CHAPTER

28   The Early Modern Book as Metaphor 🔓

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Abstract

No object, save the human body itself, is as generous with figurative possibility as a book. Its metaphorical affordances in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries begin with the durable features of the codex's physiology, pages, binding, spine, but equally exploit the changing technologies of printing and the circumstances of the marketplace. This essay canvasses a range of persons and things that were said to be books: bodies, memories, worlds, prophecies, food, drink, commodities, buildings, friends, children. The principal protagonists are Edmund Spenser (a book fantasist: the books in his book are unlike his own book) and Ben Jonson (a book realist: he writes about books like his own). Across these diverse materials the story is told of a historical shift from authorial identification with the capacity of style, to identification with the achievement of a book.

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A book has many affordances. It is a platform for printed words, for presenting them to the eye, and for navigating them in their given order, or strategically, or by chance. It is just as good at hiding them, revealing only a couple of pages at a time, and it is easy to hold private or to shut entirely. It can be ranked on a shelf in an authoritative row, or carried in a pocket, depending on its size and binding. It can wrap fish for carrying, or pastry for cooking. It burns easily. Affordances—the word was made current by the design theorist James J. Gibson in 1979[1]—are the ways that an object, like a book, makes itself convenient to use, whether use planned or use improvised, in keeping with or athwart the intentions of an author, printer, seller, owner. The long historical run of the codex, well into its second millennium, testifies to just how much a book turns out to be good for.

A book also has many affordances for the poet. As it offers itself to practical use, so it offers itself to metaphor. Its complex construction is a gift to figure, the frames and folds and hinges, the glue and stitches; any part of it can be turned to account, ink for blood, page for skin, spine for spine. The

frontispiece can be a door or an arch, the index an orderly memory. The whole may trope keeping or carrying, dark matter or bright spirit, the long time of libraries or paper's prompt tinder. It can stand in for its makers or its readers or the institutions that sponsor or house it. It can embody nation, faith, or God. All of its long history is ready to hand, too, for a book is the quintessential polytemporal object, a composite of technologies emergent over millennia, dressed in styles of binding and typography that can place and date it down to the shop and the day.[2] If it gets used as a doorstop, its metaphorical affordances may recede. But if it is written down—the book inscribed in a book, represented there—it is as easy to quicken its significations as to open it. No object, save the human body itself, is as generous with figurative possibility.

The medium is the message!—so the triumphant media theorist might proclaim. Marshall McLuhan, author of that adage, argues that the code transmitted is less important than the means and terms of its

transmission.[3] The metaphorical book is the ↳ code's revenge, literary language defining the material vehicle that carries it—for it is another affordance of the book that it can hold infinite other books (even itself), and do with them there what it likes. The writer still has to work, of course, with the book the culture offers. The early modern book in England is a complex object, complexly determined, and as the sixteenth century passes into the seventeenth it is changing in complex ways. But new techniques and formats and markets and legal circumstances only make for new affordances. What is more, the resulting metaphorical uses of the book—the ordinary and extraordinary ways in which the artefact is made significant—feed back to affect its material production. What this essay will attempt is a rough taxonomy of these uses, some local kinds and concepts of book metaphor (and book metonymy) and some of their broader applications. It will also eavesdrop on a shift in ideas of authorship, the gradual passage from identification with a style to identification with the book as an object. Perhaps the book's ultimate affordance is its likeness to its maker.

Two writers will ground this account, Edmund Spenser and Ben Jonson, with occasional assistance from their contemporaries. They have in common that both ask, or suffer, the question, what is a book? They differ in that *The Faerie Queene* is a book quite unlike any of the books it represents. Spenser is primarily a book fantasist. Jonson is a book realist: the books in his books are like the books they are in.

Prop, Blind, Body

The fantastical book culture of Spenser's supreme fiction is, like its diction, wilfully archaic and estranged. ('Spenser, in affecting the ancients, writ no language', according to Jonson.[4]) He is himself, however, very much a print author.[5] His well-born contemporary Sir Philip Sidney saw no writing to the press, in the tradition of the courtier poets whose work was assembled, mostly posthumously, in William Tottel's anthology *Songes and Sonettes* (1557). Spenser, by contrast, was a poor boy at the Merchant Taylors' School and a sizar at Cambridge, and he made his way into a government career by climbing the ladder of humanist schooling. His teacher Richard Mulcaster got him into the print shop in his seventeenth year, when his unattributed translations of Jan van der Noot's Dutch sonnets were published as *A Theatre Wherein be Represented as Wel the Miseries & Calamities that Follow the Voluptuous Worldlings* (1569). Ten years later, his anonymous *Shepheardes Calender* was printed by William Ponsonby and dedicated to Sidney: a notably bookish book, with its woodcuts and serio-ludic scholarly apparatus, its debt to classical eclogue and vernacular almanac, its mixed italic and black-letter text. It has been read both as a masterful hybrid and as an identity crisis.[6] Its publication was followed by another quiet decade, a decade that saw Spenser enter secretarial service in Ireland, and then in 1590 *The Faerie Queene* appeared, in a folio designed after the works in Italian of Ariosto and Tasso.[7] Finally, a book that knew its place, and bore its author's name.

What place does *The Faerie Queene* make for books? The second time a book appears in the poem—more later about the first—it is carried by an evil enchanter, Archimago; carried, or rather, worn:

> At length they chaunst to meet upon the way
> An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad,
> His feet all bare, his beard all hoarie gray,
> And by his belt his booke he hanging had;
> Sober he seemde, and very sagely sad.
>
> (I. I. xxix)[8]

The Faerie Queene is hardly a realist fiction, but here is a telling detail that would not be out of place in Chaucer's 'Prologue'. It is obviously a prayer book, unless it is the book of spells Archimago will use to conjure spirits later in the canto. Who can tell from its sober cover? That mask is among the bound book's affordances. We might call such usage the **book as prop**, a small piece of theatre, standing for piety or the pretence of piety.[9] Such a prop appears again when Idleness rides by three cantos later, dressed as a monk with his popish breviary: 'And in his hand his Portesse still he bare, | That much was worne, but therein little redd' (I. IV. Xix). Worn, in the sense that it advertises use, but also worn as one wears a costume.

Having named this first type of book as metaphor, it is worth pausing for a moment over the grammar of the idea. The phrase takes the book as a metaphor for *x*; to adopt I. A. Richards's sturdy distinction, as a vehicle for a variety of possible tenors.[10] The 'book as prop' compasses the ways in which a book prop (vehicle) might be used to figure piety, for example, or social position (tenor). What the book can be made to mean necessarily depends upon what it already means, and the term 'metaphor' as I use it here will have to be broad enough to include conventional, metonymic associations. Taking a book for a sign of learning depends upon the company books keep in ordinary experience, rather than discovering a novel relation across a gap of analogy.[11] Within a system of such correspondences, the figure could also be classed as allegorical, and Spenser's poem is nothing if not an ostentatious, if rickety, system of correspondences.

Early modern rhetoric makes these distinctions—metaphor, metonymy, allegory—but the basic operations fit well enough into the period's understanding of metaphor itself, 'a kind of wresting of a single word', in George Puttenham's account, 'from his owne right signification, to another not so ountri, but yet of some affinitie or conveniencie with it'.[12] Puttenham uses the word 'transport' for 'metaphor'. Henry Peacham and Richard Sherry prefer 'translation'. They all share a sense that meaning is carried over from the vehicle to the tenor by permission of some likeness between them: likeness is what the book's metaphorical affordances afford. Peacham offers a convenient example in his *Garden of Eloquence*, analysing the phrase 'Whose names are written in the book of life'. 'Here the ount "written" and "booke" ', he explains, 'are Metaphors taken from the Registers of Judges, or Scribes, or Secretaries of Princes, who are wont to register and enroll the pardons of life.'[13] The bookwork of high bureaucrats is carried over to ↳ understand what is meant in Scripture by the fatal act of writing in the book of life. Misfit and excess of meaning across such transport were questions of keen interest to early modern theorists, how a metaphor might be stretched from the 'nigh, and likely' (the adjacency of a metonym) to the 'farre fetched' (the step-too-far of catachresis).[14] The traffic was understood, however, to run one way, from vehicle to tenor. That makes early modern theorists less attentive to the ways that tenor might feed back to influence the conception, even construction, of the vehicle; the way a book might be changed by what it was made to mean. The 'as' of the book as metaphor can run both ways.

Metaphor was understood to have a unique power to clarify, persuade, and vitalize: for Sherry in 1550, 'None perswadeth more effecteouslye, none sheweth the ount before oure eyes more euidently'; for Sidney's secretary Abraham Fraunce in 1588, 'There is no trope more ountriesg than a Metaphore, especially if it be applied to the senses, & among the senses chiefly to the eie, which is the quickest.'[15] In the difference between the two accounts—one fully invested in persuasion, the second an ostensibly purposeless flourishing—there is a glimpse of the gradual emergence of a discourse of poetics from the art of rhetoric, a poetics that places figuration in general, and metaphor in particular, at its heart. To that historical rise in

metaphor's fortunes this essay will return. But the early modern theorists also reckon with metaphor's potential for obscurity, for 'covert and dark terms', as Puttenham puts it, which are as serviceable and as charismatic as any of its clarifications. Here we can rejoin what Spenser calls his own 'continued Allegory, or darke conceit'.[16] When at the end of Book III the enchanter Busyrane is surprised in his nefarious work, 'His wicked ount in hast he overthrew' (III. XII. Xxxii). Overthrew: do they land face down on the floor? They are only a conspicuous instance of the usual inaccessibility of books in the poem, inaccessibility to other characters or to the reader. Call this the **book as blind**, hidden knowledge and the power it confers, 'blind' in the sense of the vantage where a hunter waits, be they author or reader, illegible. Fidelia's Bible in the House of Holiness is a specimen, 'A booke that was both signd and seald with blood, | Wherein dark things were oun, hard to be understood' (I. X. xiii). *The Faerie Queene* is apt to see the problem of the book's hiddenness theologically, and the Elizabethan conflict over prophesying—the lay interpretation of Scripture—shades the lines. But the technology of the codex, in its foliated opacity, makes the problem possible. Shakespeare's Hamlet must have a quarto held close to his chest when he enters 'reading on a book'.[17] What book? What is he reading, what is he thinking? Prop and blind conspire. The book is almost a metaphor for the darkness of metaphor.

The Faerie Queene's first books, however, are darker still:

> Her vomit full of ount and papers was,
> With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
> And creeping sought way in the weedy grass:
> Her filthie parbreake all the place defiled has.
>
> (I. I. xx)

p. 535 This torrent issues from the monstrous half-woman, half-serpent Errour, strangled by Red Cross Knight only twenty stanzas into the poem. The book as prop and as blind depends on the book as a material object, something that has mass and blocks the light. The **book as body**, that is, material body—not as self, nor, here, the body articulated into its limbs and outward flourishes, but the body as the stuff a self might be housed in, or cumbered by. Errour's vomit is a parody of the prophetic bibliophagy in Ezekiel 3:1 ('eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel').[18] More pointedly, it reverses the tropes of ingestion and digestion common in accounts of humanist pedagogy, disgorging what should be received 'for inward digestion', as Erasmus has it.[19] The body of the book is the opposite of knowledge, the more so as it regresses towards pulp and slurry.

Errour's discharge is usually identified with a flood of Catholic propaganda; it might also be associated, more generally, with anxieties about mass print, the propagation of error, and the sheer, self-defeating volume of learning and pseudo-learning that early modern readers had to manage.[20] Spenser, in his reliable perversity, recasts the nightmarish superflux in the next stanza as the 'fertile slime' (I. I. xxi) of the Nile's annual flood. This fecundity of bookish error will fertilize the rest of the poem.

Memory, Chronicle, World, Prophecy

The Faerie Queene's most memorable books are elevated far above its labyrinthine flood plains. The Castle of Alma is an imposing allegory of the human body, which the knights Guyon and Arthur explore in cantos IX and X of Book II. Having passed through various interior spaces, including the digestive tract, they come at last to a high tower that divides the mental processes into three rooms. The first is for foresight and fantasy, and it is occupied by Phantastes, around whose head flies, bees, and visions swarm; the second, for present judgement, is overseen by an unnamed man 'of ripe and perfect age' (II. IX. liv). The rooms are painted with murals of dream and of counsel respectively. The third and hindmost chamber is a library, where old Eumnestes sits reading while his boy Anamnestes fetches records.[21] He is of 'infinite remembraunce' (lvi), and can recall the infancies of the biblical Methuselah and the epic Nestor. His lifespan is coextensive with written history, and at first it seems as though everything that happens is safely stowed in his 'immortal scrine', or chest, 'Where they for euer incorrupted dweld' (lvi).

Once Spenser turns to describing the contents of the room, however, the materials of its record-keeping qualify the claims for perfect recall.

> His chamber all was hangd about with rolls,
> And old records from auncient times derived,
> Some made in books, some in long parchment scrolls,
> That were all worm-eaten, and full of canker holes.
>
> (II. IX. Lvii)

Here is the **book as memory**. The allegorical organization of the tripartite tower has suggested something like the topics or topoi of a commonplace book, where plans, observations, and recollections might be set down in their places for ready recall. But the library has suffered time more than mastered it. It houses a mix of ancient and modern book technologies, scroll and codex, as though the records dated from the time of their events. Papyrus and paper alike are shot through with the blind incurious reading of bookworms, an anti-didactic, anti-prophetic bibliophagy. Meanwhile irritable, senescent Eumnestes sits 'Tossing and turning' (lviii) the pages in his readerly insomnia. The book stands in for this complex, conflicted management of mortal knowledge. Its mind cannot be divorced from its frail body. A mixed picture of memory results, and a mixed picture of books, too, seen under memory's aspect, with all of its blind spots and vanities.

Still, the activity of reading in the tower is of unusually focused intensity. Arthur and Guyon 'chance' on two books—Arthur's seems to rise almost magically to his hand—that turn out to be the chronicles, respectively, of Britain and Faerie Land. Both knights burn with 'fervent fire | Their countreys auncestry to understand' (II. IX. Lx). *Antiquitee of Faery Lond* is a swift mythic genealogy that begins with Prometheus' creation of Elfe, progenitor of a line of Elfin kings, and carries down the line to Elfin, Elfinan, Elfiline, and so on, with the orderliness of a conjugated verb. It is preceded, however, by the much longer account of *Briton Moniments*, the book of Arthur's lineage, Britain's 'old division into Regiments, | Till it reduced was to one mans gouvernements' (lix). The ragged lineage, drawn from such chroniclers as Geoffrey of Monmouth and Raphael Holinshed, is three times interrupted by the absence of a male heir, a pointed contrast with the orderly elves. And yet the narrator frames these sixty-three stanzas as though their story were continuous, justified, and justifying, all the way down to Elizabeth, whose ancestors' noble deeds 'Immortall fame for ever hath enrold; | As in that old mans booke they were in order told' (II. X. iv). The word 'enrold' suggests a scroll, and its affordance is a single, unbroken page, a figure for the story told in order, the **book as chronicle**, how time might work if events would stay in a row.

This continuity seems to account for how the two books absorb their readers. As William Sherman points out, recent scholarship has emphasized 'book use', a phrase he borrows from Bradin Cormack and Carla Mazzio: we moderns 'have moved from a culture in which readers take hold of texts for specific purposes', the early modern disposition, 'to one in which texts generally take hold of readers'.[22] Arthur and Guyon have their reasons for reading, but they are also taken hold of, and entranced:

> Beguyld thus with delight of nouelties,
> And ountri desire of ountries state,
> So long they redd in those antiquities,
> That how the time was fled, they quite forgate,
> Till gentle Alma seeing it so late,
> Perforce their studies broke, and them besought
> To thinke, how supper did them long awaite.

> (II. x. lxxvii)

p. 537 The stanza is another of those peculiar irruptions of ordinary life into Spenser's poem, the knights forgetting to eat, and called to table by a figure who might, for a moment, be mistaken for their indulgent mother. Desire of country's state has detained them, but also delight in novelty; there is a suspension of the outside world in favour of the story, of outside time in favour of book time. Here is the **book as world**, a world of its own. One might think of Sir Thomas Wyatt at his desk in Kent, or of Shakespeare's Brutus, on the eve of battle, searching for the page where he left off. These stoic humanists are studying, whether for action or to maintain their sense of self-mastery under duress. Arthur and Guyon's reading is closer to play, perhaps even as Spenser's is when he looks back, five books later, at the variety and pleasure of the 'waies through which my weary steps I guyde, | In this delightfull land of Faery' (VI. Pr. 1), and gives thanks for the strength and cheer to be had wandering in the self-made world of his own book.

Just as something other than 'chance' brings the right books to the knights' hands, however, the dinner bell's breaking the spell is no accident. Both readers have arrived at the moment when their story intersects the poem's present: Arthur at the birth of his father Uther, Guyon at the reign of Gloriana, the Faerie Queene. Guyon leaves off with a prayer, 'Long mayst thou *Glorian* live, in glory and great powre' (II. x. lxxvi). The end is more ambivalent for Arthur, an 'untimely breach',

> As if the rest some wicked hand did rend,
> Or th'Authour selfe could not at least attend
> To finish it

> (II. x. lxviii)

Is *Briton Moniments* a bound manuscript, in its author's hand? It is a very material book, at all events, and in the tearing away of those pages a future is at once written and withdrawn. The **book as prophecy** is another common figure, a projection, perhaps, of every reader's experience at the threshold of the first page. The idea is implicit in the *sortes Virgilianae*, the practice of fortune-telling from arbitrarily chosen lines of the *Aeneid*.[23] The prophetic books of the Bible, too, figure here, especially Revelation as it may stand for Scripture in summary apocalypse. (Mary Sidney adopts the vocabulary of the scroll when, in her Psalm translations, she describes how all time 'in the book | Of thy foresight enrolled did lie'.[24]) Books of magic can foretell or shape the future. Busyrane's is one; Marlowe's Faustus has another ('Hold, take this booke, peruse it thorowly, | The iterating of these lines brings golde'[25]). Spenser's characters dream of reading past the back cover and into the time to come. Why might the book's opacity not open to reveal what lies ahead? Though what lies ahead seems to be as vulnerable to material decay, or a hasty hand, as the recorded past. The book is still a book.

Which is all to say that *The Faerie Queene*, in managing these books and their uses, particularly cherishes an ideal of reading that is also an ideal experience of time and history: linear and continuous, holding past and future together, with reading itself as the present that connects them. The scroll is the technology that most

flatters this idea, but *The Faerie Queene* is no scroll. Spenser's book is elaborately punctuated, into books, ↵ cantos, stanzas, lines; the stanzas break unpredictably across the physical pages in all the early printings. So many of the books it represents are tattered or torn. Then of course there is the notoriously interlaced (not to say tattered) plot, which is playfully, anxiously, wickedly resistant to the possibility of consequential narrative. Kenneth Gross divides the poem's books into sacred, magical, and historical.[26] *The Faerie Queene* itself is all of them and none. When the poem figures itself, it is not as a book, but as a ship on a tempestuous voyage, or an intelligence, the narrator's, wandering in a wood.[27] Above all, it is chronically unfinished, incomplete, an endlessly unaccomplished work.

I will offer just one more instance, or perhaps allegory, of the untimely breach Spenser makes between his book and the books inscribed inside it. The 1590 *Faerie Queene* was printed by William Ponsonby in roman type and a design that looked to the Italian editions of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*; it was similar to the prestigious folio in which Ponsonby brought out Sidney's *Arcadia* the same year. Scholars argue over whether Spenser was on hand to see it made. (Andrew Hadfield, his biographer, thinks not.[28]) From its first appearance, its peculiar interior organization attracted attention. It is accompanied by an unusual number of dedicatory sonnets and a letter to Walter Raleigh expounding the author's 'whole intention in the course of this worke'[29]—both located not at the beginning of the book, but at the end. What is more, there is strong evidence that this back matter was moved from the front during printing, and a dedication to Elizabeth added ('thrust, perhaps hastily and probably disrespectfully, into the only available space in the first gathering, the verso of the title page', as Andrew Zurcher has it).[30] Such excruciations of precedence are entirely native to the looping fiction in the middle. They suggest that Spenser had not yet decided, did not yet know, what a codex was, and how it worked, even as he, or his proxies, stood above the galleys making one.

Commodity, Food, Style

Ben Jonson, by contrast, knew a book when he saw it, and that includes his 1617 edition of *The Faerie Queene*. His copy survives, with annotations that show him making full use of the readerly affordances of the codex. Handwritten allegorical glosses in the margins are common, as well as cross-references within the poem and beyond it. Next to the narrator's defence of female heroism, in the proem to Book III, he writes, 'Women in former ages have excelld in bold deeds of armes. See. Sands Ovid.'[31] He is likely referring to the description of Atalanta in George Sandys's translation of the *Metamorphoses* (printed, with commentary, in 1532), and perhaps even to Sandys's note citing Plato's *Republic* on women warriors. A note, that is, to a note, connecting readers and writers, past and present, not just by shared texts but by specific editions. (He had a copy of Sandys on his shelf when he died, given him by his friend Kenelm Digby; so, connecting friends, too.)[32] Jonson not only sought such connections in his reading, but also insisted on them in the

books he made. The outstanding instance is his Roman play *Sejanus* ↵ (1605), printed with running notes to classical sources, but all his career he sought to position his books in libraries both actual and virtual, a network of learning. Each such book is a node in a fantasy of omniscience: 'Would you…force | All doores of arts, with the petarre, of your wit', asks the airy spirit Johphiel in the masque for King James, *The Fortunate Isles and Their Union*, 'Reade at one view all bookes? speake all the languages | Of severall creatures' (v. 699)?

But this scholarly fantasy was not the only network in which Jonson situated himself. He made a place in the book market, too. Like Spenser, he had no birth passport into the courtier poets' manuscript culture. The stepson of a bricklayer, he apprenticed in the trade; his literary training came as a day boy at Westminster

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under the humanist scholar William Camden, to whom he expressed gratitude all his life. After Westminster, however, it was back to masonry, and university wits never let him forget the dust on his hands: 'a bould whorson', he is called in the Cambridge play *The Returne from Parnassus* (put on at St John's over 1601–2), 'as confident now in making of a booke, as he was in times past in laying of a brick'.[33] It was through plays—not the university drama, but the public theatres—that Jonson came to his bold bookmaking. From the first of his own plays to be printed, he took an active interest both in production and in the market. He was caustic about the posturing of readers who were not understanders, and buyers who were not readers: 'A poxe on him,' says Truewit in *Epicoene*, 'a fellow that pretends onely to learning, buyes titles, and nothing else of bookes in him' (iii. 402). Books as props (for would-be pedants and profiteering charlatans) fill the plays. His character Face in *The Alchemist* cynically (or hopefully?) observes to his accomplice Subtle that 'A Booke, but barely reckoning thy Impostures, | Shall prove a true *Philosophers stone*, to Printers' (iii. 568). Here is the metonymy of the **book as commodity**, a node not in the cross-referenced scholarly plenum of all books, but in a commercial traffic involving authors, printers, and readers. It participates in a critique of market values that only sharpens as Jonson ages: 'Thou, that mak'st gaine thy end, and wisely well, | Call'st a booke good, or bad, as it doth sell' (v. 114).

Against this traffic in the reified book, Jonson often revives the ancient metaphorics of the **book as food**. We have seen Spenser parody the idea as a broken promise of humanism. Jonson works hard to live up to it. His *Discoveries* famously praises the author that 'hath a Stomacke to concoct, divide, and turne all into nourishment' (vii. 583), and there is an especially complicated meditation on the trope in his poem, 'Inviting a Friend to Supper'.

> How so ere, my man
> Shall reade a piece of VIRGIL, TACITVS,
> LIVIE, or of some better booke to vs,
> Of which wee'll speake our minds, amidst our meate;
> And Ile professe no verses to repeate:
> To this, if ought appeare, which I know not of,
> That will the pastrie, not my paper, show of.
>
> (v. 167–8)

The idyll of free commensality elides the difference between authors and books ('a piece of Virgil') and lays minds and meat alike on the table. Jonson promises not to make that table a stage for reciting his own poems, but he allows that they might make an appearance all the same if the paper they were printed on has been used to wrap the pastry. This strange conceit of a second printing, the words transferred from page to crust, makes for a repast that transfers the text without risk of misunderstanding, an interpretative reassurance as immediate as crossing your hands over your belly.

Unless, of course, this 'untidy miracle of chemistry', as Joseph Loewenstein calls it, is better read as a parody.[34] Its accidental, mechanico-culinary reproduction is comically different from the way that Jonson himself digested the poems of Martial, which his own lines imitate so closely. And indeed, especially early in his career, Jonson can be contemptuous of print, as a promiscuous, easily corrupted, easily misunderstood medium that afflicts the communication between poets as much as it enables it. What must be transmitted is not so much text, as style; not so much what was written, as a way of writing. As he says in his *Discoveries*, the poet's work requires

> an exactnesse of Studie, and multiplicity of reading, which maketh a full man, not alone enabling him to know the History, or Argument of a Poeme, and to report it: but so to master the matter, and Stile, as to shew, hee knowes, how to handle, place, or dispose of either, with elegancie, when need shall bee.

(vii. 583)

This multiplicity of reading feeds the mastery and disposition of both matter and style, and good digestion expresses itself in an acquired capacity. Good reading makes for good writing. How else would you recognize it? Style so understood is associated more with the capable body than with the perfected book, with the 'full man' in his fullness. It is the 'writerly' text as Roland Barthes would imagine it for the twentieth century: the text that lives not in printed monuments, but in the writing it provokes, 'poetry without the poem... production without product, structuration without structure'.[35] Barthes's post-structuralism overlaps with a fundamental humanist idea of authorship as the cultivation of a distinctive yet respectfully affiliated way of making.

It is a question, however, whether that regime of implicit recognition is furthered, or betrayed, when a bookish ribbon of citations runs down the right margin. The book as style is not an entry into the present taxonomy; it is an interrupted analogy, even a category mistake, and over time, for Jonson, the two terms would come to mark poles of a problem.

Building, Self, Friend, Child

Jonson's plays and masques appeared regularly in quarto in the first decade of James's reign, when he was supported both by royal patronage and by continued, if not unbroken, success in the public theatres. The masque *Hymenaei* (1606), written to ↳ celebrate the marriage of the Earl of Essex and Lady Frances, was printed, like *Sejanus*, with learned marginal notes. It was his famous 1616 folio, however, that best expressed his innovating ambitions for the book as the form of authorship. *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* is a monument to what Loewenstein calls 'the bibliographic ego', the author-editor-owner of the book (and close supervisor of the printing) who exercised a new form of 'possessive authorship'.[36] The volume contains his plays as well as his epigrams, poems, and masques, all of them framed by an imposing architectural frontispiece, a classical arch, in the mode of the spectacles Inigo Jones constructed for their joint performances. The **book as building** is a familiar figure, whether the building is a public space (inviting, forbidding) or a private retreat (a study, a tower).[37] For Jonson, the solidity of stone promised the disciplining of style, and a motto from Horace is engraved around the pediment: 'SI[N]GULA QUAEQU[E] LOCVM TENEANT S[O]RTITA DECEN[T]ER', 'Let each style keep the appropriate place allotted to it' (iv. 613). Style so regimented, according to the classical theory of its types, is not transmissible in the mysteriously contagious manner of a personal voice. Book architecture—the frontispiece, and the table of contents that follows it—confers a fixed and even memorial order on his diverse corpus.

Jonson explores the same theme in a verse letter to Sir Edward Sackville, where he exhorts his friend not to rest in the labour of his self-construction:

> Yet we must more then move still, or goe on,
> We must accomplish; 'Tis the last Key-stone
> That makes the Arch, The rest that there were put
> Are nothing till that comes to bind and shut.
>
> (vii. 113)

We must aspire to a life made sure by the gravity of its last act; and then, by a complicated transfer, that act-as-stone binds the book and shuts it. The book as building is a particular type of the **book as self**, a self that is complete, sewn and bound, the discrete conclusion to the messy life of composition. That triumph is quite different from Milton's famous claim, in *Areopagitica*, that 'a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life'.[38] Milton's figure leaves the

affordances of the material book behind, distilling the author as an essence, preserved in a casket or a vial, a new trope propitious for some future transfusion. The figures share a promise of immortality. Spenser's anxieties about worms and canker are nowhere to be found. But Jonson's book, unlike Milton's, is still emphatically a book, even if you can almost imagine the one he recommends to Sackville as sewn shut on all sides.

There is a durable association of the book with the self-sufficiency of stoicism. A self alone with a book is truly self-collected, self-gathered; perhaps the self is a book, a book reading itself. But even the stoic has friends among fellow stoics, and may be kept company by a library, and by the authors treasured up in it. The figure of the **book as friend** has much comfort to offer. It also has vulnerabilities: as Jonson wrote to
William ↳ Browne, celebrating Browne's new book of pastorals, 'Some men, of Bookes or Friends not speaking right, | May hurt them more with praise, than Foes with spight' (iv. 462). Praising wrong is always a danger for Jonson, for it seems to have been so terribly easy to transgress his decorums, as it often is for people whose idea of friendship depends on identification. What he wants from his friends is the constancy proper to a bound book. 'And when you want those friends,' he tells Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland, 'you make your bookes your friends, | And studie them unto the noblest ends' (vii. 197). One wonders how much bookishness is transferred: is that what you do with a friend, to a friend, study them? Perhaps so, if they are an exemplar, a truly worthy object of praise, and if study is imitation, patterning yourself on a model.

Books might have other identities too, as emissaries, or go-betweens, or even children, the **book as child**. Which makes for yet another form of vulnerability: if others know you are my book, he says to his *Epigrams*, it will be thought that you are

> bold, licentious, full of gall,
> Wormewood, and sulphure, sharpe, and tooth'd withall;
> Become a petulant thing, hurle inke, and wit,
> As mad-men stones: not caring whom they hit.
> Deceive their malice, who could wish it so.
>
> (v. 113)

Go little book! as Spenser, and Chaucer, had said before him. Jonson laments that it must be blamed in advance for its author's sins, or tainted by his reputation; his advice is protective, urging the book somehow to slip its critics, and deceive their malice. ('Deceive their malice', a great phrase: it reserves the book's right to cut its critics without their knowing it.) Should it pass safely into the world, the book will be good company for the understanding reader, however they find each other.

Over time, books came to seem the only safety. King Charles never became the patron that James had been, and Jonson suffered some notable reversals in the public theatre, most famously the disastrous premier of *The New Inn* in 1629. The occasion was memorialized on the title page when the play was printed two years later: 'As it was never acted, but most negligently play'd by some, the Kings Servants. And more squeamishly beheld, and censured by others, the Kings Subjects. Now, at last, set at liberty to the Readers' (vi. 177). The audience had appeared dressed 'in their Clothes of Credit', 'To see, and to be seen' (vi. 179), a corrupt dialectic in which no term is held stable and all is fashion, the fallen form of style. There is no true liberty in the liberties taken by the audience when they interrupt the action or climb onto the stage. True liberty is reserved for the reader, to whom Jonson trusts 'my self and my Book', my self as my book, the reader who meets that book as an equal—or perhaps, as a meal? 'Fare thee well, and fall too. Read' (vi. 180). There is a hint of desperation in the way Jonson synthesizes old metaphors of the book into a sympathetic cannibalism. But his excruciations would turn out to have an outsized role to play in the history of the book.
Transformations of copyright, over time, made the book the property of the author. Under his hectic ↳ revolutions of the old tropes, new forces are working. As Loewenstein puts it, 'A literary culture committed

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to imitation is undergoing a transformation into a culture fervently committed to such novelty as could be the object of proprietary protections.'[39]

Style enjoys no such protection, then or now; it is a difficult thing to own for long. Jonson turns to the printed book to protect him from misprision, not from stylistic appropriation. But by that very insistence on the understanding, on the demanding, particular text as a figure for his demanding, particular self, he loosens another tie to a culture of imitation. He is not his style. He is his *Workes*. His conceptual dependence on the material book as a metaphor participates in these large transformations. If what literature (as we now call it) is no longer style, its identification with the perfected form of the book parallels its identification with figure—with originalities of metaphor that, in their singularity, their unrepeatability, are friendly to a literary landscape where the author is the source and the source is the owner. Style is defined by its currency, and ratified by imitation; metaphor is defined by its rarity, and copying it is theft, or allusion. Such transformations are slow and ever incomplete and at all events stretch beyond the historical scope of this essay, unfolding over at least the next two hundred years in England. But early modern book-metaphor gathers importance not only from changes in the book markets, and in the way the book meets its markets, but also from the motion of metaphor itself towards the middle of literary self-consciousness.

The Book in the Book

In the middle of the last century the philosopher Hans Blumenberg proposed terms for what he called a 'metaphorology', identifying the 'absolute metaphors' that are the '*foundational elements* of philosophical language'. His examples include the prison cell of the soul and the clockwork universe; together they are 'the catalytic sphere from which the universe of concepts continually renews itself'.[40] Because they are material, made out of bars and gears, metaphors are more historical than concepts, providing the ground on which a history of concepts rests. Surely the book is one such metaphor. In the preceding pages I have barely gestured at one of its most ambitious figurations, the book of the world, not just an absorbing fiction, a second world, but a way of understanding how we bear ourselves towards reality—as readers, whether of higher truths to which sermons in the stones direct us, or of the empirical mysteries of nature or society. 'The world's a book in folio,' wrote Francis Quarles, early in the seventeenth century, making determined use of the book's material affordances; 'Each creature is a page; and each effect | A fair character, void of all defect.'[41] Perhaps such projections of the legibility of the world are the summa of all of the lesser or partial figures I have traversed.

The one thing the book of the world does not include, however, is the figure of the book as self. Perhaps one must choose between them; a book does not read a book, does it? Both grand tropes had long lives before 1616 and have enjoyed long lives after. But if history was moving, that year, in any general direction, it was p. 544   towards Jonson's ↳ identification with his *Workes*. His volume, for all the conflictual variety of its contents, is a statement of the book as *homo clausus*, the man complete and closed, his own private property, the self as book shutting out a world that is other and unlettered and unbound.[42] One way to be a writer, and it is a durable way, is to write towards such closure, towards the end of the sentence, or the paragraph, or the poem, the moment when the thought is declared complete. Not to write, that is, for fluency, towards the next letter or the next essay, but to write towards the book. For such a writer—the writer of Barthes's 'classic'—it is the text, word for word, that travels, in the age of its mechanical reproduction; style is fixed on the printed page.[43] Closing the back cover of a book affords the most emphatic of punctuation marks, and the surest relief from the toils of life in the middle.

The book as metaphor mostly operates in between the world's totality and the closed self, across the terrain I have marked out by words like 'prop', 'blind', 'food', and 'friend'. It will often cross there with metaphors for the book. 'Book as metaphor', again, works both ways. When Shakespeare's Stephano plies Caliban with

drink, urging him to 'Kiss the book', the book is a metaphor for the bottle, but there is as much to learn about the intoxications of doctrine as about devotion to liquor.[44] What is required for such figurative traffic is an object that is both culturally significant and uneasy in its cultural position, that solicits not just definition or paraphrase but the mix of enlightenment and occlusion that is metaphor, metaphor as it answers to the needs of censorship, of sacredness, and of sheer ideological density. To this work the material book offers its infinite affordances. In return, its forms are shaped by the metaphorical work it is asked to do. If the book is taken for a building, the makers of frontispieces will respond with ever more elaborate architectural engravings, as the book strives to live up to or even literalize its changing meanings. The message is the medium.

Within these large cultural loops are many smaller ones, peculiar to the places where a book finds its way into a book. They are moments of concentrated material interest for the book historian, often parsing the artefact and its specific affordances. There are things to learn there about the history of the book that need not have anything to do with the history of literature. Such moments are also particularly literary, on that account of literature, articulated by the moderns but so resonant among the early moderns, that emphasizes its reflexivity, how it arises out of the prosaic business of meaning-making just where the text turns to reflect on itself. Looking into a book inside a book, you look into a mirror that reflects back on your own reading, or into a pool whose surface is partly reflective, partly transparent, playing your features across the features of the surface below the surface. To say as much is to inhabit an account of literature as figuration. For Spenser, such figurations will never satisfy. *The Faerie Queene* contains no book that can explain *The Faerie Queene*. For Jonson, the book looks squarely back at its maker, his better mirror, and better than a mirror for being fixed when the face, alas, must move. The early modern book is endlessly engaged in such projects of aspirational self-recognition, and its metaphors—what the book stands for, and what stands for the book—are its way of asking what it is.

Notes

1. James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York: Psychology Press, 2015), 119–136.

2. 'Polytemporal' is a term of art for Bruno Latour; see *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 74. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood develop a cognate concept of the multiple times occupied by a complex object in their *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 7–22.

4. Ben Jonson, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vii. 559. Subsequent citations will be by volume and page number in parentheses in the text; however, I will use the original spelling as it is available in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online*, which is keyed to the printed edition. On Jonson's attitude to Spenser, see also Anne Barton, 'Ben Jonson', in A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 411–412.

5. Elizabeth Chaghafi, 'Spenser and Book History', in Paul J. Hecht and J. B. Lethbridge (eds.), *Spenser in the Moment* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), 67–102. See also Joseph Loewenstein, 'Spenser's Textual History', in Richard A. McCabe (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 637–664, for an account especially of the tradition of imitating Spenser, and Hazel Wilkinson, *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

6. Stephen Galbraith, ' "English" Black-Letter Type and Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender'*, *Spenser Studies*, 23 (2008), 13–40.

7. Stephen Galbraith discusses the debt to the Italian poems in his dissertation, 'Edmund Spenser and the History of the Book, 1569–1679', Ohio State University, 2006, 115.

8. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 38. Subsequent citations by book,

canto, and stanza in parentheses in the text.

9. James Kearney gives an account of these 'girdle books' as they were used in Protestant iconography to stand for Catholics' 'misplaced trust in props of piety': see *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 100. A chapter on Marlowe treats books as props on stage (140–141).

10. I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 96.

11. I am following Roman Jakobson's account in 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 95–114. See also Harry Berger, *Figures of a Changing World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

12. George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1589), V4v.

13. Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1593), D1v.

14. Peacham, *Garden*, C1r, D3v.

15. Richard Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes [and] Tropes* (London, 1550), C5r; Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike* (London, 1588), B1v.

16. Puttenham, *Arte*, X4r; Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, ed. Hamilton, p. 714.

17. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 212.

18. Peter Stallybrass discusses the importance of these verses in Ezekiel, and the trope of eating books generally, in 'Eating the Book, or Why We Need to Digest What We Read', in Jason ↳ Scott-Warren and Andrew Zurcher (eds.), *Text, Food, and the Early Modern Reader: Eating Words* (London: Routledge, 2019), 168–184. See also Andrew Zurcher's essay 'Spenser's Vomit' in the same volume, 107–125, and Kearney, *The Incarnate Text*, 94–98.

19. '…so that becoming part of your own system,' he continues, 'it gives the impression…of something that springs from your own mental processes'. Erasmus, *Ciceronianus*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–), vi. 441.

20. See Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 58–186, and Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

21. Jennifer Summit discusses the relation between memory, history, book, and library in her *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 121–130.

22. William Sherman, *Used Books: Making Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. xvi.

23. Penelope Meyers Usher discusses the relation between the *sortes* and readerly practices of annotation and commonplacing in '"Pricking in Virgil": Early Modern Prophetic Phronesis and the Sortes Virgilianae', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 45/3 (Sept. 2015), 557–571.

24. Mary and Sir Philip Sidney, *The Sidney Psalter*, ed. Hannibal Hamlin et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 269.

25. Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ii: *Dr Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 20.

26. Kenneth Gross, 'Books in the Faerie Queene', in Hamilton (ed.), *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, 104.

27. Alberto Manguel surveys the tradition of writing as sailing in a study that traverses a wide expanse of book metaphor, in *The Traveler, the Tower, and the Worm: The Reader as Metaphor* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 32–38.

28. Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 235.

29. Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, ed. Hamilton, p. 714.

30. Andrew Zurcher, 'Printing *The Faerie Queene* in 1590', *Studies in Bibliography*, 57/1 (2005), 115–150. Elizabeth Chaghafi summarizes the textual history and the history of scholarly argument in 'Spenser and Book History', 67–99.

31. James A. Riddell and Stanley Stewart, *Jonson's Spenser: Evidence and Historical Criticism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1995), 81.

32. Ovid, *Ouids Metamorphosis Englished, mythologiz'd, and represented in figures*, trans. George Sandys (London, 1632), 2L2v. Riddell and Stewart identify and discuss the reference in *Jonson's Spenser*, 83–86.

33. D. H. Craig (ed.), *Ben Jonson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1990), 69.

34. Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 119.

35. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 5. My ellipses leave out Barthes's claim that the writerly text is also 'writing without style'; but style on his account is any preconception of how the text should move and sound, and it lacks the humanists' governing interest in imitation. What he objects to in style is arguably closer to genre.

36. Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship*, 1.

37. See Regis Debray's excellent essay, 'The Book as Symbolic Object', in Geoffrey Nunberg (ed.), *The Future of the Book* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 139–151. Alastair Fowler discusses Jonson's frontispiece in detail in *The Mind of the Book: Pictorial Title Pages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 115–126. He points out that while it evokes a triumphal arch, and has often been so described, it is 'more like a pegme or pageant frame using architectural elements decoratively' (116).

38. John Milton, *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen Fallon (New York: Modern Libarry, 2007), 930.

39. Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship*, 85–86.

40. Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 3, 4.

41. Quarles's lines are quoted in Ernst Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 323. Curtius offers a substantial treatment of this absolute metaphor across its medieval origins and its gradual, but ever incomplete, secularization.

42. The notion of *homo clausus*, 'the individual as…a little world in himself who ultimately exists quire independently of the greater world outside', is Norbert Elias's; see *The Civilizing Process* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 472. What might Elias's concept owe to the absolute metaphor (in Blumenberg's phrase) of the closed book?

43. Richard C. Newton likens Ben Jonson to Barthes's 'classic' author in a superb article, 'Jonson and the (Re-)Invention of the Book', in Ted-Larry Pebworth and Claude J. Summers (eds.), *Classic and Cavalier: Essays on Jonson and the Sons of Ben* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 31–55. He also makes a telling comparison to Spenser: 'Summarily, the reader Jonson has in mind is a philologist, not an allegorist' (40).

44. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 149.

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