

**Zeitschrift:** SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Association of University Teachers of English  
**Band:** 25 (2011)

**Artikel:** Exchanging "words for money" : the Parnassus plays and literary remuneration  
**Autor:** Blakeley, John  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-389635>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 31.03.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# Exchanging “words for mony”: The *Parnassus* Plays and Literary Remuneration

John Blakeley

Enquiries into the emergence of literary authorship in the sixteenth century often suggest that most contemporaries regarded reading and writing as ethically dubious activities, and that consequently literary endeavour was accompanied by uncertainty and anxiety. However, in a number of ways, the trilogy of university plays known as the *Parnassus* plays (1598-1601), which are the focus of this essay, provide striking contrary evidence. In order to pursue the argument, the argument is divided into two parts: in the first part some of the critical assumptions that have underpinned enquiries into authorship are considered, and in the second part the evidence the plays provide for the views of university graduates with literary aspirations is discussed. The article argues that as the trilogy progresses the plays’ initial valorisation of a literary vocation extends to a wider exploration of the writer’s place in society, in which ethical questions surrounding literary creation are increasingly superseded by material consideration.

## I

If one book more than any other has contributed to critical perceptions of uncertainty surrounding literary endeavour, it is Richard Helgerson’s monograph of 1976, *The Elizabethan Prodigals*.<sup>1</sup> In it, Helgerson argues that those young men who wrote the pioneering literary fictions of the Elizabethan period came to identify themselves with the figure of the

---

<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and suggestions of Colin Burrow and Patrick Cheney in the preparation of this article. Responsibility for its shortcomings is mine alone.

prodigal son. Through studies of John Lyly, George Gascoigne, Sir Philip Sidney, Thomas Lodge, and Robert Greene, he demonstrates the deep psychic hold that the parable had. It is evident both in the way that it turns up again and again, in many different guises, in the fictions they wrote, but also in their repentant turns away from literature, as all five apparently come to repudiate their earlier amatory fictions. These incipient literary careers seemingly replicate the parable's narrative arc, if one grants that the merciful resolution of the original is excised; as Helgerson demonstrates, it is that merciful resolution, which sixteenth-century versions conspicuously lack (*Prodigals* 2-3). Thus viewed, the sixteenth-century writer is subject to an anxious, even abject, condition.

Helgerson's exposition of the writer as prodigal has proved compelling, and has gone on to influence many subsequent studies. The reason, I think, it has proved so persuasive – apart from the fact that the parable indubitably was one of the period's most prevalent and potent narratives – is because it resonates strongly with our ideas about the uncertainties, even the dangers attendant upon, the emergence of authorship. Arguably, it is in this period that for the first time it becomes possible to earn a full-time living as a writer. But such a potentially immobile occupation was anomalous in a society with inflexible notions of place, of social hierarchy, of status and degree. Moreover, such was the capricious nature of patronage, and even of the newer forms of literary employment, provided by printing press and stage, that the writer could never be certain that the material returns would be sufficient to provide a living; dining on the husks, as it were, was an only-too likely outcome of literary endeavour.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, making your words public – as a full-time commercial writer necessarily would do – was attended by the risks of giving offence to the powerful, or of simply being seen to have demeaned oneself. Most crucially of all, the image of the prodigal conveys a potent sense of dereliction. To the young, the attractions of literature were obvious – the enticing romance, the amorous lyric – but was the reading, and writing, of such stuff really what a well-educated young man should be spending his time upon? Literary writers, according to Helgerson, suffered “an acute consciousness that they were not doing what they had been brought up to do” (*Prodigals* 23); he argues, rather, that they were expected to serve the state:

---

<sup>2</sup> For a resonant example of how the material condition of the writer could convey itself to the minds of contemporaries, see the opening of Thomas Nashe's *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Diuine* (1592).

Elizabethan fathers expected more of their sons than virtue and wisdom. Those qualities, valuable as they were, hardly merited praise if kept in seclusion. They were rather to be used and tested in an active life of service to the state. This is what Sir Henry had in mind when he alludes to "that profession of life that you were born to live in" and prays that God will make Philip "a good servant to your prince and country." (*Prodigals* 22-23)

The idea has become something of a critical commonplace. For example, a rather more recent work – having acknowledged its debt to Helgerson – asserts that "Most educated young men in Elizabethan England were trained to expect and aspire to positions of responsibility within the growing state apparatus" (Alwes 16). The emergence of authorship is thus found to be not only tentative and uncertain, but also accidental and contingent. The creation of literature may be explained as a means of advertising the writer's mastery of rhetoric, and hence of suitability for service. Lorna Hutson, for example, again engaging Helgerson, writes that "they, aspiring towards promotion and official recognition, felt it incumbent upon themselves to advertise their intellectual and discursive abilities by publishing such (juvenile) verses as they had written" (29); in what one might describe as a stumbling towards authorship, rather than a whole-hearted embrace of it, publication is seen as subordinately instrumental to the achievement of more important, non-literary ambitions. Similarly, in an influential essay, Louis Adrian Montrose claims that pastoral provided "a medium in which well-educated but humbly born young men could gracefully advertise themselves to the courtly establishment" (433). The broader, rather bleak, critical perspectives offered to us by New Historicism have, of course, chimed with, and reinforced such views.<sup>3</sup>

However, this evident anxiety surrounding literary endeavour is at first sight difficult to reconcile with what has traditionally been seen as the "Golden Age" of English Literature. How can the literary efflorescence of the late-Elizabethan period be reconciled with the apparently unpromising ideological terrain it encountered? Helgerson himself, conscious of the paradox, explains the rationale of his following – and equally influentially – book, *Self-Crowned Laureates*, as an attempt to answer the question of how Spenser came to achieve a "fully developed poetic career," in the light of the "uncertainty about the whole literary enterprise" (*Laureates* 17). Subsequently, for many critics the theorisation of literary careers and modelling of authorship has attempted to establish how individual writers or groups of writers were eventually able to

---

<sup>3</sup> For a provocative account of the prevalently pessimistic world view of New Historicism, see Pechter.

successfully evade or escape the strictures and disapproval of their betters.

But let us pause momentarily. In response to Derek Alwes's assertion quoted above one might ask whether those young men, of relatively humble origins, who managed to go to Oxford or Cambridge, via the "leg up" provided by their local grammar school – estimated to be as many as 60% of entrants in the early- to mid-Elizabethan years (McConica 159-63) – really think that their education would provide an entrée to powerful and elite circles? Of course, the intimate environs of the university could in theory open doors; indeed, one might argue that a university education allowed an ambitious young man to establish familiar, quasi-patronal relationships with aristocratic students and their families. For example, it is reasonable to suppose that it was by such means that Marlowe came to the attention of the Walsingham family, and found subsequent employment at Rheims doing "her Majesty good service" (quoted by Riggs 180). But the university was a milieu characterised by clearly understood, clearly visible hierarchies, in which dress itself was one quite obvious indicator of social distinction. The college life of scholars and sizar, as opposed to that of the more privileged fellow commoners is vividly reconstructed by Riggs (62-71) in his biography of Marlowe; and his final point should be noted:

In the real world of Elizabethan society, a poor scholar's prospects of finding preferment at court were virtually nil. Lord Burghley, the Chancellor of Cambridge University, firmly believed that educational institutions should reinforce the existing social hierarchy. [. . .] Burghley recognized the need for a complement of poor scholars who could fulfil the degree requirements and fill vacancies in parish churches; but such men were expected to remain in the lower echelons of the university and the Church. (70)

Part of the problem here – to return to Helgerson – is the evident weight he places upon Sir Henry Sidney's famous paternal precepts; given the "great expectation" placed upon young Philip's shoulders, we surely have something of a special case that ought not be generalised and found applicable to the situation of rather more humbly-connected young men.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the notion of a young man using his literary facilities as a means of fulfilling an aspiration to state service also implies a broader, uncomplicated historical process by which the Tudor State increasingly brings previously independent institutions under its control:

---

<sup>4</sup> For the phrase see *Astrophil and Stella* 21.8. Duncan-Jones (xvii) notes the "half-explicit allusion" to Sidney in Dickens' novel, though the echoes are, of course, quite possibly coincidental.

a totalising society exercising a centripetal force upon everything within its domain.<sup>5</sup> In considering the place of the university in early modern society, Jonathan Walker has recently reiterated such assumptions, while also, a little awkwardly, indicating the autonomous nature of the universities:

Like other early modern institutions, the academy resided within the purview of the state and the church, whose ideological and economic interests it served by regularly producing suitably educated young men to fill governmental, diplomatic, and clerical posts, among other esteemed occupations. At the same time, however, academies like Oxford and Cambridge administered their day-to-day activities in large measure as independent institutions, often insulated from issues of *Realpolitik*. (4-5)

Rather more promisingly, Warren Boutcher, in an article that makes brief reference to the *Parnassus* plays, considers the circumstances and writings of a few of the most influential pedagogues, and demonstrates that their varied attempts to advocate and implement a "reformed" curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge were far from being simply driven by the requirements of church and state; he shows that individuals, groups of students, and colleges were often responding to distinctly local conditions, both in addition to, or even instead of, the ostensibly state and church centred focus of Tudor humanist reform. In other words, antecedent connections were not necessarily superseded by connections formed at university. The focus and motivation of a particular student, or group of students at one college could differ quite radically from that of others, and it is with that in mind that I wish now to turn to the *Parnassus* plays.

## II

The first point I will make is the obvious one that the *Parnassus* plays should be regarded as a better source for indicating how young men and their parents viewed literary endeavour than Sir Henry's precepts. Written by, performed by, and performed in front of members of St. John's College, Cambridge over the Christmas periods between 1598 and 1601, they come from the heart of the university milieu which nourished so many of the period's most important writers. They have, moreover, obvious relevance to enquiries into the conditions of early modern author-

---

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of New Historicism's methodological propensity to assume a "unitary culture," see Kastan 29-31.

ship as, essentially, the subject matter of all three plays encompasses the literary aspirations and fortunes of university graduates. In the very last years, both of the sixteenth century and of the long reign of Elizabeth I, there is a sense of taking stock, of reflection upon the rightful place of writers in society. The *Parnassus* plays are also, I might add, very lively, and often amusing. And yet, in so much of the writing about literary careers in the period, they have been either ignored or mentioned merely in passing. If we know of them, it is usually because of the way they have been mined for references to Shakespeare or Jonson; the focus has been much more upon particular allusions than on the plays in their own right. The neglect of them is rather astonishing; a basic MLA bibliographic search "Parnassus Plays" yields eight items, only one of which was published in this century. After it, the most recent is Paula Glatzer's excellent, though also rather neglected, monograph on the plays, which dates from 1977; the other entries go further back in time, with the oldest of the eight dating from 1929.<sup>6</sup>

Suggestively, in the light of Helgerson's notion of the writer as prodigal, the plays open with a scene that recognisably engages the tradition of the prodigal's narrative.<sup>7</sup> A father, Consiliodorus, counsels his son and nephew, Philomusus and Studioso, on the perils of their forthcoming journey to Cambridge, or Parnassus, as it is termed in the plays. He makes the goal of their journey clear:

Youe twoo are Pilgrims to Parnassus hill  
Where with sweet Nectar you youre vaines may fill,  
Wheare youe maye bath youre drye and withered quills  
And teache them write some sweeter poetrie  
That may heareafter liue a longer daye. (*Pilgrimage* 36-40)<sup>8</sup>

Rather surprisingly, in the light of the dominant models of authorship already discussed, father and son, old and young, are agreed that their highest endeavour and achievement will be the creation of immortal literature, and that this is the justification for the expense of their education. Literary pursuit, then, is figured not as rebellion, but as obedience, and there is no evident anxiety, prevarication, or other reservation about the goal of authorship.

---

<sup>6</sup> Search conducted at <http://www.ebscohost.com>, 16 June 2010.

<sup>7</sup> The narrative, of course, provides a suitable theme for educational drama. For other examples, see Auberlen, 136-42.

<sup>8</sup> This and all subsequent quotations from the plays are taken from Leishman's edition.

Consiliodorus goes on to warn his young charges against possible diversions and distractions from their goal. In the ensuing play – which has aptly been described as a poetic psychomachia (Glatzer 29) – the presumed spatial journey from the family home to Parnassus is figured as a temporal journey through the curriculum. Along the way they are tempted from their course by more dilatory pilgrims, among whom we encounter Madido, who attempts to lure them to the tavern, and Amoretto, who encourages them to “sportfull dalliance” (439). However, in another challenge to convention, they never lose their sense of direction, and within some 700 lines they reach their destination, where they “heare the Muses tunefull harmonie” (714). In the *Pilgrimage*’s depiction of curricular progression, literary endeavour is not viewed as subordinately instrumental to the mastery of academic disciplines – logic, rhetoric and philosophy – disciplines with which our pilgrims are shown to be progressively grappling; rather literary creativity is the ultimate goal, and the academic disciplines merely the stages through which they have to pass in order to reach it.

The difference between the short, allegorical *Pilgrimage* and the two lengthier, more complex, *Return* plays that follow it can be thought as a transition from ideal to real. These two plays are set in a contemporary social milieu. We encounter patrons and clients, a press corrector, the printer John Danter, and there is even an appearance by Shakespeare’s fellow-actors, Richard Burbage and William Kemp. It seems as though the author, or authors, of the play, having established the value of literature – and the university as its appropriate training ground – determined that the next stage was to address how in practical terms literature is to be pursued in the world outside of Cambridge/ Parnassus; the question now is what recognition and material support will be provided to its graduate litterateurs?<sup>9</sup>

The opening of the first *Return* play echoes the opening of the *Pilgrimage*, except that old and young are now separated. Consiliodorus, having used up the resources derived from his small farm in supporting Philomusus and Studioso during their seven years of study – the period of time, of course, during which they should have acquired a BA and MA – speculates upon the returns from his investment, and worries that it has all been for nothing:

---

<sup>9</sup> Criticism on the plays has focused on the question of who wrote them. While Leishman (26-34) and Glatzer (33, 169-79) both suppose – though for different reasons – that the distinct character of the individual plays suggests the involvement of more than one author, Lake’s stylistic analysis of them indicates that “it is highly probable that one man wrote all three *Parnassus* plays” (290).

If they haue spent there oyle, there strength, there store  
 In artes quicke subtleties and learninges lore,  
 Then will god Cynthius (if a god he be)  
 Keepe these his sonns from baser pouertie.  
 But if they haue burnt out the suns faire torch  
 In foolish riot and regardless plaie  
 Then lett them liue in want perpetuallie: (*1 Return* 76-82)

Clearly in his view, if they have applied themselves properly to the arts there is nothing to fear: "I knowe this well, artes seldome beg there breade" (85) is his concluding line. If they have worked hard and shunned temptation, then the material rewards will necessarily follow. However, Consiliodurus's concluding line is immediately, and pointedly, followed by Studioso's exclamation, as the scene switches to Parnassus, "Fie coosninge artes" (86); and his ensuing speech makes it clear that though they have applied themselves single-mindedly, no reward is as yet forthcoming. The scene establishes what is to be the motif of the two *Return* plays: the unwarranted hostility of the world beyond Parnassus to the scholar-poets.

Philomusus and Studioso, to whom I will return shortly, in fact become rather more peripheral as the two *Return* plays progress; a number of other university graduates attempting to realise their literary ambitions beyond Parnassus are introduced. They include in *1 Return* the bibulous balladeer, Luxurio, and in *2 Return* the bombastic Furor Poeticus and his Latinising sidekick, Phantasma. Above all, increasingly taking centre stage there is Ingenioso, whose straightforward materialistic approach to literary creation is evident in his dealings with patrons and printers: he will write for whoever pays him. In the *Pilgrimage* he had a minor role as one of the tempter figures, denigrating the pilgrims' Parnassian ideals. But now, in what is in itself a strong indication of their changed perspective, he becomes the presiding spirit of the two *Return* plays.

The introduction of these additional characters allows a more searching exploration of the place of the scholar-poet in society, an issue which comes to be inextricably-linked to the means provided for his material support. The two major episodes involving Ingenioso in *1 Return* both depict his unsuccessful search for patronage. In the first, the audience witnesses his attendance upon a "goutie patron" (215-16) to whom he has presented his latest work. The patron acknowledges Ingenioso's lines to be "pritie" (318), and the scene culminates in his being paid two groats, as the patron tells him that "Homer had scarce soe much bestowed vpon him in all his life time" (322-23). Then, in a more substantial episode spread across three scenes, the relations he has with

Gullio, a foppish lover-courtier manqué, are detailed. Gullio commissions Ingenioso to write verses for his mistress in the styles of several different authors, but when his subsequent embassy to the mistress does not have the desired result, he is dismissed empty-handed. If there is a gull here, that gull is Ingenioso. His fortunes in this play appear designed to illustrate both the unworthiness and ignorance of potential patrons, and the grossly insufficient material returns to writers in a literary economy founded upon patronage.

Similarly, in the same play, away from the specifically literary milieu, Philomusus and Studioso are equally unsuccessful in their attempts to secure a remunerative place for themselves. Their literary aspirations having been thwarted, they take up other forms of employment, one as a sexton and the other as a private tutor; however, they are both dismissed for effectively failing to demean themselves sufficiently towards their respective employers. The decadence of patronal forms of employment, both literary and non-literary, is further elaborated in *2 Return*, through its central episode concerning the corrupt endowment of a church living upon the ill-educated Immerito over the deserving university man, Academico. The bestowal of the living lies within the power of the wealthy knight and magistrate, Sir Raderick, a man who "embodies the materialistic world both as a public figure and as a private personality" and who through his wealth "wields economic, political, social and even artistic control of the world of the play" (Glatzer 211). Sir Raderick's hostility towards scholars and university education is manifested most clearly in a lengthy exchange on the subject (1153-235) with his legal and business associate, the Recorder, where the chief grounds of their hostility lies in the university's capacity to endow "some stammell weauer or some butchers sonne" (1161) with gentlemanly status.<sup>10</sup> The conclusion of this exchange, perhaps darkly alluding to such events as the Bishops' Ban of June 1599 and the ensuing clampdown on satiric writing (Leishman, note to 1228-29, p. 299), extends their personal animosity to that of the nation:

*Recorder* [. . .] schollers are pryed into of late, and are found to be busye fellows, disturbers of the peace, Ile say no more, gesse at my meaning, I smel a ratt.

*Sir Raderick* [Well,] I hope at length England will be wise enough, I hope so, I faith, then an old knight may haue his wench in a corner without any Satyres or Epigrams. (1228-35)

<sup>10</sup> Glatzer (211-12), reading the character in the light of analogues from city comedies, views Sir Raderick as an upstart; there is, in fact, no textual evidence to suggest that he is not of a long-established aristocratic family.

In the face of this kind of hostility, it is perhaps not so surprising that the loyalties of the scholar-poets are to themselves as a group rather than to the nation or church.<sup>11</sup> This is notably illustrated by the fortunes of Philomusus and Studioso in the two *Return* plays. At the end of *1 Return*, following their failure to find remunerative employment, they resolve to leave for the Continent, indicating that their destination will be “Rome or Rhems” (1560), strongholds of anti-Elizabethan, Catholic subversion.<sup>12</sup> However, by the start of *2 Return*, they have returned, still having failed to prosper (393-98). And now they turn to criminality, using their acquisition of French to pose as a French doctor and his assistant in order to “gull the world, that hath in estimation forraine Phisicians” (429-30). Predictably, this venture also fails, as is apparent from their reappearance on the run from “perseuantes” seeking to imprison them in Newgate (1381-85).

While our scholar-poets’ conceptions of their writerly identity is clearly a long way removed from any neo-Spenserian conception of literature in the service of nation and church, the university is fundamental to their self-definition. Indeed, for the lowly born scholar, the plays could be seen to establish what Eckhard Auberlen has suggested we think of as an alternative commonwealth, a “commonwealth of wit,” in which the poet’s learning overrides, or even dissolves, other forms of social distinction (27-33). One might also fruitfully apply to the Parnasian ideals of the plays’ scholar-poets the notion of *Libertas*, as expounded by Patrick Cheney. Writing about Marlowe’s literary career, Cheney identifies a turn away from Spenser’s patriotic and Virgilian model for a literary career, in favour of an Ovidian model that aligns itself with scholarly *libertas* in place of nation, and affirms instead the immortality of the individual writer’s verse (*Counterfeit Profession* 21-25).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Boutcher (140-41) identifies in the plays a “north by north-west” perspective, which can be accounted for by the strong connections that St. John’s had with Yorkshire and Lancashire.

<sup>12</sup> In a recent article which touches on the plays, Edward Gieskes wrongly claims that “Ingeniosio, Philomusus, and Studioso, all impoverished scholars ‘goe to the press’ (1474) as a response to the failure of the traditional patronage economy to support them” (79), when in fact only Ingeniosio does so; he thus completely misses the more sinister implications of their departure from England.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Pilgrimage* 39-40, quoted above. More recently, Cheney has described the distinction thus: “Ovid’s poetry is counter-national in the sense that it writes not a collective form of nationhood, whether imperial or republican, but rather an individual form of nationhood foregrounding the authority of the poet” (*Literary Authorship* 154). The oft-quoted tag, “vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo / Pocula Castalia plena minister aqua,” from Ovid’s self-asserting elegy on immortality and his poetic vocation, *Amores*, I.15.35-36, is echoed closely by Philomusus upon his arrival at Parnassus: “Let vulgar

However, increasingly the scholar-poets' inability to find place in, or material support from, the traditional patronal economy, muddies the waters.

For Auberlen the distinction he argues that the plays maintain between university-educated *litteratus* and "hack" writer is crucial (145-56). The first play clearly insists upon ethical, aesthetic, and qualitative difference between the field of the discerning Latinate scholar-poet and that of the hacks and poetasters who live by the press and/ or write for the stage. However, as the trilogy progresses, we witness a partial collapsing of this dichotomy. The *Pilgrimage's* incorporation of a short clown scene, derisively included simply because "a playe cannot be without a clowne" (664-65), possibly gestures towards Sidney's famous neo-classical mockery of the practice (*Apology* 112). This, along with the *Pilgrimage's* easy dismissal of Ingenioso's pamphleteering (655-56), makes its position on popular forms of literature quite clear. By the time we get to the second *Return* play such distinctions are no longer sustainable; the refiguring and repositioning of Ingenioso from easily-dispatched tempter figure of the *Pilgrimage* to the central embodiment of the scholar-poet's dilemma in the two *Return* plays is the clearest manifestation of this. The need the scholar-poet has to earn a living is accompanied by the realisation that the only worthwhile means of income are in fact those provided by press and stage.

While, as we have seen, the patronal system fails to provide remotely adequate support for literary endeavour, the material returns from the seemingly more debased and popular forms of literature associated with the press and stage are rather more promising. When towards the end of 2 *Return*, Kemp and Burbage appear, their prosperous condition contrasts greatly with that of the impecunious Philomusus and Studioso, whom they seek to employ as actors; as they put it "for money, they come North and South to bring it to our playhouse" (1789-90). Similarly, while Ingenioso fails to secure any meaningful patronage for his work, he does appear to secure some kind of living through money earned writing for the printing houses (1 *Return*, 152-54; 200-02). Early in 2 *Return*, there is a scene depicting a negotiation between Ingenioso and Danter over his recently completed "Chronicle of *Cambrige* Cuckolds" (356). Danter offers "40 shillings and an odde pottle of wine," an offer unequivocally rejected by Ingenioso. As Danter peruses the manuscript he exclaims it "will sell gallantly" and that he'll "haue it whatsoever it cost" (362-63). They exit to further negotiation, and though we never find out the final agreed price, it does seem as though Ingenioso

---

wittes admire the common songes, / Ile lie with Phoebus by the Muses springs" (713-14).

will receive a sum considerably in excess of the initial offer. Inevitably such negotiation – so emphatically conducted on the basis of what will sell rather than upon literary merit – involves compromise of literary ideals. After all, the cuckold of Cambridge are probably not the most Parnassian subject matter imaginable.

The Danter scene of *2 Return* is immediately preceded by a scene in which Ingenioso appears in the company of a press corrector, Iudicio. Here, Ingenioso shows himself to be quite aware of the distinctions, typically made by university men, between good and bad writing. The two pass judgement on the work of fifteen of the best-known literary contemporaries, including Spenser, Jonson and Shakespeare, all of whom are featured in the anthology, *Bel-vedere* (1600). At the end of the scene, the corrector Iudicio, pointing to the remaining writers' names, simply dismisses them in a conventionally disdainful way:

*Iudicio* As for these, they haue some of them beene the old hedgstakes of the presse, and some of them are at this instant the botts and glanders of the printing house. Fellowes that stand onely vpon tearmes to seure the tearme with their blotted papers; write as men go to stoole, for needes, and when they write, they write as a boare pisses, now and then drop a pamphlet. (*2 Return* 320-26)

However, it is Ingenioso's response that is most striking: "*Durum telum necessitas*. Good faith, they do as I do, exchange words for mony" (327-28).<sup>14</sup>

This sudden divergence of view is especially striking given the distinctions between good and bad writing that Ingenioso and Iudicio have shared about various writers in the preceding lines. There is, ultimately, in the *Parnassus* plays an inescapable materialism overriding qualitative judgements. In short, the plays enact what could be described as a materialist analysis of the conditions of literary production, which in the second and third plays shows that if the writer fails to realise the ideal articulated in the first play, it is not because of any personal inadequacy, or failure to heed the advice of an elder, but simply because the environment in which they find themselves prevents it.

---

<sup>14</sup> "*Durum telum necessitas*," a Latin saying, means "necessity is a hard weapon."

## References

- Alwes, Derek. *Sons and Authors in Elizabethan England*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004.
- Auberlen, Eckhard. *The Commonwealth of Wit: The Writer's Image and His Strategies of Self-Representation in Elizabethan Literature*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1984.
- Boutcher, Warren. "Pilgrimage to Parnassus: Local Intellectual Traditions, Humanist Education and the Cultural Geography of Sixteenth-Century England." *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning*. Ed. Yun Lee Too and Niall Livingston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 110-47.
- Cheney, Patrick. *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- . *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Duncan-Jones, Katherine. "Introduction." *Sir Philip Sidney: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*. Ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. vii-xviii.
- Gieskes, Edward. "'Honesty and Vulgar Praise': The Poet's War and the Literary Field." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 18 (2005): 75-103.
- Glatzer, Paula. *The Complaint of the Poet: The Parnassus Plays, a Critical Study of the Trilogy Performed at St. John's College, Cambridge 1598/9-1601/2, Authors Anonymous*. Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1977.
- Helgerson, Richard. *The Elizabethan Prodigals*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- . *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Kastan, David Scott. *Shakespeare after Theory*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Lake, D. J. "The Integrity of the 'Parnassus' Trilogy." *Notes & Queries* 219 (1974): 286-90.
- Leishman, J. B., ed. *The Three Parnassus Plays*. London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson Ltd, 1949.
- McConica, James. "Scholars and Commoners in Renaissance Oxford." *The University in Society*. 2 vols. Ed. Lawrence Stone. London: Oxford University Press, 1975. I: 151-81.
- Montrose, Louis Adrian. "Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Forms." *English Literary History* 50 (1983): 415-59.
- Pechter, Edward. "The New Historicism and Its Discontents: Politicizing Renaissance Drama." *PMLA* 102 (1987): 292-303.

- Riggs, David. *The World of Christopher Marlowe*. London: Faber and Faber, 2004.
- Sidney, Sir Philip. *An Apology for Poetry*. Ed. Geoffrey Shepherd; rev. R. W. Maslen. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Walker, Jonathan. "Learning to Play." *Early Modern Academic Drama*. Ed. Jonathan Walker and Paul D. Streufert. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2008. 1-18.