

**Zenón LUIS-MARTÍNEZ, ed. 2023. *Poetic Theory and Practice in Early Modern Verse: Unwritten Arts*.
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"Poesy is a part of learning," wrote Francis Bacon in his *The Advancement of Learning* (1605, IV. I). With his habitual factual style, the English philosopher and encyclopedist established "poesy" as "one of the principal portions of learning," no matter how — in his view — it might be merely imaginative, or "feigned." Zenón Luis-Martínez's innovative volume, *Poetic Theory and Practice in Early Modern Verse: Unwritten Arts*, brings together eleven learned essays that illuminate an intrinsic relationship between knowledge and "poesy" extant in the early modern period. The collection does so by bringing the art of poetry into conversation with contemporary disciplines and discourses, on the assumption that — as Luis-Martínez puts it in his introduction — "active thinking about the making, matter, forms, and functions of poetry... is generated in practical writing rather than in normative discourse form of norms and precepts" (2). Thus, the volume reverses traditional perspectives on poetics. Rather than envisioning how poets applied the descriptive and prescriptive *artes poetriae* of the time, Luis-Martínez finds that the works of the poets themselves are at the center of the art of writing. As he explains, this approach is the result of an attentive reading of authors like George Puttenham, who believed that the poets do "not [work] by example or medi[t]ation or exercise as all other artificers do" (5).¹

The volume revolves around the notion of "unwritten arts," which furnishes a cohesive backbone to the essays. Belying its sub-titular positioning, the concept of "unwritten arts" operates rather as a *de facto* title here, variously guiding each essay. This notion — originally conceived by Rosalie Colie — takes inspiration from the early modern phrase "unwritten verities" used by Protestant religious polemicists to disparage the commentary tradition based on oral rather than literal citation of the scriptures (27). In this interpretation, Luis-Martínez departs from a widely disseminated usage, divesting the term "unwritten" of its pejo-

¹ George Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, III, XXV.

rative connotation to turn it into the compelling object of this collective inquiry into the theoretics of poetic writing. The contributors explore these “unwritten arts” implicit in the poets’ works, in “unformulated critical assumptions outside official theory,” and in “the blank surface that is left unmarked by writing” (10). A challenging enterprise, this exploration is carried out combining interdisciplinarity and rhetorical, poetical and philological analysis. The volume attends to such aspects as figurative language, metaphors and tropes, while also engaging with cultural studies, stretching the analysis of words like “grace,” “cause,” “blood,” “love,” “imitation,” “art,” or “habit” almost to the level of keywords, in Raymond Williams’s sense of the term.

The collection is divided into three parts. The first “Origin: Poetic Aetiologies” is concerned with the cause of poetry, i.e., its generating potential. In the essay opening this section, “Justified by Whose Grace? Poetic Worth and Transcendent Doubt in Late Elizabethan and Early Jacobean Poetry,” Joan Curbet Soler explores the “poetics of grace,” tracing the cultural and religious semantics of the term “grace,” with divergent Continental and English connotations in times of religious reformations. Curbet concludes that in Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Fulke Greville and Aemilia Lanyer, “the origin and the work of grace can never be fully apprehended or systematized” (44), due to the absence of consensus about the giving and receiving of grace. The subsequent essay, Emma Annette Wilson’s “The Logical Cause of an Early Modern Poetics of Action,” puts logic at the causal center of poetic practice, identifying its deep roots in the early modern mindset. Arguing that logic “gave substance, form and... causation and agency to the world and all of its beings and entities” (47), Wilson attributes newly developed concepts in poetic texts to it, in particular those depicting poetry as an agent of change. In the third essay, “Atomies of Love: Material (Mis)interpretations of Cupid’s Origin in Elizabethan Poetry,” Cassandra Gorman takes her cue from Bacon’s identification of Cupid with “the natural motion of the atom” (74–75), to examine Elizabethan erotic poetics prior to the influence of Lucretius. Poetic allusions to Cupid in the period, she finds, evince a new understanding of the nature of things: “Like the atom or elemental ‘impulse of desire’ associated with the ancient myth, these Cupids recreate the visceral impact of love and produce new forms of expression in poetic spaces” (93).

The second part of the volume, entitled “Style: Outgrowing the Arts,” includes three essays that investigate representations and performances of the body in early modern *artes poeticae*. Rocío G. Sumillera focuses

on the intersection between medicine and poetry in “Bloody Poetics: Towards a Physiology of the Epic Poem.” Eschewing more widely discussed metaphors of poems as organic entities, Sumillera interrogates analogic representations of poems and bodies animated by the flow of blood. This “semantics of blood,” she finds, was “a fundamental style indicator” (106) prominent in early modern English epic texts and translations. The two remaining essays in this section look at the interaction of bodily actions — or lack thereof — and rhetoric in performance. David J. Amelang’s “Figuring Ineloquence in Late Sixteenth-century Poetry” casts an innovative look at figures of “ineloquence” as expressions of emotional wordlessness, in dramatic works and in poems. Amelang argues that these rhetorical devices disrupt and distort conventions of language in their attempt to represent emotional devastation, while sustaining (albeit somewhat paradoxically) regular poetic rhythm. In the last essay of this section, “Eloquent Bodies: Rhetoricising the Symptoms of Love in the English Epyllion,” Sonia Hernández-Santano addresses the relationship between rhetoric, the body and the emotions. Viewing the erotic epyllion from the perspective of humanist rhetorical and poetic education, she identifies the *actio* — or body-based act of delivery — and the practice of word creation as means to portray emotions. She stresses that, read in this light, “bodily reactions of the characters in the epyllia are referred to as fulfilling the aesthetic function of style” (158).

“Poesis: Art’s Prisoners,” the third part of the volume, borrows Thomas Lodge’s description of the “snares” that poets encounter in their practice to unify the last five essays of the volume, dedicated to studying the “individual poetic programs” of Elizabethan poets. Jonathan P. A. Sell’s essay “Philip Sidney’s Sublime Self-authorship: Authenticity, Ecstasy and Energy in *The Defence of Poesy* and *Astrophil and Stella*,” proposes to unpack the critical puzzles of the authenticity and exemplarity of *Astrophil and Stella*, believed by many to be at odds with Sidney’s own theoretical views in *The Defence of Poesy*. Sell’s discussion of Sidney’s “unwritten poetics” of the sublime bridges the distance between the two works in a perceptive analysis of authenticity, the ecstatic self, and *energeia*. María Jesús Pérez-Jáuregui returns to the concept of grace in “From Favour to Eternal Life: Trajectories of Grace and the Poetic Career in the Sonnets of Henry Constable and Barnabe Barnes.” Her analysis parallels two poetic careers — Barnabe Barnes’s and Henry Constable’s — through their use of a word so religiously and poetically loaded. The cultural dynamics of “grace” in one and the other reflect their re-

ligious beliefs: while Barnes — a Protestant — considers grace to be one of the five *solae*, an “unmerited favor,” Constable — a Catholic convert — “undertakes a journey to merit salvation” (192), taking on a grace of a different kind in consequence. Cinta Zunino-Garrido’s essay “Thomas Lodge’s ‘Supple Muse’: Imitation, Inspiration and Imagination in *Phillis*” offers a new assessment of *Phillis*, a work often seen as lacking in originality, and of *The Complaint of Elstred*, believed to be unrelated to the former, despite their publication together. In her analysis of Lodge’s reflections on imitation, inspiration, and imagination in these poems, Zunino-Garrido reclaims them as “a productive space for the exploration of the poetics of this kind of sonnet compilation” (217).

The last two essays of the collection revolve around the “poetics of difficulty” in, respectively, Fulke Greville and George Chapman. In her essay “The Worthy Knots of Fulke Greville,” Sarah Knight considers Greville’s sense of his own difficult style and the later reception of such “knotty” writing, especially in the tragedies *Alaham* and *Mustapha*. By contrasting the writing and the readings of Greville’s works, Knight traces the challenges set to readers to deepen learning and heighten understanding. “George Chapman’s ‘Habit of Poesie,’” by Zenón Luis-Martínez, closes the third section with an insightful study of the poetic habit of Chapman — self-professedly obscure, and considered by many to be the difficult early modern poet *par excellence*. Luis-Martínez’s reading of Chapman’s texts, paratexts, and translations concludes that Chapman accepted “difficulty not as an end in itself but as a means to intelligibility,” a vehicle to “invite considerations of the poem as a relatively autonomous vehicle towards the elucidation of its sense” (270).

The volume closes with an elegant Afterword by Clark Hulse, who, following Rosalie Colie, recognizes the “paradox” of early modern literary theory and criticism, describable as a mismatch between theoretical positioning and actual poetry. After a terminological disquisition on the various terms and concepts used to describe early modern poetics, Hulse concludes that early modern aesthetic theory, critical judgment, and the arts of making in the period were esteemed no less than literary writing, being as they were all literary genres (288).

Poetic Theory and Practice in Early Modern Verse. *Unwritten Arts* implicitly evokes a dual understanding of the cultural semantics converging in the term “poesy” in the early modern period: poetical composition on the one hand and “the art of [making] poetry” on the other. In these eleven essays and their Afterword, Bacon’s claim of poesy for the realm

of learning is justified anew, finely articulated and elaborated using contemporary concepts and methodologies. Crucially for a collected volume, the essays speak to each other and cohesively develop their arguments around the notions of “unwritten arts.” The novelty of the book and its essays lies not only in posing unexplored perspectives on early modern poetics but also in bold cross-cutting readings of both canonical and non-canonical authors and works. Luis-Martínez and his authors have made a major contribution to the growing field of early modern poetics generally. This collection will be often read, and profitably, for years to come.

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