Early English Protestantism and Renaissance Poetics: The Charge is Committing Fiction in the Matter of Rastell v. Frith

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Summary: *The debate between John Rastell and John Frith constitutes a previously unrecognized ancestor to Stephen Gosson's attack on poetry and Sir Philip Sidney's (problematic) defense of it. Although the nominal aim of Rastell's *A Newe Boke of Purgatorye* and Frith's *A Disputation of Purgatory* is theological disputation, in fact these texts constitute an implicit defense of and attack on fictions. Consequently, they form an important background for the Elizabethan and Jacobean "war against poetry."*

The debate between John Rastell and John Frith has not received much attention, no doubt because of the general assumption that neither figure has the stature of a much more illustrious relative or colleague (Thomas More and William Tyndale respectively).¹ In this article, I intend to show that this ostensibly minor squabble deserves serious scrutiny because it provides an important insight into the formation of English Renaissance poetics. Although these texts primarily engage in theological disputation, both Rastell's *A Newe Boke of Purgatorye* (London, 1530) and Frith's *A Disputacion of Purgatory* (Antwerp, 1531) argue as much about the status of fiction and the imagination as about the existence of purgatory. Indeed, the pamphlet war between these two marks one of the first instances of an attack on and an implicit defense of fiction. Therefore this conflict constitutes a previously unrecognized ancestor to Stephen Gosson's attack on poetry and Sir Philip Sidney's (problematic) defense of it.²

Most histories and anthologies of Renaissance literary history scant the Henrician era on the pretext that the important texts (e.g. Sidney's *Apology for*

Poetry, Puttenham's *The Arte of Englishe Poesie*) were written after the accession of Queen Elizabeth.³ For example, G. Gregory Smith rightly asserts that "[t]he early essays are 'Apologies' for Poets and Poetry against the attacks of a vigorous Protestantism," but he assumes that Protestant antipoetic sentiment is a strictly Elizabethan phenomenon.⁴ Smith's work has been elaborated upon by such critics as Russell Fraser, William Nelson, Richard Helgerson, and John Guillory.⁵ However, nearly all these critics share two assumptions: first, they trace the sources of the Elizabethan attacks on poetry first to Plato and then to the Continental Reformers (especially Luther and Calvin), skipping over the early English Protestants; second, they find that the Muse-haters objected to poetry mainly because of its putative frivolity. This view needs to be amended because it leaves out how the later attacks on poetry are deeply indebted to the antipoetic biases of England's earliest Reformers, especially William Tyndale and John Frith. Furthermore, the early English Reformers (and the later Muse-haters as well, such as Gosson) were exercised as much by the dangers of the unsubordinated imagination, which included political turmoil and effeminization, as by poetry's wasting valuable time. In sum, the debate between Rastell and Frith constitutes the background for, to borrow Fraser's term, the Elizabethan and Jacobean "war against poetry."⁶

The theological/literary quarrel between Rastell and Frith takes place in the context of the incursion of Lutheranism into England and the Henrician government's dogged (and unsuccessful) attempt to stem the tide. In 1528, Cuthbert Tunstall asked Thomas More, whom he called "a Demosthenes in both English and Latin," permission to read and to refute (in English) the heretical works circulating throughout the country, thus marking the start of what would become a major pamphlet war between More and the Reformers.⁷ Alistair Fox astutely notes that More's earlier polemics (the *Responsio ad Lutherum* [London, 1532], *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* [London, 1529] and the *Supplication of Souls* [London, 1529]) "are all cast in diverse fictional modes which allow for objective distance, a play of wit, and the interaction of comic and tragic perspectives." Although Rastell's work is not nearly as polished as More's, the *Newe Boke of Purgatorye* clearly partakes of the same *serioludere* ethos permeating the *Utopia* as well as the other polemical dialogues, evincing the same sense of playfulness, of tolerance for multiple perspectives, of irony that underscores these texts. Like More, Rastell assumes that a fictional dialogue is an appropriate genre for combatting heresy, and again like More Rastell takes great pains to give his fictional world immediacy and verisimilitude. Perhaps echoing the beginning of the *Utopia*, Rastell

presents himself as a man of affairs whose business brings him to a "great cytye" (Venice?) where representatives from all the nations of Christendom and Islam gather,

And because of interchaunginge of marchaundises / the said marchauntes do dayly mete togyder in dyers placys within the same citie / and whan they have talked togyder of thinges concerning their owne besines / yet for a recreacion amonge them self / they be desirous eche of other to know news & straunge thinges of other contrees (407).

Rastell's intermingling of intellectual with commercial interests, the fascination with travel and the narrator's toleration of different customs, (essential for international commerce), derive from More's diplomatic mission to Antwerp and the ensuing discussions with Hythlodæus. But Rastell does not limit himself to slavish *imitatio*: in one key instance, he outdoes his brother-in-law in intellectual daring by implicitly challenging the primacy of the Christian religion.

More's Utopians immediately recognized the superiority of Christianity to their religion; however, Rastell does *not* insist upon Christianity's superiority to Islam. Indeed, he even allows the Turk, Gyngemyn, to understand divine matters better than the German, Comyngo, who might or might not represent the "new variaunce in Christendom" (407). In a fascinating reversal of expectations, Gyngemyn not only gets all the good lines in this dialogue; he gets all the *true* ones as well.⁹ More's Utopians perceive without revelation some of Christianity's truths, but they also recognize the superiority of divine revelation when they hear it, so we know that at best unaided religious inquiries can reveal only a part of the truth. On the other hand, Rastell's antiheretical dialogue tests the limits of humanist "thought-experiments," for in the process of supporting one aspect of Catholic dogma, Rastell implicitly destabilizes his religion's claim to be the sole fountain of truth.

First, Reformation polemics, if they mention Islam at all, invariably disparage it as a greivous form of heresy equal only to Judaism in its animus towards Christian truth. But Rastell depicts both Gyngemyn and his religion in an entirely positive manner, going so far as to grant (if only for the sake of a fiction) a kind of parity between the "Alcoron" and the Bible. By granting a Turk the upper hand, Rastell undoubtedly intended that a heathen has a better understanding of eternal verities than a schismatic Lutheran, assuming that Comyngo is indeed a Lutheran, which, even though Rastell identifies him as German, is never specified; if he is *not* part of the "new variaunce," and his

receptivity to purgatory's existence seems to suggest so, then the dialogue becomes even more radical. If a heathen, through reason, can intuit some of the foundations of Christianity, then perhaps the Scriptures are not indispensable in the discovery of religious truth. Even further, putting Christian doctrine into the mouth of a devout Turk calls into question the iron curtain that supposedly separates Christianity and Islam. In other words, in trying to assert the primacy of Catholicism over Lutheran heresy, Rastell gives us an argument, whether intentionally or not, for religious toleration that overgoes More's *Utopia* since the inhabitants of that blessed isle are really virtuous pagans whereas Rastell is talking about the shared values between Christianity and its arch-rival, Islam.

Having implied this equivalence between the two, Rastell further proposes that neither the Bible nor the Koran is essential for the discovery of religious truth. Instead, Comyngo asserts that all we need is in our head: "I shal prove to th^e by other arguments & by *natural reason & good philosophie* / that there must nedes be a purgatory" (410; my emphasis).¹⁰ Clearly, Comyngo believes (with Gyngemyn's concurrence) that our faculties are not so irreparably damaged by the Fall that any reliance upon them for divine matters will inevitably result in error and heresy. And to ensure that neither party cheats by referring to anything outside the conclusions reached by reason alone, Gyngemyn proposes that if Comyngo foregoes supporting his arguments by citing outside authorities, especially but not exclusively Scripture, then Gyngemyn will do the same:

but yet one thinge I will warne the consideringe that my onely purpose is to prove the thinge by reason that in thy reason and objeccion against me that thou aledge no maner texte nor authorite / neither of the bokes of the olde bible / nor of the new testament: neither of no other boke / of that thou calleste the holy scrypture of the devinite of thy cristen faith / nor of the lawes made therfore

.....
Comyngo. Because thou sayst so I shall not trouble the with aledginge of any suche textes or authoritees of our faith or lawe. And therefore I praye the likewise use the same maner unto me / nor aledge thou no texte nor authoritees of the boke of thy lawe calleth the Alcoron / nor of any other boke of thy Machomettys lawe . . . (410-11).

As if to underscore the importance of these rules, in the opening exchange Comyngo immediately (and rather comically) refers to the Bible as proof of an assertion; predictably, Gyngemyn chides him for breaking the agreement,

insisting that man's reason sola ratio is sufficient guide:

Comyngo. As to these two pointes [the existence of an omnipotent god the immortality of man's soul] I must nedes graunt the.

Gyngemyn. What moveth the to graunt them so sone.

Comyngo. Mary because tha' our holy scripture sheweth it and techeth us so. And also all our lawes bindeth us and compelleth us to beli[e]ve it.

Gyngemyn. Ye but yet lay all the scripture & lawes apart and tell me what thinkest thou by those two points in naturall reason (411-12).

Perhaps recalling Luther's views on man's faculties, Comyngo objects, voicing the more conventional Christian belief that man's reason is incapable of fully grasping such high mysteries: "By my trouthe I thinke that no man onely by reason can prove that there is a god that governeth all . . ." (412), but Gyngemyn insists that God's existence and nature can be proved by using our native powers: "yes I shall prove to the bothe those pointes by reason / so that thine onely reason shall judge them to be true" (412). And indeed Gyngemyn succeeds in convincing his skeptical friend, for everytime Comyngo finds himself convinced, he praises the *reasonableness* of Gyngemyn's argument. (E.g., after Gyngemyn proves that the first being must be the cause of all other beings, Comyngo says "That conclusion foloweth so resonably that it can not be denied" [413]).

Interestingly, Gyngemyn's abiding faith in reason and Comyngo's delighted assent to both the matter and the method of Gyngemyn's discourse does not mean that Rastell thought positively of the imagination. Quite the opposite, for Rastell is not so much interested in recuperating the demonized imagination as he is in excluding that troublesome faculty as much as possible from the processes of ratiocination.

Gyngemyn divides the operation of the soul into three catagories: the memory, "by the whiche one doth remember thinges paste and done" (446), the phantasy, "the operacion of the knowlege / whiche is had by reason" (446-47) and the "understandinge." Although Gyngemyn does not speak very much about the nature of the first two faculties, he clearly locates them in the lower regions of mind. First, man shares these faculties with the "brute bestes" (447), therefore they are not essential (in the Aristotelian sense) to the definition of man's nature. Second, the imagination dominates only when the "operacion of understanding" is somehow incapacitated, either by disease or by too much wine: "for such dronknes [or sickness] a man useth but the operacion of his

phansie / and not his understandinge that is the perfite of his soule . . .” (447).

Gyngemyn can place so much faith in the “understandinge” because, as he understands cognition, the imagination plays a very minor role in the discovery of truth. He restricts this faculty’s operations to processing the sense impressions gathered from outside man’s soul by the five senses; metaphysical or religious knowledge, on the other hand, originates from deep *within* the soul. Stealing both his reasoning and his assumptions from Plato’s *Meno*, Gyngemyn believes that ratiocination consists of recovering knowledge that God placed within man’s soul:¹¹

But yet take hede to this pointe that thou [Comyngo] supposest that the soule increseth in understandinge and lerneth sciens and conninge by reding and techinge / is no thyng elle but the repeticion and remembraunce of such sciens and conninge that soule had before / which memory hadde forgotten and could not rehearse / for this I wote that thou and every other reasonable man can imagine and make many great reasons and findeth many subtell invencions of reasons / whiche were to them never taught / and whiche they never lerned by reding nor instruccion of other men / but of their owne mindes & imaginacions / therfore because man have other understandinge / sciens / knowlege / that they have not by lerninge and techinge of other men. Therfore now it must nedes folow that the science and knowlege was in the soule of man longe time before (447-48).

We do not need the aid of the Bible or of the Fathers in discovering God’s doctrines, for (according to Gyngemyn at least) those doctrines already lie within our souls, waiting to be discovered. From a Christian discovering Christian doctrines, these lines would not be remarkable; but from a Turk, these lines imply that Christians and Moslems agree on key issues of doctrine, and that, in the context of a Reformation polemical tract intended to combat heresy, is astounding.

What is even more astounding is that Rastell undercuts Comyngo’s pious rationale for believing in God and the immortality of the soul by coupling a reference to the Bible with a reminder that authorities have made it *illegal* to think otherwise:

Comyngo. As to those two poyntes I muste nedys graunte the.

Gyngemyn. What moveth the to graunt them so sone.

Comyngo. Mary because y^t our holy scrypture sheweth yt and techeth us so. And also all our lawes byndeth us and compelleth us to belyve it (411; my emphasis).

Comyngo's adherence to Christian doctrine, therefore, results as much from coercion as conviction. In a curious inversion of Greenblatt's subversion/containment thesis, Rastell's *A Newe Boke of Purgatorye* attempt to contain the threat of heresy produces a demystification of Catholicism.

* * *

Frith came to respond to Rastell's dialogue by accident. Originally, he wrote a letter to "a certaine frende in englonde / desiring him instantlie to sende me certaine bokes which I thought necessarie for my use " (sig. A4^{v-r}). The friend immediately sent Thomas More's reply to Simon Fish's verse satire, *The Supplicacyon for the Beggars* "and one moe of Rastels makinge [*A Newe Boke of Purgatory*] / wherein he goeth aboute to prove purgatorye / by natural philosophye" (sig. a4). And so Frith decided to refute the positions of all three in *A Disputacion of Purgatory*.¹² In the first book he answers Rastell's attempt to prove purgatory's existence "by naturall philosophye," in the second he answers Thomas More, who "laboureth to prove purgatorye by scripture," and in the final book Frith "maketh answeere unto my lorde of Rochestre which most leaneth unto the doctoures" (sig. A1, title page).

Following the model of Tyndale's responses to More's polemical dialogues, John Frith answers an artfully constructed fiction availing itself of all the devices and freedoms the genre offers with a monologue that insists upon its very *unfictiveness*. Whereas Frith assumes that Rastell speaks to the reader through Gyngemyn and Comyngo (that the teller might not necessarily be coterminous with the tale apparently never occurred to him), Frith presents himself to the "Christen reader" without any fictive coverings, freely admitting his youth, his supposed ignorance, and his temerity in challenging men of such "greate witte and dignite" (sig. A2^r). Frith allows himself to challenge Rastell, More, and Fisher because whatever they say is as much subject to the Scriptures as whatever Frith proposes. The words of the Bible, as Frith says, are the "touchstone" of his words, and he invites the reader to compare what he writes (and what his adversaries write)

with goddes worde. If they be founde false and contrefaite / then dampne them / and I shal also revoke them with all mine harte. But if the Scripture allowe them / that you can not denye but it so is / then it is not the doctrine of god / but knowlege your ignoraunce and seduccion and retourne gladlye in to the right waye (sig. A2^v-A3^r).

.....

And therefore is it not mete that we streyght wayes cleave unto their wordes without any further enserching the scriptures / but we must examine all thinges by the scriptures . . . (sig. A3^v).

The issue, however, cuts deeper than a dispute over what constitutes valid evidence. Frith's insistence upon testing human creations against the Word of the Bible stems from his distrust of our innate capabilities. Unlike Rastell and his fictive characters, Frith believes that it is simply impossible for unaided reason to uncover religious truths. Our faculties, occluded since the fall, our "natural infirmite" (sig. A6^v) as Frith terms it, inevitably lead us astray because "is there moch imperfection in him as longe as he is included in this mortall bodye" (sig. A3^r); the Bible, on the other hand, the unfallible record of the unsullied Word of God, constitutes "the sure metyarde and perfete touchstone that judgeth and examineth all thinges" (sig. A4^r). Relying on one's faculties only leads to "grosse errores" (sig. A3^v). Putting aside for a moment Gyngemyn's marginalizing of the Bible, Frith would never agree to Gyngemyn's rules since they proceed from a positive assesment of the nature and capabilities of man's faculties: unlike Rastell, Frith sees even the higher faculties as errant and in need of Biblical constraint:

But let hym [Rastell] go wyth his turcke and let us Christen men graunte nothings contrarye to the scripture / but ever captivate our reason unto that / for it is the unfallible reason and wisdom of god / and passeth oure reason farre (sig. C5^r).

Significantly, Frith articulates his radical distrust of the products of the human mind by consistently locating their origin in the imagination. Finding no scriptural basis for purgatory, Frith concludes that someone made it up, that "this their paynfull purgatorye was but a vaine imaginacion" (sig. A5^r), and he repeats this charge throughout *A Disputacion of Purgatorye*. If the clergy had read their Bible carefully, they would not have found it necessary "to imagine a purgatorye" (sig. A6^r); Simon Fish in the *Supplication for the Beggars* tried to expose "how that the ignoraunte people by their seduccion was fallen in to that frantick imagination that they more feared the pope and his decrees ... than god" (sig. A7^r; the reasons proving the existence of purgatory put into Gyngemyn's mouth are "nothings but mannes imaginacion and phantasie" (sig. B1^r); he asks rhetorically "how can the worlde espye no punishment here / & therefore they thought it necessarie to imagine a purgatorie to purge and punish sinne" (sig. B3); and to bring this admittedly arbitrary list to an equally arbitrary close, for one can find examples of this locution on nearly every page,

Frith dismisses all the arguments for purgatory because “their wordes are nothing but even their awne imaginacion/ for they can not confirme their sayinges by the scripture” (sig. B5^v). Like his friend, William Tyndale, then, Frith puts everything that derives from Scripture in one pile and everything that is not so derived, that is to say, everything devised by human brains, in another pile labelled “imagination.” Over and over again Frith uses this term to mean anything that man, as opposed to God, creates, and it is clear that whatever humans concoct Frith assumes to be guilty until proven otherwise: “And therefore it is not sure that we folowe their exterior workes or other imaginacions / but let us ever conserte them unto the pure worde of god/ and scriptur” (sig. A3^v).

Undoubtedly, Frith’s primary objective in these pages is not the demonization of the imagination but the rebuttal of Rastell’s (as well as More’s and Fisher’s) arguments, but the incessant identification of Catholic ideas with the imagination also illustrates the on-going appropriation of anti-imagination sentiment for Protestantism. The attack on one leads to a condemnation of the other in a negative hermeneutic circle: Catholic doctrines are false, therefore they originate in the imagination; the imagination is an untrustworthy, deceitful faculty, therefore it produces the lies Catholics take for the truth. Since the products of the imagination are necessarily false (although Frith often modifies “imagination” with “vain” or “frantick” or some such adjective, he never suggests a right use for this faculty), Frith concludes that the manufacturer must be as suspect as the products themselves.

Frith’s use, like Tyndale’s, of “imagination” as an antonym for truth very quickly spread into a distrust for all manner of *fictions*. In his *Answer to Thomas More’s Dialogue*, Tyndale called the poet (i.e. More) the “natural son of the father of all lies!”;¹³ and Frith follows suit by explicitly equating fictions with lies:

There toke Rastell his holde / which is a printer dwellinge at poules gate in londen and of master Mores alliaunce / which also coveteth to *countrefeite* his kinseman / although the beames of his braines be nothings so radiaunte nor his conveyance so commendable in the yies of the wise. Notwithstandinge this Rastell hath enterprised to dilate this matter / and hath divided in to .iii. dialoges / *imagininge* that two men dispute this matter by naturall reason and philosophye . . . (sig. A7^r; my emphasis).

By the later sixteenth century, “imagine,” “feign,” and “counterfeit” would become the standard terminology for poetics (although the negative uses would continue), nonetheless, this language was relatively new in the 1530s.¹⁴

Stephen Hawes exemplifies the literary uses of these terms in the eighth section of his popular allegory of the seven liberal arts, *The Pastime of Pleasure*: “It was the guise in olde antiquitie/ Of famous poetes / right imaginative/ Fables to faine/ by good auctorite . . . “ (ll. 715-17).

Throughout his text, Frith uses the same terms for poetic production that Hawes employs and he retains their literary connotations, only Frith gives them an entirely negative twist which would have been all the more pointed given their relative novelty. In the opening epistle, Frith uses “countrefait” to mean meretricious words; later, he uses “countrefeite” as a verb to mean what we would call literary imitation, suggesting the close connection in his mind between fictions and lying. Just as the Pope and his followers have the “invencion and imaginacion of purgatorie” (sig. B2^v), so does Rastell “imagine” a dialogue in which all the proofs for purgatory’s existence deserve sharp rebuke “speciallye sith they were but of his awne imaginacion” (sig. A4). Similarly, if purgatory is a “feigned” doctrine, so are Gyngemyn and Comynge: the former Rastell “faineth . . . to be a turcke” (sig. B2^v) and the latter “he faineth to be a Christen man” (sig. B4^v).

Rather than granting the possibility that fiction might constitute a third category occupying some middle ground between truth and falsehood, at the start of his rebuttal Frith expressly reduces the matter to a simple binary opposition. Either something is true, or it is not true, and nothing in between is possible: “this booke of Rastels makinge is either true or false. If it be false / then how so ever it seme to agre with naturall reason it is not be alowed: if it be true / then must we approve it” (sig. B1^v). Nor was Frith eccentric in his distrust of fictions. Tyndale, as we have seen, regularly used “poet” and “imagination” as terms of abuse. And John Skelton, in his diatribe against the Cambridge Reformers Thomas Arthur and Thomas Bilney, “A Replycacion Agaynst Certayne Yong Scolers Abjured of Late,” (c. 1528), specifically identifies the Reformists with antipoetic sentiment.¹⁶

Why have ye then disdayne
At poetes, and complayne
Howe poetes do but fayne?
(ll. 351-52)

One result of the Protestant appropriation of antipoetic sentiment will be the the unease with fiction that hovers like a cloud over Renaissance poetics.¹⁷

Obviously, this does not tell the whole story of Renaissance poetics, and the persistent demonizing of the imagination by many Protestant theologians

and polemicists did not stop a great crowd of people of greater and lesser distinction from writing poetry. But many, especially those with particularly strong Protestant convictions (e.g. Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and even John Milton), wrote without the assurance that poetry was not in some degree culpable; consequently one frequently finds a discomfort with the imagination coexisting with a valorization of poetry.¹⁸ Theodore Beza, whose works enjoyed wide distribution in England, nicely sums up these contrary impulses when he writes of his earlier career as poet: "I have delighted in poetrie, and I can not yet repent me of it; nevertheless, it greveth me right sore [that my talent] was imployed by me in such things as the very remembrance of them irketh me now at the hart."¹⁹

As for the final outcome of the debate between Rastell and Frith, the former answered *A Disputacion of Purgatory* and Frith responded from the Tower, where he was imprisoned as a heretic. However, unlike the quarrel between More and Tyndale, in which neither combatant yielded a doctrinal inch (although, interestingly, Tyndale's attack on fictions may have influenced More's retreat from using dialogues and fictions as vehicles for religious controversy),²⁰ Frith actually succeeded in convincing his opponent of the error of his ways: Rastell converted in 1533. Ironically, one year after Henry executed More for refusing to grant the king's supremacy in religious affairs, the government threw Rastell into the Tower for hewing to the radical Protestant position on tithes (which Henry did not agree with). Sadly, Rastell had no more success with Cranmer than he did with Frith, and he died of natural causes in 1536, a defeated man and a prisoner.²¹

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Notes

I wrote portions of this essay during a 1990 National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar led by John N. King on "The Protestant Imagination: From Tyndale to Milton."

1. Richard Marius, for example, dismisses Rastell as "a bizaare and unstable man" (*Thomas More: A Biography* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984], 7). In addition, neither's works have been readily accessible until (in Rastell's case) very recently. John Rastell's *A Newe Boke of Purgatorye* is now available in a good scholarly edition along with his historical chronicle, *The Pastyme of People* (ed. Albert J. Geritz [New York: Garland, 1985]). Frith's answer, *A Disputacion of Purgatory* (Antwerp, 1531), on the other hand, still awaits a modern editor. When quoting from these texts, I have silently expanded contractions and adopted the modern usage of i/j and u/v.
2. On the cracks and fissures in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, see O. B. Hardison, Jr. "The Two

Voices of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 2 (1972): 83-99; rpt. *Sidney in Retrospect: Selections from "English Literary Renaissance*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 45-61; Margaret W. Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 138-62; Ronald Levao, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions: Cusanus, Sidney, Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 134-56; and my chapter on the *Apology* in *Squitter-Wits and Muse-Haters: Sidney, Spenser, Milton and Antipoetic Sentiment* (forthcoming: Wayne State University Press).

3. For example, G. Gregory Smith's still invaluable *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904) begins with an excerpt from Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* (1570). O.B. Hardison, Jr.'s *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance* (New York: Meredith, 1963) includes William Caxton's 1484 prefaces to Chaucer and to Malory, but he then skips to Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), thereby missing out Henry VIII's reign altogether. The major exception to this generalized erasure of early Tudor literary theory has been John N. King's recuperation of the Edwardian Protestant literary tradition in *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), although King too does not pay much attention to the earliest English Protestants. On the role ideology played in the marginalization of the Henrician era, see the various essays in and my introduction to *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 1-15.
4. Smith, "Introduction," xiv.
5. Russell Fraser, *The War Against Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); William Nelson, *Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983); John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
6. Antipoetic sentiment, although clearly benefitting from an impeccable classical pedigree, had not lain dormant since fifth-century Athens. The elevation of poetry to the level of theology, as well as the elevation of the poet to the status of an *alter Deus*, by such humanists as Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Salutati, led to a scattered revival of antipoetic sentiment in the Italian Renaissance. Significantly, even though in the 1350s attackers of poetry tended to be more conservative, Aristotelian intellectuals, by the turn of the sixteenth century a number of important humanists had penned antipoetic texts. On scholastic antipoetic sentiment, see Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Bollingen series 36. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953; rpt. 1973), 480-484, 591-592, and Rosalie Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). For antipoetic sentiment in continental humanism, see Concetta Greenfield, *Scholastic and Humanist Poetics: 1250-1500*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979) and Peter Herman, "Squitter-Wits and Muse-Haters: Renaissance Poets and Renaissance Attacks on Poetry" (unpublished Ph.d dissertation, Columbia University, 1990), 29-79.

In the 1520s, however, a key development occurred: the appropriation of antipoetic and anti-

imaginative rhetoric by the early English Protestants who attacked the Catholic Church because, they claimed, it had replaced the word of God with stuff contrived by the human mind. As Stephen J. Greenblatt puts it, Tyndale and his followers charged Rome with creating a church whose essence is not truth, but *fiction* (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* [Chicago, 1980], 112); therefore they attacked fiction as part of their attack on the corruptions of the Church. Tyndale, for example, contemptuously dismisses all the accoutrements of Catholicism with the phrase “[they] gave themselves only unto poetry, and shut up the scripture,” (*The Practice of Prelates*, in *Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of the Holy Scriptures Together with The Practice of Prelates*, ed. Rev. Henry Walter. The Parker Society [Cambridge, 1849], 268).

7. Marius, *Thomas More*, 338. Why Rastell chose to enter the fray has remained something of a mystery, although Geritz speculates that he might have wanted either to mend fences with More or to ingratiate himself with the king (Geritz, “Introduction,” 32-34).
8. Alistair Fox, *Thomas More: History and Providence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 122.
9. Of course, Rastell was not the first Christian to depict non-Christians sympathetically or to perceive how Islamic beliefs are tantalizingly close to Christian truths. See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt’s analysis of *Mandeville’s Travels* in *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 28-51.
10. Gyngemyn’s assumption that man can reason his way to religious certainty is not entirely without precedent. Raymond Sebond suggested as much in his *Theologia naturalis* (1484), which Montaigne famously refuted in his “Apology for Raymond Sebond” in terms that reiterate the more radical Protestant distrust of man’s faculties: “Presumption is our natural and original infirmity ... It is through the vanity of the same imagination that he dare equal himself to God, that he ascribeth divine conditions unto himself, that he selecteth and separateth himself from out the rank of other creatures . . .” (Michel de Montaigne, *Selected Essays of Montaigne in the translation of John Florio*, ed. Walter Kaiser [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964], 97).
11. In a sense, Gyngemyn’s implicit repetition of Platonic theories breaks his rule forbidding citations of all outside authorities. Ironically, Gyngemyn’s attempt to unearth reasons present in and of themselves, referring only to themselves, reasons ostensibly retrieved from the depths of memory where they were placed by God in an act outside of language and history, succeeds only in the constructing a text that is a tissue of quotations and syntheses of previous texts.
12. William A. Clebsch, *England’s Earliest Protestants: 1520-1535* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 89-90.
13. More: What good will he do, that believeth Martin, how
 that we have no free-will to do any good with the Help of grace?
Tyndale: O poet, without shame!
More: What harm shall he care to forbear, that believeth
 Luther, how God alone, without our will, worketh all the mischief
 that they do?”

Tyndale: O natural son of the father of all lies!

(William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge: The Parker Society, 1850), 188. A new edition of this text and Tyndale's other works is forthcoming from Catholic University Press.

14. Murray Bundy, "'Invention' and 'Imagination' in the Renaissance," *Journal of English and German Philology*, 29 (1930), 538-541. Bundy, however, overstates Hawes' rejection of classical theories of imitation. For the importance of *imitatio* (and an argument for the importance of humanism) in Hawes' poem, see Seth Lerer, "The Rhetoric of Fame: Stephen Hawes' Aureate Diction," *Spenser Studies*, 5 (1985): 169-184.
15. Stephen Hawes, *The Pastime of Pleasure*, ed. William E. Mead (London: EETS, 1928). The poem was originally published in 1509 and republished 1517 (Mead, xxix). I have modernized the spelling in the quotation.
16. John Skelton, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Scattergood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983). Bilney also knew John Frith since the two of them were among the group that used to gather (along with Robert Barnes and possibly William Tyndale) at a local tavern to discuss religion (Marius, *Thomas More*, 312).
17. On this topic, see Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976); *Self-Crowned Laureates*; Mary Ellen Lamb, "Ovid and *The Winter's Tale*: Conflicting Views toward Art," *Shakespeare and Dramatic Tradition: Essays in Honor of S.F. Johnson*, ed. W.R. Elton and William B. Long (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 69-87; Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); and my forthcoming book, cited in note 2.
18. For Milton, see my "Milton and the Muse-Haters: *Ad Patrem*, *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso* and the Ambivalences of Poetry," forthcoming in *Criticism*.
19. *Abraham Sacrifiant*, trans. Arthur Golding (Rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969), 5. The difference between Beza's retraction and Chaucer's is that the latter wrote his at the end of his life and it remains a controversial matter whether it should be read ironically, seriously, or as a combination of the two. Boccaccio's retraction is also problematic, but for different reasons. Petrarch claims in an extant letter that Boccaccio seriously considered rejecting secular literature (he tells him not to do so, but if he does, Boccaccio should donate his library to Petrarch); however, no such letter from Boccaccio survives, and we have an autograph manuscript of the *Decameron* from the last year of Boccaccio's life. (I am indebted to James V. Mirollo's expertise in this and other matters). Beza wrote his retraction as a relatively young man, and there is no doubt that he meant every word.
20. Fox, 131.
21. Albert J. Geritz and Amos L. Laine, *John Rastell* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), 20, 25.