion, Jonson establishes an order from which any deviation may be measured, made significant by contrast, and demonstrably brought under sway. By having Hymen address himself directly to King James I and Queen Anne of Denmark, Jonson establishes a relationship between the spectators and the fictional world of ancient sacred rites unfolding on stage. This initiates the peculiar variety of reflexivity that is undoubtedly one of the most interesting features of genre:

‘Tis so: this same is he,
 The king, and priest of peace!
 And that his empress, she
 That sits so crownèd with her own increase!

O you, whose better blisses
 Have proved the strict embrace
 Of Union with chaste kisses,
 And see it flow so in your happy race;

That know how well it binds
 The fighting seeds of things,
 Wins natures, sexes, minds,

³⁶² *Hymenai*, ln. 56-65

And every discord in true music brings.³⁶³

James and Anne are here introduced as the paragon of “Union” in marriage, and their example is praised and exalted as a model for the bridegroom and bride on stage. At this point in the masque, Jonson has effectively established an ideal conception of union as a form of enduring harmony, and this allows him to complicate the scene by introducing an antimasque.

Although the antimasque in *Hymenai* introduces disorder to the present arrangement on the stage, it precipitates its own resolution, thereby reinforcing the idea of sacred union that Jonson has chosen for his theme. Such a resolution results from the plot of the work, which is sequential, and thus cannot be captured in a visual representation; rather, it must be comprehended intellectually. By introducing the figure of *Reason* and establishing her relationship to the competing humors and affections, Jonson stages an allegory of human psychology with a rich and complex history.³⁶⁴ The stage direction reads: “*Here out of a microcosm, or globe, figuring man, with a kind of contentious music, issued for the first masque, of eight men.*” This eruption and dislocation of the four humors and affections from the globe that contains them occasions panic on the stage, but Hymen’s lines immediately begin to bring them back under control by describing them and establishing their relationship to religion and reason:

³⁶³ *Hymenai*, ln. 80-91

³⁶⁴ The idea of man as a “microcosm” goes back to pre-Socratic philosophy and has analogues in ancient Egyptian, Judaic, and Babylonian cultures. See George Perrigo Conger, introduction to *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922); and Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Domandi (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), 87ff and 150 in particular.

Hymen. Save, save the virgins; keep your hallowed lights
 Untouched, and with their flame defend our rites.
 The four untempered humors are broke out,
 And with their wild affections go about
 To ravish all religion. If there be
 A power like reason left in that huge body,
 Or little world of man, from where these came,
 Look forth, and with thy bright and numerous flame
 Instruct their darkness, make them know and see,
 In wronging these, they have rebelled 'gainst thee.³⁶⁵

These “four untempered humors” and their accompanying affections are antithetical to religion and must necessarily be brought under control by “a power like reason.”

Fortunately for Hymen, Reason herself remains inside the microcosm. Hymen’s request that she “look forth, and with thy bright and numerous flame / Instruct their darkness, make them know and see” makes Reason’s function explicit. The “bright and numerous flame” not only illuminates but it also informs by imposing a mathematical or geometrical order to the otherwise unruly passions: “*Hereat Reason, seated in the top of the globe (as in the brain, or highest part of man), figured in a venerable personage, her hair white and trailing to her waist, crowned with lights, her garments blue and semined with stars, girded unto her with a white bend filled with arithmetical figures, in one hand bearing a lamp, in the other a bright sword.*” Reason is what translates an otherwise invisible, inexpressible order into the language of solemn rituals and “more removed mysteries,” on the one hand, and into “arithmetical figures” on the other.

Reason’s force is a unifying one, and she is able to explain the broader significance of the present ceremonies. She differs from Daniel’s sibyl in that instead of describing each figure’s attributes, she explains their motivations and how each figure relates to the others as part of a larger synthetic whole. She remarks that the humors and

³⁶⁵ *Hymenai*, ln. 105-114

their affections run wild on account of their profane ignorance: incapable of discerning the more sublime quality of the present rites, they fail to see the limits of their role and station within the integrated microcosm. Reason exclaims:

Are Union's orgies of so slender price?
 She that makes souls with bodies mix in love,
 Contracts the world in one, and therein Jove,
 Is spring and end of all things: yet, most strange!
 Her self nor suffers spring nor end nor change.³⁶⁶

The order Reason appeals to here is a transcendent one, eternal and unchanging. Jonson's suggestion is both neoplatonic and Pythagorean, as he himself remarks in his notes to *Hymenai*. He directs his reader to Plutarch's *De Placitis Philosophorum*, and explains that Reason's "numerous flame" is "alluding to that opinion of Pythagoras, who held all reason, all knowledge, all discourse of the soul to be mere number."³⁶⁷ Placing a personification of reason before the spectators afforded Jonson the opportunity to speak through an uncontested mouthpiece, one that could explain the significance of certain actions and figures on stage, and direct his audience's attention where he desired it:

So want of knowledge still begetteth jars
 When humorous earthlings will control the stars.
 Inform yourselves with safer reverence
 To these mysterious rites, whose mystic sense
 Reason, which all things but itself confounds,
 Shall clear unto you from th'authentic grounds.³⁶⁸

Reason is thus a character in the play itself and she narrates the ways in which the various figures on stage are connected and cooperate to bring forth a single transcendent image of

³⁶⁶ *Hymenai*, ln. 123-7

³⁶⁷ Jonson's notes to *Hymenai* printed in *Jonson: Selected Masques*, 341.

³⁶⁸ *Hymenai*, ln. 134-139

union in marriage. *Reason* is not reason, however, but a *dramatic* character performing a specific *literary* function in the text. In *Hymenai*, she demonstrates how each element introduced during the performance is subordinate to the ritual being performed before timeless Juno, and Jonson's suggestions that these arcane mysteries are one with the operations of arithmetic is part of what makes his masque engaging and fantastic. Her presence within the masque is essential to resolving the tensions of order and disorder dialectically, and she underscores the relevance and importance of authoritative exegesis as a crucial component of the Jonsonian masque.

When Jonson arranged his masques for publication as part of his 1616 *Works*, he printed them with accompanying notes, and his note to this passage is illuminating, not so much for what it explains us, but for his decision to include it at all:

And for the allegory, though here it be very clear and such as might well escape a candle, yet because there are some must complain of darkness that have but thick eyes, I am contented to hold them this light. First, as in natural bodies, so likewise in minds, there is no disease or distemperature but is caused either by some abounding humor or perverse affection; after the same manner, in politic bodies (where order, ceremony, state, reverence, devotion are parts of the mind) by the difference or predominant will of what we metaphorically call *humors* and *affections* all things are troubled and confused. These, therefore, were tropically brought in before marriage as disturbers of that mystical body and the rites which were soul unto it, that afterwards, in marriage, being dutifully tempered by her power, they might more fully celebrate the happiness of such as live in that sweet union to the harmonious laws of nature and reason.³⁶⁹

Jonson here treats his allegory here not primarily as a poet might, but as a scholar and critic instead. Edmund Spenser, for example, was content to leave much unexplained in his masterful "darke conceit," *The Faerie Queene*; so why does Jonson make the meaning of his allegory explicit? Always anxious to establish beyond doubt the relevance and

³⁶⁹ Notes to *Hymenai* in *Jonson: Selected Masques*, 341.

value of the performed text, Jonson draws an analogy between the well-balanced body and mind, and the harmonious body politic. *Hymenai* demonstrates that political theater must be more than spectacular if it is to have an effect that endures after the visual effects of its enactment have vanished away. More than an exercise in vanity for the participants involved and those in attendance, *Hymenai* presents a poetic image of mankind not as it is but as it can and should be, a material imagining made of stronger stuff than a “decayed dead arras”³⁷⁰ or “the mere perspective of an inch board.”³⁷¹

4.3: *After the Word*

King James I, Jonson suggested in *Hymenai*, might rule as Reason does, explaining the order of things to his followers from his privileged position of divine right and transcendent knowledge. Yet for all of its exemplarity, the model of sovereignty that Jonson put forth would prove untenable with the succession of the years. “History was soon enough to reveal the imperial vision as hollow,” writes Stephen Orgel, as “something that could be maintained only in the world of court masques... What politics could not effect, aesthetics did.”³⁷² Forty-three years after *Hymenai* was performed at court – and the Earl of Essex and Lady Frances Howard, for whose nuptials it was

³⁷⁰ Jonson, induction to *Cynthia's Revels*

³⁷¹ “An Expostulation with Inigo Jones”

³⁷² Stephen Orgel, “Idols of the Gallery: Becoming a Connoisseur in Renaissance England” in *Early modern visual culture: representation, race, empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Erickson and Hulse (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

performed, were long since divorced in scandal – the son of James I was tried and executed for treason. Patricia Fumerton describes his procession to the scaffold:

The route the King followed to the scaffold was exactly the same as that he would have taken, in better days, to a masque. Charles proceeded from his private chambers, down his privy gallery, and into his Banqueting House. Rather than sitting in his chair of state at the south end of the hall, however, where he would have watched a masque entertainment, the King traveled the length of the Banqueting House to its north (or stage) end, where he passed through a hole “broken,” Herbert said, “through the wall” into the adjoining staircase. He then stepped out the staircase window onto the scaffold, which faced the public highway of Whitehall in front of the Banqueting House.³⁷³

The enclosed, private theater space that had hosted dozens of marvelous entertainments was broken open and the light from outside came in. Beyond the wall, beyond the fragile boundaries of the fiction on which ideological power rests, a different seating arrangement was discovered. Those who participated in the execution, both as executors and spectators, embraced the inversion of power in the very dialectical terms developed by Jonson to create the nuanced displays of balance and control that characterize his works:

Throngs packed the roofs of the neighboring buildings, peering over the scaffold’s railing to view the entire grisly act of execution. And perhaps most specifically reminiscent of a masque: the executioner and his assistant wore fantastic disguises of black masks, wigs, and false beards akin to the get-ups of antimasquers. Their tight-fitting costumes were those of sailors or butchers. The latter costume would have been grotesquely fitting for the unusually low block, apparently “a quartering-block on which the bodies of traitors were dismembered.”³⁷⁴

This macabre saturnalia stripped bare the unruly nature of power in its historical, as opposed to artistic, dimension. Despite the carefully wrought performance of warring humors brought under the sway of reason and resolved into a harmonious poetic image of

³⁷³ Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics*, 5.

³⁷⁴ Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics*, 7.

union both personal and political, Jonson's text ultimately furnished an ideal image of the world that had little in common with the violent tendencies of governance as it is.

Jonson's poetic vision in *Hymenai* may have been what Sidney would have termed "eikastic," that is, "figuring forth good things,"³⁷⁵ but the realization of that golden world would prove more difficult than either poet imagined.

³⁷⁵ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, section 64.

CHAPTER FIVE

“How eels now bellow in the ox”: Andrew Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House” and the
Imaginative Boundaries of the English Country House Poem

Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" (1651) is one of the best-known examples of the English country house poem and yet it is the one least representative of the genre. It celebrates the Fairfax family lineage at a time of pivotal social and political upheaval in England. The poem's action takes place over the course of a single day, progressing from an account of the marriage between William Fairfax and Isabel Thwaites in 1518 to a final section praising Mary Fairfax, the daughter of Lord Thomas Fairfax, who was at the time of the poem's composition Marvell's pupil. What makes "Upon Appleton House" unique is the way it strays from the commemorative or celebratory task typical of the country house poem genre. Its deviations are less topical or geographic in nature than they are perspectival, and Marvell demonstrates throughout the poem that changes in the speaker's descriptive technique have a remarkable effect on what is available to the reader as a point of view. In the midst of the poem's ninety-seven stanzas, from stanza thirty-seven to eighty-two, the speaker devotes more attention to reflecting imaginatively upon the "fragrant gardens, shady woods, / Deep meadows, and transparent floods" than upon Lord Fairfax and the history of his family.³⁷⁶ Though tempting to call this section an "interlude" between the commemorative portions of the poem, it constitutes the center of the work and contains many of the poem's most accomplished, complex, and vivid passages.

This core section of the poem comprises a succession of changing scenes, each of which experiments with focal points that effect radical changes in scale and perspective. Formally, the poem never falters, progressing always in eight-line stanzas of iambic tetrameter. A single stanza, however, may feature multiple points of view, each of which

³⁷⁶ Andrew Marvell, "Upon Appleton House," *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Smith (Harlow, England ; New York : Pearson Longman, 2007), ln. 79-80.

changes the appearance of the object of observation and alters the viewer's relation to it. Different traditions of visual representation, from landscape and perspectival painting to stage design and cartography, furnish poetic figures that are both apt and odd at turns, complicating the reader's situation with regard to the unfolding action of the poem. Noting that the perception of the viewing or reading subject fluctuates with regard to the scale of the landscape described and the objects therein contained, the poem challenges the Protagorean and humanist truism that "man is the measure of all things." By turning visual effects into a literary *topos*, which the poet can imbue with an array of figurative meanings, Marvell's poem demonstrates that what presents itself as literal or concretely described in a text is ultimately a rhetorical effect resting upon presumptions about normative visual practices and the status of the observer.

As part of the English country house poetic tradition, "Upon Appleton House" is a relatively late arrival. The genre owed its initial popularity in England to James I's attempts to encourage members of the English gentry to stay out of the city. "James tried, by legislation," notes George Parfitt, "to make country nobles and gentry live in their country homes instead of succumbing to the pleasures of London, and this was because the social organization of England depended greatly upon regional authority exercised by great local families."³⁷⁷ Ben Jonson and Aemilia Lanyer praised the country lifestyle in their poems "To Penshurst" and "The Description of Cookham" by offering an untroubled, harmonious perspective of these settings as places of both natural and social abundance and courtesy. Sir John Denham, writing later in the tradition in 1642, challenges the practice of viewing the countryside as an affirmation of social and natural

³⁷⁷ George Parfitt, ed. *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1975), 508.

harmony. By suggesting that it is the eye of the beholder that willfully projects significance onto the land, he undermines the unitary perspective that Jonson and Lanyer had employed as an epideictic strategy and paves the way for the radical experimentation in visual modes that distinguishes “Upon Appleton House.” Jonson, Lanyer, and Denham all treat the genre of the country house poem in different ways that illustrate by contrast the unique quality of Marvell’s poem.

5.1: *Precedents in Jonson, Lanyer, and Denham*

Ben Jonson wrote “To Penshurst” before November, 1612, and published it as part of his collection *The Forest*. *The Forest* takes pride of place alongside George Herbert’s *The Temple* and Robert Herrick’s *Hesperides* in what would become a revolution of form and subject matter in seventeenth-century English poetry. “To Penshurst” is the second poem in the sequence and the first long poem in the collection. It follows the short but pithy and meta-critical poem “Why I Write Not of Love,” which announces Jonson’s intention to turn away from the tradition of amorous songs and sonnets that had dominated the poetry of the sixteenth century:

Some act of Love’s bound to rehearse,
 I thought to bind him, in my verse:
 Which when he felt, Away (quoth he)
 Can poets hope to fetter me?
 It is enough, they once did get
 Mars, and my mother, in their net:
 I wear not these wings in vain.
 With which he fled me: and again,
 Into my rhymes could ne’er be got
 By any art. Then wonder not,
 That since, my numbers are so cold,
 When Love is fled, and I grow old.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Jonson, *The Complete Poems*, 95.

Jonson's poem associates the poet with Vulcan, the old blacksmith and keeper of the forge. Instead of capturing love itself in its lines, poetry is more likely to present a corrupt or fanciful emblem of it, as the allusion to Mars and Venus makes clear. Jonson's statement "my numbers are so cold" continues the idea of verse as a blacksmith's creation, cooling to assume its permanent form. Poetry, one gathers, should be remarkable more for its formal artfulness and noble subject matter, which endures, and less for its passion, which flees the trap. The poet has only so much time to write, and Jonson thus turns to subjects less transitory and of larger cultural significance.

On this note he introduces "To Penshurst," a poem of 102 lines celebrating what is often referred to as the "ancestral home" of the Sidney family. Penshurst Place was bestowed upon the Sidney family in 1552 by "the most religious and renowned Prince Edwards the Sixt,"³⁷⁹ and Sir Philip Sidney would be born there just two years after the family acquired it by royal decree. Furthermore, the family received this property only after its previous owner, Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, was executed by Henry VIII in 1521. Thus the home came to the Sidney family as a consequence of the long, tumultuous period of social upheaval that preceded, and the draconian politics that characterized, England's sixteenth century. When Jonson was writing "To Penshurst," the home had only been in the Sidney family for sixty years, a fact that seems to motivate some of his descriptions and claims of the house as reverend, ancient, and "not built to

³⁷⁹ Philip Sidney, "Penshurst Place," *Memorials of Old Kent*, ed. Ditchfield (London: Bemrose & sons, 1907). Sidney writes that this is the inscription over the gateway at Penshurst Place.

envious show.”³⁸⁰ “Country-house literature” may very well be, as Nicole Pohl writes, “fundamentally public, a literature that is concerned with social transformation and change,”³⁸¹ but Jonson’s manner of treating the ideas of change and social transformation is a conservative one: he reveals his concern about such phenomena by shutting them out entirely from his description of Penshurst Place. “To Penshurst” lends its reader a perspective onto a world sheltered from change, and its jovial landscape betrays no indication of how early modern England was beginning to show, as Barbara Lewalski puts it, “political, religious, and cultural strains in the national fabric. While the divisions were not yet unbridgeable, they were manifestly widening during the Jacobean era (1603-25).”³⁸² Boundaries, both geographical and referential, prove integral to Jonson’s celebration of Penshurst and his portrayal of it as a world removed from strife, a *locus amoenus*. The reader understands the poem’s various elements as part of a unified composition, thanks to the interpretive frame created by the poem’s carefully maintained boundaries.

Removed, alternative, and symbolically contained, the perspective Jonson offers the reader in “To Penshurst” is reminiscent of utopian literature, for within its frame

³⁸⁰ “To Penshurst,” ln. 1

³⁸¹ Nicole Pohl, *Women, Space, Utopia: 1600-1800* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 53.

³⁸² Barbara Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 4-5: “A king who vigorously defended royal absolutism was opposed by a parliament increasingly jealous of its rights and privileges...A court perceived as extravagant, morally decadent, infiltrated by Papists, rife with scandal, and increasingly controlled by the king’s homosexual favorites was opposed by a London citizenry self-styled as hard-working, wealth-producing, and morally upright, and a country-based aristocracy sensible of its diminished honor and power.”

every detail has an unambiguous place and significance. Jonson presents Penshurst Place as the exception to more recently constructed country homes, whose ostentation betrays their owners' complex desire for both grandeur and authenticity. The construction of such homes by the *nouveaux-riches* was a visible reminder of new sources of wealth independent of the traditional system of social status and preferment regulated by the English crown:

Thou are not, Penshurst, built to envious show,
Of touch, or marble; nor canst boast a row
Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold:
Thou hast no lantern, whereof tales are told;
Or stair, or courts; but stand'st an ancient pile,
And these grudged at, art revered the while.³⁸³

Beginning on this note of distinction that establishes the house's essential quality as different from those of other noble families, Jonson creates a privileged space in which the classical spirit of poetry survives. The grounds, the poem informs us, support a lively ecology of pastoral gods and their attendants:

Thy mount, to which the dryads do resort,
Where Pan, and Bacchus their high feasts have made,
Beneath the broad beech and the chestnut shade;
That taller tree, which of a nut was set,
At his great birth, where all the muses met.
There, in the writhèd bark, are cut the names
Of many a Sylvan, taken with his flames.
And thence, the ruddy satyrs oft provoke
The lighter fauns, to reach thy lady's oak.³⁸⁴

This retrospective fantasy imbues the land associated with Sir Philip Sidney's birth ("the nut was set / At his great birth") with an antique mythology, which consecrates it

³⁸³ "To Penshurst," ln. 1-6

³⁸⁴ "To Penshurst," ln. 10-18

culturally and removes it from the dynamic of history. Causality is confused here: was Philip Sidney destined to greatness because the land was sacred or is the land sacred because Philip Sidney was born there? It is a significant gesture on Jonson's part, for he has framed his description to yield *in nuce* a tableau of Sidney's life, work, and influence, so that the mythological creatures that dwell there are merely ornamental to his exceptional life. Aligning his verse with the poetic tradition established by Horace, Martial, Statius, and Juvenal,³⁸⁵ Jonson in a similar gesture presents his poem as an exception to the literature of his time, implying that his verse, like Penshurst Place, though "grudged at" by poetasters is "reverenced the while." What these opening lines frame is a charmed space within which pure and noble sentiments reflect cultural values and traditions, and nature and culture reside in harmony.

This act of framing allows Jonson to project a symbolic order onto the landscape, which ensures that nature is not a force here with its own prerogatives and tendencies but a happily subordinate feature whose creations willingly participate in the symbolic order. Though the landscape divides into distinct areas with their own function and character, what is remarkable is the abundance that the land willingly yields:

The lower land, that to the river bends,
Thy sheep, thy bullocks, kine, and calves do feed:
The middle grounds thy mares, and horses breed.
Each bank doth yield thee conies; and the tops
Fertile of wood, Ashore, and Sidney's copse,
To crown thy open table, doth provide
the purpled pheasant, with the speckled side:³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ Cf. Horace, "Epode II" ("Beatus Ille"); Martial, *Epigrams* (III. 58, "To Bassus, On the Country-House of Faustinus"); Statius, *Silvae* (I.3; II.2); Juvenal, *Satires* (IV.68-9)

³⁸⁶ "To Penshurst," ln. 22-28

The river bends to border this view, which contains a low, middle, and high ground, all of which play an important role in the husbandry of the estate. What is remarkable about Penshurst, however, is not the specific layout of its lands but nature's pervasive abundance: from paddock to pond and grassland to grove, everything produces.

As soon as Jonson mentions the physical boundary of the river, however, he retreats from it to describe the land's other qualities. We needn't know what lies on the other side of the river or beyond the ridge, for there is much here to enchant and no reason to wander. Indeed the speaker of "To Penshurst" never strays from his epideictic task but always returns to the house as the physical and thematic center, which is neatly aligned within the figurative universe of the poem. Not only are the hosts gracious and generous; the animals are too:

The painted partridge lies in every field
 And, for thy mess, is willing to be killed.
 And if the high-swoll'n Medway fail thy dish,
 Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,
 Fat, aged carps, that run into thy net.
 And pikes, now weary their own kind to eat,
 As loth, the second draught, or cast to stay,
 Officiously, at first, themselves betray.
 Bright eels, that emulate them, and leap on land,
 Before the fisher, or into his hand.³⁸⁷

Here we see how the celebratory perspective carefully established by Jonson exerts its interpretive control. Indeed it is quite easy to mistake the detail "the high-swoll'n Medway" as simply another image of abundance. This is a complicated moment in "To Penshurst," however, because high waters and the potential for flooding threaten the land's productivity as much as they are, in many places, essential to it. Thus in the midst

³⁸⁷ "To Penshurst," ln. 29-38

of Jonson’s “swoll’n” description of fertile nature’s copiousness lurks the threat of a force that could do great damage to it, but it remains, as it were, in the reader’s blind spot. The carefully regulated perspective in “To Penshurst” prevents any consideration of destructive flux, for a *locus amoenus*, ancient and protected from “time” should only be pleasing to the eye of the viewer.³⁸⁸ Nicolas Poussin makes this point beautifully in his painting *Et in Arcadia Ego*, when figures in an idyllic, pastoral landscape discover that even in Arcadia, one cannot escape death (fig. 18).



Figure 18: Nicolas Poussin, *Et in Arcadia Ego*
(alternative title, *Les bergers d'Arcadie*). 1637-1638.
© Musée du Louvre

³⁸⁸ Le temps, il tempo: time and weather as one. Cf. note 173 above.

No sooner does Jonson mention the river's fluctuating cycles than he turns to Penshurst's more readily controlled sources of water. It is another example of how the poem regulates itself and retreats from subjects that may be difficult to control. The ponds on the property provide a dependable source of sustenance for the table. Instead of the fish and eels rising above the riverbanks in wild profusion as they might during a flood (as indeed they do in "Upon Appleton House"), here they run into the fisherman's net or leap "into his hand." In "To Penshurst" descriptions are carefully regulated to present a tranquil, unified façade of harmonious relationships. Things here seem the way the observer desires them to seem. As the fisherman obtains what he seeks without effort, so the visitor to Penshurst Place sees what he or she came to see:

The blushing apricot, and woolly peach
 Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach.
 And though thy walls be of the country stone,
 They are reared with no man's ruin, no man's groan,
 There's none, that dwell about them, wish them down;
 But all come in, the farmer, and the clown:
 And no-one empty handed, to salute
 Thy lord, and lady, though they have no suit.³⁸⁹

There is no question of the original construction of the walls that partition the property: they simply are and have always been, and no one grudges their presence. Rather, the local folks pass by to offer the best of what they have and expect nothing in return for it. The world presented in "To Penshurst" proves exempt not only from natural fluctuations, but from economic ones as well. Since resources here are apparently unlimited, the economy is one of gifts, not of exchange.

³⁸⁹ "To Penshurst," ln. 44-50

Throughout “To Penshurst” the poem tends strongly towards the presentation of a single aspect onto, or facet of, both social and natural life, one which is invariably positive and affirming. The poem’s language and form are not overly ambitious or complex, and yet “To Penshurst” seems nearly baroque in the *discordia concors* it presents of otherwise irreconcilable elements. “Where the same beer, and bread, and self-same wine / That is his lordship’s, shall be mine” and “As if thou, then, wert mine, or I reigned here” create the paradoxical effect of a social leveling that simultaneously reaffirms the existing hierarchy. Everyone at Penshurst is able to enjoy the privileged perspective of the house’s lord, and, not surprisingly, this is what the king experiences at Penshurst too:

As if thou, then, wert mine, or I reigned here:
 There’s nothing I can wish, for which I stay.
 That found King James, when hunting late, this way,
 With his brave son, the prince, they saw thy fires
 Shine bright on every hearth as the desire
 Of thy Penates had been set on flame,
 To entertain them; or the country came,
 With all their zeal, to warm their welcome here.³⁹⁰

The lines glow with warmth, goodwill, and allegiance as the household gods light the way for the king and his son into the presence of his adoring subjects. Yet what Jonson accomplishes here is quite extraordinary: those present are equal not in spite of the preservation of traditional class boundaries *but because of it*. The way Jonson has framed and regulated his subject matter leads “To Penshurst” to culminate in a tableau of English social life, one in which each individual has his or her place and is free and content

³⁹⁰ “To Penshurst,” ln. 74-81

because of it. It is an idea of social order that Abraham Bosse memorably captures in his frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (fig. 19).



Figure 19: Detail from Abraham Bosse's engraved frontispiece to the 1651 edition of Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or, The matter, forme, & power of a common-wealth ecclesiasticall and civill* (London: Printed for Andrew Crooke, 1651).

The dominant perspective “To Penshurst” offers is a view onto an idealized England in miniature. Within the microcosm of Penshurst’s ancient halls one finds the proper relationships and proportions that should govern the macrocosm of greater Britain: “Now, Penshurst, they that will proportion thee / With other edifices, when they see / Those proud, ambitious heaps, and nothing else, / May say, their lords have built, but thy lord

dwells.”³⁹¹ “To Penshurst” manages all of its details in a fashion that makes them collectively present the house and its grounds as a world unto itself that resolves and resists discord effortlessly, reaffirming the conservative fantasy of “things as they should be.” To create this effect, Jonson has to take considerable liberties in how he presents both the social and natural world. Both worlds are strategically framed to guide his reader’s interpretation to the desired conclusion. Although the poem is meant to be commemorative and essentially epideictic, a more complex reality remains concealed beneath the glassy surface. The “high-swoll’n Medway” may yet still rise, and the walls that have structured the rhythm of life for centuries may still fall.

~

Aemilia Lanyer’s use of the pathetic fallacy in her 1611 poem “The Description of Cooke-ham” provides a good example of how the genre of the country house poem enlists natural features to commend the owner’s hospitality:

Oh how me thought each plant, each flower, each tree
Set forth their beauties then to welcome thee!
The very hills right humbly did descend,
When you to tread on them did intend.
And as you set your feet, they still did rise,
Glad that they could receive so rich a prize.³⁹²

Drawing on the features of the landscape and portraying them as responsive to the character and will of the dwelling master, the poet creates an enveloping effect that melds nature, architecture, and owner into one. That the land itself becomes plastic and responds to the lady’s footfalls is a wonderful detail, for it shows the extent to which the

³⁹¹ “To Penshurst,” ln. 99-103

³⁹² Aemilia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, ed. Woods (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

master is the center of both the poem and the territory, her perspective subordinating and ordering the land to her will. In “Upon the Hill and Grove at Billbrough,” Andrew Marvell takes this practice further and makes of the landscape a geometric rule that may instruct others:

See how the archèd earth does here
 Rise in a perfect hemisphere!
 The stiffest compass could not strike
 A line more circular and like;
 Nor softest pencil draw a brow
 So equal as this hill does bow.
 It seems as for a model laid,
 And that the world by it was made.

Here learn, ye mountains more unjust,
 Which to abrupter greatness thirst,
 That do with you hook-shouldered height
 The earth deform and heaven fright,
 For whose excrescence ill-designed,
 Nature must a new centre find,
 Learn here those humble steps to tread,
 Which to securer glory lead.³⁹³

The landscape here is exemplary and allegorical, presenting a characteristically early modern conception of a world that is at once prelapsarian and geometrically correct. Formed according to a strict rule, and presenting the logic of its making in its existing form, the hill assumes the dimension of political allegory:

Yet thus it all the fields commands,
 And in unenvied greatness stands,
 Discerning further than the cliff
 Of heaven-daring Tenerife.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Andrew Marvell, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Smith (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson Longman, 2007).

³⁹⁴ “Upon the Hill and Grove at Billbrough,” ln. 24-8

Two lines end-stopped with commas form a couplet bound together with a strong rhyme. The highly regular iambic tetrameter of these lines expresses probity and prudence within the prescribed measures, while the second off-rhymed couplet hurtles onward past the “cliff” edge and into a rushing, hyphenated adjectival construction. Marvell thus turns his musings on the landscape into a reflection on the respective strategies and conduct of Lord General Thomas Fairfax and Oliver Cromwell.

Throughout his poems to Lord Fairfax, Marvell draws on natural features to represent his Lord’s virtues, rendering the natural world pathetic and allegorical by turns. In his Latin “Epigramma in Duos Montes Amosclivium et Bilboreum: Farfacio,” Marvell continues to play with the contrast between humble hill and heaven-daring mountain, reading them this time as figures of Fairfax’s two-sided personality:

Erectus, praeceps, salebrosus, e arduus ille:
 Acclivis, placidus, mollis, amoenus hic est.
 Dissimilis domino coit Natura sub uno;
 Farfaciaque tremunt sub ditione pares.

[That is lofty, steep, uneven, and arduous:
 This is sloping, gentle, soft, and pleasing.
 Nature joined dissimilar things under one master;
 And they quake as equals under Fairfaxian sway.]³⁹⁵

In his description of “Fairfaxian sway” lies a fair indication of the kind of poetic approach Marvell takes to these poems that combine history and nature into a single statement by reflecting on houses, grounds, and their particular qualities.

Along with nature’s conscribed participation in the epideictic register of the country-house poem is a persistent interest in how things seem or appear to an observer. Lanyer and Jonson’s use of the pathetic fallacy may be considered part of a poetic

³⁹⁵ Marvell, “Epigramma in Duos Montes” in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ln. 13-17

strategy intended to frame and determine the significance of diverse elements. It is a technique that subordinates a poem's subject and the details that illustrate it, and establishes, in no ambiguous terms, what these details mean. Neither Jonson nor Lanyer seems particularly keen to reveal *how* their poems create such harmonious, happy effects, but Andrew Marvell adopts a technique in "Upon Appleton House" that Sir John Denham had pioneered in "Cooper's Hill" (1642) that allows him to raise this very question. By drawing attention to the eye's role in shaping the landscape and discerning within it figures of particular significance, Denham's interest in perception, framing, and figurative interpretation sets a precedent for Marvell's further poetic experimentation:

My eye, which swift as thought contracts the space
That lies between, and first salutes the place
Crown'd with that sacred pile, so vast, so high,
That whether 'tis a part of Earth, or sky,
Uncertain seems, and may be thought a proud
Aspiring mountain, or descending cloud.³⁹⁶

Denham's preoccupation with competing extremes informs "Cooper's Hill" much as it informs Marvell's Bilbrough poems. Yet Denham's open acknowledgement that it is the eye of the beholder that actively arranges the landscape is pivotal, for it introduces a second level of awareness to the pleasant façades that Jonson and Lanyer present. While Marvell sought to resolve such tensions in his Latin epigram by uniting them as two sides of a single temperament, Denham is content to include the tension itself multiple times in his poem, once, in the context of nature, as provoking wonder and delight, and once, in the context of politics, as the take-away lesson of the English Civil War:

³⁹⁶ Sir John Denham, "Cooper's Hill," in *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope. According to the London folio edition. The second edition. To which are added, several new poems since publish'd by the author* (Dublin: printed by and for George Grierson, at the Two Bibles in Essex-Street, 1727), ln. 13-18.

While the steep horrid roughness of the Wood
 Strives with the gentle calmness of the flood.
 Such huge extreams when Nature doth unite,
 Wonder from thence results, from thence delight.³⁹⁷

~

And popular sway, by forcing Kings to give
 More than was fit for subjects to receive,
 Ran to the same extreams; and one excess
 Made both, by striving to be greater, less.³⁹⁸

Unlike in Jonson's "To Penshurst," where nature mapped quite neatly onto an idealized social and political situation, Denham draws a distinction between the two and interprets the resulting tension significantly.

This more complex treatment of the natural and the political is something Andrew Marvell develops further in "Upon Appleton House." By adopting Denham's strategy and making the eye of the viewer the active, contracting force, Marvell's speaker in "Upon Appleton House" is at greater liberty to explore the house and its surroundings, embracing them in all their suggestiveness. Marvell's treatment of landscapes, their features and inhabitants brings forth what is ultimately a multifaceted sequence of competing points of view. It embraces metaphor's uncertain and digressive tendencies and acknowledges the limited, relative, and scaled boundaries of an observer's perspective. In this sense, Marvell's use of "changing scenes" and other *topoi* imported from the visual arts may be interpreted as a way of staging the limits of various modes of perception so as to expose the conditional, artificial nature of subjective experience.

5.2: "To the abyss I pass": Marvell's Competing Points of View

³⁹⁷ "Cooper's Hill," ln. 209-212

³⁹⁸ "Cooper's Hill," ln. 345-348

In his essay, “The Reality Effect,” Roland Barthes discusses the function of “concrete details” in a written text. These details are “constituted by the *direct* collusion of a referent and a signifier; the signified is expelled from the sign.”³⁹⁹ Barthes invokes a tripartite formula of signification that includes a sign, what it signifies within the text, and the original referent, the last of which belongs to what we consider the empirical reality external to the fiction of the text. A “concrete detail,” then, is one that produces the illusion of an external *real* imported into the verbal economy of the text. In “Upon Appleton House,” concrete details such as the house itself and the members of the Fairfax family such as Isabel Thwaites and, later in the poem, Mary Fairfax, situate the poem in a definite historical and geographical context. This context provides a frame of reference essential for grounding the poem’s content, and allows for an imaginative merging of the reader’s viewpoint with that of the speaker, which the text makes explicit in stanza eleven:

While with slow eyes we these survey,
And on each pleasant footstep stay,
We opportunely may relate
That progress of the house’s fate.⁴⁰⁰

Marvell chooses for his speaker the first person plural pronoun *we*, which implicates the reader and invites him or her to share his viewpoint and accompany him. The use of *we* makes the reader aware that his viewpoint is one with the speaker’s, and that his movement forward (“progress”) through the tale of the “house’s fate” will follow closely in the footsteps of his guide. From early in the poem then, Marvell encourages a

³⁹⁹ Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” *The Rustle of Language* (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 1987) 147.

⁴⁰⁰ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 81-84

hermeneutic approach that takes for granted the validity of “concrete details,” the logic they presuppose, and the possibility of experiencing a viewpoint identical to that of the speaker.

The techniques responsible for producing the “reality effect” in a work of literature bear a close resemblance to the use of the vanishing point in early perspectival painting. Paintings organized around a vanishing point, such as the drawing below from De Vries *Variae Architecturae Formae*, actively locate the viewer in the position of the artist, aligning both individuals’ perceptive experience of the given scene with a single representational logic – the spectator “sees” from the viewpoint of the artist (fig. 20):

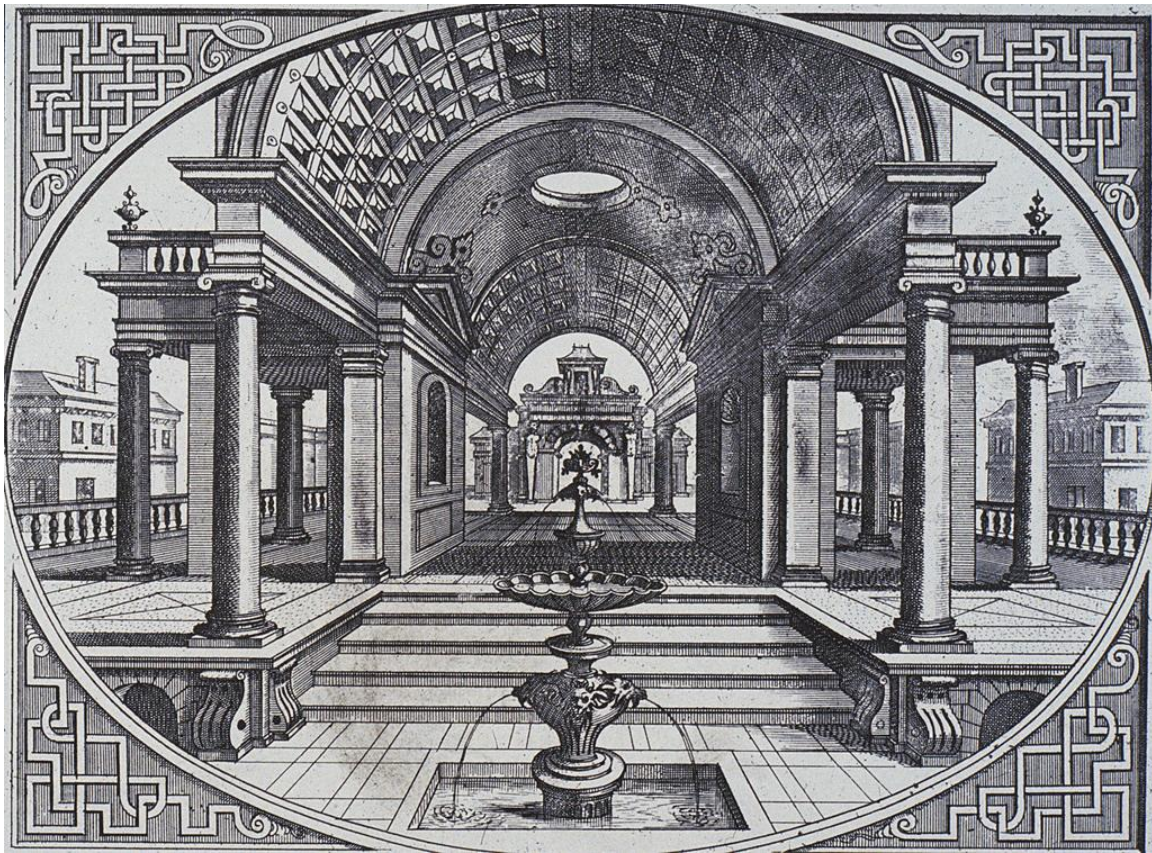


Figure 20: Vredeman de Vries, Hans, Engraving from *Variae Architecturae Formae*, 1601. The Image Gallery, University of California, San Diego; Provided by ARTstor

In the view of the “Ideal City” as imagined during the Italian Renaissance, the vanishing point is the “point of projection from which all ratios are determined”⁴⁰¹ and governs the situation, size, and relationships of architectural features on the painted surface, allowing them to appear “real” through their inclusion in a “system of linear perspective” (fig. 21):



Figure 21: The Ideal City, attributed to Fra Carnevale (1445-1484).
© The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore MD.

In both media, representational systems are operative in creating a certain artistic effect, but I want to stress their similarity: the “reality effect” is achieved in both media by aligning the perspective of the reader or spectator with the viewpoint of the artist or speaker, and the subsequent inclusion of “concrete details” that obey their medium’s organizational logic. Such alignment is an intrinsic characteristic of the vanishing point technique, but it is also implicit to the reading of literature and to an author’s creation of the literary effect I have called perspectival metaphysics. By simulating the eye’s perceptual habits, such paintings create an illusion of depth by establishing an internally consistent system of logical relations within a painting’s frame. By mediating a reader’s

⁴⁰¹ Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1987), 16.

experience through a character or speaker, literature establishes a perspective for its reader that encourages or even enforces a particular way of viewing and interpreting the fictional world. What results is a harmonious and complete *view* onto an imaginary world that appears to be governed by a rational system and representational grammar. Such a view is attractive and pleasing, if only because it conforms to the expectations of the individual who contemplates it. This mode of anticipating and regulating viewpoint is what Andrew Marvell initially adopts in the early stanzas of the poem.

Although Marvell implicitly aligns the viewpoint of the speaker with that of the reader in stanza eleven, the stanzas that precede this idealized alignment raise questions about the purpose and value of theoretically subordinating nature and human experience to rational principles. Much as Jonson does in “To Penshurst,” Marvell rejects the vogue for European architectural trends and praises Appleton House for its native, “sober frame”:

Within this sober frame expect
 Work of no foreign architect,
 That unto caves the quarries drew,
 And forests did to pastures hew,
 Who of his great design in pain
 Did for a model vault his brain,
 Whose columns should so high be raised
 To arch the brows that on them gazed.⁴⁰²

These opening lines distinguish between the force required to impose a theoretical “design” onto the land and the natural ease with which the original construction, the Nun Appleton priory, occupies its situation. Although Alberti often claims that ancient architects took their designs from nature, it is clear that their art consisted in regularizing

⁴⁰² “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 1-8

what they found in the natural world and subordinating it to a logical order and function: “The ancient Architects always kept so close to Nature, as to seem, if possible, never to have consulted any Thing but mere Convenience in Building, and at the same Time, made it their Care, that their Works should be not only strong and useful, but also pleasant to the Sight.”⁴⁰³ Alberti offers an example of how a naturally occurring feature can furnish the model for a common architectural technique:

Nature at first certainly gave us Columns made of Wood, and of a round Figure, afterwards by Use they came in some Places to be cut square. Thereupon, if I judge right, seeing in these wooden Columns certain Rings of Circles of Brass or Iron, fasten'd about the Top and Bottom, that the continual Weight which they are made to bear, might not split them.⁴⁰⁴

Nature has provided her own model for columns in the cylindrical form of tree trunks, and with a few improvements these may be made strong enough to uphold a ceiling and create “a Wall open and discontinued in several Places.”⁴⁰⁵ Despite the formal analogy between tree trunks and columns, their respective functions in nature and in architecture have nothing in common: in the first, they exist to help the tree compete with those around it and absorb as much sunlight as possible, in the second they bear the weight of a ceiling to create an open, semi-sheltered space. The link between the two is purely formal, not functional, and it demonstrates a desire on Alberti’s part to discover by

⁴⁰³ Leon Battista Alberti, *The architecture of Leon Batista Alberti: In ten books. Of painting. In three books. And of Statuary. In one book. Translated into Italian By Cosimo Bartoli. And into English By James Leoni, Architect. lustrated with Seventy-Five Copper-Plates, Engraved by Mr. Picart. In one volume.* (London: printed by Edward Owen, in Hand-Court, Holborn; for Robert Alfray, in the Hay-Market, St. James's, M.DCC.LV. [1755]), book I, ch. X, “Of the Columns and Walls, and some Observations relating to the Columns”

⁴⁰⁴ *The architecture of Leon Batista Alberti*, Book I, Chapter X

⁴⁰⁵ *The architecture of Leon Batista Alberti*, Book I, Chapter X

analogical reasoning a harmonious rule that could be said to govern the various aspects of the natural and artificial worlds.⁴⁰⁶ Beginning his poem by rejecting the image of an architect “Who of his great design in pain / Did for a model vault his brain,” Marvell treats such a worldview with supercilious – “to arch the brows that on them gazed” – skepticism.⁴⁰⁷ These curious opening lines suggest that the desire to find patterns in nature that justify and explain common practices may require for its fulfillment willful self-deception.

An enthusiastic John Dee, for example, in his widely read 1570 preface to Euclid’s *Geometry*, exalted in the possibility that all sciences could be derived from geometry and had in common a “Principall Science of *Magnitudes*”:

But there are other (very many) *Methodicall Artes*, which, declyning from the purity, simplicitie, and Immateriality, of our Principall Science of *Magnitudes*: do yet neuertheles vse the great ayde, direction, and Method of the sayd principall Science, and haue propre names, and distinct: both from the Science of *Geometrie*, (from which they are deriued) and one from the other. As Perspectiue, Astronomie, Musike, Cosmographie, Astrologie, Statike, Anthropographie, Trochilike, Helicosophie, Pneumatithmie, Menadrie, Hypogeiodie, Hydragogie, Horometrie, Zographie, Architecture, Nauigation, Thaumaturgike and Archemastrie.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ For more on analogical reasoning and renaissance culture, see Walter Ong, *Ramus, method, and the decay of dialogue: from the art of discourse to the art of reason* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1994), 17-45.

⁴⁰⁷ Elizabeth Donno cites Henry Hawkins, *Partheneia Sacra*, 1633: “A house being a mere artificial and no natural thing hath its first subsistence in the idea of a man’s brain, according to whose model, good or ill, the house so built proves good or ill.” Andrew Marvell, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Donno (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

⁴⁰⁸ John Dee, preface to *The Elements of geometrie of the most auncient philosopher Euclide of Megara*, trans. Billingsley (Imprinted at London: By Iohn Daye, 1570).

Dee’s interest in the classification of knowledge betrays a desire for order and arrangement that one could even term Ramist in its ambition. The arts of architecture and perspective appear alongside “Anthropographie” and “Zographie,” as if these various branches of inquiry could be shown to operate according to a common set of principles and laws. Alberti’s interest in the analogical relationships between nature and art, and Dee’s interest in the interrelatedness of knowledge generally, have much in common with the proto-humanist theories of the microcosm and macrocosm, which hinge on faith in an essential order founded on man. Leonardo da Vinci’s drawing, commonly referred to as ‘Vitruvian Man,’ is iconic in part because it is the culminating visual expression of the humanist worldview (fig. 22).

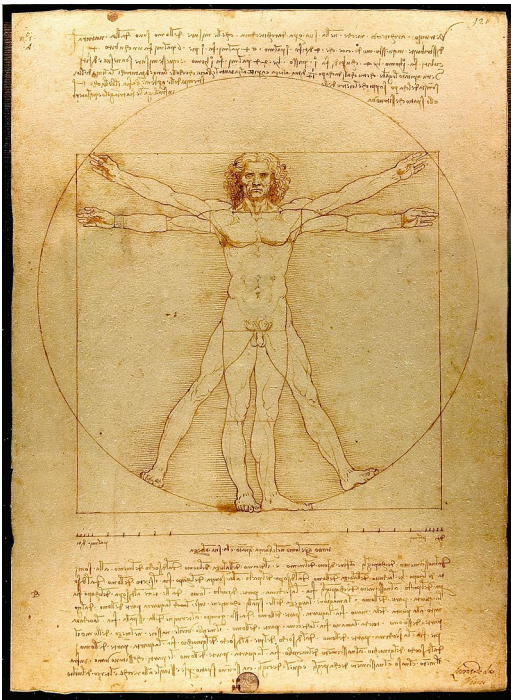


Figure 22: Leonardo da Vinci, “Le proporzioni del corpo umano secondo Vitruvio,” 1490.
© Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice.

What Leonardo’s drawing, perspectival compositions, the “reality effect,” and even T.S. Eliot’s “objective correlative” have in common is the belief in a frame of reference that can unite and explain the relationships between what would otherwise seem disparate,

independent elements. By making the descriptive procedures that establish such frames of reference the focus of his poetic endeavor in “Upon Appleton House,” Marvell demonstrates that *how* art teaches its recipient to see is a question of equal if not greater significance than *what* a work of art allows one to see.

Marvell’s opening stanzas draw a humorous distinction between the original building of the Nun Appleton priory and the more recent (and at the time of the poem’s composition still unfinished) Appleton House.⁴⁰⁹ These two buildings allow the poet to continue to contrast art and nature in terms of architectural styles and building practices:

Why should of all things man unrul’d
Such unproportioned dwellings build?
The beasts are by the dens expressed:
And birds contrive an equal nest;
The low-roofed tortoises do dwell
In cases fit of tortoise shell:
No creature loves an empty space;
Their bodies measure out their place.⁴¹⁰

Unlike the fit between a tortoise and its shell, Fairfax “in his hollow palace goes / Where winds (as he) themselves may lose.”⁴¹¹ Likening the new construction in its ambition “the world t’ unite” to the Tower of Babel, the speaker playfully underscores the difference between theory and practice. Turning to the original construction, however, he discerns in it a natural balance created not by geometry but by humility:

⁴⁰⁹ The Appleton House property included the original estate of Nun Appleton, a Cistercian priory that came to the Fairfax family by royal decree at the dissolution of the monasteries, and a newer building begun in 1637 or 1638. See Elizabeth Donno’s notes to *The Complete Poems* and Michael Powell, “Andrew Marvell, Sir Thomas Widdrington, and Appleton House,” *Notes and Queries*, 4, no. 3 (1996): 281-284.

⁴¹⁰ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 9-16

⁴¹¹ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 19-20

But all things are composèd here
 Like Nature, orderly and near:
 In which we the dimensions find
 Of that more sober age and mind,
 When larger-sizèd men did stoop
 To enter at a narrow loop;
 As practicing, in doors so strait,
 To strain themselves through heaven's gate.⁴¹²

What makes the composition of nature “orderly and near” is not a theoretically ideal treatment of space founded upon normative perception, but the individual’s willingness to submit to a rule that long antedates him and does not bend to accommodate mundane concerns:

Humility alone designs
 Those short but admirable lines,
 By which, ungirt and unconstrained,
 Things greater are in less contained.
 Let others vainly strive t’immure
 The circle in the quadrature!
 These holy mathematics can
 In every figure equal man.⁴¹³

What squares the circle in Marvell’s figure is not calculation but the ability to adapt to present circumstances. Marvell never overtly criticizes Lord Fairfax’s decision to resign from his position at the head of the Parliamentary troops and remove himself to Nun Appleton; rather, the poet suggests that his humility makes him greater than he already was, and that his actions provide a solution by “holy mathematics” to a problem that had puzzled mathematicians for centuries. His phrase “holy mathematics” is incisive, for it demonstrates his awareness that even constructions that would otherwise present

⁴¹² “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 25-32

⁴¹³ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 41-48

themselves as internally consistent and logical wholes require at some level a suspension of disbelief.

The changing scenes of “Upon Appleton House” suggest that every point of view brings with it assumptions about location, scale, and proportion. Marvell uses this technique to explore the limitations of subjective perception and expose the humanist interpretation of the universe as arbitrary. An orderly, arranged description of a landscape may yield a realistic sense of looking through a window, but the significance of such a perspective in a work of literature depends on interpretative procedures and the ascription of particular meanings to figures, symbols, and metaphors. From the line in stanza eleven – “While with slow eyes we these survey” – it has been implied that the speaker and the reader share a common point of view. It is in this mode that the speaker relates the history of the original house and the manner in which William Fairfax of Steeton married the heiress Isabel Thwaites. As readers, it is as though we have been listening to a story, guided by an omniscient narrator. But when the tale ends, the verse transitions from its historical fiction and returns to the present day: “At the demolishing, this seat / To Fairfax fell as by escheat.”⁴¹⁴ This local mythology offers a causal narrative that explains how things came to be at Nun Appleton. No sooner does this tale conclude, however, than the descriptive strategy of the speaker shifts:

When in the east the morning ray
Hangs out the colours of the day,
The bee through these known alleys hums,
Beating the *dian* with its drums.
Then flowers their drowsy eyelids raise,
Their silken ensigns each displays,
And dries its pan yet dank with dew,

⁴¹⁴ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 273-4

And fills its flask with odours new.

These, as their Governor goes by,
 In fragrant volleys they let fly;
 And to salute their Governness
 Again as great a charge they press:
 None for the virgin Nymph; for she
 Seems with the flowers a flower to be.
 And think so still! though not compare
 With breath so sweet, or cheek so fair.⁴¹⁵

As dawn breaks, the lines guide the reader's attention from the beauty of the open landscape to a bee at work amidst the "drowsy" flowers. The shift is telescopic, and it changes the relationship between the reader and the subject matter of the poem. By focusing on the bee, the "Governor," "Governess," and "the virgin nymph" are seen from a perspective that differs significantly from that employed during the historical narrative of the house's ancestors. It is a good example of how writers of the seventeenth century, as Ernest Gilman claims, "never abandoned the goal of realism and geometric precision" but began instead "to explore how the rules of perspective can magnify or diminish, multiply or distort the image."⁴¹⁶ This telescopic shift makes Thomas Fairfax, Anne de Vere, and Mary Fairfax appear on a scale equal to that of their ancestors, those "of that more sober age and mind, / When larger-sized men did stoop / To enter at a narrow loop."⁴¹⁷ Though alive in the present age of lesser men, the perspective this descriptive maneuver creates for the reader emphasizes the undiminished quality of their noble lineage. From our situation among the flowers, their opening in the warmth of the

⁴¹⁵ "Upon Appleton House," ln. 289-304

⁴¹⁶ Gilman, *The Curious Perspective*, 33.

⁴¹⁷ "Upon Appleton House," ln. 28-30

morning sun and the release of their fragrance appears as an *homage*⁴¹⁸ to the passing family. Thus the poet manipulates the reader's sense of scale to create a vivid, celebratory image. Remarking Marvell's use of diminution and expansion in his poetry, Rosalie Colie observes that such changes in scale are done purposely and "never made for their own sake alone, although he was certainly interested in the poetic limits of a principle of parsimony. He was not, however, parsimonious: he allows for expansion even in his most considerable exercises in tightness."⁴¹⁹

Yet the poet does not rest once he has created this complex aesthetic effect; rather, he complicates it further by likening Mary Fairfax to the flowers themselves. Mary "seems with the flowers a flower to be," and in a single breath the speaker encourages the reader to think of her as such while asserting that no flower could compare with her. It is a clever way to project metaphorical significance onto this passing figure, who vanishes from sight as quickly as she appears. Mary will not appear again in the poem for forty-four stanzas, but her appearance here allows a demonstration of the whimsically transformative power of figurative speech. The reader, whose perspective is aligned with that of the speaker, experiences the world of the poem only through the speaker's verbal mediation, and the rhetorical qualities of his speech are powerful indeed:

But when the vigilant patrol
Of stars walks round about the Pole,
Their leaves, that to the stalks are curled,
Seem to their staves the ensigns furled.
Then in some flower's belovèd hut
Each bee as sentinel is shut,

⁴¹⁸ from medieval Latin *hominaticum*, from Latin *homo*, *homin* - 'man'

⁴¹⁹ Rosalie Colie, *My Echoing Song: Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 123.

And sleeps so too: but, if once stirred,
She runs you through, nor asks the word.⁴²⁰

When night falls, the bee shuts itself up within one of the flowers and remains there as though on guard. The inclusion of this detail unites these stanzas into a descriptive *episode* with the temporal frame of a single day. However, since any such exercise in framing, be it historical, spatial, or metaphorical, in “Upon Appleton House” exists only to precipitate a new variety of description in the succeeding stanzas.

The enclosure of the bee in the flower immediately yields a new perspective:

Oh thou, that dear and happy isle
The garden of the world ere while,
Thou paradise of four seas,
Which heaven planted us to please,
But, to exclude the world, did guard
With watery if not flaming sword;
What luckless apple did we taste,
To make us mortal, and thee waste?⁴²¹

This apostrophe to the “dear and happy isle” makes of Britain and Eden a single topography with competing temporalities: the time of prelapsarian Eden is ahistorical, while that of Britain is always unfolding towards an uncertain destiny in time. This sudden shift in scale results from what the speaker establishes as a focal point. These stanzas demonstrate how the choice of a focal point determines the proportional relationships that are implied between its features. By progressing immediately from a point of view scaled down to that of a bee to an aerial perspective of “the garden of the world” ringed around by four seas, the poem demonstrates the extent to which a rhetorical strategy conditions the reader’s experience of both time and space.

⁴²⁰ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 313-320

⁴²¹ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 321-328

Although the passage of the Fairfax family in stanza thirty-eight initiates a change in the poem's language towards increasingly figurative and multivalent descriptions, the formal rupture in narrative practice, signaled by a grammatical shift from *we* to *I*, does not occur until stanza forty-seven. Here at the midpoint of the poem the speaker enters the text in the form of the first person singular pronoun. This simple shift has significant interpretive consequences, for it undermines the existing referential context of the poem and grammatically destabilizes the reader's relationship to the text:

And now to the abyss I pass
 Of that unfathomable grass,
 Where men like grasshoppers appear,
 But grasshoppers are giants there:
 They, in their squeaking laugh, contemn
 Us as we walk more low than them:
 And, from the precipices tall
 Of the green spires, to us do call.⁴²²

This transformative stanza likens men to grasshoppers, and grasshoppers to giants; the grass, heretofore presupposed as a simple floor beneath one's feet, engulfs the action of the poem within an alien realm of "unfathomable" depths from which rises an architecture of "precipices tall" and "green spires." Lauren Shohet notes that by "inverting space and hierarchy, the passage's reversals of low and high, inside and outside, land and water extend to interchanges of nature and artifice, living tissue and stone, human and animal."⁴²³ The grammatical shift, which erodes the distinction between who is speaking and who is observing, is likewise irresolvable: though the speaker announces himself as an individual voice, the collective *we* remains in the verse

⁴²² "Upon Appleton House," ln. 369-376

⁴²³ Lauren Shohet, "Forming history, inhabiting form in Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House,'" *Poetics Today*, 35, no. 4 (2014): 659-688.

– “contemn / Us as we walk more low than them.” The sudden presence of multiple pronouns announces a plurality of potential viewpoints onto this landscape of existential dread, which is marked in turn by pluralities of its own – grasshoppers, precipices, and spires. The grammatical shift in stanza forty-seven and the formal rupture it occasions expose the fragile, artificial quality of virtual experience from an aligned point of view.

In attempting to account for such radical and alienating transformations, I suggest that the embodiment of the speaker within the text means that the reader can no longer assume to share his viewpoint. What results is a description of a world seen from a different angle; a landscape brought to our eyes through different representational techniques. It is telling that the word “appear” enters the text here for the first time, appealing to the sense of sight from its situation in the linguistic code.⁴²⁴ The description of the grasshoppers’ “squeaking laugh” likewise asks us both to imagine a sound and to interpret it anthropomorphically.⁴²⁵ The use of deictic language, such as “*that* unfathomable grass / where men like grasshoppers appear / But grasshoppers are giants *there*,” provides verbal cues suggestive of spatial orientation, but in an unbounded space. Terms for which we may have a solid idea of size, shape, behavior and so on (e.g. “men” and “grasshoppers”) are warped by metaphor into aberrations and made unfamiliar. These figurative or rhetorical elements call for a new interpretive approach, for the previous logic of “concrete details” and shared viewpoint has been overturned. “Rhetoric,” Paul de Man writes, “radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential

⁴²⁴ In the sense of “to seem”; “appeared” shows up in the sense of “to come into sight” in line 259: “Then th’ unfrequented vault appeared, / And superstitions vainly feared.”

⁴²⁵ Grasshoppers do not have vocal chords, but communicate with their legs, as crickets do, in a process called “stridulation.”

aberration,” and this is indeed what these lines instantiate.⁴²⁶ If, as de Man writes in “The Resistance to Theory,” “grammatical cognition is undone, at all times, by its rhetorical displacement,” then the techniques of shared viewpoint and “concrete details” may be read as ways of regulating the grammatical and rhetorical functions coexistent in a text, or even of promoting the former at the expense of the latter.⁴²⁷

The instance of rupture in stanza forty-seven exposes the artificial quality of interpretive strategies and breaks the confluences – sign / referent, speaker / reader – that underlie a conventional reading experience. It is no accident that the rupture in “Upon Appleton House” coincides with the speaker’s “wandering away” or *ab-errance* from the house itself and from the poem’s other modes of description: spatial or perspectival, historical narrative, and pathetic fallacy. Upon entering “the abyss,” the presence of deictic language draws attention to the ways in which interpretive guidelines are established, especially those of size, space and time – dimensions that are often taken for granted in the act of reading. Yet the speaker’s encounter with the grasshoppers is only the beginning in a sequence of forty-four stanzas during which scenarios are repeatedly established, uprooted and replaced. The lines from stanza forty-nine, “No scene that turns with engines strange / Does oft’ner than these meadows change,” make explicit the fluctuating relationship between artist, object and representation.⁴²⁸ Instead of staying

⁴²⁶ Paul de Man, “Semiology and Rhetoric” in the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 1520.

⁴²⁷ Paul de Man, “The Resistance to Theory” in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 17.

⁴²⁸ Ernest Gilman in *The Curious Perspective* likens this interlude to the mirror play in Velasquez’s *Las Meninas*. The breaking with the “literal” that I am describing here may

within manageable poetic boundaries and retreating from features and topics that may be difficult to control, as Jonson does, Marvell courts disorder and confusion. Stanza sixty provides a remarkable instance of what I have been calling “concrete details” caught up in a maximum of disorder:

Let others tell the paradox,
 How eels now bellow in the ox;
 How horses at their tails do kick,
 Turned as they hang to leeches quick;
 How boats can over bridges sail;
 And fishes do the stables scale.
 How salmons trespassing are found;
 And pikes are taken in the pound.⁴²⁹

Here the very bases of perspectival representation are washed away in the flood and only unitary details remain, albeit in bizarre relationships to one another. The eel and the ox both speak by way of a single sound, one having been swallowed by the other, an apt metaphor for the co-presence and operation of literal and figural meanings in a text.

Once the illusion of a shared perspective between the speaker and the reader is shattered, the poem’s details are more difficult to unite as part of a single composition.

The description of the villagers’ cattle on the pasture reads:

They seem within the polished grass
 A landskip drawn in looking-glass,
 And shrunk in the huge pasture show
 As spots, so shaped, on faces do –
 Such fleas, ere they approach the eye,
 In multiplying glasses lie.
 They feed so wide, so slowly move,
 As constellations do above.⁴³⁰

be read as a detailed explanation of precisely how “Upon Appleton House” creates the effect that he describes at length.

⁴²⁹ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 473-480

⁴³⁰ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 457-464

How the cattle appear or “seem” depends entirely on the mode by which they are perceived. Collectively, they are part of a landscape composition; individually considered, they are like fleas observed in a microscope. Finally, they seem to reflect the constellations in their gradual movement across the “polished” meadow. Thus three different perspectives cooperate here to create a bewildering stanza, challenging the idea of a single objective manner of observation or literal signification.

Much as a composition in linear perspective appears natural on account of the logical system it conceals, so a vivid description regulates its grammatical and rhetorical aspects according to the logic of conventional use. That the logic responsible for regulating the grammatical and rhetorical capacities of a text is normative and presupposed casts doubt on the concept of literality itself. “The literal is the opposite of the figurative,” writes Jonathan Culler echoing Nietzsche, “but a literal expression is also a metaphor whose figurality has been forgotten.”⁴³¹ Figurality is “forgotten” in the same way that a sign’s signified is exchanged for its referent, or the absence indicated by a painting’s vanishing point is taken for presence: in both cases, conventional practices of reading and seeing become naturalized over time. Alterations in representational technique evoke the assumptions upon which conventional approaches to art depend. Vermeer’s *The Artist in His Studio*, or more literally translated “The Art of Painting” (*Di Schilderkonst*), was completed in 1666, and provides a case in point nearly contemporaneous with “Upon Appleton House” (fig. 23):

⁴³¹ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 148.



Figure 23: Jan Vermeer, *The Artist in His Studio*; alternatively titled *The Art of Painting (Di Schilderkonst)*, 1665-66.
 © Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

To create an effect of decenteredness, Vermeer situates the artist within the canvas and avoids organizing its depicted elements around any identifiable vanishing point. Brian Rotman writes that this painting “exemplifies the illusion of vanishing point perspective

through an image which unmask it, and denies it in favour of a radically more complex, self-conscious, form of viewing.”⁴³² The shift away from the technique of the vanishing point and the anteriority it purports to represent is what Rotman terms a move away from “perspectival literalism.”⁴³³ Vermeer undoes such “literalism” by depriving the spectator of the organizational logic intrinsic to a specific painterly technique, leaving his subjectivity “unlocated.” From our “unlocated subjectivity,” we may imagine that we are seeing with the artist, that the studio is a representation of a real place, that the model was once real, that the death mask on the table bears the impression of someone who really lived, but the work refuses to confirm the extent to which it is mimetic. The work retains its potential for aberrance, a point that was not lost on Fernando Botero, who, painting nearly three hundred years later, returned to Vermeer’s studio with quite drastic, tongue-in-cheek consequences (fig. 24):

⁴³² Rotman, *Signifying Nothing*, 33.

⁴³³ Rotman, *Signifying Nothing*, 55.



Figure 24: Fernando Botero, *Vermeer's Studio*, 1964. Harvard Fine Arts Library, Visual Collections - Slides and Digital Images; 1992.14146

Botero's composition achieves its flooding effect by purposely situating the model and her idealized representation within two square frames, creating a *mise en abyme* effect. Leading its viewer into an abyss in which the organizational principles of the composition reinforce one another regardless of mimetic considerations external to the canvas, Botero's technique has much in common with the grammatical rupture that marks the mid-point of "Upon Appleton House": "And now to the abyss I pass / Of that unfathomable grass."

In "Upon Appleton House" Marvell exploits analogies between practices of visual representation and literary description to illustrate the essentially rhetorical quality of poetic description. Language's ability to situate its hearer in insubstantial, imaginary landscapes by drawing on deictic language, spatial cues, and intimations of proportionality is what his experiments in perspectival metaphysics so insightfully

illustrate. As the poem proceeds from the meadows and the speaker leaves all consideration of guiding his reader behind, he wanders into the woods “where the world no certain shot / Can make, or me it toucheth not.”⁴³⁴ In this enclosed space isolation from the world becomes a form of liberation, not just from the claims of the social and political world but from time and mortality itself. The desire to lose oneself in the natural world is also a desire to be freed from the limitations of subjective perception, and thus the verse assumes an ontological aspect:

Bind me, ye woodbines, in your twines,
 Curl me about, ye gadding vines,
 And, oh, so close your circles lace,
 That I may never leave this place:
 But lest your fetters prove too weak,
 Ere I your silken bondage break,
 Do you, O brambles, chain me too,
 And, courteous briars, nail me through.⁴³⁵

The soft sound “oh” breaks the signifying chain, for it is an instance of language in the service of ineffable desire. The apostrophe to “you, O brambles” and to the “courteous briars” shift the active, shaping force in the poem from the eye of the viewer to the sinuous multiplicity of nature’s fetters. This moment of relinquishment closes the speaker’s eyes, in a sense, and experience becomes predominantly tactile. In its rejection of the visual modes that characterize the rest of the poem, these stanzas that anticipate the return of Mary Fairfax and the poem’s conclusion are the most unfamiliar. The poem’s experiments in perspectival metaphysics have revealed the contingent qualities of human perception and rationality, and just as Marvell takes recourse to “holy mathematics” to

⁴³⁴ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 605-606

⁴³⁵ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 609-616

square the circle, so he voices a spiritual desire to be free from the binds of mortality:
 “But where the floods did lately drown, / There at the evening stake me down.”⁴³⁶

~

The English country house poem is at its core an exercise in epideictic rhetoric. It gives a poet an opportunity to praise the owner of the estate for his or her virtues and lifestyle while implying that other ways of living and acting are worthy of blame. These poems single out and celebrate what is to be valued and what is to be condemned, and as such they make an ethical statement about life and the choices an individual has made. Considered this way, a common ethical perspective between the narrator and the reader may be the most important effect for this kind of poem to achieve, for it ensures that the reader will agree that praise and blame are justly given. When Andrew Marvell was writing “Upon Appleton House,” Lord Fairfax’s military career had come to a significant hiatus in the aftermath of the execution of Charles I. Within the poem’s fiction, however, Fairfax’s ethical development continues unabated: “For he did, with his utmost skill, / Ambition weed, but conscience till.”⁴³⁷ Although I have focused primarily on the succession of changing scenes at the center of the poem, what they reveal about the imaginative boundaries of visual and poetic experience is ethically significant. The unstable perspectives that rupture and transform men to grasshoppers, and cows at once to fleas *and* constellations, are exercises in artificial modes of visual experience that oppose a play of temporary appearances against enduring truths. Mary Fairfax’s return in the closing stanzas of the poem reestablishes the significance of the “house’s fate” and

⁴³⁶ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 623-624

⁴³⁷ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 354-355

the family lineage. Perspectives that yield a “new and empty face of things” will not provide the ultimate rule at Nun Appleton. “*She*, that already is the law / Of all her sex, her age’s awe,”⁴³⁸ announces Mary as the continuation of a familial character unaffected by historical change. Like those before her, “holy mathematics” will similarly justify her presence, and where she goes, “the swelling hall / Stirs, and the square grows spherical.”

⁴³⁸ “Upon Appleton House,” ln. 655-656

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alberti, Leon Battista. *Della Pittura, edizione critica*, a cura di Luigi Mallè (Firenze: Sansoni, 1950).
- Alberti, Leon Battista. *The architecture of Leon Batista Alberti: In ten books. Translated into Italian By Cosimo Bartoli. And into English By James Leoni, Architect. Illustrated with Seventy-Five Copper-Plates, Engraved by Mr. Picart* (London: printed by Edward Owen, in Hand-Court, Holborn; for Robert Alfray, in the Hay-Market, St. James's, 1755).
- Alberti, Leon Battista. *The Mathematical Works of Leon Battista Alberti*, translations and commentary by Kim Williams, Lionel March and Stephen R. Wassell (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010).
- Alberti, Leon Battista, *On Painting*, trans. with introduction and notes by John R. Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1956).
- Alighieri, Dante. *Purgatorio*, trans. Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin Books, 2010).
- Alpers, Paul, ed. *Edmund Spenser: A Critical Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
- Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
- Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. Hutton (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982).
- Augustine. *De Vera Religione*, , trans. J.H.S. Burleigh (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1959).
- Bacon, Francis. *The Major Works*, ed. Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- Barkan, Leonard. *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).
- Barocchi, Paola. *Scritti d'Arte Del Cinquecento, fra manierismo e controriforma*, Vol. 1 (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1979).
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Miller (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1974).

- Barthes, Roland. "The Reality Effect," *The Rustle of Language* (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 1987).
- Bender, John. *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).
- Berger, Jr., Harry. *Second World and Green World: studies in renaissance fiction-making* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).
- Berger, Jr., Harry. *The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957).
- Blunt, Anthony, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).
- Braider, Christopher. *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400-1700* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- Bryson, Normal. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Basil : printed and sold by J. J. Tourneisen, MDCCXCII. [1792];
- Burke, Edmund. *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* in the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2001).
- Cassirer, Ernst. *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Domandi (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000).
- Cheney, Donald. *Spenser's Image of Nature: Wild Man and Shepherd in The Faerie Queene* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999).
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Statesman's Manual* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. R.J. White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia literaria, or, Biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions*, ed. Engell and Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- Colie, Rosalie. *My Echoing Song: Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

- Conger, George Perrigo. *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922).
- Conley, Thomas. *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (New York: Longman, 1990).
- Coogan, Robert. "Petrarch's Trionfi and the English Renaissance," *Studies in Philology*, 6, no. 3 (1970): 306-327.
- Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).
- Curtius, Ernst Robert, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Trask (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1953).
- Damisch, Hubert. *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).
- Dee, John. Preface to *The Elements of geometrie of the most auncient philosopher Euclide of Megara*, trans. Billingsley (London: Printed by Iohn Daye, 1570).
- De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
- De Man, Paul. "Semiology and Rhetoric" in the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001).
- De Man, Paul. *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- Denham, Sir John. "Cooper's Hill," published in *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope. According to the London folio edition. The second edition. To which are added, several new poems since publish'd by the author* (Dublin: printed by and for George Grierson, at the Two Bibles in Essex-Street, 1727).
- Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982).
- Donaldson, Ian. *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Judith Dundas, "Fairylan and the Vanishing Point," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 40, no. 1 (1981): 82-84.
- Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Second edition (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947).
- Elkins, James. *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

- Eliot, T.S., "Hamlet and His Problems" in *The Sacred Wood; essays on poetry and criticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1920).
- Erickson, Wayne. *Mapping The Faerie Queene: Quest Structures and the World of the Poem* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996).
- Evett, David. *Literature and the Visual Arts in Tudor England* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990)
- Ficino, Marsilio. *De Amore*, trans. Jayne (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1944).
- Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964).
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1994).
- Freud, Sigmund. *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, ed. Rieff (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1963).
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1961).
- Fumerton, Patricia. *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance literature and the practice of social ornament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- Gent, Lucy. *Picture and Poetry, 1560-1620: relations between literature and the visual arts in the English renaissance* (Lemington Spa, Warwickshire: J. Hall, 1981).
- Giamatti, A. Bartlett. *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).
- Gibson, James J. "The Visual Field and the Visual World," *Psychological Review*, 59 (1952): 149-15
- Gibson, James J. *The Perception of the Visual World* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1950).
- Gilman, Ernest. *The Curious Perspective: literary and pictorial wit in the seventeenth century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978).
- Gilman, Ernest. *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down Went Dagon* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
- Goldberg, Jonathan. *Shakespeare's Hand* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Gombrich, E.H. *Art and Illusion*, Second edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Gombrich, E.H. "Standards of Truth" in *The Image and the Eye: further studies in the psychology of pictorial representation* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982).

Gottfried, Rudolf. "The Pictorial Element in Spenser's Poetry," *English Literary History* 19, No. 3 (1952): 203-213.

Greenblatt, Stephen, general ed, *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

Grogan, Jane. *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene* (London: Ashgate, 2009).

Grossman, Marshall. *The Story of All Things: writing the self in English Renaissance narrative poetry* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

Gunning, Tom. "The cinema of attractions : early film, its spectator, and the avant-garde," *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

Hamilton, A.C., ed. *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1990).

Horace. *Carmina. Liber IV* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Hughes, John. *The Works of Mr. Edmund Spenser: in six volumes : with a glossary explaining the old and obscure words* (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1715).

Ivins, Jr., William M. *On the Rationalization of Sight: with an examination of three renaissance texts on perspective* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1973).

Kalas, Rayna. *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

Jonathan Z. Kamholtz, "Spenser and Perspective," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 39, No.1 (1980): 59-66.

Kant, Immanuel. "On the Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy," *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

Keats, John. *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. Barnard (London: Penguin, 1973).

- Koerner, Joseph. *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- Krier, Teresa M. *Gazing on Secret Sights: Spenser, Classical Imitation, and the Decorums of Vision* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- Hagstrum, Jean H. *The Sister Arts; the Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan, or, The matter, forme, & power of a common-wealth ecclesiasticall and civill* (London: Printed for Andrew Crooke, 1651).
- Hulse, Clark. *The Rule of Art: Literature and Painting in the Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
- Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).
- Johnson, Samuel. *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Jonson, Ben. *The Complete Poems*, ed. Parfitt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).
- Jonson, Ben. *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, ed. Harp (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).
- Jonson, Ben. *Timber, or, Discoveries* (Cambridge, MA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999).
- Jonson, Ben. *Ben Jonson*, ed. Herford and Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963-70).
- Kemp, Martin. *Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
- Land, Norman. *The Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
- Lewalski, Barbara. *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
- Lewis, C.S.. *The Allegory of Love* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).
- Lucian of Samosata. *Works*, trans. A.M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913-1967).
- MacCaffrey, Isabel. *Spenser's Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

Marvell, Andrew. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Smith (New York, NY: Pearson Longman, 2007).

Marvell, Andrew. *The Complete Poems*, ed. Donno (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

Meek, Richard. *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

John Milton, *Areopagitica*, ed. Wolfe, vol. 2 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82).

Milton, John. *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Revard (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Nohrnberg, James. *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Primacy of Perception, and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history and politics*, trans. Edie. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

Nicoll, Alardyce. *Stuart Masques and the Renaissance Stage* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1980).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Golffing (New York, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1956).

Ong, Walter. *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: from the art of discourse to the art of reason* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Ong, Walter. "From Allegory to Diagram in the Renaissance Mind: A Study in the Significance of the Allegorical Tableau," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 17, No. 4 (1959): 423-440.

Ong, Walter. "System, Space, and Intellect in Renaissance Symbolism," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 18, No. 2 (1956): 222-239.

Orgel, Stephen, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975).

Orgel, Stephen. "Shakespeare Imagines a Theater," *Poetics Today*, 5, No. 3 (1984): 549-561.

Orgel, Stephen. "Idols of the Gallery: Becoming a Connoisseur in Renaissance England," *Early modern visual culture: representation, race, empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Erickson and Hulse (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

- Plato, *Plato: The Complete Works*, ed. Cooper (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).
- Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1961).
- Pliny the Elder. *Natural History*, trans. Jones and Eichholz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938-63).
- Pohl, Nicole. *Women, Space, Utopia: 1600-1800* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).
- Powell, Michael. "Andrew Marvell, Sir Thomas Widdrington, and Appleton House," *Notes and Queries*, 4, no. 3 (1996): 281-284.
- Puttenham, George. *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Whigham and Rehorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).
- Pye, Christopher. *The Vanishing: Shakespeare, the subject, and early modern culture*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
- Quarles, Francis. *Emblems, divine and moral, together with Hieroglyphicks of the life of man / written by Francis Quarles. In the Savoy, Printed by J. Nutt, and sold by E. Nutt, [17--?]*, p. 17, preface dated 1634. Early 18th Century Collections Online (GALE).
- Ricœur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).
- Roskill, Mark. *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1968).
- Rotman, Brian. *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1987).
- Rehorn, Wayne, ed. *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).
- Scott, Alison. *The Jonsonian Masque and the Politics of Decorum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *Moral Epistles in Works. English and Latin*, ed. W. Heinemann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917-1972).
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*, ed. Kermode (London: Methuen & Co., 1954).
- Shakespeare, William. *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Pafford (London: Arden, 1963).

- Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Methuen Drama, 2010).
- Shakespeare, William. "The Rape of Lucrece" in *The Narrative Poems*, ed. Evans (London: Penguin, 1989).
- Shickman, Allan. "'Turning Pictures' in Shakespeare's England" in *The Art Bulletin*, 59, no. 1 (1977).
- Shohet, Lauren. "Forming history, inhabiting form in Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House,'" *Poetics Today*, 35, no. 4 (2014): 659-688.
- Sidney, Philip, Sir. "Penshurst Place," *Memorials of Old Kent*, ed. Ditchfield (London: Bemrose & sons, 1907).
- Sidney, Philip, Sir. *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).
- Sidney, Philip, Sir. *Sir Philip Sidney's An Apology for Poetry and Astrophil and Stella: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2004).
- Southey, Robert. *Volume 1 of The Works of William Cowper, Esq., Comprising His Poems, Correspondence and Translations. With a Life of the Author by the Editor, Robert Southey* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1836)
- Spence, Joseph. *Observations, anecdotes, and characters of books and men: collected from conversation*, ed. Osborn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton; textual editors Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki, Shohachi Fukuda (New York, NY: Pearson Longman, 2001).
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Oram (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).
- Steward, Susan. *On Longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
- Summerson, John. *Inigo Jones* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1966).
- Teskey, Gordon. "Literature," *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance Literary History*, ed. Cummings and Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Teskey, Gordon. *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

Thorne, Alison. *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking through Language* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

Townshend, Aurelian. *Tempe Restored* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1994).

Trimpi, Wesley. *Muses of One Mind: The Literary Analysis of Experience and its Continuity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

Trimpi, Wesley. "Sir Philip Sidney's An Apology for Poetry," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 3, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989-).

Turner, Henry S. "King Lear Without: The Heath," *Renaissance Drama*, 28 (1997): 164.

Vasari, Giorgio. "The Life of Francesco Mazzuoli [Parmigianino], Painter of Parma," vol. 2 in *The Lives of the Artists*, translated with an introduction and notes by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morgan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

Wilde, Oscar. *Selected Prose of Oscar Wilde* (London: Methuen and Co., 1914).

Wöfflin, Heinrich. *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964).

Wotton, Henry, Sir. *The Elements of Architecture. A facsimile reprint of the first edition (London, 1624)*, ed. Hard (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1968).

Yates, Frances. *The Theatre of the World* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1969).

Yeats, William Butler. *The Cutting of an Agate* (New York, NY: MacMillan Company, 1912).