# Renaissance Historical Fiction

SIDNEY, DELONEY, NASHE

Alex Davis

# RENAISSANCE HISTORICAL FICTION
## SIDNEY, DELONEY, NASHE

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# TEXTUAL NOTE

I have tried to avoid the peculiarity of many studies in this field, in which quotations from canonical authors (in this instance, it would have been Sidney) appear in modernised form, as their more obscure contemporaries do not. For pre-1800 texts, therefore, I have quoted from early printings of the works under discussion, while also consulting and, where appropriate, referring to, modern editions. I have expanded contractions, lowered superscript letters, and regularised long -s and -vv (for 'w'), but otherwise retained the quirks and oddities of early modern print culture. After an initial footnote, further references appear parenthetically.

# *Introduction*

IN THE THIRD Book of Sir Philip Sidney's revised 'New' *Arcadia*, the wicked Cecropia spies in at the door of the chamber in which she has imprisoned her niece Pamela, who is praying. 'O all-seeing Light, and eternall Life of al things,' Pamela opens, 'to whom nothing is either so great, that it may resist; or so small, that it is contemned: look vpon my miserie with thine eye of mercie'. The prayer is quoted at length, followed by a description:

> this prayer, sent to heauen, from so heauenly a creature, with such a feruent grace, as if Deuotion had borowed her bodie, to make of it selfe a most beautifull representation; with her eyes lifted to the skie-ward that one would haue thought they had begunne to flie thetherwarde, to take their place among the fellow starres; her naked hands raising vp their whole length, and as it were kissing one another, as if the right had been the picture of *Zeale*, and the left, of *Humblenesse*, which both vnited themselues to make their suites more acceptable. Lastly, all her senses being rather tokens then instruments of her inwarde motions, altogether had so straunge a working power, that euen the harde-harted wickednesse of *Cecropia*, if it founde not a loue of that goodnes, yet it felt an abashment at that goodness …[1]

This emblem in prose stands as one of those moments in the *Arcadia* in which Sidney's conviction – that poetry might, by taking the form of a 'speaking picture', act as an effective agent for moral instruction – becomes self-reflexively embedded within his narrative. Earlier in the text Pyrocles had said of Musidorus that 'he taught me by word, and best by example, giuing mee in him so liuely an Image of vertue, as ignorance could not cast such mist ouer mine eyes' (P4r). Here, Cecropia finds herself obscurely moved by the sight of her niece's devotions, and is forced to the realisation that she will never bend Pamela to her will unless she can persuade her 'with some, at lest, image of Vertue'. But, the narrator sardonically adds,

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[1]   *The Covntesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (London: William Ponsonbie, 1593), sig. Y4r–v.

'what the figure thereof was, her hart knew not' (Y4v) – sardonically, because such an 'image' is, of course, kneeling right in front of her. The scene's focalisation through the consciousness of Cecropia presents an ironic take on the pictorial language that Sidney characteristically uses to point up the exemplary character of a person or action.[2] But it also underlines the fact that in the preceding *ekphrasis* of Pamela at prayer this quality is manifested in a particularly intense form, since the portrait she figures forth is itself ornamented with subsidiary, inset images, her hands kissing one another like the pictures of zeal and humbleness personified. Sidney's description is insistent on its character as 'a most beautifull representation', on his heroine's conversion into the 'tokens' and 'figure' of her own inward fervour.

It is, even by Sidney's standards, an astonishingly wrought and vehement piece of writing, both in its elaborate structure of representations contained within representations and in the sheer extremity of some of its imagery (as with Pamela's eyes, apparently preparing for a voyage into outer space). There is little reason to think that Sidney is anything other than serious in ascribing to Pamela's passionate sincerity the quality of 'goodnes'. And yet, there is something wrong with this picture: not so much a question of what Sidney has put into his 'beautifull representation' of religious virtue as of what is left out of it. What is left out is God, or, more specifically, the God of Christianity. For Pamela is a pagan, an inhabitant of ancient Greece some time – Sidney never quite specifies when – before the advent of Christianity.[3] It is true that Pamela is no polytheist. Her prayer is addressed to an 'all-seeing Light' – and then, later, to her 'God' and 'Lorde'. Later still in the *Arcadia*, in one of the great set-piece confrontations of Sidney's revised text, she will openly defy Cecropia and attempt to demonstrate from first principles the logical necessity of an all-powerful, all-knowing deity. It is an encounter as thrilling as any of the military engagements that punctuate Book Three, and played for even higher stakes. But even this episode underlines the essential point. Pamela is compelled to such heights of deductive reasoning because she, just like

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[2]  On this theme, see Jane Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in* The Faerie Queene (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). On Sidney and the visual arts specifically, see Katherine Duncan-Jones, 'Sidney and Titian', in *English Renaissance Studies Presented to Dame Helen Gardner in Honour of Her Seventieth Birthday*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 1–11.

[3]  We read that Macedonia is a kingdom 'which in elder time had such a soueraintie ouer all the prouinces of Greece, that euen the particular kings therein did acknowledge' (L2v), possibly suggesting a time after the reign of Alexander the Great, but the precise temporal location is left vague.

every other character in Sidney's fiction, inhabits a world untouched by Christian revelation.[4]

It is not just Sidney's characterisation that scrupulously adheres to the contours of this pagan mental landscape. The same is also true of his narrative voice. It would have been perfectly possible for Sidney openly to have narrated from the position of a sixteenth-century Englishman looking back at antiquity; but he does not. With only occasional exceptions, the *Arcadia* presents a past cut off from its known future.[5] For all his artful narratorial commentary on his characters' behaviour, Sidney unobtrusively excises from the boundaries of his discourse any mention of the history and mores of his own era, and therefore also of its religious belief: this constitutes the one glaring and fundamental thing that he knows and that his creations do not know, but which he neglects overtly to exploit for the purposes of dramatic irony. For long swathes of the text the effect is simply to remove religion from the narrative in any serious form. By reducing it to a series of basically decorative references to Jupiter and Cupid and Venus Sidney can bypass certain commonplace ideological constructions in order to get to the heart of the matter as he sees it. In her debate with Pamela, Cecropia features as a proponent of the Machiavellian theory that religions are mere 'bug-beares' designed to control the vulgar, 'brought by great Clearks into the world, to serue as shewelles [scarecrows]' (Z5v).[6] Sidney surely wants us to reject Cecropia's views, and we certainly never see any such fraud being perpetrated on the inhabitants of Arcadia. Neither, though, do we ever see religion as a functional aspect of the Arcadian polity in any very

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[4]  Sidney's antique setting actually supports an intriguingly varied religious culture. One character might cry out to 'Iupiter' (C4r), while another might declare that 'the God which is God of nature, doth neuer teach vnnaturalness' (B1r). Philoclea gazes up at the stars and observes that her parents have raised her to believe 'that in these fair heauenly bodies, there are great hidden deities' (K5v). Later, though, she appears as a sceptic, noting that in Lycia images of Cupid are 'superstitiously adored' (N6r), and wondering 'if Cupid be a God, or that the tyranny of our owne thought seeme as a God vnto vs' (O1r – and compare *Astrophil and Stella* 5). There is a biographical echo here. Thomas Moffet records that, at the age of three, Sidney would pray to the moon, 'as if in his earliest years he had compassed the heavens with his mind, and wondered at the works of his Creator'. *Nobilis, or A View of the Life and Death of a Sidney*, eds and trans Virgil B. Heltzel and Hoyt H. Hudson (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1940), pp. 70–1.

[5]  For one such exception, see the reference to the investiture of Garter knights, quoted on p. 104, below.

[6]  Compare the passage in Machiavelli's *Discourses* praising Numa for inventing myths about himself in order to rule more effectively: *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie L. Walker, rev. Brian Richardson, ed. Bernard Crick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 139–42, and for a discussion, Richard McCoy, *Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979), pp. 196–9.

positive sense. The sixteenth-century tendency to assume the vital necessity of institutionalised religion to a healthy and well-ordered state holds little force here.[7] Sidney's antique setting permits his analysis of forms of government to proceed unencumbered by the obligation to endorse any maxims of political theology.

Very often, then, Sidney's *Arcadia* is theologically unobtrusive – perhaps even, as A. C. Hamilton argues, 'aggressively secular' in its avoidance of religious contexts;[8] but not always. As the encounters between Pamela and Cecropia develop throughout Book Three, this mask of studied neutrality begins to slip, and Sidney's fiction suddenly appears to be in danger of advancing from its position of bland tolerance of his characters' religious views into something much more provocative. Opinion on how to read Sidney's pagan world within the context of sixteenth-century Christian thought divides into two main camps. Crucial to each is the realisation that Pamela's arguments in her debate with Cecropia are adapted out of Du Plessis Mornay's treatise *De la Vérité de la Religion Chrestienne*, which Sidney translated. On the one hand, D. P. Walker proposed in a seminal article that Pamela is a virtuous pagan who, despite her lack of access to Christian revelation, nonetheless displays 'an unmistakeably Christian frame of mind'.[9] This position corresponds to the opening manoeuvres of Mornay's text, which survey classical thinking in order to demonstrate the extent to which the axioms of the Christian religion are available to reason alone.[10] On the other hand, though, we have those, like Alan Sinfield, who would argue that

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[7]  In Book Two Miso does mention a 'priest' who had, 'between him & me … told me the whole storie of *Venus*' (O2r), possibly inviting us to imagine some religious functionary eager, in the interests of the public good, to cover up the disreputable truth about the goddess – but unable *quite* to keep the secret to himself.

[8]  'Sidney's Humanism' in M. J. B. Allen, Dominic Baker-Smith, Arthur F. Kinney and Margaret M. Sullivan eds, *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements* (New York: AMS Press, 1990), pp. 109–16: 115.

[9]  D. P. Walker, 'Ways of Dealing With Atheists: A Background to Pamela's Refutation of Cecropia', *Bibliothèque D'Humanisme et Renaissance* 17 (1955), pp. 252–77: 264. For a modern study with interests broadly in line with Walker's, but a far more detailed sense of Sidney's reading and interests, see Robert E. Stillman, 'Fictionalizing Philippism in Sidney's *Arcadia*: Economy, Virtuous Pagans, and Early Modern Poetics', *Sidney Journal* 27: 2 (2009), pp. 13–37. Stillman discusses the scene's focalisation through the eyes of Cecropia, but draws slightly different conclusions from my own, pp. 33–4.

[10]  Pamela is only the latest in a long line of literary representations of virtuous pagans, of which Sidney was well aware; Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* gets an admiring reference in his *Defence*. Book Three of the *Arcadia* generally seems to draw on Chaucer's pagan fictions: on their battle scenes; their high-flown love plots; and their ascents into grand metaphysical assertion about cosmic ordering principles. On late medieval engagements with the classical past, see A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982).

this represents a significant misreading of Mornay's text, a longer title of which is '*De la Vérité de la Religion Chrestienne Contre les Athées, Épicuriens, Payens, Juifs, Mahumedistes, & Autres Infideles*'. Sinfield emphasises how, after his relatively irenic opening arguments, Mornay ends up giving expression to a very definite theological bottom line. The treatise closes by bluntly insisting (in Arthur Golding's translation) that there is and can only ever have been the 'Religion of the *Israelytes*': 'in al other places there was nothing but the seruice of Diuells, and Idolatrie'.[11] Sinfield therefore notes that Sidney 'pointedly denies [Pamela] any specifically Christian revelation', and argues that the *Arcadia* is pervaded by an unspoken mental reservation regarding its pagan characters.[12]

This, then, is a disagreement about what the assumed-to-be tacitly Christian viewpoint of the *Arcadia* must make of the pre-Christian world it describes. What Sinfield's response to Walker suggests, I think, is not so much that Sidney's characters could never be virtuous pagans, but rather that, if they are, then their status as such can never be uncontroversial. To which we might add the further observation that Sidney's narrative technique in relation to action set in the distant past acts to elicit and foreground this controversial potential, while depriving the reader of the resources to resolve it. Sidney's presentation of Pamela at prayer stages a clash between the scene and the language in which it is described. It deploys a tacitly Christianising language ('heauen', 'heauenly', 'grace') to praise the religion of a pagan, but, in the absence of an authorial voice speaking from its present to place these two elements into a significant historical relationship with one another (as both Walker and Sinfield attempt to use Mornay to do), the result is an episode that begins to tear itself apart from within.[13] Whatever Sidney's own beliefs and intentions, the devices he

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[11] *A Woorke Concerning the Trewnesse of the Christian Religion* (London: Thomas Cadman, 1587), sig. Rr4r. On the relationship between Golding's translation and the one Sidney is said to have begun, see Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), pp. 251–2.

[12] 'Sidney, Du Plessis-Mornay and the Pagans', *Modern Philology* 58 (1979), pp. 26–39: 33. In a different vein, but also in opposition to the line of reasoning derived from Walker, Nancy R. Lindheim's 'Vision, Revision, and the 1593 Text of the *Arcadia*' in Arthur F. Kinney *et al.* eds, *Sidney in Retrospect: Selections from English Literary Renaissance* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), pp. 169–80, is sceptical about attempts to impose a Christianising structure of character development on Sidney's revision.

[13] The passage's distant echoes of Biblical phraseology only exacerbate this conflict. Compare Pamela's joined left and right hands with those of the prophetic figure of Daniel 12: 7, similarly raised to heaven, and the persecuted one of 2 Corinthians 6, similarly armed with the weapons of righteousness.

deploys to negotiate the historical character of his fiction are such that he has produced an assertion that Pamela's virtues do not merely exist but can even thrive in the absence of any specifically Christian doctrine. For the sixteenth century, it may be that this can never be a perfectly straightforward proposition; yet Sidney's narration is in no position to suggest it is anything but. The presence on the sidelines of the paradigmatically 'bad' spectator of Pamela's 'Deuotion', in the figure of Cecropia, only serves to ratchet up a further notch the anxiety about how it is properly to be regarded.

This is an episode that deliberately pits the *Arcadia*'s investment in an ideal of the 'controversial' plot – of literature as disputation – against its desire to remodel 'poetry' into an agent of ethical instruction.[14] It explicitly presents Pamela as a 'speaking picture', an exemplary image for imitation, but at the same time works to throw our engagement with that image into doubt. Our relationship with Pamela must be transacted across a historical gulf that is all the more treacherous for not being openly discussed. And there is evidence that sixteenth-century readers understood and responded to this effect. The chapter heading in the 1590 printing of the *Arcadia* brings its potential for disjunction even closer to the surface of the text by referring to '*Pamelas* prayer, and Sainct-like graces in it'.[15] What might it mean for a pagan to be not merely virtuous, but positively 'Sainct-like'? Sidney himself is not going to tell us. Throughout the *Arcadia* he has been concerned to explore the proposition that the two sisters, Pamela and Philoclea, might be possessed of resources of ethical judgement and political eloquence that make them the equals, if not the betters, of their morally compromised suitors. It is a narrative strategy that requires these women constantly to be placed in situations that test and question this virtue, cutting across the text's exemplary poetics. Book Three of the *Arcadia* suggests Sidney's desire to move this approach to the next level: a determination to wager ever more on his ability to keep in play the question of whether or not Pamela truly is an 'image of Vertue'. And, in doing this, he brings to the fore in an ever more insistent way the historical character of his own writing. The effect is to render the spectacle of Pamela at prayer – Sidney's imagined embodiment of the very best that the pagan past had to offer – at once utterly compelling and irreducibly problematic.[16]

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[14] On the controversial plot, see Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

[15] *The Covntesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (London: William Ponsonbie, 1590), sig. Ll8r.

[16] As a further index of its power, it is worth noting how Samuel Richardson's fiction repeatedly reimagines this key episode of the heroine spied on at prayer as it attempts to come

The *Arcadia* serves as a striking example of just how much it could mean to give a sixteenth-century fiction a historical setting, but it is far from unique. Much of the prose fiction produced in the British Isles during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was set in the past: not just the indefinite past of literary convention, in which Philoclea 'said' this and Jack Wilton 'heard' that, but a more or less identifiable historical milieu. The events chronicled in Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* occur during the reign of Henry VIII. Thomas Lodge often wrote about the medieval period. Robert Greene produced fictions set in ancient Rome and classical Greece. The artisan fictions of Thomas Deloney range from the earliest days of Christianity in Britain to the reign (again) of Henry VIII, but are never set in the present day. An anonymous *Famous History* presents a fantastical biography of the thirteenth-century scholar Roger Bacon, while the stories compiled in Geoffrey Fenton's *Certain Tragical Discourses* are said to have taken place in an Italy of the recent past. These represent a mere sample of the historical fictions of the period.[17] Furthermore, in all these cases the historical setting can be shown to be as relevant, as productive of significance and thematic complexity, as it can in the case of Sidney's *Arcadia*.

And yet the historical orientation of early prose fiction has largely escaped critical attention.[18] While studies of historical drama proliferate,

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to grips with the legacy of Sidney's fiction and to orient the developing form of the novel around a problematic of female 'virtue'. The following comes from the conclusion of *Pamela*: 'I stept into the Library, while he was thus pouring out his Kindness for me to Mrs. Jervis; and bless'd God there on my Knees, for the Difference I now found to what I had once known in it … he saw me on my Knees, with my Back toward him, unknown to me.' *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* (London: C. Rivington and J. Osborn, 1761), 2 volumes, 2: 348.

[17] Some further examples, from the later sixteenth century: The events of Anthony Munday's *Zelauto* (1580) are said to take place in the relatively recent past. Robert Parry's *Moderatus* (1595) opens with the Goths sacking Florence. Thomas Lodge's *A Margarite of America* (1596) purports to be the translation of a 'Spanish history' recovered from the Jesuits' College at Santos, and, like the *Arcadia*, seems to depict a pagan world. Henry Roberts' *Honour's Conquest* (1598) presents 'the famous history of Edward of Lancaster'. Richard Johnson's *Tom a Lincoln* (the first part of which was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1599) deals with the Arthurian past, while his *Seven Champions of Christendom* (1596) has a medieval setting. The trend continued into the seventeenth century. The anonymous *Morindos* (1609) is set in pre-Christian Spain. *The Famous History of George Lord Falconbridge* (1616) describes the adventures of the son of Richard the Lionheart. *The Pinder of Wakefield* (1632) fights and befriends Robin Hood. And so on.

[18] I am aware of only one critical work exclusively focused on the question of early historical prose, and this is a short journal article: Andrew Hiscock, 'Blabbing Leaves of Betraying Paper: Configuring the Past in George Gascoigne's *The Adventures of Master F. J.*, Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* and Thomas Deloney's *Jack Of Newbury*', *English* 52 (2003), pp. 1–20. Robert Mayer's *History and the Early English Novel: Matters of Fact From Bacon to Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) does devote a chapter to '"History" Before Defoe: Nashe, Deloney, Behn, Manley', pp. 141–80.

and while there are even studies of the historical poetry of the period, prose fiction is overlooked.[19] This study aims to change that. I am not claiming 'Renaissance historical fiction' as a distinct generic category on a par with the modern historical novel or even the sixteenth-century history play – that is, a form with specific, generally recognised conventions that might direct the audience's response to a work written in accordance with them.[20] Sixteenth-century historical fiction lacks this rule-governed quality. The field of possibilities it inhabits seems more fluid and less well defined than those of other kinds of writing of the period, such as the revenge play. But the absence of the sort of structured readerly expectation indicated by a phrase such as 'the Renaissance historical novel' need not signal a total absence of historical content in these texts.[21] The most basic aim of this study is to show that the settings of early fiction can, and often do, matter; although they do not always matter in the ways we might expect them to.

For the most part, the unexpressed assumption of modern criticism seems to be that if a prose fiction published in 1581 should declare that it is set 'during the tyme that the famous citie of *Constantinople* remained in the handes of the Christians' – as Barnaby Rich's tale of *Apolonius and Silla* does – this is as if to say, 'once upon a time …', and that any such historical gesture is therefore essentially neutral.[22] Sometimes this may be the case; but it need not be. Following the execution of Charles I the *Eikon Basilike* (the purported pre-scaffold meditations of the king) put into Charles' mouth a prayer closely paraphrased from the speech by the imprisoned Pamela in the *New Arcadia*. John Milton's response, in his *Eikonoklastes*, was contemptuous:

> Who would have imagin'd so little feare in him of the true all-seeing Deitie,
> so little reverence of the Holy Ghost, whose office is to dictat and present
> our Christian Prayers, so little care of truth in his last words, or honour to

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[19] On poetry, See, for example, Bart Van Es, 'Michael Drayton, Literary History and Historians in Verse', *Review of English Studies* 59 (2008), pp. 255–69, which argues that the writing of historical verse played an important part in defining 'the literary' as a category. Also the same author's *Spenser's Forms of History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Paul Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the* de casibus *Tradition* (Toronto, Buffalo, New York, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

[20] On the generic identity of the history play, see Benjamin Griffin, *Playing the Past: Approaches to English Historical Drama, 1385–1600* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), pp. 1–21.

[21] As regards the use of the period terms 'Renaissance' and 'early modern': I have favoured the former, though not exclusively, in part because (as this Introduction goes on to explain) I hope to engage with a historiography that is focused on the idea of a 'Renaissance' of European culture.

[22] *Riche his Farewell to the Militarie Profession* (London: Robert Walley, 1581), sig. I2r.

himself, or to his Friends, or sense of his afflictions, or that sad hower which was upon him, as immediately before his death to popp into the hand of that grave Bishop who attended him, for a special Relique of his Saintly exercises, a Payer stol'n word for word from the mouth of a Heathen Woman praying to a Heathen God …[23]

Flattened beneath the repetitive pummelling of this series of rhetorical hammer blows – a catalogue of duties neglected, obligations forgotten, sober decencies left unregarded, and at this most important of times above all others – we find the frivolity of a 'Heathen' fiction, the ultimate indecorum. For Milton, under these circumstances at least, the pagan setting of the *Arcadia* was very much in evidence, and offensively so. Whatever accidental virtues it may have possessed, Sidney's fiction embodied a classical mindset that disqualified it from use in serious religious contexts.[24] The potential for provocation generated by the 'Greekness' of the *Arcadia* could not be ignored. On the contrary, it served to point up the fundamental inauthenticity of Charles' devotions – what we might call, following the chapter heading of the 1590 printing of the *Arcadia*, his 'Sainct-like' posturing.[25] Samuel Butler's response to Milton – that Pamela, far from being a 'Heathen Woman', was in fact 'born and bred out of Christian Parents in *England*' – engages with the historical character of the *Arcadia* in a different way. Plainly Pamela is neither English nor Christian so far as the surface details of the text go. Anticipating D. P. Walker by several centuries, the point seems to be that

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[23] *Eikonoklastes* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1649), sig. D3v. See also the *Complete Prose Works*, ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1953–82), 8 volumes, 3: 362, which prints the variant reading, 'Heathen fiction'. Milton worries at the use of Sidney throughout the rest of his text – accusing Charles of literary theft, for instance. I am not concerned here with the charge that Milton himself fabricated the allusion; either way, the point about its potentially scandalous character stands.

[24] Milton actually goes on to concede that the *Arcadia* is 'full of worth and witt' in its way 'but among religious thoughts, and duties not worthy to be nam'd'. His objection to the text seems, that is, a little strategic. See E. G. Fogel, 'Milton and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*', *Notes and Queries* 196 (1951), pp. 115–17, which details Milton's adaptations from and excerpting of Sidney.

[25] The chapter heading works primarily to juxtapose pagan belief with Christianity; Milton uses the prayer to suggest that the apparatus of saintliness is itself tainted with 'Heathen' irreligion. Even in the eighteenth century, the name 'Pamela' retained its exotic connotations. A character in Richardson's continuation mocks it: 'A *queer* sort of Name! I have heard of it somewhere! – Is it a Christian or a Pagan name?' – Linsey-wolsey – half one, half t'other.' See Gillian Beer, '*Pamela*: Rethinking *Arcadia*', in Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabo eds, *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 23–39: 37.

the guiding impulse or 'fore-conceit' that underpins the fiction is both those things.[26] Butler's argument tacitly acknowledges the literal sense of the narrative even as it attempts to delve beneath it. For both Milton and Butler, then, the setting of the *Arcadia* is obtrusively present. One attempts to mobilise it against the memory of Charles I; the other strains to point out the national and doctrinal familiarities that might underpin its outlandish, 'Heathen' surface. Neither can ignore the fact that Sidney has written a historical fiction.

So this book aims to examine what modern criticism seems to have forgotten, but what readers such as Milton could not fail to notice: the historical settings of Renaissance fiction. At the same time it also wants to pursue a larger theme, which is that it is not only early readers who were right to be disturbed by the historical fiction they read. In what follows, this Introduction will argue that the form also harbours the potential both to engage with, and also to unsettle, our own dominant models for understanding the period. In particular, it exists in a troubled relationship with a narrative that would seek to identify the Renaissance with a revolution in historical consciousness. This model, discussed below in relation to the work of Erwin Panofsky, focuses on the development of a sense of historical difference, the natural concomitant of which is a discourse of authenticity, of truth to the life of the past. A key contention of this study is that this kind of historical self-consciousness emerges in the historical fiction of the English Renaissance in ways that are more marginal, more tentative and more unusual than we might expect. Rather than being obsessively concerned to differentiate itself from the past as historical Other, the historiographical environment that these texts were responding to was more often than not focused upon the question of the *uses* of the past. And insofar as early modern historiography felt that the past was useful in providing exemplary 'images of Vertue' for imitation, its dominant impulse was the attempt to bridge the divide between past and present, not to distinguish between them. At the same time, though, Renaissance historical fiction is not a straightforward product of this historiographical environment. Rather, at its best, the value of Renaissance historical fiction lies in how it can complicate and problematise this drive towards social productivity: tripping it up; casting it into forms that are now tragic, now satirical, now grotesque; making it,

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[26] *The Censure of the Rota Upon Mr Miltons Book* (London: Paul Giddy, 1660), sig. B1v. For a discussion of the authorship of the *Censure*, see Nicholas von Maltzahn, 'Samuel Butler's Milton', *Studies in Philology* 92 (1995), pp. 482–95.

as in the example of Pamela at prayer, vividly persuasive and intractable in equal measure. What Erwin Panofsky identified as central to the period emerges in Renaissance historical fiction as marginal: as the counter-narrative to its own dominant tendencies.

ERWIN PANOFSKY AND THE RENAISSANCE SENSE OF THE PAST

So often characterised as marking the birth of the modern individual, the Renaissance was itself suffering something of an identity crisis during the early decades of the twentieth century. This was an effect of the heated controversy surrounding what Wallace Ferguson called 'the revolt of the medievalists': the attempt to establish a view of the Renaissance as 'largely a continuation, or even decline, of medieval culture'.[27] Particularly relevant here was the challenge to the uniqueness of the period's supposed defining characteristic, most convincingly set out in Charles Homer Haskins' *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927). In a sense, the title says it all. If the Renaissance is defined by its very name as the rebirth, 're-naissance', of classical culture, and if an interest in antiquity can be shown to have existed at an earlier period of history, then the Renaissance is no longer 'the' Renaissance at all. Its distinctiveness as a period has been eroded, even cancelled. Haskins himself, it is worth noting, wanted to hold on to the old category ('there was,' he wrote, 'an Italian Renaissance, whatever we choose to call it'),[28] but in the face of the detailed medievalist scholarship of the first half of the twentieth century it was becoming increasingly difficult to construct any kind of historiographic formula that might pinpoint its distinguishing characteristics without immediately surrendering precedence to the earlier period.

This problem received a solution as elegant as it was influential in Erwin Panofsky's book of 1960, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, based on lectures given at the University of Uppsala in 1952, which in turn developed the ideas laid out in an article published in the *Kenyon Review* in 1944.[29] Panofsky openly admitted – indeed discussed in detail – the classical elements of medieval culture (and with reference to

[27] *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), p. 329.
[28] *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 5.
[29] *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco and London: Harper and Row, 1972). See also 'Renaissance and Renascences', *The Kenyon Review*, Spring (1944), pp. 201–36. Panofsky is generally classed as an art historian, but his ambitions extend beyond the field of the visual arts as narrowly defined, just as the influence of his writing extends throughout the field of Renaissance studies.

Haskins too).[30] 'The' Renaissance was *not* by any means the first moment of reawakened interest in the ancient world. At the same time, though, Panofsky argued for a fundamental qualitative difference that distinguished 'medieval' approaches to the classical from 'Renaissance' ones. In the Middle Ages, the past is always absorbed into the cultural forms of the present:

> The Greek and Trojan heroes and heroines, referred to as 'barons' and 'damsels' in the vernacular accounts of the Trojan cycle, invariably move in a mediaeval environment, act according to mediaeval customs and are clad in mediaeval armour or dress. Achilles and Patroclus as well as Medea and Jason and Dido and Aeneas are shown engaged in playing chess. Laocoön, the 'priest', appears tonsured. Thisbe converses with Pyramus through a wall separating two abbreviated Gothic buildings and waits for him in a Gothic tomb whose inscription ('Hic situs est Ninus rex') is preceded by the then indispensable cross. (85–6)

'Classical themes transmitted to mediaeval artists by texts were anachronistically modernized' (87). Medieval culture demonstrates 'a basic inability to make what we would call "historical" distinctions' (106). Panofsky contrasts this perpetual contemporaneity with the sense of historical difference that he saw animating Renaissance works of art. When thirteenth-century Mantua honoured Virgil, it portrayed him as 'a medieval scholar or canonist seated before his desk and busily engaged in writing'; but when Mantegna was asked in 1499 to produce a statue of the Roman poet, he planned 'a truly classical figure, proudly erect, clad in a toga and addressing the beholder with the timeless dignity of a Demosthenes or Sophocles' (100). In each case we have the same classical subject, but the spirit in which it is approached could not be more different. On the one hand, unthinking anachronism; on the other, a discriminating, humanistic sense of the difference between then and now. Panofsky thus salvaged the unique outlines of 'the' Renaissance, and he did so by placing a kind of historical self-consciousness at the centre of the period's achievement. The Renaissance knew that it was not like the classical world it sought to revive; the Renaissance – extrapolating – therefore knew it was a Renaissance; and so it was one. From Panofsky's point of view, an assertion of historical difference *circa* 1500 is virtually performative. If you suspect you might be unlike this classical orator or that medieval knight,

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[30] See p. 7 (effectively noting the coarsening of Haskins' formulations by others), and p. 55 n., where *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* heads the list of studies of 'the proto-Renaissance of the twelfth century'.

you have displayed the sense of historical acumen that sets you off from your medieval equivalent and that is the defining characteristic of your own separate historical period formation. You are, necessarily, correct.

Panofsky's argument is developed through another elegant inversion, whereby perspective – the specific technology of visual representation developed during the period with which he is concerned – is taken as a symbol for an entire world view:

> In the Italian Renaissance the classical past began to be looked at from a fixed distance, quite comparable to the 'distance between the eye and the object' in that most characteristic invention of this very Renaissance, focused perspective. As in focused perspective, the distance prohibited direct contact – owing to the interposition of an ideal 'projection plane' – but permitted a total and rationalized view. (108)

Rather than the world seen through the window of Albertian perspective, we have perspective considered as a window onto a distinctive way of seeing the world. The effect is decisively to situate issues of historical cognition within a language of visuality; and it is an indication of the extent to which we remain within this way of thinking that its governing metaphor is likely to strike us as both natural and compelling.[31] A lucid sense of 'perspective' is identified with the perception of historical distance, which is for Panofsky the key to a true sense of history generally, to the extent that the moment of its articulation is taken to have epochal force.[32]

Panofsky's solution has its antecedents. The notion that the Renaissance was distinguished as a period term by the self-awareness that went into its creation certainly preceded his book, as did commentary on the anachronisms in

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[31] The perspectival analogy is perhaps not as convincing as it might seem at first glance. Although Panofsky's approach to the issue of mimesis, both here and in his *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, is broadly a 'constructivist' one, this is surely a case where, at its extremes, the absence of a clear distinction between medium and message promotes confusion. Both perspective and the non-anachronistic historical consciousness deal in establishing the proper relationships of their objects of perception in, respectively, space and time. But perspective is a system for the representation of the relationships between objects in space, as distinct from the knowledge of them. Medieval artists may have shown objects and persons confusedly, in varying scales and impossible relations, but there is little reason to suspect that they were in any doubt about, say, the actual height of the average person.

[32] Compare Martin Heidegger's argument in 'The Age of the World Picture' that 'the world picture does not change from an earlier medieval one into a modern one, but rather the fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age'. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco and London: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), pp. 115–54: 130.

medieval representations of the antique.[33] His formulations were also lent credence by the way they dovetailed with a tradition of readings of the Renaissance as the era of the 'development of the individual', best exemplified by the work of Jacob Burckhardt. Nonetheless, Panofsky's represents a definitive statement of the case. His ideas immediately received the support of luminaries such as Paul Oskar Kristeller, while their impact was noted (disapprovingly) by Elizabeth Eisenstein.[34] Furthermore, they were subsequently influential on some of the most brilliant work in the field, being echoed and developed, for instance, in the discussion of historical rupture and anachronism in Peter Burke's *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* and Thomas Greene's *The Light in Troy*.[35] And despite all the scholarly developments of the intervening years – notwithstanding, for instance, the tendency to favour 'early modern' as a period designator over the by-now old-fashioned 'Renaissance', or the foregrounding of the Reformation as the most significant factor in developing a sense of historical discontinuity during the sixteenth century – they continue to be a point of reference to this day.[36] Consider, for example, a recent group of publications that set out

[33] For the former, see the footnote in Panofsky (1972), p. 9, in particular the important articles by Herbert Weisinger. For the latter, the following analysis of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* dates from 1774: 'The action is supposed to have happened soon after the marriage of Theseus with Hippolita, and the death of Creon in the siege of Thebes: but we are soon transported into more recent periods. Sunday, the celebration of matins, judicial astrology, knights of England, and targets of Prussia, occur in the city of Athens under the reign of Theseus.' Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry* (London: J. Dodsley, 1774–81), 4 volumes, 1: 367. Compare Haskins himself: 'while they could make certain literary distinctions, [they could not] see the Roman writers in their individual setting of time and place, for their historical sense was defective, lacking … the notion of development and change' (116). The crucial difference is that Haskins is referring to twelfth-century humanists *and* many of their fifteenth-century successors.

[34] Kristeller reviewed the book in *Art Bulletin* 44 (1962), pp. 65–7. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, 'The Advent of Printing and the Problem of the Renaissance', *Past and Present* 45 (1969), pp. 19–89: 30–6.

[35] *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), and *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982). See, for example, pp. 28–53, and the note to the first chapter on Petrarch p. 311, n. 21. I have discussed Greene's text in 'Erotic Historiography: Writing the Self and History in the Twelfth Century and the Renaissance', in Amanda Hopkins and Cory Rushton eds, *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 164–75.

[36] See, for example, Anthony Grafton, 'Panofsky, Alberti, and the Ancient World' in *Bring Out Your Dead: The Past as Revelation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 19–30. Also Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, 'Interventions: Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism', *Art Bulletin* 87: 3 (2005), pp. 403–15. In his 'Response' to this piece, Charles Dempsey doubts the force of Panofsky's model with respect to scholarship on the Renaissance history of art (418), although he does not

to redraw the boundaries between the medieval and the early modern. The implication of Panofsky's argument about self-realisation through an understanding of the 'antique' as such is that that the Renaissance should simultaneously create an idea of its more immediate historical antecedent. Notably, studies such as Gordon McMullan and David Matthews' collection *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, Jennifer Summit's *Memory's Library* and James Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution* all take as their guiding premise precisely this sense that the distinction between the two periods is itself the product of the later one.[37] Both Summit and Simpson prominently quote Brian Stock's crisp, Panofskian epigram: 'the Renaissance invented the Middle Ages to define itself'.[38]

## 'THESE OUR LATTER DAYES': IMAGINING PASTNESS IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND

Even in the age of the 'early modern', then, the model of history-as-difference remains a kind of deep structure or enduringly useful piece of mental furniture, supporting our sense of what defines the period. And one can certainly find formulations from the period that correspond to this paradigm of a burgeoning historical self-consciousness. Purely within literary culture there is the kind of desire to distinguish past from present that one finds in William Thynne's landmark 1532 edition of Chaucer, with its humanistic disdain for a time 'whan doutlesse al good letters were layde a slepe throughout ye worlde'. Or there is John Leland's dismissal of Gower's imitations of Ovid as 'more studied than felicitous': 'and neither should this appear surprising,' he adds, 'for hardly in this our own flourishing age

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question its influence on other fields of study. No other respondent makes this claim. Nagel and Wood's work is developed at length in their monograph on the *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010). Panofsky also features prominently in Margreta de Grazia's brilliant concise study of 'Anachronism', in Brian Cummings and James Simpson eds, *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 13–32. Both these last two texts have interests that overlap with those of this study, and I regret that they came to my attention too late to permit me fully to engage with their arguments.

[37] Gordon McMullan and David Matthews eds, *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2008); James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 2, 1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[38] See Summit (2008), p. 3, Simpson (2002), p. 7. Quoted from 'The Middle Ages As Subject and Object: Romantic Attitudes and Academic Medievalism', *New Literary History* 5 (1974), pp. 527–47: 543.

should anyone be found who could well express the overflowing felicity of Ovid's verse'.[39] Equally, the later Elizabethan period – with which much of this book is concerned – was a time of conscious formal innovation, marked both by a relentless engagement with, and an urgent need to detach itself from, previous forms of writing. It was during these years that Edmund Spenser announced himself as the 'new poet' on the literary scene (albeit in a text in which, as with so much that Spenser wrote, novelty takes the shape of a studied archaism).[40] But the very existence of two, doubled, moments of historical differentiation – the early and the late sixteenth century – suggests their incomplete correspondence with a Panofskan model, certainly in its crudest form. If what is at stake is a question of perceiving the past as such, as opposed to just defining oneself against it, these repeated acts of disavowal seem inconsistent with any single, transformative or periodising moment of recognition.

Certainly the linguistic evidence for the dissemination of a concept of the 'Middle Ages' during this period is slighter and more uneven than a reading of Panofsky might lead us to expect. One finds the term and its cognates used in Latin writing (*medium aevum*, *media tempestas*), by sophisticated historians such as William Camden and John Selden, and in ecclesiastical controversy, but effectively as a term of art, and only rarely before 1600 in the vernacular.[41] 'Reformation' now competes with 'Renaissance' as a key term in many recent accounts of the sixteenth century as witnessing a decisive break from the past (thus substituting religious and political for artistic preoccupations, while substantially reproducing the outlines of the previous paradigm), and it must be acknowledged that the single most

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[39] *The Workes of Geffray Chaucer* (London: Thomas Godfray, 1532), sig. A2v. Leland is translated in Simpson (2002), p. 25. I am grateful for the opportunity to have discussed this text and these issues with David Matthews at the symposium on *The Middle Ages in the Modern World* held at St Andrews on 17 October 2009, where he delivered a paper on 'The Origins of English Medievalism'.

[40] See E. K.'s letter to Gabriel Harvey in *The Shepheardes Calender* (London: Hugh Singleton, 1579), in which the author is repeatedly described as 'the new poete'.

[41] See George Gordon, '*Medium Aevum* and the Middle Ages', *Society For Pure English Tract* 19 (London: The Clarendon Press, 1925), and Nathan Edelman's 'Early Uses of *Medium Aevum*, *Moyen Âge*, Middle Ages', *Romantic Review* 29 (1938), pp. 3–25 and 'Other Early Uses of *Moyen Âge* and *Moyen Temps*', *The Romantic Review* 30 (1939), pp. 327–30. Ruth Morse's 'Shakespeare's Ages', *Shakespeare Survey* 59 (2006), pp. 254–66, which sets out to argue that 'time passes, and Shakespeare writes about its passage, but he did not, because he could not, share our concept of the "Middle Ages"' (266) – in effect (although she does not put it like this) opposing the Panofskian paradigm – cites Gordon and Edelman's articles as providing support for the view she wants to attack. They may have been used in this way, but their force is all in the other direction, charting as they do the late adoption and unstable usage of the terminology of a 'middle age'.

important factor in disseminating a terminology related to the idea of the Middle Ages in England may well have been John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, which contains an extended discussion of 'what the monkes were in ye primitiue time of the Church, & what were the Monkes of the middle age, and of these our latter dayes of the church'.[42] But even with the impetus that Foxe could provide behind them, the 'Middle Ages' were slow to gain general acceptance. Even in culturally elite contexts our use of the term had to compete with alternative meanings. When John Harvey refers to the 'Middle Ages' in 1588 he means something very different from Foxe: 'Christ', Harvey writes, 'was manifested in the flesh not in the first, or Middle Ages, but in the last times of the world.'[43] Of course, one might have the idea without having the precisely formulated vocabulary with which to discuss it. But, in fact, one would struggle to find a text from this period in which 'the Middle Ages', viewed as such, exists as a central organising concept.[44] Already one begins to feel the need to argue for the belated and uncertain position of English literary culture in relation to the phenomenon of a continental 'Renaissance'.

 The point is underlined by recent work on early modern historical thought, which suggests that those sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fields of inquiry in which perceptions of the past were beginning to be honed to a real discriminatory pitch were not always central to the culture of the period. The direction of modern accounts of Tudor and Stuart historiography is now away from any kind of strong, Panofskian master narrative about a revolution in historical consciousness. It is a tendency that is all the more striking for having been developed from research that initially seemed to support that position, and it is worth investigating in detail this process by which a paradigm undid itself from within. The 1960s and 70s saw the publication of a series of important studies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historical writing that exhibited interests broadly in line with those of *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*: works such as F. J. Levy's *Tudor Historical Thought*, Herschel Baker's *The Race of Time* and F. Smith Fussner's *The Historical Revolution*.[45]

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[42]  *Actes and Monuments* (London: Iohn Day, 1583), sig. N5v.

[43]  *A Discoursiue Probleme Concerning Prophesies* (London: Iohn Iackson for Richard Watkins, 1588), sig. E1v.

[44]  Contrast the ubiquity and evident utility of the term in modern culture as noted in Fred C. Robinson's 'Medieval, The Middle Ages', *Speculum* 59 (1984), pp. 745–56.

[45]  Levy's book quickly references Panofsky's: *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1967), p. 35, n. 5. See also: F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580–1640* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), and Herschel Baker, *The Race of Time: Three Lectures*

Several of these texts are perhaps more notable for their detailed attention to the minutiae of English historical writing of the period than for their invocation of a wider European context, but a narrative about the sense of historical discontinuity produced by humanist thinking seems central to all of them. Their overall tendency is most forcefully advanced in Fussner's claim 'that a "historiographical revolution" occurred between about 1580 and 1640 in England': one that forced a break with the older chronicle tradition and laid the foundations of the characteristic interests and procedures of modern historical thought.[46] Renaissance historical practice was thus understood as being borne along by, as well as being a crucial part of, the transition between medieval and modern worlds.

At the same time, though, work at this level of detail and intricate application necessarily began to generate its own countermovement, exposing and pinpointing those places where its own case was least effective or convincing. Arthur B. Ferguson's 1979 book *Clio Unbound* is founded on the realisation that, despite the history of methodological advances in Tudor and Stuart thought charted by his predecessors, the features of modern historical practice that he most prized – Ferguson mentions, among others, 'a willingness to look for processes of development in the history of a society' and 'a feeling for the uniqueness and organic unity of periods and for the relativity of customs, institutions and values' – were *not* in fact prominent aspects of mainstream sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history.[47] Instead, they begin to be developed in forms of writing that were often not considered to be properly 'historical' at all: legal studies, ecclesiastical controversy, literary theory. Attacks on the conceptual limitations of the chronicle tradition had been commonplace before this, but Ferguson usefully extended the sense of their inadequacies to take in the humanistic, 'politic' accounts that had hitherto been celebrated as the harbingers of a new and improved historical practice.

Perhaps without quite meaning to, a text like *Clio Unbound* implies the

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*on Renaissance Historiography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967). Three associated studies are: Levi Fox ed., *English Historical Scholarship in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); May McKisack, *Medieval History in the Tudor Age* (Oxford; The Clarendon Press, 1971); and Arthur B. Ferguson, *Utter Antiquity: Perceptions of Prehistory in Renaissance England* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993). Ferguson's *Clio Unbound* is discussed below. For an overview, see David Womersley, 'Against the Telelogy of Technique' in Paulina Kewes ed., *The Uses of History in Early Modern England* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 2006), pp. 91–104.

46  Fussner (1962), xii.
47  *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1979), xi.