

chronology is intended, in my case the reigns of the Tudor and Stuart monarchs prior to the Commonwealth, *Renaissance* is simply more accurate.

A problem, duly noted or endnoted where pertinent, that I have had with several otherwise distinguished treatments of Renaissance culture has involved their diachronic insensitivity, particularly to the medieval period. Much of my own scholarly career has engaged the continuities and distinctions between these two periods, and the following pages have been written with frequent glances over my shoulder at what has preceded the parameters of time I have set for my project. My use of the word *Renaissance*, which, in the interest of clarity, has been capitalized to indicate a chronological rather than an evaluative designation, is meant to require at least the awareness of defining relationships between this period and the many medieval centuries that preceded it. Distinctions between these two periods are—indeed, have to be—heuristic. There is no such “thing” as a “period.” Such reifications are fictive. This assertion granted, distinctions between the medieval period and the Renaissance can nonetheless be made, often subtly; they are almost always both gradual and irregular, but they are also cumulative, demonstrable, meaningful, material, and technologically graphic. The Renaissance, in other words, is both traditional and fundamentally in transition, and this most interesting and definitive historical phenomenon on the threshold of modernity needs clearer delineation rather than dismissal in the name of the big historical blur.

Judith Anderson. *Words That Matter: Linguistic Perception in Renaissance English*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

## Frozen Words

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In the *Moralia*, Plutarch recounts a humorous story about frozen words that came to be applied to Plato's writings: “In a certain city words congealed with the cold the moment they were spoken, and later, as they thawed out, people heard in the summer what they had said to one another in the winter; it was the same way with what was said by Plato to men still in their youth; not until long afterwards, if ever, did most of them come to perceive the meaning, when they had become old men.”<sup>1</sup> Plutarch's version of this story concludes his description of the “ostentatious and artificial” kinds of discourse that first attract but then mislead students of philosophy, which he conceives as the knowledge of virtue. Such discourse includes “disputations, knotty problems, and quibbles,” the concerns of the natural sciences, and the sophistries of formal logic; most emphatically, however, it consists of collections of apophthegms and anecdotes. Like Greeks who “never . . . put their money to any use save to count it,” collectors of such *sententiae* are, according to

Plutarch, “for ever foolishly taking . . . inventory of their literary stock” and never laying up anything “else which would be to their own profit.”<sup>2</sup> It is at this point that Plutarch, scornful of knowledge that is in some way objectified, formal, and unessential rather than centered in “character and feeling,” tells the story of the frozen words that do not thaw until their relevance has passed.

In the sixteenth century both Calcagnini and Rabelais repeat versions of Plutarch’s story, and Castiglione provides an analogous tale about the words of Russian fur traders that freeze in the air until they are warmed by fire.<sup>3</sup> Like Plutarch’s, Calcagnini’s version concerns the acquisition of knowledge, but in a reversal of Plutarch’s point, it favors “hard knowledge”—frozen words that do not evaporate on first hearing, even though they are not readily accessible to understanding.<sup>4</sup> Rabelais’s version, which might have been known to John Donne, is of still greater interest, because it occurs in an episode of the *Quart Livre* that explores signification and the meaning of language.<sup>5</sup> Based in large part on Plutarch’s story, Rabelais’s fable of the frozen words interweaves ideas about language that are variously Platonic and Aristotelian, nominal and realistic, ideal and material, conceptual and referential. It serves to introduce the complexity of linguistic views active in Renaissance thought and to expose the underlying concern of the present study—namely, the extent to which Renaissance writers conceived of a substantiality in language and the terms, including frozen speech, in which they did so.

Rabelais’s fable serves also to illustrate the ambivalence in linguistic contexts of the word *substantiality* itself, which embraces meanings ranging from the metaphysical to the conceptual and the purely material and often lacking neat boundaries. For example, in a rhetorical treatise roughly contemporary with Rabelais’s work and subsequently influential in England, Julius Caesar Scaliger attributes to poetry, and to all formal speech (“oratio”), “two *substantial* parts, matter and form (duabus . . . partibus

substantialibus, materia et forma),” which he identifies as the spoken or written words on the one hand and the idea (or Idea) and arguments on the other.<sup>6</sup> Like Rabelais’s fable, his treatise draws on an uneasy mix of Platonic and Aristotelian positions, along with their medieval and Renaissance mutations. In such a swirl of conceptual possibilities, two other terms common in Renaissance discussions of language, *thing* (Latin *res*) and *matter* (including subject matter, or *res*), share a similar breadth and instability of meaning, as Rabelais’s fable will make dramatically clear.

In Rabelais’s fourth book, when Pantagruel and his companions, most notably Panurge, are traveling by sea to the oracle of the Holy Bottle, suddenly they hear the sound of voices in the air. While Panurge reacts with fear, the more philosophically minded Pantagruel speculates about the origin of the voices. He first remembers having read (“leu”), not simply heard, that

a Philosopher named Petron believed there were several worlds touching one another in the form of an equilateral triangle, at whose base and center [*en la pate et centre*]<sup>7</sup> was said to be the manor of Truth [*manoir de Verité*] and there to dwell the Words, Ideas, Patterns, and Images [*les Parolles, les Idées, les Exemplaires et portraictz*] of all things past and future: around them is the Age [*Siecle*].<sup>8</sup> And in certain years, at long intervals, part of these drops down upon humanity like catarrhs [*comme catarrhes*] or like the dew that fell upon Gideon’s fleece; part remains there, reserved for the future, until the consummation of the Age.<sup>9</sup>

In Pantagruel’s myth words participate in truth, much as Plato’s Socrates first hopes they might in the *Cratylus*. But Pantagruel’s comparisons also allude to the less optimistic end of the *Cratylus*, where the world of Heraclitan flux is compared to a leaky pot and to “a man who has a running at the nose,” that is, to one who suffers from catarrh, Greek *katarrhoos*.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously they sug-

gest that the dregs ("catarrhs") of truth reach earth and yet that what does descend is a divine gift, a sign of favor like the dew on Gideon's fleece. The attitude toward language expressed in the myth as a whole is mixed, even if weighted strongly toward linguistic idealism.

Among Pantagruel's memories that are subsequently evoked by the voices are Aristotle's praise of Homer's winged words; the song of Orpheus that survived his death, issuing from his severed head and lyre as they floated down the river Hebrus to the sea; and Plutarch's comparison of Plato's teaching to frozen words, which motivates the entire episode in Rabelais. Each of these memories involves inspiration and art, and each indicates that words live or endure and again suggests that in some special way they communicate with truth. By including Plutarch's comparison in a chapter dominated by the myth of truth's celestial dwelling and descent to earth, Rabelais, like Calcagnini, gives Plutarch's comparison a positive thrust: Rabelais's frozen words melt only with time and are understood only with the wisdom of age ("*à peine* estre d'iceulx entendu lors que estoient vieulx divenuz"; my emphasis). Yet a trace of Plutarch's scorn also lingers in the likely futility of such knowledge for the aged.

M. A. Screech has argued persuasively that Rabelais's view of the origin of linguistic meaning is partly Aristotelian and partly Platonic, partly conventional and partly idealistic or iconic.<sup>11</sup> Like most of his contemporaries, Rabelais read Aristotle and Plato through the filter of the established commentaries on their works; Rabelais was especially influenced by Hermaeus Ammonius, whose fifth-century commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* was standard from the time of its translation into Latin in the thirteenth century through at least the sixteenth century. Ammonius endeavored to reconcile the linguistic idealism commonly attributed to Plato (usually by reducing his linguistic view to that of his character Cratylus) with the linguistic conventionalism of Aristotle (another simplification, since Aristotle's theory of signifi-

cation relies on universals—*universalia in rebus*). With Cratylus, Ammonius maintained that names have a real, natural connection with the thing named; with Aristotle, he also maintained that the meaning of words is the result of human convention. His mixed views additionally resemble those of Augustine and of Isidore of Seville, whose works were also well known in the Renaissance.<sup>12</sup> As Ammonius's views were irreverently explained by Agostino Niso in the early sixteenth century, a word such as "*lapis*, (a stone)" is inherently appropriate to the object named because it means "*laedens pedem*, (hurting the foot)"; at the same time, however, Ammonius could hold that words result from "human decision (*institutum*)."<sup>13</sup> While variations are rung on such views in the Renaissance, a great many are similarly mixed, expressing neither Cratyism nor Aristotelianism exclusively.<sup>13</sup>

But Rabelais's fable of the frozen words suggests that his linguistic views were still more eclectic. They might also be described as partly skeptical and partly idealistic, partly nominal and partly real. Both Plato's character Cratylus and Aristotle were basically linguistic realists, the latter believing that our abstract conceptions of nature correspond to things that really exist and therefore that the words in which we express these conceptions refer to what is actually there. Nominalism rejects this view, since it regards such conceptions as being without basis in objective reality. Although Aristotelianism and nominalism both consider words conventional in origin, nominalism maintains that the universals, which are for Aristotle the ground of real knowledge, exist *only* as names, empty nominations, and that conceptual language thus lacks a true correlation with a reality consisting of individual things.

In Rabelais's fable, words are variously but decidedly real, initially in the idealized forms that dwell in the Manor of Truth and then in more earthly terms, since their expression occurs in the less disembodied forms of Homeric epic, Orphic song, and Platonic philosophy. When their reality is further pressed and pur-

sued into increasingly material dimensions, however, it simply melts away. In the end, its evanescence thus enacts the distance between words and materially objective realities.

Materialism grounds the mnemonic flight of Pantagruel's linguistic idealism when the pilot of his ship informs him that the sounds they hear are only the frozen noises of a battle fought at sea during the previous winter — verbal ice cubes, so to speak — which are just now thawing out. Palpable, visible sound: this simpler idea excites Panurge's more materially oriented imagination, and he suddenly recalls Exodus 20.18: "the people saw the voices *sensiblement*" — that is, "sensibly."<sup>14</sup> In comic response, as if to dramatize the literalism of this recollection, Pantagruel promptly throws handfuls of frozen words onto the deck, and these are said to resemble "crystallized sweetmeats of diverse colors."<sup>15</sup> The narrator describes them in greater detail, his attention at once on utterance, heraldic colors, and his stomach: "We saw there some words gules — 'gullet words' — some vert, some azure, some sable, some or."<sup>16</sup> When we warmed them a little between our hands, they melted like snow, and we really heard them." Then Panurge asks Pantagruel to give him some more words, and Pantagruel quips that the giving of words is the act of lovers. "Sell me some then," says Panurge, and Pantagruel retorts, "That's what a lawyer does."

Relenting, Pantagruel tosses more words on deck, among them "some very sharp" — "bloody words that sometimes return to the place from which they have been uttered, but with a cut throat; some hair-raising words, and others unpleasant enough to look at." Clearly these are words with material consequences. Play with the melting words continues, next including onomatopoeic sounds and unintelligible battle cries in barbarous tongues, and the narrator proposes to preserve some choice "*motz* [modern *mots*]" in oil and straw. The irrepressible Panurge then provokes the vociferous ire of his fellow pilgrim Frère Jean by unexpectedly "taking him at his word" — catching him off his verbal

guard in a perversely literal sense and thereby perpetrating word-theft or entrapment. The episode ends in a sexual slur and an inarticulate gesture of derision, thus completing the catarrh-like descent from the words that dwell with celestial truth to the lower signification of matter.

Screech explains the bearing of all these palpable, visible, literal (literally, letter-all) words in the fable on a number of contemporary legal questions, such as whether a deaf-mute's testimony can be allowed and in what legal sense a word can be seen, rather than heard: for example, "I see what you mean" (pp. 433–34). What seems even more obvious, however, is the extent to which Rabelais's frozen words — visible, gustatory, multicolored, audible, shaped, consequential, and affective — explore the relation of words to things and, broadly conceived, the materiality of language.

In another national context, the definition in English of a noun in "Lily's Latin *Grammar*," the most authoritative text for English schools during the Renaissance, offers a surprisingly telling illustration of the problems that beset the relation of word to thing:

A nounce is the name of a thinge, that may be seene, felte, hearde, or vnderstande [i.e., understood]: As the name of my hande in Latine is MANUS: the name of an house is DOMUS: the name of goodnes is BONITAS.<sup>17</sup>

In its English section, Lily's *Grammar* thus characterizes a noun as the mere label for a thing and thereby encourages the identification of word with thing, whether physical or moral thing, that obscures the nature of language as a system of signification.<sup>18</sup> This is the usual reading, which rightly finds in Lily an early symptom of the problem of referentiality that becomes more acute in the following century, with its desire for so many words, and only so many, as things.

The uncertainty inherent in the syntax of Lily's English defini-

tion of a noun — an uncertainty that the superfluous comma between “that” and its antecedent merely accentuates — invites a closer look, however.<sup>19</sup> The possibility that the relative pronoun “that” modifies “name,” hence “nounge,” rather than “thing,” is distractingly present. Momentarily, it suggests that the noun itself might be what can be seen, felt, heard, or understood, or, in Rabelaisian terms, frozen, savored, sold, exchanged, believed, preserved, or seized upon.<sup>20</sup> The immediately succeeding examples (“As the name of my hande . . . is MANUS”) graphically enforce this possibility. What it involves is reification of the word itself, the word as entity or “thing”; it is a displacement of the referent, a grab for power, as it were, by language. Such reification exaggerates the substantiality of words, whereas the substitution of word for thing stresses the function of words as (ideally transparent) referential markers and ultimately would endeavor to deny it. The latter view inclines to identify the thing as the word’s real substance, and the former, its inverse, to identify the word itself as a kind of substance or thing: in the latter case, the word might be said to disappear into the referent; in the former, reality itself to be constituted or reconstituted in language. Have we only melting words or also the recovery of muted voices in Rabelais’s fable? Are the frozen words analogous only to the dissolution of Herbert’s “Church-monuments” or also to the construction of an antique image in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*?<sup>21</sup>

The Latin section of Lily’s *Grammar* offers an alternative definition of the noun, which differs notably from the English one: “Nomen, est pars orationis, quae rem significat, sine vlla temporis aut personae differentia.”<sup>22</sup> The difference between a noun that in some sense takes the place of a thing and a noun defined as a part of speech that is not a verb and that *signifies* a thing is important.<sup>23</sup> With G. A. Padley, I would give Lily’s Latin definition of a noun the benefit of the doubt and read in the verb *significat* some sense of “a linguistic sign divisible into signifying and signified facets” instead of simply “an item of nomencla-

ture.”<sup>24</sup> Lily’s “pars orationis,” or “part of speech,” also implies the relationship of the noun to a larger structure of meaning (“orationis”), and the Latin definition of the noun as being “without any difference of time or person” (“sine vlla temporis aut personae differentia”), hence different from the verb, suggests some awareness of formal grammatical criteria.<sup>25</sup> Like Lily’s English definition, this one draws, via Renaissance sources, on classical and medieval definitions.<sup>26</sup> But it also represents the persistence in Renaissance conceptions of language of some balancing sense of language as a system, rather than as merely an assemblage of names and nouns — although this sense has been greatly weakened.<sup>27</sup> Without such a sense, a functioning language would be difficult to conceive at all.

Aside from the possibility that contemporary readers of Lily were insensitive to the discrepancy between the noun’s “thingness” in the English definition and its greater structural integration in the Latin one, a partial explanation of this discrepancy is that a committee rather than a single individual compiled the *Grammar* and drew on numerous sources, which included but were by no means limited to the work of William Lily.<sup>28</sup> Often in the Renaissance, outside strictly logical contexts, seemingly discrepant alternatives are both retained, perhaps because both are items of potential worth in a store of knowledge still conceived as being essentially cumulative. Moreover, even within logical linguistic contexts, such as Ammonius’s commentary on Aristotle, an amalgam of opposing views that disorients a modern reader could be maintained without acknowledgment of any tension. Part of a work could also be considered valid apart from its modifying conclusion, as, for example, Socrates’ initial agreement with Cratylus apart from his later rejection of Cratylism.

Lily’s English definition of a noun signifies more than the *mentalité* of inveterate collecting, however. It represents the dominant conception of grammar in England throughout the Renaissance period. This definition, read as encouraging the identifica-

tion of word with extralinguistic thing, transparent label with referent, reflects the tendency "to confound the real world," increasingly conceived in material terms, with "the linguistic symbolization of it." Additionally, it foreshadows more extreme attempts to establish a radically "isomorphic relationship between language and nature" later in the seventeenth century—a relationship whose logic implied that things themselves should effectually be words and thereby obviate the need for language.<sup>29</sup> But read, even playfully, as encouraging the notion that the word per se has a substantial existence, that a noun or name is a thing to be seen or understood to an extent in itself, the English definition further suggests the projection of the semiautonomous "word-world" that Leo Spitzer long since attributed to the Renaissance period and specifically to the work of Rabelais:

The appearance of this intermediate [word-world in the Renaissance] . . . is conditioned by a belief in the reality of words, a belief which would have been condemned by the "realists" of the Middle Ages. The belief in such vicarious realities as words is possible only in an epoch whose belief in the *universalia realia* has been shaken. It is [in] this phantasmagoric climate . . . [that] Rabelais will move easily and naturally, with a kind of comic independence.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps it is really (or only) the noun that can be seen, felt, heard, or understood or that can be frozen, savored, sold, exchanged, believed, preserved, or seized upon. After all, had not St. Augustine himself said that words are things (*res*)?<sup>31</sup>

Poised between linguistic realism and nominalistic skepticism, between the idea that words really refer to something out there and the idea that they don't, the imagined world of words Spitzer describes is a fabric of possibilities with an uncertain relation to truth. Conceptually it bears comparison with Sidney's golden world or with "that happy land of Faery" that Spenser "so much do[es] vaunt, yet no where show[s]."<sup>32</sup> Bacon surely had such a fictive world specifically in mind when he likened the cultivation

of "eloquence and copie [i.e., *copia*] of speech" to Pygmalion's frenzy, "for words are but the images of matter; and . . . to fall in love with them is all one as to fall in love with a picture."<sup>33</sup> For Bacon at least, words without material warrant have simply become unreal.

Characterizing Erasmus's conception of the relation of language to thought, particularly in *De copia rerum*, Terence Cave describes a coalescence of *verba* and *res* (words and subject matter) that results in "word-things." Through this coalescence, language and thought become two aspects of "a single domain"—language—rather than remaining distinct. Language thus attains a new status but loses its secure basis in things. Cave's hybrid word-things bear a suggestive resemblance to Spitzer's world of words, to Rabelais's fable, and to the equivocations of Lily's humble noun.<sup>34</sup>

The "isomorphic relation" between words and things that I earlier associated with increasingly material conceptions of language in the seventeenth century might also result in a poem that looks like—hence visually is—an exaggeration of the substantiality of language, the reification of the word as reality that Spitzer describes. Yet it is conceptually the other kind of reification, the identification of word with thing that would eliminate the tendency of language to self-referential autonomy; this may be why Herbert's "Easter Wings" does not look like *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>35</sup> "Easter Wings" is a literalizing of the reference of word to thing. It is the depiction of a relationship whereby language is literally *shaped* by matter. "Easter Wings" is not primarily an abstract or mystical thing; like program music, it is representational, and if a hieroglyph, it is also a striking materialization of conventional English. Although "Easter Wings" may strive for a symbolic rendering, the visible thing finally dominates the word. Its domination is even more evident when the lines of the poem are printed vertically, as they were in all the early editions. In Rabelais's terms, this is frozen language.

"Easter Wings" is also a lyrical oddity, something of a *tour de force* whose extreme artifice is infrequently matched and often questioned in Herbert's poetry, as it poignantly is in the ironic self-reflection of "Church-monuments." As stanzaic, syntactical, and even verbal form disintegrates in "Church-monuments," the monumental impulse of Renaissance art—so celebrated in the gestures toward immortality of Shakespeare's sonnets—bows to matter.<sup>36</sup> "Church-monuments" reinstates what is missing—namely, the body and its mortality—from the illustrations of severed hands holding pens that Jonathan Goldberg has found in Renaissance manuals on handwriting, itself the mainstay of monumental fiction.

While Herbert thus tends to privilege the thing and Spenser the word, the line between them is thin, and what they share is finally more important in defining the linguistic character of the age. The concerns their textual practices engage are basically similar, their linguistic universe the same, the continuum between them essentially unbroken.<sup>37</sup> Their poems, if aligned, might be said to debate the relation of words to things and, in particular, the substantiality of language apparent in even the authorized grammar of the time. In both cases their practice heightens the reality of language and thereby reifies it, though inversely: the one by identifying word with *res*, the referential "thing," the other by circumventing or subsuming this identification. The mockery (and self-mockery) of Rabelais's seemingly inexhaustible play with the frozen words suggests how interrogatory and self-reflexive such practices can be and, in the fictive writing of this period, are likely to be.

As we have seen, when Rabelais writes of the words that dwell with truth, the living ("animées") words of Homer, the immortal words of Orpheus, and the enduring words of Plato, his fable suggests that language can transcend impermanence and that metaphysically it has substance. His carefully introducing, within the context of Truth's dwelling, Plutarch's comparison of Plato's

wisdom to frozen words further emphasizes the accessibility of truth to human language. As an immediate sequel to this context, Panurge's invocation of Exodus—"le peuple voyoit les voix sensiblement"—could even glance, though I should suppose ironically, at the Kabbalistic belief that the mystical secrets depicted in the very letters and accents (the letteralism) of Hebrew Scripture were revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai.<sup>38</sup> And when, instead of being conceived as intimations of celestial truth, words tumble, frozen, by the handful onto the deck, Rabelais also explores the fact that human language has not simply intelligible substance but also material dimensions, whether as *vox*, voice or sound; as a spatial object, the frozen speech of printed or written record; as the virtual stand-in for its referent, the thing itself; or as a medium of exchange, a tender between lovers, and, in the instance of lawyers, a venal commodity. But as noted before, the substance of language in the fable, when regarded materially, melts paradoxically away, like so many thawing cubes of ice. Rabelais's fable thus plays variously on the distinction (or lack of distinction) between matter and substance, which includes substances born of mind or spirit. This is a distinction that materialist philosophies, ancient or modern, reject, but it is also one that bedevils modern attempts to deal with Renaissance notions about language, since, as Rabelais's fable suggests, it is operative in them.

In an obvious sense, the fable also concentrates attention on the freezing and fixing of language, formulaic varieties of which are everywhere prominent in the Renaissance. Indeed, the reified verbal forms of the fable provide the very occasion and ground for interrogating the nature of language. Within it, the *mots* preserved in oil and straw surely glance at the volumes of *sententiae* published during the period—apophthegms, adages, proverbs, maxims, and other wise sayings preserved for posterity. Citation of the verse from Exodus, which is similarly a recognizable unit of meaning, makes light not only of literalism but also of the assumption that such a unit is a portable object, a sound bite that

will play uniformly despite its environment. Much the same is true of set expressions like "Give me your word" or "I take you at your word" when they are found amid a sea of frozen but melting linguistic forms, where their literal meanings become suddenly and absurdly volatile.

An immediate context that extends the application of Rabelais's frozen words still further occurs in Juan Luis Vives' *In Pseudodialecticos*, an attack on the contemporary teaching of logic and dialectic.<sup>39</sup> Vives' play in this work on the words *rigore* — rigidity, hardness, inflexibility — and *frigore* — coldness, frigidity, iciness — suggests another form of freezing, to which writers such as Rabelais and Erasmus were equally sensitive. Vives' treatise vehemently attacks the "senseless inanities" of the logicians of the Sorbonne and pleads for a more useful knowledge and a more natural way of expressing it. Sounding much like Erasmus, he decries the formulas, the straitjackets of thought and expression, that dominate the schools.<sup>40</sup> He takes particular aim at the logicians' distinction between a statement's being false according to common sense and its being true *ad rigorem*. Making this distinction, the logicians "are lacking in common sense, and they speak only *in rigore*, a rigor more frigid [*frigidior*] than ice" (pp. 54–55). "Let them speak *in frigore* if they so desire, and in ice itself," he exclaims on another occasion (pp. 60–61). Vives' criticism, like that in Plutarch's story, is directed primarily at the substitution of "ostentatious and artificial" kinds of discourse for a more humane engagement with "character and feeling."<sup>41</sup> But the numerous examples of formulaic inanity he cites (e.g., "Varro, though a man, is likewise not a man because Varro is not Cicero"; "Socrates and this ass are brothers"; "Nothing and No-man bite each other in a sack"), along with his awareness that both logic and dialectic have "to do precisely with words" and his repeated comparison of the Sorbonnistes' formulations to ice, indicate his specific concern with the freezing of language as well as of thought. As Vives emphasizes, language is not to be "twisted to

suit the rules [Latin *formulae*], but rather the rules follow . . . language" (pp. 36–37). What is particularly interesting in his discussion is not merely the fact of the freezing of language but once again a contemporary *perception* of it as having frozen forms.

To a greater or lesser extent, the freezing and reifying of language conspicuous in Renaissance works characterize many cultures and, at some level, culture itself. Working in the field of linguistics, for example, William E. Cooper and John Robert Ross have analyzed the fixed order — what they term "freezes" — of phonological and semantic elements in brief conjuncts of current speech, such as "bigger and better" and "fore and aft," and also in more complex constructions such as proverbs.<sup>42</sup> Nigel Barley, similarly concerned with proverbs and maxims, both current and Anglo-Saxon ones, describes such formulaic expressions as "templates" and "portable paradigms," which incorporate new situations into existing categories.<sup>43</sup> In a popular mode, these expressions serve a function analogous to that of Sorbonniste logic in Renaissance schools. Indeed, Roland Barthes has loosely characterized any "utterances of the cultural code," a description that extends to logical formulas in the Renaissance, as "implicit proverbs." Following Saussure, he has also suggested that stereotyped modes of writing like proverbs constitute "a real *linguistics of the syntagm*"; that is, they are fixed syntagms, frozen chains of utterance "out of reach of the combinative freedom of speech [*parole*]," and they therefore belong to language as system (*langue*).<sup>44</sup>

Writing in the middle of the twentieth century, William Empson broached an idea broadly similar to that of a cultural code: "A word [or phrase] may become a sort of solid entity, able to direct opinion, thought of as like a person; . . . also it is often said (whether this is the same idea or not) that a word can become a 'compacted doctrine,' or even that all words are compacted doctrines inherently."<sup>45</sup> What is popularly known as a buzzword affords an extreme example of the kind of complex word Empson



describes, which comes to be thought of as “a sort of solid entity.” A proverb is an example of a phrase to which comparable solidity might attach; to cite a case both ironically and literally in point, *Verbum sat sapienti*, “A word [is] enough for a wise man.”

Received codes themselves, as the implicit metaphor in the term suggests, are instances of freezing, and there is an obvious sense in which any semiotic system involves an element of freezing as well. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe the “metaphors we live by” — for instance, the notion, ancient and modern, that linguistic expressions are containers or arguments are buildings — as cultural encoding.<sup>46</sup> Such a code is a form of psychological and epistemological programming, a mind-set or fixing of perception that is inscribed in language. The programming appears to be culturally specific, although particular metaphoric codes may occur within broad temporal or geographic boundaries and the *grounding* of the most basic codes in direct physical experience, including spatial orientation, is very likely universal.<sup>47</sup> Not surprisingly, Lakoff and Johnson consider the human process of conceptualization itself to be fundamentally metaphorical, and they invoke Aristotle as a precursor, since he understood that “the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor.”<sup>48</sup>

Conceptual thought likewise requires some degree of reification, a fact evident in its penchant for conspicuous nominalization — “-ists,” “-isms,” “-ations,” and “-ologies.”<sup>49</sup> Among those conceptually inclined, a seemingly natural tendency to hypostatize language in this way appears meant to give us the impression that the concept really exists, or, in metaphorical terms, that it has “weight” and “substance.” Consider the seeming solidity, the visual and audible claim, of words like “distanciation,” “decontextualization,” “euphemization,” “discoursivization,” and, my current favorite for sheer orthographical enactment, “reterritorialization.” Such terms, not unlike Donne’s more modest efforts in “A Valeridiction: forbidding Mourning” (“profanation,” “trepidation,” or

even “inter-assured”) testify to our own sense of the substantiality of language.

Nominal, or “nounlike,” sentences bear on a frozen form of expression especially typical of Renaissance culture. Nominal sentences are distinguished by their general, sententious, and proverbial quality. Benveniste describes them as non-verbal assertions complete in themselves, “beyond all temporal or modal localization and beyond the subjectivity of the speaker.” Absolute and inflexible, a nominal sentence like *verbum sat sapienti* or *omnis homo mortalis*, “every man [is] mortal,” implies a nonvariable relationship “between the linguistic utterance and the nature of things.”<sup>50</sup> It is an objectified saying, an entity, frozen, inscribed in stone: the sort of sentence commonly found on monuments. There is a striking coincidence of expression and perception, medium and message, in the fact that the lapidary epigraph becomes a favored artistic form in Renaissance sculpture, architecture, and painting, achieving, in John Sparrow’s words, virtually an “independent existence” in the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century developing into a kind of book related to the epigram.<sup>51</sup> Inscriptions are inherently monumental; they seem to guarantee the solidity and weight, the stability and objectivity of language.<sup>52</sup>

One of the most familiar expressions in this period of the tendency to fix and reify language involves a reconception of graphic space and an increasing emphasis on its visual character, developments Walter Ong has ably examined, notably followed by Murray Cohen, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Glyn Norton, and, more recently but variously, Martin Elsky and Jonathan Goldberg.<sup>53</sup> Although grids, diagrams, sectioning, and various techniques of visually emphasizing parts of a text (including underlining, the use of different scripts and colored inks, illustrations, and marginal notation) were frequently employed in the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages, such visual features so multiply and

intensify in the production of printed texts as to validate the view that a significant shift in the perception and communication of data is occurring.<sup>54</sup> This shift is more than the result of the sheer quantity and quality of visual devices and the general cultural dissemination of them that the new technology of print made practical, although these developments too are important. Gradually and increasingly, it also reflects a different way of conceiving the character and purpose of representation on the page.

Visual devices become oriented increasingly to the presence of the page in its own right, to such immediate needs as legibility, reference, and comprehension—in short, to its there-ness, its character as an objective site, a locus of definitive meaning. Such a meaningful place is potentially more than a record of something outside itself or a symbolic witness to a transcendent truth, as was typically the case in the Middle Ages.<sup>55</sup> Although the roots of socially complex changes in attitude toward the page can be traced back to the Middle Ages, particularly to its later phases, in obvious ways the technology of print facilitated and accelerated these. In terms of manipulability, time, and cost, a quill pen bears on the choice of a style of writing and the very shapes of the letters themselves: a lucid medieval bookhand, for example, might be fine for an unpressured monk, but harried administrators would turn to the quicker, less distinct cursive. Standardized printing types have clear advantages of uniformity, legibility, and reliability over letters subject to the skill and circumstances of the individual scribe. Printing offers the possibility of investing more autonomous authority in the page per se, rather than only in certain pages and for special reasons.

Even the gradual movement away from abbreviated orthographical forms to fully visible words during the Renaissance is significant. There is evidence, according to M. T. Clanchy, that the system of abbreviating words in medieval manuscripts was mainly intended to cue someone reading aloud.<sup>56</sup> This evidence further suggests that writing primarily served a mnemonic func-

tion; indeed, it provided a “script” in the performative sense and not just in the literal one. The gradual displacement of medieval abbreviations thus suggests more than a lessened need to skimp on space and time, though these are relevant considerations. More important, it indicates a lessening sense of the function of letters as cues to predictable constructions and a growing sense of them as the locus of meaning, invention, and authority.<sup>57</sup> In a very small way, they are part of a greater emphasis on externalization and the material world, the same movement that informed a number of the most heated religious controversies of the period: those concerning the translation of the biblical *Logos* as either the ineffable *verbum* of Augustine or the articulated *sermo* of Erasmus; the primacy of Scripture, or the written page; the greatly elevated role of preaching, or sound; and the reality of bread (rather than its mere appearance) in the Sacrament.<sup>58</sup>

Controversies such as these register the difference between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with particular sensitivity. Recently, for example, much has been made of the enhanced status of *vox*, understood as the sounded vernacular word, in Renaissance language theory, but little of the fact that conceptually it implied not only a socialization but also a materialization of language.<sup>59</sup> For the Scholastic critics of Erasmus’s translation of *Logos*, materialization was the basic scandal from which the diachronic evolution and social mutability of language merely followed. Exceptions to any broad generalization about artificially demarcated historical periods necessarily exist and become more numerous near their putative borders. Yet, on the whole, theory in the Middle Ages gives radical precedence to the mind; it is not that the Renaissance does not often do, or try to do, the same or that medieval thinkers had no sense of matter, but that conceptually the reality of matter becomes more conspicuous, important, and indeed essential as time goes on.

Along with the significantly increased use of columns, maps, grids, and diagrams that printed books made possible during the

Renaissance, marginal identifications proliferate, seeming in the novel presence of tabular indices to function more as emphatic devices or advertisements than as mnemonic aids. By the turn of the sixteenth century, there had appeared a sufficient number of *sententiae* with forefingers pointing to them to elicit an exasperated complaint from the stylistically sensitive John Hoskyns. While Hoskyns is aware that such pointers might serve as mnemonic aids (their presumed function in an earlier period), and while he does not object to them for this purpose, he perceives them essentially as visual obstacles to understanding and as reinforcements of a corrupt, euphuistic style. His *primary* concern is with appearance and legibility as fundamental conditions for rhetorically effective writing. His attention is focused on the page itself, and that is the point.<sup>60</sup>

Earlier in the century and toward a different end, Nicholas Udall's translation of Erasmus's *Apophthegmes* had outdone even the pointings Hoskyns had in mind. Udall inserts trefoils (1542) or outstretched index fingers (1542, 1564) in the very midst of the Erasmian text to indicate the addition of his own explanatory glosses of proper names and historical, mythological, and proverbial allusions; he adds other reference marks such as asterisks, Maltese crosses, and double daggers within the text to signal further explanations in the margins; and he marks "the moralization[s] of Erasmus" with the typographical sign of a leaf (Fig. 1). In addition, Udall is at pains to explain that the text will present the apophthegm, or "saying self," in "a greate texte letter" (large type) and Erasmus's commentary in "a middle letter," his own contributions appearing in small type. Lest anything "should lacke" that might assist "the vnlearned reader," he also provides for the volume an extensive alphabetical index of names and subjects.<sup>61</sup>

Udall's employment of the page resembles medieval practices and doubtless derives from them, but in his hands the page itself has become a road map keyed less to cognitive debate and mne-

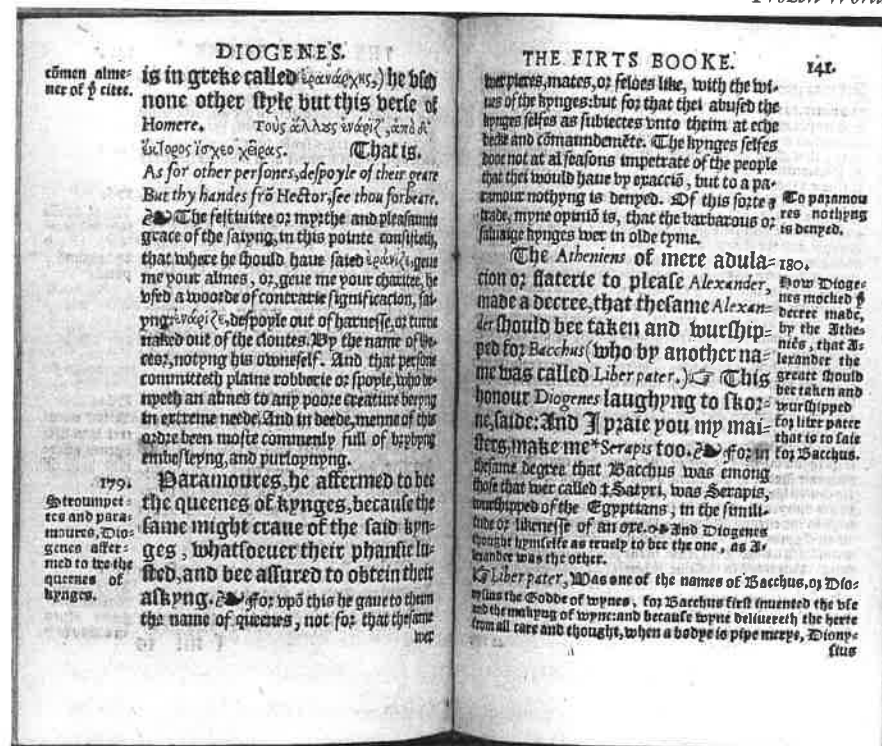


Fig. 1. Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Apophthegmes*, trans. Nicholas Udall, 1542: 140<sup>v</sup>–141<sup>r</sup>. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

monics than to textual properties.<sup>62</sup> In the Middle Ages, the layout of the standardized glosses typically found on the biblical page, for example, required no explanation, since anyone supposed to be reading them had been trained in their use. In contrast, Udall's concern for a more popular and secular audience, for a visually explanatory layout, and for the spatial, hence territorial, identification of authorial ownership is symptomatic of change.<sup>63</sup>

Additional examples suggest similar conclusions. More ubiquitous than marginal pointers in Renaissance texts is the employment of different typefaces, frequently to signal the appearance of

another voice—for example, that of a different speaker or of a sententious quotation, biblical or otherwise.<sup>64</sup> Styles of lettering in other media, like styles of print, also contribute to an emphasis on visibility. The roman style that replaces the gothic one in Renaissance inscriptions and increasingly in typography achieves visual emphasis through clarity of form and increased legibility; the swirling flourishes of signatures in italic script, the privileged “Humanist hand,” add graphic emphasis and distinction—a more authoritative presence—to the handwritten word, and italic refinements increase the sense, for writer and viewer alike, of what Jonathan Goldberg has described as “the materiality of letters themselves.”<sup>65</sup> Even the periodic sentence, in its extension on the page, might be perceived to further the same effect.

My point, however, is not that the Renaissance page is simply more spatial or the Humanist hand more material than their counterparts in the Middle Ages. The *Glossa ordinaria* was bulky enough, and a medieval scriptorium real enough. As for the material conditions of writing, a quill pen certainly required as disciplined a hand on parchment as on paper, and, in addition to the instruments for writing in the Renaissance, the medieval scribe had also an awl for pricking holes, a knife or razor for preparing parchment, and a boar or goat’s tooth for polishing the page; no milk-toast he. Often medieval gothic inscriptions were more extensive than the later roman-style ones; that is, they literally took up more space and more material. The same is true of a paratactic style like Malory’s, whose sentences are loosely but amply additive.

Aside from the sheer quantity of print that the press made available, Renaissance forms of written expression were in general more spatial or material than medieval ones only in the metaphoric sense in which “spatial” means something like “easily or dramatically visible”—that is, “legible” or “emphatic” to modern eyes—and “material” means “determinative” or “culturally focal.”<sup>66</sup> I therefore refer to these qualities as impressions, as perceptions, or, *in extremis*, as illusions. The force of Goldberg’s

description of Renaissance writing as “material” may appear somewhat different, since he grounds the materiality of the letter in the hand that writes it, albeit with a simultaneous pun on the “hand,” or script, that inscribes the body (*Writing Matter*, pp. 228–29). But unless this grounding is understood to mean a greater conceptual and societal emphasis on the hand per se, the medieval period, whose graphic production was scribal, would appear to be more material. The greater materiality of Renaissance writing (not writings) is based on quality rather than quantity, on style rather than physical extension and mass, on perception and utilization rather than purely material fact.<sup>67</sup> One John Done, presumably not the poet, puts the literalist’s case more simply, writing in his miscellany: “Observe regularly the speech of man, and there is nothing almost spoken but by figure; as one sayes, this is my hand, for his handwriting: this is my deed, when it is but his consent thereto.”<sup>68</sup> It is, of course, entirely in keeping with these views that Renaissance forms of writing, whether typographic, chirographic, or inscriptive, should also seem to be more spatial, material, and conceptually “weighty.” In Lakoff and Johnson’s phrasing, space, matter, and weight provide basic “metaphors we [have come to] live by,” to see and understand by, and, as such, they concern us vitally. What “seems,” for the practical consciousness, is often actual.

In conjunction with other related developments, the conspicuous concentration of visual techniques of organization and emphasis on the Renaissance page lent itself readily to the impression of objectivity and fixity. The quantity and replaceability of exact printed copies further heightened this impression by vastly increasing the likelihood that writings would endure once “set” in print. In this light the paucity of extant Renaissance manuscripts actually used for typesetting makes a certain lamentable sense, suggesting that the printing houses discarded them after they had been printed. Having first been marked for casting off, then corrected, smudged, and, in the words of Aldus Manutius,

"delivered over to the printers to be ripped apart, and to die like vipers in the act of birth," the manuscripts themselves were deemed redundant.<sup>69</sup> Other contemporary cultural phenomena similarly suggest the perceived objectivity, perdurability, and fixity of the printed page, as, for example, the reformers' reliance on the principle *sola scriptura* or the obsessive emphasis in the period on the eternizing conceit: "so long as . . . eyes can see / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." These lines by Shakespeare find a literalizing analogue in William Bullokar's *Booke at Large*, 1580, a treatise on spelling reform: "Letters," Bullokar writes in his metronomic verse, "for picture true, of speech, were first deuizd," and "man changing this mortall life, by picture leaues in minde, / the speciall gifts of God most high, to them that bide behinde."<sup>70</sup> Shakespeare's lines conclude a sonnet that uses metaphor to circumvent physical description of the beloved, and they roughly mean, "an impression of you lives in this poem so long as eyes can see it." Bullokar's more literally means, "speech lasts in the very letters that express it." In Bullokar's view letters accurately depict sound; they make it visible and, in effect, they freeze it. They *realize* speech, without the complicating duplicity evident in Shakespeare's couplet: the intervention of interpreting eyes (or subjective "I's") and the equivocation of the word "this" in the final line, which can be interpreted either as poetic response to the beloved or as the graphic form that perpetuates that response — in either case, an "impression." While the power of verse to confer immortality is an ancient motif, the consciousness of this potential in the perdurance of visible words and letters, whether in Shakespeare's subtleties or Bullokar's literalism, is peculiarly pronounced in the Renaissance.<sup>71</sup> Older habits of mind undoubtedly assert a strong influence throughout the period, and newer ones have roots in the past, but the cultural center of gravity is nonetheless shifting perceptibly.

Whereas to a great extent the medieval page remained the servant of memory and the inner word, the Renaissance page

had — or at least seems to have — more autonomy, and the Renaissance word more literal weight. In the Middle Ages, as Mary Carruthers has observed, books were likely to be considered "memorial cues and aids" subservient to memory, and memory itself was thought to be "most like a book," with actual books its limited extramental reflection (p. 16). By the seventeenth century, however, virtually the reverse is entirely conceivable. In the following quotations from Donne's sermons, the written form has conceptual priority: "Our whole life is but a *parenthesis*, our *receiving* of our soule, and delivering it back againe, makes up the perfect sentence"; indeed, the person of Job is the "booke" in which to study "all the *letters* in this *Alphabet* of our life." Even the death of Christ "is delivered to us" not "as a *writing*" only but also as a "writing in the nature of a Copy to learne by; It is not only given us to reade, but to write over" again.<sup>72</sup>

The closest medieval parallel to Donne's sermon that I have encountered comes in a sermon from the twelfth century. Its nearness to and distance from Donne are alike illuminating and perhaps can afford an optimum summary of the relation of the Renaissance view of writing to that of the Middle Ages. The medieval sermon asks its hearers to "become scribes of the Lord," for

the parchment on which we write for him is a pure conscience, whereon all our good works are noted by the pen of memory. . . . The knife wherewith it is scraped is the fear of God. . . . The pumice wherewith it is made smooth is the discipline of heavenly desires. . . . The chalk with whose fine particles it is whitened indicates the unbroken meditation of holy thoughts. . . . The ruler [*regula*] by which the line is drawn that we may write straight, is the will of God. . . . The tool [*instrumentum*] that is drawn along the ruler to make the line, is our devotion to our holy task. . . . The pen [*penna*], divided in two that it may be fit for writing, is the love of God and our neighbour. . . . The ink with which we write is humility itself. . . . The diverse colours wherewith the book is illuminated, not unworthily represent the multiple grace of

heavenly Wisdom. . . . The desk [*scriptorium*] whereon we write is tranquillity of heart. . . . The copy [*exemplar*] by which we write is the life of our Redeemer. . . . The place where we write is contempt of worldly things.<sup>73</sup>

Startlingly similar to Donne's, the claims of the medieval sermon differ significantly from them. The extended comparison in the medieval sermon is conventionally allegorical; it is openly contrived and motivated by a trope of resemblance.<sup>74</sup> Donne's metaphors have the same underlying structure, but they deny it. In the medieval sermon, writing is merely the illustration of a devout mnemonic process, whereas in Donne's it partakes of life's essence. There is an identity between life, death, and the perfectly written sentence for Donne. His metaphors make a claim that is literal and real; after all, are they not written? The life of Christ, too, is a writing, and, in every sense, as the saying goes, the word is the thing.

Even if it were true that "writing something down cannot change in any significant way our mental representation of it, [since] . . . the mental representation . . . gives birth to the written form, not vice versa," written or printed representations we encounter can so influence our perceptions as in time to alter them radically. At the very least, the cultural interaction of conception, representation, and production is more nearly and complexly reciprocal and dynamic than static and one-directional. They enable and shape one another incrementally.<sup>75</sup>

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Hall's chronicle records a familiar story for the year 1529 concerning Cuthbert Tunstall (1474–1559), bishop of London, and William Tyndale, translator of the English Bible, that serves to illustrate both the *mentalité* of transition from a culture of manuscripts to one of print and the material reality of the new technol-

ogy — the "letters and stampes" of the print shop itself. Tunstall, intent on destroying all copies of Tyndale's allegedly heretical translation, unwittingly employed one Packington, who sympathized with Tyndale, to buy up the remaining copies of the translation in order that the bishop might burn them. Tyndale, though aware of the bishop's intention, supplied Packington with "a hepe of newe Testamentes" and then used the bishop's money to pay off his debts and to bring out a corrected edition. Informed that the Bibles "came thicke and threhold into England" even after his bonfire, Tunstall sent for Packington and demanded an explanation. Packington explained that all available copies had been purchased, as agreed, but that Tyndale had simply printed some more. The wily Packington now advised the bishop to buy "the stampes" of the translation in order to stop the flood of books. At this point, however, the bishop, beginning to learn his lesson in technology, "smiled at him and said, well Packyngton, well," and so broke off the interview.<sup>76</sup>

The new technology clearly had a material persistence that had caught the bishop by surprise. This is a matter to which Spenser's first canto of *The Faerie Queene* also refers, when the monster Error disgorges a flood of books and papers in close proximity to a passage implicating the illimitable fertility of the material world.<sup>77</sup> Apprehension about an inability to control the output of the new technology, a sense of being overwhelmed by it, bears at once on dogmatic intransigence and on a desire to fix and freeze language. Apprehension, of course, was hardly the only Renaissance response to print or the only Spenserian one, but in celebrating technology it is the one we are likely to forget.

The commonplace book or collection of *sententiae* — variously proverbs, adages, aphorisms, maxims, apophthegms, and sayings, indeed, *mots* — figures among the most frequent of Renaissance publications, and it, too, reflects not only a desire to amass cultural treasure but also a pleasure in crystallized language. The

taste in this period for what Plutarch nominated as his prime example of frozen words, sententious sayings, whether collected or selected, secular or sacred, classical or vernacular, appears insatiable. Erasmus's *Adagia*, a collection of proverbs with commentaries, saw ten editions and many enlargements between 1508 and his death in 1536, and by 1700 it had gone through 52 complete editions and 96 editions in epitomized or selected form. It was translated into numerous vernacular languages and proved the most popular book of the century. Its popularity was almost equaled by Erasmus's other sententious collections, the early *Adagiorum Collectanea*, the *Apophthegmata*, and the *Parabola*, a collection of aphorisms based on similitudes, which was published in 38 editions during Erasmus's lifetime and in 22 others before 1600. As Margaret Mann Phillips has memorably written, this was a time when "Marguerite de Navarre embroidered *Ubi spiritus ibi libertas* on her hangings, and Montaigne had only to raise his eyes to the rafters of his study to find his own choice of proverbs."<sup>78</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot had sayings engraved on his plate and vessels; Sir Nicholas Bacon, the father of Francis, embellished the long gallery at Gorhambury with *sententiae*; Lancelot Andrewes was a student of proverbs, and George Herbert made a collection of them; William Cecil, Lord Burghley, sounding much like Shakespeare's Polonius, wrote sententious commonplaces to his son; and even John Hoskyns set Latin, Greek, and Hebrew inscriptions (presumably without pointers) in the buildings on his estate.<sup>79</sup>

This vogue has attracted various explanations. Since "sayings," albeit written, collected, and inscribed, suggest speech, it has been seen as evidence of the ingrained orality of Renaissance culture. More often, it has been interpreted as a vital engagement with traditional wisdom and particularly with what Hoskyns describes as "morall philosophie."<sup>80</sup> In terms of my earlier discussion, it also expresses the appeal for this period of culturally encoded templates such as proverbs, which Henry Peacham describes as "The

Summaries of maners" and "Images of humane life."<sup>81</sup> Developing the social utility of *sententiae*, Frank Whigham and Mary Thomas Crane have explained the period's fixation on commonplaces as the conscious and deliberate "cultural capital" of humanism.<sup>82</sup>

Like the Renaissance inscriptions that frequently drew on collections of *sententiae*, the sententious vogue exhibits abundant examples of nominal assertion — to take one from the collection at Gorhambury, LONGUM ITER PER PRAECEPTA: BREVE ET EFFICAX PER EXEMPLA, "Long the way by rules, short and effectual by examples."<sup>83</sup> In words that again suggest the monumentality of such inscribed authority Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to "the *weight* of impersonal community consensus" that the proverbial saying invokes, and Morris Palmer Tilley observes in a curiously mixed metaphor how some proverbs "sound like *petrifications* of alliterative poetry." George Puttenham's explanation of a gnomic saying, "by the Latin . . . called *sententia*," similarly suggests its substantiality: "In waightie causes and for great purposes, wise persuaders use grave and weighty speaches."<sup>84</sup>

In short, the sententious vogue tends to fix and reify language, particularly in visual, syntactical, and rhythmic terms and particularly when examples of it are in some way isolated, as in inscriptions; unsituated historically or contextually, as in compilations; or repeated ritually or programmatically, as in sermons.<sup>85</sup> Once again, this is a vogue with similarities to and deep roots in medieval culture, but it is at the same time a development of them that employs and adapts to a new technology and participates in a larger process of cultural change.<sup>86</sup> Slowly and fundamentally, this process involves interrelated perceptions of language and, in both broad and narrow senses, of the material world.

There are signs in the period itself — even outside creative writing, where we might expect them — of an awareness of the way *sententiae* operate as templates of meaning, freeze language, and appear to solidify it. The notion of a template is implicitly present

even in Roger Ascham's confidence that "good precepts of learning, be the eyes of the minde, to looke wiselie *before* a man, which waie to go right, and which not"; precepts are, as it were, the spectacles through which new experiences are seen and hence understood.<sup>87</sup> The essential significance of an experience appears to be settled beforehand. Ascham's observation belongs to a context in which, while granting that experience is profitable, he insists it is so only "to him . . . that is diligentlie before instructed with preceptes of well doinge." Experience merely provides an occasion on which to fit the precept — *praeceptum*, "already possessed."

Ascham "proves" his point, moreover, with a flurry of sayings, among them several conspicuous for the solidity of their matter: "An vnhappy Master he is, that is made cunning by manie shippewrakes: A miserable merchant, that is neither riche or wise, but after som bankroutes. It is a costlie wisdom, that is bought by experience." In Ascham's employment of these sayings metaphorical and literal meanings, subject matter and the material world, the impression of moral solidity and its material basis become virtually indistinguishable. Such solid-seeming substance rests on an appeal not only to economic sense but also to linguistic and rhetorical senses: acoustic, syntactic, and figurative. To read Ascham's sayings is to experience, in Nigel Barley's phrase, a "prefabricated unit" for the construction of meaning (p. 741). Such a unit has become at once a piece of evidence and a kind of thing.

A more explicit and negative sense of the prefabricated fixity of the sententious commonplace appears in Gabriel Harvey's *Ciceronianus*, when he speaks scornfully of "such *domiciles* of argument [*argumentorum domicilia*]" and again of the "architects of the aforesaid domiciles." Harvey's choice of words implies the affected artifice of these constructions. In a way that recalls Rabelais and Vives, his making the rhetorical "places" actual houses, and pretentious ones at that, reifies and mocks reliance on them, to which he opposes the true "sources of reason."<sup>88</sup> Harvey's aware-

ness is fitful, however, and it shows how readily one kind of Renaissance awareness of words shades into another, suggesting the significant extent to which such awareness is in flux and rendering an isolated quotation misleading. Often within the *Ciceronianus* Harvey's sense of the materiality of language is unreflective: for example, he speaks of "the architecture of clauses, the shaping of sentences," "the sinews in tropes," and "the muscles and tendons in figures" (pp. 53, 77). His extravagant deployment of these *commonplace* comparisons, moreover, is outdone by William Lewin's laudatory preface to the *Ciceronianus*, which was apparently written by one of like mind: "the body of a speech ought . . . to be like the human body, with some members longer and others shorter; for if anyone have feet the length of the lower legs or fingers the length of the forearms, people would call the fellow's appearance not merely misshapen but monstrous."<sup>89</sup> The corporeality of Lewin's extended comparison is so pronounced and literal that it is difficult not to visualize the actual metamorphosing of a multimembered sentence into a squirming monster. Spenser's monstrous Error come again — a clear case, it would seem, of words that have themselves become things.

But Harvey next sounds very much like Francis Bacon, when he speaks in the *Ciceronianus* of a need to keep Homer's winged words from flying away and endeavors to maintain their "equilibrium by the weightiness of the subject matter."<sup>90</sup> Here A. C. Howell's classic essay on the slippage of the word *res*, "things," toward an exclusively material meaning in Renaissance language theory affords a gloss on Harvey's phrasing: "the term *res*, meaning *subject matter*, seems to [have] become confused with *res* meaning *things*, and the tendency to assume that *things* should be expressible in *words*, or conversely, [that] *words* should represent *things*, not metaphysical and abstract concepts," is clearly discernible.<sup>91</sup> Howell describes the tendency to identify words with *material* things, whether this identity is conceived to be nominal or real, conventional or isomorphic.<sup>92</sup> This slippage is apparent in



the particular use Harvey makes of the metaphor of weightiness in the quotation with which this paragraph begins: he attributes a surprisingly literal force to the word “matter” in the phrase “subject matter,” the stuff required to ground those winged words of Homer. Harvey now seems to find things in language that are really out there in the world.

Vives, in *De tradendis disciplinis* (1531), intimates the materiality of sententious language in another, subtler way. He characterizes proverbs, *sententiae*, and “all those other precepts collected from the recorded [*annotata*: literally, ‘noted down’] observation[s] of wise men which have remained among the people as public wealth in a common exchequer [*publicae opes in aerario communi*].”<sup>93</sup> Although Vives clearly assumes the traditional designation of memory as the treasury of knowledge (*thesaurus*, *scrinium*, *arca*, etc.), his attention focuses specifically on the riches of wisdom preserved in language and particularly in *written* language. He gives such treasure an externalized and impersonal emphasis—“public wealth,” indeed, “material riches [*opes*]” and “common exchequer,” the last a treasury in the specific sense of “a place for keeping public funds,” a meaning associated with that of cognates like *aerarius*, “of, or connected with coinage, money.”<sup>94</sup>

Vives’ treasure, at once societal and material, is well on its way to Ascham’s solid precepts; to Bacon’s comparison of letters, words, and other semiotic signs to “currency” (moneys); and, indeed, eventually to Tilley’s description of modern proverbial knowledge as “the small change of conversation,” cultural capital devalued in a less traditional economy.<sup>95</sup> Fleeting, Vives’ image also touches Rabelais’s jest about words as salable goods in the hands of lawyers, which alludes to a much older tradition of legal venality but subsumes it in a fable whose focal concern is language.<sup>96</sup> Vives’ public treasury aligns itself as well with such quintessentially Renaissance *thesauri*, “treasuries,” as Thomas Cooper’s *Thesaurus linguae Romanae et Britannicae* and Robert Estienne’s *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, both popular printed dic-

tionaries that graphically amass and circulate the necessarily rare or mnemonic achievements, the unique or interior treasures, of the classical and medieval past.<sup>97</sup>

There is further evidence in Renaissance treatments of language of an awareness of proverbial sayings as linguistically distinctive units, things that resist any simple equation with content and reference. Peacham, for example, defines *paroemia*, the proverb, unexceptionally as “a sentence [i.e., *sententia*] or forme of speech” that is “witty, and well proportioned, whereby it may be discerned by some speciall marke and note from common speech” (p. 29). The “well proportioned” form—the proverb—apparently possesses rhetorical or grammatical features that distinguish it from its linguistic surroundings. In 1565, Henri Estienne similarly characterizes the “propriety [*la propriété*]” of the words in proverbs that constitute their charm and force and render them essentially untranslatable: “Aussi en ha chascune langue quelsques-vns [‘proverbes’], lesquels ne se peuuent pas mesmes traduire en sorte aucune, à cause de la propriété des mots esquels consiste la grace du proverbe, ou l’energie.” Inherently equivocal, the word *propriety* (Latin *proprietas*) basically means “property” and therefore both “appropriateness” and “possession.” It implies entities, in this case verbal, that have identities and rights, again a kind of thingness. More than once Estienne urges the necessity “for great discretion” in translating proverbs, for a literal translation (“word for word from one language to another”) either ruins their meaning or spoils their effect (their “grace”), even “as wine [is spoiled when] poured into an ill-smelling vessel.”<sup>98</sup> Notably, Estienne does not report the same difficulty in translating individual words.

To take an additional example in English from the following century, in 1622 Joseph Webbe observes that “euery tongue hath proper and peculiar words, which are neither agreeable to other tongues, or lyable to translation; by which the eleganter sayings, the graver [i.e., ‘weightier’] sentences [i.e., *sententiae*], and the

more vsuall proverbs are especially composed." Elsewhere Webbe concentrates more on the syntax of sententious expressions than on their diction, but once again his point is that their constitution is both distinctive and frozen: "in euery tongue there are many things, which if wee should utter *by any other order* . . . would not run well . . . as euery man may iudge by the clauses, sentences, and especially Prouerbes, of his owne language: which, *transposed* . . . would for the most part lose their pleasing grace, delightful sound, and (many times) their sense, and meaning."<sup>99</sup> Webbe's admiration for the proverb's form and wisdom coincides with his sense of its fixity — what Erasmus describes as its gemlike quality, the integrity of its thingness.<sup>100</sup>

As Webbe employs the word *transpose* (Latin *transponere*), it also indicates his awareness that linguistic formations like proverbs cannot literally be transferred ("carried across" or "translated," Latin *translatum*) from one language to another. His view of proverbs, like Estienne's, contrasts, if only on a limited basis, with what Glyn Norton has characterized as the "age-old illusion" that words are objectively referential and therefore have equivalent meanings in any language: witness the objectivity implied by the idiom of translation — *reddere*, *vertere*, *transferre*, *transponere*, and *translatio* (p. 57). Explicit Cratylism aside, both Aristotelian and Augustinian (i.e., reason-based and will-based) theories hold that a reality external to language validates the meaning of words. Their position implies that differences among languages are merely superficial and do not affect meaning in any real way.<sup>101</sup> Throughout the Renaissance, this is the view dominantly and somewhat surprisingly *stated*, despite the many controversies about meaning attendant on translation of the Bible into the vernacular and the growing recognition of vernacular languages as equivalent in status — theoretically or *de facto* — to Latin. Change usually precedes the popular acknowledgment of it.

As we have seen, however, the view that meaning is prior to

language is also challenged — directly to an extent, and more widely and implicitly through textual practices. Questions about the nature and origin of language remain substantially open. In *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, for example, Spenser aims to re-form the minds of the Celtic-speaking Anglo-Irish by requiring them to speak English: since "the wordes are the Image of the minde," he writes, "the minde must be nedes affected with the wordes[.] So that the speache beinge Irishe the harte must nedes be Irishe."<sup>102</sup> Clearly, for him words constitute meaning to a considerable extent. The same holds true for Bacon, who endeavors to disabuse men of their belief "that their reason governs words," because "words react on the understanding."<sup>103</sup> And it would appear to apply to John Donne, when he observes that "a perpetual perplexity in the words cannot choose but cast a perplexity upon the things."<sup>104</sup>

To exemplify the "age-old illusion" of objective reference, Norton cites the listing by Renaissance language manuals of words such as Latin *arbor* and French *arbre* in columns of equivalents, which imply "an identical conceptual unity" (pp. 128–29). While this may have been — and most often still is — the case, other more distinctive kinds of listings lend themselves to somewhat different stories. A common practice in English-Latin dictionaries, for instance, is simply to reverse the order of Latin headword and English translation that is found in a Latin-English dictionary. This practice often leaves intact the remainder of the English entry, including such information as grammatical data about the Latin word (now the definition, rather than the term to be defined) or a string of defining English synonyms as an extension of the English headword.<sup>105</sup> It exhibits the extent to which in a lexical context the translation equivalents and the headword, quite apart from their referents, could be considered fixed entities and *in themselves* reversible objects. It thus suggests one way in which the popularity of the printed dictionary both reflected and affected ideas about the substantiality of language. As subsequent

chapters will indicate, this was not the only way. Within the pages of Renaissance dictionaries a complexity of attitudes about language rivaling those of Rabelais can be uncovered. Some consideration of the relation of Latin to English during the period will precede my pursuit of them, however; in the absence of a comprehensive Renaissance dictionary solely in English, lexical Latin was normally (and normatively) the language on which bilingual English dictionaries were either modeled or based directly.

## Latin and Lexicons

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The frequent use of Latin, normally in a distinctive style or typeface, in Renaissance *sententiae* and inscriptions and in biblical and classical quotations can itself contribute to an impression of their authority and monumentality, their status not only as things but also as fixed and frozen things. While Latin remained the language of learning throughout the Renaissance period, its status was slowly shifting, and the perception of it as in some sense a “dead” language was emerging. The significance of its use in sayings and in citations embedded in vernacular texts — sermons, tracts, or poems — was bound to reflect these developments. Consider the use of the word *locus* even today in such a phrase as “the *locus* of meaning”: in an English environment, the Latin word, although familiar, has distinction and emphasis; its associations imply learning, tradition, even logic, and it conveys an authority that most English equivalents would lack. It has “weight” and “substance” in a culture that (still) valorizes Latin.<sup>1</sup>

Even while Humanist education sought to revitalize soci-