UNTIL THE RESURRECTION: POETIC FAME AND THE FUTURE OF THE
BODY IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE LYRIC, 1590-1641

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This study explores how English lyric poets between 1590 and 1641, facing the question of whether and how their poems might escape Time’s threat to destroy every material thing, brought together classical tropes of poetic immortality with the Christian expectation of bodily resurrection. The expectation of resurrection became for these poets an idea crucial to confronting one of the central problems of lyric, that of lastingness or immortality. As heirs of the classical tradition of poetic fame, of its adaptation by Petrarch and others, and of the repeated upheavals of the English Reformation, they were acutely conscious of threats to the long-term survival of both physical and textual monuments, and they embraced the classical trope of “devouring Time” as an expression of suspicion toward the capacity of material things to endure as vehicles of memory. I examine lyric poems across genres ranging from love sonnet to funeral elegy by poets including Donne, Shakespeare, Jonson, Spenser, and Milton.
I contend that these poets’ boasts of the power to grant lasting fame should not be dismissed as merely conventional attempts to impress contemporary readers, whether their works were intended for coterie circulation in unbound manuscript or for monumental print editions. As practices surrounding burial and funeral monuments shifted during England’s Reformation toward expressing the hope of resurrection, these poets looked to the resurrection of the body as a template of how materiality and immortality might reach some point of tangency in their verses. Resurrection would make poetic fame superfluous, but in the mean time, the poem could anticipate resurrection, providing an image or foretaste of eternity. At the same time, the body’s decay represented for these poets their anxieties about the many dangers that threaten the prospect of readership in posterity: misattribution, censorship, destruction, fragmentation, and neglect. Though literary immortality is also a concern of other genres of poetry, including epic, I focus on secular lyrics, because they tend to locate themselves in a particular moment, a moment that often looks forward to the address with which the dead are called forth at the moment of resurrection.
FOR ESTHER-MARIE

AND

IN MEMORY OF BEATRIX
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CHAPTER 1:
POETIC FAME AND MORTAL BODIES AWAITING
RESURRECTION IN ENGLISH LYRIC, 1590-1641

I. Literary Fame and the Body Awaiting Resurrection in English Renaissance Lyric: Aims of This Study

[Poetry] is crowned with the laurel, which is evergreen... for Poetry makes men immortal and ensures them against the blows of time, which usually reduces all things to oblivion. — Cesare Ripa

My aim in this study is to show how English lyric poets, facing the question of whether and how their poems might escape Time’s threat to destroy every material thing, brought together classical tropes of poetic immortality with


the Christian expectation of bodily resurrection. The body’s expectation of resurrection, of the reversal of decay, fragmentation, and dissolution, became for these poets an idea crucial to confronting one of the central problems of lyric, that of lastingness or immortality. As heirs of the classical tradition of poetic fame, of its adaptation by Petrarch and others, and of the repeated upheavals of the English Reformation, they were, I shall argue, acutely conscious of threats to the long-term survival of both textual ‘monuments’ and those made up of brass and stone, and they embraced the classical trope of ‘tempus edax rerum’ (“devouring Time,” literally “Time eater of things”) as an expression of suspicion toward the capacity of material things to endure as lasting vehicles of memory.

At the same time, I contend that these poets’ boasts of readership in posterity and of the power to grant lasting fame should not be dismissed as merely conventional attempts to impress contemporary readers with the virtuosic deployment of a venerable trope, whether their works were intended for coterie circulation in unbound manuscript or for monumental print editions. Even as practices surrounding burial, funeral monuments, and the language of epitaphs shifted during England’s long Reformation toward expressing the certain hope of resurrection, these lyric poets looked to the resurrection of the body as a template of how materiality and immortality might, if not quite reconcile, perhaps reach some point of tangency in their verses. The resurrection’s perfect restoration of the dead person would make the poem’s carrying forward of fame superfluous, but then, the promised end might be a long way off; in the mean time, the poem
could anticipate resurrection, epideictically or perhaps even through an imperfect prior participation, a kind of image or foretaste of eternity. At the same time, the body’s imminent decay represented for these poets their anxieties about the many dangers that threaten the prospect of readership in posterity: misattribution, censorship, destruction, fragmentation, and simple neglect. Though literary immortality is also certainly a concern and claim of other genres of poetry, including epic, I focus on secular lyrics, including love lyrics and funeral elegies, because rather than concern themselves with the temporal sweep of vast narratives or histories, they tend to locate themselves in a particular moment defined by an occasion, address, or encounter, a moment that often looks forward to the address with which the dead are called forth at the moment of resurrection. Showing the importance of resurrection to ‘secular’ lyric will, I hope, complicate the usual distinction between the secular and the devotional, suggesting that faith still played a central role in Renaissance thinking, poetry, and the broader culture. Through the narrow window of this study’s focus on bodily resurrection in English lyric, I seek to show the complex interdependence between the strands often distinguished under the terms Renaissance and Reformation, classical and Christian, secular and religious.
II. The Classical Origins of the Poetic Immortality Topos and Its Reception in the Renaissance

μνάσεσθαι τινά φαμι † καὶ ἔτερον † ἄμμέων.
Someone, I say, will remember us in the future. — Sappho, Fragment 147

Setting out to write a very brief account of the topos of poetic immortality, one is almost irresistibly tempted by that favorite opening of undergraduate essays, “From the beginning of time…” What evidence we have, derived from expressions that occur, bearing traces of a common etymological descent, in multiple Indo-European languages, suggests that the trope of poetry as mnemonic, as preserver of undying fame, dates back to an oral poetic tradition long before Homer. While this fame first pertained above all to the glory of the warrior who became the hero of epic, since I concern myself primarily with the lyric tradition, I will begin with Sappho. Among the fragments of her poems that remain to us, there are assurances that she, client of the Muses, will evade the forgetfulness of death, and there is also the converse, a threat to a woman who has no use for poetry, an early instance of the “poet’s curse” later deployed by Sir Phillip Sidney at the conclusion of his Defense. Sappho writes,

When you die you will lie there, forgotten.  
Afterwards no-one will remember you or long for you.  
For you have never shared in the roses of Pieria.  
Unseen in the house of Hades,  
You will flutter to and fro amongst shadowy corpses.³

To be forgotten by those still alive on earth is somehow identified with the pathetic, forgotten, invisible wandering of spirit that, not much more alive than “shadowy corpses,” is lost in Hades. This is a most dreadful fate, and yet somehow poetic remembrance is said to be proof against it. The rhetorician Maximus of Tyre, in a long discussion of the similarities between Sappho and Socrates, records that just as Socrates told his wife Xanthippe not to mourn for him when death came for him, so Sappho in a now-fragmentary poem had admonished her daughter Cleis:⁴

> There is no place for grief, [Cleis,]
in a house which serves the Muse;  
our own is no exception.⁵

Though without the rest of the poem it is hard to know whether the grief is specifically that which comes from loss and death, we know at least that Maximus read it this way and understood Sappho’s confidence in the power of the Muses to grant immortality as a precursor of, and even an influence on, Socrates’ repudiation of thinking death to be the worst evil.


The early Greek lyric poet Theognis of Megara tells his addressee, Cynos, that verse has made him proof against the worst part of death, the forgetting of one’s name:

I have given you wings, with which you may be borne up and soar easily over the boundless sea and all the earth... Even when you enter the much-lamenting abode of Hades beneath the depths of the dark earth, even dead you will not lose your glory, but will be cherished among men and possess an unwithering name forever. ⁶

There is, then, the winged and undying “you” preserved by fame, which is divided from the “you” who dies. Though the latter goes into the “depths of the dark earth,” it cannot be identified simply with the body, but includes also the spirit abiding in Hades. What the poet promises, though, is “glory” and the continuing love of future men, not in one place only but spread across the land and even the “boundless sea.” It is the self of fame, the “unwithering name” that lasts, but this promise can only mitigate and not negate the descent into the underworld the dead must suffer.

The idea of poetry as a kind of structure that outlasts other physical monuments appears in Pindar:

...where, for the prosperous Emmenidae, and Acragas by the river, and certainly for Xenocrates, a ready-built treasure-house of songs for Pythian victory has been erected in Apollo’s golden valley. This neither winter’s rain, coming in an implacable alien host of roaring cloud, nor wind will drive into the hollows of the sea, pounded with jumbled debris.

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But its façade, in clear light, will announce a chariot victory, glorious by the words of mortals, in Crisa’s valleys, shared with your father, Thrasyboulous, and your race.\footnote{Trans. Michèle Lowrie, \textit{Horace’s Narrative Odes} (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 72.}

Pindar contrasts the \textit{thesaurus} or treasure-house of song with a material building or temple; the treasure-house of song is constructed so that the chaos of the material elements cannot harm it. It might at first seem strange that the dangers he identifies would be so slow-working in any threat they could pose to a building of stone; we might compare, for instance, Shakespeare’s “wasteful wars” and “broils” that “uproot the work of masonry” in a more abrupt, spectacular way. But whether quick, like the ruination of the abbeys of England, or slow, like that of buildings ruined by disrepair and long exposure to the elements, the work of time is the same. If anything, the ascription of the destruction to rain and wind shows us the time-scale Pindar promises to outlast: after buildings of stone have been worn away by rain and wind and even fallen “into the hollows of the sea,” his treasure-house will stand secure, an ordering immune to the destructive chaos of the elements even over ages whose duration he does not spell out.

I will not discuss Horace at length here because he will be treated in detail in the chapters that follow. Though the idea of poetic fame can be traced to numerous classical sources, Horace is perhaps the single classical exemplar to whom the lyric poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries turn most often. Though he takes it from Pindar, his Ode III.30 is the presentation of the poetic
monument that becomes most influential: *exegi monumentum aere perennius, regalique situ pyramidum altius*. His monument, more lasting than bronze and higher than the pyramids, is one against which poets will measure themselves. These poets consider, among other things, whether the mere act of comparison to physical monuments sells poetry short, or threatens to instill it with a fixity contrary to its nature. As I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 5 and in the Afterword, Horace’s notion of poetic immortality is not limited to a single image: he also, in Ode II.20, transforms himself into a swan whose singing will spread across the landscape, negating any need for tombs or burial. Whether this swan is a transformation of the mortal body worthy of imitation, and whether it can be reconciled with the Christian imagining of the body, becomes a question for poets to consider.

That even the fame of the greatest heroes could not sustain itself in human memory over the passage of time without the “unwithering” life given it by poetry was frequently also part of this topos. This version of the trope is illustrated vividly by the widely-recounted anecdote of Alexander’s visit to the grave of Achilles, told here by Cicero:

And yet he, as he stood in the Sigeum at the grave of Achilles, said, “O fortunate young man, who have found Homer as herald of your excellence! He spoke truly for, had the *Iliad* not existed, the same mound which covered Achilles’ body would overwhelm his name too.\(^8\)

\(^8\) “Atque is tamen, cum in Sigeo ad Achillis adstitisset: ‘o fortunate, inquit, adulescens, qui tuae virtutis Homerem praecomem inveneris!’ et vere; nam, nisi Ilias illi exsitisset, idem
Here we see the contrast between the tumulus or grave-mound, which of itself, though it may persist through centuries, cannot make a name remembered, but can only cover it up as it does with the body, its meaning forgotten even as its material presence continues. The name cannot depend for its continuance on the tumulus which marks materiality, decay, and forgetfulness; it contexerat, covers up or entombs, the body, but cannot give it the context of a glorious name. For that, one must have the good fortune to find a poet, and not just any poet, but a Homer. Otherwise, without a song, the forgetfulness of the grave threatens to make mortal the memory even of the hero’s godlike excellence.

In a similar account, Lucan tells how Caesar trod on the tomb of Hector without realizing it:

A little gliding stream, which Xanthus was,
Vnknowne he past, and in the lofty grasse,
Securely strode; a Phrygian straight forbid
Him tread on Hector’s dust: with ruines hid
The stone retaind no sacred memory.
Respect you not great Hector’s tomb quoth he!
Oh great, and sacred worke of Poesy,
That freest from fate, and giv’st eternity
To mortall wights; but Caesar, envy not
Their living names, if Roman muses ought
May promise thee, while Homer’s honoured,
By future times shall thou, and I be read;
No age shall vs with dark oblivion staine,
But our Pharsalia ever shall remaine.  

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tumulus, qui corpus eius contexerat, nomen etiam obruisset.” Cicero, Pro Archia 10.24, quoted in Murphy 51.

In Sir Thomas May’s 1631 translation, Caesar does not simply walk over Hector’s grave but steps directly upon his dust; the materials of his body have become indistinguishable from the surrounding soil, which in the process of time has also covered over the ruins, not just of any memorial stone that might communicate a “sacred memory,” but even of the walls of the whole city of Troy. This desolation and dusty oblivion, in which no remain or ruin can be descried, is the “fate” of every man, even the greatest hero, unless the “sacred worke of Poesy” should “free” him and grant him “eternity” and a “living name.” Unlike Horace, who in Ode II.20 clearly links his expectation of his verse’s persistence with that of Rome and her empire, Lucan slyly suggests that even if Rome should someday be reduced to the same fate as Troy, he (like Homer) and Caesar (like Hector) will be remembered by the power of his “great and sacred work.” To translate the poem is to renew and to fulfil Lucan’s promise: in future times the verse is still read and the names it contains—both that of the military hero and that of the poet—perpetuated, even in another age and language. Without the explicit declaration of Cicero’s story about Alexander, Lucan likewise makes the reader see that it is only a poet like Homer who, in the almost incomprehensibly long and destructive course of time, can make even the greatest hero live in memory.

Ovid’s most famous statement of his own immortality, which Ben Jonson has Ovid speak in paraphrase as the opening lines of his Poetaster, comes at the end of the Metamorphoses:
Now I have brought a woork too end which neither loves feerce wrath,
Nor sword, nor fyre, nor freating age with all the force it hath,
Are able too abolish quyght. Let comme that fatall howre
Which (saving of this brittle flesh) hath over mee no powre,
And at his pleasure make an ende of myne uncerteyne tyme.
Yit shall the better part of mee assured bee too clyme
Aloft aboue the starry skye. And all the world shall neuer
Be able for too quench my name. For looke how farre so euer
The Romane Empyre by the ryght of conquest shall extend,
So farre shall all folke reade this woork. And tyme without all end
(If Poets as by prophesie about the truth may ame)
My lyfe shall everlastingly bee lengthened still by fame.¹⁰

There is, of course, something strange about this statement of completion and
everlastingness made at the end of a poem that is all about the changes wrought
through the whole cosmos by desire and power. Yet Ovid’s immortality is only
possible through the final, greatest transformation:

[T]he living presence of the poet is the text, the poem
as a whole, into which the mortal person of the poet
has been transformed. These last words thus match
the poet’s very first words, the epigram prefacing the
Amores in which the poet meets his audience in the
shape of his books. Two of the first-person future
verbs in the Epilogue equivocate between the
personal and the textual. ‘I shall be borne (ferar) above
the high stars’; but ferar may also mean ‘I shall be
spoken of’, turning the poet’s personal survival into a
construct of fama. … His ‘better part’ is then… his
book and the favourable reception of that book.
‘Whereever Roman power extends, I shall be read
(legar) on the lips of the people.’ This is a textual
survival, animated by a surrogate vitality through the
transient breath of successive generations of readers.¹¹

¹⁰ The. xv. bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis, translated oute of Latin into
English meeter, by Arthur Golding Gentleman, a worke very pleasaunt and delectable (London: Willyam
Seres, 1567).

¹¹ Philip Hardie, Ovid’s Poetics of Illusion (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 94.
This vision of textual survival, or rather continuance and renewal of the text by the “breath of successive generations of readers,” becomes a key theme of Shakespeare’s sonnets: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”¹² This was perhaps one reason for Frances Meres’ praise of Shakespeare as having inherited by metempsychosis “the sweet wittie soule of Ovid.”¹³ In Shakespeare, though, I will argue, this trope is altered such that the renewal of bodily breath through repeated reading or performance prefigures the renewal of bodily breath that takes place at the resurrection, which is the final triumph over Time.

The classical topos of immortality is adapted in many places during the Renaissance; a catalogue of all its deployments could alone fill a long book. Perhaps the most straightforward of these appropriations are found in the emblem books:

If mightie Troie, with gates of steele and brasse
Be wore awaie, with tract of stealing time:
If Carthage raste; if Thebes be growne with grasse,
If Bable stoope: that to the cloudes did climb:
If Athens, and Numantia suffered spoile:
If Aegypt spires be evened with the soile.
Then what may last, which time doth not impeache,
Since that we see, these monuments are gone:
Nothing at all, but time doth over reache,
It eats the steele, and wears the marble stone:
But writings last, thoughhe yt do what it can,

¹² Shakespeare, Sonnet 18.

¹³ Frances Meres, Palladis Tamia (London: P. Short, 1598).
And are preserv’d, even since the worlde began.14

The downfall of great empires and the ruins they leave behind are often invoked as illustrations of the temporary nature of even what seems most grand, indestructible, and full of temporal power. *Sic transit gloria mundi*, ruins remind us, for Time that erodes even the seemingly hardest and sturdiest material things will at last overthrow them all and reduce even their ruins finally to nothing. These warnings of the transitoriness of worldly pomp and glory were, of course, somewhat discomfiting from a nationalist standpoint; they were often also applied to the Church of Rome, whose ruins were to be read as signs that its glory had been of this world and not of God. The trope of Time’s ruins sets up the contrast between apparently durable materials like steel, brass, and marble on the one hand and, on the other, writings, which occupy a place between the material and the immaterial: there can be no writing without a material substrate, a thing written-upon, yet the way that texts can be transcribed from one substrate to another suggests that they are, in Aristotelian terms, formal rather than material, and thus immune to Time’s inexorable hold on all material things. Whitney’s insistence on pushing back the preservation of writings all the way to the time when “the worlde began” also reminds us of the way in which *sola scriptura* faith depends upon confidence that at least divinely inspired and protected writings could be preserved over the course of millennia without even the slightest corruption, even as empires repeatedly rose and fell.

In the same volume, Whitney also published a poem elegizing the recently deceased Edward Dyer and praising the promising Sir Phillip Sidney, who would die later that year:

Wherefore, proceede I praye, unto your lasting fame;  
For writinges last when wee bee gone, and do preserve our name;  
Two thousand yeares, and more, Homerus wrat his booke;  
And yet the fame doth still remaine, and keepes his former looke.  
Wheare Aegypt spires bee gonne, and Rome doth ruin feele,  
Yet both begonne since he was borne, thus time doth turn the wheele.\(^\text{15}\)

Homer’s “booke” was, apart from the Bible, often held out as the prime example of literary immortality, given that it had already been ancient even at the time of the Athenian golden age and was still famed for its unsurpassed excellence. Homer’s fame proved that even as Egyptian obelisks were pulled down and transferred to Rome by a civilization that then itself fell into ruin, a poet’s fame could “keepe his former looke” unchangingly. As far as Renaissance readers were concerned, the claims of immortal fame made by classical writers were like fulfilled prophecies: the ancient poets had not only said that their poems would outlast stony monuments, but the poems had observably done so; as one read (or painstakingly deciphered) them, one became oneself the promised reader-in-posterity, participating, as it were, in the passing of living fame \textit{per ora}, through the mouths of posterity.

\(^{15}\) Whitney 197, quoted in Clements 681.
The immortality topos appears with a particular strangeness and vividness in Ronsard:

Aussi le Roy, quelque chose qu’il face,
Meurt sans honneur, s’il n’achete la grace
Par maints presens d’un Poète sçavant
Qui du tombeau le deterre vivant,
Et fait tousjour d’une plume animée
Voler part tout sa vive renommée.16

Ronsard’s description of the poet’s way of bestowing fame makes figurative acts scandalous: his poet, having been “bought” with gifts, unearths the lucky subject alive from the grave and, with a “plume” that is both the poet’s pen and the lofting feather of winged fame, makes him fly everywhere like Horace’s swan. Far from having lost his name, that part linked with fame and threatened by forgetfulness, the poet’s beneficiary now becomes literally re-knowned, his name sounded anew and without limit on the lips of the living.

What did it mean, we may ask, for a secular poet to pull someone alive out of the grave, even in metaphor? Would this have been read as a worthy imitation of resurrection or an impious parody of it? Was not the purpose of poetic fame to leave the mortal body behind, or to change it into something no longer mortal? If so, how could such a transformation be reconciled with a confident hope in Christ’s resurrection? If poems became like monuments (only more so: *perennius, altius*), would they then lose their affinity with bodies, both living ones with breath on their lips and dead ones that would once again

breathe? Yet if poems were like or likened to bodies, would it mean they might be lost, stolen, fragmented, forgotten, reduced to dust? English poets confronted all these questions as they took up, considered, imitated, and transformed the old aspirations to poetic fame and bodily resurrection, all the while aware that they were not the first in recent memory to face this set of concerns. Although critical accounts of his reception in England have tended to focus on the particular erotic and poetic conventions that inspired so much imitation of the sonnet sequence, their most illustrious predecessor in this pursuit was Petrarch.

III. “That Buried Dust of Living Fame”: Petrarchan Remains and English Poetry

I demand no other kind of reward from you than that I might be loved; even unknown, even hidden in the tomb, even turned into ashes though I may be—just as I have loved many [who were] not only dead, but long before consumed a thousand years hence...\footnote{\textit{Nullum a te aliud premii genus efflagito, nisi ut diligar, licet incognitus, licet sepulcro conditus, licet versus in cineres, sicut ego multos, ... non modo defunctos sed diu ante consumptos per annum millesimum dilexi.} Petrarch, quoted in Murphy 75; the translation is my own with reference to Murphy’s.}

In “A Vision upon this conceipt of the \textit{Faery Queene}”, a dream-vision sonnet in praise of Spenser’s poem and included in its 1590 print edition, Sir Walter Ralegh suggests that Spenser has managed to outdo Petrarch and even Homer. His Spenser has done so, strangely enough, by robbing Laura’s tomb:
Methought I saw the grave, where Laura lay,
Within that Temple, where the vestall flame
Was wont to burne, and passing by that way,
To see that buried dust of living fame,
Whose tumbe faire love, and fairer vertue kept,
All suddenly I saw the Faery Queene:
At whose approch the soule of Petrarke wept,
And from thenceforth those graces were not seene.
For they this Queene attended, in whose steed
Oblivion laid him down on Lauras herse:
Hereat the hardest stones were seene to bleed,
And grones of buried ghostes the heavens did perse.
Where Homers spright did tremble all for griefe,
And curst th'accesse of that celestiall theife.¹⁸

In his approach to the lady’s grave, Ralegh imitates Petrarch’s own Rime Sparse

333, in which Petrarch instructs his poems,

Ite, rime dolenti, al duro sasso,
che ’l mio caro tesoro in terra asconde,
ivi chiamate chi dal Ciel risponde
ben che ’l mortal sia in loco oscuro et basso.¹⁹

In 333, Petrarch directs his “sorrowing verses” to go to the “hard stone” which
“hides in the earth” his “treasure,” Laura’s dead body, which acts as a relic
providing access to her response from heaven. Ralegh’s verses obey this
command. In Ralegh’s lyric, Laura’s grave contains, paradoxically, the “buried
dust of living fame”; her tomb is said to be the repository of both “faire love” and
“fairer vertue,” and it is, presumably, in search of this source of fame, love, and
virtue that both the speaker and the thieving Spenser, figured as the god Hermes,


¹⁹ “Go, sorrowing rhymes, to the hard stone that hides in earth my dear treasure, there
call for her who answers from Heaven, although her mortal part is in a place dark and low.”
visit the tomb. When the vision of the Faery Queene appears, it is as if Laura is now at last really dead, her cult supplanted by that of Gloriana. The “herse” which would have borne poetic tributes to her is now covered by “Oblivion.” One goddess has replaced another; as in Plutarch’s account of the cessation of the oracles and the death of the god Pan, identified by Christian commentators with either the moment of Christ’s death or that of his birth, a great cry of anguish goes up. Commentators on the story of the oracles’ cessation differed, however, as to whether it was Christ whom the oracular voices mourned as “the Great Pan” (that is, the All-in-All, the reality prefigured by the fantasies of pagan gods) or whether they simply bemoaned their own supersession.²⁰ There is a similar ambiguity in Ralegh’s poem: the shows of grief at once seem to mourn Laura’s having been surpassed and to express a very Petrarchan subjection to awestruck suffering at the glorious apparition of the Queene, who is Laura made new. The bleeding stones recall the stones that, in Matthew’s gospel, broke open at Christ’s death, bringing forth the dead from their tombs.²¹ As in the biblical trope of the heart of stone that is replaced by a heart of flesh, this encounter is so full of awe that what was lifeless, base matter becomes alive, corporeal (it contains liquid


²¹ Matthew 27.
blood), and vulnerable to suffering. Even Homer, himself usurped by Petrarch, grieves and curses “th’accesse of that celestiall theife.”

But what has Spenser stolen? It is only at Laura’s grave that Spenser’s Queene is able to appear, a kind of revenant born from the “buried dust of living fame”—from Laura’s relics. Like the rebirth of the phoenix from its ashes, her incarnation as Gloriana marks the end of one age and the coming of the next. The speaker comes to Laura’s tomb as a visionary pilgrim, as one who hopes to find some vital trace of fame, love, or virtue through closeness to the dust of a venerated body. Spenser, who has apparently been there before the speaker (the temporality is dreamlike), is represented by the “celestiall thiefe” Hermes, who is both transgressor and sealer of boundaries: in his role as psychopomp he is able to descend to the underworld without being bound there, and he is also tasked with preventing the spirits of the dead from leaving the tomb. Like Mary Magdalene in John’s gospel, or perhaps like many people walking into churches during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, the speaker immediately suspects grave-robers, but what he finds is more like a resurrection: a stumbling block and a cause of alarm and confusion to some (including the “buried ghosts” whose perhaps Homeric or perhaps purgatorial “grones… the heavens did

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22 Ezekiel 36:26. In the previous verse, the Lord speaks of the abolition of idols.

perse”), but also a source of awe. Where else would English poetry’s glory come from, except from Laura’s grave? What else is “living fame,” but the dust of her body? The breaking up of graves is a thing full of dread, so terrible that stones bleed, and it threatens the dead with “oblivion,” but it is also, in its likeness to resurrection, potentially a wellspring of living poetry. Laura has been both robbed and revived, eclipsed and reincarnated; Ralegh himself re-sounds her name with its evocation of the laurel of poetic immortality and pays her homage as the source of Spenser’s stolen glory. Poetic fame cannot be grasped without recourse to the dust of the mortal body, lost in forgetfulness though it may seem.

In this work, I will argue that with the highly visible destruction of books, monuments, and cultural systems of memory in England’s long Reformation, the questions of lasting fame and memory of the dead became pressing unsolved problems, and that these problems brought poets back, again and again, to visions of the grave and the mortal body it held. The topos of immortal poetic fame, adopted from the Greek and Roman poets, is familiar; what, though, does it have to do with the “buried dust” of the mortal body, unless as its opposite? I begin with Ralegh’s poem because, in its strangeness, it holds up some of the paradoxes that made the mortal body so attractive to poetic thinkers: it was merely material, decaying, forgotten, reduced almost to nothing, and yet at the

24 John 20:13-15. This would not be the first time a Petrarchan woman was associated with the encounter of Mary Magdalene with the just-risen Christ; consider the use of Noli me tangere in Wyatt’s “Whoso List to Hunt.”
same time always endowed with a promise of a resurrection that would make poetic fame and memory pale beside its bright perfection. As Ralegh knew, to understand the link between immortal fame and mortal body that would become so fruitful for English poets, we must turn back, if only briefly, to Petrarch.

Petrarch’s *Triumphs*, written at intervals over the course of his life, each describe the triumphal pageant of an archetypical entity: first comes Love; then Chastity who triumphs over Love’s desires; then Death whom even perfect Chastity cannot evade; then Fame who seems to grant immunity to Death; then Time, whose destructive power wins out over even the longest-lasting Fame; and finally Time’s opposite, Eternity, in which both Death and Time are utterly overthrown and the highest aspirations of Love, Chastity, and Fame brought to fulfillment. The Triumph of Fame, which Petrarch left unfinished, consists mainly of a literal act of renown, in which famous men are seen walking in Fame’s triumphal procession as her clients, their names spoken once more (renounced) by the poet, their fame re-established and re-echoed in poetry. The poem’s unfinished ending seems to presage the eventual fate of Fame at Time’s Triumph:

And our great fame that doth so highly soune  
It is no nother to be named but a second death  
Nor stay is there none as the true truth sayth  
Thus tryumpheth tyme and hasteth so a pace  
That all our glory and fame it doth deface. (200-205)25

The latter part of Petrarch’s sequence of Triumphs (Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity) is mirrored in a set of ‘Pageants’ designed by the young Thomas More for hangings of painted cloth for his father’s London house.26 More’s “Lady Fame” triumphs over the devouring maw of death, gendered male in More’s version:

O cruel death, thy power I confounde.  
When thou a noble man hast brought to grounde  
Maugry thy teeth to lyve cause hym shall I,  
Of people in parpetuall memory.

As in Petrarch’s exemplar, Time in turn boasts that he confounds fame:

I shall in space destroy bothe see and lande.  
O simple fame, how dare thou man honowre,  
Promising of his name, an endlesse flowre,  
Who may in the world have a name eternall,  
When I shall in proces distroy the world and all.

But Time itself is finite, as More’s Eternity reveals:

Me nedeth not to bost, I am Eternitee,  
The very name signifyth well,  
That myne empire infinite shal be;  
Thou mortall Tyme every man can tell,  
Art nothyng els but the mobilite  
Of sonne and mone chaungyng in euery degre,  
When they shall leue theyr course thou shalt be brought,  
For all thy pride and bostyng, into nought.

Yet unlike Petrarch’s, More’s pageants do not end here. His final pageant depicts the Poet, who, as the maker of the pageants, directs the viewer’s (reader’s) attention to eternity. The poet, perhaps meant to represent Petrarch himself,

26 These are the first work the reader encounters in the 1557 printing of More’s collected English works, which provides the only surviving text. The workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght, sometyne Lorde Chauncellour of England, wrytten by him in the Englysh tongue. (London: Iohn Cawod, Iohn Waly, and Richarde Tottell, 1557).
presents verses in Latin, where all the others have been in English. He instructs
the reader that all the slippery goods of this fragile world soon pass away, even
praise and honor, and therefore, we must place our sole trust in the love of God
who gives eternal life. For More, then, and for his contemporaries and successors
in English letters, Petrarch is the exemplar of how the poet’s striving to produce
or participate in immortal fame can, in spite of Time’s comprehensive
destruction, become aligned not with Time but with Eternity. In Petrarch’s text,
though, the promise of eternal life is more specific:

And those that haue worthely by vertuouse fame
Spent well there tyme lyuing without blame
And by vertue made both death & tyme to fere
Whyles that they lyued in this frayle world here
In theyr most freshe and lustye young courage
They shall aryse tryumphantly about that age
With beautie immortall and high fame eterne.27

The fame that had been destroyed by the triumph of Time is restored and
perfected specifically in the resurrection of the body, where the brightness of the
fame deserved by virtue and the love-inspiring loveliness of which the bloom of
youth is only the earthly shadow become one true and fully corporeal beauty.
Though More does not focus on this aspect of Petrarch, he does have the poet
instruct the reader that one who delights his eyes with gazing on artful images of
human bodies (as in his painted hangings) can also delight his soul with “true
things”; the body or its image made by art is not an obstacle but an aid to the
apprehension of eternal truth. And by making “the poet” the last term in his

27 The tryumphes of Fraunces Petrarcke, translated out of Italian into English by Henrye Parker
sequence, after even eternity, More affirms the poet’s ability not just to convey
temporal fame but also to point the mind toward the eternal. For Petrarch, there
can be no approach to eternity without the mortal body: even after receiving a
glimpse of Laura as she will be at the resurrection, he again returns to her grave:

Happy is that stone that couereth that swet face
Wherin there resteth so much beautie and grace
If that then I were happy in thys lyfe it to se
Here on this vyle earth so perfect in degree
After that this swete gratiouse Lady hath taken
That same fayre dispoyle yt semyth now forsaken
What shal it be I praye you to tel me this
Then to beholde hyr eternall blysse.28

Thus the poem becomes the link between the “now” in which Laura still lies in
the grave and the “now” of her resurrection to glory. The stone may serve as a
monument that testifies through finite time to her name, but its marking of fame
is incidental; it is by its nearness to her face, and that face’s once and one-day-
again triumphant beauty and bodily holiness, that the stone is blessed. And the
stone is also, in a pun on Petrarca, the poet himself, who in the Ovidian
metamorphoses of Rime Sparse 23 becomes the “almost living and astonished
stone” who “because a living voice was forbidden me, cried out in paper and
ink.”29 Stephen Murphy suggests that the Triumph of Eternity is, in a sense, that
toward which poetry has been striving, yet is inherently unable to reach:

28 Morley, Tryumphes.

29 “un quasi vivo et sbigotitlo sasso” … “le vive voci m’erano interditte, / ond’ io gridai
con carta et con incostro” (ll. 80, 99-100). Citations from the Rime Sparse are, unless otherwise
specified, to Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics, trans. and ed. Robert M.
[I]n the Trionfi, ... time, which has devoured all immanent things, is in its turn defeated by eternity. Clearly, such a resolution constitutes the unattainable ideal of literary memory. For what else does Petrarca scrutinize past and future, but for a state where ... “There will be no place for ‘was’ or ‘will be,’ but ‘is’ only, in the present, and ‘now’ and ‘today’”? Thus the supratemporal power portrayed as superior to poetry... is not really of another sort altogether. It is a sanctification of the essential literary ambition. The sense in which literary glory is “canceled” by transcendence is perhaps best expressed by the Hegelian ambiguity of *Aufhebung*: both suppression and elevation.30

On this reading, Petrarch’s eternity is an impossible ideal posited to fill in for poetic fame where it manifestly must fall short. For Petrarch, often credited as the originator of the Renaissance passion for unearthing forgotten texts from antiquity, the classical idea of undying fame could never be received as unproblematic: documents, monuments, and even fame itself could be and had been, over time, lost; newly found documents could, too, reveal historical figures (Cicero, for instance) to be pettier and less noble than fame had once reported them; how then could temporal fame rival immortal life? As a speaker in Petrarch’s *Africa* says, “Certainly, illustrious fame planted in fertile books will live a long time, yet even this will suffer its own night [*tenebras*].”31

At the end of the *Africa*, Murphy writes,

poetry’s place is among the dead, a dwelling indicated by many other Petrarchan texts as well. ...

30 Murphy 102.

31 “Clara quidem libris felicibus insita vivet / Fama diu, tamen ipsa suas passura tenebras.” Quoted in Murphy 98.
The *Africa* ends with the personified poem circulating as an exile in history among the different tombs: of the hero/patrons present and past and of the poet to come. Poetic immortalization is no triumph. Its crown is heavy with the pathos of a losing struggle against death and forgetfulness...\(^{32}\)

Yet this gravitation toward tombs, I would suggest, marks the struggle as an inevitably losing one only temporally and temporarily. The tomb is, for Petrarch and for the English poets who see him as their forebear, the locus at once of death, decay, time’s triumph, and oblivion—*and* of the reversal of all these. Thus, paradoxically, to dwell among the tombs or in them, with (in Donne’s words) “absence, darkness, death: things that are not,” with the dead body which is no longer an “is” and hardly even a “once was” but still (in and through faith) a “shall be,” is to be in the closest earthly place to eternal glory. Murphy recognizes that for Petrarch “the pursuit of immortality must go through mortality,” but he maintains that “the dialectic never resolves itself.”\(^{33}\) This observation is, I think, entirely true with regard to the situation of the poem as temporal or secular (as belonging, that is, to the world and to time, which it can never altogether transcend), but it neglects Petrarch’s turn toward the grave as precisely the place where one goes in expectation of “the last trumpet” at which time and death shall cease, the only place where mortality is changed into immortality. Perhaps, Petrarch suggests, poetic fame could be new-baptized if it aligned itself with the very resurrection of the body that would seem to make it

\(^{32}\) Murphy 127.

\(^{33}\) Murphy 101.
superfluous; then even a dumb stone could speak of the restored beauty of the newly reunited body and soul and thus be called happy.

The ancient topos of literary fame, received from the classical poets and already transformed by Petrarch, was taken up and adapted again with great urgency by the English poets of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It has been often observed that this was a period of anxiety about permanence and memory: within living memory, as I shall discuss in detail below, the complex social system providing remembrance and prayer for souls in purgatory had been abolished; many funeral monuments, especially but by no means exclusively those belonging to saints, destroyed; and a staggering majority of the manuscript books held by England’s monastic libraries, lost. Funerary practices and monuments now looked forward to resurrection. And so like Petrarch, the lyric poets of England took up the question of how, if at all, a poem might carry memory or even participate in immortality. Like Petrarch, they found these questions drawing them again and again toward contemplating the corruptible mortal body awaiting the glory of resurrection.
IV. Recent Theories of Body: Situating this Work in Current Discourse

Before I go further, I will first attempt to clarify what I mean by “the body” and to which understandings of it I am indebted. In the scholarly discourse of recent decades, “the body” has been anything but at rest. As I have considered how to approach these varied discourses, I have benefited immensely from the work of the medieval historian Caroline Walker Bynum. In an article titled “Why All the Fuss About the Body?” she addresses the landscape of the several scholarly discourses of “the body” prevailing in the 1990s (many of which are still very much alive). She discusses a set of discourses focusing on bodies as sites of social control; of gender, sexuality, reproduction, medical practices, desire, pain, and sensory phenomena; of selfhood and personal identity; and of conceptual constructions that seem to cause the “stuff” of the body to “dissolve into language.” Those who study early modern literature and thought have taken up the concerns of these theorists in order to discover the origins of those concerns in early modern discourses: the development of anatomy and dissection, for instance; the locating of subjectivity and interiority

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34 Caroline Bynum, “Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective,” *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995), 1-33. Since then, Bynum’s article has been cited frequently, but it is unclear how seriously it has been taken: one recent article, for instance, cites Bynum with approbation but soon after gives as an example of an early modern attitude the supposition that a fictive typical English priest attending the execution of a prisoner at Tyburn would have held that because “body is transitory,” the state of the man’s soul is “the important thing.” Oliver J.T. Harris and John Robb, “Multiple Ontologies and the Problem of the Body in History,” *American Anthropologist* 114 (2012): 668-697.
within bodies; and the construction of gender and sexuality. Bynum, while affirming the importance of these lines of inquiry, calls for a “broader understanding” of “body theory” that both refrains from caricature of premodern views (as, for instance, uniformly “dualist,” negative toward bodies, or misogynist) and also brings on board a diverse and nuanced understanding of medieval thinking about bodies and what it has to do with current concerns, such as the relationship between the body and personal identity. Bynum calls on us to remember that while the self-named “theology of the body” may today concern itself primarily with questions of gender, sexuality, reproduction, and medical ethics, for most of Christian history, theological discourses about the body had mainly to do with “death and triumph over it”: mortal bodies that suffered, died, decayed, might be fragmented, might be venerated, and then would one day (how, exactly, theologians disagreed vociferously) like Christ, rise incorruptible, the person again complete in every way that mattered. With Bynum, I would note that just as there is more to gender theory than the discussion of bodies, there can and should be more to the theory of bodies than the discussion of gender.

It is my contention that, while the early modern period did witness new developments in discourses and understandings of the body, we should not underestimate the degree to which the understanding Bynum discusses—of the body as participant in “death and triumph over it”—continued to prevail. As Deborah Shuger writes,

In Bakhtin the ‘classical body’”—elevated, asexual, static, closed—“denotes the inherent form of the high official culture,” the domain of rationality, repression, and neoclassical correctness. But when Francis Bacon saw the earl of Arundel’s gallery of ancient statuary, the first collection of classical nudes in England, he raised his hands, started back, and burst out, “The Resurrection!” In the early seventeenth century, the body of faith persists as the form of the high official culture…36

I would add that if anything, the religious imagining of the body as mortal, corruptible, yet one day to-be-resurrected did not simply persist in the post-Reformation period (though continuities are undeniable), but in fact enjoyed a resurgence of significance. The Reformation’s turning away from and prescription of purgatorial belief and practice occasioned, especially in funerary practices, a new focus on faith in bodily resurrection. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, “the body of faith”—a faith of which the body’s resurrection was the keystone—flourished as a living, intellectually and imaginatively challenging belief, a central part of the (neither uniform nor static) imaginary or world-picture in and through which people argued and wrote love

poems and died and buried the dead and raised monuments for them and published books. As I discuss in Chapter 5, I also draw on the work of several scholars who have also recently been reinvestigating and reimagining the English Protestant “body of faith,” discovering a nuanced Protestant view of mortal bodies, especially in martyrdom, as lively images of God. Building on these insights, along with those of Bynum and Shuger, I seek to show that this confident hope in a “triumph over death” for the body was not merely a tenaciously retained dogma during the early modern period, but a fruitful source of images and concepts through which to think about and question materiality, time, and decay (the forces we would today call entropy), memory and forgetting, whether any manuscript, book, or monument could really last, what posterity or the future might look like (and whether it might be as disjunct from the present as the medieval past already seemed), and the (conventional but not merely conventional) topos by which the poet claimed some purchase on immortality. Contemplating the topos of poetic immortality against tempus edax rerum on the one hand and the promise of bodily resurrection on the other, poets asked themselves: would dark oblivion and forgetfulness prevail when every book and paper came at last to dust? Would secular verses be shown as nothing but vanities when even the sky, as the book of Revelation said, curled up like a

scroll? Or might Christ’s promise of resurrection for the body somehow infuse new life into the older-than-Christian poetic promise of immortal fame?

Maintaining an Antaean contact with the ground of faith in resurrection, poets wrestled with these questions.

Though we may be struck at first by the discontinuities between the discourse of the body I have discussed and those that seem to display more continuities with (for instance) discourses of the gendered or medicalized body as they have developed in modernity, I will argue that as the readers-in-posterity these texts envision, we too (sometimes unwittingly) participate in their imaginings of the body. As Bynum points out, what at first seem to be abstruse theological concepts can provide striking parallels to questions we now find urgent and timely. Despite and because of the digitization of texts, we confront the possibility they will fall into forgetfulness unless they are mindfully conserved, reedited, and republished across temporal shifts in linguistic conventions and digital modes of storage; we too worry that the energies expended by our own activity may soon “wear this world out to the ending doom”; and we are (however little we think about it) still ourselves not just mortal, but likely in a few centuries’ time to be forgotten and lost in oblivion, whether through failures of historical preservation or in a boundless sea of unsifted data, unless perhaps a poet should graft our names into living memory.
V. Thinking Immortality: Theories of the Soul and Bodily Resurrection, 1500-1640

Having just underscored important continuities in the centrality of bodily mortality and resurrection to the faith and religious practice of English people, I also wish to recognize the importance of developments and controversies. The landscape of philosophical and theological thought about bodies and souls was, even when it remained within the bounds of religious orthodoxy, far from static before and during the Reformation. To provide context for the thought of English poets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and specifically to help show why any kind of immortality, including the poetic, might come to seem contingent on faith in resurrection, I will now give a brief and necessarily somewhat reductive sketch of the state of these questions leading up to the period covered by this study.

At the end of the fifteenth century, thanks to the influence of Ficino and other neo-Platonists, the idea that the immortality of the soul could be known to be true on the grounds of natural reason alone had been steadily gaining acceptance.  

38 This position was a Platonist one, and was at odds with the more purely Aristotelian idea held by the Paduan Averroists that all thinking beings participated in a single intellect and thus that the individual’s intellectual soul

38 Ficino, Theologica platonica de immortalitate animae, 1487.
did not continue *qua* individual after death. On this question, Platonist philosophy was more consonant with the broad Christian tradition, grounded in scripture and in ideas inherited from Augustine (who himself had received Platonic influence, perhaps indirectly), than was Aristotelian thought. In the papal bull *Apostolici regiminis* of 1513, Leo X attempted to salvage the most orthodox and uncontroversial beliefs of each philosophical school by defining the human soul (in agreement with Plato) as immortal, while condemning the thesis that the rational soul is mortal, and also (in agreement with Aristotle and Aquinas) defining the soul as the form of the body, while condemning the thesis that the intellectual soul is held in common among all humans. On the source of the doctrine of the soul’s immortality, Pope Leo declined to comment, but supporters of the idea that it could be known by natural reason felt their position bolstered. Three years later, however, Pietro Pomponazzi published a book, *De immortalitatae animae*, arguing with great persuasiveness that the immortality of the soul could not be known by reason alone, nor was the soul *by its own nature* separable from the body, on the grounds that our intellect cannot naturally perceive anything without the help of the senses, which are supplied by the body. Pomponazzi made sure to affirm at both the beginning and the end of his treatise that the doctrine of the soul’s immortality must be affirmed as revealed

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40 Levi 131.
truth, though some have questioned whether this “must” referred more to a political than to an epistemic necessity.\textsuperscript{41} For anyone convinced by Pomponazzi’s arguments, “it followed that the immortality of the soul could be known by revelation alone.”\textsuperscript{42} Only because the Bible tells us of Christ’s bodily resurrection and promises our own, we know the soul must survive: thus bodily resurrection is not an afterthought, a mere consequence of the soul’s \textit{natural} immortality, but the sole epistemic keystone by which any belief in human immortality can stand.

The year after Pomponazzi published this book, Reformation came to Christ’s body on earth, the Church. The fact of Christ’s bodily resurrection itself and the expectation of the general one, attested clearly both by the creeds and by scripture, were not dogmas on which any serious difference of opinion opened up between the dividing confessions. Despite challenges from thinkers including the Thomistic theologian Suarez, Pomponazzi’s argument that the soul’s immortality cannot be known by natural reason was influential throughout Europe even as the Church fragmented itself, gaining currency among Catholics and Protestants alike. But whether the soul could be called \textit{by nature} immortal, and what happened to it \textit{between} death and resurrection, was a much more contentious question. Many Protestants, including Luther in some of his writings, espoused versions of a doctrine that came to be known as mortalism or...


\textsuperscript{42} Levi 166.
(pejoratively) “soul sleep,” holding that the soul, lacking a natural principle of immortality, either died with the body or slept in a state of unconsciousness after death, and would along with the body be miraculously revived by God at the resurrection. On this argument, the immortality of the soul was an extra-scriptural accretion drawn from pagan philosophy that laid the foundations for the monstrously greed-driven lie of purgatory. Moreover, the mortalists asserted, holding the soul’s immortality made the miracle and promise of resurrection, one of the most central teachings of scripture, into a mere afterthought.

Thus William Tyndale to Sir Thomas More in 1530. Tyndale rhetorically places in the mouths of More’s misbelieving disciples a sarcastic retort to the Pauline doctrine that without faith in the resurrection, “we are of all men the most miserable”:

"Nay Paul thou art vnlerned: goo to master More and lerne a newe waye. We be not most miserable though we rise not agayne; for oure soules goo to heuen

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assone as we be deed, and are there in as greate ioye as christ that is rysen agayne."\textsuperscript{45}

This rhetorical strategy proved so popular that the same charge, detraction from the teaching of resurrection, was also leveled against the proponents of mortalism by William Hugh, who insinuated that calling into question the soul’s intrinsic immortality was a mere step from treating death as annihilation: “[B]elieve not these false deceivers, who endeavor not only to persuade the sleep of souls, but also to make vain the resurrection of the dead, and so to abolish an article of our faith, and to make our religion vain.”\textsuperscript{46} What these polemicists shared was the Pauline conviction that faith in resurrection was central to the Gospel; to fall into error was \textit{ipso facto} to go down a path that would lead to denying resurrection. This sense that faith in resurrection was crucially prior to all thinking about soul and body, and was somehow at odds with philosophical ways of reasoning, reached beyond the psychopannychism debate; John Lyly’s Euphues, for instance, asks himself after ten years’ study of philosophy:

Why Euphues art thou so addicted to the studye of the Heathen? that thou hast forgotten thy God in Heauen? shal thy witte be rather employed to the attaining of humayne wisedome then deuine knowledge? Is Aristotle more deare to thee with his booke? then Christ with his bloude? What comfort canst thou finde in Philosophy for thy guiltie

\textsuperscript{45} Tyndale 117.

\textsuperscript{46} William Hugh, \textit{The Troubled Man’s Medicine} (1546), quoted in Ball 47.
conscience, what hope of the resurrection, what
gladde tidinges of the Gospell?47

Well beyond “soul sleeper” circles, the conviction that there could be no
tinking of immortality except as founded on faith in the resurrection of the
body had grown strong and deep. For poets, the question of whether and how
material things might participate in immortality brought them back to the place
where the debate had begun: to the contact between the individual embodied
human person and the intellectible things apprehended by the mind. If the soul’s
dependence on the senses and the material body called even its immortality into
question, what about the poem? In a strange way, the materiality that
endangered the poem’s survival must also become its hope: if even confidence in
the afterlife of the soul must hang upon the promise of bodily resurrection, so too
any hope of immortality for the poem.

At the same time, resurrection of the dead became a figure for the
humanist project of reviving of the culture and virtues of the classical past
through literary study. “The Renaissance figures its relationship to its classical
models as rupture, excavation of the ruins, disinterment and revival of the
dead.”48 In his argument for a revival of the ancient mode of Attic Greek
pronunciation, the humanist Sir Thomas Smith likened the Italian scholar
Laurentius Valla’s *Elegantiae linguae Latine*, which was instrumental in promoting

[1578]), 65.

48 Phillip Hardie 79, paraphrasing of the central thesis of Thomas Greene’s *The Light in
Troy*.
the revival of classical Latin style, to the raising of Lazarus. This resurrection is all the more impressive, given how long the body has been in the grave: “He [Valla] raised from the grave the first born brother [i.e., classical Latin], not merely four dayes dead and buried, but four hundredth years, and brought him back to the light…”  

Even before the philosophical developments of the sixteenth century, the Tuscan humanist Coluccio Salutati imagines Scipio Africanus, the hero of Petrarch’s epic Africa, desiring to be brought out of oblivion by the power of Petrarch’s verse, not unlike the righteous before Christ awaiting his descent into hell: “Now he seeks to come into the light through your illustrious poem, and is oppressed by being held confined in darkness by time.”

Bodily resurrection had thus become central to Renaissance discourses of cultural recovery and memory as an image or figure and to theological and philosophical ones as the epistemological lynchpin of the gospel’s promises and of any claim on immortality. It is not surprising, then, that poets claiming undying fame should turn toward the same figures and images and seek the same grounding. At the same time, in England, the fragility of memory, the ease with which books could be lost and dead persons forgotten in dark oblivion, had become very difficult to ignore.


50 Iam claro carmine poscit / In lucem prodire tuo, secunque gravatur / Tempore iam clausum sub nocte teneri. Salutati, Metra … incitatoria ad Africe editionem, trans. Murphy 91.

The Petrarchan Renaissance had set off a treasure hunt in the libraries of Europe, particularly those of the French monasteries, for the “lost” or “forgotten” treasures they contained: manuscripts of unknown classical writings. In England, the sixteenth century brought a devastating irony: in the same century that English thinkers were eagerly appropriating and adapting the texts of classical humanism and English poets were translating and imitating the verses both of Petrarch and of the classical poets, the Tudor state was causing to be decimated the libraries of England’s monasteries and other religious foundations. In the cases of many such libraries, there are no extant records allowing us to estimate what fraction of the texts were lost. Those that do exist suggest that the ratio of lost books to those that survived was staggering. Of 486 books recorded in a catalogue of the library of the Augustinian priory of Lanthony, only 25 now survive, though there are a total of 117 extant manuscripts believed to have belonged to this library if we include those not listed in the catalogue. Other books not now extant may, of course, also have gone unrecorded. The fourteenth-century catalogue of the Augustinian friars of York lists 646 books,


only seven of which now survive. The Benedictine Abbey of Peterborough’s
catalogue records 346 items, of which ten now survive, along with 33 other books
and manuscripts not listed in the catalogue.\textsuperscript{53} The historian John Speed described
the process of the libraries’ purgation in 1611:

\begin{quote}
...some faults in them [i.e., the monasteries and other
foundations] were apparent, whereby they were laid
open to the generall deluge of Time, whose stream
bore down the walles of all those foundations,
carrying away the shrines of the dead, and defacing
the libraries of their ancient records.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Speed’s identification of the Reformation as “deluge” links, on the one hand, the
biblical notion of a flood deservedly sweeping away wickedness, and, on the
other hand, the image of water as an implacable natural force of chaos and Time.
His image shows floodwaters entering the abbeys through a “fault” or gap in
their metaphorical walls of righteousness, leading to the ruining of their
buildings, the sweeping away of shrines to dead saints, and the loss or erasure of
their “ancient records.” As in the Old Testament, God’s allowing chaos to
overwhelm order and destroy memory is no less terrible for its deservedness. It
is no accident that the chief contents of the monasteries, according to Speed, are
memorials for the dead and libraries containing ancient records. Both shrines
containing saints’ relics (bodies) and libraries are sites where the living
continually return to remember and, perhaps, even converse with the dead. This
is an impulse perhaps especially acute in those of us who are drawn to the voices

\textsuperscript{53} Humphreys 39.

\textsuperscript{54} John Speed, \textit{History of Great Britaine} (London, 1611), quoted in Summit 3.
contained in old books; consider, for instance, Greenblatt’s famous “I began with a desire to speak with the dead.” That a desire at least to keep alive the memory of the dead was frustrated or diverted into new channels by the abrogation of the purgatorial system has become a commonplace. In this study, I consider the unexamined ways in which lyric poets’ claims, drawing together classical tropes and the hope of resurrection, to make memory impervious to death, responded to this situation, this moment at which the sweeping away of material vehicles of memory was especially evident.

As Jennifer Summit has shown, figuring what happened to the monastic libraries as a deluge obscures not only the agency involved in their often-purposeful destruction, but also the role of those who seized the opportunity to “salvage” books regarded as useful, not too corrupted or corrupting to serve the purposes of Protestant historiography. One of these, John Bale, borrowed the rhetoric of humanist rediscovery to explain why monks were not to be credited with preserving valuable texts, but rather ought to be condemned for keeping these texts in neglect and oblivion: “Noble Antyquytees have not been ere thys time reveled, but tyed up in cheanes, and hydden undre dust in the monkes and fryres libraries.” Like a buried corpse, the book lies “hidden under dust,” waiting to be “reveled” and, elsewhere in Bale, “redeme[d]… from dust and

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byrdfylynges."\textsuperscript{57} For a book to lie in such a state of forgotten neglect is for it to suffer abuses contrary to its nature: an emblem in the margin of Richard Day’s 1608 \textit{Booke of Christian Praiers} shows Memory as a woman writing in a book while standing (with no apparent awareness) upon the very soil where Oblivion, figured as a shrouded corpse, lies buried. A gloss highlights the contrast: “Memorie is a treasure house / Obliuion is as a graue.”\textsuperscript{58} The written record is meant to preserve memory and not to become lost in oblivion, obscured by dust that reminds us of the book’s materiality and makes the book like itself in forgottenness and failure to signify. But the twinning of the book and the corpse cannot help but remind us that books are, in their materiality, vulnerable, whether to deliberate destruction, to fire and flood, or to mere forgetfulness and dusty neglect. Practitioners of both Renaissance and Reformation did their part to heighten people’s awareness of all the natural shocks to which books and manuscripts might be heir.

Nor did these threats apply only to old manuscripts from monastic libraries: the Tudor state also carried out fairly vigorous press censorship.\textsuperscript{59} In Ben Jonson’s “Execration on Vulcan,” the poet remonstrates with the god of fire for consuming works that did not deserve burning, giving a long and satirical

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bale, \textit{The Laboryouse Journey}, Bviii r, Ciii v, quoted in Summit 235.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
catalog of the sort of books that should instead have fed the flames. Indeed, Milton’s well-known view, to us almost incapable of objection, that (almost) no book ought to be destroyed because of bad content probably seemed strange to almost all his contemporaries, though they would have disagreed vigorously with one another about which books to preserve and which to burn.

There was also significant concern about the destruction of funeral monuments. These monuments were envisioned as the only way the site and name of the body, rapidly becoming one with the dust in which it was buried, might be remembered (if only for a finite while) by posterity. During the early years of the Reformation, they were often destroyed, defaced, or “pilfered” (that is, raided for valuable materials such as metals and valuable stonework) because of their connection with prayers both for and to the dead: intercession for those in purgatory on the one hand and “idolatrous” veneration of saints and their images on the other.60 Under Henry VIII, there was often tolerance of “widespread, unofficial vandalism,” while the Edwardian regime fostered a more fervent brand of iconoclasm leading to the utter destruction of tombs in many places.61 Like that of the monastic libraries, this destruction was discomfiting to many, especially noble and upper-class families whose ancestors’ monuments were threatened. In 1550, a law ordering the removal of images in

60 Summit 184; Phillip Lindley, “‘Pickpurse’ Purgatory, the Dissolution of the Chantries, and the Suppression of Intercession for the Dead,” Journal of the British Archaeological Association 164 (2011), 277-304.

churches made an explicit exception for the funeral monument of any “dead person which hath not been commonly reputed and taken for a saint,” and in 1560 Queen Elizabeth responded to continuing iconoclasm, vandalism, and looting of monuments with a “Proclamation against breaking or defacing Monuments of Antiquitie, being set up in Churches, or other publike places, for memory, and not for superstition.” Only three years after this proclamation, however, the state-promulgated Second Tome of Homilies (1563) claimed that “[i]mages placed publikely in Temples, cannot possibly bee without danger of worshipping and idolatrie” and (with scant scriptural or historical warrant) that idolatry had first arisen through “the blind love of a fond father, framing for his comfort an Image of his sonne, being dead, [so that] at last men fell to worshipping an Image of him who they did know to be dead.” Monuments, as self-glorifying works of human hands, might be suspect for reasons beyond suspicion of images as potential idols and requests for prayers for the dead. Some Protestants set up monuments that combined physical grandeur with self-undermining inscriptions pointing out their own vanity: Fulke Greville, for instance, planned a joint monument for himself and Sidney with an inscription calling itself a “Vaine affected immortalitie” striving “By stones to seeke


63 Scodel 24.
aeternitie,” and Greville’s actual sarcophagus bears an inscription proclaiming itself *Trophaeum peccati*.64

Though seventeenth-century English people continued to desire and build funeral monuments, often at great cost, these memorials also continued, for some, to be objects of suspicion, and their destruction remained a temptation for some and a worry for others.65 Sir John Coke, for instance, claimed in 1615 that the placement of tombs within churches had originated in “that superstition which taught to worship the reliques of the dead.”66 By 1631, John Weever still suspected the Puritans of harboring an iconoclastic impulse toward all monuments, writing that they would “deface or quite demolish all Funeral Monuments, swearing and protesting that all these are remains of Antichrist, papisticall and damnable.”67 Weever, though preoccupied with “funerall monuments, graves, tombes, or sepulchres,” placed greater confidence in the preservation of books, transcribing many epitaphs into his own book as a preventative against their loss: “Aboue all remembrances … for worthiness and continuance, bookes, or writings, haue euer had the preheminence… Bookes then and the Muses workes are of all monuments the most permanent,” for “it is only

64 Scodel 22-23.

65 “Resources which in the pre-Reformation had been invested in constructing and embellishing chantries were now used to produce memorials to the dead which, like their Catholic antecedents, stood as monuments to their patrons’ wealth.” Patricia Phillipy, *Women, death and literature in post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 193.


67 Quoted in Summit 184.
the Muses works which giue unto man immortality.” I will argue that the lyric becomes a place where such confidence in Muse-given immortality and the trope of the text as the only truly lasting monument collides with the materiality and potential forgetting or destruction of the literary corpus, as illustrated by the fate of the monastic libraries. Throughout the period in question, physical funeral monuments enjoyed legal protection and continued to be constructed while all the time falling under suspicion as idolatrous or vainglorious and under the perceived threat of defacement or removal. The situation surrounding them thus corroborated inherited literary tropes about monuments: people create them out of a (perhaps vain or sinful) desire to secure perpetual memory for themselves, and they appear solid and lasting, yet as material objects they are inherently susceptible to many threats and sure at last not to endure. In other words, inherited ways of thinking about monuments and the political and social situation surrounding them confirmed and reinforced one another. Not only defaced funeral monuments, but also the ruins of the abbeys themselves served as reminders. As Margaret Aston writes,

[b]y the 1590s, two generations of decay—helped by natural and human agencies—had mellowed and continued the work of Henry VIII’s commissioners. Monastic ruins were plundered, quarried, adapted, abandoned. It was an age of special sensitivity to the ruins of time.  

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68 Quoted in Summit 186.

The losses during England’s Reformation included not only particular material artefacts, such as books, monuments, or inscriptions, as vehicles of memory, but also the dismantling of an entire network of social institutions whose purpose was the memory of the dead, which can be gathered loosely under the term “perpetual chantries.”

Though these endowments, schools, and charitable enterprises cannot be understood without recognizing that one purpose of these institutions was to secure intercessory prayer for souls believed to be in purgatory, recent historians have pointed out that their role in securing the social remembrance of the deceased, often redounding to the status and prestige of the dead person’s surviving family and associates, should not be ignored. Though some such institutions with charitable purposes, such as almshouses, grammar schools, and hospitals, were granted immunity from outright dissolution, the result was still a massive social upheaval in which a broad collection of activities beyond just intercessory prayer, such as almsgiving and education, ceased to be practiced as modes of remembering the dead. As such, not only material things themselves but also attempts materially to secure remembrance for oneself were cast into a state of uncertainty. Spiritually speaking, believers in the new orthodoxy had been set free from the fear of

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72 Lindley 278.
purgatorial suffering, but if what one wanted was a way of remembering the dead or of making sure of being remembered among posterity, how was this to be accomplished?

Turning toward the Greco-Roman classics, which the humanist pedagogy of the day sought to make the source of a continuity with a past less tainted by purgatorial superstition, one might consider pinning one’s hopes of earthly remembrance among the living on the topos of poetic immortality or enduring fame. But this topos brought with it its own problems. Could it subsist and flourish alongside, or engrafted with, a culture of funeral belief and practice centered around a newly singular focus on the hope of resurrection? The new memorial practices and monuments shaped during and after the English Reformation show the importance of resurrection in the broader cultural imaginary upon which lyric poets draw. Along with the account of intellectual history in Section V, these monuments show how broadly and deeply both transtemporal memory and the hope of everlasting life were rooted in images of resurrection, images in which, I will argue, poets found substance for both their doubts and their hopes of lively memory beyond the body’s death. If a gravestone could be at once a memorial to succeeding generations and a testimony to the body’s expectation of resurrection, so too could a funeral elegy or even a love poem. But insofar as poetic texts, like bodies in the Christian imagining, had a complex relationship with materiality, and insofar as the relation between word and body could itself be imagined in various ways
(through vocal performance, through the Incarnation, through prophetic breath or speech), they might also link themselves to the promise of resurrection in a way no stony monument could do.

VII. Re-membering Bodies: New Monuments of Resurrection

Hic licet in occiduo cinere aspicit eum cuius nomen est Oriens

Here although in falling ashes, he looks upon Him whose name is Rising

—from the Latin epitaph of John Donne73

Looking at funeral monuments provides us with evidence about ways in which people in England continued to make the dead remembered after memory had been divorced from intercession. They provide significant evidence about how two kinds of futurity—remembrance by posterity within the scope of time, and bodily resurrection outside it—became inextricably linked. By the mid-sixteenth century, the suppression of monuments seeking intercessory prayer had been very successful; rather than using traditional formulas exhorting readers to remember or pray for the deceased, memorial inscriptions increasingly referred to the hope or expectation of resurrection, relevant especially to the

buried body whose location the monument often, but not always, marked. A Glouces-
shire inscription, for instance, addressed the particular piece of ground providing the tomb for the body of a lord and his wife: “Hic et pudicam quae sociae vitae fuit tenes matronam; corpus hoc geminum fove resuscitandum, & contegas almo sinu.” [Hold him and the virtuous wife who was his partner in life; cherish this body and its twin, worthy of resurrection, & hide them in your kind embrace]. Hope for the body, “worthy of resurrection,” cannot be separated from memory of the dead in posterity.

Despite the suspicion of idolatry and the threat of iconoclasm, the making of tomb-effigies continued to be extremely popular among those able to afford them. As in the Middle Ages, some effigies depicted the person as he or she had appeared in life, often adorned with accoutrements of rank and social position, such as arms or a bishop’s miter. Others, the cadaver or transi tombs, depicted the dead person, often in an intermediate state of decomposition and sometimes vermiculation, sometimes fully reduced to a skeleton. In his foundational book *The King’s Two Bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz argued that like funerary effigies, double-effigy tombs, which included effigies of both types, corresponded to the “Two Bodies,” one physical and the other political, official, or social. Kathleen Cohen argues, however, that the transi monuments of the sixteenth century are

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74 Peter Sherlock *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 44.

75 Hicks tomb at Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire, quoted in Sherlock 43.

better understood as images of resurrection, often combining images of the resurrected Christ with the decaying corpse as a reminder that this decay will be undone. Cohen attributes a shift away from earlier, grimmer transi images that emphasized the death’s horrors and the memento mori less to the Reformation and more to the spread of humanism, describing, for instance, one tomb of the 1520s in which the traditional “what I am, so you will be” inscription takes new meaning from juxtaposition not only with the corpse-image but also with a figure of the resurrected Christ. Many such pre-Reformation tombs from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries show vivid representations of the moment of resurrection: shrouds are shown “partly cast off” and, in some cases, the bodies have opening eyes or a “pose and expression... indicating ‘surprise and embarrassment,’” very like persons being resurrected in paintings of Doomsday. Transi tombs illustrated the belief that “the mortality of the flesh undermined all worldly power, and only the resurrection of the body could overcome the destruction of death.” Conventional representations of the “unlocked tomb or burial shroud” at once provided “an alarming reminder of mortality” and “an emblem of the resurrection”; for instance, an undated brass in


79 Sherlock 47.
Leigh, Kent depicts an open tomb chest with, on the one side, “an image of a shroud and the words ‘farre well all ye tell you come to me’” [i.e., as I am now you too shall be] and on the other ‘a woman … saying ‘Behold O Lord I com willingly’ in response to an angel blowing a trumpet.” Cadaver tombs declined in popularity during the rule of Elizabeth, but regained popularity in the seventeenth century as “a fruitful way of representing the new prominence given to the theme of resurrection in the wake of the Reformation.”

John Donne’s monument provides perhaps the best-known example of a post-Reformation sculptural effigy that can be interpreted both as a cadaver portrait or memento mori and as prefiguring the moment of resurrection. It shows Donne, only his face showing from out of the realistically gathered fabric of his burial shroud, “rising vertically out of an urn.” It thus depicts the hope that even a body reduced to dust or ashes that could be contained in the “little space” of an urn would be miraculously reanimated as once again itself, a complete and now incorruptible body, continuous with its mortal predecessor and yet also gloriously transformed.

Like effigies, epitaphs also emphasized resurrection: where, before the Reformation, they would have concluded with a request to pray for the deceased, they now tended to affirm that the body confidently awaited

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80 Sherlock 49.
81 Sherlock 49.
82 Sherlock 53.
83 Sherlock 53.
resurrection. On pre-Reformation monuments, “[t]he very wording of epitaphs meant that merely to read them was to engage in prayer, for the majority ended ‘Amen.’” A prose inscription on the tomb of Sir Charles Cavendish (d. 1617) exemplifies the reconfigured post-Reformation conventions: it speaks of the desire of his surviving wife and sons “in their tyme, to be gathered to his dust, expecting the happy howre of resurrection.” Such formulas often attempted to strike a careful balance between petitioning God for a dead person (which must be avoided) on the one hand and presuming salvation or election (which some would also wish to avoid) on the other. While confidence in one’s own salvation might or might not be held to be theologically appropriate, confidence in the resurrection itself was a simple act of faith in God’s promise to raise all the dead, even the damned. The 1603 monument of George Boleyn, dean of Lichfield, rejects prayer for the dead as grounded in a failure of faith in resurrection and God’s mercy:

Lo! here in earth my body lyes
Whose sinful lyfe deserves the rod
Yet I believe the same shall rise,
And praise the mercies of my God.
As for my soule let none take thought,
It is with him that hath it bought;
For God on me doth mercy take
For nothing else but Jhesus sake.

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85 David Hickman, cited in Sherlock 99.
86 Scodel 27.
87 Sherlock 97.
In this vehement rejection of intercession for the dead, the confidence with which the first-person speaker awaits bodily resurrection and the faith through which God’s grace saves him are one and the same. His trust in the Resurrection is inextricable from his trust in God’s mercy. The theme of the body awaiting resurrection was not a new development; rather, the Reformation’s ban of purgatorial themes and requests for intercession meant that the hope of resurrection now remained as the main permitted and uncontroversial religious sentiment borne by memorials.

In many Post-Reformation monuments, providing a memorial for posterity and expressing a hope of resurrection are not separate; rather, they “gesture toward a posterity to whom their family portraits offer traces of now absent ancestors, and also imagine a moment beyond posterity, when severed bonds are repaired in the Resurrection.” 88 The 1633 monument of three-year-old Henry Montagu, who had died by drowning, includes an upright effigy of the boy enclosed within an obelisk. The effigy stands on a pedestal which bears the image of waves, “recalling the boy’s death by drowning but also imagining his spiritual resurrection, guaranteed by baptism, in the upright effigy that appears to walk, like Christ, on water.” 89 By enclosing the effigial likeness of the body within the upward-pointing pagan obelisk, the monument brings together the


89 Phillippy, “Farewell” 33.
desire to spare no expense in honoring the lost child and establishing a memorial to carry remembrance of him forward to posterity, with the confidence in resurrection expressed in the *ars moriendi* treatise published soon after by his uncle and namesake: “Though the body sleepe a while in dust, yet it shall arise after thy likenesse.” 90 The restoration of likeness—both to God, and to the person’s former self—promised by resurrection gives a warrant for the making of memorial effigy: the effigy becomes a glimpse forward to the moment when the body is restored by, as Milton would write four years later, “the dear might of him that walked the waves.”

On the monument of Lady Elizabeth Russell, a detailed sculptural effigy kneels before a Bible, which lies open to the Latin text of Job 19:25-7, one of the Prayer Book’s Readings for the Burial of the Dead: “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that I shall rise out of the earth in the last day; and shall be covered again with my skin, and shall see God in my flesh; yea, and I myself shall behold him not with other, but with these same eyes.” 91 Like depictions of the Virgin that showed her with a Bible open to messianic prophecies at the moment of the Annunciation, Lady Russell will, in effigy at least, be interrupted in her encounter with the prophetic text by the prophecy’s fulfillment. The very “same eyes” that read the scriptural text during her life and are now buried beneath it will, the text promises, see God. The watchful, erect effigy, looking very much

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alive, takes its justification from Job: the desire to erect a monument that shows oneself, not as a decaying corpse, but as whole, alive, and seeing (reading) is not an earthly vanity, but a show of confidence in Christ’s promise. The conjunction of preserving memory and looking forward to resurrection, as functions not separate but interdependent, took place not only in monuments but also in funeral elegies and other poems, which often figured themselves as the only monuments time would not destroy.

VIII. Parameters and Scope

This project concentrates on lyric and elegiac verse written and published (or circulated) between approximately 1590 and 1641. I begin around 1590 because this is the point when elegies for Philip Sidney shifted from the commemoration of an aristocratic warrior and patron to the canonization of a poet who would, posthumously, serve as exemplar to a generation of poets.92 Focusing on only one of the many elegies for Sidney, I look to Spenser’s “Ruines of Time,” which attempts to ground English poetry against a temporal world of inexorable flux upon Sidney’s sacrificial body. The 1590s also mark the early manuscript circulation of love lyrics by Donne and Shakespeare, each of whom

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in different ways brings together imaginings of literary future with bodily decay and resurrection in secular love lyric. The love-lyrics of both have often been characterized as mocking the English fad for Petrarchism, yet in their jointure of uncertain literary fame with images of corruptible body and its eternal prospects, they respond to Petrarch’s synthesis of classical and Christian. I end with the years 1640-1641 because they mark the publication of the second edition of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* and the two-volume second folio of Jonson’s works. In the intervening half-century, as poets strive to lay claim to a place in an enduring English vernacular canon, they take up the question of what poetic immortality might mean in the context of the perishable and yet, paradoxically, imperishable nature of the to-be-resurrected body.

I begin with Donne because he is, among early modern English poets, the most noted for his images of the body in decay and resurrection, for his circulation almost exclusively in manuscript, and for his revival from obscurity to canonicity. Donne’s awareness of the mutability involved in manuscript circulation is often taken to mean that he had little concern for the future readership of his works, but I argue that this is a mistake. Donne, in fact, persistently imagines the futures both of his poems in their material circumstances and of his decaying body, but he is not reconciled to the destruction of either. Poems, Donne maintains, even those in manuscript, may easily last as long as anything else in the decaying material world heading toward apocalypse. More than a mere conceit, the link between poetic futurity
and resurrection in Donne scarcely recognizes distinctions between playful and
hinges on voluntary acts of self-contraction — into a private erotic relation — that,
like an alchemical process, imitate the self-immolation of the phoenix and in
doing so appropriate the body’s capacity for resurrection to the poem. The
Anniversaries envision a poetic exemplarity and fame that prefigure and look
forward to resurrection. His contemporaries, too, envision for him a literary
future that draws on his imaginings of resurrection.

From Donne I turn to Shakespeare’s Sonnets, in which some of the
language’s most resounding boasts of poetic immortality have received
surprisingly little critical attention. When critics pay attention to the Sonnets’
claims that they will survive, these are usually treated either as uninterestingly
conventional or as utterly self-annihilating. I argue that they are neither. The
sonnets on futurity confront questions of whether and how, in their own radical
contingency upon the vagaries of material survival and transmission, their
promises can be kept. The Sonnets reflect an acute awareness that both the
beloved and the poem are “patterns” that, in the mutable world of materiality,
depend upon the survival or regeneration of paper and ink, become subject to
error and ruin. Yet Shakespeare draws on and transforms the classical tropes of
devouring time and undying poetic fame, revealing the finitude of time in the
face of apocalypse and resurrection. Through faith in resurrection, the body
becomes the only material thing to outlast time, and thus Shakespeare locates the
Sonnets’ enlivening power in the embodied reading of posterity, in whose eyes and mouths the poems may even outlast the end of time.

If Donne and, to a lesser degree, Shakespeare (at least, the Shakespeare of the Sonnets) are seen as the poets of manuscript’s ephemerality, Jonson is the opposite, the Author of print’s endurance. My reading of Jonson continues to question the tendency to equate print with lasting fame and manuscript with the embrace of ephemerality. His 1616 Folio has often been seen as heralding the advent of the modern literary monument, constructed in the fixity of print. To Jonson is often attributed a dichotomy between the printed Folio monument of the Author’s Works, and the body, characterized by illness, age, humiliation, and decay, which privileges the former while heaping scorn on the latter. I find that Jonson’s funeral poems complicate this narrative considerably. Jonson’s epitaphs for his children reveal the inability of the literary monument to ameliorate the loss of the child’s body, the “fleshly birth” better than all his poetry which is only “lightly” covered, not subsumed, by earth. In the elegy for Lady Pawlet, the very monumentalizing qualities that characterize the printed Folio threaten to petrify the poet’s living form. Imitating Petrarch, Jonson finds that the poet’s power comes from the ability to resist reduction to the fixity of the material monument and retain a living voice through praise of the soul. In the version of the elegy for Venetia Digby printed in the Under-wood, the glorious wholeness of the resurrected body contrasts with the fragmentation and loss that mark the elegy. In these poems, Jonson considers the problems of the literary monument
established in the petrifying fixity of print and suggests that the body’s great liabilities, its changeableness, vulnerability, and mortality, are paradoxically essential to a living poetry seeking immortality.

If mortal bodies are crucial to poetry, what can be made of the bodies of dead poets? I consider this question in three critical elegies. Spenser’s “Ruines of Time” takes us back to the beginning of the chronological period in question, raising the question of how an English vernacular poetry can find any firm foundation in a world where Time brings every material thing to ruin. His answer comes in a series of visions that focus repeatedly on the ascent of Sidney’s martyred body: through likeness to Christ’s sacrifice, the human body can become the link that allows poetry to participate both in the material world of chaos and decay and in the heavenly world of eternal things. Where Donne, Shakespeare, and Jonson each portray the decay of their own bodies and other bodies, Spenser gives us a poet’s body that, though material, is translated immediately into incorruptibility, and as such forges likenesses between the material and the eternal that the likenesses of poetry can imitate. Jonson’s elegy for Shakespeare also repudiates burial—specifically, a burial that, like Spenser’s, makes the site of decaying bodies the measure of poetic fame—and performs a double metamorphosis of the body of Shakespeare into a swan and then a star. This transformation, unlike Spenser’s, is more performative than sacrificial, using dramatic address to place Shakespeare beyond the corporeal decay that threatens vernacular poetry. Only in a translation to the heavens that looks forward to
resurrection can the bodies of Sidney and Shakespeare cast their needed influence on English poetry.

Rejecting transformation, Milton’s elegy for Shakespeare crafts a monument that is also an admonition: readers must not become like pyramids or statues, idolatrous petrified idols, that hide the remains of the body. Shakespeare’s monument should be not marble but marvel, composed of living readers who, like Hermione in the *The Winter’s Tale*, only seem to be turned to stone. Like Jonson in the Pawlet elegy, Milton imagines himself as the poet who, in a mimesis of resurrection, resists being reduced to the silent materiality of stone.

In the Afterword, I consider Milton’s *Lycidas*, an elegy widely recognized for its concern over the body lost in the sea. Though critics have recognized the body’s recovery as central to the work of *Lycidas*, I seek through previously unrecognized intertexts both classical and biblical to show both the means and the significance of attending to the body. To outdo previous poets including Horace and Spenser, Milton must bring the body still in its own form out of the depths of the sea, invoking apocalypse and resurrection as the fulfillments of classical recoveries of bodies. Attending to the body, for Milton, becomes not only a way of ameliorating disaster, but an access to the otherwise “inexpressive” harmonies of the eternal heaven.

What these poets have in common, apart from their canonicity (which it becomes difficult, in retrospect, to separate from their aspirations to poetic fame),
is their sense that mortal bodies require poetry and poetry requires mortal bodies. In their classical models, it is up to poetry’s provision of undying fame to ameliorate the materiality and mortality that will destroy the body, as Jonson’s Ovid says, “in funeral fire.” English poets come to this tradition as to a resounding success: as monastic libraries and funeral monuments perished, Horace and Virgil and Ovid were on the ascendant, read by every schoolboy. And yet as they practice this kind of poetry, a consciousness of the materiality and perishability of books and papers calls them to remember what has been lost as well as what has survived. As these poets performed the classical gestures of approaching the mortal body, they began to think that its promise of resurrection might be the source of poetry’s immortality, its ability, unlike monuments of bronze and stone, to dwell in the material world but not belong to it entirely. The imaginings of body found in these poems are highly various: decaying scraps of hair and bone, bodies turned to stone statues or to swans or to stars, dead bodies sunk beneath the waves, reading eyes and breathing mouths. To be other than mouldering ink and paper or dead monuments of stone, the poems depend on these images of bodies as both material and immortal, dying and decaying and yet held by a promise of life.
CHAPTER 2:

THE “SCATTRED BODY”:

DECAY, RESURRECTION, AND LITERARY FUTURITY IN DONNE

In the Holy Sonnet “At the round Earths Imagin’d corners,” Donne imagines having the power to direct the resurrection of the all the dead at the end of time, commanding them, “arise, arise / From Death, you numberless infinities / Of Soules, and to your scattred Bodies goe” (1-4). Though the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body was not one of the era’s most contentious theological issues, it was nonetheless a central one for both the Catholicism of Donne’s upbringing and the Protestantism of his later career.  


94 Though resurrection of the body is not among the more controversial theological issues for the Reformers, the question of whether the soul enjoyed heaven or slept (psychopannychism) — or, in some sense, died along with the body (thnetopsychism or mortalism) — in the interim between death and resurrection did occasion controversy — a controversy the Prayer Book’s reserve on the question of the soul’s present state seeks to elide—
The service for Burial of the Dead in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, in its commitment of the body “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” looks forward less to deliverance of the soul into heavenly bliss than to the day when we “may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul.” Far from being confined to Donne’s devotional writings, images of bodies resurrected from the dust, ashes, or scattered fragments of their dissolution also recur with striking frequency in Donne’s *Songs and Sonnets* and his verse letters. Ramie Targoff has recently argued that the relationship between body and soul, and in particular the moment of their parting, was Donne’s lifelong obsession and the keystone theme that unites his various poetic and prose works. Robert Watson observes that “[t]he distant sound of that [last] trumpet, playing somewhere beyond the deafness of the grave, is the Muse enticing Donne throughout his poetry.”

Though the body in dissolution and resurrection is, as Targoff and Watson note, in its own right a focus of intense emotional, intellectual, and religious interest for Donne, it also becomes in his poetry a rich source of figural imagery. In his “secular” poems, particularly his love poems and funeral elegies, images of

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95 *Book of Common Prayer*, 1559.


the body become inextricable from concerns of poetic futurity. The ephemerality of books and papers, print and manuscript, seem at odds with the potential for poetic immortality, and yet the body’s similar material fragility is only a prelude to the promise of resurrection. The image of the scattered body that will nonetheless be resurrected allows Donne to present the survival of his poetry as contingent upon materiality, circumstance, and the unpredictable actions and responses of posterity, yet assured despite all these threats. Like the body, his poems may be scattered, may fall prey to fragmentation, change, or misattribution, but hope remains that they will not in the end be lost or destroyed. In his funeral elegies especially, Donne confronts the possibility that poetry’s promise of an earthly fame or immortality dependent upon human agency impinges upon the claims of true resurrection and eternal life. He suggests, though, that poetic commemoration may prefigure—and perhaps even allow the poet some anticipatory participation in—the divine work of resurrection. Both Donne’s own poetry and the works made by his contemporaries to commemorate him seek to work as anticipations of the Resurrection to come.

Paradoxically, the body in Christian theology is at once utterly mutable and corruptible, able to dissolve into the dust from which it was created, and in a real sense indestructible, certainly destined for reunion and reanimation at the last day. In scripture, resurrection is accomplished through the word: the dry bones of Ezekiel’s valley rise when commanded to “hear the word of the Lord,”
and Lazarus comes out of the tomb in response to Jesus’ call.\textsuperscript{98} Michael O’Connell has described the Reformation as bringing about a profound shift toward “the textualization of God’s body, the turning of the incarnation (and the devotions and ritual practices associated with it) from expression in physical and material ways to predominantly textual and verbal modes,” as exemplified by Erasmus’ description of the Christ encountered in scriptural text as “so fully present that you would see less if you gazed upon him with your very eyes.”\textsuperscript{99} Similarly, Cranmer’s preface to the Great Bible of 1540 sought to assimilate the reverence previously associated with (dubious) relics of saints’ bodies contained in jeweled reliquaries to the true and reliable textual “relics” of scripture, describing the Bible as “the most precious jewel, and the most holy relic that remaineth upon earth.”\textsuperscript{100} These authors suggest not only that text can substitute for the body, but that it is to be preferred. Donne draws upon these ideas of the textualized body or the text as a perfected, idealized replacement for the body, but his images of the relation between body and text are more complex and more reciprocal. In \textit{The Second Anniversary}, he describes Elizabeth Drury’s body and soul as “two soules, / Or like to full on both sides written Rols, / Where eyes might read upon the outward skin, / As strong Records for God, as minds

\textsuperscript{98} Ezekiel 37:4.


within” (503-507). Where an obvious analogy would have the text associated with soul and the material parchment or “skin” as the analogue of body, Donne’s image is different: body’s text is just the other side of the double-sided page from the text of soul; they are the work of a single author. As much can be learned by studying the body-text as from the soul-text on the other side of the page—in fact, thanks to the slight transparency of fine vellum and the darkness of manuscript ink, one who reads body is likely to be able to see, if not quite decipher, some of soul’s words as well.101 Text does not replace or displace body, but becomes only a metaphor for it, and a metaphor that reminds us that text, too, depends on material “skin” taken from the body of a mere animal.

The idea that Donne was seriously concerned with the survival of his work for posterity, to the point of persistently imagining it in his poems, has been deemed inconsistent with what we know of his preferences about the readership of his works and the material circumstances in which they circulated. Since Arthur Marotti’s John Donne: Coterie Poet, critics have understood the audience Donne envisions for himself primarily in terms of his preference for limited manuscript circulation.102 Though manuscript circulation enables the

101 “The chief qualities of parchment—when in later times its manufacture was greatly improved—especially of vellum, are its semi-transparent fineness and the striking beauty of its polish, particularly on the hair side. The flesh side of the parchment is somewhat darker, but it retains the ink better.” David Diringer, The Book Before Printing: Ancient, Medieval and Oriental (London: Hutchinson, 1953; reprinted Dover, 1982), 192.

poet to exercise greater (but by no means complete) control over the scope of the his or her contemporary audience by limiting it to a select coterie (who may and frequently do, nonetheless, engage in unauthorized reproduction and sharing of the text), transmission via manuscript also subjects poetry to “corruption,” disordering, and misattribution, particularly over the longer term. Like the mortal body, the poetic corpus in manuscript is noticeably mutable, often becoming altered, dispersed, and difficult to attribute with certainty. Donne’s willingness to consign his poems to this mutability, rather than commending them to the comparative stability and longevity of print, would at first glance seem to suggest a lack of concern for their survival or audience in posterity. Yet according to the doctrine of the general resurrection—a doctrine Donne dwelt upon throughout his life—corruption and anonymity are not the ultimate fate of the distributed body. Caroline Walker Bynum observes that, in the thirteenth century, the deliberate partition of saints’ bodies for relics became accepted because “[e]mphasis on integrity and identity in resurrection both made it all right to divide the body… and underlined such division as distribution of self.”103 In his poetry, Donne expresses his hope that as the body, however dissolved and scattered, can never be annihilated because it always retains its inherent capacity to be resurrected, so his poems, like the body in that they both participate in and surpass mere materiality, may also endure and be resurrected into immortality through their reception by future readers.

What anxieties might manuscript distribution hold for a poet interested both in controlling the text received by his contemporary audience and in being read by posterity? Arthur Marotti’s *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* emphasizes the mutability of manuscript poetry. In a section titled “Corrupting Donne,” Marotti describes Donne’s poetry as “perhaps the most striking case of [the] textual malleability” that characterizes the manuscript tradition. He notes that while “an author such as Donne could control somewhat the form in which his poems were first received in manuscript by coterie readers,” later stages of transmission rendered the poems acutely susceptible to alteration “both before and after his death.”

In the process of manuscript tradition, Marotti suggests, all are apt to be changed. Marotti’s emphasis on the loss of authorial control of the text’s originally ordered form after the poet’s death recalls Donne’s description in “The Funerall” of a wreath of hair that is

… my outward Soule,
Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,
Will leave this to controule,
And keep these limbs, her Provinces, from dissolution. (6-8)

The speaker’s concern to implement an artificial means of “controule” that will preserve the body from corruption parallels Marotti’s notion of the author’s control over the poetic corpus, which at (or before) his death becomes susceptible to mutability. In *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, Marotti describes Donne as a poet who “consciously controlled the dissemination of his writing” by a “restriction of his

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contemporary readership” to a limited coterie of manuscript recipients. Yet Marotti also describes the critical assumptions that would lead us to seek an incorrupt text or to regard alteration as corruption as problematic: an “idealistic, author-centered” approach to textual criticism, he suggests, has led scholars to ignore manuscript variants that provide valuable evidence of how the readers who “corrupted” these poems read and understood them, and by extension, of the social situations in and for which they were written. Manuscript transmission allows not only for simple transcription errors, but also for wholesale recastings and misattributions (which may, like the assigning of saint’s names to bodily fragments, involve the appropriation of a well-known name intended to lend prestige to an item whose own origins or merits are dubious). Marotti argues that Donne’s popularity in manuscript, by increasing the rate of transcription, adaptation, and spurious attribution, added to his works’ “textual instability and vulnerability to appropriation” and thus “worked against the isolation of individual authorship and the fixing of authorized texts.”

Thus, in Marotti’s description, manuscript circulation (as opposed to print) can be both an advantage and a liability for an author who desires to control the fate of the text: such a distribution strategy limits the contemporary audience while heightening the frangibility and mutability of the poetic corpus.

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105 Marotti, Coterie Poet, xi.

106 Marotti, Manuscript, 148.

107 Marotti, Manuscript, 159.
and weakening the identification of the text with its author over the longer term. Marotti infers from these material and cultural facts of manuscript dissemination that lyric poets who chose manuscript over print must have “claimed to care little about the textual stability or historical durability of their socially contingent productions.” I argue, however, that reading Donne with attention to his persistent links between text and body reveals that his poems make a more complicated set of claims. Many of Donne’s love lyrics and verse letters, which at least within their own fictions of readership address the smallest possible immediate audiences, imagine the future of the text in terms of the corruptible body whose incorrupt form and right identity will be restored at the Resurrection. These poems reflect an acute awareness of the manuscript text’s almost certain “corruption” and possible misinterpretation or obscurity, but they also enable Donne to imagine or prophesy a future for his poems akin to the resurrection of the body, which must be sown in corruption in order to be raised incorruptible. Poems, though not possessing the promises given to the body,

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109 Marotti, Manuscript, 2.

110 1 Cor. 15:42. Calvin disparages the public veneration of relics on this along with other grounds: “The first Christians left the bodies of the saints in their graves, obeying the universal sentence, that all flesh is dust, and TO DUST IT MUST RETURN, and did not attempt their resurrection before the appointed time by raising them in pomp and state. This example has not been followed by their successors; on the contrary, the bodies of the faithful, in opposition to the command of God, have been disinterred in order to be glorified, when they ought to have remained in their places of repose awaiting the last judgment. … [Eagerness to rescue the bodies of early martyrs] was shown, … in order to inter them in their graves, and there to leave them until the day of the resurrection; but they did not expose these remains to the sight of men for
are akin to it in that their fate is contingent on the vagaries of corruptible matter, yet not wholly so. For the poems, as for the body, the hope of resurrection transforms the anxiety of resurrection into a triumphant confidence—though not one free from every shadow of doubt.

“The Relique” and “The Funerall,” for instance, both center on the physical distribution of the body after the manner of relics. The former imagines the reassembly of the scattered body (even locks of hair) at the Resurrection, while the latter imagines appropriation of hairs that “strength and art / Have from a better brain” as a means to preserve the body from dissolution in the interim. The image of the body as both corruptible and enduring, mutable and to-be-resurrected, unidentifiable and forever connected to personal identity, enables Donne to figure his poetry’s fate as materially contingent, yet also assured.

Though it is possible to read Donne’s imagining of his poems’ futurity in terms of resurrection as simply a playful fiction or extended conceit designed for the amusement of his contemporary coterie, I see no reason to foreclose our understanding of Donne’s ambitions in this way. Achsah Guibbory has described lyrics such as “The Relique” and “The Canonization” as demonstrating a turn outward from Donne’s small contemporary coterie toward a broader future.

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their adoration.” A Treatise on Relics, 1543. On Calvin’s account, resurrection not only remedies dissolution, but seems almost to depend upon it. His scorn for “exposing” bodies to the sight of the adoring many is echoed both by the Donne’s vision of the ignorant crowd of relic-adorers in “The Relique” and by his famous resistance to allow his poems to be printed.
Richard B. Wollman also argues that Donne’s orientation toward his contemporary coterie audience and his avoidance of print should not be read as signaling unconcern with the future preservation or reception of his work. He contends that Marotti’s view of Donne’s audience as primarily defined by the contemporary coterie fails to take into account “the possibilities Donne saw for the future of his verse” and “underestimates the power of manuscript poetry as a powerful means of preserving the poems and the poet.” Yet Wollman also, by making a straightforward identification between manuscript and ephemerality, tends to underestimate manuscript poems’ potential for futurity. On Wollman’s reading, Donne embraces the ephemerality of manuscript in part because he “imagines a life beyond life for his poems” in the active and living memory of his readers, “preserved for the future without print and without regard for the immediate physical survival of the paper on which they are written.” In a reading of “The Relique,” Wollman describes the poem as setting up an analogy in which the material means of textual transmission—books and manuscripts—correspond to false relics of the fragmented body, and the poem itself, with its immaterial form that can be kept in memory, corresponds to the soul:


Donne has no need to and in fact must avoid drawing too much attention to the ‘paper’... to mistake the physical poem for its meaning is to make it a relic and to misdevote, rather than to turn body into soul and perfect the poet’s resurrection through memory.\textsuperscript{115}

But if Donne had wanted to avoid drawing attention to “this paper,” it is odd that he should explicitly and emphatically mention it in a line that enacts a vital turn in the poem. He chooses, after all, to refer explicitly to “this paper,” the material manuscript and not simply the text of the poem. For all Donne’s mockery of spurious relics and their veneration by the superstitious, the privileging of soul over body that Wollman attributes to him does not match his treatment of body and soul in this poem or elsewhere. The poem’s image of resurrection underscores the idea that the body and soul belong together and, though they separate for a time, each is incomplete without the other, and neither can achieve perfect happiness until the two reunite.\textsuperscript{116} Hence the association between the reunion of body and soul and the reunion of lovers.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} Wollman, “Donne’s Obscurity” 129.

\textsuperscript{116} The supplement to the \textit{Summa Theologica}, completed by associates of Aquinas after his death, explains that the resurrection is necessary to human happiness because, according to the Christian adaptation of Aristotelian concepts, the soul cannot be happy without the body: “Others said that the entire nature of man is seated in the soul, so that the soul makes use of the body as an instrument, or as a sailor uses his ship: wherefore according to this opinion, it follows that if happiness is attained by the soul alone, man would not be balked in his natural desire for happiness, and so there is no need to hold the resurrection. But the Philosopher sufficiently destroys this foundation (\textit{De Anima} ii, 2), where he shows that the soul is united to the body as form to matter.” \textit{ST}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} and rev. ed., 1920. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. \textit{Supplementum}, Q75.1.

\textsuperscript{117} In his 1626 funeral sermon on Sir William Cokayne, Donne describes death as unable to dissolve the spousal relationship between body and soul: “[B]ecause God hath made the band of Marriage indissoluble but by death, farther then man can die, this divorce cannot fall upon
Ramie Targoff observes that Donne’s Second Anniversary depicts a soul whose attachment to the body is at odds with the dualistic accounts of the soul’s liberation from the body at death that, on her account, dominated contemporary English Protestantism.\(^{118}\) Yet the English Protestant view cannot be reduced to a caricature of the blessed soul freed from the bondage of sinful flesh: in the space of a single prayer, the Book of Common Prayer both describes the soul as “delivered from the burthen of the flesh” and looks forward to the “perfect consummation and bliss” available only when body and soul are rejoined in resurrection.\(^{119}\)

Though Wollman’s analogy of body to manuscript and soul to poem provides a temptingly tidy formula, I argue that it disregards Donne’s images of body and soul as ultimately inextricable from one another. He deduces from Donne’s mockery of “misdevotion” to false relics that Donne would have recognized no worth at all in fragments of hair and bone. Yet in the central conceit of the poem, the positioning of the body gives the lovers power to co-opt the hylomorphic nature of the human person and even God’s power to resurrect

\[\text{man; As farre as man is immortall, man is a married man still, still in possession of a soule, and a body too; And man is for ever immortall in both; Immortall in his soule by Preservation, and immortall in his body by Reparation in the Resurrection. For, though they be separated... they are not divorced... they shall returne to one another againe, in an inseparable re-union in the Resurrection.} \]

\[\text{Caroline Walker Bynum observes that increasingly in the religious language of the thirteenth century, “[R]esurrection was not merely the assertion of wholeness. It was also the object of desire. ... [B]ody was a beloved bride.”} \]


\(^{119}\) To trace the persistent tension in Christian thought between ideas of flesh as a source of trouble and concupiscence and body as a good creation of God restored and sanctified by the Incarnation is beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice to say that it is rooted in the language of scripture; see for instance Jn. 1:14 vs. Jn. 3:6 and 6:63, or Phil. 1:20 vs. Romans 7:24.
the dead to life so that they may, at the last, “meet at this grave and make a little stay” (11). Their plan (however misguided, even idolatrous) hinges completely upon the physical stuff of the body. As Wollman discounts the body, he likewise undervalues the material substrate of the text. While the poem held in memory will endure for the lifetime of the individual reader, no one with Donne’s preoccupation with the imminence of death could equate such survival with the long-term persistence he repeatedly imagines for his work. Surely he could not have expected to realize his hopes of being remembered and “canonized” by “posterity” or another age (in poems to be discussed below) without the physical survival of some manuscript or book. It is the discovery of “this paper”—the physical manuscript that contains the poem—which will, the speaker claims, provide the necessary corrective to the misinterpretation of the spurious relics in “The Relique.” The “paper” (possibly an unbound or fragmentary manuscript) and the “bracelet of bright hair about the bone” do parallel one another, but Donne’s treatment of both “relics” affirms rather than denies the importance of these material fragments, however subject to misinterpretation and miscontextualization, to what the speaker is trying to accomplish (6). Within the conceit of the poem, misinterpretation is a danger not so much because it

120 The impossibility of authenticating claims about the origins of relics was a common trope in Reformers’ arguments against their veneration. Donne’s prophecy in “The Relique” that “thou shalt be a Mary Magdalene, and I / A something else thereby” seems likely to have been inspired, if not by this statement of Calvin, then by similar polemics: “[I]t is quite impossible to worship the bones of a martyr without danger of rendering such honors by mistake to the bones of some brigand or thief, or even to those of a horse, a dog, or a donkey. And it is equally impossible to adore the ring, the comb, the girdle of the Virgin Mary, without the risk of adoring instead objects which may have belonged to some abandoned person.” Treatise on Relics, 1543.
encourages “misdevotion” (which is presented more as foolishness to be mocked than as dangerous idolatry) as because it will lead to the disturbance of the “relics” and thus frustrate the purpose of the couple’s arrangements for the “last busie day.”

Both the idea that Donne was uninterested in whether manuscripts would physically survive and the idea that he and his contemporaries regarded manuscript (as opposed to print) as an inherently ephemeral medium are called into question by his verse letter to a Dr Andrews, a physician who has not been conclusively identified. In the letter, Donne graciously expresses thanks for a manuscript copy received as a replacement for a printed book of his that, while out on loan, had been torn to pieces by the doctor’s children:

What the printing-presses bring to birth with inky travail we take as it comes;  
but what is written out by hand is in greater reverence.  
…”

Brought back the captive of your triumph,  
Even Frankfurt passes to the halls of its conqueror.  
A book which, if it has been baptised merely in the blood of the printing-press,  
goes to shelves resigned to moth and dust;  
let it but come to us written by the pen, and it is received with reverence  
and wings its way to the high-perched cases which shrine the ancient Fathers.  
Apollo must tell the manner of its happening—  
that children smear upon a new book old age and grayness. (lines 1–2, 4–10)\textsuperscript{121}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{121} De Libro Cum Mvtv — aretur, Impresso, Domi a pueris frust[r]atim lacerato, et post reddito Manuscripto.
\end{flushright}
H.W. Garrod explains that Donne represents Andrews as triumphing over the city of Frankfurt, “the grand market-place of printed books,” by transforming its product into venerable manuscript. The dramatic situation of the poem allows Donne to play with the paradox in which the printed book, more than the manuscript, turns out to be physically fragile and subject to fragmentation, to “moth and dust,” whereas the manuscript book, thanks to the reverence inspired by its handmade character and the appearance of age, is protected from decay and the acts of errant children, and thus will last as long as the texts of the Church Fathers. Moreover, this preservation is paradoxically attributed to characteristics (vetustatem canitiemque) that, in human bodies, betoken the advent of age, decay, and death. If we attended only to the immediate audience and occasion of the verse letter, we might conclude that Donne is simply seeking to assure his friend that he does not mind and in fact appreciates having received a manuscript replacement for the destroyed book and is playing on the particulars of the situation to craft a witty note of appreciation. These contexts are certainly illuminating—without an understanding of the occasion, the letter would make

Sed quae scripta manu sunt, veneranda magis.
... Victoris in aedes,
Et Francofurtum, te revehente meat.
Qui liber in pluteos, blattis, cinerique relictos,
Si modo sit praeli sanguine tinctus, abit,
Accedat calamo scriptus, reverenter habetur,
Involat & veterum scrinia summa Patrum.
Dicat Apollo modum; Pueros infundere libro
Nempe vetustatem canitiemque novo.

little sense. But the assertions Donne makes in the letter, however playful, should also call into question assumptions that equate manuscript on the one hand with ephemerality and exclusive concern with an intimate audience of contemporaries and print on the other with longevity and hopes of preservation. When Donne gives us a scenario in which the manuscript book, because of its apparent age and rarity, is treasured and preserved alongside patristic writings (which survived before the advent of print through careful preservation and copying), we cannot conclude either that his preference for the manuscript circulation of his own poems signifies unconcern for future readership or that he regarded the physical medium as irrelevant to the preservation of the text.

In another consideration of text and its material substrate, “A Valediction, Of My Name in the Window,” Donne experiments with the way the speaker’s name, carved in the window of his mistress, can be understood both as a text and as a body, both of which can be resurrected. He begins by describing the name as inalterable:

   As no one pointe, nor dash,  
   Which are but accessaries to this name,  
   The showers and tempests can outwash,  
   So shall all times finde me the same;  
   You this intireness better may fulfill,  
   Who have the patterne with you still. (Stanza III)

Elaine Scarry has described Donne as transposing the body onto the page; she sees his valedictory poems in particular as experiments in rendering language
material.\textsuperscript{122} Donne’s statement that “no one pointe, nor dash” of his name will be washed out recalls Christ’s promise that not one “jot or tittle” of the law will pass away.\textsuperscript{123} The addressee is asked, like Christ, to bring about the paradoxically better fulfillment of what is already “intire.” The affiliation between text and body draws upon the relationship between Christ the Word of God and the already perfect Law he comes, not to abolish, but to fulfill. The speaker also resembles Christ in his promise of eternal constancy: “So shall all times find me the same.”\textsuperscript{124} As the Christian retains the image and words of Christ, the addressee keeps the name as a “patterne” of the speaker. There is an uncomfortable tension between the lover’s vow to be as unchanging as the name graven in the window and the impossibility that any mortal can keep this promise: for as Saint Paul promises, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” The “intireness” of the name’s inalterably carved text becomes emblematic of the speaker’s integrity, both moral and bodily.

Yet the image of the name inscribed on glass, the material valued by alchemists for its unreactive immutability, reminds us of the more mutable medium in which the real (as opposed to the fictional) text is inscribed. The poem, unlike the name, cannot be expected to preserve its “intireness” perfectly


\textsuperscript{124} Stringer suggests that this line is an allusion to Hebrews 13:38: “Jesus Christ, the same today, tomorrow, and forever.” 229.
in processes of manuscript transmission. The inscription of the name, too, carries a more indelible relation to personal identity than that of the manuscript poem, whose attribution may shift and become inconstant. The pun on “hard” and “deepe” in the next stanza calls our attention to the physical characteristics of the glass and its “scratch’d” inscription, and thus to the material circumstances of the poem as well:

Or if too hard and deepe
This learning be, for a scratch’d name to teach,
It, as a given deaths head keepe,
Lovers mortalitie to preach,
Or think this ragged bony name to bee
My ruinous Anatomie. (ll. 21-30)

The speaker shifts here from regarding the graven name of the speaker as an emblem of Christ’s eternal immutability despite the changes to his body in death and resurrection, a theological parallel for the speaker’s constancy which he on second thought deems to be perhaps too “hard and deepe” to be co-opted for lovers’ purposes— to imagining it as a skeletal memento mori figure. These two stanzas contrast the lover’s vow not to change with the skeleton’s reminder that “ruinous” change in the state of the body is inevitable. The name does not, as one might expect, remind the viewer of the same name as it will one day look engraved on the funeral monument; instead, the name becomes the skeletal body itself. As the skeleton survives the decay of the flesh, so the name in the window will survive the speaker’s departure. Where before the name possessed an immutable “intireness” like that of the Christ or the divine Law, it has now become both an emblem of the lover’s body in dissolution and a stubborn
remnant, a reminder that even in death the body, though it become “ruinous,” is not altogether destroyed. The first line’s “name engrav’d herein” (emphasis added) now lies here in the grave; writing has become synonymous with burial. The name is no longer entire unto itself; rather, the bare outlines of letters now trace a “ragged bony” skeleton bereft of flesh and soul, a “ruinous Anatomie.” The transformation the name undergoes between the third and fourth stanzas resembles the change from life to death described by a poem accompanying the emblem of the death’s head in Geffrey Whitney’s 1586 A Choice of Emblems:

“Where liuely once, Gods image was exprest, / … Lo, nowe a skull, both rotten, bare, and drye, / A relike meete in charnell house to lye.”

Where in the previous stanza the lover’s name, as word, shared in the immutability of Christ the Logos, now the image of God has been reduced to the bare skull. The skeleton may endure, but it is not a living thing entire. What is the speaker’s purpose in transforming the name into a “deaths head” that will preach “lovers mortalitie,” where before he was denying his own changeableness? In the context of a carpe diem seduction poem, such a ghastly image might make a certain kind of sense, but why invoke death and decay in a valediction?

Then, as all my soules bee,
Emparadis’d in you, (in whom alone
I understand, and grow and see,)
The rafters of my body, bone
Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew, and Veine,
Which tile this house, will come againe (25-30)

The speaker, we now understand, has anatomized his body and displayed his skeleton only to demonstrate the inevitability of his return. His souls dwell in the beloved as if in paradise, while in his skeletal name she possesses “the rafters of my body, bone.” Because of the assurance that not only the soul but every part of the body will be reunited at the Resurrection of the Dead, the addressee can be certain that the speaker’s living flesh—“Muscle, Sinew, and Veine,” the parts that do not remain with her—will come back to rejoin with the bones of his name.

But the addressee is not simply to wait for the speaker’s return and the metaphorical reconstitution of his body. Rather, the first line of the next stanza is ambiguous: “Till my return repair / And recompact my scatter’d body so” (31-32). The speaker charges his addressee with a task, but the line initially may mean either that this what she is to do until his return shall (in the subjunctive) “repair” and “recompact” his body, or that these are the actions she must take in order to “repair” and “recompact” him. This ambiguity, I would suggest, registers a purposeful reflection of the uncertain degree of agency exercised by the addressee-reader, although the fact that there is no second clause in the stanza then resolves the ambiguity in favor of the imperative reading. On this reading, the addressee’s actions of mourning and grief reassemble the speaker by making use of the name “cut, / When love and grief their exaltation had” in a magical process analogous to the way in which astronomical influences reportedly flow

126 This ambiguity works in the O’Flahertie and St. Paul’s mss., in which the line reads “Till my returne repayre” and “Till my retorne repaire” respectively. The 1633 first printed edition, on the other hand, has a comma between “returne” and “repayre.”
“into such characters as graved be / When these stars have supremacy” (35-38).

Rather than a straightforward conceit in which the speaker must return to the graven text as the dust and bones of the body reunite at the Resurrection, his ambiguous instruction suggests that his lover appropriate the divine power to “repaire” and “recompact” the “scatter’d body.” This appropriation, which borders on illicit magic, depends upon an ontological connection between the body and the written name, a connection akin to the powerful unity between every part of the body and its own proper soul.\textsuperscript{127} Rather than a single death and a single resurrection, the speaker experiences daily the separation of his body from the bones of his name and the souls that live in his beloved, and thus her daily action of mourning effects a contrary influence, drawing the speaker back toward reunion with his name and his lover. From the lover’s boastful promise of immutability based in the inscribed word, we have arrived at the possibility that only the continual intervention of another—of the poem’s imagined reader, who also possesses the inscription of its author’s name in the window—can preserve him from the most radical of changes, total dissolution of body and soul.

\textsuperscript{127} While “some Renaissance texts [on magic] assert that there are means of raising the dead which derive directly from God and … consequently hold the status of miracle rather than of evil magic, … raising the dead typically was condemned by orthodox demonologists as evil necromancy.” John S. Mebane, \textit{Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare}, (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1989), 178. The process Donne envisions seems most akin to “natural magic” which claimed to make use of the intrinsic properties and correspondences of substances in nature, but any prospect of raising the dead by artifice remains dubious.
Thus the connection between the flesh and its skeleton, between the speaker and his inscribed name, seems to be both intrinsic and contingent upon the reception of his verse, upon the response of the reader the poem imagines as well as the intrinsic magical properties of words themselves. The addressee’s decision about how to respond to the poem will, it is claimed, determine how strongly the speaker’s flesh will be drawn back to her. What Donne proposes here transforms the idea of efficacious mourning from a forbidden practice of superstition into a playful conceit, a game between lovers, but it also suggests that the fate of the dead cannot be entirely divorced from human agency, even if only in terms of active memory or reception of texts. The poem connects the fate of the disintegrated body with the reader’s reception of the speaker’s words. Even though the speaker and his name belong together with the same certainty as flesh and bone or body and soul, without the cooperation of the addressee who is the poem’s only explicitly imagined reader, there is no guarantee that the speaker and what he has written (which is also the name that marks his identity as the poem’s author) will be reunited. Even when poems contain within themselves something analogous to the body’s capacity for resurrection, this possibility also depends upon the participation of the reader.

The sonnet “To Mr. R.W.” likewise invokes the unorthodox notion of human agency in restoring the dead to life by natural means, in this case through the resurrecting power of poetry. Donne begins with a compliment that describes both this song and the human body as alike in their elemental composition:
“Kindly I envy thy songs perfection / Built of all th’elements as our bodies are” (1-2). This perfectly balanced combination of the four elements, like that found in a healthy body, gives the song the power to restore the body, not merely from illness, but from death. “Oh, I was dead; but since thy song new Life did give, / I recreated, even by thy creature, live” (13-14). The song “built” by the poet does not only resemble the body created by God in the ideal proportion of its elements; it also possesses divine powers of resurrection. In another verse letter, “To Mr. T.W.,” a long-awaited letter from a friend can raise the dead to life:

“And now thy Almes are given, thy letter’s is read, / The body risen againe, the which was dead” (7-8).

In “The Canonization,” one of Donne’s best-known and, as John Guillory observes, most enthusiastically canonized poems, the mortal bodies of the lovers and the poem that record their love become entangled:128

And if unfit for tombes and hearse
Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of Chronicle wee prove,
We’ll build in sonnets pretty roomes;
As well a well wrought urne becomes
The greatest ashes, as halfe-acre tombes,
And by these hymnes, all shall approve
Us Canoniz’d for Love. (29-36)

The lovers’ private relations lack the dignity and respectability of the usual epitaph, with its emphasis on public honor, marriage, legitimate issue, and dynastic concerns (“unfit for tombes”), but the private love-poem can outlast

these, as the examples of Sappho, Horace, Ovid, Catullus, and many others amply show. Though epitaphs are inscribed on tombs and lasting monuments, the purpose of the hearse is to bear the body — yet it was also commonly a vehicle on which elegies and epitaphs would be placed, and the rhyme of “hearse,” the vehicle of the body, and “verse,” the vehicle of the “legend,” links body with text. The lovers are unlikely to “prove” a “piece of Chronicle,” thanks to their indifference to the historical and political events that make up this genre. Is Donne then separating the lovers’ erotic and spiritual selves, borne by their verse and legend, from their mortal bodies, whose materiality is consigned to the public, pedestrian world of tombs and epitaphs, the allegedly higher world whose strivers for self-aggrandizement he mocks? Should we see the lovers’ dwelling in rooms made of sonnets and being buried in poetic urns as the transformation of their life into text, leaving the body with its need for “tombes and hearse” behind? John Lepage has argued that images of cremation and urn burial, which were not among actual funeral practices in the period, attracted the interest of Donne and his contemporaries because they provided such an abrupt and cataclysmic image of the reduction of the body to dust and ashes. Is the body so far reduced here that the “well-wrought urn” should no longer be read as a container for the body’s remains? John Guillory thinks so; he has complained that Cleanth Brooks found it necessary to smuggle the ashes of the phoenix into Donne’s urn to disguise the urn’s essential emptiness. I, however, do not see the

connection between the two sets of ashes—phoenix and human—as so far-fetched.\footnote{Guillory, “Ideology and Canonical Form,” 166. The BoCP’s use of “ashes to ashes” is also interesting in this context, as the phrase is not biblical in origin. I would speculate, though, that the origin of the phrase has more to do with the connection made between the traditional reminder that “thou art dust” and the imposition of ashes (which signify repentance and mourning, but also resemble dust) in the Ash Wednesday liturgy than with any notion of cremation, which would not have been regarded as an acceptable substitute for Christian burial.} The dying and rising of the phoenix is, certainly, a sexual and alchemic figure, but its rebirth from its ashes was also a frequently used symbol of the resurrection of the body in emblems and other visual representations.\footnote{John Spencer Hill, “The Phoenix,” Religion and Literature 16 (1984): 61-66. For a comparison between early Christian and rabbinic understandings of the significance of the phoenix, see M. R. Niehoff, “The Phoenix in Rabbinic Literature,” Harvard Theological Review 89 (1996): 245-265. In “A Valediction: Of the Booke,” Donne refers to those who believe alchemical truths are concealed in scripture: “in the Bible some can find out Alchimy” (54).} In his study of Donne and emblem-books, MacKenzie discusses alchemical emblems that show a couple or hermaphrodite, representing the union of masculine and feminine principles, preparing for transformation in an alembic or grave.\footnote{MacKenzie 93.} The couple, like the phoenix, are capable of self-generated resurrection; as in an alchemical process, they must deliberately reduce themselves to ashes in order to be reborn. Given the poem’s reception history, it is tempting to align the phoenix’s self-resurrection with the way the lovers are at last canonized “by these hymnes.” On this reading, though we cannot disjoin the poem from the “well-wrought urn” or the “pretty rooms” which are so clearly associated with the artfully crafted lyric, the self-canonizing “hymnes” must also be connected to the self-reviving dust of the phoenix. Indeed, it is as a respository for the mingled dust of the couple’s bodies, and not
simply as artful monument, that the urn-poem participates in this process of canonization. Sexuality becomes in the second stanza a vivid way of re-enacting the body’s mortality, as the lovers spend themselves as quickly as flies, tapers, or elements burnt in an alchemical process, and it is this love, which does not transcend but rather intensifies and revels in bodies’ mutability and mortality, that paradoxically makes them able to “rise again” and finally to be invoked as neo-Platonic saints. (So much for the Neo-Platonic distaste for material bodies, at least in Donne’s playful appropriation.) The canonization of the lovers, which in an imagined future “all shall approve,” results from the speaker’s willingness to retreat from public importance among his contemporaries into a private, erotic love that, as by an alchemical process, channels the body’s marvelous, phoenix-like capacity for resurrection. There is no doubt that “The Canonization” is a difficult and multi-layered poem, and that much more has been and will be said about it, but it clearly imagines enthusiastic, even universal, readership and veneration in posterity as taking place not in spite of but through a series of steps of self-contraction: through withdrawal from public matters (including commercial publication), through a particular sexual love that is likened to death

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133 A.B. Chambers identifies the flies as the “taper-fly,” so named for its tendency to be drawn to immolate itself in a candle-flame, which was believed to be “hermaphroditic and resurrectable,” like the lovers-made-one and the phoenix. “The Fly in Donne’s ‘Canonization,’” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 65 (1966), 252-259.

134 Geffrey Whitney’s emblem of the phoenix is dedicated to “my countrimen” of the town of Namptwiche in Cheshire, which had recently been destroyed by fire. In the accompanying verse, he hopes that as the town has emulated the phoenix in being reduced to ash, it will likewise last “a Phoenix age.” Thus the phoenix stands not only for rebirth after destruction, but also for long endurance afterward. Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes* (Leyden, 1586), 177.
in more than just a joking way, through retreat into the apparently trivial genre of love-lyric, and even through reduction to mere ashes of human bodies.

“A Valediction: Of The Booke,” a less-frequently-discussed poem, explicitly deals with questions of manuscript transmission and textual survival, giving us a vision of the future reception of the author’s “Booke” very different both from the New Critical image of the poem as an artifact formed and preserved in perfect integrity and from the multiple, almost undecideable, socially contingent variants of that have proved the challenge of recent manuscript scholarship. The speaker tells his beloved how she can occupy her time during his absence and, at the same time, achieve an immortality that will defy the ravages of time:

This Booke, as long-lived as the elements,
Or as the worlds forme, this all-graved tome
In cypher writ, or new made Idiome,
Wee for loves clergie only’are instruments:
When this book is made thus,
Should again the ravenous
Vandals and Goths inundate us,
Learning were safe; in this our Universe
Schooles might learne Sciences, Spheares Musick, Angels Verse.
(19-27)

Here Donne uses the example of barbarian invasions to evoke the specter of the destruction of books and the loss of the texts they contain. What is it that will enable the book Donne proposes to endure when other learning has been lost? A “cypher” could hardly be expected to guard a book against the depredations of full-fledged barbarian invasion, but it might help to protect it against censorship. The claim that the book serves as an “instrument” meant “for loves clergie only,”
like illegal books carried clandestinely by priests, would seem to reinforce such a reading. But Donne’s claims for this book, however hyperbolic, clearly comprehend more than sectarian content: it is the sum and microcosm of human, and even celestial, knowledge, and will endure so that “posterity shall know it too” (4). The book will survive by being “all-graved”; its capacity for translation in “cypher” or “new-made Idiome” suggests a text that transcends not only particular manuscripts or print editions, but even the time-bound particularity of vernacular language. Like the “elements” themselves, it is mysteriously able to undergo transformation without decay or destruction.

It is important to remember, too, that the posited book does not yet exist as a physical object, nor even as a compiled text. Where the conventional “immortizing conceit” involves a boast that the poet will make the beloved immortal through his verse, as in Shakespeare’s “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments,” this poem reverses the convention by giving the addressee, the mistress, a role in the creation of the text, not simply as inspiration but as coauthor and editor: “Study our manuscripts, those Myriades, / Of letters, which have past twixt thee and mee, / Thence write our Annals” (10-12). The book is not an immutable textual artifact or monument, like Brooks’s “well-wrought urn,” that can be expected to endure unchanged. Rather, the process of creating the book itself involves transformation, requiring of the addressee the careful study of manuscripts and letters (including, perhaps, this poem) that will be distilled into the book, which has yet to be written. In a far cry from the
conventional subjection of the Petrarchan speaker to an idealized, inaccessible beloved, Donne (albeit playfully) recruits his mistress to act as co-writer, editor, and literary executor.\textsuperscript{135} Her enduring fame will not be as the subject of poetry, as beautiful or virtuous or much-beloved, but as an author in her own right. Where the typical immortalizing conceit promises the beloved eternal life within the poem, Donne does not claim to use poetry as a means of conferring immortality; rather, he sees transformation into text as a privilege in itself: “Love this grace to us affords, / To make, to keep, to use, to be these his Records” (17-18). The identification of the lovers as simultaneously authors, archive-keepers, and themselves documents recalls “The Extasie,” where “the body is [Love’s] book” (72).

If the book the poem describes has yet to be written, how can Donne make such grandiose claims for something whose very existence is nebulous, located only in a projected future? What is the hypothetical book’s relation to this poem? Though elemental theory held that all things were composed of elements, they are frequently mentioned in Donne’s verse as components of the body, especially since the four elements were associated with the four humors. A body, though dissolved into its elements, could never truly be destroyed; its soul, or form in Aristotelian-derived scholastic thought, would eventually provide the template for its reassembly out of its scattered matter. Like the song in “To Mr. R.W.,” this

is a book “made of elements as our bodies are,” and like the scattered but always re-elementable body, it is as long-lasting as the elements themselves (2). Figuring the book as the elements does not express confidence in the likelihood that any single physical book will remain intact. But as the form of the body provides the template for the reunion of its material elements, so the text of the book provides a form that can be transcribed or reprinted. Yet the book’s identification with the elements themselves, not their governing form, aligns the book at least as much with the body as with the soul. Nancy Selleck has argued that for Donne, the body is composed of the four humors, which correspond to the four elements, and is thus radically “subject to—even composed of—its environment.”136 Yet the body, like the book, has an order, a form, which persists even as the materials of which it is composed may be altered.

Like the dead body in its inchoate and scattered pieces, poems circulated in manuscript (particularly poems in letters) are mutable and, without an overarching order, are especially subject to disarray and misinterpretation. The ideal book, as described in “A Valediction: Of the Booke,” possesses the integration of form and matter that belongs to the perfectly ordered body. As the book is compiled from numerous manuscripts and letters, which the compiler must study carefully in order to incorporate them into an order as perfect as “the world’s form” (the neo-Platonic world-soul, which in the Anniversaries is identified with the human soul in the way it preserves order and prevents

corruption in the whole), so the glorified body will be reassembled from the remains of the corpse. Yet the perfected body cannot belong to the present; it necessarily exists only at the *eschaton*. So too the book Donne envisions. It is indestructible and a perfect compendium of all learning precisely because it is not a physical object but an ideal or form. This compendium, perhaps because it is yet unwritten, manages to be all things to all readers. Donne’s satirical descriptions of readers allows him to depict the possibility of a number of future audiences, each only capable of comprehending and appreciating in part the totality contained in this perfect book. Readership in posterity is only a side effect of the perfection of this ideal book—a book to which we have access only indirectly, through the poem’s description.

Figuring literary immortality in terms of resurrection potentially creates a theological problem by treating earthly fame as like or commensurate with eternal life in the Christian sense. In “An hymne to the Saints, and to Marquesse Hamylton,” Donne frames a relationship between body, soul, and fame that is difficult to disentangle:

So fell our Monasteryes in an instant growne  
Not to lesse houses, but to heapes of stone;  
So sent his body that fayre forme it wore  
Vnto the Spheare of forme, and doth (before  
His body fill vp his Sepulchrall stone)

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137 In his dedicatory letter to Robert Carre, Donne writes of *Biathanatos* that “because it is upon a misinterpretable subject, I have always gone so near suppressing it, as that it is onely not burnt” and that even in the event of his death, “I only forbid it the Presse, and the Fire: publish it not, but yet burn it not.” *Letters to severall persons of honour written by John Donne ...;* published by John Donne, [Jr.] (London: J. Flesher for Richard Marriot, 1651), 22-23. Both a real book with defects and an ideal imaginary one, it seems, are susceptible to misreading; in some sense the imagined one is placed at a further remove of inaccessibility.
Anticipate a Resurrection.
For as, in his fame, now, his Soule is heere:
So in the forme thereof his bodye's there. (23-30)\textsuperscript{138}

In the understanding Donne borrows from Aristotle, the soul is the form or ordering principle of the body. The body without its soul literally loses all order and lapses into disarray; it ceases to be itself and can be described only as a heap of rubble. The “instant” dissolution of the monasteries, leading to their visible fall into ruins, figures the dissolution of the body. The soul, the body’s “fayre forme,” has ascended to the “Spheare of formes” where it anticipates the Resurrection by the fact that it is the form of the body and thus “in the forme thereof his bodye’s there.” Likewise, a simulacrum or likeness of the soul still dwells on earth: Hamylton’s fame. To locate the soul-form in the “Spheare of Forms” is to slide seamlessly from an Aristotelian theory of forms to a Platonic one, and insofar as the Marquess’s fame on earth consists in the intellective apprehension of his soul, this form can be said to be present on earth through this apprehension, though it is no longer instantiated there by his embodied self. Both fame and the soul are traditionally associated with immortality, the former pagan and connected to the claims of the classical poets, the latter Christian. The

\textsuperscript{138} This version, considered the best authenticated by the editors of the Variorum, has the variant “His body fill up…” from the O’Flahertie ms. at l. 27, where other mss., the 1633 printing, and many modern editions have “His soule shall fill up…” While the former variant emphasizes the instantaneous ascent of the soul to heaven (it is there before the body is buried), I disagree with the Stringer et al. that the other variant renders the passage “nonsensical” or that this single variant renders attempts to understand the passage “doomed.” The “soule shall” version would simply refer to the reunion of body and soul at the moment of resurrection referred to in the following line, a moment Donne often imagines. The plausibility of this reading is probably what led to the introduction of the “soul shall” variant in the first place. Gary A Stringer, “An Introduction to the Donne Variorum and the John Donne Society,” Anglistik 10 (1999), 85-95.
power to confer immortality through fame is the boast of the poet (as in Sidney’s curse on the unpoetic and the enemies of poetry: that their “memory die from the earth, for want of an Epitaph”), but the pious would insist that such immortality is fundamentally different in kind from the eternal life of the soul and ought not to be conflated with it. For those who anticipate a bodily resurrection, fame on earth or literary immortality seems at best a stopgap measure in lieu of the real thing.

Yet the nexus of fame, the soul, and the body that Donne creates in the last couplet (by eliding the differences between Aristotelian and Platonic versions of forms and souls) refuses neat dichotomies between poetic and spiritual immortality, between the body and the soul, and even between the soul and fame. If the soul, in a sense, can be said to be where fame is, and the body where the soul is, then by extension there is an unlooked-for conjunction between fame and the body, almost blurring the distinction between earthly fame and the endless life of the resurrected. Resurrection fulfills the provisional immortality granted by fame. The earthly “here” of fame and the heavenly “there” where the soul waits are, if not collapsed, at least made less distant from one another by the rhyme that links them. The poet claiming to grant immortality through fame risks meddling in the business of divinity, but Donne goes a step farther by

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140 The 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* burial service makes it clear that although the souls of the faithful will not achieve “perfect consummacion and blisse” until the Resurrection, they nonetheless enjoy heavenly life in the presence of God: “ALMIGHTIE God, with whome do live the spirites of them that depart hence in the lorde and in whome the soules of them that be elected, after they be delivered from the burthen of the flesh, be in joye and felicitie.”
blurring the distinction between poetic fame and bodily resurrection, between
the situation now and the one at the Resurrection. I would add that for Donne,
the embodiment of fame in the poetic text “anticipates” the resurrection in more
than one sense, not only looking forward to but also prefiguring it, even as it
seeks, however incompletely, to ameliorate the condition of those left to await it.

In the closings of both of Donne’s Anniversaries on the death of Elizabeth
Drury, we find that the work of poetic memorialization becomes important
precisely because the body is subject to dissolution and resurrection. The Second
Anniversary ends with a declaration of Donne’s divine warrant to give notice to
“posteritee” that they are to take Elizabeth Drury as their exemplar:

Since his will is, that to posteritee,
Thou shouldest for life, and death, a patterne bee,
And that the world should notice haue of this,
The purpose, and th’Authority is his;
Thou art the Proclamation, and I ame
The Trumpet, at whose voice the people came.141

Ramie Targoff is, I think, right to hear in this trumpet an echo of the last trumpet
at which the dead shall be raised incorruptible.142 I would add that there is more
than one set of scriptural resonances at work here. Donne’s identification also
reaches into the Old Testament past (hence the past-tense verb “came”),
suggesting the two silver trumpets the Lord commands Moses to use for

142 Targoff 104.
summoning the assembly.¹⁴³ Read according to the anagogical sense, this scene prefigures the final summoning of the living and the dead, yet it is also significant that within the temporal unfolding of the narrative, such a summoning is far distant, but the use of the trumpet is still necessary and divinely commanded. As in the “At the round Earths Imagin’d corners” sonnet, Donne turns out to be at least as interested in the deferral of the resurrection as he is in its coming to pass. Otherwise, there would be no purpose in the poet’s participating in God’s will that Elizabeth Drury should become an exemplar or “pattern” to “posteritee,” as do the lovers in “The Canonization.” Such a pattern is necessary only insofar as the Resurrection is not yet. Donne’s defense of the necessity of regard for exemplary human beings, which he takes care to distinguish from Catholic veneration for saints, suggests yet another scriptural parallel: the trumpet blasts of Exodus 19-20 which warn the people to keep their distance from the site of the divine proclamation which will be received by Moses alone. In this context, we are reminded that divine proclamation does not necessarily coincide with the immediate calling of all people into the divine presence. Thus the role of the poet, in drawing attention to human exemplars who can be identified with divine “proclamations,” prefigures and perhaps, in some sense, prepares the way for the culmination of the Resurrection, which will render such poetic exemplarity superfluous. This idea that the purpose of poetry is preparation or “tuning” for full participation in the music of heaven appears

¹⁴³ Numbers 10.2.
also in “Upon the Translation of the Psalms,” the “Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness,” as well as in the commendatory poem “To the Praise of the Dead, and the Anatomy,” published along with the Anniversaries in 1621, which closes with the wish, “Neuer may thy Name be in our songs forgot. / Till we shall sing thy ditty, and thy note.”

The association of Moses with the role of the poet in preserving human memory also appears at the end of the First Anniversary:

… if you
In reuerence to her, doe thinke it due,
That no one should her prayses thus reverse,
As matter fit for Chronicle, not verse,
Vouchsafe to call to minde, that God did make
A last, and lastingst peece, a song. He spake
To Moses, to deliuer unto all,
That song: because he knew they would let fall,
The Law, the Prophets, and the History,
But keepe the song still in their memory.
Such an opinion (in due measure) made
Me this great Office boldly to invade.
Nor could incomprehensiblenesse deterre
Me, from thus trying to imprison her.
Which when I saw that a strict graue could doe,
I saw not why verse might not doe so too.
Verse hath a middle nature: heauen keepes soules,
The graue keepes bodies, verse the fame enroules.\textsuperscript{144}

As in “The Canonization,” “verse” is set against “Chronicle,” with acknowledgement that chronicle history is considered a more honorable, dignified, and reliable genre for preserving the memory of the past. But where “The Canonization” is content to banish its lovers from the vast landscapes of chronicle to the more intimate “pretty rooms” of lyric, the First Anniversary puts

\textsuperscript{144} Variorum Edition vol. VI, p. 17.
forth an argument for verse that hinges on a scriptural warrant pragmatically
grounded in the peculiar mnemonic powers of poetry. The people of Israel
may (to their sorrow) forget their own history and even the divine Law, but they
will not forget the song. In Psalm 137, forgetting is identified with the loss of
song and of all language: “If I do not remembre thee, let my tongue cleaue to the
rofe of my mouth.” Again, Donne identifies his memorializing work as elegist
with the divine vocation of Moses, while at the same time emphasizing that the
necessity for this work, in which the poet enlivens the fame of the exemplary
person who has been made inaccessible by death, is wholly contingent on the
deferral of resurrection. Elizabeth Drury’s body can only temporarily be held by
the “strict grave,” and it is this temporary “comprehensibleness” of the body that
emboldens Donne to seek to “emprison” her in verse. But this comprehension is
already on the verge of breaking: the very word “incomprehensibleness” strains
the “due measure” of the line that tries to contain it, suggesting the imminence
with which the body will burst forth from the grave, disrupting the neat
tripartite formulation in which “Verse the fame enroules.” In both Anniversaries,
Donne sets forth the work of poetic commemoration as one in which the poet
participates in the creation of a fame and exemplarity that cannot help but
prefigure the Resurrection, which is both their consummation and the moment at
which they will become superfluous. In “A Funerall Elegy,” the ability of the

145 Moses’ song, at Deut. 32:1-43, predicts the Israelites’ forgetfulness of their law and
history.

146 Ps. 137:6, Geneva Bible (1560).
memorial poem to comprehend or represent its subject is predicated on the momentary ability of the grave to hold the corruptible body. The precarious nature of this state of affairs, in which the time to the end of the world is unknowable but accepted on the warrant of scripture to be brief, whatever brief may mean in this context (John 16:32), is precisely what gives Donne an ironic bravado about the survival of his poetry, despite the material fragility of “ragges of paper” when compared to costly tombs of jet and marble: “But 'tis no matter; we may well allow / Verse to liue so long as the world will now” (20-21).

One might suspect that when I ascribe to Donne a serious concern with posterity, as opposed to a witty engagement with the convention of the immortalization, I project Donne’s twentieth- and twenty-first-century canonical status backward in order to invest his poetry with the cachet of fulfilled prophecy. Yet Donne’s friends and contemporaries, members of the coterie that formed the poems’ first and most immediate audience, also hoped to immortalize Donne’s reputation and also imagined this in terms that draw on the idea of the reunion of body and soul. Jessica Martin has argued that Izaac Walton borrows the uncommon term “reinanimated” from Death’s Duell and, in doing so, seeks to effect a sort of resurrection through his hagiographical writing.147 At the end of the Life, after describing Donne’s funeral monument and giving a flattering description of his person and character, Walton writes,

He was earnest and unwearied in the search of knowledge; with which his vigorous soul is now satisfied, and employed in a continued praise of that God that first breathed it into his active body; which once was a Temple of the Holy Ghost, and is now become a small quantity of Christian dust.

But I shall see it reinimated.148

Walton’s final statement is strikingly ambiguous. It can be read as an unobjectionable affirmation that he too will be present at the general Resurrection. The sudden shift into the first person is startling, and precedes Walton’s initials, which mark the end of the text. The statement echoes Job’s expectation of seeing God in his flesh, with his own eyes, but the substitution of Donne for God is, of course, unconventional. As Martin notes, however, we can also read the statement as a claim of agency by Walton: that he will see something done may mean that he will make certain it happens—will see that it is done, as an overseer rather than a mere spectator like Job—and the reinanimation he describes may belong as much to Donne’s posthumous fame as to the dust of his body. We might align this statement with Walton’s description of another representation of Donne made after his death: he tells how Dr. Fox, the donor for Donne’s funeral monument, “lived to see as lively a representation of his dead friend as Marble can express; a Statue indeed so like Dr. Donne, that

148 Izaak Walton, The life of John Donne, Dr. in divinity, and late dean of Saint Pauls Church London, (London: Printed by I. G. for R. Marriot, and are to be sold at his shop under S. Dunstans Church in Fleet-street, 1658), 122.
... it seems to breath faintly, and Posterity shall look upon it as a kind of artificiall Miracle.”

These contemporary memorials to Donne show how deeply a literary “reinanimation” or a statue that “seems to breathe” in an “artificiall Miracle” appealed to Donne’s contemporaries. The art that sought to represent him to posterity could model itself as a type or foreshadowing of the true miracle of bodily resurrection. It is interesting, too, that although Donne was of course not cremated, Walton describes his remains first as “his body,” then as “his reverend Ashes,” and finally as “a small quantity of Christian dust.” The order—body, ashes, dust—follows the sequence suggested by the Book of Common Prayer, but perhaps the ashes of the phoenix from “The Canonization” have infiltrated the “Christian dust,” at least so far as to suggest that the body must be reduced almost to nothing before it can be reinimated. Donne’s “lively” funeral monument, too, shows him standing atop an urn, from which he has, perhaps, just risen, so that he remains wrapped in his shroud. The future his contemporaries imagined for him, both before and at the final resurrection, draws upon and recapitulates the one his lyrics imagine for his poetry.

Reading Donne with an eye to images of resurrection even from fragments, dust, ashes, one begins to see that the choices that look to us like apathy or indifference toward future fame—the circumscription of importance

149 Walton 120.

150 Scodel, 128, fig. 3.
and popularity through the writing of highly abstruse, irreverent, strange erotic
lyrics that seldom even bother to imitate the classical poets; the restriction of
these poems to few readers; the willingness to consign them to the corruption,
misattribution, and loss involved in manuscript circulation; the rejection of
print’s monumental endurance—begin to look less like indifference than like
daring faith, faith in “the phoenix riddle” by which only embracing reduction to
ashes can anyone or anything expect to greet posterity, not by surviving, but by
rising again.
CHAPTER 3:
“TILL THE JUDGMENT THAT YOURSELF ARISE”:
DEVOURING TIME, EMBODIED READERS, AND ESCHATOLOGY
IN SHAKESPEARE’S SONNETS

I. “‘Gainst Death and All Oblivious Enmity”: the Sonnets’ Boasts of Immortality

In reading Shakespeare’s sonnets that speak about the future, we read about ourselves, the “posterity” whose reading eyes, breath, and tongues the poems foresee. Thus the experience of reading Shakespeare’s Sonnets is one of finding a prophecy being fulfilled, or fulfilling itself, in oneself and one’s actions while and because one is reading it. We become the living bodies that substantiate and perform the Sonnets’ boasts of fame.

Despite the sonnets’ resounding boasts that they will endure and preserve the beauty of their subject through the readership of generations not yet begotten, there is a widely-held belief that Shakespeare’s lack of enthusiasm for print publication as compared with, say, Ben Jonson indicates that he gave little thought to the future of his work. Even if Shakespeare did consent to the 1609
publication of the *Sonnets*, Arthur Marotti argues, the unbound quarto was a “peculiarly perishable” format, and thus we should conclude that the sonnets’ focus on undying fame means nothing more than participation in a popular conventional trope, the virtuosic execution of which would be sure to impress the “private friends” with whose approbation he was really concerned. This perspective is by no means a recent one: in his preface to Shakespeare’s works, Samuel Johnson concluded that “[i]t does not appear, that Shakespeare thought his works worthy of posterity, that he levied any ideal tribute upon future times, or had any further prospect, than of present popularity and present profit.” Some critics, while recognizing the Sonnets’ various claims to defy time, have read these aspects of the poems as overwhelmed by the ambivalence about futurity that they also register: Lisa Freinkel, for instance, writes that “[i]n [the] context of Time’s universal waste, …the promise of immortality emerges … amid the very sense of its own impossibility.” Similarly, Tom Muir argues via a Derridean reading that Shakespeare’s claims to preserve memory subvert themselves so completely that they become their own opposites, enacting an annihilation he likens to nuclear apocalypse: in Sonnet 55, for instance,


Forgetfulness appears at the heart of the monument. It no longer simply envisages the destruction of statues, cities, civilizations; or manuscripts, books, poetry, data. It actually works to efface itself, to annul its own presence, to destroy itself without remainder.\textsuperscript{154}

Such a deconstructive reading is, by design, difficult to evade, predicated as it is on the contradictions and tensions every text contains (and without which we would call them trite, insignificant, and boring). I, however, read the \textit{Sonnets} through a paradigm of apocalypse that is, I would argue, more historically relevant than the nuclear sort: a Christian apocalypse both destructive and restorative, which stops Time’s devouring and revives human bodies. Apart from approaches that read the ‘immortality’ sonnets as utterly self-subverting, the \textit{Sonnets}’ promises to immortalize their addressee(s) through literary fame among posterity have received surprisingly little critical attention in comparison with others aspects of the collection, perhaps because critics have regarded these claims (unless they subvert themselves) as too straightforward, formulaic, overconfident, or unproblematic—Muir’s word is “innocuous”—to be worthy of close attention. I aim to convince the reader otherwise. The immortality sonnets, I argue, balance their own contingency on materiality in a world full of destruction against the possibilities of embodied reading by posterity, a kind of reading that locates their constant renewal “where breath most breathes, even in the mouths

of men” — at the site of resurrection.\textsuperscript{155}

The chief dissenter in the past century from the view that the \textit{Sonnets}' boasts are neither serious nor interesting has been J.B. Leishman. Examining the \textit{Sonnets} alongside the works of many predecessors, Leishman concludes that while there were conventional precedents for his invocations of future fame, Shakespeare's way of treating the subject deserves recognition as more than merely conventional: he takes the trope to new heights.\textsuperscript{156} But then, surely we would expect exactly this from a poet hoping to dazzle a well-read patron or coterie audience. Though Shakspeare does not openly mock the convention of poetic fame as he does the Petrarchan blazon, for instance, perhaps it should be read as a literary game on the order of the shepherd's role in pastoral, interesting chiefly for its interest to contemporary audiences, not its literal meaning. Even the film \textit{Shakespeare in Love} has Shakespeare say to a (female) lover “I would have made you immortal!” only in retaliation for her infidelity. In this scene, the immortality topos becomes a pathetic attempt to impress a contemporary audience of one, nothing more; it becomes merely a joke about male sexual jealousy.

While I would not claim to find in the \textit{Sonnets}' speaker a straightforwardly sincere Shakespearean voice, I argue that because they visit and revisit the question of futurity, engaging with it as a vexing problem rather than a mere

\textsuperscript{155} Sonnet 81, l. 14.

\textsuperscript{156} J. B. Leishman, \textit{Themes and Variations in Shakespeare’s Sonnets} (London: Hutchinson, 1961).
opportunity for poetic triumphalism, they do have something interesting to show us, not just about performance of a timeworn trope, but also about Shakespeare’s imagining of the future of his poetry. The sonnets on futurity do promise undying fame, but they do not do so simply: they also wrestle with questions of whether and how, in their own radical contingency upon the vagaries of material survival and transmission, such a promise can be kept.157 Given the recent memory of Reformation-era destruction of both texts and monuments, such survival must have seemed especially precarious. As Muir observes, the Sonnets “echo with ruin and destruction” and in such environs “[t]he question of survival... becomes a self-questioning.”158 In order to imagine how poems might endure despite various threats, Shakespeare draws upon two not entirely compatible traditions: the classical trope of poetry as giving undying fame and the eschatological vision of Christianity, in which time and decay must finally give way to apocalypse and bodily resurrection.

Shakespeare’s sonnets on poetry as, to borrow Leishman’s phrase, “defier of Time,” construct a shifting landscape in which the destruction of material monuments heightens our consciousness of the ephemerality of material things and their unreliability as vehicles of memory.159 These images are highly congruent with classical tropes of mutability and Time as devourer, which often


158 Muir 31.

159 Leishman 102.
accompany a contrast to poetry or song as “monumentum aere perennius,” a monument more lasting than bronze. Yet he recognizes the survival of poetry, too, as contingent upon the durability of material objects. While this understanding does not render hope for the survival of poetry untenable, it does make poetry’s endurance through reproduction into something almost like a miracle, an event that, though not supernatural in the ordinary sense, seems to outgo the ordinary course of nature. Moreover, Shakespeare’s engagement with classical tropes is complicated by his invocations of Christian apocalypse, a moment at which the power of “Tempus edax rerum” will be destroyed and the human body (particularly the body of the beloved, to which the Sonnets, despite their claims of preserving beauty, fail to grant any access at all) will be restored. Because the body is, in a Christian cosmos, the only material thing to outlast time, it becomes the ultimate locus for the survival of poetry, which is figured again and again as persisting not only in the material artifact of the book—although the material substrate cannot be ignored—but in the embodied reading of posterity, in their eyes and tongues, the breath of their sounding mouths. Insofar as poetry is assimilated to the bodies of its readers, it may even persist beyond the apocalypse that renders its immortalizing work superfluous. I seek to show both the consistent strands running through Shakespeare’s approach to these questions and the ways in which he uses dissonances between and within sonnets to signal the intractability of certain problems and the multiple ways of approaching them. Nevertheless, though these dissonances render the boasts of
immortality tenuous and improbable in the order of nature, the Sonnets’ imaginative landscape is also one that contains apocalypse and miracle, and thus these claims are never straightforwardly reduced to rubble or shown up as lies.

Considering why the images of the Day of Judgment and bodily resurrection loom so large in the Sonnets amidst classical tropes of poetic fame, I turn to the most famous source of the doctrine of resurrection in the Hebrew Bible, Job 19, which supplies the second reading in the burial service of the 1559 Prayer Book. In the less-well-known lines leading up to his often-quoted profession of faith, Job responds to his persecutors:

Why doe ye persecute me, as God? and are not satisfied with my flesh?
Oh that my wordes were nowe written! oh that they were written even in a booke,
[And] graven with an yron pen in lead, or in stone for ever!
For I am sure, that my Redeemer liveth, and he shall stand the last on the earth.
And thogh after my skin [wormes] destroy this body, yet shall I see God in my flesh:
Whom I my selfe shall see, and mine eyes shall behold, and none other... (square brackets in original)\(^{160}\)

It is the tension captured in this text—between writing as the remedy for the insufficiency of flesh, and the vision of the resurrected body as ultimately surpassing what is possible through reading and writing—that I believe informs Shakespeare’s transformations of classical tropes and his way of dealing with the problems of the materiality and ephemerality of writing. Job’s wish for a book to

preserve his words is linked to his confidence in bodily resurrection by the word “For,” suggesting that his desire to make a written record that will endure “for ever” is not made superfluous by the expectation of resurrection but instead, strangely, depends upon it. Harold Fisch has posited that under some circumstances “text interprets us, disturbing us with its power of addressing our historical situation.” Fisch calls such texts “revenants,” likening them to bodies that return, bidden or unbidden, from the grave in an untimely simulacrum of resurrection, and suggests that the narrative of Job has acted in this way at multiple moments, including (as others have observed) for Shakespeare in King Lear. 161 This text from Job, with its expression of desire to make words endure and its emphasis on the eyes of the resurrected body, acts as a touchstone for my reading of the Sonnets.

Thomas Aquinas read Jerome’s Vulgate translation of this Joban text as listing a successive iteration of ways of writing, progressing from the less to the more permanent and thus containing within it a meditation on the problems involved with the transmission of writing to posterity:

> [H]e first shows his desire that the thought he is about to express would endure in the faith of his descendants. We transmit our words and their meaning to our descendants through the function of writing. So he says, “Who would grant me that my words be written down?” namely, what I am about to say about the hope which I have fixed in God so that my speeches may not be forgotten. What is written in ink usually fades with the long passage of time and so when we want some writing to be preserved for a

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long time, we not only record it in writing, but by some impression on skin, on metal, or in stone. Since what he hoped for was not in the immediate future, but is reserved for fulfillment at the end of time, he then says, “Who would grant me that my words be engraved in a book with an iron stylus,” like an impression made on skin,” or, “if this is not enough, by a stronger impression made, “on a plate of lead, or,” if this seems not enough “securely sculptured,” with an iron stylus, “on flint?”

Aquinas’ discussion of the comparative impermanence of writing “on skin” shows him imagining the material circumstances of writing for Job as similar to his own, in which most writing would involve the use of ink on parchment made from animal hide, but it also suggests a linkage between the material substrate of the writing and the skin of the corruptible body as envisioned in the following lines. Aquinas’ Job considers each of the possible materials on which his words could be written, finds it wanting in terms of persistence, and reaches for something longer-lasting. Aquinas also makes it explicit that it is precisely because Job’s words are “reserved for fulfillment at the end of time” that it is important for them to survive, not only for a few generations, but even for “all posterity” (Sonnet 55, l. 11). Though materials other than “skin” are considered more appropriate for survival to the “end of time,” that “end of time” also brings a renewal of the bodily skin and eyes, able to witness to the text that foretold their restoration to life. Aquinas’ reading shows us this text as a biblical template for thinking about the aspiration to make one’s words last as connected with,

rather than opposed to, the act of looking forward to resurrection. Though I do not particularly suppose that Shakespeare knew Aquinas’ exegesis, it nonetheless illuminates ways in which scripture would have provided Shakespeare with a link between the material inscription of words and those words’ renovation in living bodies.

II. “Burn the Long-Lived Phoenix”: Devouring Time and Resurrection in Sonnet 19

In Sonnet 19, Shakespeare begins to appropriate classical models of poetic triumph over Time and mutability in a way that suggests the finitude of time in the face of apocalypse and resurrection. The apostrophe that opens this sonnet is one of Shakespeare’s most explicit references to the classical trope of Time the destroyer and devourer, “Tempus edax rerum,” which Golding translates as “tyme the eater up of things,” and John Weever more concisely renders as “eating-time.” But the first quatrain of the sonnet rings changes on this image of time, hinting that Time itself will, like the toothy beasts with which it is metaphorically affiliated, one day lose its capacity to eat all things and be vanquished by resurrection, which is figured by the immolation of the phoenix:

\[\text{Ovid } \textit{Metamorphoses} \text{ 15.234. Golding, Weever, Eulogy for Robert Cotton (1631), qtd. in Summit 193.}\]
Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,
And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,
To the wide world and all her fading sweets,
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:
O, carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;
Him in thy course untainted to allow
For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.
Yet do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse ever live young.164

The poet's dare to time to "do thy worst" has encoded within it the logic of
resurrection. The key to the first quatrain is the image of the phoenix: to "burn
the long-lived phoenix in her blood" is to hasten her regeneration by seeking her
destruction, which traditionally coincides with the end of the age; the sooner she
is immolated, the sooner she will be reborn. Similarly, Time makes the earth
commit the (entirely natural) abomination of swallowing her own children, but
this return to dust is the prerequisite of resurrection just as the phoenix's self-
immolation is, a parallel underscored by the rhyme-words of the second and
fourth lines, which differ from one another by only a slight shift in one consonant
and both evoke reproduction. Just as the earth's "devouring" of her children is
impermanent and has a terminus, so too does Time's eating up of all things. It is
not only because of the power of his verse to protect the dedicatee that the poet is
willing to taunt Time. Just as Time will "Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce

164 Texts for Sonnets and other quotations from Shakespeare are drawn from The Complete
Books, 2002).
tiger’s jaws,” so Time will itself be defanged in turn; the Lion will lie down with the lamb, and the devil who “prowleth about like a lion, seeking whom he may devour” will be utterly cast down. Yet for all this, it is clear that the speaker finds “swift-footed time” fearsome; his bravado is that of someone encountering what terrifies him.

In the third quatrain, the speaker grapples with the fear that the beloved will become a foul paper, a marked-up and defaced copy of himself. Rather than an indiscriminate devourer, Time becomes a rival inscriber wielding an “antique pen,” that is, a pen whose effects are familiar from the witness of ages, but also a pen that makes men into antiques or anticks, twisted, risible caricatures of their former selves. Similarly, in Sonnet 16, the poet’s pen is only the “pupil” to “Time’s pencil” (l. 10). The concern here (in Sonnet 19) is that the beloved will be spoiled as a “pattern to succeeding men,” whom the poem figures as documents, texts, or images based on his original. The poem’s dare to Time takes place under the shadow of the knowledge that the poem, like the beloved, will be a pattern subject to inaccuracies of reproduction that may leaved it “tainted.” Because the “verse” in which the beloved will “ever live young” is produced and reproduced by processes indistinguishable from those by which Time figuratively inscribes age and ruin, marring beyond repair the pattern from which future copies are to be made, the poem’s final dare becomes possible only in the light of the hints of apocalypse contained within the first quatrain, leading us to turn with the poem

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165 1 Peter 5:8.
from taunting time, to attempting vainly to forbid his marking inscription, back to taunting him in his impotence.

III. “In the Eyes of All Posterity”: Eschatology and Poetic Survival in Sonnet 55

Sonnet 55 likewise affiliates the triumph of poetry over temporal destruction with the coming of “doom,” “judgment,” and resurrection:

Not marble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.
When wasteful wars shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war’s quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
‘Gainst death and all oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear the world out to the ending doom.
    So, till the judgment that yourself arise
    You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes.

Like Donne’s “The Canonization,” Sonnet 55 is concerned with the finding or making a memorial space through verse. Here, however, these spaces are created not within “the poem itself,” but in the eyes of its future readers. The poem’s boast is outrageously comprehensive: its “praise shall still find room / Even in the eyes of all posterity.” This “all” is staggering. Can the poem truly be claiming that every person who lives after will encounter it—and not only encounter it, but
read it by sight (which would imply universal literacy)? Its almost absurd universality is reminiscent of Horace’s boast in Ode II.20 that barbarian tribes who do not yet even speak Latin will one day memorize his verses. Shakespeare’s claim of “all” seems to be already looking ahead to the comprehensive vision of the Last Judgment, when everything will be known and nothing will be hidden, as does the enjambment of the clause “that wear the world out to the ending doom.” As Aquinas’ reading of Job emphasizes, only by lasting until Judgment Day can a text become available to “all posterity.” At the mention of doom, we turn back to the “wasteful wars” and “broils” of the previous quatrain, seeing them now as signs presaging apocalypse. In a sense all war and strife become, retrospectively, apocalyptic. We are not looking at a world that is simply waiting for God to decide that the hour has come, but at a cosmos animated by interpersonal and political strife, a strife that will culminate with supernatural war and Doomsday.166 As in the image of time burning the phoenix in Sonnet 19, forces acting within the world seem to be able to hasten its end.

In the excerpt discussed above, Job connects the resurrection of the body to seeing with one’s own eyes; while Christian interpreters have traditionally interpreted the passage as indicating the restoration of the body in its entirety, the ability to see the Redeemer with his own same bodily eyes is particularly

166 Cf. the forces of destruction cited in Propertius: “aut illis flamma aut imber subducet honores, / annorum aut ictu pondere victae ruent” (qtd. in Leishman 42). Similarly, Horace in Ode 3.30 speaks of a monument “quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens / possit diruere aut innumerabilis / annorum series et fuga temporum.”
stressed. Thus in the context of the “ending doom,” the eyes may be understood as a synecdoche for the resurrected body and as linking readership with eschatological vision. In the couplet of Sonnet 55, the claim is scaled back only to “lovers’ eyes,” rather than those of “all posterity.” It is as if the speaker sees his own claims veering from implicitly to explicitly apocalyptic and takes a step back in this summing-up that is really a qualification. Like Donne’s “At the round Earths Imagin’d corners,” the poem pulls away from the apocalypse it summons—the judgment which seemed to be approaching with alarming haste is now deferred, because the end of time will also unmake the poem, since the poem’s power pertains only in the interval before the “judgment” that, when it shall “yourself arise,” will make the power of the poem’s praise superfluous. Yet even though the promise that “you live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes” must be merely provisional, merely a stopgap until “yourself arise,” the poem locates the beloved’s dwelling precisely in the bodily organ that, according to Job, is certain to be restored at the resurrection. As in the couplet of Sonnet 18, “So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” Men will breathe and eyes will see even after the Resurrection, but the poem’s life-giving will have been supplanted by a less tenuous and figurative kind of life. Nonetheless, as the eyes are the organs in which the action of reading the poem takes place, there is some hint that despite the poem’s superfluity at the eschaton—the fact that it will no longer be needed to enliven the beloved—the
poem may also in some way survive, since men will once again breathe and their
eyes once again see.

IV. “None, unless this miracle have might”: Time’s Political Rage, the Classical World of *Carpe Florem*, and ‘Miraculous’ Textual Reproduction in Sonnets 64 and 65

Sonnets 64 and 65, read as a pair, take the religious turmoil of the recent past as an occasion to consider whether we do in fact inhabit the highly mutable cosmos of classical poetry, and whether either texts or monuments can hope to survive the vicissitudes of the material world without something like a miracle. Sonnet 64 begins by picturing the destruction of rich images, buildings, and monuments:

> When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
> The rich proud cost of outworn buried age,
> When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed
> And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
> When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
> Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
> And the firm soil win of the wat'ry main,
> Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
> When I have seen such interchange of state,
> Or state itself confounded to decay,
> Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,
> That Time will come and take my love away.
> This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
> But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

This sonnet’s use of the term “defaced” evokes the literal defacement of images
practiced by Reformation-era iconoclasts and looters, and 'the rich proud cost of outworn buried age' suggests the destruction of costly and showy tombs which contain “buried” not only the remains of aged persons, but an entire past age, now brought to a close. The idea that what is already “outworn” is ripe for destruction reminds us of Sonnet 55 in which future generations “wear the world out to its ending doom.” The referent of “eternal” is ambiguous: brass, which seems to be eternal, is in fact the eternal slave to seemingly more perishable mortals; mortals are beings defined by their mortality, but they are able to destroy that which is not itself subject to death. This line borrows from Horace’s famous *Exegi monumentum aere perennius*, “I have completed a monument more lasting than bronze,” but Shakespeare takes the descriptor of durability up a notch from *perennius* (the Latin comparative form intensifies the adjective “enduring,” literally “through years”) to “eternal,” and this hyperbole underscores how problematic it is to ascribe eternity to material things. It is difficult not to see the repeated ecclesial reversals of the Tudor years, in which the gains of each party were promptly undone by its adversaries in their turn, reflected in the "interchange of state" described by the second quatrain.167 In biblical exegesis, the sea is often identified with the forces of mutability, destruction, and evil at work in the world. The line "state itself confounded to decay" suggests both that “state itself,” the “state” in which monarchs lived, ruled, and were buried, has itself been somehow “confounded to decay” and that

167 This observation also made by Muir.
these reversals have led to the “decay” of their “state,” their position or quality of sacredness and legitimacy.

In a highly visible and famous instance of iconoclasm targeting even royal funeral monuments, the tomb of St. Edward the Confessor, London’s premier site for relic-mediated intercession in the decades before the Reformation, had been disassembled and the gold feretory (a portable reliquary) had been removed during the reign of his Tudor namesake.168 The stones of the tomb had been reassembled during the brief return of Westminster Abbey to monastic control during the reign of Mary, but they had been put back together haphazardly and without much attention to their original order, and unsurprisingly, the gold feretory was never recovered, so the saint’s remains were placed in a recess in the stone base of the tomb. Thus, even when Marian efforts at restoration were left undisturbed during the Elizabethan return to Protestantism and beyond, the tomb remained in a state of relative disorder.169 Shakespeare’s image of the advancing and retreating tide recalls these advances and reverses. Like those of the tide, the gains of each party turn out to be impermanent, but each attempted advance contributes further to an inexorable and irreversible process of entropy in which what has once been disarrayed can never be restored to its former order. The poem’s speaker turns from the present-


day events that have "taught [him] thus to ruminate" to the classical *topoi* which teach the same lesson.

Sonnet 65, which comes next in the ordering of 1609 quarto, continues the consideration of the same themes:

> Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
> But sad mortality o'ersways their power,

It is odd to say that “mortality o'ersways” the “power” of the “earth” or “boundless sea”: surely neither the earth nor the sea can be called mortal within the ordinary scope of time. These elements may be subject to mutability, but they are remarkably persistent realities of the physical world. It is possible that the power of earth and sea is being described as less than that of death, or that they are said to be merely death’s servants, but it seems that they are also being described as subject to death in the way that mortals (by definition) are. Such a claim makes sense only in the context of a vision of radically mutable world or of time as culminating in an *eschaton*, a time when both earth and sea pass out of being, as in the book of Revelation: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”

> How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,  
> Whose action is no stronger than a flower?  
> O, how shall summer’s honey breath hold out  
> Against the wrackful siege of battering days,  
> When rocks impregnable are not so stout,  
> Nor gates of steel so strong but time decays?  
> O fearful meditation: where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back,
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Time is represented in the third quatrain not as devouring with “rage,” but as greedily gathering all the choicest and most beautiful jewels for himself. As the poem laments the lack of a higher authority to "forbid" the "spoil of beauty," this image may provide a reflection on the robbing of monasteries and chantries and the redistribution of ecclesial lands to fatten royal and noble coffers. There may be a sort of obscure play on the unrestrained preeminence of temporal (that is, timely, but also secular as opposed to ecclesiastical) authority in the repetition of the possessive in “Shall Time’s best jewel from Time’s chest lie hid.” Only by a "miracle" above the natural sphere, the poem concludes, can such depredation be forbidden; in such a "miracle" the "black ink" will continue to "shine bright" (or at least the love will shine bright in ink despite ink’s blackness).

The first quatrain of Sonnet 65 is in a sense conventional, but I would suggest that there is more than one set of conventions at work here, and they are being played against each other. Certainly, in eschatological terms, beauty could hold a plea. Though the beauty of this world might be fleeting and seductive, the end of days would reveal the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem, as reflected on earth by the adornments of the Church’s liturgical spaces and practices. When the poem asks “How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?” it suggests that beauty has come before a judgment seat — that of the state’s authority — and has
no hope of obtaining mercy, yet from an eschatological perspective, at the final judgment none of “this rage” (particularly figured as the chaos of the sea) will endure. In a Christian cosmos, beauty will, in the end, win out at the Day of Judgment. But this scriptural world is contrasted here, I think, with the world of classical verse in which beauty’s “action is no stronger than a flower,” in which Persephone is brought down to Hades against her will not despite but because of her loveliness, in which Orpheus despite the almost-resistless beauty of his song cannot save Euridice. Compare Shakespeare’s description of the weak “action” of beauty with the actions of St. Augustine’s “Beauty ever ancient, ever new”: “You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness.”

Leishman notes that Shakespeare, unlike the classical poets of “devouring time,” does not make use of the trope Leishman calls carpe florem, a variation on or subgenre of the carpe diem trope, whose most famous expression in English is Herrick’s “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.” While it is true that Shakespeare never, in the Sonnets, suggests grasping brief pleasures as a response to the depredations of time, I would argue that his “beauty… whose action is no stronger than a flower” draws upon such classical instances (I am indebted to Leishman for having gathered them) as Ovid’s “Nec violae semper nec hiantia lilia florent, / et riget amissa spina relicta rosa” or its Greek original, which Leishman renders in


172 Leishman 98-99.
English prose as “Here is lily and chaliced rose and moist anemone and soft
narcissus and dark-glowing violet: garlanding yourself with these, stop being
boastful: you flower and you cease, both you and the garland.”\(^{173}\)

This quatrain’s “how” is asking two questions: \textit{can} beauty “hold a plea,”
and if so, by what means? This poem, I think, poses the question of which world
we live in—the classical or the Christian. If beauty in fact cannot “hold a plea”
before the “rage” of destructive “interchange of state” that brings with it acts of
destructive iconoclasm and futile attempts at restoration, if the (long-deferred)
triumph of beauty is no longer reflected in the institutions meant to reflect it on
earth, are we after all inhabiting an Ovidian cosmos in which all beauty endures
for only a brief moment before perishing?

It would seem to be the world ruled by devouring Time, in which beauty
cannot hold a plea—\textit{“unless this miracle have might”} \cite{italics mine}.\(^{174}\) The
couplet raises the question of whether miracles have might in order to leave it
open. If miracles do not have might, then the only possible restoration or
preservation of beauty depends upon the world-remaking of apocalypse,
however long deferred—then, in a sense, people live in a world that differs from
the Ovidian one only in that something else will burst in upon it at the end of
time. To those living in time, there is no access to the supernatural for the

\(^{173}\) Ovid, \textit{Ars amatoria} (II, 115-116), which Leishman translates as “Neither violets nor
wide-open lilies flower for ever, and stiff stands the abandoned thorn when lost the rose”\cite{; Rufus,
Greek Anthology (V, 74), quoted in Leishman 98-99.}

\(^{174}\) Cf. Cor. 15:14-19.
preservation or restoration of fragile beauty. But perhaps this miracle has might of a more secular kind. Jorie Graham has suggested that the miraculous way in which love might “shine bright” though “in black ink” would be for the ink to remain wet, since ink when it is wet does, in fact, however briefly, shine.  

Shakespeare is certainly drawing our attention here to the material medium of the ink itself, to the paradox of its blackness and the perhaps only figuratively shining of love “in” it. One way, of course, for the ink literally to continue shining would be through recurrent publication, either recopying or reprinting in which wet ink is applied afresh.

In what way, if any, could such a mundane process be called miraculous? The continual re-liquefication of ink, considered as part of ordinary copying or printing, is far from supernatural or inexplicable by means of natural explanation. We might consider as a parallel contemporary condemnations of usury as essentially the unnatural reproduction of inanimate objects (i.e., money): such reproduction, while far from supernatural, was suspect insofar as it made use of means outside of the natural order to effect a process imitative of natural procreation.  

The strategy of poetic immortalization in the Sonnets has often been described as an alternate strategy taken up in response to the apparent failure or abandonment of the early sonnets’ attempts to persuade the

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“only begetter” to reproduce himself by ordinary natural procreation. Muir argues that

The series of oppositions between animate and inanimate matter that structure [Sonnet 55] demand the conclusion that the sonnet’s own means of transmission can be nothing like technical memory; that is, for the ‘living record’ to work, it cannot be entrusted to anything like a book or manuscript. These things are too fragile – they would be easily consumed by ‘war’s quick fire’, or by bonfires of the sort organized by the reformers. The poem’s substrate cannot be hypomnemic, outside the body. [italics in original]177

Thus, on Muir’s argument, not only is the reproduction of books and the survival of their contents “miraculous” insofar as the power to reproduce does not naturally inhere in books, but also in that it involves the preservation of a ‘living record’ by means of dead and very easily destructible material things.

Early modern English lexica do not limit the meaning of “miracle” to direct divine or supernatural intervention in the order of nature, though this was the sense in which the question of whether miracles had ceased had become the subject of heated interconfessional controversy. The 1538 Dictionary of Sir Thomas Elyot defines a miracle as “a thynge excedynge nature, or common reason,” and Thomas Cooper’s 1584 Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae defines it as “a wonder: a monstrous thing: a thing exceeding common reason and nature.”178 In The Defence of Poesy, Sidney writes that “Only the poet, … lifted up with the

177 Muir 33.

178 Lexicon of Early Modern English.
vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things ... better than nature.”

For Luther and other Reformers, the performance of false miracles, regardless of any true ability to go beyond nature, was itself a mark of Antichrist and thus a herald of the coming Apocalypse. Shakespeare’s use of “miracle,” then, encompasses the uncannily more-than-natural capacity of poetry to encourage or effect its own reproduction through the repeated rewetting in which ink renewedly shines and, at the same time, again suggests a link between the persistence of poetry, which may work like a (not truly supernatural, but efficacious) “miracle,” and the impending Judgment.

Despite the concern Muir and Marotti identify about the durability of material books and manuscripts, a concern that is clearly present in the Sonnets and particularly in Sonnet 65’s treatment of textual survival as a kind of miracle, the process of manuscript transmission has, and was remarked in the Renaissance for having, turned out to be a viable mode of poetic persistence for the classical poets, most notably Horace, in whose conventional models Shakespeare is writing. Classical poetry provided Renaissance readers with copious exempla of successful textual preservation (though, of course, they were at the same time aware that many texts had been lost). By borrowing from these poems, as Leishman demonstrates, Shakespeare both co-opts a proven successful

179 Sir Philip Sidney, The Defence of Poesie (Posonby, 1595).

strategy and implicitly reminds his readers that such a deed is possible. Andrew Hui describes the classical understanding of how poetry, despite the fragility of its material substrates, could become “more lasting than bronze”:

[O]n the one hand, the poet’s ambition is to craft a literary monument that is insusceptible to physical decay, in the sense of a Homeric kleos apthikiton, ‘undying fame’ or such Horatian monumentum aere perennius; and on the other, … this same hope is undercut by the very fact that all material things are finite. … Greek and Latin authors presented their texts as superior to physical monuments because of their ability to transcend their materiality, take leave of their origins, be imitated, appropriated, and adapted multiple times and in various historical situations; hence they have more avenues of dissemination and therefore alternative means of survival. The advent of print has, of course, increased the possibilities of textual survival, but before this technological revolution, the practices of imitation, translation, and literary appropriation were perceived as advantages that texts have over other monuments.181

Having studied the propagation of Shakespeare’s sonnets in seventeenth-century manuscript, extant examples of which appear to have been copied from print exemplars rather than descending from early manuscripts circulated during Shakespeare’s lifetime, Marcy North concludes that susceptibility to imitation and appropriation, along with anonymity, lend certain advantages in early modern manuscript transmission. She suggests that Sonnet 2, the sonnet that appears most frequently in surviving manuscript collections, may have been so popular because its “general applicability… opens its lines up to less

individualized readings” and “[w]hen read anonymously, these images renew
their value and immediacy for each new reader.”182 This observation highlights a
paradox in the Sonnets’ strategy of memorialization: universal or broad
applicability, the lack of identifying details, would seem to encourage
transmission, copying, and readership because many readers and potential
copyists will be able to read themselves into the poem, yet the stripping out of
any identifying details makes the poem unable to re-present its subject to future
generations, as Sonnet 17 complains. The universal or nonspecific nature of many
of Shakespeare’s sonnets, particularly those on futurity, at once preserves a
degree of privacy in the eyes of Shakespeare’s contemporaries should the texts be
read by those outside the circle of his “private friends,” encourages continued
transmission, and enables even readers hundreds of years later to identify with
their dramatic situations, yet it also makes them like, in North’s phrase, “a
monument without a name,” claiming to preserve the memory of a man about
whom they tell us very little.

While Shakespeare takes the classical poets as exempla of how texts might
be preserved, through the “miracle” of the re-wetting of ink which enables a
reproduction beyond that provided for by nature, I think he also concludes, as
Muir suggests, that “the poem’s substrate cannot be... outside the body.”183

182 Marcy L. North, “Rehearsing the Absent Name: Reading Shakespeare’s Sonnets
through Anonymity” in The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publication from the
183 Muir 33.
While Sonnet 65 stresses material textual reproduction through the renewal of ink, other sonnets emphasize reliance on the eyes and breath of reading human beings, and it is ultimately only through the embodied actions of readers that poems can hope to be materially reproduced—or to participate, in any sense, in resurrection, when both miracles remarkable for surpassing the course nature and all the reproductive works of nature itself will cease.

V. Yellowed Papers and Antique Pens: Materiality, Future Reception, and Prophecy in Sonnets 17, 32, and 106

Shakespeare begins his inquiry into poetic futurity in Sonnet 17 by suggesting that the poem cannot be reduced to the immaterial or transcendent song of the classical tradition: the transmission of the poem is, again, contingent upon the material vehicle of “papers yellowed with their age.” As Andrew Escobedo explains,

Although [Renaissance writers] saw poetry as superior to the material monument, poetry is monumental nonetheless, and even possesses a complicated materiality. Horace’s claim to artistic immortality in his Odes, endlessly referenced by Renaissance thinkers, reveals poetry’s affiliation with and distance from the physical monument… . [P]oetry was more lasting than bronze because it did not rely on the physical register for its existence: it possessed a spiritual essence, escaping material dissolution in time. … This sense of poetry’s duality
sometimes placed it between the materiality of the monument and the spirituality of the past object it was saving—the soul, a memory, and image, fame, and so forth. For the Renaissance, poetry possessed a spiritual essence that pyramids and statues did not, but it was also, in fact, paper and ink.\textsuperscript{184}

In Sonnet 17, Shakespeare considers how the materiality of paper and ink not only renders poetry susceptible to destruction but also threatens to undermine poetry’s credibility by showing its vulnerability to time. The poem is concerned with the tension between the veneration of antiquity that characterized Renaissance orientation toward classical authors and the hermeneutic of skepticism Reforming readers brought to their reading—and sometimes destruction—of medieval texts. The speaker recognizes that even the immaterial words of poetry themselves, in the vernacular, do not become more lasting than bronze; within the past two centuries, the shifting nature of the English language had rendered poems’ meters “stretched” and made the poets look not only antique but \textit{antic}: foolish, clumsy, the fables of a less learned age.\textsuperscript{185} Reading this poem aloud today, we trip over “stretched.” Unsure whether or not to pronounced the final -ed on a separate syllable, we find that we must literally stretch out the -ed to come out with the necessary number of iambics. The verse,

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{184} Andrew Escobedo, \textit{Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England} (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), 69-70.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Puttenham’s 1589 \textit{Arte of English Poesie}, for instance, characterizes all English poets before Wyatt and Surrey’s Italian-influenced reforms as writing a “rude and homely matter of vulgar poesy.” Quoted in J.A. Burrow, \textit{Medieval Writers and Their Work: Middle English Literature 1100-1500}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).
\end{itemize}
when voiced, performs the process of linguistic change interfering with reception among posterity that it describes.

Similarly, Sonnet 32 imagines how the poems will age in the decades “when that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover,” as fashions change and older poems begin to seem terribly dated, as “poor” and “rude” as, for instance, medieval verse romances appeared to his contemporaries:

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Compare them with the bett’ring of the time
And though they be outstripped by every pen
Reserve them for my love, not for their rhyme,
Exceeded by the height of happier men
O, then vouchsafe me but this loving thought:
Had my friend’s muse grown with this growing age,
A dearer birth than this his love had brought
To march in ranks of better equipage.
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Sonnet 32 imagines a “bett’ring of the time” in which the writers of each period surpass those of the next, reaching ever-greater heights of poetic achievement. These sonnets present a complex view of Shakespeare’s possible poetic futurities, considering more possible outcomes than the dichotomy of, on the one hand, achieving the undying fame of an Ovid or a Horace or, on the other, falling into utter oblivion. Shakespeare clearly had in mind the possibility that his poems, like those of earlier poets of the English vernacular, might continue to be read despite changes in the language and in poetic fashions that would cause them to be thought hopelessly out-of-date. Whereas in Sonnet 55 the ordering imposed by “this powerful rhyme” triumphs over messy, “sluttish time,” here the use of the same rhyme-pair subordinates old-fashioned rhymes to the passing of time that renders them obsolete.
In Sonnet 17’s pessimistic appraisal of future reception, this process of becoming dated would befall the verse even if it managed to capture the dedicatee’s beauty, but in fact the case is even worse: the sonnet is “but as a tomb / Which hides your life and shows not half your parts.” The reference to the tomb that “shows not half your parts” may refer to the sculpted tomb effigies which often rendered stiff, stylized images of their occupants, but may also gesture toward cadaver or transi tomb effigies whose images of their occupants undergoing decay literally show only some of the “parts”—usually the bones—of the physical body.186 The expression “hide your life” is also peculiar, since what an effigy tomb depicts is, of course, despite all its deficiencies rather more lifelike than the body within. It is death, rather than life, that a tomb ordinarily hides.

Perhaps Shakespeare is thinking of the defacement that had befallen many tombs in recent decades. At the same time, the idea that the tomb hides “life” rather than death or the corpse points toward the eschatological horizon of resurrection, as did many epitaphs seeking alternatives to forms of language suggesting prayer for the dead.187 The cadaver tomb effigies, too, often looked forward to the moment of resurrection, showing eyes opening and shrouds falling away.188 Though the poem concludes, echoing the procreation-themed sonnets, that living progeny would forestall the incredulity of future generations, this solution seems

186 Cohen, Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol.


188 Cohen 118-119.
inadequate, as it is not only “your true rights” that the speaker objects to having deemed a “poet’s rage.” Elsewhere (in Sonnets 13, 64, and 65), it is time’s destructiveness that is called rage, and the idea that the poem could be assimilated to or become indistinguishable from this “rage” or chaos is for Shakespeare one of the chief problems of futurity.

There is an apparent contrast between the regard for the poetic skill of “beautiful old rhyme” found in Sonnet 106 and the idea, found in Sonnets 17 and 32, that old verse is less able to communicate beauty than fashionable new verse.

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme,
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights;
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty’s best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have expressed
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophesies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring:
And, for they looked but with divining eyes,
They had not still enough your worth to sing:
For we, which now behold these present days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

This contrast would seem to suggest that the sonnets’ internal arguments should be read as little more than tongue-in-cheek flattery that showcases the poet’s quick rhetorical adaptability, rather than presenting a consistent view of the world. Sonnet 106 irreverently applies the biblical hermeneutic of typology to the old “chronicles” or verse romances. As biblical interpreters saw Christ prefigured in various characters and events of the Hebrew Bible, the speaker reads old poets and concludes that “all their praises” must have been “but
prophecies” of his beloved’s surpassing beauty. These writers wield an “antique pen,” the same instrument used by Time in Sonnet 17 to mar the features of the beloved with old age and death’s decay. The “fairest wights” featured in these poems have, in a way, been so marked: the ladies are “dead” to begin with, lending a rather macabre cast to the enumeration of their body parts, and the poem’s speaker reacts in the same way to old verses as he predicts in 17 and 32 that future readers will: he concludes that the poets lied, or told truth only unknowingly, since they “looked but with divining eyes”: they never saw the beauty they claimed to praise in the flesh, for “all their praises are but prophecies

/ Of this our time.”189 This irreverent application of the typological hermeneutic to romance and its anticipation of the beloved makes “this our time” unique in history, perhaps affiliating it (again, with some irreverent humor) to the end of days. Shakespeare’s consideration of the present reception of older literary texts becomes linked to images of embodied reading that also carry resonances of prophecy fulfilled, possessing Joban “eyes to wonder” but lacking as yet “tongues to praise” (the biblical instances where the tongue is specifically named as the organ of praise are too numerous to name). The Sonnets, perhaps thanks to the private nature of their circulation, fail to become fully embodied through voiced reading in “these present days.” Yet even reading with the eyes involves more than the eyes alone: as Bruce Smith notes in an essay on reading

Shakespeare’s sonnets, “sounding goes on to some degree, if only subliminally, when speakers of aural English scan written texts” and

the subliminal hearing of a printed text is not something that happens only in the ears, or even primarily in the ears: it involves muscle memory in lungs, larynx, and mouth. Those muscle memories upset the chronological distinction between then-and-there and here-and-now.190

The way the poem dwells on the fulfillment of prophecy suggests a turn toward a promised future, as in Sonnet 81, where the poems will find a place in “the mouths of men” who will, unlike the poet’s contemporaries, have “tongues to praise.” The inexpressibility of praise points tacitly (how else?) into a future where time does not extend endlessly into a never-ending chronicle of the dead or (as in Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress) a wasteland of mortality, but where, as in “The Canonization,” the confined chambers of the sonnet open, like the tomb, to the dawn of resurrection at which both wondering eyes and praising tongues regain their life. In his elegy for Shakespeare, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, Milton seeks to become one future reader who has not only eyes to wonder, but also a tongue to praise.

VI. “Where Breath Most Breathes”: Funerary Rehearsal and Embodied Reading as Resurrection in Sonnet 81

Sonnet 81 gives us an ambivalent consideration of the power of such embodied reading to sustain memory, associating bodily fragmentation with forgetfulness and suggesting that the performance or “rehearsal” involved in reading by posterity performs reburial as well as memory. While Donne tends to imagine the body and the manuscript poem as similarly subject to dissolution and yet not to utter loss, Shakespeare’s Sonnet 81 draws a contrast between the imagined future of his body and that of his poetry:

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten,
From hence your memory death cannot take,
Although in me each part will be forgotten.
Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die.
The earth can yield me but a common grave
When you entombèd in men’s eyes shall lie.
Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o’erread;
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse
When all the breathers of this world are dead.
You still shall live (such virtue hath my pen)
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

The first quatrain initially seems to pose a simple, indisputable alternative—either the poet or his beloved will be the first to die. Yet from the third line onward, it becomes clear that the poet shall in a sense “live” to make the epitaph, even if he, as is likely given their respective ages, should die before his beloved, because in this and the other immortalizing sonnets he is already making a sort of epitaph (1-3). The young man, even if he should outlive the poet, will
“survive” through the poem when the poet “in earth [is] rotten” (2). Thus what would first appear to be a paradox—if the young man should “survive” the poet by outliving him, he will lose his chance to “survive” through poetry—is prevented by the writing of the sonnets, which pre-elegize him or prepare his epitaph beforehand. Yet while one might expect the poem or epitaph to be offered as an antidote preventing the decay of the beloved’s body, it is the prospective rotting of the poet’s body that the poem presents as a menacing, if also comic, certainty, one the poet seems unable or unwilling to leave unspoken. The perishability of the poet’s body is set against the imperishability of his verse, while the claim to make the young man live on through the “breath” of future readers requires that the perishability and rottenness-to-be of his body be pushed aside to make room for the triumphant life of his “being” (11-14).

As a result, the sonnet sets off the beloved against the poet: the young man’s “name immortal life shall have,” while the poet “to all the world must die” (5-6). Despite boasting of the power to grant immortality (“such virtue hath my pen”), he cannot grasp it for himself (13). He can anticipate his own death by making a preemptive “monument” in “gentle verse” for the young man, but not for himself (9). Shakespeare’s first-person epitaph famously shows greater concern for the remains of the body and the physical grave than for any immortalizing verse monument: it marshals a plea “for Iesus sake” and an apotropaic curse against any disturbance of his “dust” and “bones” and the “stones” that shelter them. The fear of the disturbance of his bodily remains, that
they may be dug up and transferred to the charnel house to be mingled with the
disjointed bones of others so that the grave can, as in Donne’s “The Relique” and
Hamlet’s gravedigger scene, serve a succession of occupants, echoes in Sonnet
81’s mention of the “common grave,” which suggests a grave not only ordinary
but also shared (7). Perhaps it is because the sonnets are really not an epitaph and
have no particular physical location to link them with the remains of the body or
the equally perishable monument of stone that the young man can be
immortalized while the poet cannot. As Samantha Matthews writes, “epitaph…
bridges the gap between corpse and corpus, since it is site-specific (referring to or
speaking for the body) and biographical.”191 To our dismay, the Sonnets contain
no obvious linkage to the person of their addressee—or to the body whose
beauty they limn.

The poem’s feminine rhyme of “rotten” with “forgotten” underscores the
connection between the decay of the body and forgetfulness, the failure or loss of
memory (2, 4). What is meant by the strange prediction that “in me each part will
be forgotten”? “Each part” of the poet’s decaying body; part of the beloved’s
body, which the poet, being dead, can no longer remember; “part” in the sense of
a quality or virtue; dramatic character’s “part” played by an actor? Perhaps this
lack of specificity about parts is itself the point: in the disintegration of the body,
divorced from a context that would impart meaning, the parts become
unidentifiable, nonspecific; the identity of the person to whom they belong and

191 Samantha Matthews, Poetical Remains: Poets’ Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth
their place in the order of the body is “forgotten.” Similarly, Sonnet 71 enjoins the recipient to “remember not / The hand that writ it” once the poet’s members have gone “with vilest worms to dwell” (4-6). If we think of the sonnets themselves as “parts” of a group, their claim to capture or preserve the beauty, life, or being of the beloved person, reiterated again and again, is to some degree undermined by its repetition: within the context of the other sonnets, each becomes a partial and unconvincing over-protestation, a fresh attempt to solve an intractable problem, unable because only a part rather than a whole truly to encompass the “being” of the beloved person.

For the sonnet to effect the survival of the young man, however imperfectly, it must achieve his incarnation into, or performance through, particular parts of future readers’ bodies: “tongues to be your being shall rehearse” (11).192 To “rehearse” here is to repeat the lines of the poem as a player rehearses a part, performing the young man’s “being” in an act of vocal recapitulation, albeit one that places him at a remove by addressing him rather than speaking lines in “his” voice. Yet to “rehearse” is also, paradoxically, to rehearse, to underline again the death or inaccessibility of the body.193 The noun “hearse” is recorded during Shakespeare’s lifetime as carrying a variety of interconnected meanings, all of them funerary: it could refer to a frame where

192 Cf. Sonnet 55, “dwell in lovers’ eyes.”

epitaphs might be pinned at the funeral, to the pall, the tomb, even the corpse itself. This sense of “rehearse” also makes sense in the context of Sonnet 71, which works as a sort of anti-epigraph, commanding forgetfulness and silence rather than requesting remembrance and prayer:

O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
When I, perhaps, compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse
But let your love even with my life decay (9-13)

Like an actor playing a part the part of a person long dead in a history play, the person who “rehearse[s]” the poem embodies the one whom he or she memorializes through the breath of speech, and yet, at the same time, this recitation heightens our awareness of the absence, mortality, and dissolution of his true body and of the ways in which the totality of his “being” is now irrecoverable. The rehearser of the sonnet, then, performs absence as well as presence.

For the beloved to become immortalized—both commemorated and resurrected—the “eyes not yet created” and the “toungs to be” must participate in acts of ritual repetition, over-reading and rehearsing the poet’s praise. In performing these acts of repetition, the beloved is both re-hearsed and re-heard, entombed and grieved anew but heard anew as if he were bodily resurrected from the grave. … Simply to

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194 “hearse, n.” OED 2nd ed. (1989) OED Online. The two words in fact share an origin: the original hearse, a frame holding candles for liturgical use, is so named for its resemblance to an agricultural harrow or herse; to rehearse derives from the Middle French form meaning “to harrow again,” to go back over (OED Online Dec. 2009). We might also see in this sonnet echoes of the etymologically separate verb herse, used as late as the fifteenth century, meaning to “to glorify or extol” (OED 2nd ed. [1989] OED Online). Shakespeare elsewhere associates harrowing with the “being” of a dead person rising from its grave, or the production of an illusion that uncannily calls the person to mind: Horatio says of the ghost that it “It harrows me with fear and wonder” (Hamlet I.i.44).
overread praise has the effect of repeating death, *intombing the beloved in men’s eyes.*

The pause between the sonnet’s last quatrain and the couplet—at which the voice of the rehearser pauses, momentarily silent—transports us from a moment “when all the breathers of this world are dead” to one in which “breath” again “breathes,” “even in the mouths of men,” recalling the transformation from death to restored bodily life that will take place at the moment of resurrection and aligning this transformation with the rehearser’s lapse out of silence into speech, once again breathing the beloved into being. Through the embodied nature of reading, the future of poetry—from the time when the beloved lies “intombed in men’s eyes,” to the end of time when “when all the breathers of this world are dead,” and beyond—becomes inextricable from the resurrected body.

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195 Rhema Hokama, “Love’s Rites: Performing Prayer in Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63 (2012), 199-223. Hokama argues that the performative efficacy of the sonnets in claiming immortality for the beloved depends upon the likeness between public, vocal, repeated performance of the sonnets and the efficacy attributed to public, formal, repeated prayers of praise in Anglican devotion. While she and I both stress the bodily performance of praise as central to the Sonnets’ vision of immortality (insofar as it is possible through verse), I see Shakespeare not as assimilating his praise of the beloved to prayer or religious devotion per se, but as viewing this praise within the horizon of eventual apocalypse.

196 The “breathers of this world” are of course the people of the poet’s present world, the particular historical moment in which he lives and breathes, but they are also “all the breathers of this world” in a more expansive sense: world as *saecula*, as the finitude of time itself. Though St. Paul assures believers that “we shall not all sleep,” it is nonetheless by participation in the death of Christ that all “shall be changed” and pass out of mortality into new life.
CHAPTER 4:
PRINTED POEMS AND THE PETRIFIED POET:
MONUMENTS AND BODIES IN JONSON’S FUNERAL POEMS

Scholars have long portrayed Ben Jonson as crafting his poems into a literary monument of himself as author through the publication of his collected works in the folio format, imitating print conventions found in editions of classical poets. In a lengthy paean by his admirer R. Goodwin that Jonson included in a “packet of mine own praises” he sent to the Earl of Newcastle in 1631, Goodwin wrote of Jonson’s works that

rais’d by thy skillfull hand,
pittyng the Worlds old wonders, they shall stand
As Monuments of thee, more firme, amids
all envies blasts, then Aegypts Pyramids...

Jonson’s publication of the 1616 Folio has been described in several ways: as a turn toward the liberation of the living author from dependence upon aristocratic patronage through the profits of the press (along with those of the

stage); as an important milestone in the developing legal understanding of authors’ copyright and the history of publishers’ claims to present an authorized text, one conforming to the author’s intentions or even press-corrected by him; as a translation of drama from the ephemerality of performance to the fixity of print, and, relatedly, as an attempt to elevate English vernacular verse to the status of the classical poetry; and as a printed monument crafted with literary immortality in mind. In contradistinction to Shakespeare and Donne, who display their indifference toward fame by their preference for manuscript circulation (or so the usual narrative goes), Jonson embraces print and thus achieves “the (re-)invention of the book”; he is the pioneer of a new kind of commercial English print authorship and the exemplar of the poet who seeks enduring literary fame through print.198 “Jonson enfolioed himself, so to speak, as a dead classical author.”199 The iconography of the folio’s frontispiece emblematizes its aspirations: it shows a monument topped with two small obelisks, objects often found on seventeenth-century funeral monuments and understood both as temporally lasting monuments and as upward-pointing


199 Lynn S. Meskill, Ben Jonson and Envy (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009), 188.
emblems of eternity (See. Fig. 1). These, along with the poetic laurel twined around them, show that the “typographical monument” of the 1616 Workes reflects and establishes Jonson’s poetic immortality.

That Jonson’s 1616 Folio was conceived and stands as print monument, and points toward Jonson’s desire to secure to himself fame and literary endurance, is generally agreed. For many critics, however, the Jonsonian literary monument, enduring unchanged through print, is defined against and designed to escape the thousand natural shocks the Jonsonian body (his own and those portrayed in his works) is heir to: sickness, pain, humiliation, the purging of excrements, obesity, age, decay. Yet in Jonson’s funerary verse, I shall argue, both the poetic monument (inscribed in the printed volume) and the mortal body cannot easily be made to fit to such a dichotomy. I begin by showing briefly how, in some of Jonson’s most famous funeral poems, his epitaphs for his children, even dying and dead bodies subject to decay cannot be shunted aside in favor of literary monuments. I then examine two poems in memory of women, both published posthumously in Jonson’s Under-wood, that also complicate and even upend the critical narrative of a Jonson who privileges literary monuments, especially in print, over the indignities of mortal bodies. The first, the critically

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neglected “Elegie on the Lady Jane Pawlet,” imagines the speaker’s body transformed into an engraved funeral monument, suggesting that there are serious problems with becoming a poetic monument through print, problems poets may resist only with difficulty, through a praise of the soul that also comprehends the body. The second, the “Eupheme,” in its printed form, stands as a poetic monument that draws attention to its own fragmentariness and lack even as it glories in the immortality of the soul joined to the resurrected body. In these poems, Jonson considers the problems of the literary monument established in the petrifying fixity of print and suggests that the body’s great liabilities, its changeableness, vulnerability, and mortality, are paradoxically essential to a living poetry seeking immortality.

I. Small Bodies: Jonson’s Epitaphs for His Children

Jonson is often described as constructing the poetic monument against the body in order to exalt the former and repudiate the latter. Joshua Scodel, for instance, argues that Jonson’s epitaphs, the earliest significant body of English vernacular epitaphs by a major poet, are invested in resisting and defining themselves against materiality — both that of the gravestone or other physical
monument and that of the body. Joshua Scodel attributes to Jonson a “Stoic view of the body as foreign to the true, virtuous self.” He finds that in many of the epitaphs, such as the Ratcliffe epitaph, which “only pretends to be inscribed upon marble,” Jonson boasts that the “purely poetic monument ... can convey the immortal achievement of the deceased better than any material tomb.” Scodel traces this scorn for monuments of stone and brass both to a Reformation-influenced distaste for grandiose memorials and to the classical tradition of the poetic claim to establish the monumentum aere perennius. This classically-derived distinction between the eventual perishability of the apparently sturdy material monument and the longevity of the poetic one is summed up in Jonson’s elegy for Drayton:

Do, pious marble, let thy readers know
What they, and what their children owe
To Drayton's name; whose sacred dust
We recommend unto thy trust.
Protect his memory, and preserve his story,
Remain a lasting monument of his glory.—
And when thy ruins shall disclaim
To be the treasurer of his name;
His name, that cannot die, shall be
An everlasting monument to thee.

Thus, Jonson participates in relocating the epitaph from the tomb to the book, a process Alain Cantillon and Françoise Jaouën, with reference to other texts,


\[^{202}\text{Scodel, “Part 1: Ben Jonson and the Epitaphic Tradition” in The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 15-111; Newstok calls Jonson’s project of “Englishing the poetic epitaph on a large scale” a “stage in his self-defined publishing career as a national poet” (25).}\]

[^{203}\text{Scodel 66.}\]
describe as the replacement or supercession of the “epigraphical” (at the grave, on the material monument, and usually at the site where the body is buried) epitaph with the “typographical” epitaph.\textsuperscript{204} Although Jonson frequently rehearses this trope of claiming poetry as the real everlasting monument, a number of poems show that he is troubled by it as well. He is troubled by the ways in which committing poetry to any material substrate, including the manuscript and the printed book, makes it susceptible to the same dangers that can befall the stony monument (and then some), and, even more disturbingly, by the way in which committing poetry to the fixity of print may infect both the poem and the self-monumentalizing poet with the stony silence and deadness ascribed to the material monument. Even within \textit{The Forrest}, there are already poems that suggest that the typographical epitaph cannot be commensurate with the loss of the mortal body.

 Jonson’s poems for his children show us his regard for their mortal bodies: despite or because of its terrible fragility, the body’s death cannot be fully recompensed either by the present consolation the soul’s joy to heaven or by the crafting of a monument, even a poetic one. In “On His First Son,” Jonson uses the conventions to epitaph to bring about a subtle yet devastating sense of the inadequacy of the poetic monument: “Rest in soft peace, and, ask’d, say here doth lye/ BEN. IONSON his best piece of poetrie.” The child is instructed to

speak only if asked. These are the instructions given to a well-mannered child: speaks only when spoken to. Yet a stance of reticence is also reminiscent of the shift in epitaphic conventions that took place during the Reformation. Whereas before it had been customary for the epitaph to request prayer from the passerby, thus engaging the reader immediately in a relationship both of being petitioned and of petitioning on another’s behalf, such epitaphs were now disallowed and fell out of use. Epitaphs continued, of course, to tell the name of the deceased, and very often to proclaim that he or she lay here in faithful hope of resurrection, as I discussed in the Introduction. The reticence recommended here is yet greater: the child is only to give his name if asked. The religious consolation featured in the poem is wholly negative: the resurrection is not mentioned, only the child’s avoidance of “world’s and flesh’s rage / and if no other misery, yet age.” So perhaps the critics are right about Jonson’s view of the body: he suggests that it is the site both of concupiscence and, relatedly, of suffering, decay, age. It suffers from passions and vulnerabilities a father would be glad for his child to escape. And yet the bald, utterly conventional formula “Here doth lie” unmistakably turns our attention to the son who (whose body) lies in the grave, and Jonson calls him “his best piece of poetrie.”

The poem is like Shakespeare’s Sonnets in that it implicitly brings together procreation and poetic writing as two kinds of creation with similar ends: perpetuating a man’s name into the future beyond his own lifespan. What Aristotle had identified as the commonest way in which humans grasp at
immortality and Shakespeare, in some sonnets, treats as the surer way of
reduplicating one’s image in posterity, procreation, for Jonson has failed and
fallen prey to mortality. Contrary to expectation, the child has not outlived the
father, nor passed the paternal name or image to sons of his own. It would seem,
then, that the frailty of flesh makes poetry the surer course. Yet Jonson clearly
says that all his verses are as straw next to the body of this small boy who will
never see adulthood, who takes his father’s name with him into the tomb before
his father’s own time. If the son is, onomastically and by bodily resemblance, the
image and likeness of the self as well as its potential survivor, the death of the
son is the most poignant memento mori. Poetry is, etymologically, making, and
Jonson makes it devastatingly clear that this small body is the best thing he has
yet made or even may make in the future. “On His First Son” speaks not only
about, but both to and for his son; it claims to speak in his voice from out of the
tomb, and yet its title points us to the fact that it is only a sort of epi-poem, a
poem about or incidental to the best true poem that is the son’s body. The
ventriloquized voice Jonson gives to the son, with its clever play on “Here doth
lie,” makes the absence of the son’s real voice all the more keenly felt. For all that
the son has been freed from “flesh’s rage” and “if no other miserie, yet age,” it is
for his embodied self and not his soul that Jonson mourns, even while castigating
himself for the suffering that comes from attachment to what perishes. If the
purpose of poetry is to make a monument or memorial for the author that is not
a lifeless stone but a living, breathing likeness, there can be no better poem than a
son—but the son himself is also mortal. Next to the once-living body of the child, any poem, however elegantly crafted with classical reserve, looks cruelly inadequate. Hence the understatedness of the epitaph: though it does not explicitly indulge in the inexpressibility topos, the poem nevertheless concedes its own lack. The rejection of mourning, however impossible for flesh and blood to perform perfectly, becomes not just a rejection of the weakness of the present, passionate self, but also a tacit affirmation that the body is the only “piece of poetry” that can partake in a promise of restored wholeness. Jonson was away from home at the time of his son’s death, and famously had two visions: the first, before he learned of the death, showing his son with a bloody cross cut into this forehead as if by a sword, and the second of his son “of a manly shape, and of that growth that he thinks he shall be at the resurrection.” Rather than “a monument without a tomb” or a typographical epitaph replacing an epigraphical one, this epitaph brings us back to the site of the buried body of the “loved boy” whose loss no poem can compensate or encompass, whose promise of life and resurrection makes him the father’s “best piece of poetrie.”

Jonson’s epitaph for his first daughter ends, more explicitly than the poem for his son, with burial of the mortal body. Ann Lauinger has argued that the turn back toward the burial of the body in “On My First Daughter” signals an inversion of the “traditional [Christian] relation of body to soul,” such that the religious consolation of the image of the little Mary in Christ’s mother Mary’s

“virgin-train” is undone by the focus on burial.\textsuperscript{206} Yet this focus on the “fleshly birth” and its burial is not out of place in an era when epitaphs very often coupled the opening “Here lies” with the body’s expectation of resurrection. Despite Jonson’s Catholic gesture toward a Blessed Virgin Mary already assumed (body as well as soul) into heaven, his apportionment of his daughter’s soul to heaven and the body to the care of the living, who consign it to earth, is in conformity with the dominant practices. As in the poem on his son, there is an almost exaggerated reticence: the ghost of an invocation is here, but it is not a prayer for the soul (which, indeed, would be unnecessary for a baptized child believed already in Heaven). It makes only the strange request that the “gentle earth” to which the parents commit “the fleshly birth” should “cover” the body “lightly.” What are we to make of this? The rhyme of “earth” and “birth” reminds us of the reminding words spoken in the Ash Wednesday service: “Thou art dust, and unto dust…” Lauinger thinks this request is “brutal” in that it calls up the opposite of “lightly,” the “conclusive thud of earth on a grave.”

This contrast is certainly part of the pathos. But I think there is more: the address to the earth, and the descriptor of it as “gentle” (as opposed here not only to brutal, unfeeling, cruel, but also to low, merely material, base) suggests that the process of bodily disintegration and mingling together of matter does not just efface the identity of the person; rather, even the surrounding earth becomes, as it were, a part of the body, which we are reminded is only so mingled

temporarily: “While that sever’d doth remain…” The “fleshly birth” of the body, while belonging to and disintegrating into earth, is also only temporarily and unnaturally “sever’d” from the triumphant soul. The earth is reminded to cover only “lightly,” because its covering is soon to be disturbed. The body of little Mary, like that of her namesake already assumed into heaven, finally does not belong to earth. Thus the admonition to “cover lightly” is both an instance of the last possible act of parental care and the natural revulsion at what Edna St Vincent Millay would later call “the shutting away / of loving hearts / in the hard ground,” but it is also a warning to the material world: cover lightly; you are not the final word. Again, the mortal body is not cast off in favor of a poetic monument; rather, the poetic epitaph points toward the body’s resurrection.

Jonson’s treatment of the body in his funerary poems points to a broader importance of faith in his poetry than has usually been observed by critics. As Martin Butler observes, religious aspects of Jonson’s work have suffered from critical neglect thanks both to a larger narrative of the early modern theatre as a space marked by “evacuation” or secularization of premodern religious belief and to a not wholly unwarranted characterization of Jonson “as a mainly secular writer … whose idea of the good life harks back to classical ideals, who is hostile to religious zealots, and whose skepticism is the very essence of the Renaissance stage.” To be sure, Jonson’s caricatures of fanaticism and zealotry are some of

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207 As Butler points out, it is ironic that so much more (mostly figurative) ink has been spilled over Shakespeare’s (alleged) confessional inclinations than over Jonson’s, which are so
the funniest things in all of early modern drama, and his aspiration toward classical ideals is undeniable. In recent work, both Butler and Robert Miola have pushed back against this “mainly secular” Jonson by focusing on the twelve years he openly spent as a Roman Catholic and the consequences of that risky alignment for his life and work.208 Butler has also shown, however, that both before and after his reconversion to the Church of England, Jonson maintained an eirenic, scholarly, but by no means dispassionate interest in matters of Christian faith, as shown by his recommendation and quotation of books ranging from Robert Southwell’s verse to Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Selden’s *Of the Gods of the Gentiles*, and Jewel’s *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae* and his naming of patristic texts among his most prized lost books in the *Execution on Vulcan*. He chose, too, to begin the *Under-wood* with a small group of devotional poems, though it would be a mistake to see the scope of faith in Jonson’s lyrics as confined to these.209 In fact, above the first of these poems is a large heading that reads “VNDER-WOODS. POEMS OF DEVOTION.” almost as if “OF DEVOTION” provided a descriptive subtitle for the whole collection, and though the edition uses both white space and horizontal rules fairly liberally, no visual signal marks any disjunction between the last of the devotional poems and

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the first of the secular ones (“A Celebration of Charis”). Jonson’s funerary poems reveal a deep and subtly expressed faith, continuous through his life even as he crossed confessional bounds, in a Christian imagining of the mortal body and its expectation of immortality.

Critical treatments of the Jonsonian body have focused on his acute attention to the body’s materiality, its consequent vulnerability to humiliation and corruption, and the poet’s alleged tendency to repudiate the body in favor of the literary monument. Jennifer Brady describes how, in the last years of Jonson’s life, his would-be literary heirs and the poet himself saw his long, undignified, and infirm bodily survival as threatening to encroach upon his self-established literary monument, the 1616 Folio Workes.210 In Under-wood, Brady argues, Jonson confronts his own decrepit, distended body as “subject to ‘the accidents and dispersions of historical reality,’ the body no text can redeem.”211 Similarly, Ben Morgan finds that “Ben Jonson does not like the fact of being in a body. When bodies intrude on his texts, it is usually in the context of their capacity to be degraded, to be ridiculed, or to carry disease.”212 According to Brady, the intransigent body becomes a thing that can be neither assimilated to nor edited out of the monumental self shaped in poetry. Jonson’s later writings, she


211 Brady 196.

suggests, express anxiety about fragmentation of the poetic corpus through “dispersion, … the anonymity of the anthology[,] or the vulnerability of the manuscript to destruction,” threats against which the Folio had been meant to guard.\textsuperscript{213} The poems of \textit{Under-wood}, and in particular the choice to include acknowledged fragments and occasional poems, reflect awareness of “the precariousness of what can be salvaged… in and from time” and of the fact that poetry is as “pervious to destruction as paper itself, as susceptible to extinction as human memory.”\textsuperscript{214} Brady is acute in her observations of Jonson’s sense of the vulnerability of both bodies and texts, and she argues convincingly that the later Jonson finds himself troubled by the Folio as his lasting monument, which becomes an unyielding standard to which his peers hold him accountable in his bodily decline. She also suggests that perhaps, however many difficulties it creates, the body cannot be blamed for all the problems associated with the monument:

The evidence of the Caroline poems and of Jonson’s own Under-wood suggests that his decision to publish as \textit{Workes} texts so apparently impervious to change or to development exacted a psychological cost. Unprecedented closure of the kind Jonson engaged in by exploiting the fixity of print had unforeseen consequences. To put it differently, \textit{tomes have an uncanny way of mortifying their makers} (emphasis mine).\textsuperscript{215}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{213} Brady 205.
\textsuperscript{214} Brady 207-209.
\textsuperscript{215} Brady 194-195.
\end{footnotesize}
I would like to expand on Brady’s consideration of the problems the print monument poses for the poet and to argue that his confrontation with the problems of monumentality reveal that the body has more than one valence even for the aging, infirm Jonson. The infirmity and pain of the body, while they may beget disgust and suffering, can spur the soul toward higher concerns. Moreover, Jonson’s imagining of the body cannot be understood purely in classical terms: the body also expects the triumphant apotheosis of resurrection, in which it will transcend or redeem the materiality that had made it so intractably vulnerable to defilement.

One of the most important accounts of the process by which the author and the printed book (and, I would add, the literary monument) become closely identified with one another has come from attempts to understand the genesis of the modern concept of authors’ intellectual property. Joseph Loewenstein’s influential study *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* narrates the synchronous development of English copyright law with that of the “bibliographical ego, a specifically Early Modern form of authorial identification with printed writing.” In the process he describes, the technological development of print that might seem to alienate the text from the author (by, for instance, replacing the authorial holograph) gave rise to desires to assert an “identification” or property relation between printed text and author, in which the printed text is held to be inalienably “proper to” its own author. Jonson’s contribution to the

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developing understanding of what authorship and intellectual property mean in the world of print provides the centerpiece of Loewenstein’s narrative. Similarly, Lynn Sermin Meskill observes that “Jonson seems to have perceived the folio format as an extension of the author”; it is his identity as author, not the traditional generic divisions of the folio format, that provides the determining principle of a book containing all his important works, including both plays and lyrics.\textsuperscript{217} I seek to build on Loewenstein’s insights about what it means for the “ego” to become “bibliographical” — a process figured, I argue, by the Pawlet elegy’s image of body becoming monument — and for a text to become identified with and intrinsically proper to its author. For Jonson comes to recognize such identification as double-edged, and it is through his treatment of bodies in relation to stony monuments, and through his appropriation of Ovid (and of Petrarch’s appropriation of Ovid), that he reflects upon the perils involved in transforming self into writing — writing that is also inescapably identified with a lifeless material substrate.

II. “Alas, I Am All Marble”: Monumental Petrification in the “Elegie on the Lady Jane Pawlet”

Jonson’s note “To the Reader,” which opens the Under-wood, gives an explanation of the collection’s title which frames it against his previous collection of short verse in the 1616 Folio, suggesting that he consciously offers the later work as a successor— and perhaps a corrective— to the former:

With the same leave the ancients called that kind of body silva or hyle in which there were works of divers nature and manner congested, as the multitude call timber trees promiscuously growing a wood or forest, so am I bold to entitle these lesser poems of later growth by this of “under-wood” out of the analogy they hold to the “forest” in my former book, and no otherwise.

Thomas Elyot’s 1542 Bibliotheca Eliotae defined “sylua” as “a woode or place ouergrowen with woodes, also any matter hastely wrytten without study.”

The Greek Hyle, originally meaning simply “wood,” becomes in Aristotle’s philosophy the word for matter, as opposed to the ordering form. It also carries the significance of “firewood,” or more generally, “fuel,” something expected to be consumed by fire. So for Jonson to choose to affiliate this ostensibly jumbled collection of verse with the term hyle suggests, from the outset, a concern with bodies (he describes the silva or hyle as a “kind of body”), with materiality.


(where we might expect poetry to be associated rather with form), and with perishability (a property of manuscripts Jonson discusses at length in his *Execration on Vulcan*). While the note to the reader calls attention to the collection’s “promiscuous” and disorderly structure, as if the poems had received no purposeful arrangement, both this act of intentional epideixis and Annabel Patterson’s persuasive arguments for an intentional design behind the arrangement of lyrics in the collection should make us skeptical. The scholarly consensus holds that Jonson had begun the arrangement of the poems for publication and that this work was probably incomplete at the time of his death, but whether he worked arranging the collection from beginning to end or piecemeal and just how far he got is not known. As Patterson has observed, the apparent and explicitly mentioned disorderliness and inclusion of fragments in *Underwood* provides plausible deniability for its more pointedly topical social and political content. This strategy of apparent disarrangement also, I shall argue, intentionally creates an instance or illustration of the problems of poetry entrusted to inscription in matter. That is, it gives us a different, less polished picture of what kind of monument print can become, and it also suggests that, in some ways, the mutability intrinsic to all material things—including both bodies and material vehicles for poetry—is not entirely a disadvantage. For there are two

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seemingly mutually contradictory qualities of the material that Jonson notices: on the one hand its frustrating mutability and susceptibility to falling-apart, to the loss of form, and on the other hand its equally troublesome static deadness, its lack of spirit, life, and motion. These are both qualities of matter and of bodies observed by Aristotle, and they are both qualities that make the monument, whether stony or printed, highly problematic for Jonson. In Under-wood, Jonson explores the problems these aspects of materiality pose for the poet, especially the author whose printed book is raised as his literary monument, and show how the poet can create something that both accords with the classical claims for the poetic, immaterial monument and draws upon the Christian understanding of the body as something very much material that nonetheless transcends the liabilities of materiality through resurrection.

The “Elegie on the Lady Jane Pawlet,” written shortly after her death in 1631, investigates the figure of poet-as-monument by literalizing it. In a monologue by the speaker, the poem dramatizes a series of events that at first seem extraneous to the relatively conventional epideictic funeral elegy in the latter part of the poem. The speaker encounters a beautiful ghost who is plucking a garland from a yew-tree, a tree known for its association with

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222 The first edition of the Under-woods gives the title as “An Elegie On the Lady Anne Pawlet,” but this has universally been recognized as a typographical error, since the name “Jane” is used within the poem and was the actual name of the Marchioness.
graveyards and thus with remembrance. She “woos” him and, as he tries to persuade her to tell him her name, he finds himself being turned into stone, his petrified body destined to becoming funeral monument. At first he reconciles himself to becoming a tablet that will be inscribed by Fame, but he then begins to object that Fame speaks only of the lady’s lineage and rank, facts known to all, neglecting the praise of the soul. The impulse to praise the soul allows Jonson to resume being poet even despite his petrifaction into monument. While Brady sees Jonson as beset with anxiety that the vulnerability of the body may encroach upon the literary monument, I would suggest that for the Jonson of the latter poems, becoming monument is problematic in itself. Monumentality cannot be confined to the text; it must encroach on the liveliness of the author. The Pawlet elegy literalizes the figure of monument in order to explore some of its consequences: becoming monument means becoming stone rather than flesh, written-upon rather than writer, a tablet without agency or voice. To become too much like a stony or physical monument is to land on the wrong side of the classical distinction between monuments of brass and stone, which eventually perish, and poems which endure alive. Insofar as “author” is a kind of monument, the transformation into “author” involves petrifaction and the loss of poetic power, but it may perhaps be resisted through the praise of the soul.

223 “Whether the planting of yewe in Churchyards hold not its originall from ancient Funerall rites, or as an Embleme of Resurrection from its perpetual verdure, may also admit conjecture.” Sir Thomas Browne, Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall in Religio Medici and Urne-Buriall, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Ramie Targoff (New York: New York Review of Books, 2012), 126.
The elegy’s subject first appears as a “gentle Ghost, besprent with April deaw” who, still possessing some shadow of her former beauty, beckons the idly passing speaker. She seems to want him to “pluck a Garland” from “the fatall tree,” but the speaker is uncertain whether she means it for herself or for him. The speaker does not come on purpose to do her homage or leave a garland on her grave; rather, she approaches him. The lady’s ghost literalizes the apostrophe performed by one of the most famous conventional openings of classical epitaphs, the *sta viator* or “stay, passerby” address. An address to the visitor, by way of requesting intercession, was also a very common feature of pre-Reformation epitaphs. The suggestion that the yew-garland may be meant for *him* gives the encounter a sinister note: does the ghost wish to lure the speaker to join her in death? She is said to “woo” him with the loveliness of her image, but it is unclear at first why.

It is only after the ghost draws the speaker nearer that the speaker’s body begins to be frozen:

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O that you had breath,
To give your shade a name! Stay, stay, I feele
A horroure in mee! all my blood is steele!
Stiff! starke! my joynts ’gainst one another knock!
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By indulging his “desire to speak with the dead” (or the dead’s desire to speak with him), an impulse that the poem suggests is mixed with other kinds of desire, the poet finds himself literally becoming a monument. The speaker says “I am almost a stone”; like Petrarch in *Rime Sparse* 23, he has become “un quasi

\[224 \text{ ll. 6-10}\]
vivo et sbigottito sasso” by means of a passion that seems to involve an admixture of love-longing with ordinary fear.

Paradoxically, it is through the body’s involuntary reactions to the passions that it becomes like a stone, which would ordinarily be impervious to such effects. Moreover, the poem subtly suggests that the spirit of the dead woman has lured him to this place in order that she may freeze his body into stone and cause it to become her monument, perhaps because, as Jonson notes, his breast is appropriate for the purpose, “a large fair tablet, and a true.” Since the lady’s grave has neither a monument to mark it and tell her heritage, nor pilgrims or mourners coming to visit the site, she by her haunting has enterprised to provide both for herself, as her taking the initiative in plucking the garland implies. Like Hamlet, Jonson’s speaker has encountered a ghost who is reluctant to speak (or has difficulty speaking) but who wants to be remembered by the living.

Like characters in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* who try to continue speaking even as they are undergoing transformation into creatures or objects unable to produce human speech, the poet narrates the process of his own petrifaction:

Alas, I am all Marble! write the rest
Thou wouldst have written, Fame, upon my brest:
It is a large faire table, and a true,
And the disposure will be something new,

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226 In Act III of *Epicoene*, several mythological transformations are identified within the play’s spoken texts as “ex Ouidij metamorphosi”; upon being revealed as able to speak, Epicoene says, “Why, did you think you had married a statue?” For an in-depth discussion of Jonson’s treatment of material from Ovid, see Joseph A. Dane, “The Ovids of Ben Jonson in *Poetaster* and in *Epicoene,*” *Comparative Drama* 13 (1979), 222-234. See comment by William Anderson at n. 45.
When I, who would the Poët have become,
At least may bea th’inscription to her Tombe.227

Jonson is known to critics as one who “would the Poet have become” [emphasis mine] in a less specific sense; scholars have attributed to him a clear aspiration toward recognition as the peer of classical poets, in grandiose print editions and in history. Jonson’s elegy for Shakespeare famously endorses the notion of the poet-as-monument: far from needing to be buried by Chaucer and other worthy English poets, “Thou art a monument without a tomb,” he tells Shakespeare, and many, including his contemporaries, have seen in Jonson’s folio Workes an aspiration to a similar monumentality. Yet the very notion of “monument” is hard to disentangle from that of tombs, as the paradoxical “a monument without a tomb” acknowledges. Robert Cawdry’s 1604 A Table Alphabetical, for instance, defines “monument” as “a remembrance of some notable act, as Tombs,” and Randle Cotgrave’s A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues gives the meaning of “monument” as “sepulchre, tombe; record, memoriall, remembrance of.”228 The Pawlet elegy registers being poet and becoming monument, not as compatible, but as fates that may be mutually exclusive, and it registers a decided unease about the later. The transformation of body into monument threatens to makes the poet no longer poet, but merely substrate for the writing of the epitaph by Fame, an agent who can be described as collective, societal, or cultural. While flesh and blood are subject to suffering, humiliation, sickness,

227 Lines 12-17.

228 Lexicon of Early Modern English.
and decay, they still permit the poet to remain poet rather than becoming nothing more than a hunk of stone, a tablet for Fame to write upon. To become monument is to become inscribed rather than inscriber, a something more static than either the restless ghost or the body whose resting place it visits. The speaker at first accepts his fate and relinquishes the responsibility for inscribing him to Fame, thus setting in motion a trope in which it is not he as a partial human admirer of the lady who praises her, but Fame herself.

The poem, though, soon begins to cast doubt on the authority of Fame. Meskill notes that in Jonson’s “Masque of Queenes,” which draws upon Virgil’s depiction of a monstrous Fame who is the daughter of Terror (a description also translated by Jonson in Poetaster, as I discuss below),

the petrifying gaze of Fame, born out of the gorgon gaze of Terror, turns the text into monument. It is as if the unsleeping eye of Fame had directed its deadly ray toward the writer’s work, turning it into marble monument, a tomb of citation and gloss. Just as Perseus ... displayed the head of the Medusa before the court, Jonson turns the fatal gaze of Fame full upon his own text, changing it into petrified monument.229

Thus the arrival of Fame on the heels of the physiological phenomena associated with terror is no accident, nor is the association of Fame with the transformation of the poet into a stony monument on which an epitaph can then be inscribed. Meskill sees a similar process at work in the Pawlet elegy, quoting Paul de Man’s description of the “threat that inhabits prosopopoeia, namely that by making the

dead speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death.”

The association of Fame with a Gorgon-like capacity for petrifaction and of the literary monument with the stone tomb renders both intensely problematic. Fame turns out to be a threat to Jonson’s poetic freedom, which Victoria Moul has argued he is particularly insistent on asserting when he seems most imitative or dependent upon the support of his patrons. If Jonson wishes to retain his capacity to praise in his own voice and to continue to “be the poet,” he cannot have his voice silenced by petrification and become the passive tablet for Fame’s inscriptions, which turn out to be quite dull and conventional, including only the bare facts “the heralds can tell” about her title and descent. Although there are significant disadvantages to inhabiting a human body (one of which, obesity, Jonson nods to in his reference to the broadness of his breast), there are also problems involved in becoming a poetic monument, which turns out to require being inscribed by Fame while inhabiting a simulacrum of one’s body rendered in stone that serves as a tomb memorializing someone else.

Yet Jonson’s speaker, it turns out, has not been perfectly silenced by his petrification, and is soon remonstrating with Fame: “serve not formes, good

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Fame, / Sound thou her Vertues, give her soule a Name.” But it is not entirely clear whether it is the poet who continues speaking or Fame who replies:

Had I a thousand Mouthes, as many Tongues, 
And voyce to raise them from my brazen Lungs, 
I durst not aime at that: The dotes were such 
Thereof, no notion can expresse how much 
Their Carract was! I, or my trump must breake, 
But rather I, should I of that part speake!232

Ripa’s Iconologia, one of the period’s most influential emblem books, depicts Fame as possessed of a trumpet and a multitude of mouths.233 In Thomas More’s verses based on Petrarch’s Triumphs, Fame describes herself, saying “with tongues [I] am compassed all rounde / For in voyce of people is my chiefe livyng.”234 In Ovid, the house of Fame “is built all of echoing brass” which “repeats all words and doubles what it hears.”235 In Jonson’s Poetaster, when Augustus asks Virgil to recite some of his verse, the recitation includes a description of a monstrous Fame he calls a “fleet evil” and “covetous... of Tales and Lies”:

On her huge Corps, so many waking Eyes 
Stick underneath: and (which may stranger rise 
In the report) as many Tongues she bears, 
As many Mouths, as many listning Ears.236

232 Lines 27-32.


235 Quoted in Kiefer 87.

236 Poetaster 5.2. “Fama” in this passage (Aeneid IV.174-183) is often translated into English as “Rumor” because of its overwhelmingly negative portrayal. This many-tongued fame
Virgil’s recitation of these lines is, appropriately, interrupted by the arrival of envious conspirators who attempt to persuade Augustus of false reports against the virtuous Horace. These descriptions of Fame all indicate that, though Fame has many tongues, she does not generate her own voice; rather, her tongues belong to others, both the truthful and liars. She is a collective, not an individual speaker. Through the use of the counterfactual in which the speaker of the Pawlet elegy says that even if he—or she—had such attributes, they would be of no use in praising the soul, Jonson creates a merging between the voice of fame and that of the poet-speaker. This ambiguously voiced speech that emphasizes the fact that, if Fame speaks in or through poets, she also has no other voice than those others lend her. The question of whether the poet or Fame speaks is misleading: if Fame speaks, she speaks in the poet’s voice. The “trumpet” which “must break” if it tries to sound the things of the soul is a double symbol: it is an attribute of Fame, but also a symbol of apocalypse; the breaking of Fame’s trumpet suggests the end of Fame’s reign at the sound of the last trumpet. By creating ambiguity about the source of the voice that catalogues the attributes of Fame, and calling into question whether Fame in fact possesses the characteristics generally attributed to her, the poet manages not to be silenced, to go on speaking somehow despite the petrifaction of his body and to remain more than a monument that has been inscribed with the collective—and therefore potentially false—speech of Fame.

is clearly the source of Ripa’s and Jonson’s Fames and the slandering Rumor who gives the prologue of Shakespeare’s 2 Henry IV.
Yet for as long as the poet’s voice is merged with or becomes the voice of
Fame, there are still certain limits upon what it can accomplish. Fame cannot be
trusted to praise the dead woman’s spiritual qualities:

It is too neere of kin to Heaven, the Soule,
To be describ’d! Fames fingers are too foule
To touch these Mysteries: We may admire
The blaze, and splendor, but not handle fire!237

Either Fame or the poet— the poet’s voice now seems to have become dominant,
given the denigrating reference to Fame in the third person— rehearses an
inexpressibility topos. Fame, no longer addressed as “good,” but instead
suddenly described as a “foule” figure, almost translated from masque to
antimasque, cannot, as Jonson’s translation of Virgil in Poetaster should have
warned us, be trusted as the inscriber of the poet’s stony breast. Jonson, like
Petrarch in Rime Sparse 23, seems to recover somehow from his temporary
petrification. Petrarch writes that “nor could I help my afflicted senses: / a living
voice was forbidden me: / so I cried out with paper and ink.”238 Despite the
freezing of his body, Jonson’s speaker continues to generate language, though
this language may continue to be written or inscribed, and seems to wrest control
of the poem from the “foul” fingers of Fame once more.

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237 Lines 29-32.

238 In the original, “o dar soccorso a le vertuti afflitte;/ le vive voci m’erano interditte;/ ond’io gridai con carta et con incostrò” (ll. 97-99). Jonson’s copy of Petrarch’s Opera Omnia
survives; see Christopher Martin, “Retrieving Jonson’s Petrarch,” Shakespeare Quarterly 45.1
Why would Jonson turn to images of bodies undergoing petrification, appropriated from Ovid and Petrarch, to address anxieties about whether, in the attempt to become author-as-monument through print publication, he sacrifices the living powers of poetry? Ovid is a natural choice, of course, for images of transformation, of what it might mean or be like to be turned into something else. William S. Anderson notes that in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Ovid often highlights the way “speech, an essential attribute of human beings, stops with death, petrifaction, or bestialization. ... For a human being to become a statue reverses the creative process of art, which tries to capture life in an inanimate medium, not snuff it out.”239 In Ovid’s account of the petrification of Battus, the ill-fated Battus assures Mercury of his discretion, telling him “even that rock / will tell a story before I speak a word.” Yet when Mercury appears unrecognizable in a different guise, Battus soon betrays the location of the god’s cattle in exchange for a bribe. “Even as he spoke the poor frail-hearted servant changed to a black flint.” His transformation is thus a kind of poetic justice: for his traitorous speech, he is reduced to speechlessness by being turned into the stone that he said would speak before he would. The god punishes him with the very impossibility of speech he had falsely promised, and the metamorphosis interrupts and stops his speech.

Jonson’s account of the stiffening of his limbs and the freezing of his blood is reminiscent of Ovid’s account of the petrification of Aglauros:

She making proffer for to rise, did feele so great a waight
Through all hir limmes, that for hir life she could not stretch hir straight.
She strove to set hirself upright: but striving booted not.
Hir hamstrings and hir knees were stiffe, a chilling colde had got 1030
In at hir nayles, through all hir limmes, and eke hir veynes began
For want of bloud and lively heate, to waxe both pale and wan.
And as the freting Fistula forgrowne and past all cure
Runnes in the flesh from place to place, and makes the sound and pure
As bad or worser than the rest: even so the cold of death,
Strake to hir heart, and close hir veines, and lastly stopt hir breath:
She made no profer for to speake, and though she had done so,
It had bene vaine. For way was none for language forth to go.
Hir throte congealed into stone: hir mouth became hard stone,
And like an image sate she still, hir bloud was clearely gone.240

What Golding translates as “the fretting fistula” is, in Ovid’s original, rendered here by the same word we would use for the malady today: cancer. Ovid compares petrification to a kind of disease process, an association echoed by Jonson’s description of chilling and stiffening (transformations undergone by a corpse). By borrowing Ovid’s imagery of petrifaction, Jonson suggests that a transformation into monument does not, as one might hope, supply an escape from the body’s vulnerability to illness; rather, monumentalization accomplishes the same sort of deadening and silencing, the same reduction to cold, base matter, as does the sickening and death of the body. The Ovid character in Jonson’s Poetaster opens the play with the couplet, translated from Ovid, “when this body falls in funeral fire, / My name shall live, and my best part aspire,” displaying confidence in immortality through literary fame, and yet his character departs after his banishment lamenting that he has become “like a heartless ghost /
Without the living body of my love,” desiring her “breath” to “cheer my fainting

240 Arthur Golding, Ovid’s Metamorphoses, II.1027-1040.
spirits,” and persuading her that, even though the soul survives death, it will be a pale and dreary existence without the “affections” borne by “flesh and blood, whose quintessence is sense.” Though Jonson’s fictional Ovid is far from an exemplar of the virtuous poet—that role falls to Horace, after whom Jonson models himself—Ovid’s character does illustrate some of the problems intrinsic to attempts to produce an immortality ensconced in literary fame and divorced from the mutable, vulnerable life of the body he is, ultimately, not content to relinquish. Meanwhile, Virgil (and, by extension, Jonson as the author of Poetaster) is credited with the ability to

mould Rome and her monuments
Within the liquid marble of her lines
That they shall stand fresh and miraculous,
 Even when they mix with innovating dust.

This praise of Virgil, based upon his own description of the sculptor’s art in the Aeneid, suggests that the poet creates a sort of monument the sculptor cannot: the poet ideally can create something that endures as well as or better than marble, that is not lifeless matter, as marble is, but as “liquid” and “fresh” as blood, even (as the players do in performing Jonson’s Roman drama) in a “miraculous” way seeming to resurrect the dead. A poet who can manage this, it seems, does the

241 Poetaster IV.ix.24-25,30; IV.x.35-38

242 For discussion of contemporary controversies over the moral character of Ovid’s poetry, see James D. Mulvihill, “Jonson’s Poetaster and the Ovidian Debate,” Studies in English Literature 1500-1900 22 (1982), 239-255.

243 Poetaster V.i.19-22.
reverse of petrification: rather than turning living bodies to stone, he brings stones to life.

In the Pawlet elegy, though, Jonson gets his images for the problems of petrification and materiality from Ovid, but turns for help with those problems, not to Virgil, but to Petrarch. In *Rime Sparse* 23, Petrarch progresses through a series of Ovidian references, transplanted from the narrative into the lyric voice, providing the internal monologue of the metamorphosed, who are so often deprived of speech, frustrated aphonia often being concomitant with Ovidian transformation.244

Thus William Rossiter suggests that it is the interior voicing of lyric that enables the Petrarchan speaker to defy the silencing of petrification. Heather Dubrow, too, has described the “relationship between the immediacy of voice and writing—between air and stone” as a tension driving early modern poetics.245 Jonson takes the funerary epitaph, a poetic form that is traditionally highly public, and translates it into a new location, the printed collection of lyrics, which participate in the tradition of Petrarchan interiority despite having been graven in the fixity of print. Meskill writes,

> The desire to imitate the ancients in their literary posterity led to an effort to transform the transitory into forms that possessed some kind of natural longevity. And this effort to change one species of

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244 William T. Rossiter, *Chaucer and Petrarch* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 199.

writing into another finds its last stage, its final transmutation, in its publication in folio.\textsuperscript{246}

Ovid’s and Petrarch’s accounts of being transformed into stone provide Jonson with a figurative language through which to understand this “transmutation” into the folio, the printed monument. Jonson’s speaker, like Petrarch, suffers petrification as the object of a Medusa-like female gaze:

While Petrarch’s vision carves an idol in living laurel..., Laura’s Medusa gaze creates an idol in dead stone. … It should come as no surprise, then, that Medusa’s power of making, if directed at the poet, would kill his subjectivity by literally turning him into an object, a material thing. Furthermore, he would become an object that represents himself, … the fixed, immutable stuff of memory locked in his own verse—a Petrarchified poet.\textsuperscript{247}

Another such Petrarchan petrification takes place in “Ten Lyric Pieces on Charis,” a sequence of love-lyrics verging on the ridiculous found in the early part of Under-wood. In one of these lyrics, the speaker steals Cupid’s accoutrements, only to find himself petrified by the female beloved and subject to public mockery for his most un-Eros-like fat and middle-aged form. Here again we see the worry that transformation into a monument of stone, far from enabling one to avoid the liabilities of having a body, might in fact result in being stuck with the worst aspects of materiality. This is easy to read as a metaphor for having one’s embarrassingly lovesick lyrics in print for everyone to see, and

\textsuperscript{246} Meskill, \textit{Ben Jonson and Envy} 141.

probably laugh at, forevermore. Charis, in what almost seems to be a parody of
the resurrection of the damned, consents “to restore / Eyes and limbs, to hurt me
more,” but with the result that the speaker, even after he has been left in a most
inconvenient and wounded body, leaking blood from Cupid’s dart, can still
boast

Loser-like, now, all my wreak
Is, that I have leave to speak;
And in either prose or song,
To revenge me with my tongue
Which how dexterously I do,
Hear and make example too.

Once again, the characteristic of the poet in the model of Petrarch is that he
experiences the petrification of a Battus or Aglauros, but is not finally silenced by
it.

In the Pawlet elegy, though, Jonson’s petrifier is neither a Gorgon, nor the
ideal beloved, but a ghost: the ghost of the woman whose epitaph he is
composing, as we would say, “in real time” within the poem. It is the encounter
with the dead—whether the recent dead whom it falls to the poet to memorialize
in verse, or the dead classical authors in whose mold he typographically
monumentalizes himself—that threatens the poet with transformation into
monument, and yet also provides the opportunity to do what Ovid’s Battus and
Aglauros cannot: to go on speaking, to keep one’s voice alive. Petrarch’s lyric
resistance provides Jonson with hope that it is the poet’s particular gift to be
turned to stone (to monument, to printed book, to corpse, to whatever seems to
be mere matter) and yet somehow to resist becoming composed rather than
composer. The Pawlet elegy reflects the problems posed by the transformation of
the poet into literary monument. Through the ghostly encounter and the
opportunity it presents to praise another’s soul, and through imitation of
Petrarch’s (Christian) metamorphoses of Ovid, Jonson becomes able to resist
petrifaction, to become more than mere monument. It is praise of the soul that
empowers the poet’s voice to continue despite the petrifaction of his body, a
process that makes the body no different from the material monuments of bronze
and stone that the poet habitually claims to outdo. Yet this occasion for praising
the dead woman’s soul would never have occurred without the attempt of her
ghost—her disembodied soul—to acquire a stone monument and make sure of
memory among the living by wooing and petrifying the body of the poet. Thus
the persistent desire for remembrance in physical monuments, which include the
(printed) material book as well as the inscribed material stone tablet, creates an
opportunity for the poet to transcend becoming materialized by praising the
soul. As David Riggs has observed, through the poem’s account of her triumph
over her bodily sufferings, including those imposed both by her illness and by
her physicians, “Lady Paulet tacitly encourages the palsy-ridden poet to rejoice
in the infirmities of the mortal body whose decay he has chronicled during the
previous twelve years.”248 Through praise of the soul, the benefits of being body
rather than stone—which are inseparable from the body’s liabilities, its

susceptibility to sickness, humiliation, and pain—are revealed even as the poet resists becoming mere material monument, whether in stone or in folio.

For it is the soul’s reluctance to desert the physical body—the ghost lingering in the churchyard with its yew-tree, the way the poet’s voice continues to dwell in the stone statue—that drives the poem’s narrative. The poet ends not with the sounding of Fame’s trumpet, but with the Christian soul who “sure of Heaven, rides triumphing in.” In this elegy, the voice or words of the poet, rather than merging entirely with personified Fame, find their freedom from petrifying monumentalization in celebrating a different triumph, the Christian triumph of the human person over the grave, which is the triumph of soul and body together. The poet who is, through his own will or not, drawn to preserve the memory of the dead in verse—or to build his literary monument in print, an act that requires confrontation with the specters of one’s own death and concomitant desire to be remembered—may not be able to help being transformed into the petrified monument, Jonson suggests, but through a Christian understanding of the soul and body, he can, like Petrarch, resist being silenced by this transformation and perhaps even transform the monument into something endowed with the living voice of the animate body. It is the compelling action the dead exact upon the living, their seeming desire to be memorialized in monuments, that provides the occasion for the poet’s ability to transcend monumentality and its material deadness. Since attempts to preserve the text, including committing it to print, turn poet into monument, they threaten the
poet as possessor of living voice as much or more than do the vicissitudes of inhabiting a body. Yet this threat of deadening petrification has also been, since Petrarch at least, one the poet may counter through a Christian epideixis of the soul.

III. “Her Inscription, or Crowne, is Lost”: The Fragmentary Monument to Lady Venetia Digby

Jonson also practices the praise of the soul in the “Eupheme,” a poem to the memory of the Lady Venetia Digby. This poem in several “pieces” immediately follows the Pawlet elegy and concludes the section of original English poems (other than translations) in the Under-wood. In its placement and presentation in the volume, the “Eupheme” appears as the capstone of Jonson’s original lyric poetry, yet it also persistently calls attention to its own fragmentariness—a quality that at once shows poetry’s susceptibility to loss and realigns Jonson with the classical authors, whose merest fragments are worthy of remembrance and re-presentation in print. Though it is impossible to know which of the choices about the presentation and editing of this were made by Jonson himself, the reader of the Under-wood encounters in the form and presentation of the printed poem a juxtaposition of the crumbling poetic monument with the heavenly triumph of soul and body. Through its placement
and through the inclusion of a prose dedication that shows Jonson committing these poems to posterity with his “latest” breath, the printed “Eupheme” claims to close Jonson’s career as a poet with a literary monument that works by constantly drawing attention to its own perishability and to the immortality of body and soul. In the print edition of 1641, the “Eupheme” has its own title page, the first line of which is set in a larger typeface than that of the Under-woods as a whole (see fig. 2).

The translation of “Eupheme” as “Faire Fame” sets up a contrast with the monstrous Virgilian personification of Fame who appears in the Pawlet elegy. The title page helpfully translates the title and glosses the word “apotheosis,” which is set in the Greek characters in the name of the ninth piece, for readers who may not be proficient in Greek. The first line of the subtitle, “The Faire,” is set in type of the same size as “Under-woods” on the whole collection’s title page, suggesting that the “Eupheme” may surpass in importance the larger collection of which it is a part. The importance suggested by these typesetting choices is not surprising, since the Lady Venetia’s husband Sir Kenelm Digby, who is praised on the title page as “A Gentleman / absolute in all Numbers,” was Jonson’s literary executor, but it also is not out of proportion with the scale and epideictic rhetoric of the “Eupheme” poems, which treat Venetia Digby as Jonson’s “muse” and, like Lady Pawlet, as a model of Christian feminine
virtue.\textsuperscript{249} Among other possible meanings, the description of Sir Kenelm as “absolute in all numbers” affirms his sense of order and proportion, providing a warrant for any aspects of the ordering and arrangement of the \textit{Under-woods}, including the pre-eminence suggested for his wife’s elegy by its title page, that his judgment might have determined. The overall impression given by the title page is that of a monumental cenotaph, without pictorial engravings like the one on the frontispiece of the 1616 folio; rather, it is constructed entirely from type. The epigraph, taken from Statius, reads \textit{Vivam amare voluptas, defunctam religio} (To love a living [wife] is pleasure, [to love] a dead [wife] religion), and aligns the “Eupheme” with physical funeral monuments for Venetia Digby. In slightly expanded form, the quotation is recorded as having appeared on two monuments, a gilt-bronze bust that was set up on a marble base in Christ Church, Newgate Street, London, in 1634, and on the pedestal of a bronze bust at Goathurst, the Digby home.\textsuperscript{250} The placement, presentation, and contents of the “Eupheme” work together in the printed book to underscore at once the


\textsuperscript{250} Nigel Llewelyn, \textit{The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, c. 1500-c. 1800} (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), 32-33; 1774 description of a portrait miniature of Venetia Digby, Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill Collection, The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, <http://lwimages.library.yale.edu/strawberryhill/oneitem.asp?id=562>. The quotation is from the preface to the fifth book of Statius’s \textit{Silvae}, and it is followed by a poem describing the tomb of a friend’s beloved wife, which captures her beauty in sculpture so perfectly that other sculptors will soon copy her features for portrayals of goddesses: “Soon thou art changed into manifold images and born anew: here art thou Ceres in bronze, here the bright Cretan maid, Maia, beneath that dome, an innocent Venus in this marble. The deities scorn not to accept thy lovely features...” The quotation is thus highly appropriate to a work of art that claims to divinize a mortal woman. Trans. J.H. Mozley, \textit{Statius I}, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 1928), 283.
susceptibility to loss and fragmentation of the poetic text that is “left to posterity”
and the poet’s participation in a divine “apotheosis,” such that poetic memory
mirrors the triumph of Christian judgment.

W. Scott Howard suggests that Jonson

critiques... his own desire to create a monument to
Lady Venetia Digby... On a formal level “Eupheme”
also dramatizes that iconoclasm through the elegy’s
fragmentary and lost components... which enact the
work’s inward-turning of grief expression and
restraint, structural composition and
decomposition.251

The second piece of the “Eupheme,” “The Song of her DESCENT,” breaks off
mid-line. The remainder of the half-lost line is marked with a broken line, and
beneath it is printed in a smaller type, “The rest of this Song is lost.” This
breaking off is particularly striking in the context of the first piece, “The
Dedication of her CRADLE,” which in its first lines invokes

    Faire Fame, who art ordain’d to crowne
    With ever-greene, and great renowne,
    Their heads, that ENVY would hold downe
    With her, in shade

    Of Death, and Darkness; and deprive
    Their names of being kept alive,
    By THEE...252

Yet the “Dedication” implicitly contrasts the lady’s “descent” with her “getting
up / By JACOBS Ladder,” and thus the “descent” becomes not only her descent

251 W. Scott Howard, “‘Mine Own Breaking’: Resistance, Gender, and Temporality in
Seventeenth-Century English Elegies and Jonson’s ‘Eupheme,’” in Grief and Gender, 700-1700, ed.

252 Ll. 1-7.
from her worthy ancestors, whose names are allegedly contained in the “lost” part of the song, but also her own descent (like that of Christ) into the “shade of Death” and her concomitant ascent into heaven. One wonders whether the end of the “Song of her DESCENT” was in fact lost, especially since it breaks off mid-line, or whether the poem was left unfinished. Thus in their printed context with the demarcation of loss, the two poems together throw into question the capacity of poetic Fame to “crowne / With ever-greene, and great renowne,” since the song that keeps their names alive may be lost, even as Jonson had foreseen that Drayton’s monument would one day cease to bear a legible name.

Similarly, the third piece of the “Eupheme,” “The Mind,” is followed by this note:

A whole quaternion in the middest of this Poem is lost, containing entirely the three next pieces of it, and all of the fourth, (which in the order of the whole, is the eighth) excepting the very end: which at the top of the next quaternion goeth on thus:

What follows is a dedicatory note in prose from Jonson to Digby’s sons, advising the eldest to open the poem and read it to his brothers “so soone as you arrive at yeares of mature Understanding.” Jonson signs himself “a faithfull Servant, and Client of your Familie, with his latest breath expiring it.” The inclusion of this note and dedication calls the reader’s attention the editor’s faithfulness in including every scrap of text he possesses, even those not strictly part of the poem; it also shows a diligent concern to make plain to the reader the precise nature of the physical loss of entire pieces of the manuscript, which contrasts with the succinct assertion of the loss of the remainder of the “Descent” in the
middle of a line—a kind of loss that would seem far less likely to be due to pages falling out of a manuscript. The inclusion of the note also dramatizes, in fact literally enacts, the transmission of the poetic texts to posterity—in this case, a very specific posterity of direct descendants—and the ways in which this process is immediately threatened by but at least partly defies death, since Jonson asserts himself to do so with the expiration of his own “latest” breath. Yet as the loss of the quaternion makes clear, even what would seem to be the most sure and direct means of transmitting poetic memory to posterity—sending poems with a dedicatory note directly to the children of the person they memorialize, and even instructing that they not be opened by careless children, but only by those who have come of age—may fail so badly that a “whole quaternion” may be lost. This section shows us both Sir Kenelm as “a gentleman absolute in all numbers,” one, that is, who is just, learned in all sorts of proportions including the meters of verse and music, and concerned with precision and correct accounting, and at the same time as one who in the face of the double loss—of his wife and of the lost quaternion—has not managed to preserve his absoluteness absolutely, for though he painstakingly notes that what is the fourth piece of the “Eupheme” in its printed version was once the eighth part of the complete poem, he has forgotten to number it, according to the system that governs 1-3 and 9, with an Arabic numeral above its title, and the poem to the couple’s sons, called “Her hopefull ISSUE” on the Eupheme’s title page, becomes “To Kenelme, Iohn, George.”
The last marker of loss included in the “Eupheme” is that of the tenth piece, called on the title page “Her Inscription, or CROWNE.” A note in the same small typeface tells us that “The Tenth, being her Inscription, or CROWNE, is lost.” This statement of loss comes immediately after the ninth piece, which calls itself her “apotheosis” and asks the reader to pardon his boldness “That thus have ventur’d these true straines upon; / To publish her a Saint.” The couplet closes with “My Muse is gone,” the last words of original English verse in the Under-wood. Having become a saint in heaven, the lady can no longer be invoked as a muse of classically-inflected poetry, nor does she need the limited kind of immortality it claims to offer. While the poet makes bold to assert that Venetia Digby has received the heavenly “Crowne for which [her soul] lives,” he or his editor tells us that her earthly, poetic crown has been lost. The “Eupheme” in its printed incarnation thus forms a poetic remembrance, “left to posteritie,” that invites the reader in posterity to consider how the “ever-green” crown of poetic fame promised by “an antient BARD” may literally lose (some of) its leaves. The translation of his muse into heaven enables the poet to participate in or figure her Christian apotheosis; his other poems, “An Elegie on my Muse” suggests, “were Cobwebs fine, / Spun out in name of some of the old Nine! / To hang a window, or make darke the roome, / Till swept away...” While the title “An Elegie on my Muse” suggests an impossibility, the death of an immortal goddess (which must bring with it the death of poetry itself), the poem’s meaning in fact seems to

253 Ll. 5-9.
be the opposite: while the influence of the “old Nine” has waned, only through a mortal muse like Petrarch’s Laura who dies can the poet become able to sing the true *apotheosis*, the raising of the Christian into heaven at “That eternall Holy-day of rest, / To Body, and Soule! where Love is all the guest!” Thus, the “Eupheme” asserts, praising the immortality of body and soul through resurrection allows the Christian poet to surpass his classical predecessors even as his fragmentary works become, like their crumbling monuments, partly preserved in the imperfectly lasting materiality of print. The poem, as printed, becomes a ruined monument that testifies to the susceptibility of any material text to loss; its show of its own privation, like the incompleteness of the body on a transi tomb, becomes a kind of expectant participation in the Resurrection.

The title page of the *Under-wood* bears a one-line epigraph from Martial that reflects on the book’s publication near or, as it turns out, after the author’s death. *Cineri, gloria sera venit*: Glory comes late to ashes or To ashes, glory comes [too] late. In isolation, it may be read in several ways. For Jonson, who has died, any acclaim for this volume will come, in one sense, too late. And it can be understood to mean that all glory comes, at last, to ashes: *sic transit gloria mundi*. Even the glory of the poet will be consumed to cold, lifeless matter. (Lateness has a double edge: there is too late, belated, time drawing always towards decay and oblivion, but also late as in new, as in “at last!” or “finally!” —as in Augustine’s *Sero te amavi*, “Late have I loved thee,” or Charles Wesley’s “Late in time behold Him come…”) So there is, in light of the thread I have been tracing through
Jonson’s funereal verse, a possibility of reading this line, as Christians since at least Augustine have loved to do with their favorite classical poets, as a kind of premonition of Christian miracle: To ashes, though late, glory at last comes (is coming). We do not know who selected this line from Martial to provide the epigraph for the printed monument that would, like a tombstone, bracket the end of Jonson’s life. Reading it in this way would, though, be in keeping with the way his funerary poems seek to make the living monument unlike the stony one by pointing—through convention and reticence; through the poetic power, like Petrarch, to resist losing one’s poetic voice in stony fixity by praising the soul; through their own fragmentariness and lack—toward the mortal body, which, unlike any stone monument or printed book, passes through the ashes of its own materiality into a triumphant and living glory.
Fig. 1: The frontispiece of Jonson’s 1616 Folio Works.
EUPHEME,
OR,
THE FAIRE
FAME.
LEFT TO POSTERITIE
Of that truly-noble Lady, the Lady
VENETIA DIGBY, late Wife of Sir KE-
NELME DIGBY, Knight: A Gentleman
absolute in all Numbers;

Consisting of these
Ten Pieces.
The Dedication of her CRADLE.
The Song of her DESCENT.
The Picture of her BODY.
Her MIND.
Her being chosen a MUSE.
Her faire OFFICES.
Her happie MATCH.
Her hopeful ISSNE.
Her ANOBOZIS, or Relation to the Saints.
Her Inscription, or CROWNES.

Vivam amare voluptas, defunctam Religio.
Stat.

I.
The Dedication of her CRADLE.

Faire FAME, who art ordain'd to crowne
With ever-greene, and great renowne,
Their Heads, that ENVY would hold downe
With her, in shade

Of Death, and Darkness; and deprive
Their names of being kept alive.

Fig. 2: The title page of the “Eupheme.”
CHAPTER 5:
SWAN, BONES, PYRAMID:
THE POET’S BODY AND IMMORTALITY IN CRITICAL ELEGIES
BY SPENSER, JONSON, AND MILTON

“…presently after [Spenser] dyed; and was buried at Westminster neere Chawcer, at the charges of the Earle of Essex, all Poets carrying his body to Church, and casting their dolefull Verses, and Pens too into his graue.”

Despite a twentieth-century attempt to exhume the poems that were cast into Spenser’s grave, they have never been recovered. In the gesture of throwing the “dolefull” poem and even the pen that wrote it into the grave, the written poem joins the mortal body in burial, decay, and forgetfulness. This is a showy demonstration of despair at the futility of English poetry after the demise of a great poet, but it also points us to a set of issues and questions acutely


significant even in poems not consigned to the grave. Is vernacular poetry particularly susceptible to the mutability and decay that mark the buried body? Must a poem that attends to or aligns itself with the mortal body relinquish any aspiration to lastingness? If the body is defined by its materiality and mortality, why might the poem that seeks to claim immortality be drawn toward it rather than recoiling from it? Why should poets concern themselves with the location of the body?

This chapter takes up the central place of the poet’s mortal remains in three critical elegies: Spenser’s “Ruines of Time” and Jonson’s and Milton’s elegies for Shakespeare. In the preceding chapters, I have established that for several English poets who would become canonical, persistence or what Browne in Hydriotaphia calls “diuturnity” – the ability to reach beyond the poet’s or the beloved’s death, to resist decay and perishing, to be present to posterity – was an abiding concern, one made all the more acute by the Reformation’s display of the mutability of monuments and books, the shift into the mutable vernacular, and the imitation of classical tropes such as Horace’s monumentum aere perennius.256 The poet’s own dead body becomes a locus for these concerns, at once an illustration of inexorable decay and the only material thing to possess Christ’s promise of resurrection. I have selected these three elegies for poets because each finds in another poet’s mortal body a key to considering how poetry, particularly English vernacular poetry, can participate in immortality.

256 “Diuturnity is a dream and folly of expectation.” Browne, Hydriotaphia, 136.
The problems of materiality for poetry are twofold. Lifeless matter is, on the one hand, horrifyingly mutable, susceptible to destruction, decay, and forgetfulness. Insofar as persons and poems are material, they are prey to these threats. Yet it is also, paradoxically, static and unmoving—another kind of deadness—in the absence of life-giving breath and soul. Monuments not only emblematize this aspect of materiality, but also, as in Jonson’s elegy for Lady Pawlet and Milton’s elegy for Shakespeare, threaten to infect the living with it through petrification. The dead body of the poet seems to epitomize the threats of materiality: one who once breathed and gave voice to verses now becomes merely material, lifeless and subject to decay. Yet these elegies insist upon returning to the poet’s mortal remains. Poets’ bodies, however, do not become mere emblems of dead, decaying materiality or foils for undying, immaterial verse. Instead, for Spenser, the body of Sidney becomes a Christ-like sacrifice that joins the earthly world of materiality with the Platonic, immutable heavenly one: the translation of the sacrificial body makes possible a poetry of “vital breath” that reveals divine likeness. Both Spenser and Jonson call upon the image of the poet’s body becoming a swan. The swan image brings with it a rich collection of classical intertexts dealing with ascent, transformation, and immortalization. As one might expect, Spenser’s swan is more Platonic, Jonson’s more Horatian. Jonson finds that only Shakespeare’s capacity for poetic

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257 This paradox has been identified alike by ancient philosophers and by the modern understanding of thermodynamics, which tells us that as all material things fall apart and lapse into ever-increasing disorder, what is left becomes ever more uniform, dark, and devoid of warmth and motion.
metamorphosis can rescue him from matter’s dual perils of decay and deadly fixity; only the transformation and translation of his body can make him a paradoxical “monument without a tomb.” Following both Horace and Spenser, Jonson demands that the body not be consigned to earth; only its figurative transformation and ascent to the heavens can bring the continued thriving of English poetry. For Milton, Shakespeare’s revealed bones, which seem at first to be potential sites of relic-idolatry, become reminders of resurrection even as his verse threatens to turn readers into a marble sepulchre that outdoes Egypt’s pyramids. Milton’s tribute underscores that only through lively, embodied poet-readers, readers who like Milton himself resist petrification through the faith that body’s reduction to mere material stuff is reversible through resurrection, and not through idolatrous readers who become like petrified monuments, can Shakespeare’s work endure. For all three elegists, a stony monument is wrong for a poet’s remains, because the nature of the body the monument would conceal is crucial to poetry’s confrontation with the problems of materiality. The body cannot be committed to dust, allowed to be claimed by the category of mere matter; less still can it be properly monumentalized by physical things, whether pyramids or Folios. To do either would be to turn one’s back on the body as mortal and material, and thus to despair of the possibilities of a poetic practice that both dwells in and transcends materiality. Rather, the poet’s body must be taken up and revealed, transformed, or translated in a living practice of poetry that anticipates the incorruptible body promised by resurrection. All
poetry at last depends upon the presence of mortal bodies, which show how the material can become incorruptible, but the continuing practice of vernacular poetry does so most visibly and acutely.

In examining the discourses of the body found in these lyrics, I undertake to show that alongside the development of discourses that have been amply treated in recent literary scholarship—most notably, those of bodies anatomized, of bodies as repositories of a new interiority, and of bodies as loci of various ways of thinking about gender, sexuality, and reproduction—poets drew on an understanding of the body in terms of materiality, decay, and the expectation of resurrection that was at once old and new. It was old in that its sources were scriptural and in that it was not a major subject of inter-confessional controversy during the Reformation period. Yet it was new in that the Resurrection of the Body was, in the wake of the Reformers’ rejection of Purgatory, the subject of a renewed focus in Protestant practices of mourning of the dead, including the design of funeral monuments. Moreover, I will argue that this discourse of the mortal body awaiting resurrection became the touchstone of a poetic confrontation with problems of materiality raised alike by encountering recent ruins and by contemplating Platonic philosophy, giving rise to visions of how English Christian vernacular poetry might take up and fulfill classical tropes of lyric immortality. By introducing this way of imagining the problems and possibilities of critical elegy, Spenser’s “Ruines of Time” opens up this discourse for the English elegists who come after him.
Spenser’s “Ruines of Time,” which opens the 1591 collection Complaints, elegizes both Sidney and his uncle Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester.258 The poem’s dedication to Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, acknowledges and attempts to excuse its belatedness, coming as it does after the publication of so many other elegies for Sidney. The outpouring of elegies written for Sir Philip Sidney included many in Latin, including three volumes of academic verse, but also some of the earliest funeral elegies in English; the genre had previously been practiced almost exclusively in Latin.259 The early elegies for Sidney had focused on his noble death in battle and his virtues as a soldier and a patron of the arts, with only slight attention to his poetry.260 Along with the roughly contemporary appearance of Sidney’s Arcadia (1590) and Astrophel and Stella (1591) in print, Spenser’s elegies for Sidney help to define him posthumously as an, arguably the, exemplary English poet. I wish to focus not on the development of Sidney’s reputation, which has already received illuminating scholarly treatment, but instead on how Spenser uses the figure of Sidney to


forge a vernacular poetics that hinges on the body’s transformation or translation. As Spenser confronts the question of how poets (particularly vernacular ones) can face a material world of flux so extreme that time inevitably brings to ruin even the greatest empires and cities, he finds that in the light of sacrifice and resurrection, the body paradoxically becomes the key to everlasting poetry.

“The Ruines of Time,” like Jonson’s elegy for Jane Pawlet, begins with the narrator’s encounter with a ghostly mourning woman; however, the connection between this encounter and the elegy’s main subjects, Sidney and his uncle, Robert Dudley, the first Earl of Leicester, is not immediately clear. The ghost is the spirit of the Roman city of Verlame, now entirely ruined, and her lament gives a catalogue of the passing of all the material things that seem to be grandest and most enduring: a city famed for its beauty and monuments, its theaters and sepulchres, has perished utterly, and even the course of the Thames has altered to abandon it, leaving the site marshy and deserted. Verlame recounts how the Roman Empire, despite its grandeur, fell even as did the Assyrian, Persian, and Greek. Despite the note of Protestant triumphalism (one is reminded of Hobbes’ description of the Roman Church as “the ghost of the deceased Roman empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof”), the implications for England’s national ambitions, and for the city of London, though...
not spelled out, are clear: the greatest of earthly things give way eventually to ruins and even to traceless, forgotten sites. The tomb of England’s King Edmond is included alongside those of the ancient world:

Such one Mausolus made, the worlds great wonder,
But now no remnant doth thereof remaine:
Such one Marcellus but was torne with thunder:
Such one Lisippus, but is worn with raine;
Such one King Edmond, but was rent for gaine.
All such vaine moniments of earthlie masse,
Deuour’d of Time, in time to nought doo passe (414-420).

The destruction of King Edmond’s tomb registers a certain cynicism on Spenser’s part toward Reformation iconoclasm. The tomb is a “vaine moniment of earthlie masse,” where “masse” affiliates the merely earthly and material things to the “vaine” religion of masses offered for the dead. As Richard Schell points out, “the world of Horatian monumentum is also, by Spenserian pun, moniment—an admonition,” a kind of “as I am now, so you shall be” epitaph addressed to the nations. “Let them behold the piteous Fall of me,” Verlame warns, “and in my case their own ensample see” (461-462). Despite the monument’s association with “earthlie masse,” the pretended zeal of the Reformers gives way to destructive greed, a raging force not unlike the “raine” and “thunder” that wreak


natural destruction. Even at its (re-)founding, Spenser suggests, Reformed England is plagued by human avarice that merely underscores the ephemerality of all material things. As in Shakespeare’s sonnets, Reformation iconoclasm and tomb-robbing become emblems of a larger understanding of the world captured by the classical tropes of devouring time and the inevitable decay of material monuments. The classical move, as in Horace’s *monumentum aere perennius*, is to set material monuments as a foil for the endurance of the poem. Yet the flux of Spenser’s cosmos is so dramatic, it casts an anxiety around even the poem’s likelihood of survival, and the question Verlame applies to monuments of brass and gold can likewise be applied to poems: “For how can mortall immortalitie give?” (413).264 True, Verlame also rehearses the classical boast that “wise wordes taught in numbers for to runne, / Recorded by the Muses, live for ay,” and even gives the Muses credit for various mythological apotheoses, but her voice, distinct from that of the narrator, is not only a pagan voice but a spectral one, the last, imagined trace of something almost entirely forgotten (402-403). As Michael Ullyot has recently observed, “Verlame’s testimony alone is hardly a sufficient legacy for Sidney and Leicester.”265 It is hard to know whether we should take her confidence in poetic immortality seriously.

In the section spoken by Verlame, Spenser emphasizes that all things,

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264 Spenser’s “Ruines of Rome,” published in the same volume, “begin with an opposition between the works and the city that are dead and decaying, and their fame that will live on—and they go on to demonstrate… that this opposition is untenable.” Christopher Burlinson, *Allegory, Space, and the Material World in the Writings of Edmund Spenser*, (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 158.

simply by their materiality, are subject to ruin, vanishing, and forgetfulness:

Why then dooth flesh, a bubble glas of breath,
Hunt after honour and aduancement vaine,
And reare a trophee for deuouring death,
With so great labour and long lasting paine,
As if his daies for euer should remaine?
Sith all that in this world is great or gaie,
Doth as a vapour vanish, and decaie. (50-57)

The collective actions of human beings are ascribed to the impersonal and un-individuated substance “flesh,” as if the actions described were not those of particular persons but of a kind of amorphous mass which, as a “bubble glas of breath,” only encloses a small quantity of air separate from the rest of the material world for an instant before it “doth as a vapour vanish, and decaie.” The fragility of the glassblower’s bubble reveals it as hardly more lasting than the one borne of watery foam. Yet ironically, the lust of flesh for “honour and aduancement vaine” leads to an unrecognition of this impermanence. “As if his daies for euer should remaine,” flesh exerts himself to build what turns out to be only “a trophee for devouring death.” This transformation or turning is embedded in the very etymology of “trophee,” a recent import into English: the Greek *tropaion* means “of a defeat” or “of a turning,” from the same root as *trope*, and here the battle turns against flesh and the defeat turns out to be his own. The achievements that should have been monuments to his pride are transformed into monuments to death’s power; like the “bubble glass,” what appeared to be solid and lasting turns out to be nothing more than “vapour.” Spenser thus implicitly sets up a problem for the poet: can his “great labour and long lasting
paine” generate anything more than vanishing breath? Can poetry in some way escape the fate of “all that in this world is great or gaie”?

By framing the claims for classical elegy within the Verlame section of the poem, Spenser declines to endorse wholeheartedly the proposition that Christian faith and classical notions of poetic immortality are fully compatible. The voice in this section seems to oscillate back and forth between belonging to Verlame and belonging to the narrator. For instance, we are shown a vision of a poets’ Elysium in which Sidney joins “With Orpheus, and with Linus, and the choice / Of all that ever did in rimes rejoice” (333-334). Sidney’s placement in a heavily paganized version of heaven seems to belong principally to Verlame’s voice and then, in the next stanza, he is described as being “ever song / Of us, which living loved thee afore,” now clearly in the voice of Spenser’s narrator. As above, so below: just as Sidney “Conversest, and doost hear their heavenlie layes,” so Spenser, imitating his heavenly mentor, con-verses with or ventriloquizes the fictive voice of Verlame. The departure of the ghost of Verlame thus leaves us in an uncomfortable state of *aporia*: grandiose claims have been made in a high classical mode for the literary immortality of Sidney, Leicester, and various of their relatives, but Spenser’s voice has been commingled with that of the ghost of a Roman city who, recapitulating her discourse of ephemerality, herself vanishes, leaving the narrator astonished, speechless, and afraid. He finds himself

\[
\text{... deepelie muzing at her doubtfull speach,} \\
\text{Whose meaning much I labored foorth to wreste,}
\]

\[266 \text{Spenser Encyclopedia 475.}\]
Being above my slender reasons reach;
At length by demonstration me to teach,
Before mine eies strange sights presented were,
Like tragicke Pageants seeming to appeare. (485-490)

In these “tragicke Pageants,” Spenser again underscores that materiality undermines any earthly endurance: an idol of gold falls when the altar of clay at its base erodes; a stately tower is built on sand that suddenly crumbles into dust; a garden of bliss wastes away to nothing; a giant, in his pride, slips and falls into an abyss; a golden bridge collapses; and two gentle white bears, reminiscent of the Dudley crest, are crushed in a cave-in. Each of these visions emphasizes the instability of matter as the cause of a fall into destruction. The altar, made of “brickle clay,” is “worne away” by “showres of heaven and tempests”; the tower is a victim of “terrestriall wit, / That buildes so stronglie on so frayle a soyle”; and the bears’ cave “was but earth, and with her owne weightiness / Upon them fell” (491-574). The intense grief at seeing these wonders destroyed begets a despairing kind of contempus mundi, and yet the lesson must be learned again and again, against the viewer’s stubborn tendency to delight in earthly things; “Why will hereafter anie flesh delight / In earthlie blis, and ioy in pleasures vaine?” the narrator complains after the episode of the garden, and yet the destruction of the bridge grieves him anew, and after the crushing of the bears he at last proclaims that “for great sorrow of their sudden fate, / Henceforth all wor[l]ds felicitie I hate” (574). Contrasting with these pageants are Verlame’s earlier claims that poetry grants undying fame. This juxtaposition raises the question of “whether poetry can constitute a lasting monument, can itself ever be
anything but an earthly vanity.”\footnote{Hassan Melehy, “Antiquities of Britain: Spenser’s Ruines of Time,” Studies in Philology 102 (2005), 159-183.} As Richard Danson Brown has observed, the first six visions appear to show that “all mortal works of art, whether these take the form of poetic gardens or golden bridges, are ‘brickle’… and made in vain,” but this view is called into question, not only by the claims for poetic immortality in the Verlame section, but also by a second set of six visions focusing on the sacrificial death and body of Sidney.\footnote{Richard Danson Brown, ‘The New Poet’: Novelty and Tradition in Spenser’s Complaints (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999), 127.}

Critics have generally agreed that Spenser's aim in "The Ruines of Time" is to point the way toward a new English poetics, one defined both by and against his overwhelming sense of the vanity and ephemerality of all earthly things, and that his claiming of Sidney as forebear is somehow important to this project. Hassan Melehy, for example, argues that “Spenser moves toward a future of English poetry that … is built on the funeral monuments of certain English knights – in particular the poet-knight Sidney.”\footnote{Melehy 160.} Brown suggests that Spenser seeks to reconcile a tension between “the literary immortality offered by humanist poetry” and “the apocalyptic world-contempt of Protestantism” by uniting poetry, with its classical claims to beget immortal fame, with Christianity in “the mythologised figure of the redeemed Sidney.”\footnote{Brown 161.} I wish to expand on these insights by examining how and why Spenser imagines the remains of the
dead Sidney. I seek to show that Spenser makes a considered decision to establish his new English poetics in funeral elegy, a genre concerned with immortality because it is predicated on death as an occasion that brings home to us the split between soul and body, the material and spiritual, that which perishes and that which endures. Although rife with images of the perishing of all material things (which owe as much to classical tropes and Platonism as to Christian visions of apocalypse), this doleful contempt of mutable and earthly things does not extend to Sidney’s body. Rather, Sidney is described as offering his body to God as a “spotless sacrifice” for his country, thus transforming it from a “fleshly gaole” into something inexpressibly precious:

Yet ere his happe soule to heaven went
Out of this fleshlie gaole, he did devise
Vnto his heuenlie maker to present
His bodie, as a spotles sacrifise;
And chose, that guiltie hands of enemies
Should powre forth th’offring of his guiltles blood:
So life exchanging for his countries good. (296-301)

... 

Yet whilst the fates afford me vitall breath,
I will it spend in speaking of thy praise,
And sing to thee, untill that timelie death
By heavens doome doo ende my earthlie daies:
Thereto do thou my humble spirite raise,
And into me that sacred breath inspire
Which thou there breathest perfect and entire. (309-315)

The body as “gaole” from which the soul is set free is associated with flesh—both the dragging-down of sin in a Pauline sense and the unstable material stuff that is hardly more than a vain, amorphous bubble. This image of body as prison may
owe something, too, to some versions of Neo-Platonism, with their emphasis on the immortal soul’s desire to be liberated from the material body. Yet Sidney, through conformity to Christ, becomes able to “present / His bodie, as a spotles sacrifice.” The verb applied to this action is “devis,” a word which, though it here means primarily “to ‘contrive’ successfully; to achieve, accomplish, ‘manage’” (the OED’s 8th definition), Spenser uses in The Faerie Queene to mean “represent by art” — and that which is represented is “that deare Crosse.”

Where elsewhere in the poem images of fluidity bring to mind the terrible impermanence of matter, here the intentional pouring out of Sidney’s guiltless blood, an act in which he puts on the form of Christ, allows him to step out of a narrative of the wasting of nations and empires in a world of inexorable flux and into one of participation in heavenly things, such that his life is given not for his country’s survival or worldly exaltation or pride, but for her good: that is, for her participation in the Good which belongs to God alone, even as Sidney himself enters into “a better country; that is, an heavenly” (Hebrews 11). The trophy, trope, turn in which the victories of ancient empires became the victories of devouring death is re-turned back on itself in Sidney’s identification with Christ’s Incarnation and sacrifice, through which Death is swallowed up in victory. As in Christ’s death, what looks like utter defeat is revealed to be not an ignoble matter of killing and being killed, but a pure and voluntary sacrifice.

This sacrifice differentiates (another meaning of ‘devise,’ OED 1a) between

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271 II.I. Sig N3v, quoted in OED 8.
the mere bubbling flesh (sarx) and the body (sōma). In contrast to the breath contained only for an instant in “flesh, a bubble glas of breath,” Spenser now, calling upon Sidney’s spirit, lays claim to “vitall breath… Which thou there breathest perfect and entire,” a poetic sacrifice of praise that participates in the “spotless sacrifice” of Sidney’s body, which is not a temporary bubble of flesh but a participation in the sacrificial form of the body of Christ. Death is “timelie,” the proper action and work of Time; “daies” are “earthlie,” belonging to the temporal and material fabric of finite creation, yet Sidney is so thoroughly assimilated to Christ that Spenser invokes him to “my humble spirite raise, / And into me that sacred breath inspire.” The heavenly Sidney is no less “perfect and entire” than he will be at the resurrection, yet the sacrifice of his body as image of the incarnate Christ is crucial to the possibility of poetry as the breathing of a “vitall” and “sacred” spirit of praise even in and through the world of mutable flesh and matter. In a world characterized by fleshly decay and transience, the body-as-sacrifice becomes not an instance of this mutability, but a crucial link to the heavenly world, literally inspiring the practice of poetry. And as in Sidney’s Defense, such poetry itself becomes vital to the “country’s good.”

This reading of Spenser’s framing of Sidney’s body as living sacrifice accords and draws upon a good deal of recent scholarship on English Protestant imaginings of martyrs as living sacrifices becoming images or imitations of Christ. In Donald Kelley’s often-quoted phrase, martyrdom by violence was

272 See 1 Cor 15:44-47.
understood as “a form of mimesis—imitatio Christi with a vengeance,” and though we may see Sidney the military leader as less like Christ than those executed for their faith, Spenser portrays his sacrifice in a similar fashion.273 Susannah Monta reads the title page of Foxe’s 1583 Actes and Monuments as showing how “the sacrifice of the martyrs’ flesh replaces the Mass’s central miracle”; in the former, bread and wine are replaced by the body and blood of Christ, while in the latter, the mortification of stubbornly material flesh transforms body into a living image of Christ’s sacrifice.274 Jennifer Waldron has shown how, drawing on Paul’s epistle to the Romans, “reformers insisted that the human body and the human heart were temples fit for various kinds of ‘lively’ sacrifice,” contrasting the human body as “lively” image of God with dead relics and idols made with hands and the body as “lively” sacrifice with the false, dead, and repetitious “sacrifice” of the Mass.275 She argues that “while Foxe’s extensive use of woodcuts of scenes of martyrdom was distinctive in England, the theological underpinnings of his views of the body were not: as both a lively image and a site for lively sacrifice, the body was central to the Reformation reorientation of the sacred to new sites within the world.”276


276 Waldron 7.
Drawing on Monta’s work, Jennifer Rust suggests that in Foxe’s images, “the martyrs themselves become the sacrifice, the true *imitatio Christi,*” thus generating “a reformed English *corpus mysticum*” which sacramentally links the national community dwelling in the material and temporal world with the eternal.\(^{277}\)

Nandra Perry has linked the embrace of *imitatio Christi* piety in Reformation England with broader Renaissance practices of imitation (for instance, of classical texts), describing *imitatio* as “a technique for constructing original, but … meaningful, systems of signification from the remnants of an authoritative but irrecoverable past” and even, in Sidney’s poetics, capable of “bridging the gap between the imperfect natural world and the world of Forms.”\(^{278}\) In “The Ruines of Time,” we see Spenser’s acute sense of the past’s irrecoverability and of access to such a Platonic sphere as the only remedy for the world’s decay. In Sidney’s *Defense,* Perry argues, the “poet’s ‘golden’ world figures forth his or her ‘idea’ or ‘fore-conceit’, which is, in turn, an image of humanity’s original creation in the image of God.” Poetic imitation becomes “ultimately about bodies” – particularly bodies like that of Lucretia, which through bloody death paradoxically lays claim to integrity in a kind of proto-martyrdom. After his death, Sidney becomes “his own best Lucretia,” his

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\(^{278}\) Nandra Perry, “*Imitatio* and Identity: Thomas Rogers, Philip Sidney, and the Protestant Self,” *ELR* 35 (2005), 365-406.
“literary legacy” marked by “contingency on the catalyzing and stabilizing power of Sidney’s ‘martyred’ corpse,” the incarnate image of his “personal imitatio Christi.” This is, according to Perry, a singular moment: “Never again in early modern England would a dead body have such authorizing power.”

This view of the martyred Sidney as likeness of Christ, I believe, informs Spenser’s “Ruines of Time,” in which Sidney’s sacrificial body becomes central to the way poetic images or likenesses link the earthly, material world with the eternal one.

The speaker’s second set of six visions, which make up the last part of Spenser’s poem, each give a variation on the theme of translation from the material world into the heavens. Looking closely at each vision, I will show how Spenser’s idea of a poetry that can account for and transcend the sure perishing that clings to materiality hinges upon repeated images of Sidney’s sacrificial death and of his body.

On this reading, the poem’s treatment of the body as the key to the problem of material perishability leads me to conclude that critics have been wrong to see Spenser’s ambition to eternize through praise and his glimpses of apocalypse (however long delayed) as ultimately opposed. Watkins, for example, reads “The Ruines of Time” as dabbling in a prophetic or apocalyptic mode, from which Spenser draws back because it is incompatible with his laureate ambition:

Poets in the Virgilian tradition fetishize their own artistry in ways that are incompatible with millenarian prophecy. The imminent collapse of time

into eternity, … would render meaningless the laureate’s celebration of a particular temporal order. Spenser needs to convince his patrons and readers that future generations will admire his work. He is committed far less to preparing his audience for the end of the world than to producing what they will honor as an enduring literary monument. He draws back from apocalypse in part because his poetic achievement depends on the judgment of future readers.  

I think that the reader is meant to come away from “The Ruines of Time” with a strong sense—one the narrator himself develops only through the devastatingly repeated experience of loss and suffering—that literary endurance is not threatened by apocalypse, per se, any more than by the radically temporary and contingent nature of material existence. For Spenser, if a laureate poet is to celebrate the fame or glories of a particular earthly person, city, or nation, such a celebration can only resist time’s destructive power through a participation in what we might call an ascent that anticipates apocalypse, which is imagined more as a moment of contact between time and eternity than a soon-to-take place event, a kind of translation out of our fragile “particular temporal order.” This is why, as I will discuss, the poem juxtaposes images of the dying and dead Sidney with that of the final summoning of the Church as Bride. To participate, through poetry, in such translations is the work of the true laureate. Watkins suggests (rather like most recent critics of Shakespeare and Donne) that poets boasted of creating enduring verses as a kind of literary parlor trick meant to impress their

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contemporaries through the skillful rehearsal of old tropes, but in “The Ruines of Time” especially, it is hard to ignore the acute sense that those very contemporaries live daily under the threat, not just of mortality, but of what Spenser calls in the dedication “silence and forgetfulness” unless they are rescued by the “eternizing” action of poetry. There is an argument to be made, and Ullyot in fact makes it, that the whole pageant of decay is an elaborate sales pitch for eternity insurance, with patronage as the premium, but if, as Watkins suggests, Spenser does not want his readers to think about apocalypse, what are the Bride and Bridegroom of Revelation doing onstage? Spenser’s repeated insistence that endurance is impossible within the bounds of the material world, and possible only beyond it, should make us doubt that the “eternizing” action he attributes to poetry is just a figure of speech meaning earthly endurance for a long time. I think it is clear that Spenser understands and anticipates the kind of historical vagaries that might lead to a poet’s being read mostly by scholarly critics who describe his verses as efforts to become fashionable among elite readers now reduced to dust. While he is acutely aware of the constraints of matter (including, as Ullyot argues, the matter provided to poets by history and the material support granted by wealthy patrons), he is also very clear that his poetic achievement depends only secondarily on the judgment of either future readers or present ones. The images of ascent and apotheosis in the second six visions of “The Ruines of Time” leave no doubt that his poetic achievement
depends first on his poems’ ability to assimilate themselves, by likeness and sacrifice, to that which is eternal.

In the first vision of the second six, we encounter a “snowie Swan of heavenlie hiew” who “sweetly sung the prophecie / Of his owne death in dolefull Elegie.” Once he has finished singing, he “out of sight to highest heaven mounted / Where now he is become an heauenly signe / There now the Joy is his, here Sorrow mine” (589-603). The association of the swan with the poet-singer who mourns and ascends to the heavens goes back to Plato. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates says

> you seem to think I am inferior in prophetic power to the swans who sing at other times also, but when they feel that they are to die, sing most and best in their joy that they are to go to the god whose servants they are. But men, because of their own fear of death, misrepresent the swans and say that they sing for sorrow, in mourning for their own death. They do not consider that no bird sings when it is hungry or cold or has any other trouble; no, not even the nightingale or the swallow or the hoopoe which are said to sing in lamentation. I do not believe they sing for grief, nor do the swans; but since they are Apollo's birds, I believe they have prophetic vision, and because they have foreknowledge of the blessings in the other world they sing and rejoice on that day more than ever before. And I think that I am myself a fellow-servant of the swans; and am consecrated to the same god and have received from our master a gift of

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prophecy no whit inferior to theirs, and that I go out from life with as little sorrow as they.\textsuperscript{282}

Spenser is invoking this Platonic controversy over the swan’s song: it is acknowledged that swans sing prophetically before their deaths, but is this self-elegizing song one of mourning or of exceeding joy? No bird sings because of hardship, Plato’s Socrates says, but only in anticipation of joy in the “other world.” Sidney, like Socrates and the swan, goes “out from life” with what seems to the speaker to be a “doleful Elegy” but in truth heralds his advent into joy, into a world where sorrow cannot touch him. The grieving speaker is like Socrates’ interlocutors, who “because of their own fear of death” say the swans sing for sorrow, but by the end of the vision he is converted to the Socratic position, realizing that “the joy is his.” Spenser thus, as I will endeavor to show, begins to engage one of the Platonic criticisms of poetry, that it leads men to fear death; this criticism will be addressed further in the coming visions. Thus, according to Spenser, true elegy is a genre of mourning only insofar as it is shaped by our misunderstanding of what lies before us or stems from our grief at being left behind in the world of sorrow from which all noble and good things pass into heaven.

\textsuperscript{282} \textit{Phaedo} 84e-85b, trans. Fowler. Plato also links the swan with Orpheus, who in the myth of Er chooses, having being dismembered by women, to be reincarnated in the form of a swan rather than be born again as a woman (\textit{Republic} X.620a). According to the biographer Diogenes Laertius, Socrates in a dream saw a cygnet on his knees, which all at once put forth plumage, and flew away after uttering a loud sweet note. And the next day Plato was introduced as a pupil, and thereupon he recognized in him the swan of his dream” \textit{Lives of Eminent Philosophers}, trans. and ed. R.D. Hicks (1972), Perseus Digital Library.
Taking up the Platonic strain, “Virgil, Ovid, Horace, [and] Martial with all the Poets do constantly affirm” that swans “before their death do sing,” as William Vallans wrote in the preface to his 1590 poem *A Tale of Two Swannes.*

In Ovid and Virgil, the mythological Cygnus or Cynclus is transformed into a swan as he sings in mourning of the death of Phaëthon, and, in Virgil’s description, “left the earth and singing sought the stars.” Geffrey Whitney’s 1586 *Choice of Emblems*, displaying an image of a swan under the title *Insignia Poetarum*, links the swan’s foretelling of its death with the “lasting name” gained by poets:

> But Phoebus sacred birde, let Poettes moste commende Who, as it were by skill devine, with songe forshowes his ende. And as his tune delights: for rarenes of the same, So they with sweetenes of theire verse, shoulde winne a lasting name.

Spenser’s image of the swan not only gives us Sidney as the prophetic poet who sings his own elegy, but also suggests that the one who mourns, through his elegiac song, can participate or be transformed into one who can move from the earthly to the stellar realm. This vision thus brings together the image of Sidney as Platonic swan-poet with the possibility that Spenser’s song of mourning for Sidney may transform him, like Cygnus, into one able to ascend from the world of grief into the heavens. In Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, swans rescue from

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283 *A tale of two swannes VVherein is comprehended the original and increase of the ruer Lee commonly called Ware-riuer: together, with the antiquitie of sundrie places and townes seate upon the same* (London: Roger Ward, 1590), quoted in Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, *Dire Straights: The Perils of Writing the Early Modern English Coastline from Leland to Milton* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2013), 113.

284 *Aeneid*, quoted in Youens 22.

forgetfulness threads representing human lives that a personified Time casts into the river Lethe. The swans represent the few “Historians learnd and Poets rare” who bring these lives into a shrine that symbolizes immortality. The significance of the allegory is explained within Ariosto’s text by Saint John the Evangelist, doubtless regarded as skilled in understanding allegory because of his Apocalypse.

This vision and the ones that follow show clear marks of being a tribute to Sidney’s Defense. Sidney argues that though Plato is best known as taking the side of philosophy against poetry and for his expulsion of the poets from his Republic, nevertheless careful readers should recognize Plato’s relation to poetry as more nuanced and indeed, recognize Plato himself as a practitioner of “the flowers of poesie” and as “the most poetical” of “all philosophers.” Whoever is incapable of recognizing this, he says, “did never walk into Appollos garden.” “With the force of a divine breath” poetry “bringeth things foorth surpassing [Nature’s] doings,” for (he famously writes) our “erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected wil keepeth us from reaching unto it.”

According to Book X of Plato’s Republic, the human intellect is able to apprehend the perfection of the world of forms, but the representations made by the poets

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286 Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, 35.20.5-6; 22.3-4; 22.5-6, quoted in Michael Ullyot, “Spenser and the Matter of Poetry,” Spenser Studies 27 (2012): 90, to whom I am indebted for recognizing the connection between this episode and Spenser’s Complaints.


288 Sidney is ambivalent on the question of poetry’s divine inspiration; elsewhere he says that Plato ascribed divine inspiration to poetry while he himself does not.
are only shadows of shadows, even less like the forms than the things of the material world. Sidney, on the other hand, suggests that if inspired by “divine breath,” the poet can translate this apprehension of the heavenly forms into poetry, such that the poetic hero (for instance) comes closer to the ideal than any real, living person generated by Nature.

The relation of “The Ruines of Time” to this set of arguments is complex. Spenser is clearly following Sidney’s optimism about the poet’s capacity, via “divine breath,” to approach the eternal ideal more closely than anything one encounters in the world of sensible, material things. He is also, however, giving us a poetry anchored to the sacrificial death of a real person of the world of Nature—Sidney himself. Sidney is, however, likened both by his own action of self-sacrifice and by Spenser’s poetic action of likening to Christ, and as such no longer belongs entirely to Nature. The chief reason for the expulsion of the poets from Plato’s ideal city is that they instill in men an unreasoning grief over death—even the deaths of fictive heroes—and thus a vicious fear of death. The passages that Socrates in Book 3 proposes to “obliterate” from the works of Homer contain visions of disembodied ghosts and spirits of the dead that will cause fear of death.289 Compare one such Homeric passage quoted by Socrates with Spenser’s account of the departure of the ghost of Verlame:

And the soul, with shrilling cry, passed like smoke beneath the earth290

289 Plato, Republic 386c-387c.

With doleful shrikes shee vanished away,
That I through inward sorrowe wexen faint,
And all astonished with deepe dismay
For her departure, had no word to say:
But sate long time in senseless sad affright… (471-475)

Thus, like Plato’s reader of Homer, Spenser’s narrator is left by the shrieking
ghost in a condition of confusion, speechlessness, and fear. This fear of death is,
for Plato, the vice most harmful to the citizen, and the concomitant
speechlessness, as we have seen in Jonson’s encounter with the ghost of Lady
Pawlet, threatens to be fatal to the poet’s ability. The noblest virtue for the
Platonic polity, on the other hand, is the belief that death is not to be feared. And
what does Sidney’s death and the translation of even his body into the
unchanging realm of heaven show us but this, which even the swans know? As
Socrates advocates, Spenser resolves that “another, and nobler strain must be
composed and sung by us” so that men may “not sorrow for [their] departed
friend as though he had suffered anything terrible.”291 This, for Spenser, is the
work of the laureate: not merely to praise an earthly England that must pass
away, but, through a Christian and Platonic poetry that shows us self-sacrificial
death is not to be feared, to make the England that is passing away as much as
possible a likeness of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem.292


292 One is reminded of the resemblance between Cleopolis and the “new Hierusalem” in
The Faerie Queene:

Yet is Cleopolis for earthly frame,
The fairest preece, that eye beholden can:
Spenser’s second vision of ascent identifies Sidney with the slain Orpheus, whose lyre ascends to become the constellation Lyra. Brown sees Spenser using Orpheus as a pagan forerunner of Christ’s descent into hell to rescue his bride, the Church. The *Reductorium Morale* of Petrus Berchorius, the fourteenth-century Benedictine writer best known for his Christianizations of classical myth in the *Ovidius Moralizatus*, describes Orpheus as a figure of “Christ the son of God the Father, who from the beginning led Eurydice, that is the human soul.” He writes that “Christ-Orpheus wished to descend to the lower world, and thus he retook his wife, that is, human nature, ripping her from the hands of the ruler of Hell himself; and he led her with him to the upper world, saying this verse from Canticles 2.10, ‘Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.’” Spenser invokes the same passage from the Songs of Songs in his fourth vision. The figure of Orpheus was identified not only as a type of Christ, but also with (Neo-)Platonic wisdom: Ficino, for instance, was known for performing Orphic hymns on a lyre, and his contemporary Angelo Poliziano wrote that “his lyre ... far more successful than the lyre of Thracian Orpheus, has brought back from the underworld what is, if I am not mistaken, the true Eurydice, that is Platonic...

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And well beseesmes all knights of noble name,  
That couet in th’immortall booke of fame  
To be ertainized… (X.59.2-6)  

While Cleopolis is not the New Jerusalem and should not be conflated with it, it is in the deferral of apocalypse (without which there could be no narrative, whether romance or epic) perhaps its best likeness or reminder, the “fairest peece, that eye beholden can” while we see through the dark glas of the “earthly” world.

wisdom.” The constellation Lyra that “whilome seemed to be” that of Orpheus is revealed to be that of Sidney, which has been brought out of a river suggesting the flux of the material world (as we saw earlier in the poem with the Thames’ shift in course).

And borne above the clouds to be divin’d
Whilst all the way most heavenly noyse was heard
Of the strings, stirred with the warbling wind
That wroght both joy and sorrow in my mind.

Whereas in the previous verse, the “joy” belongs to Sidney and the “sorrow” to the speaker, now the “heavenly noyse” of Phillisides’ harp gives rise to a commingling of joy and sorrow. The experience of poetry’s music thus aids in bringing the speaker nearer to experiencing the heavenly joy tasted by Sidney; the “warbling wind” is reminiscent of the spiritual breath Sidney’s sacrifice affords him. Some versions of the myth couple the lyre with the dismembered body: according to the account of Phanocles, the severed head of Orpheus was


295 John Block Friedman notes that in Neo-Platonic thought, “the soul, attuned to the music of the spheres from which it had descended, was believed to respond instinctively to the harmony of the lyre. ... In a gloss on *Aeneid* VI. 119, published from B.N. Lat 7930 by J.J. Savage, there is a reference to a lost work ascribed to Orpheus and called *Lyra*, in which ‘it is denied that the soul can ascent without a lyre.’ ... Aristides Quintilianus, a musical theorist of the fourth century..., explained that ‘instruments made of tuned strings, are somewhat similar to the ethereal, dry, and simple part of the cosmos and to the soul itself.’ ... The lyre was, therefore, an enemy of the lower realms of earth and water.” Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2000), 80-81. In *De Re Publica* VI, Cicero wrote that the “inspired bards reproduce this celestial strain on stringed instruments and thus pave the way for their own return to this place [i.e., the celestial sphere].” *Somnia Scipionis*, Trans. James A. Kleist (New York: Schwartz, 1915).
fastened to his lyre with a nail before being cast into the sea. Though Spenser does not draw directly upon this fastening of the body to the poet’s instrument, he follows the ascent of the lyre with the translation of Sidney’s body into heaven.

Between the image of the stellification of Orpheus’ harp and its Christian fulfillment in the calling of the Bride by the Bridegroom, there is another vision, the most mysterious. In this third vision, a coffer of “heben wood” is nearly lost in a flood, but at the last moment, it is rescued by angels and “transformed into that starre / in which all heavenly treasures locked are.” Spenser tells us plainly that this coffer is “curious” — that it is an image carefully wrought, which the reader can expect to repay careful study. The coffer has usually, and I think correctly, been glossed as either or both of Sidney’s casket and his ship, the Black Pinnace, which carried Sidney’s body back to England for burial. The black of the ebony wood would be consistent either with mourning or with the ship’s name. Its contents are called a “most precious treasure … Exceeding all this baser worldes good,” and we are told in the Envoy that Sidney’s spirit “whilome wast the worlds chiefst riches,” strengthening the association between Sidney and the contents of the heben coffer.

The first and second visions are clearly known constellations, Cygnus and Lyra respectively, but the stellar identification of the third vision is less obvious. The most likely possibility is the constellation Argo Navis, Jason’s ship which

296 Friedman 9.
held the Golden Fleece, then the world’s most precious treasure, and which was translated into the heavens by the god Poseidon. This overdetermined, ambiguous description suggests an analogy between the Argo carrying the Golden Fleece, which was the physical remnant left behind after the sacrifice of a winged ram begotten by the god Poseidon, and, on the other hand, the Black Pinnace carrying Sidney’s body, itself the material remnant of a sacrifice. The statement that all “heavenly treasures” are “locked” within this star recalls Jesus’ warning the faithful not to lay up treasures on earth “where thieves break in and steal, and moth and rust destroy,” but rather to lay up treasures in heaven.297 The rescue from the waters echoes the biblical Noah’s ark, and interestingly, all three of the visions up to this point have involved something raised from a watery world into a heavenly one (an idea which will surface again in the fifth vision, where Sidney is identified with Perseus, who was cast into the sea in a chest by his mother Danaë). Interestingly, the OED’s first three definitions of “coffer” are a treasure-box, an ark (including Noah’s ark and the ark of the covenant), and a coffin, and the image of a precious “ark” that contains Sidney’s remains appears again in the sixth vision. To be lost at sea would symbolically subject the body to utter assimilation to the epitome of the material world’s fluidity and endless flux,

297 Mt. 6:20.
the chaos which, according to Revelation, will come to an end: “and there was no more sea.”

In the *Statesman*, Plato likens the world to a ship that is almost swamped by the sea of disorder:

> [T]he world went on its own accustomed course in orderly fashion, exercising care and rule over itself and all within itself, and remembering and practising the teachings of the Creator and Father to the extent of its power, at first more accurately and at last more carelessly; and the reason for this was the material element in its composition, because this element was infected with great disorder before the attainment of the existing orderly universe. For from its Composer the universe has received only good things; but it retains in itself and creates in the animals all the elements of harshness and injustice... Now as long as the world was nurturing the animals within itself under the guidance of the Pilot, it produced little evil and great good; but in becoming separated from him ... as time went on and it grew forgetful, the ancient condition of disorder prevailed more and more and towards the end of the time reached its height, and the universe, mingling but little good with much of the opposite sort, was in danger of destruction for itself and those within it. Therefore at that moment God, who made the order of the universe, perceived that it was in dire trouble, and fearing that it might founder in the tempest of confusion and sink in the boundless sea of diversity [unlikeness], he took again his place as its helmsman, reversed whatever had become unsound and

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298 Rev. 21:1. In *The Faerie Queene*, the shape-changing sea god Proteus also links the sea with the mutability of the matter (III.iv.25-37; III.viii.29-42; IV.xi-xii). “Proteus was anciently regarded as primal matter... [His] cave and dungeon may be seen, then, as the abyss of first matter...; his love for Florimell is the desire of matter for form, and Florimell is the Neo-Platonic principle of beauty, or the soul, trapped and obscured by matter.” *Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1990), 561.
unsettled..., set the world in order, restored it and made it immortal and ageless.299

It is easy to see how this passage would appeal to a Christian reader and present appealing parallels with the salvation-historical nexus of Noah’s flood, Christ’s redemption, and the completion of that redemption at the eschaton. So too the parallels between Plato’s ship and Spenser’s are readily evident — so evident, in fact, that we might be tempted to abandon the association of the coffer with the Black Pinnace and read it as a purely Platonic ship. By forging an identification between Plato’s cosmos-ship, saved at the last moment from the ‘boundless sea of unlikeness’ by its divine Pilot, and Sidney’s ship carrying his body back to England for burial, Spenser directly connects the poet with the process by which God has, does, or will “set the world in order, restore it, and [make] it immortal and ageless.” This connection is made, as I have argued, by Sidney’s body as Christlike sacrifice, which “exceed[s] all this baser Worldes good,” but it also involves the poet’s capacity to turn back the tide of unlikeness by making likenesses. Indeed, each of Spenser’s visions is an act of likeness-making deriving from the “vital breath” or, in Platonic terms, the divine ordering of the universe according to the Good, as illustrated and empowered by the translation of Sidney’s body.

The Platonic notion of the “boundless sea of unlikeness” has a rich history in Christian thought. Borrowed first by Plotinus, then by Augustine as the “regio dissimilitudinis,” it became for him and his heirs the space in which sinful

humankind wanders away and estranges itself from the divine likeness, the
imago Dei.300 The original Greek text having become available, Spenser restores
the Platonic image of a sea or “Flood” that, “overflowing,” threatens to
overwhelm the boundaries that order creation “that almost drowned was, and
done to naught.” But it would be, I think, wrong to assume that he simply rejects
the trope’s medieval development in favor of a direct return to the Platonic text.
In his famous exegesis of the Song of Songs, Bernard of Clairvaux considers the
question of how the Bride can be said to be beautiful like the curtains of
Solomon—a consideration that is broken off for a time by his almost excessive
grief at the death of his beloved friend, Gerard.301 Turning back to his initial

300 In some texts, “topon appears in place of ponton, producing, in place of “ocean,” a
“region of unlikeness.” Étienne Gilson, “Regio dissimilitudinis de Platon à Saint Bernard de
Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007), 57. This is the terminology
adopted by Plotinus and, in the absence of access to original text of the Statesman in Western
Europe, by subsequent Christian writers. Andrew Louth, The Origins of the Christian Mystical
Neoplatonic origins underlying the later development of the region dissimilitudinis have been
recognized by Etienne Gilson who attributes the widespread popularity of the topos in the later
Middle Ages to Bernard of Clairvaux.” Sally Mussetter, “Dante’s Three Beasts and the Imago
‘Trinitatis,’” Dante Studies 95 (1977), 41.

301 Would Spenser have read Bernard? A copy of the Opera Omnia of Bernard of
Clairvaux, printed at Paris in 1547, is in the inventory of Pembroke College, Cambridge, where
Spenser matriculated in 1559. H. M. Adams, Catalogue of Books Printed on the Continent of Europe,
1501-1600 in Cambridge Libraries (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967), 114. This particular copy is
not listed in E.S. Leedham-Green’s inventory of books willed to Cambridge colleges, so we do not
know when Pembroke acquired it; however, Leedham-Green does record twenty-two copies of
books by Bernard of Clairvaux given to Cambridge libraries between 1545 and 1559, and Adams
records twenty-seven separate 16th-century printings of works by Bernard, many of which had
copies present in multiple colleges. Leedham-Green, Books in Cambridge Inventories: Book-Lists from
Vice-Chancellor’s Court Probate Inventories in the Tudor and Stuart Periods (Cambridge: Cambridge
UP, 1996). Moreover, Spenser also had ample opportunity to be exposed to Bernard’s ideas
secondhand or via quotation: Calvin, for instance, often quotes Bernard approvingly in his
Institutes, and the Sermons on the Canticles are the work he quotes most often. Dennis E.
Tamburello, Union with Christ: Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard, (Louisville, KY:
question, Bernard considers this likeness in a long discourse that defies straightforward summary. He says of the Bride, which is at once the soul, the Church, and the New Jerusalem, “What can be a clearer sign of her heavenly origin than that she retains a natural likeness to it in the land of unlikeness?” For Bernard, the wonder of scripture comes from its likenesses: because the Psalms liken the heavens to a curtain, thus the curtains of the Temple are reciprocally like a heaven spangled with stars, and thus the Bride is like the heavens; yet even the heavens, because they are physical and will pass away, pale in comparison to the spiritual loveliness of the Bride, which is “something that is grasped by the intellect; … an image of eternity.” The visible heavens are only a likeness of the supernatural heaven, “the world of the intellect and the spirit,” and “[y]ou must not suppose that the bride's affections can find rest outside of this heaven, where she knows her Beloved dwells: for where her treasure is, there her heart is also.” The almost ecstatic understanding of the exegete comes in apprehending the great web of likenesses woven through scripture that, in their sublime poetry, contain only dim reflections of the “heaven of heavens,” in which each blessed soul shines more radiantly than the whole material sky full of stars. The Bride is also identified with Christ’s incarnational body, through which “he endowed a multitude of earthly followers with his own heavenly image. As Scripture says: ‘the heavenly Man is the pattern of all the heavenly.’ From that time the lives of

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many on earth have been like the lives of heaven's citizens.” “The Ruines of Time” says of the “goodly” Bride that “a fairer wight saw never summers day”: the conventional hyperbole hints that her beauty is in fact beyond that of all material and sensible things (636-637). Spenser, in moving from the rescue of the ship (coffer, coffin, treasure chest) from the Platonic “overflowing of the Flood” of unlikeness to the fourth vision’s image of the Bride summoned by the Heavenly Bridegroom, draws on Bernard’s ideas in order to assimilate his practice of poetic likeness-making to the procession of order from God into the world by means of likeness: the creation of humans in the image of God, the adoption of human form in the Incarnation, the resulting ability for Sidney’s life and sacrifice to be patterned after Christ’s, and the way in which the poetic likenesses of the scriptural text—and, by likeness to scripture, the poetic one—draw our attention out of the sensible world, “[a]bove the reach of anie living sight” and toward “that starre, / In which all heavenly treasures locked are” (628-630). Like Bernard, he is lifted out of his “inly grieving” by a rapture of heavenly likeness.

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303 I can do justice to James Nohrnberg’s illuminating exegesis of the patristic contexts for these themes in *The Faerie Queene* only by quoting at length: “When Una awakens and rises from her bower to look for her knight (I.ii.7), she resembles the seeking and forsaken bride of the Song of Songs. … The Glossa quotes Jerome (?), who says that the soul has an appetite to see God; Bernard of Clairveaux says that it asks after the Word. Alanus understands in the bride’s quest Mary Magdalen’s visit to Christ’s tomb, an interpretation rather older than its appearance in Cyril of Jerusalem. The bride’s accents are accordingly heard in the medieval homily on Mary Magdalen attributed to Origen and translated into English in 1565. Gregory explains that ‘in Holy Writ a ‘bed,’ a ‘couch,’ a ‘litter,’ is usually take for the secret depth of the heart’: ‘For it is hence under the likeness of each separate soul, the Spouse, urged by the piercing darts of holy love, says in the Song of Songs, By night on my bed I sought him, whom my soul loveth. For ‘by night and on the bed is the beloved sought,’ in that the appearance of the Invisible Creatour, apart from every image of a bodily appearing, is in found in the chamber of the heart.’ ” In n268 on
Thus, by reading through Bernard we can see the link at the center of the second pageant of visions: from the ocean of unlikeness to the bed of the Bride. Spenser’s vision of the bed connects several scriptural loci: the summoning of the beloved in the Song of Songs; gospel references to Christ as the Bridegroom, especially the parable of the wise and foolish virgins; and the image of the Church as the waiting Bride in the Book of Revelation. While Revelation shows the Church-as-Bride calling for the return of Christ, Spenser’s calling up of the sleeping Bride by the Bridegroom evokes the text of the Song of Songs, the focus of Bernard’s exegesis. Like the other visions, this one shows something precious brought from earth into heaven, but it specifically underscores that any such translation— including those in which poetry plays a part—anticipates the eschaton. By recalling the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, in which the wise virgins fall asleep while awaiting the bridegroom and yet have prepared themselves with enough oil in their lamps to be ready when he finally arrives, this vision suggests that grief over the world’s vanity and longing for heaven provide the readiness one must sustain for one’s own end, whether soon or late. At the same time, the nuptial and apocalyptic resonances remind us that

the same page, Nohrnberg also quotes St. Bernard’s *Jubilus Rhythmicus, De Nomine Jesu*: “I ask for Jesus on my bed, in the closed room of my heart…; with Mary at dawn I ask for Jesus at the tomb; … I ask with my mind, not my eye.” These patristic texts show an understanding of the bed as precisely the poetic image that points toward the soul’s desire to move beyond image, likeness, and appearance and— not coincidentally — as the type of the tomb where Christ lies, is sought by Mary Magdalene, and is not found, because he is risen. Seeking the body that rises from the bed or tomb is also implicitly likened to the seeking of the exegete who longs for the truths behind the images and likenesses of the poetic text. Nohrnberg suggests that Spenser’s Una taps into this set of patristic and scriptural resonances. James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 209.
although the Bride is often understood to signify the soul, bodies will ultimately enter heaven as well. In concert with the other visions, this one highlights the purpose of Spenser’s Christian elegy: to cultivate the particular kind of grief that begets not just contempt for the always-vanishing things of the material world, but also and especially longing for Christ’s coming and the world above. The inclusion of this vision casts the poetic translation of Sidney into heaven as a kind of early participation in apocalypse (which is indefinitely deferred and accessible to us only via poetic likeness), when the world of things that perish will be replaced entirely by a new heaven and a new earth where everything is eternal.

The emphasis on the bed where the Bride sleeps before being called up into heaven evokes, alongside its scriptural and patristic associations, the bed of Book X of Plato’s *Republic*. Here Plato’s Socrates argues that there are three beds: the form or idea of the bed, because of which we are able to call all beds by the same name; the earthly or material bed made by the craftsman; and the painting or image of the bed, which is only an appearance. This discourse reintroduces Socrates’ criticism of poetry; he then goes on to argue for the immortality of the soul and, consequently, the detrimental influence of poems, like Homer’s, that evoke in us a passionate impulse to mourn for the dead. We have already learned in Book III of the *Republic* that Homer’s poetry is problematic because he teaches us to fear death. By placing the image of the bed at the high point of a poem that begins and presents itself as funeral elegy, Spenser directly engages
the Platonic critique of poetry. If the action of a funeral elegy is to mourn the
dead, and if the bed of the vision and poem can only be identified with Plato’s
third bed, the bed of mere appearance, is not this precisely the kind of poetry
Plato condemns?

On the contrary, “The Ruines of Time” gives us an iteration of mourning
as a necessary preparation for world-contempt, and a bed that is the resting-
place of one waiting to be called up into the heavens. The literary or
representational bed—Spenser highlights its literariness, its capacity to “be
read”—is thus defended as a place of preparation for the ascent to heavenly
things. By borrowing and dramatizing Plato’s images, too, Spenser calls attention
to Plato’s own reliance upon images and likenesses in his dialogues (as Sidney
noted in the Defense, only one who had never “walked in the groves of Apollo”
could fail to recognize these as among the “flowers of poesie”). Where the vision
of the ship brings together the body of Sidney with Plato’s “ocean of unlikeness,”
the vision of the bed unites a Christian looking-forward to resurrection and
apocalypse with a chief locus of Plato’s doctrine of forms, arguing implicitly that
the poet, rather than merely awakening the passions of grief and the fear of
death, can draw the reader from grief toward likenesses that participate in the
forms and thus help direct the soul heavenward. The slumber of the Bride recalls
the Bridegroom’s injunction in the Song of Songs not to arouse or awake love
before its time, and the slumber of both the wise and the foolish virgins in
Christ’s parable, but also the Pauline description of the dead as those who have
fallen asleep. Sleeping in the bed of poetic likeness, then, anticipates both the
death of the body and the awakening and calling upward to resurrection—an
ascent that gives rise to eager anticipation, not ignoble fear. To put it another
way, the representational bed made by the poet manages to escape the Platonic
critique of (bad) poetry just insofar as it becomes assimilated to the ideal bed in
which the Bride sleeps, awaiting the Bridegroom. If it can manage this, it may be
a better bed than any material one, for it will remind us that death is only a sleep
from which we shall soon awaken.

Drawing on Sidney’s *Defense* as he apotheosizes Sidney, Spenser answers
Plato’s critique of the poets: Christian poetry can give us images and
representations closer to the Forms than anything in the material world and, in
doing so, help to vanquish the fear of death, and it will do so through the
likeness of the body to Christ. This optimism about poetry was not shared by all
Sidney’s mourners. The elegy “Silence augmenteth grief,” usually attributed to
Sidney’s close friend Fulke Greville, concludes,

Now rime, the sonne of rage, which art no kin to skill,
And endles grieffe, which deads my life, yet knowes not how to kill,
Go seeke that haples tombe, which if ye hap to finde,
Salute the stones, that keepe the lims, that held so good a minde.

(33-36)

Greville’s poem admits, even declares, that it can do little to escape from the
world of the passions: it is called “the sonne of rage” and is associated with
“endles grieffe,” a grief that, unlike that in “The Ruines of Time,” does not give

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way to or engender salutary world-contempt. The “rime” is commanded to seek after a tomb, which is its only means of approach to the body, albeit at several removes: even its ability to locate the tomb is uncertain, subject to “hap,” and once there it has nothing to do but “salute” a container (the stones of the tomb) of a container (the body) of something that is already gone, “so good a minde.” In this comparatively despairing version of Platonism, poetry is (as in Socrates’ criticism in the *Republic*) only a shadow of a shadow, even further from the world of the mind than the merely material “stones” or lifeless “lims” of the dead body. The funeral elegy is sent to approach the body, but its approach is one frustrated by the inability of poetry to be, as Plato had argued, anything but “the son of rage,” begotten by and potentially also begetting inordinate grief. This grief persists despite the poem’s affirmation that “[t]heir losse, not him, waile they, that fill the world with cries, / Death slue not him, but he made death his ladder to the skies” (17-20). Spenser’s Platonism is a radical departure from this arguably more orthodox one: in it, poetry can instill a kind of grief that, by teaching detachment from the material world and leading us instead to turn toward likenesses akin of the divine and unchanging ideas, does not end finally in the stupor of grief and the fear of death.

In the fifth vision, we return again, recursively, to Sidney’s sacrificial death. Spenser presents a knight “fully mortally … ywounded” and mounted upon “a winged steed” (646-650). As he becomes faint, Sidney-Perseus smites Pegasus, who carries him up to heaven. In Berchorius’ *Ovidius Moralizatus*, the
flight of Perseus on Pegasus represents both the ascent of fame and Christ’s ascension into heaven. These two themes—the promulgation of Sidney’s fame on earth, and his capacity, through saintly sacrifice and through poetry, to participate in Christ’s resurrection and ascension—are central to Spenser’s purpose in “The Ruines of Time.” Spenser stresses Pegasus’ birth from the spilled blood of Medusa, while also calling attention to how the wounded Sidney’s “streams of blood foorth flowed on the grass.” The juxtaposition of Pegasus with Sidney’s blood—described earlier as a voluntary “offring of his guiltles blood”—suggests that the sacrificial spilling of the poet’s blood, too, gives rise to the ability to ascend into heaven. From the bodily traces left behind by Sidney’s bloody sacrifice, the disconsolate speaker who has been left behind in the sphere of material decay conceives both the desire to leave earth behind and the idea of a poetry that may achieve such an ascent. This vision of Sidney astride Pegasus fulfills and baptizes Verlame’s claim that

... who so will with vertuous deeds assay
To mount to heauen, on Pegasus must ride,
And with sweete Poets verse be glorifide. (425-427)

The poetic glory and ascent that to Verlame is “sweete” has been purchased, not only by Sidney’s “vertuous deeds,” but also by his bloody sacrifice; the steed that bears him “straight to Heaven” is only an image of the martyrdom that sees him “Fainting at last through long Infirmities.” Verlame has grasped a partial truth, but she has it backwards: it is not the “Poets verse” that glorifies those who

aspire “to mount to heauen,” but rather, the glory of the martyr-poet’s suffering _imago Christi_ that streams down as he ascends, enlivening Spenser’s poetry even as he “deplores” the loss of Sidney.

In the sixth and last vision, the narrator recounts a vision in which Sidney’s ashes, reserved inside an “Arke of purest gold / Vpon a brazen pillour standing hie,” are carried by Mercury “above the Sky” and given a “second life” (659-660; 669). Like Jonson and Milton, Spenser draws upon the contrast between physical monuments subject to decay and poetic monuments, which have lastingness because they, like the living body, belong more to the realm of spirit or "breath" than to that of base materiality. The vision describes a contest between heaven and earth over “Whether [i.e., which] should of those Ashes Keeper be.” Though not spilled out, earth’s claim to the ashes is clear: they are a body reduced to indistinguishable, base matter, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” As such, they would seem to belong rightfully to earth, yet for just this reason, even or especially when enclosed in “purest Gold” and placed on a high pillar of brass, they (like a saint’s relics) can confer no benefit to earth or its inhabitants. Earth’s desire to retain the ashes, and its dole on having to relinquish them, is yet another example of earth’s fleshly misunderstanding and vanity, yet it is also right in that the ashes are its link with heaven. Spenser assigns the resolution of the quarrel to Mercury, who, in the largely standardized code of Renaissance neo-Platonism, acts as a “divine mediator... and is as such a placeholder for the
Son.” In Spenser’s *Mother Hubberds Tale*, Mercury puts off his heavenly shape and countenance as he comes down to earth, rather like George Herbert’s Second Person of the Trinity who “did descend, undressing all the way.” As both a messenger and the god who first gave Apollo his lyre, Mercury stands also for poetic invention (not so distant from his penchant for theft) and for the capacity of language to link earth with heaven. In Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* (like “The Ruines of Time,” an early-career dream vision poem on the death of an aristocratic patron, in which a dead body is prevented by divine intervention from being lost in the sea), according to Carol A. N. Martin, mercurial figures serve as emblems that bridge the spaces between the allegorical and literal senses, between seemingly disjointed parts of the poem, and between genres including complaint, dream vision, and elegy. Martin argues that Mercury is a figure of the poet’s translatio, a rhetorical practice that allows the poet to make what is old new in the face of the mutability of the world and language. At the same time, Spenser’s image of the ark resembles the ark of the covenant, which is a biblical image of the presence of God dwelling in a material artifact fashioned by human hands, and thus works to counter an oversimplifying attempt to


308 As I discussed in Chapter 1, Sir Walter Ralegh figures Spenser as a Mercury-like thief in “A Vision upon this conceipt of the Faery Queene.”

associate idolatry with all human works. The ark thus forms an antinomy with the Assyrian idol described in the narrator’s first vision of earthly transience. The narrator mourns because the ark is taken into heaven, leaving him and the earth bereft, yet its translation into heaven points to a possibility that even works of hands, if they contain sanctified human bodies, can escape the vanity and decay of worldly things—but not through longevity on earth. This image suggests that the conflation of poetic fame and eternal salvation in the section of the poem narrated by the Lady Verlame is not merely a pagan fantasy or typological foreshadowing of eternal things, but a real possibility for Christian poetry. Spenser’s repeated translations of persons and things from the earthly into the heavenly sphere show that finally the contrast is not between material and immaterial monuments per se, but between those that remain in the earthly world of mutability on the one hand, and those, on the other hand, that are brought (by virtue of “spotless sacrifice” that restores the human body’s divine likeness) into the realm of imperishable things.

Thus, far from being set against the body, poetry can ascend and become heavenly only in association with the ashes of the redeemed body—ashes that, despite seeming in their cold, dead formlessness to epitomize base matter, eternally belong to one who in heaven sings immortally with the true breath, that of the Spirit. No English poetry can endure unless it contains the body of the redeemed poet conformed to the image of Christ, and like him is made a living sacrifice, while the apparent eternity of the things of Rome, “that same great
seven-headed Beast, / That made all Nations Vassals of her Pride,” is in truth nothing but “pompous show.” Though the poet’s career might move like Virgil’s from eclogues to national epic, the new English poetry must also have foundations in funeral elegy because only by proceeding from the death of God's saints (see Ps. 116.15) can it escape the vanity of all material and worldly things. As Christ makes man immortal by uniting the natures of God and Man, Sidney makes English poetry immortal by being both humanist poet and saintly sacrifice—or perhaps one might say Spenser does so by forging this analogy. The imagined body of the martyr-poet is the lynchpin on which poetry's ability to escape the world of decay, of whose constant flux the mutability of vernacular language is only one instance, depends.

Questions of publication, transmission, and preservation in material media, such as the question of the lastingness of manuscript versus that of print, do not seem to interest Spenser. He emphasizes how radically all things in the earthly realm are subject, not just to a possibility or likelihood of fragmentation or loss, but almost to a certainty of physical annihilation. The only possibility of preservation, for Spenser, lies in the translation of earthly things into the realm of the incorruptible and unchanging. Sidney in his Defense promises that if the reader believes the poets’ promises to make him immortal, “your name shall flourish in the Printers shops”; his playful tone suggests the irony of attributing immortality to ink, paper, and the world of commerce. For Spenser the printer’s shops are not worth mentioning, perhaps because he is less removed by
aristocratic status from the stigma of the commercial world, but also because material substrates other than the human body are so susceptible to decay and destruction.

"The Ruines of Time," though it begins with a variation on the epitaphic trope of the accosted passerby, turns out to be an anti-epitaph; it does not work, either literally or figuratively, to mark the burial site of Sidney’s remains. The assumption into heaven of Sidney’s ashes, prefiguring the reunion of his body and soul in resurrection, makes the remains of the poet’s body both central to the new poetics and necessarily absent in that they must be claimed by the heavenly sphere and not the earthly one. Each in its own way, Spenser’s “Ruines of Time” and Jonson’s and Milton’s elegies for Shakespeare reject the veneration of the poet’s buried body conveyed by conventional memorials, yet paradoxically, this refusal does not for any of these poets constitute a rejection or dismissal of the body. Rather, the body as buried becomes a liability for the poet insofar as it is symptomatic of the mutability and decay of all earthly and material things, but the body as rising or able to rise provides a way of understanding how poetry can belong both to the material world and to the realm of eternal things.
II. Cygnifying Shakespeare: Shakespeare’s Horatian Body in Jonson’s “To the memory of my beloved, / The AVTHOR / Mr. William Shakespeare”

I now turn from Spenser’s foundational English critical elegy to the one that—in excerpt at least—is undoubtedly the best known. Jonson’s elegy for Shakespeare is the source of lines recognizable to many who do not know that Jonson wrote them or even who he was, in particularly the epithet “swan of Avon” and the phrase “not of an age, but for all time.” In proportion to its fame, the poem has received relatively little critical attention, perhaps because it seems like an inevitable monument of Shakespeare’s canonicity. James Shapiro and Lawrence Lipking have suggested that the poem gives us a less than illuminating portrait because in it, Jonson fashions Shakespeare in his own image, or the same image in which he has fashioned himself, “a humanist’s ideal.”310 This is not, however, the poem’s most overt transformation of Shakespeare. I propose to look again at Jonson’s swan, perhaps so familiar we have difficulty seeing it, in the contexts of “The Ruines of Time,” of Horace’s Carmen 2.20, and of Jonson’s repudiation of honoring Shakespeare with a burial like Spenser’s. When he cygnifies Shakespeare, what does Jonson mean by it?

At first glance, we may dismiss the swan as an unremarkable epithet, deployed simply because Shakespeare was a poet who came from a town located on and named for a river. Yet coupled with Jonson’s rejection of a Westminster

Abbey burial for Shakespeare, the swan recalls the immortal song and evasion of inane funeral rites in Horace’s II.20. Though Jonson refuses to compare Shakespeare either with his contemporaries (particularly Spenser, whose Westminster epitaph he responds to) or with the classical poets, his swan imitates Horace’s ascent and undergoes a double metamorphosis—first into a swan, then a star—much like Spenser’s transformation of Sidney in “The Ruines of Time.” Jonson and Spenser both give us transformed poetic bodies translated into the heavens, but whereas Spenser’s is grounded in likeness to Christ through Sidney’s sacrificial martyrdom, a likeness crucial to Spenser’s aspiration to a poetry that can link the perishing material world with the sphere of eternity, Jonson’s vocative and imperative addresses to Shakespeare evoke a distinctly performative transformation like those enacted by the player’s body and by Horace’s poetic voice, narrating his own bodily metamorphosis. It is the correspondence of the translated, cygnified and stellified body that makes possible the luminosity of the idealized Folio Jonson envisions in his closing lines, aligning the book not with material monuments or buried bodies, but with an active body capable of transformation, flight, ascent, and shedding light. Though the poem never refers explicitly to resurrection, and in fact might be described as presenting a classicized version of it more appropriate for the secular(izing) sphere of the theatre, it nonetheless imagines a Shakespearean body that rises up alive, ill-suited for the tomb.
Jonson is emphatic that there are ways in which Shakespeare ought not to be remembered and, as a result, places he is not willing to see him buried. For all his protests that Shakespeare is “proof against” bad praise that might tarnish a lesser poet, he still tells us which kinds of memorials would be the wrong ones:

My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser; or bid Beaumont lye
A little further, to make thee a roome:
Thou art a Moniment, without a tombe,
And art alieue still while thy Booke doth live
And we have wits to read, and praise to giue. (19-24)

In scorning the idea of making room for Shakespeare next to these other poets, all of whom are buried in Westminster Abbey, Jonson rejects a vernacular literary heritage figured by the placement of bodies in tombs. The practice he rejects was a relatively new one that had begun with Spenser’s funeral, as described at the opening of this chapter. In Spenser’s epigraph, as reported by Camden, proximity of remains explicitly represents poetic merit:

Hic prope Chaucerum situs est Spenserius, illi
Proximus ingenio, proximus vt tumulo.
Hic prope Chaucerum Spensere Poeta poetam
Conderis & versu, quam tumulo propior.
Anglica te viuo, vixit, plaustique Poesis;
Nunc moritura timet, te moriente mori.311

Preferring burial places with proximity to sites considered more holy—the altar, for instance—was a pre-Reformation practice that continued unabated into the

311 “Here lies Spenser next to Chaucer, next to him in talent as next to him in death. O Spenser, here next to Chaucer the poet, as a poet you are buried; and in your poetry you are more permanent than in your grave. While you were alive, English poetry lived and approved you; now you are dead, it too must die and fears to.” From Reges, Reginae, Nobiles, & Alij in Ecclesia Collegiata B. Petri Westmonasterij Sepulti (1600), sigs. 12v-13, quoted in Edmund Spenser: The Critical Heritage, ed. R.M. Cummings, 1971.
seventeenth century, but no record of which I am aware suggests that such preferences had previously been applied to the bodies of English poets.312 Jonson imagines the making of this kind of literary fame as a quite literal and physical jostling for place. His Shakespeare (the one in the poem) is not to be part of some unseemly scheme for the rearrangement of the dead. Along with Spenser’s epitaph, Jonson may be thinking of Hamlet’s gravedigger scene: the irony is that in trying to secure a burial place that signifies a particular exalted status, the authors are instead caught in the familiar trope of burial and decay as radically leveling, reducing kings and paupers to the same substance. Chaucer and Spenser form a vernacular literary genealogy marked by use of archaic vocabulary and backward-looking imitation of one’s forebears—Jonson is said to have remarked that Spenser “in affecting the ancients, wrote no language”—and by eagerness be buried near those forebears.313 He suggests here, I think, that to ground oneself (literally) in vernacular literary history is to tie oneself also to the mutable, decaying nature of vernacular language. By the late sixteenth century, rapid linguistic change had already rendered Chaucer’s prosody less accessible.


to readers, making it seem difficult and clumsy, and the reference to Chaucer in particular, and to Spenser as his successor, recognizes this threat.\footnote{Puttenham, for instance, criticizes Chaucer along with his contemporaries for making his “meetres . . . of such vnshapely wordes as would allow no conuenient Cesure” and says they are not to be imitated because “their language is now out of vse with vs,” quoted in Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, ed., \textit{Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357–1900}, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1925), vol. I, 126. For a nuanced treatment of Chaucer’s reception in the sixteenth century, see Glenn A. Steinberg, “Spenser’s \textit{Shepheardes Calender} and the Elizabethan Reception of Chaucer,” \textit{English Literary Renaissance} 35 (2005), 31–51.}

The third poet Jonson mentions, fellow playwright Francis Beaumont, was a disciple and friend of Jonson’s. He had died after Shakespeare and, though he was buried near Chaucer’s grave in 1616, never received his own monument.\footnote{“Francis and John Beaumont,” The Dean and Chapter of Westminster, accessed October 27, 2013, http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/francis-and-john-beaumont.} A poem ascribed to Beaumont rehearses the familiar idea of burial and decay as leveling forces that bring low the proud, so that even kings become unimpressive heaps of bones and dust:

\begin{quote}
Mortality, behold and fear!
What a change of flesh is here:
Think how many royal bones
Sleep within these heaps of stones:
Here they lie, had realms and lands,
Who now want strength to stir their hands.
Here, from their pulpits sealed with dust,
They preach, 'In greatness is no trust!'
Here's an acre, sown indeed,
With the richest royallest seed,
That the earth did e'er drink in,
Since the first man died for sin.
Here the bones of birth have cried,
'Though gods they were, as men they died.'
Here are sands, ignoble things,
Dropt from the ruined sides of kings.
\end{quote}
Here's a world of pomp and state,  
Buried in dust, once dead by fate.316

Jonson wants to differentiate Shakespeare from these other writers, not only to call him incomparable, but also to suggest that to secure burial in a place of honor is to consign oneself to a kind of dusty memory in which the decay of the buried body resembles and underscores the mutability of vernacular poetry. Jonson refuses to “commit thee with thy peers” – commit the body to the grave, as in the prayer book’s funeral service— or to “mix thee,” consigning Shakespeare to the mutability of a mixed, rather than a pure, substance. And yet his declaration of Shakespeare as a “monument without a tomb” is immediately subjected to contingencies: “art alive still while thy book doth live / And we have wits to read, and praise to give.” The book, then, is not a replacement for the monument of stone or brass, but something both “alive” and, potentially, subject to death; its life, it seems, in turn depends on the collective readerly “we” who retain “wits to read” Shakespeare and to “praise” him. The survival of the living book is connected not with its persistence as material object, but with the continued interest of readers who, Jonson suggests, might in some future age lack the wit to read or praise Shakespeare, regardless of where he is buried. The famous mention of Shakespeare’s “small Latin and less Greek” (compared, at least, with Jonson’s own massive erudition) is a reminder that the presence of future readers with the linguistic skill to decipher his language is in no sense a given.

316 Full text of poem quoted in “Francis and John Beaumont.”
If Shakespeare is to be set apart from the mutability that marks both vernacular language and the decaying body, is he to be compared with the classical authors who have stood the test of time? No, if “my judgement were of years,” Jonson says, he would not hesitate to perform impressive feats of necromancy, calling the classical playwrights back from the dead. As in Jonson’s Pawlet elegy, there is more than one kind of deadness, it seems: not only the rapid moldering of the recently-dead corpse, aligned with vernacular mutability, but also the stony lifelessness that threatens to make the ancients (for whom, of course, Jonson has tremendous respect) like ruins that “antiquated, and deserted lye.” There is, as many have noted, certainly some hyperbole in his vaunting “My Shakespeare” above “all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome / Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come,” but there is also a real sense that whatever might come from ashes (including, perhaps, Jonson’s own imitations of classical verse) would lack the quick, natural, and living quality he finds in Shakespeare. The epithet “haughty Rome” calls to mind Virgil’s description of the Roman art of ruling—in a sense, he is suggesting, Shakespeare successfully unites the arts Virgil describes: he has the power of bringing-to-life-through-art that belongs, not to Rome, but to its subject nations, and also, through his victory over both contemporary and classical poets, the Rome-like power to cast down the proud (he is one “to whom all scenes of Europe homage owe”).

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317 Excudent alii spirantia mollius aera, credo equidem, vivos ducent de marmore voltus, ... tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento;
The merry Greeke, tart Aristophanes,
Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;
But antiquated, and deserted lye,
As they were not of Natures family. (51-54)

This praise is problematic, not only because it seems excessive, but also in what it implies: if even the greatest of past comic playwrights now “antiquated and deserted lie” like ruined cities, does this not suggest that over time all dramatists, perhaps especially those working in comedy, must expect to meet the same fate? The quality Jonson praises so highly in Shakespeare, his membership in “Nature’s family,” seems to be tied to the living immediacy of his vernacular language, which is not easily separable, if separable at all, from its liabilities of changeableness and susceptibility to decay.

If he wanted to compare Shakespeare with the classical poets, Jonson tells us, he would not hesitate to conjure them by name:

From thence to honour thee, I would not seeke
For names; but call forth thund'ring Aeschilus,
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,
Paccuuius, Accius, him of Cordoua dead,
To life again, to hear thy Buskin tread
And shake a Stage... (32-37)

hae tibi erunt artes; pacisque imponere morem,
parcere subiectis, et debellare superbos. (Aeneid VI.845-853)

Let others melt and mould the breathing bronze
To forms more fair,—aye! out of marble bring
Features that live; ...

But thou, O Roman, learn with sovereign sway
To rule the nations. Thy great art shall be
To keep the world in lasting peace, to spare
humbled foe, and crush to earth the proud.

Here, as in the earlier “My Shakespeare, rise!” Jonson draws an implicit
association between rising from the dead and acting on the stage. This
association forms the central conceit of the last memorial poem included in the
first Folio and credited to I.M., often identified as John Milton, senior. The poem
identifies the Folio itself as Shakespeare-the-actor’s reappearance alive to receive
applause after dying onstage: 318

\[ WEE\ wondred\ \text{(Shake-speare)\ that\ thou\ went\’st\ so\ soone} \\
\text{From\ the\ Worlds-Stage,\ to\ the\ Graues-Tyring-roome.} \\
\text{Wee\ thought\ thee\ dead,\ but\ this\ thy\ printed\ worth,} \\
\text{Tels\ thy\ Spectators,\ that\ thou\ went\’st\ but\ forth} \\
\text{To\ enter\ with\ applause.\ An\ Actors\ Art,} \\
\text{Can\ dye,\ and\ liue,\ to\ acte\ a\ second\ part.} \\
\text{That\’s\ but\ an\ Exit\ of\ Mortalitie;} \\
\text{This,\ a\ Re-entrance\ to\ a\ Plaudite.} \]

Similarly, Jonson suggests that the poets he names, ancient and modern, can be
called back almost as easily as an actor who has performed a death scene may
reappear. The association between necromancy and theatrical performance is not
unique to Jonson; it also appears fairly explicitly in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus, for
instance. But Jonson calls Shakespeare to “rise” while apophatically declining to
summon the ancient playwrights to hear Shakespeare’s bravura performance
(they would hear Shakespeare’s footsteps, but would, one supposes, be an
audience without any ability to understand his language). To raise the dead like
a necromancer or bring it to a cyclical rebirth like that the phoenix—as in the
reference to “that which did from their [Greece and Rome’s] ashes come”—

95-105, 102.
would merely be to call them back into the world of mortality, like actors
returning to the stage for another performance of a tragedy. Jonson calls upon
Shakespeare to rise, not like the phoenix which must repeatedly return to
conflagration and the materiality of ashes, but like another bird: the swan.

_Sweet Swan of Auon! what a sight it were_
_To see thee in our waters yet appeare,_
_And make those flights upon the bankes of Thames,_
_That so did take Eliza, and our Iames!_
_But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere_
_Aduanc'd, and made a constellation there!_
_Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets... (71-77)_

Like the one imagined by Spenser, whose Westminster Abbey grave he has just
scorned, in “The Ruines of Time,” Jonson’s poetic swan is a creature able to cross
boundaries, both to inhabit the watery world of the contemporary theatrical
scene ("upon the banks of Thames") and to ascend into the heavens to become a
constellation. Despite Jonson’s subjunctive “were,” this passage has the quality
of a dramatic narration, almost as when a character tells the audience what
marvelous things he sees, supplementing visible stage effects with verbal images,
especially when he arrives at “But stay, I see thee…” In his _Odes (Carmina)_ II.20,
Horace narrates—or verbally performs—his own alarmingly detailed bodily
transformation into a swan that will soar, singing, over the far reaches of the
earth, making his fame known. “For Horace... the memorial swan functions as
the vehicle for extension through space and time, a guarantor of presence to future times and places.”

Non usitata nec tenui ferar
penna biformis per liquidum aethera
vates, neque in terris morabor
longius invidiae maior

urbes relinquam. Non ego, pauperum
sanguis parentum, non ego, quem vocas,
dilecte Maecenas, obibo
nec Stygia cohibebor unda.

Iam iam residunt cruribus asperae
pelles, et album mutor in alitem
superne, nascenturque leves
per digitos umerosque plumae.

Iam Daedaleo notior Icaro
visam gementis litora Bosphori
Syrtisque Gaetulas canorus
ales Hyperboreosque campos.

Me Colchus et, qui dissimulat metum
Marsae cohoritis, Dacus et ultimi
nosent Geloni, me peritus
discet Hiber Rhodanique potor.

Absint inani funere neniae
luctusque turpes et querimoniae;
compesce clamorem ac sepulcri
mitte superuacuos honores.

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320 On wings not weak or common, I a bard
Of double nature will be carried through
Clear air nor will I linger longer
On the earth. Surpassing envy,

I’ll leave behind the cities. I, the child
Of humble folk, I whom you summon, dear
Maecenas, I will not meet death nor
Be hemmed in by Stygian waters.
The swan becomes the material body of undying poetic fame, one that arises from metamorphosis of the mortal body. As a result of his transformation, Horace argues that ceremonial mourning for him has become ridiculous and empty: since his body has really become a swan, complete with feathers and scaly-skinned legs, his funeral fires are “inani,” empty of a body to burn, and honors paid to his grave are “supervacuos”: useless, pointless, unnecessary. Where Jonson’s swan swims in the rivers of England, the waters from which Horace’s ascends include the “Stygian wave” of death. The swan’s amphibian nature allows it to ascend from “our waters,” the present world of materiality and mortality where Jonson and his readers dwell, into an expansive and limitless aerial realm of song and poetic fame.

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Already now the skin is roughening on
My shins and I’m transformed into a swan
As on my fingers and my shoulders
There begin to sprout light feathers.

Now better than Icarus the son
of Daedalus, songbird, I’ll travel to
the groaning Bosphorus and Afric
Syrtes and the northern tundra:

The Colchian, the Dacian who pretends
No fear of Roman forces, and the far
Geloni will come to know me, the
Gaul will learn and skillful Spaniard.

Away with dirges at my empty
Burial, unseemly mourning, and complaints,
Restrain the wailing and omit
Unnecessary funeral offerings.

It is the connection between the swan and the repudiation of burial as a mode of giving honor to a poet that most clearly links Jonson with this particular poem of Horace. Insofar as the critical elegist is involved in performing a kind of funeral rite, he risks coming within the ambit of the Horatian critique of rites performed over the body as inane and “superuacuos,” entirely imimical to the undying fame of the true poet. This is a critique that both Jonson and, as I discuss below, Milton take seriously. The Horatian allusion ties his address to Shakespeare-as-swan to the rejection of the significance of bodily burial earlier in the poem, and the mention of Avon, while invoking the river, is also the poem’s only reference to the place where Shakespeare is fact buried, rather than where (and by whom) he is not.321 The epithet “Swan of Avon” also evokes Horace’s figuring of Pindar as the “Swan of Dirce” in Ode IV:2 and, as such, makes Horace an example for Jonson’s practice of critical elegy.322 (Giving Jonson less credit than I do for doing something interesting with his imitation of Horace, Michael Ferber writes, “Pindar called Horace the ‘swan of Dirce,’ and thereby launched

321 Jonson makes a more extensive and explicit use of the same Horatian transformation in his “Ode Allegorike” in praise of Hugh Holland, in which Holland becomes a black swan. For a thorough discussion of the “Ode Allegorike,” see Victoria Moul, Jonson, Horace, and the Classical Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 220. “Jonson looked to Horace as a model who offered both a high appraisal of the poet’s role and his memorializing powers (pace Norbrook, Horace... constantly asserts the immortality of his poetry), and as an example of a man of low birth who consorted with the great and yet maintained his integrity.” Charles Martindale, Horace Made New: Horatian Influences on British Writing from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 64.

322 John Wesley Hales, Folia Litteraria: Essays and Notes on English Literature (London: Seeley, 1893), 234. Hales notes both Horatian swans as alluded to by Jonson, but does not go on to consider the interpretive consequences of these allusions.
two millennia of clichés whereby Shakespeare is the swan of Avon and every poet is the swan of some river or other.”)

Is Jonson’s approach to the Horatian position a rejection of having a human body, which he had seemed in his elegy for Venetia Digby to recognize as, through resurrection, more enduring than the poetic text, subject though both are to fragmentation and loss? In Jonson’s “My Shakespeare, Rise!” one might see an attempt to perform a poetic speech-act, a command that anticipates bodily resurrection. For Jonson does participate in funeral elegizing, and so, he reminds us, does Horace for Pindar; the exhortation to rise and the unwillingness to “lodge thee by” the other poets paradoxically displays just the sort of care of the body from which Jonson’s imitation of Horace would seek to distance him. And Shakespeare has not poetically transformed himself into a swan by an act of song, like Horace (though, as an actor, he has in some sense practiced both self-transformation and rising again after seeming to die); rather, he has been called a swan, in a vocative, epithetic or metaphorical transformation like the one Horace bestows upon Pindar. The opposition between the swan and the tomb aligns Jonson’s swan with Horace’s, but Horace’s poem does not provide a precedent for the double transformation of poet into swan and then into star. Spenser’s “Ruines of Time,” though, does.

The association between poets and swans is a frequent trope in classical literature, as I have discussed; how confidently might we connect Jonson’s elegy

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to “The Ruines of Time”? In an analysis of both Jonson’s marginalia in his copy of the 1617 Folio edition of *The Faerie Queene: The Shepheards Calendar: Together With the Other Works of England’s Arch-Poet, Edm[undl Spenser* and echoes found in his Cary-Morison Ode, Riddell and Stewart conclude that Jonson read “The Ruines of Time” with special attention, annotating it extensively and imitating many of its distinctive features and tropes. Where Horace-as-swan may have certain, albeit far-flung, limits to the terrestrial range of his winged migrations, Jonson’s Shakespeare, like Spenser’s Sidney, undergoes a double metamorphosis from swan to constellation, allowing him to participate in the immutability of the heavens and to shed his influence unceasingly over the whole earth. Just as Spenser places Sidney and poetry outside the world where all material things are destined to oblivion by translating them into imperishable and heavenly things, so Jonson wants to prevent Shakespeare from becoming mired in a scheme of vernacular prestige that literally and metaphorically hinges on the burial of bodies, refusing to bury him next to Spenser even as he invokes Spenser’s stellified swan-poet. I do think that Jonson makes specific use of Spenser’s image here, but, as with all imitation, what is appropriated is also changed.

The swift metamorphosis from dead poet to swan to constellation gives us a shape-shifting Shakespeare who, despite his newfound association with the

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324 James A. Riddell and Stanley Stewart reproduce a number of pages from Jonson’s copy of the 1617 Folio edition of *The Faerie Queene: The Shepheards Calendar: Together With the Other Works of England’s Arch-Poet, Edm[undl Spenser*, showing Jonson’s marks and comments in both ink and pencil, which they argue indicates his careful reading and re-reading of Spenser’s “Ruines of Time.” They find that he showed greater attention to this poem than to many others in the volume. , “Jonson Reads ‘The Ruines of Time,’” *Studies in Philology* 87 (1990): 427-455.
immutability of the heavens, is in no danger of becoming infected with the fixity of a stony monument. Like Spenser, Jonson gives us a poet with a body somehow already ascended through poetic transformation, though without Spenser’s emphasis on Sidney’s sacrificial imitation of Christ. Whereas Spenser is a spectator or seer of visions (visions that are poetic likenesses of the significance of Sidney’s sacrificial body), Jonson has commanded Shakespeare to rise, an addressed marked by the confidence of one actor addressing another onstage when both know the book and have rehearsed the scene together. Jonson’s Shakespeare wears the buskin of the tragedian; he performs with his body a solemn play of mortality, and the transformations that body undergoes are a kind of performance by means of dramatic address, and as play-performance they take place at a remove from the theological and metaphysical immediacy of Spenser’s “The Ruines of Time.”

The “what he hath left vs” of the poem’s title turns out to be not Shakespeare’s mortal remains, but the light-giving book, a terrestrial parallel of the poet’s transformed and stellified body. The presence of the swan-become-constellation complicates Jonson’s earlier insistence on distancing Shakespeare both from Spenser and from the classical poets: they provide exempla for the

kind of metamorphosis that makes it possible to escape the merely material mutability of death. It is not Spenser’s critical elegy for Sidney that Jonson repudiates, but the epitaph that makes room for his body next to Chaucer’s. For Jonson as for Spenser, the body of a national poet is too important to remain buried in the realm of decay and dead matter; its right influence on the future of English poetry (including drama) requires transformation and ascent. Whereas Spenser’s focus on Sidney’s body centers on his bloody martyrdom, bridging the gap between earthly materiality and heaven’s eternity, through body as spotless sacrifice, Jonson’s Shakespearean body is very much that of Shakespeare the player, who like Horace-becoming-swan can perform transformation by sheer embodied verbal act, by telling his audience who or what he has now become—or, in this case as often in plays, by bodily presence and response when one is addressed by a name: “Sweet Swan of Avon!” Jonson’s attribution of this double metamorphosis to Shakespeare, especially in his hope that “thy Volumes light” will illumine the future stage, foresees both the copiousness of future Shakespearean performance (that is, of imaginative transformation of living, speaking future bodies) and his influences on poets yet to come. And the attribution of “light” to the “Volume” gives us a Folio that—despite its materiality, despite the fixity of print—becomes more like a living star or singing swan flying across national boundaries than like a heavy monument of bronze or stone. Yet this star’s ability to “cheer” or “chide” the “drooping stage” (which is, I think, both the London theater and the stage of the world) cannot overwhelm or
cancel out its own contingency upon posterity’s “wit to read” and will to give praise, a contingency of which Shakespeare in the *Sonnets* and Milton in his elegy for Shakespeare are also keenly aware.

III. Shakes-pyramids and Honored Bones: Admonition and Resurrection in Milton’s “Epitaph on the admirable Dramaticke Poet, W. SHAKESPEARE”

Milton’s elegy, like Jonson’s, calls attention to Shakespeare’s physical remains in order to deny the importance of a physical tomb or monument. This, the first published poem of Milton’s career, appeared anonymously in the 1632 Second Folio of Shakespeare’s works under the title "An Epitaph on the admirable Dramaticke Poet, W. SHAKESPEARE." Though the title (not necessarily appended to the poem by Milton) calls it an epitaph, this is a curious designation for a poem that begins by scorning grave-monuments:

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What neede my Shakespeare for his honour'd bones,
The labour of an Age, in piled stones
Or that his hallow'd Reliques should be hid
Vnder a starre-ypointing Pyramid?
Deare Sonne of Memory, great Heire of Fame,
What needst thou such dull witnesse of thy Name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thy selfe a lasting Monument:
For whil'st to th' shame of slow-endeavouring Art
Thy easie numbers flow, and that each part,
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued Booke,
Those Delphicke Lines with deepe Impression tooke
Then thou our fancy of her selfe bereaving,
Dost make us Marble with too much conceiving,
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Many critics have perceived the poem as strongly ambivalent about Shakespeare’s achievement, about the monumentality of print, and about the potential of books and reading to tempt readers to acts of idolatry. Marlin Blaine writes,

While [Milton’s] writing often evinces an iconoclastic distrust of the monumental printed book, it also shows an irresistible attraction to the book’s iconicity, or its capacity to serve as an index of poetic immortality and authority. Milton repeatedly attempts to subordinate the iconicity of the physical book to the reader’s internally transforming experience of the texts contained within it, yet simultaneously exploits that very iconicity to assert the timeless achievement of great poets such as Shakespeare and himself.  

Hilary Menges, too, argues that Milton’s poem is not merely a conventional proclamation of the superiority of the poetic monument over the physical one. Rather,

[T]he dismissal of the physical memorial in “On Shakespeare” also extends to the printed text itself. Instead of substituting the printed book for the

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326 I here follow the first printed version of the text, from the earliest printings of the Second Folio. Though all printings of the Second Folio are dated 1632, some appear to have been printed as late as 1641, with new typesettings of Milton’s poem, and there are textual variants introduced by these printings, as well as by later editions. For a comprehensive and very helpful discussion of the poem’s textual history, see two articles by Gordon Campbell, “Obelisks and Pyramids in Shakespeare, Milton, and Alcalá,”  Sediri 9 (1998), 217-232, and “Shakespeare and the Youth of Milton,”  Milton Quarterly 33 (1999), 95-105. Campbell also makes a persuasive case that Milton’s poem imitates an epitaph that, in contemporary manuscript copies, was attributed to Shakespeare.

marble pyramid—the standard move of the monumental conceit practiced by the majority of poems that preface the first and second folios—Milton implies that the book, too, is susceptible to idolatry.\textsuperscript{328}

The readers’ figurative petrification, on this reading, fits into discourses of idolatry in which those who give reverence or awe to the dead matter of idols themselves become like idols, spiritually dead.\textsuperscript{329} Paul Stevens traces a tendency among a number of other critics to describe Milton’s poem as subverting its own praise of Shakespeare by figuring the “astonishment” of Shakespeare’s readers as a deadly kind of petrification.\textsuperscript{330} For Paul de Man, Milton’s description of the readers’ transformation into marble is symptomatic of the danger implicit in the conventional address of the epitaph to the passerby, “namely that by making the [dead] speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen into their own death.” Thus, the “astonishment” of the readers transforms them into a stony monument by effecting “our actual entry into the frozen world of the dead.”\textsuperscript{331} Similarly, Jonathan Goldberg argues that Milton depicts Shakespeare’s poetic monument as “a pompous sepulchre, the excessive pyramid that is also an empty tomb


\textsuperscript{329} See Waldron on the distinction between dead images (idols) and bodies as living images of God, 4-7.


\textsuperscript{331} Paul de Man 928, quoted in Stevens 378.
anticipating death, making death the end of desire.”332 John Guillory, too, observes that

[the poem works toward its climax by opposing the fluid motion of Shakespeare’s verse to the condition of stasis he induces in his hearers…]333 but much more is at stake …, for the condition of arrest or paralysis is everywhere morally suspect in Milton’s poetry.

Calling these claims into question, Stevens argues that the images of astonishment need not necessarily be read as Milton’s subversion of his own praise, citing the apparent miracle of statue transformed into a living person’s body in The Winter’s Tale as an alternate, more positive template for Milton’s image of Shakespeare’s poetic power. In response, Erin Minear has argued that Milton does allude to The Winter’s Tale, but does so in order to reverse it: his Shakespeare transforms living bodies into stone.334 Both readings have merit, and I will argue that this is because Milton’s poem works as a warning, a kind of double image in which readers may either become like dead material monuments (the figure literalized: the letter killeth) or become a kind of metaphorical monument marvelous, like the “statue” of Hermione, precisely because their living bodies remain alive and breathing (the spirit giveth life). Drawing on The Winter’s Tale, on the Sonnets’ images of fame in posterity through readers’ living bodies, and on the promise of resurrection, Milton’s poem gives us a double


vision corresponding to the figure of readers-as-monument: readers must resist being drawn into stony idolatry and practice a lively reading in which wonder’s stillness, like bodily death itself, is only momentary. Like Petrarch and like Jonson in the Pawlet elegy, Milton offers himself as one who can defy petrification with his living voice.

Milton’s poem opens with the familiar classical trope of contrasting the poetic monument with the physical one. His particular focus on the laboriously erected pyramid echoes both Horace and Propertius. Horace’s monument is not only “more lasting than bronze” but “regalique situ pyramidum altius,” “loftier than the Pyramid’s royal pile.”335 Propertius, taking up the strain from Horace, elaborates:

nam neque pyramidum sumptus ad sidera ducti,  
 nec Iouis Elei caelum imitata domus,  
 nec Mausolei diues fortuna sepulcri mortis ab extrema condicione uacant.  
 aut illis flamma au imber subducet honores,  
 annorum aut tacito pondere uicta ruent.  
 at non ingenio quaesitum nomen ab aeuo excidet: ingenio stat sine morte decus.

For neither expensive pyramids reared to the stars nor the temple of Jupiter at Olympia that rivals the heavens nor rich wealth of the tomb of Mausolus are free from the ultimate condition of death. Either fire or rain will pull down their glories or they will topple, beaten down by the silent weight of the years.

But a name gained by genius will not be forgotten through time: the glory genius gains is deathless.\footnote{\textit{Propertius: A Critical Introduction} 3.2, trans. J. P. Sullivan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), 20.}

Milton’s “star-ypointing pyramid” is very like Propertius’ “pyramidum … ad sidera ducti,” whose stretching toward the stars merely underscores that it remains stubbornly earthbound. In denying Shakespeare’s need for such an expensive, laborious, regal structure, Milton implicitly brings in the classical comparison of architectural and poetic monuments: even the apparently indestructible pyramids and tombs will eventually succumb to the destructive forces of swift fire or slow erosion by rain, while Shakespeare’s genius makes him an “heir of fame” itself, one who has gained deathless glory. Yet Milton’s poem turns from imitation of Horace and Propertius toward the question of how and why the poetic monument endures. The book, however “unvalued,” must be as much prey to eventual destruction than stone and bronze, if not more so. Moreover, there is the question of idolatry: if what the poetic monument does is outdo the pyramids at their own game—\textit{altius}, says Horace, higher, is this not problematic, since their purpose is (in Milton) to “hide” and preserve “hallowed Reliques,” to provide a kind of immortality both artificial and vainglorious, based on dead works of hands? If the Shakespearean monument is to be something Milton deems worth having, and not simply something that (chillingly) makes kings “wish to die,” it must be a monument that does not simply outdo the pyramids, but differs from them in kind. Unlike stony
pyramids, it must be, in Propertius’ words, free from the extreme condition of death (*mortis extrema condicione*). That is, it must be not merely lasting, but alive.

In Shakespeare’s Sonnet 123, the pyramids become images, not of great antiquity or durance, but of Time’s deceptive pretense that the material world’s mutability presents us with anything new or worthy of wonder. The speaker’s refusal to wonder at the pyramids, or at anything Time presents, is directly connected with his refusal to acknowledge himself mutable, even in the face of mortality: “This I do vow and this shall ever be: I will be true despite thy scythe and thee.” This promise, like those in many of the Sonnets, gains affective force from its apparent defiance of reality. The speaker knows that, as mortal, he cannot resist Time’s scythe, yet he promises to do so: not to be like the pyramids’ impressive durability only more so, but to be, unlike their impressive false novelty, “true.” This vow of immutability can be kept only through a kind of poetic immortality predicated on resurrection.

The *Sonnets* claim their persistence, their defiance of time, from their ability to insinuate themselves into living bodies, so that the beloved dwells “in lovers’ eyes” and “where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.” It seems at first strange, then, that Milton imagines a tomb made of readers or hearers frozen into stillness. By their “fancy of her selfe bereaving,” Shakespeare (the poem alleges) makes them into rapt monuments like corpses in that their intellectual souls have (if only temporarily) abandoned their still bodies. It is worth noting, though, this is not an easy dualist separation of body from soul,
but the rending of an entity that is organically one: what the fancy is bereft of is her very self. Where Jonson’s concern in the Pawlet elegy is the poet’s capacity to resist petrifaction, Milton focuses on the collective “we,” including himself, presumably, among the transformed—yet, like Jonson, he manages to resist being silenced by the transformation, to continue to speak as poet. As Stevens points out, The Winter’s Tale provides a Shakespearean instance in which the apparent transformation of a person into a stone statue turns out to be not a disaster, but a prelude to an almost-miraculous return from (seeming) death. The statue is more marvelous because it is not a statue, but a living, breathing person: “What fine chisel,” Leontes wonders, “could ever yet cut breath?” Once all is revealed, what the play performs does not pretend to be a miracle of real transformation, either from statue to person or from death to life; the audience knows that Hermione was never really dead. It reminds the audience of the real miracle of resurrection rather than falsely claiming to perform it. Likewise, Milton’s Shakespearean monument is marvelous because readers are not really transformed into stone, nor would anyone long think so; they are better monuments than any statue or pyramid because they are alive.

Milton’s scorn for “pyramids” that house “hallow’d relics” has cautioned us to be wary of the desires of kings, who not only attempt to store up wealth and fame for themselves here where moth and rust destroy, but can even be seduced by the grandeur of monuments actually to wish their own death. This

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337 The Winter’s Tale V.iii.
final line is likely a play on Shakespeare’s “thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings/ that then I scorn to change my state with kings,” suggesting that even kings would envy a monument peopled with such lifelike figures. This is a compliment to Shakespeare’s power, but also, I would argue, a warning from Milton against a particular kind of reading. The still, monumentalized “too much conceiving” readers, though they will not really become stone statues, are in danger of relinquishing too much of their intrinsic abilities to breathe, speak, move. This sort of reading may be particularly tempting to those encountering the printed monument of the Folio, which not only fixes a particular version of the text, but also places Shakespeare’s words in a material context calculated to inspire a certain awe. It is fitting, then, that readers should encounter this warning as they reverently turn its first pages.

Such stillness and inactivity threaten the vital, breathing unity of body and soul. The problem, as Milton sees it, is not necessarily particular to Shakespeare or to print, but involves the reader’s relinquishment of activity to become a living sepulchre of the dead, a monument that turns out to be like the pharaohs’ pyramids in that it begets a desire for the stillness of death. But (as Stevens argues) the true wondrousness of the poetic monument is that despite their ‘astonishment’ its readers are not really turned to stone; otherwise the monument becomes little more impressive than a lifelike carving. Rather, readers

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should become like the paradoxical “living stones” of 1 Peter 2:4-7: “the company of the faithful is as it were a certain holy and spiritual building, built of lively stones.”\textsuperscript{339} The “miracle” of \textit{The Winter’s Tale} is that what \textit{appears} to be merely an inanimate image or idol is really the living woman, thought to be dead, whom no work of art or monument could restore or perfectly represent. It does not falsely pretend to be a real miracle; such a pretense would constitute a temptation to idolatry. This distinction, however, might be lost on some viewers or readers; insofar as idolatry is at least as much in the response of the reader as it is in the text itself, Milton sees a need to admonish readers against idolatrous reading. Milton imagines a “stone” that, like the apparent statue in \textit{The Winter’s Tale}, “rebukes [us] / For being more stone than it.”\textsuperscript{340} What Milton’s Shakespeare needs is, as the \textit{Sonnets} also acknowledge, readers and viewers who do not merely become lifeless sepulchres, but who retain their own liveliness.

Milton seeks to keep alive this lively quality in the monument of ‘his Shakespeare,’ to prevent it from becoming a Shakes-pyramid, by bestowing a kind of praise that contains within it a warning against an idolatrous and lifeless mode of reading. As in Spenser’s pun, a \textit{monument} is always also a \textit{moniment}, a warning.\textsuperscript{341} What initially appears to conform to the conventional compliment of critical elegy in which the elegist disclaims any ability to monumentalize one

\textsuperscript{339}Geneva Bible 1599.

\textsuperscript{340} \textit{The Winter’s Tale} V.iii.

\textsuperscript{341} \textit{Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser}, 382.
who has already created for himself an inimitable monument turns out to be the voice of a poet-reader who, like Jonson in the Pawlet elegy, has managed not to be made into a silent marble stone. The similarity of Milton’s concerns to those Jonson confronts in the Pawlet elegy is striking—these two elegies, one for England’s best-known poet and the other for a comparatively obscure woman, both written around 1631, both participate in the same discourse about the threat of petrification that comes with literary monumentality.

Rather than issuing a warning meant to prompt readers to eschew bad reading for good, Menges reads Milton as holding out little hope of a way of reading that does not lead to idolatry:

In substituting the monumental reader for the monumental book, Milton has merely replaced his object, but the idolatrous impulse—and its elusive source—remains omnipresent. Attempting to circumvent the idolatrous worship of the book as a relic, “On Shakespeare” seems to be more committed to introduce rather than to resolve its slew of problems.342

While I concur that “On Shakespeare” cannot be said to resolve entirely the problem of the “idolatrous impulse,” of which Milton is always wary, I would argue that his address to Shakespeare from among the “we” who respond to Shakespeare’s poetry marks himself as an instance of a poet-reader who, though included among those susceptible to “wonder and astonishment,” is able to resist becoming part of a still, speechless, stony monument. Many have remarked on the elegy’s similarity to and departures from Shakespeare’s sonnets. The elegy

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342 Menges 129.
overflows the standard length of a sonnet while composing itself entirely of rhyming couplets. As I note in my reading of the Sonnets, it is frequently in the closing couplets’ departure from the first twelve lines that Shakespeare most emphatically gestures toward his poems’—and thus, in some way, his beloved’s—survival within the lively, embodied reading of posterity. Perhaps the clearest parallel is with Sonnet 55, where Shakespeare rejects “marble, and the gilded monuments / Of princes” as monuments to his beloved in favor of a “living record” that draws its life from “the eyes of all posterity.” By including this expanded sonnet composed of nothing but couplets within the printed monument of Shakespeare’s Second Folio, Milton makes himself a fulfillment of the Sonnets’ prophecies, the reader who is not petrified by idolatry or astonishment into allowing his fancy to be altogether or permanently bereaved of itself, who experiences wonder and yet can still see, breathe, move, speak. Unlike the present-day beholders of Sonnet 106, he has not only “eyes to wonder” but a “tongue to praise” as well. (We may also recall that fancied visions of bereavement are, in Spenser’s “Ruines of Time,” preconditions for the development of the world-contempt necessary to avoid attachment to material monuments.)

Though the clear sense of the entire opening question of the poem is “What need (implied answer: none) does my Shakespeare have of a stone monument for his bones?,” the opening of the poem contains two smaller semantic units that can also be read independently as questions: “What need[s]
my Shakespeare?” and “What need[s] my Shakespeare for his honour’d bones?”

To the first, the answer is Milton and other lively, like-minded poet-readers.

Kings, defined here by their untoward cravings for material pomp, may desire to
die for such a tomb, perhaps wrongly seeing it as only an exceptionally lifelike
statue, but other true poets and lively readers, on encountering Shakespeare’s
monument, will experience a moment of potential petrifcation that begets in
them a desire to speak undyingly. In an echo of Sonnet 29, the poet should
“scorn to change [his] state with kings,” while kings would gladly change places
with him. And what sort of tomb do the kings desire of him? Why, ‘sad stories of
the deaths of kings’ that are not static tableaux carved in stone, but living
portraits enacted by living, breathing, speaking bodies on the stage, tombs that
render them not as dead but ever—wondrously—“as dying, and behold, we live,”
like Shakespeare the actor who, in the First Folio tribute attributed to Milton’s
father, has apparently died but will return from Death’s tiring-room to receive
his applause.343 Such a tomb is perhaps better than kings deserve. As for
Shakespeare, what he needs to keep him alive, according to the Sonnets, is living
poet-readers. Milton presents himself as one such, but he also, through an elegy
that works as an admonition, seeks to help create other such readers as well.

As for the second question, what Shakespeare needs for his bones is the
same thing demanded by the bones in Milton’s later sonnet “On the Late
Massacre in Piedmont”: nothing more or less than apocalypse and resurrection.

343 2 Cor 6:9.
But in the interim, neither an imposing pyramid nor the imposing Folio-monument can alone do justice to the bones’ potential liveliness. As in Shakespeare’s Sonnets, the only suitable monument is the perhaps momentarily stilled, but still living, lively, breathing, speaking body of the reader. The moment of ecstasis Milton describes overtaking the wondering reader resembles the pause in Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones, when sinew and flesh have been restored to the bones, but they have not yet been brought to life by the restoration of breath:

The hand of the Lord was vpon me, and caryed me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me downe in the mids of the field, which was full of bones. And he led me round about by them, and beholde, they were very many in the open fielde, and lo, they were very drie. And he sayde vnto me, Sonne of man, can these bones liue? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Againe he sayde vnto me, Prophecie vpon these bones and say vnto them, O ye dry bones, heare the word of the Lord. … So I prophecied, as I was commanded: and as I prophecied, there was a noyse, and beholde, there was a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, loe, the sinewes, and the flesh grewe vpon them, and aboue, the skinne couered them, but there was no breath in them. Then sayd he vnto me, Prophecie vnto the winde: prophecie, sonne of man, and say to the winde, Thus sayth the Lord God, Come from the foure windes, O breath, and breathe vpon these slayne, that they may liue. So I prophecied as hee had commanded me: and the breath came into them, and they liued…

In Ezekiel, the resurrection and restoration of breath to the valley of dry bones does not take place purely by divine action, but through the cooperation of the

344 Ezekiel 37:1-10.
prophetic speaker who utters the word of the Lord. Shakespeare’s bones are here, in the poem’s opening line, not simply to be dismissed (any more than we should dismiss the “slaughtered saints, whose bones / Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold” – though Shakespeare is no martyr, and it would be strange for Milton to treat him in the same way) but to remind us that poetry cannot be disembodied. Lycidas cannot simply become the genius of the shore; he must have his hair washed first. Milton begins with bones because they make it impossible to forget something essential: that poetry belongs to, is given voice by, people with bodies, and only insofar as the body awaits resurrection can poetry endure. Pyramids represent covering up the bones with a different kind of bid for immortality, one Milton identifies with the scriptural history of Egypt and thus with resistance to God and spiritual death. Like the bones in the valley of Ezekiel, Shakespeare’s bones depend not on monuments of stone or of print, but on the return of living breath invoked by a prophetic voice.

Stevens, I think, is right to see in Milton’s elegy an echo of The Winter’s Tale, and I would like to expand on his insights about what this means for the poem. As Elizabeth Williamson has shown, the staging of Christ’s Resurrection in pre-Reformation English liturgical drama, as in its biblical sources, involved a focus on the empty tomb and thus on the absence of the body. She argues that The Winter’s Tale should be read in the context of an ongoing tradition of
dramatizations of Christ’s resurrection. Yet the “miracle” of The Winter’s Tale does not claim to be a resurrection from the dead; rather, it provides a moment that looks forward to resurrection by revealing that what has appeared to be only a “dead likeness” that “mocks” life is really a living person. The “living statue” in the play at first appears to be an uncanny artifact almost indistinguishable from the real thing, a temptation to idolatry much like the moving statues of saints described in Protestant narratives of false miracles, but it is revealed really to be a living woman who inspires wonder in the audience not by seeming but by truly being alive. A woman who had been really made marble would be a horror; it is the equivocation between the wonder of the reality, in which the petrification of bodies is only figurative, and the horror of the figure-made-literal, which represents the spiritual condition of idolatrous reading, that makes Milton’s warning so effective. Milton’s apparent petrification of Shakespeare’s readers into a monument, can, like the pause of the voice between the last quatrains and the couplet of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 71, work as an anticipatory mimesis of death as a temporary condition, death as mere moment of stillness before resurrection. It is this potential in human bodies, whether deprived of their senses only by a moment of wonder or by death, that keeps the poetic monument from being like the material one. And this is a promise we should...

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345 Elizabeth Williamson, The Materiality of Religion in Early Modern English Drama (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 40.

346 The Winter’s Tale V.3.16-19.

347 “[T]he author’s lively body is … fundamental to breaking the illusion of statuewartship… the liveliness of the actor’s body is itself the miracle.” Waldron 79.
have been prepared for from the very first by Milton’s beginning with Shakespeare’s bones.

At first, Shakespeare’s “honour’d bones” seem to be only a stumbling block, an opportunity for an idolatry that wants to give honor to “relics” of the dead by wasting an age’s labor piling up stones to mark their place. As in Horace and Propertius, the poetic monument is in all ways superior to the physical one, which is tied to the dead body both by its location and by their shared lifeless materiality. Yet the poem reveals the poetic monument to be at least as dangerous as the pyramid, and perhaps more so: rather than simply worshipping stocks and stones, the over-awed reader may himself become deadened like an idol. Yet while the bad monument, the pyramid, appears to bestow honor on bones, what it really does is hide them. The stone of Christ’s tomb was rolled away; a pyramid, though it may point toward the stars, hides the body and keeps it in the tomb, preserving it as a dead, mummified relic. Milton, imitating the prophet Ezekiel, wants us to pay attention to bones in order to show us not just their lack of life, their dryness, but also their potential for restored life. What other readers have missed in their discussions of Milton’s concerns about idolatry and petrification, I think, is that for Milton, the key to avoiding an idolatry that results in being oneself petrified into a kind of idol lies in the capacity of the poet to resist petrification, idolatry, and death. He shows the marmoreal stillness of the rapt idolater and the dead person’s reduction to bare materiality to be the same threat, a threat we must resist through spirited
and embodied reading – a kind of reading in which, though we look like marble statues, we are really made both to marvel and into a marvel, not cold and dead but “conceiving,” temporarily concealing a quickening of new life.

The three elegies for poets I have considered form a consensus that the poet’s body cannot be rightly served by a conventional epitaph or monument, and must not be forgotten, cast aside, or made merely the dead foil for an immaterial poetry, for bodily resurrection and life are the wellspring of poetic immortality, the only way to reconcile it with the world of materiality in which its readers live and breathe. For Spenser, this means a series of transformations in which the body as sacrifice inspires a poetic practice of likeness-making that links the material world with the eternal one by providing glimpses or prefigurements of bodily ascent. For Jonson, the poetic transformation of body is distanced from sacrifice and grounded in performance and verbal address. Milton wants no transformation of the body, whether into swan, star, or stone. Only a petrification that is marvelous because it is purely figurative will do; it is as living and breathing bodies that readers become the only true poetic monuments. As we turn to “Lycidas,” we will see Milton again considering elegy as a poetic and prophetic work of attending to the poet’s body that is at once dead and yet-to-live.
AFTERWORD:

“SUNK LOW, BUT MOUNTED HIGH”:

ATTENDING TO THE BODY IN MILTON’S LYCIDAS

Mocking the pastoral conventionality of Lycidas, Samuel Johnson quipped that “one god asks another what is become of Lycidas, and … neither god can tell.” Though not precisely true, Johnson’s joke is acute because it points to something real and painful (and thus also potentially funny) about Milton’s poem: its persistent concern with locating and attending to a body which cannot be found, no matter which god, saint, or angel speaks or is called upon. We know, after all, what has happened to Edward King; what nobody can tell is where the body is and, perhaps, what it has now become. In a poem that (as Johnson notes) transfigures a clerically-inclined, recently-drowned erstwhile


349 Joad Raymond suggests that “with its floating corpse, Milton’s pastoral elegy threatens to turn away from Theocritus and Virgil and, perhaps inadvertently, toward Lucan’s Pharsalia, another state-of-the-nation poem that exploits the pathos of unrecovered bodies. Cornelia laments there for her unburied husband, Pompey: ‘Quid porro tumulis opus est aut ulla requires / Instrumenta, dolor?’ (‘But what need is there of a grave, or why does grief require any trappings?’)” Milton’s Angels: The Early Modern Imagination (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 230.
classmate into a literally generic pastoral shepherd-singer, the better to offer a generically appropriate trajectory of lament culminating in religious consolation, why such anguish over what has become of the unrecoverable body, “hurl’d” and “whelmed” in the traceless sea? What is become of King is, in the poem’s world at least, that he is become Lycidas, and the pastoral landscape to which he belongs has been lavishly invoked, and yet his body cannot be laid to rest in this fictive country.

The absence of the body in Lycidas, and the poem’s attempts at locating, recovering, or attending it, have been recognized by critics as a central problem the poem confronts. According to Barbara Johnson, “the speaker’s search for the body of the dead Lycidas” is both crucial to the poem and “unprecedented in the history of pastoral elegy. … The image of the dead Lycidas is continually evoked as the swain attempts to picture where he is and what has happened to his body.”350 Lawrence Lipking has argued that “[t]he climax of Lycidas turns on a rescue mission” important for the construction of a nationalist myth.351 The elegist’s task, according to Lloyd Kermode, is incompletely but satisfactorily [to] weave the text that “repairs” Lycidas and prepares him for “the dear might of him that walked the waves” to raise him up


and for what was once dead to be restored to the shores of life.352

This restoration, I will argue, is key to a poetics that is apocalyptic first and nationalist only second, in which Milton strives to outdo his classical and recent predecessors by claiming a prophetic-poetic power that participates in raising, rather than transforming, the body once lost in the chaos of sea.

I approach the question of the mortal body in Lycidas—it's absence and how, despite its absence, Milton tries to recover and to attend to it—by reading the poem alongside several other texts, none of which has previously been identified as a noteworthy intertext for the poem, that are crucial to the questions of why and how Lycidas poetically recovers the body. First, I consider the flower passage and geographical speculation about the location of Lycidas' body alongside Horace's Ode II.20, which, as we have seen in earlier chapters, had provided other English critical elegists with an image of the poet's body transformed from the mortal object of funeral rites into a singing swan that will bring immortal fame even beyond the reach of cartography and empire. Milton's geographic survey, I argue, represents a rejection of the Horatian idea that the mortal body, given over to funeral rites, must become something other than itself for poetic fame take flight. Second, I consider Milton's address to the Archangel Michael, whom he exhorts to "melt with ruth," as drawing the reader into Daniel's apocalyptic vision on the shore of the Tigris. The many parallels

between the landscapes of Daniel 12 and *Lycidas* open up a poetics in which prophetic writing depends upon and anticipates bodily resurrection, judgment, true understanding, and star-like beatitude. Michael’s “ruth” brings together the moment of the poet’s address—in which the angel might pity the body’s state of unrest—with the Day of Judgment when, impelled by mercy, the sea shall give up its dead (Rev. 20:13). Third, I briefly consider Milton’s dolphins as a bridge between the “O ye whales” of the apocryphal Song of the Three Children (also from the Book of Daniel, though not present in the Masoretic text accepted as inerrant by the Reformers) and classical accounts that stress dolphins’ predilection to bring bodies to shore for burial, which is often connected to apotheosis or poetic fame. The elegist may not merely look forward to the Resurrection of the Body, but must (as in the invocation of the wafting dolphins) prefigure it. The undersea sweep of Lycidas’ body, which must be “sunk low” into the oozy dregs of chaotic matter before it can “mount high”, suggests that, though the fame of Milton’s English verse may not extend as far abroad as that of the classical poets, its depths and heights are unprecedented because it is drawn, insofar as it attaches itself to the mortal human body, into the otherwise “unexpressive” harmonies of heaven. Throughout, Milton has his eye on Spenser, his model and rival. *Lycidas* has often been linked genealogically and generically with Spenser’s “Astrophel,” but I find that reading it alongside “The Ruines of Time” is also illuminating. As in “The Ruines of Time,” the sea, epitomizing chaos and mutability, threatens the poet’s body, but Milton strives
Milton’s speaker begins with an apology for his disruptive and violent acts of “plucking” and “shattering”: he does these things not freely, he excuses himself, but under “bitter constraint,” a poet “compelled” by his “sad occasion.” This occasion is not merely King’s death, but also the situation of his body:

He must not flote upon his watry bear
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of som melodious tear. (12-14)

The poem justifies its disruptiveness of the times and seasons of nature by this compulsion, a compulsion to provide a ‘melodious’ act of mourning that will offer some compensation or consolation. What begins with plain denial of the reality—“he must not flote upon his watry bear,” shifts via enjambment into a denial that the body will be allowed to do so unwept. What surfaces gradually through these lines is the recognition that, as bad as it would be for the body to float on a ‘watry bear’ without human mourners, the truth (as the imagination cannot stop itself from envisioning) is much worse: there is no restful, almost lovely ‘watery bier;’ really, the body is tumbled at random, and, even if cast up on shore, would then only be at the mercy of the equally harsh and untender wind in some deserted place. What cannot be escaped, the image of the body weltering (which, per the OED, means “to roll or twist the body; to turn or tumble about; to writhe, to wriggle”) in the surf, and then washed up and dried by the “parching” wind—these terrible vicissitudes that cannot be escaped must,
though the physical body cannot be washed, shrouded, and buried decently, yet be offset by a poetic act of mourning.\textsuperscript{353} The cruelty of chaotic and uncaring saltwater, which parallels the Maenads’ “hideous roar,” must be atoned by an orderly offering of a similar substance, a “melodious tear.” This compulsion, driven by images of the body unattended and at the mercy of elemental forces, continues throughout to drive the poem, culminating in the fabrication of the elaborate “false surmise” of the flower passage and its “laureate herse”:

\begin{quote}
Bid \textit{Amaranthus} all his beauty shed,
And \textit{Daffadillies} fill their cups with tears,
To strew the Laureat Herse where \textit{Lycid} lies.
For so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
Ay me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding Seas
Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurld… (149-155)
\end{quote}

Throughout \textit{Lycidas}, Milton tries out different ways of fictively or poetically attending to the body, but at every turn he is troubled by the sense that these “false surmises” are not enough, and the horrid truth continues to insert itself into his thoughts and into the poem. It is all very well to imagine the poet’s body transformed into a swan or a star, as Spenser had done with Sidney’s body in “The Ruines of Time,” or to imagine it wafted by rescuing dolphins, or to make a verbal act that declares him “the genius of the shore,” but are these imaginings nothing but a false way of addressing grief and what has really, horribly become of the irrecoverable body?

\textsuperscript{353} OED, \textit{welter}, v1., 1a. and b.
The stakes here include mourning for King himself but, as many critics have noted, they have a larger scope as well. As Spenser had done with Sidney, Milton maps the situation of King onto the legend of Orpheus, whose severed head was lost in water but then recovered. The many-faceted myth of Orpheus, as Heather Dubrow has demonstrated, became in the early modern period a way of thinking about (we might say theorizing) the capacious mode of lyric poetry (including longer poems like *Lycidas*), emblematizing its problems and liabilities as well as its music and power. As such we may read Orpheus as a figure not only for King, but also for the perils and possibilities of Milton’s enterprise. As we have seen, Spenser connects Sidney’s body (which is rescued from near loss in water) to that of Orpheus in “The Ruines of Time,” but, since King’s body has in fact been subsumed by water, Milton can take the parallel further. Critics have seen the violent death and dismemberment of Orpheus as a source of anxiety for Milton, an emblem of the threats of fragmentation and scattering both to poets’ bodies and to their poetry. In *Lycidas*, however, I would suggest that though the threat of dismemberment hovers in the background (“gory visage” is a fairly euphemistic way of describing a severed head), and is suggested obliquely by the multiple possibly geographic locations given for King’s body, it is the body’s

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sweeping-away by water ("down the stream ..., / Down the swift Hebrus") and the possibility of recovering it (its journey is "to the Lesbian shore") that are central to Milton's account. In the third-century version of the Orpheus myth recounted by Phanocles,

the head and lyre together were washed to the blue-green shore. And the sea put the head and lyre, still together, ashore at the sacred city of Lesbos. The sound of the clear-toned lyre reached both to the sea and the islands, and to the shore where the rivers flow into the sea, and there on the shore men buried the clear-toned head of Orpheus, and put into the tomb the clear-toned lyre as well, which had prevailed over both the dead rocks and the bitter waters of Phorcus. After this, the island had both songs and the lovely art of harping, and of all islands it is the most tuneful.356

This particular account of the body's return to shore, though highly suggestive, need not have been known to Milton for him to be familiar with the idea that the presence of Orpheus' body in a temple or the good deed of his burial was linked to a special endowment of poetic gifts.357 Barbara Lewalski suggests, without attributing the belief to a specific primary source, that "the final line of the Orpheus passage ... hints at some consolation in its reference to another aspect of the myth: Apollo guarded the head of Orpheus on its journey to Lesbos, where it

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brought that island the gift of song.”\textsuperscript{358} The Orpheus passage shows us something about Milton’s task in \textit{Lycidas}: without the recovery of the body from water, the living cannot perform their duties of mourning and attending to the bodies of the dead. The inability to do so is an occasion of intensified grief for the dead person, but it also means the loss of an opportunity for Milton as laureate to ameliorate what is (in Stephen Fallon’s words) a “violation of poetic harmony,” because it is by recovering and attending to the body of the dead poet that an island may become “most tuneful.”\textsuperscript{359} Lloyd Kermode observes that in the Orpheus passage, the speaker does not go on to celebrate the oracle of Orpheus after reaching the shore of Lesbos, where a text is created of, and for, the future. The singer’s retelling of the story is amputated so that he cannot—as Ovid’s tale can, and as we can from our knowledge of that source—celebrate the fact that the shore of death is also the shore of life.\textsuperscript{360}

Within the trajectory of \textit{Lycidas}, though, Milton is merely leaving the conclusion of the Orpheus legend implicit, reminding us what the stakes are. His ambitions for his island nation and for himself as its poet depend on some sort of recovery and proper mourning of the body of Lycidas. But is the body recovered, and if so, how?


\textsuperscript{360} Kermode 14.
In one of the most acute and influential recent accounts of *Lycidas*, Lipking has focused on the lines in which Milton, interrupting his dallying with the “false surmise” of the “Laureate hearse,” traces as if perusing an atlas the possible locations of King’s body:

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding Seas
Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurld,
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit’st the bottom of the monstrous world;
Or whether thou to our moist vows deny’d,
Sleep’st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona’s hold… (154-162)

Lipking argues that “the circulation of Lycidas’ body most fully reveals what is at stake for Milton…. In their imagined journey, the bones obey no ocean current, but rather the extreme margins of the Irish Sea, the limit of Britain.” 361 On Lipking’s reading, poem’s cartographic tracing of the body’s possible locations beneath the sea reveals not only grief’s inconsolable concern for the possible whereabouts of the sea-tossed body, but, more importantly, the expanding reach of the nascent British empire. I want to expand on Lipking’s insights about this passage by reading it as an echo of and response to the geopolitical survey in Horace’s Ode 2.20. 362 As I have shown in the preceding chapters, Horace’s image of the poet’s body becoming immortal through transformation into a swan had

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361 Lipking 210.

already been adapted for critical elegy by Spenser in “The Ruines of Time” and
by Jonson in his elegy for Shakespeare. In Lycidas, there is no swan, but there is a
parallel with Horace’s poetic-cartographic survey of empire:

Iam Daedalo notior Icaro
visam gementis litora Bospori
Syrtisque Gaetulas canorus
ales Hyperboreosque campos.

Me Colchus et qui dissimulate metum
Marsae cohortis Dacus et ultimi
noscent Geloni, me peritus
discet Hiber Rhodanique potor.

Absint inani funere neniae
luctusque turpes et querimoniae;
compesce clamorem ac sequulcri
mitte supervacuos honores. (9-20)

As David Armstrong writes, Horace becomes “a swan that will fly over the
whole map of empire. He will live forever all over it in the memory of
provincials now not civilized enough to read, like the Spaniards, currently
drinking horse’s blood, who will later read Horace once they know how.”

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363 Soon [even now], more renowned than Daedalus’ Icarus, I shall visit as a tuneful swan
the shores of the bellowing Bosphorus, the Gaetulian Syrtes, and the plains of the folk beyond the
north wind [Hyperboreans]. The Colchian shall come to know me, and the Dacian who pretends
not to fear the Marsian cohorts, and, furthest of all, the Geloni; the Spaniard will become
educated by reading my works, and so will he who drinks the Rhone. Let there be no
lamentations or any expressions of grief and mourning at my hollow funeral; restrain all cries,
and do not trouble with the empty tribute of a tomb. Horace II.20, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd
(Cambridge, MA: Loeb, 2004.) For a verse translation, see note 318.

364 David Armstrong, “The Biographical and Social Foundations of Horace’s Poetic
“Horace’s poetry is coextensive with the Roman empire in both time and space. The geography
that will be visited by the immortal poet-swan covers the extreme points of the Roman empire,
and the peoples inhabiting these lands will come to know… him as poetry. … me discet (‘he will
learn me,’ 19-20) must be of his poetry.” Michèle Lowrie, Horace’s Narrative Odes (Oxford:
Aside from the catalog of place-names and the mention of “litora,” shores, certainly an important term in *Lycidas*, the two passages do not have close verbal similarities. I think, however, that we can nonetheless see Milton entering into a conversation about the place of the body for poetry both with Horace and with Spenser. Milton is at once clashing with Horace by insisting that the body and funeral rites are important and agreeing with Horace that without the body the funeral is, despite the compulsion of grief that make us desire to perform it, ridiculous. He has been gesturing toward, and withdrawing from, first with the gathering of foliage at the poem’s opening, then with the ‘watry bier,’ then the flower passage culminating in the ‘false surmise’ of the ‘laureate Herse,’ what Horace explicitly directs his friends not to do: performing, if only in verse, the “inane” funeral in which the body is absent.

In the circulation or displacement of the body of *Lycidas*, Milton alludes to the poetic-imperial itinerary of the Horatian swan in order to put it through a sea-change. Rather than the swan, triumphantly spreading its song and fame across the map as it wings its way through the air, we have the body subjected in imagination to being “hurl’d” and “whelmed” by the waves, or perhaps finally “sleeping.” Horace boasts of his ability to evade the mortality of the human body, prey to the tomb, by becoming something else entirely. He declares, moreover, that “nec Stygia cohibebor unda.” He will not be held, confined, by the wave of Styx; *Lycidas*, though, is held “under the whelming tide.” Both Milton and Horace give us, instead of the burial for the poet’s body, a body not
confined to a particular local habitation by a tomb, but rather associated with an expansive set of possible locations traced as if perusing a map of empire. Yet Milton, unlike Spenser and Jonson, declines to transform the poet’s body into a swan. Transformation into a creature able to traverse both the watery and heavenly spheres might have seemed particularly attractive when poet had died by drowning and his body was unrecovered. We can see from Spenser and Jonson that this trope was well-established. Milton surely knew it. This bodily transformation is directly connected to Horace’s contempt for the empty clamor of dirges and mourning. *Lycidas* makes a case for the rightness of mourning rites even—no, especially—when the body is absent. Milton has, he is showing us, the poetic power not merely to save the body by transforming it into something other than what it is (a swan, a star), but to save it *as itself*, not transformed, still human. The desire of the mourners to see, locate, and honor the body is important because they point toward the body’s essential retention of its form, which is (somehow) the image of God. They honor it because it is only apparently or temporarily corruptible, because it will rise again, incorruptible, at the last day. As in Milton’s sonnet on the Waldensians and his elegy for Shakespeare, he is adamant that we must not forget the bones, that it is part of the poet’s task to present them to us, his readers. He rejects the Horatian notion that far-flung poetic fame requires the transformation of the poet into something other than human and the disavowal of the grave and the funeral songs, an immortality that consists in casting off one’s identity as mortal. If we are going to
imagine, we must imagine not stellifications or cygnifications, but flower-
bedecked hearses and dolphins who can bring up bodies from the deep.

I concur with Lipking that the undersea sweep of King’s body is the key to
Milton’s vision of British empire and his own place as its poet. I think, though,
that Lipking does not quite show why the body under the sea is able to serve as
such a key. It would seem that defining an empire by the alleged weltering of a
drowned cleric’s body under the sea might be somewhat underwhelming to
other nations, even if said cleric were to embody “grievance” and to be
posthumously declared a guardian genius. This becomes especially clear when
one contrasts the scope of Milton’s cartographic survey with Horace’s. In terms
of pagan pomp and imperial glory, Lycidas is a total loss. In Horace’s Carmen 4.2,
he had imagined that anyone who unworthily imitated Pindar would, like Icarus
flying too close to the sun, “vitreo daturus nomina ponto.” In this image, putting
on wings leads the hubristic poet to sink beneath the glassy, unmarked surface of
the ocean; his name, though remembered, gains no real purchase upon the water,
and it remains in a single locality, not spreading across the whole landscape like
the song of the flying swan. Lycidas’ fate—to be anchored to a particular shore--
is similar. Yet Milton will not rely on the divine Augustus and on the inevitably
triumphant, ever-expanding Roman imperium; he, like Spenser before him, will
maintain that if the English nation or its poetry triumphs, it can do so only by the
anticipation of apocalypse, by placing itself in a position of dependence on the
promise of resurrection. While Spenser repeatedly saves the body from being
overwhelmed by the waves (the swan traverses the surface of the water, the Orphic harp is not lost in water, the black coffer containing Sidney’s body does not sink beneath the waves), Milton outgoes him with a poetics that participates in “the might of him that walked the waves” to recover Lycidas’ body even from the deepest ocean floor.

But does he recover the body, and if so, how? If he does so, it is surely in the two lines that conclude the search, the paired invocation of St. Michael and of the dolphins. Many have called this the climax of the poem; Creaser, for instance, says that line 164 “must be a crucial one, occurring, as it does, on the verge of the poem’s abrupt translation from despair” over the loss of the unresting body in the sea “to rapture.”365 These invocations have been called the poem’s “nadir of despair,” as the fabulous “sleep” of Lycidas, like the “watry bier” and flower-strewn “Herse” before it, collapses into the realization that this has been nothing but “fable,” another “false surmise” and the speaker turns (yet once more) to the activity that Jonathan Culler has called constitutive of lyric: the apostrophe, the address to entities otherwise incapable of being addressed.366 Is this address a kind of last-ditch, hopeless cry over an irremediable situation? To converse with an angel or command a dolphin is not beyond the scope of Milton’s Adam, but in the post-lapsarian present it suggests a of reclamation of man’s Edenic capacities.


366 Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy called this the “nadir of despair” in “Essays in Analysis: Lycidas,” quoted in Creaser 236. Jonathan Culler’s notion of apostrophe applies most perfectly to inanimate objects truly incapable of mutual communication, but is also applicable in cases of entities outside ordinary conversation such as animals, angels, the dead, and so on. Culler, “Reading Lyric,” Yale French Studies 69 (1985), 98-106.
Jeffrey Hammond argues that this transition amounts to forgetting about the body, as Milton “distracts his reader from the body’s death to the soul’s marriage with Christ.”\textsuperscript{367} This couplet marks the turn from the drowned, ‘whelmd,’ ‘washed,’ lost body to the triumphant Lycidas who was “sunk low, but mounted high,” like the day-star, laving his oozy locks with nectar. I will attempt to show what the bringing together of St. Michael and the dolphins has to do with the poem’s ‘rescue mission,’ and that it represents not the abandonment, but rather the culmination of Milton’s insistence on attending to the body.

In traditional iconography and belief, St. Michael is not only the head of the celestial army and the bearer of the flaming sword at Eden’s gate, but is also imagined as participating the in the Judgment of souls at both the moment of death and the Last Day.\textsuperscript{368} The scriptural warrant for St Michael’s eschatological role derives from one of the archangel’s relatively few appearances in the Bible, in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Daniel.\textsuperscript{369} Lipking notes that “[e]ver since the Book of Daniel,… Michael had represented the ultimate nationalistic warrior-angel, Israel’s champion and prince” (209), but when one looks beyond the single verse in which the name “Michael” appears, one sees that this guardianship is


\textsuperscript{369} Feisel G. Mohamed concludes that Lycidas “presents [Michael] as protector of a terrestrial elect nation in the spirit of Daniel” while the depiction of the archangel in Paradise Lost “emphasizes the war of the Saints against the forces of Antichrist typical of Revelation.” Mohamed, In the Anteroom of Divinity: The Reformation of the Angels from Colet to Milton (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2008).
not the extent of the angel’s role in Daniel. Though he does watch over the 
children of Israel, Michael’s reappearance is also a sign that the book is shifting
from a geopolitical account of the struggles for control of the Persian empire in 
Chapter 11 to take an eschatological turn at the opening of Chapter 12. Dutch 
Protestant paintings of the Last Judgment, such as those of Hans Memling and 
Jan Provost, often show the Son reigning in heaven seated on an arched rainbow
while the archangel Michael metes out the divine judgment on earth, his gaze
cast downward toward the naked bodies of the recently resurrected multitude.370

We may suppose that Milton, given his keen interests in prophets, angels, and
the apocalypse, had studied this passage from Daniel closely:

And at that time shall Michael stand up, ye great
prince, which standeth for the children of thy people,
and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was
since there began to be a nation unto that same time:
and at that time thy people shall be delivered, euery
one that shall be found written in the boke. And 
many of them that sleepe in the dust of the earth,
shall awake, some to euerlasting life, and some to
shame and perpetuall contempt. And they that be
wise, shall shine, as the brightnes of the firmament:
and they that turne many to righteousnes, shall shine
as the starres, for euer and euer. But thou, O Daniel,
shut up the words, and seale the boke til the end of 
the time: many shall run to and from, and knowledge
shall be increased. Then I Daniel looked, and behold,
there stood other two, ye one on this side of the
brinke of the riuer, and the other on that side of the 
brinke of the riuer. And one saide unto the man

370 Despite the tendency of some Protestants to see the ascription of agency to angels as
detracting from the focus on Christ, these Dutch paintings actually give a more prominent place
to Michael than comparable scenes of the Judgment by Italian Renaissance painters. See 
Mohamed 157-159.
clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the riuere, When shall be the ende of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen which was upon the waters of the riuere, when he helde up his right hand, and his left hand unto heauen, and swaare by him that liueth for euer, that it shall tarie for a time, two times and an halfe: and when he shall haue accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. Then I heard it, but I understood it not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up, and sealed, till the ende of the time. Many shalbe purifie, made white, and tried: but the wicked shall doe wickedly, and none of the wicked shall haue understanding: but the wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be take[n] away and the abominable desolation set vp, there shall be a thousand, two hundreth and ninetie daies. Blessed is he that waiteth and commeth to the thousand, three hundreth and fiue and thirtie daies. But go thou thy way til the end be: for thou shalt rest and stand up in thy lot, at the end of the daies.

By calling upon St Michael to “melt with ruth” immediately after imagining Lycidas as one who “sleeps” — for though his body may not be at rest, nevertheless he is among the figurative “them that sleepe” — Milton brings in the whole landscape of this passage from Daniel. We encounter Daniel in deep mourning on the shores of “that great river, the Tigris”; as in Lycidas, the location on the “brinke” or shore, the liminal region where water meets land, is stressed. From Genesis onward, the separation of water and land is emblematic of the power of God to establish and sustain his creation by distinguishing kinds from one another, and, by extension, of the dependence of all created things on God to

371 *Geneva Bible* (1599), Daniel 12.
sustain their continued existence, which he will someday bring to a close.

Beginning in Chapter 10, a “man in linen” speaks to Daniel, and “the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude,” likely the model for the description of Christ in the book of Revelation as having a “voice as the sound of many waters.” The passage from Chapter 12 affirms that those “many of them that sleepe... shall awake,” some to beatitude and others to condemnation, which is reiterated in the assurance to Daniel that he himself “shalt rest and stand up... at the end of the daies.”

This association of the archangel Michael with the Resurrection and Judgment makes sense of Milton’s otherwise strange plea to the Angel to “melt with ruth”; it connects the pity the angel might feel for the body not laid to rest with the mercy shown at the general Resurrection and Last Judgment, and perhaps with Christ’s tears for the dead Lazarus as an anticipation of that mercy. The passage also brings us the association of salvation with being written down in a book; the warrant for salvific writing is given to Daniel as prophetic author, a mantle Milton surely wishes to claim for himself. The following metaphor of Lycidas rising like the day-star reminds us of the promise given to Daniel that those who “turn many to righteousness... shall

372 Calvin, Praelectiones in Librum Prophetarium Danielis: “Those who sleep in the earth and the dust; meaning, wherever the earth and dust exist, nevertheless they shall rise... This passage is worthy of especial notice, because the prophets do not contain any clearer testimony than this to the last resurrection, particularly as the angel distinctly asserts the future rising again of both the righteous and the wicked. Eternity is here opposed to those temporal miseries to which we are now subjected.” (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1852-53), 373. Milton cites Calvin’s commentary on Daniel in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. In Milton: Political Writings, ed. Martin Dzelzainis (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 39.

373 See Mohamed 155-159.
shine as the starres, for euer and euer.” Milton may have been thinking of this passage when he concluded the lyric “On Time” with the lines,

Then all this Earthy grosnes quit,  
Attir’d with Stars, we shall for ever sit,  
Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee O Time. (20-22)

By bringing in the associations from Daniel, Milton imbues the trope of stellification, as used by Spenser and Jonson, with a more vivid link to scripture that makes it both more obviously figurative or poetic (the righteous are not, as in a pagan myth, transformed into constellations, but shine “as the stars”), and more clearly Christian. Milton’s day-star image emphasizes that Lycidas must first be “sunk low” before he can “mount high” (see 1 Cor 15: 36-41).

Daniel’s mysterious “man clothed in linen which was upon the waters of the river” presages Jesus’ walking on water, and can be read as a Christophany, an apparition of the Son of God before the Incarnation. The connection with Daniel, then, complicates the temporality of Lycidas, reminding us that Christ could be named as “him who walked the waves” even in the time before the Incarnation, a time contemporary with the paganism of the pastoral speaker. The passage from Daniel also underscores the connection between the persistence of writing (in the Book of Life, where the names of the blessed are sealed until it is time for the seals to be opened) and the deferral of apocalypse (“the thing was true, but the time appointed was long,” Daniel 10:1) along with the “Blessed is he that waiteth” which Milton would later apply to himself. The passage concludes by coupling the command to “go thou thy way,” as the swain does to “valleys
new” at the poem’s conclusion, with the promise that “thou shalt rest and stand up... at the end of ye daies.” The progress of the prophet-poet is thus directly linked to receiving a promise of resurrection. Milton’s invocation of St. Michael calls up both the promise that the dead King, counted among the righteous, does rest in some sense more real than that in which he may incessantly be “hurl’d” (the rhyme of “hurl’d” with “World” is not accidental, I think; it suggests that the whole world is characterized by monstrous unrest and instability) and shall “stand up” and “shine, as ye brightness of the firmament.” There is an equivocation between the book in which the names of the righteous shall be found written from eternity and the book that Daniel himself has been commanded to write, an equivocation which, I would suggest, opens up the possibility for Milton himself in the prophetic mode to participate in a kind of writing assimilated to the heavenly book.

So in one line Milton has brought in this entire context: the prophet-poet, standing on the shore, sees the human form upon the water, vowing that the judgment, however long deferred, will come to wake the sleeping dead, who will, if they have ‘turned many to righteousness,’ at last rise up and shine like the stars. The prophet, too, is given a divine command to participate in a work of writing that is to be sealed up such that only the wise shall understand it (surely a chastening notion to all of us who attempt interpretations of Lycidas), but his writing will be opened and clearly understood in the glory of apocalypse. The weary “once more” of the poem’s opening and the deferral of divine judgment
that took place when we turned away from the dreadful “engine” ominously waiting to smite has given way to a “now” in which the prophet-poet invokes by his wish that the Angel “Look homeward” a gaze that locates the body and prefigures its resurrection to glory. The body sleeps, but can never be lost, for its rising at the last day is even now known to the Angel and beheld in prophetic vision; its “sleep” is no “false surmise.” The “melting” of the angel also assimilates the mercy he is asked to show to the acts of mourning associated with tears throughout the poem. The “meed of some melodious tear” wept, or composed, by the poet is an appropriate and obligatory mourning of the body because it participates in and anticipates the mercy shown by the body’s resurrection and the person’s inclusion among those judged righteous (not by their own merits, but by God’s mercy, which directs the angel). The angel’s gaze links the “now” of the poem with the eternal now of the last day; Michael shall stand up, but he already, even now, has those who have died in his regard. It was Michael who, in the tradition Milton takes up in Paradise Lost, banished Adam and Eve from their first home in Eden. It is he who shows Adam visions of the future of humankind and who tells him that the Son will purchase for the redeemed “a death like sleep, / A gentle wafting to immortal Life” (XII: 434-435).

It has long been recognized that the phrase ‘melt with ruth’ echoes The Faerie Queene 3.7.9, in which it is associated with the shedding of tears:

With that adowne out of her Christall eyne
Few trickling teares she softly forth let fall,
That like two Orient pearles, did purely shyne
Vpon her snowy cheeke; and therewithall
She sighed soft, that none so bestiall,
Nor saluage hart, but ruth of her sad plight
Would make to melt, or pitteously appall… [emphasis mine]
Why, then, does Milton, when wafting is wanted, call upon dolphins? St. Michael has been addressed; he can see Lycidas’ submerged body, though we cannot; he is transtemporally present at and sees the soul’s first exit into afterlife, the body’s “sleep,” and the soul’s reunion with the body at the end of days. Why then the dolphins, who in contrast to the rather casual, even peremptory, tone of the command to the Angel, are addressed with the ceremonious vocative “O ye”? There is a much-compressed echo of the biblical Song of the Three Children: “O ye Angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever… O ye whales and all that move in the waters, bless ye the Lord.”

This connection suggests an “as above, so below” structure. The Song’s address to each part of creation is recalled, too, by the act of lyric address that opens the poem: Milton’s “O ye laurels” and “O ye myrtles” recalls the Song’s “O all ye things that grow on the earth,” and his address to the Fountain Arethuse echoes the Song’s “O ye fountains.” Milton’s speaker, like that of the Song, addresses and claims the power to command aspects of creation using collective plurals:

Ye valleys low where the milde whispers use,
Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart Star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enameld eyes… (136-139)

375 Kathileen M. Swaim argues for the Song of the Three Children as a source for Adam and Eve’s morning hymn in Paradise Lost. “Supplementing more than seventy Christian Doctrine proof-texts from the Book of Daniel which indicate a keen knowledge and interest, Paradise Regained clarifies Milton’s attitude toward Daniel in repeatedly approving his preference for pulse over defiling foods, and as Barbara K. Lewalski has demonstrated, Daniel functions for Milton in this work as for his contemporaries as a type of Christ’s prophetical office and as ‘the prime Old Testament example of … the contemplative life’” (Lewalski, Milton’s Brief Epic, 250, 249). Swaim, “The Morning Hymn of Praise in Book 5 of Paradise Lost,” Milton Quarterly 22 (1988): 7-16.
In the larger biblical story that culminates with the Song of the Three Children, Nebuchadnezzar commands that three young Hebrews be burnt alive for refusing to worship an idol of himself. Though they are cast, bound, into a furnace heated seven times, their bodies are miraculously preserved alive, and they are able to walk and sing in the flames. Their song glorifies God specifically as an act of thanks for sustaining their living bodies in spite of forces that should have annihilated them. It addresses every part of creation, from the angels to the rivers and seas to the whales, with the formulation “O ye” and commands each with the refrain “bless ye the Lord.” Like Orpheus, the three children exercise the poet’s capacity to address, even to command, creatures otherwise incapable of being addressed in human speech. The address to the dolphins brings together this scriptural tradition of universal address and command with classical traditions in which dolphins are linked to Apollonian poetry and to the rescue and burial of drowned bodies.

According to M. C. A. Beaulieu, classical stories of dolphins cluster around two overarching themes: the passage of the male youth from childhood to manhood, and the preternatural care of dolphins, not only to rescue humans from drowning when necessary, but even to bring dead bodies to shore so that they may receive proper burial. A number of classical cases of rescue of the drowning and drowned by dolphins have been proposed as the source of

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Milton’s allusion. In Herodotus, the poet Arion, threatened with murder by pirates, dons his poet’s robes, casts himself into the sea, and confronts his would-be robbers again after having been rescued by dolphins. Many scholars have suggested the chief classical referent of Milton’s wafting dolphins is the myth of Melicertes, a child whose body was said to have been brought ashore by dolphins for burial and apotheosized as the god Palaemon, a ‘guardian of ships’ and patron of shipwrecked sailors. The recovery of the body is thus coupled with transformation into a protective spirit. The body of the poet Hesiod, having been cast into the sea by hosts who murdered him, was after three days brought ashore by dolphins and buried at Nemea in Oeone. Plutarch writes that “his dead body, which was drifting in the sea near Nemeum, been taken up by dolphins, who eagerly took it up and in relays brought it ashore at Rhium” and was then “sought by the people of Orchomenos who wished, in obedience to an oracle, to take up his remains and inter them in their own country.” An epigram by Alkaios of Messene describes the funeral rites performed for Hesiod:

In the shady grove of Lokris the nymphs washed Hesiod’s corpse from their own springs, and built high his tomb. And the goatherds sprinkled it with milk kneaded with yellow honey. For even as honey was the speech the old man breathed, when he had tasted the fountains undefiled of the Muses nine.

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378 See Beaulieu 95 for a full catalog of the numerous classical sources.


380 *The Greek Anthology* vii. 55.
In these stories, the actions of the dolphins attest that although animals, even they know that a poet is worthy of honor and that a drowned man ought not to remain in the sea, but to be given a proper and reverent burial. And the story of Hesiod is not given as legend, but purports to be a historical report.\(^\text{381}\) Not only in the ancients but also among natural historians contemporary with Milton, dolphins were described as extraordinary because of the many accounts attesting to their “cura in mortuos.”\(^\text{382}\) After long debate, no critical consensus has emerged as to whether one of these is the particular referent of Milton’s dolphins; it seems more likely that they rather evoke a whole complex of associations drawn from multiple myths, each with its own relevance to the occasion: dolphins as lovers of poetry, as bringers of the dead to shore for ritual burial, and thus as assisting the bones of the drowned to become the focus of veneration as guardian spirits and contributors to the fame of the place where they are given burial. As I described earlier, in the Orpheus legend, reception and ritual interment of the body brought out of the sea, particularly that of a youth or poet, not only fulfills a duty but also redounds to the glory and poetic fame of the place where the body is received. To receive a dolphin-rafted body is to enter into a ritual economy in which the providers of funeral rites receive protection and poetic gifts. For Milton, the body’s possession of the promise of resurrection shows the truth hinted in these pagan legends: it is not so much that

\(^{381}\) Plutarch, cited in Creaser 237

\(^{382}\) Gesner, Historiae Animalium, iv. 388ff., cited in Creaser 240.
the body needs burial (though it is proper that we should feel it to be so), but that
the poet needs to participate in attending to it, and no funeral could be more
resplendent than that of a poet’s body borne by dolphins, miraculously
recovered from the sea. The invocation of the wafting dolphins imaginatively
links the poet’s commanding address to the someday rising of the resurrected
body, like Christ the “day-star,” above the waves, and it testifies that all creation,
even the actions of mere animals, reflects this divine promise.

The angel-dolphins couplet marks the high point of the poet-prophet’s
song because he shows himself able to address first the angel and in the next
breath, the animal connected with Apollo and the spirit of classical poetry. The
far-sighted angel corresponds to the soul and the sinewy dolphin, wallowing in
the ocean of material flux, to the body; bringing them together in a rhymed
couplet implicates the poem in their persistent and future jointure. The command
to the dolphins shows us how the classical funeral elegy, with its insistence on
performance of the proper funeral rites for the body, is not abrogated or
discarded but taken up at a level of fiction higher than that of the imaginary
flowers and hearses and poetically performed as an anticipation of and
participation in the Resurrection and Last Judgment. Milton’s vindication and
transformation of the classical tropes implicitly defends his taking up of pastoral
elegy from the criticism that the genre was outmoded, but more importantly, it
suggests that poetry can make contact with immortality only in and through its
engagement with the to-be-resurrected body. In this Milton follows Spenser, but
Unlike Spenser, he allows the body to be entirely sunk and overwhelmed in the chaos of ocean so that its triumph—and the poem’s—may be all the more resplendent.

For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the watry floar,
So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled Ore,
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves;
Where other groves, and other streams along,
With Nectar pure his oozy Lock's he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial Song,
In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes. (166-181)

As Lewalski notes, the sun or day-star is “nature’s symbol of resurrection from the sea.” Where Horace gave us an imperial fame stretching out across the surface of the earth and forward in time, Milton gives us an elegy that encompasses the heights of heaven and the depths of the sea, time in terms of its repetitive, seasonal cycles of mourning anew and also in terms of its culmination. His dolphins bring together the biblical song in which commanding everything in heaven and earth to praise the Lord celebrates the body’s miraculous preservation with classical examples of salvaging the poet’s body from the deep, in which even wordless creatures wish to make sure the human body receives

383 Lewalski, Life, 85.
proper burial. When Lycidas laves his oozy locks in heaven, the ooze—the fluid, formless, chaotic, impure aspect of matter—is brought up from the bottom of the monstrous world to be purged from the body, to which it is alien, by its opposite fluid, nectar, often etymologized as “overcoming death.” It is the poem’s encompassing of all these things that prepares the way for Lycidas to become ‘the genius of the shore,’ presiding not just over the island’s national boundaries but also over the boundaries between pagan past and Christian eschaton, between order and chaos, and between life and death. By attending to the drowned body, Lycidas locates itself where the waves of sorrow and death break on the shore of immortality.

384 While Milton’s mortalism (an opinion he likely developed later in life) might add an extra sense of urgency to his concern for the body, the lines in which Lycidas appears to be already present in heaven would appear to complicate a mortalist reading of the poem. These lines could, however, be read as using a prophetic or visionary present tense rather than a strictly temporal one. Ultimately, I do not think the theological question of mortalism per se is especially important to the poem. Regardless of temporality, Milton clearly envisions body and soul rejoicing in heaven as one restored being. For the theological background, see Norman Burns, Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972) and Raymond Waddington, “Murder One: the Death of Abel. Blood, Soil, and Mortalism in Paradise Lost,” Milton Studies 41 (2002): 76-93.
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