

I am seeking time and resources to complete my book-in-progress. My subject is English Renaissance romance, particularly the works of Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney; my claim is that these books, so regularly read as didactic fictions, must be seen as *anti-didactic*, shaped fundamentally by their struggle against the culture of teaching out of which they were born. This polemical reversal acknowledges something that criticism of *Arcadia* or *The Faerie Queene* has never quite faced up to: that these ancestors of the *Bildungsroman* are preoccupied with the representation of educational malfunction and abuse. They were written at a moment of great upheaval in English schooling, both an explosion in new school foundations and a crisis of confidence in the promises of the new learning; a moment, moreover, when the commerce between poetics and humanist pedagogy was such that basic literary concepts like *imitatio* or exemplarity were equally techniques of practical classroom instruction. School – as a scene of reading, a legacy of mental habits, a political space and an instrument in a larger, national politics – defined how and what poetry should teach in unprecedented ways. This is a study of how romance became a language for critiquing the means and ends of the new pedagogy, and, more deeply, the ways of thinking and reading that it instituted.

Considering romance in relation to late sixteenth-century humanism is not in itself a new project; the novelty of my study arises from the way that existing strands of work have failed to recognize one another. An older tradition has seen these terms as mutually shaping but incommensurate opposites: romance is a holiday or rebellion, education a form of discipline and repentance. Critics interested in how humanist habits of mind might actually infuse romance narrative itself have underestimated the skeptical treatment they receive there. More theoretically minded accounts of the “education of the reader” pay little attention to what “education” meant in the period. I began my own thinking about the problem somewhere

between the second and third positions, until *The Faerie Queene* first compelled me to acknowledge that I was seeing much more resistance to teaching than teaching itself.

The greatest methodological challenge (and a missing element in so many accounts of literary didacticism) has been conceptualizing education itself. How is the activity, or the outcome, of learning represented – by the teacher or by the poet? I regard it as a loosely and contingently aggregated set of practices centered on but not exclusive to the schoolroom. My analytical categories are drawn from the pedagogical manuals, schoolbooks and literary criticism of the period, but if the project has a theoretical muse it is Wittgenstein. Ordinary language philosophy has helped me think about education as an *epistemological* problem: to see that the need to *prove* a student has learned something (so acute for the precarious orthodoxy of humanism in the grammar schools) generates implicit models of mind, and that those models may denature what we set out to teach in the first place. Versions of catechism and commonplace book, for example, favor the idea that education and even ethics are a matter of memory, accessible to student and teacher in the act of recitation. The resulting concept of virtue is constrained by what a particular pedagogical technique can make manifest.

Reading English education for such fictions of mind opens new ways of conceiving its relation to romance narratives, themselves ambitious, in Spenser's phrase, to "fashion a gentleman." My thinking about these problems rests on the foundation of my dissertation, but the work I have done since points the way to further research and substantial revision before I have a manuscript for publication. I will begin with a new introduction, laying out some of the concepts I have just discussed with reference to a wide range of educational and rhetorical texts of the sixteenth century. This opening chapter will explore in particular the forces that shape the deep assumptions, the fictions of mind, behind everyday classroom protocols.

The next chapter, “John Lyly’s Anatomy of Experience,” will frame the generic focus of the book – why romance? – by reading Lyly’s *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* and *Euphues and His England*, two of the century’s most popular fictions. His sophisticated narrative amounts to a laboratory within which he can test the authority of an *education by experience* – an education by the accident and error of the romance plot – against the humanist training so conspicuous in his style. Romance allows for the cultivation of a kind of empiricism, and part of the work of the chapter will be to establish the relation between this mode of literary experiment and the countercurrents in late-century humanism that would ultimately give rise to the New Science.

Chapters Three and Four are closer to being final drafts. “The Schoolmaster in Arcadia” explores the pedagogy of sententious maxims in Sidney’s *Old Arcadia*; “The Ethics of Example” looks at teaching by example in the 1590 *Faerie Queene*. The next chapter, “The Arcadian Encyclopedia,” will describe how, in revising his romance, Sidney turned away from the schoolmaster-narrator of the old *Arcadia* to a taxonomy of knowledge based on Ramist logic and diagram – a way of escaping the problems of authority inherent in personalized instruction by rewriting his book as a kind of encyclopedia. The sixth chapter – on the pedagogy of punishment in the 1596 *Faerie Queene* – has been published in part, but much remains to be done on the relation between classroom discipline and wider problems of criminal justice and its own didactic rationales.

These sketches give a sense of the organization of the whole: each of the central chapters pairs an educational concept with a romance text, offering both an account of the function of that concept in the larger culture and a reading of how it is taken up, and transformed, by a particular poetic imagination. The book will close with a coda on Milton. At the end of *Paradise Lost*, when Adam and Eve wander out into the fallen world, there is reason to hope that by their very

wandering they will learn what they need to learn. What had changed that Milton could write those lines is a puzzle I am still trying to solve; what is clear is that for the romancers of the 1580's and 90's, there is no moment of such confidence in the instructive power of their own literary mode. They wrote works pitched not only against received means of teaching, but against teaching itself. The primal scene of this disaffection was school: all the learning and reading of their university years and their adult lives was set upon its foundation, and it is that foundation to which their skeptical narratives return, again and again, in the countless scenes of flawed instruction that constitute their plots. By this negative way they made themselves, despite themselves, among the most profound educational thinkers in the English language.