

IDOLATRY, FETISHISM, AND THE DRAMA OF JOHN LYLY

BY

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ABSTRACT

Idolatry is a consistent preoccupation across John Lyly's theatrical work. Beginning with an acknowledgement that idolatry had a broad meaning in the early modern period, this thesis highlights those themes in Lyly's drama relevant to idolatry and their significance to his wider narratives. I show that accusations of idolatry typically involve the claim that an idolater has mistaken one item in a conceptual binary for its opposite; I describe these conceptual pairings as iconoclastic binaries. I demonstrate that Lyly's plays mobilise and deconstruct these binaries, exposing their normative and contradictory nature. I consider a variety of such pairings, including man/god, true/false, nature/convention, and person/thing. Moreover, I demonstrate the intellectual lineage between the idol and the fetish, showing that accusations of fetishism rely upon the same conceptual binaries employed by Judeo-Christian iconoclasts. As such, Lyly's plays constitute excellent critiques of the binaries historically associated with both idolatry and fetishism. I foreground the Marxist conception of the fetish, precisely because recent materialist scholarship has become sensitive to the normative, exclusionary, and untenable nature of traditional Marxism. In short, my original contribution to knowledge is twofold: I provide a new, illuminating perspective upon Lyly's themes, and I show how Lyly's work can be used to explore and illustrate currents within contemporary ideological thought.

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INTRODUCTION

John Lyly's second play, *Sappho and Phao* (1584), dramatises a contest for sovereignty between a mortal princess and the goddess of love. In the midst of this rivalry, the ferryman Phao becomes hopelessly besotted with the royal Sappho. While attempting to make sense of his overwhelming emotions, Phao delivers a stunning soliloquy:

O divine love, and therefore divine because love, whose deity no conceit can compass and therefore no authority can constrain, as miraculous in working as mighty, and no more to be suppressed than comprehended. How now, Phao, whither art thou carried, committing idolatry with that god whom thou hast cause to blaspheme? (*Sappho*, 2.4.16-22)¹

In his anxious psychological state, Phao attempts to articulate what “no conceit can compass” and the result is a bewildering, stimulating jumble of concepts and relations. Love is divine by definition (“divine because love”), but it is also an unknowable, ambiguous entity (he cannot “comprehend” it). The referent for Phao’s “idolatry” is strangely unclear: is it “divine love” or is it Sappho? Are the two interchangeable? Is “divine love” synonymous with Venus or is it an abstraction? More crucially, how is it possible to commit “idolatry” with a “god”, and how can one properly “blaspheme” an idol?

¹ John Lyly, ‘Sappho and Phao’ in *Campaspe and Sappho and Phao*, ed. G. K. Hunter and David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).
Dates for early modern plays follow the ‘best guess’ entries in Martin Wiggins’ and Catherine Richardson’s *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, unless otherwise stated.

These are difficult questions, all of which suggest a more fundamental one: what exactly did “idolatry” mean to Lyly’s audience? The concept is an extremely common one in Lyly’s writing, both dramatic and non-dramatic. He discusses idolatry in his first printed work, the prose work *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578), and the word is spoken by Erisichthon over ten years later in Lyly’s *Love’s Metamorphosis* (1591).² In the intervening years, Lyly is consistent in dramatising pagan deities, contests for theological legitimacy, and characters who are either idols or idolaters. He did so within the context of plays that were being denounced as idolatrous by popular antitheatrical writers throughout the 1580s. Clearly, idolatry was a consistent preoccupation for Lyly, but what exactly does “committing idolatry” entail?

The main contention of this thesis is that John Lyly is a uniquely productive dramatist for exploring the tensions and contradictions at the heart of early modern “idolatry”. The difference between god and idol is frequently obfuscated in Lyly’s drama, resulting oftentimes in undecidability and sometimes in outright paradox. In *Campaspe*, Alexander the Great is simultaneously “god” and “man” (*Campaspe*, 2.2.82, 83), a contradiction that reveals a great deal about the idolisation of mortal leaders.³ In *Sappho and Phao*, the human Sappho replaces Venus as the new “goddess of love” (5.2.76), engendering a paradox with anxieties about potentially “committing idolatry” at its core. In *Midas*, the titular king perceives gold as a “god” greater than “Jupiter” (*Midas*, 1.1.89) and he flouts

² John Lyly, ‘Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit’ in *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit and Euphues and His England*, ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 25-153 (126); John Lyly, *Love’s Metamorphosis*, ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 1.2.68-69.

³ John Lyly, ‘Campaspe’ in *Campaspe and Sappho and Phao*, ed. David Bevington and G. K. Hunter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 49-139.

“nature” (1.1.18) in order to pursue the substance as an end in itself (a recognisably idolatrous category error in the period).⁴ Finally, in *Love’s Metamorphosis*, the forester Erisichthon explicitly accuses three nymphs worshipping around a “holy tree” (*LM*, 1.2.86) of practicing “idolatry” (1.2.68). He attacks their icon, revealing it to be the metamorphosed body of a nymph. This initial accusation of “idolatry” (and act of iconoclasm) precipitates a theatrical investigation into the boundaries separating persons from things, a frontier crucial to early modern understandings of idolatrous worship. I contend that to miss the importance of “idolatry” to any one of these plays is to overlook the real theological implications of Lyly’s plotlines.

To scholars and appreciators of Lyly’s work, some of the omissions in this thesis will be inexcusable. It will become apparent that I have wholly excluded Lyly’s notable prose works, particularly the two *Euphues* books and his anti-Martinist pamphlet *Pap with an Hatchet*. I am confident that excellent work could be done unpacking the significance of idolatry to these texts. My decision to eschew them in favour of Lyly’s drama stems simply from the latter’s overwhelming interest in pagan imagery and obvious pertinence to England’s antitheatrical controversy. Concerning Lyly’s theatrical output, my exclusion of *Mother Bombie* can be defended on the grounds that it is clearly the most secular of Lyly’s plays: an urban comedy lacking any onstage deities or a Classical setting.⁵ I can only stress that my decisions to overlook Lyly’s remaining plays – *Galatea*,

⁴ John Lyly, ‘Midas’ in *Galatea and Midas*, ed. George K. Hunter and David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 152-259.

⁵ *Mother Bombie* is a farcical comedy set in sixteenth-century Rochester. While superstition is an obvious theme, the specific issue of idolatry is a tangential thematic concern at best. Leah Scragg discusses the striking secularity of *Mother Bombie* in comparison with Lyly’s other plays in the introduction to her excellent edition of the play. Leah Scragg, ‘Introduction’ in *Mother Bombie*, ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 1-55 (25).

Endymion, and *The Woman in the Moon* - were not taken lightly. I might easily have discussed sacrifice and iconography in *Galatea*, idolatry and madness in *Endymion*, or Nature and image-making in *The Woman in the Moon*. These are wonderful topics that I hope will be explored in the future. In order to allow for detailed close readings and thorough engagement with my methodological material, I have chosen to focus upon four of Lyly's plays.

Campaspe and *Sappho and Phao* were always to be included in my analysis, the former because so few had examined Alexander's aspirations to *divinity*, the latter because "idolatry" is such a conspicuous theme. My decision to consider *Midas* and *Love's Metamorphosis* ultimately depended upon my perception that idolatry is a less obvious concern in these plays as compared to some others, though it becomes of huge thematic significance once noticed. As such, identifying the relevance of idolatry to these works in particular seemed to me a more sizeable contribution to Lyly scholarship. For invaluable insight into the plays I omitted, I would direct everyone to the work of Chloe Porter, Gillian Knoll, and Andy Kesson.⁶

In order to appreciate why London's playhouses were reputed hotbeds of "Idolatry" (to quote the antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson) it is necessary to explain what an early modern

⁶ Chloe Porter has written beautifully on idolatry and antitheatricalism in relation to *The Woman in the Moon*: "'Contrived in Nature's Shop': Countering Antitheatricality in *The Woman in the Moon*" in *Shakespeare Studies*, Vol. 45 (2017), 106-112.

In her 2020 monograph, Gillian Knoll discusses a variety of Lyly's plays, though her discussion of *Endymion*'s erotic longing for the moon and *Galatea* and *Phillida*'s linguistic "edging" are particularly insightful: Gillian Knoll, *Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare: Metaphor, Cognition, and Eros* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 54, 112-135.

Andy Kesson's invaluable retracing and rehabilitation of Lyly's reception history in his 2011 monograph includes detailed discussion of the publication and performance histories of *Galatea*, *Endymion*, and *The Woman in the Moon*. Andy Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 120.

Christian understood this term to mean.⁷ This is not an easy task. The primary *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for the word echoes the Mosaic caution against “graven images”, defining idolatry as “the worship of idols or images made with hands; more generally, the paying or offering of divine honours to any created object”.⁸ The idolater here is one who offers reverence and worship to inanimate matter. Indeed, the idolatrous implications of “image” worship famously plagued the Byzantine Empire, fuelled much Reformation-era debate, and continue to incense iconoclasts to the present day.⁹ In the sixteenth century, idolatry and images were associated with one another both by English Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church. A 1538 Henrician Injunction to the English Clergy associates “ydolatrye” with “workes deuysed by mens phanthasyes”, singling out “Images or relyques”.¹⁰ In a 1563 Council of Trent sitting, the Catholic Church cautioned against “the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images”.¹¹

⁷ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions Prouing That They Are Not to Be Suffred in a Christian Common Weale, by the Waye Both the Cauils of Thomas Lodge, and the Play of Playes, Written in Their Defence, and Other Obiections of Players Frenedes, Are Truely Set Downe and Directlye Aunswared. By Steph. Gosson, Stud. Oxon.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas Gosson, 1582), B5v.

⁸ *The Geneva Bible: Facsimile of the 1599 Edition*, ed. Michael H. Brown (Missouri: L. L. Brown Publishing, 1990), Exodus 20:4-5; ‘Idolatry, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91099>> [accessed 21 August 2020].

All Biblical references in this thesis are to *The Geneva Bible* of 1599 cited above, unless otherwise stated. Library closures due to COVID-19 occasionally necessitated relying upon the 1611 King James edition instead.

⁹ Although too complex a phenomenon to be pursued here, the Byzantine Iconoclasm was partly provoked by hair-splitting distinctions between legitimate holy icons and the “images” that were “set up [...] in their place” in Byzantine’s “holy temples”. At stake was the precise boundary between idolatrous and non-idolatrous worship practice. The original text of a correspondence on this point between the Byzantine Emperors Michael II and Theophilus can be found in: J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Et Amplissima Collectio* (Florence: Antonius Zatta, 1761), 420.

Natalie Carnes’ *Image and Presence* discusses idolatry in terms of iconoclasm and iconophilia, interpreting the Charlie Hebdo shooting of 2015 as a new iteration of “Byzantine image controversy”. Natalie Carnes, *Image and Presence: A Christological Reflection on Iconoclasm and Iconophilia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 1, 9.

¹⁰ *Iniunctions Gyuen by Th [Sic] Auctoritie of the Kynges Highnes to the Clergie of This His Realme*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1538), 2.

¹¹ Pius IV, ‘Touching the Invocation, Veneration, and on Relics of Saints, and Sacred Images’ in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Theodore Alois Buckley (London: George Routledge & Co., 1851), 213-216 (215), my emphasis.

In short, the idolatrous potential of “graven images” is a definite trans-historical and trans-denominational Christian concern.¹² However, to reduce idolatry to image worship is to underestimate grossly the breadth of practices and beliefs that an early modern Christian might regard as idolatrous. Historically, iconoclasts have perceived image worship as constituting a category error: a misapprehension of the inanimate for the divine. However, the thorny reception history of “Idolatrie” suggests that a mistake of this kind would often be construed as a symptom of an already idolatrous mindset, instead of the efficient cause or sole manifestation of that mindset. The notion of a deeper epistemic cause of idolatrous behaviour is particularly apparent in Saint Paul’s letters. While *Exodus* condemns “graven images” and the famous passage from the *Psalms* imagines “idoles” to be “the worke of mens hands”, Paul’s descriptions veer away from emphasising idolised objects and instead focus upon the idolater’s psychological state.¹³

In his *Letter to the Colossians*, Paul admonishes his readers to avoid “fornication, vncleannesse, the inordinate affection, euill concupiscence, and couetousnesse which is idolatrie”.¹⁴ The “idolatrie” described here does not require paintings, statues, or trinkets. For Paul, feelings of lust or covetousness are fundamentally idolatrous impulses. This description contributes to a longstanding Judeo-Christian tradition of characterising pagan idolaters as inherently libidinous. Throughout the Old Testament, Jewish writers attempted to differentiate themselves from their “Gentile” neighbours by insisting that the latter’s muddled religious beliefs were linked to a dissolution of sexual ethics and

¹² For excellent work on the extent to which a firm Catholic/Protestant divide on the issue of images during the Reformation era has been exaggerated by historians, see Tara Hamling, *Decorating the ‘Godly’ Household* (London: Yale University Press, 2010).

¹³ *The Geneva Bible*, Psalms 115:4.

¹⁴ *The Geneva Bible*, Colossians 3:5.

health.¹⁵ As I discuss in Chapter Two below, the English antitheatricalists similarly perceived a connection between carnality and idolatry.

While Paul clearly foregrounds *sexual* behaviour in the passage quoted above (“fornication”, “concupiscence”), his equation of “idolatrie” with “couetousnesse” allows for a yet broader understanding of the idolatrous. Defined as “strong or inordinate desire”, covetousness could apply to any number of attachments and affections beyond the realm of the sexual.¹⁶ Indeed, the cultural history of idolatry consists of perennial attempts to relocate the point at which affection and desire cease to be appropriate and instead become “inordinate” and idolatrous. For my purposes, it suffices to note that across the work of Augustine, John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, and countless other theologians, fine-grained distinctions between “affection”, “adoration”, “reverence”, and “honour” are made in order to disentangle suitable from idolatrous attachments and drives.¹⁷

In short, accusations of idolatry identify a broad range of mistakes that go far beyond the issues of image worship or promiscuous sex. The realm of the idolatrous encompasses the quality, extent, and direction of our most fundamental drives and attachments. As

¹⁵ Recent overviews of the Judaic construction of “paganism” include: Jonathan Kirsch, *God Against The Gods: The History of The War Between Monotheism and Polytheism* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004); Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among The Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (London: Yale University Press, 2009); Christopher P. Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014); Catherine Nixey, *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World* (London: Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁶ Brian S. Rosner has argued that Paul uses the word “covetousness” in order to denote a kind of general “greed” that is idolatrous despite its object. Brian S. Rosner, *Greed As Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor* (London: Eerdmans, 2007), 8-10; ‘Covetousness, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/43398>> [accessed 12 October 2020].

¹⁷ St. Augustine famously differentiated *latria* from *dulia*, the former denoting worship owed to God alone, the latter denoting worship owed to human beings. The word *latria* is often translated into English as “adoration”, a word with theological and secular connotations – to “adore” can imply both worship and romantic love or desire. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), 255.

Carlos M. N. Eire has put it: “Idolatry is not simply the worship of a physical object, but *any form of devotion* that is judged to be incorrect”.¹⁸ I will return to the issues of “inordinate affection” and “couetousnesse” in my chapters on *Sappho and Phao* and *Midas*.

In his first Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul paints an even more enigmatic picture of “idolatrie”. Moving yet further from particular *objects* of false worship, Paul writes the following cryptic description: “we know that an idol is nothing in the world”.¹⁹ This formulation neatly captures the elusive, malleable nature of the idol by firmly locating it within the subjectivity of the idolater. Significantly, Paul is not being deliberately esoteric here – his characterisation simply articulates the etymology of the word “idol”. As David Hawkes observes, the Greek term rendered as “idol” in most English translations of this passage, εἰδωλον (or *eidolon*), already “designates various forms of nonexistence: ‘nothing’, ‘vanity’, ‘lie’ [...] *Eidolon* is also the Homeric word for ‘ghost’, ‘phantom’, or ‘hallucination’”.²⁰ In other words, Paul’s formulation is essentially a tautology: idols are “nothing in the world” precisely because they name an inherently insubstantial entity – a fiction, or falsehood. While paintings, statues, and sexual partners certainly do exist “in the world”, these entities themselves are not identical to one’s “idol”. The idol exists only within the mind of the idolater.

¹⁸ Carlos M. N. Eire, *War against The Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5, my emphasis.

¹⁹ *The Geneva Bible*, I Corinthians 8:4

²⁰ David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 58.

While image worship, carnality, and covetousness are all recognisable *manifestations* of a person's idolatry, the dangerous "idol" itself stems not from alluring material objects, but the idolater's defective *worldview*. As such, accusations of idolatry are not always intended to redress a single, isolatable mistake (like misperceiving divinity in an oil painting). Instead, they function to police various conceptual, ethical, and social boundaries that differentiate the rational, upright worshipper from the hopelessly confused and base idolater. In *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), the theologian Lewis Feuerbach applied the logic underpinning accusations of idolatry to the entire history of world religion when he wrote: "The historical progress of religion consists in this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective, is now recognised as subjective [...] what was at first religion becomes at a later period idolatry".²¹ Like a cultural macrocosm of cellular division, religions form and dissolve as the partition between "objective" and "subjective" (and the idolatrous and the non-idolatrous) endlessly drifts. One person's "idolatry" is simply another person's "religion" and *vice versa*.

This observation brings me to the crux of how "idolatry" will be defined in the pages of this thesis. I began my Introduction by asking what "committing idolatry" might entail. Between them, Saint Paul and Feuerbach have given us the tools to recalibrate that question. If it is true that "idols" themselves are subjective projections *and* that "idolatry" is typically perceived from a supposedly "objective", external perspective, perhaps we ought to pose a modified inquiry: what silent presuppositions are at play when one accuses *someone else* of "committing idolatry"? What makes Paul certain that his grasp of the difference between "nothing" and "something" is airtight? How can today's

²¹ Lewis Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 2nd ed., trans. Marian Evans (London: Trübner & Co, 1881), 13.

“religion” be confident that it won’t become tomorrow’s “idolatry”? In short, I maintain that the truly interesting dimension to “idolatry” is not the belief of the idolater, but the presumptions of the *iconoclast*.

At this juncture, I should mention that I employ the word “iconoclasm” throughout this thesis in its broadest sense, referring to the literal destruction of icons, but also to the broader act of attacking “entrenched beliefs or cultural institutions”.²² As Natalie Carnes has observed, “the images iconoclasm targets have diversified and changed over time, from material and concrete images to increasingly immaterial and abstract ones”.²³ In my view, charges of “idolatry” are themselves always a species of iconoclastic attack. It can be easy to forget that “idolatry” is almost always an accusation made of someone else as opposed to a practice one consciously engages in. Of course, charges of “idolatry” *can* become internalised and lead to self-reproach (as in the instance of Lyly’s Phao cited above), but in most cases such accusations serve to legitimate one’s own perspective while undermining or dehumanising a confused Other. This may seem like a distinction without a point, but it becomes supremely relevant when exploring some of the paradoxes at the heart of iconoclasm.

Typically, accusations of idolatry imply that an idolater has mistaken one item in a relevant binary for another (dead for living, something for nothing, unnatural for natural, *etc.*). As is always the case with firm conceptual binaries, tension and contradiction arise either when the binary proves too categorical to apply to reality, or when the iconoclasts’ logic undermine their *own* beliefs, engendering an epistemic stalemate in which the

²² Carnes, *Image and Presence*, 9.

²³ Carnes, *Image and Presence*, 9.

distinction between “idolatry” and “religion” is completely up for grabs. These iconoclastic binaries (and the contradictions they entail) are the subject of this thesis. They appear throughout sixteenth-century England, in a variety of governmental, theological, and popular contexts. The Elizabethan *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* (1571) associates “wicked idolatry” with “dumb and dead images”, invoking a binary between the living and the “dead” that also lay at the heart of Eucharistic controversy in the period.²⁴ During the Reformation, attempts were made to differentiate the “dead” material used to signify Christ’s body and that vital, living body itself. As Jennifer Waldron puts it, a programme of Reformed iconoclasm emerged in the sixteenth century, “which rendered dead and lively ‘images’ as polar opposites”.²⁵ The upkeep of this opposition resulted in some intellectual gymnastics that are as impressive as stupefying – Calvin’s attempts to redefine the boundary between the “living” and the “dead” to suit his theological agenda and avoid accusations of idolatry are particularly spectacular.²⁶ Crucially, despite major disagreements amongst Reformers on how to define precisely the terms in this binary, they are largely in agreement that a functional opposition between “living” and “dead” is necessary. The boundary between the idolatrous and the non-idolatrous shifts according to how this opposition is interpreted.

²⁴ ‘Homily Against Peril of Idolatry and Superfluous Decking of Churches’, in *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to Be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1864), 179–284 (281).

²⁵ Jennifer Waldron, *Reformations of the Body: Idolatry, Sacrifice and Early Modern Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 37.

²⁶ Calvin proposed a mind-melting Eucharistic theory referred to by the theologian Brian Gerrish as “symbolic instrumentalism”, in which living “reality” and dead “sign” are so interwoven that the one manifests the other. I return to this work in Chapter Four. Brian Gerrish, ‘Sign and Reality: The Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Confessions’ in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage*, ed. B. A. Gerrish (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 118-130.

As I discuss in my chapter on *Midas*, idolatry was also discussed with reference to a binary between the natural and the unnatural. Following Aristotle, various early modern writers employed teleological language in order to frame the idolatrous. For these iconoclasts, idolatry involves *misuse* – the idolater mistakes the natural use (the *telos*) of paintings, sex, or money, misperceiving ends where there are only means and consequently behaving in a manner contrary to nature. David Hawkes states the case plainly (in reference to image worship): “Idolatry transgresses against natural teleology because it misconstrues the *telos* of the material sign, mistaking it for the spiritual referent”.²⁷ Of course, this assessment will not be entirely clear until I explain what is meant by Aristotelian teleology; instead of repeating myself, I save this unpacking for Chapter Three. However, it should be clear from the above that the binaries of living/dead and natural/unnatural are, to a certain extent, inevitable corollaries of one another. The idolater who “misconstrues the *telos* of the material sign” is simultaneously mistaking the “material” (dead) for the “spiritual” (living) and, in so doing, transgressing “natur[e]”.

Generally speaking, several related binaries are invoked wherever iconoclasm takes place. As such, charges of “idolatry” typically go further than identifying a single mistake. More complicatedly, they erect a divider between an accurate epistemology and another that is fundamentally damaged. The extensive implications of such division ought to be apparent when we consider the most fundamental iconoclastic binary: true/false. Like Feuerbach’s “objective”/“subjective” or Paul’s “something”/“nothing”, an implicit true/false binary underpins all iconoclastic attack. It occurs everywhere one looks when studying the history of idolatry. In 1548, Martin Luther describes “Idolatry” as “false

²⁷ Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, 53.

fayth” – over one hundred years later, George Fox equates the “Dead-Worship of Dead Idols” with “the false Imitation of false Crosses” on the title page of his 1656 anti-papal tract.²⁸ Both the worship of the idolater (their “fayth”) and their object of worship (“Imitation[s]” and “Crosses”) are “false”. These examples attest to the common association between the idolatrous and falsehood. The religious historian Aaron Tugendhaft summarises the point: “Religions use the concept of idolatry as a means to define their "Other." This act of definition, furthermore, is rooted in a particular act of distinction—the distinction between true and false in religion”.²⁹

It ought to be clear by now how various conceptual binaries overlap and jointly comprise the iconoclast’s perception of the idolater. In George Fox’s assessment above, the “Dead” and the “false” work alongside one another to discredit the views of the idolatrous Papist. The iconoclast takes solace in their worldview’s true, objective, and natural quality, which allows them to easily differentiate the living from the dead and something from nothing. This privileged, supposedly accurate perspective also prevents them from engaging in irrational or dangerous behaviours, like worshipping the inanimate, treating gold as an end in itself, or having lots of promiscuous sex. By contrast, the idolater’s worldview is false, subjective, and unnatural, resulting in various beliefs and behaviours that are demonstrably wrong. Again, this worldview might manifest in some fairly standard idolatrous practices – like the worship of “graven images” – but there is always a deeper

²⁸ Martin Luther, *The Chiefe and Pryncypall Articles of the Christen Faythe to Holde Againste the Pope, and al Papistes, and the Gates of Hell, with Other Thre Very Profitable and Necessary Bokes the Names or Tyttels*, trans. Walter Lynne, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: S. Mierdman, 1548), Eiiiijv; George Fox, *A Vvarning from the Lord to the Pope; and to All His Train of Idolatries: With a Discovery of His False Imitations, and Likenesses, and Traditional Inventions, Which Is Not the Power of God*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Giles Calvert, 1656).

²⁹ Aaron Tugendhaft, ‘Images and the Political: On Jan Assmann’s Concept of Idolatry’ in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2012), 301-306 (302).

epistemic issue at stake. Iconoclasts make major ontological and epistemological claims every time they utter an accusation of idolatry – the force of these accusations derives from the normative boundary they establish between two sets of conceptual opposites. In essence, every act of iconoclasm completely reclassifies the world.

This is an appropriate stage to introduce the second item in my thesis title and the methodological backbone of the arguments below: *fetishism*. There is a clear intellectual lineage between the idol and the fetish. As I discuss thoroughly in Chapters Two and Three, the pidgin word *Fetisso* was originally used by Portuguese merchants to describe the material worship practice of African tribes. A 1613 travelogue written by Samuel Purchas defines the “Fetisso” as an “idoll of Guinea”.³⁰ In accounts such as this one, European travellers describe both the “trinkets and trifles” they exchanged for gold on the African coast, as well as the sacred objects of the African people – Purchas recounts the Guinean’s attachment to “many strawen Rings, called Fetissos, or Gods”.³¹ The instinct to describe these “Fetissos” as “idoll[s]” ought to make sense. From the perspective of the European, the Guinean is clearly worshipping “the worke of mens hands”. During my exploration of Lyly’s *Midas*, I unpack the dehumanising, colonial racism that haunts the legacy of the fetish.

The word “fetishism” (originally *fétichisme*) that Karl Marx and his successors inherited was first coined by the French anthropologist Charles de Brosses in *Du Culte des dieux*

³⁰ Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage. Or Relations of the Vvorld and the Religions Obserued in All Ages and Places Discouered, from the Creation Vnto This Present In Foure Partes*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: William Stansby, 1613), Vuu4v.

³¹ William Pietz, ‘The Problem of the Fetish, I’ in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 9 (Spring 1985), 5-17 (9); Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage.*, Vuu4v.

fétiches, ou parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Égypte avec la religion actuel (1760).³²

In this work, de Brosses examines the worship “of certain terrestrial and material objects called *Fetishes* by the African [...], among whom this worship survives – for that reason I will call it *Fetishism*”.³³ Although he (incorrectly) attributes the *Fetisso* label to the Africans themselves, de Brosses states that “Fetishism” is a religious attitude observable elsewhere: “I signal in advance that I plan to use it equally in speaking of any other nation whatsoever, where the objects of worship are animals, or inanimate beings that are divinized”.³⁴ In these passages, de Brosses brings the concept of “fetishism” into being, introducing an intellectual paradigm that has survived and thrived over the past two-hundred and sixty years.

Although the “diviniz[ing]” of “inanimate beings” or the worship of “material objects” sound very much like instances of idolatry, de Brosses actually drew a sharp distinction between “Fetishism” and idol-worship. In something of a throwaway line, de Brosses differentiates the fetishism of “savage peoples” from “idolatry” because he defines the latter as devotion “to works of art representing other objects, to which the adoration was really addressed”.³⁵ In his 1985 paper on the history of fetishism, William Pietz repeats this distinction, arguing that the *Fetisso* is distinct from the Christian idol because the former represents “irreducible materiality”, whereas the latter links the “iconic resemblance” of something to an “immaterial model or entity”.³⁶ The apparent difference

³² Aaron Freeman, ‘Charles de Brosses and the French Enlightenment Origins of Religious Fetishism’ in *Intellectual Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2014), 203-214.

³³ Charles de Brosses, ‘On the Worship of Fetish Gods: Or, A Parallel of the Ancient Religion of Egypt with the Present Religion of Nigritia’ in *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris, trans. Daniel H. Leonard (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 44-133 (45).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ de Brosses, ‘On the Worship of Fetish Gods’, 61.

³⁶ Pietz, ‘The Problem of the Fetish, I’, 7.

here is akin to that between worshipping a stone and worshipping Christ via an “iconic resemblance” of his being. However, as we have seen, idolatry is not reducible to a single type of error. To cite Eire once more, idolatry names “any form of devotion that is judged to be incorrect”, hence Purchas’ characterisation of the *Fetisso* as recognisable “idoll”. For a recent critique of de Brosse’s and Pietz’s heavy-handed differentiation, and which reads “the emergence of the fetisso” as inextricably linked to “anti-Catholic” idolatry discourse, I recommend James Kearney’s *The Incarnate Text* (2009).³⁷ However we choose to interpret the above distinction, it clearly relies upon a reductive, narrow understanding of “idolatry”.

Nowhere are the similarities between idolatry and fetishism more apparent than in the writings of Karl Marx. In *Idols of the Marketplace*, Hawkes adroitly notes the “homology between idolatry and commodity fetishism, insofar as they represent the same tendency of human thought applied to different objects”.³⁸ This is certainly true, and Marx himself makes several oblique references to idolatry while explaining what he means by “commodity fetishism” (as I discuss below). However, for my purposes it is necessary to amend Hawkes’ statement somewhat. Once again, I want to foreground the perspective of the *iconoclast*. I would argue that there is a homology between idolatry and commodity fetishism insofar as they are both normative *accusations* justified with reference to the same sets of conceptual opposites. In other words, figures like de Brosse, Marx, and their successors rely upon iconoclastic binaries in order to characterise a fetishizing Other as hopelessly confused. In Feuerbach’s terms, these thinkers simply represent a new

³⁷ James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 7, 186.

³⁸ Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, 52.

“religion” that supposes itself superior to “idolatry” and “fetishism” precisely because its perspective is true and accurate (“objective”) instead of false or mistaken (“subjective”).

This homology is conspicuous throughout *Capital: Volume One*, in which Marx clarifies his theory of commodity fetishism.³⁹ The first significant move Marx makes is to distinguish a commodity’s “use-value” from its “exchange-value”. As he writes:

A commodity is a use-value or object of utility, and a ‘value’. It appears as the twofold thing it really is as soon as its value possesses its own particular form of manifestation, which is distinct from its natural form. This form of manifestation is exchange-value, and the commodity never has this form when looked at in isolation, but only when it is in a value-relation or an exchange relation with a second commodity of a different kind.⁴⁰

The commodity has a “natural-form” that determines its “use-value”, whereas its “exchange-value” is generated by its relationships within a specific economic framework.⁴¹ As Marx states elsewhere, the misapprehension of the “value relation” of a commodity for its “physical nature” constitutes “the fetishism that attaches itself [...] to

³⁹ Despite its elegant simplicity, this theory is awash with ambiguity and has occasioned over a century of heated scholarly debate. I am not an economist and my arithmetic is appalling. As such, I withhold judgement on whether Marx’s economic claims are plausible. It does seem to me that his conception of exchange-value as reified labour time is somewhat reductive. Despite this, my interest is in the iconoclastic attitude Marx adopts towards what he regards as “fetishism”. This attitude is homologous to that of the early modern Christian iconoclast’s and has influenced great swathes of subsequent theoretical criticism.

⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 152.

⁴¹ The Marxist theorist Alfred Schmidt states boldly what Marx merely implies here: “The exchange-value of a commodity has no natural content whatsoever”. Marx, *Capital*, 166; Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, trans. Ben Fowkes, 3rd edn (London: Verso, 2014), 65-66.

commodities”.⁴² I unpack the intricacies of this theory in more detail in subsequent chapters. The key premise I wish to establish here is that commodity “fetishism” fundamentally names a conceptual confusion where the abstract and the “physical” are concerned.

Marx read de Brosses’ work in his early twenties and would have been well aware of the theological subtext of the “fetish” concept; he explicitly wrote about de Brosses’ work while serving as a journalist for the *Rheinische Zeitung* and, as Roland Boer puts it, “appropriated fetishism as a tool for analysis [throughout] his early journalist work”.⁴³ Moreover, Marx himself proposed an “analogy” between commodity “fetishism” and the worldview of the religious in *Capital*, where he characterised the latter as a state in which “the products of the brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations with each other and with the human race”.⁴⁴ Of course, Marx’s broad conception of “religion” here is perfectly homologous to Paul’s conception of idolatry. The “autonomous figures” (equivalent to Paul’s “nothing”) projected by the fetishist appear to them as “something” - the “dead” idol appears to have “a life of [its] own” and consequently motivates a number of category errors. Again, it is crucial that Marx regards fetishism not as a singular mistake, but as a type of upturned worldview.

In another essay on the history of fetishism, William Pietz recounts that the Dutch merchant Willem Bosman, writing in 1703, regarded the African worship of *Fetissos* at a slave port in Ouidah as reflecting “a world turned morally *upside down* by officially

⁴² Marx, *Capital*, 165.

⁴³ Roland Boer, ‘That Hideous Pagan Idol: Marx, Fetishism, and Graven Images’ in *Critique*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2010), 93-116 (97).

⁴⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 165.

enforced superstitious delusion that suppressed men's reasoning faculties".⁴⁵ The idolatrous worship of the African here is sanctioned by ruling power structures, resulting in a society with inverted ethics. Obviously, any inversion implies a hierarchical binary, some set of opposites that might be interchanged.⁴⁶ The concept of "inversion" appears everywhere in Marx's writings - it occurs most strikingly in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), where he argues that the fetishism of money results in "the transformation of all human and natural qualities into their opposites, the universal confusion and *inversion* of things".⁴⁷ We find it again in *Capital*, where Marx argues that "the rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living, of the product over the producer" and reflects the "same situation that we find in religion at the ideological level, namely the *inversion* of subject into object and *vice versa*".⁴⁸

Like Pietz, Marx paints a picture of the world turned "upside down" by fetishism. The foreign "idoll" perceived by Purchas and the "*Fetisso*" denounced by de Bosses become, in Marx's work, a cornerstone of the socio-economic conditions characterising nineteenth-century Europe. The cultural anthropologist J. Lorand Matory has written extensively on the racism encoded within the "fetish" idea, and he writes that Marx's theory functions by characterising the European fetishist as one "under the threat of looking as stupid as an African".⁴⁹ This is the new face of the early Jewish attempts to

⁴⁵ William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism' in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 16 (Autumn 1988), 105-124 (105), my emphasis.

⁴⁶ "Inversion" is a key word for Marx, as I show below. The meaning he suggests is obviously to reverse in order. The implication is that there is a 'proper' order that might be injuriously changed.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 279-401 (377), my emphasis.

⁴⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 990, my emphasis.

⁴⁹ J. Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Croydon: Duke University Press, 2018), 80.

characterise “Gentiles” and “Heathens” as idolaters: confused, base people whose mistaken premises result in eminently undesirable conclusions. Marx’s rhetorical manoeuvres absolutely rely upon the dehumanising binaries we see everywhere in Judeo-Christian idolatry discourse – true/false, person/thing, and natural/unnatural all reappear in Marx’s work as though they had been impartial, secular categories all along.

In short, once we recognise the connection between the *Fetisso* and the “idoll”, as well as the influence of de Brosses upon Marx, it becomes clear that “commodity fetishism” represents yet another iconoclastic reclassification of the world according to the contingent biases of the accuser. Matory articulates the situation with eloquence:

Much like the Dutch Protestants’ accusation that Roman Catholicism is “fetishism”, Marx’s deployment of this term not only dramatizes the wrongness of European capitalism by comparing it to African religion but also suggests that Marx embodies the anti-African aspirational ideal of the European Enlightenment.⁵⁰

In other words, Marx the enlightened iconoclast can tell the difference between the “objective” and the “subjective” in a way in which the African worshipper (or the European commodity fetishist) cannot. I believe that David Hawkes is justified in positing a “homology” between idolatry and commodity fetishism, and I agree that “it makes little theoretical or ethical difference” whether the idol or fetish in question is “financial, linguistic, erotic, or iconic”.⁵¹ The key similarity between idolatry and fetishism has

⁵⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁵¹ Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, 53.

nothing to do with the idolised or fetishised *object* and everything to do with the *form* of the iconoclastic accusation.

By this stage, I hope to have explained the connection between idolatry and fetishism to a sufficient extent. However, even if we accept the homology that Hawkes proposes, why bother to complicate a historical reading of idolatry in Lyly's work with reference to the nineteenth-century concept of commodity fetishism? What place does Marx have in a study of early modern playing culture? I propose two answers to these hypothetical questions: one broadly concerns theoretical criticism in general and another explains the *particular* usefulness of Lyly's drama to an interrogation of Marxist ideas.

Marxism has proven enormously influential within the realm of early modern literary studies. In 2018, the year I began writing the current thesis, a special edition of the journal *Shakespeare* commemorated the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth. An introductory essay by Hugh Grady and Christian Smith acknowledged the enormous influence Marxism has exerted over Shakespeare scholarship within the disciplines of "historicism", "new historicism", "cultural materialism", "feminism", "presentism", "psychoanalysis", "race studies", and "new aestheticism".⁵² Obviously, it would be impossible to recapitulate the precise debts that these various fields owe to Marx in this Introduction. Broadly speaking, it appears to me that these disciplines, to varying extents, constitute elaborations upon a formula originating in Marx and Engel's *The German Ideology* (1846): "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life".⁵³ I return to this phrase in my

⁵² Hugh Grady and Christian Smith, 'Introduction: Marx and Shakespeare: A Continuing Process' in *Shakespeare*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2018), 99-105 (103-105).

⁵³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. C. J. Arthur (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 42.

chapter on Lyly's *Campaspe*. In essence, the above fields are interested in how social and cultural formations determine or influence one's various identities, beliefs, actions, and perceptions. As such, they are all indebted to what Terry Eagleton describes as "the Marxist heritage": a popularisation of the view "that ideas are socially conditioned".⁵⁴

Moreover, Karl Marx's interest in Shakespearean drama is well-attested in the realm of Shakespearean criticism. Although he likely never read Lyly, Marx reportedly read Shakespeare "every day" and would frequently recite "whole scenes" from his works, ultimately inspiring his daughter Eleanor to pursue a career as a "Shakespearean actress".⁵⁵ This interest was not merely recreational – Marx cites Shakespeare throughout his philosophical writings, detecting in the playwright's work prescient descriptions of the political phenomena he sought to explain. Marx frequently quoted chunks of the Shakespeare play *Timon of Athens* in order to furnish his theory of commodity fetishism. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx cites a passage from *Timon* in which the eponymous character describes gold as a "visible god" that "sold'rest close impossibilities | and mak'st them kiss" (*Timon*, 14.387-8).⁵⁶ Marx reads this passage as confirmation of his view that commodity fetishism results in "the inversion and confusion of all human and natural qualities, the bringing together of impossibilities".⁵⁷ In *Capital*, Marx cites another passage from *Timon* in apparent support of the same point; he does so without explicitly explaining the relevance of Shakespeare's words to his theory.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction' in *Ideology*, ed. Terry Eagleton (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1-23 (5).

⁵⁵ Peter Stallybrass, "'Well grubbed, old mole': Marx, Hamlet, and the (Un)fixing of Representation' in *Marxist Shakespeares*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (London: Routledge, 2001), 16-31 (20).

⁵⁶ William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', 377.

⁵⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 229.fn.

Evidently, Marx viewed the significance of an early modern perspective to his own political thought as practically self-explanatory.

In short, the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism has always drawn upon an early modern perspective for validation. Marx clearly regarded the work of Shakespeare both as invaluable social observation and imaginative thought experiment, the latter's poetic descriptions of capital and power supposedly illuminating the true nature of these things and bolstering Marx's core claims. In other words, Marx *himself* invites us to employ early modern texts and theories in order to test his ideas. Crucially, the decision to draw upon accounts of money, exchange, and value from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is not an arbitrary one. Even a cursory glance at texts from this period reveal a keen, pervasive interest in the perverting power of money and other commodities. Throughout the 1580s, avarice and covetousness are key themes for England's playwrights: characters like Lady Lucre in *The Three Ladies of London*, Bomelio in *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, and Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* all represent precisely the psychological tendencies Marx associates with "fetishism". These figures embody "the rule of things over man" and their respective plays imply that their "fetishism" absolutely does entail an ethical "inversion".

Character studies of this kind are not exclusive to the decade in which Lyly was most active as playwright. In an extensive study of the relation between the marketplace and English Renaissance drama, Douglas Bruster has made the following claim:

The ‘Age of Shakespeare’, in fact, could well be characterized as the Age of Commodity Fetishism, as the time the expanding market lent rededicated power to property, rendering operative and even concretizing such concepts as fetishism, reification, and personification to an extent as unprecedented as it was alarming.⁵⁹

Bruster’s study locates explorations of “fetishism, reification, and personification” in a dizzying number of plays spanning an almost hundred-year period: *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*, *Jack Juggler*, *The Wounds of Civil War*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Alchemist* are merely some representative examples. If we accept that these varied plays contain at least *some* material relevant to Marxist thought, it is no wonder that Marx himself relied upon early modern English texts to furnish his theories.

In sum, precisely as Marx read Timon’s description of “gold” as testament to the ability of economic systems to radically influence one’s beliefs and perceptions, so innumerable early modern scholars are now descendants of “the Marxist heritage” and perceive examples of such social conditioning everywhere in early modern texts. Hence Bruster’s stark equation of the “Age of Shakespeare” with the “Age of Commodity Fetishism”. Marxism’s popularity has occasioned a scholarly feedback loop: early modern drama influenced Marx, and now Marxism is used to interpret endlessly and reinterpret early modern drama. Of course, not all critics who subscribe to the view that “ideas are socially conditioned” are Marxists, nor are all scholars interested in “fetishism” equally interested in what Marx had to say on the subject. However, Marxism has certainly influenced certain areas of Psychoanalytic, Feminist, Race, and Queer studies.

⁵⁹ Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 42.

Despite this breadth of influence, there has been considerable backlash against traditional Marxism in recent years, and it is to these scholarly currents that John Lyly's work is uniquely suited. This backlash has been targeted both at Marx himself and at the brand of critical methodology his works inspired, particularly that described as Cultural Materialism. Such debates are exemplified by a correspondence between Jonathan Dollimore and Neema Parvini.⁶⁰ I choose neither to engage in such debates here, nor to classify my own work according to a neat disciplinary label. However, some of the criticisms levelled at Cultural Materialist scholarship are symptomatic of a general renunciation of Marxist premises, a trend to which the current thesis certainly does contribute. As such, I believe they are worth rehearsing here in brief.

As I have suggested, it would take many more words than I can spare to define accurately Cultural Materialism in all of its complexity. For my purposes, it suffices to note that Cultural Materialism represents a philosophical (“with a Marxist inflection”) attitude towards texts and usually concerns “the clash between dominant cultural forms and dissident ideas”.⁶¹ In the third edition of *Radical Tragedy*, Jonathan Dollimore neatly summarised Cultural Materialism and the earlier critical perspective it sought to oppose. He described his critical model as attacking “essentialism in relation to subjectivity, universalism in relation to the human, and the belief that there was an ethical/aesthetic

⁶⁰ These thinkers engaged in a debate concerning the “anti-humanism” and general sterility of Cultural Materialism in 2012 and 2013. Parvini argued that the methodology associated with this field contradictorily blends determinism with subversion. Dollimore accused Parvini of conflating anti-essentialism with anti-humanism. Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare's History Plays: Rethinking Historicism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 34; Jonathan Dollimore, ‘A Response to Neema Parvini’ in *Textual Practice*, Vol. 27, No. 4. (2013), 733-735 (734).

⁶¹ Christopher Marlow, *Shakespeare and Cultural Materialist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), 1.

realm transcending the political”.⁶² This is an important and revealing mission statement because its second opposition (“universalism”/“the human”) has been mobilised against both Cultural Materialists and Marx himself in recent years.

Critics of Cultural Materialism locate a barefaced contradiction in Dollimore’s dual insistence that he rejects “universalism” and his own, apparently universalising claims regarding ethics, aesthetics, and subjectivity. In 1993, Graham Bradshaw described the Cultural Materialist perspective as relying upon a belief that “values are culturally specific and historically contingent”, which entails an internal contradiction insofar as the Cultural Materialist nevertheless believes “that their own values and perceptions are not culturally and historically bounded, but true”.⁶³ In 2012, Neema Parvini repeated the accusation, arguing that Cultural Materialist scholarship constitutes “a form of atheist (or Marxist) moralism, a dogmatic attempt to oppose its political rivals by countering their truth claims with its own truth claims”.⁶⁴ These responses to materialist criticism recognise that Marxism unwittingly replicates the form of those earlier worldviews it attempts to expose as rigidly “essential[ist]” or “universalis[ing]”. The materialist perspective is just as normative, exclusionary, and universalising as any previous mode of critique.

These criticisms reflect wider scholarly trends. Even from within the fields of ideology and materialism, scholars have begun to problematise and modify traditional Marxist

⁶² Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3rd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 15.

⁶³ Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 16-17.

⁶⁴ Parvini, *Shakespeare’s History Plays*, 35.

theory. By homology, these critiques pertain to “idolatry” as well, precisely because they oppose the normative binaries underpinning accusations of “fetishism”. In 1991, Slavoj Žižek described the “classical critical-ideological procedure” exemplified in the writings of Marx as involving the identification of “fetishistic misrecognitions” in the service of enlightening and emancipating the ideological subject.⁶⁵ As I have already implied, this procedure is homologous to a typical iconoclastic gesture – by pointing out that certain ideas are “socially conditioned”, “classical” ideology critics characterise fetishists as mistaken, but also *unaware* of their own mistake. Like Paul’s idolater, the fetishist is literally misperceiving the world. As Eagleton puts it, the misapprehension or category error pointed out by ideology critics might be referred to as anything from “false consciousness to fanaticism, mental blockage to mystification”.⁶⁶ However the specific epistemic malady is described, the ideology critic implies that their perspective is “objective” and correct, whereas the fetishist (like the idolater) is suffering from “subjective” and “socially conditioned” beliefs, the true nature of which he cannot accurately perceive. Accordingly, I refer to a homology between iconoclasm and the “classical critical-ideological procedure”.

As I explore in Chapter One, thinkers like Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek have critiqued and modified this procedure (and the very notion of “false consciousness” itself), arguing that “classical” ideology critique is a futile exercise because it erroneously presumes total credulity on the part of the ideological subject. Counter-intuitively, Žižek argues that ruling power structures maintain their credibility and functionality *despite* the conscious dissent or cynicism of its participants. The paradox is of a person who knows very well

⁶⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 25.

⁶⁶ Eagleton, ‘Introduction’, 1.

that economic value is illusory or that a fetishised object is wholly ordinary, but nevertheless continues to behave as though she believed the opposite. This observation gravely complicates the strategies of iconoclasts and “classical” Marxists by suggesting that idols and fetishes might function perfectly well in the face of total incredulity on the part of the idolater or fetishist. I unpack and explore Sloterdijk’s theory of “*enlightened* false consciousness” in the following chapter.

As I have already suggested, traditional Marxism has also been criticised for the dehumanising assumptions and rhetoric it mobilises. Since William Pietz’s seminal essays on the history of fetishism, many scholars have identified the colonial and racist origins of the concept. J. Lorand Matory, Lisa Freinkel, and Rosalind C. Morris have all associated “commodity fetishism” with dehumanising assumptions about non-European cultures.⁶⁷ Erik van Ree, Tomoko Masuzawa, and Babacar Camara have noted the racism underlying other aspects of Marx’s work, many of which he inherited from his intellectual hero, Hegel.⁶⁸ I discuss these assumptions in relation to early modern perceptions of “nature” and teleology in my chapter on Lyly’s *Midas*, a play that characterises its protagonist as simultaneously fetishist and “savage” (*Midas*, 4.1.20).

⁶⁷ I discuss the work of these critics in detail in my chapter on Lyly’s *Midas*. Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make*; Lisa Freinkel, ‘The Shakespearean Fetish’ in *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. Ewan Fernie, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), 109-130; Rosalind C. Morris, ‘After de Brosses: Fetishism, Translation, Comparativism, Critique’ in *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea*, 133-321.

⁶⁸ Erik van Ree, ‘Marx and Engels’s Theory of History: Making Sense of the Race Factor’ in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2019), 54-73; Tomoko Masuzawa, ‘Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (April 2000), 242-267; Babacar Camara, ‘The Falsity of Hegel’s Theses on Africa’ in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (September 2005), 82-96.

Finally, recent critics have attacked the ontological and ethical presumptions underlying Marx's binary opposition between persons and things. In *Capital*, Marx writes that capitalistic economies injuriously provoke "the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things".⁶⁹ As I explore in Chapter Four on *Love's Metamorphosis*, fetishism and objectification are closely linked. However, the emergence of New Materialism coincides with scholarly endeavours to deconstruct a straightforward opposition between "thing" and "person", the inversion of which so troubled Marx. The leading voice in this field is Jane Bennet, a critic who insists upon the "vitality, wilfulness, and recalcitrance possessed by nonhuman entities and forces", as well as the brute "materiality" of human beings themselves.⁷⁰ More recently, Alyson Cole has argued that "the rule of things over men" does not refer to a "perceptual disorder" or "delusion" that will correct itself once pointed out; on the contrary, the vitality of "things" is a much more intrinsic and complicated phenomenon than traditional Marxist theory might suggest.⁷¹

These tendencies within Marxist scholarship are reflected in recent early modern literary studies as well. Critics such as Margreta de Grazia, Peter Sallibrass, and Ann Rosalind Jones interpret early modern literary and dramatic texts as troubling, instead of validating, traditional Marxist ontology. Sallibrass and Rosalind Jones recognise that "the concept of the fetish was forged to formalize" a "conceptual opposition of person and thing", though they demonstrate that this formal opposition simply does not reflect how these

⁶⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 209.

⁷⁰ Jane Bennett, 'The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (June 2004), 347-372 (347).

⁷¹ Alyson Cole, 'The Subject of Objects: Marx, New Materialism, & Queer Forms of Life' in *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2018), 167-179 (175).

entities function in the real world.⁷² As I discuss in Chapter Four, theatrical presentations of metamorphosis constitute practical studies into the coextensivity of people and things. The playhouse was an arena in which the formal oppositions relied upon by iconoclasts were put to the test. The fluidity of actor and prop, character and object in Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis* represents an exemplary deconstruction of the boundary between "person and thing".

I am now in a position to state the argument of this thesis without ambiguity: Lyly's plays problematise the normative presuppositions underlying iconoclasm and traditional ideology critique. If *Timon of Athens* represented a theatrical *validation* of Marxist ideas, then Lyly's plays constitute theatrical *critiques* of those same ideas. This aligns Lyly's drama with contemporary ideological scholarship, which is increasingly sensitive to the normative, subjective, and contradictory nature of traditional Marxism. Lyly's complex, paradoxical treatments of "idolatry" trouble both iconoclastic notions of the idolatrous and the ideological conception of the fetish. Again, this is not an arbitrary connection – fetishism is a concept born out of idolatry discourse. When Lyly's plays destabilise the concept of "idolatry" by troubling the robustness of an iconoclastic binary like "person"/"thing", he must inevitably give pause to the ideology critic who relies upon an identical binary to castigate commodity fetishists. In short, it might be said that the following reading of Lyly's drama is Marxist in tone, but thoroughly anti-Marx in attitude.

⁷² Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe' in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Autumn 2001), 114-132 (116).

In what remains of this Introduction, I set aside Marxism and focus instead upon John Lyly and his immediate cultural context. There are three claims I wish to propose before embarking upon my analysis of individual Lyly plays: (1) Lyly was active as a playwright during a time at which “Idolatrie” was particularly associated with theatres in London; (2) Lyly was not a safe, pandering, or uncontroversial writer; and (3) Lyly has been almost entirely excluded from scholarship interested in idolatry, iconoclasm, ideology, or Marx. By presenting evidence for each of these claims, I hope to persuade my readers that an analysis of idolatry and fetishism in Lyly’s plays is both appropriate and necessary for a number of reasons.

Lyly’s plays were performed by the Children of Paul’s and the Children of the Chapel Royal at St. Paul’s and the Blackfriars - a hall abutting an old cathedral and a room within a former monastery, respectively. Various antitheatrical sermons and texts were performed or available to purchase in close proximity to these venues. Thomas White’s 1577 antitheatrical sermon was printed the following year by Francis Coldock, “one of the largest bookdealers” at Paul’s churchyard, operating out of the Green Dragon.⁷³ John Stockwood’s influential anti-playing sermon was published by Henry Bynneman in 1578, the latter having set up a book-dealers at “the Three Wells at the north-west door of [Paul’s] cathedral by 1572”.⁷⁴ Moreover, the publishers of Stephen Gosson’s *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579, Thomas Woodcoke) and *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582, Thomas Gosson) were both located around St. Paul’s Churchyard: Gosson at Paternoster Row,

⁷³ James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450-1850* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 37.

⁷⁴ John Stockwood, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse on Barthelmew Day, Being the 24. of August. 1578*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Henry Bynneman, 1578), Title Page; Raven, *The Business of Books*, 38.

Woodcocke at “The Black Bear”.⁷⁵ Clearly, St. Paul’s was somewhere that a London reader may have been exposed to the antitheatrical notion that playgoing is an idolatrous activity.

Crucially, antitheatricalism was not an idiosyncratic, fringe phenomenon. These sermons and texts do not represent Puritans preaching to the choir. As many as six thousand people attended a Paul’s Cross sermon in 1560 according to the testimony of Bishop John Jewel.⁷⁶ Lori Anne Ferrell, in her study of early modern sermons, has written that attendance at Paul’s Cross sermons “was reckoned up by thousands”, such that “the London theatres had nothing on the Cross”.⁷⁷ Printed sermons were also highly popular commodities. In 2016, Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser meticulously analysed the market share of various genres of printed text between 1559 and 1602. They located sermons within what they called “The Innovative” structure of popularity: those genres in which publishers were frequently willing to print first editions, and which were likely to be reprinted should they sell out.⁷⁸ In short, printed sermons did not occupy an obscure portion of the market, but were in popular demand in the same way as prose fiction, music, or playtexts.

⁷⁵ Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse Conteyning a Plesaunt Inuectiue against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Iesters, and Such like Caterpillers of a Co[m]Monwelth*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas VWoodcocke, 1579), Title Page; Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions*, Title Page; Blayney, *The Bookshops in Paul’s Cross Churchyard*, 26.

⁷⁶ ‘Letter XXX: Bishop Jewel to Peter Martyr’ in *The Zurich Letters A.D. 1558-1579* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1842), 70-2 (71).

⁷⁷ Lori Anne Ferrell, ‘Sermons’ in *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England*, ed. Andy Kesson & Emma Smith (Surrey: Ashgate, 2016), 193-202 (198-9).

⁷⁸ Within these temporal and generic parameters (perfectly suited to my topic), sermons enjoyed a “better than average” reprint rate, with a First Edition Weighting of over 50%, indicating “a high proportion of new titles”. Alan B. Farmer & Zachary Lesser, ‘What is Print Popularity? A Map of the Elizabethan Book Trade’ in *The Elizabethan Top Ten*, 19-55 (41, 48, 51).

The same is true of the antitheatrical pamphlets produced by figures like Stephen Gosson and Philip Stubbes. There was an “unusual double edition” of Gosson’s *The Schoole of Abuse*, and Stubbes’ *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) went through four editions in a little over ten years, indicating a wide and consistent audience.⁷⁹ The former is written in a prose style influenced by Lyly’s own *Euphues* novels and the latter takes the form of a dramatic dialogue that is named after Lyly’s own *The Anatomy of Wit*. In other words, these works were not unpleasant screeds occupying a fringe portion of the literary marketplace. They were popular, readable works reaching an impressive size of audience. It is highly probable that their claims were known to theatre audiences and playing companies alike.

Each of the above antitheatricalists, either explicitly or implicitly, associated playgoing with “Idolatrie”. Thomas White described playgoers as “heathens” and the playhouses as “Venus Court and Bacchus Kitchin”.⁸⁰ In 1578, John Stockwood drew connections between “wicked superstition”, “Idolatrie”, and playgoers, characterising London’s playhouses as equivalent to “the olde heathenish Theatre at Rome”.⁸¹ According to Stockwood, attendance at these plays provoked “whordom” and “concupiscence” (words that clearly echoed Paul’s conception of idol-worship).⁸² In *The Schoole of Abuse*, Gosson described “Stage Plays” as “consecrated to idolatrie” due to their Roman, pagan origins.⁸³ In 1583, Philip Stubbes concurred, arguing that playgoing “sprang from the heathen

⁷⁹ Arthur F. Kinney, ‘Gosson, Stephen (bap. 1554, d. 1625), antitheatrical polemicist and Church of England clergyman’. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 2004-09-23. Oxford University Press [accessed 08 January 2018]; Margaret Jane Kidnie, ‘Evidence of Authorial Revision in the Earliest Edition of “The Anatomie of Abuses”’ in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (March 1998), 75-90 (75).

⁸⁰ White, *A Sermon[n] Preached at Pawles Crosse*, 46.

⁸¹ Stockwood, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse on Barthelmew Day*, 14, 134.

⁸² Stockwood, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse on Barthelmew Day*, 135.

⁸³ Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse*, C7v.

idolatrous Pagans” and existed to “draw vs from Christianitie to ydolatrie, and gentilisme”.⁸⁴ These accusations characterised playgoing itself as a type of idolatrous ritual. As Michael O’Connell puts it, “the charge of idolatry came *ex origine*: Northbrooke and Gosson both argue that plays were first devised to honour the false gods of Greece and Rome [...] and because of this retain the taint of idolatry”.⁸⁵

This historical “taint of idolatry” ensured that the simple act of attending a play could be characterised as “idolatrous”, but several more specific aspects of the playgoing experience were targeted as encouragers of “gentilisme”. The sensuous movements of the actors supposedly provoke “concupiscence”, but also the practice of acting itself threatened the various iconoclastic binaries relied upon by antitheatricalists. These writers saw the theatre as a venue in which one’s reasoning faculties were confounded – Gosson describes playgoing as capable of turning “reasonable creatures into brute beastes”.⁸⁶ The playgoer’s loss of reason is a thread that runs through the antitheatrical literature cited above, and it explains the various charges levelled against the theatre. The antitheatrical case in this period can be articulated via a single accusation: that the playhouses provoke ethical and ontological *inversions* resulting in a number of related category errors. Hence the obvious connection in the antitheatricalist’s mind between the irrational, sensuous activity of playgoing and heathen “Idolatrie”.

The notion that playgoing inverts the perceptions and ethics of its participants has numerous consequences. Discussing the costumes of actors in *Playes Confuted in Five*

⁸⁴ Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, D3v; Ld3v.

⁸⁵ Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17.

⁸⁶ Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse*, A3v.

Actions, Gosson argues that “garments are set down for signs distinctive between sex and sex; to take unto us those garments that are manifest signs of another sex is to falsify, forge, and adulterate”.⁸⁷ This is just one example of the inversion that theatrical productions occasion – Gosson more generally admonishes actors who “by outward signs [...] show themselves otherwise than they are, and so within the compass of a lie”.⁸⁸ Anthony Munday explicitly states that playgoing’s various inversions (reason to irrationality, humans to beasts, men to women, self to other, god to idol) will ultimately result in bringing “the whole Commonweale into disorder”.⁸⁹ These extreme entailments made perfect sense once I recognised that “Idolatrie” names a thoroughly corrupted and inverted worldview. The idolatrous playgoer, like Paul’s Gentile or Marx’s fetishist, is viewing the whole world “upside down”.

This is not a thesis about antitheatricalism, but the content and popularity of the above works throughout the 1580s surely lends a hint of controversy to Lyly’s dramatic work. Despite how unsympathetic his audiences were to antitheatrical ideas, it is likely that they were aware of the theatre’s infamous reputation for encouraging “idolatry” at the time. In other words, while a modern reader might regard Lyly’s evocations of “idolatry” as passing or throwaway metaphors, a contemporaneous audience member could not have been unaware of idolatry’s supreme relevance to plays with pagan themes, and particularly those staged a short walk from a location filled with high-profile antitheatrical sentiment.

⁸⁷ Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions*, C4v.

⁸⁸ Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions*, C5r.

⁸⁹ Anthony Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters: The One Whereof Was Sounded by a Reuerend Byshop Dead Long since; the Other by a Worshipful and Zealous Gentleman Now Aliue*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Henrie Denham, 1580), 44.

This brings us to Lyly's own high-profile cultural relevance. Each chapter of this thesis begins with a critical overview of its respective play. These sections illustrate specific lacunae where Lyly's scholarly reception is concerned, but I believe that a broad introduction to this reception might help to clarify the impetus behind my project. In 2011, Andy Kesson summarised Lyly's critical fortunes between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, arguing that his work has hitherto been perceived as "politically [and] aesthetically impotent", associated with genteel Court values and offering nothing in the way of provocative or reflective insight.⁹⁰ The two nails in this particular coffin appear to have been Edward Blount's decision to print the first collection of Lyly's plays under the title *Six Court Comedies* (1632) and the publication (and subsequent influence) of G. K. Hunter's *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (1962). From these, the caricature that emerges is of a Court dramatist, far more eager to please his sovereign than to produce aesthetically or philosophically rich drama. Considered alongside his more exciting contemporaries Kyd, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, Lyly is depicted as an innocuous and wholly unexceptional writer.

The above caricature, so tenacious throughout most of the twentieth century, is gradually losing its credibility amongst scholars and theatre-makers. Increasingly, Lyly is viewed as a difficult and complex writer, whose relationship to the Court was decidedly strained. A watershed moment in Lyly's reception history was the publication of Leah Scragg's 2006 article 'The Victim of Fashion?'. Scragg questioned the critical consensus that Lyly's dramatic career was abruptly marginalised in the 1590s due to "rapidly changing

⁹⁰ Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*, 12.

tastes”, arguing instead that Lyly’s ambivalent depictions of power and sovereignty occasioned “displeasure” and, ultimately, “censorship”.⁹¹ Andy Kesson has taken this further, demonstrating that Lyly’s prose fiction and drama were printed, emulated, and discussed far beyond the 1580s, and that his writing “spoke to his contemporaries in a much more vital, astonishing, and aggressive manner than scholars suggest”.⁹² In short, Lyly’s dramatic career may have been stalled by “the closure of Paul’s Boys” around 1590, but this did nothing to curb the appetite for his work in print. Between them, Scragg and Kesson suggest a Lyly who was as influential as he was controversial, a figure far removed from the caricature of an irrelevant Court flatterer.

Recent Lyly scholarship takes this view seriously. Denise A. Walen, Theodora Jankowski, and Gillian Knoll all regard Lyly as a provocative and culturally significant writer.⁹³ A particularly important forerunner to the current thesis is Jankowski’s 2018 monograph on Lyly, entitled *Elizabeth I, The Subversion of Flattery and John Lyly’s Court Plays and Entertainments*. Clearly, Jankowski continues to characterise Lyly as “Court” dramatist to some extent, though the subversive Lyly she describes is much more similar to Scragg’s censored provocateur than to Hunter’s harmless sycophant. While the current thesis is not going to explore Lyly’s own beliefs or practices, these reassessments of Lyly’s biography are relevant because they invite a more sophisticated reading of his works. Lyly’s biography and the political or aesthetic merits of his work have always

⁹¹ Leah Scragg, ‘The Victim of Fashion? Rereading the Biography of John Lyly’ in *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol. 19 (2006), 210-226 (210, 221, 223).

⁹² Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*, 216.

⁹³ Denise A. Walen, ‘Constructions of Female Homoerotics in Early Modern Drama’ in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (October 2002), 411-430; Theodora A. Jankowski, *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly’s Court Plays and Entertainments* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018); Gillian Knoll, *Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare: Metaphor, Cognition, and Eros* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

been tightly intertwined. If Lyly is viewed as an obsequious flatterer, I might expect his drama to be “politically [...] impotent”. If he is viewed as a “victim of fashion” and a minor figure in his own time, I might also expect his drama to be “aesthetically” lacking. Challenging pejorative assumptions about Lyly’s life and career is a first step towards taking his drama seriously and engaging with it accordingly.

While Lyly’s aesthetic impotence has been thoroughly discredited (both through scholarly revision and a number of successful theatrical performances), the political and philosophical depths of his drama are yet to be satisfactorily explored.⁹⁴ Scholars interested in theatre history, the early modern book trade, performance practice, and depictions of emotion have taken an interest in Lyly, but he is consistently excluded from materialist or ideological scholarship.⁹⁵ Moreover, those scholars interested in early modern idolatry or iconoclasm have little to say about Lyly’s work, despite his obvious pertinence to these topics.⁹⁶ To list the influential studies of early modern idolatry and ideology that exclude Lyly from their analyses is to become overwhelmed – I suspect a

⁹⁴ The aesthetic merits of Lyly’s work have been confirmed by high-profile productions of Lyly’s plays in recent years. Notable productions include but are not limited to: *Galatea* by Edward’s Boys (2014, King Edward VI School), *The Woman in the Moon* by Dolphin’s Back (2018, The Globe), and *Sappho and Phao* by the RSC’s Next Generation Company (2018, The Other Place).

⁹⁵ Notable exceptions to this rule are Leah Scragg’s essay on signification, “disorders of reference”, and ideological power in Lyly’s work, and Mark Albert Johnson’s reading of fetishism in Lyly’s *Midas*. Leah Scragg, ‘John Lyly and the Politics of Language’ in *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (January 2005), 17-38 (18); Mark Albert Johnson, ‘Playing With the Beard: Courtly and Commercial Economies in Richard Edwards’s “Damian and Pithias” and John Lyly’s *Midas*’ in *ELH*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Spring 2005), 79-103.

⁹⁶ Key exceptions here are Chloe Porter’s excellent work on idolatry in *The Woman in the Moon* (which I have already cited) and Marguerite A. Tassi’s discussion of the idolatrous potential of art in *Campaspe*. Marguerite A. Tassi, *The Scandal of Images: Iconoclasm, Eroticism, and Painting in Early Modern English Drama* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005).

Chloe Porter also touches upon idolatry in a number of Lyly plays in *Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama* (2013), though she is far more interested in representation and image-worship than I am. Chloe Porter, *Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama: Spectators, Aesthetics, and Incompletion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

shorter list could be generated by compiling those works that include no mention of Santa Claus.

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to provide some indication of this absence. Lyly does not appear *at all* in notable scholarship touching on early modern idolatry such as Margaret Aston's *England's Iconoclasts* (1988), Laura Levine's *Men in Women's Clothing* (1994), Michael O'Connell's *The Idolatrous Eye* (2000), David Hawkes' *Idols of the Marketplace* (2001), Peter Lake and Michael Questier's *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat* (2002), Jennifer Waldron's *Reformations of the Body*, or Michael Martin's *Literature and the Encounter with God in Post-Reformation England* (2014).⁹⁷ Similarly, Lyly's work has not proven of interest to scholars working on ideology or fetishism. He is nowhere to be found in key works such as Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* (1984), Margreta de Grazia, Peter Sallibrass, and Maureen Quilligan's *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (1996), Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor's *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture* (2000), Linda Woodbridge's *Money and the Age of Shakespeare* (2003), or Lisa Freinkel's *The Use of the Fetish* (2005).⁹⁸ If there is a hint of arbitrariness to these lists, it is because they *are* arbitrary. As a rule, critics interested in idolatry or fetishism are either unaware of Lyly's relevance to

⁹⁷ Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts, Volume One: Laws Against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*; Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (London: Yale University Press, 2002); Waldron, *Reformations of the Body*; Michael Martin, *Literature and the Encounter with God in Post-Reformation Literature* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

⁹⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy; Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Peter Sallibrass, Maureen Quilligan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Historicism, Psychoanalysis and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor (New York: Routledge, 2000); *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Freinkel, 'The Use of the Fetish'.

these concepts or unmotivated to explore them. The current project was conceived as a corrective to this unfortunate aspect of Lyly's reception history.

In each chapter of this thesis, I consider a different iconoclastic binary in relation to a single play. In my first chapter, I explore the tense boundary between god and man in Lyly's *Campaspe*, focusing upon the figure of Alexander the Great and the play's ambivalent attitude towards his reputed divinity. I argue that *Campaspe* is a much more overtly theological play than might appear at first glance, and that its themes of cynicism and hypocrisy align its depiction of a human god with "enlightened false consciousness": a modification to traditional Marxist theory that characterises ideological subjects not as viewing the world "upside down" (in a totally credulous manner), but as consciously permitting themselves to hold contradictory beliefs. In my second chapter, I suggest that the language throughout *Sappho and Phao* steadily problematises the boundary between true and false, priming Lyly's audience to accept his play's contradictory ending, but also to acknowledge its fundamental irrationality. Read as a self-conscious meditation on "idolatry" and the loss of "reason" (3.3.115), *Sappho and Phao* becomes an intensely problematic panegyric to Queen Elizabeth that implies a troubling *equivalence* between the English sovereign and a pagan idol.

My third chapter argues that Lyly's adaptation of the Midas myth characterises the king's desire for the golden touch as resulting from a misapprehension of the conventional for the natural. A binary of this kind is central to Aristotle's theories of money, early modern idolatry discourse, and the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism. As I demonstrate, early modern audience members would have been well aware of the idolatrous

implications of pursuing gold as an end in itself; Aristotelian teleology was frequently evoked in order to denounce idolaters and usurers in the period. Once again, Lyly's plot effectively deconstructs the binary between nature and convention, revealing the inherent normativity and partiality underlying ethical appeals to the natural. Finally, my fourth chapter argues that the tree-felling scene in *Love's Metamorphosis* explicitly draws upon crucifixion imagery, simultaneously evoking Reformation-era iconoclasm and the ceremony of the Eucharist. The scene's obvious Christian subtext lends greater import to Erisichthon's use of the word "idolatry" moments before he hacks Lyly's symbolic rood to pieces. I argue that the play's subsequent preoccupation with metamorphosis can be read as a critique of the "person"/"thing" binary that plagued discussion of cross-worship and the Eucharist throughout the sixteenth century.

As I hope should be evident by this stage, the objective of the current thesis is twofold: to demonstrate the relevance of "idolatry" to Lyly's drama, and to introduce Lyly into a species of scholarship from which he is constantly (and unjustifiably) excluded. By focusing upon the ways in which Lyly's work can be used to *challenge* traditional Marxist premises, I also hope to demonstrate Lyly's usefulness to contemporary currents within the field of ideology. This is a field interested in kingship and godhood, nationalism and idolatry, reason and desire. It is a breed of scholarship that revels in contradiction, antithesis, and paradox. These are themes and features utterly characteristic of Lyly's unique dramatic style. To overlook the importance of idolatry to Lyly's plots is a misfortune. To exclude him from materialist scholarship is to miss some of the most baffling and revealing explorations of power and belief ever to grace the English stage.

CHAPTER I

“How should a man be thought a god?”: Idols and Cynics in *Campaspe*

I begin my analysis of individual plays with Lyly’s first outing as a dramatist: *Campaspe*. The play’s plot concerns the efforts of Alexander the Great to resist his attraction to the eponymous captive, a girl captured and brought to Athens following the Theban war. Campaspe quickly falls in love with Apelles, a royal painter who reciprocates her affections and fears reprimand from Alexander for doing so. Subplots feature various Greek philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippus, and Diogenes. Throughout the play, Alexander’s project to “be thought a god” (1.3.99) is undermined by his own mortal failings and the criticisms of his own subjects.¹ While the majority of the play’s Athenians express doubt as to Alexander’s godhood and imply that they view him as a mere “man” (2.2.83), the cynic Diogenes *explicitly* challenges the ruler’s divine aspirations, repeatedly drawing attention to the latter’s mortality and fallibility. As I will argue, these iconoclastic attacks against Alexander are ultimately qualified by *Campaspe*’s own formal structure; close attention to the play’s language reveals that Alexander is implicitly deified by its conclusion. Taken as a whole, Lyly’s artwork simultaneously humanises and deifies Alexander the Great, playing with his historical

¹ John Lyly, ‘Campaspe’ in *Campaspe and Sappho and Phao*, ed. David Bevington and G. K. Hunter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 49-139.

reputation as an idol in order to advance the contradictory propositions: “man” ≠ “god” and Alexander = “man” and “god”.²

In this chapter, I argue that “man”/“god” functions as an iconoclastic binary throughout *Campaspe*. Indeed, Alexander’s desire to be thought a “god” instead of a “man”, generates a great deal of the play’s momentum. However, this opposition becomes increasingly problematised as the plot proceeds: the Athenians’ insistence upon Alexander’s status as a mere “man” appears to have no effect upon his implied deification at the play’s close. In other words, the application of the binary fails to execute its iconoclastic function. Read alongside the play’s exploration of hypocrisy and its depiction of Diogenes, this feature of *Campaspe* perfectly illustrates the ideological attitude described by Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek as “cynicism” or “enlightened false consciousness”.³ While there are important differences between Ancient cynicism and ideological cynicism, Lyly’s portrayal of the former school is wonderfully instructive regarding the latter. The differences and similarities between these worldviews will be thoroughly set out elsewhere in this chapter.

My argument will begin by considering the religious landscape of *Campaspe* itself. *Campaspe* is the only Lyly play with a Classical setting not to feature an onstage pagan deity. In many respects, the play is a remarkably secular one. While the majority of Lyly’s plays depict struggles between a pagan god and a mortal antagonist, *Campaspe* portrays the efforts of Alexander the Great to become a better statesman, as well as a romance plot

² Crucially, *Campaspe* insists upon the first equation above, qualifying any attempt to read Alexander as a straightforward demigod. I will return to this point.

³ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 5; Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 29.

between Apelles and Campaspe in which the gods of love do not interfere. It will be the argument of this chapter that the striking and unusual human-centeredness of *Campaspe* is itself a symptom of the play's profound interest in the unsteady boundary between god and mortal. In his first play, Lyly sweeps aside the deities of the pagan pantheon and, as I will argue, even a transcendental "divine mover" (1.3.43), in order to make room for *Alexander's* deification.

Broadly speaking, *Campaspe* criticism has devolved into two distinct branches in recent years. There are those works interested in matters of art and representation, and those that are interested in the portrayal of Alexander and political rule. I regard the work of Leah Scragg and Theodora Jankowski as representative of the latter tendency, and the work of Marguerite A. Tassi, Chloe Porter, and Gillian Knoll as representative of the former. In her paper "'Campaspe' and the Construction of Monarchical Power' (1999), Scragg presents a politically sensitive reading of the play, in which she carefully explores the process whereby Lyly's Alexander reaffirms his royal power despite his own weaknesses and the criticism of others.⁴ Similarly, Jankowski's analysis of *Campaspe* in *The Subversion of Flattery* (2018) uses political theoretical language to construe the tension at the heart of Lyly's Alexander as one between "the body natural" and "the body politic".⁵ In contrast with Scragg's emphasis upon the irresolvable "doubleness" at the heart of *Campaspe*, Jankowski locates a definite "resolution" to the play in Alexander's decision to forgo love in favour of war and statecraft.⁶ Both critics recognise the

⁴ Leah Scragg, "'Campaspe' and the Construction of Monarchical Power' in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol. 12 (1999), 59-83.

⁵ Theodora A. Jankowski, *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 38.

⁶ *Ibid*; Scragg, "'Campaspe' and the Construction of Monarchical Power', 81.

importance of ambivalence and tension to the play's depiction of royal power, though they disagree as to the significance of the play's ending.

The other species of criticism concerns *Campaspe's* depiction of art and desire. In *The Scandal of Images* (2005), Marguerite A. Tassi writes that "Lyly's portrayal of Apelles taps into iconoclastic fears about images, yet at the same time indulges his audience's iconophilia".⁷ Again, Tassi locates a duality in the play's artist scenes, reading them as a tightrope walk between indulgence in pagan imagery and anxiety about its corrupting effects. Fundamentally, Tassi is interested in the play's ambivalent depiction of "erotic" images, and this interest links her work with that of Chloe Porter in *Making and Unmaking* (2013) and Gillian Knoll in *Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare* (2020).⁸ Porter's chapter on *Campaspe* explores the "incompleteness" of Apelles' portrait of the titular character, reading this deficiency as the sole feature preventing the painting from becoming wholly "idolatrous".⁹ Apelles is required to indulge continually in the potentially idolatrous practice of fashioning an erotic image, precisely in order to defer the "idolatrous achievement of finish".¹⁰ In a similar vein, Gillian Knoll discusses the way in which Apelles and Campaspe instrumentalise painting as a medium that "stand[s] between Lyly's erotic subject and object", while simultaneously "bring[ing] them together".¹¹ Thus, while Scragg and Jankowski identified an ambivalence in Lyly's

⁷ Marguerite A. Tassi, *The Scandal of Images: Iconoclasm, Eroticism, and Painting in Early Modern English Drama* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005), 68.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Chloe Porter, *Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama: Spectators, Aesthetics, and Incompletion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 122.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gillian Knoll, *Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare: Metaphor, Cognition and Eros* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 211.

portrayal of Alexander, so Tassi, Porter, and Knoll all discern a “doubleness” at the heart of Lyly’s romance plot as well.

In short, many critics of *Campaspe* have recognised the prevailing sense of ambivalence throughout the play, even as they focus upon entirely different aspects of its plot. My contribution to this body of work involves taking a more holistic approach to the play, reading its various plots and subplots as mutual constituents of a unified fictional world. The different sections of *Campaspe* have typically been read as separate, and even opposing, entities that do not satisfactorily cohere. Joel B. Altman describes the structure of *Campaspe* as allowing Lyly to examine different aspects of his fictional Athens “as a dialectical rhetorician”, with the result that “experiencing the play is [...] rather like being argued at”.¹² The image of the argument implies that the various scenes are somehow thematically *opposed*; for Altman, the philosopher and artist scenes clash instead of cohere. More recently, G. K. Hunter has echoed this sentiment, writing that: “In Lyly, the separate experiences of people are kept separate, not accumulated as facets of personality. They are organised for our attention in patterns which raise general moral questions [...] in the end, the contradictions remain and are accepted”.¹³ Again, even for those critics primarily interested in Lyly’s dramaturgy, ambivalence and “contradictions” remain emphasised. For these readers, the impression conveyed by *Campaspe*’s structure is a dialectical one, where the themes of the play (love or statesmanship) are presented from different perspectives: not in order to build towards a coherent conclusion, but simply to lay bare the inherently dual nature of those concepts.

¹² Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (London: University of California Press, 1978), 197-201.

¹³ G. K. Hunter, ‘Introduction to *Campaspe*’ in *Campaspe and Sappho and Phao*, ed. David Bevington and G. K. Hunter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 1-49 (18).

I agree wholeheartedly that *Campaspe*'s structure is "piecemeal" (to borrow another of Hunter's terms), though I do not agree that this serves to keep the distinct plotlines of the play wholly "separate".¹⁴ A fundamental starting point for this chapter will be an argument that the philosopher, artist, and Alexander plotlines all contribute towards the discovery of a very specific *religious* landscape for Lyly's Athens. What, how, and why people worship are cardinal concerns throughout Lyly's drama. In his more overtly religious plays, Lyly takes great pains to demonstrate the presence and legitimacy of the gods, even as they are blasphemed, opposed, or ridiculed. I read the corresponding *absence* of the gods in *Campaspe* as plainly significant. Accordingly, I interpret the theological debate portrayed in the philosopher scenes, alongside dismissive references to Jove and Venus in the artist scenes, as mutual reinforcements of the religious doubt characterising *Campaspe*'s Athens. By reading the play's varied allusions to the gods as expressing a general view of religion, I will be positioned to consider Alexander's own divine aspiration within the context of a state characterised by scepticism.

This chapter contains four sections. The first will consider the religious landscape in the play, with a focus upon the debate between Plato and Aristotle early in the action, as well as the evocations of the gods in Apelles' workshop. This second will outline Alexander the Great's historical reputation and demonstrate how Lyly plays with this reputation in order to produce an Alexander who wishes to "be thought a god". The third section will outline the differences between Ancient Greek cynicism and ideological cynicism. This section explains the relevance of historical cynicism to contemporaneous Marxist

¹⁴ G. K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 154.

scholarship, as well as the usefulness of a Marxist vocabulary for engaging with *Campaspe*. The fourth and final section will outline the centrality of cynicism to Lyly's portrayal of belief and power, showing that a cynical attitude pervades his fictional Athens and, ultimately, permits the contradictory deification of his Alexander.

Absence, Doubt, Blasphemy: Religion in Lyly's Athens

Lyly introduces matters of religion to *Campaspe* in the context of a debate, a decision that immediately emphasises the religious uncertainty characterising his fictional Athens. In Act One, Scene Three, a host of historical Greek philosophers enter onto the stage, already in the middle of a heated philosophical argument (primarily between Plato and Aristotle). Responding to Aristotle's complaint that he "cannot by natural reason give any reason of the ebbing and flowing of the sea" (1.3.34-6), Plato sharply retorts:

Cleanthes and you attribute so much to nature, by searching for things which are not to be found, that, whilst you study a cause of your own, you omit the occasion itself [...] There is no man so savage in whom resteth not this divine particle, that there is an omnipotent, eternal and divine mover, which may be called God. (I.3.38-41).

The competing viewpoints at play in this exchange are formalised into pithy statements by Crates and Anaxarchus at the end of the scene: Plato holds "that there is *Deus optimus maximus*, and not nature" (1.3.56-7), whereas Aristotle contends "that there is *Natura naturans*, and yet not God" (1.3.55). In other words, Plato regards a supernatural deity as

responsible for the movement of the tides, whereas Aristotle is committed to discovering a fundamentally natural cause of the phenomenon.

This debate occurs within a relatively narrow space of time (twenty-seven lines) and is not referred to again later in the play. These features of the scene led G. K. Hunter, in the introduction to his 1991 edition of the play, to write of “the strange and apparently dead-end scene of the philosophers’ feast”, that ought simply to be appreciated as “a typical courtly show of famous figures from the past”, similar to that parodied at the end of Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.¹⁵ Hunter acknowledges that the scene discloses the philosophers’ “concern with serious intellectual issues”, but he does not unpack what those issues are or how they might be relevant to the rest of the play.¹⁶ Given the scene’s almost total absence from *Campaspe* criticism, it is safe to presume that many of the play’s readers share Hunter’s perception that the debate constitutes a thematic “dead-end”.

I agree with Hunter’s assessment of the scene’s structure, while strongly disagreeing as to his perception of its thematic significance. Indeed, the debate between Plato and Aristotle literally terminates in an argumentative “dead-end”: neither philosopher is declared a winner, and the issue of whether “God” or “nature” is the efficient cause of the tides remains live. By anachronistically allowing Plato and Aristotle to engage in a debate - as Hunter reminds us, Plato had been dead for sixteen years “when Alexander came to the throne” (1.3.1-2.fn) - Lyly essentially stages a Socratic dialogue between two competing philosophical worldviews. By refusing to resolve this debate, Lyly undermines

¹⁵ Hunter, ‘Introduction to *Campaspe*’, 14.

¹⁶ Hunter, ‘Introduction to *Campaspe*’, 16.

the unique authority of both thinkers, contextualising them within a tradition characterised by perennial doubt and debate. In short, Lyly presents us with two figures who immediately separate into distinct philosophical camps: one prioritising natural causes, the other prioritising supernatural ones.¹⁷

Most significantly for my purposes, the scene functions to introduce the concept of “God” into *Campaspe* in a manner instantly provoking doubt as to its nature or existence. It does so by implying a deeper philosophical division between Plato and Aristotle that might be construed as the opposition between a theistic and an atheistic worldview. Indeed, the language used throughout the scene implies an equation between Aristotle’s naturalism on the subject of causes with outright atheism. Plato’s blunt assertion here that “there is no man so savage” that they do not recognise that “there *is*” “God”, coupled with Anaxarchus’ equally forthright summation of Aristotle’s position as entailing “*not* God”, characterise Aristotle’s naturalism as entailing a significant delimitation of God’s powers.

This characterisation of Aristotle reflects the vagaries of his reception history. As an illuminating chapter in Craig Martin’s *Subverting Aristotle* (2014) deftly demonstrates, the view that Aristotle was an “Atheist” was current throughout medieval Europe, though

¹⁷ Hunter construes this scene as a debate between divine immanence and divine transcendence. I disagree with his assessment. There are controversial terms even as they appear in the work of the historical Plato and Aristotle. Crucially, they simply cannot be mapped onto the debate in *Campaspe* without some rather speculative interpretation; identifying natural causes before supernatural ones *might* entail divine immanence, but Lyly’s Aristotle is clearly aligned with the stronger position of “not God”. I would advise future readers of *Campaspe* that Hunter’s transcendence/immanence distinction may constitute a red herring in this context. Lyly, *Campaspe*, I.3.53-57.fn; Chung-Hwan Chen, ‘Aristotle’s Analysis of Change and Plato’s Theory of Transcendent Ideas’ in *Phronesis*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1975), 129-145; Chin Tai-Kim, ‘Transcendence and Immanence’ in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Autumn 1987), 537-549.

it picked up significant traction at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁸ In an edition of Robert Greene's *Mourning Garment*, published 1616, Greene writes: "Aristotle, that all his life had been an Atheist, cryed at his death; Ens entium miserere mei".¹⁹ Greene explicitly identifies Aristotle as an "Atheist"; the Latin phrase "Ens entium miserere mei" translates roughly to "thing of things have mercy upon me", indicating Aristotle's frantic return to theism on his deathbed.²⁰ The phrase appears in the fifteenth-century theologian Lambert of Cologne's *De Salute Aristotelis*, where it is cited as evidence that Aristotle died, as the scholar Anton-Hermann Chroust puts it, "in a state of penitence".²¹ This leaves open the possibility that Lyly and Greene both relied upon a mutual source text that associated Aristotle's utterance here with his earlier "Atheism". Alternatively, Lyly himself may have served as a source for Greene's later work.

I am not arguing that the historical Aristotle was an atheist. I am arguing that the nature of the debate staged in *Campaspe* allows for, and even encourages, the interpretation that Aristotle's naturalism entails atheism, a view that simply reflects the philosopher's characterisation elsewhere in the period. Moreover, I recognise that "atheism" had a range of meanings in the early modern period; as Michael Hunter has pointed out, the term often referred to people who had "a cynical, iconoclastic attitude towards religion", instead of

¹⁸ Craig Martin, *Subverting Aristotle: Religion, History, and Philosophy in Early Modern Science* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 145-169.

¹⁹ Robert Greene, *Greenes Mourning Garment given Him by Repentance at the Funerals of Love; Which He Presents for a Fauour to All Young Gentlemen, That Wish to Weane Themselues from Wanton Desires. Both Pleasant and Profitable. R. Greene. Vtriusq[ue] Academiae in Artibus Magister*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: George Purslowe, 1616), B1v.

²⁰ This phrase also occurs in *Campaspe* – Aristotle speaks it moments after revealing that he cannot discover a cause of the tides. Lyly, *Campaspe*, I.3.34-37.fn.

²¹ Anton-Hermann Chroust, 'A Contribution to the Medieval Discussion: Utrum Aristoteles Sit Salvatus' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 6, 2 (April 1945), 231-238 (236-7).

those who held the more specific belief that God did not exist at all.²² However, the debate in *Campaspe* establishes a firm distinction between “God” and “not God” and Plato’s speech recalls the dialogue in Lyly’s *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* in which Euphues equates those who have feel no “spark of grace” (like Plato’s “divine particle”) with “unbelievers” who do not believe that “there is a God”.²³ We have good reason to believe that this scene in *Campaspe* concerns whether or not there “is a God”. I labour this point because the theological implications of this discussion are so easily overlooked when the scene is read as nothing more than a “courtly show”. On the contrary, this debate introduces the concept of “God” into a play that spends a great deal of subsequent time exploring the gods, divinity, and religious belief. I am hesitant to disregard its thematic importance.

Plato’s description of an “eternal and divine mover” here clearly evokes a transcendent being conformable to Christian theology. Despite his association with atheism, it was the historical Aristotle himself who popularised the notion of an unmoved mover; in Book Eight of *Physics*, Aristotle advanced the case for “a movement that is itself unmoved and eternal”.²⁴ This formulation has been enormously influential within the history of Christian apologetics, featuring most famously in the work of Thomas Aquinas.²⁵ To this day, “divine mover” arguments such as the one advanced by Lyly’s Plato are used to

²² Michael Hunter, ‘The Problem of “Atheism” in Early Modern England’ in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 35 (1985), 135-157 (136).

²³ John Lyly, ‘Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit’ in *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit and Euphues and his England*, ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 25-252 (127).

²⁴ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 36.

²⁵ I was unable to source a reliable edition of Aquinas’s *Quinque viæ*, but it is cited and learnedly discussed in the following: Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways: St. Thomas Aquinas’ Proof of God’s Existence* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Robert J. Fogelin, ‘A Reading of Aquinas’s Five Ways’ in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October 1990), 305-313.

defend belief in the existence of the Christian “God”.²⁶ By dramatising a debate concerning the causal efficacy, but also the very existence, of a proto-Christian “divine mover”, Lyly characterises his Athens as one in which even the existence of *monotheistic* divinity is undetermined. This complements the play’s sceptical attitude towards the pagan pantheon elsewhere and contributes to *Campaspe*’s overall impression of a state inundated with religious *doubt*.

I might have expected this ambivalence regarding a “divine mover” god to be supplemented by assurances that polytheistic deities *do* exist and exert an influence upon the play’s Athenians. On the contrary, while pagan deities are frequently discussed during the scenes in Apelles’ workshop, they neither appear onstage nor have any (even indirect) influence upon the play’s plot. As I have already suggested, this marks *Campaspe* as an anomaly in Lyly’s canon. Moreover, most of the evocations of pagan deities that occur throughout the play refer to painted *symbols*, as opposed to substantial, temporarily absent figures whom the Athenians’ ought to propitiate. This trend begins when Apelles’ serving-man Psyllus describes how Apelles showed him images of “the god Bacchus and his disorderly crew” to discourage him from gluttony in the play’s second scene (1.2.73-4). Later in the action, Apelles gives Campaspe a tour of his workshop, exhibiting various paintings that feature “Jupiter” and one depicting “Venus” (3.3.13, 33). This moment represents the only segment of the play in which pagan gods might feasibly have appeared

²⁶ The appeal to necessary types of cause as a foundation for proving God’s existence has been formalised into a branch of “argument type” known as Cosmological Arguments. These arguments have a rich history within the Christian tradition. Bruce Reichenbach, ‘Cosmological Argument’ in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2019). <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmological-argument/> [accessed: 08/05/2020].

onstage. If they did, they took the form of lifeless, painted images: “the worke of mens hands”.²⁷

What is more, the characters in *Campaspe* repeatedly invoke the gods only to blaspheme or question them. When shown a series of paintings depicting “Jupiter” sexually assaulting “Alcmena”, “Danaë”, and “Europa” (3.3.13, 19, 22), Campaspe characterises his deeds as “evil done” (3.3.17), and laments the excessive lust that, “in those days”, “was so full authorised by the gods in heaven” (3.3.25-7). Although Apelles retorts that such “evil” deeds are permissible for a “god” to perform (3.4.16), this is the only defence of the gods in a scene full of accusations against them. In short, Campaspe’s commentary on Apelles’ work functions to diminish the role of the pagan gods in Lyly’s Athens yet further. They appear to the audience as mere images, but also their faults and caprice are repeatedly emphasised. Even more tellingly, Campaspe’s phrase “in those days” erects a temporal distance between the world of the play and the pagan pantheon, figuring the latter as relics of a bygone era.

This distancing effect is augmented by the fact that Venus (the play’s most frequently cited deity) is typically evoked simply in order to highlight Campaspe’s superior desirability. The first character to suggest this comparison is Alexander’s confidante Hephestion, who describes Campaspe as possessing “a fair face made in despite of Venus” (2.2.76). While discussing his attraction to Campaspe, Apelles remarks: “O beautiful countenance, the express image of Venus, but somewhat fresher” (3.5.46-7). The references culminate in the play’s final scene, where Alexander asks Apelles if the

²⁷ *The Geneva Bible: Facsimile of the 1599 Edition*, ed. Michael H. Brown (Missouri: L. L. Brown Publishing, 1990), Psalms 115:4.

portrait he is currently working on is “nothing about Venus”, to which the painter responds: “No, but something above Venus” (5.4.88-90). To borrow Catherine Belsey’s terminology, the “Venus” in *Campaspe* clearly has a “citational” function, existing only to elevate others through comparison.²⁸ As Belsey writes, this function “requires the beauty of Venus to be originary – and yet paradoxically the point of origin is deferred [...] relegated by the figure whose own desirability Venus is there to validate”.²⁹ While Venus certainly is functioning as a “citational” figure in *Campaspe*, she isn’t “there” at all. The elusive “deferr[al]” Belsey writes of transcends the realm of desirability in Lyly’s first play, extending instead to the goddess’ very presence. Far from inviting comparison, the characterisations of Campaspe as “above” or “fresher” than Venus simply serve to emphasise the latter’s overwhelming absence.

In short, instead of portraying polytheistic deities who roam the stage (as in most of his other plays) or establishing agreement on the existence of a monotheistic “divine mover”, Lyly repeatedly emphasises religious disagreement and doubt in *Campaspe*. While the philosopher scene dramatises a debate concerning the existence of a transcendental “God”, the artist scenes convey an impression of the pagan pantheon as consisting of crude images and metaphors, as opposed to substantial realities. Plays like *Galatea*, *Midas*, and *Love’s Metamorphosis* feature deities such as Neptune, Apollo, and Cupid, respectively. *Campaspe* takes equivalent pains to stress the absolute scarcity of confirmed gods for its Athenians to worship. As the following section will argue, Lyly’s insistence that *Campaspe*’s Athens is a state in thrall to religious doubt has the effect of drawing his

²⁸ Catherine Belsey, ‘The Myth of Venus in Early Modern Culture’ in *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring 2012), 179-202 (183).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

audience's attention toward another potential source of divinity: the play's mortal king, Alexander the Great.

Alexander the God

Before exploring Lyly's characterisation of Alexander in *Campaspe*, it will be helpful to acknowledge the intensely equivocal reputation the historical Alexander the Great has always enjoyed. Lyly evidently relied upon Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* as a source text for *Campaspe*.³⁰ This work includes numerous anecdotes concerning Alexander's alleged divinity. At the opening of the *Life of Alexander*, Alexander's father Philip catches his wife Olympias in bed with a snake, which is later revealed to be a disguised "Zeus Ammon".³¹ When Olympias sends Alexander on an expedition to the East, she confides to him this "secret of his conception" and encourages "him to show himself worthy of his divine parentage".³² References to this "parentage" recur throughout Plutarch's account. Later in the biography, Apelles "paint[s] Alexander wielding a thunderbolt" in the manner of Zeus, and later still Plutarch tells us that an Ammon priest once referred to Alexander as "O, pai Dios" (or "son of Zeus"), compounding "the legend" that Alexander was more than human.³³

³⁰ Hunter, 'Introduction to *Campaspe*', 5-6; Joseph Westlund, 'The Theme of Tact in *Campaspe*' in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 1976), 213-221 (216).

³¹ Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander: Ten Greek Lives by Plutarch*, 2nd ed., trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert & Timothy E. Duff (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), 281.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander*, 282, 310.

However, even as Plutarch insists on Alexander's divine reputation during his reign, he is clear both in the *Lives* and elsewhere that he regards this divinity as fabricated. While the episode with the Ammon priest is described as having a significant effect upon Alexander's *mythos*, Plutarch observes that the divine address was nothing more than a slip of the tongue, as the "foreign" man attempted to call Alexander "*O paidion*" ("my son") in Greek.³⁴ In his *Moralia*, Plutarch relates that Alexander had many faithful friends put to the death, while he continued to consort with flatterers.³⁵ He was, by them: "Adored, adorned, arrayed gorgeously with rich robes, and set out like a barbarian image, statue or idol".³⁶ Of course, "idol" is the word selected by the English translator Philemon Holland in 1603, but his choice of word simply underscores the general impression of Alexander found throughout Plutarch's *Lives*: a false god, a mere mortal who was enthusiastically deified throughout his lifetime. This point is perhaps expressed most clearly when Plutarch relates that Alexander did not believe in his own divinity but capitalised upon his divine reputation in order to "enslave others".³⁷ Even by the standards of first-century AD Greeks, Alexander was considered a false god, though the nature of his cultural reception has preserved his rumoured divinity. The global reception history of Alexander is fascinating, and responses to him vary from deification to vilification, sometimes within the same work.³⁸ I cannot possibly do justice to the complexities of this

³⁴ Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander*, 310-311.

³⁵ The *Moralia* was available in Latin and English translation from as early as 1513. A Latin translation was gifted to Henry VIII in 1513 and an English one was prepared by Thomas Wyatt in 1528, though numerous other versions were also available. Fred Schurink, 'Print, Patronage, and Occasion: Translations of Plutarch's *Moralia* in Tudor England' in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1/2 (2008), 86-101 (88-89).

³⁶ Plutarch, *Moralia: Twenty Essays*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1908), 78.

³⁷ Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander*, 311.

³⁸ Indeed, Plutarch's account of him is deeply ambivalent. Callisthenes, the earliest biographer of Alexander, also presents a markedly ambiguous character study. Robert D. Milns, 'Callisthenes on Alexander' in *Mediterranean Archaeology*, Vol. 19/20, Proceedings of the 25th Anniversary Symposium of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens, 2005 (2006/7), 233-237.

reception here. Instead, I will focus upon Alexander's reputation within Lyly's early modern English culture.

In many ways, *Campaspe*'s depiction of an Alexander who is simultaneously humanised and deified is typical of his portrayal elsewhere. Indeed, almost every aspect of Alexander's reputation is ambivalent. The Alexander received by the sixteenth-century English had already been canonised as one of the Worthies, nine figures from different religious traditions who supposedly exemplified medieval chivalric ideals.³⁹ These figures constituted a popular and highly visible iconographic trope in the period, considered in a positive enough light to furnish a royal entry for Henry VI into France in 1431, and to adorn a ceremonial canvas prepared for Queen Mary and Philip of Spain in 1554.⁴⁰ A commonplace book (published by Thomas Trevelyan in 1608) provides evidence that a masque was performed during Queen Elizabeth I's reign in which Alexander the Great addressed the Queen directly:

My name is Alexander, Kynge of Macedone
Who in my tyme did overcome the world
[...] that Alexander's valour hath obtained
Eternall memory most meete for my deserts.⁴¹

³⁹ For an account of the Nine Worthies trope as it appeared within medieval culture, see William Kuskin, 'Caxton's Worthies Series: The Production of Literary Culture' in *ELH*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Fall 1999), 511-551.

⁴⁰ Johan H. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans by. F. Hopman (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965); John L. Nevison, 'A Show of the Nine Worthies' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Spring 1963), 103-107 (104).

⁴¹ This work is available to view at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, and this section of the commonplace book is quoted in: John Nevison, 'A Show of the Nine Worthies', 105.

These examples attest to a positive conception of Alexander as a chivalrous king of notable “valour”, and they are in keeping with the description of Alexander in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* as the “chief spectacle of the world’s pre-eminence” (*Faustus*, 9.24-5) and in Lyly’s own *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* as “valiaunt in warre”.⁴²

These positive assessments of Alexander were available to early modern English people alongside texts and images that referenced his divine pedigree. Ironically, the myth that Alexander was divine survived into the early modern period via the sceptical Greek and Roman works cited above. Even as writers like Plutarch, Callisthenes, and Valerius Maximus expressly critiqued the view that Alexander was divine, their works ensured the historic survival of the very myths they sought to expose. However, the image of a divine Alexander could be found elsewhere: the specific iconography of a “deified” Alexander wearing “the horns of Jupiter Ammon” appeared on silver tetradrachms that “were widely available to Renaissance collectors”.⁴³ In 1604, a play by Samuel Daniel was published entitled *The Tragedy of Philotas*, in which Alexander’s status as “the sonne of Iupiter” is confirmed by “th’oracles themselves”.⁴⁴ This reputedly divine Alexander is opposed by the conspiracist Philotas - Daniel Cadman has interpreted this dynamic as reflecting that between the “Essexian faction in Elizabethan politics” and the doctrine of “the divine

⁴² Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (London: A & C Black, 1989); John Lyly, *Euphues. The Anatomy of Vvyt Very Pleasant for All Gentlemen to Reade, and Most Necessary to Remember*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: T. East, 1578), B2v.

⁴³ Louis Alexander Waldman, “‘The Modern Lysippus’: A Roman Quattrocento Medalist in Context’ in *Perspectives on the Renaissance Medal: Portrait Medals of the Renaissance*, ed. Stephen K. Scher (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), 97-115 (102).

⁴⁴ Samuel Daniel, *Certaine Small Poems Lately Printed with the Tragedie of Philotas. Written by Samuel Daniel.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: G. Eld, 1605), C1r.

right of monarchs”.⁴⁵ This reading is both a common and a controversial one.⁴⁶ For my purposes, it suffices to observe that the image of a genuinely divine Alexander the Great was mobilised within early modern England, and even within a potential context of royal flattery.⁴⁷

Furthermore, even where Alexander is not expressly described as divine, his exalted position in early modern culture arguably invited an idolatrous attitude. John L. Nevison has argued that the rising popularity of the Nine Worthies trope in Europe can be significantly correlated with the decline of Catholic cult of the saints iconography.⁴⁸ Helen Hackett has similarly argued that Elizabethan iconography with pagan themes functioned as a replacement of earlier Catholic forms – this Elizabethan tradition encompasses masques featuring Alexander like the one I cited above and, arguably, even *Campaspe* itself.⁴⁹ The relationship between explicitly hagiographical medieval forms and later, Classically-inspired iconography is complex. I simply observe here that Alexander was a part of both royal and popular iconographic traditions that clearly sought to exalt their subjects, whether Christian or Classical. With regard to his status as a “Worthy”, the etymological relationship between that word and “worship” is perhaps

⁴⁵ Daniel Cadman, *Sovereigns and Subjects in Early Modern Neo-Senecan Drama: Republicanism, Stoicism, and Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 116.

⁴⁶ “Those Graue Presentments of Antiquitie”: Samuel Daniel’s *Philotas* and the Earl of Essex’ in *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 203 (August 2000), 423-450; Richard Stoneman, ‘Alexander, *Philotas*, and the Origins Of Modern Historiography’ in *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (October 2013), 296-312.

⁴⁷ A host of different political interpretations of *The Tragedy of Philotas*, as well as an account of the legal fallout of its initial performances, are detailed in: John Pitcher, ‘Samuel Daniel and the Authorities’ in *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol. 10 (1998), 113-148.

⁴⁸ Nevison, ‘A Show of the Nine Worthies’, 104.

⁴⁹ Helen Hackett, ‘A New Image of Elizabeth I: The Three Goddesses Theme in Art and Literature’ in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Autumn 2014), 225-256 (240).

enough to substantiate Nevison and Hackett's chief point.⁵⁰ By consistently stressing the worthiness of Alexander, while simultaneously promulgating the divine *mythos* surrounding his birth, early modern Christians clearly risked idolising the Greek king.

To make matters more complicated, there was a clear counter-tradition in the period that viewed Alexander as a manipulative idol and exemplar of heathen vice. This “doubleness” at the heart of Alexander's reputation is pithily summarised in the full quotation from Lyly's *Euphues*. For Lyly, Alexander is: “valiaunt in warre, yet gyuen to wine”.⁵¹ The “yet” in Lyly's formulation reveals the ambivalence at the heart of Alexander: the ruler's penchant for “wine” inevitably qualifies his worthiness. The image of Alexander as an alcoholic and even follower of Dionysus was widespread.⁵² A pamphlet translated into English from French in 1572 includes “Alexander, the great” as an example of one who could not refrain from “vices” in the context of a passage admonishing “fornicatyon, and all vncleanenesse or couetousnesse”.⁵³ In other words, despite his strong leadership, Alexander embodies the sins associated with base paganism. Another translated French pamphlet from 1593, describes Alexander as “the great drunkard of Greece”, recontextualising Alexander's famous suffix in order to stress

⁵⁰ The English verb “worship” derives from the *noun* “worship”, which is a compound of the word “worth” with the suffix “ship” (altering the adjective that means “having a specified value” into a noun). In other words, to “worship” is to perceive as “worthy”. “worship, n.” in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230345>> [Accessed 22 March 2020]; “worth, adj.” in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230380>> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

⁵¹ Lyly, *Euphues. The anatomy of vvyt*, B2v.

⁵² For a lucid exploration of writings that recount how Alexander sought to “imitate” Dionysus during his military campaigns abroad. Edmund Lowell, ‘The Religiosity of Alexander’ in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1971), 363-391.

⁵³ John Brooke, *A Christian Discourse Vpon Certaine Poynts of Religion Presented Vnto the Most High & Puissant Lorde, the Prince of Conde. Translated out of French into English by Iohn Brooke of Ashe next Sandwich. 1578.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas East, 1578), Aaiijr.

his notable hedonism.⁵⁴ Perhaps most famously, the conception of Alexander as an impulsive and morally dubious drunk occurs in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, where Fluellen disapprovingly compares Alexander's intoxicated murder of Cleitus with Henry V's abandonment of Falstaff (*Henry V*, 4.7.34-45).⁵⁵

In short, Alexander was celebrated and even deified within early modern English culture, but he was also denigrated and humanised. Even at the end of *The Tragedy of Philotas*, Alexander's confirmed divinity is called into question by his commanders, who outline the peril awaiting them because they "haue made a God of our owne bloud,/That glorisies himselfe, neglects our good".⁵⁶ The play itself suggests that Alexander's divinity is legitimate (or at least sanctioned by its "oracles"), but it also gives voice to the view that he is merely an idol, a "made" god whose self-glorification "doth disdain/The godds themselues".⁵⁷ In short, the scepticism apparent in the accounts of Plutarch, Callisthenes, and the early Church fathers regarding Alexander's divinity survives into early modern Christendom. Moreover, Alexander's moral credibility and authority are rendered problematic by accounts of his various heathen indulgences.

Of course, this is precisely how I might expect a deified pagan to be received into early modern Christian culture, but such scepticism sits uneasily alongside descriptions of Alexander's valour, worthiness, and even divinity. This ambivalent image of Alexander suggests both a demigod (son of Zeus and eminently worthy object of worship) and pagan

⁵⁴ John Eliot, *Ortho-Epia Gallica Eliots Fruits for the French: Enterlaced Vvith a Double Nevv Inuention, Vvhich Teacheth to Speake Truely, Speedily and Volubly the French-Tongue*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Richard Field, 1593) 139.

⁵⁵ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁵⁶ Daniel, *Certaine Small Poems Lately Printed with the Tragedie of Philotas*, F5r.

⁵⁷ Daniel, *Certaine Small Poems Lately Printed with the Tragedie of Philotas*, F5r.

idol: an alcoholic mortal willing to delude others in the service of his own selfish political aspirations. The confusing instability of this cultural reception is evident when I consider that Stephen Doloff has written authoritatively that anecdotes about Alexander in the period stressed his “liberality” and “were often negatively interpreted [...] as illustrative of Alexander’s vanity”, whereas Theodora Jankowski writes with equal authority that the Renaissance interpretation of Alexander was of “the ideal enlightened monarch” and “the temperate right ruler, self-controlled by his own knowledge of the importance of managing the mean”.⁵⁸ Alexander is simultaneously vain and enlightened; liberal and “temperate”. As I will now demonstrate, in Lyly’s *Campaspe* Alexander’s contradictory character manifests itself most transparently in relation to a single, recurring conceptual binary: “man”/“god”.

Campaspe’s treatment of Alexander’s divinity is, at times, disturbingly subtle. Lyly offers no grandiloquent pronouncements of divine pedigree, no fulfilled oracles or supernatural signs, and no evocative, theological stage images (there are certainly none that can be reasonably inferred from the extant texts). While there are several references to Alexander as a “god” throughout *Campaspe*, Lyly’s interpretation of him remains a markedly human one. Of course, this decision is calculated. *Campaspe* is a play *about* the tension between Alexander the mortal man and the divine Alexander the Great. As I will demonstrate below, *Campaspe* opposes in binary fashion “god” and “man”, ruling out a reading of Lyly’s Alexander as a demigod: the play establishes a stark juxtaposition between Alexander as a mortal man (the libidinous pagan idol) and Alexander as a literal “god”.

⁵⁸ Stephen Doloff, “Let Me Talk With This Philosopher”: The Alexander/Diogenes Paradigm in “King Lear” in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Summer 1991), 253-255 (254); Jankowski, *The Subversion of Flattery*, 34.

This tension is conveyed when Hephestion remarks (on Alexander's love for Campaspe): "You, Alexander, that would be a god, show yourself in this worse than a man" (2.2.82-3). This moment reveals the play's primary preoccupation: Alexander cannot be the "god" that is Alexander the Great if he has, as Hephestion adds, allowed himself to be "overseen and overtaken in a woman" (2.2.83-4). In order to "be a god", Alexander will have to relinquish his base affections.

Importantly, Hephestion's statement communicates a conception of divinity as a contingent, instead of an intrinsic, attribute. Clearly, Alexander *is* "a man", as evidenced by his affection for Campaspe; Hephestion acknowledges this fact and yet instructs Alexander to abandon love in order to become "a god". In other words, Hephestion encourages Alexander's divine aspirations, but he does so in a context that reveals Alexander's divinity to be chimerical, a cynical "show" recalling Plutarch's account of Alexander indulging in his own fabricated *mythos* for political gain. The instructive tension here is between the verbs "be" and "show". In putting on a particular "show" (by not showing as a man), Alexander can hope to "be" a god. In other words, by either performing or refraining from certain actions, Alexander can transform from "man" to "god" and *vice versa*.

Similar logic is expressed by Aristotle during Alexander's interview with the philosophers in Act One, Scene Three. Having determined to ask each of the assembled thinkers a question they cannot possibly answer, Alexander inquires of Aristotle: "how may a man be thought a god?" (1.3.99). Aristotle replies: "In doing a thing impossible for a man" (1.3.100). This exchange derives from Plutarch, and the notion that a man might

“be thought” or even “become” a “god” can be found in both Book Seven of Aristotle’s *The Nicomachean Ethics* and Book Three of *The Politics*. In the former, Aristotle writes that “men become gods by excess of virtue”, with such virtue consisting of “contenance”, rationality, and an ability to overcome “strong and bad appetites”.⁵⁹ The point is reiterated in *The Politics* with regard to an eminently virtuous statesman, who, as Aristotle writes, “we may reasonably regard [...] as a god among men”.⁶⁰ The exact ontological and epistemological implications of these statements have been thoroughly debated for centuries.⁶¹ I acknowledge Aristotle’s work here in order to set it aside – Lyly’s Aristotle is not encouraging Alexander to cultivate virtue and become a god-like ruler in this exchange. Rather, his almost frivolous response to Alexander’s question serves to call the ontological boundary between “god” and “man” into question, anticipating Hephestion’s later speech and contributing to the play’s general characterisation of divinity as a contingent attribute. Like Hephestion, Aristotle emphasises “doing” as constitutive of divinity and, as in the former’s speech, his remark expresses a revealing contradiction.

Essentially, Aristotle tells Alexander that it is *impossible* for a man to become a god, precisely because the words “god” and “man” are defined according to the limits of a being’s possible actions. If a “man” were to perform an action “unpossible” for a man, he

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 118, 120.

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T. A. Sinclair, 2nd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 213.

⁶¹ As the references above occur within the context of political discussions, the ethical and political significance of these statements have often been emphasised in place of their ontological or religious significance. For more on Aristotle’s precise meaning in these formulations, I recommend: D. Brendan Nagle, ‘Alexander and Aristotle’s “Pambasileus”’ in *L’Antiquité Classique*, T.69 (2000), 117-132; Giles Pearson, ‘Aristotle on Psychopathology’ in *Evil in Aristotle*, ed. Pavlos Kontos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 122-150 (122-124).

The following work has an insightful and interesting take on the notion of “becoming” across Aristotle’s work that draws upon his insights into potentiality. Lobel argues that “becoming” is not always supposed to achieve “has become”, so that a man might “become” a god by practicing virtue without undergoing a literal ontological metamorphosis. Diana Lobel, *The Quest for God and the Good: World Philosophy as a Living Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 121-151.

was never a “man” at all. There is a tension here between the ontological essentialism underlying Aristotle’s definitions of “man” and “god”, and the non-essential, contingent view of these states implied by his emphasis upon “doing”. Such emphasis renders Aristotle’s own essentialist categories vulnerable - if a “god” is only identifiable as such by performing an action “impossible” for a man, how am I ever in a position to identify positively a “man” and delimit their potential actions? In other words, Aristotle implies it is essential that a man cannot perform a particular action, but I only know he is a man because of the actions he performs: Alexander cannot perform x because he hasn’t previously performed x .

These are irresolvable paradoxes, but I contend that this is precisely the point. At first glance, Aristotle’s insistence that certain actions are “impossible for a man” might appear to frustrate Alexander’s divine aspiration. On the contrary, the contradictions entailed by Aristotle’s definitions simply call the distinction between “man” and “god” into question. This is true at the ontological level, but it is especially true regarding the epistemic question of how Alexander may “be *thought* a god”. This project becomes eminently more practical if contradictory definitions of “god” are expressed by one of the play’s resident philosophers. It should also be recalled that this exchange occurs immediately after the philosophers’ heated disagreement on the nature and existence of “God”. As such, the paradox here contributes to the prevailing atmosphere of religious doubt at this stage of the play. Philosophical arguments concerning “God” go unresolved, the deities of the pagan pantheon are absent, and paradoxical definitions of “man” and “god” are communicated. In such an atmosphere, the mortal Alexander’s project to be “thought a god” seems a perfectly achievable one.

Aristotle does not outline a specific action “impossible” for a man to perform, but it is heavily implied elsewhere in the play that if Alexander resists his love for Campaspe, he will have attained a state of divinity. After Aristotle has associated divinity with an action impossible for a “man” to perform, and Hephestion has encouraged Alexander to “show” himself a “god” by abandoning his love for Campaspe, a revealing exchange takes place. Alexander asks Hephestion: “Why, what is that which Alexander may not conquer as he list?” (2.2.120-1). Hephestion responds: “Why, that which you say the gods cannot resist, love” (2.2.22-3). This dialogue is formally similar to the earlier exchange between Alexander and Aristotle, though the vague generalities of that conversation have now become plain and specific. Instead of a “man” who cannot perform an “impossible action”, this scene presents the figure of “Alexander” who cannot “resist” love. Referring to the infamous licentiousness of the pagan pantheon, Hephestion characterises the resistance of love as an action that even the “gods” themselves cannot perform. If Alexander were to abandon his affections for Campaspe, he would transcend the play’s various doubtful or absent deities, relinquish his status as a “man”, and become the appropriate object of worship that this play conspicuously lacks.

There is a very direct echo of this exchange at the end of the play, in a context that implies Alexander has successfully acted himself into divinity. Ultimately, Alexander does relinquish his affection for Campaspe, allowing her and Apelles to consummate their love and turning his own attention back to military matters. In anticipation of Sappho’s pronouncement that she will “lead Venus in chains” after crowning herself the new “goddess of love” (*Sappho*, 5.2.72-3, 76) in Lyly’s second play, Alexander declares at

Campaspe's close: "Alexander maketh but a toy of love, and leadeth affection in fetters" (5.4.147-8).⁶² This speech recalls Hephestion's earlier insistence that neither Alexander nor the gods can "conquer" "love"; a faint echo that becomes a distinct reverberation when a smug Alexander asks his confidante: "How now, Hephestion, is Alexander able to *resist love* as he *list*?" (5.4.164-5, my emphasis). The words "resist", "love", and "list" all bridge the earlier interrogation between Alexander and Hephestion with this final one, confirming that Alexander has performed an action that even the "gods" cannot. Having overcome his human passions, and in accordance with the contingent conception of divinity expressed throughout Lyly's play, Alexander has acted himself into the status of a "god". It is in these closing moments that the absence of onstage deities, the "dead-end" philosophical debate, and the repeated binary of "god"/"man" cohere in permitting Alexander's success to boast a pronounced religious significance. Alexander is a "man", but Alexander the Great is a "god". Lyly leaves his audience with the latter, ensuring that *Campaspe* reads as though it indulges and propagates the divine *mythos* associated with the historical Greek king.

This brings me to a crucial disclaimer: I am not reading *Campaspe* as a play about the divine right of kings. Early modern dramatic scholarship, particularly that focused upon the work of Shakespeare, has long been interested in the sacral office of the king. Scholarship on this topic is overwhelming, but the obvious exemplar is Ernst Kantorowicz's work on Shakespeare's *Richard II* in *The King's Two Bodies* (1957), a study that has become a standard point of reference even as subsequent critics interrogate

⁶² John Lyly, 'Sappho and Phao' in *Campaspe and Sappho and Phao*, ed. G. K. Hunter and David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 197-301.

and nuance its findings.⁶³ Kantorowicz read *Richard II* as a play dramatising the gulf between the mortal man who holds sovereign office and the divinity attendant upon that office itself. Kantorowicz writes that the structure of the play portrays a gradual transition, on the part of Richard, “from divine kingship to kingship’s “Name”, and from the name to the naked misery of man”, thus starkly demonstrating the difference between the sacred office and the “miser[able]”, wholly mortal man who holds that office.⁶⁴ An interpretative framework stressing the difference between “the body politic” and “the body natural” has been used to read a host of plays written by Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson.⁶⁵

Indeed, the distinction is so commonplace that it feels instinctive to read a play about a monarch who “would be a god” (and especially one performed at Elizabeth’s Court) in light of that distinction. Indeed, this is the approach Theodora Jankowski took in her 2018 book chapter on *Campaspe*, where she wrote: “This dichotomy between the character of Alexander as a ruler exploring the nature of rule and a lover exploring the nature of love becomes essentially a conflict between the body politic of the ruler and his body natural”.⁶⁶ When *Campaspe* is approached as a play about Alexander choosing between

⁶³ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 24-41.

In 2011, Lorna Huston wrote of “the dominance of the symbolism of the monarch’s natural and political bodies” within early modern studies, influenced by engagement with Kantorowicz. Lorna Hutson, ‘Not The King’s Two Bodies: Reading the “Body Politic” in Shakespeare’s Henry IV Parts 1 and 2’ in *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Victoria Ann Kahn and Lorna Hutson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 166-198 (166).

⁶⁴ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 27.

⁶⁵ There are innumerable examples I could cite here. In order to demonstrate Kantorowicz’s breadth of application, I limit myself to a 2002 article that uses Kantorowicz’s distinction to read Jonson and Dekker’s contributions to Jacobean civic pageantry, and a 2014 paper that discusses the *King’s Two Bodies* in relation to performances of Marlowe’s *Edward II*. David M. Bergeron, ‘King James’s Civic Pageant and Parliamentary Speech in March 1604’ in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned With British Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer 2002), 213-231; Thomas P. Anderson, ‘Surpassing the King’s Two Bodies: The Politics of Staging the Royal Effigy in Marlowe’s *Edward II*’ in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter 2014), 585-611.

⁶⁶ Jankowski, *The Subversion of Flattery*, 34.

“love” and good government, Jankowski’s reading is a perfectly legitimate one.⁶⁷ However, when viewed from the perspective of Alexander’s desire to “be a god”, *Campaspe* utterly resists a political theological reading of the type Jankowski advances. Lyly’s play does not dramatise a mortal man’s assumption or resignation of divine office. Rather, it concerns the attempts of a “man” to become or be viewed as a “god” (not a “king” who claims “divine kingship”). This is clearly expressed within *Campaspe* itself and it corresponds to the historical Alexander the Great’s peculiar *mythos*.

However, *Campaspe* does vaguely hint at an equation between Alexander’s sovereignty and godhood on two occasions. The first occurs when Alexander, attempting to justify his authority to Diogenes, explicitly describes kings as “gods of the earth” (2.2.148). The second occurs later in the play, when Diogenes accuses the Athenians of “flatter[ing] kings and call[ing] them gods” (4.1.35-6), which is not in itself an equation of the two titles, but rather an observation that the play’s Athenians might indulge in some such superficial equation (by simply opting to “call” the king a god). I acknowledge that these two excerpts together would appear to demonstrate that Alexander’s status as “god” is dependent upon his political office. However, the play provides us with numerous reasons to suspect such an association.

Firstly, Diogenes’ accusations clearly do not reflect the views of the Athenians as they are expressed elsewhere in the play. The only characters in *Campaspe* to “call” Alexander

⁶⁷ Most critics of *Campaspe* emphasise ‘love’ and ‘government’, instead of ‘divinity’, in the play. Interestingly, Scragg argued in 1999 that the play’s title “in modern editions” often misleads scholars into viewing Alexander as “being presented solely in his character as a lover”, a view undermined by *Campaspe*’s seeming lack of interest in its own romance plot: Scragg, “‘Campaspe’ and the Construction of Monarchical Power”, 62.

a “god” or encourage him to “be a god” are Hephestion and Alexander himself. Moreover, whenever another character *does* allude to Alexander’s supposed divinity, he does so in order to undermine it. As Chrysippus says of Alexander: “I could like the man well if he could be contented to be but a man” (1.2.123-4). To this complaint, Aristotle responds: “He seeketh to draw near to the gods in knowledge, not to be a god” (1.3.125). Neither character “calls” Alexander a “god” – one of them regards the equation as egotistical and off-putting, the other claims that no such equation is entailed by Alexander’s rule. In short, Lyly provides his audience with good reason to believe that Diogenes’ blanket accusation is not a valid one. Moreover, it ought to be recalled that that ancient Greek monarchs were not considered “sacred” in the way that early modern English sovereigns were.⁶⁸ In short, Diogenes’ accusations here simply represent hyperbolic slander. If the Athenians *were* liable to believe that their kings were divine, the reigning king Alexander would have had little need to discover how he might “be thought a god”.

Secondly, Alexander’s statement that kings are “gods of the earth” is a carefully worded one uttered in response to Diogenes’ assertion that he “owes no reverence to kings” because “they be no gods” (2.2.44-7). Far from flatly disagreeing with Diogenes’ assessment, Alexander simply qualifies the relationship between “king” and “god”, figuring the former as a terrestrial equivalent to the real “gods”. This perhaps aligns

⁶⁸ There is a vast body of scholarship concerning the deification of Greek kings. It has been acknowledged from as early as 1901 that such deification was not “a regular state institution” under Alexander. In fact, Alexander the Great is often viewed as a transitional figure regarding the deification of kings. It has been argued by many scholars that “ruler-cults” fixated on Greek leaders arose subsequent to Alexander’s deification by members of foreign nations. Importantly for my purposes, the office of Greek kingship was not considered to confer divinity in itself. Edwyn Robert Bevan, ‘The Deification of Kings in the Greek Cities’ in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 16, No. 64 (October 1901), 625-639 (626); Lionel J. Sanders, ‘Dionysus I of Syracuse and the Origins of the Ruler Cult in the Greek World’ in *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 40, H. 3 (1991), 275-287; H. S. Versnel, *Coping With The Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology* (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2011), 456.

Alexander's conception of the kingly office with early modern English views of the monarch as "God's substitute", to quote Shakespeare's John of Gaunt (*Richard II*, 1.2.37).⁶⁹ However, this reading of Alexander's office in *Campaspe* simply does not align with the "man"/"god" binary the play mobilises elsewhere. Alexander's status as king is not a sufficient condition for him to become a "god", or even to "be thought a god", as evidenced by the numerous examples in *Campaspe* of subjects viewing their reigning "king" Alexander as a mortal "man" (Chrysippus, Aristotle, Hephestion). While there is debate in Shakespeare's *Richard II* as to who the rightful king is, the sanctity of the office is not called into question (and nowhere is it suggested that Richard himself is a "god"). By contrast, there is no debate in *Campaspe* as to who the rightful king is, but Alexander's assured possession of that title is insufficient to guarantee the godhood he so explicitly seeks. In Lyly's play, Alexander is not a ruler struggling with the religious connotations of his political office; he is simply a "man" who wants to be a "god".

I have stressed this point because critics so often read Lyly's Alexander as nothing more than an analogue for Queen Elizabeth. On these readings, *Campaspe* is simply an elaborate paean to the virgin queen, portraying the tension between a monarch's human urges and their divine office. While this is a perfectly valid reading of the play, it has been shown to be a somewhat trite one. *Campaspe* is so much more than an English Court drama; it is a sophisticated artwork that capitalises upon Alexander's ambivalent reputation to produce a stunningly complex study of belief and divinity. The "man"/"god" binary that Lyly mobilises throughout the play essentially synthesises the competing interpretations of Alexander's legacy: as both sensuous pagan and virtuous god. What

⁶⁹ William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.2.37.

emerges is a study into *idolatry* and *iconoclasm*. The religious doubt in Lyly's Athens, the absence of any deities, the recurring binary of "man"/"god", and even the decision to portray Alexander in the first instance, all contribute to a key assertion of the play muddled or entirely lost if one focuses too intently upon its allegorical content: that *Alexander the Great* is a "god".

With these disclaimers out of the way, I return to my own reading of *Campaspe*. I have suggested that Lyly implicitly deifies his Alexander, but he also gives voice to severe criticism of the character's divine aspiration. While the play's outcome ultimately exalts Alexander, this moment is effective only because the rest of the play has been spent criticising and undermining him, both as a ruler and as a potential "god". Compare this to the situation in *The Tragedy of Philotas*. In this later play, Daniel's Alexander relates that oracles have confirmed his status as "sonne of Iupiter" as early as Act One. Conversely, Lyly's play only implies that Alexander has shown himself a "god" by its close because it has hitherto insisted upon his status as a "man". Perceived from the vantage of the play's ending, *Campaspe* deifies its Alexander; but perceived as a whole, the play presents both sides of his reputation to the audience, manufacturing a multi-faceted character reflecting Alexander's contradictory reputation. While Alexander conquers love and effectively becomes a "god" at the play's close, Lyly's Athens remains populated by characters who in no way advocate the deifying logic mobilised by the plot itself. Moreover, there is evidence throughout *Campaspe* to suggest that Alexander's divinity, but also his authority, do not command respect. Diogenes is representative here, but Chrysippus' refusal to come before Alexander, Hephestion's chastisement of Alexander's behaviour, Timoclea's defiance in the opening scene, and even the illicit

romance between Apelles and Campaspe (a romance pursued, if not consummated, in spite of Alexander's obvious wishes) all contribute towards a general atmosphere of insubordination.⁷⁰

In the final section of this chapter, I will consider *Campaspe's* simultaneous endeavours to humanise and deify its Alexander through the lens of ideological cynicism. It is my view that the most prevalent mode of belief in Lyly's Athens is cynicism, as the concept was adapted by Marxist thinkers like Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek. Accordingly, the following section will outline their theories in detail, as well as the Marxist tradition to which they were responding. Ideological cynicism is an epistemological model that explores the persistence of power structures in the face of criticism, scepticism, and even ridicule. Ultimately, it will be the argument of this chapter that Lyly's ambivalent depiction of Alexander's divinity vividly illuminates the contradictions inherent to both idolatry and ideological fetishism.

Cynics, cynicism, and kynicism

In attempting to summarise the thorny subject of the reception history of Greek cynicism, it is appropriate to begin with the figure of Diogenes himself. Diogenes of Sinope did not commit any of his thoughts to writing (as far as I know), but became associated with a particular philosophical attitude through anecdotes told by Greek and Roman writers,

⁷⁰ Timoclea is a Theban captive brought before Alexander in the play's first scene, along with Campaspe. Unlike the deferential Campaspe, Timoclea insists that Alexander has "overcome" but has not "conquered" because "he cannot subdue that which is divine". Lyly, *Campaspe*, 1.1.52-54. Apelles' self-conscious defiance is signalled by his description of himself as a "rival with Alexander". Lyly, *Campaspe*, 4.5.3-4.

most notably Laërtius and Plutarch.⁷¹ The word cynic derives from the Greek *κυνικός*, meaning “dog-like”, a nickname attributed to Diogenes because of his hostility and refusal to conform to standard social convention (anecdotes of him defecating or ejaculating in public are plentiful).⁷² However, cynicism, even as exemplified by Diogenes, is not the apathetic, disinterested attitude later denoted by the word. As Bertrand Russell pointed out, Diogenes “sought virtue and moral freedom in liberation from desire”, an outlook later adopted by the Stoics, though they were less extreme in their rejection of “the amenities of civilization”.⁷³ It is easy to overlook the positive motivations for cynicism because it is an attitude so firmly characterised by acts of apparent opposition. Diogenes was certainly a reactionary figure, but his critique of the Greek state was either informed by, or entailed, correspondingly positive doctrines. Essentially, the cynics prioritised happiness over pleasure, the individual over the State, personal freedom over social organisation, and nature over culture.⁷⁴

Despite the political and ethical affirmations inherent to these features of cynicism, the cultural reception history of Diogenes tends to stress his ability to deliver scathing

⁷¹ In an article written on exchanges between Diogenes and Alexander the Great, P. R. Bosman points out that anecdotes about Diogenes could be found in Cicero, Plutarch, Diogenes Laërtius, and Dio Chrysostom. While these writers often disagreed on how to interpret these anecdotes, they are largely in agreement as to their content. P. R. Bosman, ‘King Meets Dog: The Origin of the Meeting Between Alexander and Diogenes’ in *Acta Classica*, Vol. 50 (2007), 51-63 (53-54).

⁷² ‘cynic, adj. and n.’ in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46638>> [accessed 13 May 2020].

For an account of Diogenes as “the only philosopher, ancient or modern, we see eating, masturbating, urinating, expectorating and [...] defecating in public”, and the relevance of this to his philosophy, see R. Bracht Branham, ‘Defacing the Currency: Diogenes’ Rhetoric and the “Invention” Of Cynicism’ in *Arethusa*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Fall 1994), 329-359 (351).

⁷³ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Unwin Hyman Limited, 1990), 241.

⁷⁴ The “return to nature” aspect of Cynicism was clearly articulated by Antisthenes, a teacher of Diogenes. Farrand Sayre outlines the centrality of nature, virtue, and freedom to Cynicism, as well as arguing that these philosophical impetuses were fundamentally “a revolt against the extreme statism of the fifth-century Greeks”: Farrand Sayre, ‘Greek Cynicism’ in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January 1945), 113-118 (113).

critiques of existing institutions. In a paper on this reception history, Derek Krueger has argued that the survival of cynicism and the sayings of Diogenes into modernity is largely thanks to: “the *chreia* [...] in the curriculum of the schools of rhetoric” in Late Antiquity.⁷⁵ A *chreia* is essentially an attributed maxim that a student can memorise and engage with during their rhetorical education - according to Krueger, “the *chreia* attributed to Diogenes number more than a thousand”.⁷⁶ As David Hershinow and Barbara Bowen have observed, Nicholas Udall’s 1542 translation of Erasmus’ *Apophthegmata* included “227 Diogenes sayings” and was “incorporated into the standard curriculum for teaching students rhetoric” in sixteenth-century England.⁷⁷ Diogenes was widely known through his sayings, the truly distinctive feature of which were their bold and critical expressions of truth.

Within the field of rhetoric, the radical exercise of free and honest speech was known as *parrhesia*. In his 1553 *The Arte of Rhetorique*, Thomas Wilson praises Diogenes as an exemplar of *parrhesia*:

Freenesse of speache, is when wee speake boldly, & without feare, euen to the proudest of them, whatsoever we please, or haue list to speake. Diogenes herein did excel, and feared no man when he sawe iust cause to saie his mynde. This worlde wanteth suche as he was.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Derek Krueger, ‘Diogenes the Cynic Among the Fourth Century Fathers’ in *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (March 1993), 29-49 (31).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-2.

⁷⁷ Barbara C. Bowen, ‘Ciceronian Wit and Renaissance Rhetoric’ in *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), 409-429 (426); David Hershinow, *Shakespeare and the Truth-Teller: Confronting the Cynic Ideal* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 8.

⁷⁸ Thomas Wilson, *The arte of rhetorique for the vse of all suche as are studious of eloquence, sette forth in English, by Thomas Wilson*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Richardus Graftonus, 1553), Ddijv.

This tendency of the cynic to speak boldly and truthfully is related to another vital component of cynic philosophy: its insistence upon manifesting truth in action and behaviour. Diogenes does not simply believe certain propositions, he is compelled to “*saie his mynde*”. Timothy Bewes expresses this aspect of cynicism as involving “an anti-theoretical, gestural critique”, and Hershinow identifies the “impulse to derive one’s authority as a speaker of truths” by living “in a manner that is true to one’s words” as the defining feature of Ancient Greek cynicism.⁷⁹

The centrality of action to Diogenic cynicism has led many thinkers to interpret the Ancient cynic as a performance artist or comedic actor.⁸⁰ Importantly, these gestures may have been “anti-theoretical”, but they were not anti-philosophical. On the contrary, Diogenes’s emphasis upon material behaviour essentially amounts to a mode of empiricist inquiry. When Plato calls man a “featherless biped”, Diogenes’ counter-argument is to pluck a chicken; if an Eleatic philosopher argues for “the impossibility of motion”, Diogenes gets up and walks around.⁸¹ In short, the Ancient cynic acts in accordance with his beliefs, whether this manifests in speech or action. Diogenes does not believe in Alexander’s authority and so does not bow down to him - he does not believe in Athenian social convention and so sleeps in a tub or defecates in the street.

⁷⁹ Timothy Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1997), 28; Hershinow, *Shakespeare and the Truth-Teller*, 14.

⁸⁰ The following contains an excellent discussion of Diogenes as a “performance artist”, as well as an overview of this interpretation’s history: M. D. Usher, ‘Diogenes’ Doggerel: Chreia and Quotation in Cynical Performance’ in *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (February-March 2009), 207-223.

⁸¹ These anecdotes and their relevance to Diogenes’ philosophy are recorded in: Philip Bosman, ‘Selling Cynicism: The Pragmatics of Diogenes’ Comic Performances’ in *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (May 2006), 93-104 (97).

It can be appreciated how this brand of cynicism (in which belief and action perfectly align) is used to explain the opposite phenomenon in the hands of twentieth-century Marxists following an acknowledgement that cynics were frequently characterised as hypocritical. In Lucian's *The Dead Come To Life, or The Fisherman*, characters such as "Philosophy", "Frankness", and "Truth" raid a cynic's bag expecting to find "lupines, or a book, or some whole-wheat bread" and instead come across "gold", "perfume, a razor, a mirror, and a set of dice".⁸² A similar view of the cynic is expressed in *Campaspe* when Solinus accuses Diogenes of frequenting brothels and chastises him: "Thou ravest, Diogenes, for thy life is different from thy words" (4.2.61-2). Far from acting according to his perception of the truth, Lyly's Diogenes is an actor in the sense that he feigns or shadows, whose behaviour (his "life") utterly contradicts his professed beliefs (his "words"). Such hypocrisy, in which a person criticises or ridicules a convention while nevertheless participating in it, is central to the cynical ideology that Sloterdijk and Žižek regard as characteristic of twentieth-century Western society.

Ideological cynicism is essentially a modification of the traditional Marxist view that ruling ideologies maintain their power by ensuring, as Žižek puts it, "fetishistic misrecognition" on the part of their subjects.⁸³ This type of "misrecognition" has often been referred to as "false consciousness"; indeed, the subtitle to Sloterdijk's first chapter in *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983) is "The Twilight of False Consciousness".⁸⁴ Despite this, Sloterdijk does not spend much time at all explaining what he imagines this idea to mean. While he is perfectly content to bandy around his modification of the concept

⁸² Lucian, 'The Dead Come To Life, or The Fisherman' in *Lucian*, trans. A. M. Harmon, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 1-83 (67).

⁸³ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 25.

⁸⁴ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 16.

“enlightened false consciousness”), there are only eight index entries for the original term in his 547-page book.⁸⁵ Moreover, the original phrase has an awkward intellectual history. It was never used by Marx and appears only once in a letter written by Engels, in which he wrote: “Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him”.⁸⁶

In this context, “false consciousness” refers to the epistemic gap between what a person “consciously” believes and the “real motives” underlying his beliefs that remain opaque to his conscious mind. Read as such, Engel’s letter articulates the experience of the subject implied by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1846). I return to the phrase I cited in my Introduction above: “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life”.⁸⁷ Of course, “the real motives” in Engel’s letter correspond to “life” in *The German Ideology*, and both phrases refer to the deterministic social and economic structures that delimit and motivate a subject’s conscious beliefs. At this stage, I could wander down any number of philosophical pathways - the theoretical gap between a person’s conscious thoughts and the structures governing and producing those thoughts is at the heart of Freudian, Saussurean, Lacanian, and Foucauldian philosophy.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ This excerpt is from an 1893 correspondence between Engels and Mehring, and it is cited in the following: W. G. Runciman, ‘False Consciousness’ in *Philosophy*, Vol. 44, No. 170 (October 1969), 303-313 (303).

⁸⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 42.

⁸⁸ The fetish, the signifier, the ‘Other’ and the *épigémè* are all homologous entities insofar as they posit a psychic structure that is a necessary condition for conscious thought, and yet typically eludes the scrutiny of the very consciousness it subsists. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

I allude to these theorists not because I am capable of pursuing their individual contributions to the diffuse legacy of “false consciousness”, but because the conception of “ideology” employed by Sloterdijk and Žižek represents an amalgamation of different theoretical backgrounds, particularly those associated with Marx and Freud (and their intellectual successors Althusser and Lacan). For Žižek, there is a homology between Marxism and Psychoanalysis insofar as both fields “avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the content supposedly hidden behind the form” of a particular ideological structure.⁸⁹ So while earlier dream interpreters would search for the “truth” within the imagery of a dream itself, and “classical political economy” theorists would hunt for the origin of value by investigating the physical nature of commodities, Marx and Freud instead posit structures (a social and a psychic one, respectively) that explain how the content of either dreams or commodities is generated by the fundamental “form” in which they exist.⁹⁰

It might be said that ideology names the study of these forms, and that “false consciousness” refers to the inability of subjects to recognise the contingent or illusory nature of a particular social formation’s proposed “content”, precisely because they remain oblivious to the nature of the “form” generating it. To give a concrete example: someone unaccustomed to the notion of commodity fetishism might well regard a brick of gold as inherently possessing its exchange-value, as being intrinsically “worth” the amount of money the economy prices it at. If that economy were to alter its formal structure such that human faeces became a fashionable commodity, the subject could be made to perceive the same “worth” in both a bar of gold and a handful of his own

⁸⁹ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

excrement. “False consciousness” would refer to the inability of the subject to recognise that this change was simply a formal, and not an ontological or metaphysical, one.

Usefully for my purposes, Marx includes an interesting diagnosis of monarchical power and its relation to ideology (and, implicitly, false consciousness) in a footnote to the first volume of *Capital*. Breaking away from his discussion of how the equivalent exchange-values of a coat or piece of linen do not represent intrinsic “properties” of those things, but rather a relation that is “activated” by their circulation in an economy (here again is the power of “form” to determine “content”), Marx writes in his footnote:

Determinations of reflection [*Reflexionsbestimmungen*] of this kind are altogether very curious. For instance, one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the other hand, imagine that they are subjects because he is king.⁹¹

This epistemic situation utterly exemplifies “false consciousness”. What appears to be an objective feature of reality (the king truly possessing the property of “kingliness”) is instead a contingent illusion that is maintained through subjects’ active participation in the mutual fantasy. They behave as subjects because the king appears to be the king, and the king continues to appear to be the king because everyone else behaves like his subject. The fetish sustains its own lie; the idol is made real because the idolater treats it as such.

⁹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 149 (fn.22).

Crucially, the belief in the monarchical power structure is maintained through *active* participation, manifesting in various social rituals, acts of obedience, and performative gestures. This is the “life” that determines consciousness. The most helpful theorist on this point is Louis Althusser, a twentieth-century Marxist who produced one of the most controversial papers ever written on ideology: *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970). In this work, Althusser states that ideology has a “material existence” insofar as it functions through imaginary relations, but also the manifestation of these relations in material (that is to say, physical or gestural) practices.⁹² For Althusser, individuals’ are “always-already” subjects who are “interpellated” into a variety of social roles. They are given a name, gender, national identity, and a language. They are viewed as occupying particular roles by others (son, student, citizen, brother) that result in the kind of reflexive procedure described by Marx, where the father, teacher, or king appears as such because the subject is interpellated as son, pupil, or subject.

On the fundamental materiality of such relations, Althusser writes:

The individual in question behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which depend the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject.⁹³

⁹² Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)’ in *On Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008), 1-61 (39).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

This is an update and expansion of the logic underlying much of *Capital* insofar as Althusser emphasises the process whereby individual beliefs are generated and maintained through “material” practices. In support of this point, he cites the work of Blaise Pascal, a seventeenth-century theologian whose famous work *The Pensées* (1670) includes a passage encouraging non-believers to perform the ritualistic actions associated with Christian belief (kneeling, praying, singing) and a genuine belief in the Christian God will follow.⁹⁴ Althusser writes that Pascal, through this formula, “scandalously inverts the order of things”, demonstrating that abstract beliefs and ideas do not generate corresponding actions, rituals, and social organisations; on the contrary, actions, rituals, and social organisations determine the “ideas of [the] subject”.⁹⁵

I must stress that I am not assenting wholesale to the truth of Althusser’s work here. His conception of ideology has attracted significant and valid criticism.⁹⁶ Rather, I outline his rather extreme ideological theory because it clarifies the traditional Marxist position (“false consciousness”) that Sloterdijk and Žižek later modified. If “false consciousness” names the presence of an epistemic gap between the subject’s experience of reality and the ideological patterning (the material rituals and practices) generating that reality, then what is “enlightened false consciousness”? Sloterdijk begins by describing traditional “ideology-critique” as a process of “unmasking, exposing, baring”.⁹⁷ The presupposition

⁹⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1943), 68.

⁹⁵ Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, 43.

⁹⁶ Alan Sinfield and Neema Parvini have both accused Althusser of advocating a totalising conception of power that construes human beings as nothing more than automata incapable of making free choices. Judith Butler and Mladen Dolar are more sympathetic, but they propose significant alterations to Althusserian ideology. Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 9; Mladen Dolar, ‘Beyond Interpellation’ in *Qui Parle*, Vol. 6, No. 2. (Spring/Summer 1993), 75-96; Judith Butler, “‘Conscience Doth Make Subjects Of Us All’” in *Yale French Studies*, No. 88 (1995), 6-26; Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare’s History Plays: Rethinking Historicism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 34.

⁹⁷ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 16.

enabling this mode of critique is that subjects are labouring under “fetishistic misrecognition”, such that a “critique-through-unmasking” functions to expose these misrecognitions, presumably freeing the subject of their “false consciousness” and allowing them to acknowledge that the emperor has no clothes.⁹⁸

Importantly, Sloterdijk argues that this type of critique need not materialise in dry, academic censure. Rather, it can manifest in “laughter”, “trickery”, and ridicule.⁹⁹ In many respects, Diogenes himself was one such unmasker, as a critic who weaponised mockery in order to expose illusion and falsehood. In a fascinating passage, Sloterdijk compares the unmasking strategies of Diogenes and the Buddha as both involving a “total, uncramping laughter that wipes away illusions and postures”.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere, Sloterdijk associates this brand of “ideology-critique” with “Kynicism”, his preferred word for the Ancient Greek school of which Diogenes was a part. This is the un hypocritical face of Ancient cynicism, the authentic living of one’s “truth”. As Sloterdijk writes:

The kynic farts, shits, pisses, masturbates on the street, before the eyes of the Athenian market. [...] Kynicism is a first reply to Athenian hegemonic idealism that goes beyond theoretical repudiation. It does not speak against idealism, it lives against it.¹⁰¹

This may seem like a rather odd form of “ideology-critique”, but it essentially constitutes an “unmasking” that coheres with the Marxist view that beliefs are most transparent in

⁹⁸ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 22.

⁹⁹ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 143-4.

¹⁰⁰ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 144.

¹⁰¹ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 103-104.

one's material practices. In a perversion of Pascalian logic, Diogenes performs the anti-idealist, anti-social behaviour of public defecation in order to practically undermine the ideological apparatus of the Athenian state. Diogenes embodies the materiality of belief, precisely by manifesting his perception of "truth" in behaviours that might function as practical criticisms of opposing ideological structures. He doesn't just indicate the misrecognitions at the heart of those structures: he vividly demonstrates how to live without them.

For Sloterdijk and Žižek, this brand of "unmasking" critique represents the opposite attitude to that embodied by the modern cynical subject. Sloterdijk's explanation of contemporary cynicism spans hundreds of pages and multiple historical periods. I will instead provide Žižek's lucid summation of Sloterdijk's analysis:

Peter Sloterdijk puts forward the thesis that ideology's dominant mode of functioning is cynical, which renders impossible - or, more precisely, vain - the classical critical-ideological procedure. The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask. [...] Cynical reason is no longer naïve, but a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 29.

This summary ought to explain the relevance of the hypocritical cynic to the conception of an ideological cynic. “Enlightened false consciousness” refers to a fundamental contradiction between what one believes and what one does. The cynical subject has already “unmasked” the particular ideological structure, revealing that the “truth” around which their actions are organised is not a “truth” at all, and yet this does not obstruct the *functioning of the structure*. This possibility supports the Marxist/Althusserian formulation that “life determines consciousness”, though it affords the ideological subject a greater degree of freedom. Life determines the cynical subjects’ consciousness, they become cognisant of this, and yet they consciously choose to maintain their ideologically determined way of life. There is no illusion to correct, no “false” belief supporting the whole system. The system survives and thrives despite what one thinks about it.¹⁰³

The corollary of this epistemic circumstance is that the “unmasking” ridicule Sloterdijk cites as representative of Kynical resistance can be annexed by the prevailing power structures themselves. In other words, even the representatives of a given structure can belittle and “unmask” the relations entailed by that structure without impairing its function: the king himself can scoff at the notion of kingship without curbing the power of his crown. To revisit Marx’s formulation that the “king” and his “subjects” appear as such to one another on the basis of a reflexive “fetishistic misrecognition” that provokes reinforcing behaviour patterns, I can now formulate three types of ideological dynamic in

¹⁰³ Obviously, this is an extension of the logic of commodity fetishism. That logic entails, as Marx put it, “the rule of things over man” insofar as the commodity appears to take on a life of its own and operate as though it possessed its exchange-value independently of any given subject’s perception. The cynical ‘next step’ here is to claim that the commodity continues to operate as such even when the subject ceases to consciously perceive its exchange-value as an “objective reality”. Marx, *Capital*, 990.

this situation, where believe stands for misrecognition and obey stands for reinforcing behaviour patterns:

Greek Kynic: does not believe, does not obey.

Traditional Marxist subject: believes, obeys.

Modern cynic: does not believe, obeys.

In what remains of this chapter, I will argue that the final item in this list makes sense of the ambivalence and hypocrisy pervading *Campaspe*.

Lyly's Athenians are well aware of Alexander's mortality, and even express doubt as to his ability to rule. However, these subjects continue to permit Alexander's dominion by indulging in the fantasy of his supreme authority. Even the embodiment of Kynical resistance in the play, Diogenes, is characterised as a hypocrite, as one whose actions are at odds with his professed beliefs. Moreover, Diogenes' criticisms of Alexander fall flat in the face of the play's deifying structure. Fundamentally, I argue that *Campaspe*'s form replicates the cynical ideological procedure. It holds up Alexander's divine aspirations to ridicule and criticism, showing repeatedly that he is nothing more than a "man". However, it simultaneously indulges in these aspirations, employing Alexander as a potent symbol of divinity and authority, allowing him to become a "god". *Campaspe* is at once an unmasking of Alexander and a religious panegyric in his honour. As such, it represents a compelling portrayal of the paradox central to cynical ideology.

“Thy life is different from thy words”: *Campaspe* and Ideological Cynicism

There are numerous hints found throughout *Campaspe* that the prevailing mode of belief in Lyly's Athens is cynical in the ideological sense. This is evident from as early as the play's opening scene, which features an exchange between Clitus and Parmenio, two Macedonian officers who have returned home from the Theban war and glory together in Alexander's "victories" abroad (1.1.2). This mutual glorification quickly descends into petty competition - Clitus becomes paranoid that Parmenio is implicitly accusing him of calling Alexander's father "Philip into question" by over-praising the latter's son (1.1.18-9). Clitus denies the implication, prompting Parmenio to respond: "Ay, but Clitus, I perceive you are born in the East and never laugh but at the sun rising, which argueth, though a duty where you ought, yet no great devotion where you might" (1.1.23-6).

Parmenio implies that Clitus cares only for "rising" suns, that his apparent "devotion" is nothing more than a politically expedient exercise of "duty". The word "devotion" was used throughout early modern England to refer to the "attachment or loyalty" owed to a monarch by their subjects; a clear example of this occurs in *Richard II*, when Bolingbroke describes his revelation of Mowbray's treachery as prompted by "the devotion of a subject's love" (*Richard II*, 1.1.31).¹⁰⁴ However, the word also names an impulse that is distinctly religious. As the relevant *OED* entry reports, the Latin *dēvōtiōn-em* passed into "the Romanic languages in the Middle Ages", where it was originally used "only in

¹⁰⁴ 'devotion, n.' in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/51579> [accessed 16/05/2020].

reference to religious matters”.¹⁰⁵ It gradually developed a secular usage, but its original religious connotation remained firmly in place. For example, Anthony Munday’s 1581 pamphlet detailing “newes from Ireland” describes Catholic “deuocion towards an infamous Idole”.¹⁰⁶

In short, Parmenio’s speech is the play’s first indication that Alexander might function as an object of religious worship.¹⁰⁷ Further, by imagining that “duty” can be performed even in the absence of genuine “devotion”, Parmenio stresses a disconnect between credulous belief and material practice: he implies that Clitus could be as sceptical of Alexander’s authority and divinity as Diogenes claims to be, though this would not prevent him from behaving as though he were convinced otherwise. As I will argue, this implied disconnect shows the logic of the entire play at a microcosmic level.

Revealingly, Clitus does not counter Parmenio’s criticism. Rather, he brings their debate to a halt by remarking: “We will make no controversy of that which there ought to be no question” (1.1.27-8). This attempt to change the subject betrays Clitus’ discomfort with Parmenio’s pointed accusations, and it precedes a feeble effort to justify Alexander’s worthiness through the employment of reflexive, contradictory logic: “this shall be the opinion of us both, that none was worthy to be the father of Alexander but Philip nor any meet to be the son of Philip but Alexander” (1.1.28-31). This speech has received remarkably little scholarly attention, despite revealing a great deal about Clitus’

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Anthony Munday, *The True Reporte of the Prosperous Successe Which God Gaued Vnto Our English Souldiours against the Forraine Bands of Our Romaine Enemies Lately Ariued, (but Soone Inough to Theyr Cost) in Ireland, in the Yeare 1580*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: J. Charlewood, 1581), Aiiiijr.

¹⁰⁷ I feel compelled to reiterate that this fact about the Athenians does not entail that Alexander’s sovereign office confers divinity upon its placeholder.

perception of Alexander's "worth".¹⁰⁸ His response employs a style of reflexive logic akin to that discussed by Marx in *Capital*. For Marx, a formal relation (king-subject) reflexively produces the properties of "king" and "subject". The misrecognition occurs when the parties within this relation imagine that the content (the properties) would persist without the form (the relation). The form produces content that ensures the persistence of the form.

Clitus implies that a similar kind of logic guarantees the worthiness of both Alexander and Philip. These figures exist in a formal relation to one another (father-son) that produces ideologically significant content (their worthiness). This logic is obviously circular. Precisely as Marx's king is the king because his subjects are his subjects (and *vice versa*), so Philip is worthy because he is the father of Alexander and Alexander is worthy because he is the son of Philip. Crucially, I cannot read Clitus as a "subject" in the thrall of "false consciousness" here, precisely because he himself is acknowledging the reflexive, paradoxical logic that sustains "devotion" to Alexander. This is the verbal equivalent of a cynical shrug: an unblushing 'it is what it is' gesture that does not restore the gap between Clitus' potentially superficial "duty" and his genuine "devotion", but rather dismisses the difference by claiming that such matters should not be open to

¹⁰⁸ One might expect this exchange to feature in Joseph Westlund's 1976 article on 'Tact' in *Campaspe*, but it is absent. Similarly, it does not feature in David Hershnow's recent work on the limits of truth-telling in the play. Peter Saccio does discuss it, but he is primarily interested in Lyly's unique style: this leads him to discuss the "paratactic" structure of the exchange and its employment of "parison", "isocolon", and "alliteration", but he does not explore what it reveals about Clitus' own beliefs. As ever, I am indebted to Scragg, who discusses the exchange in terms of an opposition between "political opportuni[sm]" and "principle", and she does detect in the dialogue a "discordant note". While she does not explore the logic of the "controversy" quotation, I appreciatively acknowledge her recognition of the scene's significance and ambivalence. Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly*, 48; Scragg, "'Campaspe' and the Construction of Monarchical Power", 71.

“question”. To paraphrase Žižek, Clitus appears to be perfectly aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but still he “insists upon the mask”.

This mode of cynical belief permeates the rest of the play. Chrysippus dutifully attends Alexander and answers his questions – indeed, Hephestion describes him as performing the “duties” (1.3.62) of a philosopher, echoing the exchange in the first scene. However, Chrysippus elsewhere refuses to come before Alexander and later grumbles about the king’s divine aspirations, only once the latter is safely offstage. There is clearly a gap between Chrysippus’ “duty” and “devotion”. Similarly, Hephestion fulfils the role of the cynical subject when he reminds Alexander that his divine mask is slipping (that he is starting to “show” as a “man”), but has no qualms with helping Alexander to refit and readjust the mask. However, of all *Campaspe*’s cynical subjects, the most interesting is surely Diogenes. While he is consistent in his criticism of Alexander, he elsewhere displays remarkable inconsistency. Lyly’s Diogenes is an amalgamation of the virtuous truth-teller described by Bertrand Russell and the spineless hypocrite portrayed by Lucian.

Diogenes is accused of hypocrisy three times in the play. Firstly, when Aristotle chastises him in Act One: “These austere manners set aside; it is well known that thou didst counterfeit money” (1.1.137-8). The logic here is plain. Aristotle implies that Diogenes says one thing and does another - he does not live in accordance with his professed beliefs. Moreover, the practice of counterfeiting money is heavily censured in Aristotle’s *The Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁰⁹ I will discuss how Aristotle’s theories of money were used to

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 277.

justify attacks against counterfeiters and usurers in early modern England in my chapter on *Midas*. It suffices to note here that this is a grave accusation in the mouth of Aristotle, and if true would have undermined Diogenes' credibility on two counts: by exposing him as a hypocrite and as a participant in a particularly controversial practice.

I have already mentioned Solinus' accusation that Diogenes frequents brothels. This charge is repeated later in the play when the prostitute Laïs berates Diogenes for describing her as "meat" in front of her clients: "Uncivil wretch, whose manners are answerable to thy calling! The time was thou wouldst have had my company, had it not been, as thou saidst, too dear" (5.3.31-3). Laïs begins by observing that Diogenes' current behaviour is in keeping with his "calling" (as a cynic, or a perpetually hostile critic of others), though the following sentence once again flags up the gap between Diogenes' professed beliefs and his private behaviour. Despite his censure of Laïs' current clients, Diogenes once sought her services himself. In short, three different representatives of Athenian society (a philosopher, a prostitute, and a citizen) reflect Diogenes' criticism back at him. They themselves perform the classic Kynical procedure described by Sloterdijk by effectively unmasking Diogenes - exposing his hypocrisy and thus invalidating his "calling".

This scenario perfectly captures what Sloterdijk describes as the moment at which "critique switches sides".¹¹⁰ Timothy Bewes has summarised the nature of this event: "Kynicism, by taking itself too seriously, becomes vulnerable to precisely its own critical processes - the moment when, as Sloterdijk says, 'critique changes sides', and cynicism

¹¹⁰ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 143.

is perversely reconstituted as a “negation of the negation” of the official ideology”.¹¹¹ This description perfectly articulates the ideological stalemate dramatised in *Campaspe*. By refusing to come before Alexander (1.3.25-7) and chastising those who want to call the king a “god”, Diogenes performs the Kynical function of unmasking Alexander, attempting to reveal that he is neither a “god” nor a possessor of legitimate authority. However, the play ensures that Diogenes is unmasked as well, that his role as Kynic (his “calling” and “manners”) is exposed as yet another variation of the ideological mask. He does not act in accordance with his beliefs, does not demonstrate virtuous truth through an authentic mode of life. On the contrary, he is a discredited hypocrite, and the gap between Diogenes’ actual life and the ideal of the Kynic is as vast and transparent in the play as is the gap between Alexander’s mortality and divinity.

While it is true that the play does not *stage* any instances of Diogenes’ hypocrisy, the volume of accusations made against him (as well as the fact that he does not dispute these accusations), suggest that Lyly’s Diogenes is absolutely a hypocrite instead of a consistent, upright cynic. Despite this, many critics have overlooked the hypocrisy of Lyly’s Diogenes - Derek B. Alwes has written of Diogenes’ “uncompromising honesty” and “integrity” throughout *Campaspe*.¹¹² G. K. Hunter uses the word “integrity” twice to describe Diogenes’ character, even interpreting this “integrity” as the fundamental issue with Diogenes’ philosophical stance (because it entails a “concomitant rigidity of attitude”).¹¹³ Lastly, and perhaps most surprisingly, David Hershinow does locate an “ugly antithesis” at the heart of Lyly’s Diogenes, but he conceives of it as one between

¹¹¹ Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity*, 41.

¹¹² Derek B. Alwes, ““I would faine serve”: John Lyly’s Career at Court’ in *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter 2000-2001), 399-421 (403-4).

¹¹³ Hunter, ‘Introduction to *Campaspe*’, 16.

“virtue” and “peevish pride”.¹¹⁴ He does not mention Diogenes’ hypocrisy. To overlook this aspect of Lyly’s Diogenes is to miss the fact that even the play’s resident iconoclast is an ideological “cynic”: one whose practices do not reflect their purported beliefs.

In short, it is clear that the diegetic world of *Campaspe* (its fictional Athens) is awash with cynical belief in the sense Sloterdijk describes. Moreover, it is my view that *Campaspe*’s dramatic form is itself recognisably Kynical. As a stage comedy, the play absolutely invites the Kynical “laughter that wipes away illusions and postures”. It unmasks its Alexander, deploying the myth of the man who “would be a god” simply in order to exhibit his fragile mortality. It even goes so far as to unmask its own resident Kynic, thereby neutralising his critique of the Athenian state (and Alexander’s divine aspirations) through a demonstration of his own inauthenticity. However, as I have argued, the play’s structure simultaneously functions to *deify* its Alexander, establishing and fulfilling conditions under which his project to “be thought a god” might be a success. In other words, it removes Alexander’s mask simply in order to reposition it. This is precisely the epistemic move that Sloterdijk and Žižek regard as typical of late twentieth-century “enlightened false consciousness”. The play’s Athenians, but also Lyly himself, exposes Alexander’s divinity as chimerical and, with a cynical shrug, contentedly reaffirms it.

My reading of this contradictory scenario constitutes a slight modification to Leah Scragg’s incisive and illuminating 1999 paper on *Campaspe*, in which she dismissed earlier critics who interpreted the play as a straightforward example of “courtly

¹¹⁴ David Hershinow, ‘Diogenes the Cynic and Shakespeare’s Bitter Fool: The Politics and Aesthetics of Free Speech’ in *Criticism*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Fall 2014), 807-835 (817).

flattery”.¹¹⁵ Instead, she offered a reading of the play that viewed its treatment of Alexander as neither wholly subversive to royal power nor wholly obsequious towards it.

As she writes:

Poised between legitimation and subversion, the historical drama of this period is characterized by its "indecidability," and Lyly's insistent ambivalence locates him firmly within this dramatic tradition. While deferring to the royal judgement upon which his own safety and prosperity depend, he presents his audience with a species of comedy that simultaneously celebrates and subverts, affirming the glory of kingship while disclosing the processes by which that glory is maintained.¹¹⁶

I wholeheartedly agree with this interpretation, but I also contend that a slight change of perspective can illuminate the play's relevance to an understanding of idolatry and fetishism.

Scragg was responding to a critical tradition that had conceived of *Campaspe* as a Court drama, a play whose defining feature was its original performance context. Understandably, Scragg reads Alexander as primarily a "king", and though she does not regard Alexander as a *flattering* study of monarchical rule, she does conceive of *Campaspe* itself as a study of "kingship". This reading was necessary. In order to move scholars away from treating *Campaspe* as a flattering portrait of the Queen, it was essential to problematise the play's depiction of sovereign rule. However, I am more

¹¹⁵ Scragg, "'Campaspe' and the Construction of Monarchical Power", 61.

¹¹⁶ Scragg, "'Campaspe' and the Construction of Monarchical Power", 81.

interested in the play's contribution to the long historical tradition of *deifying* Alexander the Great that began in his lifetime and continues into the twenty-first century, perhaps exemplified in this latter period by Oliver Stone's biopic *Alexander* (2004).¹¹⁷ As Philemon Holland recognised, Alexander is an "idol": a pagan man who desires to be seen as a god. The ancient Greeks and Romans acknowledged this, as did the early Church Fathers. His myth is an inescapably religious one and, correspondingly, the unmasking critique of Alexander that *Campaspe* performs, its endeavour to "show" Alexander as a "man", constitutes an act of iconoclasm.

Moreover, to paraphrase Scragg, by subverting Alexander's divinity and "disclosing the processes by which" that divinity is maintained, *Campaspe* executes a traditional "ideology-critique", an attempt to dispel the "false consciousness" that would sustain Alexander's divine *mythos*, to show that his apparent godhood is nothing more than a contingent, constructed fantasy. However, *Campaspe* resists being read as nothing more than an iconoclastic unmasking. Indeed, to interpret the play in this way would constitute a severe mischaracterisation of its tone. Lyly circumvents this simplistic reading by formally structuring *Campaspe* such that it encourages Alexander's divine aspiration and, ultimately, indulges it. In other words, the iconoclastic content of the play is clarified by its deifying form. If the play had been structured backwards, so that Alexander the "god" ended the play by falling hopelessly in love with a captive girl, I might have read *Campaspe* as an iconoclastic attack upon a pagan myth. As it stands, Lyly's dramatic

¹¹⁷ For more on Callisthenes' contribution to the early deification of Alexander, see C. A. Robinson Jr., 'Alexander's Deification' in *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (1943), 286-301. For fascinating accounts and critical readings of Oliver Stone's 2004 biopic *Alexander*, see *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies*, ed. Paul Cartledge and Fiona Rose Greenland (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

choices emphasise the tenacious perseverance of the idol Alexander: his resilience in the face of iconoclastic critique, the ease with which a “negation of the negation” can always take place in order to reaffirm his contingent divinity.

Campaspe does simultaneously “celebrate” and “subvert” Alexander, but the truly interesting aspect of this process is that it draws attention to the resilience of idols in the face of ridicule, exposure, and attack. Lyly’s early modern audience members already had an ambivalent idea of Alexander. For centuries, he had been a simultaneously subverted and celebrated figure, who was either a genuine “god” or an egotistical “man”. By emphasising this ambivalence, *Campaspe* confronts us with both sides of the Alexander coin *at once*, revealing that Alexander the Great’s divinity can be “activated” at any moment. The cynical attitudes of the Athenian subjects function as a microcosmic reflection of the play’s own attitude towards its royal protagonist: the play both *does* and *does not* believe in Alexander’s divinity. The unmasking iconoclasm of the play is ultimately rendered ineffective by the brute fact of its own structure.

To conclude, *Campaspe* has been read as a play that indulges in “contradiction”, that is characterised by an atmosphere of “indecidability”. By focusing upon the play’s evocations of religion, I contend that this sense of “contradiction” has a relevance to the nature of idols and fetishes. *Campaspe* mobilises the iconoclastic binary of “man”/“god”, repeatedly implying that its own satisfactory resolution is dependent upon Alexander becoming one item in this binary instead of its opposite. However, by allowing Alexander to fulfil the conditions required to “be a god”, whilst simultaneously insisting upon his status as a “man”, *Campaspe* essentially posits two contradictory propositions: “man” ≠

“god” and Alexander = “man” and “god”. This is a cynical move that illustrates the failings of traditional iconoclastic strategies and “ideology-critique”. To paraphrase G. K. Hunter, at the end of *Campaspe*, “the play’s contradictions do remain and are accepted”, but this does not constitute a thematic “dead-end” (to borrow Hunter’s language again). Rather, it essentially constitutes a dramatic performance of “duty” in the absence of any genuine “devotion”. Like its various characters (Clitus, Chryippus, Diogenes, Hephestion), *Campaspe* itself reflexively sustains belief in Alexander’s status as a “god”, even as it elsewhere grumbles that he is nothing more than a “man”.

I am confident that this contradictory scenario (and its implications for the histories of idolatry and fetishism) will have become clearer by the end of the following chapter. Lyly explores contradictory belief states even more obviously in his second play *Sappho and Phao*, in which he allows a mortal princess to become the new “goddess of love” in spite of Venus (*Sappho*, 5.2.76). In many respects, *Sappho and Phao* clarifies and exaggerates the themes that are only implicit in *Campaspe*. Like the earlier play, it explores the deification of a human being, though it does so while very directly exploring the concepts of “truth”, “reason”, and, as I will argue, *contradiction* (5.2.56-7). Accordingly, *Sappho* will be the subject of my next chapter.

CHAPTER II

Idolatry and “Truth” in *Sappho and Phao*

Adhering to the dramatic template established by *Campaspe*, Lyly’s second play, *Sappho and Phao*, deifies its royal protagonist, allowing her to usurp the role of Venus and reign as a new “goddess of love” (5.2.76).¹ However, unlike Lyly’s first play, *Sappho and Phao* depicts an extremely *transparent* contest for theological legitimacy, dramatising a struggle between Venus and Sappho to command both the “wonder” and the “worship” (2.2.8) of those around them. As I discuss below, portrayals of a competition between Queen Elizabeth and Venus were common throughout the former’s reign, with various artworks showing the overthrow of Venus at the hands of an exceptionally virtuous monarch. *Sappho and Phao* is clearly a contribution to this trend, though it is a curious and ambivalent one.

The scholarly tradition of reading Lyly’s Sappho as “an allegorical representation of the Queen of England” is longstanding.² While I was eager to avoid reading Lyly’s Alexander as a straightforward analogue to Elizabeth, his Sappho more obviously provokes such a comparison. A female ruler who resists passion and overcomes Venus clearly recalls

¹ John Lyly, ‘Sappho and Phao’ in *Campaspe and Sappho and Phao*, ed. G. K. Hunter and David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 197-301.

² Theodora Jankowski, ‘The Subversion of Flattery: The Queen’s Body in John Lyly’s “Sappho and Phao”’ in *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol. 5 (1991), 69–86 (69).

This view has also been espoused by John Dover Wilson, G. K. Hunter, and Jacqueline Vanhoutte. John Dover Wilson, *John Lyly* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Bowles, 1905), 106; G. K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 116-168; Jacqueline Vanhoutte, ‘Elizabeth I as Stepmother’ in *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2009), 315–335 (334-5).

popular Elizabethan iconography; the image must have provoked a comparison between Lyly's princess and the English sovereign. However, many critics have already noted that Lyly's Sappho is hardly a *flattering* analogue to Queen Elizabeth.³ She spends a great deal of the play delirious, lovesick, and bedbound. Moreover, her eventual triumph is a hugely qualified one: Venus leaves the stage vowing that Sappho will regret her decision to "usurp the name of Venus" (5.3.85-6), suggesting that Sappho's reign as "the new mistress of love" (5.3.83) may be short. In other words, Lyly does not depict Sappho's overthrow of Venus as self-evidently appropriate or sensible. Rather, his decision to portray Sappho's victory as a potentially short-lived *usurpation* invites the interpretation that she is an idol: a contingent object of "worship" masquerading as a "goddess" under the guise of another's "name". Lyly invites this perspective elsewhere in the play. Phao explicitly uses the word "idolatry" (2.4.21) to describe his attachment to Sappho, and the difference between legitimate and illegitimate "worship" is a core concern of this play.

In the following chapter, I argue that *Sappho and Phao* is deeply concerned with a binary opposition central to the legacies of idolatry and fetishism: "reason"/"desire" (3.3.114-6). Moreover, the play clearly associates irrationality with false, but also contradictory, beliefs. Ultimately, as in his previous play, Lyly compels his audience to accept a paradoxical scenario: "Sappho = Venus" and "Sappho \neq Venus". As I will argue, the success of this conclusion depends upon audiences members' willingness to forgo their own rationality. By repeatedly aligning irrationality, contradiction, and "idolatry"

³ Michael Pincombe regarded *Sappho and Phao* as the beginning of Lyly's "growing resistance to royal panegyric", an attitude Pincombe detects in the rest of Lyly's subsequent plays. More recently, Derek B. Alwes has echoed this sentiment, arguing that Lyly's "allusions to the queen are often remarkably unflattering". Michael Pincombe, *The Plays of John Lyly: Eros and Eliza* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 79; Derek B. Alwes, "'I Would Fain Serve': John Lyly's Career at Court" in *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter 2000-2001), 399-421 (399).

throughout *Sappho and Phao*, Lyly ultimately implies a troubling *equivalence* between the triumphant sovereign Sappho and the pagan idol she usurps.

Sappho and Phao consistently evokes “idolatry”, “reason”, and “truth”, the latter appearing eight times in Lyly’s narrative, despite its absence from any of his source texts (1.2.19; 1.2.36; 3.4.102; 3.4.103; 3.4.105; 4.3.2; 5.1.56; 5.3.8). Despite this, very few critics have acknowledged the importance of these concepts to this play. Those scholars who *have* recognised the presence of these themes in *Sappho and Phao* invariably do not spell out their mutual significance to the fundamental issue of “idolatry”. David Bevington’s introductory material to his 1991 edition of the play consistently characterises *Sappho and Phao* as a rather straightforward “love allegory”, in which “characters like Venus and Cupid abstractly represent states of mind in the play’s central figures”.⁴ By foregrounding the romance plot between Phao and Sappho (instead of the contest between Sappho and Venus), Bevington reduces the play’s deities to mere abstractions. His gloss on Phao’s evocation of “idolatry” is particularly revealing: “The rejection of idolatry *metaphorically* uses the language of Reformation anti-Catholic polemicism”.⁵ For Bevington, “idolatry” is not a crucial theme of *Sappho and Phao*. Rather, it is simply one of many metaphors used to describe the *real* concern of this play:

⁴ David Bevington, ‘Introduction to *Sappho and Phao*’ in *Campaspe and Sappho and Phao*, 141-195 (169). Bevington’s edition of the play echoes decades of scholarly consensus. John Dover Wilson had little to say about the play’s theological import, concerning himself primarily with its apparent allegory of “Alençon’s courtship of Elizabeth”. Wilson, *John Lyly*, 105.

G. K. Hunter performed an admirable reading in 1962, though he describes Sappho as “an earthly goddess” and “unmoved mover” without unpacking the significance of this fact to the play’s treatment of idolatry. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier*, 167.

Jeff Schulman, writing in 1985, takes issue with Hunter’s fundamental claim that *Sappho* was “little more than a complimentary piece to Elizabeth”, detecting ambiguity in the play’s treatment of love, but he continues to foreground “eros” and “chastity” as the play’s central themes, instead of idolatry or worship. Jeff Schulman, ‘Ovidian Myth in Lyly’s Courtship Comedies’ in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring 1985), 249-269 (251, 252).

⁵ Lyly, *Sappho and Phao*, II.4.11.fn, my emphasis.

Phao's romantic love for Sappho. In short, Bevington's seminal scholarly edition of *Sappho and Phao* completely downplays its theological content, regarding its deities and religious language as metaphorical props with no other function than to bedeck Lyly's "allegory of love".⁶

It is heartening that more recent critics have problematised Bevington's proposed allegory. In the same year that Bevington's edition was printed, Theodora Jankowski published a journal article that interpreted *Sappho and Phao* as a play in which "Queen becomes Divinity, thus flattering Elizabeth by alluding to her own semi-divinity".⁷ Jankowski viewed Lyly's deification of Sappho as a "subversion of flattery" insofar as the implied allegory associates Elizabeth's rule with paganism and irrational emotion.⁸ This reading coheres with my own, though Jankowski does not discuss how this "subversion" capitalises upon anxieties surrounding "idolatry", nor how the various subplots of *Sappho and Phao* further explore themes relevant to those anxieties.

In a similar vein, Andy Kesson's 2015 book chapter on movement and emotion in Lyly's work refutes the earlier commonplace that *Sappho* represents "simple propaganda" by arguing that the play concludes with "a passionate impasse created by narrative indeterminacy and spatial irresolution".⁹ Kesson is primarily interested in the formal components of *Sappho* (as both play and text), though his insistence upon the "impasse" of its conclusion echoes Jankowski's reading and anticipates my own. In short, recent

⁶ Bevington, 'Introduction to *Sappho and Phao*', 164.

⁷ Jankowski, 'The Subversion of Flattery', 70.

⁸ Jankowski, 'The Subversion of Flattery', 80.

⁹ Andy Kesson, "'They That Tread in a Maze': Movement as Emotion in John Lyly" in *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, ed. Richard Meek & Erin Sullivan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 177-200 (178).

critics of *Sappho* have moved away from regarding its plot as a straight, flattering allegory. Instead, they recognise in Lyly's second play the same dissonance and ambiguity that so obviously characterised his first. By demonstrating the relevance of "idolatry" to various aspects of Lyly's narrative, I hope to illuminate the precise *theological* implications of *Sappho*'s "passionate impasse" and "subversion of flattery".

The following chapter is composed of three sections. The first contextualises Lyly's play by considering his source material, other examples of pagan-inspired Elizabethan iconography, and the idolatrous significance of Venus and Cupid in the period. By providing some cultural context for *Sappho and Phao*, I aim to demonstrate that the play's language, genre, and subject matter unavoidably evoke the concept of idolatry. The second demonstrates that historical accusations of idolatry and fetishism have often characterised desire and irrationality as coextensive phenomena. Precisely as the Judeo-Christian tradition routinely associates false worship with excessive, irrational desires, so the traditional Marxist conceptions of "false consciousness" and "fetishistic misrecognition" relate these epistemic states to the triumph of desire over reason. In both instances, "truth" is characterised as an inevitable casualty of one's desires.

The final section of this chapter returns to *Sappho and Phao*, showing how Lyly juxtaposes "reason" and "desire" throughout his narrative. I also argue that his language choice reflects the common association of "reason" with the principle of non-contradiction, an epistemic theory that regards rationality as both the ability to differentiate true from false and a denial of *contradictory* propositions. By gesturing to

this definition of rationality early in his play, Lyly ultimately draws attention to the contradictory, irrational, and idolatrous tone of his own conclusion.

“As fayre and louely as the queene of loue”: Venus, Sappho, and Elizabeth

Sappho and Phao cannot be described as a theatrical adaptation of a single source text or myth. Rather, the play is inspired by certain earlier texts, chiefly Aelian’s *Varia Historia* and Ovid’s *Heroides*.¹⁰ The *Varia Historia* tells of a youthful ferryman named Phaon who, after providing the “dutifull seruice” of carrying Venus over the water, was rewarded with an “Allablaster box full of ointment” which caused him to become so beautiful that all “the women of Mitylen were inflamed with the loue of Phaon”.¹¹ Aelian describes how Phaon was corrupted by his beauty, abusing “his body in beastly pleasure of the flesh”.¹² The ferryman’s sexual immorality ultimately results in his being “murthered”.¹³ This debauched libertine is a far cry from Lyly’s Phao, who struggles with his unconsummated “affections” (2.4.11) for Sappho until his play’s close.

Lyly combined Aelian’s cautionary fable about the corrupting (and even fatal) power of desire with the epistle of Sappho to Phaon in Ovid’s *Heroides*, a collection of fictional letters written by mythical heroines to their absent lovers. In Ovid’s tale, Sappho laments

¹⁰ An English translation of the Aelian source was available in print after 1576, and so was likely known to Lyly (see below).

¹¹ Claudius Aelian, *A Registre of Hystories Conteyning Martiall Exploites of Worthy Warriours, Politique Practises of Ciuil Magistrates, Wise Sentences of Famous Philosophers, and Other Matters Manifold and Memorable*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1576), J2v-J2r.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Aelian, *A Registre of Hystories*, J2r.

the fact that the faithless Phaon has abandoned her in order to roam Mount Etna.¹⁴ Although very different in tone, Ovid anticipates Aelian's thematic emphasis upon desire by describing his Phaon as so intrinsically beautiful that even Venus would not allow him in her chariot (for fear that he might charm Mars).¹⁵ The work ends with a heartsick Sappho determining "unto Leucadian foerde to flee", where her "corps" will "drench".¹⁶ The Greco-Roman conception of "Phaon" was of a figure clearly representing excessive, lethal desire. While Aelian's account tells of how the *object* of desire meets his death, Ovid's account tells of how the desiring subject meets *hers*. The shared moral message is explicit: desire is a deadly business.

Following this tradition, Lyly depicts a Phao who is granted "sudden beauty" (2.1.2) and falls hopelessly in love with the royal Sappho. He spends the rest of the play coming to terms with the dangerous psychological effects of his desire, even suggesting that it would be preferable to "die" (2.4.9) than to tolerate his uncontrollable, "mounting affections" (2.4.11). Ultimately, Lyly's characters survive – there are no grandiose deaths depicted onstage in *Sappho and Phao*, though the play clearly echoes its predecessors by insisting upon the destructive potentials of "beauty" and desire. Where Lyly starkly *deviates* from his sources is by predicating the ruinous desires of his characters upon a contest between Venus and Sappho. In doing so, Lyly essentially uses two tragic, cautionary tales as a basis to create a generic paean to Queen Elizabeth that mobilises popular tropes evident in the work of his English contemporaries.

¹⁴ Ovid, *The Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso, in English Verse Set out and Translated by George Turberuile*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Henry Denham, 1567), 109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ovid, *The Heroycall Epistles*, 117.

Perhaps the most explicit example of this iconographic tradition is a painting commonly referred to as *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses* which depicts Elizabeth overwhelming Juno, Minerva, and Venus: the goddesses occupy the right of the frame, while Elizabeth occupies the left.¹⁷ The painting contrasts Elizabeth with Venus, suggesting an especial antagonism between these figures. As the art historian Roy Strong has observed, the structure of *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses* works to establish a definite *polarity* between the Queen and the goddess of love by placing them “as opposites”.¹⁸ The message of the painting is that the Queen has been awarded Paris’ golden apple, and so is even more beautiful than the goddess of beauty herself.

As an artwork implying a competition between Elizabeth and the goddess of love, the above painting is a precursor to both a royal entertainment devised by Thomas Churchyard in 1578 and George Peele’s play *The Arraignment of Paris*, printed in 1584. In Churchyard’s royal entertainment, the primary deity of love is Cupid instead of Venus, though the fundamental logic of *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses* is clearly evident here as well. Churchyard depicts the Queen being granted Cupid’s bow, allowing her to symbolically divest the god of his power.¹⁹ This gift is presented by Chastity, who tells Elizabeth that because “chast life is [...] thy choice”, the Queen might control Cupid’s arrows instead of yield to them.²⁰ In essence, Churchyard’s scenario conforms to the template that Jeff Schulman detected in *Sappho*: a contest between “eros” and

¹⁷ Hans Eworth, *Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses*, 1569, oil on panel, 62.9 x 84.4 cm in Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle, England.

¹⁸ Roy Strong, *The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (German Democratic Republic: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 68.

¹⁹ Thomas Churchyard, *A Discourse of the Queenes Maiesties Entertainement in Suffolk and Norffolk with a Description of Many Things Then Presently Seene. Devised by Thomas Churchyarde*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Henrie Bynneman, 1578), Diiijv.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

“chastity”.²¹ While Venus is a less conspicuous rival in this royal entertainment, Churchyard continues the tradition of depicting Elizabeth’s triumph over the pagan deities of desire.

By contrast, Peele’s *The Arraignement of Paris* does depict Elizabeth triumphing over Venus, though the play does not construe this victory as one of chastity over desire. Instead, he dangerously implies an equivalence between Queen Elizabeth and Venus (as I will argue Lyly does). Peele’s obvious Elizabeth analogue (Eliza) is judged to be “as fayre and louely as the queene of loue”.²² There is no real competition here. Eliza is described as self-evidently superior to the assembled goddesses, none of whom dispute her elevation or receipt of Paris’ golden apple. When Eliza is judged to be “as fayre and louely” as Venus, the goddess of love obsequiously remarks that she is content to yield “the honour of this honour to be thine”.²³

Lyly’s narrative essentially introduces the ethical attitude of his Classical sources (desire is destructive) into a genre of iconography that figures a competition between Venus and Queen Elizabeth. Crucially, unlike the painters and writers above, Lyly is not content to characterise Elizabeth’s triumph over Venus as inevitable or self-explanatory. Instead, he depicts a competition that is hostile and prolonged: a series of skirmishes instead of a simple, clear-eyed judgement. Moreover, Lyly does not depict a Sappho who is intrinsically *superior* to Venus – instead, the mortal woman forcibly *replaces* Venus as “the new mistress of love”, adopting Cupid and usurping Venus’ “name”. Far from

²¹ Schulman, ‘Ovidian Myth in Lyly’s Courtship Comedies’, 251.

²² George Peele, *The Araygnement of Paris a Pastorall. Presented before the Queenes Maiestie, by the Children of Her Chappell*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Henrie Marsh, 1584), Eiii3v.

²³ *Ibid.*

transcending or opposing the dangerous potentialities of desire, Sappho has simply taken control of them. If *Sappho and Phao* does belong to the tradition of Elizabethan iconography surveyed above, it nevertheless problematises that tradition, drawing attention to some of the worrying implications of its own form.

The alarming suggestion that Sappho and Venus are interchangeable entities, whose elevated positions depend upon the same irrational, harmful desires, is everywhere in Lyly's play. It is implied by Venus in her first onstage speech, in which she complains about the injustice of her neglect as a result of the Syracusan's fondness for Sappho. As Venus declares:

It is no less unseemly than unwholesome for Venus, who is most honoured in princes' courts, to sojourn with Vulcan in a smith's forge [...] It came by lot, not love, that I was linked with him [...] I will yoke the neck that yet never bowed, at which, if Jove repine, Jove shall repent. Sappho shall know, be she never so fair, that there is a Venus which can conquer, were she never so fortunate. (1.1.21-41)

This speech provides us with two crucial insights. Firstly, Venus is furious that Sappho will not "bow" to her, despite the fact that the goddess is generally "honoured in princes' courts". While the word "honour" has an obvious secular usage (referring simply to "respect", "admiration", or "esteem"), it also widely referred to a species of worship.²⁴ A sermon delivered by Simon Harward was published in 1582 and describes those who

²⁴ 'Honour | Honor, v.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88228>> [accessed 24 September 2020].

refuse to attend Church as robbing “God of his *honour*”.²⁵ In the same year, Stephen Gosson described playhouses as “consecrated to the *honour* of the Heathen Gods”.²⁶ In short, Lyly’s Venus clearly implies that she (a supposedly legitimate object of “honour”) is *blasphemed* in Syracuse. Most obviously, the word recalls Peele’s Venus and her willingness to allow “the honour” of Paris’ apple to Eliza.

Secondly, Venus implies a correlation between Sappho’s “fair” appearance and her diversion of Venus’ rightful “honour”. As in the example of Eliza in Peele’s *The Arraignment of Paris*, Lyly here suggests that Sappho’s elevation is at least partly predicated upon her *desirability* (being “fayre and louely”). Venus herself confesses this when she describes Sappho as “fair” and “amiable” later in the same speech, in the context of plotting to undermine her (1.1.49, 52). In Lyly’s *Midas*, Mellacrites assures the titular king that he can “be esteemed beautiful” because gold can create “amiableness” (1.1.60, 62). In Shakespeare’s *Othello*, the word “amiable” is used to describe the charmed handkerchief given to Othello’s mother by an Egyptian “charmer”: “She told her, while she kept it | ‘Twould make her amiable and subdue my father | Entirely to her love” (*Othello*, 3.4.57-9).²⁷ In these examples, the word clearly connotes an ability to charm and seduce. In the context of Venus scheming against an elevated Sappho, the connotations of “amiable” suggest a woman whose beauty allows her to provoke the “love” of the Syracusans.

²⁵ Simon Harward, *Two godlie and learned sermons, preached at Manchester in Lancashire before a great audience, both of honor and vvoorship*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Iohn Charlewood and Richarde Ihones, 1582), Civ.

²⁶ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions Prouing That They Are Not to Be Suffred in a Christian Common Weale*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas Gosson, 1582), B5v.

²⁷ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

This characterisation is confirmed elsewhere in the play. Sappho is consistently described as “fair” and “beautiful” (I.2.7, 2.4.24, 2.4.32), words that would not likely be used to legitimate an Alexander the Great or a Midas. Indeed, Phao falls hopelessly in love with Sappho, rendered “spurbblind” (2.3.21) by her “beauty”. A final confirmation of Sappho’s eminent desirability occurs in Act Four, when Venus remarks: “Venus, belike, is become stale; Sappho, forsooth, because she hath many virtues, therefore she must have all the favours” (4.2.19-21). The image is of competing *lovers* – the “stale” Venus lacks the qualities of Sappho and so fails to attract the attention of suitors. In short, Lyly repeatedly emphasises that Sappho’s elevation above Venus is at least partly predicated upon her “beauty”.

Crucially, Lyly follows in the footsteps of Ovid and Aelian by emphasising the ability of *physical attractiveness* to provoke destructive desire. The most obvious example here is Sappho, a figure whose eminent desirability is cited throughout the play’s first half. More specifically, Phao’s excessive desire for Sappho results from an encounter with her “beauty” (2.4.32). Further, Phao’s own desirability is clearly linked to his “sudden beauty” (2.1.2).²⁸ Lyly’s decision to have Cupid interfere with Phao’s attractiveness reflects Aelian’s version of the myth in *Varia Historia*, in which Venus gives the ferryman an ointment to make him more aesthetically pleasing.²⁹ Again, this decision emphasises physical attractiveness as a significant cause of the character’s desires, even if that attractiveness requires supernatural intervention.

²⁸ In order to signal this change, David Bevington includes the following stage direction in his edition of the play: ‘[Enter] PHAO, [now very handsome, with a small mirror]’. Lyly, *Sappho and Phao*, 2.1.0.sd.

²⁹ Aelianus, *A Registre of Hystories*, J2r.

A final example of physical attractiveness provoking destructive desire occurs in Act Four, when Venus laments that she bestowed “a benefit upon a man” (Phao’s attractiveness) that has “brought a bane unto a goddess” (4.2.5-6). She continues: “O fair Phao, and therefore made fair to breed in me a frenzy! [...] Have I brought a smooth skin over thy face to make a rough scar in my heart?” (4.2.7-8, 12-13). There is an ambiguity in this play concerning whether or not such desires are provoked by beauty alone, or by Cupid’s interference. Indeed, the only exchange in the play that does associate Cupid with Venus’ desire is decidedly vague. Venus asks: “Cupid, what hast thou done? Put thine arrows in Phao’s eyes, and wounded thy mother’s heart?” (4.2.1-2). Cupid responds that because Venus gave Phao a “face to allure” it was perfectly appropriate for him to give Phao “eyes to pierce” (4.2.3-4). While Cupid has put his “arrows in Phao’s eyes”, the ferryman already had a “face to allure”. In short, while Cupid is consistently mobilised as the emblem of different characters’ desires, the language they use to speak about those desires continually emphasises encounters with physical beauty and alluring features.

This point is important because it furthers the case for perceiving Venus and Sappho as interchangeable. By characterising physical attractiveness and Cupid’s arrows as equally provocative, Lyly detaches the notion of destructive desire from its pagan exemplars. Instead, he depicts a world in which “desire” (and the “worship” it entails) falls within the purview of Venus and Cupid, but also is characteristic of the Syracusan community’s “worship” from the play’s beginning. Long before she adopts Cupid, Lyly’s Sappho is depicted as a pseudo “mistress of love”; not a chaste alternative to the lusty Venus, but a more effective and desirable version of her.

In essence, *Sappho and Phao* begins where *The Arraignment of Paris* concludes, with a pre-eminently “fair” mortal elevated above the goddess of love. The overlap between desirability and “worship” that this scenario entails is overlooked if one simply treats Venus and Cupid as metaphorical props or abstractions. Lyly’s Venus has a twofold function in *Sappho and Phao*: to represent irrational desire (and in a way that draws attention to Sappho’s representation of an equivalent state), and to feature as a genuine deity who begrudges the idolisation of a mortal woman. In both *Midas* and *Love’s Metamorphosis*, terrestrial rulers who oppose their deities are swiftly punished. Bacchus, Apollo, Ceres, and Cupid boldly assert their legitimacy and authority in those later plays, insisting upon the superiority of divinity over customary, terrestrial rule. *Sappho and Phao* is a difficult, dissonant play because it depicts a pagan world in which the worship of Venus ought to be appropriate, and yet appears to celebrate her overthrow by a mortal woman. This situation would not be as problematic if Venus functioned throughout as an exemplar of heathen “idolatry”, and yet Lyly repeatedly suggests a troubling *equivalence* between Venus and Sappho, the latter similarly portrayed as an idol whose attractiveness draws people into a desirous state of “worship”.

As I mentioned in my Introduction, desire, irrationality, and idolatry have often been viewed as a single epistemic package within the Christian tradition. The seeds of these entailments are detectable in Judeo-Christian Scripture. Through attempts to differentiate Judaic society from Gentilism, the practices and behaviours of non-Jewish sects were clumsily packaged together to create a concept of the “pagan” or “idolater” as inherently (and simultaneously) base, mistaken, and unclean.³⁰ Here, the worshipping of idols is

³⁰ I cite various works interested in this topic in my Introduction above. The two I found most helpful were the following: Jonathan Kirsch, *God Against The Gods: The History of The War Between Monotheism and*

somehow related to an outpouring of lust: an excess of desire that undermines the familial and ethical stability of the idolatrous region.

By Lyly's lifetime, the connections between idolatry, erotic desire, and paganism were widely mobilised as both poetic and polemical devices. Danijela Kambasković-Sawers describes "the use of idolatry and blasphemy as subtext to representations of erotic desire" as a device found in Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, and William Shakespeare.³¹ Descriptions of "couetousnes", "lecherie" and "sodomitrie" were found in English attacks upon the "idolatrie" of "prelates and priests".³² On the other hand, the Catholic Church itself recognised the connection between idolatry and sexual desire during a 1563 Council of Trent session, where they ordered that: "in [...] the sacred use of images, every superstition shall be removed, all filthy lucre be abolished, finally, all lasciviousness be avoided; and in such wise the figures shall not be painted or adorned with wantonness of beauty".³³ In short, many poets, playwrights, and theologians – Catholic and Reformed alike – recognised the correlation between "idolatry" and "mounting affections" (2.4.11-12) acknowledged by Phao. Accordingly, they were also vigilant concerning the corrupting power of "beauty".

Polytheism (New York: Penguin Group, 2004); Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among The Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (London: Yale University Press, 2009).

³¹ Danijela Kambasković-Sawers, 'Carved in Living Laurel: The Sonnet Sequence and Transformations of Idolatry' in *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (June 2007), 377-394 (377).

³² Bartholomew Traheron, *A Vvarning to England to Repente and to Tvrne to God from Idolatrie and Poperie by the Terrible Exemple of Calece*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (Wesel: P. A. de Zuttere, 1558), 12.

³³ Pius IV, 'Touching the Invocation, Veneration, and on Relics of Saints, and Sacred Images' in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Theodore Alois Buckley (London: George Routledge & Co., 1851), 213-216 (215).

However, nowhere were these connections insisted upon so explicitly as in the English antitheatrical pamphlets. Oftentimes, the associations in these works are somewhat oblique, but this vagueness is revealing: the antitheatricalists take for granted their readers' appreciation of the package I describe above. This is particularly obvious when the antitheatricalists associate playhouses with idolatry, irrationality, unbridled desire, and Venus or Cupid, without spelling out the entailments between these various concepts. Jane Kingsley-Smith has observed that Venus and Cupid were uniquely useful symbols for anti-idolatry writers because they were "able to stand as a metonym for false gods and misplaced religious worship" *and* to figure "the erotic impulse behind them".³⁴ As early as 1577, John Northbrooke evoked these "false gods" to describe the English playing scene, calling London drama "the instrument and armour of Venus and Cupid".³⁵ In 1582, Stephen Gosson described the London theatres as "Venus chappell, by resorting to which we worshippe her".³⁶ His assessment was echoed by Philip Stubbes in the following year, who spelled out the nature of this false "worshippe" in more explicit detail, writing that "pleasures, dauncing, and voluptousnes is the kingdome of Venus, and the Empire of Cupid" in the context of discussing London's playhouses.³⁷

In short, when Lyly's Phao worries that his "mounting affections" constitute an act of "idolatry", he echoes the equations of excessive desire with false worship found in the antitheatrical literature cited above. Moreover, it was a commonplace to view "Venus" as

³⁴ Kingsley-Smith, *Cupid in Early Modern Literature and Culture*, 32.

³⁵ John Northbrooke, *Spiritus Est Vicarius Christi in Terra. A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds with Other Idle Pastimes*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: H. Bynnemann, 1577), 63.

³⁶ Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions*, J6r.

³⁷ Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses Containing, a Discouerie, or Briefe Summarie of Such Notable Vices and Imperfections, as Now Raigne in Many Countreyes of the World*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: John Kingston, 1583), D2v.

an exemplar of false “worshippe” and “pleasures”, the epitome of heathen “idolatrie” insofar as she represents *both* “inordinate affection” and the deities of the pagan past. She embodies the package of ethically and theologically suspect attitudes that differentiate base idolaters from upright Christians. The troubling equivalence between Venus and Sappho that emerges in Lyly’s narrative has real theological implications. If the “worship” of Sappho really is predicated upon “affections” provoked by her “beauty”, and if Venus really does see this as a threat to *her* “kingdome”, the obvious suggestion is that the Syracusans are absolutely guilty of “committing idolatry”, whether their object of worship is a pagan goddess or her mortal rival.

Contrary to Bevington, I do not regard Phao’s explicit evocation of “idolatry” as metaphorical. Instead, I read this speech as a confirmation of the play’s theological implications. Throughout *Sappho and Phao*, desire and worship are so inextricably interwoven that they are impossible to untangle. In the above soliloquy, Phao acknowledges that the direction of his desires corresponds to the direction of his worship. Even more significantly, he also recognises that he has become “carried” away, that his desires are leading him into *false* worship. Throughout Christian history, idolatrous desires of the kind Phao describes have been linked to an abandonment of one’s rationality, a fact that renders evocations of truth and falsehood (as well as contradictory beliefs) supremely relevant to a play about destructive desires and the “idolatry” they entail.

In the following section, I will demonstrate the centrality of desire and irrationality to the cultural histories of “idolatry” and fetishism. By doing so, I will demonstrate that Lyly’s

treatment of “truth” throughout *Sappho and Phao* is enormously relevant to the equivalence he draws between Sappho and Venus. At every level of the play’s plot, matters of epistemology are flagged and interrogated, resulting in a world in which the “truth” is wildly elusive. From the philosophers debating the efficacy of “judgement” (1.2.55, 64), to the servingmen composing faulty syllogisms (2.3.54-8), to Sappho bemoaning the fact that her thoughts “swerve from reason” (3.3.115), to Phao asking “where shall one fly for truth?” (V.3.8) in the play’s concluding scene, *Sappho and Phao* exhibits an obsession with what is true and what is false. These seemingly disparate aspects of Lyly’s play become enormously relevant to his conclusion when one recognises the connections between irrationality, falsehood, desire, and idolatry throughout Judeo-Christian history.

“Turned the truth of God unto a lie”: Idolatry, Fetishism, and Reason

As I have suggested, connections between idolatry, desire, and irrationality are very clearly expressed in both Scripture and the antitheatrical literature of the sixteenth century. Before I can explore the history of these connections, or how they are relevant to Lyly’s evocations of “reason”, it is necessary to ask a difficult question: what exactly does “reason” mean? The *OED* entry for the word is a useful starting point: “The power of the mind to think and form valid judgements by a process of logic”.³⁸ As the philosophers Dov M. Gabbay, Francis Jeffrey Pelletier, and John Woods point out, “logic”

³⁸ ‘Reason, n.1’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/159068>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

generally refers to “the notion of logical consequence”: the idea that the truth of a statement is determined by an accurate inference from premises bound by “connectives” (if, but, and, or, *etc.*) to a necessarily following conclusion.³⁹ The number and arrangement of premises depends upon the particular branch of “logic”, as does the specific type of inference required.⁴⁰

Aristotle has been described as “the founder of logic” and his discussion of syllogisms and non-contradiction have exerted a lasting influence upon later cultural understandings of “reason”.⁴¹ Although he was not solely responsible for schematising the principles of “logic”, Aristotle’s work states clearly many of the connotations of “reason” found across Scripture, antitheatrical literature, and early modern drama. Moreover, Aristotle was enormously influential in England during Lyly’s lifetime.⁴² Indeed, two Aristotelian syllogisms occur in *Sappho and Phao*, as I will discuss below. As a result, I take his principles of “reason” to be broadly representative.

³⁹ Dov M. Gabbay, Francis Jeffrey Pelletier, and John Woods, ‘Preface’ in *Logic: A History of its Central Concepts*, ed. Dov M. Gabbay, Francis Jeffrey Pelletier, and John Woods (Oxford: North Holland, 2012), 7-9 (7).

⁴⁰ Modal logic, Relevance logic, Justification logic, and Connexive logic all have their own emphases in this regard, as well as their own “logical vocabulary”. I cannot pursue their precise differences and influences here. Heinrich Wansing, ‘Connexive Logic’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, (Spring 2020) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/logic-connexive/>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

⁴¹ Daniel Boneva and Josh Dever, ‘A History of the Connectives’ in *Logic: A History of its Central Concepts*, 175-233 (175).

⁴² The following article uses the vast number of commentaries written on Aristotle throughout the “Renaissance” period, as well as his presence on numerous European university curriculums, as evidence of his enduring influence: Heinrich Kuhn, ‘Aristotelianism in the Renaissance’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2018) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/aristotelianism-renaissance/>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

In the *Prior Analytics*, Aristotle uses the word “demonstration” to refer to the process of forming “valid judgements” via “syllogism”.⁴³ Syllogisms are defined as an arrangement of propositions “in which, when certain assumptions are made, something other than what has been assumed necessarily follows from the fact that the assumptions are such”.⁴⁴ A clear example of syllogistic reasoning occurs in Act Two of *Sappho and Phao*, when the servingman Molus determines “by learning to prove Callipho to be the devil” (2.3.48-9). He deploys an invalid Aristotelian syllogism that can be rendered formally as: (P1) “The devil is black”; (P2) “[Callipho] [is] black”; (C) “Therefore [Callipho] [is] the devil”. (2.3.54-8). Of course, this syllogism is defective because it is missing a key logical premise (anyone who is black is the devil). As I will discuss later in this chapter, Molus’ faulty reasoning here is one among many explicit examples of the Syracusans’ collective irrationality.

The above example clearly indicates that syllogisms do not automatically produce true conclusions. Rather, for a successful and accurate “demonstration” to take place, other epistemic principles must be adhered to. The most fundamental of these is the “principle of non-contradiction”, an epistemic rule that Aristotle defends most powerfully in *The Metaphysics*.⁴⁵ In this work, Aristotle argues that the principle is the “ultimate root of all demonstration” – or, as the philosopher Hugh Lawson-Tancred has put it, this principle

⁴³ Aristotle, ‘Prior Analytics’ in *Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics*, trans. H. P. Cook and Hugh Tredennick (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938), 182-406 (201, 202).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ In fact, there are three versions of the non-contradiction principle to be found in Aristotle’s work, labelled by the philosopher Paula Gottlieb as “an ontological, a doxastic and a semantic version”. For the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in the “doxastic” version of the principle, i.e. that which pertains to belief states. Paula Gottlieb, ‘Aristotle on Non-Contradiction’ in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2019) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-noncontradiction/>> [accessed 19/04/2020].

constitutes the “foundation of all reasoning”.⁴⁶ Aristotle takes aim at philosophers who “hold both that it is possible for the same thing to be and not to be and that it is possible for us to entertain beliefs to that effect”.⁴⁷ In other words, the person who posits a contradictory proposition, in which a given entity is supposed to possess “opposite attributes at the same time” (“white/not-white”, “good”/“not-good”, *etc.*) has abandoned their “reasoning” capacity.⁴⁸

Fundamentally, Aristotle is concerned that such beliefs result in a dissolution of any meaningful difference between “truth and falsity”.⁴⁹ For, if a belief can be simultaneously true and not true, the believer inevitably regards “both truth and falsity in exactly the same way”, and would be unable to “say anything of content; for such a person is at the same time saying that such and such is the case and that it is not”.⁵⁰ Aristotle’s conception of “reason” involves both the use of “a process of logic” based upon accurate inferences from premises to conclusions, as well as adherence to the principle of non-contradiction. Crucially, the rational person is one who acknowledges the difference between “truth and falsity”; he is fundamentally committed to upholding this difference (as per the principle of non-contradiction), and he employs deductive reasoning in order to differentiate the one type of proposition from the other.

A particularly famous application of the principle of non-contradiction occurs in William of Ockham’s influential work. As Ullrich Langer puts it, for Ockham, “the only limitation

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 88, 89.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁸ Isaac Husik, ‘Aristotle on the Law of Contradiction and the Basis of the Syllogism’ in *Mind*, Vol. 15, No. 58 (April 1906), 215-222 (215).

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, 96.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, 96.

of God's power is the principle of noncontradiction".⁵¹ The view that this rational "principle" (amongst others) could be used to discover and define "God's power" was a key tenet of a "scholastic tradition" that set the terms of much theological debate in the "Renaissance" period.⁵² As Quentin Skinner has observed, there existed a "Renaissance ideal of a union between reason and rhetoric", and various sixteenth-century scholars (including Lyly's own tutor at Oxford, John Rainolds), chose Aristotle as a point of reference on both "reason" and "rhetoric".⁵³ While it is certainly not true to suggest that every early modern person subscribed to Aristotle's conceptions of reason, it will be a contention of this chapter that Lyly's depiction of irrationality evidently involves contradictory beliefs. As such, I regard his characterisation of "reason" as reflecting the Aristotelian version of the concept as outlined above.

I now return to the history of "idolatry". In 1998, the anthropologist Jan Assmann termed "the distinction between true and false in religion" the "Mosaic distinction".⁵⁴ Assmann does not claim that Moses was the first historical figure to make such a distinction (the monotheistic Egyptian Akhenaten is cited as a forerunner in that regard), but he does argue that Judaism represents a distinct tradition to "ancient polytheisms" insofar as it insisted upon a stark distinction between "truth and falsity" in order to differentiate Judaic practices and beliefs from those of neighbouring "pagans" and "barbarians".⁵⁵ The Mosaic distinction established early Judaism as both religion and *counter-religion*, as a

⁵¹ Ullrich Langer, *Divine and Poetic Freedom in the Renaissance: Nominalist Theology and Literature in France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 93.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵³ Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3, 36.

⁵⁴ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

system of thought that thrived not on intercultural communication, but rather on intercultural exclusion and estrangement.⁵⁶ In essence, this religion upheld the meaningful difference between “truth and falsity” that Aristotle encouraged, although it applied the binary in such a way as to bracket all idolatrous beliefs and practices as “false”. This set the stage for later Christian writers to associate the idolatrous with both falsehood and irrationality.

The beginnings of this trend are apparent in Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, where the connections between idolatry, excessive desire, and falsehood are spelled out. Paul begins by describing the idolatry of “Gentiles” who “turned the glory of the incorruptible God to the similitude of an image”, an initial act that:

turned the truth of God unto a lie, and worshipped and served the creature, forsaking the Creator which is blessed forever, Amen. For this cause God gave them up to vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature.⁵⁷

Here are connections between idolatry, “vile affections”, and the substitution of the “truth” for a “lie”. As in the examples cited above, Paul here implies that the idolatry and the “affections” of the “Gentile” are related insofar as they are symptoms of a common cause: a perverted worldview in which a falsehood masquerades as “truth”. It ought to be clear why later Christian writers construed such a worldview as specifically *irrational*. When a person believes that a falsehood is true, every subsequent deduction or inference

⁵⁶ Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 3.

⁵⁷ *The Geneva Bible*, Romans 1:23, 25-6.

he makes will produce distorted results. By associating such an error with “vile affections” and a recognisable act of idolatry, Paul advances the propagation of the package I discussed earlier: the notion of an irrational and libidinous idolater.

The English antitheatrical writers, who consistently align playgoing with Venus, idolatry, and “pleasures”, also routinely denounced playgoers as having abandoned their reason. In *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), Gosson argued that plays had the power to “turne reasonable Creatures into brute Beastes”.⁵⁸ He repeated the accusation three years later, writing in *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* that he considered playgoing “a blocke in the way of *reason*, because it locketh vp ye powres of the minde from doing their duetie, & like a kinde of drunkenes, maketh vs stagger”.⁵⁹ Anthony Munday made a similar point in his 1580 pamphlet, where he more explicitly linked the irrationality of playgoing with its encouragement of unchecked desire. Writing about playgoers, he remarks: “pleasure bringeth folie into estimation; and thereby the light of *reason* is vtterlie extinguished”.⁶⁰ Crucially, the tendency of these writers to package together irrationality, “pleasures”, and idolatry is not incidental. Rather, it reflects a longstanding historical tradition of characterising false, pagan worship as both “vile affections” and falsehood. When “the light of reason” is extinguished, the ability to differentiate between “truth and falsity” vanishes, causing the irrational playgoer to “stagger” into a series of category mistakes, such as bringing “folie into estimation”, or turning “the truth of God unto a lie”.

⁵⁸ Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse Conteyning a Plesaunt [Sic] Inuectiue against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Iesters, and Such like Caterpillers of a Co[m]monwelth*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas VVoodcocke, 1579), A3v, my emphasis.

⁵⁹ Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions*, J6r, my emphasis.

⁶⁰ Anthony Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters: The One Whereof Was Sounded by a Reuerend Byshop Dead Long since; the Other by a Worshipful and Zealous Gentleman Now Aliue*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Henrie Denham, 1580), 109, my emphasis.

In short, the irrational idolater who has given himself up to “the kingdome of Venus” perceives “a lie” as “the truth” - he sees something “in the world” where, for the iconoclast, there is clearly “nothing”.⁶¹ He views false gods as genuine, folly as virtuous, even actors as the characters they represent.⁶² At first glance, these mistakes appear to imply a simple inaccuracy of the type: falsehood $x = \text{true}$. However, such a false belief does not capture the full breadth of epistemic errors associated with irrationality. The person who forgoes reason for “pleasures” arrives at false conclusions after deploying faulty logic (as Lyly’s Molus did above), but also he is capable of believing *contradictory* propositions of the type: $x = \text{true}$ *and* false. In short, the idolater’s worldview is not an inverted one, but a potentially paradoxical one. This worldview is only false or inverted from the perspective of the rational iconoclast, who continues to make sharp distinctions between “truth and falsity” and apply those distinctions to the beliefs and behaviours of others.

The implications of this will become clear later in the chapter. In the following section, I argue that Lyly brilliantly evokes contradictory belief states throughout *Sappho and Phao*, gradually undermining the distinction between “truth and falsity” in anticipation of the play’s paradoxical conclusion. In what remains of this section, I will briefly consider the centrality of irrationality and “pleasures” to the legacy of the fetish. As I have already suggested, the concept of the “fetish” arose during encounters between

⁶¹ *The Geneva Bible*, I Corinthians 8:4.

⁶² The “untrustworthy appearances” of actors is another staple of antitheatrical literature, as observed by Kent R. Lehnhof. Kent R. Lehnhof, ‘Ships That Do Not Sail: Antinauticalism, Antitheatricalism, and Irrationality in Stephen Gosson’ in *Renaissance Drama*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring 2014), 91-111 (99).

Portuguese sailors and communities on the West African coast.⁶³ The idea of “fetishism” was later coined by Charles de Brosses, who very explicitly associated the mindset with irrationality and pleasure. Discussing the idea of “Divinity” in the minds of “idolaters” and fetishists alike, de Brosses wrote:

after centuries of infancy and barbarism, each people that has arrived at its maturity has adopted a more *reasonable* way of thinking on this all-important point [...] The religious beliefs of Savages and Pagans are therefore purely human opinions, whose principle and explanation must be sought in the very *affections* of humanity.⁶⁴

Once again, here are the sharp distinction between “reason” and “affections” espoused by the antitheatricalists. Because they are led by their immature desires, the idolatry and the irrationality of the “Savages” are intimately intertwined.

The historical association of “fetishism” with irrationality has been well-documented. Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann has explored the origins of fetishism in depth, writing that “the “fetish” was perceived as based upon a natural and lawless process, founded upon an *irrational* belief”.⁶⁵ This “irrational belief” has to do with the African’s attitude towards inanimate objects – as Wyatt MacGaffey puts it, these fetishistic Africans were

⁶³ William Pietz, ‘The Problem of the Fetish, I’ in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 9 (Spring 1985), 5-17.

⁶⁴ Charles de Brosses, ‘On the Worship of Fetish Gods: Or, A Parallel of the Ancient Religion of Egypt with the Present Religion of Nigritia’ in *The Returns of Fetishism*, 44-133 (106), my emphasis.

⁶⁵ Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann, ‘Under Imperial Eyes, Black Bodies, Buttocks, and Breasts: British Colonial Photography and Asante “Fetish Girls”’ in *African Arts*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2012), 46-57 (49), my emphasis.

supposed “to have an *irrational* propensity to personify material objects, which seemed to reveal a *false* understanding of natural causality”.⁶⁶ Because such “irrational” beliefs were supposedly fundamental to the fetishistic societies the Europeans observed, the former’s attachment to their “Fetishes” were thought to result in “a world turned morally upside down by officially enforced superstitious delusion that suppressed men’s reasoning faculties”.⁶⁷ Crucially, one of the supposed moral implications of this suppression concerns the desires and sexuality of the fetishistic communities.

As William Pietz has observed, there “has always been a marked sexual dimension to the discourse about fetishes”.⁶⁸ The origins of the “Fetish” concept involved a perception of African belief systems as irrational and theologically unsound, but also sexually perverse. As Engmann again notes, “African sexuality was classed as pathological, constructed as primitive, uncontrolled, excessive, animalistic”.⁶⁹ Moreover, European “misperceptions of women’s status in polygamous marriages” resulted in “a powerful erotic dimension to the notion of the fetish as somehow the essence and explanatory principle of African society”.⁷⁰ In other words, the “irrational” fetishisms underpinning African societies entail an “excessive” sexuality (a surrender to “vile affections”) that adversely affects their familial and ethical structures: an assessment that ought to sound familiar. In short,

⁶⁶ Wyatt MacGaffey, ‘African Objects and the Idea of the Fetish’ in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 25 (Spring 1994), 123-131 (123), my emphasis.

⁶⁷ William Pietz, ‘The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman’s Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism’ in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 16 (Autumn 1988), 105-124 (105).

⁶⁸ Pietz, ‘The Problem of the Fetish, I’, 6.

As Pietz notes, “August Comte and late nineteenth-century psychologists such as Alfred Binet [...] first gave the word currency to denote sexual fetishes”. Although, as I will demonstrate, “fetishism” has always possessed some connotation of desire and sexuality. Pietz, ‘The Problem of the Fetish, I’, 9.

⁶⁹ Engmann, ‘Under Imperial Eyes, Black Bodies, Buttocks, and Breasts’, 54.

⁷⁰ Engmann, ‘Under Imperial Eyes, Black Bodies, Buttocks, and Breasts’, 54.

accusations of fetishism rely upon the same opposition between “reason” and “desire” that Judeo-Christian iconoclasts have mobilised for centuries.

Moreover, the package of the fetishistic worldview was an enormously influential reference point for eighteenth and nineteenth century rationalists. As Donald L. Donham puts it: “By the time of the Enlightenment, the idea of the fetish provided Europeans with a potent example of just what reason was not—hence Hegel’s infamous account of the lack of dialectical development in African history”.⁷¹ Hegel’s was merely one of many high-profile attempts to differentiate rational Europe from irrational Africa by invoking the “fetish” concept - the same logic pervades Marx’s own contribution to the history of “fetishism”. While Marx does not linger upon the sexual or desirous dimensions of the “fetish”, he clearly emphasises the irrational and materialistic ones. He echoes de Brosses by discussing “tribal religions” whose “immaturity” causes them to misapprehend the true nature of the value they ascribe to commodities (as Marx puts it, there is a “veil” obscuring this true nature).⁷² This veil is removed when the “practical relations” between “man and man” and “man and nature” finally “present themselves [...] in a transparent and *rational* form”.⁷³

Here, it is a rational assessment of social relations (one guided by “the light of reason”) that lifts the fetishistic veil, distinguishing a mature perspective from a “tribal” one. Crucially, for Marx, the “tribal” perspective clearly entails believing in falsehoods, and

⁷¹ Donald L. Donham, *The Erotics of History: An Atlantic African Example* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 29.

⁷² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 173.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

his borrowing of the “fetish” idea to illustrate this point capitalises upon established associations between African idolatry, unchecked carnality, and the neglect of reason. As Jane Bennett states the case (using terms that reflect her period):

The phrase “commodity fetishism” now seems to draw some of its power from an image of the masses in Western Europe as creatures who bear the repulsive trace of the African savage. Its drama aligns the primitive with the negro, the negro with pagan animism, animism with delusion and passivity, passivity with commodity culture.⁷⁴

The anthropologist J. Lorand Matory provides an even franker assessment: “Marx poetically declares, in effect, you must be *as confused as an African* if you don’t believe his definition of the real nature of value”.⁷⁵

I discuss Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism in greater depth in the next chapter on *Midas* (where trade and economic value are core concerns). At this stage, it suffices to say that there are common associations between desire, irrationality, and false religion that have been used to characterise idolaters and fetishists alike, from the epistles of Paul to the insights of Marx. This is a normative, exclusionary image, intended to elevate the rational and the civilised above the deluded and barbaric. Significantly, both rely upon some version of the “Mosaic distinction”, believing the irrational Other to have substituted the “truth” for a “lie”, an act with ethical and theological implications. Equally

⁷⁴ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 118.

⁷⁵ J. Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Croydon: Duke University Press, 2018), 80.

applicable to groups as disparate as first-century Gentiles, sixteenth-century playgoers, German economists, and even entire African nations, the exclusionary binaries arguably originating within early Judaism have exerted an enormous and lasting influence upon the European imagination.

Of course, the specific category error changes across time, but the iconoclast and the ideology critic both posit a confused Other who is essentially viewing the world “upside down”. For Paul, the idolater confuses “God” for an “image”; for Munday, the playgoer confuses “follie” for the estimable; for Marx, the fetishist confuses contingent “relations” for intrinsic value. Again, all of these mistakes suggest an inaccuracy, a simple ascription of “truth-value” to a false proposition. On this view, the traditional “critical-ideological procedure” corrects “the falsehood” in question by demonstrating, via a “rational” process, that the fetishistic belief is incorrect. However, Sloterdijk’s theory of “enlightened false consciousness” reveals precisely that the fetishistic mindset does not necessarily uphold the “principle of non-contradiction”. It is *because* fetishists are irrational that they might harbour a belief with the form $x = \text{true and false}$, a contradictory proposition that is unsusceptible to rational critique. When told that their fetish is “false”, the fetishist can simply reply: I know.

In the following section, I will argue that Lyly explores the possibility of contradictory belief states (and their relationship to “idolatry”) throughout *Sappho and Phao*. By persistently undermining the faculty of “reason” and aligning “worship” with both “desire” and contradictory belief states, Lyly characterises Sappho as an idol: a false goddess who manipulates her subjects’ desires and embodies a contradiction. In essence,

I argue that *Sappho and Phao* draws its spectators into an irrational and idolatrous space, in which they are willing to forgo the principle of non-contradiction and accept that Sappho = Venus. This aspect of *Sappho and Phao* only becomes explicable when one recognises that Lyly's various subplots are mutual reinforcements of the play's obvious, central preoccupation: "idolatry".

Reason, Truth, and Contradiction in Lyly's Syracuse

By the end of *Sappho and Phao*, the contradictory beliefs of Lyly's characters are explicit and evident. However, there are various clues scattered throughout the play that "truth and falsity" is not an easy or straightforward binary in Lyly's Syracuse. The easiest way to perceive this is to chart the various evocations of "truth" throughout the play, a concept that becomes increasingly problematised as the plot develops. The concept is first introduced to the play in Act One, Scene Two, when the Courtier Pandion and the philosopher Trachinus engage in an argument concerning the relative merits of academic and Court life. Even at this early stage of the action, the connotations of "truth" are somewhat unexpected, and they further the case for detecting an equivalence (or interchangeability) between Sappho and Venus.

Trachinus opens the debate by figuring the opposition between Court and university in such a way as to imply a corollary opposition between Sappho and "Venus". As he says of the Court:

Here are times in perfection, not by device, as fables, but in execution, as truths.
Believe me, Pandion, in Athens you have but tombs, we in courts the bodies, you
the pictures of Venus and the wise goddesses, we the persons and the virtues.
(1.2.18-22)

This speech clearly reflects many of the binaries underlying anti-idolatry rhetoric in the period. Moreover, it relies upon an implied opposition between “truth and falsity” that maps onto the distinctions between reality/images and living/dead that pervaded much Christian iconoclastic discourse. By characterising the Court as home to living “bodies” and “persons” (and the university as a “tomb” populated with dead “pictures” and “fables”), Trachinus echoes the logic apparent in the Elizabethan *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* (1571), which explicitly opposes “True religion” against the false worship of “dumb and dead images”.⁷⁶ I discuss the iconoclastic binary between the living and the “dead” in depth in my chapter on *Love’s Metamorphosis*. Here, it suffices to note that Trachinus introduces “truth” into *Sappho and Phao* by conventionally differentiating “dead”, pagan idols (“Venus” and her “goddesses”) from the “True religion” associated with the living “bodies” and “persons” at Sappho’s Court.

Trachinus’ characterisation of Sappho’s Court as embodying a “truth” that sets it apart from the false realm of Venus initially suggests a typical opposition between a virtuous, legitimate sovereign and an idolatrous pagan deity (in the vein of *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses*). I might have expected this opposition to map onto the “reason”/“desire”

⁷⁶ ‘Homily Against Peril of Idolatry and Superfluous Decking of Churches’ in *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed To Be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1864), 179-284 (281).

binary evident elsewhere in the play. However, an easy identification of Sappho with “truth” (or “reason”) is belied by the remainder of this scene. Most tellingly, Trachinus consistently aligns Court life (which supposedly exemplifies “truth”) with alluring beauty and romantic desire. Sappho is “fair” and “beautiful” (1.2.7, 10) and her Court is full of “fair ladies” with “fair faces” (1.2.11-12) - a fact that Trachinus brings up again later in the same scene (1.2.61). In the context of a play that elsewhere insists that beauty and desire cause one’s thoughts to “swerve from reason”, this early characterisation of Sappho’s Court as embodying both “truth” and “beauty” already subtly prizes “truth” and “reason” apart.

This suggestion is made more explicit later in the same exchange, when Trachinus and Pandion introduce the concept of “judgement” into their debate, a faculty that has historically been associated with rationality. Trachinus brings his defence of the Court to a close by asking Pandion: “Why then you conclude with me that Sappho for virtue hath no co-partner” (1.2.53-4), to which Pandion responds: “Yea, and with the *judgement* of the world that she is without comparison” (1.2.55-6, my emphasis). Contrary to Trachinus’ earlier emphasis upon Sappho’s “beauty”, this moment of agreement between the courtier and philosopher appears to align the reverence of Sappho with a *rational* faculty. It should be recalled Aristotle’s view that rational “demonstration” allows a person to arrive at “valid *judgements*”. The faculty of “judgement” is also associated with both reason and “truth” in Aristotle’s *The Nicomachean Ethics*, where he states that “correct judgement is that which judges what is *true*”.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 113.

However, the precise relationship between “judgement” and “truth” is somewhat murky in Aristotle’s work. The philosopher actually expresses reservations about the epistemic efficacy of “judgement” in another passage from *The Nicomachean Ethics*:

Let it be assumed that the states by virtue of which the soul possesses truth by way of affirmation or denial are five in number, i.e. art, scientific knowledge, practical wisdom, philosophic wisdom, intuitive reason; we do not include judgement and opinion because in these we may be mistaken.⁷⁸

The precise differences between these five faculties are subtle; I will not pursue them here.⁷⁹ It suffices to note that Aristotle packages “judgement” and “opinion” together because the former faculty concerns a subjective discrimination, or an adjudication between two competing truth claims. Such adjudication “may be mistaken” precisely because the judge’s final choice depends upon factors other than whether or not their reasoning is valid (including the prior beliefs of the judge and their emotional state at the time of judging).

In early modern English culture, the robustness of “judgement” was frequently interrogated, even as writers associated the faculty with “reason” and juxtaposed it with “passions”. In the Prologue to Thomas Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon* is the following description: “These Wonders sit and see, sending as guides | Your Iudgement, not your

⁷⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁷⁹ For a good account of these five virtues and their centrality to “reason”, see Takatura Ando, *Aristotle’s Theory of Practical Cognition*, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 13.

passions: passion slides, | When Iudgement goes vpright”.⁸⁰ Dekker’s formulation implies a firm division between “Iudgement” and “passion”, with the former characterised as immovable, impartial, and fixed. However, other early modern texts articulate the potential fallibility of “judgement”. In William Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part Three*, the character Bona speaks the line: “Mine ear hath tempted judgement to desire” (3 *Henry VI*, 3.3.133).⁸¹ This line is glossed by the editor Randall Martin as implying a conventional opposition between reason and desire, though the content of Bona’s speech clearly undermines this binary even as it suggests it: Bona’s “judgement” is complaisant and easily transformed into “desire”.⁸² Such an account is echoed several decades later in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1674), where Adam receives the following advice: “take heed lest passion sway | Thy judgement”.⁸³

However one chooses to interpret these various allusions to “judgement”, there has never existed a stable, unanimously agreed-upon definition of the concept. While texts like Aristotle’s, Dekker’s, Shakespeare’s, and Milton’s above fundamentally agree that “judgement” *can* be an accurate epistemic faculty (and one superior to “desire”), seventeenth-century philosophers like René Descartes and David Hume both use the limitations of “judgement” (and “reason” more generally) to argue for the inevitable centrality of desire and passion to the formation of truth claims.⁸⁴ In other words, these

⁸⁰ Thomas Dekker, *The Vvhore of Babylon As It Was Acted by the Princes Seruants. Written by Thomas Dekker*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Nathaniel Butter, 1607), A3r.

⁸¹ William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part Three*, ed. Randall Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.3.133.fn.

⁸³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Books, 2000), VIII.636.

⁸⁴ Although widely remembered as an arch sceptic, Descartes’ deconstructive project in *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* (1641) was undertaken as a first step towards constructing an epistemology that might weather sceptical criticism. One of his next major projects after *Meditationes* was *Les Passions De L’âme* (1649), a treatise on the centrality of the passions to human knowledge and action. For a broad, introductory reading of Descartes’ contribution to the history of scepticism, see Gail Fine, ‘Descartes and Ancient Skepticism: Reheated Cabbage?’ in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 109, No. 2 (April 2000), 195-234.

ideas are all in flux during Lyly's lifetime. What is certainly true is that "judgement" was typically associated with rationality and opposed to "desire". I believe that these connotations of the word are present in *Sappho and Phao*, though an analysis of Trachinus and Pandion's employment of the word constitutes a subtle critique of its efficacy: a critique that is hugely significant given the philosopher Pandion's view that it is "judgement" that determines Sappho's superiority, instead of her oft-cited "beauty".

This critique begins immediately following the above exchange, when Trachinus teasingly asks Pandion if he enjoys "the ladies" at the university (1.2.61). The philosopher responds in the negative, prompting an incredulous Trachinus to remark: "Yet am I sure that in *judgement* you are not so severe but that you can be content to allow of beauty by day or by night" (1.2.64-6, my emphasis). Pandion's response to this rhetorical question constitutes an elaboration upon the notion of "judgement" that problematises his evocation of the concept a mere twelve lines earlier. As Pandion says:

When I behold beauty before the sun, his beams dim beauty; when by candle,
beauty obscures torchlight; so as no time I can judge, because at any time I cannot
discern, being in the sun a brightness to shadow beauty and in beauty a glistering
to extinguish light. (1.2.67-71)

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), the naturalist philosopher David Hume famously wrote that "reason is, and ought to be the slave of the passions". Hume was responding to a philosophical tradition in which desire and passion were associated with "blindness, unconstancy, and deceitfulness" (nowhere more so than in the English reception history of Cupid). These currents in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy attest to the highly unstable relationships between judgement, reason, and desire throughout history. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest C. Mossner (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 460.

Pandion recognises that the ability to cast accurate judgements (to “judge”) is entirely dependent upon a sensory apparatus extremely vulnerable to “beauty”. The implication of his speech is that sensory input (whether physical or aesthetic, “light” or “beauty”) can overwhelm one’s rational “judgement”, a thesis that the remainder of the play insists upon. Pandion’s view that “beauty” might have deleterious effect upon one’s ability to “judge” is relevant to Trachinus’ description of Sappho as “beautiful” in the same scene, but also to the play’s wider thesis that “beauty” is the primary cause of its characters’ desires and “worship”.

This early scene suggests that Sappho’s elevation is due both to her “fair” features and the “judgement” of her subjects. However, the same scene implies that “judgement” itself might be hostage to “beauty” (as in *Henry VI Part Three*), a proposition that further suggests that the “wonder and worship” Sappho commands has more to do with the “desire” of her subjects, as opposed to their “reason”. In short, Lyly has drawn another subtle equivalence between Sappho and Venus, associating both with irrational desire. This complicates Trachinus’ initial juxtaposition of the “truth” residing at Sappho’s Court with the idolatrous “tomb” of the university and its pictures of “Venus”. If his speech does contain traces of the logic apparent in the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry*, his subsequent dialogue with Pandion utterly discredits the view that Sappho represents rational “judgement” (“True religion”) as opposed to the idolatrous paganism symbolised by Venus. In other words, *Sappho and Phao* does not straightforwardly replicate the logic underlying such artworks as *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses* or Churchyard’s royal entertainment. There are no intuitive, undemanding oppositions between “eros” and “chastity”, or “desire” and “reason”, in *Sappho and Phao*. Lyly’s treatments of rationality,

desire, and “truth” are far too ambiguous and interrogative to sustain such an interpretation.

In particular, the concept of “truth” recurs throughout the play in a number of surprising and complex contexts. Significantly, the word is spoken again in Act Three, during a heated dialogue between Phao and Venus. The goddess has succumbed to Phao’s “fair” (3.4.92) features and begs him to reciprocate her desires. She promises to teach him how to “dissemble” (3.4.97) if he will join her, a suggestion that Phao rejects: “I will learn anything but dissembling [...] Because then I must learn to be a woman” (3.4.98, 100). The goddess argues that Phao heard that “dissembl[ing]” is a uniquely feminine trait from a man, to which the latter responds: “Men speak truth” (3.4.98, 100, 102). Venus retorts: “But truth is a she, and so always painted” (3.4.104). As Patricia Phillippy points out, invectives against female face painting were reflections of the sixteenth century’s “pervasive and multifaceted misogyny”, and often constituted accusations of fraud, “the concern that cosmetics might disguise the face to deceive onlookers”.⁸⁵ More recently, Andrea Stevens has read The Lady’s reluctance to use makeup at the beginning of Thomas Middleton’s *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy* as exemplifying a “resistance to idolatrous or unchaste adornment”.⁸⁶ In early modern culture, “painted” women were sometimes described as deceivers, false people whose attempts to “disguise” their faces constituted a perversion of the “truth”.

⁸⁵ Patricia Phillippy, *Painting Women: Cosmetics, Canvases, and Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 23-4.

⁸⁶ Andrea Stevens, *Inventions of the Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 122.

While this is one dimension to the scene in Lyly's play, I also find the notion that "truth" itself is "painted" revealing. By evoking "truth" as a noun, Lyly gestures beyond the issue of multiple women using "cosmetics" and instead provokes the figure of "truth" herself, who was one of the four daughters of God alluded to in *Psalms* to Lyly's audience members. In the relevant Scriptural passage, the four daughters (each a personified virtue) are Mercy, Righteousness, Peace, and Truth.⁸⁷ When featured together, these four virtues represented the "Reconciliation of the Heavenly Virtues", an iconographic trope that appeared "inscribed on the inner wall of St. Paul's Cathedral" and is used to frame an image of Queen Elizabeth herself on the frontispiece of Christopher Saxton's *Atlas of the Countries of England and Wales* (first published in 1579).⁸⁸

However, "Truth" had a much more elevated and conspicuous place within medieval and early modern English culture than her heavenly sisters did. While all four figures appeared together in the medieval narrative poem *Piers Plowman* (1370), the morality play *The Castle of Perseverance* (1405), and a section of the N-Town cycle *Ludus Coventriae* entitled *Parliament of Heaven*, it is "Truth" who receives the most attention during Elizabeth's reign.⁸⁹ The figure functioned as a useful metonym for royal power because of her obvious association with "the light of reason" and appropriate worship.

⁸⁷ *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Psalms 85.

⁸⁸ Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 160; Christopher Saxton, *Atlas of the Counties of England and Wales*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: s.n., 1580), Title Page.

⁸⁹ William Langland, *The vision of pierce Plowman nowe the second time imprinted by Roberte Crowleye dwellynge in Elye rentes in Holburne whereunto are added certayne notes and cotations in the mergyne, geuyng light to the reader*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: R. Grafton, 1550); *The Castle of Perseverance*, ed. David N. Klausner (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010); *Ludus Coventriae: A Collection of Mysteries, Formerly Represented at Coventry on the Feast of Corpus Christi*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell-Phillips (London: The Shakespeare Society, 1841).

Indeed, the redemptive “Veritas” described in *Parliament of Heaven* is implicitly associated with the principle of non-contradiction. The relevant passage reads:

Veritas Lord, I am thi dowtere Trewth.

[...] Whan Adam had synnyd, thu seydest thore

That he schulde deye and go to helle.

And now, to blysse hym to resstore -

Twey contraryes mow not togedyr dwelle.⁹⁰

“Trewth” separates “contraryes”, generating clarity through a process of conceptual division, a connotation of the figure that aligns her with “right reason”.

Across the reigns of both Queen Mary I and Elizabeth, this “Trewth” became a significant symbol within royal iconography. The motto *Veritas Temporis Filia* (“Truth the Daughter of Time”) was used by both Queens.⁹¹ In the context of Mary’s reign, this motto was intended to signify a return to the “true” religion of Catholicism.⁹² In this vein, a 1553 royal entertainment entitled *Respublica* depicts the Four Daughters of God (Misericordia, Veritas, Iusticia, and Pax) attempting to reform a Republic that has fallen under the sway of Avarice, Oppression, Adulation, and Insolence.⁹³ During Queen Elizabeth’s reign, the

⁹⁰ ‘Play 11, Parliament of Heaven; Salutation and Conceptions’ in *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 57-64.

⁹¹ John N. King, ‘The Godly Woman in Elizabethan Iconography’ in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring 1985), 41-84 (67).

For accounts of how this emblem proliferated in English theatrical culture throughout Elizabeth’s reign, see Soji Iwasaki, ‘“Veritas Filia Temporis” and Shakespeare’ in *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 1973), 249-263; Dawn Massey, ‘“Veritas filia Temporis”: Apocalyptic Polemics in the Drama of the English Reformation’ in *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring 1998), 146-175.

⁹² Donald Gordon, ‘“Veritas Filia Temporis”: Hadrianus Junius and Geoffrey Whitney’ in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 3, No. 3/4 (April-July 1940), 228-240 (228).

⁹³ *Ibid.*

above motto was recycled and the figure of “Veritas” reappeared in royal entertainments. A 1559 royal entry for Elizabeth I included “a girl costumed as Veritas” who presented the Queen with “an English Bible” or “*Verbum veritatis*, the woorde of trueth”.⁹⁴ In short, both women clearly relied upon the figure of “Trewth” to legitimate their authority and to characterise opponents to the sovereign as implicitly false.

The female “truth” to which Lyly’s Venus refers constitutes an allusion to a figure that was associated with both reason and the reign of Queen Elizabeth. However, once again Lyly’s flattery of his sovereign is characterised by ambiguity and dissonance. One might have expected *Sappho* to evoke the authority of “truth” at the play’s close, aligning her with the rationality and clear “judgement” used to validate Elizabeth elsewhere. Instead, it is Venus, and not Sappho, who evokes the authority of “truth”, and she does so in the context of attempting to convince Phao to “dissemble”. The contradictions here are startling. This dramatic choice aligns “truth” with an exemplar of pagan idolatry, but also further aligns the concept with deception and falsehood as opposed to virtue and transparency.

The figure of “Trewth” is undermined yet further in this scene by Phao’s final response, a line that brings his discussion with Venus to a close and recalls the earlier exchange between Trachinus and Pandion. Acknowledging the iconographic tradition to which Venus refers, Phao answers laconically: “I think, a painted truth” (3.4.104). Playing on the double meaning of “painted” (both made with paint and feigned or counterfeited), Phao reduces the concept of “truth” to a mere image. Where Trachinus’ speech echoed

⁹⁴ King, ‘The Godly Woman in Elizabethan Iconography’, 67.

the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* in order to align “truths” with the living and oppose them to dead, pagan idols, this scene suggests the complete opposite. Here, “truth” is figured as an insubstantial idol, akin to “the pictures of Venus and the wise goddesses” to be found in the “tomb” of the university. By deploying the standard, misogynistic perception of women as “false”, Phao suggests that the benchmark of rational thought (“truth” itself) is its opposite: a painted idol, something *false*.

It should be recalled here that Phao is currently in the thrall of his desires – his exchange with Venus above occurs not long after he has declared that his “mounting affections” cause him to commit “idolatry”. One might read his counter-intuitive perception of “truth” as a symptom of his currently idolatrous mindset: precisely as Paul’s idolater perceives “nothing” as though it were something, so Phao views “truth” as though it were false. The view that one’s excessive desires might result in both an abdication of reason and a corresponding misapprehension of the “truth” is confirmed by Venus in the play’s final Act, where the “truth” is evoked yet again. As she plans how to “obtain” (5.1.58) Phao, Venus delivers the following remark: “there is as little truth to be used in love as there is reason” (5.1.56-7). This formulation explicitly aligns “truth” with “reason”, though it imagines that both concepts are undermined by the desires and drives of this play’s characters.⁹⁵ Venus’ remark here essentially qualifies her earlier dispute with Phao – to the irrational, desirous characters in Lyly’s *Syracuse* (a community turned “upside

⁹⁵ It ought to be noted that Venus is here discussing the “cunning” (5.1.53) and “unlawfulness” (5.1.52-3) of her scheme to “obtain” Phao. As such, the “truth” to which she refers primarily carries an ethical (instead of overtly epistemological) connotation. Here “truth” refers to “honesty, uprightness, righteousness”. However, this ethical construal of the concept still evokes the epistemic binary of ‘true’/‘false’ – the honest, upright person is one committed to “truthfulness [and] veracity”. ‘Truth, n. and Adv. (and Int.)’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/207026>> [accessed 4 October 2020].

down” by “beauty”), the “Trewth” might as well be a painted idol; what is true will be perceived as false.

By this stage, I hope to have demonstrated that “truth” and “reason” are difficult, unstable concepts as they appear in *Sappho and Phao*. The ambivalence of the play on these issues is evident in even the briefest of subplot exchanges. Trachinus aligns “truths” with “beauty” and desire, Pandion undermines the reliability of “judgment”, Molus deploys faulty syllogisms in order to confuse and mislead, Phao reduces “truth” to a “painted” idol, and Venus confirms that “truth” and “reason” are inevitably elusive where desires provoked by “beauty” are concerned.⁹⁶ Each of these episodes contribute to an overall sense that rationality is either absent or insufficient in Lyly’s Syracuse, that his characters absolutely do inhabit a “kingdome of Venus”, despite their loyalty to Sappho. However, the truly fascinating dimension to Lyly’s treatment of irrationality in *Sappho and Phao* is its suggestion that those characters who have abandoned “truth” and “reason” are capable of holding *contradictory* beliefs. While Phao’s perception of “truth” as false implies an inversion of the kind described by iconoclasts and ideology critics – where the “truth” is straightforwardly substituted for a “lie” – Lyly elsewhere implies that both Phao and Sappho experience contradictory psychological states.

This is suggested most explicitly in Act Three, when a lovesick Sappho describes her confused epistemic state in contradictory terms: “Glutting myself on the face of Phao, I have made my desire more desperate [...] and my desires, the more they swerve from

⁹⁶ Although Venus uses the word “love” in her speech, she is referring to her own desire for Phao, a desire that, like almost all of those in this play, is characterised as irrational and was provoked by an encounter with “beauty”.

reason, the more seem they reasonable” (3.3.109-110, 114-116). This speech once again echoes the conventional opposition of “reason” and “desire” and it also wonderfully conveys contradictory beliefs. Through his formal construction of Sappho’s speech, Lyly produces a perfect summation of irrationality itself: Sappho simultaneously signals her awareness that her “desires” are irrational (they swerve from “reason”), and yet suggests that these same “desires” *appear “reasonable” to her*. The effect is to suggest a person who knows consciously that a belief he holds to be true is, in fact, false. For Sappho, her desires = rational *and* irrational, a contradiction that betrays her abandonment of the Aristotelian principle underpinning all rational thought.

Lyly provides further clues throughout *Sappho and Phao* that “desires” occasion contradictory belief states. At the beginning of Act Two, a despondent Phao, now having fallen hopelessly in love with Sappho, delivers the following speech: “What unacquainted thoughts are these, Phao, far unfit for thy thoughts, unmeet for thy birth, thy fortune [...] canst thou not be content to behold the sun, but thou must covet to build thy nest in the sun?” (2.4.1-5). This speech merely hints at the contradictory beliefs Phao reveals himself to possess later in the same speech. It does so through its differentiation between Phao’s “thoughts” and “unacquainted thoughts”, suggesting a process of psychological division analogous to Sappho’s above. Phao’s “unacquainted thoughts” are precisely his newfound “desires” – the drives and urges that compel him to “build [his] nest in the sun”. His reluctant ownership of these desirous “thoughts”, alongside his attempt to distinguish them from the “thoughts” he *is* content to identify as his own, begins to suggest a situation in which one simultaneously believes something and yet renounces it.

I have already suggested that the ambiguities inherent to Phao's speech about "committing idolatry" hint at a troubling equivalence between Sappho and Venus. More significantly, whoever one imagines "that god" to be, Phao's speech is constructed like Sappho's contradictory formulation above. The contradiction here pertains to Phao's perception of his "love" as simultaneously "god" and "idol". While he expresses an awareness that his object of worship is an illusory "idol" (that has "carried" him from himself), he remains psychologically committed to viewing it as though it were a "god". Hence the paradoxical formulation in his rhetorical question: Phao is committing *idolatry* with a *god* capable of being *blasphemed*. In a single, breathtakingly brief sentence, Lyly beautifully and subtly conveys the contradictory experience of irrationality entailed by Phao's "idolatry".

In short, Lyly's language in these scenes suggests an awareness that irrationality corresponds to an abandonment of the principle of non-contradiction; the irrational beliefs of his characters are false, but also paradoxical. The potential interchangeability of Venus and Sappho, the undermining of "reason" that recurs throughout the play, and the suggestion that irrationality entails contradictory belief states, are all relevant to an understanding of the play's conclusion. These various thematic threads reach a crescendo in the final two scenes of the play, in which the contest between Venus and Sappho is decided, and a dejected Phao evokes "truth" (5.3.8) for the last time, before leaving Syracuse and bringing the play to a close. To appreciate the significance of the concept's terminal appearance, it is necessary to consider the nature of Sappho's triumph over Venus in the preceding scene.

Lyly initially indicates that Sappho's victory is predicated upon her substituting her "desires" for "reason", though this suggestion is immediately qualified. Moments before Venus arrives onstage for the final time, the waiting-woman Mileta asks Sappho if she continues to love Phao. Sappho responds: "No, I feel relenting thoughts, and reason not yielding to appetite" (5.2.39-40). While one might be tempted to read this moment as signifying the triumph of chaste rationalism over base "desires" and "appetite[s]", Lyly immediately qualifies Sappho's resumption of "reason" by having her decide to adopt Cupid. Addressing an offstage Venus, Sappho articulates her strategic thought process: "But if I get Cupid from thee, I myself will be the queen of love" (5.2.27-8). Charmed by the Sappho, Cupid announces "I will be Sappho's *son*" (5.2.57, my emphasis). Though Sappho claims that she has returned to "reason", both Venus and Lyly's audience are confronted with the image of a victor who takes over Venus' maternal role by adopting her "son", but also explicitly states a desire to "be the queen of *love*". Again, this feels less like someone transcending Venus and more like someone consciously stepping into her shoes: a rather different pill to swallow in the context of an Elizabethan flattery piece.

Moreover, the symbolic imagery of this penultimate scene further problematises the nature of Sappho's triumph. On the basis of Venus' observation that Cupid sits "in Sappho's lap" (5.2.51), Bevington includes a stage direction in his edition of the play (following Bond) that reads: "[Enter CUPID. *He climbs onto Sappho's lap*]" (5.2.41.sd). As I have already mentioned, *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses* depicts Cupid clinging to Venus' lap. The moment also echoes a famous image from Virgil's *Aeneid*. In this poem, Venus opposes herself to the mortal Queen of Carthage, Dido. The goddess instructs Cupid to feign Ascanius' features in order to get close to her rival. She continues:

“when Dido takes you in her lap, oh so blissful, | Hugs and cuddles you, plants on your forehead a few tender kisses | You can rouse unseen fire, deceive her with venomous love-draughts”.⁹⁷

If there is a comparison here between Sappho and Dido, it is not a flattering one. As Jan L. De Jong writes, Dido “was revived in the Renaissance as a warning example against irresponsible behaviour, as a woman whose temptations keep man from reaching his higher goal”.⁹⁸ Dido is a symbol of “temptations”, but also Cupid is sent to “deceive” her. In other words, a Sappho who is analogous to Dido is one who embodies “irresponsible behaviour”, but also whose newfound “son” may remove her “reason” (and “rouse unseen fire”) at any moment. In 2007, Annaliese Connolly argued that “Lyly suggests the Virgilian icon of Dido and Cupid in his penultimate scene to highlight how unlike Dido his Sappho is [...] in the service of royal flattery”.⁹⁹ Connolly’s reading is only persuasive if one agrees with the presupposition that Lyly’s intention is to “flatter”. The suggestion of an analogy between Sappho and Dido simply underscores the point Lyly makes everywhere throughout this play: Sappho is not an exemplar of “reason” and nor is she above the same destructive desires traditionally associated with Venus.

The final symbol that Cupid in Sappho’s lap might recall is not Classical, but Christian: that of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus. Theodora Jankowski advocated this reading

⁹⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. Frederick Ahl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.673-674.

⁹⁸ Jan L. De Jong, ‘Dido in Italian Renaissance Art. The Afterlife of a Tragic Heroine’ in *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 30, No. 59 (2009), 73-89 (87).

⁹⁹ Annaliese Connolly, ‘Evaluating Virginité: A Midsummer Night’s Dream and the Iconography of Marriage’ in *Goddesses and Queens: The Iconography of Elizabeth I*, ed. Annaliese Connolly and Lisa Hopkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 136-154 (142).

in *The Subversion of Flattery*, where she also recognised the theological implications of such symbolism in an Anglican context. As she writes:

Sappho [...] would seem to represent the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus, a reference to a Catholic image already removed from Anglican churches. Thus Sappho's representation as a deposed religious icon can also suggest the problem of Elizabeth's position as powerful woman within England. Suggesting she draws her power from a Roman Catholic icon would cast doubt upon her own political power, especially since Catholic icons had already been removed from Anglican churches.¹⁰⁰

Once again, the potential symbolism here portrays Sappho as a severely problematic "icon" that might be interpreted as worryingly pagan or even dangerously "Catholic". Jankowski further suggests that Sappho's adoption of Cupid, alongside her symbolic echo of an idolatrous Catholic "icon" ultimately expresses that she is incapable of "controlling her womanish/irrational emotions".¹⁰¹ In sum, whether Sappho symbolically reflects Venus, Dido, or Mary, the triumphant image of this mortal Queen holding Cupid in her lap impedes any attempt to read Lyly's conclusion as a straight celebration of rationality's victory over "vile affections".

While the three symbolic echoes surveyed above mutually reinforce one another's implication (that Sappho embodies irrationality and "temptations"), I am specifically

¹⁰⁰ Theodora A. Jankowski, *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications), 32.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

interested in Lyly's suggestion that Sappho is a pseudo-Venus. This proposition is suggested throughout an aggressive exchange between the deposed Venus and the new "queen of love". As I have already suggested, Venus does not accept Sappho's triumph; unlike Peele's version of the goddess in *The Arraignment of Paris*, Lyly's Venus insists upon her rightful title and scoffs at Sappho's blasphemous attempts to replace her. Upon encountering the image of her treasonous son sitting on Sappho's lap, Venus remarks: "What have we here? You the goddess of love? And you her son, Cupid? I will tame that proud heart, else shall the gods say they are not Venus' friends". (5.2.76-78). Precisely as Venus intended to "yoke the neck" that yet never bowed at the play's opening, she remains resolved to "tame [Sappho's] proud heart" by its close. Moreover, her rhetorical questions illuminate the absurdity and contingency of Sappho's new identity. By allowing Venus to comment upon Sappho's triumph, Lyly draws attention to the fact that Sappho is clearly *not* "the goddess of love", and nor is Cupid her rightful "son".

The truly significant moment occurs a few lines later, when an incredulous Venus states: "I cry you mercy, I think you would be called a goddess – you shall know what it is to usurp the name of Venus" (5.2.84-6). This speech brings me to the crux of this chapter's argument. The oppositions mobilised throughout Lyly's play (between Venus and Sappho, between "desire" and "reason") are ostensibly resolved when Sappho "usurp[s] the name of Venus". In order for this resolution to register as satisfactory, Lyly's audience must accept the proposition that Sappho is now "a goddess" and a new "Venus". However, the onstage appearance of Venus herself (the *real* goddess of love) complicates this formula. While the audience are encouraged to accept Sappho's usurpation as the desirable culmination to this narrative, they are simultaneously confronted with the

obvious fact that Sappho *is not* Venus. In order to indulge this epistemic double-bind, the audience must forgo their own rationality, allowing themselves to accept a glaringly contradictory formula: Sappho both *is and is not* “Venus”.

I believe that the irrationality of Sappho’s triumph is underlined by the play’s final evocation of “truth” in the following, concluding scene. Once Sappho, Venus, and Cupid have vacated the stage, Phao and Sibylla are afforded a final exchange before the play’s close, in which the former character bemoans his unfortunate state. Phao continues to love Sappho, who now disdains him, and so he feels compelled to leave Syracuse. In a moment of self-pity, he asks Sibylla: “if Venus be unfaithful in love, where shall one fly for truth?” (5.3.7-8). The implied parallel between infidelity and “truth” in this speech suggests that the latter primarily connotes honesty and constancy, as opposed to epistemic accuracy. However, as in the case of Venus’ remark that there is “little truth to be used in love” (where “truth” primarily meant “honesty”, but was rhetorically aligned with “reason”), Phao’s final evocation of “truth” surely recalls the play’s consistent interest in the concept’s epistemological connotation. It should be recalled that the last line Phao spoke before returning in this final scene was “I think, a painted truth”. He exits the earlier scene upon the note of “truth” and immediately returns to the concept upon reassuming the stage. In other words, there is a clear psychological and thematic continuity here that invites close attention to Phao’s climactic speech.

The last time Phao used the word “truth”, he did so in order to dismiss the concept, to reduce the “truth” to a mere painting. By contrast, Phao now seeks to discover the “truth”, and I believe that this new endeavour accentuates the irrationality of the previous scene.

This becomes more apparent if one considers the rhetorical *form* of Phao's question alongside its content; doing so reveals yet another subtle invocation of the principle of non-contradiction. Phao's interrogative conditional ("if [...] where") functions because of an implied contradiction between Venus and the state of being "unfaithful in love". While Phao overtly refers to Venus' plan to remove Sappho's desire for him, his speech surely recalls the events of the previous scene, in which Sappho is referred to on different occasions as "the queen of *love*", "the goddess of *love*" (5.2.76), and "the new mistress of *love*" (5.2.83). In other words, Phao's speech draws attention to the contradictions at play in the preceding scene. If the true "goddess of love" and "love" itself have become detached (a contradiction in itself that is simply underscored by the further contradiction that Sappho might adopt the "name of Venus"), what can be known with certainty? This is a final attempt for reason, a panicked endeavour by Phao to discover "truth" in the midst of *contradiction*. In short, Phao's speech represents a longing for a world in which "contraryes mow not togedyr dwelle". It is telling that in the Epilogue to *Sappho and Phao*, Lyly felt compelled to compare his play to a "labyrinth", and to wish his audience "a thread to lead you out of the doubts wherewith we leave you intangled" (Epilogue, 3, 11-13). Lyly himself recognised that he had left his audience "intangled" in "doubts" by the play's close, that he had pulled away their epistemic footing and left them - like Phao - unable to discover truth without encountering contradiction.

By the climax of Lyly's plot, the audience of *Sappho and Phao* are confronted with two rather startling propositions: Sappho *is* Venus and "truth" is elusive. As such, *Sappho and Phao* constitutes an elaborate dramatisation of Sappho's formulation: "my desires, the more they swerve from reason, the more seem they reasonable". Lyly has manufactured

a play about “desire” that spends so long undermining “reason” and drawing equivalences between Sappho and Venus that its highly contradictory ending might seem, at first glance, “reasonable”. Such a perception is quickly belied by Venus’ opposition and Phao’s anxious questioning. However, it is precisely these latter features of the play’s climax that generate its irrational outcome: one in which, to quote G. K. Hunter’s assessment of *Campaspe*, “the contradictions remain *and are accepted*”.¹⁰²

I return now to the concept of “idolatry”. As I have suggested, the Judeo-Christian concept of “idolatry” typically encompasses irrationality, falsehoods, and excessive desire; this tradition’s iconoclasts would expect a pagan deity like Venus to provoke “idolatry”, “mounting affections”, and thoughts that “swerve from reason” simultaneously. Indeed, the figures of Cupid and Venus were metonymic for idolatry throughout sixteenth-century English culture, precisely because these deities could be used to represent desire, irrationality, and false worship all at once. Moreover, Christian iconoclasts recognised that “idolatry” entailed a misapprehension of the “truth”: a descent into an irrational, false worship in which lies appear true and *vice versa*. At first glance, *Sappho and Phao* might appear to express the rather conventional thesis that a community under the sway of Venus and Cupid will quickly abandon “reason” and “truth” and tumble into unbridled “affections” and “idolatry”.

However, Lyly’s play complicates such a reading by exploring the relationship between irrationality and *contradiction*. As the “foundation of all reasoning”, the principle of non-contradiction is an inevitable casualty of irrational “idolatry”. Lyly expertly portrays

¹⁰² G. K. Hunter, ‘Introduction to *Campaspe*’ in *Campaspe and Sappho and Phao*, ed. David Bevington and G. K. Hunter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 1-49 (18), my emphasis.

characters whose loss of “reason” results in contradictory belief states, in which they simultaneously believe a proposition to be true and false (as when Phao views “divine love” as simultaneously “idol” and “god”, or when Sappho views her thoughts as simultaneously “reasonable” and irrational). Ultimately, the play itself advances a contradictory proposition: that Sappho both is and is not “Venus”. In doing so, I contend that Lyly suggests that Sappho herself is an idol: an object of “worship” (a “goddess”) that can only be perceived as such given an abandonment of one’s “reason”. In short, *Sappho and Phao* replicates the irrational experience of “idolatry” by drawing its audience into an epistemic space in which they are compelled to accept a contradiction.

As in the case of *Campaspe*, the exploration of “idolatry” in *Sappho and Phao* can be read through the lens of scholarship on “fetishism”, particularly as the “fetish” concept similarly names an excessively desirous, irrational psychological state. Once again, Lyly’s play places its audience in the position of the cynical ideological subject, one who “knows the falsehood very well” but is yet compelled “not [to] renounce it”.¹⁰³ By connecting “idolatry” with a breakdown of the principle of non-contradiction, Lyly yet again problematises the “classical critical-ideological procedure”. This implication is much more explicit in *Sappho and Phao* than it was in *Campaspe*. In essence, Lyly’s Venus’ performs this classical “procedure” herself when she observes that Sappho is *not* “the goddess of love” and ought not to usurp her “name”. She explicitly points out the contradictions at play in Sappho’s elevation, as Phao indirectly does when he articulates the elusiveness of “truth” at the play’s close. Venus’ accusations fail to disabuse Sappho of her idolatrous intentions, but they actually *solidify* the latter’s idolisation, precisely by

¹⁰³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 29.

demonstrating the ineffectiveness of an “unmasking” critique. Sappho, like Alexander, survives her play’s iconoclasm with her divinity intact.

Lyly appears to walk a dangerous tightrope between venerating Queen Elizabeth and suggesting that she is an idol: an irrational object of worship no better than Venus. It is precisely Lyly’s sophisticated treatments of irrationality and contradiction that allow him to suggest that his sovereign is an idol. After all, Sappho both *is* and *isn’t* Venus, an ambiguity that prevents Lyly’s play from reading like a direct attack against the legitimacy of his Queen and the nature of the iconography produced to celebrate her. Whether or not that is the case, one can surely see here the seeds of “controversy” that Leah Scragg argued would eventually strip Lyly of his dramatic career.¹⁰⁴

To conclude this chapter, the centrality of “idolatry” to *Sappho and Phao* becomes clear when one recognises the relevance of desires and “reason” to historical understandings of the concept. Lyly consistently draws attention to these themes, inviting us to notice the relevance of “idolatry” to his portrayal of Sappho’s triumph. Furthermore, by aligning irrationality with contradiction, Lyly also demonstrates the difficulties that arise when an iconoclast (or ideology critic) employs the binary of “truth and falsity” in order to correct a contradictory worldview. As such, Lyly’s first two plays are thematically similar in many regards, and their depictions of mortals who aspire to divinity highlight the contradictions that such endeavours entail. Neither play wholly humanises its ruler, but nor does it indulge their aspirations to be “gods” or “goddesses” without serious qualification. When one recognises that accusations of “idolatry” typically involve

¹⁰⁴ Leah Scragg, ‘The Victim of Fashion? Rereading the Biography of John Lyly’ in *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol. 19 (2006), 210-226 (223).

asserting the ethical and ontological superiority of one set of concepts against another (“god” against “man”, “reason” against “desire”, “truth” against falsehood), the “doubleness” that characterises Lyly’s drama takes on a new, provocative significance. By producing artworks that mobilise these binaries but refuse to resolve them, Lyly draws attention both to the normative, “subjective” nature of iconoclasm and its fundamental insufficiency. Alexander and Sappho are exemplary idols insofar as they are contradictory entities. The failures of Chrysippus, Diogenes, Phao, or Venus to discredit these idols simply underscores the weaknesses of an iconoclasm that relies upon stark binary oppositions.

In essence, my readings of *Campaspe* and *Sappho and Phao* have been rather complementary. While these chapters did explore a *variety* of concepts relevant to idolatry and fetishism (paganism, hypocrisy, cynicism, desire, reason, truth), both readings fundamentally focused upon a mortal idol, a human who would “be thought a god”. As such, it might be said that this thesis is one comprised of two halves. The following two chapters, on *Midas* and *Love’s Metamorphosis*, do not focus upon a single, idolised ruler, but instead consider some of the broader practices specified by accusations of “idolatry” or “fetishism”. Specifically, the following chapter on *Midas* explores the idolatrous implications of treating gold as an end in itself, whereas my final chapter on *Love’s Metamorphosis* considers the relationship between “idolatry” and treating persons as though they were things or *vice versa*. Correspondingly, these chapters are not as generally interested in “false consciousness” or “cynical reason” as the above. Instead, they focus upon a narrower range of idolatrous or fetishistic errors, including mistaken attitudes towards economic value, personhood, and things. I commence the second half

of this thesis with *Midas*, a play in which “idolatry” is a subtle, yet colossally significant, theme.

CHAPTER III

Idolatry, Nature, and Commodity Fetishism in *Midas*

In John Lyly's *Midas*, the god Bacchus is so appreciative of the titular king's hospitality that he encourages the latter to "ask anything, it shall be granted" (1.1.8).¹ In Lyly's source text, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Midas requests the ability to turn everything he touches to gold. By contrast, Lyly's Midas is remarkably circumspect, postponing his wish to seek the guidance of his retinue. During the first speech Midas delivers onstage, he expresses wariness about potentially "desiring [...] against nature" (1.1.17-18). This statement introduces the concept of "nature" into a play that will employ the word (and its cognates) a further ten times across all five of its acts (1.1.51, 2.1.71, 2.1.99, 3.1.41, 3.1.60, 3.1.64, 3.3.99, 4.4.49, 5.2.87, 5.3.69). In Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of Ovid's version of the tale, "nature" does not feature at all.²

It appears that Lyly introduces the theme of "nature" into the Midas narrative, framing the king's infamous folly and greed with reference to an implied "natural"/"unnatural" distinction. Nature is a prominent character in Lyly's *The Woman in the Moon*, where she is described as "a sovereign Queen, and author of the world", the creator of "all that was, or is, or shall be framed" (1.1.31-2).³ As I discuss below, the belief that "all" things are

¹ John Lyly, 'Midas' in *Galatea and Midas*, ed. George K. Hunter and David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 152-259.

² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding, ed. Madeleine Forey (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 324-7.

³ John Lyly, *The Woman in the Moon*, ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

“framed” according to “nature” was often connected with Aristotelian teleology in the period, a philosophical outlook that was also mobilised to attack idolaters as behaving in a manner contrary to nature.

In the following chapter, I argue that Lyly characterises Midas’ worldview as fundamentally idolatrous. The idolatrous and the unnatural have been linked since the emergence of Judaism, and they often appeared alongside one another in early modern Christian discourse. Indeed, the phrase “against nature” itself appears in the anti-idolatry passage from *Romans* I cited in the previous chapter.⁴ To pronounce a person’s desire as being “against nature” in the context of sixteenth-century England was almost always to identify that person as an idolater.

However, while idolatry was consistently defined as unnatural in the period, the meaning of “nature” itself was markedly unstable during Lyly’s lifetime. In a Christian culture influenced by Aristotelian teleology, fascinated by the natural sciences, and working to assimilate encounters with foreign lands into a coherent national identity, the “natural” and the “unnatural” were extremely diffuse ideas. While one pamphlet uses the word to denote a celestial moral law, another employs it to refer to semen or menstrual blood.⁵ Where one writer perceives “nature” as a creative force moulding the material world into good working order, another regards “nature” as a wild, bestial landscape, as morally

⁴ *The Geneva Bible: Facsimile of the 1599 Edition*, ed. Michael H. Brown (Missouri: L. L. Brown Publishing, 1990), *Romans* 1:23, 25-6.

⁵ George Gascoigne, *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting VWherein Is Handled and Set out the Vertues, Nature, and Properties of Fiutene Sundrie Chaces Together, with the Order and Maner How to Hunte and Kill Euery One of Them*. *Early English Books 1475-1640* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1575), 186; Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes Describing the True and Liuely Figure of Euery Beast, with a Discourse of Their Seuerall Names, Conditions, Kindes, Vertues (Both Naturall and Medicinall)*. *Early English Books 1475-1640* (London: William Iaggard, 1607), Ddv.

unregenerate as literally uncultivated.⁶ These ambiguities have plagued me in the writing of this chapter.

In the following reading of *Midas*, I want to suggest that these ambiguities plague Lyly's narrative as well. Midas commits two mistakes in the course of the play's plot: he exhibits covetousness by desiring gold as an end in itself, and he judges Pan's "savage" and "barbarous" piping as being superior to Apollo's "soft music" (4.1.20, 28, 147). The structure of Lyly's play invites us to perceive both mistakes as "against nature", an invitation that critics have enthusiastically accepted: the contrast between these blunders has been consistently downplayed in *Midas* criticism in favour of reading both as manifestations of a single psychological defect. This is despite a critical tradition of characterising *Midas* as consisting of two seemingly unrelated halves. For example, even though Peter Saccio and Stephen Hilliard hold this view about *Midas*' structure, they both contend that the king's two mistakes are fundamentally the same; for Saccio, the king's judgement in the music contest is simply a "generalized version of his previous, more particular desires".⁷ For Hilliard, Midas' constant underlying error is the exercise of "tyranny".⁸ Leah Scragg does note some differences between Midas' mistakes, but she continues the critical trend by ultimately reading them both as mutual symptoms of the king's "corrupt" and "ambitio[us]" nature.⁹

⁶ John Bale, *A Comedy Concernynge Thre Lawes, of Nature Moses, & Christ, Corrupted by the Sodomytes. Pharysees and Papystes Compyled by Iohan Bale. Anno M. D. XXXVIII.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (Wesel: Nicolaum Bamburgensem, 1538), Aijr; Robert South, *A Sermon Preached before the Covrt at Christchurch Chappel in Oxford by Robert South.* Early English Books 1475-1640 (Oxford: W. H., 1665), B2r.

⁷ Peter Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly: A Study in Allegorical Dramaturgy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 196.

⁸ Stephen S. Hilliard, 'Lyly's Midas as an Allegory of Tyranny' in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1972), 243-258 (244).

⁹ Leah Scragg, 'John Lyly and the Politics of Language' in *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (2005), 17-38 (28).

I will argue that there are obvious *dissimilarities* between Midas' errors, and that these differences reveal some of the ambiguities underlying the concept of "nature" itself. In other words, precisely by implying that Midas' two mistakes are mutual "disruptions of natural order" (to quote Saccio), Lyly exposes the slipperiness, and even arbitrariness, of appeals to the "natural".¹⁰ It is my view that *Midas* transitions from an empirical, *descriptive* conception of "nature" to a conventional and ethically *prescriptive* one. This is most apparent when one considers the distinct defeaters to Midas' unnatural worldview in both halves of the play – a physical inability to digest gold is a very different confirmation of error than feelings of "shame" (5.1.1) provoked by a custodian of refined taste. This is a difference often overlooked by critics, who largely appear to agree that Midas requires, as Bevington puts it, "corrective punishment".¹¹ I suspect that scholars would approach the moral universes posited by contemporaneous plays like *The Jew of Malta* or *The Taming of the Shrew* with a great deal more vigilance. At the very least, I think scholars ought to hesitate before applauding the swift punitive actions of a god who casually throws around words like "savage" and "monster".

This chapter is composed of four sections. The first performs a close reading of *Midas*' opening scene, interpreting the king's desire for the golden touch in light of Aristotelian teleology, early modern idolatry discourse, and commodity fetishism. The second focuses upon a single speech delivered by Midas before he leaves the Court to find solace in the woods; I discuss the ways in which this speech problematises the stability of "nature", while also suggesting that Midas' desire to enter the woods is itself a return to nature

¹⁰ Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly*, 196.

¹¹ Bevington, 'Introduction to *Midas*', 131.

gesture in the manner of Diogenes or Timon of Athens. The third section considers the music contest episode, drawing attention to the opposition it dramatises between “nature” as moral order and “nature” as wild savagery. Building upon the observations of Michel de Montaigne and the scholarly work of Jonathan Dollimore, I argue that *Midas* works hard to naturalise its own aggressively normative, wholly conventional ethics and, judging by previous scholarship on this play, has been enormously successful in doing so.

“In this word ‘gold’ are all the powers of the gods”: Aristotle,
Marx, and the Idol of Money

Midas begins in the wake of a banquet hosted in honour of Bacchus. Grateful for his feast, the god invites Midas to ask for anything and it will be provided. Midas responds: “Give me leave to consult, lest, desiring things above my reach, I be fired with Phaethon; or against nature, and be drowned with Icarus” (1.1.16-18). The king asks his counsellors: “What wish may make Midas most happy, and his subjects best content?” (1.1.22-24). In a few short lines, Lyly utterly distinguishes his Midas from the king’s Ovidian counterpart, and he does so while employing recognisably Aristotelian language and concepts. Someone hesitant to desire “against nature”, and who prioritises “happ[iness]”, is behaving in accordance with Aristotelian teleology - a theory positing that objects and beings have an intrinsic “nature”, and that happiness ought to be the ultimate end of all human action.

Aristotle meticulously outlines his theory of “nature” in Book Two of *Physics*. He begins by identifying entities that exist “by nature” according to their possession of “a source of change and of stability”.¹² Such entities possess two “natures”, one referring to the underlying “material” substratum of their existence, and the other referring to “the shape and form which enables us to define what an object is”.¹³ Essentially, things that exist “by nature” are dually composed of natural matter and a natural form. For example, a table’s “matter” is oak wood, while its “form” is that of a table. It has a twofold “nature”: it is, “by nature”, oak wood, but it has “the nature” of a table.

For Aristotle, the “nature of a thing is its end or purpose” and in order to grasp this “purpose” one must investigate the “causes” of a particular “thing”.¹⁴ As Aristotle writes elsewhere, people possess “knowledge” of a thing only when they know its “cause”.¹⁵ The different types of cause one might identify in this capacity are outlined across several of Aristotle’s works (*Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*), though in my view his four cause model is most elegantly summarised in *On the Generation of Animals*.¹⁶ As he writes there:

¹² Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34, 35.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Physics*, 37, 49.

¹⁵ Aristotle, ‘Posterior Analytics’ in *Posterior Analytics, Topica*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and E. S. Forster (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), 24-174 (29).

¹⁶ Crucially, the Greek word Aristotle uses throughout his work that is typically translated as “cause” is *aitia*, which does not refer solely to those processes one might now consign to the field of “causality”. Indeed, the philosopher Gregory Vlastos has argued that scholars ought to translate *aitia* as “because”, and Max Hocutt has suggested instead the word “explanation”, where an “explanation” is construed as a “deduction”. It is important to mention this because the type of cause that I will be pursuing - the final cause - may not appear recognisably “causal” to a modern reader. Gregory Vlastos, ‘Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*’ in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (July 1969), 291-325 (296); Max Hocutt, ‘Aristotle’s Four Because’ in *Philosophy*, Vol. 49, No. 190 (October 1974), 385-399 (385).

There are four causes: first, the final cause, that for the sake of which; secondly, the definition of essence (and these two we may regard as pretty much one and the same); thirdly, the material; and fourthly, that from which the sense of movement comes.¹⁷

An entity's peculiar configuration of matter and form dictates its "final cause" and the "purpose" for which it exists. This purpose might be construed as the "goal" of any given activity, object, or being (and this is why the "final cause" of something and its "definition of essence" are "pretty much one and the same").¹⁸ For example, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that "happiness" is, for human beings, "something final and self-sufficient, and [...] the end of all action".¹⁹ In other words, "happiness" is the final cause of human beings, the natural "purpose" for the sake of which they exist. Similarly, a table's natural *telos* is to function as a table, and an acorn's natural *telos* is to become a tree.

Lyly portrays his Midas as a good Aristotelian, careful to adhere to the natural order and motivated to obtain "happiness" for both himself and his state. He is uninterested in the various suggestions made by Bacchus - "wine", "nectar", "love", "victories" (1.1.9, 10, 11, 12) – unless they can function as means to the higher end of happiness. The examples Midas selects to illustrate his point are also psychologically revealing. The stories of

¹⁷ Aristotle, 'On the Generation of Animals' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1111-1219 (1111-1112).

¹⁸ In fact, some scholars have described Aristotle's theories of causality as "goal-directed", with this feature of his analysis constituting the primary difference between his model and those employed within the modern study of causes. Christopher V. Mirus, 'The Metaphysical Roots of Aristotle's Teleology' in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (June 2004), 699-724 (706-714).

¹⁹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.

Phaethon and Icarus could also be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and both report the dangers of breaching the natural order. These particular figures do not merely exhibit poor judgement; but also, they violate man's natural *telos* by attempting to imitate the gods. In the former tale, Phaethon desires to ride in his father Phoebus' "fiery chariot", despite the latter's warning: "Thy state is mortal [...] the thing thou dost desire | Is such whereto no mortal man is able to aspire".²⁰ Despite these admonishments, Phaethon commandeers the chariot, flies too close to the sun, and is killed.

Similarly, Ovid's Icarus dies after attempting to fly using waxen wings. For man to attempt flight is generally transgressive of the natural order, but once again it is implied that the specific violation here concerns a mortal's hubristic attempt to imitate the divine. The spectators to Icarus' flight are described as believing "that they that through | The air could fly were gods".²¹ Icarus' subsequent, fatal fall serves as graphic confirmation of his mortality, a revelation corresponding to the restitution of "nature". In short, Midas' choice of precedents here indicate that his conception of the natural order involves both a general fidelity to man's natural *telos*, and a corresponding respect for the distinction between man and god.²²

Lyly's careful characterisation of Midas as someone sensitive to natural teleology ensures that the following scene reads as one of temptation, in which three of his counsellors

²⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II.74-75.

²¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII.295-296.

²² It should be recalled that Icarus and Phaethon were often cited in relation to the Aristotelian concept of the "mean" in this period. Wonderfully, Midas' sentence structure implies an attempt to find the "mean" *between* these very figures. By not desiring "against nature", Midas will move safely between the searing heat above and the deadly waters below. For a learned overview of the frequent connections between Icarus, Phaethon, and the Aristotelian "mean" in the period that also happens to consider Lyly's *Euphues* books, see Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 145-170.

argue for the merits of love, rulership of the world, and gold, respectively. Eristus submits the first recommendation: “Were I a king, I would wish to possess my mistress” (1.1.25). Eristus commodifies the hypothetical mistress and places Midas in a relationship of ownership with her. This suggestion is immediately countered by Martius, and on explicitly teleological grounds: “Love is a pastime for children, breeding nothing but folly and nourishing nothing but idleness” (1.1.31-32). Here, Martius implicitly ascribes value to the ability of things to function as means to higher ends. In his view, love breeds and nourishes “nothing”: it constitutes a teleological impasse. Despite this, Martius’ own suggestion participates in the same fundamental logic as Eristus’. The former implores his king: “Command the world, Midas; a greater thing you cannot desire, a less you should not” (1.1.40-41). Martius’ phrase “command the world” is formally identical to Eristus’ “possess [your] mistress”. In both instances, an object is commodified and placed into a relation of ownership with Midas (the verb “command” connoting possession as well as control and domination).²³ Moreover, in specifying that Midas cannot desire anything “greater” than the world, Martius reveals that he perceives such total ownership as a desirable end in itself.

Counter-intuitively, Mellacrites’ arguments in favour of “gold” do not initially appear as materialistic or teleologically suspect as the above pattern would lead us to anticipate. A crucial premise of Mellacrites’ persuasion is that gold can function as means to a great deal of higher ends, including “religion”, “virtue”, “honour”, and “love” (1.1.56, 57, 66, 67). Mellacrites stresses the radically transformative powers of gold, describing how the

²³ Compare Camillo’s line in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*: “It is in mine authority to *command* | The keys of all the posterns”. William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.2.458-9, my emphasis.

substance can: “maketh the chastest to yield to lust, the honestest to lewdness, the wisest to folly, the faithfulest to deceit, and the most holy in heart to be most hollow of heart” (1.1.46-9). This speech clearly anticipates – by almost twenty years – the lines famously uttered in Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens* (1607), and which were repeatedly cited by Marx in support of his view that commodity fetishism is capable of “extinguish[ing] all distinctions”.²⁴ The celebrated speech is spoken by Timon after he encounters a heap of gold in the woods:

Thus much of this will make
Black white, foul fair, wrong right,
Base noble, old young, coward valiant. [...]
This yellow slave
Will knit and break religions. (*Timon*, 14.28-30, 34-35)²⁵

Evidently, this speech made a lasting impression upon Marx. He had previously extolled the lines in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, in which he wrote that Shakespeare astutely recognises the “divine power of money”, consisting of its potential to transform “all human and natural qualities into their opposites”.²⁶

This is precisely the kind of power that Mellacrites ascribes to gold throughout Lyly’s opening scene. However, in *Midas*, the ability of “gold” to transform certain qualities and

²⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 229.

²⁵ William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Karl Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’ in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 279-401 (377).

states is quickly revealed to stem simply from its manipulation of people's desires. Far from working to encourage genuine "religion" or "virtue" in Midas, gold can be used to purchase other people's opinions, such that an irreligious or sinful person might be regarded in the same light as their opposite. As Mellacrites says, gold can allow Midas to "be *thought* religious and devout" (1.1.154-55, my emphasis), and can be used to bribe the figure of Justice, one of the four cardinal virtues, who is described by Mellacrites as wearing her characteristic blindfold simply so that she will "not be seen blushing" while accepting a golden bribe (1.1.103-105). In short, gold can be used to invert people's perceptions, such that Midas can appear powerful, virtuous, and holy, even if he is none of those things in substance.

Elsewhere, Mellacrites forthrightly indicates that the power he ascribes to gold derives not from the substance itself, but from the conventional, imposed value that it signifies. As he says: "In this word 'gold' are all the powers of the gods, the desires of men, the wonders of the world, the miracles of nature" (1.1.49-51). The logic of the speech indicates that the "powers" inherent to divinity, "desire", and "nature" are reducible to expressions of economic value. Even more scandalously, Mellacrites acknowledges that the manipulative tool in question is nothing more than a "word". For him, the power of "gold" is not reducible to a sensuous, material object. Rather, it is a sign or concept that is nevertheless capable of radically affecting the material world. The slippage here from "gold" as material entity to "gold" as a "word" reflects Aristotle's theories concerning money, which became interwoven with Scriptural accounts of idolatry during the sixteenth century. This interweaving produced a discourse according to which economic value is both an unnatural phenomenon and a potential idol. Moreover, although Marx

wrote critically of Aristotle in *Capital*, their individual analyses of money, value, and nature are remarkably alike.²⁷ They agree that there is a difference between “natural” and “conventional” properties, and that to mistake one for the other inevitably leads to treating people and things in a manner “contrary to nature”.²⁸ As I will argue, the mistake Midas commits in this first scene is to misapprehend the “word ‘gold’” for the substance itself, a blunder that would be recognisable to both Aristotle and Marx, and would have characterised Midas as an idolater in the eyes of an early modern Christian.

A distinction between “nature” and “convention” is crucial to Aristotle’s theories of money, which are most lucidly advanced in *The Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁹ In order to explain the introduction of money into human society, Aristotle elaborates an imagined scenario in which a shoemaker and a builder each require the other’s services. The work they do is different in nature and may be different in quality (one may be excellent and the other incompetent). For their transaction of services to entail a “proportionate requital”, the work they do for each other must be “equated” by some common measurement. Aristotle continues:

Money has become by convention a sort of representative of need; and this is why it has the name ‘money’ (*nomisma*) - because it exists not by nature but by law

²⁷ In *Capital*, Marx argued that Aristotle betrayed “the lack of a concept of value” in his discussion of money in *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Marx attributes this to the fact that “Greek society was founded on the labour of slaves” and so the “inequality of men and of their labour-powers” would have appeared eminently “natural” to Aristotle, causing him to overlook the relationship between labour and the generation of value. This assessment appears grossly unfair to me - while Marx would have contested Aristotle’s connection between value and “need”, this aspect of the latter’s analysis goes unmentioned during the above section of *Capital*, leading to a mischaracterisation of Aristotle’s views. Marx, *Capital*, 151-152.

²⁸ Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T. A. Sinclair, revised edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 87.

²⁹ This opposition is not identical to a “natural”/“unnatural” binary. While anything “conventional” is “unnatural”, not everything that is “unnatural” is “conventional”.

(*nomos*) and it is in our power to change it and make it useless. [...] Money, then, acting as a measure, makes goods commensurate and equates them.³⁰

For Aristotle, money is a “convention[al]”, man-made term that can be changed at will. “Money” does not exist “by nature” but is rather introduced into the world by human beings. Of course, “money” here is separable from the material used to *signify* money. While the particular metal or other substance used to represent money may have a natural existence, the “money” itself is wholly conventional.

This distinction maps very well onto the concepts of “use-value” and “exchange-value” in Marx’s writing. Fortuitously for me, Marx simply assumes that “gold is the money commodity” throughout *Capital*.³¹ As he writes:

The price or money-form of commodities is, like their form of value generally, quite distinct from their palpable and real bodily form; it is therefore a purely ideal or notional form [...] Since the expression of the value of commodities in gold is a purely ideal act, we may use purely imaginary or ideal gold to perform this operation.³²

Again, here are the same distinctions prevalent in Aristotle’s work: the “palpable” and “real” nature of the commodity (as gold, in this instance) is distinct from its “imaginary”

³⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 89-90.

³¹ Marx, *Capital*, 188.

³² Marx, *Capital*, 189-190.

or “notional” properties when it functions as a “money-form”.³³ Both Aristotle and Marx agree that money is at once composed of “natural”, material objects and abstract, conventional values.

They further agree that to mistake the conventional for the natural is a grievous category error with wide-ranging ethical and social ramifications. As Aristotle writes in *The Nicomachean Ethics*: “The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else”.³⁴ To pursue money, as opposed to the commodities money can be exchanged for, is a violation of nature on two counts: it involves the prioritisation of the “conventional” over the “natural”, and it transgresses man’s natural *telos* by viewing “wealth” as the ultimate end in itself instead of “the good” (which, as Aristotle specifies elsewhere, is ultimately to be equated with “happiness”).³⁵

These views are echoed in *Capital*, where Marx writes approvingly of exchanges in the form of C-M-C (where a commodity is exchanged for money that is then exchanged for a different, but equally valuable commodity).³⁶ In capitalistic circulation, this form becomes perverted. As Marx observes:

³³ Elsewhere, Marx stresses the separability of gold’s “natural” weight from its expression of a particular economic value. As he writes: “Since [...] an ounce of gold undergoes no change in weight when its value rises or falls, no change can take place in the weight of its aliquot parts”. In other words, the gold and its “aliquot parts” (coins) can remain physically the same, while their economic value skyrockets. This precisely maps onto Aristotle’s distinction between the “natural” properties of useful goods and the “conventional” realm of imaginary economic value. Marx, *Capital*, 192-193.

³⁴ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 7.

³⁵ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 11.

³⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 248-250

In simple circulation, the value of commodities attained at the most a form independent of their use-values, i.e. the form of money. But now, in the circulation M-C-M, value suddenly presents itself as a self-moving substance which passes through a process of its own, and for which commodities and money are both mere forms.³⁷

Clearly, this is a reiteration of Aristotle's concerns about treating money as an end in itself. When a person pursues money for its own sake, "value" takes on a life of its own - the entirely imaginary sign suddenly appears as though it is a "self-moving substance". In other words, the "conventional" takes on the appearance of the "natural". As Marx states elsewhere, the misapprehension of the "value relation" of a commodity for its "physical nature" constitutes "the fetishism that attaches itself [...] to commodities".³⁸

Lyly's *Midas* precisely dramatises such a misapprehension. The distinction between economic value and the material signifying that value is flagged up throughout the play. Clearly, it is indicated by Mellacrites' insistence that gold is a mere "word", but other characters in *Midas* allude to the gap between this word and the material it is typically associated with. In the temptation scene itself, Eristus describes gold as the "guts of the earth" (1.1.100), a belief that is echoed in the following Act by Licio, who declares: "Gold is but the earth's garbage, a weed bred by the sun, the very rubbish of barren ground" (2.2.5-6). Later still, Martius describes gold as the "dross of the world" (4.4.74-5). These descriptions indicate the Phrygians' awareness of the inert materiality of the substance "gold", and its fundamental detachability from abstract economic value. These characters

³⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 256.

³⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 165.

do not value “gold” as an end in itself precisely because they recognise that “gold” (not the “word”, but the “natural” substance) is no more intrinsically valuable than “earth” or “weeds”. In other words, it has no special use-value.

This is precisely what Midas learns when he is tempted into requesting an overflow of the “substance” on the basis of the transformative powers of the “word”, only to find that the material itself is useless to him. As Mellacrites reports in Act Two: “[Midas]’ meat turneth to massy gold in his mouth, and his wine slides down his throat like liquid gold. If he touch his robes, they are turned to gold; and what is not that toucheth him but becometh gold?” (2.1.52-56). During the temptation scene, Mellacrites was so enmeshed within the conventional world of abstract economic value that he implied a radical commensurability of everything (the divine and the natural alike) with quantities of “gold”. According to both Aristotle and Marx, conventional exchange-value is supposed to render distinct commodities commensurate with each other, but only at the level of abstraction. In the passage of *Capital* in which Marx cites the speech from *Timon of Athens* above, he writes:

Just as in money every qualitative difference between commodities is extinguished, so too for its part, as a radical leveller, it extinguishes all distinctions.³⁹

“Money” here refers to the conventional, abstract value (the “word ‘gold’”) that is capable of equating divinity, honour, and nature. Mellacrites’ temptation succeeded in drawing

³⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 229.

Midas into a worldview in which everything was reducible to quantities of “gold”, but the crucial, damning mistake the king makes is to misapprehend the abstract value for the arbitrary *signifier* of that value. By imagining that the substance “gold” can perform the transformative powers of “money”, Midas perversely *does* extinguish “all distinctions”. He eliminates the natural use-values of the commodities he requires to survive precisely by buying into the levelling, conventional logic of “money” to a fatally literal extent.

A category error of this type would have appeared recognisably idolatrous to an early modern Christian. The general association between gold and idolatry originates in Scripture, the earliest and most famous example occurring in the episode of the “molten calf”, in which Moses discovers that the Israelites in his charge have used their golden earrings to create a statue around which they worship.⁴⁰ The association recurs in *Psalms*, in the passage reading: “The idoles of the heathen are silver and gold, euen the worke of mens hands”.⁴¹ These imprecise connections appear with renewed vigour and lucidity in the New Testament, where idolatrous gold becomes instead any form of wealth. In *Matthew* 6:24, it is written that a Christian cannot “serve God and riches” or, as the *King James Bible* and other translations have it: “ye cannot serve God and mammon”.⁴²

The figure of “Mammon” was a favourite amongst early moderns and was used throughout the period to symbolise the attitude of treating money as an end in itself. Mammon features in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen* (1596), where he is described in his cave: “And round about him lay on euey side | Great heapes of gold, that neuer

⁴⁰ *The Geneva Bible*, Exodus 32:4.

⁴¹ *The Geneva Bible*, Psalms 115:4.

⁴² *The Geneva Bible*, Matthew 6:24; *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Matthew 6:24.

could be spent”.⁴³ He returns in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, where he declares himself content with the “lustre, gems and gold” in Hell, such that he has no desire to overthrow Heaven.⁴⁴ Although very different, these accounts both stress that Mammon is a figure who regards gold as an end in itself: Spenser’s Mammon does not exchange it for goods, and Milton’s Mammon has no ambition beyond possessing it. Such covetousness implies a misapprehension of money’s natural *telos*, and that category error is coextensive with an idolatrous worldview – precisely one in which “Mammon” is served in place of “God”.

As the above examples suggest, the Scriptural associations between money, gold, and idolatry were well represented in sixteenth-century English texts. Indeed, the concern that money might represent a type of idol was exacerbated throughout this period as an awareness of the “conventional” character of economic value steadily increased. At the beginning of that century, it was perhaps still possible for the English public to believe that a coin’s economic value was generated by the quantity of precious substance of which it was composed. As the historian T. H. Lloyd has put it (in terms suggestive of Aristotelianism):

For sixteenth-century pundits true value, with which natural exchange should coincide, was simply the amount of fine gold or silver contained in a given quantity of coins. For example, if English coins officially valued at 20 shillings contained twice as much fine silver as coins valued at 20 shillings Flemish (Fl.) then one English pound was worth two Flemish pounds.⁴⁵

⁴³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 2.7.5

⁴⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 2.271.

⁴⁵ T. H. Lloyd, ‘Early Elizabethan Investigations into Exchange and the Value of Sterling, 1558-1568’ in *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (February 2000), 60-83 (61).

Such a conception of “true value”, which might permit an economic system to appear “natural”, was beleaguered by Henry VIII’s debasement of England’s coinage in the 1540s. The economic scholar C. E. Challis summarises this process:

The motivating force of debasement was the king’s financial embarrassment, and the object of the exercise was to maintain the coin at its face value but reduce the weight and/or the fineness completely independently of the prevailing international bullion prices or ratios, the difference between the intrinsic and face values of the coin representing the king’s gross profit.⁴⁶

By failing to conform to “international bullion prices or ratios”, Henry VIII’s government essentially confirmed that monetary value was contingent and arbitrary, something imposed through “convention” as opposed to naturally occurring.⁴⁷ As David Hawkes observes, this “financial debasement” occurred during a period in which an enormous volume of gold and silver were being imported into Europe and “consequently between 1540 and 1640, Europe experienced what has come to be known as the ‘Price Revolution’”.⁴⁸ This inflation meant that “for the first time, gold coins became part of commerce at a local and humble level”, thereby further diminishing gold’s sacred aura” and making it plain that neither gold, nor any of the objects used as money, literally

⁴⁶ C. E. Challis, ‘The Debasement of the Coinage, 1542-1551’ in *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (December 1967), 441-466 (443).

⁴⁷ The difference between a coin’s “intrinsic” value (the actual value of the metal) and its “face” value (its exchange-value) amounts to the difference between the “natural” value of the coin and its abstract and merely conventional economic value. Of course, the “international bullion prices and ratios” are themselves predicated upon conventional, instead of natural, value.

⁴⁸ David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 37.

embodied value.⁴⁹ Instead, they were simply conventional, and so changeable, *symbols* of value.

Lyly's Midas enthusiastically succumbs to "gold's sacred aura". The idolatrous, fetishistic mistake Midas commits is further signalled by Mellacrites' evocation of "interest". Responding dismissively to the recommendations of his fellow counsellors, Mellacrites declares: "It is a world for gold; honour and love are both taken up on interest" (1.1.66-7). In the early modern period, teleology and idolatry converged most forcefully during discussions of usury. Aristotle specifically emphasises the unnaturalness of economic "interest" in *The Politics*, where he distinguishes between a household that depends upon "crop and animal husbandry" ("in accordance with nature"), and a household that engages in the "practice of charging interest" in order to make more money. As he writes of the latter: "of all types of business this is the most contrary to nature".⁵⁰ In *Midas*, Mellacrites takes flight into the conventional realm of economic "interest" and, in doing so, renders "love" and "honour" not simply commensurable with the *substance* of gold, but with the wholly conventional economic value that substance is merely used to signify.

The ongoing consequences of such developments are recorded in a 1568 pamphlet *A briefe treatise of vsurie*, Nicholas Sander wrote a passage exemplifying the conflation of usury and idolatry on Aristotelian grounds:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 87.

Adde herevnto, that in case the poore man, who borrowed the ten crownes, do not pay his vsurie in ten yeres, he is then dettor of twenty crownes: of ten for the principal and of other ten for vsury, which the vsurer begetteth and engendreth (as it were) to the intolerable losse of the borrower, and the excessiue gayne of him selfe: and yet these ten crownes be not his own al this while, although he picke out so great aduantage of them. Yea al this while thei be no where at al. For in one moment they were consumed and spent by him that borrowed them, and in place of them an Idoll is conceaued, which Idoll doth remain confusely, not any where in nature and truth, but in name and imagination.⁵¹

Here is the Aristotelian view that there is a distinction between “nature” and “name”. The usurer “begetteth and engendreth” the interest on the original loan, such that the extra ten crowns are conceived out of nothing - they do not exist in “nature and truth” because they are merely conventional and contingent. This value is an “Idoll” because it is a conventional “nothing” masquerading as a natural something.

In sum, there are several clues in *Midas*' opening scene that the Phrygian king's particular error is to misapprehend the conventional for the natural. It is my view that an appreciation of this subtext to Midas' initial mistake greatly illuminates the king's behaviour in the second half of the play. Typically, critics of *Midas* take a broader perspective upon this opening scene, reading Midas' first error as indicative of his “greed”, “tyranny”, or a general “lack of judgement”.⁵² While some of the associations I

⁵¹ Nicholas Sander, *A Briefe Treatise of Vsurie, Made by Nicolas Sander D. of Diuinitie*, Early English Books 1475 -1640 (Leuven, Belgium: Apud Ioannem Foulorum, 1568), 44-45.

⁵² David Bevington, ‘Lyly’s “Endymion” and “Midas”’: The Catholic Question in England’ in *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 32, No. 1, Drama and the English Reformation (Spring 1998), 26-46 (38); Mark Albert

have drawn out of this scene are subtle, I believe that references to “nature”, “happiness”, and “interest”, coupled with both a characterisation of gold as a “word” and an objection that gold is nothing more than the “guts of the earth”, would have evoked widely-known associations between teleology and idolatry in the minds of an early modern audience. These spectators would have been well equipped to recognise the precise category error that Midas is committing: an idolatrous confusion of the conventional for the natural.

In many respects, the treatment of “nature” at this stage of the play is remarkably straightforward. Midas’ mistake is identifiable as such due to the inescapable fact that gold is not useful to him as food. In other words, the king’s inability to swallow gold functions as a material defeater of his idolatry and fetishism, vindicating the “nature”/“convention” binary precisely by literalising a substitution of one type of entity for the other. Despite the apparent transformative powers of conventional economic value, here “nature” prevails.

However, “nature” continues to function as both an explicit and implicit theme in the play’s second half, where the concept’s coherence and practical usefulness is less clear. In the following section, I argue that Midas’ foray into the “woods” (3.3.111) after relinquishing the golden touch can be read as a “return to nature” gesture in the vein of Diogenes or Timon of Athens.⁵³ Far from lumbering unconsciously from one error to the

Johnston, ‘Playing With the Beard: Courtly and Commercial Economies in Richard Edwards’s “Damian and Pithias” in John Lyly’s *Midas*’ in *ELH*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Spring 2005), 79-103 (90); Annaliese Connolly, “‘O Unquenchable Thirst of Gold’: Lyly’s *Midas* and the English Quest for Empire’ in *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (September 2002), 1-3.

⁵³ I recall here my brief remarks on this aspect of Diogenes’ philosophy in the first chapter of this thesis. See again: Farrand Sayre, ‘Greek Cynicism’ in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January 1945), 113-118 (113).

next, Lyly's Midas recognises that he has desired "against nature" in the first half of the play, laments this lapse of judgement, and desires reformation. As I will argue, an attempt to "return to nature" after falling prey to a misapprehension of the conventional for the natural makes sense of *Midas*' infamously bifurcated structure, but also echoes Ovid's account of the king becoming a loyal follower of Pan in the wake of the golden touch debacle.

However, this transition complicates the straightforwardness of "nature" in the play's first half. In the latter portion of *Midas*, the "nature" represented by both Pan and the "woods" comes into conflict with the concept of "the natural" associated with Apollo. The prescriptive dimension to "nature" in Aristotle's work (dictating the pursuit of happiness through a supposedly impartial survey of man's "nature") was even more pronounced in early modern Christian culture, where a "natural"/"unnatural" binary was used to police everything from sexual practice to diet. In a less obvious, but so more insidious, way, the Marxist "fetish" presupposes a "natural" state-of-affairs that essentially reflects the social and ethical priorities of the rational, European man.

In the following section, I will argue that the concept of "nature" becomes problematised during a soliloquy Midas delivers before descending into the "woods". This speech begins to trouble the distinction between "nature" and "convention", precisely by implying that the "nature" corresponds to various arbitrary and socially contingent *conventions*. By interweaving a clear example of commodity fetishism with a narrative in which a "savage" is shamed into adhering to a supposedly "natural" ideological worldview, *Midas* functions as a perfect illustration of the dehumanising normativity inherent to accusations

of idolatry and fetishism, especially those that stress the perils of desiring “against nature”.

On the Edge of the “Woods”: Midas’ Return to Nature

At the beginning of Act Three, Midas has definitively recognised his previous error. Unable to eat, drink, or clothe himself, the king begs Bacchus’ forgiveness and implores the god to reverse his wish. Bacchus relents, commanding Midas to bathe himself in the River Pactolus in order to rid himself of the golden touch. As the king prepares to embark on this redemptive journey, he reflects upon the consequences of his desires; the soliloquy he delivers contains two references to “nature” (3.1.60, 64) and one reference to the “natural” (3.1.41). These evocations expand the meaning of “nature” as the concept appeared in the play’s first scene.

The word initially occurs in this speech when Midas laments that he has “enticed the subjects of my neighbour princes to destroy their *natural* kings” (3.1.40-41, my emphasis). Already, the “natural” relation Midas invokes here contains numerous ambiguities. He may be referring to the process of sovereign inheritance, according to which the king is “natural” insofar as he is a legitimate descendent of the previous monarch. An echo of this interpretation appears in a 1592 pamphlet persuading the French to return to their “naturall and *legitimate* king”, and in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part Three* when Clifford describes Henry as a “natural king” (3 *Henry VI*, 1.1.83) in a context clearly

implying that “natural” denotes lineal legitimacy.⁵⁴ Alternatively, it may refer more specifically to the relation *between* “king” and “subject”, which was often described as “natural” in the period on the basis that the monarch functioned as a surrogate father to his subordinates. This “natural” relation was expressed in King James’ 1598 pamphlet *The Trve Law of Free Monarchies*, in which he elaborates on the originally Roman concept of *pater patriae*, writing: “By the law of Nature the King becomes a naturall Father to all his Lieges at his coronation”.⁵⁵ This declaration leads James to describe royal usurpation as literally “monstrous and *vnnatural*”.⁵⁶

The tensions and ambiguities at the heart of this “natural” relation are most strikingly evident in a yet later pamphlet by the political theorist Sir Robert Filmer, who confesses in his *Patriarcha* (1680) that “all Kings be not the Natural Parents of their Subjects”, before changing tact and writing: “yet they all either are, or are to be reputed the next Heirs to those first Progenitors, who were at first the Natural Parents of the whole people”.⁵⁷ What follows is a brilliantly convoluted defence of Patriarchalism that wreaks havoc upon the ontological stability of “nature”:

⁵⁴ Vasco Figueiro, *The Spaniards Monarchie, and Leaguers Olygarchie. Layd Open in an Aduerisement [Sic], Written by Signor Vasco Figueiro a Gentleman of Portingale to the Rebellious French*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Richard Field, 1592), Title Page, my emphasis; William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part Three*, ed. Randall Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Robert Zaller presents an excellent account of “natural inheritance” as discussed in Shakespeare’s works and various other early modern texts, see Robert Zaller, *The Discourse of Legitimacy in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 416.

⁵⁵ James I, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies: Or The Reciproock and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a Free King, and His Naturall Subiectes*. Early English Books 1475-1640 (Edinburgh: Robert VValdegrae, 1598), B5v.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, D4r, my emphasis.

⁵⁷ Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha, or, The Natural Power of Kings by the Learned Sir Robert Filmer*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Walter Davis, 1680), C2r.

After a few Descents, when the true Fatherhood it self was extinct, and only the Right of the Father descends to the true Heir, then the Title of Prince or King was more Significant to express the Power of him who succeeds only to the Right of that Fatherhood which his Ancestors did Naturally enjoy.⁵⁸

“True” fatherhood becomes “extinct”, but the “right” of fatherhood becomes attached to a certain “title”, allowing the sovereign to succeed to an office that replicates the more “natural” relation his ancestors enjoyed. As the scholar Su Fang Ng has put it: “Although Filmer’s *pater patriae* is ultimately a title that pertains to the *political* power of fatherhood, he insists on its origins in *biological* fatherhood”.⁵⁹

As should be obvious, these arguments in favour of the king’s “natural” familial relation to his subjects threaten to undermine the stability of the “natural” itself, precisely by blurring the lines between political and familial fatherhood, as well as “political” and “biological” nature. Filmer essentially asks us to believe that a “natural” relation is preserved through political convention, such that the customary “right” of the king ought to be regarded as “natural” insofar as it reflects the relation between parent and child. I do not have the space here to follow up these various threads. What matters for my purposes is that Lyly’s *Midas* alludes to a “natural” relation that was controversial and unstable. Although I have selected the examples of James and Filmer because they encapsulate some of the ambiguities surrounding these concepts, writers similarly struggled to construct Elizabeth as a “natural” parent to the nation throughout Lyly’s

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, C3v.

⁵⁹ Su Fang Ng, ‘Bare-Forked Animals: King Lear and the Problems of Patriarchalism’ in *Family Politics in Early Modern Literature*, ed. Hannah Crawforth and Sarah Lewis (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 173-191 (187), my emphasis.

dramatic career.⁶⁰ In short, Midas' invocation of the "natural" in this speech signals to the audience that this idea remains at the forefront of his mind (substantiated by his repeated use of "nature" in the same scene), but also complicates his earlier allusion to "nature" by broadening the denotation of the word. The phrase may be intended to flatter Elizabeth, but her position as a "natural" monarch was plagued by ambiguity and debate.⁶¹

Such ambiguities are further evoked during the remainder of Midas' speech. He uses the word "nature" in both remaining instances to refer to the same "natural king" as above. Crucially, Midas is clearly indicating here that he himself has behaved *unnaturally*; he does so by negatively contrasting himself to the foreign monarch, who he repeatedly associates *with* "nature". He describes this "prince" as:

protected by the gods, by *nature*, by his own virtue, and his subject's obedience.
Have not all treasons been discovered by miracle, not counsel? That do the gods challenge. Is not the country walled with huge waves? That doth *Nature* claim.
(3.1.59-64, my emphasis).

⁶⁰ For an extensive and fascinating account of how the "political and natural bodies of the queen were inextricably intertwined", I recommend: *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World, 1500-2000*, ed. Regina Schulte (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 3.

Jacqueline Vanhoutte has argued that Elizabeth "inadvertently construed herself as a stepmother – a surrogate or substitution" by relying upon metaphors that framed her not as one who could "*be* a good mother [*sic*]", but as one who could merely function as such (these conceptual confusions obviously complicate a "natural"/"conventional" binary as well). Vanhoutte's article is also of interest here because she reads Lyly's *Endymion* as involving a maternal construction of Elizabeth. Vanhoutte, 'Elizabeth I as Stepmother', 321.

⁶¹ Indeed, Bevington plausibly reads the "petty prince" alluded to in this scene as an analogue to Queen Elizabeth. He reads Midas' speech as alluding to assassination attempts against Elizabeth on the part of the Spanish, "in defiance of 'natural' rights of royal inheritance". Lyly, *Midas*, 3.1.40-1.fn.

The first obvious point of interest here is the potential difference between “nature” and “Nature”. In the 1592 Quarto edition of *Midas*, both of these words are capitalised (though the “nature” in the play’s first scene was uncapitalised).⁶² In his 1991 edition of the play, Bevington removes the capital letter from the first “nature” in the above speech, though he retains the Quarto’s capitalisation of Midas’ following use of the word.

Bevington appears to believe that the second “Nature” is a personification and so ought to be capitalised (in accordance with modern editorial convention). I contend that his modernisation vividly illustrates some of the conceptual ambiguities surrounding “nature” that are flagged by this speech’s repeated use of the word. It seems that Bevington is attempting to align the first “nature” above with “*natural*” earlier in the speech, such that the prince is “protected” by the “natural” relation between themselves and their subjects. Conversely, the “Nature” that Midas associates with “huge waves” moves beyond the realm of human affairs (breaking the pattern of every previous evocation of the concept) and instead denotes those natural processes that *precede* human activity. Again, this recalls the figure of Nature in Lyly’s *The Woman in the Moon*, who is described in that play’s prologue: “Where lovely Nature, being only Queen, | Bestows such workmanship on earthly mould | That heavens themselves envy her glorious work”.⁶³ This “Nature” refers not to the “natural” way a person ought to behave; instead, it refers to the “workmanship” evident in the natural world. By also aligning “Nature” with “huge waves” in *Midas*, Lyly alludes to the concept of *wilderness*.

⁶² John Lyly, *Midas Plaied before the Queenes Maiestie Vpon Twvelfe Day at Night, by the Children of Paules.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas Scarlet, 1592), C3v.

⁶³ Lyly, *The Woman in the Moon*, Prologue.

Compare a description in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*: "For now I stand as one upon a rock, | Environed with a wilderness of sea" (*Titus*, 3.1.93-4).⁶⁴ Elsewhere in the period, uncultivated expanses of water were routinely associated with the "wilderness".⁶⁵ Although Midas employs the word "Nature" here in an ethically positive sense – referring overtly to the beneficent craftsman "Nature" – he also subtly gestures towards the idea of a "Nature" that precedes any human conventions (encompassing the "palpable" and "real", as opposed to the "ideal" and "notional"). I believe that this double signification of "Nature" prefigures Midas' decision to seek "solace in the woods" (3.3.111), following his recognition that he has previously desired "against nature".

Two scenes after Midas delivers the above speech, Martius informs the king's daughter Sophronia that her father was so overjoyed with the reversal of his punishment that he "determined to use some solace in the woods" (3.3.110-11). There, "by chance", Midas encountered a "great boar" and was so "eager of the sport" that he outrode his companions and disappeared into the heart of the wilderness (3.3.111-2). Historically, critics of *Midas* have not regarded the king's decision to seek "solace in the woods" as psychologically or thematically significant. The detail is generally glossed over quickly in favour of exploring the subsequent music contest.⁶⁶ However, I regard the detail of some

⁶⁴ William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Eugene M. Waith, reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁶⁵ For an enlightening account of how the Black Sea was particularly suggestive of "wilderness and the negative moral attributes associated with the peoples inhabiting [surrounding] areas" in early modern drama, see Monia Matei-Chesnoiu, *Early Modern Drama and the Eastern European Elsewhere: Representations of Liminal Locality in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 142.

Dorothy E. Litt has also written on the early modern idea of the "wilderness" as variously describing "a desert, a forest, a wasteland, a cave, or a sea". Dorothy E. Litt, 'The Idea of the Wilderness in the English Renaissance' in *ANHU*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Vol. CVI (Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1993), 23-33 (23).

⁶⁶ This detail's absence from *Midas* scholarship is so overwhelmingly total that it would be unjustifiably selective to cite any one example here.

significance to what follows, particularly given Lyly's deliberate foregrounding of "nature" in the scene prior to Midas' departure from the Court.

The first thing to note is that Lyly implies that hunting is not the sole motivator for his descent into "the woods". Martius is very careful to say that his king sought "solace in the woods" and only became entangled in "sport" with the boar "by chance". While a later scene confirms that a "Huntsman" was present with Midas and lost the king "in the chase" (4.3.47), the report of Midas' disappearance heavily implies not that he became lost, but that he *ran away*. Moreover, in Ovid's account of the myth, Midas specifically leaves the Court in order to become a follower of Pan. As Ovid writes: "Then Midas, hating riches, haunts the pasture grounds and groves | And up and down with Pan among the lawns and mountains roves".⁶⁷ Here, there are implied causal connections between Midas' revulsion from "riches", his new-found loyalty for Pan, and his abandonment of the Court. It is my view that a similar trajectory is implied in Lyly's play that is easily overlooked if one regards Midas' foray into "the woods" as nothing more than an organised hunting expedition. Hunting was a royal and aristocratic activity in both the medieval and early modern eras - it does not so much denote feral self-sufficiency as it does a landowner's exercise of privilege.⁶⁸ It should also be recalled that organised hunts typically took place in "forests". Indeed, the "forest" was defined by John Manwood in

⁶⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 11.164-165.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth M. Weixel provides detailed accounts of hunting terminology and concepts in the period in her reading of Book Six of Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, in which she goes even further than I do in reading the aristocratic forest as a site of potential "wilderness", in contrast with the civilised world of the court. Elizabeth M. Weixel, 'Squires of the Wood: The Decline of the Aristocratic Forest in Book VI of The Faerie Queen' in *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (January 2010), 187-213 (199).

1592 as a “priuileged place” for the king to hunt “wild beasts and foules”.⁶⁹ As Andrew McRae puts it, royal hunting habitually took place in the forest and “forests were not necessarily wooded, but were in agricultural use”.⁷⁰ In short, to accidentally come across a wild boar, separate from your hunting party, and disappear into “the woods” is not the same thing as to participate in a regulated hunting expedition within the royal confines of the “forest”.

I want to suggest that Lyly’s Midas seeks “solace in the woods” as a corrective for his earlier violations of “nature”, precisely as Ovid’s Midas is propelled into the “lawns” and “mountains” by his hatred for gold. This trajectory further reflects Midas’ Aristotelian instincts. Across the two halves of the play, one can perceive an almost dialectical movement from a prioritisation of the conventional and economic into a prioritisation of the simplistic, spontaneous world of the natural. Two scenes earlier, the audience were informed that Midas could not ingest food because of his indiscriminate desire for gold - when they next encounter him, he is chasing a “boar” down in the “woods” in order to kill and presumably eat it.⁷¹ Midas has essentially transitioned from the unnatural household in Aristotle’s *Politics* that relied upon “interest” to sustain itself, and into the eminently natural one predicated upon “crop and animal husbandry”.

⁶⁹ John Manwood, *A Breffe Collection of the Lawes of the Forest Collected and Gathered Together, Aswell out of the Statutes & Common Lawes of This Realme, as Also out of Sundrie Auncient Presidents and Records, Concerning Matters of the Forest*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: s.n., 1592), 3.

⁷⁰ Andrew McRae, ‘Tree-Felling in Early Modern England: Michael Drayton’s Environmentalism’ in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 63, No. 260 (June 2012), 410-430 (414).

⁷¹ For the consumption of “boar” throughout the period, see Ken Albala, *Food in Early Modern Europe* (London: Greenwood Press, 2003), 62.

One might compare Midas' search for "solace" in the wilderness with the trajectories of both Diogenes and Timon of Athens. Indeed, these figures turn their backs on civilised society in a much more exaggerated way than Midas does, but they are both propelled by a disgust for their societies into a desire for "nature". Timon ultimately renounces the world of "debts" and "interest" for the earthly "nature" of woods and caves (*Timon*, 8.50-1, 14.177-8). As Jan H. Blits points out, Diogenes "distinguished between nature (*physis*) and convention (*nomos*). [...] for him, living according to nature mean[t] renouncing all but the barest necessities".⁷² Certainly, Midas' descent into "nature" is not as extreme as in either of these cases. Nevertheless, I contend that Lyly provides us with good reason to suspect that his Midas would be eager to avoid the conditions that gave rise to his earlier mistake.

In sum, by paying attention to the king's repeated invocations of "nature" throughout the first half of *Midas*, one can perceive that his specific decision to enter "the woods" is not an arbitrary one: wishing to extricate himself from the unnatural world of economic value and "interest", Midas flees the Court and enters the wilderness ("Nature"). Acknowledging these motivations also makes sense of Midas' preference for Pan's music over Apollo's. This mistake is not simply an extension of the same bad judgement Midas displayed in the play's first scene. Rather, I read this preference as expressing Midas' new attempts to return to "Nature". Ultimately, this decision highlights the tension between "nature" and "Nature" as I defined them above. For daring to prioritise the spontaneous, uncultivated realm of "Nature", the play punishes Midas for yet again desiring "against

⁷² Jan H. Blits, 'Philosophy (and Athens) in Decay: "Timon of Athens"' in *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 78, No. 4, Special Issue on Shakespeare's Politics in Honor of the 400th Anniversary of his Birth (Fall 2016), 539-550 (542).

nature” (a set of normative ethical and aesthetic values associated with Apollo). This episode brings the contradictions inherent to the “nature”/“convention” binary to the play’s surface, suggesting that the natural order of things implied by Aristotle, Christian iconoclasts, and Marx, represents a contingent, man-made, and violently imposed *convention*.

“The god of beasts, of woods, and hills”: Pan, Apollo, and the Music Contest

Eluded by the boar he was chasing, Midas stumbles across a competition between Apollo and Pan for “sovereignty in music” (4.1.82). After confessing his earlier follies, Midas accepts an invitation to judge the contest alongside a troupe of nymphs. While his fellow judges ultimately exalt Apollo and denigrate Pan, Midas prefers the music of the latter. This partiality “displease[s] Apollo” (4.1.150), who causes Midas to sprout the ears of an ass, much to the king’s “shame” (4.1.175). The remainder of the play concerns Midas’ efforts to appease Apollo and to secure the removal of his “ass’s ears”, which become a symbol of the king’s “bestly life” and “barbarous” judgement (4.1.178, 185). Clearly, judging the contest involves more than determining the better musician. Before Midas encounters the gods, they engage in a lengthy debate concerning where or by whom they are each “honoured”, and which of them is a genuine “god” (4.1.9, 26). As Peter Saccio puts it: “Midas’ mistake in judging the contest is not merely an aesthetic error. He does not recognise Apollo’s position as creator and sustainer of the universal order”.⁷³ To

⁷³ Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly*, 196.

choose Pan over Apollo is to commit a genuine error: to misapprehend the truth and legitimacy of the natural “order”.

The first thing to note is that both Apollo and Pan had ambiguous reputations in the early modern period. Clearly, in Lyly’s play, they are being used to represent “order” and the “barbarous” (4.1.20), respectively, but both figures possessed an equivocal symbolism that ought to qualify attempts to read the music contest as ethically straightforward. Apollo was employed as a symbol of truth and moral order in the period, but he was also frequently portrayed as both a legal functionary and (largely thanks to his Ovidian reputation) as an exemplar of “debility and untrustworthiness”.⁷⁴ Similarly, Pan was simultaneously a symbol of “unregenerate human nature” and a personification of a divinely inscribed “Nature”, an ambiguous reputation that reflects the duality at the heart of “nature” itself.⁷⁵

Apollo famously featured in Plato’s exploration of cultural education in Book Four of *The Republic*, where he is associated with “good use of language, harmony, grace, and rhythm”.⁷⁶ Moreover, these qualities are ultimately associated with “reason” and the ability to notice “defects or flaws in the construction or nature of things”.⁷⁷ This version

⁷⁴ Jamie C. Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo: Antiquity, Authority, & Chaucerian Poetics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 77.

Jonathan S. Burgess has discussed the association between Apollo and both “evil” and “untrustworthiness” in the *Iliad* and beyond. Jonathan S. Burgess, ‘Untrustworthy Apollo and the Destiny of Achilles: Iliad 24.55-63’ in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 102 (2004), 21-40.

⁷⁵ Bevington, ‘Introduction to *Midas*’, 128.

⁷⁶ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 99.

Plato also recounts a music contest between Apollo and Marsyas, a satyr who played “the pipes” in opposition to Apollo’s “lyre”, in a foreshadowing of the encounter between Apollo and Pan. For an interesting account of this contest and its relation to the Apollo/Pan myth, see Andrew Feldherr and Paula James, ‘Making the Most of Marsyas’ in *Arethusa*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Winter 2004), 75-103 (92).

⁷⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 100.

of Apollo was received into the early modern period via the influence of Neoplatonism, a philosophy that associated the god with divine unity, or the “denial of all multiplicity”.⁷⁸ However, in Ovid’s work Apollo frequently symbolised unbridled passions, eroticism, and anger: qualities that would oppose him to the operations of reason in an early modern Christian context.⁷⁹

Apollo’s connections with order and harmony also connected him with “Natural Law”. As R. S. White observes, this moral code was revived from pre-Christians like “Aristotle and Cicero” and posited that “reason” could allow one to appreciate the “moral laws” entailed by the “reliable, predictable, and symmetrical patterns” observable in the natural world.⁸⁰ Due to his general association with “law”, Apollo frequently appeared as a divine analogue to lawyers and judges in both Classical and early modern drama. Indeed, Apollo shows up in Peele’s *The Arraignement of Paris* simply to take part in a trial, where he advocates strongly for “lawe and right”.⁸¹ In Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, Hermione cries out for Apollo to “be [her] judge” during a formal arraignment and his oracle ultimately functions like a reasoned legal verdict (*Tale*, 3.2.114).⁸²

⁷⁸ Deirdre Carabine, ‘A Thematic Investigation of the Neoplatonic Concepts of Vision and Unity’ in *Hermathena*, No. 157 (Winter 1994), 43-56 (54); R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Company, Ltd., 1972), 59.

⁷⁹ Apollo’s pursuit of Daphne is, of course, representative here. Although his affection for Daphne is caused by the “fierce and cruel wrath” of Cupid, the episode is testament to Apollo’s vulnerability and fallibility. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.546.

⁸⁰ R. S. White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9.

⁸¹ George Peele, *The Araygnement of Paris a Pastorall. Presented before the Queenes Maiestie, by the Children of Her Chappell*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Henrie Marsh, 1584), E1v.

⁸² For Apollo’s temple as emblematic of “just legal proceedings” in this play, see Virginia Lee Strain, “‘The Winter’s Tale’ and the Oracle of Law’ in *ELH*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (Fall 2011), 557-584 (576).

However, reducing the emblem of “Natural Law” to a legal functionary taking part in terrestrial trials exposes the tension at the heart of “law” itself. The “law” can be understood as either empirically discoverable, “natural” moral code, or as conventional, cultural institution. This raises a difficult set of questions: do the conventional, human systems of legal arbitration reflect an ideal, *natural* truth, or is that truth itself a reified mirror-image of our terrestrial, *conventional* endeavours to maintain social order? Deborah H. Roberts recognises this tension at the core of Apollo in her reading of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*. She argues persuasively that the role of Apollo as a judicial intermediary in that play calls into question his supposed embodiment of heavenly “truth”, suggesting that he instead polices “an order of things” that mortals cannot fully understand (and may be either natural *or* conventional).⁸³

Pan had a similarly ambiguous reception history. He was frequently employed to illustrate irrationality, chaos, and the demonic. In his work *The City of God*, St. Augustine of Hippo categorised “Silvani and Pans” as “incubi”, beings associated with the Gaulish demons named “Dusii”.⁸⁴ In a pamphlet published in English in 1577, John Bishop cites Pan as an exemplar of pagan idolatry and irrationality (aligning him with a tradition occupied by Venus, Cupid, and Bacchus): “the God Pan did send into men such souden terrours, and consternations of minde, making them like madde men, so impotent and vnstaied: that for

⁸³ Deborah H. Roberts, *Apollo and his Oracle in the Oresteia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 57-9.

⁸⁴ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), 638.

This trend persisted into the early modern period. In 1531, Henry Cornelius Agrippa created a taxonomy of demons in his *De Occulta Philosophia*, and these beings are said to have a similar derivation to “Silvanuses, Fauns, Satyrs, Pans, Nymphs, Naiads, Nereids, Dryads”. Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, trans. David Quint (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1992), 448.

the time they be void of reason, but also of common sense”.⁸⁵ Despite these connotations, Pan was also a representative of divine order. The sixteenth-century mythographer Natale Conti wrote that “Pan is simply Nature itself, originating in and created by Divine Providence and God’s immortal mind”.⁸⁶ This conception of Pan aligns him with a character like Lyly’s “Nature” in *The Woman in the Moon*: an embodiment of ordered, natural design.

The ambivalence inherent in Pan is epitomised by a 1577 gloss on Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calendar*. The anonymous glosser writes the following against a passage describing Pan’s death:

By whych Pan, though of some be understood the great Satanas, whose kingdome at that time was by Christ conquered, the gates of hell broken vp, and death by death delivered to eternal death [...] yet I think it more properly meant of the death of Christ, the onely and very Pan, then suffering for his flock.⁸⁷

Pan can be interpreted as both “Satanas” and “Christ”, as a misshapen embodiment of evil or as an emblem of divine order. It appears to me that this ambivalent reception history is partly due to the ambiguities attending the concept of “nature” itself. Pan can be made to represent “nature” (divine order, purpose, *telos*), or “Nature” (wilderness,

⁸⁵ John Bishop, *Beautiful Blossomes, Gathered by Iohn Byshop, from the Best Trees of All Kyndes, Diuine, Philosophicall, Astronomicall, Cosmographical, Historical, & Humane, That Are Growing in Greece, Latium, and Arabia*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: H. Middleton, 1577), 77-8.

⁸⁶ Natale Conti, *Mythologiae*, Vol. 1, trans. John Mulryan and Steven Brown (Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 376.

⁸⁷ Quoted in: Kathleen M. Swain. “Mighty Pan”: Tradition and an Image in Milton’s Nativity “Hymn” in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 1971), 484-495 (488).

chaos, irrationality, the uncivil). In short, both Apollo and Pan are ethically ambiguous figures, and so the audience should hesitate to take their depictions in Lyly's play completely for granted.

Indeed, the ethical ambivalence around Pan and Apollo is underlined in *Midas* – the gods enter the play in the midst of a heated dispute about who is the more legitimate deity. Apollo declares himself to be the god “who tunes the heavens and makes them all hang by harmony” (4.1.1-2), alluding to his Neoplatonic function as a symbol of truth, order, and divine reason. He characterises Pan as merely “the god of beasts, of woods, and hills, excluded from heaven and in earth not honoured” (4.1.25-6). Interestingly, Pan does not straightforwardly dispute these accusations. Instead of contesting the explicit facts communicated by Apollo, Pan instead attempts to invert the ethical and aesthetic hierarchies they imply: “Believe me, Apollo, our groves are pleasanter than your heavens, our milkmaids than your goddesses, our rude ditties to a pipe than your sonnets to a lute” (4.1.56-8). Pan's response to Apollo's accusations simply affirms the ethical and aesthetic merits of his terrestrial, uncultured (“rude”), and earthly realm. In order to counter Apollo's claim that he is not a legitimate “god” (“[one of the] heavenly gods”) (4.1.29), as Apollo puts it), Pan stresses the superior “pleasant[ness]” of his domain. In short, this initial exchange between the gods immediately suggests that Apollo's natural superiority to Pan may be predicated upon nothing more than the former's arbitrary tastes.

The contest proper opens with Pan's performance, which is instantly met with derision from the nymphs. Erato, speaking as their representative, provides the following judgement on Pan's song:

We all say that Apollo hath showed himself both a god and of music the god; Pan himself a rude satyr, neither keeping measure nor time, his piping as far out of tune as his body out of form. To thee, divine Apollo, we give the prize and reverence. (4.1.132-6)

Erato does not use any words denoting personal pleasure, satisfaction, or delight. On the contrary, the nymph's verdict appears to be based solely on an application of the criteria for success mandated by the nature of the contest. In other words, Erato simply rehearses the view that proper music (the type historically associated with Apollo) ought to conform to certain musical conventions (involving the correct "measure", "time", and "tune").

The teleological implications of music that is "out of tune" is indicated by Erato's equation of Pan's untuned music with his misshapen "form". To appreciate precisely what is suggested here, one might compare Lyly's passage with Shakespeare's use of a musical metaphor in *King Lear*, where Cordelia speaks the following lines:

O you kind gods,
Cure this great breach in his abusèd nature;
The untuned and hurrying senses O wind up
Of this child-changèd father! (*Lear*, 21.11-4)⁸⁸

⁸⁸ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Of course, there is a difference between a string that is “untuned” (slackened) and music that is itself “out of tune”, but there is an obvious causal connection between the two in many cases. Shakespeare associates being out of tune with an abuse of “nature”, rehearsing the teleological implications of discordant music current throughout the early modern period.

Thomas Morley, in his *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practical Music* (1597), writes that discord is “a mixt sound compact of divers sounds naturallie offending the ear, and therefore commonlie excluded from musicke”.⁸⁹ There is a fascinating blend of the natural and conventional in this formulation. Morley presumes that the “mixt sound” of discordant music is “naturallie” repugnant to human ears and is “excluded from musicke”. The fact that such sounds *can* be “excluded” implies that “musicke” constitutes a type of convention: a man-made practice, the features of which can be altered at will. Of course, Morley implies that these conventions *will* remain the same (the same types of music will be wilfully included and excluded), precisely because the ear “naturallie” favours some sounds over others. However, it can surely be seen how such an account begins to problematise the boundary between the natural and the conventional, and in precisely the same way that the king’s “natural” familial bond to his subjects did.

In short, the nymphs submit that Pan’s music fails to conform to the proper conventions of music, which are themselves supposedly reflections of natural “form”. The spirit of their judgement is noticeably different from that subsequently expressed by Midas. The king reaches the following verdict:

⁸⁹ Thomas Morley, *A plaine and easie introduction to practicall musicke set downe in forme of a dialogue: devided into three partes*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Peter Short, 1597), 71.

Methinks there's more sweetness in the pipe of Pan than Apollo's lute. I brook not that nice tickling of strings; that contents me that makes one start. What a shrillness came into mine ears out of that pipe, and what a goodly noise it made! Apollo, I must needs judge that Pan deserveth most praise. (4.1.138-143)

Midas' judgement is significantly more subjective than that proffered by the nymphs. Where Erato began her assessment with "We all say", Midas begins his with "Methinks"; the nymph's declarative judgement contrasts with Midas' expression of personal preference. Midas uses highly subjective language - "sweetness", "contents", "goodly". There are no evocations of teleology, form, or even the musicality of Pan's performance. There are no allusions to his rhythm, tunefulness, measure, or ability to keep time. Instead, Midas insistently stresses how the music appeared to *his* "ears".

Midas judges in favour of Pan's music due to a combination of its ability to "content" him and the extent to which it promotes dancing (it "makes [him] start"). Employed as a verb, the word "start" signifies "a sudden movement" (to "leap", "jump", "caper", or "cavort").⁹⁰ Famously, John Northbrooke condemned dancing in his 1577 antitheatrical treatise. Northbrooke distinguishes between two types of dancing - one named "*Chorea*" that "signifieth ioye" and another that was instituted only for "pleasure and wantonnesse" and is further described by Northbrooke as "vaine, foolish, fleshly, filthie, and

⁹⁰ As Bevington puts it, Lyly's Midas prefers music "that makes one jump". Lyly, *Midas*, IV.1.140.fn; 'Start, v.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/189183>> [accessed 30 November 2020].

diuelishe”.⁹¹ He cites “Saint Chrysostome”, who argued that dancing “came first from the Deuill” and was intimately related to idolatry. As he writes of the Devil’s institution of dancing: “For when he sawe [...] that the people had committed Idolatrie to the golden Calfe, he gaue them this libertie, that they shoulde eate and drinke, and ryse vp to daunce”.⁹² According to him, dancing is not always to be condemned, but if dancing is provoked for the wrong reasons it can constitute a demonic celebration of “Idolatrie”.

The teleological implications of dancing are laid bare in a 1581 English pamphlet entitled *A dialogue between custom and veritie concerning the vse and abuse of dauncing*. In this dialogue, Custom cites various mythical and historical instances of dancing in order to determine whether the practice ought to be permitted within a Christian state. Verity argues that each of these examples involve the type of dancing Northbrooke regards as permissible, whereas contemporaneous Christians have a “custome” that “is clene contrarie” to these precedents.⁹³ Verity follows Northbrooke in identifying some dancing with Satan, “fleshly lusts”, and “Idolatrie”.⁹⁴

The opposition of “Verity” with “Custom” on this issue is telling. Custom ultimately abandons *himself* after being convinced by Truth, declaring: “God graunt I Custome leue my course | and may be calld to grace”.⁹⁵ Essentially, the pamphlet’s point is that dancing

⁹¹ John Northbrooke, *Spiritus Est Vicarius Christi in Terra. A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds with Other Idle Pastimes [et]c. Commonly Vsed on the Sabboth Day, Are Reproued by the Authoritie of the Word of God and Auntient Writers. Made Dialogueswise by Iohn Northbrooke Minister and Preacher of the Word of God*. Early English Books 1475-1640 (London: H. Bynneman, 1577), 113-114.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 114-115.

⁹³ Thomas Lovell, *A Dialogue between Custom and Veritie Concerning the vse and Abuse of Dauncing and Minstrelsie*. Early English Books 1475 - 1640 (London: Iohn Allde, 1581), B6r.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, C3r.

⁹⁵ Lovell, *A Dialogue between Custom and Veritie*, F1r.

is idolatrous, unnatural, and false, though it has become sanctioned by “Custome”, such that the practice persists into early modern English culture. This argument recalls the sounds that ought to be “excluded” from “Musicke” in Thomas Morley’s account. In both examples, an unnatural phenomenon is described that may (but should not) be kept alive by “Custome”.

In short, the boundary between nature and convention is thornier when used to discuss music or dancing, as opposed to money. There is no obvious defeater for Midas’ apparently unnatural behaviour in this latter episode, no gold that he is unable to swallow. His mistake is perceived as such on the basis of a seemingly reflexive definition of what it is “natural” to enjoy. In other words, it is natural and reasonable to enjoy Apollo’s music over Pan’s, precisely because reasonable human beings will naturally enjoy Apollo’s music over Pan’s. The fact that someone might spontaneously enjoy Pan’s music more than Apollo’s threatens the definitions of reason, nature, and order supporting the aesthetic and religious hierarchies associated with the latter god. In other words, the very existence of such deviant opinions raises the possibility that the purportedly “natural” order is, in fact, a type of *convention*.

Indeed, Lyly’s Pan himself suggests this while jubilantly congratulating Midas on his good judgement. As the god says of the nymphs: “These girls [...] have been brought up in chambers with soft music, not where I make the woods ring with my pipe, Midas” (4.1.144-148). Pan claims that the nymphs only believe Apollo’s performance was objectively greater than his because they are *accustomed* to “soft music”. I read Pan’s claim here as an invitation to consider precisely why Apollo’s music is the naturally

superior variety, and it qualifies the play's insistence that Pan (and, consequently, Midas) is a "savage" "monster" (4.1.28, 61) who desires "against nature". In short, the rather straightforward violation of "nature" in the play's first half becomes much more complex in its second. Even as the language and concepts in the music contest scene draw attention to the ambiguities surrounding "nature", Lyly simultaneously suggests that his audience should recognise that Midas' judgement was unnatural and "savage", precisely because they themselves ought to know the natural and right verdict.

I contend that Lyly's music contest episode raises many of the issues addressed by Michel de Montaigne in his famous essay *On the Cannibals*.⁹⁶ Commenting upon European reports of Brazilian cultures that figured the latter as "wild" or "savage" (two words used to describe Pan in Lyly's play), Montaigne writes:

Those 'savages' are only wild in the sense that we call fruits wild when they are produced by Nature in her ordinary course: whereas it is the fruit which we have artificially perverted and misled from the common order which we ought to call savage. It is in the first kind that we find their true, vigorous, living, most natural and most useful properties and virtues, which we have bastardized in the other kind by merely adapting them to our corrupt tastes.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ This essay was written *circa.* 1580, though it didn't appear in an English translation until John Florio's 1603 edition of Montaigne's works. It is unlikely that Lyly read the essay, but his handling of the Midas narrative clearly evokes many of the concerns explored by Montaigne and which were increasingly vexing writers and travellers of the period.

⁹⁷ Michel De Montaigne, 'On the Cannibals' in *Michel De Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 228-242 (231-232).

The designer “Nature” here is supposedly responsible for those uncultivated, “savage” societies and, in fact, what the coloniser perceives as “natural” constitutes an artificial *perversion* of the “common order”, according to their contingent “tastes”. In other words, the colonisers’ conventional understanding of what is “natural” does not align with what is, in reality, “produced by Nature”. Montaigne’s passage clearly articulates the conventional character of the “natural” that I have argued *Midas* repeatedly draws attention toward.

In *Sexual Dissidence* (1991), Jonathan Dollimore cited Montaigne’s observations above in order to illustrate an ambivalence at the heart of “Nature” as understood in the early modern period. Dollimore focuses upon the relationship between “Culture” and “Nature”, an opposition that essentially tracks the one between nature and convention I began this chapter with. His quotation is lengthy, but worth providing in full:

Culture is construed both as the (binary) opposite of nature, yet also ‘rooted’ in nature in the sense that it operates according to, or reflects, natural law. [...] Such complexities accrue to nature as a necessary or inevitable consequence of its ideological configurations. As such they may be functional. But a functional complexity can become, or be ushered into, a disarticulating contradiction. [...] Perversion reactivates these contradictions, by revealing the coerciveness of the normal, the arbitrariness of nature, the way both the normal and the natural can maintain regimes of truth only through a demonizing and disavowal.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 115-6.

I believe that Lyly's *Midas* constitutes a compelling illustration of the "coerciveness of the normal", as well as the potential "arbitrariness of nature". Midas' perversion in the music contest provokes precisely a "demonizing and disavowal" that forces him into obeying Apollo. Midas bemoans the fact that "savage beasts must be my companions" after Apollo causes him to sprout "the ears of an ass" (IV.1.154, 181). Where the first half of the play literalised the conceptual error underlying covetous idolatry and commodity fetishism, the second half of the play literalises the ways in which historical accusations of idolatry and fetishism have been used to dehumanise an irrational, "savage" Other.

In the following, final section of this chapter, I will outline the ways in which Aristotelian teleology, Christian iconoclastic discourse, and the concept of "fetishism" have been used to dehumanise and subjugate people by declaring their beliefs and behaviours as "against nature". The same teleological framework that Aristotle used to condemn usury and money hoarding also functioned to justify slavery as a "natural", indispensable human relationship. Similarly, the concept of the "fetish" originated in accounts like those described by Montaigne: it initially marked the irresolvable social and ethical differences between European Christians and foreign people whose practices were considered irrational, unnatural, and "savage". Where the first half of *Midas* literalised the conceptual error of commodity fetishism, the second half literalises the dehumanising, exclusionary distinctions at the heart of Aristotelian teleology and the idea of the "fetish" itself. To acknowledge how these distinctions are relevant to Lyly's moral universe is to cast a fresh and extremely troubling light on the "corrective punishment" critics have been so confident his Midas deserves.

“All Human and Natural Properties”: Idolatry, Fetishism, and the Unnatural

In the same work in which Aristotle argues that money hoarding is unnatural, he also addresses the issue of “natural slavery”.⁹⁹ As the philosopher T. A. Sinclair explains these passages in his translation of *Politics*: “since Aristotle thinks of life in the Greek state as being the ‘natural’ and ‘best’ life for man, he is immediately faced with the crucial task of showing that at least some slavery is ‘natural’”.¹⁰⁰ Aristotle prefaces his justification by acknowledging a hypothetical critique of the notion that some people are “natural” slaves:

Others say that it is contrary to *nature* to rule as master over slave, because the distinction between slave and free is one of *convention* only, and in nature there is no difference, so that this form of rule is based on force and is therefore not just.¹⁰¹

Clearly, the same theoretical framework that Aristotle used to condemn money hoarding is here applied to the issue of the “slave”. Aristotle argues in favour of the naturalness of slavery by construing the master-slave relation as reflecting a “universal natural pattern” observable in various other “natural”, hierarchical relationships: male/female, man/beast, mind/body, and rational/irrational.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 63.

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 62.

¹⁰¹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 63, my emphasis.

¹⁰² Aristotle, *The Politics*, 66, 67.

Aristotle immediately recognises that this appeal to analogy will not hold up to scrutiny, precisely because many slaves do not appear to be less rational or deserving than their masters. In order to rectify this, he introduces the idea of the “legal slave”: one who is not “by nature” a slave, but rather becomes one due to social contingency (Aristotle provides the example of a prisoner of war).¹⁰³ Of course, the implication here is that some people simply *are* less rational and deserving than others – what is remarkable is how poorly Aristotle argues for the truth of this proposition. He appears content to state that a rational person will know the difference between a “natural” slave and someone who has been enslaved via “convention”.¹⁰⁴

Obviously, Aristotle’s logic here is circular, self-serving, and repulsive. These arguments have been soundly and thoroughly refuted.¹⁰⁵ However, they exerted a real influence upon early modern culture, and when “nature” is invoked to signal a person’s unethical or impractical behaviour, the concept unavoidably implies the “universal natural pattern” that might legitimate dehumanisation and subjugation. The most famous example of this subjugation from the period must be Shakespeare’s Caliban, the “abhorred slave”, “on whose nature | Nurture can never stick” (*Tempest*, 1.2.350; 4.1.188-9).¹⁰⁶ Indeed, several critics have read Shakespeare’s characterisation of Caliban in light of Aristotelian

¹⁰³ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 71.

¹⁰⁴ Aristotle’s definition of the “slave” is a circular one: “any human being that by nature belongs not to himself but to another is by nature a slave”. Aristotle, *The Politics*, 65.

¹⁰⁵ For a good, recent refutation of Aristotle’s views on slavery that also troubles his distinction between “nature” and “convention” (as I will in this chapter), see Jill Frank, ‘Citizens, Slaves, and Foreigners: Aristotle on Human Nature’ in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (2004), 91-104. The following paper explores how Aristotle’s perceptions of women and slaves are intertwined, while also showing how both perceptions imply contradiction: Dana Jalbert Stauffer, ‘Aristotle’s Account of the Subjection of Women’ in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (October 2008), 929-941.

¹⁰⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel, reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

theories of slavery.¹⁰⁷ To be clear, I am not able to pursue the specific issue of slavery in this chapter. Instead, I draw attention to this example in order to illustrate the exclusionary and dehumanising binaries underlying the Aristotelian *telos*. To accuse a usurer of behaving “contrary to nature” is to invoke a normative, ethically biased worldview according to which some people are more deservingly human than others.

Precisely as this worldview influenced early modern conceptions of idolatry, so did those conceptions contribute to the formation of the “fetish” concept that Marx would inherit. The previous chapter on *Sappho and Phao* stressed the connections between fetishism and both irrationality and desire. However, as I have also already indicated, fetishism has been used to signify mistaken attitudes towards material objects and economic value. It should be recalled that the “fetish” originated through “a first encounter between Portuguese sailors and the savages of the Gold Coast”.¹⁰⁸ The word “fetish” derives from the Portuguese pidgin word *Fetisso*, which is itself a derivation of *feitiço*.¹⁰⁹ The latter derives from the Latin *facticius*, meaning “manufactured” or “artificial”.¹¹⁰ The word *Fetisso* carries the more specific denotation of “a thing that is magical, enchanted, or

¹⁰⁷ This is a long-standing tradition, but very recent examples include: Jonathan Goldberg, *Tempest in the Caribbean* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 133-136; John Kunat, “‘Play me False’: Rape, Race, and Conquest in “The Tempest”” in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Fall 2014), 307-327; Paromita Chakravarti, ‘Natural Fools and the Historiography of Renaissance Folly’ in *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 2011), 208-227.

¹⁰⁸ Tomoko Masuzawa, ‘Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (April 2000), 242-267 (243).

¹⁰⁹ William Pietz, ‘The Problem of the Fetish, I’ in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 9 (Spring 1985), 5-17 (5).

¹¹⁰ This translation of the Latin *facticius* is sourced from the *OED* etymology for the English “factitious”: ‘Factitious, Adj.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/67507>> [accessed 17 June 2020].

A medical encyclopaedia commissioned by the American College of Physicians rehearses this etymology for “fetish”, but translates the Latin *facticius* as “made by art”: William S. Haubrich, *Medical Meanings: A Glossary of Word Origins*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: American College of Physicians, 1997), 87.

capable of producing oracles”.¹¹¹ The “fetish” ultimately connotes a misapprehension of the spiritual in materiality, a religious attention paid to the wrong (because irreducibly material) objects.¹¹²

I have already argued that there are significant affinities between the concepts of the *Fetisso* and the idol. Nevertheless, it is worth returning to the 1602 Dutch travelogue I cited in my Introduction, both because it explicitly relates idolatry with fetishism, and because it includes an explicit evocation of “Nature”. This travelogue was translated into English in 1613 by Samuel Purchas, who devised a glossary of terms to be attached to the publication; this glossary defines the word “Fetisso” as an “idoll of Guinea”.¹¹³ The account describes “many strawen Rings, called Fetissos, or Gods” that are equated with “idoll[s]” insofar as they are manufactured deities of an unnatural sort (precisely because they are the arbitrary products of “Art”).¹¹⁴ As Purchas writes of this arbitrary production:

Neither can Nature alone vsurpe this Prauiledge, but Art, in other things her jealous corriuall, and farre vnequal competitor, in this matter of God-making, commonly gets the vpper hand. And therefore they with their ceremonious Art can make them Fetisso’s , or Gods, at pleasure.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Emanuele Coccia, *Goods: Advertising, Urban Space, and the Moral Law of the Image*, trans. Melissa Gemma (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 36.

¹¹² This aligns with David Hawkes’ analysis of the similarity between idolatry and commodity fetishism. Both name a “general tendency to mere appearance, to the material world as it is empirically given to us”. Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, 53.

¹¹³ Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage. Or Relations of the Vworld and the Religions Obserued in All Ages and Places Discovered, from the Creation Vnto This Present In Foure Partes*, Early English Books 1475-1640 (London: William Stansby, 1613), Vuu4v.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 153.

Obviously, an account like this coheres with Christian descriptions of idols, as well as Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. Abandoning "Nature", the African creates artificial Gods "at pleasure". In other words, their worship practice is "against nature" because their gods are conventional and arbitrary: "the worke of mens hands".

Yet again, Purchas' definition of the *Fetisso* as an "idoll of Guinea" suggests that the difference between the fetish and the idol is not one of kind, but of location - the *Fetisso* names the specific *idolatry* of the Guinean people. As I discussed in the previous chapter, a key similarity between fetishism and idolatry is that neither concept names a single, isolatable error. Rather, both words are used to identify a defective *worldview* resulting in various unnatural beliefs and practices. The texts detailing European observation of Guinean culture typically relate the fetishistic attitudes of the people there to their wider socio-ethical organisation.¹¹⁶ As Pietz observes: "Protestant merchants visiting the coast elaborated a general explanation of African social order as being based on the principles underlying the worship of *Fetissos*".¹¹⁷ In other words, the fetishistic *worldview* of the African society is used to explain various cultural differences between them and the European traveller.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Pietz provides the following list of early modern works that characterise African societies as founded upon worship of *Fetissos*: "Ramusio, *Viaggio e Navigazioni* (1550), de Bry, *India Orientalis* (1597), Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus* (1625), Churchill, *Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1732)". William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish' in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 13 (Spring 1987), 23-45 (23).

¹¹⁷ Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish, II', 23.

¹¹⁸ It should be recalled Pietz's description of fetishistic societies as reflecting "a world turned *morally upside down* by officially enforced superstitious delusion that suppressed men's reasoning faculties". William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism' in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 16 (Autumn 1988), 105-124 (105), my emphasis.

A particularly stark manifestation of this difference concerns trade and economic value. As Pietz again puts it: “European traders constantly remarked on the trinkets and trifles they traded for objects of real value” during visits to the African coast.¹¹⁹ Of course, these encounters simply expose the socially contingent nature of “real value” in the first instance. The economically valuable objects of the European traveller may have been worthless within the African economic system; likewise, the seemingly valueless “trinkets and trifles” may have had a great deal of exchange-value on the West African coast. Unable to recognise a potential difference of economic *form*, the travellers had to presume that the Africans were misperceiving “real” value in objects that were *intrinsically* (“naturally”) valueless. As Lisa Freinkel puts it, “the *fetisso* helps a nascent European capitalism define itself and its commodities, over and against a benighted ethnic Other: an Other incapable of recognizing the “true” value of objects”.¹²⁰

This is precisely the conceptual baggage that Marx inherits when he describes commodity “fetishism” in *Capital*. Again, it should be noted that Marx found the word “fetishism” (originally *fétichisme*) in de Brosses’ work.¹²¹ As many critics have noted, de Brosses anticipates Hegel’s conception of African peoples by imagining that their material worship practice is a symptom of their “childish belief in the effectiveness of images”.¹²² In other words, Marx inherits a tradition that associates “fetishism” with African

¹¹⁹ Pietz, ‘The Problem of the Fetish, I’, 9.

¹²⁰ Lisa Freinkel, ‘The Shakespearean Fetish’ in *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. Ewan Fernie, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), 109-130 (110).

¹²¹ Aaron Freeman, ‘Charles de Brosses and the French Enlightenment Origins of Religious Fetishism’ in *Intellectual Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2014), 203-214.

¹²² Hannah Baader and Ittai Weinryb, ‘Images at Work’ in *Representations*, No. 133 (Winter 2016), 1-19 (12).

In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel famously described Africa as “the land of childhood”. It is not incidental that Hegel was an enormous influence upon Marx. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2000), 109.

credulity. At an earlier stage of this intellectual tradition, Hegel (an enormous influence on Marx) had defined the African as exhibiting “man in his completely *wild* and untamed state”.¹²³ As Erik van Ree observes, at different points in their careers, both Marx and Engels suggested that black-skinned people “stood a degree closer to animals than the rest of humanity”.¹²⁴

This contextualising should provoke us to rethink Marx’s citation of *Timon of Athens* in support of the view that commodity fetishism transforms “all *human* and *natural* properties into their contraries”.¹²⁵ As in the case of Aristotle, Marx’s theoretical claims may aspire to identify the natural and the universal, but they are the product of a worldview that is hideously contingent and partial. The idea of commodity fetishism draws its rhetorical power from an image of naïve, “savage or semi-savage” Africans unable to appreciate the true nature and origin of value.¹²⁶ In short, there is a worrying intellectual thread running through Aristotelian teleology, Christian discourse surrounding idolatry, and the “fetish” idea. In each case, a normative, “natural” epistemology implies, entails, or legitimates the dehumanisation of other people. What might appear as impartial *descriptions* of the world ultimately necessitate ethical, social, and psychological *prescriptions* that attain their persuasiveness from the image of uncivilised Others. In other words, all three of these worldviews participate in what Dollimore described as the “coerciveness of the normal”, and all three of them reflect the

¹²³ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 111, my emphasis.

For a good refutation of Hegel’s views and an account of their influence upon Marx, see Babacar Camara, ‘The Falsity of Hegel’s Theses on Africa’ in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (September 2005), 82-96.

¹²⁴ Erik van Ree, ‘Marx and Engels’s Theory of History: Making Sense of the Race Factor’ in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2019), 54-73 (64).

¹²⁵ Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, 377, my emphasis.

¹²⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 189.

menacing “arbitrariness of nature”. As a play dramatising two violations of the “natural” that reflect Aristotle’s views and anticipate Marx’s, *Midas* constitutes a vivid depiction of the dehumanising logic underpinning idolatry and fetishism.

At the beginning of this chapter, I insisted that Midas’ two mistakes were different. As I have argued, there is a revealing distinction between misapprehending gold for its economic value and preferring Pan’s music over Apollo’s. The importance of this difference becomes all the clearer once it is acknowledged that the play itself works hard to equate Midas’ errors, to cast both as violations of the same “natural” order. Upon discovering that Midas’ “ass’s ears” are the result of his preference for Pan’s music, Sophronia remarks: “Is it possible Midas should be so overshoot in judgement? Unhappy Midas, whose wits melt with his gold, and whose gold is consumed with his wits!” (5.3.72-4). By connecting Midas’ faulty “judgement”, his resulting “ass’s ears”, and “gold”, Sophronia implies that her father’s second error is simply an extension of his first, a view shared by the majority (if not all) of the scholars interested in this play.

The play’s final, redemptive moments further emphasise this implied connection. In the concluding scene of the play, Apollo explicitly declares what Midas must do in order to absolve himself and shed his “ass’s ears”. As the god prescribes:

Weigh not in one balance gold and justice.

[...] The friend that thou wouldst make thy foe,

The kingdom thou wouldst make the world,

[...] The gold that thou dost think a god

Shall conquer, fall, shrink short, be common
With force, with pride, with fear, with traffic.
If this thou like, shake off an ass's ears.
If not, forever shake an ass's ears. (5.3.90-101)

The threat is a clear one: if Midas does not respect the hierarchies associated with Apollo's rule (justice/gold, friend/foe, kingdom/world, god/gold), he must continue to appear a "savage" "monster". By associating the punishment of the "ass's ears" with both of Midas' mistakes (via his invocation of "gold"), Apollo underlines the play's general proposition that the golden touch and music contest episodes are mutual illustrations of Midas' tendency to desire "against nature". It is the discernible *difference* between these mistakes that unveils the hideously normative, aggressive, and dehumanising character of the "natural order" as ostensibly embodied by Apollo.

Upon accepting Apollo's counsel, Midas remarks: "Phrygia shall be governed by gods, not men, lest the gods make beasts of men" (5.3.34-6). He continues: "Blessed be Apollo, quiet be Lesbos, happy be Midas!" (5.3.138-9). Apollo has finally provided the correct answer to Midas' question in the first scene: "What [...] may make Midas most happy, and his subjects best content?". The answer the play provides is unambiguous: Midas must respect Apollo's hierarchies and, if he does so, he will no longer be considered a "beast", his "subjects" in "Lesbos" will be content, and he will have secured his own "happ[iness]". In short, Midas will have finally found himself desiring in accordance with, instead of "against", "nature". Peter Saccio was right to observe that Midas' mistakes are both "disruptions of natural order" insofar as the play clearly advocates a

socio-ethical hierarchy that the king fell short of twice.¹²⁷ Apollo functions here as an embodiment of precisely the kind of “natural”, normative order insisted upon by Aristotle, the Christian iconoclast, and Marx.

Before concluding this chapter, I will briefly summarise the thread of my argument so far. I have suggested that a misapprehension of the conventional for the natural was considered an idolatrous category error during Lyly’s lifetime, and it is also a mistake that corresponds to the Marxist description of commodity fetishism. By introducing teleological language into his Ovidian source material, Lyly frames his Midas as an unnatural idolater and commodity fetishist. Ultimately, the practical uselessness of Midas’ coveted “gold” illuminates his mistake. Recognising that he has misperceived an arbitrary signifier of value for abstract economic capital, Midas seeks solace in the “woods”, fleeing the abstract relations underpinning Court life and instead pursuing the “Nature” beyond its walls. Midas promptly commits another mistake, preferring Pan’s music to Apollo’s. Again, it is implied that this error is an unnatural one insofar as Apollo’s is the naturally superior brand of music. However, the music contest scene problematises the straightforwardness of Midas’ second blunder. It does so by drawing attention to the fact that Apollo’s aesthetic (and ethical) superiority may be predicated upon a type of arbitrary *convention*. The harsh, dehumanising punishment of Midas in the play’s second half simply underscores this implication: the impression conveyed is not of someone who reaps the inevitable consequences of a genuine mistake (as in misapprehending gold for useful commodities), but of one who is coerced and civilised by a violent authority figure. Interpreted in light of the play’s preoccupation with

¹²⁷ Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly*, 196.

“nature”, this coercion reflects the dehumanising, normative, and biased nature of accusations of both “idolatry” and “fetishism”.

To conclude, *Midas* mobilises and problematises the iconoclastic binary of “nature”/“convention”. Moreover, precisely as Lyly’s earlier plays appeared to encourage their audiences to accept the deification of their mortal characters, so the narrative trajectory of *Midas* appears to encourage its audience to applaud Midas’ “corrective punishment”. David Bevington described Lyly’s closing scene as depicting “the redemption of Midas” that “takes the form of submission to a higher power”.¹²⁸ On this reading, the play’s conclusion corrects Midas’ idolatry; the king implicitly concedes that his earlier errors were “against nature”, but he now respects the natural relationship between god and man (unlike his unnatural precedents, Phaethon and Icarus). However, in characteristic fashion, Lyly’s dramatic content belies the straightforwardness of his narrative form. At every turn, the coherence and stability of “nature” is called into question, resulting in another ambivalent storyline that appears to raise more questions than it answers.

In short, I believe that *Midas* does usher the concept of “nature” into “a disarticulating contradiction”, thereby qualifying its own resolution and highlighting another problematic dimension of accusations of idolatry and fetishism. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Lyly consciously *intended* to deconstruct the concept of “nature” that underpins his narrative. While I have a deep appreciation for Lyly’s work, *Midas* is the only one of his plays that I find ethically repugnant. However, I see no reason to approach

¹²⁸ Bevington, ‘Introduction to *Midas*’, 129.

this play on its own ethical terms. As I have already suggested, reflective critics and scholars are rarely swept along by the ethical presumptions of plays like *The Jew of Malta* or *The Taming of the Shrew*. It is startling to me how few critics have paid sufficient attention to the dehumanising logic at the heart of Lyly's *Midas*.

Crucially, once approached from a less credulous perspective, *Midas* provides valuable insight into the instability of the “nature”/“convention” binary. Put simply, *Midas* draws attention to the contingent and customary character of “nature” itself. For my purposes, this feature of Lyly's play is significant both because the above binary is integral to the histories of idolatry and fetishism, and because *Midas*' first mistake so *clearly* illustrates these types of category error. In short, this play from the latter portion of Lyly's dramatic career continues the trend of simultaneously mobilising and problematising concepts relevant to “idolatry”: concepts of equal relevance to the cultural legacy of the “fetish”. It is my sincere hope that Marxist scholars will take more of an interest in this incisive investigation into the nature of commodity fetishism in the years to come.

The final chapter in this thesis considers Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis*. As the title of this work ought to suggest, *Love's Metamorphosis* revels in transformations, portraying a world in which people and things become wholly coextensive. As I will argue, the play opens with a symbolic crucifixion that clearly evokes Eucharistic imagery. By initially alluding to the controversies surrounding the Eucharistic materials, Lyly's subsequent portrayal of bodies transforming into objects and *vice versa* becomes a meditation upon yet another key iconoclastic binary: person/thing.

CHAPTER IV

Iconoclasm and Objectification in *Love's Metamorphosis*

The second scene of *Love's Metamorphosis* depicts an accusation of “idolatry” followed by an act of iconoclasm. (1.2.68-9).¹ In a moment of spectacular stagecraft, the forester Erisichthon takes his axe to a “holy tree” (1.2.86) around which three nymphs propitiate their goddess Ceres. The tree pours forth red blood and utters a “voice” (1.2.104), revealing the apparent plant to be a metamorphosed nymph. In the following chapter, I will argue that Lyly adapts his Ovidian source material, transforming a general parable of blasphemy and folly into a more specific one exploring idolatry and iconoclasm. Despite Erisichthon’s explicit use of the word “idolatry”, alongside the obvious reflection of early modern iconoclasm in his desecration of the tree, it appears that no scholarly work has pursued the importance of these themes to the plot of *Love's Metamorphosis*.

Until recently, critics of Lyly have been particularly dismissive of this pastoral play. John Dover Wilson, convinced that *Love's Metamorphosis* was nothing more than a facile compliment to Queen Elizabeth, wrote that it did “not require any detailed consideration”.² G. K. Hunter and Peter Saccio were less overtly contemptuous, but both critics were more interested in identifying thematic similarities between *Love's Metamorphosis* and *Galatea* than in seriously relating the former’s themes to wider

¹ John Lyly, *Love's Metamorphosis*, ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

² John Dover Wilson, *John Lyly* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Bowes, 1905), 112.

cultural debate.³ To take Michael Pincombe's formulation as representative, even those twentieth-century critics who *did* investigate the play's plot in detail tended simply to explore its themes of "love and modesty", circling around Lyly's depiction of the shepherds' amorous pursuit of three obstinate nymphs.⁴

In recent years, critics have flouted Dover Wilson's assessment and afforded *Love's Metamorphosis* a great deal of incisive scholarly attention, producing excellent work on its themes of corporeality, virginity, and monstrosity.⁵ Moreover, critics such as Andy Kesson, Lindsay Ann Reid, and Leah Scragg have all acknowledged the play's complex staging requirements, while further recognising the relevance of those requirements to the play's themes, characterisations, and allegorical import.⁶ These scholars are much better equipped to discuss early modern staging practice than I am, and their work greatly informs the argument of this chapter. However, despite these gratifying steps forward, what has not been explored in any detail is the play's treatment of "idolatry" and

³ G. K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 81-211; Peter Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly: A Study in Allegorical Dramaturgy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 162-4.

⁴ Michael Pincombe, *The Plays of John Lyly: Eros and Eliza* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 149.

Other examples of this longstanding critical trend include: Bernard F. Huppé, 'Allegory of Love in Lyly's Court Comedies' in *ELH*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (June 1947), 93-113; Robert Y. Turner, 'Some Dialogues of Love in Lyly's Comedies' in *ELH*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (September 1962), 276-288; R. S. White, 'Metamorphosis by Love in Elizabethan Romance, Romantic Comedy, and Shakespeare's Early Comedies' in *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 137 (February 1984), 14-44.

⁵ In a 1993 paper on Lyly, Theodora Jankowski performed an admirable and sensitive reading of the "rape-murder" of Fidelity, in which she acknowledged the importance of corporeality, objectification, and Christian culture to *Love's Metamorphosis*. Theodora A. Jankowski, "'The Scorne of Savage people': Virginity as 'Forbidden Sexuality' in John Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis*" in *Renaissance Drama*, Vol. 24 (1993), 123-153 (124).

⁶ Leah Scragg's interpretations of the play are laid out in the introduction to her exemplary edition of the text (2008). In 2011, Andy Kesson wrote on the relevance of dynamic stage spectacle to the "interiority of [the play's] characters"; I will return to his work later in the chapter. Finally, in 2018, Lindsay Ann Reid published an article on "Ovidian retro-metamorphosis" that discussed how perpetually metamorphosing bodies are relevant to the subversion apparent in *Love's Metamorphosis*' resolution. Andy Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 124; Lindsay Ann Reid, 'Ovidian Retro-Metamorphosis on the Elizabethan Stage' in *Early Theatre*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2018), 71-90.

iconoclasm, two themes I regard as utterly central to Lyly's adaptation of his source material (and to the spectacular stage images that adaptation necessitates).

This chapter's primary contention is that the tree-felling episode in Lyly's play draws upon conventional crucifixion imagery. As such, I argue that *Love's Metamorphosis* belongs to a dramatic tradition of replicating or satirising the Eucharist: a tradition furnished by plays as diverse as the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (1491) and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587), two works I explore below. The secondary, corollary contention of this chapter is that *Love's Metamorphosis* constitutes a vivid study of *objectification*, a concept that is fundamental to the histories of idolatry and fetishism. The revelation that Ceres' "holy tree" is a living person precipitates a plot in which people become equivalent with things. Within the world of the play, humans are transformed into various objects and then returned to their former "shapes" (5.4.47). In the playhouse itself, actors are replaced by props and props substituted by actors. The tendency to treat people as though they are inanimate objects (and *vice versa*) has always troubled iconoclasts and ideology critics. Through its plot and theatrical magic, *Love's Metamorphosis* demonstrates the coextensivity of persons and objects, a coextensivity that has been insisted upon by recent critics of Marxist theory.

The following chapter is composed of three sections. The first demonstrates how Lyly's handling of the Erisichthon myth explicitly invites his audience to reflect upon the issues of idolatry and iconoclasm. This section also outlines evidence to suggest that the image of a blood-stained tree would have evoked Christ's crucifixion and the liturgical commemoration of that event in the ceremony of the Eucharist. Building upon these

observations, I also contextualise *Love's Metamorphosis* in relation to plays with parallel themes – in doing so, I indicate that Lyly's play slightly differs from similar drama insofar as it unveils the ontological (as well as the social, ethical, or legal) implications of the Eucharist. The second section will explain the relevance of a stark person/thing binary to the histories of Judeo-Christian iconoclasm and traditional Marxist ontology. Finally, the third section will argue that the themes of iconoclasm and metamorphosis collide in Lyly's play, generating yet another theatrical problematisation of a key iconoclastic claim.

Erisichthon, Fidelity, and the Crucifix

Love's Metamorphosis contains various echoes of the Erisichthon myth as it appeared in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and it is widely recognised that Ovid's source text for his tale was Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter*.⁷ By reading across these distinct handlings of the same myth, it becomes strikingly apparent that Lyly's version of the tale provides it an overtly Christian subtext. In Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter*, Erisichthon's motivations for desecrating the sacred grove of Demeter (the Greek counterpart to Ceres) are decidedly unclear. Readers are told that Erisichthon "hastened with twenty attendants [...] arming them both with double axes and with hatchets, and they rushed shameless into the grove of Demeter".⁸ Callimachus does not explicitly provide a motive for this assault. His

⁷ Leah Scragg, 'Introduction' in *Love's Metamorphosis*, 1-40 (11).

Ovid's source material is a contentious topic but, as C. Michael Sampson put it, "it is well established that Callimachus's *Hymn to Demeter* influences Ovid's handling of the Erysichthon myth". C. Michael Sampson, 'Callimachean Tradition and the Muse's Hymn to Ceres (Ov. Met. 5.341-661)' in *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-2014)*, Vol. 142, No. 1 (Spring 2012), 83-103 (84).

⁸ Callimachus, 'Hymn to Demeter' in *Callimachus: Hymns and Epigrams*, trans. G. R. Mair (London: Harvard University Press, 1960), 125-135 (127).

Erisichthon voices no objection to the grove's religious status, nor does he desire for anything to function in its place. The violence reads as mindless and indiscriminate, the frenzy of a mob instead of the calculated decision of a single man.

In Ovid's later version of the tale, recounted in the eighth book of *Metamorphoses*, the attack on the "grove" is greatly embellished. Ovid characterises Erisichthon as an infamous blasphemer, one who "Despised all his life | The power of gods and never did vouchsafe them sacrifice".⁹ Ovid implies that Erisichthon's attack upon the sacred grove is a manifestation of his generally impious behaviour: "He is also reported to have hewn in wicked wise | The grove of Ceres and to fell her holy woods".¹⁰ Again, a specific motivation is not provided, though the character detail of Erisichthon's blasphemy suggests that his object of attack is Ceres herself (one of the "gods" he despises). This reading is substantiated by Ovid's decision to make Erisichthon's attack a wholly individual one. When his servants refuse to cut down the "holy woods", Ovid's Erisichthon "snatch[es] an axe with furious mood" from them and carries out the desecration himself.¹¹ Callimachus' angry mob has here become a lone iconoclast, a mortal who refuses to submit to the divine. Finally, in accordance with the theme of his poem, Ovid introduces the notion that the "oak" disguises a living being, an unnamed "nymph of Ceres" who delivers a mere four lines introducing herself and announcing her imminent death.¹²

⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 8.925-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.927-8.

¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.940.

¹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.958-960.

While Lyly's version of the tale follows Ovid's very closely, *Love's Metamorphosis* contains two significant innovations to the myth. The first concerns the psychological profile of Erisichthon, which Lyly greatly expands upon and refines. The forester's first onstage speech makes it clear why he feels compelled to attack Ceres' sacred grove. He immediately asks the nymphs congregated around Ceres' "holy tree": "What noise is this? What assembly? What idolatry? Is the modesty of virgins turned to wantonness, the honour of Ceres accounted immortal, and Erisichthon, ruler of this forest, esteemed of no force?" (1.2.68-71). Lyly's Erisichthon is alone, condemns the nymphs as idolaters, and emphasises the false nature of the nymph's worship by characterising himself as the rightful object of their "honour". In short, Erisichthon's subsequent attack is a direct manifestation of his belief that the nymphs are engaged in "idolatry". While the play ultimately punishes him for holding this view, the detail does afford Lyly's Erisichthon a modicum of sympathy. His religious outlook may be mistaken, but he is not *solely* driven by "despise[ment]", "wicked[ness]", or "fur[y]". By contrast, he fulfils the role of the iconoclast eager to disabuse idolaters of their false, "wanton" worship.

Lyly's second set of innovations all concern the "nymph of Ceres" who has been turned into a tree. Lyly names her "Fidelia" (1.2.109) and provides her with an extremely lengthy speech. In Leah Scragg's edition of *Love's Metamorphosis*, Fidelia's speech spans forty-seven lines of prose. She laments her fate, proclaims her innocence, and denigrates her attacker. This is a huge expansion of that character's significance which invites the play's audience to dwell upon the immediate consequence of Erisichthon's actions. The revelation of the nymph's existence is already a much more spectacular event in Lyly's play than it was in Ovid's poem (as Lyly's audience *see* this revelation take place). By

granting Fidelia almost fifty lines of dialogue, Lyly draws even more attention to this moment, granting his audience ample time to ponder its significance. As I will argue, I believe that this choice simply highlights the thematic importance of Lyly's obvious allusions to "idolatry" and iconoclasm in this scene.

These are conscious innovations, but I believe that they highlight a Christian symbolism that would *inevitably* attend even the most faithful adaptation of Ovid in an early modern English setting. An onstage tree pouring forth blood, named after faith, and which delivers a lamenting speech before dying, would surely have recalled the popular tradition of associating Christ's crucifixion with the image of a bloody tree. This custom originates in Scripture, in a passage describing Christ as he "who his owne selfe bare our sinnes in his body on *the tree*".¹³ The image filtered into English culture, appearing in written form as early as the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood* (eighth to tenth century AD), in which Christ's Cross is figured as a bloodstained "Tree of Glory".¹⁴ As G. Ronald Murphy has observed, multiple variants of this poem (the most famous being the Vercelli manuscript and a version carved onto the Ruthwell Cross) suggest the likelihood of a "common, older source, oral and /or written".¹⁵ The historian Thomas D. Hill has contextualised *The Dream of the Rood* within a tradition of "elaborate legendary histories of the Cross" that typically trace its origin from a single "tree" (such that the Cross

¹³ *The Geneva Bible: Facsimile of the 1599 Edition*, ed. Michael H. Brown (Missouri: L.L. Brown Publishing, 1990), Peter 2:24, my emphasis.

¹⁴ *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. Michael Swanton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 122.

¹⁵ G. Ronald Murphy, *Tree of Salvation: Yggdrasil and the Cross in the North* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 135.

This point is also made by Monica Brzezinski, who regards the tree imagery in *The Dream of the Rood* as simply echoing "representations of the Judgement by other Old English poets". Monica Brzezinski, "The Harrowing of Hell, The Last Judgement, and "The Dream of the Rood" in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (1988), 252-265 (262).

becomes metonymic of this originary “tree”).¹⁶ In short, the image of the Cross as a bloodied “Tree” was already well known, even by tenth-century Christians.

The trope recurs in various medieval and early modern texts. A poem by the Benedictine monk Jean de Fécamp was translated into numerous English versions “between 1240 and 1375” and describes Jesus as “nayed to þe harde *tre*” (“nailed to the hard tree”).¹⁷ Almost two hundred years later, Jean Calvin described Christ as he “who might bear our curse upon the *tree*, that he expiate our sins” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536).¹⁸ These examples attest to the endurance of this association within literary texts but, for the purposes of this chapter, I am primarily interested in its appearance within dramatic re-enactments of the crucifixion. These appearances can be subtle. In a York Corpus Christi play, the cross “distends its shape”, evoking a legend “in which the wood of the tree resists its use to crucify the son of God” (as Sarah Beckwith puts it).¹⁹ In other words, the image constitutes an allusion to the originary “tree” from which the Cross was composed. This faint evocation of the Cross as a tree is more certain in a Chester Corpus Christi play that has Christ describing how he “bledd on rode *tree* | for your Salvation”.²⁰ This is merely a rhetorical gesture, but there is some evidence to suggest that it draws upon the *visual* spectacle of Christ’s crucifixion in such performances. In an undated letter written after

¹⁶ Thomas D. Hill, ‘The “Passio Andreae” and “The Dream of the Rood”’ in *Anglo-Saxon England*, Vol. 38 (2010), 1-10 (5).

¹⁷ Cited in: Gerhard Lutz, ‘The Drop of Blood: Image and Piety in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries’ in *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2015), 37-51 (40-41), my emphasis.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co., 1953), 96, my emphasis.

¹⁹ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act In The York Corpus Christi Plays* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 66.

²⁰ Cited in: J. W. Robinson, ‘The Late Medieval Cult of Jesus and the Mystery Plays’ in *PMLA*, Vol. 80, No. 5 (December 1965), 508-514 (511), my emphasis.

1644, an earlier Kendall Corpus Christi play is described, in which “there was a man on a tree, & blood ran downe”.²¹

Scholars who cite this sentence tend to be more interested in its evocation of “blood” than in its apparent description of the cross as a literal “tree”.²² To focus upon the latter detail, there are clearly three viable interpretations of this description: the writer saw an onstage tree prop used as a cross, a *real* tree was used to simulate the cross, or he is misremembering the image of upright wood as “a tree”. Despite which interpretation is accurate, spectators of sixteenth-century Biblical drama (and beyond) were clearly used to construing the onstage prop in those plays as either a literal or metaphorical “tree”. In various overt and subtle ways, the longstanding Christian tradition of viewing the crucifix as a “tree” was represented in the English dramatic tradition preceding Lyly’s career as playwright. While I am not suggesting that Lyly’s audience must have seen these earlier plays in order to appreciate the crucifixion symbolism in *Love’s Metamorphosis*, I cite them here because they demonstrate that onstage trees (literal or metaphorical) could function very well as symbolic representations of the crucifixion. As such, the bleeding tree in *Love’s Metamorphosis* would likely have recalled the cross on which Christ died to Lyly’s largely Christian audience. Arguably, it may have done so purely on the basis

²¹ ‘Cumberland, Westmorland, Gloucestershire’ in *Records of Early English Drama*, ed. Audrey Douglas and Peter Greenfield (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 219, my emphasis.

²² It does not appear that this letter is widely cited. Where it is mentioned, critics tend to use it as evidence for the startling goriness of Corpus Christi drama, overlooking the mention of a “tree”. Examples of this trend include: Clare Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 136; Michael O’Connell, ‘Blood Begetting Blood: Shakespeare and the Mysteries’ in *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents*, ed. Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper, and Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 177-190 (177-8); Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *Shakespeare, Catholicism, and Romance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 68-9.

of the metaphorical association between Christ's cross and a bloody tree in various written traditions, but it may also have echoed Biblical play stage imagery.

If the image of a blood-soaked "holy tree" would have recalled Christ's cross, how might this influence our reading of Erisichthon? Most obviously, he may have been interpreted as an iconoclastic Reformer: one eager to foreclose animistic "idolatry" by destroying an emblem of Christ's Cross. Indeed, the desecration of crosses and crucifixes was extremely widespread in sixteenth-century England. In 1529, Henry VIII's government was compelled to exclude from a Parliamentary pardon "those who pulled down crosses on highways".²³ Around 1534, the vicar of Hayes in Middlesex preached a sermon against the popular rise of image-breaking; he was likely prompted to do so by the recent burning of a crucifix located in Rickmansworth.²⁴ Parliamentary and ecclesiastical admonitions of this kind did little to quell England's appetite for cross-breaking. A rood was destroyed in Canterbury in 1538; the rood was removed from St. Paul's to prevent damage in November 1547; Lincolnshire parishioners were making bonfires out of roods in 1566; and, as Joel Budd observes, "between the 1580s and 1640", the Cheapside Cross in London was attacked "at least five times" and "repeatedly repaired, painted, and gilded at the city's request".²⁵

²³ Stanford E. Lehmborg, *The Reformation Parliament 1529-1536* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 91.

²⁴ Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Laws Against Images*, Vol. 1 (Michigan: Clarendon Press, 1988), 212.

It ought to be noted that cross-breaking was not always a result of fears surrounding idolatry. The 1542 witchcraft statute specified the "overturning of crosses [...] to find treasure" as a common and demonic practice in England. Karen Jones and Michael Zell, "The Divels Speciall Instruments": Women and Witchcraft Before the Great 'Witch-Hunt' in *Social History*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (February 2005), 45-63 (54).

²⁵ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 435, 454; Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 313; *Seconde Parte of a Register: Being a Calendar of Manuscripts Under That Title Intended for Publication by the Puritans About 1593, And Now In Dr Williams's Library, London*, Vol. 2, ed. Albert Peel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

In Lyly's cultural context, a man who hurls an accusation of "idolatry" moments before defacing a "holy tree" is a quintessential iconoclast, who reflects the prevalent practice of cross desecration throughout sixteenth-century England. Of course, this reading immediately raises another question: precisely what *variety* of iconoclast is Erisichthon? Is he a Puritan attacking the state's established religion, such that one might read *Love's Metamorphosis* as a theatrical equivalent to Lyly's satirical anti-Martinist pamphlet, *Pap with an Hatchet*?²⁶ Is he an antitheatricalist like Gosson or Stubbes, whose attack upon the pageantry of the nymph's worship spectacularly backfires? Is he a caricature of a more popular iconoclastic attitude: an instinctive vandalism more motivated by anti-establishment feeling than theological variance?

I mention these possibilities in order to indicate that my own interpretation of the tree-felling scene is certainly not an exclusive one; Erisichthon's iconoclasm might have evoked any number of historical events or cultural ideas. Nevertheless, I contend that the presence of "blood" in this scene, along with Fidelia's lengthy lament, would have evoked the desecration of crosses, but also the *crucifixion* itself. Moreover, as a theatrical, affective re-enactment of the crucifixion, this episode would also have alluded to the ceremony of the *Eucharist*. There is an enormous body of work on the phenomenological overlaps between playgoing and sacramental participation, particularly in an early

2010), 53; Joel Budd, 'Rethinking Iconoclasm in Early Modern England: The Case of Cheapside Cross' in *Journal of Early Modern History*, Vol. 4, No. 3-4 (January 2000), 379-404 (380).

²⁶ Lyly wrote a response to the infamous Martin Marprelate tracts of the 1580s entitled *Pap with an Hatchet*. Leah Scragg edited the tract for the Manchester Revels series in 2015. Her edition contains a wonderfully informative overview of the Martinist controversy and detailed evidence for Lyly's authorship of the *Hatchet* pamphlet. John Lyly, *Pap with an Hatchet*, ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

modern context.²⁷ These works typically emphasise the inherently theatrical quality of sacramental ceremonies, as well as the ways in which Biblical and Morality plays explicitly recreated or alluded to sacramental moments. This shared imagery established affective continuities between the sacraments and non-sacramental drama; continuities that functioned to (as Sandro Sticca puts it) “edify the faithful, to strengthen their faith, and persuade sceptics”, in both contexts.²⁸

However, the ostensibly didactic employment of liturgical imagery within Biblical plays became a more subtle and interrogative device in the hands of dramatists working for the playhouses of the late sixteenth century. Following the 1559 Elizabethan proclamation against staging “matters of religion”, these English playwrights increasingly turned to Classical texts to furnish their playworlds, though they continued, consciously or unconsciously, to exploit liturgical symbolism during moments of emotional intensity.²⁹ The migration of liturgical imagery into non-Biblical drama during the 1580s has been perhaps most thoroughly discussed by scholars in relation to Thomas Kyd’s hugely popular *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Kyd’s play jointly employs an onstage tree and a bloody murder in order to communicate affective crucifixion symbolism. This moment occurs when the protagonist Hieronimo

²⁷ Key examples include: Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming The Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Beatrice Groves, *Texts and Traditions: Religion in Shakespeare 1592-1604* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Coleman, *Drama and the Sacraments in Sixteenth-Century England: Indelible Characters* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Matthew J. Smith, *Performance and Religion in Early Modern England: Stage, Cathedral, Wagon, Street* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

²⁸ Sandro Sticca, ‘Christian Drama and Christian Liturgy’ in *Latomus*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (1967), 1025-1034 (1027).

²⁹ ‘Announcing Injunctions For Religion. Before 19 July 1559’ in *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, Vol. 2, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (London: Yale University Press, 1969), 117-132 (129).

discovers the “murderous spectacle” (*ST*, 2.5.9) of his dead son Horatio hung in an arbour.³⁰ Critics and editors of *The Spanish Tragedy* have long speculated about whether a prop tree was used in early performances of the play. Later in the action, Horatio’s mother Isabella returns to the site of her son’s death and attacks the “arbour”, using language that suggests the presence of at least one tree: “Down with these branches and these loathsome boughs” (4.2.6). In a footnote to the stage direction “They hang him in the arbour”, the editor J. R. Mulryne considered the possibility that Horatio was hung on a stage tree at length:

Whether a stage-tree was used for this purpose remains unclear; Isabella (IV, ii, 60 ff.) seems to refer to a tree; Hieronimo says (IV, iv, 111) he found Horatio 'hanging on a tree'; the author of the Fourth Addition thinks very specifically of a tree (see 11. 60 ff.). But editors may well be right in arguing that the arbour illustrated on the title-page of the 1615 edition (a trellis-work arch with a seat incorporated in it) may have been decorated with leaves and branches, and so have served as both arbour and tree.³¹

In 2010, Diane K. Jakacki made the case for the use of a “trellis-like structure” to simulate a tree in initial performances of *The Spanish Tragedy*, though she fundamentally concurs

³⁰ Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. Clara Calvo and Jesús Tronch (London: Arden Early Modern Drama, 2013).

³¹ Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. J. R. Mulryne (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1978), II.4.53.sd.fn.

with Mulryne that whatever type of prop was used onstage, it was fashioned to give the visual impression of a tree.³²

It is likely that the “murderous spectacle” Hieronimo discovers is one of a bloodied man hanging from an object resembling a tree. As early as 1972, Scott McMillin was reading Horatio’s hanging body as “emblematic of crucifixion”.³³ In 2013, Jennifer Waldron wrote a riveting account of this symbolism and how it relates to Kyd’s revenge narrative. Waldron acknowledges “the long popular tradition of staging Christ himself as fruit on the “tree” of the cross”, as well as the Catholic doctrine that the redemptive benefits of the crucifixion were “provided each time the priest reenacted Christ’s sacrifice with the body and blood of wafer and wine” in the ceremony of the Eucharist.³⁴ Locating verbal and iconographic allusions to both of these traditions in Kyd’s “arbour” scenes, Waldron argues persuasively that *The Spanish Tragedy* perverts and satirises the idea of propitiatory sacrifice within the Catholic Mass, staging a bloody re-enactment of the crucifixion that is not salvific, but rather a “a spur to revenge [...] an invitation to more sin instead of its final payment”.³⁵

³² Diane K. Jakacki, “‘Canst paint a doleful cry?’: Promotion and Performance in *The Spanish Tragedy* Title-Page Illustration’ in *Early Theatre: A Journal Associated With The Records of Early English Drama*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2010), 13-36 (32).

³³ Scott McMillin, ‘The Figure of Silence in *The Spanish Tragedy*’ in *ELH*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (March 1972), 27-48 (34).

There is an excellent historical overview of scholarship acknowledging “that Horatio’s murder evokes the crucifixion” in: Katharine Goodland, ‘New Directions: Female Mourning, Revenge, and Hieronimo’s Doomsday Play’ in *The Spanish Tragedy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Thomas Rist (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), 175-197 (178).

³⁴ Jennifer Waldron, *Reformations of the Body: Idolatry, Sacrifice, and Early Modern Theater* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 132, 133.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

If it is true that Horatio's body hanging in the arbour recalled affective Eucharistic imagery, it must be equally plausible that Lyly's bloody tree would have evoked the same symbolism. In other words, while Erisichthon's attack upon the metaphorical cross parallels early modern iconoclasm, allusions to a bleeding tree named after 'faith' would have recalled the historical event of the crucifixion and, inevitably, the commemoration of that event in the ceremony of the Eucharist. While *The Spanish Tragedy* appears to rely upon crucifixion imagery in order to satirise and critique the Catholic interpretation of the Eucharist, Lyly's play is much more similar to the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, a medieval morality play clearly written from a Catholic perspective.

The moment at which Ceres' "holy tree" begins to bleed in Lyly's play is remarkably similar to one in the *Play of the Sacrament*, in which three Jews carry out an iconoclastic attack against a sacramental host. Their assault is intended to refute the doctrine that the host is truly the body and blood of Christ - in other words, the Jews desecrate the host because they perceive it to be an idol. A stage direction written into the manuscript's margin makes explicit what the main body of the text implies - after the Jews have stabbed the host several times, the direction reads: "Here the Ost must blede".³⁶ This moment represents a visual confirmation of the attacker's misapprehension and folly, precisely what occurs when Erisichthon deals a blow to Ceres' "holy tree" and causes it to shed blood.

A further similarity can be detected in the lengthy, affective laments delivered by both Christ and Fidelity subsequent to their respective assaults. After enduring several torments

³⁶ *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, ed. John T. Sebastian (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), 480.sd.

(including submergence in a vat of hot oil), the host in the *Play of the Sacrament* becomes an “image” of Jesus and speaks the following lines:

Why ar ye to yowr Kyng onkynd,
And I so bytterly bowt yow to my blysse?
Why fare ye thus fule with yowre frende?
[...] Why are ye so unstedfast in yor mynde?
Why wrath ye me? I greve yow nowght.³⁷

The dramatic purpose of this speech (to condemn the attackers and arouse pity for their victim) is extremely similar to that of the lament Fidelity delivers once she has revealed herself to Erisichthon, and it is worth noting again that there is no counterpart to this speech in Ovid or Ovid’s source material.

Upon being attacked, Fidelity speaks the following lines:

Monster of men, hate of the heavens, and to the earth a burden, what hath chaste Fidelity committed? It is thy spite, Cupid, that, having no power to wound my unspotted mind, procurest means to mangle my tender body and by violence to gash those sides that enclose a heart dedicate to virtue. Or is it that savage satyr, that feeding his sensual appetite upon lust, seeketh now to quench it with blood, that, being without hope to attain my love, he may with cruelty end my life? (1.2.107-115).

³⁷ Ibid., 720-726.

Although the content of the above speeches obviously differ (reflecting their respective Christian and Classical settings), their formal elements are remarkably alike. Both employ rhetorical questions, search for the motivations behind the attacks, and proclaim the innocence of the speaker. Given that both speeches are delivered after an onstage prop has been made to bleed because an aggressor was convinced the object was an idol, these scenes in the *Play of the Sacrament* and *Love's Metamorphosis* are formally and thematically near-identical.

I hesitate to draw hard-headed conclusions from these similarities regarding direct influence; both the performance and textual histories of the *Play of the Sacrament* are notoriously opaque.³⁸ However, as Michael Jones observes, the play's "very existence in sixteenth-century manuscript is evidence of an original recontextualization".³⁹ In other words, the fact that people had access to the play via a manuscript dating "after 1546" attests to the play's relevance beyond its original civic function in the late fifteenth century. Speculations about direct influence aside, acknowledging the obvious similarities between the *Play of the Sacrament* and *Love's Metamorphosis* can help to bring into sharper focus some of the Christian resonances implicit in the latter work. The earlier play was an attempt to demonstrate the importance of belief in the Real Presence (a doctrine I discuss in depth below) by staging an affective simulation of the doctrine. As many critics have noted, this attempt threatens to blur the boundary between

³⁸ The surviving manuscript is of "Irish provenance" and dates from "after 1546". David A. Lawton, 'Sacrilege and Theatricality: The Croxton Play of the Sacrament' in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Spring 2002), 281-309 (285).

³⁹ Michael Jones, 'Theatrical History in the Croxton "Play of the Sacrament"' in *ELH*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer 1999), 223-260 (224).

sacramental ritual and theatrical spectacle. Mary Erler observes that the *Play of the Sacrament*'s "concluding movement involves a procession which carries the Host into the church", whereas David Bevington notes that the language of the play invites the audience to join in with the singing of Thomas Aquinas' Eucharistic hymn at the action's close.⁴⁰ In these ways, the theatrical demonstration of the Real Presence ultimately becomes a liturgical moment proper, obscuring the division between playgoer and sacramental participant.

Of course, the event of *Love's Metamorphosis*' original staging would not have recalled the Eucharist so overtly. Nevertheless, by simultaneously dramatising an accusation of "idolatry", an act of iconoclasm, and (as I will argue) a simulation of the Real Presence, Lyly invites his audience to interpret the onstage spectacle with reference to iconoclastic attitudes towards the Real Presence doctrine itself. The Catholic interpretation of the Eucharist underwent significant attack during the Reformation era, with many Reformers regarding the doctrine of the Real Presence as idolatrous insofar as it involves a fundamental category error: a misapprehension of an object for a person. Such an error implied viewing an object as though it were a living being, but also reducing a living being to mere object. This evocation of the bleeding *Fidelia* image lends real significance to Lyly's explicit use of the word "idolatry" in the same scene.

By this stage, I hope to have argued persuasively that the imagery in *Love's Metamorphosis* would have recalled popular crucifixion symbolism and, by extension,

⁴⁰ Mary C. Erler, 'Spectacle and Sacrament: A London Parish Play In The 1530s' in *Modern Philology*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (May 1994), 449-454; David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (London: Hackett Publishing Co., 1975), 783.

controversies surrounding the ceremony of the Eucharist. These conclusions about the play are rather broad, but necessarily so. Critics have wholly overlooked the crucifixion symbolism in *Love's Metamorphosis*, such that some broad contextualising has been unavoidable. In the following section of this chapter, I will explore the significance of a person/thing binary to the histories of idolatry and fetishism. This exploration will involve outlining the Real Presence doctrine as it was understood in sixteenth-century England, as well as unpacking its frequent characterisation as idolatrous in the period. I will also explain how the category error identified by critics of this doctrine is homologous to accounts of fetishism, particularly as understood within Marxist thought. This contextual work will position me to consider the significance of Lyly's own Real Presence event to the metamorphoses he subsequently depicts.

“Things into persons [...] persons into things”: Idolatry, Fetishism, and the Eucharist

Images, crosses, and the Eucharistic Host have all attracted accusations of “idolatry” at different historical points. These various items are related insofar as they function as thresholds between the realms of person and thing, as well as the living and the dead. The famous description of “idoles” in *Psalms 135* essentially equates a misapprehension of the dead for the living with idolatry:

The idoles of the heathen are silver and gold, euen the worke of mens hands.

They haue a mouth, but speake not: they haue eyes and see not.

They haue eares and heare not, neither is there any breath in their mouth.⁴¹

This passage reiterates the caution in Deuteronomy against graven images, though it fixates upon their lack of *vitality*. One of the issues with such “idoles” is that they appear to possess sense organs, though none functions as it should. Each of these functionless organs is a synecdoche for the idol in its totality: as an apparently living, vital force that cannot possibly operate as such. In short, idols replicate the form of the living, though they remain dead and inanimate.

Precisely where to draw the ontological line between living and dead (and between the idolatrous and the non-idolatrous) is an issue that has vexed Christians for centuries. Evidence of these debates originate as early as the seventh century AD, when the Christian monk John of Damascus was compelled to write a spirited defence of images and their usefulness as worship aids (*Defence Against Those Who Attack the Holy Images, circa. 730 AD*). He responds to a hypothetical criticism that images are merely “matter” and so not worthy of worship.⁴² By using Christ’s incarnation as a model for locating divine vitality within apparently inanimate “matter”, John of Damascus reframed the debate about idolatrous images. As he wrote: “Is not the thrice-precious and thrice-blessed wood of the cross matter? [...] I reverence the rest of matter and hold in respect that through which my salvation came, because it is filled with divine energy and grace”.⁴³ As Michael O’Connell has pointed out, John of Damascus further argued that “the prohibition of idolatry” was only a significant issue prior to Christ’s incarnation: by

⁴¹ *The Geneva Bible*, Psalms 135:15-18.

⁴² John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: 3 Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

allowing for a suffusion of “divine energy” into “matter”, God essentially collapsed the conceptual binaries relied upon by iconoclasts (divinity/matter, referent/image, living/dead).⁴⁴

This is an early example of a Christian thinker characterising dead “matter” as somehow lively or animated in order to avoid accusations of “idolatry”. In the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas applied a similar logic to the specific issue of cross worship. In *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274), Aquinas adopted John of Damascus’ view that “honour given to an image reaches to the prototype” in order to argue that adoration of the cross does not entail the idolatrous worship of “carved or painted wood”, but rather the worship of Christ himself, precisely because the worship rendered to the icon extends to the divine referent of that icon.⁴⁵ Again, in order to circumvent the idolatrous implications of worshipping the dead “worke of mens hands”, Aquinas reclassifies the intuitive distinction between a living being (Christ) and the inanimate, “carved” wood symbolising being. This manoeuvre potentially confuses the differences between presence and absence, living and dead, person and thing.

Despite these high-profile attempts to trouble such intuitive distinctions, the sixteenth century saw increased anxieties surrounding the idolatrous potential of dead images, crosses, and other objects. In *The Institutes of Christian Religion* (1536), Calvin neatly reiterated the Scriptural implication that idolatry consists of a misapprehension of the

⁴⁴ Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater In Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39.

⁴⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *The “Summa Theologica”: Part Three*, 2nd ed, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1913), 347-348.

dead for the living: “Nothing is lesse allowable, than gods to be made of dead stuffe”.⁴⁶ Almost thirty years later, John Foxe reprinted excerpts from the Lollard *Conclusions* (1395) in his *Acts and Monuments* (1563) that articulate the same point. *Conclusion 8* reads: “Pilgrimages, praiera, and oblations made unto blinde crosses and roodes, or to deafe images, made eyther of woode or stone: are very nere of kind unto Idolatrie, and farre different from almes”.⁴⁷ Again, the worship of “crosses”, “roodes”, or “images” constitutes “Idolatrie” due to their lack of vitality: these are senseless, inanimate objects (“dead stuffe”) and so quintessential idols. Foxe’s reprint here also demonstrates that a living/dead binary was central to the iconoclastic arsenals of both fourteenth-century Lollards and sixteenth-century Reformers.

This binary was also a conspicuous aspect of the Elizabethan State’s position on “Idolatrie”. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the 1571 Elizabethan *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* stipulated that “True religion [...] standeth not in making, setting up, painting, gilding, clothing, and decking of *dumb* and *dead* images, (which be but great puppets and babies for old fools in dotage, and wicked *idolatry*, to dally and play with)”.⁴⁸ In short, there is a long iconoclastic tradition of condemning certain images and objects as idolatrous precisely because they lack vitality and sense. For these iconoclasts, idolaters misperceive the dead for the living – they are like the “old fools” of the Elizabethan homily, who cannot differentiate between lifeless “babies” and living people. This conception of “idolatry” is so well-documented throughout Christian history that I have

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 19.

⁴⁷ John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, Volume 3, 4th Edition, trans. Josiah Pratt (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1877), 205.

⁴⁸ ‘Homily Against Peril of Idolatry and Superfluous Decking of Churches’ in *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed To Be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1864), 179-284 (281), my emphasis.

been forced to provide selective examples of both its employment and refutation. As my brief survey has demonstrated, those who worshipped crosses were often condemned for committing “idolatry” insofar as they misapprehended dead matter for a living force (as evidenced by the *defences* of John of Damascus and Aquinas, as well as the *accusations* of the Lollards, Foxe, and the Elizabethan homilist). The tension between iconoclasts and iconophiles on this point hinges upon distinct understandings of the boundaries between the dead and the living, “matter” and divinity, image and prototype. Nowhere was this boundary more unstable than in discussion of the Eucharist.

The ceremony of the Eucharist lay “at the heart of the liturgy” and, through its employment of the consecrated wafer and wine (representing Christ’s body and blood), allowed Christ to become “present on the altar of the parish church, body, soul, and divinity, and his blood flowed once again, to nourish and renew Church and world”.⁴⁹ While the spiritual presence of Christ during Mass has been widely allowed by various denominations, the precise ontological character of the consecrated Eucharistic elements has provoked endless dispute. The *OED* summarises the Roman Catholic doctrine of “transubstantiation”:

The conversion in the Eucharist of the whole substance of the bread into the body and of the wine into the blood of Christ, only the appearances (and other ‘accidents’) of bread and wine remaining: according to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 91.

⁵⁰ ‘Transubstantiation, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/205086>> [accessed 27 October 2020].

This definition relies upon an Aristotelian distinction between “substance” and “accident” that also occurs in Thomas Aquinas’ discussion of the Eucharist in *Summa Theologica* and is implied by the 1561 Council of Trent articulation of transubstantiation. Aquinas observed that “it is evident to sense that all the *accidents* of the bread and wine remain after the consecration”.⁵¹ For Aquinas, the bread and wine only “remain” as far as our sensory experience is concerned. He argues that the “substance” of these entities alters, though they retain their accidental visual features simply because the experience of consuming flesh and blood would be “horrible” to men unaccustomed to cannibalism.⁵²

At the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church also relied upon the concept of “substance” to express its conception of the Eucharist: “After the consecration of the bread and wine our Lord Jesus Christ [...] is truly, really, and *substantially* under the species of those sensible things”.⁵³ The desire to explain how the bread and wine might literally transform into flesh and blood, though nevertheless retain its original appearance, results in a convoluted ontology. Appealing to Aristotelian concepts, the above writers separate “accidental” features from “substantial” entities, generating the possibility that an entity might *appear* inanimate, but possess the substantial nature of a living being. Aristotle most famously made this distinction in *The Metaphysics*, where he defined “substance” as “the intrinsic parts” of bodies and compounds, those “which delimit them and indicate their thisness, parts on the elimination of which the whole is eliminated”.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Aquinas, “*The Summa Theologica*”, 275, my emphasis.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ H. Edward Symonds, *The Council of Trent and Anglican Formularies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 42, my emphasis.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 126-7.

By contrast, “accidental features” are those properties of an entity that are not “intrinsic” – Aristotle provides the examples of “whiteness” and “musicality”.⁵⁵

Applying this Aristotelian dichotomy to the Eucharist results in a number of theological problems. In 1952, the Roman Catholic theologian Ludwig Ott summarised one of the most longstanding objections to transubstantiation: “The sacramental accidents continue without a subject in which to inhere”.⁵⁶ In other words, what is the proper “subject” of the “accidents” of the bread and wine? According to the Catholic doctrine, there is no substantial food or drink left subsequent to consecration, and clearly Christ’s body and blood do not possess the same accidental features as a wafer or a cup of wine. This paradox has occasioned centuries of dispute; arguably, the most ingenious and impenetrable solutions to such problems arose during the Reformation era. However, even as Reformed thinkers attempted to distance themselves from Catholics “participating in the idolatry of mistaking the sign of God for God himself”, their own interpretations of the Eucharist invariably vandalised the intuitive boundary between person and thing as well.⁵⁷

A good starting-point here is Martin Luther, who criticised and modified the doctrine of transubstantiation while retaining its fundamentally Aristotelian logic. Luther’s position, as famously set out in his *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528), was later

⁵⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁶ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, ed. James Canon Bastible, trans. Patrick Lynch (North Carolina: Tan Books, 1955), 383.

⁵⁷ David B. Goldstein, *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

designated “consubstantiation”.⁵⁸ On this view, the substances of wine, bread, blood, and flesh cohere together in the Eucharistic elements. As Richard Hooker put it in 1597, “Transubstantiation” refers to “the change of one substance into another”, whereas “Consubstantiation” refers to “the kneding vp of both substances as it were into one lump”.⁵⁹ Technically, this theory solves the issue of the free-floating “accidentals”, but it clearly generates metaphysical problems of its own. The most obvious question here is: do the “substances” retain their ontological divisibility or do they fuse to create a third, distinct “substance”? Despite the weight of these objections, Luther’s own testimony in the *Confession* reveals that he is less concerned with constructing a philosophically rigorous account of the relationship between substance and accident, and more concerned simply to affirm the Real Presence.⁶⁰ As he writes: “I do not argue whether the wine remains or not. It is enough for me that Christ’s blood is present; let it be with the wine as God wills”.⁶¹

Luther’s slack attempts to have his cake and eat it were vigorously critiqued by numerous Reformers. As Christina Wald recounts, “the Swiss Reformer[s] Huldrych Zwingli”, “Andreas Karlstadt”, and “Johannes Oecolampadius” all attacked Luther’s doctrine of

⁵⁸ The *OED* defines this term as follows: “The doctrine of the real substantial presence of the body and blood of Christ together with the bread and wine in the Eucharist, as distinguished from transubstantiation in which the whole substance of these elements is held to be changed into the body and blood of Christ”. ‘Consubstantiation, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39929>> [accessed 28 October 2020].

⁵⁹ Richard Hooker, *Of the Lavves of Ecclesiasticall Politie. The Fift Booke*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: John Windet, 1597), 178.

⁶⁰ In most cases, the “Real” in ‘Real Presence’ concerns material, or physical existence. The *OED*’s definition of the doctrine illustrates some of the ontological and metaphysical ambiguities surrounding the concept of ‘Real’, opting simply to substitute that word for “actual”: “The actual presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament of the Eucharist”. Where Luther is concerned, “Real” refers to *material* presence. ‘Real Presence, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/271036>> [accessed 28 October 2020].

⁶¹ Martin Luther, ‘Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper’ in *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 37, trans. R. Fischer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 287-335 (317).

consubstantiation.⁶² In differing, though complementary ways, these thinkers all asserted that the Eucharist was not intended to *repeat* Christ's sacrifice (the position that *The Spanish Tragedy* appears to satirise). Rather, the "bread and wine are *figurative signs* which represent Christ's absent body".⁶³ This interpretation of the Eucharist was articulated by Jean Calvin in his *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (1541). As Calvin writes:

Now, if it be asked nevertheless whether the bread is the body of Christ, and the wine his blood, we should reply that the bread and the wine are visible signs, which represent to us the body and the blood; but that the name and title of body and blood is attributed to them, because they are as instruments by which our Lord Jesus Christ distributes them to us.⁶⁴

This is a subtle, frustrating doctrine that continues to rely upon Aristotelian premises. As Calvin writes in the same work: "We have then to confess that if the representation which God grants in the Supper is veracious, the internal *substance* of the sacrament is joined with the visible signs".⁶⁵ For Calvin, the "substance" here refers to Christ's physical flesh and blood; by effectively symbolising the body of Christ, the "visible signs" (the wafer and wine) manifest the "substance" of that body.

⁶² Christina Wald, *The Reformation of Romance: The Eucharist, Disguise, and Foreign Fashion in Early Modern Prose Fiction* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2014), 32.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

⁶⁴ Jean Calvin, 'Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord and only Saviour Jesus Christ' in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, trans. The Rev. J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1954), 142-167 (147).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

In my view, this doctrine represents the apogee of abstruse theorising of the Eucharist. Calvin essentially collapses the distinctions between sign and referent, substance and accident, person and thing. The philosopher Brian Gerrish has described Calvin's theory above as "symbolic instrumentalism" because it allows the "visible signs" of bread and wine (via the "names" of "body" and "blood") to somehow manifest their divine referents.⁶⁶ These symbols become ontologically equivalent to what they symbolise. It appears to me that Calvin's attempt here to circumvent the "idolatry" of treating "dead stuffe" as divine ultimately erodes any meaningful distinction between the living and the "dead", between inanimate matter and divine being. The ontology he posits does not respect such divisions, essentially rendering his own arbitrary ontological distinctions vulnerable to attack. If "names", objects, and persons can inhere within one another, a much more substantial epistemic warrant is required to distinguish one such entity from another.

Predictably, the Church of England also took issue with the doctrine of transubstantiation, positing a much more metaphorical interpretation of Christ's Presence in the Eucharist. Moreover, the doctrine of the Real Presence (however complexly construed) was the object of considerable satire and critique amongst England's writers, poets, and playwrights. The 1571 edition of the Church of England's *Thirty-Nine Articles* describes "Transubstantiation" as a doctrine "repugnant to the playne wordes of scripture", and one provoking "many superstitions".⁶⁷ In contrast with this doctrine, the Church affirms that

⁶⁶ Brian Gerrish, 'Sign and Reality: The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions' in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage*, ed. B. A. Gerrish (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 118-130 (121).

⁶⁷ *Articles Whereupon It Was Agreed by the Archbishops and Bishops of Both Prouinces, and the Whole Cleargie: In the Conuocation Holden at London in the Yeere of Our Lord God 1562 According to the*

“the body of Christe is geuen, taken, and eaten in the Supper only after an heauenly and spirituall maner”.⁶⁸ To regard Christ’s body as *literally* and *physically* present in the Eucharist was widely regarded as an idolatrous category error: it was essentially to view a “dead” object as a living (as well as divine) being. In 1550, Thomas Cranmer described the Roman Catholic doctrine as leading “the people vnto all error and Idolatrie: not bryngynge them by breadde vnto Christe, but from Christe vnto bread”.⁶⁹ Similarly, the 1552 Book of Common Prayer clearly stated that “concernynge the Sacramentall bread and wine, they remayne styll in theyr verye naturall substaunces, and therefore may not be adored, for that were Idolatrye”.⁷⁰

In more popular discourse, the doctrine of the “Real Presence” was satirically characterised as entailing cannibalism. The 1592 pamphlet *A Confutation of Popish Transubstantiation* argues that had the bread and wine at the Last Supper truly transformed into flesh and blood (the event commemorated by the Eucharist), Christ would be guilty of having committed self-cannibalism. As the writer observes: “if then the bread were chaunged into his bodie, and the wine into his blood (as many affirme) then shoulde Iesus Christ haue eaten himself, which is a monstrous absurditie to say”.⁷¹ This logical consequence of transubstantiation became a popular trope for playwrights

Computation of the Church of England, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Richard Iugge and Iohn Cawood, 1571), 18.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Thomas Cranmer, *A Defence of the True and Catholike Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Bloud of Our Sauour Christ with a Confutation of Sundry Errors Concernyng Thesame, Grounded and Stablished Vpon Goddes Holy Woorde*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Reginald Wolfe, 1550), 104.

⁷⁰ *The Booke of Common Prayer, and Administracion of the Sacramentes, and Other Rites and Ceremonies in the Churche of Englande.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Edovard Whitchurche, 1552), Diiv.

⁷¹ Peter Allibond, *A Confutation of the Popish Transubstantiation Together with a Narration, How That the Masse Was at Sundrie Times Patched and Peeced by Sundrie Popes. Wherein Is Contained a Briefe Summe of the Reasons and Arguments Which Those Render, That Will Not Receiue the Masse*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas Scarlet, 1592), B2r.

and poets. As Chris Meads has observed, numerous English plays of the period evoke bloody banquet imagery in a barefaced caricature of the “implied cannibalism” underlying the Catholic Eucharist – these include Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine, Part One*, Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar*, Greene and Lodge’s *A Looking Glass For London and England*, Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, and Heywood’s *A Warning For Fair Women*.⁷² Such humorous caricatures enjoyed real longevity. A 1625 poem by Thomas Tuke reads:

As men eat Oysters, so on him they feed
Whole, and aliue, and raw and yet not bleed
This cookerie, voyed of humanitie,
Is held in Rome for sound divinitie.⁷³

The category error of viewing the wafer and wine as literal flesh and blood inevitably entails absurdity: the living flesh does “not bleed”, and people are capable of consuming it “raw”.

The above overview is not intended to establish strict denominational boundaries, nor to suggest that any one interpretation of the Eucharist was unanimously assented to by the early modern English. Rather, it was intended to demonstrate that Lyly’s explicit evocation of “idolatry” (alongside his reliance upon Eucharistic imagery) would have

⁷² Chris Meads, *Banquets Set Forth: Banqueting in English Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 29, 79.

⁷³ Thomas Tuke, *Concerning the Holy Eucharist, and the Popish Breaden-God to the Men of Rome, as Well Laiques as Cleriqves*, by Thomas Tuke, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (Amsterdam: Successors of G. Thorp, 1625), 6.

evoked a particular brand of idolatrous category error that later became integral to the Marxist “fetish”. This error concerns the precise boundaries between person and thing, substance and accident, living and dead. According to the iconoclast, the idolater misperceives one item in each of these binaries for its opposite. As David Hawkes puts it, idolatry sometimes names the tendency “to pay attention to mere appearance, to the material world as it is empirically given to us”.⁷⁴ According to this view, idolaters neglect true divinity and the vital, living presence of Christ by focusing their worship upon inanimate objects and dead images.

A homologous mistake is characteristic of “fetishism”, particularly as the concept appears in Marx’s writings. It should be recalled that de Brosses specified “certain terrestrial and material objects” in his account of African “Fetishes”, differentiating these entities from idols because he believed that the latter named “works of art representing other objects”.⁷⁵ For de Brosses, these fetishists exemplify the psychological phenomenon described by Hawkes above. They absolutely “pay attention to mere appearance”, glorifying material “objects” over and above the people or gods to which “worship” and “adoration” supposedly ought to be addressed.⁷⁶ In his broad account, de Brosses cites the worship of “a calumet, a bearskin, a knife, a plant [...] anointed stones or baetyls [...] tree trunks [...] talismans” and various other inanimate objects as “Fetishes”.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, 53.

⁷⁵ Charles de Brosses, ‘On the Worship of Fetish Gods: Or, A Parallel of the Ancient Religion of Egypt with the Present Religion of Nigritia’ in *The Returns of Fetishism*, pp. 44-133 (45).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ De Brosses, ‘On the Worship of Fetish Gods’, 44.

Marx similarly described “fetishism” as involving the misguided reverence of material objects. In *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (1857-8), Marx explicitly posits this idea while attacking economists in the thrall of commodity fetishism:

The crude materialism of the economists who regard as natural properties of things what are social relations of production among people, and qualities which things obtain because they are subsumed under these relations, is at the same time just as crude an idealism, even fetishism, since it imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them.⁷⁸

Like the idolater who perceives an inanimate wafer as Christ’s body, so the fetishist regards “things” as though they intrinsically possessed “properties” that are, in fact, projected upon them by particular socio-cultural arrangements. As such, the fetishist radically misperceives the true nature of the “things” he encounters, causing them to overlook or neglect their real “characteristics”. In essence, they perform an identical mistake to de Brosses’ African fetishists, who supposedly imagine that their “talisman” intrinsically possesses the value they themselves endow it with.

In Marx’s writings, concerns about such “crude materialism” entail wider anxieties about the ontological and ethical separation of people and things. For Marx, “immanent in the commodity” is “the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things”.⁷⁹ These conversions imply corollary social and ethical *inversions*: Marx writes

⁷⁸ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 687.

⁷⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 209.

of “the rule of things over man, [...] of the product over the producer” as a form of “enslave[ment]”.⁸⁰ In a capitalistic economy, inanimate commodities are personified (they appear to have a “life of their own”), whereas human subjects become objectified because, as the philosopher Tomonaga Tairako puts it: “In this reversal, it is not the worker that applies the means of production but it is the means of production (objectified or dead labor) that applies him”.⁸¹

In other words, commodity fetishism entails a “reversal” of the “natural” properties (and relations between) persons and things, precisely as Roman Catholic idolatry was perceived to entail a reversal of the living body of Christ with dead matter. The idolater who perceives divine value in “dead” matter is analogous to the commodity fetishist who views a bar of gold’s economic value as a “natural property”. Indeed, Marx himself proposed an analogy between commodity fetishism and the doctrine of transubstantiation in *Capital*, where he explicitly described the misperception of a commodity’s “natural physical body” for its imaginary “exchange-value” as an “act of transubstantiation”.⁸² Idolatry and fetishism name a homologous mistake: the idolater neglects the true, living presence of Christ for a wafer and the fetishist allows intrinsically valueless, “dead” commodities to dictate the terms of their social and economic organisation. In short, when Marx argues that fetishism leads inevitably to “the inversion of subject into object and *vice versa*”, he contributes to a well-established European tradition of opposing any

⁸⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 990.

⁸¹ Marx, *Capital*, 165; Tomonaga Tairako, ‘Versachlichung and Verdinglichung – Basic Categories of Marx’s Theory of Reification and Their Logical Construction’ in *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (January 2017), 1-26 (16).

⁸² Marx, *Capital*, 197.

gesture that implies treating “dumb and dead images”, “material objects”, or “things” as anything more than inanimate and inactive.

However, the ontology implied by traditional Marxism has been severely criticised in recent decades. David Hawkes essentially summarises these new developments by posing two hypothetical questions in response to Marx’s “ethical case” against “objectification”:

Is there really any room for an ethical critique of autonomous representation, or of the objectification of the subject, in a world that daily demonstrates the empirical reality of both these phenomena? What if representation really *is* autonomous; what if the subject really *is* merely an object?⁸³

The “inversion” of people and things described by Marx lacks any ethical or ontological implication unless one presumes that “persons” and “thing” either are or ought to be distinguishable in everyday experience. However, as Hawkes’ questions above suggest, it takes a certain amount of philosophical legwork to determine that such a binary constitutes an accurate reflection of reality. The “empirical” facts that “things” *are* active and causally efficacious, and that “people” *do* share properties with “things”, call into question the logic underpinning Marx’s “critique”.

Arguably, the binary opposition implied by Marx’s “ethical case” against objectification is belied by his need to mount this case at all. In other words, his work is prompted precisely by an observation that “persons” and “things” *are* coextensive, that the

⁸³ Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, 52-3.

ontological boundary between them is anything but stable. Scholars have long noted that the iconoclastic urge to oppose in binary fashion “persons” and “things” (or the living and the dead, images and referents, *etc.*) is often motivated by precisely an “empirical” observation that such binaries are not already secure. In 1983, Jean Baudrillard observed that the desire of iconoclasts to “destroy images rose precisely because they sensed the omnipotence of simulacra”.⁸⁴ In a 2012 interview with Christopher Hill, the art historian Horst Bredekamp reiterated this case: “The iconoclasts are the real iconophiles. They believe in the social, the religious, the psychological power of images”.⁸⁵ The person eager to destroy a cross may not personally believe in its vitality or divinity, but their commitment to such destruction reveals a fundamental uneasiness about the image’s “power”. Likewise, Marx’s anxieties about objectification do not suggest the existence of a firm ontological boundary between “subject” and “object”. Rather, they are the manifestation of an acknowledgement that this boundary is worryingly flexible.

Observations of this kind are common in recent materialist scholarship. Critics such as Jane Bennett and Alyson Cole have modified traditional Marxist ontology, demonstrating that a binary opposition between “person” and “thing” is wholly untenable. In her essay *The Force of Things* (2004), Bennett attempts “to articulate ways in which human being and thinghood overlap” in order to demonstrate how “the us and the it slipslide into each other, for one moral of this materialist tale is that we are also nonhuman and that things too are vital players in the world”.⁸⁶ A key concept for Bennett is the notion of “thing-

⁸⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext, 1983), 8.

⁸⁵ ‘Iconoclasts and Iconophiles: Horst Bredekamp in Conversation with Christopher S. Hill’ in *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (2012), 515-524 (518).

⁸⁶ Jane Bennett, ‘The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter’ in *Political Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (June 2004), 347-372 (349).

power”, which she describes as “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle”.⁸⁷ Bennett argues that “things” in the world possess a vitality and causal efficacy insofar as they are constantly recontextualised by their surroundings and spectators. The properties of “things” are wholly dependent upon a number of contingent factors: how they are arranged, who is perceiving them, *how* they are perceived, how they interact with their natural environment, *etc.* Bennett posits “not a world, in the first instance, of subjects and objects, but of various materialities constantly engaged in a network of relations”.⁸⁸ She provides an example: “the current alliance Jane-keyboard-birdsong (from the yard outside) will become another ensemble of flesh, plastic, and sound when, later in the day, I drive in my car”.⁸⁹ To return to Aristotle’s language, Bennett suggests that there are no fixed substances, but instead a world of constantly shifting configurations of *accidents*. A stark differentiation of “persons” from “things” (and particularly on the basis of properties like animation, vitality, *etc.*) grossly simplifies the complexities of the “empirical” world. The chemical properties of “things” can alter human behaviour, interact with plant and animal life, and generally contribute to a stunningly complex ecosystem that binary conceptual oppositions are unlikely to reflect accurately.

I turn now to Alyson Cole’s more recent application of these philosophical currents to the specific issue of commodity fetishism. In her article *The Subject of Objects* (2018), Cole argues that a destabilisation of “the object/subject binary” and a view of “inanimate objects” as possessing “agentic vitality” are themselves inevitable corollaries of

⁸⁷ Ibid., 351.

⁸⁸ Bennett, ‘The Force of Things’, 354.

⁸⁹ Bennett, ‘The Force of Things’, 354.

traditional Marxist theory. She begins by arguing that capitalistic economies (and the fetishisms they entail) supposedly reorganise “our way of life through inversions and displacements”.⁹⁰ However, as she continues: “While these sharply delineated binaries are well accounted for in the dense corpus of Marxian interpretation, their inherent instability is less often accentuated”.⁹¹ Cole focuses upon Marx’s specific suggestion that “capitalism altered the ontological boundaries distinguishing subjects and objects, life and nonlife”.⁹²

Cole argues that this alteration cannot be reduced to “misrecognition” or a mere “cognitive error”.⁹³ Instead, “under capitalism, the product of workers’ labor, *do*, in fact, regulate their lives [...] in this sense, commodity power is empirical”.⁹⁴ Her argument reaches a crescendo in the following passage:

The fetishism of commodities cannot, therefore, be adequately understood as a diagnostic classification referring to a ‘perceptual disorder,’ a delusion, or false consciousness. Nor is Marx identifying an inversion that needs only to be exposed and turned right side up. The life of commodities is far more complicated. Precisely because it is not solely an optical, perceptual or epistemological error, addressing commodity fetishism entails more than altering ideas.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Alyson Cole, ‘The Subject of Objects: Marx, New Materialism, and Queer Forms of Life’ in *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2018), 167-179 (168).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Cole, ‘The Subject of Objects’, 172-3.

⁹³ Cole, ‘The Subject of Objects’, 174.

⁹⁴ Cole, ‘The Subject of Objects’, 175.

⁹⁵ Cole, ‘The Subject of Objects’, 175.

In other words, the seeming vitality of objects, the “wilfulness” of things identified by Bennett, is not a “delusion” that can be corrected given enough Marxist theory. Upon completing *Capital*, a reader will not find that persons and things have abruptly reassumed their “natural” functions and relations. The person who regards subjects behaving as objects, and objects behaving as subjects, is not in “error”. Rather, they are simply observing what Marx himself observed in the social life of man.

This line of thought is not intended to suggest that there are *no* ontological differences between what are normally called “people” and what are normally called “things”. However, contrary to the presumptions of iconoclasts and traditional Marxist critics, a stark binary opposition between person and thing is simply untenable. To claim that “images”, “things”, and “objects” have exerted power over human beings, or that human beings are often objectified, is simply to make an accurate assessment of much lived experience. In short, the issue with commodity fetishism is not an epistemological, but an ontological one – “dead labor” *does* rule over the living, and the possibility that this could be so is itself a defeater of the claim that “subjects” (living persons) and “objects” (dead things) exist in a polarity.

Early modern Eucharistic controversy clearly reveals the instability of a “sharply delineated” person/thing binary. Far from functioning to solidify the terms in this opposition (or to shore up the barrier between them), the debate surrounding the Eucharistic Host inevitably draws attention to the *unfixed* and *malleable* nature of these terms. Figures such as Luther, Calvin, and Cranmer could debate the exact ontological distinction between wafer and Christ precisely because the nature of that distinction was

not intuitively certain. Of course, these are old philosophical problems. The study of mereology (the relation between parts and wholes) pre-dates Plato; Aristotle's vivid "substance"/"accident" distinction simply constitutes a particularly prominent mereological framework.⁹⁶ Once the ontological *unity* of the "person" is called into question (or the integrity of a given "substance"), the partition between living human and inanimate thing becomes decidedly hazy. When the iconoclast or ideology critic relies upon such a partition in order to make bold ontological and ethical claims, the onus is on them to demonstrate that their idiosyncratic classification of the world is an accurate one. As the complexities of mereology, the endurance of Eucharistic debate, and Marx's own social observations all attest, "person" and "thing" are simply not uncontroversial or stable categories.

In the final section of this chapter, I suggest that *Love's Metamorphosis* vividly illustrates the unsteady boundaries between "people" and "things" following a clear evocation of the Eucharist. In this context, Erisichthon's use of the word "idolatry" invites us to consider the ontological ambiguities and overlaps in Lyly's play with reference to the prevalent iconoclastic binaries of "person"/"thing", or "living"/"dead". Once again, I contend that Lyly draws attention to this key binary simply in order to interrogate its coherence. As such, the play implies a similar perspective upon "persons" and "things" as that advocated by New Materialist scholarship. In short, *Love's Metamorphosis*

⁹⁶ Achille Varzi's entry on 'Mereology' for the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* is an excellent overview of the field, providing various examples of common-sense "part-whole" relations that might be challenged. Examples include: "the handle is part of the mug", "the area is part of the living room", "the first act is part of the play", *etc.* Achille Varzi, 'Mereology', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2019) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/mereology/>> [accessed 5 November 2020].

constitutes a dramatic deconstruction of a “person”/“thing” binary that complicates both Reformed iconoclastic strategies and the logic underpinning accusations of “fetishism”.

“Shapes Unreasonable”: New Materialism and the Ontology of *Love’s Metamorphosis*

I have already argued that Lyly’s image of a bleeding tree would have recalled Christ’s sacrifice (as similar imagery does in the *Play of the Sacrament* and *The Spanish Tragedy*). However, the precise implications of this imagery hinges upon the nature of the Fidelity/tree hybrid, as well as the acute ontological uncertainty characterising subsequent scenes. The moment at which the “holy tree” is revealed to be “Fidelity” precipitates a plot in which various other characters are transformed into objects and *vice versa*. In the final act of the play, Ceres admonishes Cupid: “Cupid, thou hast transformed my nymphs [...] to *shapes unreasonable*” (5.1.1-2, my emphasis). As I will demonstrate below, *Love’s Metamorphosis* concludes when these figures have been returned to their former “shapes” (5.4.48): their resumption of supposedly “reasonable” forms coincides with the culmination of the play’s plot. However, once again, the content of Lyly’s play belies the persuasiveness of its narrative resolution; his illustration of the slipperiness between the realms of “person” and “thing” complicates any appeal to a “reasonable” ontological scenario. As a play with obvious sacramental undertones, this complication has a marked theological significance, particularly where the character of Fidelity is concerned. Accordingly, my analysis begins with her.

Lyly's Fidelity *straddles* the boundaries between the living and the dead, person and thing, animate and inanimate. Where Horatio's hanging body functions as a straightforward reminder of Christ's death, and the "Host" in the *Play of the Sacrament* transforms from one "image" into a distinct other, Fidelity is a complex, multifaceted entity whenever she appears onstage in Lyly's play. While these appearances are brief, the language used to describe her is always confused and confusing (as I will demonstrate below). It is impossible to say with certainty how the tree-felling scene would have been staged, though Lyly's text does provide us with some clues. Firstly, one can presume that the "tree" would have initially appeared as such to the audience. In other words, it is likely that there was no visual indication of the tree's *humanity* at the beginning of the play. After Erisichthon's attack, it is the appearance of blood and the sound of Fidelity's voice that jointly reveal the tree's status as a human being.⁹⁷

However, this revelation does not constitute a wholesale *transformation*. It would be possible to have the actor playing Fidelity deliver their lines from somewhere offstage. In fact, such a decision would be supremely economical due to Erisichthon's subsequent felling of the tree, an action indicated by his threat to double the nymph's "griefs with [his] blows" (1.2.156), as well as Ceres' observation in the following scene: "here *lieth* the tree, hacked in pieces" (2.1.5-6, my emphasis). Leah Scragg includes the stage direction "[He fells the tree]" in her edition of the text; Bond's earlier edition has the direction: "ERISICHTHON cuts down the tree". Given the evidence of the text

⁹⁷ For the sake of clarity, I refer to Fidelity and the nymphs as "human beings" throughout this chapter in order to gesture to their status as humanoid people within the world of the play (they are all 'nymphs'), as well as to the actors portraying them.

(particularly the word “lieth”) and the practicalities of staging such a scene, I follow Bond and Scragg in presuming that the tree is toppled over.⁹⁸

If the actor playing Fidelity were inside the tree, this stage effect would become much more difficult to accomplish, particularly if Andy Kesson’s argument for a doubling of Fidelity and Protea is correct. Discussing a 2008 staged reading of the play for Shakespeare’s Globe, directed by James Wallace, Kesson wrote:

Wallace cast the same actress, Rebecca Todd, as both Fidelity and Protea. This is a doubling that the structure of the play invites, since Fidelity is dead after the first act, and Protea enters for the first time in the second scene of Act 3.⁹⁹

The “structure of the play” invites this doubling, but so does some of Lyly’s language as well. When Protea asks her father to “chop and change [her]” (3.2.21), her word-choice recalls the earlier tree-felling scene, drawing an implicit thematic connection between Erisichthon’s destruction of Fidelity and his later decision to sell Protea to a Merchant.

In short, if an actor did double as Fidelity and Protea, it would be convenient to have him deliver his lines as the former character offstage, instead of secreting him within a tree prop from which he would have to be removed. The staging requirements of *Love’s Metamorphosis* necessitate some ambiguity as to the nature of the Fidelity/tree hybrid. It is likely that the audience were required to use their imaginations in order to perceive the disembodied voice of an actor and the prop of the tree as a single being. This ontological

⁹⁸ Lyly, *Love’s Metamorphosis*, 1.2.156.1.sd.fn.

⁹⁹ Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*, 124.

slipperiness also applies to the Fidelity/tree hybrid within the diegetic world of the play. Fidelity's descriptions of her own body and self are somewhat confusing: she relates that she once prayed to be "turned to a tree", so that now her body "is grown over with a rough bark" and her "golden locks are covered with green leaves" (1.2.141-142). The words "over" and "covered" suggest that Fidelity's human body is simply obscured by the properties of a tree; her skin and "golden locks" have not been *replaced* by "rough bark" and "green leaves", but rather covered over. However, this clearly raises questions as to the "substance" of the Fidelity/tree hybrid. The descriptions of Fidelity in this scene draw attention to the ambiguous nature of her being; despite the onstage image, Lyly's audience are presented with several characters who struggle to understand the ontological status of what they are perceiving. Inevitably, this raises questions as to how one ought to differentiate "substance" from "accident" in any given scenario.

These difficulties are recognised by the play's characters, whose reactions to Fidelity's appearance imply confusion as to her ontological status. Immediately following Erisichthon's first axe blow, the nymph Nisa declares: "But see, the tree poureth out blood, and I hear a voice" (1.2.101-102). Nisa's instinct is to presume that "the tree" is bleeding, instead of questioning whether what she is seeing is, in reality, a "tree". The incongruous property of red "blood" apparently does not provoke her to rethink the "tree"-ness of what she is seeing. Moreover, her choice of the phrase "I hear a voice" (as opposed to the obvious alternative, the tree speaks) suggests some ambiguity as to the source of the sound. For Nisa, it is not entirely clear that the tree is a person or that the speaking voice belongs to the bleeding object in front of her. By contrast, Erisichthon demands: "if in the tree there be anybody, speak" (1.2.104). While the word "if" implies

confusion on Erisichthon's part as well, he is more confident that the "voice" originates from *within* the tree. In short, the ambivalent language in this scene suggests that Fidelity's stirrings provoke disorientation and uncertainty. Unlike the Host in the *Play of the Sacrament* that clearly *becomes* an "image" of Christ, Lyly's Fidelity confusingly bestrides presence and absence, person and thing.

Significantly, this confusion persists beyond Fidelity's death. In the following scene, Ceres arrives onstage to confirm the desecration of her "holy tree" and, upon surveying the site of violence, proclaims: "Here lieth the *tree*, hacked in pieces, and the blood scarce cold of the fairest *virgin*" (2.1.5-6, my emphasis). There are two nouns in this formulation, indicating that Ceres conceives of "the tree" and "the fairest virgin" as separate (or, at the very least, separable) entities. Although she appears to suggest that the "blood" belongs to the "virgin", and that the "tree" was "hacked", the coextensivity of Fidelity and "the tree" once again results in ambiguity regarding precisely which properties (possessing blood, being hacked) belong to which entity. To paraphrase Ludwig Ott, the "accidents" here seem to continue without a firm "subject in which to inhere". It would be equally legitimate to claim that the "fairest virgin" was "hacked" and that "the blood" is "scarce cold" of "the tree". In short, whatever Ceres is looking at represents an almost inconceivable ontological mess. Ultimately, it is impossible to assume definitively that either "person" or "thing" possesses ontological priority: *the body is a tree and the tree is a body*.

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that a stark ontological distinction between human and plant life is belied by some sixteenth-century medical insight. Acknowledging this

provides us with another perspective from which to challenge the presumptions of iconoclasts and ideology critics, whilst also suggesting yet another way to interpret Lyly's depiction of Fidelia. As Hillary M. Nunn observes, sixteenth-century medical and literary writers "routinely invoked botanical language to illustrate a perceived overlap between the human and the plant realms", particularly while discussing the condition of "greensickness".¹⁰⁰ Some examples of this "perceived overlap" can be interpreted as figurative; in his influential *The Body Emblazoned* (1996), Jonathan Sawday discussed how "the metaphor of vegetative growth" was expressed through "flowering foetus" images in "anatomical manuals".¹⁰¹ However, in the case of greensickness, this overlap was "far less figurative".¹⁰² As Nunn again observes, greensickness was thought to result from "wasted fertility", and the "greenish complexions and atypical behaviours associated with the condition, led medical and popular writers alike to depict greensick women as teetering on the edge of the human".¹⁰³

According to these writers, vaginas that had not been penetrated by a penis remained too narrow to properly expel "excess blood, seed, and bad humours".¹⁰⁴ This resulted in women who were perceived to exhibit "concretely vegetable qualities".¹⁰⁵ What may appear to be a rather unlikely ontological scenario to a modern reader was rendered plausible in this period by the "fluid economies" of the Galenic humoral system, a prevailing physiological model that emphasised perpetual microcosmic motion, thereby

¹⁰⁰ Hillary M. Nunn, 'On Vegetating Virgins: Greensickness and the Plant Realm in Early Modern Literature' in *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature*, ed. Jean E. Feerick & Vin Nardizzi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 159-181 (159).

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 216.

¹⁰² Nunn, 'On Vegetating Virgins', 160.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Nunn, 'On Vegetating Virgins', 160.

¹⁰⁵ Nunn, 'On Vegetating Virgins', 160.

complicating the ability to establish clear organic boundaries, “whether those boundaries separate organs from one another, individuals from their environment, or, indeed, people from plants”.¹⁰⁶ In short, in a medical context highly influenced by Galenic physiology, the notion that a greensick woman might literally *become* a “plant” is not as farfetched as one might now believe. Nunn explores numerous early modern plays that involve discussions of greensickness in “outdoor settings”, thus symbolically emphasising the potential “overlap” between human and plant.¹⁰⁷ Her survey entirely omits Lyly’s depiction of a “chaste” (1.2.108) woman who *literally* straddles “the human and the plant realms”. I believe that a strong case could be made for reading Lyly’s *Fidelia* as a literalisation of “greensickness”, though I will not explore that likelihood in depth here. Rather, I mention the possibility simply to indicate another way in which early modern culture problematised the robustness of a person/thing binary, as well as another way in which Lyly’s play potentially acknowledges this problematisation.

Significantly, the boundary between person and thing is markedly unstable elsewhere in *Love’s Metamorphosis*. Again, Andy Kesson has acknowledged the ontological fluidity apparent throughout the play. After quoting Scott McMillin’s observation that the ornately costumed actors in Thomas Middleton’s plays themselves function as “scenic design, in their patterns of motion and colour”, Kesson explores how, “through their props, their costumes, and their whereabouts” the actors in *Love’s Metamorphosis*

¹⁰⁶ Nunn, ‘On Vegetating Virgins’, 160, 161.

¹⁰⁷ Nunn, ‘On Vegetating Virgins’, 166.

become co-equal with the imaginary world they inhabit.¹⁰⁸ More specifically, the actors become co-equal with props, and characters become coextensive with objects.

This dimension of the play is most apparent in relation to the fate of the three nymphs at the hands of Cupid. Once again, I contend that Lyly invites his audience to interpret the objectification of the nymphs in light of the discourse surrounding “idolatry”. The nymphs are transformed into “unreasonable shapes” by Cupid precisely because they perceive the god of love to be an *idol*. More specifically, they reduce him to a mere image, robbing him of his vitality and personhood: an action that Cupid reciprocates in a literal fashion. The nymphs’ perception of Cupid as an idol is indicated in a speech delivered by Nisa in Act Two. When asked by Ceres if she has ever seen Cupid, Nisa responds:

No, but I have heard him described at the full, and, as I imagined, foolishly. First, that he should be a god blind and naked, with wings, with bow, with arrows, with fire-brands [...] with many other devices which the painters’, being the poets’ apes have taken as great pains to shadow as they to lie. (2.1.59-66)

For Nisa, Cupid is a “painte[d]” “shadow”: a mere fiction (a “lie”) masquerading as a genuine “god”. In Act Four, the three shepherds report to Cupid that the nymphs continue to view the god as an idol, using language that recalls the idolatrous “dumb” and “deafe” images described by numerous English iconoclasts. According to the shepherds, the

¹⁰⁸ Scott McMillin, ‘Middleton’s Theatres’ in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 74-87 (83); Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*, 104.

nymphs argue that Cupid “hath no ears”, “hath no eyes”, “hath no nose”, and “hath no sense” (4.1.51-59).

This is an odd characterisation, particularly as the nymphs actually encounter Cupid onstage several scenes prior to the above report (2.1.96). The emphasis upon Cupid’s lack of sense organs clearly recalls *Psalms 135* and its description of “the idoles of the heathen” as lacking “a mouth”, “eyes”, “ears”, or “any breath in their mouth”. Indeed, this description of Cupid only makes sense once the wider cultural associations between senselessness and idol worship are acknowledged. The nymph’s dismissive descriptions here function as an implicit version of Erisichthon’s earlier, more explicit charge of “idolatry”. Crucially, it is the *form* of their category error that is identical to Erisichthon’s: in both scenarios, a living being (Fidelia or Cupid) is mistaken for an inanimate object. The forester reduced Fidelia to a mere “tree” and the nymphs reduce Cupid to a “dumb and dead image” (to borrow the language of the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry*). In doing so, they characterise them as “idoles”.

I believe it is important to recognise Lyly’s specific, though implicit, evocation of “idolatry” here because it both furthers the case for the play’s general preoccupation with the idolatrous *and* somewhat alters the nature of Cupid’s punishment. Contrary to Scragg’s assessment that the nymphs simply “resist [Cupid’s] authority”, it is repeatedly emphasised that their particular transgression is to falsely accuse the god of being an idol.¹⁰⁹ Cupid’s decision to transform the nymphs into three inanimate objects essentially literalises and rebounds their objectifying criticisms, transforming them into what they

¹⁰⁹ Scragg, ‘Introduction’, 26.

accuse Cupid of being. The precise nature of this punishment also raises interesting questions regarding the relationship between “accident” and “substance”. Cupid transforms each of the nymphs into an animal or object. He accuses them of possessing metaphorical properties that correspond to the entity into which they are changed. Nisa, “being so hard as stone” is turned to stone; Celia, “being so fair and proud” becomes a flower, and Niobe, “whose affection nothing can make stayed” becomes a flighty bird (4.1.86-94).

In other words, the metaphorical qualities of the nymphs are literalised, so that the “hard” nature of Nisa’s personality is translated into the “hard” texture of the stone, Celia’s “fair” appearance into the aesthetic pleasantness of a flower, and Niobe’s inconstancy into the literal flight of a bird. In Act Five, Scene Two of the play, Protea’s declares: “But see, Petulius, what miraculous punishments here are for deserts in love. This rock was a nymph to Ceres, so was this rose, so that bird” (5.2.26-28). The ontological relationship between the nymphs and the objects used to represent them is anything but straightforward. As in the case of the Fidelia/tree hybrid, there is consistent ambiguity regarding the precise ontological overlap between each nymph and the “rock”, “rose”, and “bird”. Despite Protea’s use of the word “was” to describe the objects’ relations to the apparently absent nymphs, the final scene of the play complicates the view that the nymphs are simply *replaced* by the three objects, instead suggesting that the onstage props represent hybrid entities, partly person and partly thing. This is first indicated by the speeches of the nymphs’ three suitors, who all suggest that the transformation from person to thing did not quell their romantic desires. Indeed, the suitors imply that they

each continued to regard the inanimate objects as fundamentally (substantially) their human beloveds.

The shepherds come before the restored nymphs and recount the anguish they felt following the latter's transformations. Ramis declares: "Upon that rock did I resolve to end my life. Fair Nisa, forgive [Cupid] thy change" (5.4.126-127). Here, "Nisa" and the "rock" are figured as coextensive entities: the "rock" did not wholly replace Nisa, but rather represented a "change" that the nymph herself underwent. Ramis' determination to "end [his] life" upon that same rock belies a continued fascination and attraction towards the merely "change[d]" Nisa. Similarly, Montanus continued to desire the "rose" into which Celia was transformed: "in the rose did I always behold thy colour, and resolved by continual gazing to perish" (5.4.132-133). Finally, Silvestris completes the pattern:

Sweet Niobe, the farther you did seem to be from me, the nearer I was to my death;
which to make it more speedy, wished thee wings to fly into the air, and myself
lead on my heels to sink into the sea (5.4.137-141).

Again, Silvestris conceives of the "flighty bird" as "Niobe", who simply came to possess "wing[s]". Crucially, the persisting desires of the three suitors, considered alongside Cupid's decision to return the nymphs to their former shapes, simply underscore the fact that the initial metamorphosis did not obliterate the substance of each nymph. Instead, it simply altered their *accidental* features.

These ontological ambiguities are then aggravated by the three nymphs themselves, who each deliver a speech in response to their suitors. Firstly, they indicate that they were all conscious in their metamorphosed states; secondly, they express a *preference* for these states; thirdly, they claim to retain the properties characteristic of their respective objects. Upon being returned to her human form, Nisa remarks that she would rather be turned back again, declaring: “For rather had I been worn with the continual beating of waves than dulled with the importunities of men [...] How happy was Nisa, which felt nothing; pined, yet not felt the consumption!” (5.4.73-9). Nisa describes the rock beaten by waves as “I”, and though she claims that she “felt nothing”, continues to identify with this unfeeling entity. In other words, it was “Nisa” who “felt nothing”. Celia has a similar speech, remarking: “Well could I content myself to bud in the summer, and to die in the winter” (5.4.85-6). Again, Celia explicitly describes the “rose” as “I”, even imagining that *she* was “content” in her metamorphosed state. Finally, Niobe proclaims that she preferred her life as a bird: “Happy Niobe, that touched not the ground where they go [...] In the heavens I saw an orderly course; in the earth, nothing but disorderly love” (5.4.103-7). This speech completes the pattern: the transformation into a bird did not put an end to Niobe’s subjectivity and identity. The bird is “Niobe” and “Niobe” is the bird.

Although all three nymphs petition Cupid to “turn” (5.4.81, 98, 108) them back into their objectified states, they ultimately relent in the face of Ceres’ admonishments, reluctantly agreeing to remain human and be with their suitors. However, they end the play by delivering three speeches that suggest they retain the properties of their respective objects. In other words, precisely as the nymphs continued to inhere within the objects, so it is suggested that certain qualities of the objects persist within the restored nymphs. Nisa

begrudgingly accepts Ramis as her husband, with the following caveat: “I am content, so as Ramis, when he finds me cold in love or hard in belief, he attribute it to his own folly, in that I retain some nature of the rock he changed me into” (5.4.144-147). Nisa claims that she will “retain” some of the properties of the “rock” into which she was transformed. Similarly, Celia declares that, as the rose “hath prickles with her pleasantness” so “he is like to have with my love shrewdness” (5.4.155-157). Finally, Niobe announces: “But if Silvestris find me not ever at home, let him curse himself that gave me wings to fly abroad, whose feathers, if his jealousy shall break, my policy shall imp” (5.4.164-166). In short, while Protea’s assessment that each onstage object “was” a nymph essentially established a firm ontological boundary between nymph and object (between “person” and “thing”), the overlapping “accidents” of these entities instead suggest that the “person” and the “thing” are not two wholly distinct bundles of properties, but rather the same bundle *differently arranged*.

At this stage, I return to the question I opened this section with: what are the implications of Erisichthon’s allusion to “idolatry” and the subsequent evocation of the Eucharist in the tree-felling scene? In my view, these aspects of *Love’s Metamorphosis* invite its audience to reflect upon the doctrine of the Real Presence, highlighting the ontological instabilities that render disputes over this doctrine irresolvable. While the *Play of the Sacrament* stages a Real Presence moment in order to startle its onstage Jews into conversion, and *The Spanish Tragedy* depicts a horrific re-enactment of “blood for blood” logic, functioning to satirise Roman Catholic doctrine, *Love’s Metamorphosis* instead employs Real Presence imagery in order to illuminate the “empirical” reality that

“persons” and “things” are not straightforwardly distinguishable.¹¹⁰ The result is not an advocacy for a particular denominational stance, but rather an invitation to acknowledge the incoherence of a “sharply delineated” binary between “person” and “thing”. This manoeuvre feels more mischievous than partisan. Lyly might be satirising the Roman Catholic position, drawing upon pagan imagery in order to illustrate the absurd ramifications of their proposed ontology. Conversely, Lyly might be mocking the Reformed perspective that sought to establish strict ontological divisions between dead “matter” and living “person”. Despite how one interprets the play’s sacramental subtext, *Love’s Metamorphosis* employs language and stage magic that vividly demonstrate the instability of boundaries that have been debated and interrogated since, at least, the time of John of Damascus.

The dramatic form of *Love’s Metamorphosis* compels its spectators to doubt their senses and to forgo any intuitive strategies for differentiating “persons” from “things”. As such, instead of straightforwardly advancing a particular sacramental theory, I propose that *Love’s Metamorphosis* confirms and explores an obvious implication of debates surrounding the Real Presence, however interpreted: “the impossibility of determining the substantial structure of a given thing from its outward appearance”.¹¹¹ In this play, “outward appearance” and “substantial structure” become hopelessly adrift. At the beginning of *Love’s Metamorphosis*, Erisichthon, the nymphs, and Lyly’s audience are presented with the “outward appearance” of a “holy tree”, causing them all to

¹¹⁰ Waldron, *Reformations of the Body*, 138.

¹¹¹ David Coleman, *Drama and the Sacraments in Sixteenth-Century England: Indelible Characters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 98.

misapprehend the object's "substance". However, what occurs next is not a straightforward transformation of a "thing" into a "person".

Instead, the emergence of new accidents ("blood", "a voice") forces the audience to reassess the "substantial structure" of the entity they are perceiving. The "holy tree" was always Fidelity; Lyly does not stage a physical metamorphosis in this early scene. Instead, he instigates a transformation of his audience's *perceptions*, revealing the untrustworthiness of "outward appearance" and the ease with which one can be made to *subjectify* "things" if compelled. The later onstage appearance of the metamorphosed nymphs similarly requires the play's audience to regard onstage "things" as "persons". In short, *Love's Metamorphosis* pressures its audience into constantly assessing and reassessing onstage entities as living or dead, person or thing. In the context of a play that begins with an accusation of "idolatry", an act of iconoclasm, and an evocation of the Real Presence, this pressure constitutes a type of research in action: a literal confirmation that the iconoclastic binaries of living/dead, person/thing, or referent/image do not always map onto our lived experience.

As such, *Love's Metamorphosis* would make an excellent point of reference for materialist scholars, precisely because it so vividly calls into question the robustness of traditional Marxist ontology. When Marx documented his concern that "fetishism" results in "the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things", he relied upon a "categorical binary" that even a brief glance at European cultural, medical, or theological history would severely complicate, if not undermine completely. *Love's*

Metamorphosis is an invaluable contribution to that history that goes beyond asserting the incoherence of such binaries, but vividly demonstrates it.

CONCLUSION

As I suggested in my Introduction, the playing culture of 1580s London was repeatedly associated with “Idolatrie”.¹ At the pulpit of St. Paul’s Cross, listeners could hear the playhouses described as “Venus Court and Bacchus Kitchin”; at the booksellers dotted around Paul’s churchyard, readers could pick up tracts that described playgoing as “consecrated to idolatrie”.² John Lyly began his dramatic career within walking distance of these venues, where he staged *Campaspe* and *Sappho and Phao* at the Blackfriars. The combination of Lyly’s themes, imagery, and cultural context ensures that the issue of “Idolatrie” could not have been far from his audience members’ minds. Moreover, Lyly’s works were not performed in a vacuum: they are not museum pieces of interest only to later scholars of drama. Rather, Lyly’s explorations into “idolatry” constitute active contributions to the cultural debates going on everywhere around him. His revealing portraits of reason, nature, and objectification intervene in the perennially evolving discourse of “idolatry” as incisively as any Homily, tract, or sermon.

This thesis has engaged with half of Lyly’s extant dramatic canon. In doing so, I have shown that Lyly’s interest in “idolatry” was consistent, spanning numerous plays and several years. In order to identify accurately the persistence of this interest, it has been

¹ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions Prouing That They Are Not to Be Suffred in a Christian Common Weale, by the Waye Both the Cauils of Thomas Lodge, and the Play of Playes, Written in Their Defence, and Other Obiections of Players Frenedes, Are Truely Set Downe and Directlye Aunsweread. By Steph. Gosson, Stud. Oxon.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas Gosson, 1582), B5v.

² Thomas White, *A Sermon Preached at Pawles Crosse on Sunday the Ninth of December*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Henry Bynneman, 1578), 46; Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse Conteyning a Plesaunt Inuectiue against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Iesters, and Such like Caterpillers of a Co[m]monwelth*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 (London: Thomas VVoodcocke, 1579), C7v.

necessary to acknowledge that “idolatry” names far more than the worship of “graven images”.³ While critics such as Marguerite A. Tassi and Chloe Porter have discussed the idolatrous potential of “images” in Lyly’s work, many of his less explicit evocations of “idolatry” will go unnoticed without an acknowledgement of the word’s wide range of meanings.⁴ To accuse someone of “committing idolatry” is to denounce their understanding of the differences between true and false, natural and unnatural, rational and irrational, person and thing. The preservation and application of these distinctions is at the heart of “idolatry”; the ethical and philosophical dimensions to the concept go far beyond the singular issue of “images”.

The aim of this thesis has been to show how a variety of Lyly’s themes that one might not intuitively associate with “idolatry” (cynicism, contradiction, nature, metamorphosis, *etc.*) are nevertheless supremely relevant to the legacy of the idol. To acknowledge such connections is to shed light on the theological and ethical dimensions to Lyly’s drama. If unaware that Alexander the Great was considered an “idol”, it is easy to overlook the relevance of the man/god binary that recurs throughout *Campaspe*.⁵ If unaware that idolatry and irrationality are tightly intertwined, one might miss the thematic connections between “reason”, “truth”, and “worship” (2.2.8, 5.1.56-7) in *Sappho and Phao*. Without recalling that Paul viewed idolaters as those who desire “against nature”, or that wealth, gold, and idolatry are closely associated in the Christian imagination, one might fail to observe that the mistakes in *Midas* are fundamentally idolatrous.⁶ If unfamiliar with the

³ *The Geneva Bible: Facsimile of the 1599 Edition*, ed. Michael H. Brown (Missouri: L. L. Brown Publishing, 1990), Exodus 20:4-5

⁴ Tassi, *The Scandal of Images*; Porter, *Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama*.

⁵ Plutarch, *Moralia: Twenty Essays*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1908), 78.

⁶ *The Geneva Bible*, Romans 1:26.

crucifixion symbolism inherent to a bloodied tree, or the sacramental imagery evoked by Fidelity's appearance in *Love's Metamorphosis*, one might regard Erisichthon's inviting allusion to "idolatry" (1.2.68-9) as little more than a throwaway line. By recognising these thematic connections it becomes apparent that Lyly was a playwright as obsessed with the concept of "Idolatrie" as any one of his antitheatrical rivals.

Following this observation, the connection between idolatry and fetishism ensures that Lyly's drama is also relevant to the historical development of the latter concept.⁷ In this thesis, I made a deliberate choice to focus exclusively upon the work of Karl Marx and his critics. The writings of Marx represent a crucial pivot between two historical iterations of the fetish. The first is the anthropological "*Fetisso*" used to describe foreign, "savage" nations, such as can be found in European colonial texts and the work of de Brosses and Hegel.⁸ The second is not an observation about a specific foreign culture, but a highly theorised *critical tool*: Marx used the concept of "fetishism" to refer to his own society's beliefs and practices.⁹ This development essentially mirrors the evolution of early Jewish observations about their Gentile neighbours into the wide-reaching, exclusionary slur of "idolatry". In both cases, the boundaries between true and false, natural and unnatural, rational and irrational are consolidated into a single accusation. Lyly's interrogation of these boundaries aligns his dramatic work with the rejection of Marxist premises evident across a great deal of contemporary scholarship.

⁷ David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature 1560-1660* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 52.

⁸ William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish, I' in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 9 (Spring 1985), 5-17 (5).

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 165.

I initially hypothesised that Lyly's work could be used to *validate* Marxist principles, and I envisaged my finished project as a contribution to Cultural Materialist scholarship. My early chapter drafts were embarrassingly uncritical of Marx, Raymond Williams, and Althusser. While I certainly *did* detect instances of commodity fetishism, interpellation, and reification in Lyly's work, I was constantly baffled by the playwright's *resistance* to Marxist theory. Examples of "false consciousness" or fetishism were always strangely qualified; Lyly's characteristic ambivalence would not allow for a straightforwardly Marxist reading of his work. Similarly, I embarked on this project possessing a rather naïve conception of "idolatry". At first, I focused exclusively on "images"; later, I reduced "idolatry" to *explicit* acts of religious propitiation (bowing, praying *etc.*). Again, Lyly's work proved stubborn in the face of these definitions and I felt increasingly lost.

The breakthrough moment occurred when I realised that "idolatry" was almost always an *accusatory* term relying upon a great deal of ethical and ontological presuppositions. This realisation prompted me to rethink Marx's position and to read more widely on the history of "fetishism". I was led to the work of recent Marxist scholars who recognised the subjective and contradictory nature of traditional Marxist thought. I realised that the critiques of these scholars applied to the presumptions of Marx, but also to the presumptions of early modern iconoclasts. Thinkers like Pietz, Sloterdijk, Engmann, and Cole exposed the arbitrary and normative conceptions of truth, reason, nature, and personhood embedded in traditional Marxism. These critics provided me with a vocabulary and a critical perspective to *interrogate* the concept of "idolatry" as it was current in Lyly's lifetime. They also permitted me to perceive the critical *value* of Lyly's infamous ambivalence and stubborn resistance to Marxist theory. Instead of asking how

Judeo-Christian or Marxist texts could expose or illuminate Lyly, I was now positioned to ask how Lyly's drama could expose or illuminate the presumptions of iconoclasts and traditional ideology critics.

The ability of Lyly's drama to *expose* the incoherencies of particular concepts generally involves an illuminating collision between his thematic content and dramatic form. The language and structure of *Campaspe* functions to deify Alexander the Great, even as the play's content exposes his frailty and humanity. The same is true of *Sappho and Phao*: the structure of the play invites us to celebrate Sappho's replacement of Venus, though its content repeatedly draws attention to the irrationality (and "idolatry") inherent to that scenario. In both instances, the iconoclastic content of the play is undermined by its deifying form and *vice versa*. The results are contradictory (as many critics have already noted), but a contradictory scenario does not have to spell the end of critical discussion: a contradiction can be translated into a positive assertion. Through the medium of theatrical event, *Campaspe* and *Sappho and Phao* illustrate that iconoclastic attempts to re-invert one's idolatry, fetishism, or false consciousness are insufficient in the face of irrational (contradictory) beliefs. Alexander and Sappho thrive as idols despite their obvious mortality. In doing so, they confirm the thesis of enlightened false consciousness and demonstrate the insufficiency of the classical ideological procedure implied by Marx.

Although *Midas* and *Love's Metamorphosis* are less interested in barefaced contradiction, their combinations of thematic content and dramatic form similarly expose some of the presumptions of iconoclasts and ideology critics. While the narrative structure of *Midas* works to cast the king's distinct errors as violations of the same "nature" (1.1.17-8), the

play's content draws attention to the arbitrariness of this ethical category, undermining the justice and validity of Apollo's "corrective punishment" at the play's close. Similarly, the resolution of *Love's Metamorphosis* occurs when its characters have abandoned their "shapes unreasonable" (5.1.1-2), but the preceding narrative has worked hard to call the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable "shapes" into serious question. Where *Midas* invites its audience to question the ethical validity of "nature", *Love's Metamorphosis* invites its audience to interrogate the boundaries between person and thing, living and dead. In both cases, Lyly's drama encourages critical reflection upon key iconoclastic concepts, precisely as contemporary materialist scholarship does. These observations completely invalidate the view that Lyly's work is "aesthetically [or] politically impotent" (a view that Kesson has already problematised).¹⁰ Indeed, Lyly's aesthetic mastery of the theatrical form is integral to the complicated way he illuminates political or theological ideas.

I invite future critics to pursue and expand upon my findings here; there were some dimensions to "idolatry" and fetishism that I did not have space to consider. Perhaps most glaringly, issues of gender and sexuality are rarely discussed. Of course, there are obvious gendered dimensions to binaries such as rational/irrational or natural/unnatural. I am certain that a reading of these concepts in Lyly's work, with reference to the histories of idolatry or fetishism, could provide a new and fruitful perspective to an already impressive body of work on sex and gender in Lyly's plays. Perhaps relatedly, my decision to foreground Marx has led to a neglect of Psychoanalysis; I am confident that excellent work could be done on Lyly and the Psychoanalytic fetish. While I found it

¹⁰ Andy Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*, 12.

enlightening to consider how the concept of fetishism reaches *beyond* the realms of desire and the sexual, I acknowledge that future studies of Lyly and the fetish might do well to highlight those realms to a greater extent.

I also invite future scholars to relate my findings to Lyly's own biography and position within Elizabethan society. In my Introduction, I observed that the current project is not especially interested in John Lyly's own beliefs and practices. This lack of interest stems from a combination of my lack of interest in biographical criticism and my reluctance to become mired in detailed arguments concerning Lyly's background, company, or denominational loyalties. My decision to sidestep Lyly's personal beliefs has been both advantageous and detrimental. On the one hand, it has allowed me to ignore presumptions about Lyly's career aspirations or position at Elizabeth's Court, freeing me to engage his plays on their own terms. As a corollary, I have been able to pursue my historical and methodological material to a thorough extent, permitting me to demonstrate Lyly's relevance to various disciplines and discourses. On the other hand, it has sometimes prevented me from firmly situating Lyly within his own immediate cultural context. If I had an expectation about Lyly's own attitudes to "idolatry" or iconoclasm, I might be able to interpret his treatment of those concepts with more specificity. I became frustrated on this point during the composition of Chapter Four. I hope to have shown that *Love's Metamorphosis* constitutes a statement upon "idolatry", iconoclasm, and the Eucharist, though I confess that I have failed to interpret the precise implication of that statement. While I did sense anti-Elizabethan and anti-Anglican sentiments (as well as Catholic sympathies) in some of Lyly's decisions, I did not feel confident to pursue those instincts. Generally speaking, my outlook is a Historicist one – I have been careful to avoid outright

anachronism in these pages. As such, I recognise that my inability to ground Lyly's work within its immediate context constitutes a flaw in my thesis. I invite scholars with a superior knowledge of Lyly's background and beliefs to build upon my insights here.

Despite these limitations, the current work sheds light upon some rarely discussed aspects of Lyly's drama, while illustrating its pertinence to serious political and philosophical ideas. Lyly's plays are not "impotent", and nor are they frivolous works solely designed to entertain. Rather, they are repositories for *ideas*: imaginative testing grounds that pit concepts against one another, generating friction and illumination. In this thesis, I have focused upon a particular set of ideas that confirm Lyly's interest in "idolatry", his relevance to the history of "fetishism", and his validation of contemporary materialist scholarship. In doing so, I have produced original readings of four understudied plays and, I hope, provided an impetus for their future consideration. These works have a great deal to say to us and it is our duty to listen to them. Indeed, in the confrontation between Lyly and Marx that I oversaw, the former's voice was absolutely "vital, astonishing, and aggressive".¹¹ I am confident that Lyly will continue to speak to us and to the scholars of the future in much the same tone.

¹¹ Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*, 216.

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