Sidney and Herbert on Failure: Modesty Topos or Writer's Block?

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CAN THE FOCUS OF *Astrophil and Stella* and *The Temple* on the difficulties that arise when composing poetry, usually viewed as a self-conscious performance of inadequacy, rather be seen as amused advice about how to steer clear of a writer's block?

There is only one history of blocking, that by Zachary Leader, who takes a psychoanalytic approach, considering the condition as the result of the anxiety of influence. He argues that the problem was first conceptualised in the eighteenth century, when authors described themselves as daunted by feeling that they had little new to say, given the achievements of classical and Renaissance writers. Though Romantic writers subsequently disagreed with this position, some (Leader picks out Wordsworth and Coleridge) lamented how, in their own cases, the original sources of their creativity dried up in later life as freshness of perception waned, so they wrote nothing new, or wrote at length but badly.[1]

Perhaps, though, a pre-history of writer's block might start with the 'modesty topos', so common in early modern texts? Currently, commentators see this topos as a pretence of weakness that elicits support from its readers. For instance, Patricia Pender and Matthew Harrison argue that a declared inability to write inverts the relationship between the perceived social or political weakness of writers before their patrons or readers and these writers' demonstrated rhetorical power. The topos typically involves authors proclaiming that

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they are merely copying or compiling a text written by others, or belittling the work produced, or apologising for composing it, or saying that they were forced to do so, and such like excuses. These positions help defuse any criticism from readers while still allowing authors to claim the authority to speak. The modesty topos thus operates in a similar way to the performance of *sprezzatura* recommended by the period's courtier literature, Pender argues.[2] Gordon Braden focuses on a subsection of the topos, that of secular and devotional panegyric, which regularly and expertly voices its poetic incapacity to suggest how overcome the poet feels when considering his beloved.[3] Braden cites Spenser wondering at how his 'pen ravished is with fancy's wonderment: / Yet in my heart I then both speak and write / The wonder that my wit cannot indite', and Shakespeare talking of how his 'tongue-tied muse' allows him merely to 'think good thoughts whilst others write good words', 'In polished form of well-refined pen'.[4] Nor need such modesty be a merely formal ploy, Gavin Alexander observes, since to draw 'attention to the generic constraints, to the anxieties of love and of love poetry', is to create 'a more convincing representation of love. If being in love is all about doubts about fiction and reality'.[5]

What, though, if comments by Sidney and Herbert about difficulties in writing are taken at face value – as expressing long-standing problems in composition?

Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, a mainstay of the upper forms in Elizabethan and Jacobean grammar schools, initially takes the line that failure to speak is an effective pretence to woo the audience's sympathy (a modesty topos, in short).[6] In the opening of a speech, there is 'a certain tacit approval to be won by proclaiming ourselves weak, unprepared, and no match for the talents of the opposing party'. Moreover, it is helpful to continue to do so throughout the body of the speech: pretending to be at a loss for words can give the impression of sincerity and spontaneity, and the audience will feel goodwill towards any speaker who humbly admits a fault, or admire one who shows quick thinking in recovering from an apparent problem. Methods to create apparent blocks, such as breaking off suddenly as though

overcome with emotion (*aposiopesis*) or correcting oneself mid-sentence (*correctio*), or stating one could not speak adequately of a topic (*occupatio*) were learned and practised in early modern schools.[7]

But Quintilian also acknowledges such blocks can be real, creating real anxiety, which often arises from a perfectionism which causes over-preparation and over-editing. 'Some people are never satisfied; they want to change everything, and express everything differently to the way it came to mind . . . They wear themselves out with work, and relapse into silence through being too anxious to speak well'. Extrinsic circumstances can also affect ready composition, and not only the obvious ones, such as the education and health of the orator. Composing a speech by dictating a draft to another, for instance, means the speaker may try to save face by blurting out material. Moreover, the presence of an amanuensis means the speaker cannot use the 'gestures which accompany ... stronger feelings, and themselves help to stimulate thought', such as waving his hand, frowning, striking his breast (or the table) in passion, or just nibbling his fingernails while considering what to say. The cure is to be limited in aim (not trying 'to speak better than you can'), steady in accumulating matter ('it will come if, instead of lying back looking at the ceiling, mumbling to ourselves to stimulate thought, and waiting for something to turn up, we approach our writing problem somehow like ordinary human beings, and ask ourselves what the circumstances demand', for 'most points, in fact, are certain and unless we close our eye to them, come into view on their own'), and sensible in finding the right place and time to compose.[8]

It is noticeable that Quintilian does not consider anxiety of influence, and indeed is unequivocal about how examples of best practice help rather than hinder. When 'aiming at forceful oratory', try 'reading and hearing the best models', 'examples which are in fact more powerful than those found in the textbooks ... because the orator demonstrates what the teacher only prescribed'. He gives extensive reading lists for the tyro orator, and holds out the hope that, if these are approached with 'discretion and judgement' – but without

making their practice into a 'law of oratory' – the writer might even try to surpass his models. Even trying and failing will develop his skill.[9] One of the joys of reading Quintilian is this tone of amused pragmatism. There are no absolute rules about what methods work or not, or what should or should not be said, and hence the manual provides a wealth of examples to develop the young orator's responsiveness to the needs of specific situations. Such rule-based manuals as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* or *De partitione oratoria* are easier to follow but make for a much less masterful orator. These are studied in the lower forms of the grammar school; Quintilian is reserved for the upper forms.

Quintilian's assumption that blocks are an effect of poor cognitive processes, not sub-conscious rivalry with other authors, is endorsed by current research into blocking. The two principal studies, by Mike Rose and Keith Hjortshoj, are based on empirical research into the moment when creativity is lost: putting together present-moment recordings of writers in the middle of composing a piece (as they mutter, gesticulate, pause, and write), stimulated-recall interviews of what they were doing and feeling as they wrote, and the authors' notes and drafts (whose additions, deletions, and marginalia are retained). The researchers found that normally competent writers tend to develop blocks for three principal reasons. The first is when they distract themselves with unnecessary reading or other preparation, rather than starting to draft using what has already been done. The second is when they apply rigid or inappropriate assumptions about what should be written (for instance, 'always vary sentence lengths') or how to write (for instance, 'good writing always arises out of inspiration'). The third is when they edit their own work too early in the process, stopping short of finishing a draft of the whole piece by trying to finalise the verbal texture of a small section of it, or evaluate and then edit the work with some vaguely conceived standard of perfection in mind (often concentrating on the potential response of future readers rather than working on the piece in front of them). Rose and Hjortshoj note how the displeasing feeling of being blocked (often expressed by images of restricted movement

or physical sensation, such as feeling stuck, mired, stranded, numb, or paralysed) can create a loop in the process, reducing the motivation to start writing still further.[10]

Given that self-proclaimed failures express both rhetorical mastery and its opposite, it is not surprising that early modern writers are fascinated by situations in which there might suddenly be nothing to say. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus describes at length the embarrassing moment when 'great clerks have purposed / To greet me with premeditated welcomes', but 'Throttle their practised accent in their fears, / And in conclusion dumbly have broke off' (V. i. 93-8). One disputant in a formal debate before the queen at the University of Oxford in 1592 was so worried about this possibility that he twice refused to end his speech at her request; 'he would not, or as some told her, could not put himself out of a set methodical speech for fear he should have marred all', gossip said, contrasting this with how she then showed him 'that she could interrupt her speech, and not be put out'.[11] Accordingly, speakers came to social events armed with tactics for creating matter. For instance, Richard Greenham, the rector of Dry Drayton, Cambridgeshire, who was renowned for his pastoral advice, called it a Christian duty to join in the conversation at dinner: if those present 'would not speak of any thing, yet they should aske something: if they could not ask, yet they should speake of the Communion of saincts: if they cold say nothing yet at least they should complain of ther dul minds … and even of ther dulnes and deadnes should rayse quicknes and life of speach again'.[12] The social anxiety about possibly having nothing to say gives comedies an opening. In *Twelfth Night* Viola and Olivia vie to push each other into or out of Viola's 'excellently well penned' speech of love (I. v. 165 ff.); in *Love's Labour's Lost* the most rigorous training Rosaline can impose on Biron is to 'Visit the speechless sick and still converse / With groaning wretches' for a year (V. ii. 836-7); and in *As You Like It* Rosalind advises Orlando that as 'very good orators, when they are out, they will spit', so lovers 'were better speak first, and when … gravelled for lack of matter … take occasion to kiss'; should the beloved refuse this, 'then she puts you to entreaty, and there begins

new matter' (IV. i. 69-75). The fact that a modesty topos may express the real worry that a void may open up, as well as providing a faux excuse to speak further, provokes the fascinated amusement of schadenfreude.

At least fifteen of the 108 sonnets of *Astrophil and Stella* consider two of the principal problems in the process of composition: over- or mis-judged preparation and poor or premature editing. The sequence famously opens with a scene of frustration about not being able to write. Astrophil is 'helplesse' in his painful 'throwes' (Sonnet 1), which are notably amplified by his determination to do so when he has nothing to say: 'Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite'.[13] Astrophil has already deduced that the cause of the block is over-preparation. Rhetorical handbooks recommend seeking matter by imitating what has already been said by others on the same topic (both content and words), and by logically analysing the circumstances of the situation (its qualities, causes, effects, and so on). Astrophil remembers how enthusiastically he has tried out the first method, 'Studying inventions fine … / Oft turning others' leaves' (Sonnet 1), but observes that the more he worked at it, the less it worked: 'words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay, / Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Studie's blowes'. Germaine Warkentin points out that while Astrophil starts with the same problem as Petrarch (neither is able to capture the essence of his beloved), he ends otherwise by concluding that the fault lies with the poet, not the material. Astrophil thus shifts to the second form of invention: attending closely to the fact of Stella herself should solve the problem, as Quintilian advises.[14]

However, Astrophil continues to be tempted to over-prepare, cataloguing and even exemplifying a range of accepted poetic techniques for inventing material, before briefly dismissing them. Sonnets 3, 6, 15, 28, 55, 74, and 90 run through fifteen different approaches, including using alliteration to bring words to mind (Sonnet 15), writing passages which invoke the Muses to do what he cannot do unaided (Sonnets 3, 55, 74), appealing to ready-made rhetorical schemes and tropes (Sonnets 3 and 15), creating oxymorons and paradoxes from conventional positions (Sonnet 6), exploiting

mythic or pastoral tales for analogies (Sonnet 6), developing allegories to create further content (Sonnet 28), reading travel books for images of exotic flora and fauna (Sonnet 3), and adopting an elegiac mood (Sonnets 6 and 15) or a maddened authorial persona (Sonnet 74). Criticism of other love poets does not arise out of envy or anxiety that Astrophil cannot measure up; he simply finds them boring. He emphasises how their techniques are based on highly conventional assumptions about how to write, speaking of 'You that' use some such technique (Sonnets 15 and 28), offering to 'Let daintie wits' do so (Sonnet 30), and noting how 'Some Lovers speake' in one or other way (Sonnet 6). He then contrasts their actions with how he, 'in pure simplicitie / Breathe[s] out the flames which burne' (Sonnet 28), for 'nothing from my wit or will doth flow, / Since all my words thy beauty doth endite' (Sonnet 90).

Some of these sonnets are explicitly structured as investigations into empirical practice, either noting at the moment of writing how changes in Astrophil's approach to creating a poem are occurring, or recalling later how this has happened. The alterations are usually heralded by a 'but', so the sonnet gives nine or ten lines on one way of working, followed by a change in technique: 'But if (both for your love and skill) your name / You seeke to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame, / *Stella* behold' (Sonnet 15); or 'But now I meane no more your helpe to trie … / But on her name incessantly to crie' (Sonnet 55); or 'Guesse we the cause: "What is it thus?" Fie no. / "Or so?" Much lesse. "How then?" Sure thus it is: / My lips are sweet, inspired with *Stella*'s kisse' (Sonnet 74).

Again and again, Astrophil arrives at the same conclusion as Sonnet 1 (to focus on the circumstances being described, that is, his love for Stella herself, from which, as Quintilian says, invention will naturally arise), but it is the looping, the repetitiveness, which stand out. Henri Bergson argued that onlookers laugh when a person shows themselves to be inflexible in repeatedly carrying out the same act, as the graceful energy of animate beings drains away, leaving them mere material, rigid, or mechanical.[15] This aspect reappears in the many run-ups which Astrophil takes to producing a

poem through sheer willpower. In Sonnets 1 and 44 he sits down with a clear plan of action, voiced as a *gradatio* to create love verses to entice Stella. Sonnet 1's escalator runs through 'loving … show … pleasure … reading … knowledge … pitie … grace'; Sonnet 44's runs through 'words … mind … smart … pitie … heart'. Bewildered in both sonnets at the failure of this mechanical scheme ('Alas, what cause is there so overthwart?', Sonnet 44), Astrophil only gets help from a friendly Muse in the first. In the other, he is left to crank out what even he describes as an unconvincingly hopeful 'guesse' (that on arriving at Stella's ears 'the sobs of mine annoyes / Are metamorphosd straight to tunes of joyes').

   He is generally no more flexible, and hence successful, when it comes to editing his work. Astrophil recalls how he once intended to 'With choisest flowers my speech … engarland', yet 'oft whole troupes of saddest words I staid, / Striving abroad a foraging to go', until sure of 'How their blacke banner might be best displaid' (Sonnet 55). Mostly, he edits his work in damaging ways, before it is fully formed. At one point a verse is on the brink of emerging: 'Come then my Muse shew thou height of delight / In well raisde notes, my pen, the best it may / Shall paint out joy'. Then he suddenly halts: 'Cease eager Muse, peace pen, for my sake stay … / Wise silence is best musicke unto blisse' (Sonnet 70). When he does allow his thoughts to 'swell and struggle forth' from him in verses about Stella,

> as soone as they so formed be …
> With sad eyes I their weake proportion see, …
> So that I cannot chuse but write my mind,
> And cannot chuse but put out what I write,
> While those poore babes their death in birth do find
> (Sonnet 50)

Francis X. Connor draws attention to a passage in the *Arcadia* in which Dorus tries to write to Pamela:

> never words more slowly married together, and never the Muses more tired than now with changes and rechanges

of his devices; fearing how to end before he had resolved how to begin, mistrusting each word … This word was not significant; that word was too plain: this would not be conceived; the other would be ill-conceived … At last, marring with mending and putting out better then he left, he made an end of it … his reason assuring him the more he studied the worse it grew.[16]

Connor reads this as evidence that Sidney does not idealise the act of bringing a work into being, seeing it as a physically and mentally toilsome business.[17] However, the passage could also be read as a description of how a block can build up through premature editing while writing a draft, not afterwards. Dorus has to force himself to cut his losses and end on a good-enough note. Even when Astrophil wills himself to compose ('Come let me write'), he quickly loses confidence: 'Thus write I while I doubt to write' (Sonnet 34), asking helplessly in the following sonnet 'What may words say, or what may words not say, / Where truth it selfe must speake like flatterie' (Sonnet 35). In a later pair of sonnets he cannot find ink 'blacke inough to paint my wo' (Sonnet 93), and has to leave Grief in the following sonnet to 'find the words' (Sonnet 94).

   Commentary upon *Astrophil and Stella*'s self-conscious meditations on the process of writing tends to assume that Sidney is demonstrating, by mocking his authorial persona, the argument in *A Defence of Poetry* on the ineffectiveness in love poetry at catching up 'certain swelling phrases which hand together', such as 'far-fet words … strangers to any poor Englishman … coursing of a letter, as if they were bound to follow the method of a dictionary … all herbarists, all stories of beasts, fowls, and fishes … rifled up'.[18] Reading the sonnet sequence through theories about writer's block does not vary this conclusion, though it does sharpen a sense of what exactly is going wrong. However, reading Herbert's poems about poetic failure through Sidney's understanding of blocking gives some startling results, very far from the critical consensus that *The Temple* demonstrates how divine inspiration alone can create a godly poem.

Herbert is unusual among Sidney's imitators in focusing on the concrete way that *Astrophil and Stella* pinpoints problems in writing. Sonnet sequences by other poets who were influenced by Sidney (Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, and Bartholomew Griffin) show little interest in the theme. Nor, indeed, do those by Herbert's own admirers (Christopher Harvey, William Crashaw, and Henry Vaughan), bar a single poem by Ralph Knevet, whose 'Infirmitye' starts by praying that his poems would rather make 'holy Auditours / … lamente, then laughe' – which he then realises is impossible, so settles for gifts of the heart instead![19]

Sidney's and Herbert's self-conscious search for simplicity in poetry creates for them the role which L. L. Martz dubbed 'love's simpleton'. From the 1980s onwards, most critics have read disavowals of poetry by Herbert as meditations on the consequences of the Protestant solafidian doctrine, which sees divine grace alone as behind all good acts (including writing).[20] Reading Herbert's ten poems on failure with Sidney rather than soteriology in mind makes the simpleton appear much more knowing, and suggests Herbert's reader needs to be so, too.

Where Sidney, faced with a void, madly redoubles his efforts, Herbert instead sinks into a state he finds distressingly chilly, damp, and limp.[21] This applies to both his devotional and secular activities, as when being 'eager, hot, and undertaking' in a course of action declines into 'cooling by the way' and becoming 'pursie and slow' ('The Answer').[22] He is particularly liable to entropic depression when he has problems in writing. Until he can once more 'relish versing', he talks of 'last-past frosts', 'snow in May', 'cold', and a 'shrivel'd heart' ('The Flower'). In 'Dulnesse', a 'drooping and dull' Herbert gropes for 'quicknesse, that I may with mirth / Praise thee brim-full' (with the grumpy aside, 'Sure, thou didst put a minde there, if I could / Finde where it lies'). 'Love 1' asks dolefully who sings God's 'praise? onely a skarf or glove / Doth warm our hands, and make them write of love'. 'Love 2' prays to God for his 'greater flame' to allow his 'brain' to 'All her invention on thine Altar lay, / And there in hymnes send back thy fire again'.

This dismal tone contrasts with that of 'Jordan 2' (entitled 'Invention' in an earlier version in the Williams manuscript), where the speaker is engagingly enthusiastic, expert, and energetic in preparing to write. His thoughts 'began to burnish, sprout, and swell', and 'Thousands of notions in my braine did runne', 'As flames do work and winde', he 'sought out quaint words, and trim invention'. Critics tend to read the poem as a condemnation of self-absorbed creativity, one which ignores its divine subject.[23] They lean heavily on the speaker's note that 'So did I weave my self into the sense', reading it as a sincere self-criticism. They point to how the poem self-consciously echoes Sidney, as '"Foole", said my Muse to me, "looke in thy heart and write"' (Sonnet 1) and 'All my deed / But copying is, what in her Nature writes' (Sonnet 3) are conflated into the conclusion of Herbert's 'Jordan 2': 'I might heare a friend / Whisper, … / *There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd / Copie out onely that and save expense*'. As Anne Boemler concludes: 'Herbert's disavowal of invention is more complete precisely because his poem is an imitation of another's', urged still to copy, but to choose his model more wisely.[24]

Yet without Sidney's run-up depicting a painful block, which is where all the energy of Sonnets 1 and 3 lies, the concluding advice in Herbert's last three lines seems lame. A mutely frustrated Astrophil has no option left to speak about his love except by copying. Herbert, by contrast, has already shown in 'Jordan 2' how he relishes the number of techniques he has at his fingertips. Turning to 'readie penn'd' words looks like a lazy evasion when the advice to write at first hand is so pointedly and recognisably second or even third hand, coming as it does via Sidney's 'Muse' and Herbert's 'friend'. The only reason that friend gives for using such hand-me-downs is that they are cheap; they 'save expense'. 'Jordan 2' may be advocating a more efficient approach to fittingly 'clothe the sunne', but that need not mean fewer or less artful words.

This rather contrary interpretation gathers support from looking at what happens when Herbert does, in fact, dutifully edit down his verses into stub entries. 'The Forerunners' looks ahead to how all his 'sparkling notions' and 'flame' of

poetry will be lost to age, and 'dulnesse turn me to clod', left with the 'bleak palenesse' of 'winter'. The speaker equiv-ocally claims to be content to be left with the single phrase of '*Thou art still my God*', since, he says provocatively, this is all any poem, 'Perhaps with more embellishment', can do. He then, even more impudently, suggests that God too 'will be pleased with that dittie, / And if I please him, I write fine and wittie'. The 'perhaps' and the namby-pamby rhyme, noticed by many readers (and so presumably by God also), suggests they should be sceptical about this bravado.

   A similar thing happens when God co-writes a poem in 'A true Hymne'. Herbert is content to leave his heart 'mutt'ring up and down / With onely this, *My joy, my life, my crown*', warning the reader to 'slight not these few words: / If truly said, they may take part / Among the best in art'. God, how-ever, whom the poem emphasises

        craves all the minde,
  And all the soul, and strength, and time,
  If the words onely ryme,
  Justly complains, that somewhat is behinde,
  To make his verse.

Herbert then asserts that God is willing to 'supplie the want' of any 'scant' poem that has been made when the poet's heart is 'moved'. The accepted reading for this passage is that God is looking for, and will give, love as well. But since the heart is already moved, and 'all the soul' has already been offered, a literal reading of the lines is a possibility. God wants 'the best in art' as well as love. Indeed, Herbert's concluding instance is offered tongue-in-cheek. God ends the poem with a single impatient word, rather than any extending poetic co-writing: 'As when th' heart sayes (sighing to be approved) / *O, could I love!* And stops: God writeth, *Loved*'.

   In 'The Odour', Herbert drugs himself by languidly and frequently murmuring '*My Master*' (to create an 'orientall fragrancie'), then invites God to join him in getting a hit of this 'spiciness' by repeating '*My servant*'. The phrase for the day in 'The Posie' is '*Lesse then the least / Of all thy mercies*',

repeated whenever speaking, writing, or singing (along with the cursory command to 'Invention rest, / Comparisons go play, wit use thy will'). In 'Grief', finding 'Verses … too fine a thing, too wise / For my rough sorrows', Herbert commands them to 'cease, be dumbe and mute'. Lovers have 'musick and a ryme', he says, but his grief 'excludes both measure, tune, and time'. He then concludes with a sample of this new style of poetry: the uninspired phrase 'Alas, my God'. Taken together, these five poems suggest that Herbert is pointing out how self-righteously perfectionist self-editing can produce a damaging block. Perhaps, given that God is neither cloth-eared nor stupid, better merely to leave the meaning as 'something understood' ('Prayer 1'), if it seems like too many words and images are coming to mind.

It seems inconsistent for critics to say that Sidney is mocking Astrophil's proposed solution to writer's block (a quavering repetition of 'Stella'), but then to say that Herbert is seriously supporting his speaker's bland, remaindered phrases. Sidney and Herbert are not noticeably borne down by an anxiety about whether they can match rivals, past or present, in saying something new. Instead, if the poems about composition are put together, both seem amused at the way writers trip up if not aware of the processes of composition. A pre-history of blocking might start with them.

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NOTES

[1] Zachary Leader, *Writer's Block* (Baltimore, 1991), pp. 115-45.

[2] Patricia Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 17-28; Matthew Harrison, 'The Rude Poet Presents Himself: Breton, Spenser, and Bad Poetry', *Spenser Studies*, 29 (2014), 239-62. See also Kevin Dunn, *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford, Calif., 1994), pp. 3-13.

³ Gordon Braden, 'Unspeakable Love: Petrarch to Herbert', in E. D. Harvey and K. E. Maus (eds.), *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Chicago, 1990), pp. 253-72.

⁴ Edmund Spenser, Sonnet 3, *Amoretti* (1595), in *Selected Shorter Poems*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (1995), p. 218; William Shakespeare, Sonnet 85, *Sonnets* (1609), in *The Complete Works*, gen. eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford, 2005), p. 789. All subsequent citations of Shakespeare's works are from this edition.

⁵ Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney: The Literary Response to Sir Philip Sidney, 1586-1640* (Oxford, 2006), p. 208.

⁶ T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana, Ill., 1944), ii. 197-238.

⁷ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria: The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, 5 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 4.1.8-9, 8.3.85, 9.1.30, 35, 9.2.19.

⁸ Ibid., 10.3.12, 13, 15-16, 21-2.

⁹ Ibid., 10.1.6, 15, 25, 10.2.28.

¹⁰ Mike Rose, *Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension* (1983; Carbondale, Ill., 2009), pp. 4 ff; Keith Hjortshoj, *Understanding Writing Blocks* (New York, 2001), pp. 6-10.

¹¹ *John Nichols's The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. Elizabeth Goldring, Faith Eales, Elizabeth Clarke, and Jayne Elisabeth Archer, 5 vols. (Oxford, 2014–15), iii. 626–7.

¹² Kenneth L. Parker and Eric J. Carlson, *'Practical Divinity': The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot, 1998), p. 144.

¹³ All quotations of *Astrophil and Stella* (1591) are from *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford, 1962).

¹⁴ Germaine Warkentin, 'Sidney and the Supple Muse: Compositional Procedures in Some Sonnets of *Astrophil and Stella*', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 15 (1982), 37-48.

[15] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudsley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (1911; New York, 2013), pp. 13-14, 21-5, 31-2, 89-90.

[16] Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1593), ed. Maurice Evans (1977), p. 437.

[17] Francis X. Connor, '"Delivering forth": Philip Sidney's *Idea* and the Labour of Writing', *Sidney Journal*, 31 (2013), 53-75.

[18] Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* (1595), in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and J. A. van Dorsten (Oxford, 1973), pp. 117-18.

[19] Ralph Knevet, *A Gallery to the Temple*, ed. Giuliano Pellegrini (Pisa, 1954), pp. 61-2.

[20] Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 269-70. Braden sums up the critical consensus: 'Unspeakable Love', pp. 257 ff.

[21] In early modern godly writing, the presence or absence of zeal is often expressed in terms of temperature. Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 72-7.

[22] All quotations of *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633) are from *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge, 2007).

[23] The critical tradition is outlined in Herbert, *Poems*, ed. Wilcox, pp. 365-71.

[24] Anne Goetz Boemler, 'George Herbert and the Dangers of Invention', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 60 (2020), 47-65: 55.