

9-12-2014

The Early-Modernization of the Classical Muse

Bruce Carroll

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
English

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July, 2014

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is indebted to the constant support of Angus and Michelle Fletcher. Another *sine qua non*, Lorenzo Garcia, Jr., very generously stepped in during the last year and made possible everything since.

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ABSTRACT

The Early-Modernization of the Classical Muse juxtaposes ancient and Renaissance uses of the Muse to retrieve her from the status of mere literary convention. I draw on Hans Blumenberg's 'reoccupation' (*Umbesetzung*) thesis, which locates in philosophy concerns originally raised in myth, to argue that the poet's relationship with his Muse, as the perceived source of his art form, was always somehow ontological (ontology: the theory of human being). In the pre-literate, pre-philosophical invocations of archaic figures like Homer and Hesiod, I locate the 'ontological stirrings' in which the poet identifies his self through his at times troublesome and combative dependence on the Muse. By early modernity, a philosophical era, the classical Muse's appearances figure radical and imminently modern shifts in a still-persistent essentialist ontology. Here poets assert a re-orientation to the human person, a new ontology centered not on humanity's quondam dependence on nature, the deified *genetrix* overseeing all sublunary production (including poetry), but on an independent human production, so that *techne*, or art, becomes not only the prime factor in the recognition of human being but also the vehicle for its re-orientation.

A chief contribution of this dissertation is its identification of an ontological poetics. Impossible outside of poetic language, this poetics employs inversions of conceit and discontinuous rhetorical structures to raze the vertical scales that placed causes (like nature or the Muse) over their effects (the poet and poetry). Ontological poetics forwards instead a horizontal ontology based on lateral connections among the poet-speaker, his beloved poetic subject, and the poem itself. A critical novelty of this project is that unlike in any of Blumenberg's examples of reoccupation, these analyses must consider the return of a myth within the era of philosophy. Because the appearances of the Muse in early modern poetry embody the basic ontological issues that the era of philosophy originally inherited from her, her early modern situation acts as an acid test for Blumenberg's thesis.

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Part I Chapter 1: Introduction



The rondel above depicts the Muse of poetry who occupies one of the four center positions of the ceiling of Raphael's Vatican Stanza della Segnatura.¹ She wears the laurel wreath of her counterpart Apollo, his symbol popularized by the Homeridae, the rhapsode descendants of Homer,² whose bust adorns the arm of the Muse's throne. The white blouse and dark sash recall her liminal place between upper and lower worlds. By association with her mother, Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, she had access to the underworld's river *Lethe* (oblivion) the waters of which surfaced in the earthly Heliconian springs that she founded her cult of the arts around.³ Thus her office both governed poetry's ability to bring about forgetfulness of cares and granted the poet's need for a surplus of memory in his oral performances of memorized epic. Her wings, loaded with iconographic allusion, may result from Ovid's tale of the Muses who turned the hubristic Pierides into crows, or they may reflect a conflation of the Muses and the winged Sirens as old as Plato (*Republic* 10.617b).⁴ The two putti who flank her hold plaques reading *numine afflatur* (inspired or breathed upon by the spirit), which recalls Marsilio Ficino's then still popular *furor poeticus*,⁵ the Renaissance understanding of poetic inspiration as a kind of religious frenzy thought to

descend from Hesiod's 8th century BCE initiation by the Muses who breathed into him the gift of song (*Theogony* 1-115). A rich collection of reference, this one panel of the Stanza cites half a dozen contemporary and classical authors and emblemizes the humanist fetishization of learning.

More significantly, in the harp pulled back in the Muse's left hand and the codex thrust forward in her right, the panel manages to capture the two principal eras of intellectual history at the time of its composition. Used by poetic singers, the *aoidoi* of Homer's, Hesiod's, and Pindar's archaic Greek era, the harp accompanied a primary oral culture's poetry which, prior to the advent of writing, was set to music to aid in memorization. Because of her intimate association with memory one may think of the Muse as a personification of information technology. It was within her that the poet's unwritten song was stored and through her that it was accessed again and again. In his in-depth study of Greek oral culture, Walter J. Ong identifies the poet's actual 'muse' as the repetition of poetic clichés and, especially, of complex but regular poetic structures, "mnemonic formulas" (24) around which epic tales were constructed to better facilitate memorization. The epics were no mere aesthetic cultural artifacts but the source of tribal knowledge, of laws, mores, and heroic reference. In a culture without writing, knowledge itself and the thought that conveyed it had to be formulaically repeated, and constantly so, or it would be lost (24).⁶ Writing changed all of this. With the static written text that could be referred back to and critiqued, the West saw the advent of the sequential, classificatory, and explanatory examination of data that had been impossible for an oral culture (8-9).⁷ Most importantly, writing made possible abstract thought (24), which was beyond the reach of an oral culture's mind grounded less in ideas than in situations(49). An example, offered by Bruno Snell (1-5),

concerns the Homeric notion of sight which always referred to an object being seen or to some quality or manner of how it was seen. But there is no evidence of any conception of *sight* or of *one who sees* generally speaking. Thus we can attribute characteristically Greek cultural features, like constitutional democracy, not simply to the written information technology needed to record complex systems of law but also to the late possibility of conceiving of abstractions like *the state* (not to mention *the citizen*, *justice*, and so on).

With abstraction comes the emergence of philosophy (Ong 24) and the hallmark of that emergence, the works of Plato. His *Phaedrus* (274-77) expresses deep fears of writing, of the possibility that it both dehumanizes interactive communication and sacrifices human memory. Though writing had been around for centuries and his discipline wholly relied on it, Plato's hesitations provide us a glimpse of a culture in the midst of a paradigm shift from orality to literacy, from the harp of the Muse's mythology to the bound record of the philosopher's abstract meditations.

As a contribution to the field of philosophy and literature, this dissertation deals with another though not unrelated shift, from late medieval to imminently modern conceptions of human ontology (from the Greek *onta*: being) as they begin to find traction in the poetic language of the Elizabethan sonneteers. Taken up below, their use of the classical Muse convention both figures a shaken belief in the (largely scholastic) understanding of a center-oriented, essential human being and points to the advent of its indeterminate and uncertain modern accretion. Thus her appearance in early modern poetry permits the intersection of a pre-philosophical mythological figure with post-mythological principles. Or, she brings together the harp and the codex. More so, the early modern poetic use of the Muse clarifies a reoccupation by philosophy of concerns originally raised in archaic myth. Establishing a

working backdrop to this dissertation is Hans Blumenberg's thesis in which a reoccupation occurs when philosophy attempts to better answer the questions inherent to mythological stories.⁸

Blumenberg does not dwell on what any exact questions may have been (he is more concerned with the function, as he puts it, of reoccupation than with the reoccupied content [*Legitimacy of the Modern Age (LMA)*, 64]), but I will note that the Muse invocation posits answers to questions on the origin of the art form and the role within the execution of poetry played by the poet. I argue that this role was always uncertain, and it is in the poet's relationship with his Muse—a subtly contentious arrangement—that this is clearest. In his well-known *Iliad* book 2 invocation, Homer only postures deference in his request for assistance with the following 400 line catalogue of ships:

And now, O Muses, tell me—for you are goddesses, are present, and know all things, while we hear only rumor [*kleos*] and know nothing—who were the captains and lords of the Danaans? The multitude I could not tell nor could I name if I had ten tongues, and ten mouths, and a voice unbreakable, and a breast of bronze within, unless you, O Muses, were to recount them to me. Nevertheless, *I* will tell the leaders of the ships and all the captains (my emphasis, 484ff.).⁹

The Muses¹⁰ have the extraordinary presence that gives them access to the truth of the story, to its detailed and factual data *in toto*, while by comparison, *we* (the poets and by extension all human persons) know only *kleos*, synonymous with rumor and the ever-shifting status of glory. Yet signified by his claim “*I* will tell,” the Homeric poet says *he*, not the Muse, will sing the song. His invocation uses poetic convention to turn attention to himself as source

and sum of his craft, a craft not divinely inspired and not, after all, requiring the superhuman features of ten tongues, ten mouths, etc. The questions implicit to the passage appear to ask: To what extent is the poem a human domain? To what extent must the poet share it with something irretrievably beyond himself? Their answers point to poetry as a human construction. Further, through the juxtaposition of divine Muse and mortal poet—a juxtaposition disregarding the role of external powers in the creative process—the poetic craft provides both an examination and an expression of human personhood.

In a similar manner the imbrication of the poet's craft and his self also appears in Elizabethan uses of the Muse, one of the most recognizable being Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* 1 which closes: "Fool, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write" ([A&S] 14). Like the Homeric speaker, this poet appears to take instruction from the Muse. He has even gone so far as to give her voice in his poem. But her brash statement actually turns the inspiring force away from herself and toward the poet-speaker who is to look no farther than his heart, which in Elizabethan usage signified faculties of mind, personality, morality—in sum, self.¹¹ Rendering her office obsolete, Sidney's Muse provides the occasion for his poet-speaker's self-assertion. As well, Sidney's example troubles the ancient convention that placed the poet in a hierarchical setting descending from Zeus, father of the Muse, to the Muse, then to the poet (Hesiod, *Theog.*, 1-115). Like his predecessors he seems to implicitly ask questions about the hierarchical character of his craft, about degrees of creative dependence that fashion the limits and freedoms of his person.

Using Blumenberg's terms I observe that such a reoccupation of these concerns had already taken place in a philosophical hierarchy. This was a scale of causes descending from a prime cause (sometimes labeled *God*), which ordered atomic matter into the spatio-

temporal universe, to the Natura synonymous with that universe, which itself acted as a secondary cause continuing the generative act of the prime cause, and finally to the human artifex, perceived to be dependent upon nature for his causal status.¹² Note this hierarchy, a hierarchy of making, in the *Commentary on the Timaeus* by William of Conches (c. 1090- c. 1154): “Every work is either the work of the Creator, or a work of Nature, or a work of the artificer imitating nature” (qtd. in Eco 93). Bonaventure, drawing from William, delineated the same stratum. There is “God, who creates out of nothing; Nature, which operates on potential being; and art, which operates on nature” (*In II Sent.* 7, pars 2, qtd. in Eco 95). Dante also called on the structure: “[N]ature follows—as she takes her course— / the Divine Intellect and Divine Art . . . / [and] when it can, your art would follow nature, / just as a pupil imitates his master; / so that your art is almost God’s grandchild” (*Inferno* XI, 99-100; 103-105). In each example one cause begets, determines, and limits another cause, and specifically within the human relationship with nature, nature offers the models for all things that the artifex brings into being. The notion is not foreign to anyone, since it lies at the root of the most basic conceptions of mimetic, representational arts. But as well, clothes are patterned after animal pelts, weapons from tusks and claws, and the human products that we do not find examples of in nature, which must include tools like bowls and spoons, these come about through the raw need that nature inspires. In this sense nature becomes a muse of technological innovation, and the artificer much like the classical poet before her finds herself in a state of dependency upon that muse.

I do not argue that this hierarchy of making is itself anything like a rote reoccupation of the inspiration scale belonging to the Muse.¹³ But I do notice certain characteristics the two structures share in common. These point to a much more general recurrence of

fundamental questions—questions about personhood and the role of human production in identifying it—as well as to the hazarding of new answers. The hierarchical strata themselves reflect one another, particularly in their primary aim of identifying three classes of maker with similarities from scale to scale. Zeus and the prime cause are both orderers who beget secondary generative forces, and like the later artifex, the poet-speaker of myth situated himself in a position as the representative of mortals. Of course, such generalization does not become possible until the philosophical era, but the hints of it are already present as are the germs of the more scientific categorical, taxonomical thinking (itself evidenced in the use of hierarchies). Another important similarity lies in the intractable nature of the power relation in which poet and artifex find themselves, for neither Muse nor natura can be disavowed without simultaneous reaffirmation. When the Homeric poet asserts his own creative primacy, he must do so within the convention of the invocation, the space reserved for both poetic commentary and his extra-narrative lyric *I* reference to himself (seldom seen anywhere but in such apostrophes). His use of the Muse to the end of self-assertion only reminds us of her authority over him. A similar situation will be inferable from chapter four forward, for even in resisting the overarching role of nature in works of philosophy, visual art theory, and poetics, thinkers succeed in restating its dominance. Like the Muse to myth, nature is so central to philosophical thought that there is no sufficient means of subverting it. Part of the reoccupation of the inspiration scale entails this self-erosive problem, a reflexive foil that only ensures the conceptual dominance of such an entrenched figure as the Muse in the one era and Natura in the next.¹⁴ Finally, each structure proposes a secondary cause who authoritatively acts as the source of the human player's causal powers, and thus, whether in

mythological or philosophical guise, this secondary seat is both honored and disclaimed, seemingly petitioned to and resisted, by poet and artifex.

Where the archaic poet would have lacked the terminology needed to explicitly question his and his product's existential status, philosophy made possible self-definition via one's dependence upon nature. The ideological belief in nature's dominion was rooted in the hierarchy of causes, so that all forms of production—sexual, economic, artistic—were arbitrated by a belief in natural order. Teleology, the reasoning of phenomena to ends ordained in nature, was the ideological instrument that determined right sexual behavior (as opposed to sodomitic sex), right economic practice (a belief that prohibited the unnatural earning of profit through usury), and right representational art (that observed the natural causal relationship between signified and sign). The subjugated status of human production shaped an understanding of human being as a product of nature. This is the foundational understanding of being (also self, personhood, identity) in this argument. One's self proceeded from nature; *to be* was to participate within nature.

The primary aim of my dissertation is to clarify the poetics of ontology that appears in Elizabethan sonnets and that identifies not simply the newly indistinct state of personhood in early modernity, but further, the confusion and hesitancy that results from it. This will require going beyond the clichéd assumption that marks Renaissance figures of my interest, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Philip Sidney, as spurs for an ever advancing, modern state of metaphysical freedom. These thinkers, artists, and poets do resist the conventions of thought binding them to a commonly perceived source of art and production, but not without a measure of anxiety over the as yet unmapped landscape before them, an anxiety alluded to first in philosophy, diffused into visual art and poetic theory, and then

arriving at its full realization in the subversive and discontinuous poetic language of the English sonneteers. Among these are Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, and William Shakespeare, as well as Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton. The reoccupation found in their sonnets is of the ancient Muse's tendency to comment back on the poetry in which she appears and to provide the poet the opportunity to examine his identity as a maker of the poem. This is just as philosophical attention to nature serves to comment on human production and the special identity of the artifex. The early modernization of the Muse, then, is not simply a reoccupation of the Muse by the concept of nature, but more so, it involves the assumption of mythological questions by the era of philosophy, and the philosophical engagement of these questions in the self-reflective commentary, the meta-poetics, of sonneteers focused on the unsure state of their selfhood.

Their uncertainty is only compounded by their razing of the vertical scale that placed the relationship between the poet and his source of poetry, as well as between sign and signified and fiction and reality, in the by then ancient hierarchical arrangement. Establishing in its stead a horizontal ontological plane, the Elizabethan introduction of an ontological poetics begins to carve out lateral relationships that blur distinctions between the sonnet speakers, their subjects, and their poems. A previously inconceivable freedom emerges in these lateral connections, but their indistinction jeopardizes both metaphysical dignity and essential personhood. The resulting consequence will involve a simultaneous assertion of ontological independence and retreat into commonplace assumptions dependent being.

Sonnets occupy my attention because no other genre of writing in early modern England seems quite as self-reflective, -investigative, and -interrogatory. According to Paul Oppenheimer the sonnet form, invented by Giacomo da Lentino, a *notaro* of Frederick II's

thirteenth-century court, was the first poetic form since the fall of the Roman Empire intended not for public performance but for solitary, silent reading. Other popular medieval forms were written for musical accompaniment, but Oppenheimer notes that despite the sonnet's reputation as a sung form (a reputation that follows it still), no music appears for the sonnet until some 200 years after its invention, a fact marking the sonnet as a private, non-performative poetic genre (186). Further, the sonnet has a "capacity for self-confrontation" (185) inherent to its basic form that positions an octave in which a problem is posed against a sestet in which a solution is attempted. Written and read in reflective quiet, the original sonnet was a "lyric of self-consciousness or of the self in conflict" (3), just as one finds in its Elizabethan use.¹⁵

Despite my attention to anxieties over self found in early modern English literary texts, my observations are much unlike those made in Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, which enlists a psychoanalytic architecture to reveal the socio-political implications of the period's uncertain sense of personhood. To adopt new historicist methods of analysis would mean applying some form of postmodern critical architecture to the poems of my interest and this might sacrifice the ample and revelatory poetics that emerges from the Elizabethan language itself, a poetics that gazes forward to commonplace postmodern notions of indeterminate being that are hardly commonplace in early modernity. A high point among such notions is twentieth-century French existentialism, particularly Sartre's 1946 claim "existence precedes essence." Featured in the essay "Existentialism is a Humanism," the premise inverted scholastic orders placing essence before existence in all matters of being, and became a guiding principle of existentialism. In its wake recent inquiries into subjective and violable aspects of personhood have associated ontology with race (Yancy), gender (Fuss,

Linstead and Pullen, Somers and Gibson, Stanley and Wise), and other social and political identities (Oksala). These are only unconventional ontological inquiries when juxtaposed against the still persistent strain of Neo-Scholastic essentialist metaphysics. They are actually emblematic not only of inessentialist modes of thought but of the adaptation of the whole notion of essence, which has evolved into a now commonly assumed state of indeterminacy. Therefore, my particular focus on the ontological shifts afoot in the poetic language of the period offers a deeper glance into the mindset just underneath the social and political revelations made by new historicists.

That language is key to the ontological examination my dissertation forwards. It ranges in scope from remaining vestiges of medieval notions of metaphysical dignity: “And for myself mine own worth do define” (Shakespeare 62.7), to pre-modern conceptions of cognition: “A burden to my selfe, distrest in minde” (Daniel 49.2). Rather than use the codifications of professional philosophers, early modern English poets examine their ontological status by means of self-reflection, the use of poetic language, structure, theme, and allusion to point attention back to the source of the poem.¹⁶ This reflection does not stop at highlighting the self of any one poet but *the self* understood as a fundamental marker of human being. Passages of self-reflection are not limited to the poet’s use of a lyric *I*, but will commonly appear in discussions of the beloved subject, of the process (the *techne*) of poetry, as well as of the poetic product, the poem. They appear in the use of discontinuous logic and inversions of rhetorical order.¹⁷ All together these features of the poetry signal an inquiry into human ontological status impossible to philosophy proper. For this reason I allow the poetic language to guide my impression of its understanding of human being instead of forcing the language through the sieve of any one philosophical approach.¹⁸

The remainder of Part I includes Chapter Two, “History and Hierarchy,” which establishes the archaic Greek and classical Latin treatments of the Muse. Covering poets from Homer to Ovid, it introduces her authoritative position over them and also hints at pre-ontological stirrings within what resembles the poet’s expression of his self in his less than bucolic relationship with his inspirer. Issues of ontological dependence and human production first broached in mythological guise become the philosophical principles covered in Chapter Three, “Metaphysics and Making.” This chapter offers an exposition of nature’s Muse-like authority over any conception of human making—which again includes sexual, economic, and artistic production—showing the commonly accepted subjugated status of the human artifex. Early resistance to that status makes up the content of Chapter Four, “Conception and Application,” in which Pico della Mirandola’s late fourteenth-century theory of ontological self-making, spelled out in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man (Oratio)* and modeled on a common artisans’ manual of his day, provides a step by step instruction for overcoming the metaphysical barriers represented by an authoritative nature. His contemporary and one-time housemate Michelangelo Buonarroti gives us a first glimpse at the application of a new ontological consciousness in poetic language, figurative language that gives the sculptor—and the human person through him—the generative powers of nature over the marble block that is the object of his craft. Closing Part I, “Diffusion into Theory” marks the same shift in the understanding of artificial powers as seen through the new lens of early modern visual art theorists and writers of poetics. For Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti nature’s spatial dimension becomes a human domain through the application of recent advances in mathematics and geometry (known as linear perspective) to create visual representations so lifelike that the sign rivals nature’s primacy as the signified. The

chapter includes transitions from visual art to literary theory and from Italy to England. There a fresh reading of Philip Sidney's *Apology* uncovers the peculiar status to which he elevates both poet and poem through the disembodied nature of words. Where the visual arts may have rivaled nature's spatial dimensions, Sidney's prescriptions allow the abstract poetic representation to circumvent nature's most limiting principles.

Part II leaves behind philosophy and theory, and focuses on the Elizabethan use of poetic language to examine the sometimes troubling implications of ontological advances made in the Italian Renaissance, and made available to members of the intellectual and artistic community of London through the influence of traveled figures like Sidney.¹⁹ Chapter Six, "The Unread Muse," reintroduces the concerns of the dissertation and gives an indication of their relevance to the remaining chapters. In brief, those chapters include "The Ontological Quest," which refigures the erotic pursuit showing its ontological undergirding in Elizabethan sonnets, which involves a demonstration of the extra-natural lateral ontology found in that corpus of poems. Chapter Eight, "The Muse Position," argues that initial poems in sonnet cycles provided an indication of the author's poetic theory not unlike the Muse invocations discussed as sources of ancient poetics in Chapter Two. These sonnets carry a reoccupation of the Muse, whether she is mentioned or not, in their examination of poetry and selfhood often in the same breath. "The *Sonnets'* Muse" follows and offers a fresh reading of the Shakespearean *Sonnets'* well-known opening call for the increase of beauty. Within it are significant reversals of natural orders that look forward into the many appearances of the Muse in this cycle (more so than in any other of the time). Taken together, these rich instances of poetic self-commentary reach beyond classical allusion and clarify the ontological poetics of the cycle, covered in detail in Chapter Ten, "Shakespeare's

Ontological Poetics.” The pressure of ontological freedom, the freedom to lose one’s limited but distinct sense of self, is clearer in the *Sonnets* than in any other work of poetry or theory discussed here. In locating it I consider poems typically ignored in Shakespearean studies, or entirely reconsider those that are not so uncommon. In these poems freedom means existential threat, and the risk is the personhood of the speaker’s beloved poetic subject, a potential tragedy that forces the speaker to reconsider the writing of his sonnet cycle altogether.

I have used Raphael’s learned and allusion-dense portrait of the Muse of poetry to offer a contrast between one type of Muse found in the Renaissance, that of fashionable learning loaded with classical citation, and the type I deal with which looks beyond herself to the poet’s ontological relationship with his art form. Raphael places her on a backdrop resembling ceramic or stone mosaic which leaves the Muse and her variety of iconography seeming less like the subject of an early modern fresco and more like an excavated and relocated work of the remotest antiquity. This dissertation serves the opposite purpose, its excavations unearthing her reoccupation into contemporary existential puzzles amounting to an early modernization of her one-time classical self.

Chapter 2: History and Hierarchy

This chapter argues that the poet's relationship with his²⁰ Muse has always been one of problematic ontological dependency, even since the archaic era where we have—erroneously—assumed the Muse-poet rapport to be its most bucolic. There within the archaic and classical literary cultures so influential to the Renaissance,²¹ the hierarchy of inspiration that descended from Zeus to the Muse to the poet was actually troubled with a carefully veiled hubris, an apparent resistance to the Muse's domination over the poet in which he appears to use the hierarchy as a means for his own betterment. Dealing with a pre-philosophical and thus pre-ontological culture, I want to proceed with some caution but still permit the language of the poems in this chapter to speak for the possibility of ontological stirrings at this early moment in Western intellectual history. These earliest instances of the poet-Muse relationship offer significant poetic commentary that points back to what must be the poet's identification of himself—as a maker of poetic works, as one who depends on an exterior source for his craft, and as one who vies for his creative independence. The following will leave the suggestion of the imbrication of art—generally understood—and human being even before the advent of philosophy, and once that advent has come to pass, the concerns hinted at in these early examples of myth will find a more scientific expression. This chapter also offers the foundation for the chapters of Part II in which the early modern Muse, much like her ancient counterpart, appears as a vehicle for a more explicit ontological poetics.

It is important to pause and question our whole notion of ancient inspiration, the origins of which we commonly place in the Homeric poet's requests of his Muse and Hesiod's initiation rites (roughly eighth-century BCE), covered in detail below, but which

derive anachronistically from Plato (fifth-century BCE). He popularized the concept of a fevered state of artistic creativity (the *furor poeticus*, as it will later be recognized in the fifteenth-century by Marsilio Ficino) that deliberately confused the poetic craft with notions of supernatural possession and ecstasy. He famously defined the poet as “a light and winged and sacred thing, [who] is unable to compose until he is inspired and out of his mind and his reason is no longer in him” (*Ion* 534-535). Reincarnated by Ficino’s translation of Plato’s *Ion*, this commonly accepted understanding of inspiration cuts an image of poetry as a non-rational, spiritual experience, and the poets themselves as *entheoi*, full of the god(dess), or *ekstatikoi*, outside of themselves. In a state of ecstasy, they were thought of as *manikoi*, raving, and suffering from *mania*, madness.²²

To our ears Plato’s assessment sounds rather encomiastic, but it is a seeming compliment paid at the price of the poet’s independence and the legitimacy of his craft. For Plato has Socrates argue at length that no poet can compose by virtue of his own skill (*techne*) and knowledge (536-37), but must rely entirely on the divine inspiration of the Muse.

Yet one Homeric moment comes to mind that enables us to question Plato’s assessment, the inexplicably accurate—and apparently uninspired—account of the Trojan War by the blind bard Demodocus. (When a blind poet sings of a blind bard, we may fairly assume the passage says something to us about poetry.) We know Demodocus’s song is truthful because the one person at the banquet who was present at the events described in the tale, Odysseus, is reduced to tears by the true-to-life account (*Odyssey* 8.521-31). Odysseus says he does not know whether Demodocus was taught his song by the Muse, daughter of Zeus, or Apollo, or heard his account from some eye-witness (487-88). And even if Demodocus got his account from someone else—which is likely, given that the Homeric

presentation of poetry is largely bereft of any religiosity, a notion expressed in what we will see are Homer's rather agnostic invocations—then Demodocus clearly possesses enough knowledge of the War to ply his poetic skill and to make of the arguably second-hand story an emotionally charged song. Moreover, Demodocus's *poeticus* is entirely lacking in *furor*. Far from reveling in a state of *ekstatikos* or *entheos*, he is depicted relaxing among the party-goers and, very much within himself, enjoying a slice of pork between his songs (482-83).

Thus, the state of ecstatic ignorance advocated by Plato is not even experienced by a Homeric bard at work. Rather, Demodocus's inspiration is actually of what I will simply call *knowledge*: in this case, knowledge of persons and events of the War. Though a modern conception of knowledge was unknown in archaic Greece, it does adequately describe what, according to my reading, the poet so often asks the Muse for. Invocations like “The wrath, goddess, sing, of Achilles” (*Iliad* 1.1) and “Tell me Muse of the man” (*Odyssey* 1.1) are requests for the raw information that comprises the following narratives—about Achilles, the War, Odysseus, his journey. This aspect of the Muse's authority does not necessarily make her the provider of the requested knowledge each time it is asked for, but it does make her the keeper, and thus, sometimes, the seeming withholder of that knowledge. Here is the crux of the poet's relationship with the perceived source of his craft, for the Muse and the inspiration that always attends her together represent not only creative gifts but also the barriers that dog poetic production. The poet attempts to circumvent the problems represented by his need for inspiration through a poetics that, despite his appeals to her, disavows the Muse. As I will show, the archaic poets—including Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar—lack a religious orientation to poetry, and instead so often refer to themselves as the progenitor of their work. This produces what appears to be a confusion of allegiances, and is

the reason why we will see these poets veil under their petitions to the Muse an elevation of themselves within her hierarchy. In the following, the poets use convention to subtly draw attention to themselves, to indentify through accenting the power of their own knowledge and *techne* in the production of their poem.

Showing the versatility of the Muse as a concept—as “a purely intellectual principle” (Curtius 229)—the later Latin poets regard the Muse alternately as an ancient divinity and as a figure for their primary artistic obstacle, the poetic predecessor. For Persius this includes the Helikonian Muses themselves, plus Homer and Hesiod, who become Muse-like intertextual authorities. Virgil also resists Homer’s overpowering influence through his reconception of the Homeric Muses, and Ovid employs the Muse convention both to assert himself as his own artistic progenitor and to disavow divine and mortal authority. In the following, I treat the archaic poets in section one and the Latins in section two.

Archaic Poets

As I have said, archaic requests for inspiration express the poet’s need for knowledge of the tale he is about to tell. The most recognizable example in Homer’s work is in *Iliad* book 2, the catalogue of ships and captains, which provides an epistemology in its clear distinction between the forms of knowledge natural to the Muses and the poet: “And now, O Muses, tell me—for you are goddesses, are present, and know all things, while we hear only rumor [*kleos*] and know nothing—who were the captains and lords of the Danaans?” (484ff.). The invocation juxtaposes human *kleos* (commonly translated as rumor or hearsay) and the Muses’ divine *presence*,²³ which supposedly gives them an eye-witness account of the events of the Trojan battle both fought long ago and far away from their poet who retells the tale. According to Adriana Cavarero, the Muse is an eye-witness who

sees with omnipresent sight the events as they happen and, as the daughter of Mnemosyne [goddess of memory], she preserves memories of them all. In other words, she is the witness and memory of the story. The Muses' omnipresence and memory confer an objective status of reality and truth on the story. The story is true because what happened, happened like this and not in any other way, in the very presence of the Muse, who sees it as it happens and preserves its memory. She represents the radical truth and objectivity of the story. (56)

Radical objectivity points to the Muse's close association with *aletheia* (Hesiod, *Theogony* 27-28), a concept only loosely translated as 'truth', which, with its philosophical undertones, is likely too expansive and abstract for the pre-philosophical archaic mind. "Unlike Plato the philosopher, the Muse does not know [and thus cannot inform the poet of] Man but rather knows, one by one, all the men and women who act and speak in her presence" (Cavarero 57). The Muse's impressively objective comprehension of the world is not of abstract truth so much as factual knowledge. One commentator has suggested that the Muse's connection to *aletheia* provides her an understanding of "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" (Clay, 2011, 327), or the facts *in toto* of history, what Cavarero calls an absolute narrative, which involves "a completeness and inclusion of every relevant detail. In a time-frame expanded to infinity she [the Muse] could narrate everything to men if such an exhaustive account were humanly audible" (57). But it isn't, she notes, unless the poet is *entheos*, outside himself, and can "hear the absolute narration and make it into the telling of a story which is necessarily partial and incomplete but humanly audible" (57).

Cavarero's assumption that, according to the *Iliad* book 2 invocation, the poet has access to the Muse's extraordinary knowledge, and that this knowledge is shared with him when he is in a state of inspiration, is likely only encouraged by Homer's closing remark of the book 2 invocation. Immediately preceding the vast catalogue of ships and captains, over 400 lines of verse, he admits: "The multitude I could not tell nor could I name if I had ten tongues, and ten mouths, and a voice unbreakable, and a breast of bronze within, unless you, O Muses, were to recount them to me." (488ff.). His confession of weakness, of the need for superhuman powers to complete his task, actually appears to bolster his poetic authority through his chosen alternative, a reliance on the divine Muses.

Yet I find fault with Cavarero's assumption that the poet has access, that he even believes he has access, to the Muses' extraordinary powers, first, because he establishes such a distinction between his and his Muses' knowledge, and second, because after explicitly requesting it, he disavows their assistance. To start, let me make clear the limitations of human knowledge as the poet sees them. Reducing what he can know to *kleos*, the poet suggests that he is only capable of second-hand knowledge (a knowledge lacking the directness of the Muses' presence). Relying on sense perception, such as the hearing in "we hear only rumor," *kleos* is a handicapped knowledge filtered through an information sieve. There is *what is*, the total truth and absolute narrative of the story, and then there is what we mortals can actually perceive and know. This hierarchical epistemology recalls the Platonic critique of poetic mimesis, that representational arts imitate the sensory, material world, the sensory world itself being an imitation, a reflection, of what is primary, abstract, immutable, and therefore real. For Plato, the world itself is second-hand information, which renders any artistic representation of that world only a less reliable rumor of what is real and true. Where

what troubles Plato is the nature of re-presentation to constantly progress away from the real, Homer's *kleos* is defective for its inability to regress through time, to witness and thus to know the precise *aletheia* of the historical events that make up the content of the epic song. There is no point in suggesting that Plato inferred his theory from Homer, though Homer is the most cited of all authors throughout the Platonic corpus. But Plato does help us more clearly see both the hierarchical nature of Homeric knowledge and the distance between the Muses' presence and the poet's *kleos*, which the poet himself seems to suspect is utterly unbridgeable.

For despite his invocation and his own testimony that he would need super-human abilities to recount the names of the ships and leaders of the Greek armies (ten tongues, a breast of bronze, etc.), the poet abruptly recants his dependency on any super-natural force in the line that at once closes the invocation and opens the catalogue. Here is the entire invocation:

And now, O Muses, tell me—for you are goddesses, are present, and know all things, while we hear only rumor [*kleos*] and know nothing—who were the captains and lords of the Danaans? The multitude I could not tell nor could I name if I had ten tongues, and ten mouths, and a voice unbreakable, and a breast of bronze within, unless you, O Muses, were to recount them to me. Nevertheless, *I* will tell the leaders of the ships and all the captains (my emphasis, 484ff.).

After the set-up suggesting his dependence on the Muses, the poet proceeds to do the work himself,²⁴ without either abnormal human powers or divine aid. And it may well be that the poet required neither to complete the task, for lengthy though it is, the catalogue is only a list.

It neither involves specific events nor characterization, and so does not require Cavarero's eye-witness account of the Muses. Though Homer claims: "The multitude I could not tell or name . . . unless you were to recount them to me . . ." (488f.), the catalogue is actually the stuff made of *kleos*: second- (and third- and fourth-) hand historical data, as we might think of it. The same scheme appears again in the *Odyssey* 1 invocation:

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many devices, driven far astray after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy. Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose minds he learned, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea, seeking to win his own life and the return of his comrades, for all his desire, for through their own blind folly they perished—fools who devoured the cattle of Helios Hyperion; whereupon he took from them the day of their returning. Of these things, goddess, daughter of Zeus, beginning where you will, tell us in our turn.

Now all the rest, as many as had escaped sheer destruction, were safe at home, safe from both war and sea; but that man alone, filled with longing for his return and for his wife, did the queenly Calypso, that beautiful goddess, keep prisoner in her hollow caves, yearning that he should be her husband. (1-20)

Here, the poet opens asking for information about specific episodes, and from among them, the Muse may choose where she would like to begin the telling of the tale. Then, contradictorily, the poet takes the liberty of beginning at Odysseus's episode with Calypso. Again he has asked that the Muse begin by giving him the very information he declines to use, a move that amounts to his first acknowledging and then disavowing her authority. More

specifically, the poet uses the Muse as a convention—expected by his audience—to assert his reliance upon himself, upon both his own technical ability and knowledge.

Turning to the *Iliad* book 1 invocation, “Wrath, goddess, sing...,” Homer does not begin by claiming that the Muse has asked him to sing about the following events, but he gives the Muse her theme, which in the case of the *Iliad* is the “wrath” of Achilles. The move is repeated at the beginning of the *Odyssey* when the poet, not the Muse, nominates the “man” Odysseus as the subject of the following song (Pucci, 1998, 44-45 n.20). In both instances the poet actually makes no request but gives his Muse an instruction in the imperative; either “sing” or “Tell.” The ‘imperative command’ of the Muse is a move so powerful in its subtlety, and we will see it repeated by other poets from the archaic era through the English Renaissance.

Another poetic scheme used to the same end is the ‘petition-response’ wherein the poet asks the Muse a question that she, presumably, answers. An example is the question asked at the bottom of the *Iliad*’s book 1 invocation: “Who then of the gods was it that brought these two together to contend?” (8), the answer to which: “The son of Leto and Zeus [Apollo]” (9), both begins the remainder of the story and appears to be offered in the Muse’s voice. This is a common interpretation, taken even further by Rabel who presumes that the Muse then narrates the whole story (33-43). Yet this does not tell us what to make of the periodic appearances of the poet, for example, in Muse invocations, unless we are to assume that these are merely his purposeless cameos which interrupt the flow of the Muse’s story. The reading is hardly plausible. G. M. A. Grube perhaps more sensibly sees these moments as evidence that the Muse assumes the poet’s voice, as if he narrates but as her passive

instrument (2). Similarly, Grace M. Ledbetter, calling the petition-response formula the “ambiguity of voice,” says that it

generates a view of the poet as possessed by the Muse . . . By declining to distinguish the poet’s from the Muse’s voice, the poem promotes the poet as the voice of the divine, and it promotes the poem as a direct link to the events at Troy. The Muse speaks “through” the poet in such a way that their voices are indistinguishable into human and divine elements. We can say, then, that the poet transmits poetry “supernaturally” because his song transmits the Muse’s divine voice. (25)

Each critic, however, has interpreted the petition-response scheme without careful attention to what Homer has actually done with it. What I observed in the *Iliad* book 2 invocation of the catalogue applies here, as Homer does not ask for information that requires divine knowledge, but in fact, only asks for what may come from legend and the sharing of stories—or rumor, if you will. (For that matter, this applies to the nature of information requested at the opening of the *Odyssey*, which is in no way extraordinary.) Ledbetter is no more correct than Cavarero that through his Muse the poet offers a “direct link to the events at Troy,” for the story he tells is no absolute narrative but obviously, and unashamedly, limited to human *kleos*. For this reason, I can allow that the poet leaves the impression that he is somehow drawing on a divine voice with divine knowledge. But through his petition of the supernatural for information that is nothing but mundane, the poet actually disavows his Muse and the supernatural inspiration she is said to provide. What at first glance looks like the poet’s external source of inspiration is instead the subtle internalization of the Muse

convention by a poet who first appears to disparage but then draws solely on his own species of knowledge.²⁵

It may, in fact, be accurate to read the Iliadic epic as a text of some religious skepticism, for the poet's petition-response—"Who then of the gods was it that brought these two together to contend? The son of Leto and Zeus" (8f.)—recalls the fact that it is the gods who both bring the humans into contention and take sides, aiding one faction and contending with another, only abetting the slaughter of countless human lives in the War. The entire cycle seems to begin with a negative implication of the divine, and I think that the poet's curious disregard of divine knowledge is, overall, reflective of this opening treatment of the gods. He invokes his Muse, yes, but appears to question his relationship with her as well. His disregard of her divine knowledge suggests his doubt that he has access to her assistance, not to mention his possible doubt in her existence. Therefore, at key and visible moments in the epic he manipulates convention and uses the Muse invocation as the setting in which he questions his need for her and her divine inspiration.

Sirens

The poet also asserts himself, and disclaims any divinity, through a reliance on his own *techne*, for it is within the narrative he constructs that he can contain and, to some extent, re-create his Muses. In the Homeric narrative, a veiled and critical re-invention of the Muses appears in their comparison to Sirens. They were the mysterious female deities who occupied a meadow-like island and whose song so enchantingly promised knowledge and pleasure that men left their ships and attempted to swim to the Sirens' shores (*Odyssey* 39ff.). Circe gives Odysseus instructions so that he can hear the Sirens' song and avoid this fate:

But row past them [the Sirens] and anoint the ears of your comrades with sweet wax, which you have kneaded, for fear any of the rest may hear. But if you yourself have a will to listen, let them bind you in the swift ship hand and foot upright in the step of the mast, and let the ropes be made fast at the ends to the mast itself, that with delight you may listen to the voice of the two Sirens. And if you shall implore and command your comrades to free you, let them bind you with yet more bonds. (47ff.)

Upon his arrival at their island, bound to the mast, he hears the Sirens themselves say:

Come hither on your way, renowned Odysseus, great glory of the Achaeans; stop your ship that you may listen to the voice of us two. For never yet has any man rowed past the island in his black ship until he has heard the sweet voice from our lips; instead he has the joy of it, and goes his way a wiser man. For we know [*idmen*] all the toils that in wide Troy the Argives and Trojans endured through the will of the gods, and we know [*idmen*] all things that come to pass upon the fruitful earth. (184ff.)

Note that Homer makes his Sirens refer back to his *Iliad* 1 invocation, as they concede his blame of the “gods’ will” for starting the War. Further, as Pucci has noted, the Sirens describe themselves in terms that recall the Muses. They have beautiful voices that give men pleasure, much as song itself was considered a chief source of enjoyment (1998, 187), and they impart wisdom to their hearer, not unlike how the Muses’ presumably promise knowledge to the poet (187-88.). But it is the degree of knowledge claimed by the Sirens that makes them so conspicuously like Muses. “[W]e know [*idmen*],” the Sirens claim, “all the pains the Argives and Trojans suffered in the wide land of Troy because of the gods’ will,

and we know [*idmen*],” they repeat, “whatever happens on the bountiful earth” (189ff.). The formula “we know [*idmen*] . . . we know [*idmen*]” we will find in the speech Hesiod gives his Muses in his *Theogony* invocation. But its predicates that claim the Sirens’ knowledge of the past and of all things recall the Muses’ presence, the knowledge *in toto* that seemingly defies the natural limits of mortal understanding. Pucci points out that the Sirens demonstrate their claims to omniscience, “for they recognize Odysseus at *sight*, whereas other goddesses or divine beings, such as Circe and Polyphemus, for instance, fail to do so. The Sirens . . . therefore have the same power of presence as the Muses or Apollo who inspire Demodocus when he sings the truth about Troy (*Odyssey* 8.488-91)” (1998, 6). I offer Pucci the corrective that the Sirens actually demonstrate the knowledge that we only hear about the Muses having, that which has been attributed to them and comes to us through *kleos*. But Pucci’s conclusion is illuminating:

[T]he implication is obviously that the poet of the *Odyssey* considers the divine inspirers of the *Iliad* to possess the attributes of Sirens rather than the attributes generally granted to the Muses. The poet of the *Odyssey* presses the point that the inspirers of the *Iliad* are turned toward an irretrievable and remote *kleos* and grief, whose song indeed fascinates the listeners; yet the memory of that *kleos* and grief spells only death. (1998, 6)

Pucci refers to the extension of the meaning of *kleos*’ from rumor to glory, or those glorious things we hear rumored about the heroic deeds of persons now dead. If Pucci is right, and I think he is, then Homer compares his Muses to the Sirens who possess knowledge that, once shared, costs any mortal his or her life. I believe that Homer goes beyond suggesting that access to the Muses’ knowledge also causes death. Instead his commentary is on the

problematic nature of poetry itself, epic in particular, which the Muses represent. The problem is that being the subject of a poem, and of kleos, requires death. Twentieth-century poet and theorist Allen Grossman pondered the very same problem. To be preserved in any poem, regardless of genre, to achieve, in Homeric terms, immortal glory through renown, one must first die (240-44).

In the end, the pile of bones Circe warns Odysseus (and us) about is never seen by him or his crew members. Of course, the crew, bent forward steadily rowing, likely cannot see the Sirens. But while Odysseus might provide us eye-witness account, so important to him, of the Sirens, their island, and the death they have caused, the poet only offers us an auditory account of this scene. As de Rachewiltz has noted, there are no visual cues in the entire scene but the events are relayed to us through hearing (23). The poet emphasizes that he is limited by kleos and its primary sense of hearing.

Yet, the scene ends with mortal Odysseus escaping the Sirens' lure having successfully stolen their song (as de Rachewiltz reads it [32]). Unlike any other man, Odysseus lives the remainder of his natural life with the Sirens' coveted knowledge. If Odysseus may be read not solely as the hero of the *Odyssey* but also as the hero of the *Odyssey* poet, then in the poet's stead, Odysseus trumps both Muses and their Sirenic ruse. To hear the Sirens' song, Odysseus relies on neither inspiration nor magic (which Circe does not offer him), but he applies Circe's reasonable advice. He plies the use of rope and wax, itself an example of *techne*, and he escapes with both the Sirens' secrets and the life he ordinarily must sacrifice to be glorified in song. In short, he is made to transcend that which limits the poet who creates him. Thus through the *techne* of narrative, the Homeric poet

craftily belittles the divine Muses and elevates his hero, the versatile Odysseus, who in this case may triumph in the stead of all humanity, including the mortal poet who creates him.

Hesiod

Hesiod begins his *Theogony* by exercising narrative to similar effect. He introduces the Muses three times in his opening invocation. First, at line 1: “Let us begin to sing from the Heliconian Muses, who possess the great and holy mountain of Helicon” (1-2); at 36: “Come, then, let us begin from the Muses, who by singing for their father Zeus give pleasure to his great mind within Olympus” (36-37); and finally, the proper invocation at line 104: “Hail, Children of Zeus, and give me lovely song.” One first impression might be that Hesiod carefully approaches his Muses before exhorting them to inspire him, each approach beginning like a courtship with the maids leading finally to the consummation that begins the *Theogony*. At the same time Hesiod has offered two false starts, each hesitation providing him additional time to present the Muses as he wishes within his narrative. Hesiod’s repeated encomium throughout the first 115 lines of the invocation actually provides him the narrative space in which he may draw on and improve upon his Homeric predecessor and invent the Muses as he sees fit. There is no conception here of a Creator God who makes humanity after himself, only a poet who fashions the divine Muses in the image that suits him.

Hesiod takes care in this process of inventing the goddesses, making no hubristic move too forthrightly. Note for instance the different structures he gives his two presentations of the Muses’ foundational song. According to his initial example, the Muses’ song is a brief genealogy of the gods, a theogony, properly understood, that progresses in its subject matter from divine Olympians to the Titans and then to humanity:

[B]y night they [the Muses] walk, sending forth their very beautiful voice, singing of aegis-holding Zeus, and queenly Hera of Argos, who walks in golden sandals, and the daughter of aegis-holding Zeus, bright-eyed Athena, and Phoebus Apollo, and arrow shooting Artemis, and earth-holding and earth-shaking Poseidon, and venerated Themis (Justice) and quick-glancing Aphrodite, and golden-crowned Hebe (Youth) and beautiful Dione, and Leto and Iapetus and crooked-counseled Cronus, and Eos (Dawn) and great Helios (Sun) and gleaming Semele (Moon), and Earth and great Ocean and black Night, and the holy race of the other immortals who always are.

One time, they [the Muses] taught Hesiod beautiful song while he was pasturing his lambs under holy Helicon. (10-23)

Where humanity should appear at the bottom of the hierarchy, beneath the Titans whom Zeus defeated to establish his rule from Helikon, Hesiod has deftly placed himself, a not unreasonable move given the nature of his narrative, but one that diverts the audience's focus from matters of the divine to matters of the human poet. This mention of himself follows with his retelling of his poetic initiation by the Muses, which I will return to momentarily. For now, Hesiod's second outline of the Muses' song:

Sending forth their deathless voice, they glorify in their song first the venerated race of the gods from the beginning, those to whom Earth and broad Sky gave birth, and those who were born from these, the gods of rivers and good things; second, then, the goddesses, both beginning and ending their song, sing of Zeus, the father of gods and men . . .; and then, singing of the

race of human beings and of the mighty Giants, they give pleasure to Zeus's mind within Olympus. (41ff.)

With much of the same content differently ordered, the Muses now begin their song, sensibly enough, at the beginning, when Earth and Sky gave birth to the race of gods; yet the claim is that they have two beginnings: one with Earth and Sky and the other with Zeus, the “beginning and ending of their song.” Peculiarly, they then progress to the humans and Titans (Giants), which places their mention of Zeus in between races of divines and mortals who are inferior to him, an odd way to give pleasure to his mind.

Along with the poorly organized revision of the Muses' song structure, there is the matter of their veracity, for the Muses claim the beginning is with Earth and Sky, and yet Hesiod later starts his own genealogy by saying: “In truth, first of all Chasm came to be, and then broad-breasted Earth” (116f.). A great vacancy, or, in a metaphysical sense still anachronistic to Hesiod, a *nothing* is the progenitor of all. Then there are ten more lines of theogony before Earth even begets Sky, and seven more before the two bed one another to beget more gods. Hesiod begins his catalogue of gods after drawing on the Homeric petition-response formula. “[G]ive me lovely song; glorify the sacred race of immortals,” he demands (104-05). “Tell how in the first place gods and earth [*gaia*, not *Gaia*] were born . . . These things tell me from the beginning, Muses” (108, 114). The petition portion of Hesiod's petition-response scheme is characteristically laden with imperative commands, so that, as with Homer, it is unlikely that the “truth” that follows—“In truth, first of all Chasm came to be” (116)—is spoken in the Muses' voice, or by Muses who have possessed Hesiod's voice, either of which would make line 116 the Muses' corrective of their earlier mistake (41-42). More likely, Hesiod follows his predecessor by using the scheme to accent not the Muses'

divine voice but his own mortal abilities, while also outdoing Homer by first setting up the Muses' faulty knowledge and then amending it himself. To do this Hesiod relies much more on narrative (*techne*) than Homer did.

Where he follows Homer is in his presentation of the Muses' absolute and comprehensive knowledge. Like his predecessor, Hesiod appears to be a skeptic, or one who questions whether or not mortals can know the nature of the divine or share in divine knowledge, should any of it actually exist. And Hesiod paints both his Muses' knowledge and his access to it in much more starkly contrasted tones than does Homer. His couplet at lines 27-28 is the well-known subject of much critical attention:²⁶ “we know [*idmen*] how to say many false things similar to genuine ones [*pseudos*], but we know [*idmen*], when we wish, how to proclaim true things [*aletheia*].” In Hesiod's handling, the Muses explicitly admit to lying (*pseudos*). In fact, their claim to knowledge is nothing like that of the Homeric Muses. It is a claim only to knowledge of how to deceive—and of how to tell the truth, but who could know when they are being deceitful or honest? The enigma in which Hesiod figures them is enough to cast doubt of their divine veracity in anyone's eyes, and in this way Hesiod more explicitly than Homer encourages the skepticism of his audience. After all, *how* could one believe in what his Muses claim to know?

Then of course the repetition of “we know [*idmen*] . . . we know [*idmen*]” recalls Homer's Sirens who say “we know [*idmen*] all the pains the Argives and Trojans suffered in the wide land of Troy because of the gods' will, and we know [*idmen*] whatever happens on the bountiful earth. (*Odyssey*, 12.184ff.)” claims every reader knows are lies, as they know that to believe the Sirens and to listen to their song is to die. The particular terms in which Hesiod draws on Homer's Muses amplify Homer's doubtful and almost agnostic stance on

divine inspiration. But that his explicit quote from Homer makes his Muses' claims that of the treacherous Homeric Sirens, this suggests that Hesiod is indeed not only a skeptic of some commitment but also a very close reader of his antecedent. Hesiod notes Homer's use of narrative to draw negative attention to the Muses, specifically through the notion of their supposed knowledge, by their comparison to the false-promising Sirens.

Expanding on Homer's *Odyssey* tactic, Hesiod has captured his Muses within a narrative from the very beginning, anything like an actual invocation of them only taking up a very small number of lines. For Hesiod the Muses are a narrative phenomenon, not to be relied on but to be shaped and manipulated in a manner that highlights both Hesiod's own knowledge of his subject matter and his technical skill in crafting a story. We might note that both times his Muses' song is outlined it is a genealogy of the gods, just like the human song in which it appears, and each time we see how the Muses' very few lines fall far short of the full genealogy offered by Hesiod. In his handling, the poet corrects the Muses' mistakes, offers the "truth" (116) where they have promised lies that cannot be discerned from truth (27-28), and he completes the remaining genealogical task with unaided human knowledge and poetic craft.

Pindar

We learn from Pindar's fragment 31, also called his *Hymn to Zeus*, that the Muses were the invention of Zeus, made at the request of his fellow Olympians to celebrate his triumph over the Titans: When he had established order in the universe, Zeus asked the gods if they lacked anything. They advised Zeus to "create for himself some gods [the Muses], who, by means of words and music, would [*katakosmesousi*] his great deeds" (qtd. in Pucci, 1980, 164).²⁷ The verb *katakosmeo* has been alternately translated as *to beautify* or *to praise*

(Snell 77, 78) and *to set in order* (Pucci, 1980, 164), and the significance of this difference (and of the similarity) will become apparent below.

For now I should point out that Pindar's narrative focuses on *kosmopoiesis*, world making. And though the philosophical science was still anachronistic to him, Pindar permits us to make certain metaphysical inferences from the overall implication of his poem (inferences that become much more apparent in the English Renaissance's use of narrative, or fiction, as Philip Sidney had it, for expressly metaphysical ends). At first glance Pindar's Muses account for the final cause in Zeus's *kosmopoiesis*, for it appears that his great deeds are not complete without the Muses' contribution of the arts and song. To this extent their praise in effect comprises the kosmic order, or rather, the very world in which the poet lives and about which he sings. The Muses' knowledge, then, comprises not only his subject matter but even himself. But because we may associate the Muses' praise with Pindar's praise, with the very encomium that characterizes his *Hymn to Zeus*, Pindar actually suggests that the Muses are the penultimate cause and that he—and by extension, any human poet—is responsible for the final ordering of the world. The interpretive nature of poetry makes this possible. Pucci points out that in the archaic understanding there was considerable slippage between ordering and praising. Encomium was not entirely distinct from the interpretation of the object praised, and interpretation, through its endowment of meaning, shared in the act of creation. Pucci explains that “[w]hen the poet celebrates something or somebody he also gives a ‘meaning’ to the object he celebrates; the kosmos, i.e., the ‘order’ he attributes to the object, becomes constitutive and functions as a principle of interpretation” (Pucci, 1998, 32).

In ontological terms not yet fully comprehended in the archaic era, the constitutive function of the poem involves an examination of human being and its place within the

hierarchical order of the world. Furthermore, the kosmic drama is not only emended by including the importance of poetry, which the Muses represent, but also the emendation appears within the very genre of poetry, encomium, that Pindar makes so crucial to the world's ordering. Together these leave the suggestion that the poem encompasses the world itself. Therefore, I read Pindar's *Hymn to Zeus* as a veiled hymn to the human poet and poem, for it leaves such a strong impression that the poem, as the product of the poet, has its own *kosmopoieic* powers.

Bruno Snell offered a very different reading of the fragment. He said: "The beauty and order of the world," according to Pindar, "depend upon a wise singer to have their meaning made clear to men" (78). This sober, but I think not entirely correct, reading seems to say that the poet, acting as liaison to the Muse, brings the order of the world into the mortal sphere. It may say even less, that the Muse-inspired poet simply makes the world's beauty and order apparent to humans. If so, then for Snell meaning and interpretation are only matters of clarification for an audience. But consider Pindar's various claims: "Be my oracle, Muse, and I shall be your interpreter" (fragment 150), *Olympian 7*: poetry is "the gift of the Muses and sweet fruit of my mind" (9) [Gk 7-8], and also *Nemean 4*: "Words live longer than deeds, words which the tongue, / With the Graces' [or Muses'] favor,²⁸ draws from the mind's depths" (6-7) [Gk: 6-8]. In each instance the poet has granted the Muse only a part of the creative process, and kept the rest of it for himself. For instance, my lattermost example from *Nemean 4* identifies a complex of three sources: divine favor, the poet's mind, and his mouth, each offering a means by which the product, the word, is created. It in fact couches the notion of divine favor within both human ingenuity, figured by the mind (a move repeated by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* invocation, discussed below), and the material

instrument of the creative process, the mouth. Such an explicit comparison of the poet's own abilities to his Muse's is truly remarkable given the subtlety with which his predecessors asserted themselves. If we are to grant Pindar that he has indeed one-upped Homer and Hesiod, we might instead say that each example reads less like a comparison and more like an implicit contrast in which he asserts his own talent and *techne* over the Muse's participation in the creative process. In this case he only uses his mention of the Muse as the occasion to inform his audience of his own role in that process.

And in fact, Homer and Hesiod were only able to assert their use of human knowledge and their technical abilities by juxtaposing—if much more carefully—themselves against the Muse. The Muse must enter any poet's attempt to distance himself from her, for he must draw on her, must name her, to then leave the suggestion that he does not require her inspiration. The Muse is so engrained into the culture mind of the archaic era that in this way the poet has to rely on her to depart from her, a curious circumstance that also beset the Latins. They must first refer to their poetic predecessors, granting the elder poets some of their intertextual authority in doing so, in order to disclaim that authority and establish independence.

Snell's interpretation of fragment 31, that the world depends upon a "wise singer to have [its] meaning made clear to men" (78),²⁹ neglects to consider Pindar's bold and forthright comparisons of himself to the Muse. I think it is clear that Pindar considers his role as the interpreter in Pucci's terms, that is, as one who serves a constitutive, creative function. Pindar does not simply claim privileged access to a source but that he himself is a source, more likely *the* source, of his poetry.

From this vantage point, two things become clearer about each archaic poet and his relationship with his Muse: each uses inspiration as the convention with which he carefully elevates himself in the hierarchy descending from Zeus or Apollo to Muse to poet. And doing so, each makes his craft the product not of any divine power but of human knowledge and skill. Hesiod writes himself into the divine line, following the Olympians and the Titans, and then invents his own Muses within his narrative. Homer acknowledges the Muses' connection to the aegis-bearing Zeus, and assumes the Muses' voice in the execution of his song. Skeptical that he has access to divine knowledge, he constructs his epics solely of *kleos*, and disclaims the Muses within his narrative. Pindar suggests parallels between his encomiastic hymn and the praise of the Muses that completes Zeus's establishment of the kosmos, and in this way, associates his work with the ordering of the world. In each case, the poet attempts to control what his Muse represents by writing her into his narrative, and he employs mimesis (as it will be known in the Renaissance) to reorient himself within her hierarchy.

The tension generated by the poet's reliance upon the Muse and his desire to be freed of her inspiration, to become reliant only upon himself, fully matures in the millennial Latin era when the Muse and her tendency to represent the artist's obstacles become both more pronounced and more definitive of her later accretion.

Latin Poets

Among the Latins the Muse is not only an already ancient deity overseeing artistic production but she is also the poet's predecessor whose diction and poetic structures appear both repeated and altered in the Latin Muse invocation. According to the nature of textual forebears, when he composes an invocation, "the poet is necessarily 'quoting' earlier

invocations, [which] serves to place him in a long tradition of using this kind of vocabulary for talking about inspiration, and indeed it actually *performs* the inspiration, in the sense that it is precisely through such intertextual activity that poetry comes into being” (Sharrock 208). The ever presence of intertextuality creates a circular problem for the Latin poet, who cannot establish himself without drawing on the textual authority of the ancient predecessors, and yet doing so only leaves him reliant upon a source of poetry external to himself. Again, according to the nature of textual forebears, the later poet’s antecedent is a text figured by its author, and as a text, is a literal source that must always remain outside of the poet who adapts it. The likeness of the authoritative poetic predecessor to the authoritative divine Muse will become more apparent as we see that each Latin poet not only disavows the Muse’s divinity, but within invocations and references to her, the poet also at once draws on his antecedents’ influence and seeks to distance himself from it.

Persius

In his treatment of both the divine Muse and his Muse-like predecessors, Persius (34-62 CE) offers a flagrant and at moments even shocking example of hubris. From the opening of his *Satires*:

I have neither drenched my lips in the nag’s fountain, nor do I remember having had a dream on two-peaked Parnassus, so as thus suddenly to make my appearance as a poet. The maids of Helicon and pale Pirene I leave to those whose busts are licked by clinging ivy. I myself bring my poem to the sacred rites of the poets . . . (qtd. in Miller 159)

Persius’s vitriolic temper, though perhaps not uncharacteristic of a satire, exaggerates the problematic relationship between both divine and mortal poet Muses and the millennial poets,

such as Virgil and Ovid. And yet Persius's vitriol relies entirely on the poetic tradition it purports to depart from.

Examining the many allusions, we find that divine Pegasus has become the *cabullus*, or nag, who stamped the sacred fountains Hippoucrene and Pirene into the side of Parnassus, and from which poets drink as participants in the Muses' cult. Their sips purportedly provide an inspiration of the sudden sort, the freely won "Aha!" moments that take a mere stylist to the level of poet in an instant. The situation that Persius disparages is of course Hesiod's encounter with and instant inspiration by the Muses on Helicon, which later poets Callimachus and Ennius also claimed to have experienced, but in dreams. In Ennius's dream, he meets Homer who tells him that he, Ennius, is his reincarnation. Any such association with the past does nothing for Persius's professional ethos. He appears to see all poetic lineages as aged artifacts, the "busts" (also translated as "museum pieces" [Miller 161]) of once great, but now dead, figures who have remained stationary long enough to be choked with ivy. Persius can't even remember (*nec . . . meminī*) if he has had an inspirational dream like Callimachus's or Ennius's, his forgetfulness a clever disclaimer of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory and Hesiod's mother of the Muses. Her gifts of memory are not his, and he does not ask to have a share in them.

If not the Muse then for Persius, who or what is the source of poetry? At one point he suggests that the teacher of art (*magister artis*) is *venter*, literally "stomach," from which we might infer the poet's hunger for patronage and social stability. But soon after, Persius points his satirical ire to poets motivated by hunger, for "if the prospect of delusive cash should gleam [in the eyes of venal poets], you would believe . . . the plagiarists and other hacks . . . were singing the nectar of Pegasus" (qtd. in Miller 162). Persius both lampoons poets

motivated by survival and takes a jab at us, his apparently ignorant audience, the “you” of “if they were paid well enough, you would be taken by the hacks.” Even worse, if we are thus persuaded, we must associate the work of such ill-motivated poets with the ancient pedigree, the “nectar of Pegasus,” that Persius has already thoroughly discredited. According to Miller, both kinds of inspiration, the divinely endowed and the materially motivated, are insufficient.

The idea of a supernatural initiation creating poets instantaneously ignores the criterion of *ars*. The belly’s drive to endeavors beyond one’s capabilities perverts the prerequisite of talent. Persius is not inspired by Parnassus or the Muses or the belly. He rejects all these, holding instead to his implicit ideal combination of the proper *ingenium* [natural talent] and *ars* [technical ability, *techne*]. (162-63)

Therefore, the two-fold source of poetry lies within the poet himself, within his native abilities combined with technical training. And yet, Persius cannot make this radical claim—and surely cannot make it with such impact—without paying homage to poetic predecessors. The creative authority of Homer, Hesiod, Callimachus, and Ennius, is undeniable given the explicit attention they enjoy in the invocation. To this extent, Persius, if in a very different tone, has done little more than Ennius who in a dream became the reincarnation of Homer. Roughly we see here a shift from rhetorical praise to blame, and yet within the blame, that is intended to establish the poet’s independence, is still something very much like a reliance on Muse and creative antecedents, a problem we find expressed with both more subtlety and expansion in Virgil and Ovid.

Virgil

The opening of Virgil's *Aeneid*: "*Arma virumque cano,*" or "I sing arms and the man [Aeneas]," both disavows the divine Muse and engages Virgil's Homeric predecessor. His peculiar, humanistic invocation summons not a divinity but the impression of a human will in control of artistic production. It is *I*, the poet, who sings the following tale into existence, a notion missed by many translators who have tried to make the line more amenable to English ears by including prepositional phrases, such as: "This poem is about battles and the man" (Sisson's translation). But this poem is more than *about* battles and heroes. The invocation's claim is ontological and thus reminiscent of Pindar's encapsulating narrative, which lays claim to the cosmic drama that it exists within by suggesting that the poet fashions the drama and with it, the world. For Virgil's song *is* the subject matter, the epic world itself, brought into being solely by human resources. And yet his claim to total authority is actually not limited to Virgil's own poetic ability. It can't be. For referring to "arms" and "man," he returns us to the opening lines of both Homeric epics: the *Iliad*, which asks for information about the martial wrath of Achilles, and the *Odyssey*, in which the first word is *Andra*, the man, specifically Odysseus, about whom the poet appears to petition the Muse for her knowledge of his journey. By referring to Homer, Virgil associates the epic that follows with its epic predecessors, making them and their poet the inspirers of the *Aeneid*. But this is another example of the circular relationship had by poet and Muse. While his assertion that he, and not the Muse, sings his song into being both departs from his Homeric antecedent and permits him at least some claim to an authority of his own, his use of allusion in the process makes his own authority also reliant on the Homeric texts.

The actual invocation of the Muse that follows at line 8 reaffirms Virgil's problem with artistic authority, for ever present are both species of Muse:

Tell me, O Muse, the cause; wherein thwarted in will or wherefore angered,
did the Queen of heaven drive a man, of goodness so wondrous, to traverse so
many perils, to face so many toils. Can heavenly spirits cherish resentment so
dire? (8ff.)

Virgil has inherited the petition-response formula of his antecessors, as well as his use of the imperative in addressing the Muse, his "Tell me" reminiscent of the *Iliad's* "The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son Achilles" (1.1) and the *Odyssey's* "Tell me, Muse, of the man of many devices" (1.1). And like Homer, whose blame of the divine for the horrors of the War he reveals through his question: "Who then of the gods was it [who started the War]?" (*Iliad*, 1.8), Virgil questions the fiber of the gods based on the treatment of Aeneas. Aeneas is good, wondrous even, and he heroically endures perils and toils, while the gods are angry and given to resentment, an implicit comparison that makes the human the only figure of any virtue. If Virgil's request for the cause (*causa*) of Aeneas's poor treatment is not somehow a more philosophical, and also rational, approach than Homer's (for Homer does, after all, ask the same basic question, though lacking in philosophical terminology), then Virgil's request is more direct, his demands of the Muse more forthright, and therefore, his assertion of himself that much clearer than Homer's.

This is made more apparent through a comparison of the answers each poet gives to his questions. As I have shown, the Homeric poet asks the Muse for information, about either the Trojan War or the man Odysseus, and then offers the answer that makes up the whole of the epic that follows. In the *Iliad* we see the poet's question: "Who then of the gods was it

that brought these two together to contend?,” followed by the answer: “The son of Leto and Zeus [Apollo]” (8-9). But the *Aeneid*’s interrogation: “Can heavenly spirits cherish resentment so dire?” (11) is followed by an answer that only avoids the question: “There was an ancient city, the home of Tyrian settlers” (12). Homer really does not ask a question that requires a Muse’s absolute knowledge of the story to answer, but asks what anyone could answer with mundane historical information about the War. Naturally, the poet provides himself that answer. But Virgil’s question is essentially one that only a divinity could answer: “What is the nature of divinities? Explain to me their motives.” The subtle significance of Virgil’s very different question should not be overlooked. Homer, as well as Hesiod, repeatedly ask their divine Muses questions that do not require divine knowledge to answer. Homer’s demands, for example, for information about Achilles’ wrath and Odysseus’s journey, as well as Hesiod’s petition for a genealogy, a rote catalogue not at all unlike the *Iliad* book 2 catalogue of ships, these are slights to the Muse because they only ask for the sort of information *kleos* can provide. Yet Virgil goes so far as to ask for information intimate to divinities, and his response, spoken clearly in his own voice, is the stuff of *kleos*: ‘Once upon a time in an ancient city’. Disregarding an answer proper to his question, Virgil implicitly rejects the Muse.

Virgil employs an innovative tactic that does not simply disavow divine and mortal Muses outright, as Persius does, but invites us to reconsider the invocations of his predecessors. He shows us where the petition-response formulas are and what it means to either assume the Muse’s voice or to disregard her answer, and therefore, her herself. His question was one that any member of his audience, and many of us, might also ask: ‘Why do the gods make us suffer?’ By making this his opening use of the petition-response formula he

raises it above the level of mere convention, which enables his audience, and we ourselves, to actually *hear* the questions we all may have missed in Homer and Hesiod. Through adaptation, Virgil actually teaches us how to read the invocations of the archaic poets, and to contrast his, favorably, against theirs.

Though there are numerous more conventional invocations in the *Aeneid*, yet they are each colored by the more outstanding self-will and human determination that Virgil has undeniably summoned in his unique—and yet allusive—book 1 opening. For instance, at 10.163-65 the poet requests: “Now open, goddesses, and move the song: what band at this time accompanied Aeneas from the Tuscan shores.” The poet then provides the answer in the form of a list, just as Homer had in his *Iliad* book 2 invocation. Though we may suspect that the poet assumes the Muse’s voice with his answer, it is difficult to read him as a member in good standing of Homer’s, or the Muse’s, artistic cult. As long as Virgil, or any poet, endows his work by participation in the poetic tradition *and* seeks to rely on his own voice, both Muse and artistic ancestor are at once intractable fixtures in his poem and the authoritative sources he seeks to disclaim. Wherever we find Virgil’s likeness to Homer, we identify the price he pays to assert his independence from him.

Ovid

Opening the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid’s ambiguous prayer for inspiration instantly establishes his epic as a departure from any conventional belief in the Muses and from his poetic predecessors Homer, Hesiod, and also Virgil:

My mind [*animus*] is bent to tell of bodies changed into new forms. Ye gods,
for you yourselves have wrought the changes, breathe on these my

undertakings, and bring down my song in unbroken strains from the world's very beginning even unto the present time. (1.1-5)

First of all, his reference to gods (*di*) appears in the masculine, so that they may be read as either male or both male and female deities, which means that Ovid slights both the goddesses and his predecessors by not referring to the Muses as Muses, or at the very least, by not opening his poem with an invocation to another female deity. (Even Lucretius acquiesced to tradition and called on the help of a *genetrix*, who in his case was Venus.) Thus from line 1, Ovid defies expectations and establishes his distance from both the Muse proper and the precedent established by Homer, Hesiod, and also Virgil, who includes an explicit reference to *Musa* near the beginning of his *Aeneid*.

In fact, Ovid's initial claim to self-inspiration is not at all unlike Virgil's "I sing arms and the man" (*Aeneid* 1.1). But more carefully detailed, and more resembling Pindar's *Nemean* 4, it is Ovid's own mind, his *animus*, that produces his song. The poem is about changes in the natural world, which he does not take credit for but allows the gods to have their due (*nam vos mutastis et illas*: for you yourselves have wrought the changes). However, in his treatment of the gods, in his fabrication of them, they are reduced to inspiring [*adspirate*] only Ovid's tale, while the poet places himself within his own *animus*, far beyond their reach. Specifically, Ovid refuses to let the divine breathe into him the gift of song, as Hesiod had permitted it, and in this way summons the impression of his reliance upon his own craft, his departure from his predecessors, and his disavowal of the divine Muse.

Ovid's most explicit engagement with the Muses is his inclusion of them in book 5 of the *Metamorphoses*. In this narrative, the Muses' roam an unsafe Helikon in a state of fear (271-73). For recently out walking and suddenly caught in the rain, they encountered king

Pyreneus who was enamored with the nine goddesses, and persuaded them to retreat to his home where it was dry (282-84). Once inside Pyreneus tried to rape the Muses and they only found safety by donning their wings and flying from the roof (288). Pyreneus followed them saying, “*qua via est vobis, erit et mihi,*” or “What way you take, the same will I take also,” and leaped from the roof to his death (290-91). A number of readings have influentially argued that the Muses’ inclusion in the narrative of book 5, which involves a lengthy song sung by Calliope, affords them creative agency within Ovid’s epic tale (Hinds 1987, Leach 1974, Lateiner 1984). This interpretation is inventive but doubtful, and Alison Sharrock has questioned the very premise of it:

Instead of inspiring from the outside, Muses actually become part of the story; they enter by the third person [in Ovid’s telling], and use the first person [in the telling of their own tale]. They tell subjective stories of themselves, not truths about the world from the mouth of the poet. In doing so, they become subordinate to the poet, for they are given no greater authority for their speech than any other narrator. Where the second person gives them power (power to inspire), the third person subjects them to the poet’s power. (223)

Firstly, one should note that Sharrock’s emphasis on the use of person leads her to conclude that the Muses are weakened when they appear in the third person (in Ovid’s narrative) and empowered when addressed in the second person, such as in the conventional invocation opening: “Tell me, Muse” or “Sing, Muse.” These are the phrases that associate her with inspiration. But as we have seen, such uses of the second person, hardly empowering, are actually found within imperative commands. No poet, not even Homer, makes any passive

request but commands the Muse “*Do this,*” and in this way, draws on her conventional authority as he attempts to establish his independence from it.

However, I want to concede where Sharrock is clearly right. In their Ovidian state, the Muses speak of themselves and their own trials, and do not tell truths about the world. But if they no longer tell such truths, rather, no longer convey knowledge of the poet’s world, they have lost their use to him. For Ovid, the Muses are too pathetic to be relied on, and his knowledge must come from himself. And Sharrock sees that the Muses are not only the subjects of but are subjected to Ovid’s narrative, though she neglects to provide supporting evidence from the *Metamorphoses*. By including the Muses in the book 5 story, Ovid internalizes their persons. He does not let them remain external goddesses petitioned for inspiration, as Sharrock indicates, but gives them their fictive ethoi through their actions that he determines and their dialogue that he constructs within his text. Moreover, the many details from their story suggest that the Muses in no way participate in Ovid’s creative process, but that being subjected to it merely play roles in his mimetic recreation of the world that once was theirs.

Accordingly, the book 5 narrative prompts us to ask some conspicuous questions. For instance, when did it begin to rain on Helikon? When did the Muses’ bucolic world become unsafe, and how did their authoritative ethos yield to fear? Ovid has created vulnerable Muses who no longer wield the certain authority they once did. This recent state of affairs is not least of all demonstrated by their naïve persuasion by the lecherous Pyreneus, despite the fact that they, and specifically Calliope, the Muse of rhetoric and kings, are supposed to be the inspirers of such persuasion. Avoiding Hesiod’s confusion over his Muses’ enigmatic claims to truthful knowledge, Ovid creates Muses who are themselves lost in the porous

borderland they created between *pseudos* that resembles *aletheia* and *aletheia* itself; Pyreneus's assault on them suggests that *aletheia* is only realized in actions (Pyreneus's treacherous but true actions), while words are but the vehicles of that which only seems to be true.

We might also ask when the Muses got their wings, for which there may be two possible answers. The first is suggested by the very next narrative, which begins: "While the Muse was still [telling the tale of Pyreneus's scandal], the sound of whirring wings was heard and words . . . [that sounded like human voices] came from the high branches of the trees" (5.294-95). Thus enter the Pierides, the nine sisters of Pierus, who the Muses turned into magpies because, like the *Iliad's* Thamyris, they challenged the Muses to a singing competition and, also like Thamyris, had their gift of song taken from them as punishment for their hubris. As magpies, they can imitate almost anything (*imitante omnia* [299]), but cannot actually sing with human voices again. The *stolidarum sororum*, stupid sisters, may serve as clever and satirical doubles of Muses, the *doctae sorores* (255), the learned sisters. Their number (nine), their one-time ability to sing, and their recent wings, a feature we have just been introduced to in the previous episode of the Muses and Pyreneus, all point to the Pierides serving as unfavorable reflections of the Muses.

Another and I think likely possibility is an association of the Ovidian Muses with winged Sirens. Though Homer never describes his Sirens, but only gives us auditory cues during Odysseus's episode with them, visual depictions of winged Sirens circling Odysseus's ship like flies were known in Homer's day and ancient by Ovid's time.³⁰ He in fact has his own Sirens in book 5 who request wings to search for their lost friend Proserpina, and so, perhaps unwisely bring about their own transformation into birds (551ff.). This is to say that

not long after Ovid's disempowered Muses have donned wings, he describes the *aetion*, the moment of origin when the Sirens get this emblem of their character. Ovid draws on common iconography to engage Homer by demonstrating the courage lacking in his predecessor's more timid comparison of the Muses to Sirens. Though Ovid's Muses are not utterly helpless, as they do know when to don their Ovidian wings and fly from trouble, the fact that they even need to flee forces us to reconsider entirely the status of their once powerful collective character. And yet the only things that keep them from being a victim of Pyreneus, the wings that permit yet another comparison of them to the infamous Sirens, these only serve to make them the victim of Ovid.

Perhaps, too, his poet Muses fare no better, a possibility we may infer from his use of both Pyreneus and the stupid sisters, the Pierides, as figures for artistic *imitatio*. Remember that Pyreneus followed the Muses right off of his roof, saying: "*qua via est vobis, erit et mihi,*" or "What way you take, the same will I take also" (290-91). Pyreneus imitates the Muses, so that we may read him as, in Ovid's handling, a failed poet, a sycophant of the goddesses and perhaps also of other poets. In Pyreneus's case, imitation costs him his life. With the Pierides, imitation means the death of their artistic lives, for as magpies they can imitate almost anything (*imitante omnia* [299]), but with the exception of song, their beloved craft that also leads them to ruin. For Ovid, either divine or mortal Muse is only capable of providing a model for imitation, and in both instances in which *imitatio* appears in book 5, it is derisively associated with death and destruction.

Conclusion

Here we may note that central to the notion of inspiration is the role of *spiritus*, breath. The Muse who "breathed a divine voice into" Hesiod (22-35) technically *en-spired* him since

she breathed *into him* the voice of song. Hesiod's *in*-spiration would denotatively be the intake of air, and thus, leave the suggestion that Hesiod somehow breathed into himself his own inspiring breath. Therefore, *en*-spiration we may liken to *fiat*, the *en* signifying the action done unto the poet. His request for the Muse's breath suggests both his need of her participation in his poetic work and the inadequacy of his mortal abilities. The shifting winds with *in*-spiration signify an act of artistic self-will, and thus, what must be nothing less than the poet's resistance to his Muse. We found such resistance in his attempts to best her, to overcome his dependence on divine assistance, and to overturn the hierarchical arrangement that sublimates him to an external source of his artistic output. Throughout this chapter we have seen how the tense slippage between *in*- and *en*-spiration figures the very conflict that we may now say with some certainty characterizes the ancient poet's response to the hierarchy of inspiration and so, too, his less than bucolic relationship with his Muse.

Throughout this argument the first stirrings of an ontological consciousness appear in the poet's relationship with his perceived source of poetry so that the Muse invocation provides not only a space for poetic commentary but also for a theoretical engagement of self, anachronistic as that conception may be. More specifically, ancient poetic commentary is imbricated with a theory of self inferable through the poet-Muse relationship. The following chapter establishes philosophy's nature as an authority similar to the Muse, an overseer of both art and self-identification, and in Chapters Four and Five that authority is questioned with its own slippage not unlike what we have seen among these poets.

Chapter 3: Metaphysics and Making

Whether honored or departed from, the chain of creative command from Zeus to the Muse to the poet establishes a stratum of causes. Zeus, the chief Olympian, orders the Titans' chaotic cosmos and fathers the Muse who, singing the praises of his works, both founds a cult of the human arts and provides the artist his identity through her endowment of inspiration. But to describe each as a *cause* and the relationship linking them to one another a *stratum* is to drift from the mythological language of character and narrative in which their scale originates, and to rely instead on the critical, philosophical language that followed the era of myth. It is in fact to philosophize them by grouping the three into generalizations that can be extended to other physical and metaphysical phenomena. None of this is possible with mythological language. Concerned with the philosophical era and its language, this chapter locates a reoccupation from the archaic poet-Muse relationship to the relationship had by the *artifex*, a philosophical generalization referring to the human maker, and the perceived source of human artifice, the nature against which the artifex was juxtaposed. Another conceptual generality, *nature* in this chapter refers to the workings of the natural world and its products which supply the raw material for art of any kind. As I have mentioned *art* is understood in its theoretical generalization as *ars*, *techne*, manufacture, and production, and may be defined as any rationally ordered activity with a productive end (Close, 1969, 467).³¹ Put another way, art is simply that which enables a person to make something through the application of theory, practice, and/or skill. This includes rhetoric, which produces persuasive argument, the economics that generates profit, and of course, the mimetic arts responsible for representations of what is real 'in nature'.

These generalities will aid in the later identification of the ontological relationship had by the early modern poet, another species of cause, and his perceived creative source. For as the following exposition shows, the notions of human maker, the process of making, and the resulting product become signs for humanity's ontological status so that the pre-ontological stirrings found in the archaic poet's less than conceptual attempts to define himself via his relationship with his Muse find fuller expression within a new terminology and its more critical mindset. It must be made clear that such a reoccupation is hardly absolute. Nature, as a philosophical conception, also had roots in figures like Athena, who likely descended from Isis, the many-breasted female figure overseeing generation and fertility. If original, mine is an association of the mythological Muse with philosophical nature based on only one of nature's many domains: human production. In this way, the Muse's authority over the poet's craft and his identity establish fundamental questions later approached in the understanding of humanity's causal dependency on nature. However, because nature's far reaching dominion over human production extended into means of survival, such as sex and economics, the existential dependency of the artifex on nature surpassed that of the *aoidoi*, the singer or poet, on his Muse. The ancient singer-poet derived his identity from her, a matter of no small ontological change, but in the natura of the era of philosophy, the human person found a source for the means of existence.

What still remains in the transition from a mythological to philosophical scale is the centering stability of hierarchy. As Part II's focus on early modern poetry will suggest, philosophy does not put to rest the questions raised in Homer's and Hesiod's invocations. But philosophy does attempt to stabilize the ontological anxieties that result from their lack of acceptable answers. And a metaphysical rank of making may in fact be more successful at

doing so because of the seeming certainty, the absolutism, of its categories and codifications. But the more sturdy and generalized identification of human being, not unlike that of natura, may also account for added, existential anxieties previously unimaginable.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an exposition of the ontological premises established through philosophy and to demonstrate the extent of their influence over ideological norms in Elizabethan society. Establishing these norms now will highlight the novelty of later departures from convention. I want to first distinguish between metaphysical chains, between the dynamic chain of making and the more commonly recognized but static 'great chain of being'. The latter sees the human positioned above nature and neglects the abundance of philosophical propositions placing the human beneath nature's causal dominance. Thomas Aquinas' discussions of the causal characteristics of nature and man will provide a foundation for the appearance in Elizabethan social rhetoric of nature's authority over a variety of modes of production, including discourse itself, creative arts, sex, and economics. The examples provided in this chapter do not historicize these ideas but are organized to best illustrate how pervasive the belief was that human art was tied to nature and that human being found its expression in the one and its limiting dependency in the other.

A conceptual metaphysical chain of causes must not be confused with other scaled ontologies, such as the chain popularized by Arthur O. Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* and applied to the Renaissance time period in E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture*. Both works do identify ontologies, but not ones that accent causality in a manner even remotely suggestive of the mythological scale descending from Zeus to the Muse to the poet. The more familiar hierarchies of being offer a static ontology in which all things, from angels to animals to plants to minerals, are what they are because of their level of dignity or

cosmic value determined upon their creation by God. It is this conception, and not that of the chain of making, that deduces human superiority over the animals, and, by extension, the ruler over the commons, the male over the female, one race over another, and so on. Thomas Elyot's *The Booke Named Governour* (1531) offers an illustration:

Behold also the order that God hath put generally in all his creatures, beginning at the most inferior or base and ascending upward. . . . He made not only herbs to garnish the earth, but also trees of a more eminent stature than herbs; and yet in the one and the other be degrees of qualities. . . . But where any is found that hath many of the said properties, he is more set by than all the other, and by that estimation, the order of his place and degree evidently appeareth.

After a similar hierarchical delineation of *animalia*, where “some [animals] bear things profitable to sundry uses . . . some others serve for pleasure,” Elyot advances to humanity,

for whose use all said creatures were ordained of God, and also excelleth them all, by prerogative of knowledge and wisdom. Notwithstanding forasmuch as understanding is the most excellent gift that man can receive in his creation, whereby it doth approach most nigh unto the similitude of God. . . . It is therefore congruent, and according in that influence, as thereby being next to the similitude of his maker, so should the estate of his person be advanced in degree, or place, where understanding may profit. . . . (4-5)

In this scheme, one's place is judged by eminence of stature (such as trees over herbs), by usefulness for profit or pleasure (as with the animals), or by the divine-like qualities of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (had by humanity). The scale ascends upward from

earthly (inferior, base) beings to divinity (superior, celestial), placing humanity in the middle seat to signify our dual make-up of divine and earthly qualities. According to Elyot, “it may not be called order except it do contain in it degrees; high and base, according to the merit or estimation of the thing that is ordered” (4).

In locating all of nature below humanity, Elyot’s ontology cannot account for the varied, pervasive, and, most importantly, overpowering concept of nature that at this time seemed to govern man and not the other way around. This understanding stretches back to the earliest written records³² and certainly pervades the thought of the West from the classical era to the Enlightenment (when it lost its credibility). For Quintilian, “All things which art brings to fruition have their origins in nature” (qtd. Close, 477). Plato before him repeated such beliefs at *Laws* 889a and 899c-e and *Sophist* 265e, and relied on the same reasoning to formulate his well known, idealistic ontology that descends from reality, found in the forms (for him an über-Nature), to the material earth, and finally to the inferior human imitation of it (*Republic* X 597). Plato distinguished between the crafts, such as carpentry, and the representational arts like painting, the latter holding a hierarchical seat below the former because of the fact that the representation remains at a remove from the material nature it imitates and at that much further a remove from his nature of abstract forms.

Because of the use of such generalities, the notion of art alters at times and with it nature’s participatory role. For instance, Aristotle saw that the art of governing altered the ‘natural material’ of the individual within the citizenry. Unable to create a person it takes the citizen made in nature and simply fashions her according to its artificial tenets (*Politics* I, 1258a 23). Art was also subservient to nature’s methods of generation (*Protrepticus* IX;³³ *Parts of Animals* 639b 19-21). Its modes or means of generation are worthy of human

imitation in order to find more efficient modes of artificial production. Material then is not limited to the wood and stone repurposed by man for fine art, design, and construction, but can include any product of nature including the model of its means for production. A. J.

Close sums up this pedigree of thought as an example of mimetic imitation:

Human beings are creatures of their natural environment; their knowledge and experience are bounded and determined by it; their activity is circumscribed by its conditions. From these facts it follows inevitably that their technical inventions “imitate nature” in the sense of following its laws, adapting its potentialities and resources, even mimicking its methods. (1969, 483)

Mimesis is a much repeated but misunderstood concept Latinized as *imitation* (*imitatio*) and remaining within our cultural imaginations more specifically as the commonplace *art imitates nature*. The phrase is typically read as a topos used to identify an artist’s pictorial copying of natural phenomena. This is not inaccurate, and I elaborate on it in my discussion of visual art theory in Chapter Five, but it fails to note the existential significance that links the three distinct concepts: human person, artifice, and nature. Edward M. Taylor saw the relationship among them as “the tools man used in understanding himself and his world, in organizing his views of himself and experience” (11). The limits of mimesis were established through its reliance upon nature as the source of imitations, and by extension reflect the limits of the imitator’s self-definition.

In these and similar terms, not uncommon portrayals deified nature and ensured its powers of arbitration over human productive behavior. Alan of Lille (1128-1201) exemplified these powers in what reads like a prayer to Nature:

Oh child of God, mother of creation, bond of the universe and its stable link,
 bright gem of those on earth, mirror for mortals, light-bearer for the world:
 peace, love, virtue, guide, power, order, law, end, way, leader, source, life,
 light, splendour, beauty, form, rule of the world. (*The Complaint of Nature*, 128)

Within this hyperbolic praise a deified natura, the “mother of creation,” is raised to God’s causal height as a co-creatrix of the world. At the same time, it sits in the middle of a structure as the product of God and the mirror for mortals. Humanity is not nature’s equal, but as a mirror nature supplies the means of human self-knowledge. This bond of the universe, source, order, end, and rule of the world makes up the centering stability of any essentialist understanding of that self. For Chaucer nature was the “vicaire of the almyghty Lord” (*Parliament of Fowles*, 375), and later, for Thomas Browne, God’s “universal and public manuscript” (qtd. in Bray 23). Similarly Richard Hooker (1554-1600) thought of nature as “nothing else but God’s instrument . . . We see then how Nature itself teacheth laws and statutes to live by” (qtd. in Bray 107). “Just as the order of right reason is from man,” Thomas Aquinas reasons, “so the order of nature is from God himself. And so in sins against nature, in which the very order of nature is violated, an injury is done to God himself, the orderer of nature” (*Summa Theologiae* [ST] 2-2.154.12 ad 1).

I have drifted from nature’s dominion over production to its sway over right-behavior more generally considered. Note here, however, that Thomas’ scale—God, nature, and man—is repeated in a narrower focus on causality which gives a clearer picture of how the “order of nature” offers both the model and the barrier of human manufacture:

For when anyone makes one thing from another, this latter thing from which he makes is presupposed to his action, and is not produced by his action; thus

the craftsman works from natural things, as wood or brass, which are caused not by the action of art, but by the action of nature. So also nature itself causes natural things as regards their form, but presupposes matter. If therefore God did only act from something presupposed, it would follow that the thing presupposed would not be caused by Him. (*ST I* q. 45, art. 2)

As a secondary cause nature relies only on God's creation (*ex nihilo*) of matter, atomic matter, which nature orders and uses in the generation of natural things. Making one thing from another, the artifex reorders what nature has made, what Thomas refers to as alteration (*ST I* q. 45, art. 1), a process of making that is wholly dependent upon previous (presupposed) materials and forms. Thus this chapter of the *Summa* constructs a scale of both makers and their particular mode of making: God's prime-creation, nature's generation, man's alteration.

The focus of interest regarding human production is the distance between natural generation and artificial alteration. The former is capable of producing substantial (essential) forms, which amount to the *thingness* of the thing, while the latter only accidental (ancillary) forms. In this view humans might carve from stone, for instance, the accidental form of a figure from nature, but our creative intervention could have no effect on the substantial stoneness of the rock itself. To draw on a concrete example, Michelangelo may fashion the accidental form titled *David*, but the *David's* substance always remains its substantial, essential, marbleness. As the stoneness of both raw and artificially altered stone, substance is the immaterial and most underlying uniqueness that makes something what it is. All of nature's works are in their substantial form, and that part of the work remains unalterable (*Comm. de Anima*, II, 1, 218 [paraphrased from Eco, 95]). The form of a product, then, amounts to the ontological footprint of its maker: a substantial footprint if natural, accidental

if human. According to Umberto Eco: “[In the scholastic system,] [t]he objects produced by art did not introduce a new order, but remained within the limits of their substance” (95). Or as Bonaventure saw it: “The soul can make new compositions, but it cannot make new things” (*In III Sent.* 37, 1 dub 1, qtd. in Eco 95). Thus “generation is simply nobler and more excellent than alteration, because the substantial form is nobler than the accidental” (*ST I q.* 45, art. 1). One might say, then, that Chaucer’s “vicaire” of God relies on nature as an “instrument” (Hooker) to set down in “universal and public” manuscript form (Browne) a definition of the human person understood through her limited productive powers.

The same powers are central to the Renaissance philosophy of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, taken up in Chapter Four. There the stable substantial form begins to lose its quality as the essential characteristic of a person, which in the scholastic view is a remote part of the self not only unalterable but which also both precedes and extends beyond the lifetime of the individual.³⁴ The only qualities that may change are accidental, the secondary features of the substantial person, like nationality.³⁵ But in Pico’s view, being itself seems to become an accidental phenomenon over which human will has the power of generation. From Pico to Sidney to the Elizabethan sonneteers one sees a highly altered but in no way conventional conception of metaphysical freedoms (and their uncertainties). The social rhetoric of the Elizabethan era attests to how conventional scholastic notions of nature’s dominion over man were still commonly subscribed to, and illustrating some of them here will both further demonstrate the ideological authority of the belief in nature and accent the novelty of what will be found in English poetic theory and sonnets.

The following sections range from a focus on rhetoric to sexuality to economics. Note though that they all share in common qualities of human production, production both

governed and normalized though period conceptions of what is natural. Rhetorical sequence, for example, offers an instance of ‘right order’ from which any departure was thought of as disordered and *preposterous*. According to Patricia Parker:

‘Preposterous’ comes from *posterus* (“after” or “behind”) and *prae* (“in front” or “before”) and connotes a reversal of “post” for “pre,” back for front, second for first, sequel for beginning. As contemporary definitions of the term make clear, it is hence available for “backward” or “arsie versie” (John Barret), “last done which by rule [should] have been first” (Richard Huloet), and thus more generally for inversions that disrupt a “proper” or “natural” sequence. (1992, 186)

Similarly, the pre-posterous was thought of as “that before which should be behind (Puttenham),” and “that which ought to be in the first place . . . in the second (Angell Day),” and as “the term that marks as ‘unnatural’ the inverse of orders presented as both ‘naturall & necessary’ (Henry Peacham)” (187). No mere matter of grammar and logic, insistences upon right order were also the means for naturalizing communal behavior. Richard Taverner’s examples of “things done preposteriously” include: “if a wife would rule her husband” or the “commons . . . tel theyr Prince what he had to do” (qtd. in Parker 190). And Peter Martyr (*Decades* 1555) associates “abominable and unnaturall lechery” with the “preposterous venus” (Goldberg 180) of purportedly unnatural sex acts, that is, sodomitic behavior that turns the posterior forward. With less color but still much to the point, Edward Coke (1552-1634) described sodomitic sex as “*contra ordinationem Creatoris et naturae ordinem*” (qtd. in Bray 26) (or, against the ordination of the Creator and the order of nature). Thomas Aquinas spells it out plainly elsewhere, holding that the end “which nature intends in

copulation is offspring to be procreated and educated, and that this good might be sought, it put delight in copulation. . . . Whoever, therefore, uses copulation for the delight which is in it, not referring the intention to the end intended by nature, acts against nature” (*On the Sentences* 4.33. 1. 3). Where Thomas finds disorder in confusing the naturally intended purpose of sexual pleasure, Erasmus places right order, and the proper experience of both pleasure and procreation, within the convention of marriage:

For if to live well ... is to followe the course of Nature, what thinge is so agreynge with Nature as Matrimonye? For there is nothing so naturall not onely unto mankind, but also unto all other living creatures as it is to kepe their owne kinde from decaye, and through increase of issue, to make the whole kinde immortall. (*Epistle to perswade a young gentleman to Marriage*, qtd. in Hawkes, 2000, 349)

As the avenue to procreation (the increase of issue) Nature requires marriage, and one who refuses matrimony, as Erasmus suggests, lives at once outside of social convention and in opposition to nature. Though social convention may easily be conceived of as an artificial contrivance, Erasmus’ attachment of it to nature lies at the crux of the English observation of the preposterous. In this and the previously cited comments, nature appears as the T-square on which linearity, or “straightness,” extended to sexual social norms in either homo- or hetero-sexual terms. Undergirding the household and communal patriarch, the authority over wife and commons is, first and foremost, a looming and deified Natura establishing all that is “naturall & necessary.”

The dominion of nature extended to economic practices, specifically to interest taking through usury, which qualified as an artificial mode of production, the production of profit,

and which was closely associated with perceived sexual transgressions. For its supposed transgressions against nature, usury was in fact regarded as a species of sodomy. Miles Mosse (1595) wrote that “usurie is *Contra legem naturae*, contrarie to the lawe of nature . . . [I]t is against nature, for money to begette money, (in which sense one saide that usurie was *Sodomia naturae*, a kind of Sodomie in nature)” (*The Arraignment and Conuiction of Usurie*, qtd. in Fisher 11). Thomas Pie (1604), drawing liberally on Aristotle, reasoned likewise that

the Usurer perverteth that end and use of money, which is . . . agreeable to nature: namely commutation, for commutation was the end where-fore money was ordained in humane societie; and is the use of it, which naturall use the Usurer turneth into that which is against nature . . . Therefore it is called a kind of Sodomie” (qtd in Fisher 12).

Frances Meres (1598) addressed explicitly the problem of generation shared by both forms of sodomy: “As Paederastie is unlawful, because it is against kinde [a synonym for nature]: so usurie and encrease by gold and silver is unlawful, because against nature . . . nature hath made them sterill and barren, and usurie makes them procreative” (*Palladis Tamia* qtd. in Fisher 11). (Meres repeats the commonplace that money is barren, found also in *The Merchant of Venice*’s description of sodomy as “a breed for barren metal” [4.3.461]). Pederasty is likewise unlawful because it bastardizes the act of breeding (sex) in a context in which procreation is impossible. Meres “describes both sodomy and usury as unnatural attempts to make an infertile thing (boys/money) productive” (Fisher 11).

A closer look at Dante’s figure from *Inferno* XI may be helpful here: “[N]ature follows . . . / the Divine Intellect and Divine Art . . . / [and] when it can, your art would follow nature” (99-100, 103). Found in the Circle of the Sodomites, Virgil explains to Dante

that usurers are in hell because only nature is capable of making that which humanity translates into wealth (such as land, crops, livestock), and according to nature's limits, man must labor to share in its bounty. The taking of interest *makes* money without labor. It literally manufactures it, and doing so, it usurps nature's primacy and disrupts causal order. Will Fisher sees the moral association of sodomite and usurer in the following way: "The usurer's attempt to make barren money breed is the equivalent of the sodomite's attempts to make a non-reproductive sexual object or orifice breed. The usurer and the sodomite thus commit the same crime in different forms" (11).³⁶

That crime is a transgression of nature's limits over any human production, be it the making of babies or the generation of wealth. For this reason early modern England saw heated debate over the push to legalize usury. It generated much ire in the pulpits throughout the country, and was the subject of pamphlet wars from the 1571 Compromise, which banned only the taking of interest above ten-percent, to the legalization of most forms of usury in 1624.³⁷ Like non-procreative sex, the earning of interest on money was considered *contra legem naturae*, against the law of nature. This critique of the practice stretched back to Aristotle's much cited *Politics* 1258:

This is why usury is called by the word we commonly use [*tokos*: a birthing]; for as the offspring resembles its parent, so the interest bred by money is like the principle which breeds it, as [as a song styled by the father's name, so] it may be called 'currency the son of currency'. Hence we can understand why of all modes of acquisition, usury is the most unnatural" (qtd. in Shell, 50, n. 12).

Central to the problem was a disruption in the ontological order maintained in the relationship of sign to signified. Money was assumed to be an inert sign, with no procreative ability, only referring back to the actual wealth it represented. Yet usury, the taking of interest on money, enabled money to transcend its limitations as a sign through its own reproduction. David Hawkes is convinced that, to the early modern English critics of *use* (a pejorative for both usury and illicit sex), the taking of interest “was the reproduction of autonomous representation. They understood that money is a sign, and they objected on ethical grounds to the idea that signs could ‘breed.’ In fact, they protested against the idea that signs could do anything at all independently of human intervention” (Hawkes, 2010, 4). Thus we see vivid warnings about the product of interest taking, in Thomas Wilson’s *A discourse upon usury*:

But to lend contrary to the nature of lending, whiche shoulde be free, and to make an other contracte than ever god or nature devised, to advaunce youre gayne thereby most ungodly—surely suche kynde of dealing, I must needs saye, is utterlie and cheefely forbidden upon payne of dampnacion, (268)

as well as in Nicolas Sander’s *A Brief Treatise of Usurie* (1568):

Now those things which are begotten, are lyke to them by which they are begotten. In usurie, mony bringeth forth mony: wherefore that kind of gaining is specially against nature . . . The usurers do also mocke at those rules of nature, whiche affirme, that of nothing, nothing can be begotten. But yet among them, usurie is begotten of that, which is not, nor never was, (qtd. in Hawkes, 2000, 348, n. 14)

and particularly in Henry Smith’s *The Examination of Usury*:

When God had finished his creation, he said unto man, and unto beasts, and unto fishes, Increase and multiplie, but he never said unto money, increase and multiplie, because it is a dead thing which hath no seede, and therefore is not fit to ingender. Therefore he which saith to his money, increase and multiply, beggetteth a monstrous birth, like Anah, which devised a creature which God had not created before. (qtd. in Hawkes, 2000, 348 n. 14)

Hawkes' semiological argument has much to recommend it, but given the examples he cites from Elizabethan social discourse, his claim of usury's autonomous representation, that is, the generation of the sign money without human intervention, asks for further elucidation.

Without referring to Philip Sidney, Hawkes seems to have derived this observation about the money-sign from Sidney's use of the doctrine of the second nature, which was contemporaneous with the usury debates. The poet, he asserts, grows into "another nature" (85) when creating the poem. The power lying in the poem is to create more heroic Cyruses among its audience members, so that we may infer it, too, achieves the status of another nature, one not only set into motion by the poet but which has generative powers beyond him. This theory occupies much of Chapter Five. It affirms an ontological status of the poem beyond what Elizabethan conservatives lobbying against the practice of usury would have allowed any representation. The "monstrous birth" of usurious profit is, in semiotic terms, the other nature proposed by Sidney in which the poem becomes a nature of its own "which God had not created before."

The transgressive behavior here is a matter of disturbing the causal relations that reaffirm the ideological authority of nature as its own signifier, a transcendental signifier. Dante offers an example both conventional in its scholastic restraint and forward looking in

the liberties it hints at. When he encounters Adam in *Paradiso* XXVI he is told: “Though you do not declare / your wish, I can perceive it better than / you can perceive the things you hold most certain (103-05). As a redeemed soul Adam’s mind is unhindered by language” (Hart 3). He perceives with the “Truthful Mirror / that perfectly reflects all else, while no / thing can reflect that Mirror perfectly” (106-108), a juxtaposition of the non-linguistic domain of God and the semiological limits of nature. Adam’s original violation in the tasting of the fruit of the tree was but an indication of his real crime, the “trespass of the boundary,” or in Dante’s original, *trapassar del segno*,” the trespass of the sign (115-117). Original sin, then, is linguistic. As a pursuit of the unfettered knowledge of the tree, it is also the attempt to transcend the natural limits of sign and signified, which Adam only achieves in his redeemed death. Adam’s knowledge is no longer limited by ephemeral knowledge of God who is, according to one generation, *I* and to another *El* (135-36). “Such change must be,” Adam says, “[for] the ways that mortals take are as the leaves / upon a branch—one comes, another goes” (136-38). According to Kevin Hart, Adam “now enjoys immediate knowledge in the manner approved by God . . . who stands above language,” while the “mutability of all signs” is itself the sign of his mortal disobedience (3). Sidney’s—and the usurer’s—signs are mutable enough that they deconstruct nature’s authoritative status and leave one wondering who causes whom, and upon whom are which things, signs, and products dependent?³⁸

Each example presented here—and there are countless more—does more than associate grammar, sex, economics, and representation, but implicitly insists that nature, and the supposed right order it represents, lays claim to all such modes of creative output. Accordingly, any production that violated nature threatened the order on which human being was then understood to rely, and doing so risked marring human being itself.

Chapter 4: Conception and Application

Essence (from *esse*: to be) acts as a synonym for the substantial form introduced in the previous chapter. Originating in a prime cause and conveyed to creation via nature, it describes the individual quality of any species of things and establishes its “restricting principle” (Dougherty 135) marking the humanness of the human, the marbleness of the quarried marble block, and so on. Essentialist approaches to personhood become the object of the present chapter in which the young philosopher Pico della Mirandola troubles common assumptions and illuminates signature early modern changes in the conception of human being. As a trained scholastic, Pico offers an important point of transition during the time, using the strict terminology of the scholastics with considerable revision and liberality.³⁹ His *Oration on the Dignity of Man (Oratio)* is easily the most anthologized Renaissance philosophical tract, and his notion of human freedom, a fundamentally ontological freedom, has been noted before.⁴⁰ My argument, however, identifies Pico’s guide for the making of one’s own essence, which he appears to have based on a popular artisan manual of his day. This means that the *Oratio* not only illustrates a self with shapeable and indeterminate essence but constructs an artful ontology as well.

The chapter also covers the poetry of Michelangelo Buonarroti, who in his adolescence shared the Medici household with the twenty-something Pico. There he inherited a Neoplatonic view of his craft and self under the influence of thinkers like Pico and his teacher Marsilio Ficino, also a fixture in the house. Michelangelo’s sonnets are important for the fact that they offer a glimpse of an early ontological poetics in their use of highly figurative language to examine the ontological relationship of a sculptor and his craft, and through that to reconsider previously assumed limits to his causal abilities. Beyond this, my

analysis of these sonnets provides an indication of how certain Elizabethans might also assert an ontological theory without the rigor of scholastic learning. Just as Pico upturns the notion of human essence in his proposed self-making, Michelangelo fashions into himself the ability to alter the essence of his marble blocks.

For my purposes it is not necessary to establish anything like a direct influence from Pico to any of the artists, theorists, and poets featured in this dissertation, but it would be irresponsible not to at least suggest the possibility of that influence, since Pico does offer us one of the earliest modern assertions of human ontological independence and does so in a context of making, of artful manufacture. Brian Copenhaver, a leading Piconian, has argued that the content of the *Oratio* was for three centuries largely unknown until it was reified by Kantian historians attempting to Romanticize the Renaissance (“Magic and the Dignity of Man,” 295-320 and “The Secret of Pico’s Oration,” 56-81). But more recent research by M. V. Dougherty has unearthed a different story of the *Oratio*, one in which its content began to be used right after its posthumous publication in 1496 (two years after Pico’s death). Its appearance in documented papal court orations—sometimes in paraphrase other times quoted directly—shows that four out of the first six popes of the sixteenth-century were exposed to some portions of it (Dougherty 147). The first of them was Alexander VI who rescinded Innocent VIII’s excommunication of Pico, something perhaps not inappropriate since this was the text intended to introduce the theses that got Pico excommunicated in the first place.

Such orations were not always affairs closed to those not in the clerical papal circle. In fact, the orator delivering the speech heard by Alexander VI was Tommaso Inghirami (147), the Vatican librarian and humanist who advised the stunning and comprehensive encyclopedic program of the Vatican rooms painted by Raphael (from which the Muse

rondel heading my introductory chapter is taken). It was in fact the first portion of the speech, which occupies the following pages and which has garnered so much attention as a definitive statement on human freedom according to the Renaissance, that was drawn from for Inghirmani's and each of the other Vatican orations. The content of this section appears paraphrased in non-clerical genres in the later sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries in both Italy and England, as I note below, each seeming to capture the spirit of Pico's interrogation of yet current and conventional, scholastic ontology. Of course there is no conclusive evidence to suggest the *Oratio*'s influence on Raphael, nor is there evidence that Michelangelo, more important to my purposes, was present at Inghirami's oration, given on All Saints Day in 1497. But having arrived in Rome the previous year, he was living at the Vatican then and was, that very month, commissioned by the Holy See to begin cutting his now iconic Roman *Pietà* (Bull 103). Perhaps more telling though is his poetry, discussed below, which carried in its creative application of loosely inherited philosophical conceptions the atmosphere of Pico's thought, in this instance, considered in the context of the art of sculpting.

Note that the notion of essence has not been abandoned, but instead has itself made an ontological transition from static to mobile. It is still the product of a prime cause, still endowed by nature, as I cover in detail below, but now it is somehow also a product of artifice. It is not my purpose to locate any sources of the era's shifts in ideas. (The results of such a task would be dubious unless they were derived from taking into consideration more possibilities than could fit in this chapter.) But these observations do offer a conceptual gateway through which essentialist understandings of being (the human person's and that of

other entities) undergoes the very reconception that will be referred to throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

Conception

In 1486, at the age of twenty-three, Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola returned to Florence from a brief theological study at the University of Paris. He had with him the material for an original tome, his *900 Theses*, which brought to the attention of many intellectuals the Hebrew Kabbalah and the concepts of Neoplatonic thinkers Plotinus and Proclus (Edelheit 279). He published and planned a public disputation of this work in Rome the same year, inviting the Pope, the College of Cardinals, and a number of intellectuals throughout the Italian peninsula, who might travel to the event at his personal expense (Dougherty 114). However, thirteen of the 900 theses were condemned by the papacy as either “heretical” or at least of “dubious orthodoxy” (Edelheit 279), and as a result the disputation was called off. But Pico did compose the introduction to his public defense, the untitled piece now known as his *Oratio*. In it Pico places the onus of essence on the human person, endowing us, unlike any other species in creation, with the ability to make our selves. This power of self-manufacture is the aseity (*a*: from, *se*: self) previously reserved for God, the only being whose essence and existence are one and for whom neither has an ontological antecedent. Thus only that which comes from itself, that which can make itself, enjoys freedom from ontological dependence. Dependence approaches reality from its “ontological joints” (Correia 1013). It views being not solely in terms of existence or essence but in the way one’s existence or essence proceeds from something else. A part of course may depend upon its whole and the whole upon its parts, so that an important avenue to understanding the being of either part or whole is to recognize its dependent nature. As Fabrice Correia defines

it, “ontological dependence is sometimes thought of as marking a certain form of ‘non-self-sufficiency’” (1013). Thus the relationship between causes spelled out in Dante’s *Inferno* XI—from God’s product, *Natura*, to nature’s product, man, to the human product that is art—is one of strict dependence, and it is this non-self-sufficiency that presents itself as one of Pico’s chief problems.

Proposed as a resolution, his technique for self-fashioning occupies my attention in the following, for I find within the *Oratio* a step-by-step instruction manual for this task. His speech is actually not at all unlike popular art manuals of the day, the most popular of all being Cennino Cennini’s late fourteenth-century *The Craftsman’s Handbook*, which may have offered the era’s first written prescription for the use of nature as an object of artistic imitation: “[T]he most perfect steersman that you can have, and the best helm, lie in the triumphal gateway of copying nature” (15). It also offered a technical approach to the imitation of nature in its illustration of the artisan’s tools and techniques of the trade, including the making of brushes, mixing of paints, and step-by-step techniques for the proper use of each. Cennini’s focus on object of imitation and means of that imitation found its way into the artists’ and poets’ manuals of the later Renaissance, and unlikely as it may seem, appears also in the *Oratio*’s artful metaphysics. Heavenly intelligences, from the angels to the godhead, provide the object of imitation for the making of a person,⁴¹ and the artful technique for that imitation may be found in Pico’s use of “the three ways” (purgation, illumination, and perfection) originating in pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s *Celestial Hierarchy*.⁴² This process guided patristic and medieval contemplatives (meditators) through stages of both corporal and interior cleansing, enlightenment, and finally, union with the godhead, commonly referred to as deification. For Pico, the chief obstacle lying between the

human, laboring to produce his personhood, and divinity, the ultimate aim of that production, is the secondary cause *Natura*.

Pico opens his speech with the humanist trope claiming that there is nothing more wondrous than man, that we are ourselves nothing less than a “great miracle” (2012, 109), and he reviews without satisfaction the reasons previously given for our unique and exalted state. Included are references to Christian humanist writers of the human dignity genre⁴³ who focused on man’s virtuous but static place between divine and earthly beings. Pico also departs both from Marsilio Ficino, his teacher, who praised humanity as the “wedding-song of the world,” the “midpoint between fixed eternity and fleeting time” (2012, 111), and from David’s Psalmic claim that we are only slightly inferior to the angels (Ps. 8:4-7). Contrary to these assessments that make the human person a central but static figure in the cosmos, Pico relieves man of any ontological limitations by granting him an absolute freedom over the fashioning of himself. What makes man the ‘great miracle’ also places him in opposition to any essentialist “restricting principle” (Dougherty 135). Pico’s take on personhood surely contradicts most, if not all, understandings of human nature at this time, but according to him the power of self-manufacturing is divinely ordained. After his God has created the universe and everything inhabiting it, he realizes that he has left no provisions for the creation of humanity:

He had already adorned the supercelestial region with intelligences, enlivened the heavenly globes with eternal souls, and filled the excremental and filthy parts of the lower world with a multitude of forms of animal life. But when the work was finished, the Craftsman still longed for there to be someone to ponder the meaning of such a magnificent achievement, to love its beauty and

to marvel at its vastness But there was nothing among His archetypes from which He could mould a new progeny, nor was there anything in his storehouses that He might bestow upon His new son as an inheritance, nor was there among the seats of the world any place for this contemplator of the universe. Every place was by then filled; all things had already been assigned to the highest, middle, and the lowest orders. At length, the Master Creator decreed that the creature to whom He had been unable to give anything wholly his own should share in common whatever belonged to every other being. (*Oratio*, 2012, 114-15)

Like the form and content that comprise any work of art, here the archetype and the store of the treasure house figure both model and material of natural ontological creation. They account for the composition of everything—the spatial regions, intelligences (angels), globes (stars and planets), souls, and the excremental, filthy world and its animals—all conventionally ranked among the high, middle, and low positions along the ontological chain. The implication is that prior to the inclusion of man, nature is complete, its generative systems, including the formula requiring form and content, are functioning. If there were archetype enough and store, the fashioning of the human person via these mundane means would still juxtapose him against the established nature that he is in this presentation only questionably a part of.

But the lack of resources needed to fashion humanity and the omission of our seat in the natural scale accent our distinction from the rest of creation all the more—and doing so reveal our miraculous freedom:

He therefore took man, this creature of indeterminate image (*indiscretae opus imaginis*), set him in the middle of the world, and said to him: “We have given you, Adam, no fixed seat or form (*facies*) of your own, no talent peculiar to you alone. This we have done so that whatever seat, whatever form, whatever talent you may judge desirable, these same may you have and possess according to your desire and judgment. Once defined (*definita*), the nature (*natura*) of all other beings is constrained within the laws We have prescribed for them. But you, constrained by no limits, may determine your nature (*natura*) for yourself, according to your own free will, in whose hands we have placed you. . . . We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you may, as the free and extraordinary shaper (*plastes* [Pico adds “*et factor*,” and maker]) of yourself, fashion (*effingere*) yourself in whatever form (*forma*) you prefer. (2012, 117)⁴⁴

With no archetype or material at hand, the godhead has made a humanity of indeterminate image, has fashioned us outside of the confines of *Imago*, and thus, made us much like itself: beyond all representation (2012, 117, n.17). The problem of humanity’s static place in the cosmos is solved when we are given no seat or locus in existence, no unique qualities (or “talents”) that would mark us as human. All other beings are defined (*definita*) and therefore restricted by the limits of who or what they are according to their place in nature. If humanity may be defined, we are indefinite; if we have a nature it is to defy nature. Everything in Pico’s re-creation of man points to an indeterminate shapelessness.

That is nowhere more evident than in the artful claims that the human person is the shaper and maker of himself, that we “fashion” ourselves into the “form” we prefer. The

claims require a revisionary use of the principles of causality (*plastēs, factor*) and form (*facies, forma*), or put another way, the maker and her product. Recall that form was thought of as two-fold, either substantial or accidental, that nature left the substantial ontological footprint, while humanity left only the accidental, which still retained nature's substance within it. Walking in nature's footsteps, we might say. But in nominating Adam the causal *factor* of his own substance, Pico places the province of creation on the human creature rather than the secondary creator, nature. The artificial making of the human person comes to replace that of nature when accidental maker produces substantial form, his own substantial, essential personhood.⁴⁵

The challenge for Pico becomes one of access to the interior region where this substance may be fashioned, a place, if it may be called that, only obscured by the body. Here he applies his guide for self-manufacture, reasoning that

it is not in fact the bark which makes the plant, but dull and insentient nature; not the hide that makes a beast of burden, but a brutish and sensual soul; not the circular body [stars, planets] that makes the heavens, but straightforward reason; not a separation from the body that makes an angel, but its spiritual intelligence. (2012, 131)

Of course, the adopted order—from the plant to the beast, and then from the stars and planets to a spiritual intelligence—reiterates the conventional hierarchy of being. Again we see the omission of the human seat in the scale, between beasts and heavenly beings, though in this instance it likely draws inferential attention to the human body-soul dichotomy: just as the body is not the soul, being is not the bark, the hide, the physical stars, or, in the case of angels, not even separation from the body, but is instead the interior core, the fundamental,

the substantial thingness itself. Removed from the passage, the human actually remains at its center, for it is his bark and hide, his physical make-up, in closest contact with the natural world external to him that prohibits access to the site of his core essence.

The *Oratio* solution is to sever the person from the body through a process resembling mortification. He says: “[L]et us *purge* the soul ... Then over a soul which has been ... *purified*, let us pour the *light* of natural philosophy, that lastly we may *perfect* it with the knowledge of divine things” (emphasis mine, 1965, 9). The diction—purge, light, perfection—refers to Pseudo-Dionysius’s paths of purgation, illumination, and perfection. For Pseudo-Dionysius and generations of contemplatives after him, the three ways were a manual for their interior life and ascetic habits. Perfection (also known as the ‘unitive’ way) “is the way of those who are in the state of the perfect, that is, those who have their minds so drawn away from all temporal things that they enjoy great peace” (Devine). The illuminative way, between purgation and perfection, is associated with light because it is the state in which the initiate discovers the avenue to perfection. Illumination we may think of as the enlightenment that may only follow the intensity of purgation. The purgative way “purifies” the soul and mind through both meditation and habitual action. Initiates purge themselves of what John of the Cross referred to as the “night of the senses” and of the “rigorous imprisonment” of the sensory, bodily flesh. The initiate’s meditations in this period are on death, judgment, hell, and heaven; acts include corporal austerities, with a particular emphasis on mortification.⁴⁶

While Pseudo-Dionysius used the ways to enhance what was believed to be an inherent divine-likeness within us—yet another certain and static definition of humanness—Pico’s liberal application suggests something much more. He instructs:

Let our souls be pervaded by a certain holy and Junonian ambition (*sacra Iunonia ambitio*) so that we, not satisfied with what is mediocre, may aspire to what is loftiest, and may apply ourselves with all our strength in that pursuit, for we shall succeed if we are so minded (2012, 135) [A]ccording to the sacred mysteries, seraphim, cherubim, and thrones [the topmost rank of angels] occupy the first places; let us emulate [*emulatio*] their dignity and glory, unwilling as we are to yield to them and unable to endure second place (135). If so we wish, we will not be inferior to them at all. (137)

Nothing here implies the mere enlarging of divine-like human virtues, but instead we find the prescription to emulate, to better, divinity itself, to take what was once thought of as the mortal human person and, drawing on the divine possibility made within us by God, to make ourselves into divinity. To this end we must “spurn the terrestrial, disdain the celestial” (2012, 135). One gloss suggests that along with the earth, Pico disparages both the astrological and astronomical heavens (2012, 153, n. 46) because, I would add, the planets and stars are as physical and natural as the filthy excremental world Pico has already called us to denounce. We apprehend them by way of our senses which channel through the body the exterior natural world.

Cennini’s prescription for imitation has become more like the emulation later prescribed by Giorgio Vasari. Raphael, he says, mixed colors that triumphed over those found in nature (280), but his Michelangelo *divino* triumphed over ancient artists, modern artists, and even Nature herself (282). I will return to Vasari in the next section on Michelangelo, but for now it is enough to show Pico’s forward looking disposition. His

prescriptions, like Vasari's after him, identify human being by its freedom from nature and employ art as the means to that freedom.

Our ultimate freedom, of course, is perfection within the godhead, which Pico describes as being placed "outside of our minds" and "our minds and ourselves [placed] in God" (1965, 14); as being "aroused with ineffable charity as with fire, placed outside ourselves like burning Seraphim, filled with divinity." Essentially, we find unity in our own annihilation, suggesting that the end of his technique returns us to the mortification of its beginning. Pico's attention to mortification belies the centrality of it to his method for ontological transition. Before we may "transform" ourselves, we must "slough" our "skin" (1965, 5); we are to "spurn earthly things," "to put in last place whatever is of the world," to "fly beyond the world" (7); we emulate the seraphim who "burns with the fire of charity," we "burn" with "devouring fire" (7); we must "wash" the "filth of ignorance and vice" to "purge the soul" (9); the one who employs his art Pico describes as a "divinity clothed in human flesh" (6), the rest he likens to "brutes and mindless beasts of burden" who are "all flesh" (7).

The body we may say belongs to *physis*, but our interactions with that physical world, involving appetites for what the world provides, are richly metaphysical. If this figurative language describes no literal body in touch with literal materiality, then it signifies the figurative flesh in contact with all our metaphysical and appetitive interaction with nature. We climb the *scala*, Pico says, with the "feet of the soul[,] that most despicable portion which alone rests upon matter as upon the earth, I mean the nutritive and the food-taking power, kindling wood of lust and teacher of voluptuous softness" (1965, 9). The vilification of skin, earthly things, the world, and flesh, calls our attention to external obstructions. His

later *Heptaplus* continues the critique of earthly phenomena. As opposed to the ultramundane, intelligible world of the godhead, there is

the sublunary one which we inhabit. This is the world of darkness; that the world of light This world is symbolized by water, a flowing and unstable substance; that by fire, for the splendor of its light and the elevation of its position Here there is an alternation of life and death; there, eternal life and unchanging activity This world is composed of the corruptible substance of bodies; that one of the divine nature of the mind” (1965, 75-76).

To secure a divine status, one must overcome the primary obstacle, which does not appear to be any particular human habit or vice but the sublunary and dark world made up of the corruptible stuff of the body, and from which one’s interior personhood may be defiled with the impressions of the senses. That part of us in contact with the physical world is a sheath separating us from our selves, a distinction recalling Marsyas’ cry, “*quid me mihi detrahis?*” (Ovid *Metamorphoses* 6.385). His highly metaphysical interrogative—Why do you tear *me from myself?*, or literally, Why do you tear *me from me?*—distinguishes the body from something not bodily but still in the region of his person. According to the Renaissance reconsideration of the myth, Apollo’s flaying of Marsyas is the welcomed torture needed to reduce the problem of the flesh. Edgar Wind’s reading of Raphael’s fresco depicting Apollo skinning Marsyas (*Stanza della Segnatura*) reveals the meticulous iconographic relation between the Apollo and Marsyas figures, arguing that in this case they represent one person (142-43). Wind reports Lorenzo di Medici’s brief comment on the story: “The way to perfection is by this road” (144). Lorenzo’s Christian Neoplatonic studies of pagan thought and art took place while Pico and Marsilio Ficino shared his home, a time of voluminous

translations of the Greek classics into Latin, much more accessible to Western European intellectual culture, and a vigorous Christianization of their subject matter. One can see how the rending of the flesh of a rustic flutist by a senior pagan divinity would be reinterpreted, or in its own right reoccupied, as Blumenberg might have it, as an illustration of the importance of mortification. With Marsyas representing the body and Apollo the intelligent will, the single person takes action against one part of herself to form and shape another, and using her intellect to do so, applies a purgative way as her technique. The structural feature repeating itself in the reoccupation is a matter of authority. Where Apollo once ruled violently over Marsyas, in the early modern understanding the two become differing faculties of one self-governed person. For Pico the hallmark of that governance is the reduction of the faculty in touch with excremental nature to the end of a fashioning of the self.

Application

The following section examines ontological concerns handled far outside the confines of philosophy. For example, where even an unorthodox visionary like Pico still maintains scholastic terminology, an artist like Michelangelo Buonarroti, having no formal orientation to philosophy, freely blurs concepts and omits the primary distinctions between and among them. Instead, he uses metaphysics as another tool for the expression of his highly conceptual art form. The same creative employment of once systematized scholastic concepts will appear and reappear throughout the remainder of this dissertation, as visual art and literary theorists, artists, and poets adapt formal metaphysics.

But he does not shy from Pico's techniques. In his later visual art and poetry we glean the nagging urge to craft his personhood through the removal of his *scorza*, or skin, the *velo*, veil, of himself. Skin is *superchio*, the inessential excess that must be removed if he is to

shape, to sculpt, his own person. Unlike Pico, however, Michelangelo extends these elements of self-making to his making of art, so that the marble he must cut away in the process of crafting a statue is also *superchio*, a mere insubstantial excess lacking in essential form. According to the poems and letters I will examine below, form is not bifurcated into substantial and accidental domains, and is not strictly the product of nature, but proceeds from, is birthed from, the artist's imagination, what Michelangelo calls his *concetto*, a term which carries the connotations of both intellection and parturition (think of 'concept' and 'conception'). Hence my earlier claim that the accidental *David* still retains its substantial marbleness is now dated. It is from the artisan's imaginative *concetto* faculty that the art work's sole form now proceeds. Whether in Michelangelo's understanding all form is accidental or substantial is not clear, but we may be certain that from this point forward the human exerts formal dominion over nature's products. The ontology gleaned in Pico's *Oratio* we will find in application both in Michelangelo's self-fashioning and in his re-conception of the formal powers of the artisan.

The *Last Judgment* fresco occupies the entire wall behind the altar of the Sistine Chapel and includes a self portrait of its maker. The portrait appears in a passage that doubles as the image of St. Bartholomew, who was martyred by being flayed alive, and the Apollo and Marsyas myth. Facing the Christ of the fresco's center—who appears, in Apollonian form, muscular, short haired, and clean-shaven—St. Bartholomew wields the instrument of his torture, a flaying knife, like a Marsyas indicting his murderer. In his other hand he holds his rumpled and flayed skin, the *scorza*, bearing Michelangelo's face.

This macabre image of the artist is not foreign to his presentation of himself in his poetry. It provides a visual indication of the man's metaphysical ideas, numerous expressed

in his writings. His metaphysics allowed him to apply his approach to his craft to himself, for so many of his references to carving himself, filing and shaping his person carry at once the air of mortification, of art, and of self-manufacture. For example, he refers to “sloughing off [his] hide” (*la scorza cangia*), for “death and my soul are still battling, / one against the other, for my final state” (51. 26-28). Comparing himself to a silkworm who dies so that its silky cocoon may be converted into fabric, he repeats the previous figure, saying the worm “strips off its own skin” (*sua scorza spoglia*), because “only through death might [it] be called truly born” (94. 3, 4), and that much like the worm, “through death” (*per morte*), he seeks to “change [his] condition” (*cangiar mie stato*) (8).⁴⁷ And with imagery combining mortification and the techniques of sculpting, the artist asks himself,

From what sharp, biting file
 does your tired skin keep growing thin and failing,
 O ailing soul? When will time release you from it,
 so you'll return to heaven, where you were
 pure and joyful before,
 your dangerous and mortal veil cast off (*deposto il periglioso e mortal velo*)?
 (161. 1-6)

He closes the poem with “take me from myself” (*tomm' a me stesso*) (17), an imperative recalling Marsyas's agonized distinction between his *me* and *mihi*. And agonized though his own tone may be, Michelangelo desires the separation of him from his self, for the former only obstructs the fashioning of the latter.

The former we may think of as excess, the *superchio* that appears in the poems in such a troubling guise. In love poems, “excess to [his] heart” (*superchi al cor*) equals a “fatal

relief” (*gli spiriti sparti*) (157. 10), and likewise, erotic excess equals a mortal threat, or “from excessive gifts frail strength dies” (*don superchio debil virtu muore*) (150. 14). Referring to himself as a sculpting model of little worth (*model di poca istima*) (236. 9-10), he says that in order to obtain salvific rebirth (*mie parto fu*) (10), he must file down his excess (*mie superchio lima*) (12).

A key use of *superchio* we find in his poem “*Non ha l’ottimo artista alcun concetto,*” popularly considered the key exposition of his *concetto*, or imaginative art theory:

Not even the best of artists has any conception (*concetto*)
 that a single block of marble does not contain
 within its excess (*superchio*), and *that* is only attained
 by the hand that obeys the intellect. (Saslow’s italics, 151. 1-4)

Because this passage provides insight into Michelangelo’s deeply imbricated notions of his work and his self, I want to pause here for a full and, hopefully, elucidating analysis. The original Italian in these lines is reputedly ambiguous, and the range of English translations read like creative variations on the same theme. Apart from Saslow’s translation above there are also:⁴⁸

The best of artists never has a concept [*concetto*]
 A single block of marble does not contain
 Inside its husk, but to it may attain
 Only if the hand follows the intellect. (Creighton Gilbert)

The best of artists can only select
 the concept [*concetto*] which the marble already contains

within its excess. But there only attains
the hand that obeys the intellect. (Sydney Alexander)

The greatest artist does not have any concept which a single piece of marble
does not itself contain within its excess, though only a hand that obeys the
intellect can discover it. (Christopher Ryan)

Each translation interprets *concetto* as the form of a work of art that exists within both the
artistic material (marble) and in the artisan's imagination. Seemingly, the sculpture is *a priori*
in the material the artisan works, an interpretation supported by well relied on commentaries.
Robert J. Clements argued that the *concetto* is "waiting" within the rock (1961, 65), that the
theory places the "unchangeable *concetto*" within the "material" (1966, 25). Anthony Blunt
offered the following hypothesis:

For Michelangelo the essential characteristic of sculpture is that the artist
starts with a block of stone or marble and cuts away from it till he reveals or
discovers the statue in it. This statue is the material equivalent of the idea
which the artist had in his own mind; and, since the statue existed potentially
in the block before the artist began to work on it, it is in a sense true to say the
idea in the artist's mind also existed potentially in the block, and that all he
has done in carving his statue is to discover this idea. (64).

In this explanation *concetto* refers to the Aristotelian notion of active form, which is within
the artist and is "the operative principle of the artificial form in matter" (Panofsky 120). Here,
too, the form in the artisan's mind and the form in the material of his making are shared.

Of course all of these readings bind the artisan to nature's materials. He becomes, as William Wallace has said, the servant to the rock rather than the other way around (2008, 22). Wallace points out that our interpretations of this poem likely come from Vasari's metaphoric explanation of it in the technical preface to his *Lives*. He writes:

[Michelangelo] gradually chisels away the stone till the figure thus measured time after time, issues forth from the marble, in the same manner that one would lift a wax figure out of a pail of water, evenly and in a horizontal position. First would appear the body, the head, and the knees, the figure gradually revealing itself as it is raised upwards, till there would come to view the relief more than half completed and finally the roundness of the whole.

(qtd. in Wallace, 2008, 20, n. 3)

Thus Michelangelo merely lifts his figures from the body of gentle rock; thus his sculpting is an easy participation in nature. But Wallace points out the actual difficulties the sculptor faced with his material, that even in his most well known pieces the marble resisted his *concetto*. For instance, Michelangelo found a crack in the marble of the *Rebellious Slave*, and though he tried to change the angle of the figure's head to avoid it, it can still be seen across the face and neck of the statue. As well, the *Risen Christ* had to be recarved because of an unexpected black vein running through the white marble, and while carving the Medici Chapel's famed *Night* figure, he ran out of marble unexpectedly, and for this reason one can see in photographs the statue's disfigured right arm (23-24). If the form of the work is shared by both artisan and stone, if the two, the craftsman and the material, enjoy such a symbiosis in the creative process, then this working relationship is clearly dysfunctional.

Perhaps better than Vasari's metaphor or late translations that find numerous ways to say the same thing, we might turn to Benedetto Varchi's interpretation of Michelangelo's "*Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto,*" which, at the very least, the artist and poet appears to have endorsed: "The sonnet does in fact come from me, but the comment[ary] from Heaven" (Michelangelo, 1963, 284). In his "beautiful and learned comment" (285), as Michelangelo called it, Varchi states:

[L]et us say . . . that in a marble block all the beauty which any perfect master can imagine and give to any figure (for example, a Mercury), exists potentially and can be extracted. Now, if a sculptor working his marble and making this Mercury from it, did not know how to carry it through to the perfection that he or another even better Master could imagine, on what should one place the blame for this fact, on the marble or on the Sculptor? . . . [T]he flaw must be in the Master who did not know how to express with his knife what he had imagined in his mind [*ingegno*]. Instead, his hands, not obeying his imagination [*fantasia*], made everything contrary to what he intended and considered necessary. (qtd. in Wallace, 2008, 22)

By placing the responsibility for the success of the completed work on the craftsman, Varchi expresses doubt that a fine sculpture results from the participation of the block being sculpted. The artist determines the *concetto*, the final product's form, and crafts it from within the stone's excess (*superchio*). Put another way, the artisan decides what is essential, and does so within his imaginative *concetto*, imposing his form on the rock at the expense of its unsubstantial *superchio*.

In this case, nature leaves no ontological proof of its generative powers within the stone. *Concetto*, in fact, not only removes formal agency from nature, but also replaces nature as an object of imitation, making the creative process both self-contained and anthropocentric. Its only reliance on anything exterior to it is on the inert matter of the stone. The artist can't create matter, but significantly, he can generate forms. The *Oratio*'s treasure house store supplying the content of creation may be beyond his ability to fashion, but the archetypes are all his.

As I indicated above, the excess of the marble block and the presumed excess of his own fleshly make up Michelangelo treats similarly. Within poems suggesting his need to be rid of his excessive *scorza*, he seems to reiterate a desire for transformation by his own trained hand. The sculptor's knife can flay from the self the insubstantial excess of his person, either literal or figurative, just as it removes from marble what he has determined is inessential. Hence his technique for sculpture is also a technique for self-crafting. In a letter to Varchi of 1549 (the same year of Varchi's published interpretation of his "*Non ha l'ottimo*" poem), Michelangelo put this technique into words, juxtaposing painting, which derives from the *via del porre*, the way of addition, against sculpture's superior *forza del lavare*, or the force of subtraction (Michelangelo, 1963, 284).⁴⁹ Of the difference between the two, he says, "As for the man who wrote that painting was more noble than sculpture, if he had understood the other things he wrote as well as he did this, my serving maid would have written them better" (284). Sculpting triumphs over painting because the method for its execution may also be applied to one's self, to take it under control and to shape and mold it as one finds necessary.

At this point we might ask why in his *Last Judgment* Michelangelo presents himself as the flayed *scorza* of the Marsyas figure. What may have prompted him to leave an image of himself as the mere excess and not the figure of substance in the passage? We may find a clue in Dante, an author Michelangelo was rumored to know by heart.

When progressing from *Purgatorio* to *Paradiso*, Dante invokes Apollo and asks for a transition from the pilgrim he has been throughout the *Comedy* to the poet he must now become to finish his quest:

O good Apollo, for this final task
 make me the vessel of your excellence,
 what you, to merit your loved laurel, ask.
 Until this point, one of Parnassus' peaks
 sufficed for me; but now I face the test,
 the agon that is left; I need both crests.
 Enter into my breast; within me breathe
 the very power you made manifest
 when you drew Marsyas out from his limb's [*membra*] sheath [*vagina*].
 (1.13-21)

Allusive and elusive, Dante's invocation both draws on and departs from its Hesiodic roots. "Enter into my breast; within me breathe" surely carries the hint of en-spuration, that is, of the god or goddesses breathing an inspiring breath into the mortal. But Dante's actual request is for divine possession, that Apollo may enter him, and then breathe his, Apollo's, own divine power into him. Poetic inspiration is employed here to bring about a thorough transformation from the person of pilgrim to that of poet. Thus far, Apollo's peak on Parnassus (Helikon)

was enough for his trek through the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, but the aim in *Paradiso* is for the pilgrim Dante to make his full transition into poet, the one who occupies not only Helikon but also Cythaeron, Bacchus's slightly lower peak on Mount Parnassus. Dante's overall structure of the *Divine Comedy* appears to rely on Pseudo-Dionysius's purgative, illuminative and perfective ways, and he uses the ways not unlike Pico had (or rather, it is the other way around). But in both cases, the combined stages result in a personal metamorphosis. Dante adds to the equation his perfection in an art form beyond self-making.

This implication is played out in the remainder of the invocation. His comparison of himself to Marsyas, whose limb, *membra*, Apollo removed from his sheath, *vagina*, recalls Ovid's distinction between *me* and *mihi* in Marsyas's cry: "*quid me mihi detrahis?*" (Why do you tear *me* from *myself*?) (*Metamorphoses* 6.385).⁵⁰ Dante's analogy between Marsyas and himself offers a self-portrait of his being, we might say. As Marsyas' *membra* is removed from the veil of his *vagina*, Dante the poet is removed from the pilgrim.

Michelangelo's association of himself with Marsyas further complicates the myth for the fact that he paints himself as the seemingly superfluous *vagina*, and not the whole *membra*. More of his poems, however, help to clarify his choice. As we have seen, Michelangelo's body is the non-essential part of himself, the *scorza* (poem 51) and the *pelo*, an animal's pelt (161). Reference to the body as *mortal velo*, a mortal veil, is ubiquitous (106, 161, 188, 209, 215, 227, 265). Michelangelo likens himself to an "old serpent" that must shed its "old armor," as well as "everything human," so that his soul may be "restored to life" (33.7-10). Other poems written during his work on the *Last Judgment* reflect the metaphysical distinctions made by Ovid, Dante, and Pico. In an apostrophe to a lover, Michelangelo distinguishes between the *me* and *mihi*: "take me from myself (*tomm' a me*

stesso) and make me one who'll please you" (161.17). Referring to his body as "tired skin," Michelangelo asks that his soul might be "freed from itself" (162.10). Speaking directly to one aspect of himself about another, he asks:

From what sharp and biting file
 does your tired skin keep growing thin and failing,
 O ailing soul? When will time release you from it,
 so you'll return to heaven, where you were
 pure and joyful before,
 your dangerous and mortal veil cast off? (161.1-6)

This body is a *vagina*, a *velo* that conceals and even imprisons his soul, the *membra* or essence of his being. In the *Last Judgment* fresco's unveiling of that essence we discover the sanctity of Michelangelo the *scorza*: the St Bartholomew veiled by the hide of Michelangelo. Where Dante invites Apollo into him, the interior of Michelangelo is already divine. The fresco passage not only redeems Marsyas for his mythic hubris against the gods but also uncovers the reborn (*nato fu*) Michelangelo. Remove the *superchio* to bring about the *forma*. Michelangelo represented for Giorgio Vasari, arguably the first modern art historian, both sum and zenith of all artistic achievement from antiquity to the *moderna*, and as I recounted above, he was Vasari's *il divino* precisely because his abilities bested nature's. Vasari's discourse at once identifies and disparages nature as the chief object of artistic imitation, ultimately making of it a new form of *imago*, an image in the image of man.

And yet despite such bold reinventions of natural ontological limits, few thinkers here or in the following chapters actually take an absolute stance on human personhood, but instead each equivocates in one way or another. Pico offers an ideal example. What stands

out about his *Heptaplus* is the relative sobriety, and to an extent, the orthodoxy, of his ideas. Over humans, for example, “the angels have more likeness and affinity with the divine nature” (1965, 134). Apparent as well is his reconsideration of mortification. He warns that if we do not attain self-knowledge, then “we must leave our Father, and disinheritance follows that departure. What is more unhappy than this? Likewise, we must go forth from ourselves, for the soul which does see itself is not in itself. Whoever goes out of himself, however, is violently separated from himself. What is more bitter than this?” (1965, 117-18). But such backtracking actually belies the innovation of the original assertions, the examinations of self revealing the breakdown of metaphysical stability. The once constraining but certain personhood presently slipping away might leave freedom in its place, but an uncertain freedom with no sure foundation on which to define self.

The following chapter exhibits very similar approaches to nature and its causal constraints, while also finding the same zealous assertion of and prudent retreat from ontological independence in Italian art theory and English poetics. Both disciplines work to collapse the distinctions between the artistic representation and the reality it represents. In the case of the former, technological advances permit an artistic simulacrum so convincing it qualifies as a second nature, while in the latter, that same second nature is found in the abstraction of language, especially in Philip Sidney’s theoretical take on it. In this view the words of poetry exist outside the confines of nature’s spatial domain—for they, as words, occupy no space—and their extra-spatial composition will by Chapter Ten give them freedom from time, the temporal domain, as well. The prospect of an artifice created outside of nature’s two principle areas—space and time amounting to the territories of her

authoritative range—both establishes the ontological independence of the artifex, and through it, the unstable ground on which new shapes of personhood begin to form.

Chapter 5: Diffusion into Theory

The *Apology for Poetry*'s first critical response, and the sole surviving response from Sidney's own day, is William Temple's *Analysis*. Temple was an accomplished logician and Sidney's personal secretary who read and responded to the *Apology* probably between 1584, when he met Sidney (Temple 11), and 1585, the year of Sidney's departure to the Netherlands (where he died in 1586).⁵¹ In his critique Temple respectfully pauses often to offer his employer praises, but he does not hesitate to bring up his points of disagreement. He contends in fact with one of Sidney's central claims that poesy, which he calls fiction, subverts nature's causal dominion by making completely new things. "But can it be," Temple asks, "that such a making is anything *but* the invention of something that has never existed?" (my emphasis, 81). Stealing poesy's creative thunder, he regards the principles of logic as the pre-existing material from which poetry is made: "Anyone who makes fictions, creates what are logical arguments—namely causes, effects, subjects, adjuncts, contraries, comparisons, or the rest of the things which originate from these" (81). He offers an example from Ovid:

In this way, Ovid, feigning the realm of the sun, feigned an efficient cause by which it was constructed, matter out of which it was put together, and adjuncts by which it was decorated. But feigning causes, effects, subjects, adjuncts and the other arguments, is nothing other than inventing causes, effects, subjects, and adjuncts. Therefore, fiction-making will be the same as something that does not yet exist. But if this is so, then the art of fiction-making will pertain not to poetry, but to dialectical invention, through which are conceived not only true things, but fictions as well. (81)

Temple's rather brittle reading seems to refute the *Apology's* extraordinary claims on logical grounds but then draws on some of these very claims to grant the same ontological powers to dialectic. His close association of feigning and invention epitomizes his contradictory reasoning, but his contradictions also reflect his employer's own numerous and significant equivocations.⁵²

Sidney says that the poet “doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature” (85). But before these two qualities of poetry are allowed to stand the poet at too great a height over Nature, Sidney retreats by equating the two: “so as he [the poet] goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit” (85). And just as he finds that their causal faculties measure equally, he remounts the original argument:

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich a tapestry as divers poets have done;
neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor
whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is
brazen, the poets deliver only a golden. (85)

Temple claims not to accept and then does accept (and appropriates) what Sidney appears not ready to say at the very same moment that he is saying it. He does not hesitate to claim a human advantage over the *creatures* of nature, but he falters in his expression of human independence from Natura. In the case of either Sidney or Temple, questions seem to be pursued and propositions offered with an insufficient vocabulary, as if we are witness to the clumsy development of a new technology, a technology of thought that will, once matured, make possible previously inconceivable shapes of the poet (or logician)—and self-identity

through them. I want to accent here, as I hinted at the end of the previous chapter, that it is enough for thinkers and poets of this time to challenge still predominant conceptions of a hierarchically advantaged *Natura*, so that the language used is still riddled with a persistent reliance upon convention. As vestiges of a belief system in the process of reoccupation, these examples indicate an inability to argue out clearly and cohesively—to even conceive of fully—a person and her production entirely independent of an ontological antecedent.

An examination of some of the leading theoretical and technological advances on the Continent will help bring out the full implication of Sidney's reconsidered attempt to make artifice equal to or better than nature. Such an examination combining art theory and poetics will offer an indication of the atmosphere of ideas present during the composition of the Elizabethan sonnets of my interest. I should say here that Sidney's treatment of poetry was not original but drew on what may be called the doctrine of the second nature found throughout theoretical work of the time, work Sidney had exposure to during his grand tour.⁵³ Coinciding with art theory were technological innovations, chiefly in the development of linear perspective, which offered human mastery of nature through the reproduction of three-dimensional spatial relations on an artificial two-dimensional plane (such as a canvas or fresco surface). Poetic theory focused on the other chief natural domain, time, and through prosodic utterance made its claim to the perceived source of its rhythmic and metered (and thus temporal) art form. Through a re-creation of space or time, each in its own right objectified nature and suggested that through the representation it might be ruled by man.

Attention to visual art theory will support my position that a philosophical *natura* was at this time the conceptual source of imaginative art, as it was for sexual, economic, and other modes of production. But because of its direct influence over Elizabethan poets, early

modern poetics, particularly Sidney's,⁵⁴ will take prominence in this chapter. For one thing, poetics was more comprehensive in its ontological orientation than was speculative work devoted to the visual arts. That much English poetics followed in the wake of the visual arts theory, leaving poetics to benefit from its counterpart's discoveries, may contribute to this, but it likely has to do with the nature of language itself, its ability to take shapes and offer allusions, and above all, to progress sequentially from one proposition, idea, image, and passage to the next (another expression of temporality). The necessity of sequence also gives the literary form the ability to deliberately depart from sequence, which as we saw in Chapter Three's brief discussion of the preposterous, can implicitly comment on and resist assumed notions of order. Language, therefore, appears as an ideal medium for the confusion of philosophical norms which in this chapter range from markers of sequence to the sign signified distinction. Altogether language has the greater potential for ontological nuance and thus will provide an ideal transition into Part Two's narrower focus on the ontological poetics surfacing throughout the sonnets of Elizabethan England.

Visual Art Theory

The visual arts' use of the reproduction of space to create a kind of representational second nature implicitly called into question longstanding assumptions of semiological orders purportedly ordained by nature. Though I am interested in the subtleties found in the Renaissance theory, this situation does account for a more grandiose rhetoric, appearing from the beginning of the 16th century and stretching through mannerism, that called for the use of representational art in the conquering of nature (*vince la natura*, Garrard [237]; *vincere naturam*, Tayler [140-41] and Hagstrum [81-88]). The troubled relationship with nature was not a modern contrivance but had an ancient pedigree, at least as old as Heraclitus' well

known aphorism “Nature loves to hide.” Ovid closed his *Metamorphoses* with praise for Pythagoras who “discovered by the eyes of the heart what Nature refused to human eyes” (book 15, qtd. in Hadot 31). And of even greater intellectual import to the Renaissance, Lucretius. He both opens his *On Nature* with an invocation to his personified natura, the Venus genetrix, and complains that “jealous nature has hidden the spectacle of atoms [his foundation for all existence] from our view” (I.321). He boasts that heroic Epicurus “robbed nature of all the veils that concealed her” (III.29-30), however, and thus “forced [open] the tightly closed gates of nature” (I.71, qtd. in Hadot).

In these examples, the measure of geometry, the rule of mathematics, and the penetration of philosophical theory are the arts used to mine nature’s secrets with knowledge, while the imaginative art of nascent modernity, be it a painted panel or literary piece, used representation to arrest the artistic subject ‘in nature’. Nature’s reality might be contained within the recreation of its fundamental characteristics, its extension in space and persistence through time. The artifex then might slowly, during the long push from natural philosophy to science, remove himself from the orbit of nature’s domination. Virtually unquestioned by art historians, visual art’s implementation of perspectival theory played a lead role in the advance of science within intellectual history.⁵⁵ Its representations of the world—from the interiors of architecture to the interior of the human body and the arrangement of the organs—reflected the doctrine of the second nature appearing in Continental and English theory and poetry. The doctrine has murky origins but surfaces, as an implicit commonplace, throughout Italian art and literary theoretical works. Note the particular argument Leonardo da Vinci constructs to defend painting against the common assumption of poetry’s superiority:

If you, historians or poets or mathematicians, had not seen things through your eyes, you would only be able to report them feebly in your writings. And you, poet, should you wish to depict a story as if painting with your pen, the painter with his brush will more likely succeed The works of nature are far more worthy than words, which are the products of man, because there is the same relationship between the works of man and those of nature as between man and god. Therefore, it is nobler to imitate things in nature, which are in fact the real images, than to imitate, in words, the words and deeds of man.

Leonardo alters the Platonic ontology that distanced images of things from those things in reality. He does so by adding another, demoralizing length from reality to its transliteration in words. The abstraction of language cannot achieve the substance of a paint-and-canvas image, which extends into space and is in fact *real*. The painter “should be like a mirror which is transformed into as many colors as are placed before it, and, doing this, he will seem to be a second nature” (qtd. in Garrard 154). According to Michelangelo (as reported in the dialogues of Francisco de Hollanda):

Whenever . . . a great painter makes a work which seems to be artificial and false, this falseness is truth. . . . [To which Hollanda himself adds:] A painter is worthy of great praise if he paint an impossible thing which has never been seen with such art and skill that it seems alive and possible and causes men to wish that such things did actually exist. (61, 63.)

These theoretical germs reflect the era’s professional expectation of ever more realistic portrayals of the natural artistic subject and a deep appreciation for the new artistic techniques that promised to level the playing field between the tertiary human cause and the

substantial *natura* it could up to this time only imitate. Erwin Panofsky reports one early hint at this attitude, found in a letter from Giovanni Dondi⁵⁶ of about 1375. He describes a contemporary sculptor admiring antique statues, who says, “[I]f those works did not lack life, they would be better than living beings” (205, n. 11). Donatello’s *Zuccaro* statue was said to be so lifelike that it only lacked speech, and sometime after its completion in 1425 Donatello himself is reported speaking to it as if he expected a reply (qtd. in Garrard 56).⁵⁷ Anecdotes attesting to the realistic qualities of art only increase in the sixteenth-century. According to Pietro Aretino (1531) a picture of John the Baptist by Titian included a lamb so realistic a live sheep bleated at it. In 1508, a man’s dog mistook for the man himself a portrait of him by Dürer. And reportedly Bramantino painted a horse so realistic it was attacked by an actual horse (Kris and Kurz 63, n. 2). There were more legends. Jean H. Hagstrum reminds us that Bernazzano’s outdoor fresco of a strawberry patch was pecked at by peacocks, and also of the story of Girolamo of Verona’s painted tree that birds actually tried to fly through (82). Whether or not any one of these is even remotely true is less important than the artistic techniques, and their ontological implications, that they ask us to pay closer attention to.

The advent of the use of oil paints over those with an egg tempera base, the common foundational ingredient in paint throughout the medieval era, surely contributed to the quality of images produced from the fifteenth-century forward. (For comparison, one might look at a Fra Angelico against, say, a Raphael. Fra Angelico’s work with tempera contrasts remarkably against Raphael’s famed innovations of color, which would have been impossible without the use of oil.) Too, the earliest days of the Renaissance saw the perfection of the use of *chiaroscuro* (or simply ‘shading’), the technique of juxtaposing light and dark areas of a painted object to give the impression of the object’s three dimensions. Along with

chiaroscuro was the production of those even more convincing three-dimensional effects through linear perspective. Means such as foreshortening, the reduction in size of figures in ratio to their distance from the viewer, and vanishing point perspective, which reproduces spatial depth through the use of lines converging at single points on the painting's surface, gave the illusion of natural, three-dimensional depth to the two-dimensional surface on which the artisan worked. Though perspective had been used in the paintings of antiquity, the ancient artisans had guessed at the accurate perspective, painting only 'by the eye', we might say. The mark of the Renaissance was its precise reproduction of spatial relations.

This effort hinged on developments in mathematics and geometry, first by artist, architect, and mathematician Filippo Brunelleschi and his contemporary and fellow magister Leon Battista Alberti. Using geometry, Brunelleschi figured out how to reproduce natural perspective in any scale and from multiple points of view. To demonstrate his approach, he painted a realistic image of the Florentine Baptistery and drilled a hole in the panel just large enough to see through. He peered through the back of it and held up a mirror between the panel and the actual Baptistery. The mirror reflected his painting, which fit perfectly with the remainder of the baptistery visible around the edges of the mirror. Brunelleschi knew that a mirror reproduced three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional surface, much like artisans attempted to produce on their painted panels, and his use of it proved that his perspectival geometry could create images that reflected nature's spatial relations just as accurately. Alberti's invention was the perspectival "window." The design called for a transparent veil to be placed between the subject and the artisan, with heavy thread in the veil creating a checkerboard pattern of parallel lines. A corresponding pattern was drawn on paper, and the artisan transcribed the contents of each square he looked through to the corresponding square

on the paper. The image on paper then became a reproduction accurate—or natural—in its perspective (Alberti, *On Painting*, 68-69). Used by artisans as diverse, and far afield, as Leonardo, Dürer, and Hans Holbein the Younger, the screen still appears in drawing texts today (121, n.28). Its use makes a manageable object of imitation out of a wily subject in reality: “You know how impossible it is,” Alberti writes, “to imitate a thing which does not continue to present the same appearance,” for “as the distance and the centre [of focus] are changed, the thing you see seems greatly altered” (69). But by transferring what the artist sees into its square divisions, the artisan reduces his subject to the space that geometry can master. Through the screen he presents an “unchanged plane” (69), both fixed and reproducible. In looking through the squares of the screen and recording their contents, the artisan mimetically compartmentalizes the reality on the other side within an artificial space. “To create the illusion of a living, vital space on the surface of a wall or panel is to dissolve that surface, to sublimate matter” (Garrard 58), a process inverting nature’s substantial endowment of matter and its reign over space. In the shift from three dimensions in reality to three dimensions in technological reformation there are more than hints of the substantial power given the human person by Pico and that same power Michelangelo exercised over both himself and the marble block.

One both prime and key example of Brunelleschi’s and Alberti’s devices at work is Masaccio’s *The Holy Trinity* of circa 1426. Though it is difficult to appreciate today, so accustomed are we to the use of perspective in visual media, the piece’s replication of a Roman barrel vault housing the Trinity, the Crucifixion, and Mary and Joseph was front-guard for its time. For according to the then unconditioned eye, Masaccio had done nothing less than build the vaulted room onto (or within) the flat church wall. Ernst Gombrich

conjectured: “We can imagine how amazed the Florentines must have been when this wall-painting was unveiled and seemed to have made a hole in the wall through which they could look” (Gombrich 172-173). Art historian Judith V. Field (43-61) was in 1996 given the rare opportunity to measure the surface of the fresco, and from her intimate vantage point was able to note Masaccio’s linear incisions extending upward and outward from the base of the cross. On these incisions, inspired by Brunelleschi, Masaccio mapped his image. Too, there is a grid on which, or within which, he painted the face of Mary not fully turned toward the audience. As this is such a difficult angle to pull off well, it was likely first sketched with a model and using an Albertian “window,” and then transferred onto the fresco square by square.

Technology for Pico and Michelangelo was the pure theory that cast a reconception of human limitations. Brunelleschi and Alberti combined developments in theory with plastic devices.⁵⁸ Instead of nature being used as its own model and standard for representational accuracy, the mirror and the window become artificial means to determine the accuracy of an imitation of nature. One might see the conceptual play on *imago* here: Natura has been reconceived in the image of technology. Now man can arrest the moving three dimensions of natural phenomena and bring them to a halt within a manmade space on a two-dimensional and “unchanging plane,” as Alberti had it. Brunelleschi’s and Alberti’s preposterous use of the artificial as a model for what is real is the very subversion not solely of conventional thought but of logical, common sense that we saw also taking place in the new metaphysics of the previous chapter. As with the new advances in thought, particularly as they appear in the handling of a non-specialist like Michelangelo, Brunelleschi and Alberti do not rely on, much less limit themselves to, strict scholastic conceptions or terms. Abandoning that precise

vocabulary enables them to actually *do* things with metaphysics. This freedom of imprecision we will continue to see in this and following chapters. For now it is enough to note that the dependent structures linking humanity to our natural cause here begin to lose their firm place.

Poetic Theory

Some of our most well known Renaissance lyrics employ time as an antagonist: for example, “But wherefore do not you a mightier way / Make war upon this bloody tyrant Time” (Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, 16. 1-2). But these more obvious examples only bob at the thematic surface of the formal implications that underlie them. Even the most free verse is rhythmical, and all metered forms are numerical, temporal, and if not in rote imitation of time then seek to contain time through the use of temporal verbal expressions. As theorist and poet Allen Grossman succinctly put it: “Prosodic utterance insofar as it is ‘numerous’ is an imitation of time. Incorporating time, it triumphs over time” (240). Beyond its prosody, poetry leaves rich temporal impressions on its readers, especially readers of the lyric who find, as Matthew Zarnowiecki has, that the lyric “dwells in the moment” and thus leaves its reader “stretched between present and past,” “both in and beyond” the lyric moment (4). His example is one of only a few lyrics written by Chidiok Tichborne just a few days before his execution for his involvement in the Babington Plot intended to kill Queen Elizabeth. One reflective stanza reads:

The spring is paste, and yet it hath not sprung

The fruit is deade, and yet the leaues are greene

My youth is gone, and yet I am but yonge

My threed is cutt, and yet it was not spunn –

And now I liue, and now my life is donn. (qtd. in Zarnowiecki 3)

As an ideal form for an already dead man's meditation on life, the lyric meter marches forward at a predictable clip, and with no elision between lines, drops off at the end of each, much as the speaker anticipates of his imminent mortality. The constraint of the line limits the poet to a use of language that frees our own meditations on the speaker's present and future, both of which are somehow already now past. But the poem is intimately temporal enough that we do sense that we share with the speaker something like a present moment, that we "dwell" there, as Zarnowiecki put it, despite the expanse of historical time between us. This seeming collapse of temporal boundaries is precisely what gives poetry its preservative characteristics, the artificial powers permitting Horace to "evade the death god" by way of his inherence within his poetic "monument more lasting than bronze" (*Odes*, 3.30).

Reaching beyond the mastery of this single dimension of nature, Sidney's *Apology* brings English poetics into conversation with the spatial concerns of visual art theory and highlights the peculiar ontological endowment of the poetic craft. Having defined the poet as one who matches or betters nature, Sidney regards poetry as "an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, a speaking-picture—with this end, to teach and delight" (86). Sidney's repetition of the dictum typically attributed to Horace, that the purpose of poetry is to teach and delight, has occupied much critical imagination,⁵⁹ but his use of another commonplace, the one defining poetry as a speaking picture, serves my purpose for it sets up a juxtaposition between poem and painting, poet and painter, which offers insight into his conception of the poem's status as unique among representational art forms for its ability to collapse the distinction between sign and signified, much as it does the distinction between temporal boundaries.

The *Apology* distinguishes three types of poems and these point to three kinds of poets. The first and “chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God,” or the biblical poems composed by David, Moses and the like. “Against these none will speak that have the Holy Ghost in due holy reverence” (86). In this kind, Sidney includes prophetic pagan works and their writers also who, “though in a full wrong divinity,” should include Orpheus, Amphion, Homer (“in his Hymns”), “and many other, both Greeks and Romans.” The second sort takes philosophy as its subject and may focus on matters moral (as with Cato), natural (as with Lucretius), astronomical (Manilius), or historical (Lucan) (86). But what of the third kind, produced by what Sidney calls “right poets”? To discuss these he contrasts poet and painter, saying his right poet is as different from the previous sort as are two kinds of painter, the one imitating only what is seen in reality by the eye, the other,

the more excellent, who having no law but wit, bestow[s] that in colors upon you which is fittest for the eye to see: as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia, when she punished in herself another’s fault; wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue. For these third [kind of poets] . . . to imitate [is to] borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be. (87)

The excellent painter relies on no real model but fashions an ‘imitation’ from an internal image.⁶⁰ He paints not by the eye but the mind’s eye, and doing so circumvents any external reality. The right poet does likewise, and Sidney’s particular comparison recalls Leonardo’s critique of poetry on similar grounds:

And you, poet, should you wish to depict a story as if painting with your pen, the painter with his brush will more likely succeed The works of nature are far more worthy than words, which are the products of man, because there is the same relationship between the works of man and those of nature as between man and god. Therefore, it is nobler to imitate things in nature, which are in fact the real images, than to imitate, in words, the words and deeds of man. (20-21)

Whether or not Sidney was exposed to this text during his tour of the Continent is unknown, but he clearly uses the same terms to take the opposite view. Leonardo has the mimetic artist rely on the real world external to him without which his works would be mere 'works of man'. And poems are inferior to paintings precisely because their linguistic content is solely a human product. Never mind that paint, panel, and fresco derive from the same *techne* that produces poems, the argument is clear: painting betters poetry because of its use of concrete reality, real subjects and real ingredients. Words lack this substance entirely. They exist, in this respect, outside the boundaries of space so theoretically important to the visual artist.

But this is part of how Sidney identifies his right poet who avoids fashioning the poem in imitation of any external source. Leonard Barkan has noted the similarity of these passages:

Indeed, as one glimpses from Leonardo's comments on words, there seems to be an awareness that artists of language are enjoying a kind of free ride when they exploit the concept of *mimesis*—when, in fact, it is the artists of image who really imitate. This, I suppose, is rather a long way about saying that Sidney's famous doctrine of the "other nature" is once again a combination of

that which is absent and of an invention out of nothing to fill up the space.

The absence is, to be sure, double: in the specific historical case Sidney does not have [at home, in England] the lively pictorial culture out of which painterly claims get made; but in a more universal sense, the picture that is conjured up by words is always that many more words away from being "real." ("Making Pictures Speak" 337)

Barkan's claim clarifies the ontological hue of Sidney's doctrine of the second nature. Sidney really need make no grandiose claims likening his right poet to the Creator God and the poem to the miraculous Creation *ex nihilo*. Instead, he allows words to be words, abstract entities that exist in no one place and thus occupy no space. The Shakespearean *Sonnets* will offer an extended meditation on this feature within the ontology of the poetic form. Much like the *Apology*, they question what becomes of the natural poetic subject preserved within the mimetic poetic image. The non-spatial image can exist on a scribbled manuscript, in a printed edition, or in the reader's memory. But the poetic subject (particularly the human poetic subject of the first 126 sonnets, the fair youth) is a spatial being who risks ontological annihilation within the non-spatial confines of the supposedly preservative poem.

For Sidney, though, the abstract nature of the word highlights his insistence on the poet's independence from externalia. Recall his third and right-poet whom he juxtaposes against the poet of philosophy because of the latter's over reliance on philosophical subject matter. This poet "is wrapped within the fold of the proposed subject, and takes not the course of his own invention" (86). Sidney is careful not to explicitly juxtapose right-poets against the first, "chief" poets of scripture—though these poets, too, fail to take the "course of [their] own invention," relying on divinity as the inspirer of their work instead. If it is here

suggested that the Holy Spirit is behind the work of biblical authors, then we may contrast those pagans among the chief poets against the self-reliant right-poet by virtue of their reliance on the Muse. The right-poet is “right” because by taking the course of his own invention, he transcends dependence upon any source of inspiration, be it Holy Sprit, Muse, or Natura. It is through the exercise of his craft that he is not reliant upon but “doth in effect grow into another nature” (85).

It should be questioned—because it has not been sufficiently—exactly where Sidney places the source of poetry. Based on the following passage, it appears that Sidney locates it in the human mind. The poet, he says, disdains to be tied to any subjection of nature but,

lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, [the poet] doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets deliver only a golden. (85)⁶¹

The lawyer, the grammarian, the physician, and so on, must “build upon the depth of Nature” (85), but what of the poet? Like most, Ronald Levaio reads the ranging zodiac of the wit and the vigor of invention as reference to faculties of mind which are “*not* a metaphysical *apex mentis* directly sparked by the divine. It is the faculty that creates fictions, the faculty that

creates another nature and so reveals our divinity to ourselves” (Levao’s emphasis 139).

Referring to the passage “the skill of the artificer standeth in that *Idea* or fore-conceit of the work, not in the work itself” (85), Levao continues: “We know our Ideas, not by tracing them back to an eternal Logos, but by making them ‘manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as [we have] imagined them’ [*Apology*, 85]” (139). In this view, invention, wit, ideas, and “fore-conceits” provide figures of the mind and its imaginative images which alone are the source of the art form. But William Temple, Sidney’s logician secretary, had a very different impression, particularly of Sidney’s use of “invention” which he took to refer to the poetic product. He seems to translate the passage “the poet is lifted up with the vigor of his own invention” by saying that nature has “in fact been surpassed by poets in the polish of the work of art they produce” (77). “Vigor” and “invention” are rendered as “polish” and “work of art.” Rather than a conception of mind, Temple reads this as a conception of *techne*. Temple’s interpretation does not point to a metaphysical *apex mentis* but to an inverted metaphysics overlooked by Levao. Making the artistic product the artistic source preposterously reorders causal relations and appears to remove the poet from the scale in which he is subservient to the *apex*.

This was a not entirely uncommon privileging of the artistic product at this time, particularly among those of influence to Sidney. For example, Girolamo Fracastoro (1478-1553), whom Sidney mentions by name in the *Apology* (108), offers a rational reinterpretation of *furor* that makes the poet inspired by his own work. In his *De poetica* (1555), he links the ecstatic state of *furor* not with an exterior *celestis afflatus* but with human made music. Fracastoro constructs a mythic poet who is careful to “modulate sounds,

to select the musical, and reject the unmusical . . . to give attention to sonority.” According to Fracastoro, the arrangement itself is the source of inspiration:

As soon as he [the poet] had joined all the beauties of language and subject and had spoken them, he felt a certain wonderful and divine harmony steal into him, to which no other was equal. And then he observed that he was, as it were, carried out of himself. He could not contain himself, but raved like those who take part in the mysteries of Bacchus and Cybele when the pipes were blown and the drums re-echo.

Hence, O friends, that Platonic madness (in the *Ion*) which Socrates thought heaven-sent. God is not the cause, but music itself, full of a sort of great, exalting wonder which makes the pulse beat with the rhythm as if stirred by some violent frenzy, and takes away self-possession, and rouses one to ecstasy. Rightly indeed do the poets deserve to be called divine, since they alone have invented that divine speech by which the gods have condescended to speak in oracles to men. (qtd. in Hathaway, 405)

What Fracastoro implicitly critiques is the conventional understanding of poetic inspiration at the time, brought about by Marsilio Ficino’s work on the subject, particularly his introduction to his translation of Plato’s *Ion*, which was likely Fracastoro’s source. Inspiration, or furor, frenzy, was necessary to unify the human soul in discord (*discordiam*). It provides musical tones (*musicos tonos*) and harmonious sweetness (*harmonicam suavitatem*) to awaken and prepare the soul unification (197-99). Taking his belief from his interpretation of the *Ion*, Ficino said that one cannot make poetry by his own artifice but must rely on celestial inspiration (*celesti afflatu*) (202-03). Fracastoro uses Ficino’s emphasis on

the effects of music to construct a new program in which inspiration is not celestial but of the artistic product itself. The maker of poetic language is self-reflexively inspired by what he makes. Voice is as key here as it is for Hesiod where the Muse gives the poet human *audê* to communicate her divine *ossa*. When Fracastoro claims that the gods “condescend” to speak through a musical voice, he appears to give the notion of divinity the same cautious representation as Sidney has the “chief” poets of biblical scripture. But as he implies they do not actually compare to Sidney’s inventive, “right” poets, and in a similar reversal of expectations, Fracastoro’s gods must depend on the self-inspired poets and the musical, poetic speech they have invented if they wish to “condescend to speak in oracles to men.”

Closer to home for Sidney, Richard Willis’s *De re poetica disputatio* (1573) is considered the earliest Elizabethan apology (Atkins 103), and it appears to have influenced Sidney’s definition of poetry, which is for Willis also imitative. It “imitates in words not only existing things, but also things non-existent, just as if they existed, and represents them moreover as they might be or ought to be” (qtd. in Atkins 108). And where Willis acknowledges the notion of poetic inspiration, he rationalizes it making art the source of furor, as Fracastoro had. “Of all the arts conceived by human genius poetry alone is deemed to proceed from divine frenzy [furor poeticus]. For poets, inspired by a sort of divine breath, sing of matters worthy of wonder and amazement. Wherefore Plato calls poetry a divine madness” (qtd. in Atkins 108-09). However, poets are not “out of their minds, but . . . they so apply their minds to things and assume the emotions they describe, that, *as if* stimulated by passion or roused by divine breath, they *seem* to be transported hither and thither; which often happens to us when contemplating something seriously, not to understand in a measure what we are doing” (my emphasis, 109). The massaging of language with “as if” and “seem”

gives Willis room to question assumptions about the role of an inspirer in the poet's craft. It appears that poets bring about their own inspired state, if not through strenuous contemplation then through adopting the states they depict in the literary work. This latter rings with the suggestion that it is the literary work itself, or rather, the artful *working* of the work, that reaches back to inspire its poet. When Sidney says "For that same exquisite observing of number and measure in words, and that high flying liberty of conceit proper to the poet, did seem to have some divine force in it" (84), he attributes the divine force to the number and measure of poetic craft. This is the same temporal prosodic utterance that enables the poet to manage the dimension of time and the very same musicality that Fracastoro found to be the poet's pathetic experience typically taken as furor. Sidney refers directly to Plato, thought of as the source of the Renaissance's conception of furor. In his *Ion* (534) he famously makes of the poet an inspired being whose art is the product of the Muse. According to Sidney: "he [Plato] attributeth unto Poesy more than myself do, namely, to be a very inspiring of a divine force, far above man's wit" (107). Attributing to poetry the divine intervention of the Muse, Plato limits the role of human making in the exercise of the poetic craft, which in the case of Sidney's "right" poetry relies on neither the Muse's inspiration nor Natura's role as model of imitation.

And yet as has already been alluded to Sidney has his fair share of equivocation. I have built much of my argument on his bold claim that "[the poet] doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth" (85), but he quickly pulls back by saying that the poet "goeth hand in hand with Nature." First the "number and measure of words" and the "liberty of conceit" has a "divine force" (84), then poetry's source lies in the "*Idea* or fore-conceit of the work, not in the work itself" (85). And on the one hand

poetry makes “quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature,” and on the other Sidney withdraws into the metaphysical commonplace of his day, allowing that the fruits of nature are “essential” while those of poetry are “in imitation” of the essences (85). If one may take a printer’s liberty as another such instance, in *An Apology for Poetry* the poet “doth grow into another nature” (85), while in *The Defence of Poesy* he “doth grow in effect another nature” (216),⁶² the former making a nature of the poet himself, the latter of the poetic product.

Another of his recognized passages, claiming that nature’s world is brazen but that the poets “only deliver a golden” (85), also exhibits a subtle contradiction. Its complexity lies in its allusion to alchemy in which the understanding was that artificial gold could be brought from natural brass (and other materials) through the expert intervention of the alchemical craft.

Sidney’s arresting assertion that the poet creates a golden world superior to nature’s actually suggests that the golden world proceeds from, and thus relies on, nature as its brazen base, the starting point from which it makes its ontological improvements ascending an alchemical, elemental scale. While the right poet is lifted up by his own invention and freely ranges within the zodiac of his wit, his artifice must begin in nature to then better it. And yet the figure Sidney toys with refers to a highly contested practice which always risked a transgressive interference with nature. Recall that the violation of nature was the premise under which Dante condemned the alchemist in *Inferno* XXIX for successfully aping nature’s mode of production so that he had overstepped his ontological limits. The kind of making that landed him in hell Sidney refers to in order to both extol as remarkable and limit as mundane the poet’s extraordinary capacity for production.

I would like to pause and consider the discontinuous reasoning involved in proposing that the poem amounts to another nature, in an attempt to uncover its deeper suggestions that

trouble the dependent relationship between sign and signified. One way to begin is to examine documented semiological confusions during the general time in which Sidney was working. In Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*:

Look when a painter would surpass the life
 In limning out a well-proportioned steed,
 His art with nature's workmanship at strife,
 As if the dead the living should exceed . . . (289-92)

The competition here recalls my above examples of visual art legends in which lifelike paintings not only fool their human audiences but some, such as Bramantino's painted horse that was attacked by a real horse, even trick the 'real' creatures of nature. Again, whether or not such tales are true is not as important as the ontological consciousness they belie, one that would permit the break down of semiological barriers. That is the break down underlying the moment in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* when, because Proteus cannot actually have Julia herself, he asks instead for her painted portrait: "And to your shadow [portrait] will I make true love" (4.2.1760). Likewise in *The Winter's Tale*, where the only art is Hermione's pretending, Leontes believes her to be a lifelike statue and says: "Let no man mock me, / I will kiss her" (5.3.78-79). And Shakespeare's Lucrece (*The Rape of Lucrece*) momentarily confuses sign and signified when she defaces the image of the traitorous Sinon, a surrogate for her rapist Tarquin: "She tears the senseless Sinon with her nails," but then acknowledges the futility of her act: "'Fool, fool,'" she says to herself, "'his wounds will not be sore.'" (1564, 1568). Proteus, Leontes, and Lucrece are certain that these images are not the persons depicted by them, while at the very same time, each at least momentarily suspends her and his understanding of right order, of sequential dependence descending from reality to

representation. Each does so by responding to images as if they share something with their subjects, as if each sign *is* its signified.

At the same time there was a wider fear of such semiological blurring expressed in the social rhetoric of William Camden's historical record. In his *Annales* he retells an incident of 1591 where William Hacket, a cult leader calling for the deposition of Elizabeth, painted the queen's portrait on a tablet and then stabbed a dagger into her pictured breast (qtd. in Bowers 381). Camden also tells us of a Brien O'Rork, a late sixteenth-century Irish upstart and sympathizer with the Spanish, who "commanded the Queen's Picture, painted in a table, to be hung at a Horse's Tail, and hurried about the Streets in Scorn, and at last disgracefully cut in pieces" (qtd. in Tassi 142). No doubt in part because of their hostile and rebellious temper, Camden presented these figures as mad (and with Hacket, who claimed he was the second coming of Christ [Tassi 142], he may have been right), but the expectation of the orderly, right regard for the representation should not be overlooked. Camden offers only a brief example of an Elizabethan attitude toward the norms governing the relationship between reality and the representation, but it is the very same attitude noted in the push to keep usury and its blurring of wealth and money illegal, and likewise, and perhaps more conspicuously, in the puritan iconophobia that spread throughout the English sixteenth century.⁶³ Though it was in origin focused solely on the prohibition of liturgical images,⁶⁴ it eventually extended into cultural attitudes toward secular art, chief among them the theater. According to Stephen Gosson's *The Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, the actor is a real person who in play-acting renders himself a sign, which is, for so long as he is on stage, to live a lie. He says that "every man must show him selfe outwardly to be such as in deed he is." The modifier 'in deed' signifies the Aristotelian notion of the play as an action, but Gosson here

draws attention to it as a dissembling compromise of the actor's singular integrity. The necessity of cross-dressing and characterization offered examples of the problem: "in Stage Playes for a boy to put one the attire, the gesture, the passions of a woman; for a meane person to take upon him the title of a Prince with counterfeit porte, and traine, is by outward signes to shewe them selves otherwise than they are." As an example he uses the role of a tyrant in which the player "whetteth his mind unto tyranny that he may give life to the picture he presenteth." Problematically, play acting risked the *arsie-versie*. It put the cart before the horse through its ability to change the actor from a person playing a character to a person who in deed *is* the character. The process of constructing an image, which in the drama involved the interior, cognitive act of character formation ('getting into character', as one might say today), also sacrificed the maker's true personhood to the false image he made.

What Gosson seems to present, if unwittingly, is a theory of what we might now call efficacious representation, which acknowledges that the sign, supposedly a limited effect of the signified, can actually produce effects of its own. Referring again to usury, recall that this appears to have been the fundamental problem with it since the practice afforded money (the sign) the ability to produce wealth (the signified). Where it was intended only as a means of the exchange of wealth, with the practice of usury it was elevated to an efficacious nature. We should not let the different contexts of representational art, economics, and pervasive social phobias force us to overlook the striking similarities. Sidney's use of the doctrine of the second nature appears with hesitation because of its similarity to the "monstrous birth" (Smith, *The Examination of Usury*, qtd. in Hawkes, 2000, 348 n. 14) of usurious profit. Usury in effect became its own second nature with the sort of artificial laws that also describe the theater's disordered tendency to render reality (the actor) a representation (the character)

and to bring about another perverse nature that “God hath never created” (Smith, qtd. in Hawkes, 2000, 348 n. 14).⁶⁵

Without much strain the ideological temperament that Sidney was dealing with, and that he no doubt to some extent subscribed to, presents itself as formidable. But at the same time one senses that Sidney wants to loosen the conceptual bonds of essence, to invert commonly held, and admittedly commonsensical, notions of ontological order, the pattern or stamp of causal relations that imposes a state of dependence upon the effect. I do not want to make any careless assumption that he somehow pre-figures the grand and metaphysically libertine ideology of later centuries,⁶⁶ but as a product of its own day the *Apology* exhibits a theorist pushing forward into a yet unknown that will eventually invert the signified-sign order and its genus cause and effect with it. That such an unknown is still unpronounceable does not mean it is entirely unimaginable. This appears to be the very dissembling so feared by Gosson and the usury prohibitionists. As I show in later chapters the same hesitations shape the poetics of period sonnet cycles that examine with such speculative pause the contemporary state of the self and its relationship with artifice.

Part II Chapter 6: The Unread Muse

The Muses get their name from a root that indicates ardor, the quick-tempered tension that leaps out in impatience, desire, or anger, the sort of tension that aches to know and to do. In a milder version, one speaks of the “movements of the spirit.” (*Mens* is from the same root.) The Muse animates, stirs up, excites, arouses. She keeps watch less over the form than over the force. Or more precisely: she keeps watch forcefully over the form.

–Jean-Luc Nancy

At this point a revisitation of some fundamental premises may be in order. The previous chapters support the claim that the questions embodied by the mythological Muse, questions concerning the source of poetry (or human artifice) and the role played by the poet (or artifex) in the creative process, become reoccupied in the later science of metaphysics, which, through its use of technical and abstract language, such as the generalization of ‘artifice’ for poetry and ‘artifex’ for poet, permits the in-depth examinations of the relationship of the artist and poet to their products, as the previous discussion of theorists like Sidney shows. Hesitant though he may be Sidney is able to adapt what were once firmly held conceptions of personhood understood through nature’s dominion over human production. This bending of concepts occurs with much more flexibility in the poetic language. The codifications of scholastic philosophy and of the ideology it influenced must lie at an opposite pole from the explorations of self found in the Elizabethan sonnets, which take liberties all but impossible to philosophical work. The poets discussed do not systematize their conceptions, which are far too uncertain for any codification. Rather, their as of yet *undefined* notions of personhood they allow to emerge from their particular use of conceit

and inversions of convention, of rhetorical reversals, of reason and unreason, all of which express the contemporary uncertainties already noted.

Just as in my Chapters Three, Four, and Five, in Blumenberg's examples of reoccupation the questions raised in myth are taken up in new terms within a new science and the mythological plots and personae are not revisited. The use of Blumenberg's analytic tool shows how early modern poetics and its concerns with the limits of human being and production carry within its critical assessments the themes and questions once personified in story and character form. At the same time, theoretical engagement of an ontological *Natura*, authoritatively overseeing all modes of human production, both broadens and technically specifies the concerns originally raised in myth. The broader, more technical re-imagination of the old questions, as a chief characteristic of the philosophical science, amounts to the early modernization of the Muse, properly understood. For this reason the mythic *Musa* might never appear again in this dissertation. And yet she must appear because of her numerous and significant cameos in the early modern literature, significant because her mythological guise actually signifies the very modern reoccupation that has been the object of my argument so far.

I have resisted the possibility that nature is a direct re-invention of the Muse, not least of all because the scientific conception of nature likely derives from any number of mythological figures, and the power relationship it has over the artifex from multiple mythological strata not unlike the hierarchy of inspiration. But her disordered, discontinuous, and preposterous treatment in contemporary poetry does bear a remarkable similarity to the treatment of nature in theoretical work. No associations of the two are as close as Thomas Lodge's. As he Christianizes the classical Muse, he places nature in the middle position

within a structure not unlike the inspiration hierarchy: “Poetrye commeth from aboue, from a heauenly seat of a glorious God . . . Wel then you see that it commeth not by exercise of play making, nether insertion of gawds [pagan], but from nature, and from aboue” (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 71). But the associations that follow are close enough to bring out the subtle innovations of the English sonneteers whose Muses will, in later chapters, figure the preposterous ontologies found scattered throughout these sonnet sequences.

The early modern Muse’s relevance to the arts may be inferred from her portrayal in much commentary in which she personifies the cosmos itself, the worldly object (and subject) of all representational endeavor. Mario Equicola (1470-1525) subscribed to the view that the nine Muses corresponded with the nine known spheres of the universe. He claimed to draw this wisdom from Plato and the Pythagoreans saying that “the world consisted of all concent and harmony, which were names for the holy Muses and Apollo, their leader, and under their name all poetry is celebrated, the Muses being called the knot and chain of the sciences; and fittingly they were said to be children of Jove and Memory [or Zeus and Mnemosyne, according to the Greeks]” (qtd. in Hathaway, 434).⁶⁷ The Muses are the nine spheres and the sciences enlisted to understand those spheres. Antonio Minturno wrote in his *L’arte poetica* (1564):

And the Muses, the offspring of Jove and nine in number, what other do they signify than the nine choruses of the celestial spirits, which sing the praises of God and also inspire in mortals all their knowledge of things, what other than the means by which God teaches men the sciences and arts and gives them laws? And the nine Intelligences of the nine spheres of the heavens that move and rule everything, and disseminate the seeds of all things, and, as the

Platonists say, inform souls, are they not the same? Thus, the world has no excellence of things, no ornament, and no perfection that cannot be attributed to the Muses and to poetry. (qtd. in Hathaway, 435)⁶⁸

The Muse has been transformed into an Isis, the many breasted source of generation (another mythological persona that would contribute to philosophy's nature). But as concent and harmony, knot and chain (Equicola), or as the givers of law, the rulers of all, seeds of all, and source of all perfection (Minturno), these inspirers occupy center stage in an unspoken myth of the centered and ordered universe, the story of the world that ensures its audience of the stability of the cosmos and of each person's pre-ordained role in it. The general position recalls Diodorus Siculus' (circa 60-30 BCE) telling of the Apollo and Marsyas story. Apollo, the god of music and player of the lyre, is challenged to a music competition by the aulos (flute) player Marsyas. In every telling Apollo wins and somehow destroys the hubristic musician, usually by flaying. But in Diodorus' telling, Apollo is disturbed by his destruction of Marsyas and in his overwhelming grief he destroys his lyre, a sign of cosmic harmony. The Muses are quick to repair the instrument and restore order to the universe, making them Apollo's co-adjudicators of cosmic order (*Library of History* 5.75.3). Though I am aware of no mythic tale of Apollo and the Muses that makes of the nine sisters anything more than his attendants, and of Apollo anything less than their overseeing chaperone,⁶⁹ Diodorus' elevation of them in mythic status (an ontological elevation in its own right) has none of the range and force of what is seen in Equicola's and Minturno's treatments, which seem to insist on a universal stability likely more dubious in their time than it was in Diodorus'.

Following them, Filippo Masini's 1588 published lecture on *ecstaticus*, or the inspired state, considered the inspired state a "privilege and divine grace" descending to the poet in the following way:

Jove, who is the mind of God, takes possession of Apollo, who is the mind of the soul of this great animal of the world . . .; Apollo then lustrates the Muses, which are no other according to Orpheus than the moving intelligences of the eight celestial spheres, with the soul of the world completing the number of nine, in such a way that this soul of the universe is that harmonic unity, or unique concert, as we mean to say, resulting from the said Intelligences called the Muses, so that while they are harmoniously intent on moving the heavens, they give rise to a numbered and musical harmony, which, as into nine voices divided—that is, into the eight tones of the celestial orbs and into a single concert—produce for God nine Sirens divinely singing. These Muses then awaken and arouse the souls of poets, and the poets, afflated and inspired, inspire (to use the Platonists' words) their interpreters, and the interpreters move the listeners. (qtd. in Hathaway 407-08)

Masini's repetition of the ancient hierarchy of inspiration—from Jove (or Zeus) and Apollo down to humanity—makes the Muse of the middle seat a governess of the heavens. Acting as his 'soul of the universe' she is, just as with Equicola, both an agent of the world and the world itself, a *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.⁷⁰ Significantly for these early modern treatments it is unclear to what extent the Muse figures the workings of nature or that of the poet himself. In the case of the former, she is, in the simplest terms, the signified of his sign and thus its source. But as mover of the world she also recalls the poet's own creativity, his

generative powers at this time expanding beyond their limits more than at any time since the dawn of Christian philosophy.

Siculus' unique portrayal of Apollo's self-destructive grief bears revisitation. It is not that the Muses repair the lyre but the arts that maintain cosmic order. Through their action the sciences that seek to know and the arts that represent actually have some bearing over the world they are purportedly designed for. In Siculus' pagan world there is no indication that such a proposition would have any such significance as it would have after scholasticism when it would upset linear and semiotic orders. Thus within these insistences on the efficacy of external inspiration and genuflections to the classical Muse there is an underlying suggestion of art's ontological powers.

It should be mentioned that in few of the sonnet sequences worked with in Part II does the Muse appear as explicitly as in these examples. Perhaps due to the longstanding influence of epic predecessors on the evolution of literary genres, much of a poet's commentary appears at the beginning of a work, in the space reserved for formal Muse invocations in which the poet gave an indication of his poetic purpose and philosophy, and in particular, where he was not charged with maintaining the traditional narrative and so could give himself voice through his speaker. Recall Homer's *Iliad* book 2 invocation (484ff.) which distinguished between the Muse's knowledge and the poet's access only to kleos, rumor. Through his request for her divine recall we gather his purpose—the purpose of his epic tale—to report the truth of the events of the war. Among the early modern sonneteers the opening poems include all of the meta-poetic suggestion found in the openings of their classical predecessors, and much more. Whether the Muse is referred to or not, this amounts to a Muse position where, for instance, in Spenser's *Amoretti* the Muse is merely hinted at

through a nod to Helicon (10) but the actual invocation is to the leaues (1), lines (5), and rymes (9) that make up the tools of the poet-speaker's artistic trade. As we saw in Fracastoro's celebration of the emotive effects of poetic musicality, the inspiration for the *Amoretti* sonnet cycle comes not from the Muse or any other external source of art but from the art itself. Like introductory remarks—which is precisely what the archaic invocations were—these initial statements look forward into the more developed ontological poetics touched on throughout their sonnet cycles.

One modern example, the epigraph, such as the one at the head of this chapter, offers at least an indication of the ontological significance of the Muse position in its early modern application.⁷¹ Jean-Luc Nancy's passage conjures a forceful Muse reminiscent of her authoritative appearance in previous chapters, reminding us that our conventional assumptions of a bucolic Muse, who earns her keep teaching filthy shepherds to sing prettily, are erroneous. To the contrary, her appearances signify, she points beyond herself, she *means* something. As an initial statement in a work, the epigraph does no less. Rich in potent suggestion it inspires us with the very colors with which the author wishes to enhance our perceptions, offering in a brief form an undeniable imbrication of the work and its author. It points directly back at the author as the source of the work just as the Muse invocation identified the perceived artistic source in a deified personification. By the time of the epigraph the author need no longer contend with any external sources, but it is in the Muse position of early modern poetry that the poet establishes his self as in relation with the conventional sources of his craft and artifice.

In the poetry that follows that source is what governs the limits of literary representation. Natura provides, on the one hand, the catch-all conception of what is real and

thus found represented within the poetic image, and on the other, the nature that distinguishes between *res* and *signum*, the principle establishing the limits of the sign and prohibiting its confusion with the reality it represents. Homer's and Hesiod's pre-metaphysical age had no such conception and therefore only a divine personification could provide the boundary between the poet's song and the historical events described within it. Their Muse, as I have indicated, not only offered a figure whom they might petition for the unadulterated facts of their story, but also amounted to a personification of what kept them from being able to relay to their audiences such events and facts, events and facts likely impossible to capture *in toto* in a poetic representation, even if the poet had access to them. With the advent of investigative sciences, the Muse became unnecessary to explain why a simulacrum could not equal its referent in all its complexity. Distinctions based on *onta*, being, explained the division among various phenomena, and the study of being, ontology, relied not on a personification but a principle known simply as *nature*.

As in matters of sexual behavior and economics, the concerns of poetic theory extended beyond its abstractions and into the ideological thinking that, though less philosophical, still carried much ontological suggestion. By the time of the Elizabethan sonnet fashion, literary history had established poetic conventions that were deemed nothing less than natural norms of order. These in fact made up the basis for Samuel Daniel's argument that rhyme is that which

both Custome and Nature doth most powerfully defend: Custome that is before all Law, Nature that is aboue all Arte. Euery language hath her proper number or measure fitted to vse and delight, which Custome, intertaininge by

the allowance of the Eare, doth indenize and make naturall. (*Defence of Rhyme*, qtd. in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 359)

Daniel likens the convention, or “Custome,” of rhyme to a “Graunt of Nature” that, “hauing beene so long . . . held vnquestionable, made me to imagine that it lay altogether out of the way of contradiction, and was become so natural, as we should never haue a thought to cast it off into reproch” (357). Custome becomes nature by way of its endurance through cultural history. Daniel is not inclined to connect his statement with the doctrine of the second nature, that nature of artificiality manufactured by the artifiex, but this is in effect what convention becomes. In this case, nature is not innate but formed, not perceived as overseeing by virtue of itself but by virtue of man’s continued participation in it. The roots of the prohibition against usurious economic production relied on convention:

This is why usury is called by the word we commonly use [*tokos*: a birthing]; for as the offspring resembles its parent, so the interest bred by money is like the principle which breeds it, as [as a son styled by the father’s name, so] it may be called ‘currency the son of currency’. Hence we can understand why of all modes of acquisition, usury is the most unnatural. (*Politics* 1258, qtd. in Shell, 50, n. 12)

And hence we can see how the convention of naming supplies the metaphor by which Aristotle argues for the incestuous and therefore unnatural means of usurious production. The association of convention with nature appeared in other modern contexts as well, where the right by succession of the first born was among “the primarie precepts of nature” (Hayward, *Answer to the First Part of a Certain Conference*, qtd. in Parker, 213), and on the same basis, where a prince might accuse the king of an “unnatural” disinheritance (*3HVI*, 1.1.193).

Time makes the artificial natural so that something like rhyme—which by virtue of its progressive repetition through a stanza represents the matters of succession noted above—may be treated as a kind of substance and source of the poetic art. For this reason departures from convention must be appreciated for their deeper resonances which do not stop at securing aesthetic attention but in their own way contribute to a greater effort to reflect back on their author’s professional and special identity. In this light, to defy convention is to assert independence from custom and nature alike.

Leading up to Part II, I have promised to examine a poetic language that constructs its own ontologies, typically through the use of reversals of norms and commonly recognized understandings of order. Instances are plentiful and they make up the content of my Chapters Seven and Ten devoted to detailed discussion of ontological poetics. It will be helpful, however, to see some of the same language in the native habitat of its conventional use so that departures from convention may stand out as more remarkably ‘unnatural’. One example is the shadow-substance conceit. As a poetic frame it appears as early as Chaucer (around 1386): “Certes a shadwe hath the liknesse of the thyng of which it is shadwe” (Parson’s Tale, 212), and in a variety of early modern uses. Shadowy ephemerality takes a nefarious hue in the *Faerie Queene* where to “feed on shadowes” equals to “die for [substantial] food” (3.2.44). Beyond poetry, Elyot uses the distinction to assert humanistic values of linguistic style: “the translations that we haue be but a rude and grosse shadowe of the eloquence and wisdom of Aristotell” (*The Boke Named the Governor*, 1.11). Note its use in the following anonymous poem of around 1596:

I heard a noise and wished for a sight,

I looked for life and did a shadow see

Whose substance was the sum of my delight,

Which came unseen, and so did go from me.

Yet hath conceit persuaded my content

There was a substance where the shadow went.

.....

But what it was, alas, I cannot tell,

Because of it I had no perfect view;

But as it was, by guess, I wish it well

And will until I see the same anew.

Shadow, or she, or both, or choose you whither:

Blest be the thing that brought the shadow hither! (Anonymous 112)

The author employs common juxtapositions, between the perceived stronger sense of sight over sound, the stronger rhetorical feature of content over conceit, and the object of the poem, the stronger status of substance (also referred to as *life*) over shadow. The distinction accounts for the juxtaposition of the quondam scholastic notion of accidental, inessential being against some form of substantial matter or essence, and its use maintains conventional, inherited conceptions of centering order. But passages like “All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me, / and all their showes but shadowes sauing she” (Spenser, *Amoretti* 35.13-14) reverse the order of simulacra (shadowes) and reality (the worlds glory), and doing so subvert distinctions between false and true, representation and reality, artifice and nature. In the metaphysics of Pico, the poetic theory of Michelangelo, and the poetics of Sidney, previously held distinctions between the essential and inessential were blurred and both figure and diction were innovated in the assertion of subtly new conceptions of human being,

just as the theory of chapter five inverted semiological orders and hinted at uncertainties about the stability of the self.

Those hints become much more pronounced in the poems that follow. Their departure from philosophical terminology and reliance on poetic language gives them room to range in their examinations of self. I will begin Part II with an illustration of ontological poetics found in the work of sonneteers Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, Samuel Daniel, and Michael Drayton. This chapter is followed by a discussion of their uses of the Muse, or simply the Muse position, the initial poems of a sonnet sequence that establish the unsure footing on which the cycles examine the one-time permanence of human being. Chapter Nine is devoted to the Muse position and appearances of the Muse in the Shakespearean *Sonnets*, which are unique in both their prolonged attention to the classical Muse and their in-depth exploration of an ontological poetics. That poetics in its Shakespearean application makes up the content of Chapter Ten.

Chapter 7: The Ontological Quest

We say the eye is the window of the soul but
 what if there is no soul behind the eye, what if
 the eye is a crack through which we can
 perceive just the abyss of a netherworld?
 — Slavoj Žižek, *The Pervert's Guide to
 Cinema*

It is important to pause here and note that since Sidney this argument has become a disembodiment, disembodied from the Continent and disembodied from the physicality dealt with by visual art thinkers. Sidney's focus on the abstraction of language gave his particular use of the doctrine of the second nature a shape previously unseen so that he at least intimated a detachment from the hierarchy of makers. Note that even Pico was still very much embodied by this stratum, and constructed his method of self-fashioning strictly along the links of its chain. Sidney disturbed the causal order by confusing reality and representation, and yet his explicit attention to nature still restated her ideological dominance. This self-erosive, reflexive foil cannot find resolution until ontological concerns enter the poetic context where a more indeterminate language permits an assertion of independence that, in places, will omit nature from the equation of being and making altogether. The present chapter is devoted to illustrating the ontological undergirding of such language in Elizabethan sonnets. Here the poet-speaker establishes a lateral connection between himself and his subject and himself and his poem. As I have figuratively put it, he uses both his poetic subject and his poem as the geographies on which he maps a conception of self. But where previously the mapping has been of an expected vertical scale, now we will note in places the charting of a horizontal plane. As if there is no scale to climb, and no ontological

self-betterment based on the premise of a natural authority, the connection between one-time distinct entities is laterally direct.

This must stand as the most successful inversion of orders so far, but the victory is not a celebrated one, for the anxieties noted in previous chapters, the assertions and retreats from ontological independence along the conventional chain, are hardly quelled. These poems offer a disordered outline of self so new, malleable, and uncertain that, just as we saw in theory, they appear to push forward into an ontological unknown and then, in turn, to retreat back into the safety of essentialism. The expected erotic themes of the sonnets discussed here carry these assertions and retreats in the expected advances and hesitations of the sonnet speakers' pursuits of their beloved poetic subjects, so that eros provides a structure for the poet-speaker's self-examinations.

Obviously, the notion of a sonnet cycle as an 'erotic quest' would strike no reader as far-fetched. "Like an adventurous sea-farer am I," writes Michael Drayton (*Idea* 1.1), "Who hath some long and dangerous voyage beene, / And call'd to tell of his discoverie, / How far he sayl'd, what countries he had seene." Not without its obstacles, Drayton's speaker asks of this terrain: "And on what rocks in peril to be cast?," and answers: "Thus in my love, time calls me to relate / My tedious travels and oft-varying fate" (1. 1-4, 12, 13-14). But through the erotic premise of the voyage, the sonneteer traverses a geography of selfhood. For Drayton soon disregards the nautical figure and jumps headlong into a disconcerting and puzzled quest which begins in the dissolution of the speaker's individual integrity: "'Save me', I cry, you sigh me out a No; / Must woe and I have nought but No and Aye? / No I am I, if I no more can have" (4.8-10). In the following, similar confusions lead to an exploration, a journey through an 'other nature' where extra-natural connections between entities are

possible, where one person discovers her indistinctness, where she blurs with another person, where persons blur with non-persons (such as the poet-speaker and the poem), and reality blurs with fiction.

A particularly accessible example is Spenser's re-fashioning of natural barriers through his use of autobiography which dissolves the distinction between Spenser the empirical author and his fictional poetic speaker. Like the empirical Spenser, the *Amoretti* speaker loves a woman named Elizabeth, has a mother and a queen by the same name, as well as a friend Lodowick, and it just so happens is working on an epic poem about a faery queene (Johnson 18). According to William C. Johnson, these connections suggest an "analogue" between Spenser and his poetic voice, and

point to the metafictional nature of Spenser's canon, in which the same [speaker] speaks out at various times, sometimes commenting on other of 'his' works, sometimes drawing in terminology, characters, even concerns, of one work into another, and always suggesting the interconnectiveness of the imaginative, poet-created world with the empirical, God-created one. In another sense, the "realistic" situation depicted in Spenser's sequence, whereby the empirical Spenser presumably relates his experiences in courtship, gives this sequence the kind of autobiographical authority one finds analogous to Dante writing of Beatrice, to Petrarch and Laura, Ronsard and Hélène, Sidney and Stella, and to all those hosts of other sonnet lovers and their ladies. The process of creating such an auto-graph suggests another analogy—that of the empirical poet with his fictional self. (18-19)

Rather than rely on Johnson's observations as analogues (or take the *Amoretti* at its word that it offers a literal transliteration of Spenser's life), which leave room for inference about Spenser-the-man and his social and personal habits but not much more, I note that the metafictional nature of the work, its reduction of barriers between poet-created world and the empirical God-created one, actually points to disorienting coherences between the reality of the signified and the fiction of the sign. If Spenser's hints of autobiography offer instances of his social state (and social self-fashioning), in a congruent metaphysical sense they exemplify further his ontological poetics in their use of a mimetic art to replace the reality it purportedly imitates.

Throughout the dissertation I have referred to Patricia Parker's identification of the preposterous, a feature of Elizabethan social and artistic rhetoric, a cultural-linguistic norm, exemplified by the very ontological quest embarked on in this chapter. Such "deformations of order," she claims, "need to be remarked against the background of emergent discourses of order in an age whose increasing neoclassicism and neo-Aristotelianism were intimately related to the articulation of new structures of social order and power" (213). The question I hinted at in my introduction regarding what ideological currents underlay the socio-political observations made by new historicists may be broached again here. For in these poems I find an emergent discourse, complete with its own, varied deformations of order, which articulates new conceptual structures that reorient *metaphysical* powers, and which I suggest may undergird the development of new socio-political structures. I mention this to reiterate that these ontological observations are not entirely remote from the political matters that occupy so much of our critical energy at present, though my purpose here is not to devote attention to this association. It is instead to identify the way in which poetic language can

express new structures of order in the first place, structures making possible previously unseen notions of that primary status of the political citizen, the human being.

I have claimed that the poetic subject, her or his relationship with the poet, and the occasion of the sonnet form provide the geography on which the poet maps the self, and in the present section I will allow poetic figures, diction, and structures employed in these works to provide support. The ontological language of English sonnet cycles is rich and varied but I will limit myself to a few of its significant examples. These include the use of material things as signs of interior, personal qualities and of ontological functions. Eyes and hearts, for example, couple with other body parts and metonymically capture the whole of which they are parts. The often discordant relationships among these organs in a cycle's poetic speaker figure instabilities only made worse by the connection between the organs of speaker and subject, say, the eye of one and the heart of the other. Shaking the same barriers, the use of the mirror conceit calls attention to the blurring of the representational reflection and the person it reflects, just as the poem itself will at times become indistinct from its subject matter and its maker. Finally, the juxtaposition of *shadow* and *substance* offers a metaphorical rendering of the scholastic distinction between accidental and substantial forms. Within its rote philosophical language, philosophical conceptions, rather, find a footing in the Elizabethan mindset in the play of inessential and essential qualities of personhood. In all cases, contrasts—between material and immaterial, between organs of the body, between opposing qualities of self—are at once capitalized to both make assertions and expose uncertainties about special identity and the poet's, speaker's, or subject's ontological status.

Eyes, hearts, and especially the eye-heart combination act throughout Elizabethan literature as metaphors for varying faculties indicating internal and intimate qualities of the

person. Mental activities, for instance, were figured by the Elizabethan and Jacobean sense of sight. Recall Philip Sidney's sonnet 5: "It is most true, that eyes are formed to serve / The inward light" (1-2), which likely draws on Luke 11:34, where the eye works with an inward moral and decision making faculty: "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, then is thy whole body light: but if thine eye be evil, then thy body is dark." (Tyndale's translation.) In his *Five Plays Confuted*, Stephen Gosson treats sight as the pathway to the theater-goer's moral sense: "[V]ice is learned with beholding, sense is tickled, desire pricked" (192-93). One commentator has said that in the early modern outlook, "[s]ight was the most noble and certain sense but also the most corruptible and most corrupting—by a kind of necessary symmetry" (Clark 24). Sight may be corruptible because it is so easily deceived, but sight is only corrupting by virtue of its connection to something beyond or interior to itself, something like Sidney's "inward light" and its capacity for making decisions. The faculty that the eye connected to was often represented by the heart, itself a site of judgment, imagination, and also the intellect, as the *Sonnets* suggest when a "quest of thoughts" are the "tenants to the heart" (46.10). Using the heart to figure interior workings of thought, Tyndale translated the Vulgate's *pravitatem cordis* (Jer. 13:10), which literally means "the crookedness of the heart," as "the wicked ymaginacions of their awne heart." The King James version that followed also reads "the imagination of their heart."⁷²

By calling the imagination into moral question, the translation, much like the examples above, associates figures like the heart and capacities like thought with the characteristics (in this case moral characteristics) of the individual. According to David Summers' *The Judgment of Sense*, the imaginative and judicial facilities were understood as internal senses: "The internal senses performed judgments, which were acts of distinction, comparison, association,

and combination . . .” These functions of the mind he says “were all *faculties of soul*” (my emphasis, 27), or markers of one’s intimate qualities of individuality.⁷³ In Elizabethan poetry, the heart and eye may be used to figure a unified bipartite self: “where before hart lou'd and eyes did see, / In hart both sight and loue now coupled be” (A&S 88.12-13), or the eyes of the beloved may blur with the heart of the lover: “Fayre eyes, the myrroure of my mazed hart” (Am.7.1), implying a correspondence between poetic subject and poet that disregards ontological barriers.

The sonneteer could establish an immaterial connection with his beloved through the application of this scheme. Note that there is more than blazon at work when in A&S the speaker refers to his beloved as “Fair eyes, sweet lips, dear heart” (43.1), for these are no isolated parts of the whole but the whole itself: “Her eyes, her lips, her all” (52.3). Samuel Daniel refers to those whose “vntouch'd harts, with vnaffected eye, / Approach not to behold so great distresse” (3.5-6) as his speaker has beheld in his troubled experience loving Delia. Shifting from the naïve to the jaded subject he says of her: “I feare your eye hath turn'd your hart to flint” (29.14), and uses the figure to the same ends, to identify character traits and states of being in his subject, ends which may be applied to the poet as well. Sidney offers an example of self examination in “where before hart lou'd and eyes did see, / In hart both sight and loue now coupled be” (88.12-13) and, if in a more nefarious presentation, in Drayton’s *Idea 29*: “My heart should suffer for mine eyes’ offence” (4). In these examples, heart and eye function within the body in a corresponding fashion and allude to a unified person. But more often the use of the two body parts placed them in opposition to one another: “Mine eye and heart are at mortal war” (Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, 46.1) which allowed the trope to speak of an internal strife suffered within the poetic speaker. Dedicated “To Imagination,” Drayton’s

sonnet 33 repeats the belief that the sense of sight coupled with the mind to perform functions of the imagination. But in Drayton's handling eye and heart are beset with conflict.

Whilst yet mine eyes do surfeit with delight,
 My woeful heart, imprisoned in my breast,
 Wisheth to be transformèd to my sight,
 That it, like those, by looking might be blest;
 But whilst my eyes thus greedily do gaze,
 Finding their objects over-soon depart,
 These now the other's happiness do praise,
 Wishing themselves that they had been my heart,
 That eyes were heart, or that the heart were eyes,
 As covetous the other's use to have;
 But finding Nature their request denies,
 This to each other mutually they crave:
 That since the one cannot the other be,
 That eyes could think, or that my heart could see. (1-14)

Not unreasonably, the eye's and heart's mutual but insatiable craving to have what is unreachable to them recalls a lover's despair over the absence or rejection of his beloved. This lover's conflict takes into consideration no external phenomena and meditates only on his own disquiet. Yet the mutual functions of the lover's organs, here disordered, deserve attention. The eyes take in what the heart can preserve—most likely an image of the beloved, as Shakespeare will have it in sonnets 46 and 47 taken up below—so that the blind heart depends on the eyes for its external phenomena and the eyes on the heart to retain what they

have seen. Within the normal functioning of a single mind comprised of many cooperating parts the longing for one faculty to possess the abilities of another conjures the impression of their discordant working relationship. But Nature arbitrates the matter and restores order by reminding of natural limitations and the impossibility—the speaker momentarily assumes—of transcending them.

Bringing in both the beloved and his image, the image the speaker's eye and heart are charged to preserve, Shakespeare's sonnet 46 reads like a commentary on Drayton. But where Drayton's organs envied each other's abilities, Shakespeare's eye and heart insist on the one's superiority over the other, with each claiming some assumed right to the image of the young man.

Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war,
 How to divide the conquest of thy sight;
 Mine eye my heart thy picture's sight would bar,
 My heart mine eye the freedom of that right.
 My heart doth plead that thou in him dost lie,--
 (A closet never pierced with crystal eyes),
 But the defendant doth that plea deny,
 And says in him thy fair appearance lies. (1-8)

Reminiscent of a custody battle, the corrupting eye (of course the defendant) makes its claim to the young man's image based on its capacity for the apprehension of his fair appearance. Drawing the young man from the domain of sight and into itself, the closed closet of the heart must be "pierced" should the eyes wish to glimpse the young man again. Colin Burrow recalls that a closet in Elizabethan usage was a private chamber (472, n. 6), a "small room

used for conducting private or intimate work” (329, n. 1659). He cites Angel Day’s *The English Secretary* (1586): “The closet in every house, as it is a reposement of secrets, so it is only . . . at the owner’s, and no other’s commandment” (329, n. 1659). The closet of the heart then is the speaker’s private space to which the eye brings the image of the young friend, and the enmity between the two organs amounts to a potential crisis for the lover who relies on a mental picture of the youth during his apparently frequent absences. Thus he calls on his own moral and decision making faculties to settle the dispute:

To ‘cide this title is impannelled
 A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart;
 And by their verdict is determined
 The clear eye's moiety, and the dear heart's part:
 As thus; mine eye's due is thy outward part,
 And my heart's right, thy inward love of heart. (9-14)

The *panel* and *quest*, both judicial bodies (Burrow 472, n. 9, 10), brought in to decide the case reveal an effort to bring to the situation a harmony. But these legal authorities are really juries of one residing in the speaker and limited solely to his thoughts. Thus their verdict is in the heart’s favor: the moiety granted the eye is a smaller portion than the dear heart’s part (Burrow 472, n. 12), and likewise the eye’s outward part of the youth cannot be as valuable as his inner faculties granted the heart. The following sonnet 47 quickly reconciles the lopsided judgment:

Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took,
 And each doth good turns now unto the other.
 When that mine eye is famish'd for a look,

Or heart in love with sighs himself doth smother,
 With my love's picture then my eye doth feast,
 And to the painted banquet bids my heart.
 Another time mine eye is my heart's guest,
 And in his thoughts of love doth share a part. (1-8)

The treaty of alliance, or *league* (Burrow 474, n. 1), between eye and heart returns the imagination to a state of order and ensures access to the image of the young man: “So by thy picture [in the eye] or my love [heart], / Thyself away are present still with me” (9-10). At the same time, *league* suggests the distance that remains between these aspects of the speaker (Booth 210). The division within him persists in double-entendre. It recalls the previous attempts to return the mind to order, such as in the judicial hearing and the use of a chiasmic structure closing sonnet 46, in the repetition of *heart-part* (9, 11) and *part-heart* (13, 14). The various faculties of personhood more than suggest the speaker’s own internal division, a situation only made worse in his subsuming of the youth into himself, either in his eye or heart. The *Sonnets* will again employ both thematic and formal avenues to re-orient the speaker to a sound state of self but with no more success than one sees here. Whether presently at rest or once again restive, his discordant composition suggests more than his troubled erotic relationship with his poetic subject.

Also using a poetic scheme *Am*. 73 establishes a correspondence between the self of the speaker and that of his beloved:

Being my selfe captured here in care,
 My hart, whom none with servile bands can tye:
 but the fayre tresses of your golden hayre,

breaking his prison forth to you doth fly.

Lyke as a byrd that in ones hand doth spy

desired food, to it doth make his flight:

euen so my hart, that wont on your fayre eye

to feed his fill, flyes backe vnto your sight.

Doe you him take, and in your bosome bright,

gently encage, that he may be your thrall:

perhaps he there may learne with rare delight,

to sing your name and prayes ouer all.

That it hereafter may you not repent,

him lodging in your bosome to haue lent. (1-14)

The speaker and his subject are identified metonymically by figures like hart, hayre, eye, and sight. But more than the adaptation of conventional Petrarchan conceits, the features of person interact with one another in ways that permit the conspicuous confusion of their discriminate being. The beloved's hayre binds the lover's heart (2-3), which he breaks free from (4) but only to fly himself back into her sight, her fayre eye (7-8), and finally, to encage himself in her bosome, another figure for heart or self (9-10, 14). There is not simply a lateral connection here between entities not naturally so connected but one that places the hart of the speaker in some fashion of jeopardy. The problem of existential freedom and threat will become more and more apparent in this and following chapters, a matter taken up in Sidney's sonnet touching on similar themes:

Stella, thinke not that I by verse seeke fame,

Who seeke, who hope, who loue, who liue but thee;

Thine eyes my pride, thy lips mine history:
 If thou praise not, all other praise is shame.
 Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame
 A nest for my young praise in lawrell tree:
 In truth, I sweare I wish not there should be
 Graue in my epitaph a Poets name.
 Ne, if I would, could I iust title make,
 That any laud thereof to me should growe,
 Without my plumes from others wings I take:
 For nothing from my wit or will doth flow,
 Since all my words thy beauty doth endite,
 And Loue doth hold my hand, and makes me write. (A&S 90.1-14)

Where *Am. 73* employed the hart, the hayre, eyes, sight, and bosome, Sidney's poem extends the identity markers to the speaker's pride and personal history (3), his epitaph and "Poets name" (8), his title (9), his wit (12) and his words (13). His willingness to sacrifice them is a willingness to annihilate himself within his beloved. Unlike the *Amoretti* speaker who, comfortably "captured" within his beloved's hart "in care," sacrifices only his freedom, A&S 90 describes what is nothing less than an ontological suicide, a suicide *into* the beloved's bodily eyes and lips (3) and extending to her inner faculties these organs represent.

The possibility of such dangers surfaces throughout uses of diction and poetic figure that confuse the distinction between what is real and what is representation.

Vppon my selfe you best may finde the forme.
 Then leave your glasse, and gaze your selfe on mee,

That Mirroure shewes what powre is in your face:

To viewe your forme too much, may daunger bee (Daniel 29.8-11)

The connection between poet and subject is achieved by blurring selfe and forme. Elemental to it, the mimetic reflection, a reflection between selves, both provides the vehicle for ontological correspondence and alludes to its danger, a danger hinted at in the speaker's invitation that the beloved see herself not in her glasse but in him. In his person she finds hers through a curious mimesis that extends beyond the poem to alter reality—the confines of natural, real barriers—within an ontological confusion. Sonnet 14 of Drayton's *Ideas Mirroure* begins with the speaker gazing into the "glasse"⁷⁴ of reminiscence, recalling the disappointing pursuit of his beloved addressee. "Then in these teares," he says,

the mirrors of these eyes,

Thy fayrest youth and Beauty doe I see,

Imprinted in my teares by looking still on thee:

Thus midst a thousand woes, ten thousand joyes arise. (1, 5-8)

His tears, the salts of his bodily earth, serve to both reflect and contain himself (through his eyes) and his beloved subject, her ephemeral youth and substantial Beauty. Imprinted in his tears as Dante's essence was imprinted within him by God ("*in me si 'mprenti,*" *Para. XXVI.27*), her Beauty occupies a place of substance in the Platonic triad the Good, True, and Beautiful. And yet the reflective function of the tears makes the beloved—and the lover—insubstantial representations. The entire 'reality' of the octave takes place in a reflected fiction, a complication hardly even hinted at in the tension between woes and joyes (8) but which is brought out with more clarity in the tone of the following quatrain:

Yet in these joyes, the shadows of my good,
 In this fayre limned ground as white as snow,
 Paynted the blackest Image of my woe,
 With murdering hands inbrud in mine own blood.
 And in thys image his darke cloudy eyes,
 My life, my youth, my love, I here Anotamize. (9-14)

Thrown back against limning, painting, imprinting, reflecting, and imaging, the speaker's life, youth, and love are murdered in the process that dissects and divides in an attempt at self-examination. The mirror's reflection, just like the representational drawing, painting, printing, etc., "Anotamize" as well through their tendency to multiply their subject—from a single existence in reality to many existences throughout the multiplication of reflected images possible in the various disciplines of the mimetic arts, poetry included. Shakespeare will approach the same problem in his speaker's attempt to poetically preserve his young friend and subject without also marring his essence. His poetics is as disorienting as Drayton's where even the Platonic real, the *good*, is reduced to shadow (9), just as woe becomes its image (11) but an image given eyes (or being), which are found reflected in the image of the beloved (13). The reduction of a substance (the Good) to shadow and the reflections upon reflections pulling the reflected source farther from itself amount to a disintegration already seen in *A&S* 90, but the loss occurring through mimetic art casts doubts on the speaker's art form, if only implicitly suggested, and the problems it raises.

The more explicit involvement of the art form and the mimetic principles through which it is understood make up the foundation of Shakespeare's sonnet 24 in which the eye paints and the heart captures and contains what is painted by the eye.

Mine eye hath play'd the painter and hath stell'd,
 Thy beauty's form in table of my heart;
 My body is the frame wherein 'tis held,
 And perspective it is best painter's art. (1-4)

This image is of the poetic subject who appears to lose himself to the heart in which he is kept.

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. (5-8)

The young friend's eyes decorate the speaker's heart, within his bosom, which contains not just a simulacrum but his "true image pictured." The young man should in fact look to the painter's work stell'd on the table, or tablet, within his lover to see his truth, which is remarkable for the fact that the friend is often asked to 'see' himself as he really is but to do so through a mirror: for example, when urged to reproduce his beauty: "Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest / Now is the time that face should form another" (3.1-2); when the friend's beauty becomes too difficult to convey in poetry: "Look in your glass and there appears a face / That over-goes my blunt invention quite" (103.6-7); and when the youth begins to age: "Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear . . . // The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show" (77.1, 5). Though the mirror image offers an accurate semblance of the young man, just as it does the speaker: "my glass shows me myself indeed" (62.9), his imprint on the heart must lack mirror precision and reflect only as a glass darkly. But this is not his presentation of it. Here as in Drayton's sonnet 14 the poetic subject will somehow

find his self, his true self, representationally imaged there, so that his reality and the poetic fiction based on it are ultimately confused.

Noted previously, the shadow-substance poetic figure was also potent with ontological expression. Stephen Booth summed the significance of the metaphor and the belief system it reflected in the following way:

[W]hat we ordinarily take for reality is not reality; the particulars we perceive are only *shadows* (images, reflections) of the *substance* (ideas, forms) manifested in, and distorted by, the dross of physicality. Each particular thing, each shadow, has something of reality, i.e. something of the form it approximates, but the particulars we perceive are impermanent and always changing, while reality is unchanging, *constant*. (224)

Booth's summary offers a lead-in to the poetic figure but does not expand on its ambivalence. Katherine Duncan-Jones notes how *shadows* may suggest "various kinds of simulacra," synonymous with portraits, actors, and also ghosts (216). Pictures and plays, like poems, are easily acceptable as reflections of what they represent. But in Drayton's "O Sweetest Shadow, how thou serv'st my turne" (13.9) the sense of ghost appears as the human soul, something more akin to Booth's definition of substance as the constant forms or ideas. Moreover, *substance* often appears in poetic language completely abstracted from its Platonic roots and refers to the "dross of physicality," the material substances that cut light and cast actual shadows. That the terms themselves were not only diverse but easily contradictory in meaning may make for imprecise analysis of their use, but at the same time the ambivalence attending them only abets the richness of their ontological reference and the particular degree to which they capture the undercurrents of confusion in which they are used.

Commonly shadow-substance provides a poetic frame for elevation of the beloved's ontological status to unnatural heights. In the case of Spenser's *Amoretti* 35: "All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me, / and all their showes but shadowes sauing she" (13-14). Making the beloved the crux of what is real offers an exemplary instance of the preposterous, the inversion of norms appearing in the elevation of the human effect over her natural causes in the world. Providing the foundation of Shakespeare's sonnet 53, the same distortion also takes on artistic resonances:

What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since every one, hath every one, one shade,
And you but one, can every shadow lend. (1-4)

Instead of making his young friend the Christ-like light of the world, he is the solid object on which that light shines and from which the shadows of many others are cast. As with the *Amoretti* subject, the *Sonnets'* friend manages to reverse norms of causal dependence; he is no effect of the world but its cause. Like everything else, he has but one shade (a synonym of insubstantial shadows, but also of souls, the purportedly "constant" [14] feature of personhood), but the unique shadow he casts accounts for the souls of others beyond himself. The play between shadow and substance in this use suggests the distinction between sign and signified, which Booth recalls in *Lucrece* where "this sad shadow" (1457) refers to Hecuba's portrait. When in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Proteus cannot have his beloved Silvia, he asks for her portrait instead:

Madam, if your heart be so obdurate,
Vouchsafe me yet your picture for my love,

The picture that is hanging in your chamber;
 To that I'll speak, to that I'll sigh and weep:
 For since the substance of your perfect self
 Is else devoted, I am but a shadow;
 And to your shadow will I make true love.

Much like a silhouette made by the division of light around a substance, *shade* and *counterfeit* appear synonymously in this context, along with portrait, actor, representation, and also shadow. Proteus' masturbatory satisfaction with making love to a simulacrum reminds us of his own shape-shifting tendencies, while Silvia's response to his request accents the substance of her character:

I am very loath to be your idol, sir;
 But since your falsehood shall become you well
 To worship shadows and adore false shapes,
 Send to me in the morning and I'll send it:
 And so, good rest. (4.2.1754-1769)

If Shakespeare understood the status of the shadow as not the "substance" of one's "perfect self" but the picture of that self, and thus, a falsehood and false shape, then the implications of sonnet 53 should not be difficult to glean, especially as the ante is upped in the following lines:

Speak of the spring, and foison of the year,
 The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
 The other as your bounty doth appear;
 And you in every blessed shape we know. (9-12)

The reality that aestheticians as close to home as Philip Sidney took to be the source of all pictures takes the secondary role of the image. The beauty of spring, or the products of natural generation, and the vernal bounty, or generation itself, become not only the young friend's picture but his causal effects. A similar inversion occurs in the second quatrain:

Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
 Is poorly imitated after you;
 On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
 And you in Grecian tires are painted new . . . (5-8)

The mythological Helen and Adonis, sources of conventional erotic comparisons, derive their worth as imitations of the friend. The arsy-versy use of poetic conceit upsets the very same artificial nature that elevated poetic predecessors (like Virgil) and convention (like rhyme) to a height thought to be above artifice.⁷⁵ Sonnet 53's opening question, "What is your substance, whereof are you made, / That millions of strange shadows on you tend?," with its shadows that doubled for portraits, actors, and representations, identifies the subject and friend as the exemplar on which they tend, "wait upon, [or] follow" (Duncan-Jones 216). Again, the subject becomes a source of nature as a referent for all representations.

As he so often does, the speaker switches tone at the couplet, a switch that here returns us to more sober metaphysical reflection: "In all external grace you have some part, / But you like none, none you, for constant heart" (13-14). Hardly radical, the youth having some part in external grace, even *all* external grace, may repeat the commonplace that the human person acts as a microcosm of the macrocosmic whole. And the final suggestion that the speaker's observations are simply motivated by love attempts to revert the previous claims to aggrandizements, mere exaggerated displays of affection. Perhaps because of this

trivializing conclusion Duncan-Jones locates the poem's significance in its Neoplatonic praise of the youth's moral excellence (216). Yet I read the couplet as an instance of backtracking in the manner of Sidney's *Apology*, on the one hand forwarding a self-assertive agenda that dismantles conceptual limits, and then prudently retreating from it.

Although in no way as rich in allusion as any of the *Sonnets*, the anonymous example of the shadow-substance frame offered in chapter six one may now see takes on less conventional resonances. Here is the 1596 poem in full:

I heard a noise and wished for a sight,
 I looked for life and did a shadow see
 Whose substance was the sum of my delight,
 Which came unseen, and so did go from me.
 Yet hath conceit persuaded my content
 There was a substance where the shadow went.

I did not play Narcissus in conceit,
 I did not see my shadow in a spring;
 I know mine eyes were dimmed with no deceit,
 I saw the shadow of some worthy thing:
 For, as I saw the shadow glancing by,
 I had a glimpse of something in mine eye.

But what it was, alas, I cannot tell,
 Because of it I had no perfect view;

But as it was, by guess, I wish it well

And will until I see the same anew.

Shadow, or she, or both, or choose you whither:

Blest be the thing that brought the shadow hither! (Anonymous, 112)

The author does not explicitly confuse the thing that brought about the shadow with the shadow itself, but throughout the piece shifts its focus in turn from substantial to accidental features. On the one hand, the shadow “glancing by” serves to give the speaker the “glimpse” of something real, while on the other, the insubstantial shadow is repeatedly referred to as its own entity, something with its own thingness throughout the piece. The recurring juxtaposition between conceit and content (5-6, 7-10) recalls the use of *shadow* to describe artistic representations and gives the piece the air of meta-poetic commentary. It is because of the conceit (of which the shadow-substance figure is a kind) that the poem’s content has been written, because of the flashing glimpse, not unlike a moment of inspiration, that the speaker finds the occasion to write. And so it is unsurprising when he grants the shadow its own personhood by wishing it well, elevating the shadow to the content and substance of the piece.

It is perhaps not remarkable that this poem lacks the urgency of the others, since we cannot expect all poets of the era to have been similarly conscious and similarly preoccupied, at least not without such preoccupations having become obvious to us long ago. According to the works exhibited here Žižek’s abyss is the ontological unknown built on “structures” (Parker) of a still uncertain architecture. The poetics implicit within these poems, figured in metonymic body parts and organs, mirror reflections, and other representations, offers an early indication of indeterminateness expressed through the conspicuous and disorienting

confusions of persons, non-persons, and the inversions of semiotic barriers once firmly occupied by the real and its representation.

Chapter 8: The Muse Position

Quite likely descended from the epic invocations, what I am calling the Muse position, the initial poems of sonnet cycles, serves a purpose similar to that of its ancient predecessor. As I have mentioned these poems need not feature the actual Muse (though some do) to perform her function. In their inversions of norms and conventions and in the curious portrayal of both the poet-speaker and his craft, they reflect the ontological uncertainties featured in the previous chapter. And yet nowhere does an initial group of sonnets offer an explicit ontological claim. Instead they toy with poetics, and do so advance an approach that redistributes inspirational powers. In each example, the author problematizes the assumed source of artistic craft, placing it within neither a mythological Muse, nor a Christian divinity, nor a philosophical personification (such as Natura), but within the personal territory of himself and/or his craft. The take on poetry alluded to in these sonnets draws attention to commonly recognized poetic inspirers, not unlike ontological dependencies. Such an inspirer may be the beloved poetic subject, according to Petrarchan tradition, which here is subverted through the use of various schemes of self-reflection that point a reader back to the poet.

The dedication of Daniel's *Delia* offers rich examples. He addresses his patroness,⁷⁶ the Countess of Pembroke, saying that it was only because of a "greedie Printer" who published "to the world" some of his poems, his "secrets," and "vncorrected" ones at that, that he even shares his completed *Delia* with her. He endears himself to Pembroke: "for my selfe, . . . I am thrust out into the worlde, and . . . my vnboldened Muse, is forced to appeare so rawly in publique . . ." The unauthorized publication does not stop at violating his social privacy but assaults his most interior domain: "I rather desired to keep in the private passions

of my youth, from the multitude,” he claims, “as things vttered to myself, and consecrated to silence . . .” Daniel suggests that these poems are not even verses meant to be read by a silent audience, as Oppenheimer might note, but they are his private meditations—of and *to* himself. He is his own self reflecting audience. Troubled by the Printer’s release of his uncorrected work, he has offered emendations that appear before his dedication to Pembroke. They include corrected misspellings and the rectification of omitted modifiers, such as “her troubled brow” for “her brow” of sonnet 41. There is nothing of any significance to theme or narrative, leaving the suggestion that what is really at stake in the Printer’s fraudulent publication is the exposure of its author. Or rather, since Daniel is clearly behind the legitimate publication of *Delia*, what is at stake is an understanding of the sonnet cycle as an expression of himself.

Delia’s opening sonnet portrays itself and the sequence that follows as a catalogue of the speaker’s most interior reflections. One cannot deny that on the surface Delia—or her beautie (1)—acts as an inspirer of sonnet 1. Without her “no Censors eye these lines suruaide, / Nor grauer browes had iudg’d my Muse so vaine” (7.5-6). But this example of the Petrarchan convention making the poetic subject the source of the poetic cycle follows Petrarch in a less recognized Petrarchan fashion. For Petrarch actually does not mention Laura until his sonnet 3: “For your eyes, lady, held me fast” (4). She is preceded by a contemplation on the speaker’s own emotional state and the problems he has encountered within his erotic affections for her, as if emotion is the inspirer and the source of the emotion (the beloved) an afterthought. Daniel follows suit: “O had she not beene faire, and thus vnkinde, / My Muse had slept, and none had knowne my minde” (6.13-14). It is not simply Delia’s beauty that inspires so much as the speaker’s response to her unkindness. Elaborating

on the matter, the idiom *Muse* provides a synonym for his minde, his interior mental and creative faculties, which, like eyes and hearts, are metonyms for himself. In fact, the use of figure draws attention from subject and poetic forebears and to the speaker throughout the poem.

Heere I vnclaspe the booke of my charg'd soule,

Where I have cast th'accounts of all my care:

Heere have I summ'd my sighes, heere I enroule

Howe they were spent for thee; Looke what they are. (1.5-8)

Curiously, what the speaker presents his beloved is not simply a testimony of his affection but a ledger, an itemization of his “charg’d soule” which offers an account for his cares and sighs, his interior torments and their expression. “Looke on the deere expences of my youth,” he continues, “And crosse my cares ere greater summes arise” (9, 12). The use of financial vocabulary to describe erotic affection is unlikely and disorienting, stealing strength from Delia’s beauty as an inspirer and reappointing it to the speaker. We are left not as curious about the woman who is presumed to be wooed by the soul of a book-keeper as we are about the speaker who would woo in such a manner. The move affords the poet-speaker some share in the status of the poetic subject, managing to blur the distinction between the two. Thus my claim above finds traction. The *Delia* speaker’s opening preoccupation with the printer’s violation of his trust reveals his sonnets as his private self-examinations and -explorations, his self-indulgences that he calls “the Posts of my desire” (4.1) and “These lines I use, t’unburthen mine owne hart” (13).

Just as it will in the cycles of other sonneteers, self examination through poetic language results in *Delia* in interior conflict, specifically a mental conflict referred to

explicitly through the use of *thought* and *mind*. The *Delia* speaker's ongoing inquiry he calls his "thoughts-maze," his "confusion tending" (17.2), and one cannot help but wonder if self-examination is a boon or a hindrance to his effort. "My thoughts like houndes," he says, "pursue me to my death" (5.12). The reference to *thought* as separate from *me* both divides and places in a state of conflict an individual person. Such combative division in Daniel's handling results in existential threat: "Those [thoughts] that I fostred of mine owne accord, / Are made by her to murther thus their Lord" (5.13-14). The defeating tone of the entire *Delia* sequence—and it is the most dreary and defeating of all sonnet cycles in English—points not only to the futility of his love pursuit, but through that futility to the speaker's apparently failed attempts to determine through the nature of an indeterminate being.

Probably because the poem finds employment as the tool of self analysis, the inspirer switches from *Delia*—or rather, the poet's response to her cruelty—in sonnet 1 to the poetic craft in sonnet 2:

Goe wailing verse, the infants of my loue,
 Minerua-like, brought foorth without a Mother:
 Present the image of the cares I proue,
 Witnes your Fathers grieffe exceedes all other.
 Sigh out a story of her cruell deedes,
 With interrupted accents of dispayre:
 A Monument that whosoeuer reedes,
 May iustly praise, and blame my loueles Faire.
 Say her disdain hath dryed vp my blood,
 And starued you, in succours still denying:

Presse to her eyes, importune me some good;
 Waken her sleeping pittie with your crying.
 Knock at that hard hart, beg till you have moou'd her;
 And tell th'vncind, how deerely I haue lou'd her. (2.1-14)

Though she is still the general subject of discussion, Delia's importance takes a backseat to the poem that the speaker gives agency over her. The poem is to "Goe," "Present," "Witnes," "Sigh," "Say," "Presse," and "Waken." It is the actor and she the object of the action. The imperatives recall the instructions given the Muse in ancient invocations, such as *Iliad* book 1: "Wrath, goddess, sing . . ." and *Odyssey* 1's "Tell me, Muse . . ." Beneath what reads like a petition to her, the Muse is actually made the charge of the poet, a subtle reversal of roles that momentarily both afforded him agency over his craft and an assertion of his professional identity.

The privileged place Daniel affords his sonnet through its invocation is bolstered by his comparison of it to the mythic Minerva. The Latin Minerva became commonly associated with the Greek Athena and through her with war. But prior to her Greek syncretism she was the Old Latin *Menerwa*, a deity of the arts and the intellect, associations Minerva never wholly lost and that left her Muse-like in her own right. Like *Minerva*, the word *muse* is believed to descend from the Indo-European root *mens* (Nancy 1), which places both deities within the domain of what we moderns call the mind. Daniel does in fact associate "Muse" and "mind" (6.14) with both serving as the sign of his poetic motivations and ingenuity. And though Minerva is "Motherless," she shares with her cousin a father figure, Jupiter, the Latinization of Zeus and father of the Muses. I do not mean to apply all of this to Daniel's intentions, but I want to illustrate the potential significance of his comparison of his poem to

Minerva. That the poem is “Motherless” suggests that it is inspired by no Muse or female beloved, or a Mother Natura for that matter. These sources are disregarded by the speaker when he gives the poem such extra-ordinary agency. His poem goes beyond the ordinary not simply because of the intimacy by which it is the catalogue of his soule, not because it offers the means by which Delia may actually know him, but also because his poem is how she may know herself. Sonnet 1 asks Delia to “Looke on the deere expences of my youth, / And see how iust I reckon with thyne eyes: / Examine well thy beautie with my trueth” (9-11). Once again, like Drayton’s sonnet 14 confusion of representation and reality through a blurring of persons, this passage inverts the convention that made the poem, and artistic representation in general, an untrue facsimile of the real beauty it was supposedly only capable of imitating. In the Platonic view, true beauty was natural but existing in the nature of the immaterial forms, the über-nature in Plato’s cosmology that was sum and source of all other conceptions of the cosmos. But here the poet’s close association of these diametrically opposed phenomena subverts the distinction between reality and mimesis and overlooks entirely any nature of ideals that would place the poem at so many unbridgeable removes from what it represents. Whether intentional or not, the high status given the poem couples with the uncertain state of human being and offers insight into emerging, unconventional ontologies noted throughout these sonnet sequences.

Drawing on such uncertainties, one instance in the opening poems of Michael Drayton’s *Idea* begins: “Nothing but no and I, and I and no,” and continues,

I say, you love, you peule me out a no:

I say, I die, you eccho me with I:

Save mee I crie, you sigh me out a no;

Must woe and I, have naught but no and I?

No I, am I, if I no more can have . . . (4. 1, 6-10)

The homonym *I* and *aye* (or *yes*) masks passages on sexual permission and refusal while the interplay between *aye* and *no* generates a degree of sexual tension in which the speaker's desire and his identity mingle: "No I, am I, if I no more can have."

Answer no more, with silence make reply,

And let me take myself what I do crave,

Let no and I, with I and you be so:

Then answer no and I, and I and no. (13-14)

Another mingling is found in the overuse of *I*, which confuses pronominal referents, softening the distinction between lover and beloved, between the poetic speaker and the poetic subject. "Give me my selfe, and take your selfe againe" (7. 9), he states with more clarity, "Since you one were, I never since was one, / Since you in me, myself since out of me" (3-4). The sentiment that the lover is nothing without the beloved will not strike anyone as anything but cliché, and yet the depth of the speaker's meditations are remarkable for their confusion of essentialist and inessentialist views of the self. Drayton does not flaunt convention so much as he exhibits a new possibility in conceiving human personhood, a possibility he does not embrace but approaches with considerable caution. Underneath each illustration of a protean self there lies an attachment to the stable *I*. The speaker may confuse himself with both the beloved and his desire for her, but each use of *I* and *my selfe* leaves the impression that he believes he refers to something substantial: "You doe bewitch me, O that I could flie,/ From my selfe to you, or from your owne selfe I" (13-14). His exploration of and

resistance to his own potential impermanence allows him to orient himself through the dubious north stars of his subject matter and his erotic pursuit.

Drayton has offered an indication that this might be the case in his opening, fourteen-line dedication “To the Reader of these Sonnets.” The air he summons in this dedicatory sonnet unhesitatingly turns his creative attention to himself:

Into these loves, who but for passion looks,
 At this first sight here let him lay them by,
 And seeke else-where, in turning other books,
 Which better may his labor satisfie.
 No farre-fetch'd sigh shall ever wound my breast,
 Love from mine eye a tear shall never wring,
 Nor in *ah-meas* my whining Sonnets drest,
 (A libertine) fantastickly I sing:
 My verse is the true image of my mind,
 Ever in motion, still desiring change;
 And as thus, to varietie inclin'd,
 So in all humors sportively I range:
 My muse is rightly of the English straine,
 That cannot long one fashion intertaine. (1-14)

Drayton’s saucy dedication seems to say that if you are looking for the conventional, “whyning” (7) love poem—including ‘sighs’ etc., probably a direct reference to Dante and Petrarch—then you will be better off “turning others books” (3). These sonnets are the speaker’s beloved: “Into *these loves*, who but for passion looks” (my emphasis, 1), and in

them he writes a libertine's song that is, importantly, inspired by himself. His "muse" is no external source but the "true image" of his own mind (9). Self-inspired and self-absorbed, his sonnets promise to cross conventional lines ("in the "English straine, / That cannot long one fashion entertaine" [13-14]) and to make their maker from their subject matter.

In a similar fashion Spenser's *Amoretti* develops a view of poetry built on a foundation of its own artifice. Note how *Am.* 1 is structured in such a way that it reads like an invocation to the techniques and materials of the speaker-poet's craft:

Happy ye leaues when as those lilly hands,
 which hold my life in their dead doing might
 shall handle you and hold in loues soft bands,
 lyke captiues trembling at the victors sight.
 And happy lines, on which with starry light,
 those lamping eyes will deigne sometimes to look
 and reade the sorrowes of my dying spright,
 written with teares in harts close bleeding book.
 And happy rymes bath'd in the sacred brooke,
 of *Helicon* whence she deriued is,
 when ye behold that Angels blessed looke,
 my soules long lacked foode, my heauens blis.
 Leaues, lines, and rymes, seeke her to please alone,
 whom if ye please, I care for other none. (1-14)

The first invocational nod is to the leaves of paper on which the lines are composed. "Lines" probably include written or printed lines on the page and the numbered and metrical poetic

line. Together with the sonic contrivance of rhyme, these material and formal means of the poem's presentation occupy the territory that would otherwise be held by the Muse. Another way to see it is that the Muse has not been so much replaced as she has taken a new and modern shape in Spenser's handling. The substance and source of this poetic cycle is the craft itself. The repetition of "leaues, lines, and rymes" at line 14 merely re-signaling the many determining factors that contribute to the formation of a work of art which must include the technology by which the work is executed. Spenser's nod to "Helicon" (10) not only exhibits the fashionable fetishization of antiquity but associates the content of *Amoretti* 1 intimately with a theoretical and definitive conception of the poetic craft. Poetry is the product of its own *techne*. The incestuous proposition repeats favorably Aristotle's admonition against usury on the very same grounds, that usury defies nature by enabling money to beget money of which it is too like in kind for proper generation.⁷⁷ For Spenser there is no outside source petitioned, no invocation of *natura* or *genuflection* to mimetic theories still popular at the time. There is the poet, the subject, and the craft, the lattermost establishing the poetic structure for the presentation of both of the former.

But the privilege given both poet and poem is questioned within the dialog of sonnet 75. Between the poet-speaker and his subject, the conversation suggests an ambivalence toward the powers of poetic artifice:

One day I wrote her name vpon the strand,
 but came the waues and washed it away:
 agayne I wrote it with a second hand,
 but came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray.
 Vayne man, sayd she, that doest in vaine assay,

a mortall thing so to immortalize,
 for I my selue shall lyke to this decay,
 and eek my name bee wyped out lykewize.

Not so, (quod I) let baser things deuize,
 to dy in dust, but you shall liue by fame:
 my verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
 and in the heuens wryte your glorious name.

Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,
 our loue shall liue, and later life renew. (1-14)

The sonnet employs the by this time highly conventional nature-versus-art duality for as yet unconventional ends.⁷⁸ The not unexpected use of poetry to resist the passage of time and to thwart decay makes of nature the adversary of the speaker-poet. Time's passing finds its sign in the waves and tides that outdo the poet's means of preservation. One might read the written name as a representation of the beloved's person and the passage itself a commentary on the author's craft. The speaker promises that he will eternize her and thus write her glorious name in the heavens, which lie above time's claim to the strand, as well as to paper and pen, lines and rhymes.

One must wonder, though, why he has chosen such a defeating medium to begin his preservation of her. Why attempt to preserve her name on the beach, the very domain of nature's ever shifting tides that threaten anything within their reach? The subject herself offers the voice of common sense. As a mortal and time bound being, she wishes to remain unpreserved. She opts for death (for "decay") and for the total annihilation (the "wype out") of both her person and its nominal part. Elizabeth, the beloved, resists not only her suitor's

obviously failed strategy but also the metonymic nature of the poem that substitutes her whole personhood for her name, or alternatively, her “vertues.” These must be among her most important qualities but as a metonymic sign they omit the total picture of her complexity. She resists reference to herself as a name, her virtues, and the fame by which she may live, if only in part, forever. Beyond identifying herself as *I* she reverts to philosophical generalities calling herself *a mortal thing*, but to no avail. She loses the debate, the speaker denies her request, and he removes her person to the confines of his written representation of her. (And for this reason we not only have the poem today but also know, against her wishes, her name of Elizabeth Boyle.) At the same time, *Am. 75* offers a well thought out counter to the assertions of the cycle’s opening. Poetry’s powers bring about their own dangers. As the sonnet gives the speaker an ability to possess his subject’s person it jeopardizes her singular integrity. This problem highlights similar implications found in the sequences of the other Elizabethans, where a one-time singular human being may lose herself in her imbrication not only with the poetic product but in a blurring of the speaker’s and subject’s persons.

Sidney’s opening sonnet contributes to his positions on poetic inspiration spelled out in the *Apology*. There he removes inspiration to the poetic product where it is on the one hand divine-like and on the other still man-made (84, 107). But in the initial musings of his sonnet 1, Sidney turns his attention inward, locating the source of his craft within his own mental capacities:

Louing in trueth, and fayne in verse my loue to show,
 That she, deare Shee, might take som pleasure of my paine,
 Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
 Knowledge might pittie winne, and pity grace obtaine,

I sought fit wordes to paint the blackest face of woe;
 Studying inuentions fine, her wits to entertaine,
 Oft turning others leaues, to see if thence would flow
 Some fresh and fruitfull showers vpon my sun-burnd brain.
 But words came halting forth, wanting Inuentions stay;
 Inuention, Natures childe, fledde step-dame Studies blowes;
 And others feet still seemde but strangers in my way.
 Thus, great with childe to speak, and helplesse in my throwes,
 Biting my trewand pen, beating myselve for spite,
 Fool, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart, and write. (*Astrophil and Stella*
 [A&S], 1.1-14)

If the passing reference to Helicon in *Am.* 1 was enough to alert the reader to the poem's critical self-commentary, the presence of the Muse here, a speaking Muse at that, should be worthy of equal attention. Sidney's saucy and disparaging Muse, referring with such force to her charge as *Fool*, is Homeric in temper. I am thinking here of the Muses of *Iliad* book 2 who are challenged to a singing competition by the talented Thamyris and who respond by robbing him of his ability to sing, blinding him, and crippling the hand with which he played his lyre.⁷⁹ In its own right, this is an ontological event as it forces Thamyris through an identity transformation from renowned poet to blind beggar. In the same way, Sidney's Muse transforms his speaker into his own source of poetry: "looke in thy heart, and write," and doing so turns him away from "others leaues" and "others feet," the humanistic mode of imitating the content and form of past, established poets ("feet" most likely referring to formal strategy metonymically through a reference to metrical feet). The Muse's instruction

is all the more convincing since it includes the only present-tense action verbs (*looke* and *write*) in a sonnet that seems to tread water on –ing verbs, which lack the substance of her sharp command. Reverting him from “Studies blowes” (10) and to his invention residing within his own Nature, the Muse makes the speaker’s personhood—also found in her use of *heart*—his self-reflexive artistic source.

I said that the internalization of poetry’s source contributes to Sidney’s portrayal of poetic inspiration in the *Apology* where it does not precede but results from the effect of poetic language, from its musical qualities that themselves give the poet the inspired feeling. Locating the source of his craft within himself instead would trouble this proposition if it were not for the double-entendre found in the closing line sonnet 1. The speaker is told to look into his heart and write but the homophonic impression of *heart* allows him to look either into his self or to find his source in his *art*. In the latter respect, Sidney has taken the stance of Spenser whose implicit invocation to the tools of his poet’s trade had *techne beget techne, artifice beget artifice*. But the possibility of double-entendre also permits the inference of some ambivalence on the part of Sidney’s poetics. His Muse, for instance, may embody the might of Homer’s Muse who so demoralized Thamyris. Yet in reverting inspiration back to the poet, Sidney’s Muse has curiously rendered her own office as inspirer and figurative source of poetry obsolete. In this light, the *A&S* Muse also resembles Ovid’s Muse, the all but helpless victim of Pyrenneus’ attempted rape. She is trapped within the narrative into which Ovid has written her, the story she should have inspired from without. Likewise removed from her exterior authority, Sidney’s self-negating Muse can only inspire from within the imaginative faculties of the poet or from her place inside the poetic product, at line 14.

In addition to these ambiguities we learn that the speaker “sought” fit words to convince Stella of his love, but wrongly sought them in the work of poetic predecessors so that his native invention “fled” the study of poetry. The contrasting actions of seeking and fleeing, the one moving forward and the other losing the gained ground, do not simply leave the speaker within the stasis suggested by the abundant but hardly progressive use of *-ing* verbs. Instead the push and returning pull of seeking and fleeing points to the speaker’s creative conflicts that make up most of the poem’s thematic basis: Where does poetry come from: my subject, my peers or predecessors, my divine Muse, myself, or my poem?

Daniel more than the others leans on the convention of the erotic quest to embark also on a journey of intimate and personal scope, while Drayton forthrightly engages existential puzzles. Spenser invokes his craft and then suggests poetry’s potential dangers to the personhood of the subject, and as he does in the *Apology*, the poet Sidney asserts a humanized art form but not without equivocating over who or what is the actual source of his craft. Not unlike the inversions of ontological order noted in the previous chapter, the poet’s suggestion of himself as source of his craft subverts much convention and calls self-reflective attention to poet and poem.

Chapter 9: The *Sonnets*' Muse

The Shakespearean *Sonnets* begin famously with the speaker's call for the procreation of his beloved young friend and poetic subject: "From fairest creatures we desire *increase*" (my emphasis, 1. 1). As it is used in Erasmus' "increase of issue" (*Epistle to persuade a young gentleman to Marriage*, qtd. in Hawkes, 2000, 349), the term *increase* refers to sexual procreation. Thus in the opening sonnet, biological procreation takes over in the space we have previously seen reserved for statements on verse, so that commentary on the artifice of poetry finds itself replaced by a call for natural production in the form of procreative sex. The inversion of norms is itself reversed at sonnet 15 where the speaker more conventionally offers his verse as a means of preservation: "As [Time] takes from you, I engraft you new" (15.14), *engraft* conjuring an impression both botanical and literary. His own tough sell, the speaker resolves in the following sonnet that writing is "barren" (16.4) and returns to his argument for biological preservation. But note the language adopted: "To give yourself away keeps your self still, / And you must live drawn by your own sweet skill" (13-14), where natural sex, and the marriage by which the young man will 'give himself away', takes on an artificial coloring through the use of "draw" and "skill." "But were some child of yours alive that time, / You should live twice, in it and in my rhyme" (17.13-14) continues the mixture of natural and artificial allusions until poetry is ultimately settled on in sonnet 18: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this [sonnet], and this gives life to thee" (13-14).

Yet the turn to an emphasis on a poetic means of production is no idle rectification of the *Sonnets*' disordered opening. Rather, just as the opening call for biological over poetic increase undermines the nature of convention, the turn from sexual procreation to artificial

generation around sonnet 15 inverts the primacy of nature over artifice. The *Sonnets* establish a brief series of inversions that undermine prominent conceptions of order. Nature's primacy is actually acknowledged throughout these opening poems by way of their numerous references to time, which holds sway over everything existing within nature's other dimension, space. This includes the speaker's young friend who, himself spatially oriented, will succumb to time and thus lose his beauty, so that time is given its own nefarious personhood (as *Time*). It is demonized as a "never-resting" (5.5) "bloody tyrant" (16.2), as "swift-footed" (19.6) and "Devouring" (1), and appears by way of suggestion throughout the first 18 poems: "When forty winters shall besiege thy brow, / And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field" (2.1-2), "These hours, that with gentle work did frame / The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell, / Will play the tyrants to the very same" (5.1-3), "Then let not winter's ragged hand deface / In thee thy summer ere thou be distilled" (6.1-2), "Lo in the orient when the gracious light / Lifts up his burning head" (7.1-2), "When I do count the clock that tells the time" (12.1), and "When I consider every thing that grows / Holds in perfection but a little moment" (15.1-2).

However measured—by the figure of a clock or the passing of seasons—time promises the imminent destruction of the youth's beauty, a threat compelling the *Sonnets* to range through various means of preservation, whether purportedly natural or purely artificial, like a process of trial and error that ends with verse. These means are all productive. They include procreation, profit generation, and mechanized print, and considered together, they offer insight into the speaker's understanding of his craft which is always linked to the personhood of his poetic subject and friend. Biological procreation can only re-produce the young man within his progeny, but cannot ensure his survival beyond the reach of time. Sex

promises “to breed another thee” (6. 7), which will retain something of the friend in the ‘other thee’ of his offspring, but a something that cannot be the whole friend himself.⁸⁰ Usury economics follows with its ten for one profit: “Ten times thyself were happier than thou art, / If ten of thine ten times refigured thee” (6. 8-10). The dubious ten to one pay off makes the subject a fungible commodity, or something with a value not intrinsically its own. In this state, the commodity may be easily exchanged with like commodities without any depreciation. We handle currency and produce in this way but not friends or human artistic subjects.⁸¹ One might see the speaker discarding sex in favor of profit generation because of the unpredictability of procreation.⁸² Yet the roulette of genetics prohibits any assurance that the friend himself will in any way remain in his children, presumably even if he should have ten of them. As a final resort, the young man can simply “print more” “copies” of himself (11.14), a coarse alternative that is abandoned as quickly as it is proposed.⁸³

The elimination of sex, economics, and printing amount to failed attempts to conjure the friend into a sufficient form for his preservation. As the speaker exhausts the possibilities, we might say he discovers that his attempted modes only offer children, profit, or prints in exchange for the original and cherished subject.⁸⁴ Each proposed means would not preserve so much as exchange him for something else. What the speaker may be attempting to avoid Richard Bernheimer identified as the problem of substitution:

Whenever an entity, of whatever kind it may be, enters a system as a substitute, it is immediately deprived of its uniqueness as an individual and treated as a member of a species whose characteristics make it desirable as a contributor to the common cause. It is always *a* machine

part, *an* organic substitute, *a* piece of food that is required for the maintenance of a system and it matters little what other characteristics the object may possess if only the required generic qualities be present. It is the same quality which the system demands from all of its members, including the one whose place the substitute is to assume. (53)

A system of substitutes sacrifices one thing through its replacement, an exchange necessary to achieve the ends of an agenda unconcerned with either the integrity of the replacement or of what it replaces. The eliminated means in the speaker's preservation system would have compromised the individuality of ten of the friend's children, only brought into being to serve in his stead, and the *Sonnets'* peculiar phrasing does nothing to suggest that the friend would be spared the same fate. The speaker tells him: "Now is the time that face should form another" (3. 2), "That's for thyself to breed another thee" (6. 7), "Make thee another self for love of me" (10. 13). Each line attempts to assure that a substitute of the friend (another formed face, another thee, another self) will suffice in the actual friend's absence, and each fails arguably because the substitution of him would jeopardize the individuality that makes him worth preserving. Furthermore, and more importantly, each means would result in a substitution that is also perishable. Children, profits, and prints may outlive the friend, but they will not outlive his chief adversary, time.

A problem only hinted at previously, I devote Chapter Ten on Shakespeare's ontological poetics in the *Sonnets*, to verse as a problematic alternative to the above explored options. The representational nature of the sonnet only generates another substitution of the youth, his *re*-presentation in poetic form which is just as threatening to the young man's unique person as anything else. The poetics found in the *Sonnets* maintains its focus on the

integrity, the singularity, of the young man. It calls into question the very institution of representational art which preserves through the multiplication of the signified subject within the poetic sign, and doing so, hazardously dismembers an otherwise unified person. I will let that chapter and its abstractions speak for themselves but will offer here that the *Sonnets*' speaker seems to come to the conclusion that his own poetry, its tendency to *re-present* its subject matter, is both an exertion of artifice over natural norms and a defiance of those norms to his beloved's detriment.

The threat produces in the speaker a degree of anxiety hinted at here and made explicit there throughout the first 126 sonnets, but perhaps nowhere is it raised with such clarity as in Muse sonnet⁸⁵ 103's captivating interrogative "Were it not sinful then, striving to mend, / To mar the subject that before was well?" (9-10). A common idiom for the process of representing natural phenomena, the suggestion that 'poetic strife'⁸⁶ somehow mars the poetic subject casts considerable doubt upon the speaker's preservation project—and with it, much of the entire cycle. Such an existential threat to the *Sonnets*, not unlike the state in which the speaker fears his poems place the subject, amounts to an unprecedented inversion that distills the many preposterous commentaries on the poetic form—and on the identities of both poet and subject—revealed in the following pages devoted to the Muse subsequence (sonnets 100-103). But any reversals or inversions are countered by rhetorical attempts to restore right order. Poetic tensions bring to the surface the speaker's veiled and anxious pushing and pulling, his assertion and retreat that shows him caught in the state of freedom from past conceptual restraints but left with anxious uncertainty.

For instance, some disturbance troubles the bucolic setting of the sonnets just preceding the group at 100-103, where summer (97.5) is imbibed with the "freezing" and

“dark day” symptoms of winter (3). The “teeming autumn big with rich increase” bears “the wanton burden of the prime” (6-7), resembling spring. In the same setting the speaker goes on to note the ornaments of summer, such as the “lays of birds” (5), the “lily’s white” (9), and “the deep vermillion in the rose” (10), but only to subordinate them to the young friend: “They were but sweet, but figures of delight / Drawn after you, you pattern of all those” (11-12). Making the young friend the pattern or essence of the natural world is further developed in the poem’s close: “Yet seemed it winter still, and, you away, / As with your shadow I with these did play” (13-14). Once again, *shadow* was a common term referring to that which is inessential, that which can only shadow, follow, or derive from what is real, from what has essence and is substantial. Thus beyond the distortion of time in the confusion of the seasons and their characteristics, the poem perverts causal limits in allowing the young man to double as a product and cause of nature.

A similarly non-linear mode of reasoning woven throughout the Muse constellation vividly brings to our attention a Muse that is actually absent. Summoned in sonnet 100: “Wherefore art thou Muse...?,” called “truant” in 101, her inspiration described as “A lack” in 103, she is as conspicuously missing from these sonnets as the speaker’s references to her make her present. Her absented presence offers but one pervasive confusion continued in the speaker’s twist of mythology, the myth of Philomela, the in-law of Tereus who raped her and cut out her tongue so that she could not testify against him. With no voice to enunciate words she becomes the nightingale responsible for announcing the return of spring in her song. The myth is already rich in inversion in its association of violence and the bucolic. The sonnet develops the confusion and inserts the speaker as both the victimized and victimizing poet. True to the original, his Philomela hushes the night with her “mournful hymns” (102.10), but

she is actually the *Sonnets'* speaker, now *Philomel*, a *he* who sings and plays *his* pipe.

Recalling his reference to the young friend as the androgynous “Master Mistress” of sonnet 20 (2), the poem distorts both the speaker’s gender, in making him the mythic woman, and his poetic renderings of the youth, which take on a nefarious hue. The speaker tells the boy: “Therefore, like her [Philomela], I sometime hold my tongue, / Because I would not dull you with my song” (13-14). The not uncommon conceit, that a poet’s craft can only do disservice to, or dull, the beauty of the beloved poetic subject, is innovated by the unconventional and even disorienting image of the male-female speaker, a *him-her* holding aloft his own severed tongue, the likely result of a self-mutilation acted out only to avoid the poetic mutilation, the dulling, of the subject. The sonnet evolves from the already twisted nature of the tragic story and to an exaggerated degree that leaves a freakish impression of the speaker and his craft.

His awareness of ancient mythology appears to extend to at least a few of the Muse’s original, mythological treatments, which he distances himself from through their alteration. In these passages he does not shy from a Petrarchan convention that makes the poetic subject the poem’s inspirer, but his particular implementation of the convention is brash enough that it warrants attention as unconventional. Further, the passages present a disorder of grammar and logic in which presumed orders—of thought and convention—are challenged. All results in the last poem of the Muse subsequence which features a backtracking attempt to restore order—to the Muse sonnets and to the sequence as a whole.

Like Ovid, the speaker gives his Muse flight. But instead of the flight resulting from the threatening advances of Pyreneus, its source is the beauty of the *Sonnets'* subject’s eyes: “Thine eyes, that taught the dumb on high to sing / And heavy ignorance aloft to fly” (78.5-6). The suggestion here is also that the poetic subject, in this case the young man, is the

source of the Muse's office and identity, for he not only teaches her how to sing and fly but adds feathers to her characteristically learned wing (7). The suggestion is unconventional but not unreasonable, since the production of a poem is predicated on having something to write about. Implicit here is an equation of Muse and artistic subject, a humanization (and rationalization) of poetic inspiration that gains traction in sonnets 100 and 101 where the friend and subject gives the Muse "all [her] might" (100.1) and the ears of the poet-speaker "esteem" her "lays" (7) and "give [her] pen both skill and argument" (8). In 101 the young man is made not only the source of the Muse but of philosophical abstractions as well:

O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends
 For thy neglect of truth in beauty dyed?
 Both truth and beauty on my love depends:
 So dost thou too, and therein dignified. (1-4)

This resembles the now familiar aggrandizement of the young man's causal powers, that the Platonic principles of truth and beauty, as well as the source of the poetic craft, might be ontologically dependent upon him. Whether "my love" refers to the youth himself or to the speaker's affection for him, an invalid syllogism has been employed to subvert the status of the forms typically conceived of as beyond mortal comparison. Because truth and beauty are dependers upon the subject, the Muse must for some reason depend upon him as well, a conclusion the speaker may only draw by relying on an unspoken and invalidating fourth term (which would read something like: *The Muse is dependent upon truth and beauty*). Without investigating the Aristotelian logic found here, one can easily hear that some line of argument is missing from the speaker's reasoning, the coordinator *So* implying a connection between the two otherwise unconnected propositions.

Both the grammar and diction in the poem result in similar confusion. “[T]hy neglect of truth in beauty dyed” employs “dyed” as either a modifier of “truth” or of “beauty.” If the former, the line would read: “For thy neglect of truth dyed into beauty,” and if the latter then: “For thy neglect of truth in dyed (false) beauty.” Ambiguity darkens the innocuous statement that beauty be steeped in truth by aligning it with the suggestion that beauty may somehow confuse truth and falsity. Though George Chapman translated Hesiod’s *Works and Days* one must wonder whether or not the enigmatic statement by Hesiod’s *Theogony* Muses, the principal claim by which they identify themselves and the craft they inspire, did not somehow circulate in the late 16th: “we know how to say many false things similar to genuine ones, but we know, when we wish, how to proclaim true things” (27-28). The confusion of the false and true hardly finds resolution by the sonnet’s end where the Muse is charged to let the youth “much outlive a gilded tomb” (11) by making him “seem long hence as he shows now” (14). Of course, to “much outlive” even a tomb gilt with gold is not to live forever, not any more than to “*seem* long hence” is to actually *be* forever. And being itself has been reduced to “show,” a term accenting seeming over substance, would-be falsity over certain actuality.

Moreover, the Muse’s seemingly no-nonsense statement actually serves to render herself unnecessary to the poet. She is made to say that “Truth needs no color with his color fixed, / Beauty no pencil beauty’s truth to lay” (6-7), implying on the one hand the sensible distinction between the forms of truth and beauty but on the other the possibility that the young friend does not need the pencil, the artifice, of the speaker’s poetry, poetry she is presumed to inspire. Without nearly as much discordant substantiation in Sidney’s *A&S* sonnet 1, his Muse essentially turns him from her inspiration and insists that he inspire

himself: “Fool, said my Muse to me, Looke in thy heart and write” (14). But the similar sentiment underlying these statements insists upon the human claim to art, to a creative domain that assumes as its source and sum the human entities of poet and subject, artistic means and product. And yet the distortions of logic, linearity, tradition, and normative expectations that have attended these claims belie a not always happy impression of the human identity, freed from natural conventions, which they conjure.

An attempt to right the confusion of the previous sonnets and restore order to the subsequence appears with some urgency in sonnet 103. The sonnet begins, without surprise, with a complaint, but one that weaves an ordered sensibility through the lines of the octave:

Alack, what poverty my Muse brings forth,
 That having such a scope to show her pride
 The argument all bare is of more worth
 Than when it hath my added praise beside.
 O, blame me not if I no more can write!
 Look in your glass, and there appears a face
 That overgoes my blunt invention quite,
 Dulling my lines and doing me disgrace. (1-8)

Note that the first lines of each quatrain appear related to one another.⁸⁷ The speaker’s “lack,” his impoverished poetry, is the failure of the Muse in line 1 and seems congruent with the outright blame of her in line 5: “O, blame me not if I no more can write!” The generous scope the Muse has to show her inspiring pride in the speaker’s work (2) he tells us is the mirrored face of his beloved poetic subject (6). The bare argument, the young man himself, ringing in at a higher value than the poem (3), outdoes the speaker’s “blunt [poetic]

invention” (7). And the insufficient “praise” “added” to the beautiful youth (4) finds repetition as the poet’s disgraced and dull lines (8). The poem returns the reader—and the speaker and subject for that matter—from distortions of time and personhood to an ordered balance contrived by the correspondence of matching lines between the two quatrains.

The previously mentioned interrogative at line 9 looks beyond sonnet 103 into the confusion of both the previous Muse sonnets and the greater sub-sequence of poems devoted to the ontological problem of poetic preservation, thus establishing the need for 103’s stabilizing octave:

Were it not sinful then, striving to mend,
 To mar the subject that before was well?
 For to no other pass do my verses tend
 Than of your graces and your gifts to tell.
 And more, much more, than in my verse can sit
 Your own glass shows you when you look in it. (9-14)

The abrupt shift from declarative to interrogative and the radical turn in rhetorical mood (from epideictic to juridical) creates a momentary, speculative pause. That the momentum only slowly begins to build again but never achieves the pace of the octave leaves the impression that the poem and the order it establishes hangs on the question of whether or not it was wrong to attempt “to mend” the artistic subject of his tendency to age by capturing his beauty in the increase of poetic representation. If the speaker’s artistic striving is successful, then the poetic re-presentation of the youth would remove him from the flow of time, but in the process can only achieve a pyrrhic victory that also mars his time-oriented personhood. The poetic craft that the speaker presently doubts risks an existentially fatal alteration to the

subject's original presentation in nature. Probably for this reason he has already suggested: "Let him [another poet] but copy what in you is writ, / Not making worse what nature made so clear" (84.9-10), and instead of insisting on the efficacy of his representational written work, as he does in the sonnet promising to marmorealize his friend's youth (such as in the well known passages of sonnets 55 and 65), he resolves instead that the young man cannot be substituted, cannot be anything but his self, represented by the passages: "O that you were yourself; but, love, you are / No longer yours than you yourself here live" (13.1-2), and simply "you are you" (84.8), and remarking explicitly on the representational aspect of poetry: "Who is it that says most, which can say more / Than this rich praise: that you alone are you . . .?" (1-2). If you are you and not a representation of you, if this and nothing more can be said about the poetic subject, then the *Sonnets* cycle, as a representational celebration of the young man, is itself in a state of existential threat.

The discord exemplified by the *Sonnets'* speaker's contentious relationship with his Muse looks forward into the sequence from the Muse position and outward from the Muse subsequence, signaling the speaker's doubtful relationship with his craft. The ontological poetics behind that relationship makes up the content of the next chapter, which is devoted to a full analysis of the previously overlooked negative portrayals of verse throughout the first 126 *Sonnets*, most of them in the initial poems. Statements like "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this [sonnet], and this gives life to thee" (18.13-14) are countered by portrayals of representational verse as a "barren" (16.4, 76.1, 83.4) preservative of the subject's beauty, recalling both the "barren rage of death's eternal cold" (13.12) and the winter trees "barren of leaves" (12.5), as well as those who "barrenly perish" (11.10) and landscapes void of beauty with "barrenness everywhere" (5.8). The *Sonnets* exemplify the

mode of assertion and retreat found throughout the early modern context, but in them the retreat is given particular pause, pause enough to permit a re-thinking of the poetics implicit within the cycle.

Chapter 10: Shakespeare's Ontological Poetics

Most readers will recall the *Sonnets*' well-known promises to immortalize the poetic subject and beloved young friend (the 'fair youth'), promises such as "So, till the judgment that yourself arise, / You live in this [sonnet] and dwell in lover's eyes" (55.13-14) and "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this [sonnet], and this gives life to thee" (18.13-14). But my attention in this chapter is drawn to the speaker's less recognized negative portrayal of his craft, a critique of the poetic form that clearly marks it as a threat to its subject. In one instance, poetry is a theft: "Why should false painting imitate his cheek / And steal dead seeming from his living hue?" (67.5-6), and in another, a theft with mortal consequences: "[verse] is but as a tomb / Which hides your life and shows not half your parts" (17.3-4). The disconcerting possibility of death is reemphasized: "I impair not beauty being mute, / When others [other poets] would give life and bring a tomb" (18.11-12). Similarly, the speaker calls creative verse "barren" (76.1), "barren rhyme" (16.4), and the "barren tender of a poet's debt" (83.4). For what it is worth, I do not overlook the *Sonnets*' conventional elevations of the poetic subject to the disparagement of the poet's skill, such as: "And him [the friend] as for a map doth Nature store, / To show false Art what beauty was of yore" (68.13-14). But it is neither conventional to indict verse for stealing from or causing the death of its subject, nor is it a trope when the speaker's first explicit mention of poetry, as "rhyme," likens it to the up to then most negative descriptor in the sequence, "barren."

The speaker's aggrandizements and criticisms of his craft at once suggest that the qualities of poetry empowering it to safeguard his young friend against the ravages of time also bring him harm. How this may be possible is the object of the present investigation.

If unconventionally the *Sonnets* forward what resembles a theory of the relationship between the poem and its subject, which operates on a blurring of the boundaries, the ontological boundaries, between the two. Put another way, poetic preservation requires a transition from person-as-poetic-subject to inanimate poetic form. This seemed sensible enough to Horace, whose ode “more lasting than bronze” ensured that “part of [him] would evade the death god” (“I have completed a monument” Ode 3.30, vv. 1, 6-7). But the *Sonnets* meditate at length on the consequences of poetic preservation, and a comparative analysis of the poem and the other art forms mentioned in the *Sonnets* reveals the pyrrhic solution found in the extra-ordinary ability of verse to protect its subject matter from the progress of time. Removing the friend to the ontologically foreign poetic image means driving him from his native ontological state, a state of life and flux that must include both age and death. It is this transition that threatens his definitive temporal nature and thus sacrifices his personhood, the *who* and *what* the speaker wishes to safeguard in the first place.⁸⁸

I argue in the following section that the speaker’s choice of the poetic image over any visual, material media, such as the “marble” and the “gilded monuments of princes” of sonnet 55 (1-2), highlights the poem’s unique, non-material make-up and encourages an investigation of its essential characteristics that distinguish it from other representational forms. For instance, unlike any visual monument or art work, the same poem may exist in different places: in numerous editions, in countless e-files, even within many memories or imaginations.⁸⁹ For this reason, I find that a chief characteristic of the poem is its resistance to spatial orientation, or rather, its ability to exist in a space with no apparent location, a virtual space.⁹⁰ Through preserving his young friend within a medium, the speaker removes the youth from normal space, and doing so, from the progress of time. Circumventing the

dimensions of space and time the speaker offers a far more thorough departure from nature than seen in the art theoretical effort to manage nature by re-creating spatial relations visually. The *Sonnets* actually apply Sidney's premise of the "right poet" who shuns the use of nature's models and materials and creates the image with the abstract, non-spatial entities of words.

The Shakespearean suggestion that the representational arts may have a significant effect upon their subject is not limited to the *Sonnets* but is also present in *Hamlet's* dumb show (3.2), *The Murder of Gonzaga*. Hamlet organizes the play for his uncle Claudius's benefit, in the hopes that the portrayal of a murder will stir him emotionally and reveal him as the murderer of Hamlet's father. It works. Claudius cannot bear to watch the theatrical murder take place on stage and flees the room, implicating himself. With Claudius as its subject, the one-act does not simply portray a murder but reveals Claudius as murderer. Granted the use of representation in *Hamlet* is largely forensic, but it is no less ontological for that fact. 'Murderer' becomes the full realization of what Claudius is, what he has fashioned himself into through his actions. In the following I will show how the use of representation in the *Sonnets* does not so much reveal a truth about the speaker's friend as it alters his truth. This subverts reasonable expectations in period metaphysics that prescribed the representational work of art the role of the shadow and the work's subject that of the substance. The *Sonnets* offer a deeper consideration of the preposterous notion that the representational shadow somehow alters the substantial poetic subject.

The choice of verse as an alternative to brass, rock, steel (sonnet 65), marble, stone, and masonry (55), all common forms of preservation, contrasts poetry against everything from stately monoliths and memorials to that mainstay of monumental representation, the

statue. Statuary may be crafted of the most durable material and cut to accurately resemble its subject, to reflect his character in a recognizable gesture or gait, and even to occupy the same amount of space as the subject by the statue's reproduction of his height and girth. In his *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, a meditation on the animation, the life, of statuary, Kenneth Gross has said that "the statue presents a body or a pose arrested in time, arresting time itself; it marks an absence or a loss through the presence of the thing that is yet irremediably, materially present" (2006, 15). The statue's monumentality should satisfy the speaker's need to overcome both the young man's absence and the force of time that will destroy him. Yet it is the very materiality of steel, stone, and masonry, that eventually succumb to the "wreckful siege of batt'ring days" (sonnet 65), to broils, decay, and all the happenstances of "sluttish time" (55). The speaker identifies the essential dependence of visual arts upon the material of their fashioning. Each piece *is* its material form. Because the spatial nature of all matter closely binds it to the progress of time, all matter over time decays, so that material monuments cannot adequately protect the friend from the age and death to which they themselves are subject. The alternative is the immaterial "monument" of "gentle verse," "Which eyes not yet created shall o'er read, / And tongues-to-be your being shall rehearse" (81.9-11).⁹¹ The speaker repeats the proposition in the previously mentioned passages: "So till the judgment that your self arise, / You live in this [sonnet], and dwell in lovers' eyes" (55.13-14), and: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / so long lives this [poem], and this gives life to thee" (18.13-14). The role of "gentle verse" deserves enough attention that it must be taken up at length below. For now, I want to examine the role of the eye and its significance to the speaker's aversion to material monuments. The preservation of the young

man within—that is, *inside of*—both the poem and the eyes of its audience members associates closely the virtual spaces of the poem and the human mind.

I have discussed previously the role of the eye in figuring Elizabethan conceptions of creative and mental faculties, which themselves metonymically figure one's individual personhood. IN this case, the eye that partners with poetry also suggests the faculty of mind needed to apprehend and generate images, a matter not only of moral implications but also of creative and preservative powers. Note that unlike visual works, letters and words cannot visually imitate what they represent. This is arguably the limitation of any poem, that it cannot present itself immediately to its audience in the way a visual image is present upon first sight, its audience confronted, in some cases accosted, with it precisely because of its visual nature. (Whether we desire participation with a visual piece or not, we cannot *not* see what is before us, and once seen, we cannot *unsee* it.) To the contrary, the poem requires an audience's careful, attentive interaction through reading to conjure the image somehow latent within its verbal or rhetorical constructions. Reading forms the poetic image and does so nowhere but within the mind, the mental space, of the reader. The image of the poetic subject, then, lacks the literal immediacy of the visual image, but the reader's imaginative conjuring of the poetic image gives its subject a personal immediacy.⁹² This personal experience accounts for the numerous images within the minds of each of us derived from our reading: images of the physical features of literary characters, the setting of a fiction, and the impressions of abstract poetry. And though most of us have read many of the same texts, it is unthinkable that any two of our images are alike. The picture formed by reading is an image created within and belonging to that reader. Such personal immediacy permits an imaginative and even emotional intimacy that will not allow the literary subject to become, as Horace

said of ancient heroes who had no bard to keep them present in the minds of posterity, unwept (*inlacrimabiles*).⁹³ Thus, the poet relies on an audience of “lovers”, on “lovers’ eyes” (55.14), and his subject’s within his poem, on the “eyes not yet created” (81.10).

Such preservation means that the friend’s poetic image, what sonnet 24 calls his “pictured,” “true image” (6), remains in an imaginative and virtual space, one neither limited to the confines of ordinary space, or the physical properties that enable us to measure them, nor to the progress of time. Of course overcoming the young friend’s temporal limitations is the *sine qua non* of the speaker’s efforts to preserve him, as it is key to his choice of “gentle verse” over material monuments for the site of his preservation.

His two-fold formulation that the young man may “live in this [sonnet], and dwell in lovers’ eyes” (55.14) operates on the principle that a poem is not limited to its material make-up, the printed page, that like mental space, it does not exist in any conventional understanding of space. In one sense, this is evident from the fact that it can be printed and re-printed (or re-written) numerous times without any compromise of the poetic work itself. For is not sonnet 55 in one copy of Colin Burrow’s edition of the *Sonnets* just like the sonnet 55 of the next copy?⁹⁴ However, the material monument is like the visual work of art, which is typically singular and singularly valuable. If more than one copy of it is made, each is numbered and becomes less valuable the more times it is reproduced. For this reason, a painting, sculpture, or marble monument is far more precious than any piece of paper with a poem on it. The higher value of these works relies on their tangibility, the fact that they will, in time, decay. The literary equivalent would be the collector’s item, a folio edition or an inscribed or autographed page of poetry, which derive their worth from their singular

uniqueness. The inscribed page is only valuable because of its inscription, but the poem itself, provided that it is printed elsewhere, is not extraordinary in value.

The general difference between visual and written works, however, is also an indicator of the poem's unique agility. While the material of its presentation is fungible, the poem itself is unaffected even by mass reproduction. It can move freely from one page to another, and exist entirely apart from the page; if memorized, sonnet 55 'exists' in my memory, another mental space, and no longer relies on the printed page or e-file where I first encountered it. I can recite it or write it down for someone else with no alteration to what it actually is.⁹⁵ I cannot describe to others a painting or a photograph in a comparable way, cannot replicate either as completely, because a description does not equal the actual article and because a replication is only that and not the work itself. Though not marble, consider that monument the *Mona Lisa*, probably the most reproduced image in the world. While no reproduction or photo can present to us the actual *Mona Lisa*, my recitation or rewriting of sonnet 55 presents the poem *in its whole form*. The *Mona Lisa* can only exist in one geographic locale (at present, the Louvre), but the poem is no less complete when off the page than on it. No visual medium has this versatility.

I should concede here the fact that we all know of more than one version of sonnet 55, and though at this point in the *Sonnets* editorial history the differences are mainly in punctuation, the poem does differ from edition to edition. Yet my claims that sonnet 55 may exist whole and complete on the page or in the mind still apply. They rely neither on a single, standard version of the poem reproduced in one "master edition," nor on what I believe is the sonnet 55 intended by Shakespeare. One might memorize the version in either Burrow's or Stephen Booth's edition, and though they differ (Booth's has one more question mark than

Burrow's), numerous copies of each version have been reproduced, so that each may have its own existence in multiple spaces, both on pages and within memories.

Such observations, however, may require that a distinction be made between the sonnet and other poetic forms, which accounts for a second matter. More like a song, such as a ballad or madrigal, we know a sonnet's form through sonic cues heard through recitation or in the mind's ear when reading silently. We hear the progression from one quatrain to the next and sense its close in the repetition of the couplet or some other formal device. As a poetic form, songs rarely, if ever, rely significantly on the space of the page.⁹⁶ We ordinarily learn them by performance (recitation) and in some cases may never experience them in print. Many know Nat King Cole's "Mona Lisa," though how many have ever *read* it? But because it is undoubtedly in print and e-file in many places and may exist in memory, it shares essential characteristics with sonnet 55. By limiting my study of the sonnet's make-up to its juxtaposition against material art forms mentioned in the *Sonnets*, I have uncovered the sonnet form's essential resistance to spatial orientation, as well as the importance of this resistance to the *Sonnets*' speaker's attempt to preserve his young friend. The question that remains is enlightening, if unanswerable: If not within a single mind or on a single page, where is any one sonnet? Early in its life it must be fixed to the page where it is being—or just has been—formed.⁹⁷ But by the time of its publication and replication, can we say with any certainty where it exists? The questions, and their lack of conclusive answers, reflect the highly fluid make-up of the speaker's chosen medium, a make-up that ensures a heightened and longer lived presence of the poetic subject within it.

The greater effectiveness of the sonnet form is the reason for its threatening presentation. In one instance it is a theft: "Why should false painting imitate his cheek / And

steal dead seeming from his living hue?" (67.5-6), and a theft that extends to death: "[verse] is but as a tomb / Which hides your life and shows not half your parts" (17.3-4). The point is reemphasized: "I impair not beauty being mute, / When others [other poets] would give life and bring a tomb" (83.11-12). Similarly, the speaker calls creative verse "barren" (76.1), "barren rhyme" (16.4), and the "barren tender of a poet's debt" (83.4). He even questions the safety of the mind's virtual space, saying that the young man will lie "entombed in men's eyes" (81.8). The speaker's troubling critique of his chosen medium forces us to consider the *Sonnets'* promises of representational immortality "in black ink" (65.14) beyond the hyperbole of Horace with which they have been so commonly associated. In this modern portrayal, poetry both contains and preserves and it contains and somehow threatens the subject, a proposition fully considered in the question: "Were it not sinful then, striving to mend, / To mar the subject that before was well?" (103.9-10). Just how the poetry that can mend the friend's natural shortcomings can also mar him is indicated in passages like: "Who is it that says most which can say more / Than this rich praise that *you alone are you*" and "But he [a poet] that writes of you, if he can tell / That *you are you*, so dignifies his story" (84.1-2, 7-8, my emphasis). These lines suggest that the young man is not his poetic representation but only *him himself*, which points to an awareness of the possibility that verse jeopardizes his singular integrity, as I see it, in two possible ways.

One is the tendency to reduce the whole subject to its parts, to treat him as a synecdoche (Kunin 99-100) by privileging his beauty (such as in sonnet 12), his image (sonnet 3), or some other part of him but not his whole person. Sacrificing the whole and intact friend, synecdoche dismembers him, part for whole within the poetic form because the sonnet can only preserve, at best, by dismantling who and what he is, as we see in the

illustrations of barren and deathly verse, such as sonnet 17's: "And yet, heaven knows [verse] is but as a tomb / Which hides your life and shows not half your parts" (17.3-4).

The *Sonnets*, then, question a principle of the visual art methods and poetics of the time. As a matter of course, painters and sculptors selected desirable body parts from multiple models to create a more ideal human form, what Mary D. Garrard has called "concentrating scattered beauty" (Garrard 110).⁹⁸ The antique progenitor of this method, Zeuxis, famously would not paint an image of Helen from the model of one young woman, but chose several women as his models from whom he made a more perfect composite. Poets employed the approach as early as Petrarch, who drew on the topos of the honey bee that collects pollen from many beautiful flowers to make a single honey: "so that from many and various things is one produced, and that different and better."⁹⁹ One application was the blazon, which by design abstracted praiseworthy parts, such as eyes, hair, and lips, from the presumably less praiseworthy whole person. The *Sonnets* have only the famed anti-blazon, "My mistresses eyes are nothing like the sun," which unconventionally acknowledges and accepts the black mistress' flaws.¹⁰⁰ As for the young man, the speaker tells him: "Let him [another poet] but copy what in you is writ, / Not making worse what nature made so clear" (84.9-10) (lines that echo Sidney's sonnet 3: "in Stellas face I reed, / What Love and Beautie be, then all my deed / But Copying is, what in her Nature writes" [12-14]). "Copy" in the early modern usage suggested both *copia*, "Nature's bounty" (Burrow 402), and "an exemplar of nature's excellence" (Duncan-Jones 132). The "nature" the speaker says the poet should copy recalls the whole friend crafted within nature, his "natural" person.

Likewise, the term refers to the orderly norms of intellectual culture that insisted upon the rhetorical and stylistic "following"¹⁰¹ of humanist masters to produce "Coppies" not at all

unlike the period injunction to take one's representational subjects from nature. For one to follow the lead of a master as one would nature, this upheld the expectations of right sequence and order. As natura was source of generation that produced the poet or artisan and so oversaw the poets own creative output, the master was by virtue of his longevity in the profession a source (both in his textual production and in himself) who must naturally inspire the work of the novice. In this case, the normalizing practices of intellectual culture in early modern England were not at all unlike those reacted against in the archaic and classical eras, where the Muse figured not only a deity but the poet's creative predecessor, his literal Muse. To resist this anxiety of influence was to object to a fact of nature: those who come before inspire those who follow after, and mentioning them or their work even to distance oneself from their influence is actually to affirm one's reliance upon them (yet another instance of self-erosion).

On the one hand, the appearance of *copy* in such an unconventional sequence of poems filled with inversions of both structure and theme reveals a clear awareness on the author's part of expected norms of order. On the other hand, its use in reference to the speaker's young friend suggests a fantasy of benign representation, a representation that will not "make worse what Nature made so clear," but will honor his essential personhood. Probably *copy* betrays the speaker's fear of his own craft, serving to reaffirm the threat of verse's tendency to compromise its subject.

The speaker's criticism of his craft, his resistance to it,¹⁰² is warranted given the nature of the sonnet form, for the dismembering of synecdoche is only amplified by the fluidity of the sonnet's make up. This brings me to the second way in which the sonnet jeopardizes the subject's singular integrity. Where the "gilded monument" of sonnet 55

surely sacrifices the whole prince it represents in exchange for the preservation of certain of his qualities, the monument's spatial nature limits this synecdoche to one instance in one place.¹⁰³ Not so with the sonnet where the dismembered parts of the subject may exist in multiple copies and in the minds of many audience members. This means that the sonnet is not only limited to representing the parts of its subject, but those parts are further dispersed among the various locations (its various copies, etc.) where the sonnet may exist. The young man's singular integrity that one sonnet sacrifices is further sacrificed within the sonnet's impressive capacity for reproduction.

There is material here enough for an addition to the *paragone* that undergirded so much of the art and poetic theory shared by both Italian and English Renaissances. According to the dispute between the two chief visual arts, painting bettered sculpture because it relied less on the manual working of a material substance, such as stone. Painting was less labored and cleaner, and therefore, of a higher class of craft. Poetry was always included among the liberal arts, the arts of those who could afford the education needed to practice them, and it bested both painting and sculpture because it relied that much less on labored means and material content for its execution and overall make up. The very same principles make it a superior preservative, as it is in no way bound by the space that partners with time to bring about physical change and decay. A further indication of its agile non-physicality is that any single poem may be reproduced in and parsed throughout the various media of print, writing, memory, and recitation, all in a manner that would destroy any visual medium.

But while this agility is required to properly safeguard and preserve a poetic subject, it poses a dire problem to the speaker's friend who is himself physical. That he is more like

the visual work of art, and limited to only one geographic place, returns us to the speaker's critique of his own craft, the theft and death that he suspects may result from the poetic capture of his "lovely boy" (126.1). The problem is the discord between the poem's fluid ontology and the friend's comparatively static person. The purpose of the sonnet is to arrest him in time, reducing him to the two dimensions of an image that cannot grow, change, age, or die. Of course, any preservation halts the process of decay, and thus interferes with the natural tendency of any thing to constantly change and eventually degrade. But the defiance is amplified in the sonnet form, since it may not be found on any one piece of paper or in any one reader's imagination. We cannot say where any one poem actually is, and this indeterminacy equals the troubling fact that the speaker's sonnet removes his friend to a location alien to him, alien to any person and, most likely, to any thing. Furthermore, unlike the statue that eventually decays, the poem never releases what it preserves but only retains it within its poetic, imaginative images, images that do not just fix but fix multiply in various copies, editions, recitations, the ontological compromise of the subject only repeating itself over and over again in a manner unimaginable with the visual representation.

Among these poems, two in particular exemplify the overarching problems that attend the speaker's preservation agenda. Sonnet 5 adopts the expected juxtaposition of time and, in figurative form, the young friend's beauty: "For never-resting Time leads summer on / To hideous winter, and confounds him there" (5.5-6). It offers distillation as a solution to the nefarious progression of temporal change:

Then were not summer's distillation left
 A liquid pris'ner pent in walls of glass,
 Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,

Nor it nor no remem'brance what it was. (9-12)

If summer were not somehow captured, as a distillation captures what it preserves, not only would beauty itself and that which it begets be separated, but there would be no summer and not even the memory of it in imaginative space. And yet distillation is actually a dubious protector, for though it may offer shelter from the flow of time, the language used to describe the solution—"pris'ner," "pent"—is all but as sinister as the problem. Taking a second glance, the stanza is laced with suggestions of disorder. How else might one explain the separation of causal beauty and its effects, or the annihilation of any thing simply due to natural seasonal progression?

The same disorder couched within the same figures is, in another instance, associated directly with verse. Sonnet 54 draws on the conventional comparison of a beloved to a rose, so conventional in fact that the poem appears to ask for a reading of its subtleties. As we know the rose differs from the scentless canker only in the "sweet odor which doth in [the rose] live" (54.4). Without fragrance, the cankers remain "unwooded," "unrespected," and "Die to themselves" (10-11). By contrast,

. . . Sweet roses do not so;

Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made:

And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth:

When that shall vade, by verse distills your truth. (11-14)

Certainly the odor of any thing is, in a metaphysical contemplation, a part of its secondary nature, one inessential feature of the whole composition no more primary than hair color to the rest of the person. But if scent is the substance preserved through the sacrifice of the actual rose, then the direct comparison "And so of you," makes poetic praise of the young

man his substantial “truth” and him himself an incidental quality. The reversal of order is congruent with the claim that a sign might produce its signified or an effect beget its cause. And if distillation means imprisonment, as we saw above, then the close association of it with verse is all the more remarkable. Distillation’s “walls of glass” (5.10) are the trap of artifice that the speaker associates with his own poetry. Likening poetry and distillation accents the harm that both bring about, for does not the process of distillation preserve through a kind of blurring, a chemical permeation where, in this case, the rose ceases to be itself and becomes the solution in which it is preserved? As with the sonnet, so with distillation: the rose’s preservation sacrifices the rose itself.

The sonnet has become the site where two stormy metaphysical forces meet, the one grounding its ontological power in immobility, the other in its potentially endless action of division and replication. They underlie Thomas Greene’s revolutionary take on the Renaissance self, which was on the one hand “centripetal,” or durable and center-oriented, and on the other “centrifugal,” or disoriented and “in quest of transformation” (1970, 326). For Greene, Volpone is the exemplar of the centrifugal character, his urge being to transform his single, centered self into many selves in a manner that is only constant in its dynamism (337-43). His example shows us “the horror of a self too often shifted, a self which risks the loss of an inner poise. It reflects this horror even as it portrays . . . the whirlwind virtuosos of multiplication” (344). Though Greene’s analysis retains its metaphysical hue, his privileging of the stable over the transformative self belies a spatial, physical understanding of Volpone’s personhood. Volpone’s whirlwind shifting disorients an inner poise that only risks division at its peril, and the vehicle of his constant transforming is the object of all alchemical efforts, gold. The “cruel lesson of the play,” in fact, “is that gold fails to confer

that infinite mobility its lovers covet, but rather reduces them to the status of fixed, sub-human grotesques” (343). Thus the self and the value of the physical work of art face the same compromise: multiplication is also reduction (343).

Volpone’s flaw is the confusion, the blurring, of the naturally static and the naturally mobile, and we might recall that these same opposing forces set the stage for the whole *Sonnets* sequence. The opening claim “From fairest creatures we desire *increase*” (my emphasis, 1.1) first relies on sexual procreation as a means of preserving the speaker’s young friend through his progeny, a means that will eventually transition from sexual to poetic generation. But the call for increase, for multiplication, to protect the young man from the movement of time is soon joined by the speaker’s repeated insistence upon stillness. As we have seen: “Then let not winter’s ragged hand deface,” the speaker says, “In thee thy summer ere thou be *distilled*” (6.1-2), to which the speaker adds: “to give yourself away [in procreation] keeps yourself still” (16.13), so that “beauty *still* may live in thine or thee” (10.13-14). Where the friend of the *Sonnets* is forced into the divisive dual forces, one pushing in the direction of flux, the other fixity, Volpone is lured by them as he invests his substantial self in the seeming metallic stability of gold. As is the case with any precious metal, the *self* of gold is nothing but the shifting foundation of its value. That value is itself built upon the ever tenuous market only makes gold that much more unstable a substance. The predicament of identifying oneself with it recalls a close and precarious association with the sonnet, which, within the “whirlwind virtuosos of [the] multiplication” (Greene, 1970, 344) of its forms, can only fix its subject matter through his division, his reduction, between the multiplication of increase and the stasis of stillness.¹⁰⁴

I have considered the poem from two ontological vantage points, that of the sonnet specifically and that of the representation more generally. In both cases essential features emerge. For the sonnet, it is a spatial orientation that gives this poetic form a peculiar capacity for reproduction without any compromise of what the work is. For the representation, of which the sonnet is a kind, an essential characteristic is the reductive tendency to make of a whole and living subject a fixed part. Preservation within a representational form comes with a dire consequence to the humanness of the subject. The speaker's sonnet promises *to mend* the friend not only of his natural inclination to age and die, but also of his ontological limitations; that is, to mend him of his temporal nature requires the alteration that compromises his humanity and thus *mars* him. The conventional, no nonsense metaphysics resorted to in "you alone are you" (84.2) affirms a well justified ontological concern for the speaker's friend and subject. His conflicting perceptions of his craft accent the dangers of synecdoche and fixity, threats inherent to preservation within all representational media and perhaps nowhere more so than in the sonnet. The *Sonnets'* speaker's dilemma is the recursive puzzle that any representation becomes. If the speaker places his friend within the ontologically fluid sonnet form, the young man avoids the decay to which a spatially bound visual medium is prone. But the more successful inherence within the sonnet only assures that the subject's whole self is dismembered and that his nature to grow and change is halted. To truly preserve the friend in his natural state, a state of singular integrity *and* flux, is to allow him to age and die. To preserve *him himself* is to leave him unpreserved, and to abandon the *Sonnets'* preservation project. By offering an ontological analysis that both compares art forms and their effects on their subject matter and pays close attention to the subject and the poem as metaphysical entities, these previously unnoted

existential threats in the *Sonnets*—to both the young subject and the cycle itself—may be made clear.

This chapter offers the capstone to my previous observations and the conclusion to the dissertation. It exemplifies the hesitancies noted in theory and poetry, the hints of anxiety over the prospect of ontological independence. The Muse's either implicit or explicit appearance in the Elizabethan sonnet provides the self-reflective space in which we find the early modern mind in anxious play over the possibility of new and not entirely welcome freedoms. Once again, in the era of philosophy the Muse need never again appear *as Muse* but she continues in the Muse position to offer the same meta-poetic commentary she was once the figure of. Beyond this, was she ever anything else? Recent studies have noted the all but total lack of the Muse's identity throughout antiquity (Spentzou 3-5). This was much unlike her fellow Olympians, such as Apollo and Athena who had distinct characteristics that gave them identifiable characters, that gave them personhood. The Muse however is depicted as one of nine by Hesiod, throughout her early, visual (pre-literate) appearances as one of only three, and as a single deity (*Od.* 1). Then again, her parentage changes,¹⁰⁵ as do the markers of her occupation, so that she sings with a harp in one setting and writes with a scroll in another (Raphael, Bing 15). Like a multi-faceted sign, the Muse could be shaped, revised, applied, and reapplied in various contexts and for various purposes. She exemplifies not the edifice of the classical age, the paradigm of learning constructed by the early modern humanist, so much as the shifting disorientation, the uncertainty, of the era's poet.

This must be evidence of Hans Blumenberg's claim that the Renaissance was a "misunderstanding" (*LMA*, 8, 125). Here he questions the era's cultural backward glance that made the ancient past the fulcrum on which its identity leaned. The proposed intellectual and

aesthetic re-birth was “an attempt to forestall the new concept of reality that was making its entrance by interpreting it as the recurrence of a structure already experienced and manageable with familiar categories” (8). The avoidance tactic tried to ignore imminently modern intellectual changes, changes that we might say taught the later deconstruction how to see the breakdown of transcendental signifiers (such as Natura, Being, and God eventually).

That these signifiers did not hold up suggests one of the shortcomings of the reoccupation of myth. For despite philosophy’s best efforts, it only succeeded in doing what its predecessor had done, or attempted to do, before it: to manage the world through the creation of structures and the assignment of names. Or as Blumenberg put it: “to convert numinous indefiniteness into nominal definiteness and to make what is uncanny familiar and addressable” (*WoM*, 25). The need to do this stems from what he calls the absolutism of reality, a source of great anxiety produced in our distant ancestors when they left the safety of the jungle and entered the savannah, a new environment in which a vulnerable human species was overcome with fear and dread of its own biological limitations. Where retreat deeper into the forest or high into the trees had previously been a sufficient response to the threat of danger, it was of no use in the open grasslands where they could both perceive and *be* perceived under the enlarged horizon (x). In response to an environment for which they were little prepared biologically, they developed a tool for psychological survival, one that involved rationalizing anxiety

into plain *fear* of specific, named agencies, more or less personalized powers, whom we can address and (to that extent) deal with. It is important that these powers . . . are plural, so that each has only a limited domain—there is a

“separation of powers” among them, so that none of them can present that kind of all-encompassing threat [of the absolutism of reality]. (x)

Over time the named agencies would grow to include the separation of causal powers represented by Zeus and the Muse. Their plurality, their distinct individuality, was the separation of a power frightening in itself but no longer anxiety inducing.

But the philosophical generalization reduced the number of named agencies and increased their powers many fold. It allowed philosophy to subsume all within its reasoned mode of observation and appraisal, a mode that may claim itself a scientific improvement over myth for the fact that its technical vocabulary better offered an inductive illustration of the reality it sought to manage through identification. Yet philosophy—and this is from the start—allowed its concepts to become personae of their own. Prime cause (reincarnated as God), Being, even telos, and by all means Natura, all became hardly innocuous grand signifiers. Not reduced and separate as were the persons of myth, these named agencies comprised a totality of being—the reality of one’s self and the reality beyond that self—so that the mere fear achieved by myth returned to anxiety under such absolutizing conceptions. Nor were they scientifically induced, but instead were the vehicle of deduction. Deduction shadows the scientific efforts of philosophy, leaving it not identifying phenomena (causes, Being, nature) but employing it to anticipated ends: *this* does *that* because it is ordained in nature to do so. The exercise of reason certainly distanced philosophy from myth, but the reliance on sweeping generalities like natura carried with it a well-reasoned narrative, a myth all the more oppressive, deep into the age of theoretical inquiry. “Even when modern philosophy conceives of itself as in the sharpest possible contradiction to its theological [and mythological] prehistory, which it considers itself to have ‘overcome’, it is bound to the

frame of reference of what it renounces” (*LMA*, 69). Within the story of philosophy, specifically the tale of natural generation and human production within the frame of metaphysics, order and disorder juxtapose in such a way as to create new, larger, and more anxiety producing protagonist and antagonist roles.

Thus if the Renaissance was “an attempt to forestall the new concept of reality that was making its entrance by interpreting it as the recurrence of a structure already experienced and manageable with familiar categories” (*LMA*, 8), then the shattering dissolution of the signifiers on which the era of philosophy had been built turned the attention of the time back to what was familiar, remote, and therefore, safe. Early modern anxiety over the dissolution may be reflected in the backtracking and equivocating of the theorists and poets of my interest. Hannah Arendt located the resulting backtracking and equivocating confusion in the wake of the early seventeenth-century Cartesian doubt which deprived us of our immortality, “or at least of the certainty of immortality,” and thus left the world “less stable, less permanent, and hence less to be relied on than it had been in the Christian era” (320), which shunned worldliness. She continued, saying that “modern man did not gain this world when he lost the other world, and he did not gain life, strictly speaking, either; he was thrust back upon it, thrown into the closed inwardness of introspection, where the highest he could experience were the empty processes of reckoning of the mind, its play with itself” (320). Her observations, of course, sound like a description of the generation before Descartes and its self-confronting sonnet discourse, where liberation from ontological permanence and the paralyzing threat of an independent artistic production turned back and forth in anxious play within the empty reckoning of self-reflected poetic thought.

Notes

¹ She is joined to her left by the female figure of Philosophy, to the right by Theology, and directly across the ceiling from the Muse, Jurisprudence.

² The Homeridae, technically the ‘children of Homer’, are believed to be the collective authors of the Homeric hymns from which so much ancient iconography is taken. Performed at weddings and other festive events, these hymns were likely original compositions sung as introductions to certain books from the Homeric epics.

³ Kerenyi offers a more full explanation but without textual reference (105), while Bradac’s is more informative but focused on the role of Pegasus in establishing the Heliconian springs. (She concludes that horses become symbolic of the liminal threshold between upper and lower worlds.) (284-86).

⁴ The combined reference to the Muses and Sirens also appears in Spenser: “They [Sirens] were faire Ladies, till they fondly striu’d / With th’Heliconian maides for maistry” (*Faerie Queene* [FQ] 2.xii.31).

⁵ A chief source for Ficino’s conception of furor is found in the introduction to his translation of Plato’s *Ion*.

⁶ Ong draws on the previous research of E. A. Havelock’s *Preface to Plato*.

⁷ At this time, the Muse’s canon of iconography takes on the written scroll (Bing 15).

⁸ This is the presentation of reoccupation throughout *Work on Myth*, in which Blumenberg argues that certain myths (such as the Prometheus and Faust stories) persist through time because of the “Darwinism of words,” which eliminates the tales that do not speak clearly enough to, that do not adequately express the life experience of, their audiences (*WoM*, 150-51, 159). Part of this matter of mythological expression, of the need for the particular plots and persons of certain myths to remain and undergo a continued process of selection and revision, dovetails with the original presentation of reoccupation in *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (first published in 1966, some sixteen years before *WoM*).

There Blumenberg’s concern is with identifying the quality of modernity that has not been inherited from either the Christian era or its pagan predecessor, and thus, which provides modernity’s legitimacy (which he refers to as self-assertion [*Selbstbehauptung*]). To do this he focuses on fundamental questions raised in one epoch that forwards “answer positions” insufficient to the thinkers of the next era. They approach the same

questions with a new set of intellectual armory, and the process continues (*LMA*, 65). This system binds the thinker of the future by the questions asked and methods of answering them posed in the past. Thus Myth establishes the premise that logocentric theory must follow. Because myth “defined the standards of achievements that [the philosopher] could not fall short of . . . [.] the postmythical epoch is under pressure to accomplish what the epoch preceding it had claimed or even only pretended to accomplish. Theory sees in myth an ensemble of answers to questions, such as it is itself, or wants to be. That forces it, while rejecting the answers, to acknowledge the questions” (*WoM*, 27). Theory/philosophy actually builds itself on the mythical foundations, though with modifications. “By ‘reoccupying’ identical systematic positions it [the era of philosophy] avoids or seeks to avoid letting the longing gaze of its contemporaries turn back to the gods of Egypt that they have left behind” (28). As I argue in my conclusion, this hypothesis becomes problematic when philosophy, specifically metaphysics, creates its own transcendental signifiers and attendant belief systems around conceptions of Being, Natura, the Prime Cause, and God.

⁹ George Chapman’s translation *Seven Books of the Iliad of Homer Prince of Poets* (which included books 1, 2, 7-11) was not published until 1598, the complete *Iliad* not until 1610-11, and his *Odyssey* 1614-15 (Chapman ix). These facts limit the possibility of direct influence on a number of the sonnet cycles I work with, though they also do not account for the likelihood of influence by coterie circulation of Chapman’s work in manuscript form. His translation of Homer’s book 2 invocation captures the essence of the original: “Now tell me, Muses, you that dwell in heavenly roofs (for you / Are goddesses, are present here, are wise, and all things know; / We only trust the voice of fame, know nothing)” (2.413-15).

¹⁰ The Muses were alternately plural and singular, and sometimes both within the same work. Throughout I alternate depending on the number of the Muses in the passage under discussion. Note that Nancy makes their plurality the premise of his explanation of modern art (throughout but especially 1-40), while in Spentzou their plurality, particularly in Hesiod, symbolically gestures to a corporate singularity (4, n. 14).

¹¹ The Elizabethan use of organs like hearts and eyes (as well as the mind and mental functions) to metonymically figure qualities of personhood is taken up in full in chapter seven.

¹² A key characteristic granting nature such authority was its ability to generate essence (from *esse*: to be). Found in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (book 4) and restated in the scholastic philosophy so influential over the

early modern theoretical and also social mindset, essence amounted to “the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity” (Fuss xi), the static and inviolable core of personhood that trumped all other features of the person and even preceded her existence (Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* [3:1], *Summa Theologiae* [1:1]). Humanity’s inability to produce essence becomes the object of Pico della Mirandola’s concern in chapter four where he, and his protégé Michelangelo Buonarroti after him, grant the artifex this causal power in the artistic context.

¹³ One reason for my caution is that the hierarchy of making could be a composite of any number of hierarchical orders and other notions of causality that may be inferred from myth. My purpose here is to identify the significance of the Muse to early modern uses, and so I illustrate but one possibility.

¹⁴ In a different context but similar in form, Blumenberg said: “Even when modern philosophy conceives of itself as in the sharpest possible contradiction to its theological [and mythological] prehistory, which it considers itself to have ‘overcome’, it is bound to the frame of reference of what it renounces” (*LMA*, 69).

¹⁵ Since I locate the origin of this quality of the sonnet in the seemingly lyric moments of the archaic epic speaker’s Muse invocations, I should concede my lack of attention to Renaissance epic. *Orlando Furioso* by Lodovico Ariosto (1474-1533), a work ultimately inspired by literary predecessors, attempts to complete the epic of Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, left unfinished in 1494 at the time of Boiardo’s death. Ariosto opens the work with an implicit invocation to Virgil: “OF LOVES and LADIES, KNIGHTS and ARMS, I sing, / OF COURTESIES and many a DARING FEAT” (I) (The text is divided into numbered stanzas of eight lines each (*ottava rima*). I will cite the stanza numbers), who likewise opened his *Aeneid* not with a mention of the Muse but with reference to the epic’s content: “*Arma virumque cano*,” or ‘I sing arms and the man’. Too, Ariosto promises to tell his story “in the strain of Roland” (II) recalling the debt of Boiardo’s *Orlando Innamorato* to the twelfth-century romance-epic *Song of Roland*. Beyond the citation of predecessors, the only discussion of the poetic craft occurs in his pledge to tell “Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme” (II). And this he does. Ariosto’s story is a geographic wonder spanning throughout the known world and even involving a trip to the moon. Its characters meet fantastical creatures, magicians and sorceresses, and light on magical islands. Ariosto utilizes the full range of fictive liberties, and though his work remains a fantastical celebration

of creative freedom, there is little suggestion of the limits and liberties of his—or his speaker’s or characters’—self orientation.

Torquato Tasso (1544-95) opens his *Jerusalem Delivered* with a fairly conventional, Christianized Muse invocation:

O heavenly Muse, that not with fading bays
 Deckest thy brow by the Heliconian spring,
 But sittest crowned with stars’ immortal rays

In Heaven where legions of bright angels sing . . . (II)

He dedicates the work to “noble Princes” who “protect and save / The Pilgrim Muses and their ship defend / From rock of Ignorance and Error’s wave” (IV). In turn he promises the princes: “My Muse hereafter shall perhaps unfold / Your fights, your battles, and your combats bold” (IV). In the archaic Greek vein, the poet asks for the ability to retell the events of the story and its battles with accuracy, suggesting that the aletheia of the story remains within the jurisdiction of the Muse. As the noble princes protect her, she protects the poet’s craft from Ignorance and Error. Getting the job done, Tasso’s invocation appeals to an audience with an affection for humanist learning (not unlike Raphael’s) but offers no intersection of poetics and personhood. He and Ariosto either fail to note these key features of the opening lines of their epic predecessors, or neglect them by design, relying instead on the classical tradition as an aesthetic fashion.

Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, published in 1590, offers many demonstrations of humanistic learning, and like his predecessor Tasso, Christianizes the Muse: “Helpe, then, O holy virgin chiefe of nyne” (Proem, 2.1). But unlike the other two major epics of the era, Spenser does hint at some issues of his ontology in his tendency to refer to himself (arguably autobiographically) from work to work. In *FQ*, for instance, he opens the Proem by referring back to his work, to his persona, in the Shepheardes Calender:

Lo I the man, whose Muse whylome did maske,
 As time her taught, in lowly Shephard’s weeds,
 Am now enforst a farre vnfitter taske,
 For trumpets sterne to change mine Oaten reeds . . . (Proem, 1.1-4)

in which the Shephard's weeds and Oaten reeds describe the Colin Clout guise of his poetic personhood.

Likewise, recall that his *Amoretti* speaker has a beloved, a mother, and a queen by the name of Elizabeth, just as Spenser had, and that he too is working on an epic poem about his queen. Because my focus is on Elizabethan sonnets I do not engage the *FQ*, but do take these matters up in much detail in Part II's focus on ontological poetics, in which his seeming autobiography plays an important role in the *Amoretti*.

¹⁶ It must be noted that in the age of humanism, ontology as a mode of philosophical inquiry had gone out of vogue and was replaced by a zeal for moral philosophy. And though I will find hints and strains of ontological concerns in the thought of the day, I want to imply that the practice of ontology had reverted to art theory, poetics, and poetry.

¹⁷ Inversions of expected sequential order in rhetoric, logic, and in other contexts were seen as preposterous, a concept made available largely through Patricia Parker's work, which will appear with much significance in Part II of this dissertation.

¹⁸ This is also Joel Fineman's method, as he found that the Shakespearean *Sonnets* provide the best description of their own operations (324-25).

¹⁹ Travel was only one means for the diffusion of ideas throughout Europe, covered by Bouwsma (7-11). For a more comprehensive study demonstrating the circulation of humanist ideas apart from travel, Kristeller, "The European Diffusion of Italian Humanism" (69-88).

²⁰ This chapter deals exclusively with male poets from the archaic Greek and Classical Latin eras.

²¹ Apparently, earlier twentieth-century work devoted to the influence of ancient ideas and literatures on the early modern humanist outlook was so convincing that very little of such criticism has been recently added. Now classics in criticism, studies by Trinkhaus (1970), Snell (1953), Auerbach (1991 [1946]), and even Curtius (1979 [1948; in English, 1953]) and Seznec (1953 [1940]) in their own right, have provided important depth and scope for later works like Hathaway (1962) and Heninger (1988).

²² Plato's account of the poet, and his claim that his description appears at the end of a long line of similar observations about the character of poetic inspiration, has been drawn on as authoritative by many classicists reading the archaic poet's relationship with his Muse (see Tigerstedt's summary of the criticism, 165-66). But, there being no reason to take Plato for his word, a few voices (belonging to E. R. Dodds, E. N.

Tigerstedt, and Penelope Murray, among others) have questioned the prudence of relying on him. For these Greek terms and their English translations I have drawn on Tigerstedt (164).

²³ Again, George Chapman's translation of Homer captures this very essence of the passage: "Now tell me, Muses, you that dwell in heavenly roofs (for you / Are goddesses, are present here, are wise, and all things know; / We only trust the voice of fame, know nothing)" (2.413-15).

²⁴ Most translates αὖ as *nevertheless*, but it may also be rendered *in turn*, such as "Tell me Muse and I, in turn, will tell others." Taken this way, the invocation at *Iliad* book 2 demonstrates the poet's dependence upon his Muse which he more forcefully departs from in the *Odyssey*.

²⁵ We will later see Virgil completely adapt Homer's use of the petition-response scheme but to the same end. And it will likely be clear then that his re-reading of Homer has actually inspired my analysis.

²⁶ Pucci offers a helpful summary of the body of criticism (1977, 9-16).

²⁷ Though the fragment receives wide attention in Pindaric studies, the original *Hymn to Zeus* is lost. Our only account of it descends from the rhetorician Aelius Aristides.

²⁸ The Muses were closely associated with the Graces since Hesiod (*Theogony* 64) and would remain so from antiquity through the Renaissance.

²⁹ Snell is not alone in this interpretation, which is seen also in Ledbetter who cites other similar critical assessments (62-63).

³⁰ In his dissertation *De Sirenibus: An Inquiry into Sirens from Homer to Shakespeare*, Siegfried de Rachewiltz quotes from Pausanias's record of his travels in Greece where he describes a temple of Hera with an "ancient image" of her holding winged Sirens in her hand (63 n. 32).

³¹ A. J. Close did two landmark documentary studies of the nature-art dichotomy, one focused on the idea in classical antiquity and the Renaissance (1969) and the other, an in-depth prequel on classical antiquity (1971).

³² Over half of Lovejoy's and Boas' sixty-six commonplaces on humanity's relationship with nature meet this description, and many of them stretch back through Plato's and Aristotle's era to the pre-Socratics (447-456).

³³ Because the *Protrepticus* is only a reassembled fragment, the location of passages by chapter number can be difficult. Therefore, I will also include the page numbers of chapter IX of the edition I use (21-22).

³⁴ This is the difference between essence and existence. In the scholastic view the two are only one and the same in God. Pico makes this the extra-ordinary quality of the human self as well (*Oratio* 117).

³⁵ As I noted in the introduction, the quondam accidental qualities of race and culture have now entered the canon of ontological markers. Although essential and inessential qualities are no longer assumed to have the certainty they once did, racial and cultural aspects of the person are as substantial as any others.

³⁶ In contexts perhaps not limited to homosexual behavior: The Clown of *Measure for Measure* laments: “’Twas never merry world since, of two usuries, the merriest [sexual] was put down, and the worser [monetary] allow’d by order of law” (3.2.5-7). Ben Jonson epigrammatically likened usury and prostitution: “If, as their ends, their fruits were so the same / Bawdry and usury were one kind of game” (qtd. in Hawkes, 2000, 163). According to Thomas Dekker’s *Works for Armourours* (1609), “Usurie was the first that ever taught Money to commit incest” (qtd. in Hawkes 164).

³⁷ David Hawkes reports pamphlet wars waged over usury in the years 1571, 1604, 1606, 1614, 1621, and 1624 (2000, 345).

³⁸ The same preposterous powers both ennobled and called into moral question the productive art of alchemy. In the *Inferno*’s eighth circle, reserved for the fraudulent, Dante encounters the alchemist who reminds him: “com’ io fui di natura buona scimia,” or, “recall how apt I was at aping [imitating] nature” (XXIX.139-140). The *scimia* (Latin: *simia*), the ‘ape of nature’, was a commonplace figure for the human maker, who, like an ape that imitates man, worked within nature’s confines, imitating the world and its processes. But the alchemist was believed to generate metals artificially, to subvert the orders of nature and artifice. Dante’s alchemist is only in hell, of course, because of his considerable aptitude, because his ‘aping’ of nature transcends any mere imitation and threatens to supplant nature’s causal dominance.

³⁹ Pico’s experience with scholasticism was not limited to his time at the University of Paris but was central to his relationship with his colleague (and some say teacher) Marsilio Ficino. An illustration of their professional rapport may be found in Kristeller (1964, 407-10).

⁴⁰ Greenblatt (258, n. 3) cites Thomas Greene's original study of the "flexibility" of the Renaissance self (1968), which draws on Pico's *Oratio*.

⁴¹ Pico suggests the imitation of cherubim and other angelic deities (1965, 7-8).

⁴² Pico owned *Celestial Hierarchy*, according to Pearl Kibre's catalogue of his library (35-36).

⁴³ Avery Dulles cites Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (1452) which was influenced by Bartolomeo Fazio's *De excellentia ac praestantia hominis*, written some ten years earlier (106).

⁴⁴ If more restrained, hints of Pico's passage are detected in Richard Hooker's claim, quoted by William J. Bouwsma without citation, that "we should never be content with earthly existence but always aspire to 'that which exceedeth the reach of sense': we seek something we do not know, yet desire 'doth so incite [us] that all other knowne delightes and pleasures are layd aside . . . so that nature even in this life doth plainly claime and call for a more divine perfection'" (2000, 25). Note also the following from Frederigo Zuccaro's 1607 *Idea of Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*:

Because of His goodness and to show in a small replica the excellence of His divine art, [God] having created man in His image and likeness with respect to the soul, endowing it with an immaterial, incorruptible substance and the powers of thinking and willing, with which man could rise above and command all the other creatures of the World except the Angel and be almost a second God, He wished to grant him the ability to form in himself an inner intellectual design; so that by means of it he could know all the creatures and could form in himself a new world . . . so that with this Design, almost imitating God and vying with Nature, he could produce an infinite number of artificial things resembling natural ones, and by means of painting and sculpture make new Paradises visible on earth. (qtd. in Bouwsma, 2000, 31)

⁴⁵ As noted in Chapter Three, Aquinas makes clear at least three times that the ability to produce substantial form is prohibited to human beings: *Summa* q. 45 a. 4; q. 47 a. 1; q. 117 a. 3.

⁴⁶ Note that the three ways provide the overall structure of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: only after purgation in the Inferno may Dante progress to the illuminative Purgatorio and then to Paradiso, or perfection with God.

⁴⁷ Saslow reports that the poem was written on the back of a letter addressed to Michelangelo and dated 1535. Since the *Last Judgment* had been commissioned in 1534, Saslow says, ideas for the fresco were taking shape at this time (219-20).

⁴⁸ These examples are taken from Wallace, 2008 (21), and are followed by the name of the translator.

⁴⁹ I have taken the original Italian from Bohde (22), and have slightly modified Creighton Gilbert's translation of Michelangelo's letter.

⁵⁰ For a detailed discussion of Dante's intertextual relationship with Ovid, see Jessica Levenstein (414, 420 n.13).

⁵¹ One may assume these dates because of Temple's direct address to Sidney, for example: "You conclude the comparison of Nature and poetry by refuting an objection . . ." (79). It is commonly believed that Sidney began the work around 1579, the year Edmund Spenser published *The Shepheardes Calender*, which he dedicated to Sidney. Sidney compliments the poem in the *Apology* (100).

⁵² It should not be assumed that Temple's is the response of the larger artistic and intellectual community. As a logician he is more satisfied with a skeletal reading of a creative and theoretical work than would be Sidney or many of Sidney's contemporaries. But within his rational response there is a hint of what critical audiences took note of, what gave them pause, and what they found worthy of comment and refutation.

⁵³ Katherine Duncan-Jones records that during his time in Europe (a three year tour beginning in 1572) Sidney became familiar with the Italian visual art setting, and mentions by name in his letters and in his *Arcadias* Titian, Veronese, and Tintoretto (4-5). Forest G. Robinson proposed that the "doctrines of the *Apology* have much more in common with mannerist theory, which accorded the artist a natural faculty for forming another nature within himself" (105). Without denying Sidney's exposure to Italian theory, D. H. Craig denies that Sidney could have been influenced by the later mannerists and offers a soberer timeline for his possible sources ("Hybrid Growth" 185ff). In the *Apology* Sidney mentions as his influences J. C. Scaliger (108, 116) and Girolamo Fracastoro (108).

⁵⁴ Sidney's influence may be found throughout the Elizabethan canon, if nothing else then because of the Sidney family's reputation as patrons of the arts. But two notable instances include Stephen Gosson's critical work *The Schoole of Abuse*, an attack on the English theater, and Edmund Spenser's poetic cycle *The*

Shepherdess Calender, both of which were dedicated to Sidney. The speculation that Sidney wrote the *Apology* as a direct response to Gosson has been treated carefully in at least two instances: Howell (172-74) and Herman (31-34), with both concluding that Gosson's *Schoole* may have warranted response during the time of the *Apology* but that it is likely not the work's sole inspirer.

⁵⁵ Panofsky's "Artist, Scientist, Genius: Notes on the Renaissance-Dämmerung," first published in 1953, was a seminal contribution to the critical conversation associating Renaissance visual arts and natural philosophy (science).

⁵⁶ Dondi was the Venetian clock-maker who relocated to Padua and designed an astrarium, or astronomical clock, some 60 years before mechanical clocks appeared in Europe.

⁵⁷ The account was not recorded until the sixteenth-century, but Garrard notes that it is consistent with the rhetoric of Donatello's time (56).

⁵⁸ Michelangelo was notoriously non-technological, refusing to use the window and even mathematics in the execution of his work, but painted and carved solely by the eye. This becomes more evident the older he gets and the more free-form his work becomes.

⁵⁹ The whole of Robert Matz's *Defending Literature in Early Modern England* is devoted to the early modern social context of Horace's definition of poetry.

⁶⁰ In Paolo Beni's (1552-1625) *Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, God is an imitator by "realizing," or bringing into being, the divine ideas stored within the divine mind, "by which term Nature is said to imitate God, and Art to imitate Nature" (qtd. in Hathaway, 21). The novelty of Beni's proposition is that divine-creation is the mimetic result of God's imitation of his own divine idea. Sidney does not take his claims quite this far (and there is no indication he was familiar with Beni's theoretical work) but he does appear to have been influenced by a similar conception of mimesis, a creation of images through imitation of imaginary images. In this case, nature's reality is circumvented in the creative process.

⁶¹ This passage has generated much critical attention and perhaps too much has been made of it. Michael Mack for one has read it (or over-read it) as nothing less than an assertion of human creativity, or the human ability to produce in the manner of the Christian God. Creation at this time was *ex nihilo*, from nothing,

and this is clearly not what Sidney asserts. Admittedly, Sidney's own grandiosity may have inspired twentieth- and twenty-first- century critical aggrandizements of his statements.

⁶² Geoffrey Shepherd notes that Sidney never gave the essay a title, but the titles we have were given by the printers of the first two editions, the *Apology* by Henry Olney and the *Defence* by William Ponsonby, both in 1595 (*Apology* 1).

⁶³ The critical work on the English iconoclasm is voluminous, but I have found a few titles particularly helpful in understanding this important historical and intellectual moment: on the role of iconoclasm in shaping English poetics, see Gilman (31-60) and Gross (1985), throughout; on the distinction between image and idol, see Gross (1985, 27-77) and Besançon (183-203); and on the intellectual history of early modern iconoclasm (not limited to England), see Besançon (165-177).

⁶⁴ The movement stemmed largely from John Calvin's admonition of religious imagery in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (originally published in Latin in 1536 and in 1559): "seeing that this brutish stupidity has overspread the globe, men longing after visible forms of God, and so forming deities of wood and stone, silver and gold, or of any other dead and corruptible matter, we must hold it as a first principle, that as often as any form is assigned to God, his glory is corrupted by an impious lie" (11: 91). By the words of Exodus 20:4 (*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth*), God "curbs any licentious attempt we might make to represent him by a visible shape, and briefly enumerates all the forms by which superstition had begun, even long before, to turn his truth into a lie." The problem of representing God is that the very manufacture of such an image abstracts God's truth and leaves only the falsity of the image made. Calvin adds: "We think it unlawful to give a visible shape to God, because God himself has forbidden it, and because it cannot be done without, in some degree, tarnishing his glory" (100). On the one hand, the idol substitutes for the god it represents, a mode that cannot but compromise the integrity of the god. Concluding that "God himself being the only fit witness to himself" (96), Calvin anticipates idolatry's tendency to substitute. On the other hand, the idol supercedes mere substitution in that it "may not so much stand for or contain a god as usurp the god's place" (Gross, 1985, 35). Iconoclasm's Calvinist architecture identified just such a problem in representation's ability, as an "impious

lie,” to “corrupt” God’s glory; to “turn his truth into a lie”; to “tarnish” his glory” (100). The chief problem is the representational power to affect that which *is* and to render it otherwise.

⁶⁵ For the sake of brevity, I have recounted only Gosson’s focus on the way the representational theater dissembled the actor. To exemplify its effect on the audience, Gosson re-tells Xenophon’s account of a performance of a play on Bacchus and Ariadne. Once Bacchus and Ariadne have expressed in “daunce” the “passions of love,” the reaction in the audience, according to Gosson, is marked:

At this the beholders beganne to shoute. When Bacchus rose up, tenderly lifting Ariadne from her seate, no small store of curtesie passing betwene them, the beholders rose up, every man stooode on tippe toe, and seemed to hover over the play. When they sware, the company sware, when they departed to bedde; the company presently was set on fire, they that were married posted home to their wives; they that were single, vowed very solemnly, to be wedded.

(Playes Confuted in Five Actions)

The radical effect on the audience is not limited to mere imitation of behavior, however. Laura Levine says it raises “the more radical idea that watching leads inevitably to ‘being’—to assuming the identity of the actor. The play is dangerous precisely because the spectator becomes a replica of the actor” (124). Thus within the iconophobic outlook the problem is dual-directional in its application to both the actor and the audience. On the one hand, play acting perverted the maker who, either by constructing a fiction or pretending to be someone he is not, compromised who ‘in deed he is’. On the other, the play confused viewers through their substitution of what is false for what is true. In both cases the representational arts have the efficacy to shake otherwise stable conceptions of human being.

⁶⁶ I am thinking here of Sartre’s claim “Existence precedes essence” (“Existentialism is a Humanism”).

⁶⁷ Ficino offers a similar portrayal in *Theologica Platonica* I.130-31.

⁶⁸ Plato in *Republic* 10.617b gives each planet a Siren, an association that becomes in later handlings one of Muses and planets. And though developed by much earlier Neoplatonists, no treatment appears as comprehensive as these in the Italian Renaissance.

⁶⁹ Edith Wyss's *The Apollo and Marsyas Myth: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Images* offers a thorough catalogue of images and textual adaptations of the myth from antiquity through the counter-reformation, and places them within the relevance of the time period in which they appear.

⁷⁰ Nature could be thought of as two species of one figure: as *natura naturans*, or nature as a force for life and regeneration, and *natura naturata*, the observable things, or the product of *natura naturans*, such as rocks, trees, and inert matter. Garrard notes that the terms first appear in the West in the Latin translation of Averroes' commentary on Aristotle's *De caelo* (322, n. 155).

⁷¹ Ahern's *The Art of the Epigraph: How Great Books Begin* is devoted entirely to the significance of the modern epigraph, particular in its role as a heading—and directive—in modern novels.

⁷² Peter C. Herman makes this observation, though limits it to his discussion of Elizabethan suspicions against the imagination (41).

⁷³ William J. Bouwsma associates the heart with an Augustinian sense of self adopted by the various cultures of humanists throughout the Renaissance. He offers ample examples (2000, 21-23).

⁷⁴ For a both lively and thoughtful materialist discussion of the use of the mirror reflection as a poetic trope, Kalas (114-117).

⁷⁵ What is more, the Elizabethan English use of *counterfeit* carried negative implications that raise the sense of the fraudulent (Booth 159, n. 8; 225, n. 5). It did have some of the same economic suggestions it has today but with social and political resonances now lost to us. In particular, to counterfeit was akin to transgressive sexual behavior, such as the use of prostitution as Gower presents it in *Henry V*: "Why this is an arrant *counterfeit* rascal; I / remember him now; a *bawd*, a cutpurse" (my emphasis, 3.6.1523). Implicitly, Gower may also be talking about a bastard since adultery and its product were often spoken of in similar terms: "And that most venerable man which I / Did call my father, was I know not where / When I was stamped; some coiner with his tools / Made me a counterfeit" (*Cymbeline* 2.5.1372). The "interchangeability" of terms for coining and sex, especially transgressive coining and sex, likely had long and deep roots in Latin culture. "The Latin *adulter*," in fact,

came to mean not just an adulterer (or, in Vulgate Latin, the offspring of adultery, a bastard), but (usually in the form *adulter solidorum*), 'a counterfeiter or adulterator of coin'; while

adultero similarly acquired the sense ‘to falsify, adulterate, or counter-feit’. The same extended meaning is present in Medieval English *adulter* (‘corrupt’ or ‘debase’), and is everywhere apparent in the expanded sixteenth- and seventeenth-century terminology of adultery. (Neill, 152-153)

An example of the right order that adultery and its product depart from is found in Alan of Lille (12th c.) who figures Natura as the power of procreation, as we saw her in Chapter Three. Perhaps borrowing from Macrobius, Alan’s Natura says she is “a coiner for stamping the classes of things . . . minting the copies of things on the appropriate anvils,” thus not permitting “the shape to deviate from the shape of the anvil” (*De planctu naturae*, 8.4, qtd. in Garrard 24-5).

⁷⁶ Without question the patron of a sonnet cycle may indeed be treated as a Muse, and one with whom the poet might have as much conflict as his classical predecessor exhibited with the goddess. But the critical work on early modern patronage of the literary arts is voluminous and to attach the following observations to it would seem perfunctory. The purpose of this and the following chapter on Shakespeare’s Muse is to demonstrate the significance of these initial sonnets as equal to that of the ancient Muse invocations, to show, in effect, a reoccupation of the “function,” and even some of the “content” (Blumenberg, *LMA*, 66), of this invocational space so rich in both poetic and ontological commentary. Once the premise of the Muse position is established, then its implications beyond the matters of my concern should be pursued.

⁷⁷ Again, Aristotle’s *Politics* 1258: “This is why usury is called by the word we commonly use [*tokos*: a birthing]; for as the offspring resembles its parent, so the interest bred by money is like the principle which breeds it, as [as a son styled by the father’s name, so] it may be called ‘currency the son of currency’. Hence we can understand why of all modes of acquisition, usury is the most unnatural” (qtd. in Shell, 50, n. 12).

⁷⁸ A thorough survey of the convention in Renaissance use is in Tayler (11-37) and Hagstrum (62-63 and 69-70). Examples from the writers featured in this dissertation include: “In scorn of Nature, Art gave lifeless life” (*Lucrece* 1374) and *Venus and Adonis*:

Look when a painter would surpass the life
 In limning out a well-proportioned steed,
 His art with nature’s workmanship at strife,

As if the dead the living should exceed . . . (ll. 289-292)

Shakespeare's ambivalence may also be noted in Spenser:

One would haue thought, (so cunningly, the rude
 And scorned parts were mingled with the fine,)
 That nature had for wantonness ensued
 Art, and that Art at nature did repine;
 So striuing each the other to vndermine,
 Each did the other's worke more beautifie. (*FQ* 2.12.59-64)

⁷⁹ Sidney would have had access to the Homeric epics in their original Greek, but the Thamyris episode is recorded in Chapman's English translation (2.520ff.).

⁸⁰ Kunin finds the language so un-erotic, he actually refers to the *Sonnets*' presentation of sex as a kind of technology (96).

⁸¹ For example, two five-dollar bills or ten one-dollar bills are still valued at \$10, which makes currency fungible. Likewise, according to most consumers, 10 lbs of thick-skinned russet potatoes is a fair exchange for 10 lbs of thin-skinned. Persons, however, cannot be exchanged with the same fungibility. Shakespeare's familiarity with usury is likely given that his father was charged with the crime twice (Honan 37).

⁸² In "An Essay on Art," Jacques Maritain speculates that "in the child, because of matter and heredity, one cannot be sure that it is the father or the mother, rather it may be some more or less desirable ancestor who comes to life again and manifests his or her likeness. There is in the child a terrible unknown which does not exist in the work of art" (88).

⁸³ Coarse as it is, it does carry ontological inference reminiscent of Dante's portrayal of his self as imprinted by God (*Para.* XXVI.27).

⁸⁴ Though David Hawkes' is perhaps the most engaging—and recent—analysis of these opening sonnets, his suggestion that the sonnets serve to question the teleological reasoning behind the Elizabethan prohibitions of homosexuality and usury economics (2000, 345-46 and throughout) misses entirely the attention the sonnets pay to production generally considered. I argue that these sonnets do not stop at questioning social

moral prohibitions but go on to question the effects of production, especially poetic representational production, on human personhood. I will introduce this argument in the present chapter and develop it fully in Chapter Ten.

⁸⁵ “Muse sonnet” refers to one of a handful of sonnets either addressing or referring to the Muse. The only cluster of such sonnets is found at 100-03, but others may include 38, 78, 85, and even 21, 32, 79, 82, though the use of “Muse” in this latter group is more idiomatic.

⁸⁶ Note Shakespeare’s and Spenser’s use of the term, in *Venus and Adonis*:

Look when a painter would surpass the life
 In limning out a well-proportioned steed,
 His art with nature’s workmanship at strife,
 As if the dead the living should exceed . . . (ll. 289-92)

and in *FQ*:

One would haue thought, (so cunningly, the rude
 And scorned parts were mingled with the fine,)
 That nature had for wantonness ensued
 Art, and that Art at nature did repine;
 So striuing each the other to vndermine,
 Each did the other’s worke more beautifie. (2.12.59-64)

⁸⁷ Quatrain 1	→	Quatrain 2
1,5 Alack, what poverty my Muse brings forth	→	O, blame me not if I no more can write
2,6 That having such a scope to show her pride	→	Look in your glass and there appears a face
3,7 The argument all bare is of more worth	→	That overgoes my blunt invention quite
4,8 Than when it hath my added praise beside	→	Dulling my lines and doing me disgrace

⁸⁸ Both Allen Grossman (with Mark Halliday) and Aaron Kunin derive this basic conclusion, but with a very different emphasis on the personae found in the poem. Grossman sees that the human collective keeps the poem, any poem, culturally alive, but that the poet as poetic speaker must die to be remembered in poetry (240-41). Kunin addresses the *Sonnets*’ poetic subject and finds that the young friend himself resists the annihilation of his character that will result from his own poetic preservation (100). Both critics associate poetic

preservation with some form of death, but I focus on what the poem does to its subject from the only point of view we are given in the *Sonnets*, the speaker's. Considering the speaker's troubled concern over his poetry's effect on his young friend, I draw on a large number of passages within these sonnets not considered by others to show just how central a problem the sonnet itself is to the sequence.

⁸⁹ Though philosopher Peter Kivy considers the ontological status of works of art "one of the most vexed and deeply philosophical questions in contemporary aesthetics theory" (6), he notes that the study arises from commonsensical observations. For example: "you can put the *Mona Lisa* in the trunk of your car but not Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. What sort of 'object' then is the musical work . . . ?" (6). Kivy's observation suggests that where we can, or cannot, locate a work of art helps us better understand what it is. *Where* it may exist suggests *how* it exists. The *Sonnets* allow us to ask such questions of the poem: Can you put sonnet 55 itself in your trunk? That is, does it possess a singular existence in one place, such as the *Mona Lisa*, or is it like Beethoven's Fifth, which defies such limitations? And to what extent does the nature of sonnet 55's existence affect its capacity for making present and thus preserving its artistic subject?

⁹⁰ In his *The Architecture of Virtual Space*, architectural theorist Or Ettliger offers what is arguably the first consistent theory of virtual space (viii). He limits the notion of virtual to pictorial space that is created by "physical devices," such as "paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, films, video games, TV," devices that allow us to "visually experience something that is not physically there" (6). Not included are the devices of sculpture, landscape, theater, or texts, but Ettliger notes their relevance to further study. Thus, I draw my conception of virtual space from Ettliger's more generalized definitions: "By applying paint on canvas such that we interpret it in terms of the physical world, the painter creates a new place for us to experience. It does not exist as a physical place in physical space, but exists nevertheless, as a virtual place in virtual space" (26).

⁹¹ Compare these lines to sonnet 107: "thou in this [sonnet] shall find thy monument, / when tyrants crests and tombs of brass are spent" (13-14).

⁹² Though the notion of mental images became a signature modern dispute in cognitive theory, at the time of the *Sonnets* the close association of image (*phantasma*) with the mental function of imagination (*phantasia*) was still current. In Aristotle's handling, it is impossible to think without images (*phantasmata*) (*De Anima*, 431a). For him, imagination is itself a mental activity during which a mental image (*phantasma*) is seen

in the mind (428a). Nigel Thomas locates the beginning of the modern conception of mental imagery with Descartes' 1641 *Meditations*, which denies that certain concepts, like God, appear in our minds as an image. First refuted in 1651 by Hobbes, who conceived of all thought as a "trayne of imaginations" (*Leviathan* I.3, quoted in Thomas), cognitive "picture-theory," as it is called, remains a matter of contention. Sections 3 and 4 of Thomas's entry are devoted to this still ongoing debate.

⁹³ In his *Odes* 4.9, Horace credited Homer with keeping Agamemnon present to us through the poetic image:

Many heroes lived before Agamemnon
 but they are all unweepable [*inlacrimabiles*: actually *unwept*], overwhelmed
 by the long night of oblivion
 because they lacked a sacred bard. (qtd. in Grossman, 7)

More than the preservation of history, Grossman credited Homer's poetic image with the "holding-in-mind by the poem of the picture of the person" (7). Thus the poem not only reports that Agamemnon lived, but in making him weepable to us, it retains a measure of his personhood that historical account is not designed for.

⁹⁴ A work's capacity for reproduction as a component in understanding its ontology has a long, well argued, and not much resolved, history within discussions on the ontology of art, of which Paisley Livingston offers a concise and helpful summary (especially section 2.1). Livingston suggests categories of works based on their reproducibility: "Multiply instantiated works [such as a poem] form one major category, then, while single or non-reproducible ones [such as a painting] form another."

⁹⁵ Livingston treats the ontology of the photo in terms informative to an understanding of the sonnet: "[I]t would be highly implausible to contend that Henri Cartier-Bresson's famous photographic work 'Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare, (1932), consists in the negative used to make the prints, or in the first or any other single print of this picture.'" I see that, likewise, the existence of the poem cannot be limited to the material of its presentation, especially if there are numerous instances of it. Again, here we ask where a work exists to determine how it exists.

⁹⁶ Other types of poetry rely on the space of the page to create the visual effect that establishes their form and makes them at once literary and visual pieces. The shape poems of George Herbert come to mind as

an obvious, if too obvious, instance of a visual use of the page, so I will rely on a modern lyric for a more subtle contrast to the sonnet:

Six monarch butterfly cocoons
 clinging to the back of your throat—

 you could feel their gold wings trembling.

You were alarmed. You felt infested.
 In the downstairs bathroom of the family home,
 gagging to spit them out—
 and a voice saying *Don't, don't*—

Signified by the advance and retreat of the indentation in Dana Levin's "Ars Poetica," the poetic speaker is both driven by and resistant to the artistic inspiration she likens to the gestation and hatching of cocoons. An artist comes of age like an invasive pregnancy come to term. I choose this lyric because surely anyone might memorize and recite it with impressive effect, allowing its generous use of the page to signal vocal emphases or pauses. But, my own interpretation of the lines' seeming progression and retreat besides, how can recitation capture the significance of the indentations, which may only be visually noted? Because such use of the page's space is both significant and an appeal to the sense of sight, we cannot memorize and reproduce Levin's poem with either written or oral means in its whole form. Her literary and visual poem, then, has a make-up that is other than the sonnet's, one that likens it more to the visual, space-bound work of art than to its sister song or sonnet.

⁹⁷ Collingwood (139 and 149-51) proposed that no work of art, not even a visual work, is a physical object because it has its existence within the imagination: first, in the imagination of the artist, then in the imagination of the viewer or audience, whose imaginative cooperation is necessary to experience the work. One must wonder how contingencies that determine unexpected turns in creation or composition figure into the work's primary imaginary existence, however. Surely the sculptor 'discovers' her work as she cuts stone, just as the poet finds his finished product by rigorous revision, and neither has the complete work already in mind from

the start. For this reason we may see the sonnet's existence as progressive until it is complete, and then bound to the page on which it has been composed until its replication.

Amie Thomasson says that the imagination hypothesis results from the common ontological problem of noticing that something (here, a work of art) cannot be identified with a mere external physical object, and "finding nowhere else to put it, concluding that it must be in the mind" (91). My own hypothesis that the sonnet exists in virtual space avoids the disjunction that an art work exists either physically or imaginatively, and permits both possibilities.

⁹⁸ Garrard's discussion of scattered beauty draws on Summers (1981, 186-99).

⁹⁹ This translation of Petrarch's *De reb. fam.* XXII.ii.124 is quoted in Summers (1981, 194). Whitfield provides the original in full: "*Vitam mihi alienis dictis ac monitis ornare fateor est animus, non stilum; nisi vel prolato auctore, vel mutatione insigni, ut mutatione apium e multis et variis floribus mel unum fit.*" (27).

¹⁰⁰ Note how in *Twelfth Night* Olivia blazons herself, to humorous effect:

. . . I will give
out diverse schedules of my beauty: it shall be
inventoried, and every particle and utensil
labeled to my will: as, item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two gray eyes, with lids to
them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth. (1.5.532-37)

¹⁰¹ Parker offers a discussion of "following" (1987, 67-69, 112).

¹⁰² Kunin's position that the young man resists the speaker's attempts to preserve him may be questioned based on the fact that none of the other players in the *Sonnets* has a voice but, as I suggested in the introduction, each poem is limited to the speaker's voiced meditations. Note how we are never offered the point of view of the friend, the black mistress, the Muse, or Time, all persons whom the speaker addresses directly. Without the voice of the friend to tell us, we have no indication of his resistance.

¹⁰³ This is strictly in the case of non-cast sculpture. Cast-sculpture, which is made from the pouring of liquefied materials into a cast form, qualifies as reproducible.

¹⁰⁴ The sonnet's threats to the young man's personhood are likely the threats of any representational form, for does a painting or photograph, for example, do anything other than parse and fix its three-dimensional,

living subject? Photography, in fact, is not unlike the sonnet. For its time period, it serves as a principal means of making present its representational subject, and we may find in it the same problems located in the sonnet. Note Roland Barthes's description of his experience when he is the subject of a photo: "[When photographed,] I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. The Photographer knows this very well, and himself fears . . . this death in which his gesture will embalm me. As if the (terrified) Photographer must exert himself to the utmost to keep the Photograph from becoming Death" (14). On the ontological threat of such concern to Barthes (and to the *Sonnets*' speaker), see Susan Sontag (180), who identifies the photo as a "potent means for turning the tables on reality—for turning *it* into a shadow." Sontag not only draws on the use of *shadow*, like that of *specter*, as synonymous with *ghost*, but also makes a metaphysical statement: photography reverses the ontological relationship between reality and image.) Barthes's suggestion that the Photographer may exert himself and produce a representation that does not become Death recalls the *Sonnets*' speaker's proposition that the poem copy the ontological writing of nature, and leave its subject unharmed. Both artistic subject (Barthes) and agent (the speaker) share a fantasy of right representation. But do the Photographer and the Sonneteer have the ability to alter the natural results of their representational forms? The photo still places Barthes within the container of parenthesis that, as he demonstrates for us, removes a clause from the grammatical flow of the sentence just as the taking of his image removes him from the flow of life. "[M]yself," Barthes says, "never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn . . . , and 'myself' which is light, divided, dispersed; like a bottle-imp, 'myself' doesn't hold still, giggling in my jar: if only Photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body which signifies nothing!" (12). His speculation—"if only"—is that Photography cannot recreate a whole body (an-anatomic: with all parts, not partitioned), but can only parse its subject out as a signifier, one thing that exists to refer to something else. That a signifier must mean something reduces and fixes the varied complexity of the human life depicted in the representation to something we can point to with certainty: *this* means *that*. The fixed—or *fixing*—nature of the photo arrests and defies Barthes's tendency to flow, to remain constant only in his natural dynamism. His "divided" and "dispersed" self is not the victim of synecdoche, but it is his vigorous and animate nature that repels the essential feature of representation: to signify, to mean, to fix. Gross finds the same problem in language where the word arrests what it represents, its concept or referent, in what he

calls “the bondage of ideas” (2006, 16). Likewise, the statue’s ability to make what is absent “irremediably, materially present” comes with a price to the depicted subject, which, as either a person, thing, or concept, becomes “codified,” “calcified,” once in stone (15, 16).

¹⁰⁵ Pausanias’ *Descriptions of Greece* catalogues many such versions of the Muse throughout the Mediterranean world (9.29).

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