Perspective, Invention, and Metatheater in Renaissance Literature

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PERSPECTIVE, INVENTION, AND METATHEATER
IN RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

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PERSPECTIVE, INVENTION, AND METATHEATER
IN RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

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This dissertation challenges the misconception of post-Reformation England as iconophobic. On the contrary, it argues that early modern English poets and playwrights adapt Continental theories and techniques from painting, translating them into their own poetic and dramatic forms. It explores how allusions to contemporary perspectival images serve as governing metaphors and structural devices for the works in which they appear. Particularly in the genre of the Elizabethan epyllion and in works by Shakespeare, it suggests that texts are designed to be read “perspectively,” to borrow Shakespeare’s coinage, so that they are open to ambiguity and multiplicity, and capable of being interpreted in conflicting or complementary ways. In chapters on the Elizabethan epyllion, it examines how the rhetorical superfluity and linguistic play of Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* and the satirical experience of “curious viewing” in Marston’s *Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image* effect a shift in the period’s understanding of artistic invention. In chapters on Shakespeare, it reveals how the modern interest in Shakespearean metatheater — where the theater draws attention to itself as theater — is in fact grounded in the contemporary language of visual perspective. It shows how Shakespeare cues his original audiences to view his plays as perspectival double images, constituted not only by the
embodied characters within the fictional worlds of his plays, but also as the physical, human actors of his professional playing company in early modern London. It contends that Shakespeare’s plays become increasingly visual and perspectival, changing meaning and resonance depending on venue, after his professional playing company, the King’s Men, acquire their second playhouse, the Blackfriars. This dissertation therefore traces evolutions in aesthetics and dramatic form occasioned by contemporary developments in the period’s larger visual culture, breaking new ground on the confluences between the visual, poetic, and dramatic arts.
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Ad matrem et patrem, Gay Gunter and John Roudabush, in gratitude for their endless love and support.
INTRODUCTION

I leave it to Artists, and I wot not whether in a matter so confused, so severall and so casuall, they shall come to an end, to range into sides this infinite diversity of visages; and settle our inconstancy and place it in order.
—Michel de Montaigne, “Of Experience”

A Painter without the Perspectiues was like a Doctor without Grammer.
—Richard Haydocke, A Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge, Caruinge & Buldinge

I

Masaccio’s Trinity (c. 1427–8, Fig. 1). I step into the Santa Maria Novella, a short walk south of the Piazza del Duomo in Florence. Passing under Giotto’s Crucifix (c. 1290–1300), I stand before Masaccio’s arresting fresco, considered by most to be the earliest extant perspective painting.² Its two anonymous Dominican donors crouch in prayer, painted on the threshold in front of two pillars, so that they appear to inhabit the spectators’ world — the living, praying world of the cathedral — rather than the sacred world within the work of art itself. One painted step up, the Virgin Mary projects a commanding gaze while she extends her hand, gesturing to behold the crucified Christ, raised below God the Father. I think of how Vasari stood in this spot nearly five centuries ago, when he wrote, “At Santa Maria Novella…there is something even more beautiful than the figures: it is a barrel vault, drawn in perspective and divided into coffers

filled with rosettes whose proportions decrease with foreshortening so that the wall appears to be hollowed out.” Mary and God gaze outward from the painting, not quite looking directly at their viewers, yet nonetheless aware of their presence as they look beyond into the cathedral. Their placement on the fresco, deceptively rendered so that it appears “hollowed out,” establishes a connection between the two realms of art and reality, between the gazed-upon object and its observers. Perspective thus initiates a confrontation, from Vasari to me and every other beholder of the painting since, involving us in the production of the work’s meaning.

Perugino’s *The Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter* (c. 1481–2, Fig. 2). A two-hour train ride south to Rome reveals how perspective was, ideally, to develop after Masaccio, according to its first major theorist, Leon Battista Alberti. In the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo’s ceiling cycle and climactic *Last Judgment* dominate attention, but it is Pietro Perugino’s earlier (and much-celebrated, before Michelangelo took over) fresco of the Biblical scene from the Gospel of Matthew, *The Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter*, that represents the humanist ideal of visual perspective’s potential uses. Anachronistically set in an idealized Italian piazza, the subjects inhabit a grid of horizontal and orthogonal lines conveying three-dimensional depth. The figures correspond in perfect proportion as they recede toward the domed temple and triumphal arches, ultimately diminishing into the ethereal landscape. The vanishing point converges in the central temple, framing the main, titular action of the fresco itself, as Christ hands a pendulous key to Saint Peter — the significant act authorizing Pope Sixtus IV’s power, who called Perugino to Rome and commissioned his cycle of paintings for the chapel — precisely along this centric point. Conveying the illusion of depth, as if the chapel were “hollowed out” like Masaccio’s fresco, the two-dimensional wall transforms into a window onto

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3 Quoted in ibid., 53–4.
this idealized Italian landscape; spectators view the image as if also inhabiting and looking directly out onto where the Biblical istoria, the central narrative action, occurs. The lesson of obedience to Petrine and Papal authority is foregrounded through the perspective. All is clear and serene, under complete control and without distraction. Viewers’ eyes go where Perugino directs them.

Holbein’s The Ambassadors (1533, Fig. 3). Across the Atlantic, two assured, imposing men, Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, French envoys to the English court of Henry VIII, have been returning the gazes of their admiring, inquisitive viewers for nearly five centuries. Like Masaccio’s Trinity, the subjects of Holbein’s Ambassadors address their viewers directly, making them active participants in the world of the painting. Unlike Masaccio and Perugino, however, who achieve Alberti’s ideal of transforming a two-dimensional surface into a window of a three-dimensional scene, Holbein instead disrupts his own portrait by turning perspective against itself. The scene is claustrophobically set before a lush green curtain, and interrupted by a smear on the floor. Each of the objects on the shelves are foreshortened in their own individual way as if appearing for their own still-life portraits; they are playful demonstrations of Holbein’s own perspectival skill, existing as much for their own sake as for the symbolic presence they bestow upon the ambassadors’ mastery of the liberal arts. Further disrupting the clarity of the perspective is the painting’s most striking feature that has captured attention and perplexed viewers for centuries: the anamorphic skull placed between the two ambassadors’ feet, a distorted perspective interrupting the portrait proper. Holbein juxtaposes his technically precise portrait with the skull, two opposed images that are linked thematically, creating a puzzle for

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observers to interpret, which can only be done by shifting one’s point of view to see the skull from its proper angle. By contrasting the individually foreshortened perspective instruments on the shelves with the distorted anamorphic skull, Holbein creates a paradoxical link between these two opposed sets of images. His painting, as Jennifer Nelson puts it, “uses perspectival techniques that often suggest one thing (unified space that extends the real) in order to suggest an opposite thing (disjunctive space that interrupts the real).” Holbein’s shelf of mathematical instruments “lays out the tools of creating such unity, then denies it.” The anamorphic skull is itself devised by the same, albeit exaggerated, perspectival methods as the rest of the painting. This tension between the two worlds of the ambassadors and of death, and of perspectival representation and its anamorphic counterpart, becomes the focus of Holbein’s painting.

While one aspect of Holbein’s anamorphic puzzle is a playful reference to his own name, “Holbein” meaning “hollow bone,” its larger upshot is both to the vanity of worldly pursuits and to pointing out his own mastery of perspective, a self-reflexive demonstration of his artistic skill. It also underscores how perspective has become not just a technique for bestowing an istoria and didactic lesson, but also a metaphor for multiple possible points of view and interpretations: shuttling between the two physical vantage points of Holbein’s painting effects concomitant shifts between ways of thinking and seeing. To obtain a clear vision of the skull and its symbolic meaning, viewers must physically obtain a different vantage point and inhabit a different world, in this case, the world of death and eternity.

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5 Ibid., 7.
Despite their diversity, all three of these paintings would have been similarly considered “perspectives” in the early modern period. Writing toward the end of the sixteenth century in France, Michel de Montaigne’s reflections in my first epigraph not only point to how far perspective painting had developed — he concedes to “leave it to Artists” to better capture human experience than himself as an essayist — but also highlight the ambivalence perspective had acquired throughout the sixteenth century. Masaccio, Alberti, and Perugino had plotted perspective on a path of Renaissance achievement: it was supposed to supply a more convincing, and therefore more accessible, relationship between the secular and sacred, and an enhanced belief that humans were at the centric point of their universe, now capable of capturing its three-dimensionality on two-dimensional surfaces. Later throughout the sixteenth century, however,

6 I use the terms “Renaissance” and “early modern” interchangeably throughout this dissertation. I am aware that most of the events of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries on which I write did not constitute a Renaissance — a rinascimento or “rebirth” of classical antiquity and an efflorescence of creative output — for the vast majority of people. I frequently use the term “early modern,” therefore, to be less value-laden while also reflecting these years as formative for modernity, such as the emergence of nascent globalism and capitalism, a more fluid and blended civic life between social classes, the commercial book-trade and popular entertainment, and individual senses of self. I also, however, follow Richard Strier’s defense of continuing to employ the term Renaissance: “I prefer to refer to ‘the Renaissance,’” he writes, “rather than the ‘early modern’ period since the former term captures the period’s own ideology about itself, and the latter term seems horribly Whiggish.” I use “Renaissance,” then, to reflect the fact that many of the texts I examine throughout this dissertation are based on classical precedents and precursors, and that most of their authors viewed themselves as participating in a Renaissance, not only recovering but also reinvigorating classical texts and ideas for their contemporary moment. On the other hand, I also use Renaissance because, to many outside of academia, early modern is almost always more alien and consequently more pretentious and value-laden, than its more familiar alternative. See Richard Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 2n2. The works of both Robert Weimann, *Authority and Representation in Early Modern Discourse*, ed. David Hillman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), and Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), make strong cases for “Reformation” being an underused term in conversations of periodization, and which, if writing on different texts and subject matter, would otherwise appear in these pages with more frequency.
Holbein and Montaigne — as well as Dürer in *Melancholia I*, who represents the personified goddess as unsatisfied with her achievements, not least the giant perspectival polyhedron and the vanishing point above it (1514, Fig. 4) — reflect how perspective had accrued a more melancholic, and “a more complex and ambiguous relationship between the knower and the knowable.” Like human experience, developments in perspective had become a “matter so confused.”

As he so often does, Montaigne anticipates our own modern dilemma in criticism about perspective in fields as diverse as philosophy, mathematics, art history, and literary studies. There is, in Montaigne’s words, an “infinite diversity of visages” not only in paintings, but in references to perspective in poems and plays as well. Montaigne hopes that “inconstancy” can be “place[d]…in order,” echoing the Brunelleschian and Albertian ideals in theory, but his dubious tone underscores how he and his contemporaries viewed their own world, suggesting that this is not how human perspectives work in practice. Still today, there remains an “infinite diversity” of interpretations and applications of perspective in various fields of criticism. It remains “homeless,” as James Elkins puts it, among academic disciplines.

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This is a dissertation on literary adaptations of visual perspective in the Renaissance. It began with my asking, Why do references to these new visual art forms increasingly appear in a vast array of poems, plays, and other discourses throughout England in the two decades surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century, despite the country’s designation as “iconophobic” after the Reformation and dissolution of monasteries?10 My thesis is that early modern writers used these new visual art forms as potent metaphors and structural devices for the poems and plays in which they appear. This is most evident in two specific literary areas during the two decades surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century. The concentrated number of allusions to visual perspective in the Elizabethan epyllion and in works by Shakespeare signal their special emphasis on being read “perspectively”: these works, that is, are open to ambiguity and multiplicity, deliberately designed to be read in competing or complementary ways depending upon point of view and approaches to reading. Allusions to perspective in Elizabethan epyllia indicate how they are open to being read for substance or style, and how they question the meaning of poetic invention at the end of the sixteenth century. The preponderance of references to perspective throughout Shakespeare’s career, from his earliest poems to his final plays, suggests a considerable influence on his thinking about his poetry and dramaturgy. On the one hand, perspectival double images provided a way of thinking about the oscillating indeterminacy between viewing his plays mimetically as a fictional cast of characters, or metatheatrically as his company of actors themselves. On the other, they contribute to his awareness that dramatic meaning can depend upon one’s perspective in a specific material

playing space, and that each performance reinvigorates a play’s meaning for changing audiences depending upon venue.

These answers grew out of my exploration of what the word “perspective” itself could mean for so many writers, in so many contexts, throughout the early modern period. By viewing contemporary usages of the term alongside perspective images, I gleaned that while its chief, modern figurative sense of “a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; an individual point of view,” was often latent before finally emerging in the early seventeenth century, the term was also a contranym. Perspective images, and literary allusions to them, foreground the possibility for multiplicity, for holding two opposite or complementary meanings in tension, resolving either toward perspicacity of vision or toward deception. Although originally conceived as an art striving for clarity, I realized many artists and writers harnessed perspective instead for ambiguity. I also recognized that, preceding its modern metaphorical sense about individual attitudes, perspective was often a very material thing, referring to “An optical instrument for looking through, as a magnifying glass,” or “any of various devices, such as an arrangement of mirrors, for producing an unusual optical effect,” such as “the distortion of an image.” Early modern writers’ allusions to perspective underscored the visual art’s link, to borrow Paul de Man’s memorable phrase, to “the materiality of the letter,” of the capacity of language to confound, destabilize, and effect changes in points of view similar to perspectival images themselves. Not only do references to perspective appear in rhetorical handbooks of the

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12 Ibid., 2a.

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; they also appear in the work of many of the period’s most influential writers, whose constellations of characters and viewpoints so richly challenge our own modern perspectives today.

In both the visual and verbal realms, moreover, perspective is frequently grouped with the adjective “curious,” as adduced by the title of Richard Haydocke’s book from which my second epigraph derives, and with the notion of perspective as a kind of “device.”

On the one hand, its frequent appellation as the “curious perspective” connotes the fascination with the new modes of representation and ways of seeing in the period as a form of curia or curiosity, as well as its Latin etymon, as a curiosus, something contrived “full of care or pains.”

On the other, as a kind of “device” for artists and writers, the art of perspective also carried its early modern senses of “invention, ingenuity…The manner in which a thing is devised or framed; design.”

“Perspective” in the Renaissance suggested a plethora of meanings, often contradictory, but all witty, inventive, and engaged in a dynamic interplay between the viewer and the viewed, between the designer and the interpretation of the device.

In short, this project developed out of my genuine belief in the value of these contradictory meanings of perspective, not least for viewing, listening to, and learning from diverse points of view. There is a value, I propose, in reading and thinking “perspectively.”

Despite Shakespeare’s numerous allusions to perspective throughout his work, this adverb only appears once in his oeuvre, when the King of France, having been suppressed by Henry V, tells

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the English king that he sees his new lands “perspectively, the cities turned into a maid; for they are all girdled with maiden walls that war hath never entered.”17 If we take Shakespeare’s King of France at his literal word, to see “perspectively” is to see violently and oppressively, as the manipulative final scene of Henry V between Henry and Katherine bears out.18 But if we attend to the perspectival nature of Shakespeare’s plays and poems more generally, of the dramatic juxtaposition of ideologies and of characters, as Norman Rabkin famously did in his exploration of this very play as a double image, to read perspectively is to read receptively, to be open to poetic tensions, paradoxes, and multiple possibilities of shifting meanings.19

In the chapters that follow, I offer new ways of reading Renaissance literature perspectively. Perspective in the Renaissance often self-reflexively calls attention to its own creative processes, and how such representational forms, whether a painting like Holbein’s Ambassadors or a play like Henry V, are not mimetic but constructed; they do not simply represent the external world to us but invent how we see it.20 The simultaneous coexistence of multiple points of view produces a game of wit, enjoining viewers, readers, and audiences to contemplate paradoxes from multiple sides. It also offers an alternative epistemology in which such self-reflexive displays of visual and verbal artistry can be encouraged, applauded, and studied for their own playful sake, for the artist’s ingenuity and devices, rather than subordinated

to a larger monolithic lesson. Perhaps most importantly, it initiated a dynamic relationship between works of art and spectators, and by extension, between texts and readers, and plays and audiences. It is these affiliations with perspective that early modern writers have in mind in their numerous allusions to the visual art throughout the period. These are aspects of this study that I knew from the start of my research but have only been able to better articulate closer to the end. Before I turn to forecast the arguments of each chapter, I will begin by further examining the complicated history of perspective in the Renaissance, as well as a survey of modern critical approaches to similar studies in this field.

II

Although our English word “perspective” literally means “looking through,” and typically connotes seeing things correctly and within proper context (“in perspective,” as we say today), in the early modern period it was paradoxically one of the most controversial terms and concepts.21 On the one hand, after the Latin perspectiva had comfortably morphed into the English “perspective” by the late sixteenth century, the term in its original English usages denotes the clear vision and higher insight of its etymon. In his “Mathematical Preface” to the first English translation of Euclid’s Elements, Elizabeth I’s court astronomer, the polymath John Dee, describes how “He may wonderfully helpe him selfe, by perspetiue glasses.”22 Elizabeth

21 The Latin perspectiva’s cognate, perspicillum, also literally means “an instrument to see through,” specifically what we now call a telescope. This was the term Galileo used to describe his own self-constructed spyglass to observe the moon in Sidereus Nuncius. See Lawrence Lipking, What Galileo Saw: Imagining the Scientific Revolution (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2014), 30, and Wendy Beth Hyman, “Beyond Beyond”: Cymbeline, the Camera Obscura, and the Ontology of Elsewhere,” English Literary Renaissance 52, no. 3 (2022): 402.

herself would later scoff at the suggestion that “I have not so small a perspective in my neighbor’s actions, but I have foreseen some wicked event to follow a careless government.”

Even toward the end of the early modern period, Milton’s nephew Edward Phillips defined perspective as “the art of advantaging the sight.” On the other hand, the same word also contradicted its original meaning of “seeing through.” In contrast to perspective glasses that assist sight are similar optical instruments that distort vision and clarity of thought. As early as Chaucer’s Squire’s Tale there are references to “Alocen [al Hasan Ibn al-Haytham, known in Latin as Alhazen] and Vitulon [Witelo, a Polish physicist] / And Aristotle that writen in hir lyves / Of queynte mirours and of perspectives” that produce “anglis” [angles] and “slye reflexiouns.”

The English Renaissance rhetorician George Puttenham likewise describes “perspectives” as “false glasses” that “shew things otherwise than they be in deede.” In the middle ages and early modernity, then, “perspective” was a surprisingly controversial contranym.

These opposed meanings reflect perspective’s winding history throughout the Renaissance, and into the art historical, philosophical, and literary criticism of our present day. This history typically begins around a concentration of events and works in quattrocento

23 See John Bruce, ed. Letters of Queen Elizabeth and James VI of Scotland (London: Printed for the Camden Society, 1849), 173.


Florence. The early biography of Filippo Brunelleschi, attributed to Antonio Manetti, records his seminal experiments in the Piazza del Duomo around 1425. Experimenting with mirrors, Brunelleschi desired to depict the three-dimensional Baptistery in the Piazza onto a two-dimensional small wooden panel from the precise point in which he stood. Manetti indicates that Brunelleschi’s intent was to achieve a perfect illusion of reality, so that “it seemed as though one were seeing [not a painting but] the real building.” His experiments invented linear perspective, permitting his two-dimensional surface to serve not only as a mirror, an illusory two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional reality, but also a window, allowing viewers to reconstruct the same frozen point of view as the artist’s original.

It was up to Brunelleschi’s contemporaries and successors to realize Brunelleschi’s discoveries in practice and in theory. Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Doors of Paradise* (c. 1425–52, Fig. 5), designed for the same Baptistery as the site of Brunelleschi’s optical discoveries, serve as some of the first objects to create a three-dimensional representation of imagined space using perspective. In the Jacob and Esau panel, for example, Ghiberti employs Brunelleschi’s discoveries so that the figures correspond in proportion and conform in space with one another. He composes the scene around the vanishing point in the central arch, plunging viewers’ gazes into where the dramatic action of the Biblical scene takes place. The three-dimensionality of the scene introduces one of the paradoxes that will continue to be attached to perspective for the Renaissance and beyond: the more deceptive the perspective, the truer the image will appear.

It was only down the street in the Santa Maria Novella where this chapter began that Masaccio painted his *Trinity* fresco (c. 1427–8), the only surviving painting contemporary with

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Brunelleschi’s experiments. As we have seen, Vasari underscored one of the revolutionary aspects associated with perspective for Renaissance artists, theorists, and, as I argue, even poets and dramatists: that “the wall appears to be hollowed out,” creating the illusion of a fictional chapel extending beyond the wall itself, blurring the boundary between art and reality. Not observed by Vasari, however, is the radical new relationship Masaccio introduced between works of art and their viewers. The figures’ clothing and the painted arches spill out of the frame and into the church; the women at the threshold of the image are not contained by the scene, but instead possess their own gaze, addressing and looking beyond viewers, participating in a shared act of religious devotion. Perspective now establishes a stronger connection between the gazed-upon work of art and its spectators, involving them in the work of art itself.

Alberti, who designed the Santa Maria Novella’s façade that houses Masaccio’s fresco, dedicated his revolutionary treatise On Painting (1435) to Brunelleschi about two decades after his discoveries in the Piazza. I will return to Alberti’s text in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2 to examine its influence on Renaissance aesthetics and its consequent implications for English poetics in the sixteenth century. For now, it will serve to briefly stress its primary contribution to the ideas surrounding perspective circulating in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries after the emergence of this new form of visual representation. According to Alberti, the painter’s aim was not artisanal, as it had been previously considered, but intellectual. Throughout the treatise, he argues that poets and painters have much in common, first and foremost, that they both “compose,” employing a distinctly literary term.28 Aiming to elevate painting to the level of rhetoric, oratory, and poetry, Alberti saw Brunelleschi’s discovery as a means to enrich the end

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of painting, which he describes, in a famously untranslatable term, as the “istoria.” For Alberti, perspective better serves the didactic aims of painting by being able to show figures in action, directing viewers’ attention along what he calls the “centric point” within a geometrically coherent and ordered narrative composition; or, to borrow Wentzel Jamnitzer’s eloquent phrasing, “This universe of things seen which can be captured on paper with correct proportions, widths, thicknesses, and lengths.” By improving the illusion, painters enhance their ability to move and instruct spectators: like poetry, Alberti claims, “painting is most useful to that piety which joins us to the gods and keeps our souls full of religion.” Works such as Fra Angelico’s Altarpiece of San Marco (1438–43), Piero della Francesca’s Brera Madonna (c. 1472–4), Perugino’s aforementioned Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter (c. 1481–2), and Leonardo da Vinci’s The Last Supper (c. 1495–8), all of which utilize a centric point within a perfectly geometrically organized space to emphasize the primary didactic element of their respective scenes, exemplify this Albertian ideal. There is no interference or distraction pulling away from the central, religious narrative: all is ordered and harmonious.

Despite Alberti’s attempt to set a straight and narrow path for perspective, within the next century it accrued vastly different purposes for Renaissance artists and writers. In his Pratica


30 Quoted in Elkins, Poetics of Perspective, 48.


della perspettiva (1568), Daniele Barbaro warns against letting the centric point appear “strained, dizzily steep, deformed, or awkward,” reflecting artistic theorists growing concern with how perspective was being wielded in practice in the latter half of the sixteenth century. As I will explore in Chapter 1, painters began to wield the vanishing point for alternative, often playful and disruptive reasons, drawing viewers’ gazes and attention away from the didactic center of the istoria. Developments into anamorphosis and trompe l’oeil — such as Holbein’s Ambassadors, Erhard Schön’s woodcuts, and Giulio Romano’s illusionistic frescoes — would have been considered forms of perspective across the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, and were based on the very same mathematical principles. As the renowned English miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard would put it, perspective “worketh by falsehood to express truth in very cunning of line and true observation of shadowing . . . to deceive the eye.” Such uses of perspective turned the art against itself, ironizing perspective and challenging Alberti’s original aspirations.

In addition to its conflicting associations built up to this point — on the one hand harmonious and truthful, on the other indecorous and deceitful — by 1591 perspective had acquired further philosophical and rhetorical resonances. John Harington employs the term in his introductory “advertisement” of his translation of Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso to describe the cinematic narrative woodcuts that depict the multiple episodes within each book. By doing so,

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33 Quoted in Elkins, Poetics of Perspective, 176.


35 Nelson, Disharmony of the Spheres, 7. For an authoritative, extensive, and in-depth analysis of the development of perspective in the Renaissance, see Martin Kemp, The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990).
Harington effectively makes perspective into “a narrative construction rather than a depiction of a single incident,” so that it becomes “a vehicle for larger meanings.”36 Likewise, in a letter to Cigoli in 1612, Galileo writes of an anamorphic picture, describing it as “a kind of allegorical poetry with a phantasmagoria of its own, in which the images and meanings flow out of each other and change according to the direct or oblique perspective of the concept.”37 As Harington and Galileo attest, perspective could function both synecdochally and allegorically, capable of gesturing to meanings beyond the narrative surface and functioning as a metaphorical part for a larger thematic whole.

The early modern period also inherited ideas about perspective from various classical authorities. Although the terms “anamorphosis” and “trompe l’oeil” were not recorded in English until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, these forms of perspective were increasingly well-known and a significant part of the popular imagination for early modern painters, poets, playwrights, readers, and audiences.38 Indeed, as Nelson observes, “to treat anamorphosis as a kind of perspective would have been no anomaly…It was one of several


38 The Greek neologism *anamorphosis* was first used in 1657 by Gaspar Schott in his *Magia universalis natura et artis* (Johann Gottfried Schonwetter: Wurzburg, 1657), 153. The first recorded English usage of the term appears in Ephraim Chambers’ *Cyclopedia, a universal dictionary of the arts and sciences* (1728), one of the first general encyclopedias in English. The *OED* records the first use of the French *trompe l’oeil* in the late nineteenth century, when Clara Harrison Stranahan speaks disparagingly of “The public of connoisseurs who care not for any tricks of ‘trompe l’oeil,’ but for art” in her *History of French Painting* (1889). See “anamorphism, n.” and “trompe l’oeil, n.” *OED Online*. March 2023.
advanced perspectival techniques.”\textsuperscript{39} From the revival of classical texts, the Renaissance inherited three primary legends of illusionistic perspective, including examples of anamorphosis and \textit{trompe l’oeil}. Phidias’s statue and Trajan’s column, optical wonders in the sixteenth century, appeared grossly deformed at eye-level but in proportion when raised, in which “Art, supplementing Nature’s error, causes the distant parts to be as discernible to the eye as the nearest.”\textsuperscript{40} Pliny’s mammoth (in size, popularity, and number of editions and reprints) \textit{Historia Naturalis} circulated the painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, in which — as I will return to in Chapter 2 — Zeuxis was able to deceive birds through his illusionistic representation of grapes, yet Parrhasius triumphed for being able to deceive Zeuxis, an artist himself, with his deceptive representation of a curtain.\textsuperscript{41} Vitruvius’s \textit{De Architectura} also records the story of Agatharchos, a Greek painter who devised the first Greek illusionistic stage scenery for a tragedy by Aeschylus.\textsuperscript{42}

Perspective’s ability to deceive was also considered remarkable through published accounts of Renaissance artists themselves. In his seminal \textit{Lives of the Artists}, Vasari recounts how Leonardo’s father had his son paint a shield manufactured by one of his peasants, who had made it himself out of a fig tree from his father’s property. Having first improved the “clumsy”

\begin{itemize}
  \item Baltrušaitis, \textit{Anamorphic Art}, 9.
\end{itemize}
quality of the servant’s wooden construction, Leonardo devised how to transform the bare shield into an illusionistic image,
that might be able to terrify all who should come upon it, producing the same effect as once did the head of Medusa…he formed a great ugly creature, most horrible and terrifying, which emitted a poisonous breath and turned the air to flame; and he made it coming out of a dark and jagged rock, belching forth venom from its open throat, fire from its eyes, and smoke from its nostrils, in so strange a fashion that it appeared altogether a monstrous and horrible thing.43

When Leonardo’s father came to retrieve the shield he was “taken by surprise” and “gave a sudden start, not thinking that that was the buckler, nor merely painted the form that he saw upon it,” and fell “back a step” in surprise. The terms in which Leonardo’s father praises the work, as “nothing short of a miracle [maraviglia],” and the conceit of it as “the ingenious [ingegno] idea of Leonardo,” highlight “the high esteem in which illusionism was held” in the Renaissance.44

As I will argue in Chapters 3 and 4, this desire for, and celebration of, innovations in illusionism filtered their way into early modern English drama as well, often focalized around the illusionistic possibilities for cross-dressing boy actors.

From such a range of sources, events, and intellectual associations, Renaissance theorists, artists, and writers inherited and disseminated competing ideas about perspective. On the one hand, theoretical discourses praise it, as Hamlet says, for holding “the mirror up to nature,” as well as for its uses in religious, moral instruction.45 As Hamlet seems to not comprehend how his humanist ideals fail, however, when dramatic theory is put into practice, so too would theorists


of perspective, such as Alberti, fail to capture how painters, and in turn poets and dramatists, adapt perspective to their own artistic and idiosyncratic ends.\textsuperscript{46} In other words, a disjunction surfaces between the theoretical discourses and practical applications of perspective for painters, poets, and dramatists alike. The development of anamorphic and illusionistic art exemplifies this point. These various significations and associations that perspective accumulates throughout the Renaissance — from capturing and directing viewers’ gazes, to deceptive illusion and self-reflexive artifice, to synecdochal significance — will inform my readings in each of my subsequent chapters.

III

Perhaps because the Latin verb from which perspective derives, “\textit{perspicere},” means not only literally “to see clearly,” often through the assistance of a material device, but also metaphorically, “to regard mentally” or “to ascertain,” the flexibility of perspective’s early modern meanings has continued into contentious debates over whether it ought to be studied only as a technological advancement in representational practice or as a conceptual metaphor by which to interpret the early modern period more generally. Beginning with his seminal works of art history, Erwin Panofsky located in the new form of visual representation a symbol for “the general mental attitude of the Renaissance.”\textsuperscript{47} Many critics since have followed Panofsky’s lead, similarly arguing that developments in perspective reflect intellectual attitudes characteristic of


the larger culture. For Samuel Edgerton and S. K. Heninger, Jr., the shift from a relative flatness in medieval forms of visual representation to the three-dimensional depth of linear perspective not only more closely approximates how human beings actually see; through its geometric basis and proportionality, it also attempts to construe God’s divine order underlying his physical creations. In contrast, for Anthony Grafton, Alberti’s emphasis on “producing illusions as the artist’s continual task” diminishes the theological subtexts of perspective argued by Heninger and Edgerton, reflecting instead a Renaissance secularism more closely aligned with Panofsky.

In his landmark book Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History, Claudio Guillen’s tour de force chapter “On the Concept and Metaphor of Perspective” traces evolutions in perspective’s metaphoricity from its origins in Renaissance Tuscany, through Shakespeare’s Richard II, into its emergence in the philosophical ontologies of Leibniz and Nietzsche, until closing with its relevance for twentieth-century Symbolist painters and poets such as Pablo Picasso and Wallace Stevens. Guillen argues that the period’s references to perspective encapsulate developments of individual subjectivity and interiority occasioned by the Reformation. More generally, however, they also “bring into focus the methods used for the presentation of fictional events.” Allusions to perspective do not simply refer to it as a mimetic device, but in fact call attention to its inventive, constructive nature as a form of representation.

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51 Ibid., 310.
Beyond linear perspective generally, it has been its eccentric offshoot, anamorphosis, and its most widely-recognizable example from the Renaissance, Holbein’s *Ambassadors*, that have been most frequently cited and applied to interpretations of early modern literature and culture for roughly the past forty years. The first to adapt the concept of anamorphosis for literary studies, Ernest B. Gilman argues that “displays of metaphysical wit in poetry are like displays of visual wit in what the seventeenth century called the ‘curious perspective.’”\(^{52}\) Gilman observes that — like many writers, readers, and critics today — early modern poets and playwrights were also fascinated with optical ingenuity, which “finds its way into verse not only through the importation of optical imagery but through a deeply-felt concern with the ways we look at the world.” Drawing attention to the fact that Renaissance writers and painters were themselves brought up in an educational system that “perceived and created connections among the arts,” Gilman enjoins that comparisons between the curious perspective and Renaissance literature can not only enrich our understanding of the period’s metaphors, themes, and forms, but also serve to alter our own preconceptions about history, truth, and the world around us. By comparing theories of perspective with contemporary arguments about poetic wit, Gilman contends that the “double vision” and “complex kind of doublethink” demanded by the curious perspective served as a model for early modern poets and playwrights to create ambiguous texts skeptical of stable, fixed, unified points of view.\(^{53}\)

Applying Gilman’s theories to the Spanish picaresque novel, David R. Castillo suggests that the development of visual perspective parallels the period’s emerging skepticism and radical

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\(^{52}\) Gilman, *The Curious Perspective*, 1.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 87.
questioning of authoritative points of view. As he states at the outset, he connects “the perspectivistic drive of several Golden Age texts with the aesthetics of anamorphosis, also known as the curious, magic, or secret perspective.”54 The ambiguity of Spanish Golden Age texts like Don Quijote, he argues, “is a product of a vast historical zone of uncertainty that crystallizes in the Renaissance in and around the discovery of modern perspective and the proliferation of multiple viewpoints.”55 Like most other recent studies of parallels between the visual and verbal arts, Castillo’s aim is not to trace direct influences or sources, but to establish a shared aesthetic between the curious perspective and siglo de oro texts that “challenge well-established beliefs about the world in much the same way that certain forms of perspective anamorphosis reveal the arbitrariness and incompleteness of any total view.”56 Building on Mikhael Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, moreover, Castillo foregrounds the connection between visual perspective and literary irony, and their comparable juxtaposition of conflicting voices and worldviews that disrupts and undermines notions of fixed ideological systems and social values.

Playfully updating Panofsky’s contentious title in her own chapter on “Anamorphosis as Symbolic Form,” Jennifer Nelson argues for a “positively disharmonious” reading of Holbein’s Ambassadors that extends throughout sixteenth-century texts and epistemologies.57 Setting out to correct famous readings of Holbein’s painting by Lacan, Žižek, and Greenblatt, which interpret the anamorphic skull’s rupture of the painting to signify “the vain desire for correspondence

55 Ibid., 7.
56 Ibid., 2.
57 Nelson, Disharmony of the Spheres, 125.
among things,” Nelson points out how each of the instruments on the painting’s shelves are also foreshortened in their own unique way: “Holbein treats each object as itself the occasion of a portrait rather than an attribute.”58 The anamorphic skull is itself devised by the same methods as the rest of the painting. This juxtaposition between the anamorphic skull and other carefully delimited instruments, Nelson contends, may be not simply another allegorical vanitas, as it has commonly been read, but is in fact representative of the period’s emerging embrace of “disharmony” as constitutive of human liberty and free will.59

Most famously, the opening chapter of Stephen Greenblatt’s Renaissance Self-Fashioning compares Holbein’s anamorphic painting with Sir Thomas More’s contemporary work Utopia. For Greenblatt, the relation between the two worlds in Holbein’s painting, the world of the anamorphic skull and the world of the ambassadors, is like the “two distinct worlds” of More’s text — More’s England and More’s Utopia — “that occupy the same textual space while insisting upon the impossibility of their doing so.”60 In particular, he finds More’s use of litotes in Utopia to be “the close equivalent at the verbal level to the visual technique of anamorphosis, whose etymology itself suggests a back-and-forth movement, a constant forming and re-forming.”61 More’s numerous ironies, the inconsistencies and “ruptures” throughout the work, and the comparisons between More’s England and his Utopia are, like Holbein’s anamorphic skull, invitations “to the viewer to play…to enter a carefully demarcated playground

58 Ibid., 4, 111.
59 Ibid., 123–4.
61 Ibid., 23.
that possesses nonetheless a riddling relation to the world outside.” For Greenblatt, then, Holbein’s perspective painting and its anamorphic skull are analogous to More’s rhetorical duplicity and its thematic integrity to the work as a whole. Both Holbein’s painting and More’s text call attention to their own artifice and modes of composition, and both work to challenge their viewers’ and readers’ religious and political perspectives.

Alison Thorne’s *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking Through Language* perhaps most closely resembles my present study. It is, however, more of an obverse and complement to my own rather than an overlap. Thorne compellingly argues for a greater interest and reception of Italian theories, specifically Alberti’s, than is typically attributed to early modern England. She similarly insists that in Shakespeare’s plays “language has the capacity to function as a rhetorical equivalent or analogue for perspective,” and she speculates “about the qualities it came to embody in the minds of indigenous artists and, no less importantly for our purposes, of English writers — qualities that Shakespeare was able to harness for his own imaginative ends.” It is precisely upon these shared themes of the rhetorical equivalencies of rhetoric and perspective, and how Shakespeare creatively harnessed perspective for his poetry and dramaturgy, that Thorne and I diverge. For example, Thorne views Shakespeare’s use of rhetoric in *As You Like It* as paralleling Alberti’s injunctions to artists to construct “an imaginary harmony, capable of absorbing and resolving into a single focus.” My first two chapters, in contrast, show how English poets followed Continental painters in deviating from Alberti’s

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62 Ibid., 24.


64 Ibid., 8.
artistic, moral prescriptions, creating an alternative epistemology around the value of both visual and rhetorical indecorousness that pulls attention away from an instructive center, and even questions the possibility of such a center for artistic invention itself. While we also both view perspective as a potent metaphor for Shakespeare, she suggests that it serves as a “metaphor for the relativity of human perception and of the cultural value-systems by which it is shaped,” echoing similar claims by Gilman and Castillo.\(^{65}\) In contrast, I argue that Shakespeare found perspective to be a potent metaphor and resource for the double-images he could create as a dramatist, particularly through the indeterminate body of the cross-dressed boy actor, as I argue in Chapter 3, and through the different perspectives afforded by his company’s different playing spaces, as I contend in Chapter 4. My study is therefore the first to show how Shakespeare not only translated the visual qualities of perspective into his poetic and dramatic forms through rhetorical devices and structural metaphors, but also into the material exigencies and conditions of performance, and into his evolving dramaturgy throughout his career.

Perspective and anamorphosis have become not only appealing lenses through which to view early modern literature because of their origins in the period, but also because references to the new art appear in nearly every realm of early modern English culture. By 1622, perspective images, and references to them, had become familiar enough for the preacher Thomas Adams to use them to illustrate the diverse types of people in the changing landscape of early modern London. According to Adams, London has transformed for the worst from a placid, medieval painting into a dynamic, shifting piece of perspective. “[T]his famous Citie,” Adams disparages London, which else had no Parallell \textit{sic} vnder the Sunne. Shee may not vnfitly bee compared to certaine \textit{Pictures}, that represent diuers beholders, at diuers stations, diuers forms.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 56.
Looking one way you see a beautiful virgin; another way, some deformed monster. Cast an eye upon her Profession, she is a well grac’d creature: turne it upon her conversation, she is a misshapen stigmaticke.66

A century prior, Martin Luther’s own blissful exegesis of God’s grace had itself been a fundamental Protestant source for thinking about perspective as a new conceptual tool for the period. The two words of Scripture, “Iustitia Dei,” transformed before Luther’s very eyes as if he were viewing a perspective painting. As Brian Cummings recounts Luther’s revelatory experience,

Initially he had interpreted the phrase ‘Iustitia Dei’ to mean sein gestreng gericht (‘his severe judgement’). Judged so by God, he could only be damned for ever (so wer ich ewig verloren!). Such words therefore seemed hateful to him; but then in front of his eyes they reversed in meaning… Iustitia is not the justice which judges man, but that by which man is justified. Luther attributes the new grace to a new grammatica. For the active condemnation of God is substituted a passive justification of man.67

The very same two words of scripture became subjective, a matter of perspective, depending upon how the reader parsed the grammar. Luther’s experience thus illuminates how perspectival readings are dependent upon a subjective interiorization, an ability to transform not only a literal statement into a figurative one, but also for the viewer to undergo a transformational experience and hold multiple perspectives in mind. As I argue in Chapter 2, anamorphosis displaces meaning from within objects — whether scripture, a painting, or a literary text — onto the subjective interpretations of viewers and readers themselves.

These religious forms of anamorphosis, in which one object or grammatical construction could mean two or more things at a single time, extend into early modern poetry as well.


Although both John Donne and George Herbert refer explicitly to perspective in their sermons and poetry, respectively, two recent essays by Eric B. Song and Anna Riehl illuminate how they incorporate the period’s emergent “anamorphic logic” into their devotional and amatory lyrics.68

Song shows how Herbert’s “Coloss. 3.3” is like an anamorphic painting in the way it can be divided and read along multiple lines: linear and diagonal, centric and eccentric:

“Coloss. 3.3”

*Our life is hid with Christ in God*

*My words & thoughts do both expresse this notion,*

*That Life* hath with the sun a double motion.

The first *Is* straight, and our diurnall friend,

The other *Hid*, and doth obliquely bend.

One life is wrapt *In* flesh, and tends to earth.

The other winds towards *Him*, whose happie birth

Taught me to live here so, *That* still one eye

Should aim and shoot at that which *Is* on high:

Quitting *with daily* labour all *My* pleasure,

To gain at harvest an *eternall* Treasure.69

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68 In Donne’s elegy, “Obsequies to the Lord Harrington,” he refers to “Deeds of good men” as being “in proportion, fit by perspective…for by their being here, / Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near” (ll. 38–40.) In his better-known elegy for Elizabeth Drury, “The Second Anniversary: Of the Progress of the Soul,” he also uses perspectival “spectacles” and Alberti’s velo as metaphors for the errors of human understanding: “up unto the watch-tower get, / And see all things despoiled of fallacies: / Thou shalt not peep through lattices of eyes / Nor hear through labyrinths of ears” (ll.293–7). See John Donne, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins (New York: Routledge, 2010), 901–2; Gilman, *The Curious Perspective*, 26; and James Jaehoon Lee, “John Donne and the Textuality of Two Souls,” *Studies in Philology* 113, no. 4 (2016): 897–8. George Herbert refers explicitly to perspective in the closing couplet of one of his most complicated and confounding poems, “Sinne (II)”: “Yet as in sleep we see foul death, and live: / So devils are our sinnes in perspective” (ll.9–10). Although the ambiguous usage of “perspective” as the final word of the poem even leaves the OED uncertain enough to provide the footnote, “the sense is unclear; perhaps ‘by mental projection,’” other critics have offered fuller interpretations. See most recently Simon Jackson, *George Herbert and Early Modern Musical Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2023), 94–5.

Herbert constructs “Coloss. 3.3” to contain a poem within the poem that enacts a “double motion” (l. 2) so that it can be read both “straight” and “obliquely” (l. 4). The poem has one direct meaning: the body and soul are dualistically divided, and life in the body on earth should be directed at achieving eternal salvation of the spirit. Yet the poem also can be read “obliquely” through the diagonal acrostic and vertically through the epigraph. In the process of reading the poem “straight,” then “obliquely,” and then emerging from the poem at its completion, Song argues, it is as though readers are gazing at an anamorphic painting: they see it centrically, then eccentrically, and then are asked to meditate upon the connection between the two. The effect is multiple: to take solace with Herbert as a communal participant in the ritual lyric, “Our life is hid with Christ in God”; to recognize oneself as a spatially and temporally bound fallen subject, unable to comprehend both poems simultaneously, and unable with “one eye” to look “on high” while inevitably having to read “down” the lines; and also to meditate upon the poem’s deliberate intricacies, to recognize the double call for Christian salvation in the final line, and to work to discover one’s self in the “words” and “thoughts” of “Coloss. 3.3.” Song shows how Herbert’s deliberate revision of the line from Colossians 3.3, from “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” to “Our life is hid with Christ in God” in the epigraph and “My life is hid, in him that is my treasure” in the acrostic, makes the poem both deeply personal and communal: it is a pronounced assertion of the speaker aligning himself with the reader. Rather than read the anamorphic properties of the poem as producing doubt, as in Greenblatt’s reading of Holbein’s Ambassadors, he shows how Herbert revises this aspect of anamorphosis in order for the poem to enable the reader to enact a religious experience: “the poem invites us to finish reading across both of its axes…Herbert’s poem offers us a unity of simultaneous apprehension: as long as we are looking and not reading, we are able to grasp at once the poem’s ‘double
motion.’ It is, in Herbert’s typical fashion, a subtle but meaningful epiphany.”70 Like Luther’s epiphany when reading the same phrase, “Iustitia Dei,” from a different perspective, Herbert’s anamorphic poem produces the flickering opportunity for religious transcendence rather than the paralyzing recognition of fallen existence.

In contrast to the revisionary religious use of anamorphosis Song identifies in Herbert’s poetry, Anna Riehl argues that an anamorphic logic permeates early modern habits of thought more generally, and in John Donne’s amorous poetry in particular. She suggests that scholars ought to shift anamorphic readings away from explicit references to paintings in early modern literature to “a mechanism for making sense of literary texts,” as one of the early modern “patterns of thinking.”71 By analyzing Donne’s “The Ectasie” in terms of an anamorphic logic, she finds that the three-part structure of the poem, as well as the four-person configuration of speaker, beloved, embedded observer, and reader, enacts a process of anamorphic discovery and revelation, similar to Luther’s exegetical experience. The speaker’s shift from an account of his and his beloved’s spiritual union to a plea for bodily love is not a self-interested erotic conceit but a journey through an anamorphic lesson. Riehl concludes, “In taking us from one point of view to the other, Donne’s purpose (and accomplishment) is precisely to convince us that the spiritual union will not be negated by the sexual.”72 His poem therefore uses the logic and process of anamorphic discovery to “teach a lesson about the properties of love.”73


72 Ibid., 152.

73 Ibid., 147.
Both Song and Riehl illuminate how the period’s anamorphic logic serves a more deliberately transformational — whether religious or moral — function than more familiar rhetorical tropes such as irony in early modern English literature. Anamorphic logic in the period is not limited to the select poems or plays where this specific form of media is invoked; rather, it is an important aspect of the period’s ways of thinking, writing, and representing. It is a technique that is essentially geared toward revelation and transformation, brought about especially by drawing a reader or audience member into active participation within a poem or play.

The sheer number of allusions to perspective in a variety of discourses, genres, and registers is important to underscore how pervasive they were to the thinking of sixteenth and seventeenth century English writers, and how we read their works today. In addition to works already mentioned or those that serve as the basis of this dissertation, they appear in the works of Ben Jonson, the poems of Andrew Marvell, the travel accounts of Adam Olearius in Persia and Thomas Coryate and John Evelyn in Italy, the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, and the daily life of Samuel Pepys. They reflect a genuine fascination in England with these new forms

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of representation, and the ability of poets and playwrights to adapt them into their own poetic and dramatic media to cater to this very interest. They also indicate shared aesthetic epistemologies among painting, poetry, and drama that center on the dynamic, sometimes confrontational, relationship between aesthetic works and the perspectives of their viewers, readers, and audiences, and an appreciation for the witty, illusionistic innovations of painters, poets, and dramatists.

Other, albeit fewer, critics have been less eager to follow Panofsky by making broad metaphorical readings of early modernity based on these new forms of visual representation. E. H. Gombrich’s inquiry into whether perspective should simply be treated as “precisely what it claims to be, a method of representing a building or any scene as it would be seen from a particular vantage point,” is representative of subsequent scholars who deny perspective as a larger cultural metaphor. Martin Kemp follows Gombrich in portraying such readings as “poetically beautiful” and “intellectually brilliant,” but dismisses them as having “no place in

historical analysis.” Similarly, James Elkins and David Topper have both cautioned against culturally representative readings of perspective and anamorphosis, both putting it quite bluntly: Elkins observes that Renaissance writers themselves “did not spend much time thinking about the meanings of perspective,” while Topper asserts that modern critics who continue to make such arguments are “often confusing, and sometimes downright wrong.”

Given that perspective’s functions and metaphorical meanings were contested even in the Renaissance, perhaps critical disputes in the twenty and twenty-first centuries over the same issues should come as no surprise. Alberti’s On Painting, for example, consists of a first book that he claims is “all geometry,” while the ensuing two are about the art’s moral ends. Likewise, Elkins observes that the “sometimes stark differences between monographs that reconstruct perspective practice and those that speak philosophically or poetically were prefigured by the differences between, say, the Italian Renaissance rationalists Cigoli or Sirigatti and northern Renaissance writers such as Jamnitzer, Stoer, and Erhard Schön.” Even only a few decades after Alberti’s book at the end of the fifteenth-century, Elkins continues, perspective was already understood as “‘part philosophy and part geometry.’ Perspective has always been hermaphroditic, part convention and part invention.”


77 Elkins, Poetics of Perspective, 263.
Underlying perspective’s relations to these disparate fields was its connection with rhetoric in the early modern period, enabling poets and dramatists to adapt it in various ways into their poetry and dramaturgy. Not only did figures such as Barbaro deal with subjects from optics to rhetoric, and Alberti, whose treatise on painting attempted to elevate the art by modeling it on Ciceronian oratory, but rhetoricians, poets, and dramatists also recognized the perspectival nature of the English language itself.\(^7\) Defending poets in general and aiming to elevate English poets and poetics in particular, Puttenham uses the image of a perspective glass to explain the function of the imagination, or “Phantasie,” in relation to English poetry. Like Sidney, who I will discuss in Chapters 1 and 2, Puttenham acknowledges that the imagination, as had been famously charged against poetry since Plato, can be the seat of “disordered fantasies, for which cause the Greeks call him \([phantastikos]\).”\(^7\) His defense of the imagination hinges on the two main contradictory impulses of perspective images and metaphors in the period. On the one hand, “this fantasy may be resembled to a glass…whereof there be many tempers and manner of makings, as the perspectives do acknowledge, for some be false glasses and show things otherwise than they be indeed.”\(^8\) In other words, the imagination is like the current proliferation of “perspectives” of many kinds, some of which work to distort reality and deceive people’s eyes; so, too, does the


\(^8\) Ibid., 110.
medium of the English language and its effects on the imagination and our sensory perception, as Puttenham and later semioticians and philosophers of language have realized, work to distort reality and draw people away from it.\textsuperscript{81}

Puttenham’s point that “there be many tempers” of such “perspectives,” however, also works to reclaim the imagination, poetry, and perspective for beneficial ends. As de Man later formulated his philosophy of language and its shaping power on the imagination in terms of the “materiality of the letter,” so too does Puttenham defend poets by figuring the imagination through the diverse medium of perspective: in contrast to producing sensory and imaginative distortion, it also can be

not only nothing disorderly or confused with any monstrous imaginations or conceits, but very formal, and in his much multiformity uniform, that is, well proportioned, and so passing clear, that by it, as by a glass or mirror, are represented unto the soul all manner of beautiful visions, whereby the inventive part of the mind is so much helped, as without it no man could devise any new or rare thing.\textsuperscript{82}

Puttenham represents the imagination in visual terms, “well proportioned.” “Form” becomes a key term in his rhetorical soundscape of “very formal…multiformity uniform.” The imagination, like perspective glasses and like figurative language, is “formal”: malleable, temperable. Puttenham’s defense of poets, then, “hinges on an observation about the matter of the imagination: the imagination is as material and as uniquely tempered as any mirror or perspective glass.” It does not simply represent or distort reality, but is “uniform” in its “multiformity” to do both: it is like a perspective glass, which can contribute to “the inventive

\textsuperscript{81} This sense of the imagination, also referred to by Puttenham and throughout the early modern period as “phantasie,” “fantasy,” or “fancy,” is perhaps best described by John Keats as a “deceiving elf” in \textit{Ode to a Nightingale}, ll. 74.

part of the mind” in order to clarify, or even create, “any new or rare thing.” As Sidney will claim, and then immediately qualify, poets, having been made in God’s “own likeness,” bring inventions forth “with the force of a divine breath...far surpassing her [Nature’s] doings...since our erected wit makes us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keeps us from reaching unto it.” Unlike Sidney, however, who strived to elevate English poetics by imitating classical quantitative meters and situating English poets with their classical predecessors, “Puttenham measures the integrity and authority of English poesy...by way of a contemporary technology, the perspective glass.” Puttenham’s entire project of Englishing classical rhetorical tropes can be condensed, in short, into reading figurative language as a kind of perspective, capable of either distortion or invention, confusion or clarification.

As Eugene Donato first brought to critical attention, Emmanuele Tesauro’s Il cannocchiale aristotelico from 1654 provides evidence of an early modern theory of rhetoric connecting poetic wit with the optical ingenuities of visual perspective. It announces this connection from its frontispiece, which presents two figures together, Poesis and Pictura. On the left, Poesis peers at the sun through a telescope, or perspicillum, held by the steadying hand of Aristotle, while on the right, Pictura paints an anamorphosis that brings into clear focus the distorted Latin tag underneath it: Omnis in unum, “all in one” (Fig. 6). As this engraving


84 Sidney, Defense of Poesy, 216. On the deliberately convoluted grammar of Sidney’s radically new, and religiously controversial statements here, see Cummings, The Literary Culture of the Reformation, 264–70.

85 Kalas, Frame, Glass, Verse, 137.

suggests, for Tesauro poetic conceits function similarly to early modern perspective devices. Both poetic and perspectival wit are forms of metaphor, considered broadly, capable of superimposing two or more ideas within or against one another: “metaphor packs everything tightly into a word,” Tesauro writes, “and in an almost miraculous way makes you see one thing inside another. Hence the greater is your delight: in the same way as it is a more curious and pleasing thing to see many objects through a perspective aperture.”

Tesauro follows Aristotle’s Poetics and its central emphasis on marvel and wonder. Renaissance poetry and drama, that is, fell under a similar purview of concepts inherited from both classical poetic theory and contemporary Italian painting, as both witty visual and poetic metaphors were viewed and read as feats of “ingegno” and “marvaviglia,” marvellous feats of artistic ingenuity allowing viewers and readers to perceive connections between dissimilar things in novel, unexpected ways. Tesauro’s treatise illuminates how far Puttenham’s comparisons between perspective and figurative language had extended and developed in the century since, and how early modern writers themselves drew interdisciplinary comparisons, both positive and negative, between visual perspective and poetic wit in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Peter Schwenger observes, despite being published in the mid-seventeenth century Tesauro’s work still offers something more valuable than a specific source for English literature that predates his text: it reflects an early modern way of thinking about poetry and poesis that was percolating and

87 Quoted in Gilman, The Curious Perspective, 81.

88 See Aristotle, Poetics, 1452a.
permeating throughout the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and an “aesthetic theory by which such practice was viewed and judged.”

V

The chapters that follow challenge the misconception of post-Reformation England as “iconophobic,” and the linked notion that “the highly distinctive English spirit…seems so remote from French or Italian art.” On the contrary, they argue that early modern English poets and playwrights share an underlying aesthetic with Continental perspective paintings. The spread of perspective paintings and theories in England, notably by Italian artistic influences, are typically attributed to the Caroline period in the mid-seventeenth century, “where it remained in many respects an alien discourse” until then. When Charles I travelled to Spain to meet his prospective bride and queen, the Infanta Maria Anna, for example, he instead returned with Titian’s portrait of Charles V, and in 1632 he appointed Anthony van Dyck, “an artist fully familiar with the international tradition and greatly influenced by Titian,” as court painter. In closer contact with European courts than their predecessors, both Charles I and Henrietta Maria amassed a collection of European paintings, including works by Titian, Leonardo, Mantegna, and

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Correggio, and a record of his inventory at Hampton Court includes seven paintings by Giulio Romano, the only artist specifically mentioned by Shakespeare, and two by Parmigianino.93

Yet well before Charles I’s reign, there were other sources and routes for both Continental and English aesthetic ideas to interchange in more dynamic and organic ways, in addition to physical paintings or published books. For example, the Italian painter Girolamo da Treviso was one of a number of artists working for Henry VIII in the early sixteenth century in England.94 Elizabeth’s court astronomer and adviser John Dee specifically owned a copy of Alberti’s On Painting, as well as other works on perspective, and in his preface to Euclid he uses Albertian language in his definition of “Zographie,” or drawing.95 In 1574 Sir Philip Sidney wrote to his friend and mentor Hubert Languet that “As soon as I go back to Venice I will have it [my portrait] done, either by Paul Veronese or by Tintoretto, who in this art today are easily the best.” One month later, he sat for Veronese in a now-lost portrait.96 When the Italian painter Federigo Zuccaro visited England in 1576, he remarked that Holbein’s portraits of German merchants, made during the 1530s and displayed at Guildhall until 1598, rivalled those even of


94 Ibid., 7.

95 See Thorne, Vision and Rhetoric, 45. Although Gent views early modern English visual culture as isolated, “so remote” from Continental pictorial aesthetics, she also confirms that “considerable numbers of copies of perspective treatises and architectural treatises (many of which discuss perspective) can be traced in England at the time,” and that “perspective treatises are not uncommon after 1580 in English libraries,” in Picture and Poetry, 25, 66.

Raphael. Other visitors to Whitehall, including Shakespeare and the Chamberlain’s Men, could have seen the anamorphic perspectives of Holbein’s *Ambassadors* and the portrait of Edward VI (1546, Fig. 16), attributed to the King’s Painter, William Scrots. The theory and practice of perspective became even more widespread when Richard Haydocke published his translation of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo’s *A Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Painting, Carving, and Building*. Haydocke publicized his knowledge of specific paintings and techniques of Italian Renaissance masters such as Vasari, Mantegna, Raphael, Leonardo, Titian, and Michelangelo.

He refers to Lomazzo as “equall with, if not superior to Appelles,” for his “profound knowledge and deep skill in the Arte” of painting, and alludes to him as “another Aristotle,” for systematically “compiling this most absolute body of the Arte.” But Haydocke also attests to Nicholas Hilliard’s reputation amongst Italian “strangers” visiting England. Indeed, the English miniature popularized by Hilliard and his pupil Isaac Oliver in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Raphaelle Costa de Beauregard writes, also “testify to the cohabitation of high Renaissance and Mannerist aesthetics in English taste during the 1580–1620 period.”

Haydocke even reflects the high status of English painting in the period, contrary to modern

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98 See Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain, 1530–1790* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), 25, for the attribution of the Edward VI portrait to Scrots. She suggests that he was likely imitating Holbein’s painting to display his prodigious skill and wit to the court.


100 Ibid., iiiv.

preconceptions, as on a comparable level with Italian art, stating his wish that he, like Vasari’s *Lives* and Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, could write a similar work paralleling Italian and English artists.\(^\text{102}\)

In the spirit of Haydocke, then, the following chapters hope to trace “parallel lives” between Continental developments in perspective and concomitant evolutions in English aesthetics, poetics, and dramatic form occasioned by the period’s larger visual culture. I aim to build on this growing critical field to propose new confluences between early modern visual, poetic, and dramatic arts. In particular, my four chapters are structured as a kind of diptych, each offering a new way to read Renaissance paintings, poems, and plays “perspectively,” and new ways of reading old texts that were designed to be interpreted in conflicting ways depending upon point of view. Taking their cue from the numerous implicit and explicit allusions to visual perspective in these poems and plays, the first two chapters focus on Elizabethan epyllia, a short-lived yet influential genre contemporary with England’s growing fascination with visual perspective at the end of the sixteenth century. The second two chapters focus on Shakespeare, who, I would argue, engages with perspective more than any other English Renaissance writer.

Chapter 1, “*Ut Pictora Rhetorica*: ‘Curious Imagery’ in Elizabethan Epyllia,” triangulates a network of allusions to the “curious perspective” in Christopher Marlowe’s and George Chapman’s epyllia in the first half of the 1590s. The opening section considers Chapman’s cluster of references to “invention,” “skilful Painters,” “spice,” and “perspective” in his prefatory letter, establishing how he situates his work within the *paragone* between painting and poetry. I argue that poets writing in this fashionable new genre attempt to rival developments in perspective painting, creating their own poetic “pieces of perspective.” In so doing, however,

\(^{102}\) Haydocke, *A Tracte*, vi'.
they concentrate not on the Albertian belief in the didactic capacity of perspective to better move spectators toward civic and moral ends. Rather, I contend that epylliants emulate perspective’s alternative epistemology, translating artists’ playful, self-reflexive demonstrations of artistic skill into their own “colors of rhetoric” and rhetorical “spice.” While there has been a longstanding rhetorical view of painting since Horace in antiquity and Alberti in the Renaissance, I chart a painterly view of rhetoric in England in the 1590s. Marlowe’s self-conscious display of rhetorical tropes in his epyllion draws attention to his own linguistic embroidery rather than to any instructive center in his poem. This chapter concludes by examining Shakespeare’s reference to the “gross painting” of other writers’ representations of his friend in Sonnets 82 and 83 as a response to such extravagant, fetishistic uses of rhetorical tropes, which draw attention away from true poetic invention in representing him, and instead only showcase their own artificial surface.

While my first chapter observes how the invention of visual perspective occasioned new developments in Elizabethan poetics, Chapter 2, “On Invention: Shakespeare’s Trompe L’Oeil and Marston’s Anamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image,” reverses the terms by considering how such developments also effected a reevaluation of the nature of artistic invention itself. I explore the surprising number of references to “invention” in Elizabethan epyllia and their paratexts, arguing that this genre was a prominent proving ground for new ideas surrounding invention. I argue that developments in visual perspective, especially trompe l’oeil and anamorphosis, contributed to a redefinition of invention at the end of the sixteenth century. Situating it among its close synonym, “conceit,” I show how contemporary developments in visual perspective and Elizabethan poetics displace invention from its previously privileged humanist position — a quality inherent within the work of art to be extracted — viewing it instead as an unstable
meaning contingent upon the subjective opinion of every new spectator or reader. After charting the development of these terms in the second half of the sixteenth century, the remainder of the chapter argues that Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* and Marston’s *Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image* are poetic adaptations of *trompe l’oeil* and anamorphosis. On the one hand, Shakespeare constructs *Venus and Adonis* around the allusion to the classical competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, creating a poetic *trompe l’oeil* that critiques the limits of rhetoric and the “gross painting” undergirding the highly visual contemporary poetry that is mere surface without substance. On the other, Marston’s *Metamorphosis* is a poetic anamorphosis: Marston turns readers into active participants in the production of his work’s meaning, and reflects their voyeuristic gazes back at them to satirize the debased state of invention and literary taste at the end of the sixteenth century.

After the first half of my dissertation compares evolutions in visual perspective and poetic invention, the second half demonstrates that Shakespeare adapted visual perspective into his metatheatrical dramaturgy throughout his career. The opening section of Chapter 3, “‘This is and is not Cressi’d: Seeing Double in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida,*” shows how Shakespeare incorporates recent developments in painting as structural and thematic devices for full-scale speeches, scenes, and even entire works. I then focus on *Troilus and Cressida* and the visual indeterminacy of the female character Cressida and the boy actor performing her. Building on Robert Weimann’s notion of the “bifold authority” of the early modern stage — the tension between the fictional, imaginary world represented and the material, performing bodies presenting it — I argue that Shakespeare harnesses this tension as a source of strength, inviting audiences to analyze the visual analogy between the perspectival image of the character Cressida and the company’s apprenticed boy actor beneath. Whereas the character Cressida is vulnerable
in Troy, a city at war with the Greeks, the boy actor behind the role is vulnerable metatheatrically, performing within a market of warring theaters that capitalize on his own commodification and exploitation.

Building on the perspectival relationship between Shakespeare’s fictional characters and his material company of actors examined in Chapter 3, my final chapter, “Shakespeare’s Perspectival Playhouses and the Case of Cymbeline,” argues that allusions to perspective and anamorphosis also signal Shakespeare’s double vision for how his plays could be viewed depending upon theatrical setting. I locate this advancement in Shakespeare’s dramaturgy in Antony and Cleopatra, where the play’s multiple allusions to perspective serve as structural metaphors for the play’s own recurring focus on how dramatic interpretation is dependent upon physical point of view and material circumstance. After establishing the relationship between anamorphosis and Shakespeare’s dramaturgy in his late Roman tragedy, I apply this lens to his British tragicomedy Cymbeline. Attending to its engagement with its playing spaces, I examine two scenes in particular which deliver on this aesthetic opportunity, taking on new, sometimes opposed meanings and resonances depending on changes in playhouse and audience. I argue that while Shakespeare designs Cymbeline to more smoothly sustain a nationalistic reading at the Globe, he confronts his audience at the Blackfriars, creating more dissonance that undermines Jupiter’s concluding prophecy for British prosperity, and that lingers over the play’s literal last word, “peace.”

VI

At the Columbia University English Institute in 1941, eminent critic René Wellek spoke on an admittedly “cryptic and vague” topic, “The Parallelism between Literature and the
Arts.” Speaking in the wake of a number of recent studies applying Heinrich Wolfflin’s landmark *Principles of Art History* from 1915, which broadly delineated Renaissance art as linear, unified, and closed, and Baroque art as pictorial, asymmetrical, and open, Wellek cautioned against the number of studies attempting to transfer terms and categories from art history to literary criticism. For Wellek, this new trend had led to everything exemplifying “the principle either of concentration or of expansion” through its method of “universal analogizing” between the arts. Although Wellek has been interpreted as cautioning against criticism comparing the visual and verbal arts, he himself asserts that it would be wrong to interpret him as implying “a wholesale dismissal” of such scholarship. Rather, he desires his audience to “concentrate on an analysis of the works themselves and relegate to the background studies in the psychology of the reader and the spectator or the author and the artist.” He concludes that these studies “should be approached anew.”

As the number of articles and books cited in the footnotes of this Introduction and throughout the dissertation indicate, studies on the interrelations between the arts has continued to flourish since Wellek’s lecture. My dissertation hopes to contribute to these studies while heeding Wellek’s important caution to “concentrate on an analysis of the works themselves” and to approach the field “anew.” While I do make analogies between perspective paintings,

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104 Ibid., 49.

105 Ibid., 56.

106 Ibid., 60.

107 Ibid., 65.
techniques, and the aesthetic epistemologies undergirding them, with their rhetorical and theatrical counterparts in Renaissance English poetry and drama, I do not do so loosely like the critics under Wellek’s scrutiny in the early twentieth century. Rather, my study is unique — both in comparison with Wellek’s contemporaries and with recent discussions comparing visual perspective with Renaissance poetry and drama — in that its objects of study are exclusively poems and plays that explicitly refer to perspective within them, including Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Cymbeline*, or texts that are very implicitly invested with the fashionable new art form and its rapidly evolving meanings, such as Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* and Marston’s *Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image*. Despite Wellek’s caution, and the exaggerated analogizing to which interdisciplinary studies between the arts can be susceptible, the Ovidian education received by early modern poets and playwrights encouraged them from a young age to metamorphose other arts into their own, and Horace’s dictum “ut pictora poesis” pervaded the Renaissance to such an extent that it insisted upon them to make comparisons between painting and poetry. Unlike Panofsky and those criticized by Wellek, I do not make claims asserting a representative “spirit of the age” of the Renaissance. Instead, I illuminate shared aesthetic concerns among the seemingly distant fields of Continental developments in visual perspective, Elizabethan poetics, and early modern metatheater. Grounding my analysis in texts that signal their engagement with visual perspective, I elucidate English writers’ familiarity with perspectival images, theories, and devices, and how they imaginatively integrated them into their own poetic and dramatic forms, ultimately occasioning shifts in the idea of artistic invention and contributing to Shakespeare’s innovations in metatheater in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
An inherent limitation in a study of this kind is the fact that, despite the ample references to perspective and anamorphic images throughout early modern English literature in sermons, poems, plays, wills, and royal and personal inventories, only a limited number of material artifacts remain extant today. I therefore am constrained to employ familiar anamorphoses and pieces of perspective that have appeared in the pages of previous studies, such as Holbein’s *Ambassadors*, Scrots’ portrait of Edward VI, Schön’s *Aus du Alter Tor*, and the anonymous *Anamorphosis, Called Mary, Queen of Scots*. Because I approach this study from the perspective of a literary scholar rather than an art historian, I use Alberti’s *On Painting*, the most influential treatise on perspective in the Renaissance, as my primary theoretical source, and I analyze English poems and plays at much greater length than their counterparts in painting. Alberti himself conceded at the outset of his invaluable treatise, “In all this discussion, I beg you to consider me not as a mathematician but as a painter writing of these things.” I ask you to consider me neither as a mathematician nor a painter, but as a literary scholar. Like Alberti’s seminal text on perspective, which he expressed from the outset was an “admittedly difficult subject,” I, too, hope to bring a methodology, approach, and corpus of texts to this field which have been “never before treated.”

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CHAPTER 1

*Ut Pictora Rhetorica:* “Curious Imagery” in Elizabethan Epyllia

This grew speedily to an excess: for men began to hunt more after wordes, than matter.
—Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*

I

When George Chapman published his epyllion *Ovids Banquet of Sense* in 1595, the fashionable genre was already beginning its descent from its height of popularity, much of which was owed to the genre’s characteristic rhetorical ostentation, Ovidian playfulness, and heightened eroticism. As Shakespeare had done with *Venus and Adonis* two years prior, Chapman also prefaced his work with a letter to his friend, the poet Matthew Roydon, explaining his own expectations for his poem in particular and the epyllion genre more generally. Unlike Shakespeare, however, who expressed anxiety over “the first heir of my invention,” Chapman instead aimed to distinguish his work from the “lowe invention” of his precursors, and their morally insubstantial poems:

That, *Enargia*, or cleernes of representation, requird in absolute Poems is not the perspicuous delivery of a lowe invention; but high, and harty invention exprest in most significant, and unaffected phrase; It serves not a skilfull Painters turne, to draw the figure of a face onely to make knowne who it represents; but hee must lymn, give luster, shaddow, and heightning; which though ignorants will esteeme spic’d, and too curious, yet such as have the judiciall perspective, will see it hath, motion, spirit and life.\(^{109}\)

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Chapman’s prefatory letter triangulates key terms and concepts central to my opening two chapters: invention, spice (i.e., rhetorical tropes), and perspective. Writing retrospectively of other erotic, rhetorically superfluous epyllia from the first half of the 1590s, Chapman also reflects the understood relations among invention, rhetoric, and perspective in this particular poetic genre that I aim to bring to light in these opening chapters.

What is perhaps most striking in Chapman’s account of “absolute Poems” and “harty invention” is his testimony regarding enargeia and the special role afforded to the visual, painterly capacities of poetry. Chapman compares his work as a poet to that of “skilfull Painters,” situating himself within the Horatian tradition of ut pictora poes is. Yet just how to achieve this visual “cleernes of representation” for poets is complicated: as soon as Chapman praises an “unaffected phrase” for achieving a “harty invention,” he immediately employs the similitude with painting in order to defend, in a seeming contradiction, what “ignorants will esteeme spic’d, and too curious,” or, in other words, what many may view as excessively rhetorical.

Chapman’s tangled position tries to reconcile how rhetoric can create a painting-like poem that also contains a morally substantial invention, an “absolute Poem.” He does so to distance himself from other poets in the new epyllion genre who are not concerned with supplying a didactic moral to their Ovidian material, as Arthur Golding had done, for instance, in his translation of The Metamorphoses a few decades prior (1567). Instead, they only shallowly imitate painters by peppering their poems with rhetorical tropes and devices, with “spice” that is merely ornamental. Sir Philip Sidney had similarly rebuked such poets in his contemporary Defense of Poesy, also published in 1595 but composed in the decade prior, as base “versifiers” who “cast sugar and spice [rhetorical figures] upon every dish [poem] that is served to the
table.” Viewed from “the judicall perspective,” however, Chapman contends that “spice” and rhetorical artistry can in fact not be “too curious,” but instead can serve to rival the “harty invention” of a good painting. According to Chapman, *enargeia*, “or cleerness of representation,” is brought about by such poetic “lymn[ing]” and rhetorical “spice” that inject “motion, spirit and life” through poetry’s intensely visual capacities.

Chapman, however, does not compare himself and his work to just any painter or painting. He deflects potential charges of poetic indecorum by explicitly aligning his poem with new developments in painting and the “curious perspective.” Indeed, by the fourth stanza of his epyllion proper, Chapman echoes his prefatory letter when he describes a perspectival fountain depicting “Stone Niobe…So cunningly to optick reason wrought,” and her fourteen children carved “in curious imagrie,” that they can only be perceived correctly when viewed from a distance, or, as Chapman puts it, from “a judicall perspective.” As Raymond Waddington has argued, the recurring references to visual perspective throughout Chapman’s poem enjoin readers to relate the poem itself “to the dominant metaphor” of the prefatory letter: Chapman’s *Banquet* is itself a carefully constructed “perspective poem,” a “speaking picture” that provides an

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111 Chapman, *Ovid’s Banquet of Sense*, B1v.
implicit moral commentary on the fallibility of human senses, reason, and acts of interpretation.¹¹²

By concentrating on the “curious” aspect of perspective in both his preface and his poem, Chapman reveals how other contemporary epyllia were constructed and received: derived from the Latin cura — meaning not only a “care” or “concern,” but also a “literary effort” or “literary work” — these poems are “curious” because they are “Ingenious, skillful, clever, expert” and “skillfully, elaborately or beautifully wrought.” They are “curious” by evoking “the curious pencil of Appelles,” the renowned classical painter, in their allusions to visual perspective, and because of the ways in which they often confront the subject position of readers and their own readerly “curiosity,” their own “desire to see” and probe into these Ovidian poems, which many moralists would consider matters upon which “undue care is bestowed; a vanity.”¹¹³

As Chapman’s epyllion takes readers past the fountain of Niobe’s children carved “in curious imagrie” and through the sensorium of his poem — including the climactic placement of sight itself — his work reflects how Elizabethan epyllia, when founded on “lowe invention,” had become too “spic’d” and “curious” for their eager, prying readers. Chapman’s preface, in short, draws attention to the emerging tensions between poetic invention, rhetorical spice, and the curious perspective within Elizabethan epyllia at the end of the sixteenth century.


¹¹³ “curious, adj. and adv.” 4, and “curiosity, n.” 13. OED Online. March 2023. Thomas Watson, The Hekatompathia or Passionate Centurie of Love Divided into Two Parts (London: Imprinted by Iohn Wolfe for Gabriell Cawood, 1582), A3⁶. In his prefatory dedication to Edward de Vere, which includes “A Pasquine Piller Erected in the Despite of Love,” the first published pattern poem in English that is playfully built according to the “Arithmetike” and “rule and number” of perspective, Watson even specifically “conferre[s]” his own poems “with Appelles Portraites, for worthiness.”
The remainder of these opening chapters will examine how Renaissance English poets translate Horace’s venerable dictum of *ut pictora poesis* into the Elizabethan epyllion of the 1590s. In particular, I argue that writers in this genre from Marlowe to Marston not only create poetic pictures, but are explicitly interested in incorporating the contemporary fascination with Renaissance perspective into their own poetic practice. The Ovidian minor epics that flourished in the 1590s, that is, can be viewed as literary experiments in imitating and rivalling perspective art. As Georgia Brown writes, “Epyllia are witty, erotic and urbane poems which place great emphasis on style and invention, and constitute virtuoso displays of poetic skill. Moreover, the genre is extremely self-conscious, and the epyllion writers ostentatiously raid each other, copy each other and continue each other’s work, thereby establishing themselves…as poets who are instantly recognizable as members of a literary avant-garde.” Indeed, many of these epyllia introduce a semantic vocabulary of “looking” and “seeing” as if their poems are *enargeic*, experimental, verbal paintings explicitly designed to vie with the visual arts.

I am not arguing for specific influences between perspective paintings and Elizabethan epyllia. Rather, I follow David Castillo, Ulrich Weisstein, Roland Frye, and Leonard Barkan’s interdisciplinary approaches to reading across painting and poetry. Rather than search for direct influences, I wish to proceed by way of analogy to mutually illuminate “common aesthetic ground” and a shared “aesthetic epistemology” between Renaissance painters and poets, contrary

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115 Cf. most famously Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (New York: New York UP, 1969), 150–55, who argues that Titian’s painting of *Venus and Adonis* was in fact a direct source for Shakespeare’s epyllion of the same name, given that it resided in London and was frequently copied and printed contemporary with Shakespeare’s poem.
to the established ideals of their respective arts, in the two realms of perspective paintings and poetic epyllia.\textsuperscript{116}

I view this shared aesthetic among perspective paintings and Elizabethan epyllia in two important regards. First, I suggest that both perspective painters and epylliaists similarly work against codified theoretical ideals about their respective forms. Like perspective artists who place strained vanishing points away from the moral of their istoria to instead draw attention to their own artifice, poets writing in this new erotic genre — and for my purposes, specifically Christopher Marlowe — also lace their works with references to gardens, flowers, and embroidery, calling attention to their poems as troves of vivid ornamentation filled with \textit{florilegia} to demonstrate their rhetorical skill.\textsuperscript{117}

Other critics have also read Marlowe’s epyllion \textit{Hero and Leander} through the lens of visual perspective based on the poem’s contrasting, imagistic depictions of Hero, on the one hand, and the detached “point of view” generated by the poem’s ironic, digressive narrator and


\textsuperscript{117} Although I concentrate on the subversive, “pointless” aesthetic of Marlowe’s \textit{Hero and Leander} in this chapter, see also the wondrous description of the “ornament” of Clarion’s armor “curiously engraven,” “his shinie wings…Painted with thousand colours, passing farre / All Painters skill,” and the simultaneously literal and rhetorical garden of flowers through which he flutters in Spenser’s “spectacle of care,” in the \textit{Muiopotmos, or the Fate of the Butterfly}, in \textit{The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser}, eds. William A. Oram, Einar Bjorvand, Ronald Bond, Thomas H. Cain, Alexander Dunlop, and Richard Schell (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), ll.66–96, 440, italics added.
superfluous rhetorical style, on the other. In contrast, I propose that the virtuosic, self-conscious technical demonstrations found in new forms of visual perspective share a similarly playful, unruly aesthetic with Elizabethan poets such as Marlowe who incorporate extravagant displays of rhetorical tropes into their epyllia, which, I will argue, Shakespeare defines as “gross painting” in Sonnet 82. Visual perspective’s evolution into anamorphosis, moreover, also parallels the evolution of the Elizabethan epyllion, which culminates in Marston’s anamorphic satire, the Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image. In other words, by the end of the sixteenth century the genre’s rhetorical and erotic superfluities, which rebuke the ideals of humanist decorum, give way to Marston’s anamorphic satire, which captures and confronts readers’ desirous gazes and critiques the genre’s characteristic linguistic foreplay.

Second, I will show how the development of the terms “invention” and “conceit” also overlaps in surprising ways for Renaissance painters and poets, as expressed by figures from Alberti to Michelangelo, on the one hand, and Gascoigne to Sidney, on the other. As perspective (d)evolves into anamorphosis, and epyllia become structured around rhetorical style without

118 See Albert Labriola, “Perspective and Illusion in Hero and Leander,” English Language Notes 16 (1978): 14–18, and Robert Logan, “Perspective in Marlowe’s Hero and Leander: Engaging Our Detachment,” in A Poet and a Filthy Play-Maker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe, eds. Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance Brown Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 279–91. On the one hand, Labriola, 17, compares Marlowe’s and Chapman’s representations of Hero with contemporary pictorial representations of the Three Graces to show how their interpretations of Venus, and Hero as “Venus nun,” are “vastly different”: whereas Marlowe’s verses are fueled by rhetorical and sensual discord, Chapman’s sestads are tempered by discordia concors. On the other, Logan, 281, 289, argues that the shifts in rhetorical styles and tones throughout the poem create ironic detachment in order to reveal Marlowe’s underlying concern, not only in the poem but throughout his poetic and dramatic corpus, with “power and its human limitations.” While Logan attempts to unify the apparently superfluous elements within the poem toward this moral, thematic end, he also admits that the rhetoric can leave readers “feeling empty…without pointing to anything beyond” Marlowe’s display of poetic skill and “mere cleverness.”

moral substance, both perspective paintings and Elizabethan epyllia question Renaissance aesthetic ideals and the structures on which they depend. In particular, in creating a poetic trompe l’œil in *Venus and Adonis* and a verbal anamorphosis in the *Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image*, Shakespeare and Marston exploit shifting notions of poetic invention and artistic conceit articulated by figures such as Gascoigne and Sidney: the result of epyllists’ education is mere “verbal fetishism,” not poetry that provides moral *exempla* to move readers to civic virtue. As Marston will put it, artistic invention has become “All conceit” by the publication of his poem in 1598, highlighting the ambiguous moral implications this previously prestigious term had accrued from earlier in the century. Shakespeare’s and Marston’s perspectival epyllia expose the broken link between artistic invention and rhetorical decorum by the end of the sixteenth century.

II

The Elizabethan epyllion was a genre particularly entrenched within the Horatian framework of *ut pictora poesis*, “as a painting, so a poem,” a phrase pervasive in early modern England, and which Chapman’s prefatory letter and poem would have immediately called to mind. Horace’s claim that poetry could, and even should, imitate painting had become a

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commonplace during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, comparisons among the arts are constitutive of the Renaissance itself, reviving the notion not only from Horace, but Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch as well. Before Horace, Plato writes that “The poet is like a painter” in Book X of the Republic, and his pupil Aristotle also frequently uses painting as a point of comparison for poetry in his Poetics. Of the work’s five references to painting, only one distinguishes it from poetry based on their differing “means” of imitation, while the other four establish parallels between the two arts. Aristotle’s essential point is that “The poet, like a painter,” is like “any other image-maker,” in that they are all “engaged in representation.” Because of this basic likeness between painting and poetry — which Aristotle does not simply mention in passing but instead returns to at pivotal moments regarding plot, character, and action throughout the Poetics — Aristotle not only promotes the nascent idea in Plato that “the poet is like a painter,” but he even goes further by declaring that “poets should copy” painters.

It was Horace’s Latin phrase, however, that — all the more forceful for its ubiquity and more charming for its brevity — proliferated comparisons between painting and poetry throughout early modern England. Although it is significant that Horace opens the Ars Poetica


124 Ibid., 1460b7–8.

125 See 1454b10–12.
with a comparison between painters and poets (*pictoribus atque poetis*) in order to assert his aesthetic theory of decorum — creative “license” tempered by natural, realistic unity and consistency — his later, more famous comparison in the *Ars*, “as a painting, so a poem,” is not elaborate or extensive.\(^{126}\) Rather, in its original context, *ut pictora poesis* simply draws a parallel to say that good poems, like good paintings, can be viewed from different angles and in different lights. Some poems and paintings pique one person’s interest but not another’s, and some are worth reviewing and rereading while others are not: “A poem is like a picture: one strikes your fancy more, the nearer you stand; another, the farther away. This courts the shade, that will wish to be seen in the light, and dreads not the critic insight of the judge. This pleased but once; that, though ten times called for, will always please.”\(^{127}\)

Yet even though Horace’s comparison is simplistic in its original context, it would eventually become “almost the keynote of Renaissance criticism.”\(^{128}\) In sixteenth-century Italian literary circles, the polymath Julius Caesar Scaliger wrote that “every oration consists of image, idea, and imitation, just like painting,” while another of his humanist contemporaries, Pomponius Gauricus, asserted that “Poetry ought to resemble painting.” In England, Sir Edward Hoby first translated and publicized Simonides’ influential phrase into English, originally reported in Plutarch’s *De Gloria Athenensium*, that “Painting is a dumme Poesie, and Poesie is a speaking


\(^{127}\) Ibid., ll. 361–5. On comparisons between painting and poetry in Plato and Aristotle, the meaning of Horace’s influential phrase in its original context, and its reception in the Renaissance, see Jean H. Hagstrom, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 3–10, to which this section is indebted.

picture; & the actions which the Painters set out with visible colours and figures the Poets reckon with words, as though they had in deed been performed.”\textsuperscript{129} And Francis Meres, in his \textit{Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury}, one of the first collections of criticism on contemporary Elizabethan poetry (including the first critical references to Shakespeare’s narrative poems and early plays), writes, “As we are delighted in deformed creatures artificiallye painted: so in poetrie, which is a liuely adumbration of things, euil matters ingeniously contriued to delight.”\textsuperscript{130} Across the sixteenth century, comparisons between poetry and painting flourished, and it even became commonplace that poetry “ought to resemble painting,” that poetry “is a speaking picture.”

The most obvious examples of poets imitating painters occur when they describe an ekphrasis, the verbal representation of visual art, or when they practice the art of \textit{enargeia}, the rhetorical skill in “vividness” inculcated in most Elizabethan poets during grammar school.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{129} Quotations are cited in Hagstrom, \textit{The Sister Arts}, 58–61. Although Simonides’ phrase is constantly repeated throughout the period, perhaps most notably in Sidney’s \textit{Defense}, Plutarch actually quotes Simonides two other times to “partially qualify and diminish the power of this saying.” See Rocco Coronato, \textit{Shakespeare, Caravaggio, and the Indistinct Regard} (New York: Routledge, 2018), 16.

\textsuperscript{130} Francis Meres, \textit{Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury} (London: Printed by P. Short, for Cuthbert Burbie, 1598), 276. By “critical references” I mean actual aesthetic judgments, and therefore exclude the earliest allusion to Shakespeare in Greene’s \textit{Groats-Worth of Witte}, to “an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his \textit{Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde}, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute \textit{Iohannes fac totum} is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a country.” See Greene’s \textit{Groats-Worth of Witte} (London: [J. Wolfe and J. Danter] for William Wright, 1592), F1v.

Enargeia occurs when a speaker or writer, to cite Aphthonius’s Progymnasmata, the most commonly used grammar school textbook after Lily’s Grammar, “does not narrate so much as depict” so that “the reader does not read so much as see” [ut nos depinxisse, non narasse, lector spectasse, non legisse videatur]. Or, according to the Roman rhetorician Quintilian, one of the Renaissance’s leading authorities on enargeia, “instead of being merely transparent it somehow shows itself off. It is a great virtue to express our subject clearly and in such a way that it seems to be actually seen” [et illud patet, hoc se quodam modo ostendit…Magna virtus res de quibus loquimur clare atque ut cerni videantur enuntiare]. Enargeia, that is, occurs when “a whole scene is somehow painted in words” [tota rerum imago quodam modo verbis depingitur].

The fact that Elizabethan poets out of grammar school imitated, and indeed emulated, painters is further evinced by the famous paragone between the arts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Indeed, epylliasts such as Chapman, Shakespeare, and Spenser refer to it explicitly in their work, indicating their own awareness of the contest between the arts and their own desire to translate pictorial ideas into their poetic and dramatic forms. In the proem to Book III of The Faerie Queene, Spenser celebrates “sweet verse’s” ability to surpass painting in the depiction of complex virtues such as beauty and chastity: “Poets wit” surpasses “Painter farre,” Spenser claims, by providing “mirrors more then one” to better see the moral virtue of Chastity from multiple angles in contrast to the monocular view afforded by the fixed, flat surface of a

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painting. While Spenser aims to show Elizabeth “in living colours, and right hew,” he claims his own poetry can do so more completely than even one of her royal portraits. In the opening scene of *Timon of Athens*, in contrast, Shakespeare puts the *paragone* onstage by having an anonymous Painter and Poet each celebrate his own art over his rival’s. As Shakespeare’s Painter claims, “A thousand moral paintings I can show / That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortune’s / More pregnantly than words.”

Since *ut pictora poesis* was an inherited classical dictum, it was the recent invention of visual perspective that enabled Elizabethan poets to distinguish themselves from their ancient and medieval precursors. It was in the epyllion, I contend, that Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Marston first explicitly strove to “paint in words,” and to translate the imaginative resources of visual perspective into their poetic medium.

III

Alberti’s seminal treatise theorizing the invention of perspective had worked to elevate painting into a humanistic art rather than a mere craft, even drawing, as John R. Spencer has shown, on Cicero’s theory of rhetoric as an ennobling art for painters and viewers alike. Alberti locates painting’s value in its capacity — akin to the period’s belief in Ciceronian oratory — to teach (*docere*), delight (*delectare*), and move (*movere*) its viewers. According to Alberti’s ideal


135 William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, eds. Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 1.1.92–4. I will return to the irony underlying this claim, however, within the complex context of it being spoken by an actor playing the Painter, in Chapter 3.
perspective construction, the design of the painting, like a “window,” enables viewers to examine, be delighted, and be moved to virtuous character.\textsuperscript{136}

Yet the Renaissance invention of perspective is more complicated and playful, and casts both light and shadow on English poetry and poetics. In his revisionary work of art history, \textit{The Poetics of Perspective}, James Elkins argues against the prevailing account of early modern perspective since Panofsky’s landmark \textit{Perspective as Symbolic Form}. Elkins argues that Panofsky’s account of perspective as a single, unified discovery of rationalized pictorial space, which serves as a metaphor for the Renaissance’s new capacity to represent an objective world, is anachronistic. Instead, he argues that early modern artists did not think of a perspective painting as a “unified, isotropic space.” Rather, they understood perspective as the various objects \textit{within} paintings — such as lutes, polyhedrals, \textit{mazocchi}, and vanishing points — designed to showcase the artist’s perspectival skill, and that artists frequently incorporated different methods of perspective to destabilize and unsettle perfectly coherent spaces. In other words, pictures were full of “perspectives” rather than being unified perspective pictures.\textsuperscript{137} In particular, Elkins draws attention to manuals that depict artistic \textit{demonstraciones}, including

\textsuperscript{136} See John R. Spencer, “\textit{Ut Pictora Rhetorica}: A Study in Quattrocento Theory of Painting,” \textit{Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes} 20, no. 1 (1957): 26–44, and Vincent M. Bevilacqua, “\textit{Ut Rhetorica Pictura}”: Sir Joshua Reynolds’ Rhetorical Conception of Art,” \textit{Huntington Library Quarterly} 34, no. 1 (1970): 64. As the title of his article suggests, Bevilacqua explores how the eighteenth-century painter also conceived of his task as a painter in rhetorical terms. In contrast to my argument here, however, which connects “colors of rhetoric” in early modern poetry with contemporary perspectival \textit{demonstraciones} in painting, Reynolds, like Alberti, viewed painting to be like rhetoric according to the shared tasks and ends of painting and oratory as processes of artistic invention: “that is, as a creative yet intellectual process of inventing, disposing, and expressing both thought and affection for a designed effect on the mind of a spectator.” See ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{137} Elkins, \textit{The Poetics of Perspective}, 45.
reproducible geometric objects whose complexity made them perspectival showpieces for artists to study and imitate. These attempts to demonstrate technical prowess eventually cede to “ludic spaces,” in which artists shift their pictorial aims away from “unified windows” toward “an increasingly intricate repertoire of devices that work against clarity and simplicity” and begin “to play with the fabric of perspective itself.” Such, for example, is the role of the otherwise inexplicable presence of mazzocchi on the head and neck of two figures in Paolo Uccello’s fresco of the Biblical Flood, foregrounded in front of the image’s dramatic vortex of vanishing points (Fig. 7), or the presence of the too perfectly foreshortened perspective instruments on the shelves of Holbein’s Ambassadors (Fig. 3), or the polyhedron at the foot of the tapestry The Resurrection of Christ, designed by Raphael, and Christ’s illusionistic ability to follow his spectators along the room with his own gaze, wherever the viewing subject’s vantage point (Fig. 8). In this woven tapestry, Raphael is quite literally playing “with the fabric” of perspective.

Similarly, as Elkins has shown, Girolamo Marchesi da Codignola’s rendering of the common religious subject, The Adoration of the Magi, transforms the scene of Christ’s birth into a reflection on the medium of linear perspective itself (Fig. 9). The humble barn is now a perspective structure in the making, half of its scaffolding visible and under construction, the other half completed with diagonals, orthogonals, and arches. It is a frenetic scene bustling with workers and animals, so that the magi, Mary, and Infant are scarcely visible in the foreground of the painting. The painting is “strained,” as are viewers’ eyes away from these important images, instead toward the center of the perspectival architecture. The vanishing point of the painting is

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138 Ibid., 56–8.

not focalized around God, Christ, or the magi; rather, it is around two laborers grasping at this “infinite space.” As Elkins puts it, “the point literally vanishes: it is the point ‘whose center is nowhere.’” The eye almost physically cannot be pulled out of the vanishing point at the center of this painting to instead turn to God above and Christ below it. Codignola’s “emphasis on the convergence around the principal point is the most distracting of all demonstrations of skill.”

In fact, there are circles within circles inside this vortex that disorient and distract rather than clarify. Codignola’s use of perspective points to a “meaninglessness” of infinite space rather than the salvation brought about by Christ’s nativity. The vanishing point tugs and captivates viewers’ vision, drawing attention to Codignola’s own demonstration of perspectival mastery rather than his religious painting’s istoria. Codignola and viewers share in the experience of admiring the techne of perspective rather than the istoria. This painting points to how, by the end of the sixteenth century, perspective represents “an ensign, a narratively meaningless form that draws attention to the presence of perspective itself.” Elkins reads Codignola’s painting as exemplifying how perspective is not a symbol of a new Renaissance consciousness, but a form of variable, reproducible, playful artistic craft, of “indecorum and meaninglessness.”

There was, in short, a tension between the formal devices of perspective construction — the textured canvas

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140 Elkins, Poetics of Perspective, 153.

141 Ibid. See also Kimberly Johnson’s analysis of Piero della Francesca’s Flagellation of Christ, a painting often recognized “the example” of correct perspective, but whose aesthetic emphasis — through the vanishing point, lighting, and competing prominence of figures in the background and foreground — deemphasize the titular, Christian subject of the painting, presenting instead “a seductive but referentially bewildering excess of signs that compete ‘meaninglessly’ with the biblical narrative,” in “Linear Perspective and the Renaissance Lyric,” PMLA 134, no. 2 (2019): 286.
and paints, the manipulative vanishing point, and the framing device of the *velo* (Figs. 10 and 11) — and perspective painting’s instructive content, the *istoria.*

What has yet to be observed is just how closely Elkins’ narrative of the development of perspective — from technical demonstrations to self-conscious artistry and indecorousness — and Johnson’s articulation of this tension between perspective’s aesthetic form and content, parallels the development of rhetoric from the Elizabethan classroom into the unruly aesthetics of the epyllion. Despite Daniele Barbaro’s warning to artists “not to let perspective get out of control: to place the principal point so that nothing seems ‘strained, dizzily steep, deformed, or awkward’ in order to maintain an “aesthetic decorum,” perspective paintings are nevertheless “indecorous” and “seething with senseless ornament”: they are attempts at giving “individual demonstrations of perspectival skill.” Colleen Rosenfeld’s account of sixteenth-century poetics presents a strikingly similar portrait, filled with breaches of “aesthetic decorum” that are undermined by “indecorous thinking” and “belabored ornament.” For instance, Sidney’s rebuke of versifiers centers on their “sugar and spice,” as if imported from “those Indians, not content to wear ear-rings at the fit and natural place of the ears, but they will thrust jewels [rhetorical figures] through their nose and lips, because they will be sure to be fine.”

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142 See Johnson, “Linear Perspective and the Renaissance Lyric,” 280–97. Alberti himself seems not only to have been aware of this tension, despite his repeated assertions attempting to privilege the *istoria* and didactic content over form, but to have embraced it. In his love poetry, for example, he employs the same term from his treatise, *il velo,* to draw attention to how his beloved Lauromina is alternatively revealed and concealed by a veil, and by the formal, rhetorical surface of his poetry. See Roy Eriksen, *Ashes to Ashes: Art in Rome Between Humanism and Maniera* (Roma: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 2006), 55–6.


excessive ornamentation as unnatural and alien, running counter to his project of elevating English vernacular poetry in the sixteenth century. As Catherine Nicholson puts it, “it nurtures a taste for strangeness more likely to bankrupt the vernacular than to enrich it.”

For Sidney, a poet who uses “art to show art and not to hide art as in these cases he should do,” like Castiglione’s account of sprezzatura, “flies from nature, and indeed abuses art.”

Yet as Rosenfeld has shown, in Sidney’s own poetry he does not always seek “to hide art,” as he claims “he should do.” In fact, like Codignola and other perspective painters, at times he self-reflexively draws attention to his own artifice, the rhetorical “sugar and spice” and “jewels” of his own poetic creation. In Book Three of The Old Arcadia, for example, Dorus’s song employs rhetoric simply for the sake of showcasing it:

Sweet glove, the sweet despoils of sweetest hand,
Fair hand, the fairest pledge of fairer heart,
True heart, whose truth doth yield to truest band,
Chief band, I say, which ties my chiefest part,
My chiefest part, wherein do chiefly stand
Those secret joys, which heav’n to me impart.

trans. R. A. B. Mynors, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 130; Carmelle Caporicci, ““Take this picture which I heere present thee’: The Art of Portraiture in the Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences,” in The Art of Picturing, 155; and Asper in Jonson’s Every Man Out of His Humor, who, when he tells the audience that he will “hang my richest words / As polished jewels in their bounteous ears,” Rosenfeld observes, “both literalizes Sidney’s emblem of indecorous poesie from the Defence and proposes a new measure of decorum,” in Indecorous Thinking, 169.


In addition to sprinkling the tropes polyptoton (the repetition of the root words “sweet” and “Fair” in different forms throughout the song), and anadiplosis (the repetition of the start of one line with the same words as the previous line, “my chiepest part, / My chiepest part”), the governing figure of speech in the song, *gradatio*, is referred to by George Puttenham as “the Marching figure.” Sidney himself alludes to his clever use of the trope when Cleophila accuses Dorus of “vauntingly march[ing] over” him and his own abject, lovesick state.148 Cleophila’s “figure pointing,” as Rosenfeld aptly names it, notes Dorus’s use of rhetoric as if he were marking the speech with a manicule in a book’s margins.149 In contrast to Sidney’s other famous use of the trope in the opening quatrains of *Astrophil and Stella* — “Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show, / That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,— / Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,” where *gradatio* is meant to express “logical relations…with the aim of enfolding that listener [Stella] into its narrative,” Dorus’s song only concerns “the pleasure of its maker.”150 Like Pamela’s glove, the song is an empty “vaunt.” Composed “entirely from sugar and spice,” it is completely ornamental rather than substantial.151

Rosenfeld’s archival findings also show how early modern readers mined and reproduced self-reflexive rhetorical demonstrations such as Sidney’s, despite their asserted violation of aesthetic decorum, similar to ways in which artists sought out and reproduced artistic

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148 Rosenfeld, *Indecorous Thinking*, 52.
149 Ibid., 48.
150 Ibid., 54–5.
151 Ibid., 62–5.
demonstrations of perspective devices. Both Dorus’s song and *Astrophil and Stella* I appear paired together in Abraham Fraunce’s 1588 rhetorical manual, *Arcadian Rhetorike* (the only printed edition of Dorus’s song before the 20th century), and Nathaniel Whiting asserts “that Sidney-prose / Out-musickes Tully, if it scape the nose.” Whiting thus positions Sidney as an authority to be read not for his political wisdom or maxims, but for his rhetoric and style, his quintessential “Sidney-prose.” Like artistic demonstrations of perspective, which were “ready to be copied and used in other compositions,” Sidney’s poetry was read for its “formulas for composition,” despite his Defense’s hopes for the contrary.

While Rosenfeld focuses on early modern romance — including Sidney’s *Arcadia* and Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* — as the genre where “poets send the period’s affection for figures of speech into a kind of hyperdrive,” Elizabethan epyllia also showcase their authors situating themselves as perspectival poets, producing self-reflexive demonstrations of their own *enargeic*, rhetorical artistry. Like Sidney’s poetry, which was read for its rhetorical formulas, Elizabethan epyllia, Brown writes, “anthologize themselves, breaking up into poetic gems, ready to be picked and retransmitted.” Indeed, beginning with Thomas Lodge’s inaugural epyllion *Scillas Metamorphosis* in 1589, the genre is marked by ornamental, “purple passages” similar to Dorus’s song. For example, the “spectacle of care” Thomas Lodge bestows upon the elaborate blazon of “faire Scilla, my fond fancies juell,” serves to “demonstrate the author’s poetic skill”

152 Quoted in ibid., 71–2, 222n57.
153 Ibid., 64.
154 Ibid., 15.
rather than provide a substantial lesson for readers.\textsuperscript{156} While Lodge initiated the epyllion vogue and its excessively ornamental rhetoric, it was Marlowe’s \textit{Hero and Leander} which was not only most frequently anthologized for its “poetic gems” and rhetorical flowers, but also critiqued and satirized for its linguistic fetishism and its voyeuristic conditions of reading and writing.

\section*{IV}

Unlike Musaeus’s Greek account of the famed lovers, Marlowe is not as interested in the legendary lovers’ first night sleeping together; rather, his epyllion’s interest is on linguistic foreplay. Expanding the corresponding narrative in Musaeus, 282 lines in classical hexameters, into “818 lines in heroic couplets, or about three times its source in length,” Marlowe dwells instead on the lovers’ “first sight,” and the process of curious viewing he invites through his elaborate rhetorical descriptions.\textsuperscript{157} In doing so, he delays the lovers’ actual erotic climax until late into the poem, where little is revealed. While Abraham Fraunce could declare that “Leander and Heroes love is in every mans mouth” in the early 1590s, the well-known “foregone conclusion” of Marlowe’s poem that readers expect is continually interrupted by Marlowe’s linguistic ostentation and rhetorical digressions so that “no one is really sure when this ‘moment’ occurs.”\textsuperscript{158} Leander’s “phallic point” paradoxically affirms the “complete pointlessness” of


\textsuperscript{158} See Abraham Fraunce, \textit{The third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch} (London: Printed [by Thomas Orwyn], for Thomas Woodcocke, 1592), M4’, and Judith Haber,
Marlowe’s aesthetic that subverts the Renaissance’s “flawed conception of decorum.”\textsuperscript{159}

Dwelling on rhetorical skill and verbal sophistry to create a visually stimulating poem, Marlowe promotes our initial instance of reading “perspectively”: in \textit{Hero and Leander} he propounds the interrelated acts of reading, writing, and desiring as pleasurable, indecorous ends in themselves.

Marlowe not only emphasizes his poem’s aim for rhetorical decadence from his choice of myth and primary source, Musaeus, whose particularly bathetic classical text is underlined by a “thematic concern with the meretriciousness of all rhetoric,” as Gordon Braden, one of the most careful, and caring, readers of the poem points out; Marlowe’s poem in fact goes beyond Musaeus in exaggerating the original author’s digressiveness and ornamentation.\textsuperscript{160} He does so from the outset in his initial description of Hero, when he alludes to her, and by extension, his own poem, as a work of self-conscious visual artistry:

\begin{quote}
\textit{At Sestos, Hero dwelt, Hero the faire,}
Whom young \textit{Apollo} courted for her haire,
And offred as a dower his burning throne,
Where she should sit for men to gaze upon.
The outside of her garments were of lawne,
The lining, purple silke, with guilt starres drawne,
Her wide sleeves greene, and borded with a grove,
Where \textit{Venus} in her naked glory strove,
To please the carelesse and disdainfull eies,
Of proud \textit{Adonis} that before her lies.
Her kirtle blew, whereon was many a staine,
Made with the blood of wretched Lovers slaine.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{159} M. L. Stapleton, \textit{Marlowe’s Ovid: The Elegies in the Marlowe Canon} (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 181.

Upon her head she ware a myrtle wreath,
From whence her vaile reacht to the ground beneath.
Her vaile was artificiall flowers and leaves,
Whose workmanship both man and beast deceaves. (5–20)

In contrast to the quintessentially aural quality of his drama — exemplified by Jonson’s celebration of “Marlowe’s mighty line” — in Hero and Leander it is immediately apparent that this is a visual poem. In speaking only two words in the opening 337 lines of the poem, Hero serves, at least initially, as a monumental work of rhetorical “workmanship,” drawing attention to Marlowe’s own poetic skill. Frozen within an ekphrasis, she is objectified to “sit for men to gaze upon.”

Subtly drawing out the Ovidian etymology of his poetic text, from the Latin texere, “to weave,” Marlowe opens his poem with a self-conscious description of Hero’s woven garments and veil. Carefully tailored by both material fabric and rhetorical artifice, the visual depiction of Hero establishes parallels between Marlowe as poetic artificer and Hero as rhetorical artifact. As Brown asserts, “Hero’s carefully wrought appearance provides the occasion for the poet to make their own carefully wrought appearance, and heroine and narrator enjoy a symbiotic relationship in which the celebration of Hero’s artifice is simultaneously also the celebration of the poetic artefact, and of the poet’s imaginative reach.” Weaving Ovid’s myth of Venus and Adonis, embroidered upon Hero’s sleeve, with the Roman poet’s θηρ- myth of artistic creativity, Arachne, he blends the splendid fabric of Hero’s clothing with the rhetorical fabric of his own text.

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162 See Weaver, “Marlowe’s Fable,” 401–2.

163 Brown, Refining Elizabethan Literature, 163.
Marlowe follows the allusion to Venus and Adonis on Hero’s sleeves with a witty pun on the embroidered myth’s own framing narrative in Ovid: the “myrtle wreath” which Hero wears derives from Adonis’s incestuous mother Myrrha. Like Sidney in Dorus’s song, Marlowe vaunts his own wit by emphasizing how his own textual description creates such a visual impression of Hero. In addition to her sleeve “bordered with a grove,” Hero’s own “vaile,” like Marlowe’s own poem, is constituted by “artificiall flowers” and “workmanship,” punning again on the “flowers” of rhetoric and the “workmanship” that make up the texture of his poem. By writing that his depiction of Hero is “for men to gaze upon,” moreover, Marlowe indicates that his epyllion is meant to provoke desire and arrest readers’ gazes in his visually stimulating poetic descriptions, “Whose workmanship both man and beast deceaves.”

Fifteen ekphrastic lines are not sufficient, however, to portray Hero. Marlowe continues for twenty-five more, dilating and delaying before even thinking about turning to narrative action:

Many would praise the sweet smell as she past,
When t’was the odour which her breath foorth cast.
And there for honie, bees have sought in vaine,
And beat from thence, have lighted there againe.
About her necke hung chaines of pebble stone,
Which lightned by her necke, like Diamonds shone.
She ware no gloves, for neither sunne nor wind
Would burne or parch her hands, but to her mind,
Or warme or coole them, for they tooke delite
To play upon those hands, they were so white.
Buskins of shels all silvered, used she,
And brancht with blushing corall to the knee;
Where sparrows pearcht, of hollow pearle and gold,
Such as the world would woonder to behold;
Those with sweet water oft her handmaid fils,
Which as shee went would cherupe through the bils. (21–36)

These subsequent descriptions of Hero’s adornments continue the humor and hyperbole from her initial portrayal. Like Hero’s hilarious “kirtle blew, whereon was many a staine, / Made with the
blood of wretched Lovers slaine,” and her veil, artfully decorated with “artificiall flowers and leaves” in order that they deceive both humans and animals alike, her breath is also so fragrant that bees are deceived, repeatedly, as if Hero herself were a pollenating flower. In a sense, she is, as an infinitely generating florilegium from which successive poets cull. Anticipating Shakespeare’s allusion to the classical competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius at the center of Venus and Adonis, which I will discuss in the next chapter, Marlowe here provides an early hint at the role perspective painting plays in his poem through the figure of Hero: like the allusions to Venus and Adonis, which fleetingly beckon a moral allegoresis without delivering one, Marlowe so deceivingly represents Hero on the outside, yet he reveals nothing — neither to man, beast, nor bees — under Hero’s textile, and his own textual, surface.

This focus on playful, decorative excess rather than rhetorical decorum continues into the downward description of Hero’s ornate buskins. The alliterative, sibilant stream “of shels all silvered used she” flows into the plosive “brancht with blushing corall to the knee,” drawing attention to Marlowe’s linguistic extravagance, before revealing his equally imaginative poetic inventiveness. Hero wears ingeniously engineered buskins equipped with hydraulics, so that when “with sweet water oft her handmaid fils…as shee went would cherupe through the bils.” As William P. Weaver has shown, Hero’s “hydraulic music machine” imitates the mock-heroic fable Battle of Frogs and Mice taught in the Elizabethan grammar school, a poem used in the classroom for students to practice rhetorical exercises in amplificatio and copia. Like the men, beasts, and bees within the poem, Marlowe also mocks his readers “sense of verisimilitude” through Hero’s clothing.164 The allusion early in the poem to this grammar school poem in particular, and the fable genre in general, makes transparent to Marlowe’s Elizabethan readers

164 Weaver, “Marlowe’s Fable,” 400.
that the work they are reading is more about the pleasing sound and sense of his virtuosic
rhetoric and poetic imagination rather than anything morally useful: mimicking the sweet smell
of Hero’s breath, Marlowe’s poem privileges the dulce of Horace’s memorable dictum.

Before even arriving at the beginning of the lovers’ tryst, Marlowe again pauses to
showcase his own rhetorical skill through another ekphrasis of Leander:

\[
\text{Amorous Leander, beautifull and yoong,} \\
(\text{Whose tragedie divine Musaeus soong}) \\
\ldots \\
\text{His bodie was as straight as Circes wand,} \\
\text{Jove might have sipt out Nectar from his hand.} \\
\text{Even as delicious meat is to the tast,} \\
\text{So was his necke in touching, and surpast} \\
\text{The white of Pelops shoulder. I could tell ye,} \\
\text{How smooth his brest was, & how white his bellie,} \\
\text{And whose immortall fingars did imprint} \\
\text{That heavenly path, with many a curious dint,} \\
\text{That runs along his backe, but my rude pen} \\
\text{Can hardly blazon foorth the love of men,} \\
\text{Much lesse of powerfull gods: let it suffise,} \\
\text{That my slacke muse sings of Leanders eies,} \\
\text{Those orient cheeks and lippes, exceeding his} \\
\text{That leapt into the water for a kis} \\
\text{Of his own shadow, and despising many,} \\
\text{Died ere he could enjoy the love of any [.] (51–76)}
\]

As he begins his second sensual poetic display, Marlowe acknowledges his classical auctor,
“divine Musaeus,” as the source of his poem. He does so, however, not to indicate his
“apprenticeship to Musaeus but rather its placement between two major embellishments, each
over forty lines long, that Marlowe supplies in his version.”165 Following the forty-line
description of Hero, that is, the insertion of Musaeus’s name “is strategically placed to draw
attention to the greater abundance of Marlowe’s imitation — its copia, or fullness of

\[\text{165 Ibid., 389.}\]
discourse.” Inviting comparison between his own poem and Musaeus, Marlowe also calls attention to his own command of his poetic form, the heroic couplet, in contrast to Musaeus’ classical hexameters and other Latin translations of his original Greek poem. Inserted between the two ekphrases of Hero and Leander, moreover, the reference to Musaeus is a form of “self-advertisement” for Marlowe’s richer rhetorical artistry. He flaunts his command of the couplet form by emphasizing what he can get away with: many of Marlowe’s first rhymes after this self-conscious comparison between himself and Musaeus are comically slanted — including “tast / surpast,” and, best of all, “ye / bellie” — even given the variety of dialects and flexibility of pronunciation across early modern England. While the former rhyme jocularly suggests how Marlowe’s couplets surpass even the tasty repast between Jove and Ganymede on Mount Olympus, the second serves precisely to “figure point” the rhetorical play underlining Marlowe’s drawn-out description. “I could tell ye” initiates a rhetorical *occupatio*. Contrary to Renaissance ideals of rhetorical decorum and poetic invention, Marlowe’s humorous couplets and elaborate ekphrases delay and pull attention away from a moral, didactic center. Instead, Marlowe is literally occupying time, proffering an act of writing and reading for its own playful sake.

From the opening portraits of Hero and Leander, then, rhetoric serves only to draw out ekphrastic, erotic, rhetorical displays of objectified, sexualized bodies, and to underscore Marlowe’s own poetic skill. Not only does it delay and frustrate readers seeking out the poem’s civic, moral *utile*; it also fails — or, from Marlowe’s perspective, succeeds — in its lack of

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166 Ibid.

167 Logan, “Perspective in Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*,” 284.

168 The obvious allusion to Narcissus without naming him in lines 73–6 serve a similar function for Marlowe’s knowing readers in his classically educated, self-fashioned literary community. A rhetorical *periphrasis*, he is again literally “speaking around” rather than forward.
individual distinction between Hero and Leander as psychologically motivated characters. Like his depiction of Hero, Marlowe effeminizes Leander into an abstract, artificial object of pure desire: “Some swore he was a maid in mans attire, / For in his looks were all that men desire” (83–4). As Brown writes, “In fact, there is nothing innately masculine or feminine about Hero or Leander: they are the products of various discourses of desire, even the same discourses of desire. Both are, for example, constructed through the conventions of Petrarchanism…They represent the desire aroused by language, and the desired object fashioned by language.”

Marlowe describes significantly little about Hero and Leander, focusing instead on the tantalizing effects they have upon others within the poem, and upon readers without. Rather than provide readers with the expected useful invention at the center of his poem, he substitutes it with the glimmers of rhetorical artifice, and the pleasures they produce, for “men to gaze upon.” Marlowe’s poem thus becomes a linguistic fetish, and establishes the epyllion as a genre of voyeurism, but only of surfaces without substance.

Echoed across two consecutive lines in Marlowe’s initial ekphrasis, Hero’s “vaile” would seem to operate as a “clue to the kind of representation Marlowe employs” throughout his epyllion. As Weaver observes, “The veil was an important metaphor in Renaissance discussions of the ‘poetic fable.’ Like the veil, the poetic fable alternately conceals and reveals,

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172 Weaver, “Marlowe’s Fable,” 403.
depending upon the speaker’s intention and the audience’s interpretive capacity.”¹⁷³ In addition to the poetic fable, the veil had a similarly ambivalent function in discussions of other forms of aesthetic representation, notably visual perspective. Alberti believes “nothing more serviceable” to painting “than the veil…whose use I was the first to discover.” Yet while Alberti praises his invention for its ability to “rationaliz[e] the act of looking through the frame to what lies beyond, Alberti’s text is strikingly attentive to the velum itself…the stuff of the grid itself, whose texture and color and distribution and pattern are meticulously noted.”¹⁷⁴ Despite promoting the instrument’s ability to reveal a three-dimensional window into another geometrically represented world, the veil draws attention to itself as a mediating surface.

Hero’s decorative veil foreshadows the fact that, even when Marlowe moves beyond the opening ekphrases and turns to the narrative action of the poem, like Alberti and his velo, he dwells upon the rhetorical texture of his poem rather than its instructive center. Marlowe himself calls attention to his epyllion’s origins in grammar school exercises such as the fable, and his own training in disputation at Cambridge, when he likens Leander to “a bold sharpe Sophister” at the outset of his courtship of Hero. The epyllion serves as an opportunity for Marlowe, through Leander, to ventriloquize “words…as spotlesse as my youth, / Full of simplicitie and naked truth.”¹⁷⁵ Despite his protestation, Leander’s words are anything but “Full of simplicitie,” and Marlowe continually stops just short of the “naked truth” that is supposed to be made transparent according to conventions of the poetic fable and Renaissance theories of poetic invention.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Ibid., 403–4.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 197, 207–8.
¹⁷⁶ Weaver, “Marlowe’s Fable,” 407.
Leander’s 142-line argument adopts conventional carpe diem commonplaces as well as “spices” and “jewels” of rhetoric, from anadiplosis — “Which makes me hope, although I am but base, / Base in respect of thee, divine and pure” (218–19) — to ploce, “But you are faire (aye me) so wondrous faire” (287). Although Leander’s twenty-one heroic couplets appear to Hero to be about her own virginity, “this faire jem,” they are also Marlowe’s elaborate showcase of his own rhetorical jewels and gemmas (247). Like painters calling attention to their technical demonstrations of perspective instruments and magnetic vanishing points, and like Dorus calling attention to his rhetorical device in Sidney’s Old Arcadia, Marlowe “figure points” at his own rhetorical artistry. In Hero’s response to Leander’s oration, “Who taught thee Rhethoricke to deceive a maid? Aye me, such words as these I should abhor, / And yet I like them for the Orator,” Marlowe underscores his own display of “Rhethoricke” that constitutes the poem. Leander’s role as sophister, rhetorician, and orator evokes how Marlowe deploys his Elizabethan education grounded in Ovid and Virgil — intended, as Lynn Enterline has argued, to create self-controlled, obedient, masculine subjects — against itself, using it only for sexualized “parlie” (762).  

177 Marlowe playfully demonstrates his rhetorical virtuosity only for the pleasure “to deceive a maid,” and to titillate his readers in the process. Indeed, when Hero ultimately “yeeld[s]” to Leander after his elaborate wooing, Marlowe bathetically mentions that she already “was woon before” (330). Leander’s entire speech serves, then, not for any real argument or persuasion; instead, it is an occasion for Marlowe to demonstrate his rhetorical faculties in amplificatio and copia.

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177 See Enterline, Shakespeare’s Schoolroom, 75–6.
What I am arguing about Marlowe’s influential epyllion, then, is that there is a surprising shared “aesthetic epistemology” between the development of visual perspective and the burgeoning Elizabethan literary genre at the end of the sixteenth century.178 As painters aimed to demonstrate their proficiency in perspective by including technically complex objects to be imitated by others, rather than to create perfectly unified spaces, so too do poets in this new genre: they aim to lace their works with references to gardens and flowers, workmanship and embroidery, not directing attention to the moral of the poem, but “figure pointing” to the ornamentation and self-conscious demonstration of rhetorical skill to be applauded and emulated. Marlowe’s myriad rhetorical tropes, like Hero’s intricate clothing, are aesthetic ornaments meant to display his own artistic ingenuity, and to position readers as desirous voyeurs of his narrative poem while he suspends the erotic climax. As Peter J. Smith writes, the excessive rhetoric of the epyllion is “a kind of linguistic foreplay, both a means of exciting and deliberately frustrating the reader.”179 It is, in a sense, both sexually and edifyingly fruitless.

V

Despite the popularity of epyllia in the 1590s, their self-reflexive rhetorical artifice, verbal fetishism, and linguistic foreplay did not go without criticism. As Shakespeare expresses in Sonnets 82 and 83 — a pair of sonnets in the sequence addressing the Fair Youth after a rival poet has intervened — such erotic, insubstantial ends to which poets’ rhetorical training in vivid description and enargeia were being put to use began to be considered “gross painting” in words:

I grant thou wert not married to my Muse
And therefore mayst without attaint o’erlook
The dedicated words which writers use
Of their fair subject, blessing every book.\textsuperscript{180}

Shakespeare “grant[s]” there is no exclusive right, no loving or binding contract, between his “Muse” and his beloved friend. Yet within this granting of permission there is already a suggestion that other poets’ verses are not truly representing him. While “o’erlook” can mean simply that the speaker’s friend may “read through” and “examine, scrutinize, inspect” other poets’ “dedicated words,” it also implies that his friend is “o[v]erlooking” in its inverse sense: he is “fail[ing] to see or observe” the hollowness and insincerity of their “dedicated words” which “bless every book,” not just those dedicated to him.\textsuperscript{181}

In the second quatrain, the poet even admits that his own verse is insufficient to praise his friend, and so his desire to seek it in others’ dedications is not a fault:

\begin{verbatim}
Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue,
Finding thy worth a limit past my praise,
And therefore art inforced to seek anew
Some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days. (5–8)
\end{verbatim}

The poet concedes that to represent his friend is “a limit past my praise,” both for his “knowledge” and his “hue.” The quatrain subtly shifts the focus from the “dedicated words” and “books” of the rival poet to their visual emphasis: the poet praises his friend, relatively uniquely in the sequence, not just for his youth and constancy and beauty, but for his “knowledge.” His “knowledge,” however, is noticeably an \textit{aesthetic} feature, as Helen Vendler observes, “because

\textsuperscript{180} Quoted in Helen Vendler, \textit{The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 364. All future references to Shakespeare’s sonnets will be to this edition and line numbers will be given as in-text parenthetical citations.

the young man has been representing himself as a literary connoisseur.” He occupies the place of Chapman’s fashionable reader possessed with a “judiciall perspective” toward “spic’d” and “lymn[ed]” poetry. Indeed, as the poet concludes in the final quatrain and closing couplet, he remarks disapprovingly that his friend is a fashionable connoisseur of especially visual poetry seeking capture his own “hue” in words. The double meaning of “art” as both helping verb, “art enforced,” as well as a noun subject doing transitive action, “art enforced [you] to seek anew,” enacts the shift from the verbal to the visual emphasis. Knowledge of other forms of “Art” enforced him to look for better, more vivid representations of his “hue.”

After lovingly permitting him to “do so, love,” the poet equates others’ excessive rhetoric with painting:

yet when they have devised
What strained touches rhetoric can lend,
Thou, truly fair, wert truly sympathized
In true plain words by thy true-telling friend,
And their gross painting might be better used
Where cheeks need blood; in thee it is abused. (9–14)

Shakespeare makes explicit the connection between the profuse use of rhetoric, “strained touches,” and “gross painting” in the final decade of the sixteenth century. As Shakespeare will put it in the next sonnet’s continuation, recalling the pivotal verb from the volta of Sonnet 82, such “praise devise[d]” through colorful rhetoric does not “give life” to true poetic invention, but instead interst it in a leaden “tomb” (12–4). The formal properties of “gross painting” and ostentatious visual rhetoric interfere with the inner content being expressed. In the “desire to shine technically,” Vendler writes, the rival poet fails “to represent accurately.”

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183 Ibid., 369.
pair of sonnets thus indicate the influence “gross painting” had on epylliiasts, who translated the visual art into the stimulating yet artificial poetic “devices” of “strained” rhetorical tropes. The friend’s “fair…knowledge” attests, moreover, to the importance of the fashionable aesthetic status such visual and intricately rhetorical poetry held in the 1590s.

In short, it is this “gross painting” wrought by the “strained touches [of] rhetoric” that Shakespeare and Marston will criticize as characteristic of Elizabethan poetics in general, and in the emerging epyllion genre in particular, in the late sixteenth century. Like the tugging vanishing point of Codignola’s *Adoration of the Magi*, straining viewers’ eyes away from the salvific center of the painting, the “gross painting” that constitutes the rhetorical fetishism of Elizabethan epyllia “strains” poets and readers away from true poetic invention; it is incapable of truly representing the Fair Youth and “that within which passes show” within him.\(^{184}\) It is even worse than perspective painting, according to Sonnet 24, in which painters at least “draw but what they see,” even if they “know not the heart” (14). To Shakespeare and Marston, epylliiasts who imitate the curious perspective by turning their rhetorical training in *enargeia* into extravagant, visual displays of rhetoric in fact reduce poetic invention to “gross painting,” an illusory surface without substance where “All’s conceit.”\(^{185}\)

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CHAPTER 2
On Invention: Shakespeare’s Trompe L’Oeil and Marston’s Anamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image

Picture is the invention of heaven: the most ancient, and most akin to nature.
—Ben Jonson, Discoveries

And we should hardly call it uncanny when Pygmalion’s beautiful statue comes to life.
—Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny”

I

The previous chapter examined how the invention of visual perspective inspired Renaissance poets to adapt the fashionable art into their own verbal media. More specifically, it argued how painters’ desire to showcase perspectival virtuosity within paintings — a kind of playing with the fabric of perspective itself — was translated into poetic displays of the “colors of rhetoric” that accentuated the Elizabethan epyllion’s own linguistic fabric, a verbal fetishism that generated the erotic and visually stimulating genre, that gave it “motion, spirit and life.” In this chapter, I want to reverse the order of the terms: beyond considering how the invention of visual perspective was integrated into Renaissance poetry, how also did developments in perspective change how the Renaissance thought about the nature of invention itself?

II

Although Filippo Brunelleschi is accredited with the invention of visual perspective for his catoptric experiments outside the Florence Baptistery, it was Leon Battista Alberti who
codified the new art into a humanist theory, and elevated painting from a material craft into a liberal art. In the first book of On Painting, which, Alberti writes to Brunelleschi in a prefatory letter, consists of “all mathematics,” Alberti introduces linear perspective to the theory of painting for the first time. Perspective’s geometric foundation is only a means to a larger end concerned with invention, the artist’s capacity to move viewers toward virtue, which nearly occupies the remainder of On Painting after Book One. By creating a proportionate world within the painting and relating that to the position of viewers, the perspective painter “creates a microcosm” for viewers to relate to their own reality, their own external “macrocosm.”186 The most important consequence of the visual, temporal, and spatial unity brought about by Renaissance perspective that Alberti introduced, however, was the istoria: “The greatest work of the painter is the istoria,” Alberti states: “Bodies are part of the istoria, members are parts of the bodies, planes are parts of the members.”187 By connecting the perspective painting’s proportionate microcosm with the macrocosm of the viewer’s own world — as well as perspective’s ability to guide, direct, and even “admonish” and “beckon” viewers through the vanishing point and other figures — Alberti and later theorists exalt painting to the level of poetry as a didactic and morally elevating art. “All is pointed towards ornamenting or teaching the istoria” for Alberti, and “the istoria which merits both praise and admiration,” he claims, “will be so agreeably and pleasantly attractive that it will capture the eye of whatever learned or unlearned person is looking at it and will move his soul.”188

187 Ibid., 70.
188 Ibid., 75.
Given that Alberti based his own theory of painting on Cicero’s case for the virtuous ends of rhetoric — capable of delighting, moving, and instructing his audience — his formulation of the *istoria* is, in fact, in many ways comparable to Elizabethan ideas surrounding rhetorical and poetic invention.\(^{189}\) Just as Alberti’s *istoria* is the moral end by which bodies, members, and planes are the material means, so too is invention the end by which characters, narrative, and rhyme are the means toward encouraging virtue in poetry’s readers.\(^{190}\) Like Alberti’s *istoria*, poetic invention is directed to “possess the sight of the soul” and “move” it to civic and moral ends.\(^{191}\) As Alberti himself recommended, “artists should associate with poets and orators who have many embellishments in common with painters and who have a broad knowledge of many things.”\(^{192}\) According to Alberti himself, the most useful and shared quality of painting and poetry is the analogy between *istoria* and invention: “These could be very useful in beautifully composing the *istoria* whose greatest praise consists in the invention. A beautiful invention has

\(^{189}\) See John R. Spencer, “*Ut Pictora Rhetorica*: A Study in Quattrocento Theory of Painting.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 20, no. 1 (1957): 26–44. In his sixteenth-century Italian treatise on perspective, *Trattato dell’ arte della pittura, scultura et architetture* (1585), the first to be translated into English by Richard Haydocke, Paolo Lomazzo similarly points to the rhetorical underpinnings of Renaissance perspective. He expresses that his own understanding of painting and artistic invention are “fitter for a Rhetorician to handle, then for mee a plaine Painter, who am onlie acquainted with the varietie of material colours.” Quoted in Vincent M. Bevilacqua, “‘Ut Rhetorica Pictura’: Sir Joshua Reynolds’ Rhetorical Conception of Art,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (1970): 64.


\(^{191}\) See Sidney, *Defense of Poesy*, 222, also 216–17, 221.

such force, as will be seen, that even without painting it is pleasing in itself alone.”^{193} Centered on invention, both Renaissance perspective and poetics are affective means toward achieving the period’s Horatian ideal of art as being both “

> utile et dulce.”^{194}

The force, nature, and belief in invention — what it does, and where it resides — became increasingly complicated, however, throughout the sixteenth century, contemporary with the developments in visual perspective and the emergence of the Elizabethan epyllion I have been discussing. In fact, Georgia Brown has argued that the 1590s were particularly crucial toward, as her influential book’s title suggests, “redefining” Elizabethan literature.^{195} While Brown concentrates on the pursuit of shame and its transgressive role in the poetry of this period, in which “literature started to be conceived as a valuable activity in its own right” and “a new aesthetic ideology” emerged, I similarly suggest that developments in visual perspective, particularly trompe l’oeil and anamorphosis, also contributed to redefining artistic invention and shaping a new aesthetic ideology in the Renaissance.^{196} Like Brown, I root this redefinition within the Elizabethan epyllion in the last decade of the sixteenth century.

Derived from the Latin *in* + *venire*, “to come” + “in(to),” the nature of poetic invention is already ambivalent from its etymology onward.^{197} To put it most simply, artistic ideas either can “come into” one’s mind from the external world — what Roland Greene calls “invention as

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^{193} Ibid.


^{196} Ibid., 4, 102.

discovery” — or they can “come into” existence from an artist’s originary intellect — what Greene refers to as “invention as conception.”\textsuperscript{198} The premier word scrutinized in his book \textit{Five Words: Critical Semantics in the Age of Shakespeare and Cervantes}, Greene argues that whenever the word “invention” appears in the sixteenth century, it always operates as a “semantic palimpsest.”\textsuperscript{199} Across the sixteenth century, the word gradually shifts from its original, Ciceronian meaning of the “discovery” of textual matter to arrange for an oration, toward its more modern meaning of the “conception” of something novel. Neither sense, however, is ever fully absent or supplanted. On the one hand, Greene argues, “Invention as discovery posits a more or less inert object, a concessionary (if not a superstitious) approach to textual authority, and a temporal project that brings matter out of the past into the present.”\textsuperscript{200} In early modern usages, we might look at Sir Thomas Elyot, who calls invention “the fyrste parte of Rhetorike,” referring to the practice of gathering topics from a storehouse of knowledge to create an inventory, which shares the same root.\textsuperscript{201} Similarly, for the rhetorician Thomas Wilson it is “the finding out of apte matter, called otherwise Invencion.”\textsuperscript{202} Even in George Gascoigne’s “Certayne Notes of Instruction in the Making of a Verse,” the first published work on English vernacular poetics, Gascoigne is still relatively materialist, describing poetic invention as an essential, preconceived “platforme” on which the rest of a poem — such as its characters,

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{201} Sir Thomas Elyot, \textit{The Boke Named the Governor} (London: Tho[mas] Bertheleti, 1531), G8v.
\textsuperscript{202} Thomas Wilson, \textit{The Arte of Rhetorique} (London: Richardus Graftonus, 1553), A3v.
narrative sequence, and rhetorical embellishments — is built. In particular, almost echoing the urgency of the Lord’s Prayer, he warns against letting the temptations of rhyme “leade you not from your firste Invention.” He continues,

For many wryters when they have layed the platforme of their invention, are yet drawen sometimes (by ryme) to forget it or at least to alter it, as when they cannot readily finde out a worde whiche maye rime to the first (and yet continue their determinate Invention) they do then eyther botche it up with a worde that will ryme (howe small reason soever it carie with it) or els they alter their first worde and so percase decline or trouble their former Invention: But do you alwayes hold your first determined Invention, and do rather searche the bottome of your braynes for apte wordes, than chaunge good reason for rumbling rime.\textsuperscript{203}

Gascoigne’s “platform” of invention is “determinate” and “determined” before poetic composition; it is both within the text itself as well as at “the bottome of your braynes” where poets can consult other “apte words” to rhyme and harmonize with their “former” conception. Even as Gascoigne’s metaphor for invention remains Ciceronian and materialist, a physical “platform” structured by the arrangement of textual matter, it also begins to express the shift to “invention as conception” in the second half of the sixteenth century; invention is now the product of “the bottome of your braynes,” highlighting the newfound distinction bestowed upon the creative power of the Renaissance artist.

In the latter half of the sixteenth century, the former notion of invention-as-discovery described by Cicero, Elyot, and Wilson, and still somewhat residual in Gascoigne, yields to the new notion of invention as conception, which has less to do with inventories of textual matter to be organized than with this new Renaissance privileging of artistic ideas. Across the sixteenth century this emerging notion of “invention as conception supposes a lively, sometimes ineffable object, a greater degree of independence from past authorities, and a project that creates fictions

\textsuperscript{203} George Gascoigne, \textit{The Posies} (London: By H. Bynneman for Richard Smith, 1575), T4‘.
in the present destined to be encountered in the future.”

According to this development of the term invention, these changes from “discovery” to “conception” epitomize the shift in the period toward its greater sense of human agency, especially as it relates to where textual authority and meaning inheres. “Invention changes,” Greene writes,

> with the first phase of humanism in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which was engrossed in the exploration of human capacities. Having named a multifarious relationship between matter and thought, where the former is almost always infinite and the latter often accessory to it, *invention* becomes human centered rather than matter centered, a way of conceiving how human beings give meaning to the world of things instead of the other way around.

In other words, the essence of textual authority and meaning inside an artist’s work increasingly “becomes human centered.” It shifts to artists and, problematically, to their subsequent readers, and how they consume, repurpose, and “give meaning” to it instead.

III

While Greene argues that invention becomes “the signal concept of early modernity” during the sixteenth century, as it evolves from an adherence to the authority of revered texts to a new celebration of the artist’s creative faculties, he also claims that “the word *invention* scarcely appears in the poems, plays, and fictions about which such [rhetorical and poetic] treatises speculate.”

As I illustrated in Chapman’s prefatory letter at the outset of the previous chapter, however, the term appears prominently in the major epyllia of the 1590s. The Elizabethan epyllion’s exceptional proportion of allusions to invention compared with other genres, as well
as its highly visual, voyeuristic scenes and its literary enactments of “curious viewing,” evinces this particular genre’s special investment in the nature of invention itself, as well as its important relation to developments in visual perspective.207 Building upon Greene’s seminal study, Chapman’s prefatory letter, and Alberti’s treatise, all of which illuminate how invention concerns both poets and painters alike, I argue that the concept of invention in the sixteenth century becomes entangled with both developments in visual perspective and the new poetics of the Elizabethan epyllion.

Sir Philip Sidney’s posthumously published Defense of Poesy not only formally theorizes these sixteenth-century tensions surrounding poetic invention; it also indicates that visual perspective had begun to influence Elizabethan poetics.208 Sidney compares poetry with painting to reinforce how he views the changing state of invention:

For I will not deny but that man’s wit may make poesy, which should be eikastike (which some learned have defined: figuring forth good things), to be phantastike (which doth, contrariwise, infect the fancy with unworthy objects), as the painter, that should give to the eye either some excellent perspective, or some fine picture, fit for building or fortification, or containing in it some notable example (as Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac, Judith killing Holofernes, David fighting with Goliath), may leave those, and please an ill-pleased eye with wanton shows of better hidden matters.209


209 Sidney, Defense of Poesy, 236.
Neither “man’s wit” nor invention are essentially worthy or infectious, according to Sidney.

Rather, it is the wit of certain poets of “lowe invention,” to use Chapman’s terms, that may abuse poetry, and “with wanton shows of better hidden matters…do more hurt than any other army of words.”

In contrast to other arts — such as astronomy, music, grammar, logic, and rhetoric — which take Nature as their “principal object,” Sidney declares that it is “Only the poet,” who,

disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature brings forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goes hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.

Sidney boldly proposes, echoing the celebrated classical painter Zeuxis, that poets in fact are capable of adding to and perfecting Nature through their “own wit”; as Enobarbus says in Antony and Cleopatra, “where we see / The fancy outwork nature.” By famously selecting only the

210 Ibid.

211 Sidney, Defense of Poesy, 216.

212 Sidney’s impassioned Defense and its celebration of the poetic imagination in great part arises from his dispute with Plato’s Ion, the originary source that posits poetic invention as a direct result of divine inspiration, not from poets’ “own wit,” ideas, and art that are capable of perfecting Nature: “Poets tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; they, like the bees, winging their way from flower to flower. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles” (italics added). See Plato, Ion, in The Dialogues of Plato, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 223–4. On Sidney’s recent reading of Plato’s Ion, in the newly available Latin translation by Jean de Serres in 1579, and its influence on his Defense published shortly thereafter, see S. K. Heninger Jr., “Sidney and Serranus’ Plato,” English Literary Renaissance 13, no. 2 (1983): 146–61. For another Renaissance artist siding with Zeuxis, Cicero, and Sidney, see Albrecht Dürer: “What Beauty is I know not, though it dependeth upon many things. When we wish to bring it into our work we find it very hard. We must gather it together from far and wide, and especially in the case of the human figure – we must study all its limbs
best features from five different women for his depiction of the Goddess Aphrodite and of Ideal Beauty, Zeuxis attempted to perfect the flaws of human nature and the realm of the senses, and legitimized the belief in his own divine Idea, conceived in his own mind. Sidney reinforces this classical belief for Elizabethan poetry, and upholds that artistic ideas can contribute — contrary to Plato’s banishing of poets from his imagined Republic — to an improved human society. Sidney forcefully champions invention as the fully formed and carefully structured product of artistic imagination:

for any understanding knows the skill of each artificer stands in that idea, or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet has that idea is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he has imagined them. Which delivering forth, also, is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it works, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency, as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him.

For Sidney, poets conceive an originary “idea, or fore-conceit of the work,” which is then to be analyzed, “re-created,” and imitated by readers. As Jeff Dolven puts it, “The fore-conceit is a kind of essence of the text, conceived in the poet’s mind before composition: an abstract

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compound of its meaning, its worth, its purpose, and its design…The original conception of the author, that is, is essential to the reception of the work." Poetry’s meaning is “inside the text” itself, “a kernel in an ornamental shell,” which “The reader, in turn, extracts…from the text in the process of reading.”\textsuperscript{215} Forrest G. Robinson, moreover, observes Sidney’s account of poetry as an essentially \textit{visual} process: “The poem is merely a verbal medium through which the poet’s mental pictures are made delightfully accessible to the eyes of his audience. An adept reader will invert the creative procedure.” Sidney’s account of Renaissance poetics thus figures the poetic text as a perspectival mirror that needs to be “invert[ed]” by readers in order to arrive at the poet’s original “idea.”\textsuperscript{216}

As soon as Sidney has proposed that a poet is “lifted up with the vigor of his own invention,” however, his soaring claims for poetic autonomy fall into ambivalence about going “hand in hand with nature.” Poets are divine for Sidney, able to create \textit{ex nihilo}, “making things…quite anew, forms such as never were in nature.” This is problematic, however, for it figures poets like God, yet they also rely upon the study and imitation of Nature.\textsuperscript{217} As Brian Cummings writes, “Sidney in this way provides the counter-argument to his own theory even as he evolves it.”\textsuperscript{218} Is invention, then, a material “platform,” as it was for Gascoigne, or is it an abstract “idea or fore-conceit of the work,” as it is for Sidney? What is invention, these Elizabethan poets ask, and where does it really lie?

\textsuperscript{215} Jeff Dolven, \textit{Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 129.
\textsuperscript{216} Quoted in ibid.
\textsuperscript{217} Sidney, \textit{Defense of Poesy}, 216.
\textsuperscript{218} Brian Cummings, \textit{The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace} (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 269–70.
Although Sidney’s lofty view of the artist and his reflection on the emerging view of artistic invention is a hallmark of the Renaissance, he also made himself and this idealizing position “ripe for parodic but critical treatment.”

This is, however, not simply because of changing definitions of invention in the sixteenth century, as Greene has suggested; this is also, I argue, because of Sidney’s dependence on an additional key term undergoing linguistic change and operating as a similar semantic palimpsest on which this chapter will now focus: conceit. For Chapman and Sidney, the emerging ideal of invention-as-conception “standeth in that idea or fore-conceit of the work,” which is up to readers to discover and analyze, to “learn aright,” in poetry, and then to imitate in their own lived experience. As his frequent comparisons with painting would support, Sidney shares this key term with the visual arts, influenced by the Italian concetto, primarily meaning an “intention, design, plan, idea,” and, especially informative for Sidney’s Defense, the “fundamental idea which underlies a work of art.”

Concurrent with the legitimization of the divine idea of artists in the first half of the sixteenth century was the notion of the conceit and concetto: it was this concetto that Michelangelo viewed as the noble “inner vision” of his work that needed to be extracted. The fabled sculptor Pigmalion, for example, was interpreted as extracting divine “concetto from matter.”

By the end of the sixteenth century, however, the Sidneyan ideal of the “fore-conceit” and of the divine concetto ultimately developed into their complicated cognate, of conceit as conceitedness. Published in 1594, Shakespeare’s Rape of Lucrece reflects the fluctuations in

219 Greene, Five Words, 18.
221 See Coronato, “The Unfinished,” 68, 73.
the term’s meanings during the height of the Elizabethan epyllion in the mid-1590s. On the one hand, Shakespeare alludes to how “bottomless conceit” resides in the “still imagination.”

As Lucrece attempts to express her suffering to her husband Collatine, Shakespeare relates how “Conceit and grief an eager combat fight... Much like a press of people at a door, / Throng her inventions, which shall go before.” In these first two usages in the poem, conceit retains a similar meaning as an artistic idea and is still connected with invention. Lucrece is searching the “bottome of [her] braynes for apte wordes,” for the right conceit, to express her inward “inventions,” without being “drawen” away by “rumbling rime” or her emotional state of “grief.”

It is precisely when Lucrece views the “piece / Of skilful painting” depicting the fall of Troy, however, that Shakespeare reflects the term’s new, less exalted meaning for both painting and poetry: he refers to the painter as “conceited,” not for his ability to perfect Nature and extract a divine concetto from matter, but for his conceitedness: for drawing an image “so proud,” for depicting a “Conceit deceitful” (1366–71).

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that Shakespeare gathers together the late sixteenth-century conflicting meanings of “conceit” while writing within a poetic genre that is particularly concerned with the nature of artistic invention, and its relation to rhetorical spice and linguistic fetishism. What is more, he does so within a poem that culminates with its heroine — and readers over her shoulder — gazing at Shakespeare’s own ekphrasis of a piece of perspective adapted from Philostratus’s Imagines. Shakespeare, then, is not only concerned with the

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223 Shakespeare, The Rape of Lucrece, ll. 701–2

224 Ibid., ll. 1298–1302.

225 In his collected sumptuous descriptions of classical paintings, the Imagines, Philostratus describes a work depicting the siege of Thebes: “Some are seen in full figure, others with the legs hidden, others from the waist up, then only the busts of some, heads only, helmets only, and
entanglements among rhetoric and invention; in the *Rape of Lucrece* he also reflects the influence perspective has had on aesthetic meaning and the interpretive process emphasized by Chapman.

The rest of this chapter will first turn to Shakespeare’s other epyllion, *Venus and Adonis*, another highly rhetorical, visual poem which explicitly alludes to perspective through the famous painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius. It will then conclude with John Marston’s *Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image*, a poem that, by taking the seminal myth of artistic invention and the attempt to literally inspire “spirit, motion and life” into a work of art, responds to these poetic concerns in the 1590s. Like Chapman’s careful distinction between the “lowe invention” of his precursors and the “harty invention” of his “absolute Poem” in his prefatory epistle, both Shakespeare’s and Marston’s concern with the nature of poetic invention is evinced by their two epyllia’s prefaces. Both Shakespeare and Marston figure their poems not only as works of invention, but also as unruly, malleable children coming forth into a chaotic world of readers and interpreters. Shakespeare addresses his poem to his patron Henry Wriothesley, the third Earl of Southampton, the “noble…godfather” of what Shakespeare anxiously called “the first heir of my invention,” which he worries might “prove deformed” when seen into publication. Marston, too, expresses anxiety over his first published writing, calling it his

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“young new-borne Invention.” By foregrounding their poems as their first conceived works of “Invention,” both Shakespeare’s and Marston’s epyllia reveal that these short, playful poems are in fact interested in important matters to the poetry of the 1590s, not least of which are the nature of representation and shifting understandings of invention.

In both of their epyllia, moreover, Shakespeare and Marston allude to, and employ techniques from, the curious perspective, to reflect on the status of invention by the end of the sixteenth century. These works deviate from, and even satirize, the ideals surrounding invention theorized by prominent figures such as Alberti in painting and Sidney in poetry. In Venus and Adonis, the engine of invention only works to produce a poetic trompe l’oeil, a rhetorical conceit without substance, a surface without depth. For Marston, as his satirical dedication “To The World’s Mightie Monarch, Good Opinion” makes clear, his “young new-borne Invention” depends entirely upon this “Great Arbitrator, Umpire of the Earth…thy Deitie.” Divinity here is not ascribed to the poet or poem, but to “Great OPINION.” Sounding like a parodic precursor to Milton’s God, Opinion is “the All / of all, and All in all, by whom all things are that that they / are” (A3⁴). Marston radically refigures invention: far from sharing Sidney’s view of poets, he instead attributes inventive agency, and textual divinity, to readers’ opinions. In so doing, he shares the alternative aesthetic epistemology of anamorphosis that developed out of perspective, taking the divine idea out of the work itself and placing it instead into the subjective position of viewers, and their own individual points of view. According to Marston at the end of the

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227 Marston, The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image, A3⁴. All future references to the paratexts of Marston’s poem will refer to this edition and be given as in-text parenthetical citations.

In the sixteenth century, poetic invention has become “All conceit” and infinitely reproducible — infinitely anamorphic, or “formed again” — with each new reader and reading. Anamorphosis, in short, changed invention for painters and poets alike.

IV

In the other major epyllion of the 1590s alongside Marlowe’s Hero and Leander, Shakespeare transforms Marlowe’s miniature image embroidered on Hero’s sleeve into a full-scale poetic painting, Venus and Adonis. As early as Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Lectures on Shakespeare, critics have observed the poem’s essentially visual character: “His Venus and Adonis seems at once the characters themselves, but, more, the representations of those characters by the most consummate actors. Throughout, you seem to be told nothing and to hear and see everything.” More recently, Stuart Sillars compared the poem to a diptych, a painting with a pair of contrasting situations, Venus’s courtship of Adonis, on the one side, and her

229 The first 818 lines of Hero and Leander, which were composed by Marlowe, and Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis were both entered in the Stationers’ Register in 1593, although Marlowe’s work remained unpublished until 1598 when it was sold with Chapman’s additions and divided into sestads. Although it is uncertain which work preceded which, or whether they were written simultaneously, I view Venus and Adonis as an exercise in amplificatio critical of Marlowe’s epyllion’s eroticism, self-conscious rhetorical artistry, and, as Chapman might say, “lowe invention,” well “spic’d” but not an “absolute Poem.” Many other scholars also agree that Hero and Leander preceded Venus and Adonis, which is often taken, as I do here, as a poetic response to Marlowe’s epyllion. See Stephen Orgel, ed. Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Poems and Translations (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 219; Patrick Cheney, Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 127; and Cheney, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 102–3, 286. For the suggestion that it was written in tandem with Venus and Adonis, see William Keach, Elizabethan Erotic Narratives (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), 85, and Katherine Duncan-Jones and J. R. Woudhuysen, eds. Shakespeare’s Poems, 12, 20–1.

mourning over his death, on the other. In *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare not only emulates Marlowe’s self-consciously artificial, visual work, highlighting his own rhetorical artistry from the poem’s opening lines with an elaborate simile; he also carefully establishes himself as a perspectival poet, interested in adapting the visual art into his epyllion and thinking about the status of poetic invention.

On the one hand, Shakespeare seems like other epylliaists, such as Lodge and Marlowe, who transform virtuosic *demonstraciones* of perspective into his own display of rhetorical “colors” and figures. For example, in his summary of Venus’s paradoxical situation, “She’s Love, she loves, and yet she is not loved,” Shakespeare deftly combines the rhetorical tropes antanaclasis and polyptoton within a single line. Like Marlowe’s Leander, Shakespeare draws attention to how Venus is like a “bold sharpe sophister”: her first persuasions are generic exercises in rhetorical *copia* and *inventio*, culling stock arguments from erotic *carpe diem* poetry and classical myth: “Narcissus so himself himself forsook, / And died to kiss his shadow in the brook…Seeds spring from seeds and beauty breedeth beauty; / Thou wast begot: to get it is thy duty” (161–8). The narrator’s rhetorical questions and pedagogic language throughout the

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232 Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*, in *Shakespeare’s Narrative Poems*, ll. 610. All future references to Shakespeare’s epyllion will be to this edition and given as in-text parenthetical citations.

233 Shakespeare also later “figure points” to his poem’s rhetorical *copia*, self-reflexively calling attention to Venus’s wooing of Adonis as a demonstration of his own linguistic capabilities, when he describes amorous lovers’ discourses as “copious stories.” As Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen note, “The term was most famously associated with the inexhaustible profusion of language and matter through Erasmus’s manual *De Copia Verborum ac Rerum* (1513),” and this is only one of Shakespeare’s two uses of the term, along with *Richard III*, “where it is applied to trumpet blasts” (845n).
poem, moreover, echo Shakespeare’s own grammar school exercises similar to Marlowe’s erotic epyllion. His interjections throughout Venus’s attempted arguments, “Now which way shall she turn? What shall she say?” figure point to the grammar school training underlying the poem’s artifice (253). It only takes Adonis listening to 420 lines of “the engine of her thoughts” (367) for him to wink at the rhetorical game Shakespeare is playing: “leave this idle theme” (422, italics added).

On the other hand, Shakespeare also imitates perspective by flaunting the art’s highly visual qualities and striving for, as Chapman writes, “Enargia, or cleerness of representation.” In fact, he invites readers to “Look” at his own poetic creation no fewer than eight times, often in elaborate visual similes and rhetorical ekphrases.234 For instance, when Adonis attempts to abandon Venus for the hunt, Shakespeare asks readers to “Look when a painter would surpass the life / In limning out a well-proportioned steed” (289–90).235 Shakespeare compares his own poetry with the art of “limning,” and himself with a painter able to “surpass the life” of an actually living horse, self-reflexively drawing attention to the rhetorical artifice undergirding his epyllion. The allusion to how a painter would depict the horse underscores how well Shakespeare’s own poetic description “limns out” the proportions and movements of the steed: “Round-hoofed, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long, / Broad breast, full eye, small head and nostril wide, / High crest, short ears, straight legs and passing strong” (295–7). The horse’s

234 See ll. 67, 79, 229, 529, 815, 925.

235 Mark Eccles has shown how Shakespeare’s uses of “Look when” and “Look how” in Venus and Adonis are Elizabethan idioms meaning “Whenever,” “Just as when,” and “Just as,” but the exceptional frequency with which he employs the phrase in this epyllion compared to other poems and plays, as well as the work’s repeated invocations and allusions to painting, makes the emphasis on “Looking” remain. See Mark Eccles, “Shakespeare’s Use of Look How and Similar Idioms,” The Journal of English and Germanic Philology 42, no. 3 (1943): 386–400.
movements parallel Shakespeare’s own rhetorical moves as he demands to be appreciated aesthetically. Shakespeare’s poetry, unlike painting, is even able to imagine what the horse would say in his “ravishing strides”:

Sometime he trots, as if he told the steps,
With gentle majesty and modest pride;
Anon he rears upright, curvets and leaps,
As who should say, ‘Lo, thus my strength is tried,
And this I do to captivate the eye
Of the fair breeder that is standing by.’ (277–82)

Shakespeare’s set-piece description of Adonis’s horse and its pursuit of the “fair breeder,” deliberately juxtaposed with the main characters Venus and Adonis, is a rhetorical exercise in painting in miniature. It is a vivid, moving description designed to display Shakespeare’s artifice and capacity to affect a reader emotionally. The aural pun linking the beastly “breeder” with the poem’s readers, moreover, suggests that the rhetorical display is designed to “captivate the eye,” not of the jennet alone: like a work of perspective, Venus and Adonis fixes readers’ eyes upon itself as an object of self-reflexive artistry.

By arousing a highly visual, vivid image through his rhetorical enargeia, then, and even imagining what words his carefully depicted horse would speak, Shakespeare’s epyllion seems to be upholding the poetic ideals of invention espoused by Sidney, as it figures forth, quite literally, a “speaking picture of poesy.” By translating perspectival demonstrations within paintings into rhetorical set-pieces within his epyllion, Shakespeare seems to be similarly associating his work with prestigious demonstrations of technical mastery and displays of perspective, capitalizing on its contemporary currency in aristocratic and courtly circles. Within this context it is not a

236 Sidney, Defense of Poesy, 222.

237 Contemporary with the epyllion’s rise in England, Elizabethan poets were not only contending with, but also engaging with, new ideas about art and painting imported from Italy,
coincidence that Shakespeare’s most visual poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, both of which allude to and adapt perspective in a variety of ways, are dedicated to the aristocrat Southampton.

Underlying Shakespeare’s self-reflexive demonstrations to move his readers visually and imaginatively, however, is an allusion to perspective that suggests a discomfort with the fetishistic use of rhetorical, visual displays in Elizabethan poetry and their implications for the state of invention in the 1590s. At the midpoint of *Venus and Adonis*, stanza 101 out of 199, Shakespeare alludes to the classical painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius to describe Venus’s inevitably unsatisfied desire for Adonis. Its deliberate placement in Shakespeare’s poem, not found in Ovid, makes its significance all the more apparent:

> Even so poor birds, deceived with painted grapes,  
> Do surfeit by the eye and pine the maw;  
> Even so she languisheth in her mishaps,  
> As those poor birds that helpless berries saw.  
> The warm effects which she in him finds missing  
> She seeks to kindle with continual kissing. (601–6)

The simile draws on Book 35 of Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis*, which bemoans how painting, “an art that was formerly illustrious…But at the present time it has been entirely ousted by marbles.”

most notably through Sir Thomas Hoby’s translation of Baldasarre Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano*, or *The Book of the Courtier*. Ever since Brunelleschi’s experiments with perspective were codified and elevated into an artistic ideal by Alberti, perspective art became the hallmark for courtly discussions of visual forms of representation. By 1561 in England with Hoby’s translation, aspiring courtiers would be expected to be “cunning in drawyng, and the knowledge in the very arte of peincting.” Even Mary, Queen of Scots, when the envoy Nicholas White visited her imprisoned at Tutbury Castle in 1569, reported that she “entered into a pretty disputable comparison betwene karving, painting and working with the needil, affirming painting in her owne opinion for the most commendable qualitie.” See Marjorie Munsterberg, “The Beginning of Writing about Painting in English: Chaucer to Shakespeare,” *The British Art Journal* 18, no. 1 (2017): 21–3.
In his catalog of the Greek “artists eminent in painting,” Pliny dwells in particular on the artist Zeuxis:

His contemporaries and rivals were Timanthes, Androcydes, Eupompus, and Parrhasius. This last, it is recorded, entered into a competition with Zeuxis, who produced a picture of grapes so successfully represented that birds flew up to the stage-buildings; whereupon Parrhasius himself produced such a realistic picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should now be drawn and the picture displayed; and when he realized his mistake, with a modesty that did him honour he yielded up the prize, saying that whereas he had deceived birds Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.\(^{238}\)

Both Zeuxis’s painted grapes and Parrhasius’s painted curtain are examples of a special kind of perspective, *trompe l’oeil*, which “strives relentlessly to achieve perfect duplication of reality to the point of delusion.”\(^{239}\) In Pliny’s account, Parrhasius’s achievement in the competition is not only to “achieve perfect duplication of reality,” which Zeuxis also achieves, but also his ability to deceive “an artist.” Pliny’s account thus provides Shakespeare and his contemporaries with a myth involving perspectival competition and emulation, a classical source for epylliiasts’ rivalry in producing different effects of rhetorical illusions and deceptions in 1590s poetry and, in the following decades, for innovations in early modern metatheater.

Not only does the allusion cleverly function as a hinge dividing the epyllion into two halves, split between Venus’s courtship of Adonis and her mourning for his death, as if it were a painted diptych depicting these two scenes; it also functions as a major structural principle for the work’s “complete narrative and thematic design,” a self-reflexive gesture to his own poem’s status as a *trompe l’oeil* itself.\(^{240}\) According to Catherine Belsey, the allusion to Zeuxis’s painted grapes


grapes captures the essence of desire that operates throughout Shakespeare’s Ovidian poem; it is not an ornamental, extravagant simile but one central (both figuratively and numerically) to the poem. Zeuxis’s painted grapes do not merely deceive the birds, Parrhasius’s curtains do not merely deceive Zeuxis, and the idea of Adonis’s love does not merely deceive Venus: they also tantalize them with the desire of something absent and ultimately unobtainable.

Placed as it is at the direct center of the poem, it occupies the analogous place to the centric point of a perspective painting, which divides the horizon line into two parts.241 Reading the epyllion as a verbal piece of perspective, the centric point should provide a fixed place to observe the work’s istoria and invention, the didactic center of the poem. By making the centric point of the epyllion a stanza regarding Zeuxis and Parrhasius, however, Shakespeare does not unveil a fixed, stable center in his poem. Rather, he directs our vision to an allusion about illusion, a story about a painted surface without a veiled substance, and to the tension between art’s mediating surfaces and its symbolic objects of representation. He situates readers, moreover, in Venus’s position: as readers of a rhetorically embroidered text without a moral center, readers, like Venus, are forced to recognize that the gratification of their desire is ultimately imaginary and will forever fail to be satisfied. This recognition encapsulates the effect of Shakespeare’s Ovidian epyllion as a whole and exemplifies how Shakespeare has turned it into his own literary form of perspective. Like Zeuxis’s painted grapes — a shadow without substance, a signifier without a referent — Shakespeare’s poem is itself both a reprisal of Ovid and a literary adaptation of Zeuxis’s and Parrhasius’s paintings. As Rocco Coronato observes, comparing Venus to the deceived birds “underscores this note of longing” for something true and real beneath the illusionistic image, seeming to “combine the experience of artworks with

Ovidian myths of frustrated touch like that of Narcissus.” Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* prompts in readers a desire for an action and moral that it fails to gratify. It is a poetic perspective, “a text of and about desire,” tantalizing without delivering.

By adapting perspective into a literary *trompe l’oeil* and turning himself into, in effect, not only an English Ovid but also a poetic Parrhasius, Shakespeare questions the uses to which rhetoric and *enargeia* are being put in contemporary Elizabethan poetry. As Pauline Kiernan has demonstrated, Shakespeare’s poem is not simply rhetorically excessive, artificial, and erotic throughout; nor do these elements exist simply for their own sake. Rather, Shakespeare juxtaposes this Ovidian and, as I have been situating it, perspectival language alongside clearer, more direct, and more physical descriptions. It is the rhetorical and erotic language of other epyllia, voiced through Venus, that in fact *deprives* poetry of “motion, spirit and life,” the point of invention itself. When Venus calls Adonis a “lifeless picture, cold and senseless stone, / Well-painted idol, image dull and dead,” Shakespeare reverses the myth of Pigmalion, suggesting that the rhetorical engine of Elizabethan poetry “has turned Adonis’ flesh and blood into a cold and senseless statue, she who has turned life into art.” Shakespeare, then, does not uncritically

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contribute to the linguistic fetishism characteristic of the genre. Instead, he turns Venus, the goddess of Love and Beauty, into a Gorgon, and “makes an implied criticism of the way” rhetorical tropes deprive Adonis of “motion, spirit and life” in particular, and how they undermine the potentially ennobling uses of poetic invention in general.245 Perhaps it is Adonis’s own explicit response to Venus’s injunctions, “I hate not love, but your device in love” (789, italics added), that evokes and rebukes Marlowe’s verbal fetishism most clearly, and expresses the limitations of ostentatious rhetorical copia to persuade and move an audience toward its desired end.246

V

When John Marston, the satirist turned dramatist turned Canterbury Deacon, pseudonymously published his first volume of poetry in 1598, the epyllion genre had continued to wane in popularity since the major publications of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Chapman. The collection, published under the pen name William Kinsayder, contains not only Marston’s Certain Satyres, Juvenalian satirical verses lamenting both the moral and poetic decrepitude in

245 Ibid., 483.

246 See Enterline, Shakespeare’s Schoolroom, 91, who argues that the outburst of Ovidian epyllia in the 1590s, and specifically Venus and Adonis, testifies to the failed ideals of Shakespeare’s own humanist curriculum. She shows how the rise of Ovid’s place in grammar school curricula in fact generated poetic responses counter to what the humanist education desired to produce. The teaching of immoral Ovid alongside edifying Virgil was grounded in the belief that studying rhetorical copia, regardless of subject matter, would in turn inculcate rhetorical invention; it ended up, however, steering many students, and eventual writers, away from Virgilian civic duty and instead toward Ovidian self-conscious artistry: “Shakespeare’s lovely puellus,” Enterline writes, “declines to take up the part already written for him in the text from which he comes — and declines further to learn a lesson derived from the texts his narrator is imitating…he is turning his back on more than sex. He also turns it on the language, lessons, and practices that sixteenth-century pedagogy indelibly associated, in the experience of its initiates, with eroticism and violence.”
England (from which Marston would go on to make a career as a dramatist), but also *The Metamorphosis of Pigmation’s Image*, an ostensible erotic epyllion comparable to its precursors from earlier in the decade.

By selecting the myth of Pigmalion from Book X of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Marston deliberately reveals his own attempt to address similar questions raised by epyllia throughout the 1590s. In the sixteenth century, the myth could signify the ideal of artists and poets alike to breathe “spirit, motion and life” into their works. Pigmalion is thus the original artist capable of invention-as-conception, of extracting a divine *concetto* from his matter and animating his original artistic *idea*. Yet as an artist who becomes enamored with his own artificial creation, Pigmalion also could serve as a cautionary example, not an artist extracting divine *concetto* but instead an onanistic figure infatuated with his own artificial creation, with himself and his own verbal conceitedness.

While the two titles in Marston’s pseudonymous publication fashion dual, opposing personae through contrasting styles and forms for the two texts, it is nonetheless singularly interested in contemporary notions of conceit and invention. On the one hand, *The Metamorphosis* is composed in the same stanzaic form popularized by Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, and employs familiar amorous language:

*P*igmalion, whose hie loue-hating minde
Disdain’d to yeeld seruile affection,
Or amorous sute to any woman-kinde,
Knowing their wants, and mens perfection.
Yet Loue at length forc’d him to know his fate,
And loue the shade, whose substance he did hate. (A6’)

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From its very subject matter, as well as from the last line of the opening stanza, Marston picks up the theme of other epyllia before him, and Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* in particular: how to inspire spirit and life into the artificial medium of language and poetry, and the entanglements between “shade” and “substance” when attempting to do so.

In the *Certain Satyres*, on the other hand, Marston speaks through his alternative persona, Kinsayder, the Juvenalian barking satirist who flaunts his “Satyrick Muse” in couplets:

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Tut, he is famous for his reueling,
For fine sette speeches, and for sonetting;
He scornes the violl and the scraping sticke,
And yet’s but Broker of anothers wit.
Certes if all things were well knowne and view’d
He doth but champe that which another chew’d. (C4v)
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By appending *Certain Satyres* to his Ovidian epyllion, Marston makes it clear that his own “Precedent poem,” *The Metamorphosis*, is meant to satirize, rather than partake in, the erotic genre and its “Salaminian titillations” that constitute “the swaggering humor of these times” (C1v). He views contemporary erotic poets parroting one another’s conceits and forms. Picking up on Shakespeare’s critique of contemporary epyllists’ empty rhetorical displays from his set-piece description of the jennet in *Venus and Adonis*, Marston similarly figures them as mere “Broker[s] of anothers wit” who “doth but champe that which another chew’d.”

The two volumes can be seen, then, as another kind of diptych or verbal piece of perspective, offering two contrasting satirical views on the contemporary state of poetic invention in Elizabethan England.

Like Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* and Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, Marston’s *Metamorphosis* is a similar exercise in rhetorical *amplificatio*, expanding fifty-five lines from

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248 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb “to champ,” denoting “To bite upon (anything hard); said especially of a horse which impatiently bites the bit in its mouth,” had only recently coined by Barnaby Googe in 1577. See, “champ, v.” 2. *OED Online*. March 2023.
Ovid into 234 in his epyllion.\textsuperscript{249} In contrast to Shakespeare’s poem, which was clearly situated within a courtly context from its epigraph and dedication, the complex sequence of dedications and paratexts preceding Marston’s poem points to the parodic thrust of his satire toward his precursors’ poetic inventions in the 1590s.\textsuperscript{250} These paratexts consist of a complex negotiation of addressees, from “the World’s Mightie Monarch, Good Opinion,” an abstract personification Marston invents and invokes in order to woo his volume’s second dedicatee, “his Mistress,” a pastiche imitating the Petrarchanism and Ovidianism permeating contemporary English poetry.

Despite its fictional, satirical addressees, the dedications nonetheless disclose Marston’s aim in writing a belated, parodic epyllion. As in Shakespeare’s dedication to Southampton, Marston expresses similar anxiety over his first published writing, calling it his “young new-born Invention.” By similarly foregrounding his poem as his first conceived work of invention, Marston evinces that his playful poem is in fact invested in the nature of poetic representation and the meaning of invention at the end of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{251}

\textsuperscript{249} Philip J. Finkelpearl, “From Petrarch to Ovid: Metamorphoses in John Marston’s \textit{Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image},” \textit{ELH} 32, no. 5 (1965): 333.


\textsuperscript{251} Cp. Lynn Enterline, \textit{The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 128, who observes that in its original published context, Marston’s poem resembles the “Roman practice of declamation, that public display of invention” delivered before his learned, masculine audience at the Inns of Court.
Following a panegyric to “Good Opinion,” to whom Marston “humbly offer[s] thys my Poem,” the rest of the first dedication radically proposes that poetic invention is not the offspring of poets, but of this apostrophized abstraction:

Thou soule of Pleasure, Honors only substance,  
Great Arbitrator, Umpire of the Earth,  
Whom fleshly Epicures call Vertues essence,  
Thou mouing Orator, whose powrefull breth  
Swaies all mens judgements. Great OPINION,  
Vouchsafe to guild my imperfection. (A3v)

Anticipating the key terms of the epyllion proper’s opening stanza, Marston suggests that Opinion is not a “shade,” but the “soule” and “substance” of “Pleasure” and “Honor.” By addressing Opinion in the dedication’s opening stanza as “Thou moving Orator, whose powrefull breath / Swaies all mens judgements,” Marston makes Opinion the force that enacts *enargeia* and the source of invention, rather than himself as the poet; it is only Opinion who is able to give “breath” and life to poetry. The second stanza proceeds to ask Opinion to “daine to grace my blushing stile, / And crowne my Muse with goo opinion.” He asks, in effect, for the personified entity “Good Opinion” to beget and multiply “good opinion[s]” about his poem. If Opinion “daine[s]” to do so, Marston claims that he will write another poem “in honor of thy name, / And add some Trophie to enlarge thy fame.” If Opinion censures his poem, however, Marston himself will censure back:

But if thou wilt not with thy Deittie  
Shade, and inmaske the errors of my pen,  
Protect an Orphane Poets infancie,  
I will disclose, that all the world shall ken  
How partiall thou art in Honors giuing:  
Crowning the shade, the substance praise depriving. (A3v)

By ultimately appropriating Great Opinion’s chief attributes from the first stanza — “Honors only substance” — Marston’s dedication reveals that he conceives of poetic success and meaning
as completely unstable and random, a contest between “whose powrefull breath” is pronounced loudest and most recently; in other words, whose subjective reading of the poem is most opinionated. “Honor” is not essential or inherent; it is not a true “substance” but only “partial,” and partially given. Poetic “substance,” in other words, can likewise dissolve and vanish into a “shade” based on any opinionated reader and their bias.

In his subsequent “Argument of the Poem” and dedication “To his Mistres,” key words about poetic invention recur. In the “Argument,” Marston forecasts Pigmaion’s artistic creation — and, by extension, his own — in the same terms as other epylliasts. Like Hero’s veil which “both man and beast deceives,” Pigmaion is “so deeplie enamored on his own workmanship, that he would oftentimes lay the Image in bedde with him.” Pigmaion’s work is almost “a breathing creature,” so much so that “in the end, finding his fond dotage, and yet persevering in his ardent affection, [Pigmaion] made his devout prayers to Venus, that shee would vouchsafe to enspire life into his Love (A4’, italics added). Despite having just invoked both Good Opinion to “guild my imperfection,” and then “Venus…to enspire life into his love” on only the previous page, Marston next writes to his beloved, an anonymous “Mistres:”

I invocate none other Saint but thee,  
To grace the first bloomes of my Poesie.  
Thy fauours like Promethean sacred fire,  
In dead, and dull conceit can life inspire.  
Or like that rare and rich Elixar stone,  
Can turn to gold, leaden iuencion. (A5’)

Like Shakespeare’s Lucrece from four years prior, Marston yokes “conceit” with “invention” in the same stanza. By 1598, however, the notion of conceit as divine concetto is now absent. The previously deified notion of poetic conceit is “dead, and dull” by the end of the century, needing to be transformed by an unknown Mistress’s opinion from “leaden” into “gold…iuencion.” Poetic invention has undergone a staggering rewind of the Four Ages of Man, or, put another
way, a process of reverse alchemy. The claims Marston’s opening paratexts make about poetic invention depart from Chapman and Sidney who, only three years prior, had idealized invention as the product of “the force of a divine breath.” Marston thus shares the bitter view from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 83 regarding the leaden “tomb” into which poetic invention has been interred, but satirically adds that it can still be exhumed by his Mistress’ favorable reception. By the end of the sixteenth century, Marston parodies invention as the byproduct not of a poetic idea or concetto, but something completely contingent upon readers’ “Good Opinion.”

Through these shifting voices and addressees in the opening paratexts, as Lynn Enterline has observed, Marston creates a complex layering of associations between Pigmallion, the narrator, other epylliasts, and their readers. On the one hand, Pigmallion, as an artist “enamored on his own workmanship,” resembles other poets obsessed over their own rhetorical “workmanship” to which they self-reflexively call attention. There is also the fictional narrator Kinsayder, a poetic persona distinct from Marston himself, who also resembles Pigmallion, and whose own beloved is compared to Pigmallion’s statue throughout the poem. When Kinsayder exclaims, “O that my Mistress were an Image too, / That I might blameless her perfections view,” and when he apostrophizes, “O Ovid would he cry, / Did ere Corinna show such Ivorie / when she appear’d in Venus livorie?” doting on his own artificial creation “Which he did work,” he is also the object of Marston’s satire. As a “verbal fetishist” himself, however, repeatedly displaying his own “conceit” and “Imagery” — indeed, exploiting and punning on these terms’

252 Sidney, Defense of Poesy, 217.

ambiguity throughout the poem — while writing for his likeminded audience at the Inns of Court, Marston “also runs the risk of indulging in the failings he mocks.” In the same breath that he analogizes other epylliasts with his doting sculptor, Marston thus also fashions a “shadow portrait of himself” in both Kinsayder and Pigmalion.

Yet readers are also roped into Marston’s satire and into resembling Pigmalion, Marston, and his narrator Kinsayer. Like his apostrophe to Ovid, he also speaks directly to “Yee gaping eares” of his readers, “that swallow up my lines” (38). Readers are situated like Pigmalion as well, the erotic consumers of his excessive artifice leering at his curiously contrived work. Alternatively, readers are also compared to the figures in the poem’s only two similes: they are like “the subtile Citty-dame / In sacred church,” who “when her pure thoughts shold pray, / Peire through her fingers, so to hide her shame” (10), and like the “peevish Papists” who crouch before “some dum Idoll,” another analog for Marston’s own poem (14).

With all the overlap between Marston, Kinsayder, Pigmalion, and readers, the relation between Pigmalion’s statue — his “Image” — and any of these other characters remains unexplored. That is, who becomes the statue in this nexus of literary agents? By the end of the poem, I argue, the work becomes not an Ovidian metamorphosis but a verbal anamorphosis: it is readers who are in fact metamorphosed into “Pigmalion’s Image,” into his sculpture, becoming a part of the meaning of the work of art itself. Marston implicates every reader’s experience and opinion into the process of poetic invention.

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At the start of the twenty-first century, Lynn Enterline was able to say accurately of Marston’s *Metamorphosis* — perhaps because it is, as she humorously calls it, a “poem of questionable taste” — that it “generally receives little more than passing commentary.”\(^{255}\) Little has changed in the poem’s criticism since. While early debates over the poem dwelled on its satirical nature, Enterline significantly intervened by observing how in this poem Marston dedicated “himself to the task of exposing and satirizing the connections between rhetoric and sexuality in Petrarchanism,” and its “poetic discourse of verbal fetishism.”\(^{256}\) At least implicitly, moreover, her focus on the essentially erotic qualities of rhetorical fetishism is also grounded in discussions of poetic invention in the sixteenth century, particularly with regard to Marston’s attention “on Ovid’s carefully chosen verb, ‘to move’ (*movere*)” his work of art into a living


being. Indeed, as she puts it, “Marston, like Ovid and Petrarch before him, is drawn to the rhetorical dimension of the story and turns it into a provocatively eroticized commentary on his own scene of writing...[he] finds the story of animation particularly useful for posing questions about the erotic undercurrents of rhetorical and poetical relations.” 257 In other words, she views Marston’s Metamorphosis like the previous Elizabethan epyllia I have examined thus far: that Marston’s poem is also as much about obsessing over its own rhetoric as it is a satire.

“Throughout Marston’s brief satire,” Enterline writes, “the narrator insists on Pigmalio’s preference for a turn of phrase — for an ‘image’ (stanza 2 and passim), a ‘conceit’ (7), a ‘shadow’ (28), an ‘imagery’ (4), an ‘idol’ (14), and a ‘shade’ (1) — over the mere fleshy ‘substance’ of womankind (1).” 258 As an artist obsessing over his own rhetorical creation, Marston “becomes a metapoetic figure” like other epylliasts before him, not simply parodying but also paralleling them, as Marston’s emphasis on rhetorical “conceit” throughout his epyllion functions as another form of “linguistic foreplay.” 259 As soon as Marston’s Pigmalion “glimpses the body of his beloved — ‘the faire proportion of her thigh’ — he turns away from it.” His interest, instead of her body, is on “the beauty of his own images and figures.” 260

In contrast to Enterline, who views Marston’s poem primarily as a misogynistic critique of Renaissance Petrarchism, a poem that works to determine “the limits within which men...can

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258 Ibid., 130. Cp. Melissa J. Jones, “Spectacular Impotence,” 99, who similarly contends that “Marston’s slightly awkward but persistent reference to the statue as an “image” recalls the verbally drawn images of the day’s courtier poets, making clear that Marston’s close-range target is ‘the verbal fetishism’ of Petrarchism.”


260 Ibid., 133.
speak,” I instead wish to focus on Marston’s satire as a direct response not to Renaissance Petrarchism in general, but to the rhetorical and visual emphases of Elizabethan epyllia in particular. I wish to situate it, moreover, not alongside Marston’s literary precursors, Ovid and Petrarch, but among its contemporary visual culture of perspective and anamorphosis. This focus seems especially necessary given the highly visual subject matter and content of the poem, in which readers’ voyeuristic gazes are drawn by Marston to “wink” and “looke again” from different vantage points at his statue’s naked body and his poem’s erotic poetics.

Marston signals that his satire is directed at other epyllia writers by invoking the same terms Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Chapman used to self-reflexively praise their own rhetorical artistry. Returning to the language of the opening “Argument,” Pigmalion “was amazed at the wondrous rarenesse / Of his owne workmanships perfection” (3), and he “fed” on “Her Amber-coloured, her shining hair” and “her cheeks” (6). Marston’s language does not simply echo, but parodies Marlowe’s rhetorical “workmanship” that vividly represents the miniature ekphrasis on Hero’s sleeve, and satirizes Shakespeare’s Venus “feeding” on the puerile Adonis’s lips and cheeks. He implicates, moreover, the erotic and morally insubstantial genre’s readers who are “amazed” and “enamored” with the poems’ ornamental “fayre image[s]” being “portraied” in these visually stimulating poems.

By taking Ovid’s myth of Pigmalion as his subject, Marston satirizes the Petrarchan conceit of “relentless stone” used to describe the love objects of Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s epyllia.261 He satirizes previous sonneteers and writers of epyllia as modern “Pigmalions,” enamored by their own artistic creations and erotic poetry.

261 See Marlowe, Hero and Leander, ll. 163, and Shakespeare, Venus and Adonis, ll. 200, 211.
He thought he saw the blood run through the vaine  
And leape, and swell with all alluring meanes:  
Then feares he is deceiv’d, and then againe,  
He thinks he see’th the brightnes of the beames  
Which shoote from out the fairenes of her eye:  
At which he stands as in an extasie. (5)

The stanza’s opening reference to the visual, “He thought he saw,” echoes the conventional formulas of ekphrasis and of enargeia. In contrast to the compelling, moving images these rhetorical arts are meant to create, however, Marston’s description of his artistic creation coming to life parodies the decade’s earlier epylliasts, and their poems’ indecorous artifice. In this case, there is actual “blood run[ning]” through his work of art, causing him to “swell with all alluring meanes.” Delaying the scene of erotic unveiling with punctuation and caesuras, Marston mocks the connection between rhetoric and sexuality that enargeia had begun to generate in late-Elizabethan poetics. He pokes fun at Pigmalion’s, and, by extension, readers’, infatuation with such carefully contrived works of art, in which they “stand as in an extasie,” putting metrical emphasis on his pun about their actual arousal from this erotic genre.262

Marston’s poem in fact verbalizes the dramatic experience of “curious viewing” effected by early modern perspective paintings and imitated by earlier erotic epyllia. For example, he invokes the form of a traditional blazon describing “Her Amber-coloured, her shining haire,” her “golden beames,” “her lips” and “breasts, like polish Ivory appeare,” but makes it into a complicated scene of erotic viewing in and across stanzas. He enlists readers as spectators, moreover, into Pigmalion’s place as principal predatory viewer. As a stand-in for both Marston and his readers, Pigmalion’s gaze parallels our own:

Until his eye discended so farre downe  
That it descried Loves pavilion:  
Where Cupid doth enjoy his onely crowne,

And *Venus* hath her chiepest mantion:
There would he winke, & winking looke againe,
Both eies & thoughts would gladly there remaine. (9)

As a poetic substitute for the reader’s experience reading Marston’s poem, Pigmalion directs our view “discend[ing] so farre downe” his statue’s body to the site of “Loves pavilion,” a kind of vanishing point alluded to but not shown.

One of the only two similes in the poem specifically occurs during this scene of gazing on Pigmalion’s “workmanship.” He first compares Pigmialion to a “subtile Citty-dame,” who “In sacred church, when her pure thoughts shold pray, / Peire through her fingeers, so to hide her shame.” Like a young woman “Peir[ing]” through her fingures in order to gaze at other men, so too do Pigmalion and readers “view, and winke, and view againe,” at the sculpture and poem, for “A chaster thought could not his eyes retaine.” Whereas Pigmalion “winks” at his statue for fun, “the city-dame,” and readers too, do so “for shame.” “The city-dame’s mixed feelings of desire and shame,” Melissa Jones points out, “can be seen to forecast the reader’s structural recognition of her own peeking pleasure.”263 By comparing readers with the “subtile Citty-dame,” and later the “peevish Papists,” Marston presents his satirical view of the degradation and moral nadir of the erotic epyllion’s readership in the 1590s.

Whereas Marlowe had emulated perspective artists by paralleling their technical demonstrations with his own rhetorical “colors,” Marston instead turns his perspectival poem into an anamorphic satire. He foregrounds the rhetorical approaches of earlier epyllia to satirize both poets’ and readers’ desire to bring these erotic literary creations to life. Like an anamorphic image that captures its viewer’s voluptuary gaze, his own poem confronts readers’ desire and

critiques the genre’s characteristic linguistic foreplay and eroticism. He argues that in his poem, like the erotic epyllia before it, “all’s conceit”:

Yet all’s conceit. But shadow of that blisse
Which now my Muse strives sweetly to display
In this my wondrous metamorphosis.
Daine to beleeeve me, now I sadly say:
    The stonie substance of his Image feature,
    Was straight transform’d into a living creature. (28)

Echoing his opening panegyric to “Good Opinion” — “the All / of all, and All in all, by whom all things are” — Marston now reveals that, in his precursors’ erotic epyllia, “all’s conceit”: mere “ornament,” a “shadow” of the imagined events. While at first, as Stephen Guy-Bray puts it, “Marston appears to be saying that the embraces themselves are ‘conceit’ in the sense, now familiar to us from the poem, of being only in Pigmalion’s head,” invoking the previous ideal of conceit as concetto, “It immediately becomes clear, however, that conceit in this case refers to the poem itself. The ‘blisse’ of the lovers is real, and it is Marston’s poem that is only a shadow.”

By referring to the erotic desire prevalent in the epyllion genre as a “shadow” of his protagonist’s actual bliss, Marston explicitly recalls Chapman’s letter to Royden prefacing Ovid’s Banquet of Sense. In contrast to Chapman who applauds his poem’s many rhetorical “shadows,” which ought to be praised by those with a “judicial perspective,” Marston instead suggests that they are in fact insubstantial, merely another rhetorical performance. Whereas Chapman asserts the validity of “harty invention” in an “absolute Poem,” Marston instead claims “All’s conceit” in invention by the end of the sixteenth century, and that artistic meaning and interpretation are contingent upon Good Opinion, “by whom all things are.”

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264 Guy-Bray, Against Reproduction, 135.
Marston’s avowal that “all’s conceit” in poetry, and in particular erotic epyllia, has surprising implications for what he is suggesting about the nature of art, representation, and invention in Elizabethan England. Specifically, it calls into question the stability of a completed poem, or “the thing done,” as Ben Jonson writes. Sidney’s and Marston’s contrasting views about the essence of poetic meaning reveal a surprising connection between visual perspective and Renaissance poetics. Perspectival and rhetorical demonstraciones, ornamental “sugar and spice” believed capable of enriching invention, are instead mere “conceits.” Consequently, developments in perspective into trompe l’oeil and anamorphosis displace invention from within the work itself, a stable truth to be discovered in order to communicate moral exampla, to the unstable, individual experience and interpretation of each new viewer or reader.

Like invention, the meaning of “conceit” was in similar flux at the end of the sixteenth century. Abraham Fraunce likens a rhetorical conceit to the older meaning of invention-as-discovery. An axiom, he writes, “heere signifieth any sentence or proposition whatsoeuer, wherein one argument, reason, conceipt, thing, is so conioyned with, or seuered from another.” Conceit, like invention, lies in the discovery and arrangement of matter, of “things.” In contrast, James Sanford draws on Plato to instead equate “conceit” with an artist’s original Idea: “Plato putteth his chiefest ende in a certayne thinge whiche he calleth Idea, whiche is

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nothinge els, but a concept of mynd in Imagination.”267 And just as Greene has shown how Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* 1 exemplifies the period’s shifts in meanings of invention, so too does his *Defense* use “conceit” interchangeably with invention when he refers to “That high flying liberty of conceit proper to the Poet.”268 In the two decades prior to the Elizabethan epyllion’s concerted negotiation with the meaning of invention, then, “conceit” functioned as a similar semantic palimpsest to invention, referring both to a material, discoverable “thing” and an artist’s original, mental “Idea.”

In the 1590s, however, the notion of “conceit” as trivial wit lacking substance began to override the other definitions that were nearly synonymous with invention. Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for example, attests to this recent emergence, when Egeus accuses Lysander of “bewitch[ing] the bosom of my child,” pitting Lysander’s amorous “conceites” side-by-side with the mere likes of “gawdes,” “knackes,” and “trifles.”269 John Green similarly belittles the notion of poetic and dramatic “conceit” to “amorous” verses alone, “none to any good intent, but all fruitlessly to mispend their time.”270 And Thomas Morley — chorister, composer, and organist of St. Paul’s shortly before Marston would become one of the Chapel’s shareholders and leading playwrights — anticipates Marston’s usage of the term when he writes

267 James Sandford, *Mirrour of Madness, or a Paradoxe Maintayning Madnes to be Most Excellent* (London: In Fleetestreate, neare to S. Dunstones Church by Thomas Marshe, 1576), B1r.


of other musicians, who by “Conceit of their own sufficiency hath overthrown many.”

Between the 1580s and 1590s, “conceit” had transformed from a synonym of invention into a parody of it, not a “thing” of matter to be discovered and used, nor a preconceived, Platonic “Idea,” but instead a “trifle,” a false feeling of artistic sufficiency.

At the culmination of his satirical *Metamorphosis*, Marston exploits these various meanings of “conceit” at the end of the sixteenth century. While “conceit” could mean, like Sidney uses it, “something conceived in the mind, a notion, conception, idea, thought,” it could also instead refer to the reader’s own “mental image,” or “mental capacity” and “action of conceiving or understanding,” rather than the author’s “idea” itself. Further, it could also signify the reader’s “emotional state or disposition” and “frame of mind” as well as, returning to the satirical patron of Marston’s book, one’s “personal opinion or judgement.”

The reader’s conception of his poem, Marston suggests, is not dependent upon the “idea or “fore-conceit” of the poet as Sidney writes, but rather the subjective disposition of his readers. Its meaning is inextricably bound up with their “emotional state” and “personal opinion.”

By transferring his poem’s meaning onto the “conceit” of his readers, Marston transforms his poem into a verbal imitation of contemporary works of anamorphic art, and anticipates Jacques Lacan’s theory of anamorphosis as it relates to the subject’s gaze. The actual poetic

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272 According to *Early English Books Online*, the term’s appearance in print exponentially increased from 73 records in the 1570s, to 164 in the 1580s, to 378 in the 1590s. According to Google Ngram, the word “conceit” appeared in a higher proportion of print in the 1590s, and 1595 specifically, than in any other decade in published English record.


274 Ibid., 3, 5.a.
image of Pigmalion’s sculpture coming to life, Marston writes, is not within the poet’s own
“fore-conceit” embedded within the poem, but is entirely shaped the reader’s own imagination:

Let him conceit but what himselfe would doe
When that he had obtayned such a favour,
Of her to whom his thoughts were bound unto,
If she, in recompence of his loves labour,
Would daine to let one payre of sheets containe
The willing bodies of those loving twaine.

... What he would doe, the selfe same action
Was not neglected by Pigmalion. (34, 36)

The sudden transfer of poetic authority, “Let him conceit but what himself would do…What he
would doe, the selfe same action / Was not neglected by Pigmalion,” transforms readers into
makers within the poetic world itself. The textual metaphors of bookbinding and reading —
punning on how Pigmalion’s erotic “thoughts were bound” between “one payre of sheets,” both
in his bed with his statue and in Marston’s printed work — further impresses Marston’s satirical
point about the sexually charged act of reading Elizabethan epyllia in the 1590s. Although
Marston defers describing the scene itself, the “one payre of sheets” being read nonetheless
extracts what readers themselves “would doe.” Marston’s text extracts its invention from its
readers, rather than the other way around. By capturing his reader’s gazes and forcing them to
supply the poem’s meaning and content with their own erotic thoughts, Marston metamorphoses
not just Pigmalion and his statue, but readers themselves into the subject of his poem’s
representation.

Unlike Marlowe’s Hero and Leander, which rigorously eroticizes his beautiful
protagonists and presents them as visual objects for his readers’ gazes, Marston’s poem inverts
the perspective and stares back. By returning the gaze and mirroring readers’ own erotic
thoughts, the poem becomes an anamorphosis, inverting the process of invention and
transforming voyeur-readers into gazed-upon works of art themselves. Readers’ ideas, not the artist’s own, become the sight and site of meaning.²⁷⁵ Like viewers standing before Caravaggio’s *Medusa* (Fig. 12) — potentially painted the same year as Marston’s poem in 1598 — petrified by her glare as their act of looking becomes a part of the work itself, readers and their leering gazes are similarly metamorphosed into the “image” itself within the poem. Marston also assumes the role Foucault grants to Velazquez in his famed reading of *Las Meninas* (Fig. 13):

> the painter’s gaze, addressed to the void confronting him outside the picture, accepts as many models as there are spectators; in this precise but neutral space, the observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange. No gaze is stable, or rather, in the neutral furrow of the gaze piercing at a right angle through the canvas, subject and object, the spectators and the model, reverse their roles to infinity.²⁷⁶

It is as if Marston captures his readers’ gaze “at a right angle,” making them into subjects of his poetic object. Like Caravaggio, Velazquez, and other more explicitly anamorphic painters, Marston plays with perspective, reverses readers’ roles, and resituates them from spectators of the erotic scene to the gazed-upon objects of his poem. Marston and his readers “reverse their roles,” and he becomes the spectator confronting their erotic “conceits” and excited imaginations. In the end, it is the poem itself that becomes Pigmalion’s, Marston’s, and readers’ “image” or *imago*, a shadow of every reader, unstable and constantly being remade with each rereading.


VII

I will close with a final comparison between the perspectival techniques of Marston’s poem and the anamorphic art of the German artist Erhard Schön. Schön’s woodcut *Aus du alter Tor* (*Out You Old Fool*, Fig. 14) depicts two scenes separated by a column on a single panel: on the left Schön illustrates the Renaissance commonplace “ill-matched couple” (popularized by Schön’s mentor, Dürer, in his 1495 woodcut, Fig. 15), not unlike Pigmalion and his statue, depicting a bearded, older man feeling a younger woman who steals his purse. What Schön’s illustration adds to Dürer’s woodcut, however, are the two additional figures, as well as the complementary anamorphic image that serves to direct spectators’ interpretation of the woodcut. In the former, Schön has the young woman pick the old man’s purse and hand it to another man, perhaps a rival suitor or perhaps the woman’s procurer, behind a curtain to her left to receive the stolen money. He also includes, moreover, another figure behind a curtain to her and the older man’s right, a Peeping Tom dressed like a fool laughing apparently to himself at the old man’s folly.

Yet the distorted anamorphic side panel, visible by only “peeping” at the image from the correctly skewed angle, in fact aligns spectators of the woodcut with the Peeping Tom as well as with the ridiculous old man being pickpocketed. Viewed directly, Schön presents an imperceptible mass of cascading lines, flanked above and below by visible hunting and boating scenes. But Schön also includes, as Jennifer Nelson recently discovered, “a disembodied, stylized eye” on the left of the woodcut for viewers to position themselves in order to make perceptible the anamorphic image.277 When one assumes this vantage point, the concealed

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anamorphic image resolves into a scene of pornography, where the thief, old man, and young woman are nude; the woman and younger man grope each other while her gesture corresponds with the revealed anamorphic text of the woodcut’s title: “Aus du alter Tor” [Out you old fool]. The Peeping Tom is no longer present in the image, aligning spectators not only with the old man, as before, but also putting them into the position of the now-absent gazing fool himself. Like the Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image, which repeatedly emphasizes “the masturbatory pleasures” of the poem’s verbal fetishism and of erotic “descrying” for both Marston and his readers, Schön’s anamorphic image “wittily identifies the viewer with both male characters…this is the scene of viewing: the creep who opened his purse for this print at market is now foolishly and awkwardly squinting sidelong across an unwieldy piece of paper…at fictional mutual masturbation.”

Invention, the humanist branch of rhetoric heralded for the finding out of fit subject matter, was considered the most important component of perspective painting and of English poetics for Alberti and Sidney. Yet at the end of the sixteenth century Marston parodies this process by locating invention not in history, classical mythology, or the Bible, but in his readers’ subjective, salacious thoughts.

Schön’s visual anamorphic woodcut can be seen, then, to anticipate Marston’s poetic technique in his Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image. After purchasing Marston’s erotic epyllion to gaze at the verbal representation of a statue’s naked body, readers find themselves stared back at, and shamed as if peering through their fingers. Both works put forward critiques of “social perspective, of the viewer’s perhaps labile and fungible role in society and in societally

inflected fantasies,”²⁷⁹ for Schön of the “Mismatched couple,” and for Marston of the readers of erotic epyllia, written to rhetorical excess but lacking moral substance. It captures the shift in conceptions of artistic invention, moreover, by the end of the sixteenth century, from the exalted height of extracting a divine concetto that inheres within the work itself, into a new aesthetic where “All’s conceit,” and in which the work’s invention changes with every rereading, depending upon readers’ subjective “good opinion.” Anamorphosis’s displacement of artistic invention contributes to the Elizabethan aesthetic in which, according to the play discussed in the next chapter, textual meaning is determined by whom “opinion crowns / With an imperial voice,” and it inheres only “as ’tis valued.”²⁸⁰


CHAPTER 3

“This is and is not Cressid”: Seeing Double in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*

A transitional moment of shock signals the onset of the image: one feels the shudder of its refusal to settle into the illusion.

—Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*

I

In the previous chapter, I discussed Shakespeare’s first publications, the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. It is remarkable that Shakespeare builds both of these classical, highly rhetorical poems, in which he first presented himself to his patron and to his broader public readership, around conceits of perspective. The myth of the famous painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius occurs at the midpoint of *Venus and Adonis*, so that the allusion serves as the fulcrum of a poetic diptych and underscores the poem as an Ovidian *trompe l’oeil*, a poem that tantalizes but fails to satisfy desire. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare takes a “piece / Of skilful painting” from a passage in Philostratus (considered to be the first art critic) for his set-piece ekphrasis, and to compare painting and poetry in order to reflect on these forms of artistic representation.281 Within the Horatian tradition of *ut pictora poesis*, both of these poems — as well as the genre of the Elizabethan epyllion as a whole —

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participate in the Renaissance paragone between painters and poets, and the frequent Renaissance translation of ideas and artistic techniques from the visual medium of painting to this novel poetic form.

In this chapter, I want to maintain this focus on the transfer of artistic ideas, techniques, and theories that arose from the paragone between painting and poetry. Instead of tracing how developments in Elizabethan epyllia parallel the evolution of visual perspective into anamorphosis, and how Marston’s anamorphic satire reflects the concomitant changes in notions of Renaissance invention for both painting and poetry, this chapter will examine how Shakespeare the dramatist, rather than poet, translates perspectival images and ideas from his contemporary visual culture into his own metatheatrical dramaturgy. I will begin, however, with a brief outline of Shakespeare’s own familiarity with perspective and artistic theories beyond what has been covered so far in order to serve as a point of departure for where his visual ideas originate, and how he integrates them into his dramatic form.

II

Shakespeare, as has been well documented, was familiar with Renaissance art theories, as well as with many specific perspectival devices and images, evinced throughout his poetic and dramatic career. In two of Shakespeare’s later plays, Timon of Athens and The Winter’s Tale, he draws on contemporary art theories more than a decade after his initial interest in perspective in his narrative poems.282 In The Winter’s Tale, Shakespeare alludes to the famous story of Zeuxis,

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282 Although Timon of Athens is now widely accepted as a collaborative effort between Shakespeare and Middleton, the extended dialogue between the Poet and Painter in the first scene is confidently attributed to Shakespeare. See Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, eds., Timon of Athens (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 5–6, 402.
who selected only the best features from five different Crotonian (or Sicilian, depending upon
whether one reads Cicero or Pliny) maidens to portray ideal beauty, when Paulina idealizes the
supposedly deceased Hermione:

If, one by one, you wedded all the world,
Or, from the all that are, took something good,
To make a perfect woman, she you kill’d
Would be unparallel’d.²⁸³

The play also contains Shakespeare’s only allusion to a contemporary artist, the apprentice of
Raphael and the master of illusion, “that rare / Italian master, Julio Romano.”²⁸⁴ The Third
Gentleman, describing what he believes to be a statue of the late Hermione, evokes the origins of
the Renaissance paragone, the contest over the primacy of painting and sculpture. Romano, he
claims, is like Pigmaliion, who “could put breath into his work” so that the statue seems alive:
“he so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that they say one would speak to her and stand in
hope of answer.”²⁸⁵ It is, of course, Shakespeare and the boy actor playing Hermione, not

5.1.13–16. See Hagstrum, The Sister Arts, 86. The two differing sources of the Zeuxis Selecting
Models myth circulated in the Renaissance through Cicero’s De Inventione (II.I) and Pliny’s
Historia Naturalis (XXXV). See Elizabeth Mansfield, “The Zeuxis Myth,” in Too Beautiful to
As Rocco Coronato puts it, the myths were “obsessively repeated” in the decades leading up to
Shakespeare’s play. See Shakespeare, Caravaggio, and the Indistinct Regard (London:
Routledge, 2018), 35–6. They appear, for example, in the entry on “Zeuxis” in Thomas Cooper’s
influential Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Brittanicae (London: [Henry Denham], 1578), in
John Lyly’s Queen Elizabeth’s Entertainment at Mitcham, ed. Leslie Hotson (New Haven: Yale
UP, 1953), 24, twice in Spenser’s Faerie Queene, ed. A.C. Hamilton (Harlow: Longman, 2007),
IV.v.12.6–8 and Dedicatory Sonnet 17, and twice in Robert Allott’s popular miscellany of
contemporary English poetry, England’s Parnassus (London: For N. L[ing], C. B[urby], and T.
H[ayes], 1600), 411, 414.

²⁸⁴ Shakespeare, The Winter’s Tale, 5.2.95.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.2.97–9.
Romano’s statue, who “could put breath into his work,” subordinating the *paragone* between sculpture and painting to his own dramatic art within the world of his theater.\(^{286}\)

It is in the earlier *Timon of Athens*, however, in which Shakespeare most clearly puts the Renaissance *paragone* onstage. Although it began as a contest between painters and sculptors, for Shakespeare and his contemporaries the *paragone* had developed, most notably through Plutarch’s famous citation of Simonides of Ceos, into a competition between painters and poets. Shakespeare opens his play with an extensive dialogue between an anonymous Poet and Painter over the virtues of each other’s art’s ability to praise their generous patron Timon. Admiring the Painter’s portrait of Timon, the Poet praises

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how this grace
    Speaks his own standing! What a mental power
This eye shoots forth! How big imagination
Moves in this lip!\(^{287}\)
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As Jean Hagstrum explains, the Poet evaluates the painting like Shakespeare’s contemporary art critics, praising its vividness and for bringing human virtues like “order, character, meaning, morality, and purpose” to life in painting through physical details and minute visual expressions: “Posture reveals grace, an eye expresses mental power, a lip suggests the power of mental

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\(^{286}\) On the relation between Shakespeare’s wonderfully dramatic statue scene and the *paragone*, see Stuart Sillars, *Shakespeare and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 256, and Leonard Barkan, “‘Living Sculptures’: Ovid, Michelangelo, and *The Winter’s Tale*,” *ELH* 48, no. 4 (1981): 655–64. As Barkan concludes, the statue scene “is Shakespeare’s fulfillment of the *paragone*, one of his most intricate essays in artistic self-consciousness... Shakespeare’s medium, with its three — we would say four — dimensions, is the equivalent of sculpture, for as painting is to sculpture, so is narrative fiction to drama. Yet if drama is the equivalent of sculpture, it can yet triumph over the frozen medium just as great statues (like Hermione herself) can triumph over their frozenness.”

conceiving.” Shakespeare’s Poet praises the Painter’s art not for its exacting representation of Timon’s physical appearance, but for making invisible things, such as interior character, visible. At the same time, however, it is Shakespeare’s own audience, perhaps squinting at the painted image onstage while listening to the Poet’s description of “th’ dumbness of the gesture / One might interpret,” who may instead praise the Poet for his own “speaking picture” in describing the image onstage.

Yet as critics have shrewdly pointed out, in the context of the actual scene Shakespeare does more than simply recapitulate the paragone or elevate one art over the other. In fact, it should come as a surprise that Shakespeare has the Poet praise the Painter. Shakespeare exposes the two sides as “smug flatterers and scroungers” of Timon, spewing falsities about themselves and each other only for personal, financial gain. On the one hand, this reduces the paragone to flattery: “mere prattle without praxis,” both arts deceive rather than truthfully produce what they claim in theory, and extol their own virtues for their own gain. As Catherine Belsey puts it, “it seems inconceivable that the audience should regard either of them as authoritative; on the contrary, the paragone is mocked even as it is reproduced.” On the other hand, while Shakespeare mocks the Painter and Poet, and the contemporary competition between painting and poetry, he also does so within yet another medium: his actors voice the flattering exchange

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onstage within a work of drama. Shakespeare therefore adds “another order of artifice, the theatre, while revealing the falsity of the speakers’ opinions of themselves … through the medium of a form that adds another term to the oppositions it interrogates.” In these plays Shakespeare therefore not only demonstrates his own understanding of the nature of the Renaissance paragone, inserting himself and his drama into the conversation, but also a fully developed understanding of Renaissance art theory.

More particularly, no other early modern poet or playwright alludes to and adapts the art of perspective more often than Shakespeare, who does so continuously throughout his career. After his earliest published poems, he refers to perspective specifically in no fewer than six of his plays (from history to comedy to tragedy). His allusions range from perspectival landscapes in Henry V — such as those made by Erhard Schön, Francesco Zucchi, Athanasius Kircher, Giuseppe Arcimboldo, and their followers — to beveled perspective lenses in All’s Well That Ends Well, and to anamorphic and turning panel perspectives, which I will discuss further in relation to Troilus and Cressida below, in Richard II and Antony and Cleopatra. He even

292 Sillars, Shakespeare and the Visual Imagination, 238.


creatively adapts perspectival vanishing points into his dramaturgy and across entire lengths of speeches and full-scale scenes.²⁹⁵

Although not published until the interval between Timon of Athens and The Winter’s Tale in 1609, Shakespeare composed at least part of his sonnet sequence around the same time as his narrative poems, given Francis Meres’s allusion to Shakespeare’s “sugred Sonnets” in Palladis Timia in 1598.²⁹⁶ Shakespeare’s collection of sonnets demonstrates his continued interest in adapting the conceptual properties of perspective into poetic form in the 1590s, while also thinking about how to transfer this interest to the stage. Perspective is in fact the main subject of Sonnet 24, a sonnet which few readers enjoy, fewer critics, teachers, and students value, and even fewer publishers anthologize. It is one of the most confusing, dizzying, and vertiginous of the sonnets, defying easy comprehension and thwarting a tidy conclusion in its closing couplet. Yet this is precisely Shakespeare’s point throughout his structurally ambivalent sonnet, an ambivalence foregrounded by its subject, one of the early modern period’s most inherently paradoxical arts. Shakespeare, in fact, constructs the sonnet with persistent ambiguities and duplicities in each quatrain, providing a glimpse into how he translated the burgeoning art of perspective painting into his own dramatic medium.


Throughout Sonnet 24, Shakespeare deploys phonetically, orthographically, and semantically ambiguous terms in order to replicate the destabilizing and deceiving effects of perspective art.297 This is most apparent in the first quatrain:

Mine eye hath played the painter, and hath steeld,
Thy beauties forme in table of my heart,
My body is the frame wherein ti’s held,
And perspective it is best Painters art. (ll. 1–4).298

From the poem’s initial end-rhyme, “steeld,” Shakespeare presents readers with a “constellation of possible readings” akin to images multiplied by perspectival glasses. On the one hand, in early modern English “steeld” not only could mean “to back a mirror with steel,” but also “To make hard, unbending, or strong as steel.”299 Shakespeare had, in fact, recently employed this latter sense in both of his narrative poems, and notably at specific moments in which he invokes the visual arts. Venus implores Adonis, “Give me my heart…O, give it me, lest thy hard heart do steel it, / And being steeled, soft sighes can never grave it,” (l. 374–6), and Lucrece, facing the “skilful painting” depicting the fall of Troy, observes in the image “where all distress is steld,” (l. 1444).300 The first rhyme’s counterpart, “held,” moreover, could mean simply “to have or keep...

297 Following Philostratus’s remarks that the point of perspective “is to deceive the eyes,” Shakespeare’s most famous and influential contemporary Elizabethan painter and miniaturist, Nicholas Hilliard, wrote in his Arte of Limning that perspective is essentially a device of deceit: “For perspective, to define it briefly, is an art taken from or by the effect or judgment of the eye, for a man to express anything in shortened lines and shadows, to deceive both the understanding and the eye.” See Hilliard, A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning, eds. R. K. R. Thornton and T. G. S. Cain (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981), 71.

298 Quoted in Helen Vendler, The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 141, provides both a facsimile of the original 1609 quarto printing as well as a modern version with emendations.


300 An underlying pun on “steal” is also salient in all three poems, reinforcing the deceptive qualities commonly associated with perspective in the period.
within it,” but, if rhyming with “steeld,” could also mean “to hide or conceal; to keep secret.” If emended to “stelled” as it has been since the eighteenth-century critic Edward Cappell, however, it would instead denote “to delineate and trick out the proportion as a man,” as it was coined by Richard Haydocke in his 1598 translation of Lomazzo’s Italian treatise on perspective, the first and most prominent English publication to introduce Italian art theories to England. As Rayna Kalas writes, “the slanted rhyme of the first and third lines prompts the reader to consider rectifying the rhyme in multiple ways, reading words as superfluities rather than as signs or pointers. The impression that the poem makes on its readers becomes as important as any inscription made by the poet.” The lexical ambiguity invites readers to participate in configuring the meaning of the sonnet’s very first rhyme words.

The fourth line poses similar grammatical cruces. Stephen X. Mead observes the startling appearance of “perspective,” a word which not only fits uncomfortably in the pentameter line, but which also can function grammatically as either a noun, as if the art of linear perspective itself is the subject, or as an adverb, viewing his friend’s image as if it is an anamorphic portrait “perspectively,” needing to be “seen through the right angle” or “seen through the appropriate optic glass.” Like the multiplicity of “steeld/stelled” in line one, the grammatical duality and

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metrical contortion of “perspective” in line four function as linguistic imitations of visual perspective devices. With the accent falling uncomfortably on the first syllable of “pérspective,” the initial accent is like a warped image calling attention to itself. Its grammatical duality, moreover, serves as the verbal equivalent to the “doubled subject” of an anamorphosis. Just as an anamorphosis “allows for two possible subject positions, the one that shows the image in proportion and the one that sees from the image skewed,” so too “this line has two grammatical subjects, ‘perspective’ and ‘it.’”

By celebrating “perspective” as “best painter’s art” in Sonnet 24, Shakespeare intimates that he himself “is trying to keep pace with the ‘best’ or latest techniques of the painter,” not only in his narrative poems but also in this sonnet and, as I argue in the rest of this chapter, throughout his plays onstage.

While the sudden appearance of the metrically contorted word “pérspective” in the first quatrain signals Shakespeare’s deliberate attempt to import the visual art into his sonnet, the sestet also invokes other aspects of perspective beyond the themes of ambivalence and deceit. The final quatrain introduces an unexpected guest in the form of a third character, the Sun:

Now see what good-turns eyes for eies have done:
Mine eyes have drawne thy shape, and thine for me
Are windowes to my brest, where-through the Sun
Delights to peepe, to gaze therein on thee
Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art
They draw but what they see, know not the hart. (l. 9–14)

The entrance of the Sun who “Delights to peep, to gaze” through “windowes” on the Fair Youth evokes the kind of perspective images discussed in previous chapters, particularly in relation to Marston’s *Metamorphosis of Pigmalion’s Image*: anamorphic portraits which force viewers to


307 Ibid., 178.
view elongated forms at particular angles, and perhaps even through special “windows” such as a viewing hole, as in Erhard Schön’s woodcut, or a glass viewing device, as in William Scrots’ portrait of Edward VI, in order to reveal their subjects. Like Schön’s woodcut and Marston’s Metamorphosis, Sonnet 24 confronts viewers and readers with their own desiring gaze through the figure of the “peep[ing] sun,” in effect another stand-in for readers of the poem themselves.

The sonnet finally resolves in a contradictory couplet, admitting the limits of perspective in painting, in contrast to its efficacy in poetry: “They draw but what they see, know not the hart.” As Mead puts it, only a “reproduced, perspectivally enhanced, but nevertheless superficial image of the beloved” lies within the speaker’s heart and body: “The poetic interior contains only a painterly exterior. Shakespeare imagines a perspective painter who, literally, cannot see into his subject.” Shakespeare’s Sonnet 24, in other words, meditates on perspective’s associations not only with deception and ambiguity, but also with desire and the art form’s capacity to multiply visible surfaces rather than provide an accurate representation of a subject’s interior depth. With its “criss-crossing double meanings” and its emphasis on confusion and ambiguity, Sonnet 24 is also like a perspective image, conflating “two images into one.”

This emphasis on early modern perspective’s duplicity — both in its modern usage, meaning “deceitful,” as well as its etymological roots, *duplex* and *duplicitas*, meaning “twofold” and “doubleness” — offers a glimpse into what Shakespeare found useful about it for his own dramatic art. If Sonnet 24 shows Shakespeare experimenting with the deceitful and ambiguous properties of visual perspective in his poetry, then Bushy’s famous speech on perspective in Richard II, likely composed around the same time as Sonnet 24, can be seen as his first attempt at testing this experiment onstage.

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In Richard II, one of King Richard’s counsellors and favorites, Bushy, attempts to assuage the Queen, who “With nothing trembles” and “At something…grieves,” after her husband’s departure for the Irish Wars. To do so, he employs a dazzling metaphor that incorporates the Queen’s own two fears, of “nothing” and of “something,” in order to console her:

Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
Which shows like grief itself, but is not so;
For Sorrow’s eyes, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects,
Like perspectives, which, rightly gazed upon,
Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry,
Distinguish form. So your sweet majesty,
Looking awry upon your lord’s departure,
Find shapes of grief more than himself to wail,
Which, looked on as it is, is naught but shadows
Of what it is not. (2.2.14–24)

In his attempt to allay the Queen’s grief, Bushy conflates two devices known to Shakespeare in order to create his own perspectival speech onstage. The queen’s one true “substance of a grief,” Bushy argues, is refracted by her tears as through a faceted perspective glass into “twenty shadows.” These illusory shadows of the true substance are, Bushy continues, “Like perspectives,” but now of a different kind: “which, rightly gazed upon, / Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry, / Distinguish form.” Bushy moves from comparing the Queen’s grief as a substance divided by false perspective glasses into anamorphic images, which “Show nothing but confusion” when viewed “rightly,” or directly, but “Distinguish form” when “eyed awry,” whether through an attachable device or from a designated sideways point of view. By the end of

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the speech, Shakespeare turns Bushy and his refracted metaphor into a confused perspective in itself. Whereas he concludes that the Queen is mistaken to be “Looking awry” and ought to look on Richard’s departure “as it is,” it is precisely the “awry,” anamorphic position he had earlier urged that is necessary to distinguish the true form of her grief. As Ernest B. Gilman writes, “In our actual experience of Bushy’s speech the criss-crossing double meanings of ‘rightly’ and ‘awry’ make the passage itself like an anamorphic perspective which conflates two images into one.”310 Shakespeare’s first play with perspective, then, not only illustrates his awareness of multiple perspective devices, but also exhibits him reworking visual perspective into a confused verbal form onstage.

This cursory sketch of Shakespeare’s engagement with Renaissance art theories in general, and of perspective in particular, demonstrates a variety of instrumental uses for him as a dramatist, as well as a variety of sources from which his ideas derive, from the classical Philostratus, Pliny, and Cicero to the early moderns Holbein, Haydocke, and Hilliard. This brief look at the range of references spanning his career, moreover, points to a familiarity both for himself and his audience members: it suggests that this visual-verbal discourse served as a source of creative adaptation and inventive possibilities for Shakespeare and his audiences. As John Dixon Hunt puts it, the paragone between poets and painters, and the tradition of ut pictora poesis in the Renaissance, gave rise not simply to “the copying in one form of the other’s devices, not the transcription, but the translation of ideas and images into the other medium.”311


The remainder of this chapter will focus on this very “translation of ideas and images” from Renaissance visual perspective into one of Shakespeare’s most overlooked perspectival plays, *Troilus and Cressida*.

By taking Shakespeare’s references in Sonnet 24 as a point of departure for this chapter, I follow other critics who have similarly used this otherwise unspectacular poem to introduce their own perspectival readings of Shakespeare’s more interesting dramatic productions. Previous scholars, that is, have also traced Shakespeare’s references to perspective, explored how he turns them into governing metaphors for the works in which they appear, and observed how he adapts visual perspective into his dramatic media. While there have been recent, specialized studies of Shakespeare’s perspectival dramaturgy, particularly in relation to dramatizing vanishing points onstage, Gilman’s seminal work, *The Curious Perspective: Literary and Pictorial Wit in the Seventeenth Century*, provided the foundation for the study of perspectival metaphors and techniques in Shakespeare’s plays.312 Gilman first argued that contemporary perspectival images provide a conceptual “doublethink” for Shakespeare and his plays, and that “the double vision demanded by the curious perspective offers a model for the experience of a witty poem — or even a witty play.”313 Gilman focuses on a history, *Richard II*, and two comedies, *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In *Richard II*, “the painter’s anamorphic ‘perspectives’ lend the playwright not just a local metaphor but…a conceptual model for seeing the chronicle of English history.”314 Bushy’s allusion to perspective serves as a model for the complex double

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312 Two studies from the past decade, for example, Mead’s “Shakespeare’s Play with Perspective,” 256, and Sillars’ *Shakespeare and the Visual Imagination*, 149, 161, argue that the vanishing point becomes of special interest as a visual technique for Shakespeare’s dramaturgy.


314 Ibid., 97.
vision necessary in the play’s larger exploration of the processes, ambiguities, complications, motivations, and interpretations of English history, in contrast to the orthodox view chronicled by Raphael Holinshed and others. Bushy’s speech thus governs and illuminates the whole play.

Similarly, Duke Orsino’s allusion to “natural perspective” in *Twelfth Night* serves as “a tautological reflection of its own thematic concern with the illusions of love”; it is the play’s “emblem…in the complexities of sight,” providing a model for the experience of Shakespeare’s other comedies and their comparable “lessons in perception.”

By contrast, for my reading of *Troilus and Cressida*, I want to highlight the special emphasis Shakespeare places on perspective’s duplicity, both in terms of illusion and stereoscopic doubleness, and its ability to conflate images visually, whether merging a human being’s visage into an anamorphic landscape, as in *Henry V* and contemporary woodcuts, or what I will argue happens when he puts perspective onstage, blurring a fictional character with the performing actor. In Sonnet 24, “stelled” is “steeled,” “held” is “heeld,” and “perspective” is both a noun and adverb; Bushy’s metaphor likewise uses perspective to conflate false beveled glasses with anamorphic images. According to these distinctively Shakespearean usages, identities and points of reference eagerly multiply when he invokes perspective in his plays. I want to focus on this doubleness, which Shakespeare adapts from the visual arts for both his poetry and drama.

In the rest of this chapter, I aim to extend two of Gilman’s fundamental insights: first, that Shakespeare’s allusions to perspective serve as governing metaphors for larger themes of the plays in which they occur, and second, that perspective and anamorphic images can be viewed as models for Shakespearean metatheater. Whereas Gilman focuses on two of Shakespeare’s most

315 Ibid., 139.
explicit references to perspective in his histories and comedies, my interest is on an overlooked reference in *Troilus and Cressida* that links Renaissance perspective with Shakespearean metatheeater. In *Troilus and Cressida*, perspective is not only a governing metaphor underscoring the inherent ambiguities of history, as in *Richard II*, or the inherent problems of perception, as in *Twelfth Night*. Instead, perspective’s conceptual properties of “doublethink” and “double vision” underscore the play’s underlying metatheatrical significance, and serves as a model for Shakespeare’s metatheatrical dramaturgy. In his primary source for the play, Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, Shakespeare found a war between Greeks and Trojans involving a vulnerable heroine, subjected to her circumstances and to competing perspectives within a patriarchal framework. He also found an essentially perspectival character who lends herself to proliferating meanings and invites a double vision toward her character and the boy actor performing her among warring theaters in Elizabethan London.

III

Near the end of Shakespeare’s play *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1602), having just witnessed Cressida desert him and transfer her affection to the Greek prince Diomedes, Troilus struggles to reconcile how his idealized image of his beloved has been suddenly shattered:

This she? No, this is Diomed’s Cressida.  
If beauty have a soul, this is not she;  
If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,  
If sanctimony be the gods’ delight,  
If there be rule in unity itself,  
This is not she. O, madness of discourse,  
That cause sets up with and against itself!  
Bifold authority, where reason can revolt  
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
Without revolt! This is and is not Cressid.316

Troilus’s love problems are making him see double. In his eyes there are two Cressidas: “Diomed’s Cressida,” who has effectively ended their relationship under his furtive gaze, and his own ideal of her, to which he clings. Troilus’s difficulty is in comprehending who Cressida really “is,” given that she has not lived up to his romantic expectations. Shakespeare even conveys Troilus’s dilemma through the structure of his speech. Troilus gives rhetorical shape to Cressida’s split self in the opening parallel conditionals through the figure of isocolon. After creating two incompatible selves between “Diomed’s Cressida” and his own, he recognizes the inherent contradiction of his logic in the form of a chiasmus — “where reason can revolt / Without perdition, and loss assume all reason / Without revolt!” — a rhetorical trope that epitomizes, for Troilus, the vacillating nature of Cressida’s identity; the additional foot in these two enjambed, irregular hexameter lines further stresses his overflowing emotional difficulty. His resolution that “This is and is not Cressid” finally returns to the popular trope of smitten lovers, the oxymoron: how can “this strange nature,” Cressida’s seemingly indivisible, “inseparate” self, be divided “more wider than the sky and earth” (5.2.155–6)? In his attempt to reconcile these contradictions, Troilus duplicates Cressida in his mind, his eyes, and his language. What Troilus ultimately seeks and desires in Cressida is a unified self. His problem, however, is that she is a dramatic character (played by a boy actor) in one of Shakespeare’s most insistently metatheatrical, disjunctive, and, as I will argue, perspectival plays.317

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316 William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. David Bevington, Rev. ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 5.2.144–53. All further references to Shakespeare’s works in this chapter will be to the Arden Shakespeare Series and given as in-text parenthetical citations.

317 I use the terms “metatheater” and “metatheatrical” not in the original senses of mid-late twentieth century criticism that focused on the performative, theatricalized nature of Shakespearean plays and characters on the one hand, and explored the nature of Shakespeare’s
Although Troilus never finds the truth for which he yearns about Cressida’s essential self, Shakespeare cues his audience how to reconcile this paradox. Troilus’s claim that “This is and is not Cressid” prompts audiences to view Cressida, and the play as a whole, as a perspectival double image. By the time of Shakespeare’s play the phrase “is and is not” had come to serve as a specific reference to perspective in his work. Troilus’s language echoes the climactic finale of *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601–2), a play contemporary with *Troilus and Cressida* and likely in repertory at the same time, in which Duke Orsino, at the simultaneous sight of the twin siblings Viola and Sebastian, exclaims, “One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons, / A natural perspective, that is and is not!” (5.1.212–13, italics added).\(^{318}\) For Orsino, perspective creates the illusion of

\(^{318}\) On the basis of the Stationers’ Register entry for *Troilus and Cressida* on 7 February 1603, which states that the play had already been previously “acted by my lord Chamberlens Men,” and John Manningham’s diary entry recording his attendance at *Twelfth Night* on 2 February 1602, Roslyn Lander Knutson suggests that *Twelfth Night* and *Troilus and Cressida* overlapped in the Chamberlain’s Men’s repertory in 1602. See *The Repertory of the Chamberlain’s Men, 1594–1613* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991), 81, 206.
“two persons” in “One face, one voice.” Or, to put it another way, perspective creates the possibility of viewing “two persons” within “One face, one voice.”

The term “perspective” was more polyvalent in its meanings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it is today. Not only could it refer to our modern sense of “point of view,” but also to pictures constructed “according to the rules of perspective,” or devices used to produce “an unusual optical effect.” In arguing for Shakespeare’s play and the character Cressida as works of perspective, I have in mind early modern pieces “designed to appear distorted or confused except when viewed from a certain position, or presenting totally different aspects from different positions,” such as Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* (1533, Fig. 3) and the anamorphic portrait of Edward VI, attributed to William Scrots (1546, Fig. 16).

Shakespeare and his contemporaries also allude to perspectives that depict conflicting or

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319 The first source to popularize the idea of perspective as what “is and is not” in English, and which to my knowledge has not yet been mentioned in relation to Shakespeare’s usage in these plays, actually appears earlier in the century in Sir Thomas Hoby’s influential translation of Baldasarre Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano*. In his preface to Signor Don Michel de Silva, Bishop of Viseu, Castiglione likens himself to a painter too inadequate to portray the late Duke of Urbino and others of his court who are now dead. He claims to send his book “as a purtrait in peintcinge of the Court of Urbin: not of the handiwoorke of Raphael, or Michael Angelo, but of an unknowen peincter, and that can do no more but draw the principall lines, without setting furth the truth with bewtifull colours, or makinge it appeere by the art of Prospective that it is not” (italics added). See Sir Thomas Hoby, *The courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio diuided into foure bookes. Very necessary and profitable for yonge gentilmen and gentilwomen abiding in court, palaice or place* (London: Wylyam Seres, 1561), B4r.


321 Ibid., 2.b. Shakespeare likely saw both of these portraits when his company performed at Whitehall Palace. With regard to the portrait of Edward VI in particular, Roy Strong writes that “throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century this portrait or anamorphosis…was shown to every official tourist visiting Whitehall Palace.” See *The Elizabethan Image: An Introduction to English Portraiture, 1558–1603* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969), 19, and Alison Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking through Language* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 137.
complementary double images, depending upon the tilt of the surface or vantage point, such as the relatively overlooked *Anamorphosis, Called Mary, Queen of Scots* (1580, Fig. 17). As Marjorie Garber writes, these paintings create “a visual metaphor or analogy” between the different images that asks to be interpreted and discovered by the viewer. By evoking the notion of Cressida and the boy actor playing her as a “natural perspective,” Shakespeare also creates a visual analogy between the performed female character and the performing boy actor.

Like these works of perspective, Cressida can be viewed alternately by spectators as the vulnerable, eroticized female character within the play, or the vulnerable, eroticized boy actor onstage in Elizabethan London. This dramatic possibility is precisely what Shakespeare enjoins through Troilus’s speech: that the “One face” and “one voice” of Cressida in the play actually contains “two persons,” both the fictional female character in ancient Troy and the boy actor performing the role in contemporary Elizabethan London: “This is and is not Cressid.”

**IV**

After the twentieth-century debates centering on Shakespeare’s structural and thematic use of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* in general, and his ambivalent characterization of Cressida in particular, more recent scholarship has considered Cressida’s character in the context of the material conditions of Shakespeare’s theater. In particular, scholars have drawn

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attention to the “doubleness” of Shakespeare’s Cressida and “a double awareness both of the world represented in the play and the play occurring in the theater and also of the characters as themselves and as figures actively being produced by the actors.” This “doubleness” and “double awareness,” I contend, is at the heart of the play’s metatheatrical and perspectival nature. Shakespeare himself foregrounds such an awareness through the play’s multiple references to perspective and optics, but these visual themes have only just begun to be explored. Imtiaz Habib argues that Troilus’s assertion that “This is and is not Cressid” reflects the dominant mode of characterization throughout the play, in which “a splitting or bifurcation typifies the depiction of character.” For Habib, this “split character” results from “Shakespeare’s attempt to explore and describe the inevitable schism that exists between the created and the spontaneous self,” or, in other words, between Cressida’s public persona and essential identity.326 Alison Thorne similarly views Cressida as possessing a “radically split” psyche.327 Whereas Habib locates this rupture between the public and the private self, Thorne contends that Cressida’s split character results from her inhabiting a play in which all identities are emptied of inherent meaning; put another way, Cressida suffers from alienation, viewing herself through others’ gazes. By contrast, B.J. Sokol has most recently situated the play among discussions of early modern optics, particularly the phenomenon of stereopsis, in which each eye perceives


objects differently. Cressida, Sokol argues, is the only character in the play able to resolve multiple viewpoints and achieve a “stereoscopic self-vision” of herself and her future.  

While each of these scholars links Troilus and Cressida to Elizabethan visual culture, none consider it in the material and commercial contexts of early modern London, from the network of playing companies and actors to the part-scripts which they used to con their lines. Nor do they address what I find to be the most crucial aspect of split character in the play: the fact that every female character in the play, most importantly Cressida, was portrayed by a boy actor.

Whereas critics have identified the source of Cressida’s bifurcated character as the result of a collapse between her public and private self, on the one hand, or as the result of her forced circumstances, on the other, I would argue that her apparent bifurcation results from the material conditions of dramatic production as well as the play’s theatrical context in the early seventeenth century. I thus extend Robert Weimann’s inquiry into the “bifold authority” of the early modern stage, the tension between the imagined “world-in-the-play” and the those physically “playing-in-the-world”: in this case, between the imaginary realm represented, ancient Troy, and the material bodies presenting it, the Chamberlain’s Men in Elizabethan London.

By drawing

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329 Robert Weimann, Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare’s Theatre (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 55. By comparing the aesthetics of visual perspective with Shakespearean metatheater I am also adding to Kimberly Johnson’s more recent work which argued that “perspective…finds its literary correlative in the lyric,” in that both acknowledge “the tension between formal technique and narrative content.” The same is true, I contend, of early modern drama and what Shakespeare’s Troilus refers to as its “bifold authority” between competing systems of signification, between the presentational form of the material stage and its actors and the represented content of the narrative fiction. See Kimberly Johnson, “Linear Perspective and the Renaissance Lyric,” PMLA 134, no. 2 (2019): 288.
attention to his play as a play and his actors as actors, Shakespeare invites audiences to view them stereoscopically, with one eye on the fictional characters and the other on the performing players, so that ancient Troy simultaneously evokes Shakespeare’s contemporary theatrical world. For Weimann, this tension between imaginary character and material actor “constituted a source of strength” for the Elizabethan theater and its “practices marked by doubleness and contrariety.” This doubleness could create either involvement or detachment, awareness of either similarities or differences between the two worlds. I contend that in Troilus and Cressida Shakespeare harnesses this source of strength by inviting audiences to translate the similarities between the doubled, rather than the contrary, realms: specifically, to observe continuities between Patroclus and the satirical boy actors of the children’s theater, between the Greek generals and the satirized professional actors in the Chamberlain’s Men, and, most importantly, between Cressida and the boy actor who embodied her. Rather than examine the gaps between Shakespeare’s text and its embodied performance, I develop Weimann’s claim that “it was possible for the material and the imaginary, body and representation, profoundly to interlock and engage one another.” I argue that Shakespeare welded these two worlds, the imaginary and material, into the language and action of the play itself.

Troilus and Cressida, then, is not simply about rival factions between Greeks and Trojans; it is also simultaneously about rival factions among the professional and boys’ playing companies. Composed amidst what the playwright Thomas Dekker called “that terrible Poetomachia,” the “poets’ war” in the early seventeenth century, Shakespeare’s Troilus and

\[330\] Ibid., 3.

\[331\] Ibid., 70.
Cressida comments on the precarious position of boy actors on both public and private stages. Viewed in this context, the play does not simply praise the “value of theatrical labor,” as Yachnin has argued, but also foregrounds the exploitation of child actors on Elizabethan stages. Whereas Chaucer’s Criseyde is vulnerable in Troy, a city at war with the Greeks, Shakespeare’s Cressida is metatheatrically vulnerable as a boy actor, performing within a market of warring theaters that capitalize on his own commodification and exploitation.

V

From the outset of the play, Shakespeare encourages audiences to engage with the play on these two levels: the represented, fictional world of ancient Troy as well as the contemporary, material world of the Elizabethan theater. He stages a play-within-the-play that depicts the Chamberlain’s Men railing against their competition: the recently revived children’s companies satirizing their abilities on indoor stages.

In the first scene depicting the Greek camp, Ulysses diagnoses the Greeks’ misfortunes in the Trojan War. He points to the fact that Achilles has been a spectator rather than a soldier. Achilles spends his time in his private “tent,” lazing like a playgoer, watching Patroclus impersonate Ulysses and the other Greek generals:

The great Achilles, whom opinion crowns
The sinew and the forehand of our host,
Having his ear full of his airy fame,
Grows dainty of his worth and in his tent
Lies mocking our designs. With him Patroclus,
Upon a lazy bed, the livelong day
Breaks scurril jests,

332 Thomas Dekker, Satiro-mastix, Or the Untrussing of the Humorous Poet (London: Printed [by Edward Allde] for Edward White, 1602), A3r.

333 See Yachnin, “‘The Perfection of Ten,’” 311.
And with ridiculous and awkward action,
Which, slanderer, he imitation calls —
He pageants us. Sometime, great Agamemnon,
Thy topless deputation he puts on,
And, like a strutting player, whose conceit
Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich
To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
'Twixt his stretched footing and the scaffoldage,
Such to-be-pitied and o’erwrested seeming
He acts thy greatness in; (1.3.142–58)

Ulysses understands the Greeks’ failure in the Trojan War as akin to losing a war between theaters. Nearly every line of his speech arguably evokes ongoing questions and issues about dramatic and aesthetic propriety during the Elizabethan War of the Theaters that surrounded performances of this very play. His disdain does not refer, like Hamlet’s, to stage clowns who “o’erstep…the modesty of nature” (3.2.19), but rather glances at the recently revived children’s companies, whose repertoire was, in part, distinguished by satirizing the conventions of the adult theater, from the adults’ histrionic styles to their use of apprenticed actors.334

Ulysses’ language specifically links Patroclus with a satirical boy actor and Achilles with a spectator patronizing the children’s companies who mock the Chamberlain’s Men onstage.335 Patroclus’s “scurril jests” and “strutting” antics in an enclosed “tent,” that is, align him with the

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335 Patroclus is also addressed as “boy” (5.1.14), “Male varlet” (5.1.15), and “masculine whore” (5.1.17), further associating him with boy actors in children’s companies and their sexual availability throughout the play. When Achilles frantically searches for Hector to avenge Patroclus’s death, moreover, Shakespeare coins the compound “boy-queller” (5.5.47) to sustain this connection (“boy, n.1 and int.” C3). Derived from the Old English cwellan, “to kill,” the neologism underscores, albeit hyperbolically, the potential violence and vulnerability accompanying Elizabethan boy actors. See also Brett Gamboa, who, within his wider categorization of boy actors in Shakespeare’s company, raises the possibility of “doubling Patroclus and Helen,” in Shakespeare’s Double Plays: Dramatic Economy on the Early Modern Stage (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018), 259.
parodic techniques of boy company performers in contemporary private playhouses. Achilles praises Patroclus’s performance as a work of “imitation,” a successful mimicking of the behavior, expressions, and gestures of the adult players. As Jeanne H. McCarthy notes, imitation was one of the acting styles for which child players were trained and applauded. In Ulysses’ view, however, Patroclus’s imitation is “ridiculous and awkward,” a grotesque “mocking” of the Greek generals “designs.” The language of the theater so saturates the speech that it is easy to conflate the Greek “host” and their military “designs” with the plots and plays of the Chamberlain’s Men. Ulysses’ unexpected verb at the start of the next half-line, “He pageants us,” is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a Shakespearean coinage, “To mimic or imitate in an exaggerated manner, as though acting in a pageant.” Ulysses’ disgust at being “pageanted” derives from feeling slighted as an actor, as if he were old-fashioned and incapable of keeping up with the contemporary innovations in early modern drama. As McCarthy explains, the term not only derived from medieval drama and the “‘wheeled cart’ on which a cycle play was performed,” but it also applied “to the kind of play, playlet, or succession of playlets that such a structure allowed, one that, in contrast to much later early modern drama, offered ‘fixed, static presentations.’” To be “pageanted” in early modern England, then, would suggest “a kind of playwriting in the adult tradition, that was not primarily bookish or literary but

336 Shortly before the turn of the seventeenth century, in fact, “scurril” had just recently become synonymous with “biting” satire, or “jesting and invective” language. See “scurrilous, adj.” OED Online. March 2023.


rather highly theatrical and residually oral, well-suited to most of the public playhouses.”

By pageanting the Greek generals and, by extension, the actors in the Chamberlain’s Men performing them onstage, Achilles and Patroclus are “slander[ing]” them, caricaturing their style of drama as static and dated. Ulysses’ reference to Patroclus mocking them in “wooden dialogue” and “‘Twixt his stretched footing and the scaffoldage,” moreover, also specifically recalls the prologue of Shakespeare’s recent play *Henry V* (1599), one of the first plays designed for, and perhaps the first play performed in, the Chamberlain’s Men’s new amphitheater, the Globe, and its references to “this unworthy scaffold…this wooden O” (Prologue 10–13).

Indeed, Shakespeare’s satirical play-within-the-play between Achilles and Patroclus seems to be a direct response to another pastiche of the adult theater, Jonson’s contemporary play *Poetaster* (1601), which was likely performed within the year preceding *Troilus and Cressida*. In a satirical subplot at the center of his children’s play, Jonson dramatizes two *pyrgi*, boy pages apprenticed to their master Tucca, performing an audition before Histrio, who is, as his Latin name suggests, a parody of professional actors generally. Tucca prompts the apprentices to ape familiar types from the adult companies: “In an amorous vein now, sirrah…Now the ’orrible fierce soldier, you, sirrah…Now thunder, sirrah, you, the rumbling player” (3.4.184–206). By staging the *pyrgi*’s audition as an imitation of apprenticed actors on professional stages, Jonson contrasts their broad, mechanical style with the highly skilled and literate child actors in his own

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play. As a spectator of Patroclus’s satirical private performance, Achilles similarly asks him to cycle through exaggeratedly stock roles and stereotypes, even echoing Jonson’s adverbial imperatives, “Now play me…Now play him me”:

    and when he speaks,  
    ’Tis like a chime-a-mending, with terms unsquared,  
    Which from the tongue of roaring Typhon dropped  
    Would seem hyperboles. At this dusty stuff  
    The large Achilles, on his pressed bed lolling,  
    From his deep chest laughs out a loud applause,  
    Cries ‘Excellent! ’Tis Agamemnon just.  
    Now play me Nestor; hem, and stroke thy beard,  
    As he being dressed to some oration.”  
    That’s done, as near as the extremest ends  
    Of parallels, as like as Vulcan and his wife;  
    Yet god Achilles still cries, ‘Excellent!  
    ’Tis Nestor right. Now play him me, Patroclus,  
    Arming to answer in a night-alarm.’ (1.3.158–71)

Like Jonson’s *pyrgi*, Shakespeare presents Patroclus as if he were a child player satirizing professional acting as a “pageant” of stock conventions and scenarios, which are capable of being easily reproduced by simple sounds and gestures, “hem, and stroke thy beard,” and patched up through recycled situations, “being dressed to some oration” or “Arming to answer in a night-alarm.” What Jeanne McCarthy says of Jonson’s parallel scene in *Poetaster* could just as easily apply to Patroclus’s performance in *Troilus and Cressida*: “his scene satirically parodies an adult style of performance with its reliance on stock types and pantomimic stock gestures as well as its pageant-like production of spectacular iconic scenes and over-the-top situations.”

What upsets Ulysses the most about Patroclus’s satirical performance is its defamation of himself and the other Greek generals: “And in this fashion,” Ulysses reports,

    All our abilities, gifts, natures, shapes,  
    Several and generals of grace exact,  
    Achievements, plots, orders, preventions,

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Excitements to the field, or speech for truce,  
Success or loss, what is or is not, serves  
As stuff for these two to make paradoxes. (1.3.178–84)

The “abilities,” “shapes,” and “plots” Ulysses mentions are as much self-reflexive references to the various roles and capacities the actor playing him performs, and the plays in which he partakes, as they are about his character’s own physical stature and military exploits. He is not only irate at Achilles and Patroclus for stalling the Trojan War, but also for satirizing his own professional “abilities” to put on different “shapes” as an actor, and the “plots” his company produces.

Resembling Rosincrance, who alludes to the “eyrie of children” who “berattle the common stages” in the Folio text of Hamlet, Nestor likewise scolds Patroclus for injuring their reputations.343 “Many are infect,” he adds, by Patroclus’s grotesque travesties:

Ajax is grown self-willed and bears his head  
In such a rein, in full as proud a place  
As broad Achilles; keeps his tent like him,  
Makes factious feasts, rails on our state of war,  
Bold as an oracle, and sets Thersites —  
A slave whose gall coins slanders like a mint —  
To match us in comparisons with dirt,  
To weaken and discredit our exposure,  
How rank soever rounded in with danger. (1.3.187–96)

Like Achilles, Ajax, too, has retreated from the public. He makes “factious feasts” in which he “rails on our state of war.” Nestor figures Patroclus’s satirical child’s play, and its role in the poetomachia with the adult theater, “our state of war,” as a contagion. According to Ulysses, it influences audiences “To weaken and discredit” the Chamberlain’s Men and the professional stage. Because of Patroclus’s satirical performance, others like Ajax and Thersites now compare

them “with dirt” and “discredit” them not only as generals within the play, but also as actors outside it.

Although Patroclus’s satirical performance of the Greek generals is only related through Ulysses, Shakespeare does later stage another play-within-play that reveals the metatheatrical complexity of *Troilus and Cressida* and its role in the *poetomachia*, when Thersites and Patroclus perform “the pageant of Ajax” before Achilles (3.3.273). Once again, Patroclus — as well as Thersites now — impersonates a boy actor satirizing the adult theater, while Achilles evokes Jonson’s Tucca, and directs their parodic pageant. Achilles prompts Patroclus, “Do this”:

PATROCLUS [to Thersites, as though addressing Ajax] Jove bless great Ajax!
THERSITES [Mimics Ajax’ manner] H’m!
PATROCLUS I come from the worthy Achilles —
THERSITES Ha?
PATROCLUS Who most humbly desires you to invite Hector to his tent —
THERSITES H’m! (3.3.279–7)

Shakespeare shows what remained unseen in the offstage play-within-the-play in the opening act. He stages this parodic pageant as a scene of little skill or interiority of character using fragmented prose and grunts, creating a gross caricature of his own company’s professional performance practices as depicted on contemporary children’s stages.

These plays-within-the-play of *Troilus and Cressida* show Shakespeare responding to the repertory of children’s companies and their satirical representations of the adult theater, and appropriating for himself the children’s conventions of metatheatrical mockery. He does so, however, to allow the actors in the Chamberlain’s Men to self-reflexively perform their own caricatures as portrayed on children’s stages. Their performances expose such simplistic caricatures as just that: caricatures. By having his actors ape their own imitations, Shakespeare not only parodies the children’s companies’ belittling satires, but also defends his own company of actors by highlighting their skill within this scene of complex metatheater. Achilles’ and
Patroclus’s performance suggests the simplicity of the children’s satirical representations in their attempts to reduce professional playing conventions to mere stalking and stamping, gesturing and grunting.

The extent to which there actually were “warring theaters,” and the degree to which we take seriously the Chamberlain’s Men’s couched anxieties regarding the commercial threat of the revived children’s companies, has become a source of critical contention. On the one hand, Roslyn Lander Knutson’s work helpfully challenges dated modes of viewing such topical allusions as genuine expressions of the Chamberlain’s Men’s insecurity about their new “rivals.” Rather, she reframes the rivalry in distinctly early modern terms. As associates in a cooperative yet competitive cultural enterprise, Knutson suggests, that playing companies — including both children’s and professional — alluded to, adapted, and advertised each other’s work in order to reach the widest audience and promote the growing theater industry.\(^\text{344}\) In other words, scenes satirizing the professional stage and its conventions, and the Chamberlain’s Men’s metatheatrical responses to such scenes, can be seen as mutually beneficial, advancing rather than detracting from each company’s popularity.

Although the revival of children’s companies — at least initially — likely did not pose a serious commercial threat to the Chamberlain’s Men and the adult theater, it is clear that companies on both sides fashioned themselves as partaking in a “poet’s war.” Dekker coined the term “poetomachia” in 1601, the First Quarto of Hamlet affirms a dichotomy between “the principal public audience” and “private plays” performed by “children.”\(^\text{345}\) The degree to which


\(^{345}\) See Dekker, Satiromastix, A3\(^r\), and Shakespeare, Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623, eds. Thompson and Taylor, 7.272–3.
the companies were actual rivals is of less concern than the fact that the companies found it
compelling to fashion themselves as such. By adapting strategies from children’s repertories
within a play that stages rival factions and warring theaters, Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*
exemplifies Knutson’s model of “company commerce.” It self-reflexively dramatizes the rivalry
and imitation between professional and children’s playing companies in the years surrounding
*Troilus and Cressida*, while also offering a defense against the caricatures of his own theater and
playing company.

VI

Having established how *Troilus and Cressida* comments upon the contemporary
*poetomachia* while adapting and responding to metatheatrical conventions from the children’s
repertories, the rest of this essay will read the ways in which the play constructs Cressida, and
the boy actor playing her, as erotic figures, in light of boy company repertories from the
sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Two contexts from children’s companies are directly
relevant to viewing the eroticization of Cressida as explicitly metatheatrical, foregrounding the
boy actor beneath. First, the children’s repertory often included scenes, typically early in a play,
that establish a “dual consciousness” and “detachment,” reminding the audience of the boy actors
behind the characters they play. They incorporate scenes that invite audiences to view their

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actors metatheatrically as actors, rather than, or at least in addition to, as their fictional characters throughout the play.

Second, as a substantial body of scholarship from the past fifty years has demonstrated, the repertory of the children’s companies was not only characterized by the satire of professional playing conventions, but also by the commercialization of their actors’ erotic appeal. The repertories of both the boy companies of the 1580s and those revived at the turn of the century provided metatheatrical narratives centering on their actors’ vulnerability to being coerced to perform in plays showcasing their sexual attraction and availability. As Bart van Es recently argued, the association of boy actors as “captive children” was a primary metatheatrical theme of plays written for the children’s theater by John Lyly. van Es shows how Lyly’s influential play Galatea is particularly obsessed with desire for, and control over, children: it plays upon their vulnerability, their source of sexually ambiguous attraction for both men and women, and their secluded position in a private theater yet on display to the public’s gaze.347 Lyly — who worked for a notoriously deviant royal patron, Edward de Vere, and was dubbed the “Vicemaster of Poules” by Gabriel Harvey — wrote plays which suggest “that the children’s companies could be associated with sexual misdemeanour.”348

Christopher Marlowe similarly opens Dido, Queene of Carthage, performed by the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars, with the voyeuristic stage direction, “Here the Curtaines draw, there is discovered Jupiter dandling Ganimed upon his knee.” Jupiter’s first line of the play, “Come gentle Ganimed and play with me,” furthers the play’s striking discovery of the god

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and his cupbearer, repurposing the erotic invitations from his *carpe diem* pastoral poem for the boy actor playing Ganymede.\(^{349}\) Marlowe repeats this amatory image when Dido invites the “sweet boy” Cupid, disguised as Aeneas’s son, to “Sit in my lap and let me hear thee sing.”\(^{350}\) Jupiter’s and Dido’s desire for Ganymede and Cupid — perhaps played by the same boy actor — self-reflexively dramatizes the offstage audience in the Blackfriars and that audience’s own taste for the theater’s eroticization of boy actors.\(^{351}\) As Clare R. Kinney argues, moreover, recalling that the play itself was performed by the Children of the Chapel is critical to Marlowe’s revision of Virgil’s epic. Because it was performed by child choristers impressed for performance under royal patronage, Marlowe’s *Dido* “would therefore be enacted by a troupe of Ganymedes.” “[T]he boy players might not be abducted to Olympus” as was Ganymede, a Trojan youth abducted by Jupiter to serve as his cupbearer, but “they were vulnerable to ‘legalized kidnapping.’”\(^{352}\)

The revival of the children’s companies in 1599 and 1600 was accompanied by similar metatheatrical narratives of the sexual availability and exploitability of boy actors. Although potentially preceding the companies’ revival, the enigmatic Histrio-mastix — perhaps a theatrical exercise for young men or schoolboys from earlier in the 1590s, perhaps performed at either the Inns of Court or a children’s stage such as Paul’s around the turn of the seventeenth


\(^{350}\) Ibid., 3.1.25.


century — clearly reflects these aspects of the children’s repertories.\textsuperscript{353} A character named only
as “Ingle” comes onstage for a mere two lines:

\begin{verbatim}
INGLE Doth this fashion like my friend so well.
BELCH So well I meane to weare it for your sake.
INGLE I can deny thee nothing if I would.\textsuperscript{354}
\end{verbatim}

Irrelevant to the play’s dramatic action, Ingle’s suggestive dialogue with Belch indicates, as
Harry R. McCarthy puts it, “a bit of extra-textual business.”\textsuperscript{355} Whatever happens between the
lines of Ingle and Belch’s dialogue, it prompts Gulsh to exclaim, “Fie how this Ingling troubles
our rehearsal: say on.”\textsuperscript{356} Despite the little dramatic use this “Ingling” may have for the play
itself, it is clear that its “work in performance makes for a good show for the audience.”\textsuperscript{357} Such
extra-textual business also occurs in \textit{Antonio and Mellida}, performed by the Children of Paul’s,
in which the boy actors playing the lead romantic couple are directed to kiss each other after
speaking. As Mellida says, “weele point our speech / With amorous kissing, kissing commas,
and euen suck / The liquid breath from out each other’s lips” (G4\textsuperscript{v}), a moment which is

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{353} For conflicting accounts of the play’s date, staging, and authorship, see Knutson, \textit{Playing
Companies}, 75–102, James P. Bednarz, “Writing and Revenge: John Marston’s ‘Histriomastix,’”
\textit{Comparative Drama} 36, no. ½ (2002): 21–51, and Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson,
61.

\textsuperscript{354} John Marston, \textit{Histrio-mastix: Or, the Player Whipt} (London: Printed [by George Eld] for Th[omas] Thorp, 1610), E4\textsuperscript{v}.

\textsuperscript{355} Harry R. McCarthy, \textit{Boy Actors in Early Modern England: Skill and Stagecraft in the

\textsuperscript{356} Marston, \textit{Histrio-mastix}, E4\textsuperscript{v}.

\textsuperscript{357} McCarthy, \textit{Boy Actors in Early Modern England}, 66.
troublingly recalled when similar directions are thrust upon the boy actor playing Cressida in Shakespeare’s later play.\textsuperscript{358}

In the years surrounding the first performances of \textit{Troilus and Cressida} in the early seventeenth century, audiences would have been especially aware of the connection between the staged eroticization, subjugation, and exploitation of boy actors in the children’s theater, and the reliance of that theater upon a legalized form of kidnapping. As is now familiar, in 1601 a Star Chamber suit was filed by Henry Clifton complaining that James Robinson, acting as deputy for the Masters of the Children of the Chapel, Nathaniel Giles and Henry Evans, abducted his son and other children, and forced them to memorize lines “by harte” under threat of whipping. As Jeanne McCarthy argues, although the original pretense for the practice of child impressment was to educate and provide actors for religious performances in need of trained child choristers, after Evans and Giles revived the children’s companies they appear to have imposed “a new, syndicate model,” a commercial business venture that was “even more domineering, [and] less educative.”\textsuperscript{359} The petition claims that Clifton and the other seized children were not taken “to be taught to singe”; instead, they were employed solely for the “base trade of a mercynary enterlude player,” and simply for the “benefit [or profit] the[ir masters] made.”\textsuperscript{360} While this single court record is most often invoked, McCarthy suggests that “It would be naïve to presume Evans’ methods were unique or that the children’s training, especially when coupled with the demand for ‘perfect’ memorization, involved little discipline.”\textsuperscript{361}

\textsuperscript{358} Marston, \textit{The History of Antonio and Mellida}, G4’.  
\textsuperscript{359} McCarthy, \textit{The Children’s Troupes}, 199.  
\textsuperscript{360} Ibid., 229.  
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid., 200.
Although the exploitability of children had featured in boy company repertoires from the 1580s and at the turn of the century, Jonson’s Poetaster is remarkable for redirecting this association with the children’s theater into an accusation aimed at Shakespeare’s professional company and its system of apprenticeship. While Histrio serves as Jonson’s comic representation of professional actors generally, his connection to Shakespeare’s company is suggested when Tucca worries that Histrio’s company will “bring me o’the stage there; you’ll play me, they say…your Globes, and your triumphs!”362 This obvious reference to the Globe compares Histrio with the Chamberlain’s Men, and contrasts their repertory and system of child apprenticeship with Jonson’s own, “on the other side of Tiber,” at Paul’s and Blackfriars.363 Immediately before the two apprentices perform their parodic audition, Tucca asks Histrio, “What wilt thou give me a week for my brace of beagles here, my little point trussers?”364 Jonson stages theatrical apprenticeship as explicitly exploitative, with children functioning as bargaining chips for company profit. Despite the pyrgi’s stereotyped acting, Histrio admits to being “rapt” by their performance, and asks Tucca, “what will you ask for ’em a week, captain?” Despite his initial offer, Tucca refuses to negotiate, instead calling Histrio a “magonizing slave,” and accusing him that “you’ll sell ’em for ingles.”365 Jonson represents Histrio and the Chamberlain’s Men not as cooperative members of a guild but as trafficking in child prostitution.

362 Jonson, Poetaster, 3.4.168–72.
363 Ibid., 3.4.164–5.
364 Ibid., 3.4.176–7.
365 Ibid., 3.4.237–41.
In contrast to the system of boy actors’ impressment in children’s companies, Jonson's accusation is based on the professional theater’s own commodification of boy actors in the apprentice system. Philip Henslowe records in an oft-cited entry of his Diary that he “Bowght my boye Jeames brystow of william agusten, player” and leased him for profit at a weekly rate. Using similar language in Chapman’s May Day, Captain Quintiliano offers “three crownes a week” for a boy, another “pretty Ganimede,” if he acts well. Lucy Munro recently traced this “merchandize of Play-boyes” and their “trafficke” in Shakespeare’s company, concluding that “The practices of theatre industry do not seem to have been out of kilter with the more general financial exploitation of adolescent boys with the apprentice system.” At the turn of the seventeenth century, then, the commodification and exploitability of boy actors was not only associated with the revived children’s companies, but also with the professional theater and its system of apprenticeship. The commodification and subjugation of boy actors was a source of metatheatrical attraction for audiences attending both children’s and professional stages.

As in the satirical plays-within-the play involving Patroclus, Shakespeare stages another caricature of Jonson’s accusation through the figure of Cressida, who is vulnerable both as a prisoner of war in the play and as a ward in the Chamberlain’s Men. In doing so, he shares in the children’s companies’ practice of capitalizing on the exploitability of child actors on Elizabethan stages. Shakespeare, however, adapts the convention of metatheatrical narratives centering on the

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erotic appeal and vulnerability of boy actors from children’s companies not only to stage a
defense of his company and actors, but also to dramatize the contemporary theatrical traffic in
the commodification of children.

VII

Observing how Shakespeare does not simply respond to the *poetomachia* but stages it in
miniature within *Troilus and Cressida* sheds new light on the scenes involving Cressida, and the
boy actor playing her, throughout the play. In each of these scenes, Shakespeare emphasizes their
concomitant vulnerability. In her first appearance onstage, Cressida asserts her defenselessness
as a woman in Troy and as the niece of Pandarus. When Pandarus jokes about her elusive
character, “One knows not at what ward you lie,” she responds by expressing her defenselessness
in a series of paradoxes: “Upon my back to defend my belly, upon my wit to defend my wiles,
upon my secrecy to defend mine honesty, my mask to defend my beauty, and you to defend all
these; and at all these wards I lie, at a thousand watches” (1.2.249–55). When Pandarus presses
Cressida to “Say one of your watches,” punning sexually on “watches” as “anything that
involves keeping awake at night” (1.2.256n), Cressida retorts, “Nay, I’ll watch you for that; and
that’s one of the chiefest of them too. If I cannot ward what I would not have hit, I can watch you
for telling how I took the blow” (1.2.256–60). On a figurative level, Pandarus’s initial reference
to a “ward,” as well as Cressida’s response, imports technical language from the art of fencing:
Cressida fences with him rhetorically in verbal thrusts and parries.
Although critics have noted the essentially vulnerable sense of Cressida’s speeches, they have overlooked the pointed emphasis on Pandarus. Her first speech is structured around the rhetorical trope *gradatio*. Her sequence of defenses — “Upon my back to defend my belly, upon my wit to defend my wiles, upon my secrecy to defend mine honesty, my mask to defend my beauty” — accentuates Pandarus, her uncle and ostensible protector in Troy: “and you to defend all these” (italics added). Although the primary sense of “ward” in these lines refers to Cressida’s mode of defense, the term also evokes the fact that the boy playing Cressida would have been an apprenticed ward in the Chamberlain’s Men.

By repeating the word “ward” three times in eight lines, Shakespeare not only draws attention to the precarious position of Cressida in the world of the play, but also to the status of boy actors in both professional and children’s companies in Elizabethan London. As Heather Bailey writes, “there was an uncomfortable similarity between the exchange of boy players in the theater world and the wardship system; both involved a form of legalized ‘trade’ in children.” Like Tucca’s reprimand of Histrio, that is, wards also “were viewed as exchangeable objects… many guardians saw their wards as mere commodities that would earn them money.” Calling attention to the status of the boy playing Cressida as an apprenticed ward, the speech functions similarly to scenes in children’s plays that highlight discrepancies between fictional characters and the actors playing them. Rather than create ironic distance, however, Shakespeare uses the

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370 Heather Bailey, “‘Thou Shalt Be Dido’s Son’: Surrogate Motherhood in Christopher Marlowe’s Dido, Queene of Carthage,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 20, no. 1 (2020): 97.

371 Ibid., 98.
indeterminate body of the boy actor playing Cressida to suggest their shared dramatic situations. In doing so, Shakespeare does not simply dramatize the accusation Jonson levelled against his company in *Poetaster*; he stages the vulnerability of boy actors among warring theaters, in which their erotic attraction is frequently exploited.

Yet Pandarus proves to be an unreliable warden for Cressida, a surrogate protector who is more interested in her as a movable object. Cressida claims that she can “watch [Pandarus] for telling how I took the blow,” meaning that she can expect not his help but his gossip if she were to become pregnant. In Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pandarus tells Troilus that “Were it for my suster, al thy sore, / By my wil she sholde al by thyn to-morwe.” Shakespeare, however, has Pandarus tell Cressida directly that he would willingly surrender her to Troilus, highlighting the lack of protection she has from her guardian: “Had I a sister were a grace, or a daughter a goddess, he should take his choice” (1.2.228–9). In the scene paralleling the lovers’ sexual consummation and Troilus’s famous *aubade* from Chaucer, moreover, Shakespeare instead has Pandarus escort a veiled and silent Cressida onstage to pledge her love to Troilus. His implicit stage direction, “What, are you gone again? You must be watched ere you be made tame, must you?” suggests Cressida’s discomfort with her role onstage (3.2.41–2); it indicates that she is trying to flee, not fornicate. Pandarus’s rejoinder that Cressida must “be made tame” characterizes her as an animal needing to be mastered, echoing Shakespeare’s earlier *Taming of the Shrew*, and its verbal, psychological violence toward Katharina. When Pandarus instructs Troilus to kiss his niece, “So, so, rub on, and kiss the mistress,” and comments, “How now, a

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kiss in fee-farm?” (3.2.48–9) his feudal analogy figures Cressida as perpetually owned by Troilus and expresses the prolonged duration of his forced kiss.

While this scene of forced kissing evokes the erotic interactions more frequently displayed in the children’s theater, it also troublingly predicts Cressida’s fate in the ensuing act and her very next appearance onstage, when Shakespeare dramatizes the exchange of Cressida for Antenor. Rather than adhere to his primary source, which specifies only Diomedes escorting Cressida back to the Greek camp, Shakespeare instead crowds his stage with actors to not just witness, but participate in the objectification of the boy actor playing Cressida. Having exchanged Cressida and Antenor, the Greeks Agamemnon, Ajax, Achilles, Patroclus, Menelaus, Ulysses, and Nestor greet Diomedes and Cressida in their camp. Recalling Marston’s scene from *Antonio and Mellida*, Shakespeare “points” his actors’ speeches “With amorous kissing.” Unlike the boy actor playing Mellida, however, Cressida is silent for her first twenty-three lines onstage while she is “kissed in general” by Agamemnon, Nestor, Achilles, and twice by Patroclus:

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AGAMEMNON Is this the Lady Cressid?
DIOMEDES Even she.
AGAMEMNON Most dearly welcome to the Greeks, sweet lady. [He kisses her.]
NESTOR Our general doth salute you with a kiss.
ULYSSES Yet is the kindness but particular;
'Twere better she were kissed in general.
NESTOR And very courtly counsel. I'll begin. [He kisses her.]
So much for Nestor.
ACHILLES I'll take that winter from your lips, fair lady.
Achilles bids you welcome. [He kisses her.]
MENELAUS I had good argument for kissing once.
PATROCLUS But that's no argument for kissing now;
For thus popped Paris in his hardiment,
And parted thus you and your argument. [He kisses her.]

ULYSSES O deadly gall and theme of all our scorns,
For which we lose our heads to gild his horns!
PATROCLUS The first was Menelaus's kiss; this, mine.
Patroclus kisses you. [He kisses her.] (4.5.18–34)
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Agamemnon’s greeting kiss is not enough: Ulysses sees this “kindness” as selfish (“particular”) and that “‘Twere better she were kissed in general.” The fraternization surrounding the scene adds to the exploitative image of Cressida, who is silent center-stage. As Laurie Maguire puts it, she “is initially and unusually silent, an indication of her bewilderment as she is exposed to the osculatory equivalent of gang rape.” Shakespeare makes Cressida not only a prisoner of war, forcibly exchanged from Trojans to Greeks; she is also sexually vulnerable and violated, subjected to the older actors onstage as well as the offstage crowd of gazing spectators.

Cressida’s silence, bewilderment, and victimization is especially troubling when she is read both as the vulnerable woman in the play and as the boy actor onstage by attending to the scene’s material conditions. As Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern argue, apprenticed boy actors would likely have been rehearsed only with the actors who deliver their cue lines. Cressida, however, is not cued by any of the actors who actually kiss her. The only actors who do cue her speeches, and consequently the only actors with whom she would have needed to rehearse this scene, are Menelaus and Ulysses, the two Greeks who in fact do not kiss her. The boy’s initial cue is from Menelaus, “by your leave,” who is the first to ask Cressida for permission to kiss, but whom she refuses. Yet this occurs only after she has been kissed five times while awaiting his


374 Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, Shakespeare in Parts (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 62–8. Scott McMillin adds that the apprentice’s master in the company often did this rehearsing, because he would cue the majority of speeches for boys with more “restricted” roles, such as Cressida. Given that Pandarus delivers nearly half of Cressida’s cues, and likely even more if he doubled as any of the Greeks, with whom he never shares the stage — such as Menelaus, as Gamboa proposes — I would suggest the boy playing Cressida was his apprentice, his ward both in the play and without. See “The Sharer and His Boy: Rehearsing Shakespeare’s Women,” in From Script to Stage in Early Modern England, eds. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 231–51, and Gamboa, Shakespeare’s Double Plays, 258.
cue. It is possible, therefore, that in the play’s original performance, the boy playing Cressida would have been unaware of this initial silent objectification and violation. Whether the boy rehearsed the scene in its entirety or not, without a cue he is forced to remain voiceless onstage.

As soon as Cressida is cued, however, her original wit returns from the first act. Cressida responds to Menelaus’s request with matching rhymes:

**MENELAUS** Lady, by your leave.
**CRESSIDA** In kissing, do you render or receive?
**MENELAUS** Both take and give.
**CRESSIDA** I’ll make my match to live
   The kiss you take is better than you give;
   Therefore no kiss. (4.5.36–40)

Cressida’s rhyming banter displays her wit that has been suppressed since the outset of the play. She even outwits wily Ulysses. When he entreats Cressida, “May I, sweet lady, beg a kiss of you?” she forces him to be literal:

**CRESSIDA** You may.
**ULYSSES** I do desire it.
**CRESSIDA** Why, beg too. (4.5.49)

Forced to beg but ultimately spurned, Ulysses criticizes Cressida in the same language employed against the satirical child actors in Elizabethan London. Since Cressida had remained silent while she was kissed consecutively by the other Greek generals and soldiers, Ulysses can only insinuate Cressida’s “wanton spirits”: “There’s language in her eye, her cheek, her lip, / Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out / At every joint and motive of her body” (4.5.56–8).

Ulysses’ language evokes a now-lost Puritan pamphlet that polemicated the children’s theater for its erotic content. According to the eighteenth-century critic and poet Thomas Warton, the Elizabethan pamphleteer wrote: “Even in her majesty’s chapels do these pretty upstart youths
profane the Lord’s Day by the lascivious writhing of their tender limbs.” Ulysses invokes a tradition of misogyny to console his punctured masculinity. The distance between Cressida’s imagined dangerous sexuality and the actual eroticism of children’s theater is, I think, Shakespeare’s metatheatrical point in this scene. The explicit eroticization and exploitation of impressed boy actors invites these kinds of polemics against theater itself, revealing the hierarchical inequities within the children’s theater rather than a collaboration among Shakespeare’s professional company of guild members and apprentices. It suggests the consequences of the contemporary poetomachia between adult and children’s drama, in which Chaucer’s poem is reduced to “wars and lechery” between adults and children (5.2.201–2).

Cressida’s role is thus divided between being rhetorically nimble and silently vulnerable. While the boy actor’s part-script in this scene reveals to him an empowered voice that denies Menelaus and even Ulysses’ advances, it hides the fact that he has been kissed five times while standing silently onstage, un-cued and unable to resist. In fact, the entire part-script for the role of Cressida is suggestive of the ambivalent character that Shakespeare inherited from Chaucer. Cressida has the second highest number of speeches in the play (152, second only to Pandarus’s 153), but not one of her speeches exceeds seventeen lines: she speaks frequently, but not for long. The form of these 152 speeches on the part-script also indicates a refracted character: 76 of Cressida’s speeches are in verse, 75 in prose, and one in both verse and prose. Like Shakespeare’s Antony — “Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon, / The other way’s a Mars” (2.5.116–17) — Cressida is visible from two distinct angles: from one side witty, bold,

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375 Quoted in van Es, “Captive Children,” 170.

and beautiful, and from another bawdy, victimized, and vulnerable. Cressida’s character is “split” in more ways than one: between her public and private self, between her speeches in prose and verse, between Troilus’s romantic idealization and Ulysses’ misogynistic slander, and between the puerile actor’s body and the vulnerable woman he portrays. She is one of Shakespeare’s most perspectival characters.

Cressida’s final scene onstage transports audiences back into a private tent, although this time it is not Patroclus’s tent as earlier in the play, but that of Cressida’s father, Calchas. She has been handed over to the Greeks and is now under Diomedes’ protection. Previously Pandarus’s “ward,” Cressida is now explicitly referred to as Diomedes’ “charge,” reinforcing her status as an exchangeable object in the theatrical marketplace in the early seventeenth century. It is a troubling scene, one that Maguire has read in terms of modern psychological abuse. I wish to draw attention, however, to how Shakespeare emphasizes on the one hand the boy actor’s central placement as the object of leering gazes, and on the other the stereoscopic aspect of Cressida and the boy actor playing her.

Rather than being mediated by Chaucer’s narrator, Shakespeare has an all-male onstage audience of chorus-like figures arbitrate how audience’s view Cressida and attempt to influence their perspective. Modern interpolations in the opening stage direction specify that Troilus and Ulysses “Enter [at a distance, and, separate from them, Thersites], underscoring Cressida as the object of multiple competing gazes. The effect is similar to a play-within-a-play: as audience members, we are given sight of how the male, prejudicial onstage spectators react to Cressida. Cressida pitifully pleads for sympathy, “Diomed—” only to be interrupted and dismissed, and she relinquishes Troilus’s sleeve only after an extended internal struggle (5.2.73–111). Despite presenting to the offstage audience a scene of emotional turmoil, the onstage male audience fails
to see Cressida’s plight as a complex human being. Troilus refuses to believe Cressida could act pragmatically out of realistic pressures and exigencies, concluding instead, “Was Cressid here?...She was not, sure” (131–2).

In a fitting final speech, Cressida herself draws attention to her perspectival character and the exceptional focus on different modes of seeing in the play. As she bids “Troilus, farewell!” she puns on her own shifting, divided selfhood: “One eye yet looks on thee, / But with my heart the other eye doth see” (5.2.113–4). Sokol observes that Cressida’s stereoscopic sight clashes what that of the male eavesdroppers, who ignore her vulnerability and plight as a prisoner of war in enemy territory, and undermines their monocular, misogynistic reactions. With the aural pun on “eye” and “I,” indistinguishable in performance, moreover, Cressida draws attention to the two “I’s” of her character: not just the two stereotypes of women Troilus and Ulysses can only fathom, an angel or a siren, but instead the fictional vulnerable woman, and the boy actor beneath, that constitute her character.

In Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde Shakespeare found a heroine who is not only ambivalent and double-sided, but who is also utterly vulnerable to her precarious circumstances. When Shakespeare took up the plot of Chaucer’s poem for his own play, he adapted this ambivalence and vulnerability within his own contemporary discourse surrounding boy actors at the turn of the seventeenth century. He dramatizes the poetic ambiguity of Chaucer’s Criseyde into his own perspectival character onstage.


378 This is one of Shakespeare’s favorite and most recognizable puns. Most importantly, see Richard II, “I, no; no, I” (4.1.201), and Jonathan P. Lamb, “The Stylistic Self in Richard II,” Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England 28 (2015): 123–51, esp. 142, who similarly argues that Shakespeare puts the larger political and philosophic issues of the play “in and through its formal features” such as these punning reflexive pronouns and homophones.
While *Troilus and Cressida* complements *Hamlet* and its metadramatic reaction to the revived children’s companies, it also offers a more visual, sustained critique of child exploitation by putting the boy actor playing Cressida center-stage. By associating audience members with Achilles, who patronizes Patroclus’ satirical child’s performance, and with characters such as Pandarus and the Greek leaders, who eroticize, assault, and leer at Cressida, Shakespeare positions them uncomfortably as “Good traders in the flesh” of boy actors onstage (5.11.45). Through the famous figure of Chaucer’s Criseyde, a prisoner of war in Troy, Shakespeare metatheatrically dramatizes the exploitation and vulnerability of “captive children” in early modern London: he intertwines the Trojan war and the War of the Theaters to reflect upon his own cultural, theatrical moment.

By reading Troilus’s claim that “This is and is not Cressid” as a cue to view her stereoscopically, and arguing that this conditions a perspectival reading of the play as a whole, I hope to have shown how perspective — and, to use our more modern term, anamorphosis — was a conceptual resource for Shakespeare’s metatheatrical dramaturgy. Shakespeare specifically uses the language of perspective, the representation of what “is” by what it “is not,” at metatheatrical moments to signal the “bifold authority” of his drama: the tension between the presented action’s form — the material conditions of the early modern stage — and its content, the represented, symbolic fiction. Emerging out of his experiments with adapting perspective in his poetry, Shakespearean metatheater therefore develops concurrently with the rise of the “shared assumptions about the operation of the aesthetic” that Kimberly Johnson recently articulated between visual perspective and the early modern lyric: they are “analogous rhetorical technologies that set content and form in tension with each other, presenting competing significative values simultaneously, with the result that the work of art must be encountered not
as a transparent window onto a narrative (content) nor as a set of denarrativized obstructions (form) but rather as a mechanism that modulates between the two.”\textsuperscript{379} Derived from the Greek \textit{ana} (again) and \textit{morphoun} (to form), moreover, anamorphosis’s etymology also suggests how these early modern works were deliberately designed to require their viewers to “form again” the analogy between the conflicting or complementary images. Steven Mullaney has similarly employed anamorphosis to describe the nature of Elizabethan theater once the playhouses moved from the city to the liberties outside of London. From the outside looking in, he writes, Shakespeare’s stage offered an “anamorphic point of view...one rich in oblique commentary on its own times.”\textsuperscript{380} The anamorphic “place of the stage” in early modern London can also be useful to think about the anamorphic “place of the actor”: in recognizing Troilus’s cue to view Cressida as a perspectival image, we can more accurately “form again” her vulnerable, split character, and its relation to Shakespeare’s “oblique commentary” on the place of the Elizabethan boy actor at the turn of the seventeenth century. My final chapter will return to the anamorphism of the early modern stage, but not in Mullaney’s sense of strangeness and marginality. Rather, it will observe how Shakespeare’s unique professional position, as a sharer in a company that owned two contrasting theatrical spaces, enabled him to compose scenes that would be formed anew, changing meaning and resonating differently depending upon the venue in which they were performed.


CHAPTER 4
Shakespeare’s Perspectival Playhouses and the Case of Cymbeline

Vision is doubled, split, one possibility layered over and vibrating with another, but the two refusing to coalesce into a single scene.  
—Joe Moshenska, Making Darkness Light

I

One upshot of the preceding chapters is the new visual, perspectival aesthetic of English poets and playwrights surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century. Although Shakespeare was interested in perspective from the outset of his poetic and dramatic career, transforming its visual properties into the verbal forms of Sonnet 24 and Bushy’s anamorphic speech, and organizing both of his narrative poems around perspectival conceits, it was in the decade after Troilus and Cressida when dramatic adaptations of visual perspective became more innovative in England. In fact, of the eleven allusions to perspective in Shakespeare’s works, five appear after Troilus and Cressida, when Shakespeare’s company became the King’s Men, and performed under their new royal patron, King James. This resulted, in part, from the increased popularity of the court masque under James. In contrast to the relatively bare Elizabethan public stage, the perspectival scenery popular in Italy throughout the previous century was brought to the Stuart court masque by Inigo Jones. Instead of distributing privileged sightlines throughout
the audience, the masque concentrated its most privileged vantage point in the seat of a single audience member, the King himself.\footnote{381 See Stephen Orgel, \textit{The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), and Hillary Nunn, \textit{Staging Anatomies: Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart Tragedy} (London: Routledge, 2005), 114–20.}

Another reason for the increase in allusions to, and adaptations of, perspective in the early seventeenth century was also, as I suggested in Chapter 2, due to the emulation of the classical artistic competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, as dramatists strove to produce different and deeper levels of ambiguity, deception, and illusion. As Jeremy Lopez has argued, “the greater part of a company’s commercial success came from its ability to constantly present audiences with something ‘never before seen,’” and dramatic adaptations of visual perspective form one overlooked area of dramatic innovation in the first decade of the seventeenth century.\footnote{382 See Jeremy Lopez, \textit{Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 8.} Following \textit{Twelfth Night} and \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, numerous plays early in James’s reign suggest, to borrow Janet Clare’s and Roslyn Lander Knutson’s helpful terms, a “stage traffic” and “company commerce” in perspectival allusions and illusions in plays of the period.\footnote{383 See Janet Clare, \textit{Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing, and Competition in Renaissance Theatre} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), and Roslyn Lander Knutson, \textit{Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare’s Time} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).}

Contemporary with the first perspective backdrop’s appearance on an English stage in Jonson’s \textit{Masque of Blackness} in 1605, in \textit{King Lear} Shakespeare poetically emulates the...
recently imported illusionistic scenery.\textsuperscript{384} Disguised as Poor Tom, who is supposedly leading his father Gloucester to the edge of Dover Cliff, Edgar communicates its elevation by drawing upon the technology of visual perspective:

\begin{quote}
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down  
Hangs one that gathers samphire — dreadful trade!  
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.  
The fishermen that walk upon the beach  
Appear like mice, and yond tall anchoring bark,  
Diminsh’d to her cock…  
\hspace{1em} I’ll look no more,  
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight  
Topple down headlong.\textsuperscript{385}
\end{quote}

Edgar turns the illusions of perspective scenery from Jonson’s recent \textit{Masque} into an exhibition of perspectival poetry. Like a daring demonstration of technical skill in painting, “Edgar’s conjuration of the cliffs at Dover…is an outrageous exercise in inducing vertigo on a flat surface.”\textsuperscript{386} As John Gillies writes, the scene is “constructed entirely around the idea of perspective diminution,” and the “‘virtuoso’ element of the performance is keyed to an association of perspective with the marvellous, in the sense of dizziness or optical effects.”\textsuperscript{387} Such scenes built around these visual, vertiginous conceits would be impossible without the


\textsuperscript{385} William Shakespeare, \textit{King Lear}, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 4.6.13–24. All further references to Shakespeare’s works in this chapter will be to the Arden Shakespeare Series and given as in-text parenthetical citations.

\textsuperscript{386} Bert O. States, \textit{Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 56.

invention of perspective and its contemporary popularity. Following the introduction of perspective scenery to the Jacobean court masque, Shakespeare and the King’s Men clearly identified adapting its illusionistic qualities as a selling point for their audiences, and explored how they could improve upon their own and others’ innovations moving forward.

The rest of this chapter will focus on two of Shakespeare’s relatively late plays to show how he continued to incorporate perspective as a conceptual resource for his dramaturgy. Building on the creative tension between Shakespeare’s fictional characters and his performing actors, particularly their cross-dressed apprentices, examined in Chapter 3, this chapter argues that allusions to perspective and anamorphosis also signal Shakespeare’s double vision for how his plays would be viewed depending upon the playhouse in which they were performed. That is, once the King’s Men began to acquire their second theater, the Blackfriars, to pair with the Globe, Shakespeare developed an anamorphic dramaturgy so that “plays new at one venue,” as Knutson puts it, could be made “new again when they made the switch from one playhouse to another.” I begin by locating this development in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, where the play’s multiple allusions to perspective serve as structural metaphors for the play’s own recurring focus on how dramatic interpretation is dependent upon physical point of view and material setting. In contrast to other Roman plays from the same period — Jonson’s *Sejanus*, written for the King’s Men at the Globe, and Marston’s *Sophonisba*, written specifically for the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars — Shakespeare deliberately composed his play to be playable at either playhouse, and to different effect.

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After establishing the relationship between anamorphosis and Shakespeare’s portable playhouse dramaturgy in Shakespeare’s late tragedy, I will apply this lens to one of his final plays, the tragicomedy *Cymbeline*. Attending to the play’s engagement with its playing space — “haunted” by former rivals’ past performances — as well as the political resonance of the play’s final act, I argue that when the King’s Men’s finally acquired the Blackfriars theater, they realized an economic and aesthetic double vision, in which plays could take on opposed meanings and resonances depending on venue. In the case of *Cymbeline*’s resolution, I contend that while the variety of formal conventions contribute to a smoother patriotic resolution at the Globe, these very same conventions amplify the dissonance of the play’s nationalism, specifically Jupiter’s prophecy for British prosperity, at the Blackfriars. I argue that the King’s Men used the two spaces to produce varying metatheatrical effects, and that the audience’s reception of the plays would differ depending upon each playhouse’s past repertories, and how the material spaces cast past light and shadow over present performances of these plays.

II

The Globe and Blackfriars each had different physical dimensions, qualities, and histories behind them that enabled different dramaturgies and repertories, while posing different creative limitations and dramatic possibilities. The Globe’s stage was roughly 43 x 27 ft., plays were performed during the day, and the theater held approximately 2,000 people of all social classes. Inside this large timber playhouse with its combustible thatched roof, crowded audiences were

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notoriously “smelly,” bundled in clothing for comfort rather than display, and many came from work for an afternoon interlude. The Blackfriars, in contrast, was markedly smaller, holding audiences of about 500–600, with a 30 x 23 ft. stage inside of a 46 x 66 ft. room, enclosed within a 107 x 52 ft. exterior building. It was composed of stone walls, large glass windows, a high-pitched roof, and a “great pair of winding stairs” was required to enter the playing space, where plays were performed at night. Contemporary documentary evidence, moreover, indicates that attending the theater was itself a highly anticipated performance for the wealthier, “gentle” audience.

Converted from a prior monastery by James Burbage, the Blackfriars was especially nostalgic and redolent of its past. A new theater for a moneyed audience, its novelty as an established indoor theater within the walls of London, combined with its historic past, gave it the qualities of a space being simultaneously current as well as elsewhere in time: blending nostalgia with modernity, the Blackfriars had, as Tiffany Stern puts it, a “haunted atmosphere.” The Blackfriars’ stage itself was remarkably narrower, almost by a full half-length, bringing audiences into closer proximity with the actors. This occasioned a shift away from larger, louder battle scenes, toward more minute, visual features such as actors’ facial expressions and the use

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392 See Ibid., 15–16.

393 See Stern, “‘A Ruinous Monastery,’” 98.
of smaller props, evinced by performance-oriented stage directions in plays from this period. The narrower dimensions of the Blackfriars stage make it inherently more perspectival, in the sense that spectators’ gazes are drawn vertically from front-to-back of the stage, compared with the Globe’s more expansive, wider playing space.

The question of the effects of the shift from the outdoor, “public,” Globe to the indoor, “private” Blackfriars, has, of course, become a familiar question. First proposed by G. E. Bentley in the first half of the twentieth century, he argued that the King’s Men’s acquisition of the Blackfriars’ playing space drove Shakespeare to write his late plays exclusively with the new theater in mind. A growing awareness of the Chamberlain’s Men’s earlier attempts to acquire the Blackfriars, and the appearance of elements in Shakespeare’s plays that seem suited more for indoor performance even before they finally possessed it, have led to reevaluations of Bentley’s claim. Since James Burbage purchased property in the former Blackfriars priory in 1594 within three months of the Chamberlain’s Men’s official formation, only to be prohibited from playing there in 1596 after local protests over “great annoyance and trouble,” Andrew Gurr suggests that Shakespeare may have had indoor performances for his plays in mind as early as the mid-

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395 G. E. Bentley, “Shakespeare and the Blackfriars Theatre,” Shakespeare Survey 1 (1948): 38–50. Although Stern acknowledges that Bentley “overstates his case,” she claims that “it seems that from the moment of acquiring use of the richer and grander theater in 1608/9 plays were constructed with the indoor playhouse primarily in mind.” Clare similarly suggests that because of the “more mannered style” of the late plays and their “rejection of clowning, the plays written for the Blackfriars and the Globe…disclose a shift away from popular theatre.” See Tiffany Stern, “Taking Part: Actors and Audience on the Stage at Blackfriars,” in Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage, ed. Paul Menzer (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 2006), 41, and Clare, Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic, 263.
1590s. Because the Chamberlain’s/King’s Men only finally obtained permission to use the Blackfriars during the winter of 1609, nearly a decade after it had been permitted to be used by the revived children’s companies, Gurr argues that The Tempest “was the first play Shakespeare unquestionably wrote for the Blackfriars rather than the Globe.” Both Bart van Es and Sarah Dustagheer agree that The Tempest contains clear internal evidence — such as the Masque of Ceres, the atmospheric music, and the stage direction indicating Ariel’s entrance “loaden with glistening apparel” (4.1.193SD) — to suggest that it was written with the Blackfriars in mind. Yet both also recognize that conventions from the indoor theater were already present in many of Shakespeare’s plays preceding The Tempest. For van Es, the “Blackfriars as a building, then, was not the decisive element that precipitated Shakespeare’s change of style around 1607. The alteration came too early to be traced to the new venue.” Instead, he rightly suggests, “We need to think of Shakespeare as having had a protracted and changing relationship with Blackfriars, stretching from early hostility, through accommodation, to absorption.” Dustagheer’s most recent work further nuances these claims. She contends that the contrast between the raucous storm that commences The Tempest, an uncharacteristically loud opening effect for an indoor theater, and the play’s softer music elsewhere, reflects a new “performance duality” in Shakespeare’s dramaturgy. Dustagheer argues that having both playhouses enabled

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398 Bart van Es, “Reviving the Legacy of Indoor Performance,” in Moving Shakespeare Indoors, 250–1.

399 While Dustagheer argues that The Tempest was the first to put this duality into practice, she claims that Coriolanus was the first to have this performance duality in mind. Lucy Munro
Shakespeare and the King’s Men to combine their theatrical and spatial practices so that plays could be performed “in different but parallel ways for both their theatres.” Dustagheer’s concept of a “performance duality” supports Knutson’s point that that even before acquiring the Blackfriars the King’s Men’s repertory always had to be “multipurpose…playable before any audience, on any stage.” Acquiring the indoor theater, however, enabled them to capitalize financially by “having plays new at one venue new again when they made the switch from one playhouse to another.”

Shakespeare and the King’s Men, then, were not only thinking of how to compose a repertory adaptable for both the Globe and Blackfriars even before finalizing the acquisition of the indoor playhouse; they were also considering how to creatively harness reportorial conventions from this very stage in order to speak to their own future productions.

I share Knutson’s view that Shakespeare and his company’s repertory always was, and continued to be, “multipurpose,” playable in amphitheatres or provincial Inns, at Blackfriars or at court. While I also agree with Knutson’s claim that Shakespeare and the King’s Men conceived of their plays as becoming “new again” when moving from one playhouse to another, I would like to suggest that, beginning with Antony and Cleopatra, they in fact were conceived to be

explores this possibility in detail, suggesting that in Coriolanus “Shakespeare attempts to overwrite children’s performance and, in particular, the recent performances of tragedies by the Children of the Queen’s Revels on that same Blackfriars stage. He does so by picking up and reworking certain aspects of children’s performance, specifically their tradition of satiric detachment and their exploitation of the distance between actor and role.” See Sarah Dustagheer, Shakespeare’s Two Playhouses: Repertory and Theatre Space at the Globe and the Blackfriars, 1599–1613 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017), 58–9, and Lucy Munro, “Coriolanus and the Little Eyases: The Boyhood of Shakespeare’s Hero,” in Shakespeare and Childhood, eds. Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 84.

Dustagheer, Shakespeare’s Two Playhouses, 3, 6–7.

deliberately changed by the different playing spaces, for different dramatic, aesthetic, and auditory effects. I would also add that the two playhouses not only “balanced one another economically,” but also aesthetically: they not only “could be successful on both stages,” but were designed to achieve different effects, like perspectives viewed from different angles and vantage points. Indeed, the allusions to perspective and anamorphism in *Antony and Cleopatra*, closely contemporary with the King’s Men’s acquisition of their second playhouse, suggest that Shakespeare continued to find perspective to be a useful conceptual device for his own evolving dramaturgy. I propose reframing Dustagheer’s suggestion that Shakespeare wrote with a dramatic “hybridity,” and that the plays could be performed in “parallel ways” at both theaters. Rather, in order to build upon these studies and further elucidate how the King’s Men’s “combined practices” may have worked, I propose to continue thinking of his dramaturgy “perspectively” and anamorphically, capable of being reshaped and “formed again” in distinct rather than parallel ways by the different settings and audiences of the Globe and Blackfriars.402 This approach is admittedly inherently speculative given the nebulous nature of our understanding of early modern audiences. It remains, however, grounded in Shakespearean plays that explicitly allude to visual perspective and anamorphosis, signaling the visual arts’ relation to these plays’ overarching themes and dramaturgies. These late plays, moreover, contain “spectacles so precious” that they invite a degree of imagination and speculation in interpreting them in all their contradictions and complexity (*Cymbeline*, 1.6.37).

402 Dustagheer, *Shakespeare’s Two Playhouses*, 7, 10.
During the four-year period from 1603–1606 preceding Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, early modern English audiences were treated to two classicizing tragedies that showcased their playwrights’ contrasting styles, and suggested their relatively singular playhouse focus: *Sejanus* by Ben Jonson, written in 1603 for the King’s Men at the Globe, and *Sophonisba* by John Marston, written in 1605 for the Children of the Revels at the Blackfriars. To put it simply, in the years between Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Jonson and Marston uphold a division between professional drama written for the outdoor theaters and children’s drama written for the indoor playhouses.

Jonson’s *Sejanus*, for example, does little to capitalize on the dramatic opportunities afforded by the King’s Men’s apprentices. It contains three boy actors, and they appear in only three scenes throughout the play. Only the first could be considered theatrically imaginative, when Eudemus the physician reapplies the makeup of the boy actor playing Livia. By having his actor reapply Livia’s makeup onstage, Jonson teases audiences by overtly revealing the boy actor playing her. He briefly concentrates their attention onto the “prosthetic” quality of femininity on the early modern stage rather than attempting to uphold the illusion of the scene or the verisimilitude of his otherwise historically realistic play. But after this opening scene between a boy actor and one of the masters in the company, Jonson does not further capitalize on other opportunities afforded by the King’s Men’s apprentices. The boy playing Livia, in fact, disappears from the stage after this point. The boy playing Agrippina,

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moreover, appears in only two scenes throughout the play, while Sosia, the only other remaining female role, utters a mere half-line. \footnote{Jonson, \textit{Sejanus}, 2.4.51.}

Although there is an impoverished use of the apprentices in Jonson’s plays written for the professional theater, his confidence in, and imaginative use of, boy actors is readily apparent in plays written for the children’s companies. In contrast to \textit{Sejanus}, all three of the plays Jonson wrote for the children’s theater — \textit{Cynthia’s Revels}, \textit{Poetaster}, and \textit{Epicene} — “exploit the homoerotic appeal of the boys to some extent, via sexual banter and references.” \footnote{Rebecca Yearling, \textit{Ben Jonson, John Marston, and Early Modern Drama: Satire and the Audience} (New York: Palgrave, 2016), 171.} Yet this prevalent convention of Jonson’s boys’ plays is absent from his tragedy for the professional theater. In his plays for the children’s theater Jonson constructs incredibly demanding roles for the young actors, challenging them to memorize elaborate, lengthy speeches in verse and prose. \footnote{On the demands Jonson could place upon boy actors in his plays for the children’s theater, see Jeanne H. McCarthy, \textit{The Children’s Troupes and the Transformation of English Theater, 1509–1608: Pedagogue Playwrights, Playbooks, and Play-boys} (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 76, and on the emphasis placed by playwrights and audiences on the skills of early modern boy actors more generally, see Harry R. McCarthy, \textit{Boy Actors in Early Modern England: Skill and Stagecraft in the Theatre} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2022).} In differentiating the ways he uses the boy actors’ abilities depending upon the company and the playhouse, Jonson maintains a strict division between what he finds suitable for professional versus children’s drama.

Marston’s \textit{Sophonisba} is closer to Shakespeare’s \textit{Antony and Cleopatra} in both chronology and subject matter. The title page of the 1606 quarto announces it having been “sundry times Acted / at the \textit{Blacks Friers},” and it was most likely performed by the Children of the Queen’s Revels the previous year. It dramatizes the historical death of Sophonisba, “the
wonder of Women” who, like Cleopatra, opted for suicide rather than become a prisoner of Rome. Unlike both Jonson’s and Shakespeare’s plays, Marston’s is unique in being performed by an all-boy cast. Marston’s epistle “To the General Reader” begins by playfully distancing his classical tragedy from Jonson’s: “Know, that I haue not labored in this poeme, to tie my selfe to relate any thing as an historian but to inlarge euery thing as a Poet, To transcribe Authors, quote authorities, & translate Latin prose orations into English black-verse [sic], hath in this subiect beeene the least aime of my studies.” Unlike Jonson, Marston is not concerned with presenting himself as a humanist, but instead “to enlarge everything as a poet,” specifically as a playwright for the boy company of which he is a sharer. In an authorial note appended to the Epilogue of the first quarto, however, Marston himself admits, and begs apology for, the fact that his dramaturgy is oriented exclusively around indoor performance for child actors, and not imagined as portable between playhouses: “After all, let me intreat my Reader not to taxe me, the fashion of the Entrances Musique of this Tragidy, for know it is printed onely as it was presented by youths, & after the fashion of the priuate stage.”

In contrast to Jonson and Marston, who maintain a division between the dramaturgy of professional drama written for the outdoor theaters and the children’s drama written for the indoor playhouses, in Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare exposes this division as artificial. In Antony and Cleopatra, he continues to adapt conventions from Marston’s children’s company’s performance of Sophonisba, deploying them to different uses depending upon theatrical location.

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408 See John Marston, The Wonder of Women, or The Tragedie of Sophonisba as it hath beene sundry times acted at the Blacke Friers (London: Printed by John Windet, 1606), A2v.

409 Ibid., G3v.
He innovates a new double vision for his dramaturgy to be playable to different effects on indoor and outdoor stages.

The allusion to perspective in *Antony and Cleopatra*, which has been called Shakespeare’s “most anamorphic drama,” also signals an evolution in Shakespearean metatheatrer. 410 “Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon,” Cleopatra says of Antony, “The other way’s a Mars” (2.5.116–17). Shakespeare’s perspectival allusion foregrounds how nearly everything in the play is susceptible to distortion, from Philo and Demetrius’s opening assessment of Antony’s “dotage” for Cleopatra and her “gipsy’s lust” (1.1.1–9), to Octavius’s and Cleopatra’s opposed recollections of Antony’s transcendent masculinity. Whereas Octavius memorializes him “so like a soldier” who “didst drink / The stale of horses and the gilded puddle / Which beasts would cough at” (1.4.62–4), Cleopatra remembers instead how “His face was as the heavens,” and how “His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm / Crested the world; his voice was propertied / As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends” (5.2.78–83). What audiences see and hear throughout the play is shadowed by mediating comments, such as Philo’s and Demetrius’s, and by mediating memories, such as Octavius’s and Cleopatra’s. Drawing attention to the epistemological problem of being and appearing, in *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare makes an entire play into an anamorphic work of art.

The potential for characters and situations to be viewed from literal, physical changes in points of view depending upon the space in which audiences sit amplifies the anamorphic qualities of *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as other King’s Men plays surrounding 1608 when they acquired the Blackfriars indoor playhouse. Although this play was likely composed and

performed around 1606–7, a few years before the King’s Men began performing at the Blackfriars, the Lord Chamberlain’s 1669 records indicate that it in fact had been “formerly acted at the Blackfriars.” As van Es has argued, while “this development was accelerated by the King’s Men’s acquisition of the new venue, it was (for a variety of reasons) already under way before 1608.”

Shakespeare and his company had multiple performance locations in mind, and were thinking opportunistically about how changes in playhouse could multiply a spectator’s perspective on scenes and characters beyond what is provided in the dialogue.

This anamorphic hybridity is most apparent in Cleopatra’s famous suicide speech, when she warns Iris:

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us and present
Our Alexandrian revels; Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth; and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I’th’ posture of a whore. (5.2.215–20)

Performed by the leading boy actor on an all-boy stage (Cleopatra is accompanied only by Charmian and Iris), Cleopatra’s self-reflexive allusion to a “squeaking Cleopatra” draws the audience’s attention to the “boy” currently performing her “greatness.” It also invites comparison between the actor and his capabilities with those of other contemporary actors and playing companies. In 1606–7, this would specifically draw comparison with the actors performing for the recently revived children’s companies previously discussed. When performed at the Globe, Shakespeare asks his audience to recognize the leading boy actor’s “greatness” in his performance of Cleopatra, and to applaud his superiority to the actors in the children’s

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412 van Es, “Reviving the Legacy of Indoor Performance,” 249.
companies; Shakespeare and his actor are so talented that they can blur the fictional world of the play and the material world of the theater.\footnote{See Marjorie Garber, who writes that the boy playing Cleopatra produces “theatrical disillusionment” so that “Here it is the fiction, the legend, the character who is ‘real’” in \textit{Shakespeare After All} (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 750, and Michael Shapiro, who argues that “Shakespeare’s use of self-conscious theatricality here merges actor and character into an even richer stage illusion” in “Boying Her Greatness: Shakespeare’s Use of Coterie Drama in \textit{Antony and Cleopatra},” \textit{The Modern Language Review} 77, no. 1 (1982): 13. The detail of a “squeaking Cleopatra” is particularly suggestive of the satirical children’s companies, which often channeled the “squeaking” qualities of their boy actors’ changing voices into parodic, metatheatrical effects. See George Chapman’s Bassiolo who remarks that “Perhaps some tender Ladie will squat here, / And if some standing Rush should chance to pricke her, / She’d squeak & spoile the songs that must be sung,” in \textit{The Gentleman Usher} (London: Printed by V[alentine]. S[immes]. for Thomas Thorppe, 1606), C1'. Likewise, both Feliche and Rosaline in \textit{Antonio and Mellida} comment on the “squeakiness” of boys’ voices on the children’s stages. Feliche asks “what trebble minikin squeaks there, ha?” and Rosaline judges that one of the singing page’s voice “squeaks like a dry cork shoe,” in \textit{Antonio and Mellida} (London: Printed by [R. Bradock] for Mathewe Lownes, and Thomas Fisher, 1602), E3', H4'. See also Gina Bloom, “‘Thy Voice Squeaks’: Listening for Masculinity on the Early Modern Stage,” \textit{Renaissance Drama} 29 (1998): 39–71.} When this would eventually be performed at Blackfriars, however, Cleopatra’s self-reflexive allusion to herself as a boy distorts this effect at the Globe. On the Blackfriars stage, where boy actors often took on incongruous roles to produce deflating parodies of their characters, Cleopatra’s reference to herself as a “squeaking…boy” alludes to herself as just another boy playing at being a transcendent hero.\footnote{See Munro, \textit{Coriolanus} and the Little Eyases,” 86.} When performed at the Blackfriars, Cleopatra’s suicide speech becomes more satirical and parodic.\footnote{See Bloom, who suggests that “Perhaps in rehearsals the boy playing Cleopatra had been able to use his uncracked or partially cracked voice to deliver the line…at least provoking laughter from the audience at the tragic climax of the play,” in “‘Thy Voice Squeaks,’” 54.}

By continuously drawing attention to the boy actor’s body beneath the character Cleopatra, by staging her as a potentially parodic heroine played by an incongruously “squeaking” boy actor, and by adapting the conventions of Marston’s \textit{Sophonisba} in his all-boy...
suicide scene, Shakespeare collapses the artificial division between professional and children’s
drama constructed by Jonson and Marston. In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare creatively
employs conventions from the children’s companies to advance his own evolving repertory and
appeal to audiences of both indoor and outdoor theaters. Unlike Jonson, who primarily used his
boy actors imaginatively at the Blackfriars, and unlike Marston, who apologizes in the “Author’s
Note” appended to *Sophonisba* for how his dramaturgy is exclusive to “the fashion of the private
stage,” Shakespeare shows how conventions of both playhouses can be made portable and
produce different effects depending upon audience and location. He demonstrates how the
conventions of children’s companies, as well as boy actors themselves, could be resourcefully
incorporated alongside professional actors on both indoor and outdoor stages to distinct rather
than parallel effects.

R. Warwick Bond was, to my knowledge, the first to link the British *Cymbeline* to
Shakespeare’s Roman *Antony and Cleopatra*, suggesting that *Cymbeline* is “a direct sequel to the
sumptuous *Antony and Cleopatra*.” Whereas Bond links the two plays based on Shakespeare’s
desire to bridge his “two great series of plays, one on English, the other on Roman history,” I
read *Cymbeline* in light of Shakespeare’s anamorphic dramaturgy inaugurated by *Antony and
Cleopatra.*\footnote{See R. Warwick Bond, “The Puzzle of *Cymbeline*,” in *Studia Otiosa: Some Attempts in
Criticism* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1938), 73-4.} I connect the anamorphic nature of Shakespeare’s late dramaturgy written for both
the “amphitheater” of the Globe, “etymologically a place of ‘seeing both ways,’” with the
capacity to be “formed again” when performed at the Blackfriars.\footnote{Wendy Beth Hyman, “‘Beyond Beyond’: *Cymbeline*, the Camera Obscura, and the
Ontology of Elsewhere,” *ELR* 52, no. 3 (2022): 402.}
IV

Composed after the King’s Men finally acquired the Blackfriars, Cymbeline itself is particularly sensitive to how dramatic scenarios, words, and images can change meaning because of venue and circumstance. For example, it includes two texts that can be read in contradictory ways, despite being literally verbatim: Posthumus’s “feigned letter” to Imogen (3.2.40–7, 5.5.278), an amphibologic epistle, and the Soothsayer’s equivocal prophecies (4.2.345–51, 5.5.465–74). As Wendy Beth Hyman writes, “The audience…is offered the privileged position of seeing the same property from two different vantage points at once, like a tree branch half in and half out of the water.”

The scene in which Imogen imagines Posthumus’s departure from Britain for Italy, exiled by King Cymbeline for transgressing his lower social status and secretly wedding the King’s daughter, is also based on the metaphor of perspective. Occurring early in the play’s first act, the scene establishes the optical device as a structural conceit for the play and suggests Shakespeare’s continued exploration of its relation to his dramaturgy, and how perspectival images’ potential for doubleness and contrariety could be adapted into his dramatic medium.

After Pisanio relates Posthumus’s departure from Britain, “Still waving” back at him (1.3.12),

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418 Throughout this chapter, I silently emend the Arden edition and other critics who refer to Shakespeare’s heroine as “Innogen,” using instead the name as it was printed throughout the First Folio, “Imogen,” in order to etymologically draw out how I read part of her function in this perspectival play. As John Pitcher argues, the original spelling of Imogen’s name signals how she is “imagined or pictured in various ways,” and I would add, in various ways depending upon the playhouse in which she is performing, “by all the men around her, and her name tells us this. She is ‘the imagined one’, the ‘Imagine’, the Imogen.” See John Pitcher, “Names in Cymbeline,” Essays in Criticism 43 (1993): 8. For contrasting, comprehensive accounts of the evidence for, and merits of, whether to emend the Folio’s printed text or not, see ibid., 3–8, and Wayne, ed. Cymbeline, 391–8.

419 Hyman, “Beyond Beyond,” 408.
Imogen responds, “Thou shouldst have made him / As little as a crow, or less, ere left / To after-eye him” (14–16). Like Edgar’s Cliffs of Dover speech, Imogen, too, employs the image of a distant crow to imagine a vanishing point along a painted horizon line, clinging to the image of Posthumus until he disappears from sight. When Pisanio tries to tell her, “Madam, so I did,” Imogen is rapt in thought to develop her perspectival metaphor. While less confused than Bushy’s from the end of the previous century, it is still just as dazzling:

I would have broken mine eye-strings, cracked them, but
To look upon him till the diminution
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle;
Nay, followed him till he had melted from
The smallness of a gnat to air, and then
Have turned my eye and wept. (1.3.17–22)

Although Valerie Wayne notes that Imogen’s “broken…eye-strings” refer to her “nerves, blood vessels, tendons or muscles of the eye, which were thought to break at death or the loss of sight” (1.3.17n), they also evoke the many contemporary diagrams with “eye-strings” that were used to illustrate distance-point perspective (Fig. 18). This suggestion is underscored by the very next line, as she imagines following Posthumus on his departing ship “till the diminution / Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle…till he had melted” into the vanishing point of a perspective painting, “to air.” As Hyman puts it, “Posthumus’ receding substance is evoked along a vanishing point, that technology for the representation of space that is oriented in relation to absence…a symbol of nothing and nothingness.” Rather than see this “nothingness as the mere negation of matter,” however, for Hyman the speech serves as a point of departure for the entire play’s preoccupations with perspective, with its encounters and clashes between time and

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420 Ibid., 403.
space: in short, with ontology. It captures the play’s allusions “to a (divine) realm elsewhere or beyond,” and the play’s ability — perhaps more than any other early modern play — to activate new categories of thought: in short, new perspectives that do not depend upon monocular, fixed, certain points of view, but rather “significance beyond the evident sense certainty of sight.”

Building on Hyman’s insight into the play’s preoccupations with multiple types of perspective, I add that the play itself enacts this dialectical process of viewing from two different subject positions, not just within the play, which stages multiple doubles and echoes of itself, but also beyond the inner world of the play and into its exterior setting from two different perspectives, the Globe and the Blackfriars.

The playhouse anamorphism of Cymbeline revolves around, on the one hand, its engagement with the inherited playing space of the recently disbanded children’s companies on the Blackfriars stage, and on the other, the political resonances of Cymbeline at the two playhouses. The first of these involves a scene that has proven to be one of the most conspicuous in Cymbeline, both in Shakespeare’s time and our own. It is surprisingly a scene of two typically inconspicuous actions: reading and sleeping:

Enter Imogen in her bed.
IMOGEN Who’s there? My woman Helen?
HELEN Please you, madam.
IMOGEN What hour is it?
HELEN Almost midnight, madam.
I have read three hours then; mine eyes are weak.
Fold down the leaf where I have left. To bed.
Take not away the taper, leave it burning,
And if thou canst awake by four o’th’clock,
I prithee, call me. Sleep hath seized me wholly.

421 Ibid., 403–4.

To your protection I commend me, gods.
From fairies and the tempters of the night,
Guard me, beseech ye. *Sleeps.* (2.2.1–10)

Shakespeare depicts a domestic scene between Imogen and her lady Helen. Audiences witness Imogen in her most private space, her bedchamber. Imogen would be focalized and framed either by the discovery space at the rear of the Globe and Blackfriars, or foregrounded center-stage: on early modern stages the bed operates, Sasha Roberts explains, “like a stage-within-a-stage, an intense and compelling visual and symbolic arena for acting out powerful passions and transgressions, and for mapping the disruptions and collisions of private and public space.”

Imogen also alludes to one of the dramatic elements constituting her present performance. The “taper” she had been using to read before bed doubles, on the one hand, as a stage prop at the Globe, and on the other, as the dominant source of lighting for performances at the Blackfriars. Performed during the day at the open-air Globe, the taper functions like many other stage props, subsumed into the fiction of the play without emitting any functional light in the theater or creating a sense of continuity between the onstage action and offstage spectators. At the Blackfriars, however, the shared lighting implicates audiences into more direct relationship with performers. According to Eleanor Collins, boy actors performing women’s roles at the Blackfriars, wearing cosmetics and appearing under the candlelight of the

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playhouse’s numerous tapers, would have appeared “at once saintly and sexually provocative.” They are capable of appearing, in other words, more anamorphic, like the double images circulating in early modern London. Between the Globe and Blackfriars, Imogen’s appearance is changeable, with audiences’ perspective of her contingent on their place in different venues, each distinctly overwritten by previous histories. Although Shakespeare has established Imogen’s character as exclusively “saintly” up to this point in the play — she reveals Cymbeline’s evil Queen as “dissembling” and as a “tyrant” (1.1.85), and demonstrates sincere love for Posthumus — the sleeping Imogen, vulnerably on display in the indoor theater, verges into the position of eroticized boy actors from past performances on this very stage by children’s companies discussed in the previous chapter. At the Blackfriars, then, Shakespeare problematizes the role of the audience in this intimate, domestic scene.

Immediately after Imogen falls asleep, Iachimo creeps out, specified by the Folio’s stage direction, “from the trunk,” deceptively placed in her room as if bearing love-tokens from Posthumus. Upon emerging, Iachimo immediately creates a visual scene through his language to depict the furnishings of Imogen’s bedroom:

The crickets sing, and man’s o’er-laboured sense
Repairs itself by rest. Our Tarquin thus
Did softly press the rushes ere he wakened
The chastity he wounded. Cytherea,
How bravely thou becom’st thy bed! Fresh lily,
And whiter than the sheets! That I might touch,
But kiss, one kiss. Rubies unparagoned,
How dearly they do’t. ’Tis her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus. The flame o’th’taper
Bows toward her and would under-peep her lids
To see th’enclosed lights, now canopied
Under these windows, white and azure laced
With blue of heaven’s own tinct. But my design —

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To note the chamber. I will write all down. (2.2.11–24)

Because Iachimo slinks from the trunk already placed within her bedroom rather than entering the stage after she falls asleep, Sarah Wall-Randell has shown how “the impression is almost created that he is actually coming out of the book she has just laid aside…we cannot be sure at first that Imogen isn’t dreaming Iachimo’s night visitation.”426 This possibility destabilizes how audiences understand what is happening onstage. Audiences are temporarily suspended into believing that they are so proximate with Imogen that they are within her own head, watching a manifestation of her dream, which quickly morphs into nightmare.

Following the scene of intimate domesticity between Helen and Imogen, Iachimo immediately emphasizes the surrounding stillness and silence: “the crickets sing.” Simon Forman’s firsthand account of the play indicates the success of this effect in its original performances:

Remember also the storri of Cymbelin king of England…and howe the Italian that cam from her loue conveied him selfe into A Cheste, and said yt was a chest of plate sent from her loue & others, to be presented to the kinge. And in the depest of the night, she being aslepe, he opened the cheste, & cam forth of yt. And vewed her in her bed & the markes of her body, & toke awai her braslet, & after Accused her of adultery to her loue &c.427

Occupying over a fourth of his summary of the play and encompassing “all of his descriptive energy,” Forman remembers this scene at greater length and in greater detail than any other in Cymbeline.428 In addition to noting how Iachimo’s ekphrastic scene-setting created the atmosphere of “the deepest of the night,” Forman emphasizes this as another scene of “curious


Quoted in Wayne, ed. Cymbeline, 30–1.

See Wall-Randell, The Immaterial Book, 50.
viewing,” a scene which rehearses the intersections between perspective, rhetoric, and their potential for sexual violence: “And vewed her in her bed & the marks of her body.” Once Iachimo’s speech unfolds, it also foregrounds artistic invention and its susceptibility to change depending upon viewers’ vantage points and material settings.

Iachimo’s ekphrasis of the interior of Imogen’s bedroom, in other words, recalls scenes from three of Shakespeare’s works previously discussed. He not only invokes his two early epyllia, *The Rape of Lucrece* (“Our Tarquin”) and *Venus and Adonis* (“Cytherea”), but also Enobarbus’s sexualized description of Cleopatra’s barge: “With tapestry of silk and silver, the story / Proud Cleopatra when she met her Roman, / And Cydnus swelled above the banks” (2.4.69–72). Ros King rightly notes how “the stage presence of trunk and bed, the touching sight of Imogen asleep, which also feeds our voyeurism, Iachimo’s appearance, his actions and erotic poetry, together conjure up an entire gamut of contradictory emotions and reactions to sex and rape.”429 I would add that these contradictory reactions to, and interpretations of, Iachimo’s ekphrastic poetry and his violation of the sleeping Imogen would depend upon the playhouse in which it was set.

The first allusion that comes to Iachimo’s mind, “Our Tarquin thus,” puts audiences into a shared position with the rapacious Roman from Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*. Forman, who attended the play at the Globe, retains some distance in his account of the scene. His opening imperative to himself, “Remember also,” echoes the teleological early modern method of reading in which lessons from literature were committed to memory and applied to personal and civic life.430

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429 King, *Cymbeline*, 22.

description of Iachimo maintains a similar detachment: “And [he] vewed her in her bed.” Indeed, at the Globe, the further away from the stage, the higher the seats cost, and, typically, the wealthier were the audience members. Those closest to the stage, and therefore closest to Iachimo and Imogen, were the groundlings, who only paid one-pence for attendance. Their own social class and theatrical affinities with the Globe’s nationalistic ethos, and its sympathies for British chronicle history and domestic tragedy — two genres “profoundly alien to the indoor stage” — thus stand in contradistinction to Iachimo, and may retain a distance and even antagonism toward Iachimo.431

The playhouse conditions and history of the Blackfriars, however, and its audience of gallants — some of them onstage alongside Iachimo, and who would have even been directly addressed by him — enhances their complicit gaze. Shakespeare thus links them with not only with Iachimo, but with the voyeurism of Tarquin from Lucrece. His inclusive first-person pronoun, “Our Tarquin thus,” spoken intimately to the proximate audience in the indoor theater — both to those on stools onstage as well as to the other few hundred members in the audience under the shared tapered lighting, “under-peep[ing] [Imogen’s] lids” — implicates them uncomfortably with Iachimo. In contrast to Forman and the audience at the Globe, the Blackfriars audience is literally next to Iachimo, and in intimate proximity to the vulnerable Imogen. As Stern has suggested, the minute visual details included in some of the stage directions of Shakespeare’s late plays signal the kinds of close attention enabled for Blackfriars audiences.432 At the Globe, the only audience members potentially capable of seeing “On her left breast / A mole, cinque-spotted” would have been the groundlings (2.2.37–8). At the Blackfriars,


in contrast, this may have been revealed not only to Iachimo, but to most in the audience and particularly the gallants onstage. Because of the Blackfriars’ atmosphere, haunted by erotic, satirical children’s plays from the preceding decade, Stern also contends that “when Shakespeare started writing for the Second Blackfriars Playhouse himself, then, he will have had to win round a ready-made audience used to boy performance. Perhaps that explains why Shakespeare’s post-1608 plays are, in innuendo-filled fashion, repeatedly concerned with boys and girls on the sexual threshold.”

Rather than trying to “win round” the Blackfriars audience accustomed to drama displaying child actors as sexually available to the spectators’ gaze, Shakespeare uses this backdrop to make the voyeurism of this scene into an act more violent and perverse. Indeed, as Patricia Parker has argued, “the voyeuristic pornographic display of Imogen’s female body (and what Iachimo calls its ‘natural notes’),” focuses attention on the sleeping, vulnerable body of the boy actor. Performed at the Blackfriars, the scene thus functions as a continuation of Shakespeare’s metatheatrical critique of such stage erotics and voyeurism dramatized in *Troilus and Cressida*. Especially if placed within the discovery space that gave the stage, as Michael Neill writes, “its structural focus,” Imogen’s vulnerable body within confines of the narrower Blackfriars would challenge the audience’s “curious gaze,” focalized on Iachimo preying over her and the boy actor silently asleep in bed.

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433 Stern, “‘A Ruinous Monastery,’” 106.


Iachimo’s poetry, moreover, reenacts the issues over the uses to which highly visual rhetoric learned in grammar school was being put to use by poets in the 1590s. While Iachimo’s speech begins by projecting an imagistic setting onto the bare Jacobean stages of the Globe and Blackfriars, moving audiences into imagining her bedroom — “Such and such pictures, there the window, such / Th’adornment of her bed, the arras, figures, / Why, such and such, and the contents o’th’story” (2.2.25–7) — it shifts into a poetic assault when he arrives upon Imogen’s exposed body: “Ah, but some natural notes about her body, / Above ten thousand meaner moveables, / Would testify t’enrich mine inventory” (2.2.28–30). Underscoring the object of Iachimo’s poetic invention through its etymological cognate, Iachimo’s “inventory,” Shakespeare again foregrounds the erotic ends to which perspectival rhetoric is capable of being put to use.

Shakespeare thus constructs the scene in Imogen’s bedchamber to be anamorphic visually. The relative distance of the audience from Iachimo at the Globe shrinks inside the Blackfriars, putting audiences into more confrontational positions, uncomfortably situated alongside Iachimo’s violative rhetoric. King’s assertion that “however much we may side with Imogen, we too are voyeurs, caught up in the luscious beauty of Iachimo’s poetry,” is particularly true at the Blackfriars, where the children’s companies had only recently been prohibited from playing in this very theater in 1608 shortly before the first performances of Cymbeline. In the play’s finale, however, Shakespeare ultimately wields his contrasting playing spaces, and their distinctly acoustic qualities and metrical allegiances, to splinter the political meaning of his play and how it would resonate for different audiences.

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436 King, Cymbeline, 23.
Written in the wake of James’s accession to the throne, his assertions of divine right absolutism, and his project to unite England and Scotland, *Cymbeline* has been read as a propagandistic play promoting English imperialism.\(^{437}\) It has also more recently been read as a play dissonant and critical of James and his imperial aspirations.\(^{438}\) Part of the ambivalence of the play’s nationalism, and critics’ difficulty in understanding how to interpret it, derives from the fact that its most patriotic speech on “the natural bravery of your isle,” Britain, is also delivered by its most repugnant character, the wicked stepmother of Imogen, Cymbeline’s anonymous Queen (3.1.17–34).\(^{439}\) Even more of our political interpretation of the play, however, depends upon its final act, in which the ghosts of Posthumus’s ancestors question Jupiter’s treatment of their son, and in which Jupiter appears as a *deus ex machina* to justify himself and prophesy Posthumus’s and Britain’s prosperous future.

In her seminal reading of the play, Leah Marcus shows how “*Cymbeline* will support a remarkably subtle, detailed reading as political allegory…a vision of political concord under the

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reigning monarch.” As soon as she makes this claim, however, a skeptical “And yet” reverberates throughout her next paragraph: “And yet, for all our efforts to follow the play’s ‘Jacobean line,’ there are ways in which the play itself resists it…And yet, in the interpretation of Cymbeline, as very frequently in the decipherment of the Stuart masque, we have to follow the ‘authorized’ line of political allegory in order to discover the gaps.” She puts pressure on moments involving “particular cultural and political resonances, the specific moments in the dramatic action at which its [deconstructive] energies burst forth,” including the play’s final act. For Marcus, “the Descent of Jupiter is perilously balanced between the compelling and the ludicrous. It is ‘double written’ or overwritten in a way that calls special attention to it and invites political decipherment but also provides a mechanism by which the ‘authorized’ political reading can be dispersed or ridiculed.” Building on Marcus’s historical study, Wayne has further explored how the play has been adapted from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century for both patriotic and parodic purposes. I want to add to these studies and the fruitful line of criticism they have generated by exploring the multiple perspectives, and the cultural and political resonances, at work in this scene that complicate how it could have been originally received by Jacobean audiences in performance. Focusing on the metatheatricality of its poetic forms in particular, I want to consider how changes in the play’s venue and audience could have affected how its final scene was “read.” I argue that the potential for widely disparate interpretations of the play that speak to their physical, cultural, and geographic settings that

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440 Marcus, Puzzling Shakespeare, 139.

Wayne recognizes in eighteenth-century and modern productions, from Bath to Santa Cruz, was built into the forms of the play itself, and anticipated by the play’s original capacity to resonate differently in Shakespeare’s indoor and outdoor playhouses.

The final act’s cascade of theatrical and metrical forms foregrounds how they are intertwined with the play’s meaning and reception. In the scenes immediately preceding the Descent of Jupiter, for example, Shakespeare shows, and then narrates, Guiderius, Arviragus, and Belarius’s victory over the Roman forces, and their rescue of the captive Cymbeline, four separate times. He first depicts the battle in an unusual dumb show, “naked of the usual ‘Alarums and Excursions.’” Posthumus then describes what the audience has just witnessed in a rousing 48-line blank verse narration: “Then began / A stop I’th’chaser, a retire; anon / A rout, confusion thick” (5.3.39–41). One of the Britons who retreated interrupts to compress Posthumus’s lengthy speech into a brief, sexually suggestive aphorism: “This was strange chance: / A narrow lane, an old man, and two boys” (5.3.51–2). Posthumus concludes the episode by exasperatedly editing the Lord’s version of the story into a doggerel heroic couplet:

Will you rhyme upon’t
And vent it for a mock’ry? Here is one:
‘Two boys, an old man twice a boy, a lane,
Preserved the Britons, was the Romans’ bane.’ (5.3.55–8)

Shakespeare thus initiates the play’s sequence of resolutions by deploying a contrapposto of verse forms and theatrical tropes. He emphasizes how much the media are the message of the play’s conclusion.

In the following scene, considered “the hardest passage to understand from a play that presents many interpretive difficulties,” a detailed stage direction indicates how “Jupiter

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442 King, Cymbeline, 96.
descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle. He throws a thunder bolt. The ghosts 
fall on their knees.”

A literal *deus ex machina*, Jupiter begins the play’s pivot from tragedy to comedy. Evoking James, Jupiter descends to rebuff the ghosts of the sleeping Posthumus’s ancestors, and declare future peace for Britain, brought about by the union of Posthumus and Imogen. Shakespeare continues to focus the audience’s aural attention on his shifting poetic meters. While Jupiter speaks in a kind of expanded Shakespearean sonnet, alternating *abab* rhymes until it resolves in a concluding couplet (5.4.63–83), he also ridicules the “din” spoken by Posthumus’s ancestors, who “offend our hearing.” “Hush!” he exclaims, before proclaiming how “Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift…He shall be lord of Lady Imogen” (5.4.77).

The scene’s self-consciousness about its theatrical artifice — from its cohabiting verse forms to its spectacular theophany — make interpretations of the scene and its Stuart iconography so variable and challenging. Wayne observes that in adaptations of *Cymbeline* in performance, Jupiter’s Descent “serves as an ideological index in each instance, since it projects Posthumus’s dream of a deity who is in charge of the play’s events.”

How Jupiter appears and sounds, in other words, shapes audience’s patriotic or parodic response to the play and its nationalistic, imperialistic politics. Marcus similarly suggests that how audiences “read” this episode “would depend in large part on how it was brought to life in the theater.” She speculates how, at court, “the play’s overlay of uncertainties and questioning could have been overcome through spectacular staging of scenes like the Descent of Jupiter,” while elsewhere, “the play could have been staged in ways that subtly highlighted its own deconstruction of reading and


By drawing attention to the play’s own insistence, on the one hand, to how its textual echoes acquire different meanings in different contexts, and on the other, to the play’s own insistence on how it sounds — “You are made / Rather to wonder at the things you hear,” Posthumus says (5.3.53–4) — I want to consider how the play’s final act may have been received in the King’s Men’s two playhouses. I use the “din” of the ghosts’ speeches, spoken in rhyming fourteener, to explore how they may have been heard by different audiences based on contemporary repertories. As Lucy Munro has suggested, Shakespeare’s surprising incorporation of an outmoded verse form “argues that the debates about nationhood and national identity found elsewhere in the play are also operating on a stylistic level.”

Immediately after Posthumus repents for his attempted murder of Imogen in some of the play’s most moving blank verse, he falls asleep, before another dumb show commences to bring the ghosts of his family members onstage to rebuke Jupiter:

SICILIUS No more, thou thunder-master, show thy spite on mortal flies.  
With Mars fall out, with Juno chide, that thy adulteries  
Rates and revenges.

…

1 BROTHER Where once he was mature for man, in Britain where was he  
That could stand up his parallel, or fruitful object be  
In eye of Imogen, that best could deem his dignity?

MOTHER With marriage wherefore was he mocked, to be exiled and thrown  
From Leonati seat, and cast from her, his dearest one,  
Sweet Imogen?

…

2 BROTHER For this, from stiller seats we came, our parents and us twain,  
That, striking in our country’s cause, fell bravely and were slain,  
Our fealty and Tenantius’ right with honour to maintain. (5.4.30–53)

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445 Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, 144.

The aural shift from Posthumus’ probing speech of penance to the Leonati’s rhymed fourteeners to Jupiter’s expanded sonnet indicate how audiences would be able to hear the deliberate differences in meter.

Various explanations have been proposed for Shakespeare’s choice of rhymed fourteeners, often focusing on the form’s past popularity in Tudor poetry and drama in the sixteenth century. For Roger Warren, the distinct sound of the verse form serves to demarcate the play’s “normal” world that Posthumus inhabits, from the dream world of his ancestors: they help “to define the fact that we are watching what Posthumus is dreaming about. The first, and most important, dramatic function of the style is the externalization of his dream.” For Geoffrey Hill, the “plodding inadequacy of the verse” serves as “an element of formal pleading which is quite distinct from the eloquent magnanimity of confirmed majesty. Their wooden, archaic cliches are like an emblem of old and rather weary sincerity, whereas Cymbeline’s concluding oratory is the reaffirmation of the mystique of status.” Similarly, Maurice Hunt suggests, “If Shakespeare had wanted to convey the impression that the ghosts enter Posthumus’ world from a time long dead, he could not have done better than to have them speak rhymed fourteeners.” Martin Butler likewise emphasizes “the pointedly archaic language” and how it “resurrects the relentlessly stiff aural world of a theatre that had yet to unlock the fluency of blank verse…foreground[ing] their difference, making them seem like visitors from another, less

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spacious dramatic world.” Yet Butler also integrates the ghosts’ fourteeners into the harmony of reconciliations needed by the play as a dramatic romance: although “their voices deepen the play by linking it with an older harsher universe,” the ghosts ultimately “need Jupiter, and his more commanding speech, to show them that their sufferings are not meaningless.”

These assessments derive from the fourteeners’ former popularity in Tudor poetry and drama. As Munro observes, this was the verse form chosen for the “Englishing” of epic poetry, and was “associated with national and dynastic heritage.” Having been invented by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey in the sixteenth century, fourteeners were employed by the most popular and influential English translations of Homer, Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and Seneca. The form was also commonly used in Elizabethan plays, such as Clymon and Clamydes and Damon and Pithias — both sources for Shakespeare’s Cymbeline, the former an Elizabethan romance, the latter a tragicomedy — and Cambyses. Based on Shakespeare’s allusion in I Henry IV, the form originally evoked majesty, pity, and “passion”: “Give me a cup of sack,” Falstaff


451 Munro, Archaic Style, 220, 222.

452 See, for example, Thomas Phaer’s translation of Virgil’s Aeneid, which attempted to elevate English vernacular poetics to the status of Virgil’s classical idiom (the first seven books were printed in 1558, which were expanded and reprinted seven more times prior to Cymbeline); Abraham Fleming’s first English translation of Virgil’s Eclogues (1575) and Barnabe Googe’s translation of the same text two years later (1577); Arthur Golding’s influential translation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses (1567); Lewis Evans’ first English translation of two of Horace’s Satires (1565) and Thomas Drant’s first English translation of Horace’s Arte of Poetrie, Epistles, and Satyrs (1567); George Turberville’s translations of Mantuan’s Eglogs (1567) and Ovid’s Heroycall Epistles (1567, and reprinted five times within three years); Alexander Neville, Thomas Newton, and John Studley’s translations of Seneca’s Tragedies (1560s); Neville’s The Lamentable Tragedie of Oedipus (1563); the anonymous first English translation of Theocritus’ Sixe Idillia (1588); Arthur Hall’s Iliad (1581); and George Chapman’s monumental translation of The Iliad, whose first seven books were published in 1598, before being expanded and reprinted in 1609 and 1611 around the time of Cymbeline’s first performances.
says, “to make my eyes look red, that it may be thought I have wept; for I must speak in passion, and I will do it in King Cambyses’ vein” (2.4.374–7). They were even employed for George Withers’ translation of Janus Dousa’s dedicatory book of British Odes, *Odarum Britannicarum Liber* (1586), celebrating Robert Dudley and the English army’s presence in the Netherlands to aid them against Spain: “Not yet like praise was due to him for his deserte, / As to your excellence: who comes with force to take our parte.”

When performed at the Globe, these past performances and associations with the unexpected, archaic verse form overwrite the finale of *Cymbeline*. The Leonati’s spectral speeches do not ironize the Descent of Jupiter and its attempt to resolve the play’s political fissures. Rather, the Leonati’s fourteener make them sound as much like ghosts of the Elizabethan public theater and the original dynastic project of English poetics. The metatheatricality of the verse at the Globe, as Munro writes, intensified “the epic undertones of Posthumus’ redemption, capitalising on the archaic grandeur and emotional heft of the established form.” The mix of the Leonati’s fourteener ceding into Jupiter’s expanded sonnet even suggests, as Butler implies, a metrical union between the public playhouse’s nostalgic Tudor drama and the commanding voice of Jupiter, who shadows the King’s Men’s royal patron and his projected national Union.

Although Francis Meres still lauded the translations of Virgil, Ovid, and Seneca into fourteener in *Palladis Tamia* (1598), by the first decade of the seventeenth century fourteener

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453 Quoted in King, *Cymbeline*, 84.

454 Munro, *Archaic Style*, 222.
had accrued contrasting connotations.\textsuperscript{455} Indeed, while each of the aforementioned scholars focuses on the verse form’s “archaic” nature alone, fourteeners had, in fact, continued to be used into the first decade of the seventeenth century, including within indoor, private theaters. No longer evoking patriotism, however, fourteeners had devolved into parody.\textsuperscript{456} Ben Jonson, for example, uses them to initiate the second scene of \textit{Volpone} (c. 1605–6). Although this play was written for the King’s Men and was performed at the Globe, the meter appears exclusively in a scene that was likely unique to academic performance, where, Jonson later claims, his play was favorably regarded at “The Two Famous Universities.” As Robert Watson notes, because the printed text of \textit{Volpone} exceeds the customary two-hour traffic of the early modern stage, this scene is often cut. Nano’s opening lines, which call attention to the scene’s arcane subject matter and its jarring old-fashioned verse form, suggest that his pedantry is “better suited to a university than a general audience”.\textsuperscript{457}

\begin{quote}
Now, room for fresh gamesters, who do will you to know,  
They do bring you neither play, nor university show;  
And therefore do entreat you, that whatsoever they rehearse,  
May not fare a whit the worse, for the false pace of the verse. (1.2.1–4)
\end{quote}

Nano declares that this comic set-piece is “neither play, nor university show,” that it is neither from the public theatre, nor a typical academic performance. He asserts that a new kind of “university show” is occurring. Pleading for acceptance of “the false pace of the verse,” he not


\textsuperscript{456} Shakespeare had also anticipated the form’s turn of fortunes, playing with the potential for the comic metatheatricality of this meter in the earlier “tedious brief scene” of \textit{Pyramus and Thisbe} in \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 5.1.270–99.

only acknowledges that the fourteeners sound distinctive; he also indicates that they are also now out of fashion. Rather than celebrate either college’s alumni who had used the form for their vernacular translations of the classics — such as Oxford’s Phaer or Cambridge’s Neville — Jonson employs the form for satire. Nano’s fourteeners constitute a long-winded speech describing the transmigration of Pythagorean philosophy in the colleges:

For know, here is enclosed the soul of Pythagoras,
That juggler divine, as hereafter shall follow;

... Hermotimus was next (I find it in my charta)
To whom it did pass, where no sooner it was missing
But with one Pyrrhus of Delos it learn’d to go a fishing;
And thence did it enter the sophist of Greece.
From Pythagore, she went into a beautiful piece,
Hight Aspasia, the meretrix; and the next toss of her
Was again of a whore, she became a philosopher. (1.2.1–20)

Jonson satirizes the “false pace” of the dated verse form for his academic audience by loading it with Latinisms and Anglicisms — “my charta,” “Hight Aspasia, the meretrix” — and doggerel rhymes, “missing / a fishing.” For the private academic audience of Volpone, fourteeners are not nostalgic, but parodic. In contrast to the form’s former glory in Elizabethan poetry and the public theater, Jonson’s fourteeners at “The two famous universities” constitute an academic joke.458

Francis Beaumont had also recently employed fourteeners exclusively for the fourth Interlude of his highly innovative and metatheatrical play The Knight of the Burning Pestle,

458 See also Jonson’s later claim to William Drummond, “That the translations of Homer and Virgil in long Alexandrines [fourteeners] were but prose,” in Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems, ed. George Parfitt (London: Penguin, 1988), 461, as well as his later, still parodic use of fourteeners for the character Iniquity, modelled after the Vice from Medieval and Tudor drama, in the opening scene of The Devil is an Ass (1616), also performed at the Blackfriars by the King’s Men, in The Devil Is An Ass and Other Plays, 1.1.44–53. The archaism of Iniquity is mocked by both Satan and the lesser devil Pug throughout the scene: “Remember what number it is: six hundred and sixteen,” Satan admonishes Iniquity, reminding him that he and his verse were fashionable “fifty years agone” (1.1.83).
performed by the Children of the Queen’s Revels at Blackfriars in 1607, shortly before Shakespeare and the King’s Men acquired this very playhouse. It therefore offers perhaps the best touchstone for how the form would have sounded to the Blackfriars audience a few years later in the same setting. Each interlude is designed to satirize George and his wife Nell’s taste for old-fashioned material from the public playhouses. In the fourth and final entr’acte, Rafe enters as the Lord of May and calls for a Morris dance, by now “a stereotypically rural activity” surrounding a holiday that had been waning in popularity since Elizabeth’s reign, and even more so in the early seventeenth century, particularly for the aristocracy and wealthy elite who mostly comprised the Blackfriars audience:

Rejoice, oh English hearts, rejoice; rejoice, oh lovers dear;
Rejoice, oh city, town, and country; rejoice eke every shire.
For now the fragrant flowers do spring and sprout in seemly sort,
The little birds do sit and sing, the lambs do make fine sport. (35–8)

Beaumont’s parodic treatment of the grocer George, his wife Nell, and his apprentice Rafe culminates in these alliterative fourteeners celebrating May Day. Beaumont employs the form in the final Interlude to further link George and Nell with the public theater, not just with its different use of musical instruments and its plays celebrating citizen achievements, but also with its dated meter.

As Joshua Smith recently argued, however, Beaumont’s celebration of May Day in the final Interlude, and George and Nell’s subversive distribution of lower-class beer to the Blackfriars’ audience of gallants, redirects the object of his satire partially away from Rafe, George, Nell, and the conventions of the public theater. Rather, by celebrating May Day in the

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460 Ibid., 490.
nostalgic meter of fourteener — and Rafe’s are relatively skilled compared with Jonson’s
deliberate pastiche, exemplified in the alliteration linking the “fragrant flowers” with the “spring
and sprout in seemly sort,” even if not approaching the serious flexibility with the form in the
hands of Phaer and Chapman — Rafe, George, and Nell assume “the traditional role of the
nobility on May Day,” thereby confrontationally undermining the Blackfriars’ aristocratic
audience members, “implicitly critiqu[ing] their social superiors in the process.” As Parker has
argued, moreover, the Blackfriars audience was also partially comprised by members of the
traditional aristocracy disgruntled by James’ recent penchant for “carpet knights,” richly dressed
and given “increasingly important titles,” who Shakespeare seems to echo in the play’s final
scene through the figures of Imogen (currently dressed as Fidele), who has “looked thyself into
my [Cymbeline’s] grace, / And art mine own” (5.5.94–5), and Belarius, Guiderius, and
Arviragus, who are elevated by Cymbeline to the position of “knights o’th’battle…Companions
to our person,” and fitted “With dignities becoming your estates (5.4.20–2). The nationalistic
verse form can also function to confront the Blackfriars audience, and their recent taste for
deflating satires of James and his Scottish countrymen, of English patriotism, and of the public
theater on this very stage in the years before the King’s Men finally acquired it.

461 On the skill of Chapman’s fourteener in particular, see Munro, Archaic Style, 220.
Smith, “Reading Between the Acts,” 493.


463 On the children’s companies’ satires of the public theater and its patriotism, see van Es,
Shakespeare in Company, 208–17, Munro, “Coriolanus and the Little Eyases,” 80–95, and
of English Theater, 1509–1608: Pedagogue Playwrights, Playbooks, and Play-boys (Abingdon:
When performed at the Blackfriars, then, the Leonati’s fourteeners would have overwritten the palimpsest of this stage’s previous performances, specifically Rafe’s in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, as well as on other private stages, such as those at Oxford and Cambridge in Jonson’s arcane, satirical scene in *Volpone*. The old-fashioned verse form, that is, contributed to more dissonant and critical readings of the final act of *Cymbeline* when performed at the Blackfriars compared with the Globe. Indeed, the ghostly form leads into Jupiter’s Descent “*in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle.*” At the Globe, the Descent not only would provide the outdoor audience the privilege “to experience something of the grandeur of the elaborate court entertainments from which they were excluded,” but it would also mirror the spectacular splendor of the same stage action in Thomas Heywood’s contemporary *Golden Age*, performed by the Queen’s Majesty’s Servants at the Red Bull amphitheater, which includes Jupiter “presented with an eagle, crown, sceptre and thunderbolt, after which Jupiter ascends to Olympus on his eagle in a striking scene.”464 At the Globe, Jupiter would descend from “the heavens” above the stage by a winch, whose noise would be masked by “firecracker thunderbolts,” theatrical devices upon which the Leonati self-consciously comment: “He came in thunder; his celestial breath / Was sulphurous to smell…The marble pavement closes, he is entered / His radiant roof” (5.4.84–91).465 In contrast, in the confines of the Blackfriars, Jupiter’s Descent could not have been as spectacular without the heavens and its stage machinery, and, given that firecrackers were not permitted in the indoor theaters, drums would likely have


performed the same office, deflating the Leonati’s metatheatrical references. In short, as Clare suggests, Jupiter’s Descent in the Blackfriars “would have appeared decidedly less awesome.”\footnote{Clare, \textit{Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic}, 251.}

The verse form, as I am arguing, also would have sounded “less awesome,” with the potential instead to sound either more parodic or more confrontational at the Blackfriars than the Globe. This would therefore enhance the dissonance critics have increasingly ascribed to \textit{Cymbeline} and its ambivalent nationalistic resolution, undermining Jupiter’s — and by extension, James’s — prophecy for British prosperity and hovering over the play’s literal last word, “peace” (5.5.484).\footnote{Indeed, in his review of Peter Hall’s 1988 production at the National Theatre, Stanley Wells describes the sound of the verse as “a deliberately mechanical style that had the effect of parody, betraying a mistrust in its incantatory power,” in “Shakespeare’s Performances in England, 1987–8,” \textit{Shakespeare Survey} 42 (1990): 142.}

I have argued that Shakespeare composed \textit{Cymbeline} to look and sound distinct in his two contrasting playhouses, and to harness the unique material conditions of the two spaces to produce diverging metatheatrical effects and interpretive possibilities. Shakespeare’s plays have long been viewed as taking a less aural, more visual turn in the late plays toward the end of his career. This results not just from the contemporary flare of Jacobean spectacle and the court masque, but it was also a part of Shakespeare’s sustained and evolving dramaturgy, which worked to integrate contemporary developments in visual perspective from the beginning of his career. It was only in these late plays that his interest in an anamorphic, portable dramaturgy was finally able to coincide with his company’s newly acquired palimpsest of a playhouse, the Blackfriars. I have argued, moreover, that the invention of \textit{Cymbeline} — its essential, and especially political, meaning — has been difficult to pin down for critics for so long because it is
implicated with the audience’s perspective, and susceptible to their vantage point in contrasting, culturally inflected playhouses.
EPILOGUE

“A grand Perspective of all concerned”
—John Keats, Annotation to *Paradise Lost*

By the end of Shakespeare’s career, developments in visual perspective were far from exhausted, but they had been successfully adapted into early modern English poetry and drama by the ingenuity of Marlowe, Chapman, Marston, and Shakespeare, among others. In addition to the specific innovations in Shakespeare’s dramaturgy examined in the previous two chapters, perspective had been more broadly integrated into Jacobean drama, as John Dixon Hunt puts it, through “the fashion in which audiences are presented with an exercise in manifold perspectives…a technique upon which the Jacobean drama rings infinite and subtle changes.”

By the early seventeenth century, Inigo Jones had introduced perspective scenery as an ordering device for the Stuart court masque, and an anamorphic logic would proceed to pervade the work of Donne, Herbert, Marvell, and numerous other seventeenth-century writers.

The forms into which visual perspective crystallized in the poetry and drama that I have been tracing perhaps most clearly coalesce, however, in the work of Shakespeare’s epigone, John Webster. Webster is relatively unusual in explicitly referring to anamorphosis in both of his

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major tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, and paintings play a critical role throughout his comedy, *The Devil’s Law-Case*.\(^{469}\) The spectacle and wit of Webster’s scenes, as T. S. Eliot and Bert O. States have observed, are akin to the perspectival *demonstraciones* with which my first chapter illustrated in Marlowe’s *epyllion*; they are designed to showcase his ingenuity as a dramatist rather than produce dramatic unity or clarity, and they often build upon familiar, stock dramatic scenarios of his precursors.\(^{470}\) The initial failure of his play *The White Devil* at the Red Bull amphitheater, “acted,” as he explains in the 1612 quarto’s prefatory letter to readers, “in so dull a time of winter, presented in so open and black a theatre,” underscores his shared understanding with Shakespeare of the “influence that the conditions of viewing exercise over an audience’s evaluation of a dramatic production’s significance.”\(^{471}\) In the same play, moreover, Webster deploys dramaturgical techniques similar to Shakespeare in making

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\(^{471}\) See Nunn, “Lethal Passivity,” 122.
spectators aware of their controlled gazes and the perspectival nature of history and of theater. He also similarly creates dramatic versions of perspectival vanishing points by demanding viewers to “See” his characters, particularly his heroine Vittoria Corombona, as visual objects framed by others onstage.\footnote{472} The metaphor Flamineo employs to assuage Camillo of his marital jealousy — “spectacles fashioned with such perspective art” — materializes over the course of the play, so that spectators’ views of Vittoria are multiplied, manipulated, and “fashioned” by other characters onstage.\footnote{473} It is particularly revealing how, while the play’s ambiguous title is deliberately meant to be applicable to a number of characters in the play — including Lodovico, Flamineo, and Vittoria, among others — by 1665, when the play is entered into the Stationers’ Register and published under a new title, \textit{Vittoria Corombona, or, The White Devil}, the play has been transformed precisely into what Vittoria, and the point of Webster’s play as a whole, is not: as Catherine Belsey puts it, Vittoria is “radically discontinuous” with “no single, unified, fixed position from which to speak.”\footnote{474} The play’s textual history, however, reveals how she has become “fixed” as the eponymous \textit{White Devil}.\footnote{475} Lastly, in the entry on “An Excellent Actor”

\footnote{472} Vittoria is framed dramaturgically in every scene in which she appears, both by other characters and by props. See, for example, 1.2, where she is framed by a carpet Zanche specifically brings out in a detailed stage direction; 3.2, uniquely set apart in the 1612 quarto by the unusual heading “The Arraignment of Vittoria,” where she is dramaturgically placed at the center of a stage-within-the-stage, and surrounded by the officials trying her; and 4.2, where she is framed by a bed onstage. For the unusual heading demarcating “The Arraignment of Vittoria” in the first quarto, see John Webster, \textit{The White Deuil} (London: Printed by N[icholas] O[kes] for Thomas Archer, 1612), E2v.

\footnote{473} Webster, \textit{The White Devil}, in \textit{The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays}, 1.2.96.

\footnote{474} Catherine Belsey, \textit{The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama} (New York: Methuen, 1985), 164, 160.

\footnote{475} See Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, \textit{British Drama, 1533–1642, A Catalogue: Vol. VI, 1609–1616} (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 256, 262. Even before officially affixing Vittoria as the “White Devil” in the 1665 Stationers’ Register, the Oxford deacon and scholar
attributed to Webster for Sir Thomas Overbury’s expanded collection of *New and Choise Characters*, Webster compares playing and playgoing with perspective painting: “sit in a full Theater, and you will think you see so many lines drawne from the circumference of so many eares, whiles the *Actor* is the *Center*… Hee is much affected to painting, and tis a question whether that make him an excellent Plaier, or his playing an exquisite painter.” Webster conjures the concentric lines of perspective to represent the audience’s engagement with “the *Actor,*” who is “the *Center,*” the vanishing point around which a play is constructed, and who is now regarded as “an exquisite painter” for his ability to captivate audiences.

This brief reading of Webster’s dramaturgy thus offers “a grand Perspective of all concerned,” to borrow John Keats’s later phrase, by encompassing the various ways visual perspective had been adapted by English poets and playwrights in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in ways more diffuse than has been previously understood. Even before Haydocke published his translation of Lomazzo, before Inigo Jones introduced perspective scenery to the English stage, and before Charles I appointed van Dyck as court painter, poets and playwrights harnessed visual perspective’s creative possibilities for their own poetic and dramatic media, catering to their audience’s fascination with the new forms of visual representation.

Comparing the unruly, playful experiments with perspective in painting and rhetoric in poetry reveals a surprising shared aesthetic among Continental painting and Elizabethan poetics.

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Abraham Wright had also given the title as “*Vittoria Corombona*” in his miscellaneous transcribed extracts around 1640. See ibid., 262.

Sir Thomas Overbury, *Sir Thomas Ouerburie his Wife, with new elegies upon his (now knowne) untimely death, whereunto are annexed new newes and characters, written by himselfe and other learned gentlemen* (London: Printed by Edward Griffin for Laurence L’isle, 1616), M2r–v.
It illuminates the development of an alternative, perspectival model of reading and writing, one centered around a vanishing point of moral meaninglessness and rhetorical richness; it allows us to revise our understanding of aesthetic decorum in the period. Developments in perspective changed the nature of artistic invention for both painters and poets, displacing aesthetic meaning from within the works of art themselves into the individualized, subjective experience of viewers, spectators, and readers.

I have also aimed to reveal the vital role perspective played for Shakespeare as a creative resource, first as a poet, and then as a dramatist throughout his career. I hope to have illuminated the fact that Shakespeare employs the vocabulary of perspective to articulate the metatheatrical nature of his plays and dramaturgy. I have argued that Shakespeare compared his poems and plays to perspectival double images. He capitalized on the generative tension between what “is” symbolically represented by what materially “is not.” Contributing to the emergence of our modern sense of perspective as an individual point of view or attitude, he incorporated the techniques of perspective to direct and manipulate viewers’ gazes, and to foreground how humans’ understanding of historical events and figures are shaped by mediating forces. He took advantage of the metatheatrical matter of verse forms, and of the potential for dramatic conventions to be “formed again” in different settings for different audiences. Both perspective paintings and metatheatrical plays self-reflexively draw attention to their own artifice, celebrating rather than suppressing their material means of artistic production. Visual perspective and early modern metatheater both depend on a dynamic interplay among artists, their gazed-upon works, and their viewers, enfolding them into the process and production of a work’s invention.
By underlining these connections among perspective, invention, and metatheater, I hope to have opened avenues for future research. While I have shown how early modern English poets and playwrights share these perspectival techniques and aesthetic qualities with Continental painters, future work can explore how viewers, readers, and spectators are acknowledged and wielded when confronted by works of art in the early modern period, whether by paintings, poems, or plays. Scholarship can further consider how Shakespeare interweaves the circumstances and personalities of his actors with the symbolic characters they represent, such as the apprenticed boy actor in Elizabethan London and Cressida in ancient Troy. If we look, we will find that Shakespeare creates other visual analogies between the double images of his performed characters and performing actors that he invites to be discovered and interpreted.477 Similarly, if we continue to advance recent work on playhouse conditions, conventions, and repertories, we can pursue how Shakespeare — and other playwrights working for the King’s Men — composed scenes, characters, and plays to resonate differently depending on the settings in which they were performed, according to their material conditions of performance and reportorial histories that overwrite his palimpsestic playhouses. I hope ultimately to have shown that reading “perspectively” can enlarge our view of the early modern period, as well as our own.

477 See, for just one recent example, Andrew Gurr’s argument about the shared circumstances of Richard Burbage and Antonio when The Merchant of Venice was first performed in the mid-1590s, both of whom were in debt with precarious chances of repayment. Having inherited his father’s debt from his purchase of the Blackfriars but prohibited from performing in it by the local petitioners, Burbage “would have felt precisely the same pressure [as Antonio] from loan sharks,” so that “when Shakespeare wrote his play, the new Blackfriars playhouse looked appallingly like Antonio’s shipwrecked argosies,” in “Venues on the Verges: London’s Theater Government between 1594 and 1614,” Shakespeare Quarterly 61, no. 4 (2010): 469.
Figure 1. Masaccio, *Trinity*, 1427–8. Fresco. 667 x 317 cm. Santa Maria Novella, Florence.
Figure 2. Pietro Perugino, *The Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter*, 1481–2. Fresco. 330 x 550 cm. Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Rome.
Figure 3. Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, 1533. Oil on oak. 207 x 209.5 cm. National Gallery, London.
Figure 4. Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia I*, 1514. Engraving. 24 x 18.5 cm.
Figure 5. Lorenzo Ghiberti, Panel of Jacob and Esau, *Doors of Paradise*, 1425–52. Gilt bronze. Museo dell’Opera del Duomo.
Figure 6. Emanuele Tesauro, Frontispiece of *Il Cannocchiale Aristotelico*, 1670. Engraving.
Figure 7. Paolo Uccello, *The Flood*, 1447–8. Fresco. 215 x 510 cm. Green Cloister, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.
Figure 9. Girolamo Marchesi da Codignola. *Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1524–5. Oil on canvas. 96.3 x 125.5 cm. Cassa di Risparmio, Cesena.
Figure 11. Albrecht Dürer. Draughtsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Reclining Woman. In Unterweysung der Messung, 2nd edition. 1538. Woodcut. 7.7 x 21.4 cm.
Figure 12. Caravaggio, *Medusa*, c. 1597–8. Oil on canvas mounted on wood. 60 x 55 cm. Uffizi, Florence.
Figure 13. Diego Velazquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656. Oil on canvas. 318 x 276 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid.
Figure 14. Erhard Schön, *Aus Du alter Tor*, 1530s. Woodcut. 15.6 x 75.1 cm.
Figure 15. Albrecht Dürer, *The Ill-Assorted Couple*, c. 1495. Engraving. 14.9 x 13.8 cm.
Figure 16. William Scrots, *Edward VI*, 1546. Oil on panel. 42.5 x 160 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London.
Figure 17. **Anamorphosis, Called Mary, Queen of Scots**, 1580. Oil on panel. 33 x 24.8 cm. National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh.
Figure 18. Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola. “La Prima Regola e La Seconda Regola.” In *Le due regole della prospettiva practica*, 1583. Woodcut.
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