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The Aesthetics of Discovery:
Text, Image, and the Performance of Knowledge in the Early-Modern Book

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Abstract

How does the book-object in early modernity participate in the representation of scientific knowledge? How was the reader meant to approach the book and to comprehend its contents? This project starts from the contention that scientific knowledge is not a product simply to be deposited into unmarked containers and transmitted unproblematically. On the contrary, the book, whether literary or scientific, actively shapes and invents objects of scientific knowledge. Sensory, affective and cognitive ways in which the reader is expected to approach the book and its contents are implicit in its formatting of text and image, not to mention margins, presentational material and indices.

This project draws from literary and natural scientific traditions of the French and Italian Renaissance in order to study how the early-modern book forms and performs scientific knowledge in various ways. Compelling the reader to interrupt his or her reading and to explore the book’s text and images as if they were objects in their own right, the book-object strives to imitate the experience and method of scientific discovery for the early-modern reader. To this end, touch, appetition, and bodily awareness become as important as sight and critical reasoning in a procedural approach and apprehension of knowledge in and of the book-object. An “aesthetics of discovery”, formed by the book and performed by the reader, is implicit in the book’s careful articulations of text and image.
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To my parents

whose unflagging support
made everything possible.
Introduction:

Towards an Early-Modern Aesthetics of Discovery

Prelude

Every time I make my way – bleary-eyed after a long trans-Atlantic flight – back down into Paris from the aéroport Charles de Gaulle along the RER B, I am charmed and reanimated by the feminine voice which, as always, faithfully announces every stop. The dots along the blue line are long familiar to me and I can picture what they would look like seated at a train window – Le Parc des Expositions, Drancy, La Stade de France – after which a tunnel dives under the périphérique into the historical heart of Paris; unless, perhaps, I’m lucky enough to catch the direct train which skips the Région parisienne’s vast banlieues, and coasts non-stop from Charles de Gaulle to La Gare du Nord.

Whatever the trip, the same maternal voice accompanies my journey. With a graceful inflection, she asks each time we roll into the station – “Sevran-Beaudottes?” – inviting me to consider descending upon the next “pretty dot”, just this once. Or she’ll inquire with the same
coy play of fascination – “La Gare du Nord?” – bringing into view a wide ramification of destinations (and the Thalys publicité: “retrouvez votre âme d’explorateur grâce à Thalys!”). When we approach Notre Dame her voice sounds almost provocative – “Saint Michel – Notre Dame?” – and I am made to wonder: “Who is Saint Michel? What is Notre Dame?” Nevertheless, each of her questions – mysterious, inviting or provocative – are always answered, and the suspense never lasts too long. When we pull into Sevran-Beaudottes I stay seated, suitcase between my knees, and explore with a perusing eye through the large, dirty train window, while the same voice assures, following her suspenseful question: “Sevran-Beaudottes.” At the Gare du Nord the many trips which had opened up with her question collapse into one when she affirms, pulling into the station: “Gare du Nord.” And when she inquires after the very possibility of someone called “Saint Michel” and something called “Notre Dame”, I am assured that whatever they are, they’re still up there on the surface, when at last she answers her own question: “Saint Michel - Notre Dame.” My own trip ends with a final tease before the doors open at my destination: “Luxembourg? … Luxembourg.”

Not long ago, blissfully absorbed in an early edition of Belon, or, perhaps, turning the textured pages of a Songe de Poliphile during one of my countless happy visits to the Houghton library, I was reminded of these trips to and from Paris on the RER, and of that peculiar voice with its curious lilt. True, as I paged those (by then) familiar books, I am pretty sure the reading room was not gliding along any tracks. When, after I’d shut my books and returned them to the librarian, and had opened the library doors to step into the falling dusk, I never hoped to stop into Poliphile’s Gardens of Eleuthyrilda, nor did I ever encounter Belon’s hippopotamus in the grand menagerie of the Grand Sultan of Constantinople. And though Belon, in his Observations,
took me many times from Crete to Lemnos and on to Constantinople and Alexandria, there was
no physical way I could step off his itinerary to range a little wider from his singular trail, as
François Maspéro blazed his own path parallel and orthogonal to the RER B line for *Les
Passagers du Roissy-Express*. Yet the illustrated books I have explored for this study do their
best to simulate the possibility of alternate paths, of personal readings, of leisurely views. As
absorbing on page one, as on page one hundred, they invite the reader of any time to hop in
and out, to dwell on a detail, take in a folio-sized illustration, or link obliquely this text with that
image. Like the cradle of a car, the book bears our imaginary travels which we weave from its
text and images. And like a train-car, the illustrated book not only offers its sights through the
frame of the page, it also comes with its own stops and starts, jolts and swerves, bringing us
back to our body. For, the books I have studied most carefully don’t only offer the possibility,
lying stationary at a given page, of diverse creative tangents; every page turn, too, is a new
transition, a potential surprise, every discontinuity from text to image – and back again – an
event. In such a way, they construct their own space of travel, though there are no doors to
step in or out, off or on. Belon appears to be tracing a path, yet his books are designed to plot
objects like places, destinations, departure points. “Constantinople?” the book asks, “a
dragon?”. And while we wonder, turning the page, an image, a diagram, a tactically placed bit
of text answers the question: “Constantinople.” (Here is a map...); “A dragon.” (Beware...)

“Luxembourg?” “Luxembourg.”

We’re here. Now it’s time to explore.

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Of the texts that we have chosen, two major characteristics have emerged over the course of our study. They shall be our guiding thread in the writing that follows. The first is that knowledge is performed in the book through deliberate articulation of text and image. When treating the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (1499), the Songe de Poliphile (1546) and Belon’s books on natural history (1551-1555), we shall seek to understand how scientific knowledge is not only deposited, as it were, in the text, but how it is dramatized in their woodcut images and surrounding text. In the books we have focused on, we argue that natural science is staged upon and through their material support. We shall accordingly take the perspective that these texts are not merely texts, susceptible to abstraction from the page, but rather texts which negotiate and run through the book, interacting with images as well as paratexts, margins and other elements to generate an object with which the reader must contend, think and discover.

The second major characteristic of the texts we have chosen is the critical role of the body in their aesthetics of discovery. Indeed embodied discovery and knowledge may be understood as a corollary of the performance of knowledge and the aesthetics of discovery in the book. The reader’s body, with his senses of sight and of touch stimulated by the book-object, his appetition and finally his more complex emotions, is implicated in a drama of knowledge inscribed in the deployment of the book. The reading body, moreover, is a locus of assimilation and contention. Knowledge, to be properly apprehended, must be embodied, aligning as it were all three levels of the Platonic soul. As such it is as unamenable to the mind alone as it is equally unamenable to the unregulated senses. These visual texts seek to bring the reader to knowledge through imbricated work on the book and on the body.
A fundamental tension resides at the heart of the aesthetics of discovery between the scientific object and its textual and visual representations. Frontispieces across the sixteenth-century betray the fantasy of handing the fruits of knowledge through the page. While seventeenth-century title pages celebrated instruments of mediated knowledge – among early examples, we may point to that with which Béroalde de Verville introduces his idiosyncratic re-edition of Poliphile (Le tableau des riches inventions..., Paris: Guillemot, 1600) or the frontispiece of the Nova Reperta¹ – the title page of the Songe de Poliphile (Paris: Kerver, 1546) or, less elaborate, that of Belon’s Observations (Paris: Corrozet, 1555) positively brim with autumnal fruits as though the reader had simply to reach out a hand and immediately pluck what he would know. These frontispieces are allegories of knowledge close at hand, and the pages of natural history books accordingly display objects of knowledge on the page – we have only to think of Belon’s Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins... (1551) – as though they were at the market or atop a dissecting table. These visual displays are the focal points, or perspectival objects², of a pursuit of knowledge through the book. The tension that emerges then pits the “real” object of knowledge outside the book and the representation in text and image of that object cradled, as it were, within the book’s margins. A constant hesitation in regards to where the object of knowledge resides – outside of the text or couched within – may be discerned in the books under our consideration. What then, the book asks, is the object of

¹ Deduced to and most likely commissioned by Luigi Alamanni between 1587-1589, published in its entirety (title page plus twenty moreprints of recent discoveries or “inventions”) between 1599-1603. See Dackerman, Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe, pp. 38-45.

² Guy Rosolato’s introduces his psychoanalytic concept of the perspectival object in Relation d’inconnu (Gallimard, 1978), esp. p. 27 ff and passim. We understand the perspectival object as “the concept that shifts the spectator from a passive role to that of an engaged traveler who moves through the time and space of a given body of words, images, and sensation.” (Conley 1996, p. 17) For further bibliography on the perspectival object, see infra.
knowledge? Is it the referent in a utopian *hors-texte* – a “real” Greek column of which the *Hypnerotomachia* is a shadow, an exotic fish swimming in its element only alluded to by Belon – or is it the shaped material of the book? The texts we have chosen to study hesitate between two “proper” places of the object of knowledge: nature and the book.

The aesthetics of the book-object animate this epistemological tension between the scientific object and its representation. By the 1550s, a naturalistic gesture spearheaded by the books of Pierre Belon became the norm in works of natural history. Despite a book culture in which prints were copied and shared widely without always checking their faithfulness to the objects they were meant to represent³, naturalists advertised an object’s visual representation, to quote Belon, “quasi comme si elle estoit presente”. This new naturalistic aesthetics, already under way in the successful German herbals of Leonhart Fuchs and Otto Brunfels, simulated a face-to-face encounter with *naturalia*. A naturalist such as Belon could proudly proclaim that his images were “retirees du naturel” in both senses of the term: pulled out from nature and represented according to nature. Illustrations thus become critical focal points; objects to think with on par with the object of science they represent. Their naturalistic status however inevitably points to a source beyond the book, whether that source be generic nature, or a natural event. The visual object in these books endlessly disrupts any eventual cohesion between text and image. It is in the fractures of these epistemological gaps that the book consists of an object with which to think and experiment.

Pierio Valeriano (1477-1558) may have captured best the aspirations and consequences of this new naturalistic aesthetics when he likened the material in his book to a variegated and astonishing catch pulled in from the sea. Addressing a patron (Giovanni Grimani, Patriarch of Aquileia from 1545 to 1550), the Horapollo enthusiast declares:

“Je vous ay donc envoyé ces deux poissons & tout ce qu'en les peschans s'est trouvé quant & eux au Reth: ie ne veux pas iuger si ces choses sont bonnes ou mauvaises: car aussi tost que le Reth a esté tiré, ie les vous ay faict tenir telles qu'elles sont [...].”

Belon and many contemporary naturalists would surely have consented to this delightful metaphor (indeed Valeriano’s “reth” echoes a similar net motif in Belon’s *Histoire naturelle*). The scientist in this picture is one who embarks on an adventure to find something in particular yet remains open and curious to the fortuitous and the surprising, delighting at the *varietas* of nature, or *varietas mundi*.

Pierre Belon – while ostensibly an advisor to Gabriel d’Aramon, ambassador of France to the Sublime Porte – follows a similar methodology of attention and distraction, allowing for fruitful sidetracks to nourish his research:

“Puis donc que de propos deliberé mon desir me tiroit là, pour les trouver ou par monts, ou par vaulx, plaines campagnes, & ombrageuses forests en diverses parties du monde, mon intention m'a pas esté du tout frustrée. Car en les cherchant & reconnoissant, plusieurs autres choses d'abondant se sont offertes à moy tant en Asie qu'en Grece,

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5 For the aesthetic and epistemological pull of natural *varietas* in Belon and Renaissance natural history, we look to Beuchat, Robin. “Formes diverses de la varietas mundi: les Observations de Pierre Belon (1553),” *Revue suisse des littératures romanes* 56 (2009), pp. 139-158.
From this point of view, the book is a vehicle of *naturalia* as they are encountered by the author. The naturalist’s judgement is suspended (“je ne veux pas juger si ces choses sont bonnes ou mauvaises”) and information about the object is transmitted “succinctement”. A naturalistic aesthetics of discovery claims to put the reader face-to-face with the surprising object as it would be pulled from the teeming sea, or encountered in exotic lands. The reader himself must mirror the author’s scientific approach, positioned in an ethically “indifferent” way vis-à-vis the object of knowledge: a “naïve” (read “native” and “natural”) stance which will be further picked up and elaborated with Montaigne in his project of self-portraiture, and formulated in his address to the reader. In this way, textual and visual representations are presented in the book as objects to think with in their own right.

How is the early-modern reader expected to practice these scientific books? How is he meant to acquire the knowledge they claim to deploy? The passages just cited from Valeriano and Belon could suggest a certain passivity vis-à-vis the scientific object drawn from nature and deposited, as it were, within the margins of the book. As suggested by the ripe autumnal fruits of a sixteenth-century frontispiece, the reader might simply be invited to open a book on architecture, such as the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, or a book on natural science such as Belon’s, and pluck a kernel of knowledge from its pages. But Valeriano’s metaphor of scientific

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6 *Observations* (Paris: Corrozet, 1555), e*1v, my emphasis.

7 The English translation of Rembert Dodoens, *A Niewe herball; or the Historie of plantes* (London, 1578) exhorts the reader from the outset in the opening address: “To the friendly and indifferent Reader...” (*iiiir).*
information offered to the reader pell-mell and indifferent to its utility ("Ea utilia essent, an inutilia, nolui meum esse iudicium...") implicitly demands of the reader a whole new kind of engagement. As each of the authors with whom we are principally concerned feigns a kind of retraction or disengagement, the reader is left to his own devices vis-à-vis the book-object. Faced with the object of knowledge as a naturalist may be faced with a new, unrecognized plant, he is pressed to find his own practice of knowledge in the making, inventing his own use for the objects he comes across. As in his Notebooks, Leonardo da Vinci celebrates man’s invention of an “infinite number of compounds” out of nature’s “production of elementary things,” so these books are laboratories for the reader to work and play with.

Hence images in the books we shall study – whether they be visual representations of architectural designs, pictures of animals in books of natural history or ekphrases shot through with enargeia – are part of a more complex rhetoric in which the reader is called to participate in the production of knowledge. Paradoxically it seems, the striking naturalism of Belon’s fish, or the vividness of Montaigne’s exempla, does not permit the reader to casually access the truth of the matter immediately. The reader is, like Poliphile, a wanderer and a hunter – in the sense of Will Eamon’s epistemology of the hunt8 – ferretting out the truth between the pages, forging correspondences in text and image which the reader or editor may not have even intended. Indeed the immediacy of certain images (exemplified by the case of a coiled sea

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snake in Belon appearing to spring out of the page\textsuperscript{9}) cautions the reader against hasty consumption of knowledge in the book. The reader in these books is positioned and indeed disciplined to be a “veritatis diligens indagator” — to borrow an apt phrase from the early modern botanist, Leonhart Fuchs: “a diligent tracker of truth”\textsuperscript{10} — called to piece together images and text to arrive at scientific discovery.

This agonism between the early modern reader and the book, dramatically productive of knowledge, will be our chief concern in the pages that follow. What implied interactions between reader and text may we discern by considering the careful articulation of text and image? What attitude towards the object of knowledge may we infer from the perambulations of Poliphile, the protagonist of the \textit{Hypnerotomachia Poliphili}; and may we draw parallels with the quasi-myth of the natural historian \textit{cum} adventurer embodied by a host of sixteenth-century science writers from Pierre Belon to Charles de l’Ecluse? Though a first assumption in the age of the \textit{Adagia} could be that the early modern book is a reader’s cornucopia, our task will be to explore these important illustrated texts which show the extent to which the book could also be presented as a material with which to construct knowledge through the cognitive as well as imaginative work of the reader.

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins}, (Paris : 1551), f20r. The power of this image may be attested by its subsequent reproduction in future natural history books including Conrad Gessner’s \textit{Historiae animalium lib. IV} (p. 90), Ippolito Salviani’s \textit{Aquitallium animalium historiae} and Adrian Coenen’s extraordinary manuscript \textit{Visboek} (Fish Book) who quotes the accompanying text in Belon’s \textit{Nature et diversité des poissons} (Paris: 1555), pp. 153-154 (where the sea snake picture is reproduced). Coenen also dedicates two pages of his \textit{Visboek} (f133v-134r) to an epitome of Belon’s rediscovery of the dolphin.

My work cuts across disciplinary lines, striving to find shared patterns of organization in a diverse set of early modern books. To this end, the concept of diagram as elaborated by John Bender and Michael Marrinan will be constantly hovering in the wings. Bender and Marrinan elaborated a wide-ranging cultural use of diagram with its loose, user-oriented organization of information in a number of Enlightenment texts, beginning with Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. A diagram, Bender and Marrinan define,

“is a proliferation of manifestly selective packets of dissimilar data correlated in an explicitly process-oriented array that has some of the attributes of a representation but is situated in the world like an object.”

The *Encyclopédie*, for example, with its alphabetization coupled with a system of cross-references, establishes “a tension between encyclopedic closure and a serialized accumulation of knowledge” which it becomes the user’s vocation to activate. Diderot and d’Alembert *Encyclopédie* represents the exemplary model of an “emerging ability [of the book-object] to concretize process”, namely affective and cognitive process. Yet already with Fuchs’s *De Historia stirpium* (1542), alphabetic organization broke with the closed form of traditional encyclopedias (which were themselves hybrid as the structure of the incunabular *Hortus Sanitatis* will attest) and Sachiko Kusukawa has demonstrated the open, process-oriented construction of knowledge in Fuchs’s great herbarium. Belon’s pages too, like those of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, “are situated in the world like objects: they foster many potential points of view, from several different angles, with a mixed sense of scale that implies nearness

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alongside distance.” Belon’s readers must contend with upsetting shifts in scale, uncertain color schemes, and pictures which run over margins and, as it were, beyond the book. The vivid exempla of Montaigne’s Des Coches, to name only the most obvious, similarly demand the reader to contend with upsetting shifts in perspective and scale. My work tries to discern process-oriented patterns in these early modern books which correlate text and image in an attempt to both organize knowledge and leave it open – “performable” – to the reader.

In Culture of Diagram, Bender and Marrinan further show that a userly performance of knowledge puts a particular focus on the role of the body in a pursuit of science. They compare the readerly work upon an open-ended diagram to the experience of an actively engaged theater-goer as conceived by Diderot and Marmontel13. Theatrical tableaux, like visual data in the book-object, encourage an affective correlation of the audible text with visual cues, and it becomes the theater-goer’s vocation to tap into their sensibilité “to unite a succession of tableaux and trigger profound feelings”. Likewise, I will argue, reading a book like the Songe de Poliphile is a theatrical event in which both cognitive and affective modes of apprehension come into play. In Diderot’s vision of the theater, the audience “literally completed the playwright’s work,” presupposing “a kind of audience immersion in the expressive mechanics of the stage.” The play as such does not exist without its spectator, and the Songe de Poliphile cannot be properly understood independently of its actuation by the reader. Book and reader are dynamically coupled in a creative and open-ended process of knowledge fertilized by affect and imagination.

In different ways, Pierre Belon too participates in a theatrical presentation of knowledge which takes the reader’s body into account. The theater of Belon’s natural history has consequences for the epistemological status of the image as it hesitates between accident and form, instance and type. Belon presents his animal illustrations as typical and yet frames them dramatically as encounters, leaving it up to the reader to negotiate between two forms of knowledge: theory and experiment. The role of the reader’s body, meanwhile, takes center stage. Indeed, as we shall see, Belon indicts his reader on account of an overly luxurious approach to natural knowledge and the first book of his compendious œuvre becomes a prolegomenon to a sensually-disciplined approach to the pursuit of science. As in Diderot’s dramaturgy, the reader of Belon’s *Histoire naturelle* first immerses himself in a theatrical articulation of text and image in order finally to purge an unnatural – indeed monstrous – scientific approach and begin constructing knowledge within the book.

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The primary texts which I will focus on in this study are the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, first published in 1499 in Venice by Aldus Manutius; the *Songe de Poliphile* published in French some fifty years later and wholesale reinvention of the Manutian original; and the works of Pierre Belon. Of Belon, his first book, the *Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins*, printed in 1551 just five years after the *Songe*, will occupy most of our time; while his *Observations de plusieurs singularitez & choses memorables*... (1553) will provide further material in our task of elucidating Belon’s book-bound aesthetics of discovery. While Belon’s
entire œuvre – several volumes printed in the years between 1550 and 1558 – will be sourced to paint a picture of Belon’s practice of natural history and his deployment of the natural object in the book, his early works of 1551 and 1553 will interest us the most. It is in and through these texts that Belon traces most clearly a methodology which will inform all of his later work.

I first came across the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili and the Discours du Songe de Poliphile in a course co-taught at Harvard by my mentors Tom Conley and Henri Zerner. In the course we paid special attention to the development of prints and typography in incunabular and sixteenth-century books. Colonna’s Venetian Hypnerotomachia Poliphili – still reputed as a “chef-d’œuvre de typographie et de gravure”\textsuperscript{14} – was at the top of the bill, along with the reinvention of Colonna’s and Aldus Manutius’ incunabular book, the Discours du Songe de Poliphile, translated by Jean Martin and co-edited by Jean Kerver. While we focused in on the evolution of the woodcut series and the paginal formatting from the Italian book to the French, it was only when I sat down and read through the Songe – and later the Hypnerotomachia – that I experienced the distinct theatrical deployment of the two books. Woodcut images are placed strategically to punctuate dramatic moments or compel further study; the narrowing of cul-de-lampes imitate developments in plot, tying them to readerly experience; and text and image combine to build an implicit epistemology of the book-object and the knowledge it both offers and withholds. I was especially struck by the dizzying mise-en-abysme of the book itself. For, the peripateias of its hero, as he encountered and studied the fictional objects of the plot, mirrored and shaped my own experience of the book through its visual and textual forms; reading through the eyes, ears and even body of the hero, Poliphile, forced me to consider

what it meant to approach the book not as an abstract container of text and visual material, but as a dramatic adventure in which I was the protagonist as much as the hero in the steps of whom I was treading.

It was in this same course that I was introduced to Pierre Belon through his celebrated woodcut illustration of two skeletons – a bird’s and a human’s – keyed to the text which compared and contrasted their structures (fig. 4.1). This early presentation of the human frame in Belon’s *Histoire de la nature des oyseaux* (1555), adjacent to the object of investigation is emblematic, I soon discovered, of the role of the reader’s body in his book-bound hunt for natural objects of knowledge. When I came across the *Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins*, I was struck by the book’s aesthetic and narrative dimensions as much as its scientific ambition. The pictures in the book were remarkably naturalistic, representing their objects “in the flesh”, and offering each picture as a specimen, rather than a species; an event of discovery, rather than an object already discovered. The naturalistic pictures of fish and other animals, singular moments in the deployment of the book, reminded me of the *Hypnerotomachia’s* and *Songe’s* insistence on the natural basis of each architectural structure, hinted at by the vegetation growing profusely out of building facades and by streams of water flowing through pipes and fountains. In both these architectural works and in Belon’s natural history however, the reader is called to grapple with the appearance of an object in the book, making sense of it with the clues which the book places at his disposal in surrounding text and image. The agonism between reader and book-object which leads to knowledge, is dramatized in the way text and image are articulated. From a sensual perception of the objects represented in the book often provoked by the element of readerly surprise, to a cognitive understanding and construction of
objects of knowledge through correlations in text and image, these books dramatize the procedure of scientific discovery.

In the first three chapters of what follows, our goal will be to explore the “aesthetics of discovery” implicit in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and the *Songe de Poliphile*. How – the first chapter asks – does the hero of these books, Poliphile apprehend the objects he would know? What, in particular, are the roles of the senses – sight and touch, especially (which the reader can see allegorized as the eagles and turtles on the frontispiece of the *Songe de Poliphile*)? Does the sensual “economy” of Poliphile’s experience tend towards a valorization of one perceptual pole over another? Within the oneiric thought-experiment of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Poliphile will exemplify a dynamic mode of scientific discovery shot through with Eros and shifting from tactility to vision and back again. While commentators have underlined an ostensible celebration of vision in the adventures of its hero, close reading demonstrates that vision for the earth-bound Poliphile (and for the reader) is decidedly imperfect. Poliphile teaches us that discovery of necessity implicates the body, and the *Hypnerotomachia* offers as an emblematic process of discovery the first structure which appears to its hero: The great pyramid. From a distance, Poliphile, like a surveyor, can indeed discern a lot: the proportions of the structure, the number of its steps, the disposition of its elements, in a word, the *ratio* of its façade. But from afar, the *possibility* of such a structure remains unfathomable. Geometrical knowledge comes at the cost both of physical alienation – like the monocular eagle soaring at great heights – and of the dreamer’s ignorance who wonders before his vision: how is this feasible? It is only with the adventure of touch that proportion breaks down and begins to

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15 Poliphile is on several occasions alluded to as terrigena. See infra.
reveal its material potentiality. Poliphile ventures up and into the objects which appear to him
in order to “reinvent” them in the “laboratory of his imagination”\(^16\). Touch, and the
involvement of the body in the process of discovery, while allegorized as a chthonian, chaotic
force, is foundational in the epistemology of the *Hypnerotomachia* to the possibility of
knowledge.

The second chapter focuses in on the book-object and asks how readers used (and
abused) its text and images in an effort to make sense of the objects in the book. The
*Hypnerotomachia* drew heavily from a plethora of sources – both ancient and contemporary –
from which it cobbles together its invented objects of knowledge. Readers were encouraged,
accordingly, not only to follow and recreate the objects of knowledge invented in the book, but
also to plumb the sources of its intertexts, as annotations in the margins of one copy of the
*Hypnerotomachia* in Modena, Italy have shown. The Modena reader, studied by Dorothea
Stichel\(^17\), demonstrates a mode of reading which approaches the *HP* as a working source-book
of scientific knowledge. The *Hypnerotomachia*, for this reader at least, is not merely a work of
fiction in the mode of the Italian *romanzo*; nor, however, is it a compendium of natural
historical *topoi* from Aristotle to Alberti. As such, it encourages the reader to approach the text
from the margins as a scientific field which opens up lines of questioning. A reader of the *Songe
de Poliphile* who left tell-tale underlines and one marginal note in a Houghton copy\(^18\) suggests
yet another way of approaching the book. Motivated by the presentational material, the reader

\(^16\) “officina dilla imaginativa” (*HP*, f.s2v) and Godwin, 283.

\(^17\) Stichel 1998, “Reading the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* in the Cinquecento”.

\(^18\) Typ 515.46.296, bound with *Roland Furieux* (Paris, 1544) and *Premier livre de l’histoire & ancienne cronique de Gerard d’Euphrate* (Paris, 1549).
may approach the *Songe de Poliphile* as an invitation not only to philological work, but to suspenseful play, encouraged by the articulation of its objects of knowledge on the page. This reader appears to have heeded the call of Jean Martin (the editor of the *Songe de Poliphile* and author of an address to the reader) to search for objects of knowledge within the margins of the book, rather than turning to ancient authority and other intertexts for comparison and confirmation. The book, in this mode of reading, becomes a self-contained theater of knowledge production.

In the third chapter, we turn to a more detailed exploration of these books’ *mise-en-page*. Myriad formatting choices – from the presentational material to the placement of woodcuts, and from catchwords at the bottom of pages to text that introduces or follows woodcut images – will suggest how the editors of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and the *Songe de Poliphile* articulated different modes of reading. Both books suggest an embodied apprehension of the objects of knowledge they stage in text and image. But while the *Hypnerotomachia*, with its generous white space in the margins and woodcut illustrations, offers a greater degree of play and readerly recreation, the *Songe* fills its illustrations with narrative and ornamental detail. As a result, while the *HP* offers a more positive role to the embodied apprehension of its objects, the *Songe* exacerbates the underlying tensions between scientific and affective modes of reading.

Belon will use this underlying tension to his advantage in his first book on natural history. The second half of our study – comprised of chapters four and five – will be devoted to Belon’s first two publications and his dramatic articulation of text and image in representing objects of natural history. Chapter four explores Belon’s understudied yet remarkable first
work, the *Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins*, in which the naturalist constructs his book not as a repository of natural knowledge, but as a singular event of rediscovery. Belon exploits the same kinds of formatting effects as the ones we explore in the *Hypnerotomachia* and the *Songe*, especially in his placement of woodcut images and the text introducing or following them. In such a way, the reader must contend with punctual elements of surprise, and he must make sense of implied sensual correlations between text and image, especially of touch and taste. But while exploiting these features, Belon is also aware that they may be used as objects of excessive aesthetic pleasure, as our analysis of the *Songe* will suggest. Drawing his reader in with the allure of his naturalistic images, yet charging any excessive appetite with strong taboos, Belon’s *Histoire naturelle* sets up a drama of discovery which implicates the reader as strongly as any tragic play.

The fifth and final chapter further explores Belon’s proposed mode of “observing” natural objects in the book. Placing Belon’s work in its historical context will allow us to appreciate how dramatically the representation in text and image of natural objects – of animals especially – changed in the 1550s. In the *Hortus Sanitatis* (1491), and its French translation the *Jardin de Santé* (1539), the iconographic representation of animals encouraged a text-bound knowledge of natural objects. The reader could confer with intertexts, as the Modenese reader had worked out his philological puzzles from his copy of the *Hypnerotomachia*. Or he could check the illustration which confirmed the distinguishing features cited in each article. Belon’s pictures, by contrast, destabilize such a closed, text-bound reading. The reader must learn to contend with new illustrations, discovering them through the accompanying text. “Observing” natural objects in the book means attending to a new,
disciplined mode of reading natural history in text and image which properly combines affective and cognitive apprehension.
“Architecture is the ultimate erotic object, because an architectural act, brought to the level of excess, is the only way to reveal both the traces of history and its own immediate experiential truth.”

Bernard Tschumi

“Crawling on, chapter by chapter, I sensed, rather than saw, a growing number of details that I was to encounter later in my work on alchemy.” Thus Carl Jung characterized his experience reading the curious *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a lavishly-illustrated book telling of its hero Poliphile’s numerous encounters with architectural marvels within the narrative frame of a medieval love-quest for his long-lost Polia. The idea that the *Hypnerotomachia* contained alchemical secrets – suggested by its allegorical frame and its many illustrations of pseudo-

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21 First published by Aldus Manutius in 1499 under the full title *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, vbi hvmana omnia non nisi somnivm esse docet atque obiter plurima scitu quam digna commemorat* [Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, where it is taught that all human things are nothing but a dream and where, along the way, many things worth knowing are fully evoked]. The *HP* was republished only once in Italy before the twentieth century, and that was by Manutius’ sons under the translated title *La Hypnerotomachia di Poliphile: cioè pvgna d'amore in sogn, dou'elegli mostra, che tutte le cose humane non sono altro che sogno, & doue narra molt'altrcose degne di cognizone* (Venice: In Casa de' Figliovoli di Aldo, 1545).
Egyptian hieroglyphics – dates at least from Béroalde de Verville’s edition and interpretation of its French rendition as the *Discours du Songe de Poliphile*\textsuperscript{22}. Our interest in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, and in its equally significant first French translation of 1546\textsuperscript{23}, lies not in its possible alchemical undertones, however, nor in its inscription within a history of alchemy, but, as Jung’s characterization suggests, in the illustrated books’ design as objects to think with and through, in which “sensing” as much as “seeing” is integral to an experience of discovery, and in which one “crawls” through a thorny text as much as hovers over images in an eventual construction of knowledge. Generations of readers of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and the *Songe de Poliphile* took their texts and image sequences as stepping-stones leading to diverse fields of knowledge. Setting aside questions of influence which have indeed been amply explored\textsuperscript{24}, our problem in this chapter and the next will be to elucidate the emotional and sensual aspects of knowledge in the making, through a careful consideration of both the thematics in text and image and the books’ design.


\textsuperscript{23} *Hypnerotomachie, ou, Discours du songe de Poliphile : deduisant comme amour le combat a l’occasion de Polia….* Paris : J. Kerver, 1546.

\textsuperscript{24} For a helpful overview, see A. Blunt, “The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* in the 17th Century in France”, *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. 1, 2 (oct. 1937), 1937-1938, p. 117-137. For the HP as a literary influence, see for Rabelais: Marcel Françon, “Francesco Colonna’s *Poliphili Hypnerotomachia* and Rabelais,” *MLR*, 50 (1955), pp. 52–5; for La Fontaine see Françoise Charpentier, “De Colonna à La Fontaine: Le Nom de Poliphile”, *L’Intelligence du passé : les faits, l’écriture et le sens : mélanges offerts à Jean Lafond par ses amis*, eds. Pierre Aquilon et al., Tours : Université François Rabelais, 1988, pp. 369-78 ; for general influences on architecture and literature, Claude Popelin’s “Introduction” to his translation of the HP remains an excellent resource (*Songe de Poliphile*, op. cit, pp. vii-ccxxvii); for influences on alchemy, see esp. Polizzi 1993.
Taking as our starting point Hal Foster’s useful categories of vision and visuality\(^{25}\), our goal in the present chapter will be to elucidate the epistemology of vision and tactility implied in the hero’s carefully staged discoveries. The third chapter, taking as its focus *Le Songe de Poliphile*, Jean Martin’s wonderfully idiosyncratic rendition of the *Hypnerotomachia* into French, will treat the careful composition and staging of the page itself. Its *mise-en-scène* of discovery, I claim, implies a special visuality of reading and puts into practice the theories of vision and touch proposed by Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Robert Nelson has rightly suggested that the distinction between vision and visuality risks cutting down disciplinary lines\(^{26}\). Theories of vision are primarily treated by the domain of science and the history of science, while visuality as a cultural expression belongs to the humanities or the social sciences. Our aim in these two chapters will be to place the notions of vision and visuality in close dialogue by considering the book-object as their point of contact. While the text and images of the *Hypnerotomachia* vehicle theories of vision – more precisely, embodied vision – the book itself is presented as a laboratory of thought, starting with a practice of sight, touch and feeling in the form of emotional and bodily awareness.

In many ways the Renaissance accepted wholeheartedly the ancient commonplace of contemplative man’s superior status, standing erect with his eyes turned to the firmament. Sight was accordingly granted a privileged status over the other “baser” senses, abstracted as it

\(^{25}\) “[T]he difference between [vision and visuality] signals a difference within the visual - between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations - a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein.” Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1988), ix.

was away from the material world of change and instability. The great propounder of neo-Platonist philosophy, Marsilio Ficino, theorized man’s philosophical and theological purpose as “called to the sublime through vision,” lamenting those who would “plunge [themselves] into the mire through touch”\(^27\). Although vision and the preeminence of contemplation largely dominated theoretically, practically-speaking touch and “handiness” began to take the upper-hand\(^28\). The revalorization of touch and its principal organ, the hand, had two broad consequences at work in the *Hypnerotomachia* and the *Songe de Poliphile*. Symbolizing Poliphile’s (and his period’s) *libido scienti*, the hand adventurously reaches out and disrupts objects of knowledge and contemplation. Though such a break with vision and the visionary, brought about by direct, quasi-empirical contact, would in other contexts be cast in a negative light, the desire to touch and make contact represents a starting point in the *Hypnerotomachia* for an intimate, embodied construction of knowledge. We will see taking shape here an aesthetics and epistemology of touch and risk-bound contact which will resurface in the natural historian Pierre Belon and the design of his books. The second consequence emerges naturally from the first. While the adventurous hand is tactically bound up in the brute emotions of fear and desire, the feeling hand haptically creates and recreates in the imagination and in the world the objects of nature and art. The metaphor of the poet’s or creator’s hand for the *ingenium* which disciplines and arranges imaginative material was common since the Middle Ages\(^29\).

What remains unprecedented in the *Hypnerotomachia* and the *Songe de Poliphile* is the

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positive appeal to emotion and feeling\textsuperscript{30} in the apprehension and comprehension of a body of knowledge in the making.

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At first glance, it would surely appear that the *Hypnerotomachia*, and its French translation the *Songe de Poliphile*, are works that celebrate the sense of sight and all of its attendant pleasures. Sight is what mobilizes their protagonist, as he moves through his dream-vision from one marvel to the next. Charles Mitchell observes that the *Hypnerotomachia* and its hero take as their field of study “the world discovered, explored and recorded in all its positive shapes by the early Renaissance archeologists,” interpreting the book as a kind of positivist anthology of ancient knowledge based on visual forms. Poliphile, he continues, is himself “moved to fervid wonder by the memorials of antiquity”\textsuperscript{31}, and in this Mitchell is confirmed by the address to the reader where we are told to anticipate the “mirande cose” that Poliphile “havere in sonno visto”, which Jean Martin echoes when he tells us that “Poliphile dit avoir vu en songe des choses admirables”. Poliphile predominately utilizes his sense of sight to make sense of the “mirande cose”, all of the “positive shapes” of the world that he sets out to

\textsuperscript{30} Antonio Damasio, in his research on the fundamental role played by the emotions in human rationality and decision-making, defines “feeling” thus: “[T]he] process of continuous monitoring, that experience of what your [emotional] body is doing while thoughts about specific contents roll by, is the essence of what I call a feeling. [...] In other words, a feeling depends on the juxtaposition of an image of the body proper to an image of something else, such as the visual image of a face or the auditory image of a melody.” *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, (New York, NY: Penguin, 1994), p. 145. As will become clear in what follows, “feeling” in this sense – a self-awareness of bodily states and emotions – is integral to the construction of knowledge and the process of decision-making for Poliphile and the reader of the *Hypnerotomachia* and the *Songe*.

discover. Moreover, we the reader are urged to enjoy and comprehend this book in a visual way. Indeed, writes Tamara Griggs, the *Hypnerotomachia* is both an imitation of courtly festivals and an inspiration for later festival books such as the royal entry of Henri II into Rouen in 1549, memorialized in a festival book published two years later. The court festival, like the *Hypnerotomachia* modelling itself after it, was “essentially a moving visual copia” which “sought to overwhelm and delight the citizens with visual marvels.” The *Hypnerotomachia*’s images were meant to clarify the book’s difficult subject matter and all but impenetrable prose. The book’s financier, Leonardo Crasso, wrote to its patron the Duke of Urbino that while “res natura sua difficiles essent” (“the points are difficult by its nature”), the book’s many images will shed light for the reader upon those difficult points which “imaginibus oculis subjectae patent & referuntur” (“lie open and reproduced by illustrations under the [reader’s] eyes”). Like the objects its own protagonist encounters through his dream-vision, the book itself is a novelty and a marvel (“mirabilis & novus libellus”) according to the poet Giovanni Battista Scita who dedicates a poem to Leonardo Crasso, echoed by the subsequent anonymous elegy which characterizes the *Hypnerotomachia as opus mirum*.

Criticism today lingers at length upon the visual feast which the *Hypnerotomachia*, not to mention the *Songe* (with its increase in woodcut illustrations), offers its reader. If the Renaissance reader was expected to look with admiration at the book’s images and design, modern-day reactions to the book have not changed. The sense of sight is still the sense most

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32 *Cest la deduction du sumptueux ordre, plaisantz spectacles et magnifiques theatres dresses, et exhibes par les citoyens de Rouen […]* Rouen: Robert le Roy, 1551. The illustrations of this festival book are sometimes attributed to Jean Cousin or Jean Goujon, through Mortimer (1998) estimates them to be the work of a lesser artist influenced by Goujon’s designs for the account of Henri II’s entry into Paris.

appealed to and most likely to be gratified by the book. “Lavishly illustrated”, as one critic characterizes it, we cannot help but pay attention to the book’s “beautiful woodcuts”, for which it remains “most famous” today and indeed much ink has been spilled to try and get at a correct attribution for them. Rosemary Trippe writes of contemporary criticism that it “generally considers the Hypnerotomachia as a [...] philosophical treatise in which simple, clear images recount the pleasing fiction of a dream”. Some graphic designers have even gone so far as to create computerized reconstructions of the architectural spaces in the Hypnerotomachia. Sight seems then to be still the appropriate means through which to contemplate and appreciate this book.

If indeed the Hypnerotomachia displays a “remarkable level of visual culture and clarity,” a closer look, not only at its text and image proper, but at its paratextual material, will already suggest that a more nuanced apprehension of the book is at stake. The sense of sight is, the above examples from Scita’s poem or the anonymous elegy notwithstanding, remarkably absent in the book’s presentational material. Where it is present, it must be qualified. The Italian address to the reader, for instance, which provides a sort of synopsis for the “lector [qui] desideri intendere brevemente quello che in quest’opera se contiene,” is assuredly chock-full of

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words belonging to the semantic field of vision (visto, amirare, mirandi, maraveglioso, mirabili, aspectare, amirare, vide, mirando). But from the outset vision must be narrated: “Sapi che Poliphile narra havere in sonno visto mirande cose...”. In Jean Martin’s address to the reader of 1546, one encounters a corresponding semantic field pertaining to vision (vu, admirable, merveilleuse, faire voir, montrer, aller voir, regarder...). However, a cursory glance at the other verbs of the address shows how predominant are verbs of telling and describing. Following the 1499 address from which Jean Martin takes his cues, the first sentence of the address begins:

> Si vous desirez (Messeigneurs) entendre a peu de paroles ce qui est contenu en cet œuvre, sachez que Poliphile dit avoir vu en songe des choses admirables, entre lesquelles il en descrit plusieurs antiques dignes de mémoire...

As in the 1499 address, we are reminded that everything Poliphile has seen is related back to us through his words. To complicate matters further, Jean Martin’s address conflates the protagonist with the author (calling him “l’auteur” and “Poliphile” interchangeably). We read “l’auteur vient a descrire” juxtaposed with “[Poliphile] trouve s’amie Polia [qui...] lui fait voir quatre triomphes du grand Jupiter...”, so that the text hesitates between description and vision without landing in favor of one or the other. In the opening chapter of the Hypnerotomachia, a similar hesitation reinforces the confusion regarding Poliphile’s diegetic position. The chapter heading begins at the head of the page in the HP’s celebrated capital Bembo type:

> “POLIPHILE INCOMINCIA LA SVA HYPNEROTOMACHIA AD DESCRIBERE ET LHORA, ET IL TEMPO QVANDO GLI APPARVE IN SOMNO DI RITROVARSI IN VNA QVIETA ET SILENTE PIAGIA, DISCVLTO DISERTA.”
“Poliphile begins his *Hypnerotomachia* by describing the time and season when he seemed to find himself in a dream on a quiet and silent shore, wild and deserted.” (Godwin, 11)

In this heading, it remains an intentionally open question whether Poliphile the “author” is commencing his elaborate *romanzo* entitled *Hypnerotomachia*, or whether Poliphile as the protagonist of the tale is about to begin his visionary “strife of love in a dream”. Indeed this conflation of author and protagonist is already implicit in the title of the book, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*: “The Strife of Love in a Dream” of/by Poliphile (the Latin genitive does not allow us to decide one way or the other). Leonardo Crasso seems to highlight this in his paratextual address to Guido da Montefeltro, where he praises the book he proffers, a “novum quoddam et admirandum Poliphili opus (id enim nomen libro inditum est)” [“certain new and admirable work of Poliphile (for this is the name ascribed to the book)’”]. This hesitation between Poliphile the author and Poliphile the protagonist has direct epistemological consequences for the status of the book. For either it is held up and pointed to by the paratextual material (including the chapter headings) as something to be given, seen and admired – the work by Poliphile – or it appears to stand alone as an autonomous and anonymous *imitatio* of the protagonist’s vision – the dream of Poliphile. Both readings, of the book-as-object and the book-as-event, will continue to sit side-by-side, nuancing the ways in which the reader is asked to approach the book.
The perceptive sense appealed to most emphatically, if not most frequently, in the paratextual material is not sight but hearing. While, as previously observed, the anonymous Latin elegy\(^{37}\) refers to the *Hypnerotomachia* as *opus mirum*, we also read in the first four lines:

*Candide Poliphilum narrantem somnia lector,*
*Auscultes, summo somnia missa Polo,*
*Non operam perdes, non haec *audisse* pigebit*
*Tam variis mirum rebus abundat opus*

*[Gentle reader, hear Poliphile tell of his dreams,*
*DREAMS sent by the highest heaven.*
*You will not waste your labor, nor will listening irk you*
*For this wonderful work abounds in so many things]*\(^{38}\)

Similarly, Godwin’s translation of the verses notwithstanding, the author of the Italian poem dedicated to Crasso (on f3v-4r) calls upon the “terso lector” (“gentle reader”) to “ascolta ascolta / gli somni di Poliphile narrante”\(^{39}\); “non perderai il tempo stravagante,” we are further assured, “anzi iubilerai de aver *udito* / l’opera di varie cose exuberante”\(^{40}\). This appeal to hearing is, of course, the same topic appeal of the orator or the preacher who prepares to deliver a riveting sermon shot through with *enargeia*. Indeed, the apostrophe to the listener-reader in the anonymous elegy is followed by a synopsis of what there is to be “seen” in the

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\(^{37}\) Pozzi and Ariani both contend that the “anonymous” Latin elegy, along with the two anonymous paratexts which follow, both Italian volgarizations of the elegy in prose and verse, were written by Colonna; see Pozzi 1959:53 and Ariani 1998b:493. Ariani observes that the term *elegy* here refers to the metric form, in elegiac couplets, of the poem, not to a particular content. (ibid.)

\(^{38}\) Godwin, p. 3.

\(^{39}\) Perhaps more in line with what a modern reader would expect, Godwin renders the verses as “Then *look*, gentle reader, and *look* again / at the dreams told by Poliphile” (Godwin 1999:6, my emphasis)

\(^{40}\) I have modernized the spelling in this quotation.
following pages, a synopsis no less enargic than the many ekphrastic pages that comprise the bulk of the narrative. We read lines such as these:

*Hic sunt pyramides thermae, ingentesque colossi [...]*
*Hic diversa basis fulget varieque columnae [...]*
*Hinc lege de triplici quae maiestate tonantis / Dicat [...]*
*Polia qua fuerit forma, qua culta, triumphos*
*Inde Iovis specta quattuor aethereos.*

[Here are pyramids, baths and vast colossi [...]]
[Here] a novel pedestal shines forth, and various columns [...] 
Read what is said here about the Thunderer’s triple majesty [...] 
See [there] what Polia’s form was like, and her dress, 
And the four heavenly triumphs of Jupiter.]

In these epideictic lines, which multiply *ad libitum* throughout the elegy, we are not merely told what there is to be seen in the novel; the author of the poem is, as it were, picking up the book and leafing its pages, directing us to read of and see the objects it contains: “hinc lege” (here, read), “inde ... specta” (there, see); or he simply points to the things themselves, as though he were cradling a pop-up book: “hic diversa basis fulget ...” (here a novel pedestal shines forth), “hic sunt pyramides ...” (here are pyramids). This enargic elegy helps us explain the confusion of author and protagonist into one *actor* that we observed in Jean Martin’s address to the reader. The objects treated by the orator-actor are both collected *hic et nunc* in the book and recollected discursively from a past vision. It is our task as listener-readers to lend our ears and

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41 Godwin, p. 4. I add in brackets translations of the important Latin deictic markers some of which Godwin chooses to eliminate in his rendering.
recreate those same objects, a task we are assured that will not be for naught: “non operam perdes”, “you will not waste your labor” (Godwin 3).

“It was hearing rather than sight,” Robert Mandrou observes of pre-modernity, “which stimulated the imagination, while touch was likewise infinitely more important than sight.” Though some recent scholars have taken issue with Mandrou’s blanket assessment, the author of the Hypnerotomachia does not permit either its protagonist, nor its reader to “see” things immediately. This is certainly the case – metaphorically speaking – for the reader who must endure long ekphrastic passages before arriving at the image, for instance, of an architectural façade. It is especially the case for Poliphile who often must have recourse to his other senses, and especially hearing. When he meets five nymphs, representing the five senses, in the locus amoenus through which he navigates during the majority of the book, he has just recovered from a shock which rattled him as a result of misinterpreting sound cues:

Suddenly I heard a great noise and din behind me, like the flapping of the dragon’s bony wings, and before me, horrors! I heard the sound of a trumpet. Wretch that I was, I twisted frantically around and saw on one side a number of Egyptian carob-trees with their long, ripe fruits hanging down: they were shaking and striking together as they were blown by the wind. I quickly came to my senses and moved on, laughing at what had occurred. (Godwin 75)

Though he corrected his initial misrepresentation of shaking fruits as a dragon’s bony wings, it is only much later that Poliphile realizes the trumpet he heard had not “betokened a military troop”, but was the air passing through a weathervane atop the bathhouse to which the

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42 Notably Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes, pp. 34-36.
nymphs will guide him. There, he laughs again and observes “how a man who finds himself alone and terrified in a strange place is easily scared by every little noise.” (ibid., 81) Not everything Poliphile hears before seeing is a source of terror, however. Indeed, he enjoys the sounds of the approaching five nymphs before relishing their sight: “It was not long after this that I heard a company approaching which I guessed, from its tender young voices, to consist of comely and beautiful maidens, […]. The incredible sweetness of their harmonized song wafted to me on the temperate and dewy breezes and spread throughout the pleasant region, blending with the suave accompaniment of the lyre.” (ibid., 75) What emerges from these passages is three-fold. Poliphile, first, is regularly denied an immediate understanding – “seeing” in an intellectual or imaginative sense – of the objects he encounters. He is enjoined to wait – as we are – despite his emotional upset and to gather other sensual data. Secondly, his sense of sight is often frustrated and aural images in these instances are the first to arrive to him. Finally, sound is like to “an emotional curtain” (Ackerman 182): Poliphile’s initial aural cue strikes him with great emotive power, inspiring pleasure or fear, but forestalling proper knowledge. It is only upon consolidating all of his sensual images – visual, aural and otherwise – that the curtain may be lifted and that a cathartic laugh may dispel often fearful misinterpretations.

Sight, we might therefore be tempted to conclude, is for Colonna the sense par excellence through which one may check the truth of initial interpretations. And yet sight, too, is subject to the same kinds of illusions as those suffered by Poliphile through aural images. What he sees is not necessarily what he thinks he sees, nor indeed what he hears what he
thinks he hears. At moments, Poliphile’s sight is overwhelmed by the object he attempts to contemplate. Of Polia, he exclaims:

I was overcome by the incredible beauty of her face; and if her radiant eyes had chanced upon mine, everything would have appeared double for a while, until I could control their blinking and restore their original clarity. (Godwin 150)

Polia’s luminous eyes would remind the reader of a host of other moments when Poliphile’s sight was stunned or diverted by the objects of his gaze. As he contemplates the cart of a triumphal march, for instance, he remarks on the “light” reflected from the carriage which “made luminous flames appear reflected in all the detailed carvings, making it impossible to look steadily at them” (Godwin 176). Though at times his sight is as voracious as can be, as when his eyes “turned into whirlwinds” as they contemplated Polia’s figure, “gulping in and absorbing her incomparable virginal beauty,” (Godwin 155) the capacities of sight are easily surpassed by the objects Poliphile attempts to contemplate. Again, Poliphile confesses that beholding the “harmonious host of beauties in one perfect and inviolate little body,” namely Polia’s, “exceeded the grasp of my eyes” (Godwin 239). In a completely analogous way, the wonder of buildings only points to what the eye cannot see, which tires in its attempt to comprehend: “If I had good reason to consider the very sight of such enormity an unbelievable and inconceivable thing,” he writes of the great pyramid encountered early in the romance, “(and it greatly tired my eyes and diluted the spirits of my other senses), how much more so was the making of it?” (Godwin 23) Clearly the proper understanding of objects in Colonna’s
fictional world does not stop at the gaze. Indeed, sight, if improperly relied upon, is merely a dead-end in Poliphile’s path to knowledge.

If the examples above demonstrate the physiological and psychological limitations of sight explored by Colonna, others show how sight may not only fail in its ability to accomplish its function, but leads directly to misunderstanding, examples analogous to those aural illusions considered above. In Colonna’s romance, for instance, countless natural objects seem to reflect perfectly like mirrors. In fact, the more polished they are, and therefore the purer of any extraneous material, the more they seem to resemble each other in their ability to simply reflect light impinging upon them. We read of a floor paved “with beautiful stones of various colors, so smoothly fitted as to resemble a single piece, admirable in its mirror-like sheen and its perfect finish.” (Godwin 352) Though, as Colonna indubitably knew, Aristotle praised sight as the “more important” sense “for the mere necessities of life” since, better than any other sense it “informs us of many differences of all kinds” (Aristotle 1975:219), such praise is here undermined; for all of the “beautiful stones” surveyed by Poliphile reflect as “a single piece”. Not far from this passage we read of a pergola with a wall fabricated from the mineral *cetionides*, “which shone so brightly beneath the pergola that it seemed not to be closed, but open to the serene sky that was reflected in them” (Godwin 353). Perhaps this very property of perfect reflection is meant to help Poliphile identify the mysterious *celionides*. For, as Pliny reports of it, “even the stones with flaws in them have so brilliant a lustre that they reflect an image as if they were mirrors” (Pliny 1962:293). Still, the very fact that Poliphile is unsure whether he sees a façade or nothing at all is indicative of the illusions which the natural world –
and in particular the natural world at its most “pure” and unadulterated – can play on the sense of sight.

How might Poliphile get out of this conundrum? Another episode, squeezed in between the two examples given above, offers a clue. Poliphile is being shown the extravagantly ornate island of Cythera. Upon reaching the center, a vast theater surrounded by the pergola just mentioned, Poliphile is:

“seized by the highest admiration: I thought at first sight that I was witnessing a most stupendous miracle, because the entire pavement of the arena encircled by seats of this theater seemed to consist of a single, solid obsidian stone of extreme blackness and indomitable hardness, so smooth and polished that at the first step I withdrew my right foot, fearing that I was about to fall into an abyss and perish in the midst of all my love and happiness. But its resistance soon brought my scared and shaken spirits to their senses, by hurting the erring foot. In this clear stone one could see the limpid profundity of the sky perfectly reflected as in a calm and placid sea, and likewise everything around or above it, much better reflected than in the shiniest mirror.” (Godwin 352-53 my italics)

Illusion, here, turns to cold, hard truth when Poliphile is literally made to bump into it. Indeed, without such an unpremeditated event, the hero would have remained, once again, at the level of simple admiration for the illusion of a perfectly-polished stone which appeared to yawn open like an infinite hole. Having brought his erring foot into contact with the natural material however, Poliphile may recognize it for what it is. Even better, he is treated, safe and sound, to the whole spectacle of nature reflected in the mirror-like obsidian, the “profundo caelo” and “tutte le cose ... in gyro” (HP, y5r). It is, of course, his sense of touch which permits Poliphile to
ultimately make sense of the otherwise terrifying illusion which gapes before him. His sense of touch becomes, as it were, the solid base upon which may be built his orientation in the world, and his ability to safely survey and comprehend it. Mandrou has written of touch that it was the primary sense with which pre-modern man “checked and confirmed what sight could only bring to one’s notice. It verified perception, giving solidity to the impressions provided by other senses, which were not as reliable.” (Mandrou 1975:53) This is to be sure an important quality of touch. But Colonna does not merely give touch the capacity to confirm sight; as we see in this example, and as we shall see in others, touch – or direct bodily contact with the world – dispels the illusions that sight may bring and reorients Poliphile upon a solider footing.

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As we have seen, the Hypnerotomachia has long been celebrated for its visual parade of woodcuts and “the overall composition of text and image into a harmonious whole” (Lefaivre 1997:17), qualities which may fairly characterize its French translation as well. A cursory leafing of the pages of either book will immediately give support to such a reception. Yet the text of Colonna’s romance, and the particular articulation of its text and image both in 1499 and 1546 – about which more in the second part of the present chapter – provide evidence of the author’s valorization of the sense of touch, and of tactility as a fundamental modality in the experience of the world. Several critics have understood the Hypnerotomachia as a neo-Platonic romance in which the body and its concomitant senses are gradually sloughed off in
order to achieve purity of mind and soul. Poliphile, the argument goes, traverses an initiatic adventure from *locus terribilis* to *locus amoenus*, from the chaotic matter of a dark forest to the perfect symmetrical forms of an island of Cythera, all the while searching for the architectural idea or *eidos* of the buildings he encounters and the objects he contemplates, including finally Polia, whom Charles Mitchell has interpreted as an allegorical figure for *prisca theologia*, and who seems to gather in her image all of what he comes across, like the universal One, the identification with the idea of God to which the Neo-Platonist aspires. The broad neo-Platonic arc of Poliphile’s adventure has even led one critic to argue that Marsilio Ficino was the author behind the *Hypnerotomachia*. In fact, as Rebekah Smick (2002) has convincingly shown, Colonna’s work cannot be fully understood without a proper consideration of its pervasive Aristotelian and Thomist influences. As we will continue to see, the world of the *Hypnerotomachia* never forgets for too long the famous scholastic dictum, originating with Aristotle and propounded by Saint Thomas Aquinas, that “Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius in sensu”. However, as we have already explored, Poliphile’s senses do not lead immediately to

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43 Nordenfalk (1985), for instance, interprets Poliphile’s bath with the five senses as a scene of purification. But how then to make sense of the scene which follows where the nymphs apply an ointment onto themselves and enjoin Poliphile to do the same? Soon thereafter the hero “began to be sexually aroused and lasciviously stimulated to the point of total confusion and torment, while these wily girls, knowing what had happened to me, laughed unrestrainedly” (Godwin 86). It is clear that sensual appetite is as strong as ever – indeed reinforced – after Poliphile’s bath with the five senses, albeit with a significant sense of detachment and irony which did not prevail before it. Our understanding of the bath sequence is more in line with Henri Zerner’s, who observes that the bath was an “aesthetic locale par excellence”, encouraging, as at Francis I’s Fontainebleau, the exaltation of the senses in order to better appreciate fine art (Zerner 223-24).

44 Mitchell 1960, p. 468.


knowledge. Indeed, the senses are more likely to over-stimulate emotion and imagination before they may behave as proper pathways to truth. Poliphile’s is thus an apprenticeship of his sensual life in order to properly appreciate and apprehend the natural and artificial objects in the world.

His sense of touch, understood broadly to mean a proprioceptive sense of body as well as physical contact with the world, is ever-present in Poliphile’s process of discovery. Certainly, for neo-Platonist thinkers, touch was also a fundamental sense, shared with all sentient beings according to Aristotle. But for them it was also problematic because touch led invariably to incontinence and lechery. Ficino, for one, writes, following Aristotle, that no sentient being is more sensitive to touch than man. “The eagle,” he writes in his Teologica Platonica, “exceeds man with its sight, and so do many birds with their hearing and the dog with his sense of smell; but no animal is superior to man in taste and touch.” (Ficino 2003:127). “Taste,” he adds, still following Aristotle, “is nothing more than a touch of the tongue”. However, the very same acute sensibility in man may lead to his demise as he bogs himself down in the sensual worlds of sex and food, no better as a result than the vilest of animals: “It is not surprising that [men] indulge more avidly than animals in the pleasures they feel more keenly.” (ibid.) Therefore, although man’s sense of touch is the most sensitive of all animals, it remains for Ficino structurally furthest from intellect and, worse, the most apt to draw man down to bestiality.

47 Cf. De Anima 413b4–7.

48 Sense and Its Objects [De Sensu], IV (Aristotle 1975: 63), Pliny the Elder will subscribe to the idea of man’s tactile and gustative superiority over all other animals: “Of the senses, touch in man is superior to everything else, and so is his taste; as to the others, he is surpassed by many. Eagles see more clearly, the vultures smell more sharply, moles hear more distinctly”. (Pliny Nat. Hist. X: 69, cited in Vinge 1975:39)

“Of all the powers of the soul which are concerned with knowing,” he explains in his commentary on Plato’s *Symposium*, “the highest are intellect and reason, and the lowest are taste and touch. The last two for the most part lead down to bodily nature, while the first two lead up to the divine substance, which is not of the body.”

Achille Bocchi will later explicate the neo-Platonic view of the five senses as steps to spiritual freedom in his *Symbolicarum quaestionum* (1555). In an emblem (see fig. 1.1) of a hero’s sepulchre, Bocchi portrays touch as the lowest step of a graduated base upon which

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50 Cited in Boyle (1998:4-5). See also *Commentarius in “Symposium” Platonis* 5.2; 6.8; *Commentary on Plato’s “Symposium” on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (1985), pp. 84-86, pp. 118-120. Reason, for Ficino is analogous to the divine and does not participate in the body nor in the bodily senses. For the independence of reason and of the soul from sensory objects in the Neo-Platonism of Ficino, see Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (1943), p. 234.

51 For Bocchi’s link to the Quattrocento and his drawing upon the hieroglyphs of the *Hypnerotomachia* for the emblems in his *Symbolicarum quaestionum*, see Edgar Wind 1968:n.71. Quiviger cursorily relates Bocchi’s sepulchre emblem to Neo-Platonic thought, but the subsequent interpretation is my own. See Quiviger 2010:98-99.
stands an obelisk topped by a sphere and the adage “FELIX QUI STATUIT BONUM QUOD UNUM EST” (Bocchi 1555:98-99; Happy is he who stands well, for he is one). Supporting the obelisk, a quadrangular pedestal represents the four cardinal virtues and below it, five steps are decorated by motifs representing the five senses: touch at the bottom, followed by taste, smell, hearing and finally sight. The symbolism is clear: the senses, beginning by the earthiest one, must be mastered step by step by the virtues to achieve spiritual oneness and ultimately immortality of the soul. The idea will be perpetuated through other avenues, most interestingly the French academies where, following the earlier intellectual program of Pico della Mirandola, philosophers and poets labored at syncretic philosophy attempting the harmonization of Aristotelianism with neo-Platonic thought. One prominent contributor to Henri III’s academy, Bartholomeo Delbene, has given us his Civitas Veri sive morum, an illustrated “allegorical dream in [an] architectural setting” which “though of a different

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52 Cf. Aristotle, who identifies each of the five senses with one of the four elements: “The sense of touch is connected with earth; and taste is a species of touch.” (Sense and its Objects [De Sensu], II, p. 53) The tradition will be passed on by the Physiologus (see Vinge 1985: 50). Ficino accepts and expounds on this association of touch with the cool element of earth: “Who would hesitate to assign touch to earth, since it comes into being through all the parts of the earthly body, is completed in the nerves, which are very earthly, and touches things which have solidity and weight, qualities which earth gives to bodies.” (Ficino 1985:85) Also cited by O’Rourke Boyle, Senses of Touch, p. 6.

53 Alternatively, the vertical structure also represents the neo-Platonic ideal of the vita contemplativa as opposed to the vita activa or worse the vita voluptuaria, the last of which Poliphile pointedly chooses when faced with three portals representing them (Godwin 135). Beginning with sight, “there starts a movement, upwards or downwards, and the senses serve as kinds of steps.” (Vinge 1975:72) As Ficino explicates in his Commentary on Plato’s “Symposium” on Love, “Thus every love begins with sight. But the love of the contemplative man ascends from sight to intellect. That of the voluptuous man descends from sight to touch. That of the active man remains in sight. [...] These three loves are given three names. The love of the contemplative man is called divine; that of the active man, human; that of the voluptuous man, bestial.” (Ficino 1985:119-120) Bocchi’s illustration remind the viewer that the steps under the obelisk can be taken either up towards unified, divine reason and the contemplative life or down towards earthly touch and the diffused, voluptuous life.
temper”, Francis Yates observes, shares “a certain relationship” with the Hypnerotomachia. The City of Truth is accessed exclusively by five gates: the gates of the senses. “It is divided by a plain, whereon are the highways of the moral virtues, and the cloudy swamps of the vices; and a central mountain on the summit of which are the temples of the intellectual virtues grouped round an upward mounting flame which represents the heavenward direction of the whole personality, both intellect and will.” (Yates 1988:112) The allegory clearly attempts to conflate Aristotelean moral philosophy as developed most notably in the Nicomachean Ethics, with the “poetic enthusiasm” and “higher wisdom” of neo-Platonist theory, as embodied in the Timaeus.

Surely, as Yates suggests, the Hypnerotomachia shares some affinities with Delbene’s Civitas Veri. Both are written as allegories within an architectural setting; both share a syncretic impulse to synthesize Aristotelian moral philosophy with neo-Platonic Formalism. However, while Delbene’s allegory carefully takes its reader along a linear path from the senses through the moral virtues by way of the passions, up finally towards the intellectual virtues and divine wisdom (where Aristotle bows out to make way for a higher vision), the Hypnerotomachia is highly non-linear and ambiguous in its development. Gilles Polizzi, writing on the Songe de Poliphile, has remarked on the constant ambiguity maintained in the romance between the literal and figural, on both the narrative and descriptive levels. Far from presenting a transparent allegory, the Songe renders indefinite the borders between abstraction and


55 Once again honoring the scholastic dictum “Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius in sensu”.

materiality, giving “l’espace du songe une sorte d’épaisseur, de densité dans laquelle l’abstraction, réfléchie par des emblèmes multiples comme par des miroirs, se diffracte et, dans son morcellement, confond l’intelligible avec le sensible.” (Polizzi 1988:215) Though the five senses, represented as five nymphs, are indeed the first to greet Poliphile in the kingdom of Eleutherylida which, like the City of Truth, is otherwise impenetrable, “on the outside […] surrounded and fortified by steep and impassable cliffs” (Godwin 78), Colonna does not permit us to think of the senses as stepping stones, like the base of Bocchi’s sepulchre, which gradually sloughed off will free one of the weighty body and liberate a unified and immortal soul. Indeed, such an idea appears entirely upended when, upon his first encounter with an architectural marvel Poliphile’s head begins to spin the higher he directs his gaze:

[…] si io el suo excesso, oltra el credere, inopinabile cosa meritamente de essa essere el specularre arbitraua, la quale imperoche mirando non mediocrementemente la potentia uisiua affatichaua, & gli altri spirituali sensi attenuando, quanto piu affare? (a8r)

What more could I do if, I maintain, to observe the excess of this pyramid was difficult beyond belief because, reflecting upon it, the power of vision tired significantly and confused the other perceptual senses.57

Instead each new discovery is an embodied experience which appeals to all of the senses throughout the event of discovery. Far from being the lowest and therefore the first appetitive sense to overcome, touch more than any other sense is the ever-present modality in the Hypnerotomachia’s and the Songe de Poliphile’s aesthetic of discovery.

No more nor less than sight, then, Poliphile’s sense of touch is everywhere stimulated and appealed to in order to make sense of the world. Indeed unlike the often illusory images

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57 My translation, where I am guided by Ariani and Gabriele, II, p. 28.
supplied by his sense of sight – is Poliphile not after all experiencing a dream-vision? – touch
and the proprioceptive sense of his entire body help him to orient himself in an unfamiliar
world, and, finally, to remember sensibly the artificial and natural objects encountered along
the way. The book might show – as proclaimed in Roman block letters on the sparse title page
of 1499 – that “Humana omnia non nisi somnium esse”; it nevertheless leaves a tactile residue
in memory as it traces “along the way many things full worthy of knowledge” (“obiter plurima
scitu sanequam digna”; Colonna 1499:f1r, my translation).

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The first episode of the Hypnerotomachia begins with a kind of primordial scene suggestive of
the relationship between Poliphile’s sense of sight and touch. Both, operating together, will
seek to be productive of meaning. Let us follow Jean Martin who, here, translates Colonna
rather faithfully:

“Ô Jupiter, souverain dieu, appellerai-je cette vision heureuse, merveilleuse ou terrible,
qui est telle qu’en moi n’y a partie si petite qui ne tremble et arde en y pensant ? Il me
sembla (certes) que j’étais en une plaine spacieuse, semée de fleurs et de verdure. Le
temps était serein et atrempe, le soleil clair et adouci d’un vent gracieux : pourquoi tout y
était merveilleusement paisible et en silence: dont fus saisi par une admiration craintive,
car je n’y apercevais aucun signe d’habitation d’homme ; qui me fit bien hâter mes pas,
regardant deçà et delà. Toutesfois je ne sus voir autre chose sinon des feuilles et
rameaux qui point ne se mouvoient. ” (Polizzi 1994:17-18)

Poliphile begins his narrative by recalling his dream-vision, unsure what to make of it, whether
it ought to be interpreted as an auspicious, desirable message, a terrible, frightening one, or
whether it ought to be simply marveled at as a beautiful object. What he can be certain of (certes) is what imagination has brought to his lively experience. Whether this be a creation of imagination or the imagination of things created is irrelevant. The world opens up all of a sudden in the generic space between body and imagination: “Il me sembla (certes) que j’éttais en une plaine spacieuse…” We are not offered yet anything to see, but the sense of the body opening up, like an eyelid, to itself; a “plaine spatieuse”\(^{58}\): not a mere spacious plain, but both full (“pleine”) space – space to be felt, bumped up against, crawled through – and spacious fullness – a body with its transparencies, its symmetries and hidden dimensions. “Le temps était serein et atrempé, le soleil clair et adouci d’un vent gracieux”. As in innumerable other places along his journey, a gentle breeze both helps Poliphile pay heed to his tactile sensitivity, and ties him sensibly to the space around him and the objects contained within it\(^{59}\). Let us recall that before Poliphile caught a glimpse of the five nymph-senses, it was their sound-images which “wafted to me on the temperate and dewy breezes and spread throughout the temperate region”. Wind and air are vectors of information which enliven and make contact with Poliphile’s body before any other sense. They bear information to our vagabond hero and tease him towards objects as they send their signals downstream. Discovery is a bodily process in the *Hypnerotomachia* and the *Songe* which is ever proceeding but never complete.

Nevertheless a body born to itself is not sufficient to produce meaning, and this primordial scene brings that home. Poliphile bathes in the light of a “soleil clair” and the touch

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\(^{58}\) “spatiosa planitie” (Colonna 1499:a3r)

\(^{59}\) This awakening of the subject to the world based on touch is a defining characteristic of the tactile sense for Derrida: “En deçà ou au delà de tout concept de la ‘sensibilité’, le toucher signifie l’‘être-au-monde’ pour un vivant fini. Il n’y a pas de monde sans toucher. Et donc sans [...] l’efforcement.” (Derrida 2000:161), cited in Marin 2003:101.
of a “vent gracieux” but meaning is not, for all that, forthcoming. His body and his surroundings remain as yet a tacit hieroglyph: “tou y était merveilleusement paisible et en silence”. And here, like everywhere in Colonna’s romance, lack of meaning is lack of movement, stasis – a point to which we will return. The narrative, upon opening up, threatens already to collapse under its own optical illusion: “Toutesfois je ne sceu voir autre chose sinon des feuilles & rameaux qui point ne se mouvoient”. Faced with silence, Poliphile, with the tread of his foot and the saccade of his eye must set out however randomly as generator of meaning.

Upon closer inspection, the illustrations of the Songe and of the Hypnerotomachia reveal the importance of touch and its relation to sight. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote of tactile sensibility that “among men, it is a virtue of fineness of touch, and not of any other sense, that we discriminate the mentally gifted from the rest” (in Classen 2012:xii). Surely Colonna and the illustrators of his book had this in mind when they depicted Poliphile’s suggestive hand, a hand which both reaches out into the space of discovery and evokes meaning in its gestures. Indeed Jean Goujon seems to accentuate Poliphile’s tactile sensibility with the graceful dimensions of his fingers and the added details of his hands: fingernails, knuckles and wrist-bones, invisible at first in 1499. In fact, the illustrations of 1546 could be said to highlight the sensual dimension of discovery in the details provided by Poliphile’s postures, loosening in return the rigorous symbolism and visual rhetoric of the 1499 woodcut series. Two thematically opposed illustrated episodes may provide us with a lively example. In the first we see Poliphile who,

60 These added details could suggest to the sixteenth-century reader an added earthiness to the figure of Poliphile. The fingernails, for one, were readily associated with the earth element. As Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle relates, “the renaissance anatomist Alessandro Benedetti (1450?-1512) speculated that fingernails originated in the earthy part of humans and had scant heat.” (Boyle 1998:6) Bony structures, moreover, like Poliphile’s added wrist-bones, knuckles and ankle-bones will remind the viewer of his association with the earth, since as Leonardo da Vinci wrote in his Notebooks, “a man has a bony frame for his flesh: the world has rocks to hold up the earth” (da Vinci 1952:45), cited also in Jeanneret, Perpetual Motion, p. 51.
after having strayed along the spacious plain just discussed, wanders aimlessly into a dark wood where he immediately loses his bearings. In 1499 Poliphile’s gesture is part of a visual rhetoric “representing sentiments to the viewer-reader, as vernacular lyric poetry does” inspired especially by Petrarchan *topoi* (Trippe 2002:1225). The dense forest immediately brings to mind the “silva oscura” of the *Inferno*, and indeed in the 1499 woodcut (fig. 1.2), the trees hem the hero in more oppressively than in the *Songe’s* suppler variation. As a thematic contrast or contrapposto (see ibid., 1238) Poliphile’s first encounter with Polia takes place in a greatly-thinned *silva*, a kind of *locus amoenus* to the dark forest’s *locus terribilis*, where poetic desire may more easily be expressed (fig. 1.3). Indeed, Rosemary Trippe points out a startling detail of

Fig. 1.2. Poliphile in the *silva oscura*. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, f.a3v. Source: Harvard University, Houghton Library (Typ Inc 5574)
Colonna’s 1499 woodcut illustration. Poliphile, trying hard to hide the physical effects on his body which “begins to grow warm with tender love for the elegant maiden, and his feelings [which] catch fire” (Godwin 147), reaches down with his right hand to hide an erection under his robe. With his left hand, meanwhile he holds Polia’s right, who in turn holds aloft a torch in her left hand. These manual gestures have their counterparts in the first woodcut of the 1499 series where Poliphile is lost in the wood (though curiously Rosemary Trippe does not elucidate them). There, Poliphile, “defenseless and terribly afraid,” reaches out a right hand eclipsed by a tree trunk in the foreground, and with his left visibly holds the folds of his garment around his crotch towards himself. Discovery of the world, these episodes evoke for us, is wrapped up in Eros, and Eros in bodily awareness. As contrapposti they demonstrate two tactile extremes.
One is active or passive, seeking to grab or be grabbed, to castrate or be castrated, the other, an “active exploratory touch”, which does not stop at the “grasping of an object” but seeks the “grasp of its meaning” too. This reciprocal touch between subject and object from which meaning may emerge is, like Poliphile and Polia’s two held hands, both grasping as much as grasped, a middle ground between the pure, earthy desire of Poliphile’s erection and the divine, unfathomable light of the torch she holds aloft.

In 1546, Poliphile’s gestures seem caught in action, in the arc of a gesture, thus losing to some degree the apparent symbolism in 1499 in order to evoke the process of exploratory touch. In the first woodcut of the series, for instance, Poliphile, no longer as dramatically framed by tree trunks barring his way, nevertheless evokes plenty by virtue of his posture (fig. 1.4). Edging his bare right foot hesitatingly before his left, he stares all the while at an abysmal knot in the tree bark before him, a kind of echo perhaps of Poliphile’s “eyes turned into whirlwinds” (Godwin 155), and holds his left hand to his breast, his right eclipsed around his back. We note an added detail: the presence of two gloves held in Poliphile’s left hand, the index finger of which suggestively straightens out. Gloves, especially perfumed ones, it is known, were a new courtly fad at the time, inspired by the arrival of Catherine de’ Medici (Toussaint-Samat 1990:436-438). Apart from this new Italian trend at the French court of Henri II, the choice of this added detail suggests a heightened sensitivity to the tactile world after the removal of a protective covering.

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61 These formulations are from James Gibson’s seminal work on the senses (see Gibson 1966:123) and in particular touch as much more than just “yielding information only about patterns on the skin in two dimensions” (ibid., 102) but also as an exploratory ability to create images in three dimensions and concomitant images of the body. “Thus a child who grasps a ball might feel the shape of the object as well as the shape of his grasping fingers.” (Ibid.)
which as Toussaint-Samat writes, “protège [la main] des intempéries comme il l’isole du contact direct avec ce qui est impur, ce qui est dangereux” (ibid., 436). Removing a glove not only leads to potentially hazardous contact with the world, it also suggests a desired intimacy; such a gesture “signifiait que l’on se présentait désarmé, les mains nues, en confiance” (ibid).

Poliphile’s naked hand is thus as apt to defile or be defiled, as it is to search out for a more intimate communion with the world at large.62

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62 Boyle (1996:573-574) has remarked on the glove as a particularly feminine accoutrement, made popular by Catherine de’ Medicis, Louise Labé and later, on the other side of the channel, Elisabeth I who would draw “on and
Within the woodblock series of 1546, the erotic dimension of tactile discovery is perhaps subtler than its 1499 counterpart, but nevertheless far from absent. In the final woodcut print of the first part, for instance, the discerning viewer will note an added detail, absent in 1499 (see fig. 1.5). Poliphile, sitting among the throng of nymphs who have accompanied him and Polia to the island of Cythera, is preparing to listen along with them to Polia’s account of their love’s beginnings. His right hand rests with its fingers curled on his right thigh while his left hand, slipped half-way under his left thigh, extends an index finger in just

![Fig. 1.5. Poliphile at the fountain of Venus. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.132r. Source: Harvard University, Houghton Library (Typ 515.46.296)](image)

off her glove to reveal her beautiful hand”. This early “revelation” of Poliphile’s hand already makes of it an eroticized object of exceptional psychological power.
the right place... No doubt Goujon is reminding us here of the powerfully erotic dimension of exploratory touch and of discovery in general. Moreover, any question of whether Poliphile has had to take leave of his senses in order to reach the idyllic island of Cythera is definitively put to rest by his subtle gesture. Touch remains the fundamental, generating sense of the world. We note, furthermore, to dispel any possible doubt that Poliphile’s gesture is devoid of meaning here, that he echoes similar gestures assumed by the satyr and nymph on the frontispiece of 1546 (fig. 1.6). Both caryatids are highly stimulating of the viewer’s tactile imagination. The satyr folds his right arm under his generous, rather feminine breast as he touches his left nipple with his thumb and wraps four fingers over his intercostal muscles. His left arm reaches down towards his crotch, while his fingers curl into the invaginations of the hide he is barely
wearing. This sexually ambivalent portrait of auto-stimulation reappears, inverted, as it were, on the opposite side where a nymph looks over in fear (or is it coyness?) at her lascivious counterpart. Mirroring his gestures, she seems to be pushing off her garments as much as pulling them over her, as her right hand grips them over her pubis and her index finger straightens out to suggest that she is, perhaps, male. These creatures prepare us for Poliphile’s sensuous adventure, and their empathic relationship encourages the reader’s own erogenous, bodily apprehension of the text and images to come. The caryatids imply, together, that the tactile road to knowledge is not binary, traveled by the toucher and the touched, the grabber and the grabbed, the assimilating and the assimilated. These are dead ends. Rather, it demands that its apprentices be touched by as much as touch the world, that they let the world create them as much as they create it, accepting along the way the reciprocal nature of touch.

To be sure, in the epistemology of Colonna’s romance, the acquisition of knowledge of the world through Poliphile’s sense of touch alone is problematic. He will not forego touch for all that, but it will have to be synchronized with sight in order to lead to the proper path to knowledge. Poliphile’s apprenticeship of his sense of touch will move from what Hans Jonas has termed “contact-sensation” or “touch-impression” – “the most elementary level” of tactile sense “in which the pressure of a contiguous body is felt at the point of incidence” – to “the act

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The satyr’s posture indicates bodily zones of particular sensitivity and (tactile) self-perception. As Quiviger 2010 reminds us, “tactile receptors are principally concentrated on the hands, feet and mouth areas, followed by nipples, genitalia, and feet” (pp. 108-110). While the frontispiece’s caryatids have no feet by definition, Poliphile is bearfoot throughout the woodcut series (see, e.g., fig. 1.4), not to mention his oddly pursed lips in the final woodcut illustration of the Songe’s first part (fig. 1.5).
of feeling” (Jonas 1954:510). Let us listen to Poliphile in the *silva oscura* into which he stumbles after his visual-tactile awakening within the “spatiosa planitie”:

Et cusi dirrimpecto d’una folta silva ridrizai el mio ignorato viaggio. Nella quale alquanto intrato, non mi avidi che io cusi incauto lassasse, non so per qual modo, el proprio calle; dique al suspeso core di subito invase uno repente timore, per le pallide membre diffundentise cum solicitato battimento, le gene del suo colore exangue divenute. Conciosia cosa che ad gli occhi mei quivi non si concedeva vestigio alcuno di videre ne diverticulou, ma nella dumosa silva apparianou si non densi virgulti, pongente veprett, el silvano fraxino ingrato alle vipere, ulmi ruvidi alle foecundde vite grati, corticosi subderi apto additamento muliebre, duri cerri, forti roburi et glandulose querce et ilice et di rami abondante, che al roscido solo non permettevano gli radii del gratioso sole integramente pervenire, ma come da camurato culmo di densante fronde coperto, non penetrava l’alma luce… (Colonna 1499:a3r)

[Thus I steered my ignorant course toward a thick wood that lay opposite. Scarcely had I entered it than I realized that I had carelessly lost my way, I knew not how. A sudden fear entered my hesitating heart, whose rapid beating spread it throughout my pallid limbs and drained all the colour from my bloodless cheeks. I realized that no track or side-path was to be seen here in this thorny wood – nothing but dense thickets, sharp brambles, the wild ash that vipers shun, rough elms that suit the fruitful vines, thick-barked cork-oaks apt for woman’s adornment, hard Turkey-oaks, strong roburs, acorn-bearing oaks and ilexes with their abundant branches. They did not allow the sun’s welcome rays to reach the damp soil, but covered it like a vaulted roof with dense leaves that the nurturing light could not penetrate.] (Godwin 13)

Following a short-lived state of grace, Poliphile’s search for meaning diverts him into the thick of the “vastissima Hercynia silva”, what Martin translates as the “Forêt Noire”, an ancient quasi-mythical forest located between the Rhine and the Danube (Polizzi 1994:413). The topos, importantly, is not only an evocation of primordial chaos, but of high-pitched physical contact. Pliny, ever an inspiration for Colonna, writes of the legendary forest’s “vast expanse [...]
untouched by the ages and coeval with the world, which surpassed all marvels by its almost immortal destiny.” He tells, moreover, of the oak trees’ great roots, that “their arches in their struggles with one another [inter se rixantes] rise as high as the branches”\(^\text{64}\). This is a place where sight fails in the absence of the “sun’s welcome rays” and where touch violently presides. Colonna multiplies the tactile impressions suffered by Poliphile – of thickets, vipers, rough elms and embracing vines, to mention only a few – bringing them to life on the tip of our tongues and the edge of our lips. Indeed, fricatives abound in the text. All of a sudden, at “Conciosa cosa...”, we encounter as many [v]’s as Colonna brambles and thorns: “quivi”, “concedeva”, “vestigio”, “videre”, “diverticulo”, “silva”, “virgulti”, “vepretto”, “silvano”, “vipere”, “ruvidi”, “vite”... And it seems we are barely wheezing Poliphilo through the tactile space between our teeth and lips, as though through the undergrowth. The more Poliphile attempts to escape touch-impressions in this \textit{locus terribilis}, the more they multiply: “I forced my hesitant and wandering paces to hurry on, often falling over roots protruding from the earth, seeking at random now this way, now that, now right, now left, now forwards, now back again, not knowing where I was going. Thus I came to a woodland full of briars and brambles, a place of thorn-bushes and prickly prunes whose rough berries scratched my face, while the sharp thistles and other spines tore my robe and held me back, delaying my attempted flight.” (Godwin 14) Yet the more his touch-impressions multiply, the faster and more randomly Poliphile attempts to get away: “Seeing no indication of a viable footpath or trodden way, I was much confused and dismayed and went even faster.” (ibid) Poliphile’s fear does not permit him to take the time to wait and feel out the objects in his way, attempting to form a haptic image.

\(\text{64}\) Pliny (1945), \textit{Natural History}, \textit{Vol. IV}, p. 391.
of what lies around him. Instead he bumps from one obstacle to the next in a frantic attempt to escape assimilation and loss of identity, avoiding in other words the “lairs of dangerous beasts and caverns full of noxious creatures and fierce monsters” (ibid) which he imagines around every corner. Indeed, every new contact evokes any number of imagined threats – a chaos of imagination. The singular touch-impression permits of a possibly infinite number of contiguous objects: a thorn? a tusk? a dragon’s tooth?... Thus, the thorny V’s which proliferate in the text do not only mimic, as fricatives, Poliphile’s tactile experience, they also emblematize the embodied touch-event in their form: the single touch-impression (what Jonas evocatively calls an “atomic touch-sensation”), like the point of a V, may be generative of many, indeed infinite, imagined associations. It also emblematizes the psychological dynamic of blind touch-impression. At the touch-event, or the point of the V, Poliphile is threatened by assimilation and loss of identity. Instead of feeling his way out, however, he bifurcates his path like a pinball’s from one contact-event to the next without gaining any further knowledge about his surroundings nor himself. His flight ramifies finally into a “tangled Labyrinth” (Godwin 15) in an endless attempt to avoid the fatal touch of Ariadne’s “monstrous brother” (ibid), the Minotaur. 

Poliphile will, by the grace of the gods, escape this first tactile gauntlet but not without learning an important lesson. To make sense of the world one cannot be in a fight-or-flight rapport with it. Poking, grabbing will not do. To make a garden out of nature’s primordial forest one must concomitantly make a garden out of the chaos of one’s imagination. The fulcrum of that process of habituation is at Poliphile’s fingertips, his palms, with which he will feel out the world and sculpt a sense of it for himself.
In his phenomenological study of the senses, Hans Jonas suggests that the sense of touch is the “most difficult in the phenomenology of sense-perception, because it is the least specialized and in its achievements the most compound of the senses.” (Jonas 1954:510) Indeed, as anyone knows a tactile apprehension of the world comes in many guises. “Representation of tactile awareness comes in several categories including expressions of internal bodily awareness, skin contact and perception of ambient temperature” (Quiviger 2010:105) Skin contact alone, as Jonas shows, is of great phenomenological complexity. It may remain at the level of an “atomic element”, that is, “simply having a touch encounter,” a “contact-situation” which sets off in Poliphile’s mind such a cascade of potential meanings. Yet willful haptic exploration takes mere sentience to a new level. “Through the kinesthetic accompaniment of voluntary motion the whole perception is raised to a higher order: the touch qualities become arranged in a spatial scheme, they fall into the pattern of surface, and become elements of form.” (Jonas 1954:510) For Poliphile, this demands a more equilibrated emotional relationship with the tactile world, reaching his hand further out still to collect the next touch datum – though the next “V” be the tooth in the gaping maw of a dragon. It is clear that emotion and imagination are intimately linked in such a sense-making process. The more Poliphile tames his fear and experiments the world at his fingertips, the further he may carve form and meaning out of his wild imagination. If upon a primordial touch he is unindividuated and in constant contact with a chaos of form, a primordial act of will, overcoming fear, reaches to the next “touch-situation,” and the next, correlating them, synthesizing, bringing form out from brute matter like the bas-reliefs Poliphile meets along the way.
The apprenticeship of Poliphile’s savage touch begins in the dramatic scene in which he is chased into a “difficult and devious labyrinth” for the second time (Godwin 61). It will be worthwhile to follow Colonna’s careful mise-en-scène of this episode which couples and complicates the modalities of sight and touch. After having carefully described the visually stunning façade of a magnificent portal, Poliphile places his “right foot reverently on the sacred threshold […] without any thought but curiosity” and penetrates the “open entrance into the bright hallway” (Godwin 59). But he is immediately treated to a visual shock. Jean Martin follows Colonna closely here:

... je mis le pied droit sur le seuil de la porte et [...] je passai outre [...] et trouvai que le dedans n’était pas moins riche que le dehors, car les murailles costières étaient de marbre blanc et, au droit du milieu d’icelles, de chacune des parts, était rapporté un grand rond de jayet, environné d’un chapeau de triomphe, fait de jaspe vert ; lequel rond était si noir et tant poli que l’on s’y pouvait voir comme en un miroir cristallin. Je fusse passé outre sans y prendre garde, mais quand je fus entre les deux, j’aperçus ma figure d’un côté et d’autre, dont je devins aucunement épouvanté, pensant que ce fussent deux hommes. (Polizzi 63)

The “grand rond de jayet” proleptically echoes from afar the “grand piece de jayet” (Polizzi 318) in which he will mistakenly glimpse the abyss before he literally bumps into it. Here, however, rather than a yawning void that threatens the dissolution of his identity, Poliphile is given a superficial reassurance of an identity integrated into the world. We are reminded of Merleau-Ponty’s words on mirrors in La Prose du Monde. “The trouble with mirrors,” he notes, “is that they show too much. I do not see my body in the ordinary course of things as I see it in the
mirror. It is not an object laid open to my gaze, as it is in the mirror, but that which looks, feels, moves. The world exists for me not because I see it but because I am a part of it.” Poliphile, momentarily rattled by a foreign gaze, settles down when he finds his are the only eyes navigating the surface of this world. Moreover, the mirrors offer a convenient means through which to safely survey the surrounding environment: “[I] was reassured by an unexpected pleasure, for [the mirrors] offered a clear view of the scenes [offeriva chiaramente el iudicio dille historie] that were depicted there in splendid mosaic work.” Curiously, Jean Martin does not translate this part, perhaps because of the peculiarity of Poliphile’s means of appreciating his surroundings. It is, however, a crucial element of the episode which helps shed light on Poliphile’s apprenticeship of sight and touch.

Poliphile’s means of apprehending his surroundings through the obsidian mirrors is surely inspired by Brunelleschi’s famous perspective machine. As a reminder, in Brunelleschi’s famous demonstration of linear perspective, he had the experimenter, situated a few feet inside the central portal of the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, place a panel between him and the Baptistery across the way. The panel was blank on the side facing the experimenter. On the opposite side was a painting in perspective of the Baptistery. Peering through a pin-hole in the panel’s center, the experimenter, to his surprise, could compare the optical equivalence between the “real” Baptistery glimpsed through the pinhole, and what he saw there when he placed a mirror in front of the panel. The mirror, reflecting the painted side opposite, presented an exact replica of what he had seen previously through the hole. Poliphile too marvels at the

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65 Cited in Josipovici, Touch, p. 18.
66 For a thorough treatment of Brunelleschi’s demonstration of linear perspective, see S. Edgerton 2009:44-53. Edgerton contends that “the increasing popular standard for measuring pictorial ‘realism’” in Colonna’s
mosaic work along the portal’s ceiling through a black, circular reflecting surface which seems to conflate both the pin-hole and mirror in Brunelleschi’s experiment. It is, furthermore, implied that he sits down along the portal wall to gaze through either mirror at his leisure. The text quoted above continues: “Low down on both sides, beneath the bright mirrors, there were stone seats along the walls.”

Curiously, nowhere in the text is it explicitly stated that Poliphile sits, though this must be the case geometrically for him to be able to view the ceiling through the side mirrors. Moreover, when Poliphile is finally chased from his day-dream by a frightful dragon the associated woodcut catches him verisimilarly in the act of standing back up again, one foot still touching the bench and the other stepping into the midst of the portal (fig. 1.7). Be that as it may, Poliphile’s mode of apprehending his environment in the portal is based on a neglect of bodily movement as well as bodily awareness. Poliphile enters into a trance in which he surveys the entirety of nature as if seated in a planetarium. “I gazed intently with my lips agape, my fluttering and mobile eyelids motionless, my soul enraptured, as it contemplated these scenes which were so beautiful, so well arranged and perfectly in order […]. There were exquisite details of waters, springs, mountains, hills, woods and animals, whose colours faded with distance and opposing light; there were the appropriate reflections in the folds of garments and in other places, in no small emulation of nature’s skill. I was so amazed and absorbed that I was as though lost to myself.”

The hero is treated here to a magnificent and flawless vision in which touch plays no part. Indeed nothing tactile comes in to time “was not by direct comparison to the phenomenal world, but by comparison to the novelty of mirror reflection.”

It would appear, under the portal, Poliphile applies this popular standard to his aesthetic appreciation of its mosaic work.

“Au-dessous de ces ronds, au long des costières, étaient faits des sièges de marbre, de la hauteur de deux pieds…” (Polizzi 63)
interrupt and break the illusion: “the coloured ceiling was free from unwanted spiders’ webs” (Godwin 59). He is even treated to the same sense of bodily immersion as within the “spatiosa planitie” of the incipit: “a fresh breeze continually blew there” (ibid). But this only exacerbates the illusion and it is clear that Poliphile is another Icarus, whose father is depicted upon the ceiling “making ingenious wings for himself and Icarus to escape from imprisonment; but the unfortunate son did not follow his father’s command and example, and fell headlong into the Icarian waters, to which, dying, he gave his name.” (Godwin 61) Poliphile, as in a dream of flying, feels the breeze in his hair and thinks himself above the world. But his illusion is about to flip right-side up, and Icarus come crashing to the ground...

68 The spider’s web was a particularly potent symbol of the sense of touch in medieval and renaissance art and mnemotechnics. The earliest example is from Thomas de Cantimpré’s verses in his Liber de naturis rerum as a mnemonic aid associating particular animals with the senses in which they excelled: “Nos aper auditu, lynx visu, simia gustu, / Vultur odoratu praecellit, aranea tactu” (Nordenfalk 1985:1 my emphasis), a distich which will still be found in Cesare Ripa’s Iconologia (Vinge 1985:51). For later iconographic examples of the spider as an animal allegorizing touch, see Nordenfalk 1976:21-25, 1985:19-20, Dackerman 2011:390-395, Vinge 1985:51-53. By Colonna’s time, however, the parrot and especially the tortoise are vying with the spider as representations of touch, by and large winning out over their predecessor in baroque iconography (see Vinge 1985:n.53, Classen 2012:75, Dackerman 2011:390-395). Still, in the 18th century, Alexander Pope will avail himself of the spider’s tactile reputation: “The spider’s touch, how equisitely fine! / Feels at each thread and lives along the line” (cited in Nordenfalk 1976:22). For the spider as a persistent representation of both “woman as housewife [...] and as temptress”, see Classen 2012:75.

69 Poliphile’s “fluttering and mobile eyelids motionless” are quite suggestive of what we know now to be indicative of REM sleep and its associated vivid dreaming.
about to turn back from there when I suddenly heard through the broken ruins something like a breaking of bones and a cracking of branches. (my translation)\textsuperscript{70}

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\textsuperscript{70} Godwin begins his translation “In this way I came to the end of the hallway, where the charming scenes ended...” (61), and Martin too assumes Poliphile is walking around: “Ainsi, cheminant pas après autre, je parvins jusques au bout de l’entrée où la peinture finissait...” (Polizzi 65). Ariani and Gabriele make the same assumption in their Italian translation (1998:79). But reading the text carefully, one notes that nowhere is Poliphile said to be standing, much less walking around (instead the passive voice is used). My contention, to reiterate, is that Colonna wishes we imagine him comfortably sitting on one of the benches under one mirror while admiring the ceiling in the mirror opposite. He may have to shift up or down or change sides, but as Poliphile reports, the mirrors “offered a clear view of the scenes that were depicted there in splendid mosaic work” and this is the medium through which he chooses to produce his oculocentric experience.
teeth. Its fat, scaly body slithered over the tiled pavement, and as it glided, its wings slapped its
furrowed back, while its long tail wound itself in serpentine fashion into tight, unstable knots.”
(Godwin 62) As in the forest scene discussed above, the text here in Colonna is full of
alliteration suggestive of oral tactility. In the first sentence, [t]’s proliferate (“trisulche &
tremule lingue vibrante cum le pectinate maxille di pontuti & serrati stridente”), followed in the
last by guttural [g]’s (“Cum la longa coda lapsi anguinei, grandi nodi strictamente inglobava
instabili”), both suggestive of the dragon’s physical anatomy: the [t]’s multiply in imitation of
the beast’s teeth, the [g]’s of its sinuous tail and its digestive tract. In the illustration
immediately following Colonna’s text, we see Poliphile preparing to flee into the dark labyrinth
behind him, surprised from his shattered reverie as he leaps to his feet from under the circular
mirror. His left foot still abuts the seat where he sat just a moment ago in ecstasy “as though
lost to [him]self” under an aerial vision of the world, the other steps out into the midst of the
portal, turned at ninety degrees to his right. His armspan continues the bodily torsion as his left
points out of the page and appears to touch the mirror rim, while the right points into the dark
portal and touches only the “densissimo obscuro che non audeva intrare”. As the [t]’s littering
the text – like crossroads or compasses – suggest as well, Poliphile is undergoing a reorientation
in his sensory engagement with the world which we may properly understand when compared
to another, analogous illustration appearing later in the text: a “hieroglyph” which, Poliphile is
given to understand, emblematizes the injunction to “hasten slowly”, or festina lente. A
“polished square of porphyry” he observes “on the central arch of the bridge” shows a “lady
wreathed with a serpent, sitting on only one buttock and lifting the opposite leg. On the side of
which she was sitting, she held a pair of wings in her hand, and in the other, a tortoise.” (fig.
1.8) The torsion in the woman’s body, with her right leg abutting her stool, and her left, at a ninety degree angle, preparing to stand up, not to mention the direction of her gaze away from the striding foot, permits us to draw a parallel between this festina lente emblem and Poliphile’s bodily position in the dragon scene. Both shed light on each other, and both say much more than is explicated in the text. If we are to believe Poliphile’s guide Logistica, who presents the “lady wreathed with a serpent”, we may only draw the lesson, already encountered by our hero at several stages of his adventure, of the virtue of prudence by holding the golden mean. She summarizes this particular festina lente by the adage, “Control speed by sitting, and slowness by rising”. More than just a question of balancing virtues, however, the emblem is concerned with the embodied discovery of the world. For on the left side, the side to which the lady turns her gaze, she holds two wings that can only be eagle’s wings, the animal known since Aristotle for its keen sense of sight. According to Pliny, the eagle has the “quickest and clearest eye” of all other animals, “soaring and mounting on high”\(^71\), while for Aristotle, the eagle “alights in high places [and …] it flies high in the air to have the more extensive view”\(^72\), and for Ficino, no other animal possesses such keen sight as the eagle\(^73\). Indeed, the eagle was not only associated with sight, but particularly for its ability to see at great heights, floating immobile in the sky as Isidore de Seville writes\(^74\) and the Hortus Sanitatis reiterates\(^75\). Thus, the left-hand side of the emblem represents the embodied

\(^71\) cf. Nat. Hist. X:iii (Pliny and Holland 1601, p. 272)
\(^72\) Hist. Anim. IX:34.
\(^73\) See Ficino 2003:127 and supra.
\(^74\) “The eagle is named aquila from the sharp-sightedness, acumen, of its eyes. Its sight is said to be so great that when it is borne at great height on immobile wings, over the sea, invisible to human gaze, it sees small
fish swimming; like a missible from a catapult, it descends and drags the snatched prey to shore.” (Etym. XII.vii.10, trans. Priscilla Throop, 2005)

75 “Aquila. Ysidorus. Aquila ab acumine oculos vocata. Est essi tanti contuitus ut cum super maria immobili penna seratur, nec humanis pateat obtutibus de tanta sublimitate pisciculus natare videat [...]” (De avibus, cap. 1)
experience of sight which, albeit as quick as the eagle darting earth-bound for its prey, 
nevertheless remains abstracted and detached, unengaged from what it appropriates visually. 
One could stay seated, as Poliphile does under his mirror, and believe that the world is at one’s 

ingertips. As Josipovici observes:

“Sight is free and sight is irresponsible. I can cast my eye to the far horizon and then back to the fingers I hold up before my face, all in a fraction of a second and with no effort at all. And I can repeat the operation at will.” (Josipovici 1996:9)

The left half of Colonna’s emblem contains a similar implication: though sight is quick and all-encompassing, it is physically unengaging. In the right half of the emblem, away from which her gaze is turned, the lady holds a turtle, an earthy, chthonic animal representing not only “slowness” but also touch while she extends her leg like a tentacle or an antenna, a gesture which should invoke for us, by now, Poliphile’s “erring foot” with which he dispels the errors of the eye. The lady does not merely teach to “control slowness by rising”, but encourages an active, haptic exploration of the world, one that involves both desire and fear, choice and risk, in a word, experimentation. Josipovici continues his remarks concerning our ability to cast at random our eye upon the far horizon, or, in the next instant, upon our fingers:

“On the other hand, were I to walk to that point on the horizon it would take time and effort, time and effort I might feel I could better employ doing something else. To look costs me nothing but to go involves both a choice and a cost. Yet the very decision to walk to that place endows the ensuing walk with a weight which mere looking lacks. A walk will always bring me up against the unexpected.” (ibid., my emphasis)

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76 See supra, n. 31
We are therefore led to understand the image of Poliphile’s twisting body before the dragon as a violent recalibration of sensory modalities. Torn away from the idleness of visually contemplating surfaces, his left hand still hovering over the edge of the mirror at the center point of the image, he is enjoined to engage with the unknown as he plunges his right hand into the void. Only bodily movement and physical engagement will be creative of meaning and knowledge in the chiaroscuro world in which Poliphile is made to wander.

Up to this point Poliphile has experienced tactile and visual extremes. The silva oscura had offered, to use Mandrou’s words, “an imaginary world of exceptional immediacy” (Mandrou 1975:57) in which touch alone is productive of a chaos of imagination. Blind touch is colored by fear and a binary toucher/touched, assimilating/assimilated psychology. Its mythic domain is the labyrinth in which an aerial view is denied and a tactic rather than a strategy must, finally, be employed. At its most fearful, as in the worst nightmares, it descends into bodily inertia and feels always already the devouring Minotaur. The great planetary mosaic, on the other hand, devoid of “spiders’ webs”, had permitted Poliphile to sate his desire to see, as only Icarus far above the world could see, the plan of the labyrinthine world beneath. Disembodied sight is colored by desire, a narcissistic desire for itself alone, taking for granted a given world which opens up, unique, before a singular point of view. Though disembodied sight in Colonna might appear, for a moment, to transcend the fearful binary world of blind touch, such a possibility, as

77 It goes without saying that, as the eagle and the turtle in the festina lente emblem represent sight and touch respectively, so too do the mirror and Poliphile’s hand in the dragon episode. This itself has its analogue in the iconography used for Colonna’s representation of the five senses as nymphs where touch only holds out her hand, and sight holds a mirror. See Nordenfalk (1985) for other iconographies of sight and touch utilizing the mirror and the hand.
the vengeful dragon brings home, is illusory. Thus, between pure sight and blind touch, between desire and fear, between stasis and movement, image and imagination, contemplation and distraction, Poliphile is enjoined to develop an ethics of discovery through which he may make sense in the world.

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Indeed, Poliphile’s work is properly to make sense in the world, not of the world. He is creative of a world of sense. This is what he means when he appeals to “the workshop of my imagination” (Godwin 283) in an effort to mold with his mind’s finger the shapes in his environment which he cannot simply have and hold. And this is the purpose of the paradoxical setting of worldly discovery within a dream. For Colonna, meaning cannot emerge from sight alone, the sense productive of illusion and mere repetition; meaning begins with the difference of touch, a feeling touch illuminated by the light of phantasia or imaginatio. Knowledge, then is not the apprehension of an object already there by a subject merely opening its eyes to receive it ready-made – a voir; nor is it the possession of an object grasped by the hand – an avoir; it is a mutually constructive communion in which both subject and object are transformed, or reborn, as it were, through an eventual con-naissance. What distinguishes the one from the other, the human experimenter from the world experienced is, for Colonna, the power of choice, the will to reach out and make eventual contact with a material world, every new contact the site of a new con-naissance.
Thus, Poliphile, a fallen Icarus deep within the bowels of the labyrinth which serves as the foundation of the great pyramid and portal he had been admiring and speculating upon in purely visual terms, is compelled to turn himself into the chthonic snail.

Although my eyes had become somewhat accustomed to the darkness, I was miserably unable to discern a single thing, but walked with my arms stretched out in front of my face to avoid striking my head on a pillar as I went. These did the office of my sightless eyes, just as a snail, carrying its house, stretches and shrinks its soft little horns to feel its way and draws them in at every obstacle. That is how I went, feeling so as not to bump into these massive foundations of the mountain and the pyramid. I kept turning toward the doorway to see if the cruel and fearful dragon was following me, but the light had totally vanished. (Godwin 63)

The snail is of course a symbol of slowness, deliberation and care. Poliphile, here, on the foundation of art and knowledge, at the primordial border between “montagna & Pyramide” (Colonna 1499:d4r) and thus disorder and order, matter and form, takes on the key quality of the architect for Colonna who, “besides being learned, [...] should be well-spoken, kindly, benevolent, mild-mannered, patient, good-humoured, hard-working, a man of universal curiosity, and slow. Yes, I say slow, so that haste will not lead him into blunders...” (Godwin 43).

In the “workshop of my imagination”, Poliphile (re)creates the world around him with every feeling gesture, every deliberate extension of a seeing body into the world. “Feeling so as not to bump”, he has in effect learned his lesson of the silva oscura where every “atomic touch-sensation” (to return to Jonas’ term) was productive of a chaos of imagination. With the mitigation of fear, the elementary touch encounter may evolve under the pyramid into the

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78 In an emblem of Alciati (1534: 53), the snail is compared to the marvelous remora fish, celebrated by Pliny as a small sea-creature which in spite of its size is nevertheless capable of stopping a ship under full sail by attaching itself to its hull.
visualizing touch of a snail, generating surfaces and creating forms in the imagination. It is no surprise then when the reader finally follows Poliphile to the very navel of the pyramid, glowing with a mysterious light, where “some dark statues were visible, whilst all around were vast and indiscernible corridors and fearsome subterranean passages beneath the mountain, supported on either side by great piers in endless rows, some square, others hexagonal or octagonal, scarcely discernable in the feeble light but of a size fit to bear the excessive weight of the pyramid pressing down on them.” (Godwin 65). Like a good architect’s, Poliphile’s haptic experimentation of the world begins here to shed a new light on nature, constructive of what Leonardo da Vinci called a “second nature” comprised of the “marvelous and various works” of the “human race” (Vinci 1998:61) which it is not in the purview of nature by herself to create. Poliphile at the portal is thus denied the clean knowledge of a contemplating demi-god high above his creation; within the labyrinth he must get his hands in the mud to create knowledge from scratch based on a tactic of experience and experiment. It is his creations alone that he may intimately know – much like the “infinite number of compounds” which for Leonardo da Vinci is within man’s power to create from nature’s “production of elementary things” (Vinci 10) – because he has shaped them with the finger of his mind and the palm of his hand. We may understand better at present the aptness of the dream-narrative, where from the depths of his sleeping body, Poliphile is enfolding and unfolding his encyclopedic knowledge within the complexity of his visions.

By the time Poliphile escapes the labyrinth thanks to a feeling touch which illuminates the complicated space around him, he has effected a transformation not only of opaque brute matter but of himself – transformations which will continue to occur at every event of discovery. Indeed two parallel transformations have taken place, one of which we have just considered. In the first Poliphile begins with a chaos of matter as yawning as the portal into which he flees. The moment is reminiscent of the *silva oscura*, but will occur for Poliphile at every new encounter. His first meeting with the five senses is a perfect and archetypal example. Fearful of the welcome he might receive from the mysterious nymphs and unable to identify what he is seeing and hearing, Poliphile is faced with an abrupt question from one of them, “more confident and bold than the rest”: “Who are you?” (Godwin 77), a question which strikes the wanderer dumb: “I was flustered with my habitual fear and sudden shame, not knowing what to say or reply, and with my voice and mind both paralyzed, I remained standing half-dead, like a statue.” (ibid.) And indeed, Colonna’s illustration (fig. 1.9) depicts our fearful hero, his hands tucked within his sleeves like two retracted snail’s antennae, separated from the five senses by two twisted tree trunks: brute matter. The doubled tree suggests the process of discovery and the event of *con-naisance* which merges a binary, agonistic, subject-object pair, defined by an assimilating touch, into a single mutually creative event wrought by imaginative feeling. Thus every new encounter asks the same question. Not only “what is this”? but “who am I”? And every new answer will be a rebirth. But before he can get there, Poliphile must, like the first nymph Aphea (i.e. touch) in Colonna’s illustration, reach out a hand into the environment and possibly touch something – as she is possibly touching the tree trunk before her. With movement eventually comes the transformation of fear into desire, and the sense of
smell coming next in line in the illustration suggests those ubiquitous breezes which marry the discoverer with the discovered. The sense of hearing, who holds a lyre, is also excited by sounds borne on a breeze, but strives moreover to sense and create harmonies even in the absence of light. Finally sight follows in line, holding a mirror which reflects the forms and surfaces recreated by the imagination. The final sense in the series is taste, who holds up a chalice of “precious liquid”. We may understand this curious placement of the sense of taste as the transformative endpoint of the event of discovery – a communion between the discoverer and
the thing discovered, the experimenter and the experimented⁸⁰. When Poliphile finally escapes from the labyrinth, having passed through its belly where corridors radiate harmoniously like a silent air, he appears to transform his feeling arms once more. Having beheld a “particle of blessed light”, indicating an exit from the heart of the labyrinth, he speeds towards the issue:

“I finally reached the broad outlet and hurried out of it, without hesitating for a moment as I fled, while my arms, busied hitherto with avoiding collision with the stout pillars, turned themselves conveniently into oars to assist my flight.” (Godwin 66)

Though the reference to oars may seem incidental, there is a precedence for it in the novel and indeed elsewhere⁸¹. Icarus had flown high over the world with an “oar-like device” his father had “made from feathers” (Godwin 61). And the “spreading wings” of the statue of a Jovian eagle gripping a baby Ganymede in its talons were characterized as “oar-bones” (Godwin 50). Poliphile, having felt his way through the labyrinth as a snail, transforms himself for a second time as an eagle. Yet he is still denied the possibility of the bird’s-eye view he had vainly appropriated at the portal’s threshold. As the Icarian allusion as well as the “oar-bones” of an artificial Jupiter suggest, Poliphile has fashioned himself into a visionary; and his surroundings into a vision. Thus, the final “sense” in the series of five reminds us that Poliphile’s discovery of the world begins with fearful illusion and elusion – a static state in which both he and things are

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⁸¹ See Alciati (1534: 53) where an emblem, chiding students who in spite of great potential allow themselves to be distracted and slowed down in their progress by the vain pursuits of youth, shows a mariner touching a snail with an extended finger, an act which, like the remora fish tucked beneath the ship, stops the swift propulsion of its oars (remorum).
kept secret and apart – and end in collusion, a secret and intimate communion with the world founded upon creative contact.

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Poliphile’s world is a visual one, surrounded by the beautiful, the luminous and the mysterious. Yet as we have seen, the hero of the Songe and the Hypnerotomachia cannot remain at the shimmering surface of things. Sight alone cannot lead to a proper knowledge of the world. At best it leaves Poliphile in rapt and static awe under the planetarium of a tessellated portal; at worst it leaves him terrified by the illusion of an abysmal slab of black obsidian. In both cases he stops merely at the vain matter of dream, refusing – out of a narcissistic desire or a primitive fear – to engage with the world. But as the subtitle reminds us, out of the silent, nameless world of a dream, many things “obiter” (“along the way”) might be weaved which are worthy of memory. Poliphile has only to fearlessly extend a feeling hand – or an erring foot – to meet and work the pliable matter before him, as he begins to do at a river bordering the dark forest (fig. 1.10). There, thirsty and tired, he crouches on its bank and reaches a hand to cup some cool water to his parched lips. At this early stage, Poliphile has yet to learn the lesson of the five senses – to hasten slowly in his tactical experience of the world – and, thirsty though he is, he lets slip from his hands the life-giving water in order to follow acoustic harmonies he hears wafting, abstract and mysterious, on the breeze. In this first dream sequence – he falls asleep again exhausted and more parched than ever under a great oak tree – Poliphile suffers a fall from grace when he allows his handful of water to fall to the ground. Ejected from this Eden of
the imagination – for without a doubt the river is the source and *copia* of imagination and uninterrupted discourse – Poliphile must draw upon his own creative resources to fashion the surfaces and forms of knowledge. A Narcissus damned to wander east of Eden, he is resurrected as a Pygmalion making beautiful and ordered sense out of the elements of a disordered world.
We began this chapter by reading some passages from the paratextual material of the *Songe* and the *Hypnerotomachia*. While, from the language found there, we could certainly confirm the importance of a visual modality of reading, it became clear that the reader was also compelled to discover the book’s contents in an embodied fashion. One elegy simulated an orator at once pointing to the images in the text and to the objects represented by the images, encouraging an imaginative slipping in and out of the fictional world of the image and text. The sense of hearing was particularly appealed to as would an orator preparing to communicate the tools – so many figures of speech – out of which his audience must actively construct their own vision. Indeed, the river at which Poliphile kneels appears to have its source this side of the frame – with us. We are appealed to – our feeling sight, our imaginative touch, and finally our *understanding* (“intendere”/“entendre”) – in order, finally, to make collective sense of the *Songe* and create sites of memory. The way the book in its composition and articulation, in its *mise-en-scène*, succeeds in persuading us to do so will be the subject of the next chapter.
What can we discover about the way the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and its French counterpart were read and used by their early readers? Before taking a closer look in the next chapter at the particular editorial choices in text and image articulation within these two books, I would like to take a close look at the suggestive marks on several copies held at the Houghton library. My hope is to motivate the idea that readers both treated the text as a treasury of scientific fact and a book with which to play and imagine.

As in our preceding chapter on Poliphile’s sensory modes of apprehending knowledge, let us turn first to the presentational material framing these two texts. The paratexts of the *HP* and the *Songe* had helped us make sense of the roles of sight and touch in Poliphile’s amorous quest for knowledge, as they began to suggest how we are expected to approach the book and its contents. Aside from introducing appropriate modes of knowledge acquisition, what is it exactly that the paratexts promise the reader may find within the pages of these books? In the
proem by Leonardo Battista Scita singing the praises of the *Hypnerotomachia*, the first few verses indeed promise quite a lot:

\begin{verbatim}
Hic mirabilis et novus libellus
Aequandus veterum libris avorum,
Quo, quicquid dat in orbe vita tota
Rarum et nobile, fertur ac refertur[.]
\end{verbatim}

The meaning to which Jean Martin’s translation closely hews:

\begin{verbatim}
Ce livre excellent & nouveau,
Aux antiques equiparable,
Dict tout ce qu’il y a de beau
Sur terre fertile & arable.
\end{verbatim}

In other words, everything under the sun. Everything? Well, not quite: everything *beautiful*. Everything, that is, which pleases as much as it teaches: *docere* predicated on *dulcere*.

Moreover, that we may expect everything on fertile as well as arable earth prepares us to expect not only the wonders of spontaneous nature – the so-called “simples” of natural history and medicine – but also the compounds which man has brought forth by the sweat of his brow: the wonders, therefore, of nature and of culture. The paradigmatic text here to which the *Songe* proposes to be “equiparable”\(^\text{82}\) is, I would suggest, Pliny’s *Natural History*. For Pliny too did not limit himself to the natural world. Instead, his scope takes him from geography to anthropometry, from metallurgy to statuary and architecture. Much more than a book on nature, Pliny had the pretension of writing a book on life\(^\text{83}\). He wished, furthermore, to stitch together a

\(^{82}\) “Fit to be compared, or equalled unto” (see Cotgrave 1611)

\(^{83}\) “Rerum natura, hoc est vita, narratur,” Pliny affirms to Titus of his *Historia naturalis* in his dedicatory epistle to the Roman emperor.
work recasting the productions of nature – so well differentiated already by the logical categories of Aristotle – in literary form. Providing a model for the wave of naturalist “comperegrins” and their literary Observationes of the mid-sixteenth-century, Pliny offered a guiding – if often tenuous – Ariadne’s thread though the productions of life: “I beseech the readers to take in good worth: and for the discoverie and knowledge of all Natures workes [...] to make a short start abroad with mee, and in a breefe discourse by mine owne paines and diligence digested, to see all.”

The declared aesthetics of shaping and formatting knowledge of nature and culture, garnered from careful study and often hazardous travel, into well-organized and enjoyable literary forms characterized both “literary” and “scientific” works of the sixteenth century. We read, in the poetic dedication to Crasso, of the Hypnerotomachia’s well-disposed sequence of things: “rerum [...] seriem tam bene dispositam”, while the Songe advertises a presentation of works – so laboriously invented by the eyes and hands of those who preceded us – in elegant and fluid style:

- **Ce que mille yeux & mains ont practiqué**  
  - **A grand labeur, en ce livre se donne**

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85 The wonderfully rabelaisian term is used by Wes Williams to describe Pantagruel and his fellow travelers of the Quart Livre. See W. Williams, “'Being in the Middle': Translation, Transition, and the 'Early Modern’” Paragraphs 29; 1 (2006), 27-39, p. 30. Comperegrinus (from the Latin meaning “travel companion,” or “fellow pilgrim”) seems not to have been nearly as attested as its near relative peregrinus (from peregrinor), though we encounter it, for example, in the 15th century sermons of Denis the Carthusian: “omnes in seculo isto sumus comperegrini”.

The Songe has become “brief”, indeed significantly briefer than its predecessor. Weighty tomes, in this case, are not equated to a treasure trove of knowledge. Here it is the quasi-spiritual weightlessness of the book that is the guarantor of its worth. The poet goes on to disparage those avaricious readers who would prize a book based on the weight of its contents, rather than by the style in which they are conveyed:

_ O gros espritz que raison abandonne,
Et vous au gaing miserable entendans,
Ce livre est tel, que son poix vous estonne._

Readers who stop at the weight and feel of the book are left stunned at the first phase of philosophy according to Aristotle – astonishment or wonder\(^87\) – while savvy readers will know better. Much like the snail bumping into the great pillars of the pyramid in the HP, those dull readers cannot sublimate their tactile apprehension of things. It’s through an appreciation of style and elegance, though, of _dispositio_ and narrative suspense, that the ideal reader will (re)construct the knowledge folded neatly in its sparse prose\(^88\).

\(^{87}\) “It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize.” _Metaphysics_, Vols. 17, 18, trans. H. Tredennick. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), the role of wonder and astonishment may be tracef further back to Plato: “[…] wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.” _Theaetetus_, 155d (trans. Benjamin Jowett).

\(^{88}\) The _topos_ of the deceptively light book demanding the reader’s intervention for its unpacking will return in the context of applied natural history with Pierre Belon and his _Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins_ (1551). Jacques Gohory articulates the notion in his Latin insert to later editions of the _Songe de Poliphile_ (Paris: Kerver, 1554, 1561), as well as in his curious _Livre de la fontaine perilleuse_ (Paris: Jean Ruelle, 1572): “vous ne devez moins estimer pour le peu de feuilles qu’il[s] contien[nt], […] car tels escrits ne se mesurent pas, ains se poissent comme cogoistra par effet le studieux lecteur & industrieux operator : lequel Dieu vuelve selon sa bonne intention & volonté inspirer & conduire à bon & heureux succes.” (f.a3r)
Only a few copies of the incunabular *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* are still extant – some thirty or so in private or public collections. And of these, only a precious handful have been annotated by early modern hands. Dorothea Stichel has studied one such copy, now in private possession, which was worked over by a diligent reader some time, she concludes, during the second quarter of the sixteenth century. Its copious marginalia are a priceless trove for the cultural historian to get some sense of the *HP*’s reception by Seicento readers. Of greatest interest to this particular glossator were philological explications, an unsurprising fact given the *Hypnerotomachia*’s invented and often confounding hybrid of Italian, Latin and Greek. But more than simply elucidating the meaning of a fanciful neologism, the reader, cued by proper names, diligently tracked them down through the thicket of multiple source materials, expanding, as well, the wealth of possible proper names for a given thing. In the margins next to the term *sciuri* for instance (from the Latin *sciurus* for “squirrel”), the reader makes a personal note – “l’animaletto da noi detto cusetta, et da toschi schiratto” – thus expanding a natural object’s synonyms in other languages and dialects, including his own, as botanists and naturalists were busy doing in the many vernacular works of natural history being published at the time this reader was working through his annotations. Indeed, as Stichel informs us, frequent use of contemporary natural historians was made such as Leonhart Fuchs and Jean

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91 “the animal called *cusetta* by us, and *schiratto* by Tuscans”, ibid., p. 236.
Ruel, who in France had published the first correspondence table between the Latin and French names of plants\textsuperscript{92}. The scholar’s further onomastic efforts to make sense of technical terms in book and link them to the vernacular were also greatly aided by Gessner’s \textit{Onomasticon}\textsuperscript{93}, an annotated and expanded version of the highly influential \textit{Calepino}\textsuperscript{94}.

To what end did this reader work so laboriously over his copy of the \textit{Hypnerotomachia}? The authority most cited in the margins is Pliny (about two hundred quotations in the marginalia) and as Stichel affirms, of greatest interest to the reader were embedded kernels of natural science\textsuperscript{95}. His philological explorations were not merely intended to amplify on the text, but to clarify its often enigmatic allusions with reference to ancient and contemporary sources in natural history, and if need be correct the author’s misrepresentations and misquotations\textsuperscript{96}. The marginalia, in often conferring a plurality of literary \textit{loci} per term, paint a portrait – Belon will call it a \textit{perspective of effigy} – on a given \textit{topos} in natural history. The conference of authorities do not always hold together but can sit in contradiction with one another, and with

\textsuperscript{92} Jean Ruel, one of the sixteenth-century botanists who for Gessner, “shine among the others like suns among lesser stars,” authored, among other erudite works of botany, his \textit{De natura stirpium} in three books first published in France in 1536 by Simon de Colines and then many times thereafter over the course of the century. Ogilvie, B. “The Many Books of Nature: Renaissance Naturalists and Information Overload” \textit{Journal of the History of Ideas}, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Jan., 2003) 34.

\textsuperscript{93} First published at the press of Hieronymus Curio in Basel in 1544. The Houghton holds an early edition of this early work of Gessner’s: \textit{Onomasticon propriorum nominum virorum, mulierum, sectarum, [...] Nunc primum cum ex Calepini, tum ex aliorum doctorum dictionariis partim à Conrado Gesnero, partim ab ejus amicis congestum} (Basel: Hieronymus Curio, 1546), Cyc 11.9*.

\textsuperscript{94} First published at Reggio in 1502 at the press of Dionysius Bertochus, Ambroglio Calepino’s highly successful polyglottal dictionary enjoyed a long notoriety, expanded and republished countless times well into the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Albert Labarre counts 211 editions between 1502 and 1779. See \textit{Bibliographie du dictionarium d’Ambrogio Calepino: (1502-1779)} (Baden-Baden : Koerner, 1975).

\textsuperscript{95} Stichel 1998, 224, 235. Over five hundred passages in the \textit{HP} have been attributed to Pliny’s \textit{Natural History}. Lefaivre 1997, 36. For myriad lexical borrowings from Pliny and other authorities we also refer to Casella and Pozzi, \textit{Francesco Colonna: Biographia e Opere}, II, esp. pp. 92-96.

\textsuperscript{96} Stichel 1998, 228.
the text. Thus when the reader comments on the tomb of the Egyptian king Simandro and the statue of Semiramis\(^97\), the margins bring together both an ancient and a modern – Diodorus Siculus and Leon Battista Alberti – who treat that topic “molto diversamente” and which individually stand in contradiction to the description in Colonna. Leaving such ambiguities in the balance, the reader paints a patchwork picture of a given work of nature or culture. These textual conferences are not at all unlike those which Belon describe in his methodology with which he skeptically sets out prior to confronting the object “oculairement”.

Stichel concludes of her glossator’s style of reading and approach to the HP that “he demonstrates a self-confident, critical awareness. Indeed, he treats the Hypnerotomachia more or less as a nonfictional work, poetic license being simply out of place.”\(^98\) Is he alone in this “naïve” approach to the fictional text? The presentational material of another work of fiction which enjoyed great popularity in throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century, the Aethiopicus of Heliodorus, would suggest not. In his 1534 edition of this bonafide work of Greek antiquity, Heliodorus’ first editor, Vincent Obsopäus presents the novel as a treasury of natural historical erudition, ripe for the plunder:

The author is most learned, showing real cosmographical knowledge and understanding in his descriptions of many places; he digs out and reveals the hidden causes of not a few things, and there are not a few peoples whose customs and manners he describes, all with erudition. He explains the nature of a good many rivers, mountains, stones, plants and regions of Egypt and neighboring Ethiopia (unknown to common folk) […]

\(^97\) ibid., p. 228.
\(^98\) ibid., p. 234.
what is more he left nothing rude or unpolished in the whole of his work, nothing that
could induce nausea in even the most delicate reader.  

Writing around the same time as Stichel’s glossator worked over his HP, Obsopāus presents the
Aethiopicus as a clear source of natural knowledge awaiting the reader’s diligent investigation.
And indeed, as Wes Williams has found, early modern readers of the romance who left us their
notes in copies now held by libraries in Cambridge, Oxford and London were only too eager to
“gut” their Heliodorus for natural historical, as well as ethnographic, information.

How did readers of Jean Martin’s Songe de Poliphile use his book? How did he intend it
to be used? Substantial clues to the latter question can be deduced from his address “aux
lecteurs” (f.2v-3v). The address is composed of two distinct parts. The first is a lengthy,
uninterrupted passage (f.2v-3r). It is translated, but with significant modifications, from a
similar address to the “lector” of the HP (f.3r) and offers a condensed synopsis of the story’s
plot. The second part is Jean Martin’s own supplement to original address in which he coyly
drops some hints regarding some enigmatic features of the book, not least of which are its
original author, its translator, and Jean Martin’s own role in the realization of the present
edition. We will return to this part of the address, however let us first consider the changes
wrought to the original address in the HP.

99 “multorum quoque locorum situs cosmographica ratione scitissime depingit: non paucarum rerum caussas
easque occultissimas eruit & aperit: nonnullorum populi ritus & mores erudite describit: plerorumque
fluminum, montium, lapidum, herbarum & regionum naturas, Aegypti nimirum & Aethyopiae huic conterminae,
vulgo haud cognitas explicat […] adeo in toto opere nihil rude & impolitum reliquit, quod etiam delicatissimo
lectorui nauseam adferre queat.” Epistola Dedicatoria (dated 1531) in Hēliodōrou Aithiopikēs historias biblia deka,
(Basiliae, ex officina Hervagiana, 1534) f.a3r, translated and previously cited by Wes Williams, Monsters and their

100 ibid., p. 30-31.
The first quality of Martin’s translation which strikes us immediately is its courtly tone, addressed from the outset to “Messeigneurs” (a term which recurs two more times at the head of two paragraphs and once again at the conclusion of the address). The HP, in its letter to its readers, contains no analogous epithet, rendering them as indefinite as its author. More to the point, Martin plays down the philological and descriptive contents of the text. When, for instance, the HP writes that Poliphile describes in “elegante stilo” everything which “dice havere visto di puncto in puncto & per proprii vocabulari”, Martin excises this entire passage. A little further on, he also belies the claim to Colonna’s elegant style (which was, indeed the butt of courtly humor in Italy as well\textsuperscript{101}) when he discusses the translation, evoking the original “phrase italienne [...] tant corrompue” not to mention the author’s “prolixité plus qu’asiatique”. And he implies that Colonna’s lexicon of esoteric vocabulary is a thorny field fit only for those who are “plus que moyennement doctes” – not a compliment for a book whose principle ethos in practicing science is hewing to the mean\textsuperscript{102}. Conjugated with his specific apostrophe to noble readers, Martin appears to be delineating a courtly style of scientific practice in which a call to readerly work on close, philological puzzles is silenced.

The style of Martin’s address is also suggestive of a different modality of reading. While the HP synopsis of its contents puts an emphasis on the objects to behold within the folds of

\textsuperscript{101} “[. . .] ché già ho io conosciuti alcuni che, scrivendo e parlando a donne, usan sempre parole di Polifilo e tanto stanno in su la sottilità della retorica, che quelle si difidano di se stesse e si tengon per ignorantissime, e par loro un’ora mill’anni finir quell ragionamento e levarseli davanti.” Baldassarre Castiglione, \textit{Il Libro del Cortegiano}, ed. Ettore Bonora, (Milano : Gruppo Ugo Mursia, 1972), p. 275.

\textsuperscript{102} “Les bien-heureux ont tenu le moyen. En ce passage se iuge le milieu de nostre cours, auec lequel se marie & conionct la felicité, la richesse, ou la science [...]” (1600, f41v-42r)
the book, the overview in the *Songe* is markedly diachronic, focusing on Poliphile’s
peregrinations and the story’s peripateias. Even the layout of the text – the synopsis fits
perfectly on one recto page – gives the reader of the *HP* synopsis the impression of having a
kind of snapshot of the *HP*’s objects beneath. The synopsis of the *Songe*, on the other hand,
beginning on the verso side of folio two, casually overflows on the facing recto page.
Syntactically, the copious objects in the *HP* synopsis – “Pyramide, obelisci. Ruine maxime di
edificii. La differentia di colonne la sua mesure, gli capitelli, base, epistyli [...]” – are
enumerated paratactically in a dazzling display of *amplificatio*. The synopsis gives the
impression of a box of scintillating jewels. The objects listed range widely in kind, the major part
having to do with statuary and architecture but including, too, “uno spavento” (“a fright”), “uno
egregio bagno” (“a remarkable bath”), “li cinque sentimenti” (“the five senses”), as well as
events in the plot revolving around an architectural pivot point, for instance, “Le tre porte in
quale lui rimanse Polia” (“The three doors through which he discovered Polia”\(^{103}\)). Martin, on
the other hand, makes the significant aesthetic move to weave all of these objects together in a
temporal plotting of Poliphile’s oneiric journey. In the *HP*, for example, we simply read “Le tre
porte in quale lui rimanse Polia come era di habito & habitudine.” (“The three doors through
which he discovered Polia in her usual clothing and manner”) with an implied subject and verb

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\(^{103}\) Reading on: “Le tre porte in quale lui rimanse [...] Polia come era di habito & habitudine”, where the forward slash indicates a line end. There is no reason however to interpolate a period or other punctuation as translators have done. Godwin translates the passage as “the three doors before which he tarried; Polia, her appearance and behaviour.” (op. cit., 5), while Ariani and Gabriele [AG] write “le tre porte e quella che oltrepassò, come erano l’abbigliamento e il portamento di Polia.” (op. cit., 9). Though the paratactic character of the entire passage would motivate such a move, I think both are misled by the formatting and the peculiar verb *rimanere* (expanded from *rimanse* with a tilde over the a). Instead of deriving from the Italian *rimanere* as Godwin seems to conclude, *rimanse* is most likely a Colonnian construction from the deponent Latin verb *rimor*, which can mean “to penetrate” but also “to investigate” and “to comprehend”. It takes a direct object – Polia, in this case – and seems to me a particularly apt verb for the critical event.
a full thirteen lines above “Ove lui [Poliphilo] finge havere visto [...]”. Martin expands the fragment, adding verbs, conjunctions and plot focus: “Partant de là, il s’en va aux trois portes et entre en celle du milieu où il trouve s’amie Polia dont il exprime la beauté, la bonne grâce et la façon de ses accoutrements.” Martin, in this instance, multiplies the original’s one active verb (rimanse) into four (aller, entrer, trouver, exprimer). Other examples could be given, but the result is clear. Martin is electing here to focus on plot over content. We shall discern below certain consequences of this in the book’s formatting.

What does this mean for the epistemological status of the book? To be sure, Martin is not denying his Songe its priceless contents of knowledge. Indeed, where the HP address to its readers simply looked ahead to a grand banquet scene (“uno regio pasto & superexcellente”), Martin encourages his reader to look out for medical material in the episode (“un festin solonnel en quoi l’on peut apprendre beaucoup de choses commodes à la santé des hommes”). It is unlikely though that Martin expected his reader to interrupt his reading and from thence pull out Mattioli’s Italian commentary of the Materia medica104, published only two years prior in Venice, nor Jean Ruel’s 1516 Latin rendition105, nor (heaven forbid) Manutius’ erudite edition in Dioscorides’ original Greek, published in the same year as the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili106. Instead, Martin postures as impresario as he draws a veil over the coded contents of the book. He coyly drops a clue “en passant” to assist the reader in uncovering the author’s name (“il faut

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104 Di Pedacio Dioscoride Anazarbeo libri cinque dell’istoria e material medicinale, tradotto in lingua volgare italiana da M.P. Andrea Matthioli sanese medico, con amplissime annotatione e censure (Venice : Niccolò de’ Bascarini 1544)
105 Pedacii Dioscoridis Anazarbei De medicinali materia libri quinq[ue], (Paris : Henrici Stephani, 1512)
106 Pedakiou Dioskorídou anazarbeós peri hulês iatrikês logoi hex, (Venice : Aldus Manutius, July 1499)
suivre depuis le commencement jusqu'à la fin, les lettre capitales enrichies de feuilles arabesques et celles-là vous instruiront de ce que desirez \(^{107}\), and as for Polia's identity, for a courtly sixteenth-century reader, his hint could not be more obvious: “elle porte le nom de la Romaine qui se tua pour avoir été violée par le fils d’un roi orgueilleux”. One early modern reader penned the name “Lucrezia” and underlined the corresponding text \(^{108}\) in book two of the *Songe* where Polia/Lucrezia obliquely gives her name, evidence that some readers took Martin’s address seriously and delighted in his suggested game, however facile, of textual discovery. Jean Martin chooses to heighten the erotics of enigma and the suspense of discovery in his addendum to the original address to the reader. Immediately following the synopsis, he writes:

> Vous pouvez croire Messeigneurs que dessous cette fiction, il y a beaucoup de bonnes choses cachées qu’il n’est licite révéler et aussi n’auriez-vous point de plaisir si l’on vous les spécifiait particulièrement, car jamais ne goûteriez la saveur du fruit qui se peut cueillir en cette lecture : parquo ne vous en dirai autre chose, ains remettrai le tout a l’exercice de vos études.

Our impresario is not far from taking on the role of the serpent in the garden of Eden, or “Eva Prima Pandora”\,… . Indeed he knows more than he lets on, having obscured many terms in the preceding synopsis. Where the *HP* glosses itself, Martin is mute, paring down the play of lexical and allegorical correspondence. Below is a table with all of Martin’s ellipses that I could find:

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\(^{107}\) The historiated initials form the acrostich “POLIAM FRATER FRANCISCVS COLVMNA PERAMAVIT”. In 1600, Verville will render them instead to “Francois Colomne seruiteur fidele de Polia, ce est plus conuenable & beau a un Gentil-homme, que le dire moine, tel que fut ce Colomne apres la mort de sa maistresse [...]” (Verville 1600, *op. cit.*, *4r*)

\(^{108}\) “me fut donné le nom de la chaste Romaine qui se tua iadiz pour l’oultrage que luy fit le filz d’un Roy orgueilleux” (Houghton Typ 515.46.296, f134v)
Table 2.1: Ellipses in Jean Martin’s address to the reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HP</th>
<th>Songe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“epistyli, cioe trabi recti”</td>
<td>“architraves”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“zophori, cioe frisii”</td>
<td>“frises”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“zoie overo petre pretiose”</td>
<td>“pierres precieuses”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“le cinque sentimenti in cinque nymphe un egregio bagno”</td>
<td>“comment cinq belles Nymphes le menerent aux baingz”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“el palatio della regina che e el libero arbitrio”</td>
<td>“le Palais de la Royne Eleutherilide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“uno in Laberyntho che e la vita humana”</td>
<td>“le tiers faict en Labyrinthe”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ove in medio era espressa la trinitate in figure hieroglyphe, cioe sacre sculpature aegyptie”</td>
<td>“Au milieu […] est une pyramide entailleee de caracteres egyptiens que l’on dit lettres hieroglyphiques”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“El sacrificio allantica di Priapo”</td>
<td>“le grand dieu des jardins avec ses sacrifices”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first three examples are philological and would have encouraged the reader of the HP to work over the text as Dorothea Stichel’s reader had done, drawing lexical correspondences between ancient and living languages. At each omission, Martin goes with the French name and drops the Greek terminology. The following four examples are pruned of their allegorical dimension, and in the last one Martin, predictably by now, chooses to be allusive. As in the author’s and Polia’s names, Jean Martin is playing a game of hide-and-seek for the reader’s

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109 My emphasis, here as in the following examples.
edification. His aestheticization of reading is only further intensified by these omissions, guaranteeing the pleasure his readers may garner at having uncovered each puzzle.

Jean Martin does not offer the reader his *Songe de Poliphile* entirely as a courtly *romanzo*, nor entirely as Obsopäus had offered his Heliodorus and as Stichel’s reader had received and laboriously worked over the *HP*. Instead, the *Hypnerotomachia* – translated, revised, graced with a new series of mannerist woodcuts, its bristly language tamed into graceful garden paths into the edulcorated *Songe de Poliphile* – is presented by him as fertile grounds for an epistemology of the hunt. As we have seen, Martin is patently addressing a courtly audience and by mid-century the metaphor of science as a hunt had become commonplace, especially in court society. Indeed, hunting itself, “signorial sport par excellence,” lent itself well to the image of a lord and attendant who track the secrets of science on hereditary land. Moreover, hunting was by its nature an enjoyable if physically demanding sport: the pursuit was as pleasant as the catch, and the rarer and more colorful its trappings, the better. Similarly, science as *venatio* meant gifting a prince the priceless *mirabilia* of nature, over things of intrinsic value: “only something novel, exotic, or surprising suited a prince.” Thus, for instance, when Jean Nicot brought back his wonderful new American plant from a trip to Portugal, he dedicated it to the queen, Catherine de’ Medici, hailing it as an herb to cure her migraines. She ordered the “savage” plant to be cultivated and the plant which we

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111 ibid., p. 271.
now call tobacco was dubbed “la Cathérinaire”, “l’herbe de la Royne”, or “l’herbe Médicée”\textsuperscript{112}, following a long tradition of naming potent new plants after the rulers who patronized their discovery and put them to good use\textsuperscript{113}. It ought not surprise us then if we observe a careful underline in the Houghton’s TYP copy of the \textit{Songe} plucking the mythical \textit{Moly} plant\textsuperscript{114} from its rows of type:

\begin{quote}
ne & recreu qui repose la tete sur son elchine, & tumbe sur les deux genoux. \\
Lors gisant en celle maniere, je coideroie en moymeille les variables mutations de fortune : & me soucouent des enchantemens de Circe, & autres ses semblables, penans s’il estoie point enforcelé. Helas, disfoie, comment pourra ze icy entre tant de differences d’herbes trouver Moly la mercuriale, avec sa racine noire, pour mon refugie & medicine : Puys peste, ce n’est point cela mais qu’el ce donc fors qu’on delay maing de la mort par moy tant desirez? L’elboie(croize) tant diminue de force, qu’a grand peine po
nouy ie humer lair, pour le rechauffer dedans mon estomach, ouu est de mouru vn bien peu de chaleur, preste a expire & fortir, pour me lai-
\end{quote}

As symbol of both perseverance in the \textit{emblemata} tradition and of the noble goals of natural history, the object of Poliphile’s search aligns itself with the reader’s in an assiduous hunt for

\textsuperscript{112} Bowen, Willis H., “The Earliest Treatise on Tobacco: Jacques Gohory’s \textit{Instruction sur l’herbe Petum}”, ISIS 77 (Vol. XXVIII, 2), May 1938.

\textsuperscript{113} See, for example, “To the Reader” in Rembert Dodoens, trans. Charles de l’Ecluse, \textit{Histoire des Plantes} (Antwerp: Jean Loé, 1557) and “Preface” in Pierre Belon, \textit{Observations} (Paris : Hierosme de Marnef, 1588). Carolus Clusius and others later took to the practice of naming plants after their discoverers, or, more precisely, those who first communicated to them their description. Thus Jean Liebault in his \textit{Maison rustique} (Paris: Iaques Du-Puys, 1572) introduces the tobacco plant as \textit{Nicotiana}, the Latin appellation still used today. Gessner too proposed to name any new plant not known since Antiquity after the individual who first communicated its description to him. Kusukawa, “The sources of Gessner’s pictures for the \textit{Historia animalium}” \textit{Annals of Science}, 67:3, 303-328, p. 320.

\textsuperscript{114} Rembert Dodoens rehearses the Moly plant’s ancient Greek pedigree: “Moly is also excellent against enchauntements, as Plinie […] do[es] testifie, saying, that Mercurie revealed or shewed it to Ulysses, whereby he escaped all the enchantements of Circe, the Magicien.” (Dodoens 1578; 509b) The cure-all was indeed hailed by Pliny, and had the Greek naturalist imprimatur of both Dioscorides and Theophrastus. Highly charged, it symbolized the Renaissance botanist’s noble quest (see Fuchs 1551, aa3v), while for Erasmus (\textit{De Copia}, 1978, p. 612) and Budé (\textit{op. cit.}, 191-192), who drew from its Homeric tradition as a panacea against bestiality, it symbolized humanist and christian wisdom. In the \textit{emblemata} tradition it could symbolize eloquence (Alciato, \textit{op. cit.}, 13v) or perseverance (Coustau, \textit{op. cit.}, 307). The vague and contradictory descriptions in Homer, Theophrastus and Dioscorides gave rise to a wide range of attempts at identifying the moly plant in the sixteenth-century (see de Gubernatis, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 229-30). For an overview of the complex philological and botanical history of identifying the Moly plant up until the present day, see Stannard, \textit{op. cit.}
rare pearls of knowledge. Martin’s Songe is a book in the venatio tradition which strives to belie its own erudition and demonstrate “the superiority of empirical over bookish knowledge,” as naturalist-explorers were claiming to do from Jacques Cartier to Pierre Belon. Experience, in the epistemology of the hunt, trumps theory, and phenomena are more valuable than essences. It is perhaps then no surprise that Jacques Kerver, a few years following the publication of the Songe, also published the courtly French physician, Antoine Mizauld’s works on arcana and memorabilia with titles highlighting their phenomenological contents such as Les ephemerides perpetuelles de l’air, or their copious and rare secrets of nature: De Arcanis Naturae, Libelli quatuor. Editio tertia, Libellis duobus pulcherrimis aucta et locupletata. The first of these would have offered circumstantial knowledge based on observations of the heavens: an ars indicii or art of practicing indications, while the second regaled the reader with a banquet of arcane natural knowledge “as much for entertainment as for practical instruction.” Kerver’s Songe de Poliphile, like the natural world for Mizauld and his audience, is a maze of indications and mirabilia, its text and image set up and presented as a delightful phenomenological field through which the discerning reader is invited to hunt for accidental science.

How then did readers react to Martin’s Songe? One way of approaching the question, as Stichel and others have done for the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, is to consider markings by early

115 Eamon, op. cit., p. 273.


117 Antonii Mizaldi Monluciani De arcanis naturae, libelli quatuor. Editio tertia, Libellis duobus pulcherrimis aucta et locupletata (Paris : Jacques Kerver, 1558)

118 Eamon, op. cit., 274.
modern readers. One such reader heavily and carefully underlined words and passages in the TYP copy at Houghton library, leaving only one manuscript note in the margin: the “real” name, Lucrezia, of Poliphile’s love-object Polia. Unlike many other readers of the Songe de Poliphile as well as the HP\textsuperscript{119}, this one read to the end with about the same density of underlines all the way through. As we would expect of an early modern reader places of interest vary widely, but we can heuristically separate them into three categories. The first is lexical, pertaining to words of Greek origin which the reader most likely did not already know. The great majority of them are underlined in the sidenotes provided by Jean Martin which gloss these difficult words for the reader’s convenience (nipping any further philological research in the bud). When, for example, the sense-nymphs appear the reader, as per his habit, underlines their Greek appellations. In this particular example, Martin places his gloss on their names (absent in the HP) in the main body of the text:

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Page from the HP showing underlining and glosses.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{119} Girolamo Cardano, for one, claimed to have quickly succumbed to the book’s soporific prose before he could ever reach the end: “[…] ego cum audio Polyphilì historiam, statim dormio”. \textit{De Rerum varietate} (Basileae [per Henrichum Petri] 1557), 583. However, considering the context – a discourse on the virtues of the imagination – the remark should not hastily be taken in a literal and derogatory sense. Cardano deeply valued the visionary side of sleep and every kind of dream. See William V. Harris, \textit{Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity}, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 84. Other copies belonging to Houghton of both the Songe de Poliphile and the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili show evidence of interrupted reading.
The second category is broadly natural historical in the broadest sense set by Pliny: topics pertaining to the works of nature and men. Thus, he picks out the emblematic information pertaining to “le Lymacon, qui va tastant le chemin avec ses cornes, & s’il treuue empeschement, les retire soudain a soy”\textsuperscript{120}. Here, as elsewhere, the reader teases out statements on natural history embedded in a more complex syntactical structure. Besides plants and animals, he also focuses on the mirabilia of man such as “Mennon, qui forma trois figures de Jupiter d’une seule pierre massive”, an allusion to the Colossi at Memnon described by Pliny and Alberti\textsuperscript{121}. Of course the second category often intersects with the first. Thus the reader underlines a difficult word in the text, “pierre Pyropecile Thebais”\textsuperscript{122}, the granite out of which the great pyramid on f.4v is made. The term is a gallicization of the Colonnnian “petra Pyro pecila Thebaicha” itself filched from Pliny’s *Natural History*. The third category is comprised of broadly medico-moral aphorisms pertaining to sensation, affect and moralized human behavior. Thus the reader picks out a dictum on fear and human nature worthy of Montaigne or Pascal observing that “l’homme qui se treuue tout seul en pays estrange, est bien soudain espouventé a chacun petit bruyt qu’il oyt” (f.25v); or the neo-Sceptic assertion that would not be out of place in Montaigne’s *Apologie* or Descartes’ *Méditations métaphysiques*: “nonobstant que l’homme soit sauant & expert, il n’en peult apprendre autre chose sinon qu’il est” (f.144r). Elsewhere, the reader highlights an adage worthy of Alciato: “la seule perseverance emporte la corone pour loier” (f.105r); and fifty folio pages later: “la perseverance est en amours

\textsuperscript{120} f.20r, I replicate reader’s exact underline here and in what follows.

\textsuperscript{121} see AG, *op. cit.*, II, 651.

\textsuperscript{122} Solely for its antique flair it seems. The term was already obsolete to Pliny. “In the neighbourhood of Syene, too, in Thebais, there is a stone found that is now known as ‘syenites,’ but was formerly called ‘pyrrhotæcilon.’” (*Hist. Nat.*, 36.13).
merueillement utile & necessaire” (f.152r). In the same vein, as if our reader were encouraging his own careful readerly work: “Qui pretend accquerir richesse, doibt delaisser oisieté, signifiee par ceste grosse corpulence, & prendre la test, qui est celle escripture : car en travaillant auec industrie tu trouveras le thresor desiré”. Husking complex sentences of their narrative envelope, we thus observe him assiduously sucking out the book’s “substantitique moelle”.

In all of these categories, our reader methodically sticks to a reading agenda spelled out by Jean Martin himself. Indeed, the reader underlines only two short clauses in Martin’s address to him:

“la congoist on les affections & divers effectz de l’amour”;

and on the facing recto page:

“dessoubz ceste fiction il y a beaucoup de bonnes choses cachees”.

Highlighting eros and hidden things, the reader prepares to set out on an eroticized practice of reading which Martin cleverly sets up. Jean Martin’s coy omissions in his address to the reader have intensified and highlighted the erotic suspense of discovery in the book. Our reader is only too eager to read the Songe in this manner. For the “affections & divers effectz de l’amour” which he seeks out in the hedgerows of the text are not only elucidated in the form of adages or pseudo-Galenic theory\textsuperscript{123}. They are also the driving force of his readerly practice as

\textsuperscript{123} “Quand je fu au droict du cueur, i’apperceu le lieu ou amour forget ses soupirs, & l’endroict ou il offense le plus grieuement” (f.9v) Rather than underlining here, the same hand has inserted quotation marks in the margin to
suggested by Martin, channeled by the page’s articulation of text and image. When the reader picks out an architectural allegory of Ionic columns – “que les canaux estoient attribuez au sexe feminin, & le remplissage au masculin” – we hear an echo of this kind of reading as susceptible to affect as it is driven to possess the promised “chooses cachees” at the end of the hunt. We will explore the format in text and image of the *Songe de Poliphile* to press further this point of an affective, sexually amphibious style of reading.

Apart from the three categories we have just proposed – philological, natural historical and aphoristic – the reader also underlines a group of passages which, while intersecting these three, also betray a much more affective style of reading. Taking them as a group, one can argue that this reader was particularly sensitive to passages which suggested or even provoked the activation of his bodily senses. Thus one underline plucked from an episode in which Polia is being taunted in a nightmare by a ghoulish old man highlights a particularly nose-tickling moment: “Le reste du corps pourry, & tourné en fien : & au remuer de ses vestemens sortoit une odeur de pissat [...]” (f.142r); while on the contrary, the reader is equally sensitive to moments of olfactory harmony and delight, highlighting the idea that the nose can preside as judge: “L’eau, selon le jugement de mon nez, fut faicte de roses, escorces de lymons, ambre gris, & benioyn, deuement proportionnez, rendant une odeur tressuaue.” The sense of hearing and its associated affect is equally interesting to this reader. When Poliphile observes a chess game played out with living pieces and accompanied by music, he compares the gestures of

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indicate its importance. See AG, cit., 591-592 for the poetico-philosophical intertexts – running from Aristotle to Dante – of this particular passage.
Fig. 2.1. The great portal with its “teste espouvantable de Meduse” added for the Kerver edition. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.5r.
those pieces, as they attack or retreat, to the soldiers of Alexander who go to war or peace on
the turn of a musician’s verse: “Timothée, lequel par la force de ses accordz contragnit les gens
de guerre du grand Roy Alexandre de prendre les armes, & se renger en bataille : puis
flechissant de voix & ton, les ramodera, & feit retourner en leurs tentes”. (40v) And, with our
reader, we can practically hear the shrieking Medusa in the passage describing her face
sculpted as a portal: “la teste espouvantable de Meduse, criant (comme il sembloit) par
furieuse demonstration, rechignee, les yeulx enfoncez, les sourcilz pendans, le front ridé &
refrogné, la guele ouverte, qui estoit cauee & percee d’un petit sentier fait en voute…” 124 (6r)
The passage is a moment of exceptional synesthesia where sight provokes a virtual sense of
painful hearing, and where in this extreme case, hearing – as the passage takes us into the
Gorgon’s cavernous mouth – provokes a breakdown of sight. It is perhaps no surprise that in
1546 this powerful textual moment is visualized in the accompanying woodcut illustration (fig.
2.1) while in 1499 it had been left out (fig. 2.2). One can easily imagine our reader taking a
giddy pleasure in comparing the sensation provoked by this vivid textual passage to the sight of
the Gorgon’s howling face.

But the highest synesthetetic pleasure the reader appears to have gotten from the text
and its accompanying illustrations is from a tactile sight, or a visualized touch. In many
instances – around ten in all – the reader picks up on familiar topoi from the blason tradition

124 The reader underlines “la teste espouvantable de Medusa” and then highlights the passage with quotation
marks in the margin. The structure is reminiscent of a similar portal at the Parco dei Mostri at Bomarzo. See
Calvesi, Gli incantesimi di Bomarzo, p. . The sculptures of the Parco dei Mostri, or Sacro Bosco have been shown to
be heavily influenced by the fanciful architectural designs of the HP. Eugenio Battisti, L’Antirinascimento, pp. 125-
133.
Fig. 2.2. The great portal of the original Manutius edition. Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, f.b1v.
and petrarchan lyric. Thus he highlights, reading of Polia, “une petite vallée assise au milieu de
sa poitrine, entre deux mammelles plus rondes que pommes, & plus blanches que floch de
neige” (f.84v), or elsewhere, “ses deux tetins, si blancs, & de tant belle forme, que lon les eust
iugez de laict” (f.33r). In these interests we hear echoes of two other Italian lyrics translated
into prose by Jean Martin – Ariosto’s Orlando furioso and Sannazaro’s Arcadia – the former of
which is bound in the same TYP copy at the Houghton. Other highlighted moments are
perhaps more significant to our analysis because more germane to a local readerly experience.
Thus, for instance, in the course of a long ekphrastic passage describing the bas-relief fountain
of a reclining Venus, the reader picks up on a critical passage punctuated by fantasized touch:
“Elle auoit les cuisses refaites, les genoulz charnuz, & un peu retir ez contre mont, si bien
qu’elle monstroit les semelles de ses piedz, tant belles & tant delicats, qu’il vous eust prins
enuie d’y mettre la main pour les chatouiller.” (f.23r) The text here, addressing the reader
directly (“il vous eust prins envie”), encourages the reader to put himself in the narrator’s stead
and reach out an adventurous hand to “realize”, perchance, the arch of a beautiful foot. This
reader, underlining the synesthetic passage up at the top of f.23r, would have surely gazed
meanwhile at the corresponding foot, daintily illustrated at the bottom of the same page.
Further along, the reader zeroes in on a moment of similar erotic intensity in which are
imbribated the acts of reading, vision and haptic exploration. He selects one short passage
buried within a long ekphrastic portrait of Polia’s accoutrements:

125 “Le beau col est neige blanche, & la gorge de laict: le col est rond, la poytrine pleine, & large, ou deux pommes
femmes faictes d’yuoire, vont & viennent, comme l’unde a la premiere ryue, quand la plaisante aure combat la
vainquoyent de blancheur la premiere neige, & estoient plus que yuoire au toucher doucles. Les tetins rondeletz
sembloient laict […] & tel espace descendoit entre eulx, comme les umbreuses valées entre petis costaultz,
lesquelles l’hyuer en sa plus doule saison à remplies de neige. ” (ibid., f.47v); See also L’Arcadie, trad. Jean
Martin, (Paris : M. de Vascosan et G. Corrozet, 1544) f.21r.
Mais sur tout ie regarday ses tetins, si rebelles, qu’ilz ne vouloient souffrir d’estre pressé du vestement, ains le repoulsoient en dehors, formant deux petites pommes, qui(a grand peine)eussent peu emplir le creux de la main. (50r)

Is it licit to lend an ear to the word-play in parentheses? We have already seen\textsuperscript{126} how the illustrator of the \textit{HP} gives visual expression to Poliphile’s aroused state. Here I would suggest that the reader picks up on a similar expression formatted right at the center of the page. For the object of Poliphile’s fantasized touch, filling his palms “a grand peine”\textsuperscript{127} takes place at the optical center of f.50r. The editor went through his own special pains to imply the hint where he wanted it: at the center of line 23 with 23 more lines following to complete the page. Every other complete page that I have investigated contains 45 (not 46) lines. The reader’s underline further highlights another surprising feature if we glance over to the corresponding illustration in which Poliphile gazes through a trellis towards Polia. For we may define a line joining the center of f.50r and Poliphile’s outstretched hand which, when prolonged, exactly intersects Polia’s “testin, si rebelles” (fig. 2.3). The textual “pain” implicit in the palm of two parentheses finds some relief along Poliphile’s penetrating gaze.

\textsuperscript{126} supra, p. 48, esp. fig. 1.3 and p. 51, fig. 1.5.

\textsuperscript{127} Where we are permitted, as good Rabelaisians, to hear \textit{pene}, Italian for penis. Panurge, for instance, in his come-on to the “haulte dame de Paris” makes a sly double use of the puns \textit{pene/peine} and \textit{veit/vit}: “L’on dit bien que à grand peine veit on iamais femme belle, qui aussi ne feust rebelle.”
In these last underlines focusing on a more sensual, erotic knowledge, we may discern not only an interest in a well-worn petrarchan topos but also and above all an eroticized search for knowledge in the book. If in the HP it was necessary for the reader such as Stichel’s to laboriously “tirer construction,” according to Jean Martin, from its “asiatique” lexicon, his Songe provides more of a well-manicured park through which his reader may hunt for knowledge with more sprezzatura and grace. And the style of reading science in the Songe could be aptly emblematized by the poet’s gaze upon his beloved’s breasts, towards which a finger forever points but never touches. Ronsard provides an excellent example of this eroticized epistemology of the hunt in his Elegie à Janet. After blazoning her face and shoulders, the poet
coyly blushes as he reaches her cleavage and, reminiscent of the bewildered Poliphile, 
tentatively reaching a hand out within the *silva oscura*, he affects a disoriented posture:

Je ne sçay plus, mon Janet, où j'en suis, 
Je suis confus, & muet je ne puis, 
Comme j'ay fait, te déclarer le reste 
De ses beautés, qui ne m'est manifeste : 
Las ! car jamais tant de faveurs je n'u, 
Que d'avoir veu ses beaus tétins à nu. 
Mai si l'on peut juger par conjecture, 
Persuadé de raisons, je m'asseure 
Que la beauté qui ne s'aparoist doit 
Du tout respondre à celle que l'on voit.128

Unable to see his beloved’s breasts in the full light of day the poet is at a loss, and, left to his 
own devices, is obliged to extrapolate from visual clues, those precisely which he has already 
tracked down in the preceding lines129. The process of extrapolation is, as in the epistemology 
of the hunt, based on analogy and indication. Taking into account how things respond 
(“répondre”) to one another, as the pawprint of an animal “responds” to its paw130, the poet 
makes “conjectures” as to the beauty hidden from his gaze. In the same way, Poliphile must 
piece together the lines and curves of an architectural marvel – its accidents subject to sense

129 For a careful reading of the *Elégie à Janet* with particular attention given to the playful plotting of graphic clues 
by the poet and tracked by the attentive reader in the stanza cited above, see Tom Conley’s “Nu de Ronsard,” 
130 See Carlo Ginzburg, *op. cit.*, esp. 102 sqq.
data – to get at the essence of the absent architect’s idea. The reader, meanwhile, moved by
the sense and sensuality of the book, plunders its pages, called upon by its coy “inventor” to
draw his own vectors and correspondences in an endless quest for knowledge.

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We have seen how one reader answers the call by the Songe’s translator and, if we may be
permitted the metaphor, its impresario, pruning its lines for exotic Greek words, natural
historical facts, and a series of adages which could find a welcome place in Alciato’s Emblemata
liber. But with another set of underlines he also suggests how the text with its accompanying
visual cornucopia mobilizes an eroticized, suspenseful search for knowledge. As Wes Williams
notes, it is in the years around the publication of the Songe de Poliphile that novels like the
Aethiopica of Heliodorus were being newly repackaged to their readership as carefully plotted
dramas rather than source books for knowledge. While Obsopäus presented his Greek
Heliodorus as chock-full of explanations on “a good many rivers, mountains, stones, plants and

131 When, for example, Poliphile encounters the great portal early in his dream quest, it’s his concupiscence for
abstract knowledge which bridges his practice with another’s invisible idea: “Venu que je fus devant la porte, qui
bien meritait d’etre soigneusement regardee pour l’excellence de l’ouvrage, il me prit envie d’entendre la
proportion et mesure que l’ouvrier y avait observee, dont pour la trouver usai promptement de cette pratique…”

132 I use the term in the sense of the sixteenth-century meaning “discoverer”. See Diane Ackerman, Prints and the
Pursuit of Knowledge, op. cit., p. 40. The terms “invention” and “découverte” continued to be “assez synonyme” to
the writers of the Encyclopédie (Atkinson, op. cit., 50). In his account of how the translation of the HP came to his
attention Martin provides a romantic anecdote complete with a knight of Malta. In his insert on the verso side of
the title page in later editions, Jacques Gohory will, in part, belie Martin’s account, suggesting that the latter
served a specific purpose. The Songe, much like the Horapollo (Paris: Kerver, 1543) which Martin translated three
years prior, is framed as a “discovered” object as much as an instrument of “invention” and further discovery.
regions [...]”, Jacques Amyot, in the *Proësme to L’Histoire aethiopique*, his newly-minted French translation of Heliodorus, highlights the dramatic quality of the story and its ingenuous use of suspense over its scientific contents. Indeed, as we shall see in our upcoming chapters on Pierre Belon, it is in the 1550s, a few years after the publication of *L’Histoire aethiopique* and the *Songe de Poliphile*, that natural historical descriptions of exotic objects of knowledge come under the demesne of a burgeoning, new genre: the *Observationes*. The period is one of entanglement between the natural historical *Observationes* and epics such as the *Histoire aethiopique* and the *Songe de Poliphile*. Pierre Belon – and he shall be far from the only one – will draw heavily on the heros of Greek epics, chief among whom Ulysses, to frame his own *Observations*. And, meanwhile, a book like the *Songe* – framed as an exotic object of knowledge in its own right – continues to attract readers called to track down its natural historical facts in an eroticized hunt for knowledge. In the following chapter, we shall take our cues from what we have already seen of one reader’s work and play with the *Songe de Poliphile* to study its articulation of text and image. We will show how Martin’s repackaging of the *Hypnerotomachia* puts an ever greater emphasis on suspense and an embodied experience of knowledge with/in the book.

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Chapter 3:

“The Workshop of my Imagination”: Mise-en-Page and the Embodiment of Discovery in the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili and the Songe de Poliphile

“In va falloir [...] réveiller l’expérience du monde tel qu’il nous apparaît en tant que nous sommes au monde par notre corps, en tant que nous percevons le monde avec notre corps.” (Merleau-Ponty)

In the preface to his great encyclopedic project in natural history, Gessner reflects for a moment on the great advantage offered the reader by the pictures in his book:

Romani imperij principes olim adhuc maximae orbis terrarum partis domini, multa peregrina subinde animalia populo spectanda offerebant, ut ita illius animos sibi devincitent. Atqui illa non nisi brevi tempore, quo scilicet durabant spectacula, inspici et considerari poterant. Nostrae vero icones, quas omnes ad vivum fieri aut ipse curavi, aut ab amicis fide dignis ita factas accepi ( nisi aliter admonuerim, quod rarum est), quovis tempore et perpetuo se spectandas volentibus, absque labore, absque periculo, offerent.134

Princes of the Roman empire, rulers over the largest portion of the earth then and since, used to show many foreign animals to the populace for them to watch at spectacles so that they might subdue their minds to their advantage. But the people could not see the animals except for the brief interval of time in which the spectacle lasted. Now, our pictures – all of which we took pains to draw from life either ourselves, or we had them drawn from life by friends worthy of trust (unless I admonish the reader otherwise, which is rare) – offer themselves up willingly to be inspected anywhere at any time, continuously, and without toil nor danger.135

135 My translation.
Gessner here spells out an epistemological fantasy centered on the true-to-life or “ad vivum” image: that it offers nature up as though she had pushed the pause button on her show to allow for free, safe and leisurely observation. According to this ideal, Gessner’s book is meant as a democratic investigation into nature’s *varietas*, while the power of the printing press places the empire over nature and her riches into the hands of the reader. The Roman emperors, Gessner observes, had only permitted fleeting glimpses of nature’s great *mirabilia* within great structures like the Colosseum in Rome which both stood as representations of power and harnessed power over representation. His images on the other hand stay the fleeting and deceptive nature of spectacle, allowing his reader to come down from the stands, as it were, and take a leisurely and, perhaps, critical look at the objects on display. In this way, Gessner’s great compendium of visual and textual information on natural history was meant to allow for a more cool-headed, dispassionate approach to knowledge in which the tools of critical analysis were in the hands of the reader.

In many ways the illustrations of the *Hypnerotomachia* and the *Songe de Poliphile* offer this same fantasy of casual, dispassionate inspection. Poliphile himself is quite often alone with the great buildings, sculptures, and engravings he inspects. Even when he isn’t the world he

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137 Albeit the well-heeled reader. At over 19 florins for the complete colored set of four volumes (Feyerabend’s colored Bibles ran 8 to 10 fl. in 1565), Gessner’s *Historia animalium* was not a work intended for the struggling student! W. Becker, “Zacharias Ursins Briefe an Crato von Crafftheim, nach den in Breslau befindlichen Urschriften”, *Theologische Arbeiten aus den rheinischen wissenschaftlichen Prediger-Verein*, 12 (1892), 41-107, esp. 85. Also noted in Kusukawa, “The sources of Gessner’s pictures”, *op. cit.*, 304-305.
lives in is one of visual suspense where things and people seem to pause in the course of his long, ekphrastic descriptions. Nor is this emphasis upon visual stasis unique to the architectural concerns of the HP and the Songe. Belon’s first book, as we shall see, offers an array of fish—animals notoriously hard to catch and bred in the most fertile element—lying still, as if on display at one of the Mediterranean marketplaces he would frequent. Yet the static image, built either through ekphrasis or displayed in a woodcut illustration, also implies a readerly responsibility, indeed a calling. Gessner brings to mind the passive Roman populace, seated under the punishing sun as they watch the spectacular marvels of nature move by. The illustrated books we are considering, on the other hand, as they insist upon the stasis of their objects of knowledge, shall also urge the reader to mobilize himself around those same objects, thus animating and breathing life into them again. In what follows we will explore how the Songe and the HP both, in their own particular ways, guide their reader in a subjective and mobile construction of knowledge out of text and image.

Despite the static image, the book is an object both mobile and mobilized by the reader. We may choose to dwell on the page of the great pyramid in the HP, pondering its proportions as we make comparisons with the accompanying textual description. We may choose also to flip another page to its verso side, or begin a new block of reading on a facing recto side. We may finally flip through pages at random or flip forward and backward to make correlations between text and images. More radically, we could even follow the study and compilation techniques of certain sixteenth-century students, cutting the book into pieces and collating text

and images elsewhere. The reader, it seems, has unlimited power over the material object of
the book once it is in his hands. But the *Songe de Poliphile* and the *Hypnerotomachia* both
acquiesce to this power and, at the same time, push back against it to generate a dynamic
apprehension of knowledge. The books proffer their objects of knowledge without allowing
them to be merely possessed by sight or touch. To borrow from James Elkins, the books “stare
back” at their readers. In his preface to *The Object Stares Back*, James Elkins urges us to reflect
on what really happens when we go shopping. When a salesperson asks if he can be of
assistance and we simply reply, “No. I’m *just looking*,” what, Elkins wonders, can we mean? Are
we ever “just looking”? Answering in the negative, James Elkins suggests that shopping
(especially browsing) is more like a hunt. “I’m on the lookout for something in particular,” he
reflects, “I’m hunting for it and trying to pick it out of the thousands of objects that I do not
want.” But shopping is also a hunt in which we look out for something as much as it looks out
for us: “Instead of saying I am the one doing the looking it seems better to say that objects are
all trying to catch my eye, and their gleams and glints are the hooks that snare me.”

The hunt for *mirabilia* and *memorabilia* in the *Songe* and the *HP* can be characterized in this way. The
book offers a field in which we look for clues, tracing patterns, trying to track down what we
don’t yet know. But it also always “stares back”, looking out for us, trying to catch (or avert) our
gaze, ensnaring us in a complex web of text and image.

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139 Ann Blair, “Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1550-1700”, *Journal of the History of
manuscripts, letters and other printed books. See also Blair, *Too Much to Know, op. cit.*, 213-229.

140 *The Object Stares Back*, pp. 19-20.
In fact, once we start looking out for faces in these books they begin to disconcertingly sprout about everywhere. Poliphile, as he takes his first tentative step in the *selva oscura* is confronted by a tree which stares back at him through its cycloptic knot, seeming to stop him dead in his tracks (fig. 1.4). The feature had not been in the original edition, and browsing Kerver’s new woodcut series quickly suggests that the uncanny knot is an early exemplar of a broader motif, thematically present in Manutius, but visualized in Kerver. The whorl in the tree bark, staring down Poliphile’s “eyes turned into whirlwinds”\(^ {141}\) is echoed by the following image in the form of a whirlpool in the stream (fig. 1.10). These early textured whorls are later elaborated in a variety of vegetal ornaments punctuating the pages and staring out at us, as much as they invite us to stare in (fig. 3.1). Even an obelisk appears to form a curious face if we gaze at it the right way (fig. 3.2). While these ornaments were already present in 1499, among other new woodcuts, Kerver adds a remarkable print to illustrate the great labyrinth “*che e la vita humana*” which Poliphile is invited to contemplate from a safe elevation. The picture visualizes an allegorical “abîme et vorage” of the six stages of life, elaborated in the text, at the center of which awaits “*le loup des dieux*” – the earth, that is, which devours all\(^ {142}\). The image is foreshortened ever-so-slightly to obviate the complete visual abstraction of an aerial view, inducing a wonderfully vertiginous feeling of precariousness as though the reader – captivated

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\(^{141}\) “gliocchii mei [...] absorbentissimi Typhoni” (f.k2v)

Fig. 3.1. An ornament inviting the gaze in, as much as it gazes out. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.73r. Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University (IC.C7192.Eh546h)

Fig. 3.2. An obelisk “stares back”. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.85r.
by the final portal at the wolf-eye’s center – could dive like a new Icarus into the picture\textsuperscript{143}. This abysmal whorl harkens back to another notable wolf – a creature notorious since Plato for taking one’s breath away if met with eye-to-eye\textsuperscript{144} – encountered by the protagonist and illustrated in both Manutius and Kerver editions. However, as it crosses Poliphile’s path, Kerver’s wolf no longer turns his head towards him at a safe angle from us, but appears to be looking at us \textit{and} the protagonist (figs. 3.3, 3.4). And though we might leisurely peruse the geometrical details of another Kerver obelisk (which later inspired Bernini’s obelisk in Rome\textsuperscript{145}), we may get the peculiar impression of being watched until we realize that the great, wrinkly elephant supporting the object of our gaze has been, in fact, staring back at us under its fleshy eyebrows all along (fig. 3.5). Kerver’s woodcut series, much more so than its Italian predecessor, positively bristles with these and other earthly eyes.

The \textit{Hypnerotomachia}, by contrast, behaves closer to Gessner’s ideal of an object which passively and permanently offers itself up to the reader’s gaze. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the address to the reader conveyed this model of the book as it packed the book’s contents onto a single side of one folio page. The objects to be discovered within, barely linked by parataxis, were presented independently of the protagonist’s adventure and the affective apprehension his adventure entailed. Accordingly, a single woodcut illustration disrupts the reader’s visual scan of it much less insistently in the \textit{HP} than in the \textit{Songe}. We have already

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{143} We are reminded here of the mosaic representing the Icarian story under the great portal and paralleling Poliphile’s own captivation by the awesome visual representation, an episode which nearly sees him devoured by the chthonic dragon. See supra, ch. 1, p. 36.
\item \textsuperscript{144} The expression “to see the wolf” in Greek meant to be stunned mute. Cf. Plato, \textit{Republic}, 336d. Also noted in Polizzi, p. 414. For this tradition in medieval bestiaries, see Ariani and Gabriele, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 547. Going by other details in the text, the source of the \textit{HP} is almost certainly Pliny, \textit{N.H.}, VIII.24.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Lefaivre 1997, p. 42.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Fig. 3.3. The wolf stares at Poliphile... and us. *Le Songe de Poliphile*, f.4r.

Fig. 3.4. The wolf stares back at Poliphile. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, f.a7r.

byade, non essere forza a queste comparabile. Ecco che uno affermato &
carniuro lupo alla parte dextra, cum la bucca pienami apparue.
Fig. 3.5. The elephant and the obelisk. *Le Songe de Poliphile*, f.10r.
seen\textsuperscript{146} how the Gorgon head charges the woodcut illustration of the great pyramid, infusing it with a sense of danger and taboo which it did not have before. The illustration of the great portal is another salient example. In the \textit{Hypnerotomachia} its many ornamental details are left out, as opposed to the \textit{Songe} where the portal is brimming with detail (figs. 3.6, 3.7). What remains in the \textit{HP} are blank spaces the completion of which is left up to the reader as he consults the text preceding the visual representation. Such blank spaces, as Efthymia Priki has argued, “aim to interact with the recipient, giving birth to an imaginative energy.”\textsuperscript{147} I would add to this that the blank spaces prevailing in the \textit{HP} give rise as well to an imaginative \textit{freedom} granted the reader, productive of subjective knowledge. As John Bender and Michael Marrinan observe of the “white space of diagram” in the \textit{Encyclopédie}, which they consider to be a “constituent element” of the work’s structure, the \textit{HP} and its own blank spaces “mobilize our attention across the word-image divide, and reward us with a comprehension that is not ordained, but is actively produced.”\textsuperscript{148} Blank spaces allow for a greater range of cognitive freedom and play, and the woodcut illustrations of the \textit{HP} offer themselves up as objects subject to imaginative manipulation.

Designed like a building, the \textit{Hypnerotomachia} obeys the architectural principles laid out in its text. Taking a break from describing the great portal just considered above, the narrator of the \textit{HP} offers an aesthetic reason for why the structure was so judiciously designed. The “proper goal of architecture,” he posits,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{supra}, ch. 2, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{148} Bender and Marrinan 2010, p. 47.
\end{flushleft}
Fig. 3.6. The great portal. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.13v.
“which is its supreme invention [is] the harmonious establishment of the solid body of a building. [...] [T]he first rule that the architect must observe after the conception of the building is the square, which is subdivided to the smallest degree to give the building its harmony and consistency and to make the parts correlate with the whole.”

Giving a textbook example of the Albertian principle of *concinnitas* – the term often returns, in nominal and adjectival form, throughout the book – Colonna characterizes the perfectly conceived architectural structure as one in which every element is balanced out by another to produce a sense of harmony and eurhythmia. It is not difficult to see how this principle is extended to the balance of text and image on the page, as well as to the entire book itself, taken as an architectural structure. Like the portal, the first part of the book is “subdivided to the smallest degree”, comprised of 23 sheafs thereby corresponding to the 23 characters of the Latin alphabet, the “elementa” of language for Renaissance grammarians from which all discourse may be pieced together. The illustrations of sculptures and architectural *mirabilia*, for their part, are characterized by a rigorous left-right symmetry. The impression of immobility and ponderousness given the book prevails in these illustrations where symmetry is rigorously enforced. And the reader is invited to deconstruct them to get at the principles of symmetry from which they are conceived.

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149 Godwin, p. 47.

150 In grammar textbooks of the period, Latin characters were understood as the indivisible, elementary particles of language. In the *Rudimenta Latinogallica*, for instance, a particularly clever student quizzed by his teacher affirms that the 23 Latin characters may rightfully be called by the name “Elements [...] car tout ainsi que le corps est composé & fait des quatres elements, c’est a scavoir de la terre, de l’eau, de l’air, & du feu, & finalement se resoult en icoels elements: tout ainsi les syllabes & dictions sont composees des lettres, & en icelles se resoudent.” Claudio Calderio, *Rudimenta Latinogallica cum accentibus*, (Paris : Guglielmi le Bret, 1553) f.4r.
Fig. 3.7. The great portal. Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, f. c7r.
Despite this aesthetic of simplicity inviting contemplation of objects as fixed and finished forms, we are nevertheless actively engaged in a construction of knowledge within the book. This was already apparent in the blank space of the portal, and it is further suggested by the book’s structural mapping onto the Roman alphabet. But the reader’s role also takes on an important ethical coloring through narrative perapateias, imitated in the book by the articulation of text and image. By way of example, let us return momentarily to the early episode where Poliphile, awakening from a dream within a dream, encounters the wolf suddenly crossing his path:

“Ma peregrinando solitario,” Poliphile recalls, “tra le non densate, ma intervallate palme spectatissime, cogitando delle Rachelaide, Phaselide, & Libyade, non essere forsa a queste comparabile. Ecco che uno affermato & carnivoro lupo alla parte dextra, cum la buccia piena mi apparve”

We first follow a solitary Poliphile musing over his aptly spaced palm trees which from Pliny to Alciato and beyond were significant for their exceptional resistance against external pressure. Their strength and rigid, spear-like fronds made of them an apt symbol of victory, as the text itself rehearses further above. Poliphile, idly inspecting the “spectatissime” palm trees further suggests a certain modality of the gaze, captivating its object in a piercing, elevated and monocular line of sight. When, his path is crossed by the wolf, however, the

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151 “I was strolling alone along the palms, which were not crowded but neatly spaced, thinking that the groves of Archelais, Phaselis and Libya had nothing to match them, when look! — a hungry and carnivorous wolf appeared on my right, its mouth full” (Godwin, p. 21; where I have translated “bocca piena” as “mouth full” instead of Godwin’s “jaws agape”, and “right” for “dextra” in spite of the image in which the wolf is indeed on Poliphile’s left).

152 Nat. Hist., 16.81.


154 The palm frond is an “electo signo di victoria per el resistere suo ad lurgente pondo”. This quality of the palm tree, that it resists a heavy adverse weight, is explained in Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights III.vi. Erasmus sums up the well-known symbol in his adage “Palma ferre” (“to bear the palm”) in Adagia, I.iii.iv.
situation is suddenly reversed, and it is Poliphile who becomes the object of a foreign gaze. At the sight of the wolf, Poliphile freezes, “gli capigli mei immediate se ariciorono, & dicio volendo cridare non hebbi voce. Il quale desubito fugite.” Unable to speak, his hairs bristling, Poliphile is fixed momentarily into an atavistic object of natural history so long as the wolf stares him down. The wolf’s full maw (“bocca piena”) meanwhile authorizes an allegorical reading of it as lubricious and ravenous appetite. The tables, for an instant, have turned. Poliphile had been able to capture in his voracious mind every palm tree imaginable – the “Rachelaide, Phaselide, & Libyade” – with those under his observation as perfect prototypes. He held, for a victorious moment, the world of palm trees in his mouth. An accidental wolf had to interrupt his soaring, static vision and bring it back to material earth.

These episodes are indeed quite common in the *HP*. We had already analyzed one in a previous chapter when Poliphile’s visionary contemplation of the portal’s mosaic was interrupted by the great dragon. Elsewhere, in a miniature version of this event, Poliphile is jolted from rapt study when a lizard erupts onto the scene. The *HP* makes evident that were it not for these earthly *perapateias*, there would be no story to speak of. As we previously

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155 “all my hairs stood on end, and when I tried to shout, my voice failed me. But it suddenly fled.” (Godwin, p. 22)
156 In Valeriano, for instance, the wolf is likened to the reputed insatiability of female sexuality. “Ceux aussi qui soustienent que l’effrontee ribauderie de la putain est signifiee par le simulacre du Loup, croyent que cest hieroglyphique soit emprunte de l’insatiable rapacite d’icelle. Car on scait bien que les putains & filles de joie sont appellees Louues, & de la les Bordeaux sont nommez par les Latin Lupanaria.” *Commentaires hieroglyphiques ou images de choses*, .
157 ch. 1, p. 37.
158 “Ove cum la mente applicata a tale piacevole respecto essendo, ecco che a spalle sento la casura d’alcune tessellature, et a mi solitario, in deserto, et silentioso loco trovantime, repente me alquanto pavefacto, et retro volventime mirando, vidi uno ascalabote, overo murilego, che era stato causa di tale ruina.” (f.r4v) [“While my mind was pleasantly concentrated on this, I suddenly heard behind me the falling of some tesserae, and finding myself solitary, in a deserted and silent place, I was quite frightened. I quickly turned round and saw a gecko or wall-lizard which had caused this accident.” (Godwin, 272)]
pointed out in our first chapter, the sub-title of the *HP* itself suggests that only by virtue of the way Poliphile eventually sees things (*obiter*: “on the way, in passing or going along”) may he transform them into memories worthy of knowledge (*plurima scitu [...] digna comemorat*).

Indeed, we may entertain the notion that, were he to have remained in any of his pleasant contemplations, Poliphile would have never reawakened nor then recreated his vision in book form! These diverse accidents bringing Poliphile back down to material concerns make it possible for any human creativity to take place, including our own (re)creative reading.

It is in this context that we may understand the complex formatting of the *HP* and *Songe*. We have seen how the *HP* especially is deliberately organized as a harmonious architectural whole the parts of which respond to one another. We have also considered some full-page woodcut images, such as that of the portal, offering white space to allow for the production of readerly knowledge across the text-image divide. Elsewhere, however, the articulation of text and image is designed to interrupt any attempt at steady reading or contemplation. When Poliphile encounters the wolf considered above, the syntax of the sentence preceding the image combined with the placement of the image itself allows the event to literally happen in the book: “Ecco che uno affermato & carnivoro lupo alla parte dextra, cum la bucca piena mi apparve” (see fig. 3.4). The long adjectival clause effectively takes the reader’s breath away by the time he gets to the active verb: *apparve*. What appears, moreover, does not neatly tie together the preceding discourse according to a visual aesthetic of *concinnitas*. To the contrary, Poliphile and the reader had just been ruminating in a *locus*
amoenus drawing on Virgil’s Georgics: from a variety of trees (copes of “giovani quercioli; di roburi, fraxini & Carpini, & di frondose Esuli”, etc., etc.) we passed through to herbs which Martin had qualified as “herbes médicinales” (“multiplice herbe verdissime, quivi vidi il Cythiso, La Carice, la commune Cerinthe. La muscariata Panachia”, etc. etc.), and on to the palm trees with its fruit “foecunde & abundante” putting the finishing touch on a portrait of operable and opulent nature. The image, however interrupts the suggestion of perfect harmony between nature and cognition with which Poliphile leads his reader through the hedgerows of his text like a new Adam, the first onomastician. Instead, we see Poliphile caught in an awkward pose by the wolf’s monocular gaze, stumbling (or about to stumble) about strange ruins we had not read anything about in the text; while the wee lizard at the bottom looks ahead to its sudden eruption later in the story. As these ruins and the lizard itself suggest, the image is not a static presence in the book: it “appears,” erupting onto the paginal scene to break any readerly complacency, constraining us at each page turn to reconsider and rebuild.

These sudden breaks in the book remind the reader of its materiality and bring him back to bodily cognition and tactile sense. Let us consider a further example in the HP. Emerging, early on in the story, from his first locus terribilis, the dark forest at the outset of his dre...
unearthly harmonies wafting on the breeze, “Cum uoce non terrestre, cum tanta armonie, cum tanta incredibilie sonoritate, cum tanta insueta proportione”\textsuperscript{163}. The suavity of the sound far exceeds the narrative’s capacity to communicate it, as Poliphile insists: “sencia dubio questa cosa excede ultra la potentia di narratione.” Yet rather than give up and stop in an infinite, contemplative present, the episode is tentatively prolonged:

\textit{Intanto che l’aqua hausta intra la clausura dellintervalli degli deti, insenso quasi et gia obstupefacto lo intellecto, & sopito l’appetito, niuna virtute contradicendo reserati gli nodi se sparse ad humida terra.}

The water, trapped within the closed space of my interlaced fingers – [I was] almost out of my mind, immobilized, my thirst quenched and powerless to resist – as their joints loosened, spilled over the humid ground.\textsuperscript{164}

The last word “terra” brings Poliphile, and the reader, back to earth from the bewonderment of harmonies “non terrestre”. It brings us back to the material book for it is with the final word “terra” that the reader must turn the page. And it brings us back to ourselves, for man is \textit{terrigenus} according to Colonna’s own ubiquitous epithet\textsuperscript{165}. It is precisely this abrupt discontinuity, a kind of fall from grace, which, as we turn the page, allows us to guess at the indescribable harmonies holding Poliphile captive. For on the verso side of the page we catch Poliphile frozen in a bucolic setting (fig. 3.8). The scene is transitional and asymmetric: the dark forest on one side of the river from whence Poliphile emerged, a clearing on the other. Poliphile’s left hand leans on the bank of the river and his face is tilted up to receive the harmonies on the breeze. His right hand floats vaguely and tentatively in front of him,

\textsuperscript{163} \textit{HP}, f.a5r.
\textsuperscript{164} My translation, where I have tried to preserve as closely as possible the syntax of the original.
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{HP}, f.h6v, f.l6r, f.p1v, f.p2v, f.z2v, f.A1r, f.A2v, f.E6v. According to Cicero (see \textit{De divinatione}, 2.133), the snail too is “terrigena”, into whom, as we have seen (ch. 1), Poliphile metamorphoses under the great pyramid.
Fig. 3.8. Poliphile at the river. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, f.a5v.

Fig. 3.9 Poliphile at the river. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.2v.
negotiating a middle path between touch and vision. The tactility – or tactile values to borrow Berenson’s concept166 – of the corresponding 1546 woodcut are even more striking, bearing witness to the greater focus on sensuality in Kerver’s Songe (fig. 3.9). For here, Poliphile’s right hand, instead of striking a middling pose between his grounded left hand and his ecstatic face, is shown limp, his fingers loosened as the water he had been holding flows back into a whorl in the stream. The text directly preceding the image further heightens the gustatory suspense (“Quand ie fu eschappé de toute ces afflictions, & que ie desirois de gouster de ceste eau doulce”) and the text immediately following the image offers a heightened sense of contact (“ie mey les deux genoulx en terre sur le bord de la fontaine”). Far from offering a field in which readerly vision is the preferred mode of cognitive apprehension, the placement and content of these images urge us to read with our bodies and our hands, even our mouths. But it is especially by virtue of our hands “the natural vehicle for man’s most noble creative aspirations”167 that we may actuate the book and build intellectual forms from its parcelled text and image. The hand differentiates the book’s passive reader from what Jacques Gohory characterizes as its “industrieux operateur”168. It is only by allying hand – Aristotle’s “organum organorum” (“the instrument including all other instruments”) – with mind – “species speciorum” (“the form including all other forms”) – that we may properly work with/in the book.169

166 Berenson, Florentine Painters of the Renaissance, p. 15 and passim.
168 See supra, n.88.
169 In our first chapter, we saw the eroticized “revelation” of Poliphile’s hand in the first woodcut print of Kerver’s Songe. This first, along with the many other instances of Poliphile’s hand caught in a variety of gestures and configurations, could be broadly proposed as a “microtheme” of the Songe (to pick up on a concept introduced by
Another arresting *mise-en-page* by Kerver and Martin demonstrates the extent to which they went in “reinventing” the *Hypnerotomachia*. To aid the reader with the lengthy geometric description of the great portal in their 1546 edition, they had added a schematic illustration of it criss-crossed with vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines all keyed to the text. In such a way, the reader (who in 1499 had to inch through a full thirteen pages before finally arriving at the portal image) may prepare his mental construction by comparing the text on f.13r to its corresponding architectural blueprint on the facing page (fig. 3.10). Furthermore, directly following the text on f.13r the reader’s comparatively short geometrical work is rewarded with the “finished” portal on the verso side (fig. 3.6). What is most remarkable about this spread is the shape of the text toward the bottom of f.13r, anticipating the page turn. Narrowing down in a cul-de-lampe, it reaches a fulcrum only to flare out again, stop, and then resume the cul-de-lampe shape down to the bottom of the page (fig. 3.11). The textual form is arranged in such a way as to respond to the finished portal on the verso side. One need not even flip the page, for the print on f.13v is dark enough and the page transparent enough to observe that the edge of the text on the recto side follows perspectival lines into the portal. Textual evidence, to use a metaphor favored by the naturalist Pierre Belon, is set up as a visual “perspective” anticipating the image which coheres to and “confirms” it. Moreover, the textual fulcrum turns around the single word “mylieu”, investing the text and image with the ethical injunction many

Rudolf Arnheim) which embeds in the woodcut series a “concentrated version of the subject that is played out in the composition as a whole”. Accordingly, the microtheme of the hand could “act as a condensed and abstract replication of the larger subject”, namely the functional relation between the reader-viewer and book-object. This central “microtheme” of the hand insists on the tactile engagement of the reader. (See Arnheim, *The Power of the Center*; pp. 76-77.)

170 “ie veuil enseigner la vraie perspective du Daulphin, & aussi en bailler la peincture” (*Histoire naturelle, op. cit.* f.5r); “je voulu auparauant tirer la perspectiue de leurs effigies des liures de noz ancestres, pour l'imprimer en mon idée” (*Observations, op. cit.*, f.e1v)
Fig. 3.10. The portal blueprint, facing its textual explication. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.12v.
Fig. 3.11. A complex cul-de-lampe following perspectival lines of the great portal on the verso side of the page. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.13r.
times repeated throughout the text, and which Béroalde de Verville conveniently indexes in his edition: “Le Milieu est accompagné de felicité”\textsuperscript{171}. As we have seen in chapter one, this golden rule to “hasten slowly” enjoins Poliphile to tactile and optical modes of cognition. Hence with their pivotal word, Martin and Kerver suggest that active reading of the \textit{Songe} ties together both visual and bodily receptivity.

Perhaps the most successful integration of text and image in the HP represent four triumphal marches each celebrating a mythological story centered on \textit{eros}, in the form of Cupid. Four page-spreads each show a chariot supporting the key figures in the story at hand and pulled by an array of nymphs, satyrs, centaurs and elephants. The text in three out of the four triumphs is formatted into a cul-de-lampe, suggesting again that the text is a “perspective” which, projected upon the picture and animated by the reader, may properly bring the subject to life. The process of correlating text and image in the reader’s activation of the book necessarily involves a bodily interpretation. For prior to these full triumphal spreads in which the chariots are seen to “move” from left to right across the page, the reader is required to construct them with preceding material. Two folio pages first introduce Poliphile and the reader to each of four sides as he imaginatively walks around the chariot (fig. 3.12, 3.13). Proceeding panel after panel, stories of cupido’s omnipotence are woven through an apprehension of the object. Starting off our process of discovery, we are given to see “la face du costé droict” where we are told is represented:

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Le tableau des riches inventions couvertes du voile des feintes amoureuses}, (Paris : Mathieu Guillemot, 1600).
En la face du costé droict, estoit susceptible une nymphe fille de Roy, assise au mylieu d’un prê, accompagnée de plusieurs pucelles de son âge, saisons chapelletz de fleurs aux tordeaux qui la pasturoient, ivn desquelz estant aupres d’elle, se monstroit mervelleusement tractable, & fort priué.

En l’autre face estoit celle mème Nymphe, passant la mer sur le Torseau, qu’elle embrassoit d’une contenance magnanime, & bien assurée.
“une ieune Nymphe fille de Roy [...] faisans chapelletz de fleurs aux Toreaux qui la pasturoient, l’un desquel estant aupres d’elle, se monstroit merveilleusement traictable, & fort privé.”

We find the scene represented in the following woodcut illustration, framed within a panel itself encased in the chariot. The perceived stasis of the representation is reinforced by the woodcut frame which touches and stabilizes the chariot at exactly three different points.

Fig. 3.13. The second two panels of the chariot. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.54v.
Proceeding to “l’autre face” on the opposite side of the chariot the story of Europa’s ravishment continues. The stabilizing visual context has now dropped away and we are swept into the scene as Europa is swept across the sea. “Au front de devant estoit la figure de Cupido...” continues the textual description on the verso side, so that turning the page is tantamount to turning a corner of the chariot. And the frame “du derriere”, completes the circle both narratively and spatially when it reminds us that noone (“NEMO”) – not even Jupiter, Europa’s erstwhile ravisher – can withstand cupid’s shafts. The folio page with its recto and verso side oblige us to reconstruct the chariot with its ornaments, but the narration in the panels also remind us that we bring our bodies into any lived apprehension of a given object. Thus, far from engaging in Gessner’s dispassionate observation of illustrated natural objects, the reader is compelled into an embodied and frankly erotic relationship with the object on the page.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology may here bring timely commentary for our understanding of a sensual readerly experience in the Songe and HP. In his Phénoménologie de la perception, Merleau-Ponty strives to reinsert the body in our understanding of how the world of objects is apprehended and understood. In his introduction to “Le Monde perçu”, the second part of his magnum opus, he looks ahead to his philosophical agenda: “Il va falloir […] réveiller l’expérience du monde tel qu’il nous apparaît en tant que nous sommes au monde par notre corps, en tant que nous percevons le monde avec notre corps.”¹⁷² Merleau-Ponty strives not only to reinsert the body in his phenomenology but to “awaken to” bodily experience of the

¹⁷² Œuvres, 891-895.
world, remaining sensitive to the experience of perception rather than overcoming it preemptively through symbolic thought. In his introduction, he asks us to consider the cube whose “natural geometry” may never be experienced as such: “Le cube à six face égales est non seulement invisible, mais encore impensable”. A reflexive attempt to constitute the object as absolute (“object absolu”) necessarily quashes the lived experience of the object:

“en voulant survoler l’object, le penser sans point de vue, [l’analyse réflexive] en détruit la structure interne. S’il y a pour moi un cube à six faces égales et si je peux rejoindre l’object, ce n’est pas que je le consitue de l’intérieur : c’est que je m’enfonce dans l’épaisseur du monde par l’expérience perceptive.”

Much like Poliphile who can never fully transcend the world but must feel his way through it, we do not, in our lived experience of the world, immediately construct a general idea such as “the cube,” lending geometrical reason to the foreshortening of its sides. It is rather lived bodily experience, as I move about the cube, which “discovers” the object as it appears to me: “déjà la nouvelle apparence est entrée en composition avec le mouvement vécu et s’est offerte comme apparence d’un cube.” The body and its proprioception, for Merleau-Ponty, is at the heart of our organic, emergent discovery of the world of objects:

“La chose et le monde me sont données avec les parties de mon corps, non par une ‘géométrie naturelle’, mais dans une connexion vivante comparable ou plutôt identique à celle qui existe entre les parties de mon corps.”

Merleau-Ponty’s places the body at the heart of his phenomenology as the HP and – to perhaps a still greater extent – the Songe place the body at the heart of readerly discovery. The body (re)animates the book and its plethora of objects and we imagine that their editors would have
agreed with Merleau-Ponty’s compelling opening line: “Le corps est dans le monde comme le cœur et dans l’organisme: il maintient continuellement en vie le spectacle visible, il l’anime et le nourrit intérieurement, il forme avec lui un système.”

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology helps us to better understand how the reader is compelled to work on and through the page in the “workshop of [his] imagination”\textsuperscript{173}. Our apprehension of the chariot in the triumphal march is continually kept in motion. Even the first illustration which offers the most static representation of the object with its three points fixed to the frame is destabilized by the presence of the panel itself. Our visual experience hesitates between a fixed, geometric simplification of the object and what Merleau-Ponty describes as “s’enfoncer dans l’épaisseur du monde” as we let our eyes graze with the bulls represented within the embedded panel. The preceding ekphrasis of the chariot, moreover, is founded upon a significant shape: the circle. For Colonna, and Martin after him, consistently begin their description of the chariots with “le quatro rapide rote” (“its rapid four wheels”)\textsuperscript{174} upon which they are carried. Much like Merleau-Ponty’s cube, the circle is eminently susceptible to abstraction, yet Colonna’s ekphrasis does not permit us to imagine the wheels as geometric ideas, but rather as perpetually mobile objects\textsuperscript{175}. From the outset we imagine these foundational shapes in contact with the ground as vectors of matter rather than static elements. The dynamic apprehension of the object introduced with the wheel further evolves with the reader’s imagined bodily shifts around the chariot in all four cardinal directions, while

\textsuperscript{173} “officina dilla imaginativa” (\textit{HP}, f.s2v) and Godwin, 283.
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{HP}, f.k3v; Godwin, 158.
\textsuperscript{175} In the descriptions of other chariots we read first of their “volubile rote” (“rolling wheels”) or “vertibile rote” (“rotating wheels”).
the panels’ narrative continuity provides the cement which makes of the chariot an affective whole. The “industrieux operateur” of the book embodies a readerly “wheel” whose four spokes from four directions both gaze at and lock into the object of the book, animating it finally across four triumphal page-spreads.

Kerver confirms this fundamental motif of circulation in his choice to activate the objects in his new woodcut series which in 1499 had required the reader’s imaginative invention. Indeed, at least one reader of the HP could not resist “turning on” its illustrations in a number of cases when he drew in streams flowing from two fountains, and colored in a handful of torches\(^\text{176}\). Another reader was compelled to extend the contours of a number of figures and add hatch marks for shading\(^\text{177}\): simple but clear attempts to increase the texture and volume of the illustrations as motivated in large part by the elaborate text. In Kerver’s woodcut series, new shading lends volume and thickness to the illustrated forms; swirls, whorls and folds lend texture and heightened tactility to water, bark and the folds of dresses. Significantly, these features are accompanied by a general narrative animation. Not only are the fountains flowing with streams of liquid only alluded to in Colonna’s original text, new illustrations are inhabited with human figures which had not been there in the earlier version. One illustration with its accompanying text is worth studying further in this regard. The Dantean vision of an inferno damning for all eternity those “ames de ceux qui par trop ardamment aymer, se sont meurdriz eux mesmes” was, in 1499, merely an empty shell inviting the reader to inhabit it through the

\(^{176}\) Houghton, WK R 3.5.4. The marks are now barely visible, a later owner having presumably wanted to “clean” his copy; f.e7r, f.g6r, f.h5r, and passim.

\(^{177}\) Houghton, Typ Inc 5574.
accompanying narration (fig. 3.14). Already in the Manutius woodcut, the image suggests a ghoulish face with a wide open maw reminiscent of medieval representations of hell. But in

Fig. 3.14. The unpopulated inferno, waiting for its reader. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, f.q2r.
1499 the reader engages with patches of white space in which he is invited to reconstruct the scene. Poliphile had described a wonderful colored mosaic on the previous recto page, f.q1r, before turning to its visual representation on f.q2r. The ekphrasis opens with an obscurely visible space: “Quivi cauernatamente picto era uno fornice di spissa caligine infuscato monstrante una ingente & trista & terricula spelunca [...]”¹⁷⁸. But by the time the reader has reached the bottom of the recto page of folio q1, he has already begun to follow the eternal narrative of the tragic lovers doomed to the terrible cavern. The mosaic gives way to a scene in which his senses are mobilized to embody its elaboration. Thus his body along with his visual imagination is called to fill out the space when he reads of “a dark and muddy lake, frozen hard”¹⁷⁹ depicted on one side. He imagines the unfortunate damned as they try and escape the “frigidissimo averno”, hiking up the “frigidissimo littore” only to fall back into the frozen lake when they reach the top. We not only see but hear, with Poliphile, the “rubenti & lachrymosi occhi indicante clamori, stridore di fauce, & cum dolorosi pianti & guai.”¹⁸⁰ Our whole body revulses when the mountain “vomeva tetro & caliginoso fumo”; or again, we are given to hear the cavernous space with our bodies when we read of the mountain’s great “vomitione [che] dava vista di crepitare, o uero fare scloppo”¹⁸¹. So vivid is the mosaic, for Poliphile, and the ekphrasis for the reader, that we are able to imagine the other half of the great inferno before ever turning the page. Having imaginatively spun out the “visible” half of the inferno with its poor shivering souls, the ekphrasis has taken on sufficient thickness to imagine the “penoso

¹⁷⁸ “The vault’s hollow space was pictured to represent a cavern obscured by thick smoke showing a huge, bitter and terrifying cave” (my trans.)
¹⁷⁹ “uno scuro & cretamoso laco glaciale & rigidissimo demonstrantise” (f.q1r)
¹⁸⁰ “reddened and tearful eyes, indicating cries, wailing and pitiful sobs and moans” (Godwin, 249).
¹⁸¹ “vomiting [which] gave forth a rumbling, or rather an explosion” (ibid.).
ordine [...] dalaltra parte"\textsuperscript{182} with its “alme deputate alle sempiterne flamme”\textsuperscript{183}. Before ever getting to the illustration on the following folio page, the reader has followed with Poliphile a vertiginous circuit. From the “static” mosaic we are plunged into a dynamic and synesthetic world of touch, taste and hearing, sensual modes of apprehension which allow us to inhabit and even extend into the original visual object. When the reader turns the page in 1499, he can well understand why the first word on f.q1v is “apparve”, the same key word we encountered with the wolf. This is an illustration which, following the preceding ekphrasis hunts the reader as much as he hunts with/in it. We do not need to see the “resolute art of coloring and of representing gestures and expressions”, missing in the accompanying visual representation. The white space coupled with the preceding ekphrasis compels us to “walk” up and around the cursed ramp, imaginatively taking on the expressions and gestures as we feel the frigid and fiery temperatures with our bodies. Taken separately the illustration is an unconvincing representation of a Tartarean abyss, but coupled with the text and the reader’s body, its white space becomes the gaping maw of the hair-bristling wolf.

No small wonder then that Kerver commissioned a woodcut making “sense” of the original (fig. 3.15), texturing its fiery and frozen lakes, its rocks, its caverns and, most importantly, populating the space with the damned, vulnerable in their naked bodies as they circulate in various gestures of despair. The illustration has significantly increased in size with respect to the text on the page, perhaps to allow for the artist’s additional detail. Its articulation

\textsuperscript{182} “a similar arrangement [...] on the other side” (Godwin, 249-250).

\textsuperscript{183} “souls condemned to eternal flames” (ibid., 250).
Fig. 3.15. The “animated” inferno. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.89r.
with the text around it still activates the illustration synesthetically. Thus, before turning to the illustration we read of the cave on the previous folio page that “il sembloit qu’il s’y engendrast un tonnerre merueilleusement / impeteux”\textsuperscript{184}. The reader seems to “engender” the marvelous cavern which appears as he turns a rustling page. And just as he is invited to scrutinize the illustration again, he reads of the souls circulating therein. As each side reaches the only bridge in their attempt to escape their respective pools – fiery on one side, frozen on the other – they run into the other for a brief instant so that each soul, before tumbling in again, “sentoit cela qu’elle appetoit, asauoir celle du froid, la chaleur: & celle du feu, la froidure.” As it introduces the image, the text not only leaves the reader off with a sense of his body (in its vivid allusion to temperature extremes) but integrates it into a drama of discovery, inviting the reader to “fall into” the image as he finds what he craves (“appetoit”).

This “tantalizing” scene probably best exemplifies the major difference in our two books’ aesthetics of discovery. On the one hand, the articulation of text and image in Manutius’ \textit{HP} seems to reward the reader’s embodied work. Taking him, as we saw, through the narrative and, like a snail within its shell, compelling him to fill out the original fictive space of the mosaic, the picture “appears” (“apparve”) to the reader in conjunction with his imaginative work. Directly following the illustration (fig. 3.14), Poliphile celebrates the artisan’s ingenuity and in so doing seems to celebrate own readerly (re)invention:

“Dunque chi accuratamente tale expressura considerava facilmente coniecturare cusi essere il poteva, per che il factore disolertia uberrimo, & di cogitato perstante, havea quivi exquisitamente fincto le anime ad expresso corporale.”

\textsuperscript{184} f.88r-v.
“Therefore, whomever considered this expressive representation with care would easily be able to understand why the author, brimming with intelligence and exceptional ingeniousness, had exquisitely drawn therein the souls expressed with bodies.”

We have come full circle indicated by the deictic quivi (“here”, “there”, “therein”) which had introduced the ekphrasis on the preceding pages (“Quivi cavernamente…”). The ingenuity has clearly been our own, for we understand the artist’s corporalization of the fallen souls in the figure not because we see them, but because we ourselves have had to lend sensuality to our vision.

This readerly ingenuity, clearly celebrated by the Hypnerotomachia, is subtly but consistently undermined in the Songe. For one, pictures do not always come after their accompanying ekphrases, as they consistently do in the HP. While the reader of the Hypnerotomachia picks through thirteen pages of text describing the portal and its elaborate ornamentation, the Songe places its new portal woodcut before the vast accompanying text. Consistent with this general drive towards elucidation, Efthymia Priki points to the many inscriptions and hieroglyphics now accompanied by French translations, additional inscriptions and explanatory text “in a way that demonstrates a tendency to make these images as clear as possible to the reader.”

Printed sidenotes, as we have seen in the previous chapter, now provide translations to the numerous allegorical Greek names to facilitate interpretation. Ekphrases are greatly reduced in length, beginning with the “Aurorae Descriptio” – announced in the heading of the first chapter of the HP – an elaborate depiction of the dawn which

185 my trans.
186 Priki 2012, p. 341.
welcomes Poliphile’s lucid dream, and which the Songe cuts down to a couple of subordinate clauses! The reader of the HP, left to his own devices, does not even encounter the first person pronoun until the first page-turn, while we hear “je, Poliphile” taking over his Songe by the second line. Perhaps the most symptomatic illustration, newly added to the Songe, of this general drive towards elucidation is the woodcut visualizing one of the three gardens of

Fig. 3.16. Poliphile gazing out at the reader; Also of note is the text introducing the print which draws attention to the “strange” identity confusion exchanging Poliphile with the reader/viewer. Songe de Poliphile, f.41v.
Eleuthyrilida (fig. 3.16). As we scan the beautifully patterned space which the reader, lending sensual imagination to the ekphrasis in 1499 had been invited to inhabit himself, our eyes are inevitably met by another’s, centered and framed like a voyeur in the background: Poliphile’s. Those uncanny eyes, like Poliphile’s early “je”, eject us from readerly recreation. While the HP was constructed to coax the reader into a slow, sensual apprehension of the objects it deploys on the page, the Songe deflects and subverts this original readerly authority.

The HP, we have seen, sets up an evolution in text and image which tends toward stability as the reader slowly recreates its objects. “Inventions” like the inferno mosaic are finally “understood” because the reader lent their bodies to fill out the space, much like Merleau-Ponty’s apartment which takes shape through bodily apprehension: “Je peux évidemment survoler en pensée l’appartement, l’imaginer ou en dessiner le plan sur le papier, mais même alors je ne saurais saisir l’unité de l’objet sans la médiation de l’expérience corporelle.” The aesthetics of the book in the HP strivestoward a unity of experience authorized by the page itself. Thus when Poliphile first begins his dream after the long dawn preamble, we read from f.2v to the facing recto page: “Ad me / parve de essere in una spatiosa planitie […]”. Where we saw the prerogative given the first person pronoun in the Songe, here we find it symbolically cut off from the new facing page in which a “spacious plain” opens up and invites our own elaboration.

In the Songe, on the other hand, the new woodcut series is voyeuristically charged. We have seen the pleasant garden inhabited by Poliphile’s gaze and the many faces of the series

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187 Merleau-Ponty 2010, p. 891 (my emphasis).
that “stare back” – faces that were not present in 1499. Surrounding text too contributes to a tactical discipline of the gaze. Let us take a look at the interaction between text and image in the bath-house episode. In this highly eroticized passage, Kerver significantly decides to introduce two brand new woodcuts (fig. 3.17, 3.18) visualizing the exterior and the interior of the bath, respectively. The third woodcut (fig. 3.19) capping off the trio is of a bas-relief within

Fig. 3.17. The exterior of the bath-house; a new Kerver print. Songe de Poliphile, f.26r.
Fig. 3.18. The bath-house interior; a new Kerver addition. Note Poliphile’s oblique gesture towards the “peeing putto” fountain. Songe de Poliphile, f.27r.
Fig. 3.19. Kerver’s “peeing putto”. *Songe de Poliphile*, f.28r.
Fig. 3.20. The “peeing putto” in the HP. Note the symmetry and structural stability of the sculptural group as well as of the page itself. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, f.e7r.
the bath-house and provides a climax to the episode. Only this bas-relief was represented in the 1499 series (fig 3.20). If the reader skims through the three woodcuts as though flying over, the impression is of a powerful surgical gaze capable of manipulating an architectural structure and operating within its interior. Indeed, Poliphile’s hand guides us once again within the bath-house as it appears to cut a swift diagonal line across Kerver’s bath-house in the direction of the bas-relief which “appears” after a page-turn. The woodcut just prior to Poliphile’s cutting gaze presents the exterior of the bath-house at a three-quarter profile along the opposite diagonal. The result, visually, is a zig-zag series of glimpses working its way into the object, but never gazing upon it straight on.

The evolving visual dynamic of these three woodcuts on three successive recto pages (f.26r-f.28r) is reinforced by text which both concludes the verso pages on the opposite sides, and introduces each illustrated page. On f.25v facing the bath-house exterior, we read of the five sense-nymphs who accompany him there. In an ekphrasis which stretches over about half of the page, the senses take a back seat for a moment as the bath is textually constructed. Poliphile, as is typical, begins by exclaiming that the “baingz […] estoient (certes) un merveilleux edifice”. He proceeds through the geometrical foundations of the structure (“C’estoit une place octagone […]”) until he reaches the weather-vane at the top which, he discovers, produces a sound as it turns in the wind which, when the bath-house had not been in view, he had fearfully interpreted as the trumpeting of a passing army. Now, it appears, rational sight has prevailed and Eros is momentarily eclipsed when we read at the bottom of the verso page: “En la face respondant a l’opposite de la Nymphe seruant de fontaine / estoit l’entrée par un riche portail […]”. “La Nymphe seruant de fontaine” was a bas-relief of a slumbering Venus unveiled by a
satyr. It had earlier occupied Poliphile’s bemused gaze but now sits away from view, opposite the bath-house entryway. As our eyes shift from the bottom of f.25v to the top of f.26r, and the syntax of the split sentence shifts from one face of the bath-house to the opposite face, vision appears swift and unproblematic, capable of operating abstractly on the architectural bath-house within the structure of the book.

Yet already the word “entrée” to f.26r introduces an ambiguity. The word refers to a structural element (“un riche portail...”) as much as it invites further exploration, correlating with the orientation of the bath-house in Kerver’s new woodcut: for, the structure is not presented symmetrically like a “full face view” but just off-center. To be sure, Poliphile will answer the call to further exploration, incited by the sense-nymphs, and so shall we. When upon a page-turn we find ourselves inside the structure, the choice of textual mise-en-page again proves significant. Poliphile here peruses the many features within the bath structure, stimulating our every sense. We are invited to visually imagine “une clarté de plusieurs diuersons couleurs” piercing through the trellis of the closed doors, the interior wall which “estoit de pierre de touche tresnoire, & si polie” qu’elle reluysoit comme un verre” and the sculptures on each face standing out from the polished black background “aussi blanche que fin ivoire”. We may smell “aucunes gommes & bois odorant” and feel the water “attrempeymbout de chaleur artificiele, mais seulement par la nature”. It would appear that Poliphile and his reader have reached a situation in which the senses may be stimulated with neither taboo nor danger.

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188 The *pierre de touche* was the alchemist’s *touchstone*, a piece of dark jasper allowing him to distinguish gold from what merely glitters. Here it invites Poliphile’s wandering touch into the abysmal material “tresnoire” only to reflect him back (or does it refract him as *Polia*?) from its surface “si polie”. Belon describes the metallurgist’s use of the “pierre de touche” to test the purity of gold in *OS*, f.49v.

189 “Temperately, moderately, modestly; patiently; stayedly, coolely, faire and softly, soberly” (see Cotgrave 1611)
Indeed, instead of the disturbing naked bodies of the five sense nymphs, Poliphile chooses to alight his gaze upon the sculpted nymphs, white on black and thus ideally visible: “O comme je regarday ces images ainsi exquisement taillees ! Certes plusieurs & plusieurs fois, mes yeux furent detournez des vrayes & naturelles pour contempler les contrefaictes”. Despite the sensual inhabitation of the bath therefore, Poliphile’s choice of object allows, momentarily, for attentive contemplation. When we arrive at the bottom of the page, however the naked bodies of the nymphs “vrayes & natureles” disrupt this stable order of affairs:

“Les damoyselles se despouillerent, & mirent leurs riches vestemens sur le dernier degré qui estoit hors de l’eau, en-/ueloppans leurs blondz cheueux en belles coiffes de fil d’or. Et sans aucun respect de honte, me permirent librement veoir leurs personnes toutes nues [...]”

The choice of sentence to conclude the verso page and introduce the recto page upon which Kerver places his new woodcut of the bath interior clearly charges the facing page with an erotics of suspense and revelation which the verso page did not yet have in its ekphrastic, contemplative mode. Poliphile suddenly gazes upon the “real” nymphs as we are we invited to do, undressing, it would appear, as “shamelessly” as their sculpted versions. Yet our gaze is decidedly disrupted as we transition over the gutter. The choice of catch-word is already significant: though the nymphs seem to undress in one frank verb (“les damoyselles se despouillerent…”), the catch-word – “enveloppans” – covers them up again only to uncover them a second time as the reader alights upon the verso page. Although Poliphile claims to

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190 This hesitant dynamic is reminiscent of Octave Mannoni’s phrasing of the fetishist’s paradoxical logic: “je sais très bien, mais quand même”. In this instance, the reader “knows very well” within the logic of the story that the nymphs are undressed, but the catch-word allows him to veil their nudity with the fetish word “enveloppans”; he also “knows very well” that these nymphs appearing on the recto page are the fictive creations of text and image,
watch “librement” the nymphs’ white and vulnerable bodies (“nues, blanches & delicates”), his erstwhile gaze is nevertheless fractured into a multiplicity of glances: “pour euyter a tous inconueniens, & pour mon mieux ie destournoie souuentesfois ma veue de la beaulté tant attraiante.” In an analogous way, the reader’s gaze upon Kerver’s new woodcut is multiplied into glimpses – of the nymphs who are depicted caught in the moment of undress – and sideways glances suggested by Poliphile’s oblique gesture.

Turning the page upon which Poliphile gestures towards the bas-relief we encounter the last page spread of the episode. On the left, again, the recto page is a block of text. On the right the bas-relief of a peeing putto held up by two sculpted nymphs is depicted. We are told that the sculptural group is just opposite the wall from the Venus fountain alluded to at the start of our adventure into the bath. Just like the first description of the bath-house exterior, the ekphrasis describing the fountain in text before its visual representation on the opposite page takes up half of the recto side. But while Venus had been occluded in that first page spread and vision granted a stable and swift mode of operation, here it would appear, she claims a ludic revenge. One of the nymphs asking for a drink from the fountain, Poliphile (“qui ne desiroi[t] sinon leur gratifier & complaire, ains me rendre serf & subgect pour leur faire quelque seruice”) hastens to fulfill the task. We continue at the paginal transition: “ie n’eu pas si tost mis le pied sur un degré pour m’approcher de l’eau tombante, que ce petit enfant leua la quynette, & me pissa droict contre le mylieu de la / face, un traict d’eau si froide & si forte, que ie cuiday tumber a la renuerser...”. The victim of the fountain as he steps upon a trick tile, Poliphile suddenly goes

from smooth operator to mechanized and, therefore, risible body. Kerver’s first paginal transition had granted a disembodied operation upon the bath-house structure. The second transition had fractured the gaze into a network of glimpses and glances. The third finally blindsides the protagonist and the reader. By the time we arrive at this last transition, we have been fiercely, if playfully reminded of our own body and the way it tries to operate through the book.

Before concluding, let us return one final time to the Hypnerotomachia. As we mentioned, the bath-house episode in 1499 is devoid of illustrations depicting the structure itself. The final illustration representing the peeing putto, however, is included in the book and takes up most of the page on f.e7r (fig. 3.20). No text introduces it above the woodcut while ten lines follow it below. The whole page offers a sense of ponderous stability accentuated by the position of the nymphs who appear nearly symmetrical and by the erect stance of the pre-pubescent cupid at their center. As we examined in the inferno episode, it is up now to the reader to “animate” the object: missing here is the stream running from the putto’s “instrumento puerile” and out of the page. In the Kerver fountain, the stream is lustily traced in and the mise-en-page articulated to target the reader “contre le mylieu de la face”. The choice of paginal transition of the HP by contrast is telling of the way in which it positions the reader. Following the episode in which Poliphile is tricked, we read, at the bottom of f.e6v: “Daposcia io connobi la deceptione dil artificio peritissimamente ex-/cogitato” [“I then understood the trickery of the artifice most-

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cleverly designed”). While the new page, in the Songe, had staged readerly confusion, the HP sets up its transition as an instant of comprehension and clarity.

Conclusions

We began our reflections with Gessner’s epistemological model of the image. The natural historian had posited that his visual representations allowed the reader ample freedom to consider each natural object within the space of the book. Taking as a foil the spectacular Roman games in which emperors both flaunted their ownership over nature’s goods and allowed the public to glimpse them for only fleeting moments, Gessner praises his method of collecting the visual representations of natural objects as gleaned from a variety of sources and presented to potentially countless readers for their own, private edification. The space of the book becomes one, according to this model, of critical, readerly control. Animals are fixed in their frames in space and time, and the reader may amble, as it were, around each species to comprehend them to their heart’s content.

The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili and the Songe de Poliphile render such an epistemological model of the image considerably more complex and problematic, with repercussions as we shall see for one French natural historian, Pierre Belon, who will not offer the image in his natural history books as merely passive objects of knowledge, nor as pure spectacle. The HP is constructed in text and image in such a way as to continually shift the reader between sensation and idea, compelling him to build his own cognitive bridge between the two. Wolfs “appear”, as do pages, indicated by the common catch-word “apparue”,
suggesting an experience deliberately out of the reader’s control. In these moments, an abstract view on nature – as we have seen, for example, with regards to the palm tree – is disrupted in order to bring Poliphile back to the moment at hand, to bring the reader back to the materiality of the book, and to bring both back to haptic, embodied mode of discovery. But the HP is also methodically constructed in text and image to allow the reader to reinvent the objects folded within its pages. Visual representations are deliberately presented without excessive ornamentation and the blanks spaces characterizing its woodcut series grants the reader a degree of cognitive freedom. As we investigated with regard to the four triumphs and the inferno scene, the reader’s process of discovery is founded upon a bodily sense. Like the diagram as defined by John Bender and Michael Marrinan, combined text and image as animated by the reader “incite a correlation of sensory data with the mental schema of lived experience that emulates the way we explore objects in the world.”192 Punctuated by disrupting images and surprising page-turns, the HP also allows for the reader to explore the objects it sets out diachronically. Aided by the “laboratory of the imagination”, we are compelled to work with/in text and image to recreate the book’s objects. It is in this way that we can say, with Bender and Marrinan, that the book’s articulation of text and image – or, diagrams – are “closer to being objects than to being representations of objects”. The reader eventually reifies the book’s diagrams as living concepts through the imaginative work required to correlate data in text and image.

The Songe de Poliphile delineates a rather more problematic approach to the image and to the diagram in the book. Visual representations are more numerous, but the increase in

192 Bender and Marrinan 2010, p. 21.
Kerver’s woodcut series is accompanied by a more limited role for the reader and viewer of the book. Gorgon’s heads and other staring faces including the protagonist’s own, seem to embody a mistrust of the HP’s previous relationship vis-à-vis the reader, in which the book object was presented as a quarry of science to cobble together. Instead the presentational material, the woodcut series and certain narrative choices veer towards a consolidation of the Songe as a romance in which the protagonist is given pride of place, to the exclusion of the inventive reader. Images are frequently cued by text to charge them with a fetishistic gaze. If, according to Sharratt, the glimpse is “the elusively incomplete, though not necessarily fleeting character of the visibility of the divine, of power, even of the sexual”\textsuperscript{193} then the Songe delights in offering the reader a meshwork of glimpses without ever allowing the embodied gaze to settle upon its object. Rather than contemplate their fixed forms, for instance, the reader is compelled to animate the five sense-nymphs when he reads, immediately before the image, of their finely-wrought buskins “que lon pouvoit coignoster quand le vent esbranloit leurs cottes”. And we have seen how the new bath-house series provides more visual material – but obliquely – introduced by text which invites as much as it chastises the reader’s gaze. Sense perception is more immediately correlated to images in the Songe. We noted the text introducing the inferno as it leaves the reader off with an extreme sense of bodily temperature, as well as Poliphile at the river where the illustration is enlivened by a virtual sense of touch and taste. With these sensual and frankly sexual cues, the woodcut series is charged with markedly greater desire on the part of the reader. That desire however does not find the same white space as in its predecessor which had allowed the reader to carefully develop and inhabit its objects.

The Songe reminds us then of what the Hypnerotomachia had already staged and what Gessner prefers to ignore in his epistemology of the image in the book. Gessner had focused on a supposed permanence of the book to emphasize its independence of place and time: with my book of natural history, I can learn and relearn of the elephant at the library as well as at home, today as well as in a year, for the book and its contents will not alter in time and space. The HP and the Songe however insist on the “eventfulness” of the book. Moments of discovery are given pride of place through careful articulation of text and image. And while Gessner expresses misgivings about the spectacle of nature, the HP and Songe deliberately stage a spectacle out of reading. But in the HP in particular the reader is compelled to practice the diagrams in its text and image, inhabiting the objects in the book with the laboratory of his imagination. The book provides a recreative procedure through which to consolidate and build upon his knowledge of natural history. The Songe continues this tradition in part but the work delegated the reader is largely reduced. Significant portions of text are excised and more visual material is added. It seems that, while the Songe may still in some ways be approached as a repository of natural history, it places its greatest emphasis in the dramatic experience of reading and the discovery of its woodcut series. If the pursuit of natural history is given a place, it is largely within a courtly and eroticized epistemology of the hunt, tracing sensual lines of correlation between text and image. It is in this context that we must turn to Pierre Belon, in order to fully appreciate his potent and complex deployment of illustrations in his works on natural history.
La Soultière, a modest hamlet of the Sarthoise countryside witnessed the birth of Pierre Belon du Mans in the year 1517. A mere 47 years later the ill-famed Bois de Boulogne was the site of his violent and untimely death, perhaps at the hands of a Huguenot assassin. Pierre Belon's short but “adventurous existence” propelled him around the Mediterranean basin for three full years in the 1540s, circumambulating Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and North Africa while, following his self-ascribed role-model Ulysses, he took stock of everything he saw. A spate of publications followed on the heels of his adventures based on his multifarious observations. In quick succession he published a number of books in the 1550s on plants, fish, birds, and the customs of the peoples he came into contact with.

History has since extended a number of laurels to Belon for his scientific innovations. Though he was part of an international circle of natural historians and philosophers who became tremendously productive in the 1550s, Belon was the first to publish an illustrated book that investigated the properties of a particular kind of animal, in this instance the fish. In

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195 *ibid*. For an excellent account of what we know of Pierre Belon’s life reconstructed from his own *Croniques* and *Observations*, we refer to Philippe Glardon’s critical edition of *L’Histoire de la nature des oyseaux* (Paris: Droz), esp. pp. xv-xviii; and Delaunay 1926.
196 “Preface,” in *Observations*, e*1r. Thévet would later be celebrated by the Pléiade as the French Ulysses *par excellence*, who bettered his illustrious predecessor by writing his own *Odyssey*. Wes Williams, “Out of the Frying Pan”, p. 31.
1551, at the press of Regnaud Chaudière, he published the first illustrated book on the budding field of ichthyology complete with 21 woodcuts representing a variety of aquatic life. In this he was also an innovator. For, although he is not the first to have used woodcuts to illustrate fish – the *Hortus Sanitatis* (1491) is one salient precursor – his fish illustrations are the first to adopt a conscious naturalism based on direct observation. The question of what a properly naturalistic illustration entails is a fraught one, as Sachiko Kusukawa has evidenced in her study of illustrated early modern herbals and medical texts. But there is no doubt that Belon, soon to be followed by his compatriot Guillaume Rondelet, was the first to include illustrations of fish purposefully rendered as accurate and naturalistic as possible. Finally, Belon is commonly associated with an original woodcut illustration he includes in a beautifully illustrated book on birds, published in 1555 by Corrozet and Cavellat (fig. 4.1). In this two-page spread, Belon compares a human skeleton to that of a bird’s – scaled up for the occasion to match its companion – and demonstrates in his text what the images make immediately clear, “combien l'affinité est grande des uns [os] aux autres.” Consequently, Belon has sometimes been hailed

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198 *Libri de piscibus marinis, in quibus veræ piscium effigies expressæ sunt*, 2 v. (Lyon: Bonhomme, 1554-1555)

199 The two editors also printed Belon’s *Observations* together “à communs fraiz,” thereby splitting the cost of the woodblock series. One historian of science writes enthusiastically of Belon’s skeleton spread that it “probably had a greater impact on science than all his published words put together!” (Huxley 2007, p. 69)

Fig. 4.1a. Human skeleton keyed to its bird skeleton counterpart. The woodcut, which first appeared in Belon’s HO, is here reproduced (along with a novel quatrain) in his printer’s edition of Belon’s visual work into an album book entitled Portraits d’oyseaux [...] (Paris: Cavellat, 1557), f.3v.
Fig. 4.1b. The keyed bird skeleton to which the facing human skeleton is to be compared. Note the quatrain which insists upon the scale invariance of the skeleton portrayed. *Portraits d’oyseaux* [...] (Paris: Cavellat, 1557), f.4r. Source: Harvard University, MCZ, Ernst Mayr Library.
as the father of comparative anatomy since the nineteenth century. It is true that Belon looked for homologous structures in human and animal anatomy: indeed, he had already compared human anatomy to that of the dolphin in 1551, though without such a memorable illustration. One of the consequences of the present chapter will show, however, that this impulse to compare human and animal derived as much from a need to morally identify with an object of investigation as to study it objectively. These competing impulses are indeed impossible to disentangle in Belon.

Pierre Belon, along with his international set of colleagues in the natural sciences, such as Conrad Gessner and Ulisse Aldrovandi to name only the most prolific, has rightfully been associated with the dawning Scientific Revolution, a period generally agreed to have spanned the two centuries from about 1500 to 1700. As such, they were seen as watershed figures who broke with the worn-out traditions which had preceded them and began to propose new, fruitful ways of thinking and organizing knowledge. In this grand narrative, great ideas such as Copernicus’ heliocentricism, or Belon’s comparative anatomy, are born and accepted by

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201 cf. Guillaume Cavellat, writing of Belon’s comparative zoology: “il n’y eut onc philosophe, qui ait exactement parlé de la nature des corps humains, que par la comparaison faicte de ices avec celle des dessusdits [oyseaux] & des plantes, sachant que pendant qu’elles sont en vigueur ont leurs effets comme les bestes terrestres, leurs principes, aages & fin de mesmes, & d’estre sains & malades, s’envieillir & mourir”.

202 In *Les Mots et les choses* (pp. 37-38) Foucault famously treats Belon’s comparison of human and avian skeletons as an especially important instance of one of the four “similitudes” of Renaissance epistemology: *analogy*. Man, Foucault argues, is a special fulcrum through which many if not all analogies may pass. Foucault has, perhaps rightly, been attacked by some critics who see his Renaissance epistêmê as drawing too heavily and haphazardly from the neo-Platonic occult tradition (See for example Ian Maclean, “Foucault’s Renaissance Episteme Reassessed: An Aristotelian Counterblast”), while his treatment of Belon has been accused of being too perfunctory (George Huppert, “*Divinatio et Eruditio*”). If one were to insist on reading Belon through the Foucauldian epistêmê however, I would suggest that Belon not only uses analogy to structure knowledge, but also sympathy – another similitude – between reader and referent as he deploys his narrative to stage an experience of knowledge.

203 Delaunay 1926, p. 132.
virtue of their inescapable truth, leading inexorably to more and more sophisticated notions until we arrive at the current state of science. But scholarship since the early 1990s has been revisiting the notion of the Scientific Revolution as a clear rupture from the past\textsuperscript{204}. Belon could garner many laurels indeed. The book we shall explore in this chapter was the first of its kind in more ways than one: the first devoted not only to a single kind of animal, but to a particular species, the dolphin; the first to incorporate naturalistic woodcut illustrations of fish; two years later, Belon was, as mentioned above the first to illustrate side-by-side the skeletons of a man and a bird, charting their homologous structures, and thereby paving the way for eighteenth-century Linnaean zoology and nineteenth-century theories of evolution and adaptation. He was among the first, with Gessner, Aldrovandi and others, to lay the foundations of modern zoology. In this chapter, though, we will not dwell on these accomplishments, however impressive they may be\textsuperscript{205}. Joining up with the questions that are being posed in the history of early modern science today, our concern with Belon's book is not as a container of his thoughts and discoveries, but as an instrument specifically \textit{designed} for a contemporary reader with which to \textit{think} and to \textit{discover}. Rather than pick through Belon's text for resonances with future categories of knowledge, we shall pay heed to how Belon deploys his text and image to design an experience of discovery for his reader.

\textsuperscript{204} For a concise overview of recent scholarship on “the Scientific Revolution”, see the introduction in Osler, \textit{Rethinking the Scientific Revolution}. For a challenge to the linear story of natural history in particular, see esp. the preface to Park and Daston (1998) and Steven Shapin who in \textit{The Scientific Revolution} (1996) provocatively begins by undermining its own title (“There is no such thing as the Scientific Revolution, and this is a book about it”).

\textsuperscript{205} For an account of the accomplishments made by several early-modern naturalists including Pierre Belon, see E. W. Gudger, “The Five Great Naturalists of the Sixteenth Century: Belon, Rondelet, Salviani, Gessner and Aldrovandi: A Chapter in the History of Ichthyology,” \textit{Isis}, 22(1), (Dec., 1934), pp. 21-40. For a recent account of natural history of the Scientific Revolution which goes beyond a teleological study, according early-modern natural history more than the “shallow niche” usually offered it in surveys of the Scientific Revolution, see William Ashworth “Natural History and the Emblematic Worldview” in \textit{Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution}, pp. 303-332.
A casual look through the most famous books on natural history and the natural world of Belon's time could quite convincingly suggest that the major intellectual push of the time was towards a totalizing possession of knowledge. The goal of *l'encyclopédie* or *encyclos disciplina* was assimilated into French humanist thought by the likes of Nicolas Bérauld and Guillaume Budé a few decades prior to Belon's first publication²⁰⁶, and great tomes such as Gessner's multi-volume study on plants and animals, Guillaume Rondelet's natural history of fish, and *Cosmographiae* such as Münster's and Thévet's were being published before or around Belon's time. Pierre Belon too would soon contribute to this effort in his book on fish first published in Latin in 1553, the *De Aquatilibus (AQ)* at the press of Charles Estienne (latinized as Carolus Stephanus), and his book on birds published in 1555 at the presses of Gilles Corrozet and Guillaume Cavellat. Yet, in spite of appearances, none of these authors would presume to have presented in their books everything there was to know of their fields. “Combien,” Belon concedes in the opening lines of his *Observations*, “que j’aye entreprins de mettre les choses memorables, & les singularitez des pays estranges par escript en ce livre, ainsi que les ay observées, ce neantmoins ie ne pretens soubz l’ombre de ce tiltre, forclore un autre qui pourra faire mieulx: ains l’inciter d’avantage à son debvoir.”²⁰⁷ Münster too was known to have


²⁰⁷ Belon’s use of the term *singularité* in these introductory words, as well as in the full title of his book (*Les Observations de Plusieurs Singularitez & choses memorables*) suggests how close he is in spirit to a new breed of cosmographers such as Andre Thévet, who will publish in the same decade his *Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557). As Tom Conley has argued in *The Self-Made Map* (esp. pp. 187-196) and Frank Lestringant in *Le Livre des îles* (cf. esp. pp.), the totalizing gesture of early cosmographies was giving way in this period to the idea
requested to his readers that they send him information through the mail about the regions in which they resided\textsuperscript{208}. The reader was more often than not expected to take an active role in both reconstructing and contributing to a field of knowledge perpetually in evolution. Some books of the period, such as Charles Estienne's \textit{Guide des chemins de France} (1552), even included blank spaces to encourage the reader to supplement the material printed by the author with his or her own observations.\textsuperscript{209} But even if the reader was not expected to contribute materially to the book at hand, he was nevertheless expected to actively engage with the contents, inspecting woodcut images in detail, and reconstructing the author's arguments for himself.

\textit{Proof, however was often mixed up with persuasion in early modern books of natural history}\textsuperscript{210}. Images in Vesalius' \textit{De fabrica} for instance, helped the author persuade his audience of knowledge as mosaic. Rather than within well-defined borders, knowledge was presented as more and more \textit{insular}, and therefore cut off from the organizing “continent” of a coherent body of knowledge.

\textsuperscript{208} In Basel, where he taught Hebrew and theology at the university and published his \textit{Cosmographia Universalis} (1544) at the press of Grynaeus, Sebastian Münster did not only benefit from many erudite collaborators, but also collected many testimonies from students and Reformist refugees arriving from abroad. See Jean-Marc Besse, \textit{Les grandeurs de la terre: aspects du savoir géographique à la renaissance}, esp. pp. 200-208.

\textsuperscript{209} Estienne writes in his liminary address to the reader: “L'auteur [...] se connaissant estre homme, c'est a dire, subiect a faillir, a laisssé par expres marge suffisante a chacun endroit d'iceluy, pour ne t'oster liberté de pouvoir adiouster ou diminuer par tout ou bon te semblera.” (*2r) The Houghton copy (*FC5 Es863 552g) includes manuscript leaves supplying distances from Maubeuge to various places. Chronicles such as Lycosthenes' \textit{De prodigiorum ac monstorum} left space for future prodigious events, a practice dating back to the Nuremberg Chronicle (Shaffer 1950, p. 31). In the burgeoning botanical field, the Houghton copy (Bot 248.2.10) of Dodoens's \textit{Histoire des Plantes} (Antwerp: Jean Loë, 1557) includes no fewer than twelve blank folio pages taken advantage of by one user to compose a manuscript concordance table of Greek to English names (e.g. Allysom / Garlyke; Anethsom / Dylle). The user would have likely composed his table prior to 1578, when the first English translation of Dodoens was published in London.

\textsuperscript{210} For a general account of the role of rhetorical form in the demonstration of truth in early-modern natural philosophy, we refer to Serjeantson, R.W. “Proof and Persuasion” in the \textit{Cambridge History of Science}, vol. 3, pp. 132-175.
in the dissection room, as well as on the page, of his opinion as much as of fact\(^\text{211}\). As suggested
by the quote cited earlier from the opening lines (and the title itself) of Belon’s *Observations*,
this was at core due to the fact that natural historians were foregrounding more and more their
own observations. As they engaged with their ancient predecessors such as Galen for Vesalius,
and Pliny for Belon, more or less preserving all the while the structure of Aristotelian
categories, their own comparisons between *verba* and *res* made clear that the ancients were
indeed fallible. While Galen could have been judged at fault due to careless editing, by the time
of Vesalius and Belon, reliable Latin editions were being published of Galen and Pliny, and these
“authoritative” texts – along with the authors they represented – were put to the test in
earnest for the first time\(^\text{212}\). This undermining of textual authority posed a unique challenge for
natural historians of this critical period. On the one hand, sensory experience and “observations
oculaires”\(^\text{213}\) were deemed the most reliable source of information. Nevertheless, the very texts
which were put to the question were brought in elsewhere as “proof” of personal observation,
der obi test  testimony. Belon, here, is no exception: “Il m’a semblé convenable,” he writes, “amener
quelque fois les passages des bons autheurs, pour d...
fish, as he himself tells us: Aristotle, Porphyrus, Elian, Oppian, Nicander, and Pliny (the Elder). As we will discuss further, sensory experience for him was a way to finally cut through any disagreement of his sources, lending his work the only “asseurance ferme & stable”. But textual authority was also the touchstone of his work. Synthesizing sensory experience and textual knowledge, Belon's first book is a textually-constructed *perspective* on the natural world which attempts to see through and beyond the texts which precede him.

A fundamental problem lay at the heart of the naturalist's work of Belon's period. While sensory experience was held up as a trump card that could ace any source of antiquity, proof based on sensory experience in text is inherently difficult if not impossible. How does an author persuade his readers of the validity of his personal observations? One solution could be simply to allege one's good credentials, and the credentials of other eye-witnesses, which explains why questioning the statements of a natural historian at the time could be seen as a personal affront to one's honor. Seeking the patronage of a powerful prince or churchman was another solution, by which the prestige of a patron could rub off on the material in the book and its author. But these were not the only means of fashioning textual proof of statements.

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215 We refer to Philippe Glardon for a detailed, statistical study of Belon’s ample textual sources, especially his bar-graph resuming those ancient sources to whom Belon is most indebted in the *AQ* and *ND* (Glardon, 2011, p. 314).

216 “...ie veuil enseigner la vraie perspective du Dauphin, & aussi en bailler la peinture...” (1551: f5r). The hesitation between accepting the “good credentials” of ancient predecessors and the information gathered from direct sensory experience has its legal analog in the period, where, as Andrea Frisch argues, legal procedure hesitates between the socio-ethical act of “bearing witness” and the epistemic model of “eyewitnessing”. See Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early-Modern France*. (2004). For Thévet and eyewitnessing, see Lestringant’s introduction to *La Cosmographie du Levant* (Droz, 1985).


218 The Cardinal de Chastillon’s patronage of Belon’s work and Belon’s dedication and address to his patron in the forward to *Histoire naturelle* would have lent significant authority to the book. For an overview of courtly patronage of the natural sciences see Bruce Moran, “Courts and Academies”, in *Cambridge Companion History of...*
based on subjective, sensory experience. Another means must have been more satisfying for contemporary readers: that of simulating sensory and ocular experience in the book. Kusukawa has shown how Vesalius utilized the dialogue of text and image to “demonstrate” his contentions, even in the absence of a dissected body, as though his readers were present in his Paduan auditorium. Belon, as we shall argue in this chapter and the next, is no different. Text and image are articulated in his first book to train the reader’s sensory experience, compelling him to see the natural object “naturally”. Our task will be to deconstruct this articulation of text and image, what we might call Belon’s aesthetic evidence, in order to understand how he persuades his readers into believing they are witnessing proof.

Belon was the first to publish an illustrated book on fish\(^\text{219}\), but he was certainly not alone in producing illustrated works of ichthyology. Several of his contemporaries were about to publish illustrated studies of fish including the likes of Conrad Gessner, Guillaume Rondelet and Ulisse Aldrovandi\(^\text{220}\). It may help us to understand how Belon was different in comparing him to one of his contemporaries, Ippolito Salviani, who published a truly regal book on fish of the Adriatic in 1554: the *Aquitilium animalium historiae libri primum* published in Rome and granted privileges from no less than Pope Julius III, Charles V, Henri II, and Duke Cosimo II de'
Medici. Salviani indeed was one such author, as was Vesalius, who sought to build authority by associating big names to his book. As Vesalius had dedicated his *De fabrica* to the emperor Charles V, Salviani dedicated his oeuvre to the pope. No work could be more different than Belon’s 1551 book on the dolphin and cetaceans, nor than his more complete work which will also fall within our purview, his AQ of 1553, translated two years later as *De la nature et diversité des poissons* (ND). A full-folio volume, richly illustrating 99 specimen on 81 full-size copperplate engravings, it appears like a whale, placed next to Belon’s woodcut minnows...

These remarkable engravings suggest another answer to how an author might construct aesthetic evidence in a book. While, as suggested by Belon’s quote in the *OS*, aesthetic evidence is never self-contained but points to something beyond, urging the reader to continue seeking, Salviani builds a wonderful yet watertight natural world, neatly circumscribed by text and image.

The comparison with Salviani may also help us understand another of Belon’s concerns as he constructs natural discovery in text and image. As he reminds us throughout his *Histoire naturelle*, spectacle of the natural world was ubiquitous in his time. Kings such as Francis I were brought strange and rare fish for their color and uniqueness; emperors of antiquity paraded orcas as tokens of glory; and people rich and poor willingly paid for the pleasurable horror which inspired them at the sight of a never-before-seen sea monster. The spectacle of a sea creature brought with it certain assumptions: the paraded animal was rare, typically of

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221 Kusukawa 2012, p. 231.
223 A practice reminiscent of Montaigne’s encounter with an “enfant monstrueux” paraded about “pour tirer quelques sou” (*Essais*, II.30).
unusually great size, and often suggested hybridity. In a word, it was a marvel. As we will see, Belon associated unbridled wealth with spectacle, and with it an inflated perspective of the animal beheld. The correct appreciation of an animal on the other hand was not dissimilar to “appreciating” – in its etymological sense – the material value of a coin (as distinct from its face value). The humble dimensions of Belon’s first book – not to mention his subsequent AQ and ND tailored to the size of their natural objects – when placed next to Salviani’s spectacular visual presentation, at once suggests a conscious wish to celebrate what Belon will call the natural simplicity of the dolphin and of nature itself, as well as an expectation that the reader follow him beyond the counterfeit surface of images to reconstruct a “truer” relationship with respect to nature and naturalia. Belon attacked the spectacle of natural phenomenon as rooted in a violent and uninformed relationship with the fruits of nature – as when the idle soldiers of Octavian Augustus are made to spear a helpless beached whale which their emperor then goes on to parade in the streets of Rome (HN, f32r-v). Belon’s condoned spectacle is instead the spectacle of dissection, transgressive perhaps, but disciplined and controlled. And he not only dissected sea-life for his study: texts were the primary object of dissection in his work. In the final analysis, the animal body is, to Belon, completely illegible in itself. Unlike his contemporary Gessner who believed every plant to possess its own hieroglyphic which it was

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224 In this Belon may be seen to distinguish himself from the likes of Vesalius, for instance, who even boasted, in the introduction to his De Fabrica, about his bald-faced violation of tombs to acquire corpses for dissections. cf. Katherine Park, “The Criminal and Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy”, in Renaissance Quarterly: 47 (1994) pp. 1-33. The dissection amphitheater like the one in Padua where Vesalius worked was a space in which the implicit transgressions of the anatomist could be ignored, along with the individual to whom the dissected body belonged. cf. Payne, Lynda. “‘With much nausea, loathing, and foetor’: William Harvey, dissection, and dispassion in early modern medicine.” Vesalius. 2002 Dec; 8(2): 45-52. This kind of strictly dispassionate work on the natural object is an attitude belied by the HN.
his task to decipher, Belon's sea-animals are in themselves utterly mute. His aesthetic evidence will prepare the reader to see each animal properly, and to appreciate it “naturally”, through a careful mise-en-scène of text and image.

I. L'Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins: (Re)discovering the dolphin

After returning from his explorations of the Mediterranean basin conducted from February 1547 (when he first departed from Venice) to around the end of 1549, equipped with what must have been copious notes and drawings from his observations of naturalia, Belon began working on his voluminous œuvre, completing no fewer than nine books, translating and reediting some a number of times, all within the decade following his travels. One of these publications, the duly famous Histoire de la nature des oyseaux (HO) of 1555, stretches well beyond 300 pages. Most are lavishly illustrated with woodcuts primarily representing animal and plant species, but also depicting subjects as various as anatomical organs and skulls (HN, f38r, f40v), skeletons (HO, f40-41), coins (HN, f12v), talismans (OS, f24v), maps (OS, f24v), as well as men and women in foreign dress (OS, f105v, f106r-v, f151v, f184v), a subject later picked up

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225 Kusukawa 2012, p. 175.
227 For a complete bibliography of Belon’s works (including his manuscript Croniques held at the Arsenal in Paris) and all 16th century editions, we refer to Glardon, Oyseaux, p. 485-489.
229 OS, f92v (Alexandria) and f78r (the Bosphorus).
again in the beautiful copperplate illustrations of Belon’s follower and admirer, Nicolas de Nicolay. The woodcut images of birds in the *HO* number an impressive one hundred and sixty-one (including the skeletons previously mentioned, and the only surviving portrait of Belon, at 36 years of age). By contrast, Belon’s very first work focuses its attention on a single species: the dolphin. At a relatively slim fifty-five folio pages, and incorporating twenty-one woodcuts, it is dwarfed by Belon’s later endeavors and, perhaps for this reason, has been largely ignored by contemporary critics and historians of science. Nevertheless, as Belon’s first case study, it offers a privileged glimpse into his burgeoning program in natural history.

Joachim du Bellay, only two years prior to the publication of Belon’s book on the dolphin, had written his *Défense et illustration de la langue françoyse* which simultaneously defended, point by point, the rhetorical merits of the French language with respect to Greek, Latin and Italian, while illustrating those same merits by the energy of its prose. As a simultaneous statement and illustration of his scientific methodology, Pierre Belon’s first book could also be conceived

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In a copious passage beginning with Noah, “le premier & principal, qui a fait voyages & peregrinations,” Nicolay caps his chronological list of great explorers with his contemporary, Belon, “diligent annotateur des choses qu’il a veues, congées & observees” ("Preface", pp. 4-6).

231 Ruth Mortimer, p. . For an excellent overview of the illustrations in Belon’s *HO*, including a study of their provenance, we also refer to Glardon, *Oyseaux*, pp. xxxix-xlii.


233 It is known that Belon enjoyed close ties with the poets of la Pléiade, some of whom dedicated verses in honor of the naturalist (see Delaunay 1923, pp. 139-143). For Belon and Du Bellay see also Pascale Barthe, who affirms that by choosing French as the language in which to write his *OS*, Belon “participe à l’élan insufflé par Du Bellay dans sa *Défense et illustration de la langue française.*” (Barthe 2013, p. 24)
Fig. 4.2. Title page of *L’Histoire naturelle des estranges poisons marins* (Paris: Regnaud Chaudière, 1551). Source: Harvard University, Houghton Library (*FC5 B4186 551h*)
of as a Deffense et Illustration of his natural history, providing the kernel from which would flourish his entire oeuvre.\(^{234}\)

Before studying how the book's pieces are articulated together in order to construct a particular experience of discovery – the object of the following chapter – we will do well to provide a broad structural and thematic overview of Belon's first book. Following an initial overview of the *HN*, its aims and its general structure, we shall conclude this first chapter by introducing the symbolic and psychological dimensions set up by the book which guide and shape the reader’s (re)discovery of the dolphin, and related sea-going creatures.

Upon opening the *Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins*, the reader is first struck by the largest Roman font of the book in which is announced Belon’s implicit debt to Pliny’s great *Historia Naturalis*\(^{235}\) (fig. 4.2). With the same gesture, however, the title also distances itself from its predecessor, as it proudly announces the book’s unique contribution to the French language. For, if one discounts translated excerpts of Pliny, Belon’s *Histoire naturelle* is in fact the first natural history to have been published in French, and indeed the first original *Histoire naturelle*\(^{236}\). The long title, signaling to us the book’s presentation of exotic sea-going “fish”\(^{237}\)

\(^{234}\) Cf. the last lines of Ch. 1, in Belon’s *Oyseaux*: “nous rendrons les noms Grecs & Latins avec les Français à chaque oiseau, à fin que le moderne en ait plus d’authority.” (p. 5)

\(^{235}\) As P. Glardon observes (1997), Belon draws from Pliny by far the most copiously, followed by a handful of other ancient sources chief among which is Aristotle (*Historia animalium*), which he had most likely read through Théodore Gaza’s Latin translation.

\(^{236}\) To my knowledge, Belon’s is the first original natural history in French. The earliest Parisian Pliny to be translated into French is an excerpt (book 2) of the *Historiae naturalis* (Moreau, op. cit., V, n. 1491). Other French “histoires naturelles” followed directly on the heels of Belon’s first book in the 1550s: his own study of fish (1553) and birds (1555), not to mention a translation of Oviedo, *L’histoire naturelle des Indes, isles, et terre ferme de la grande mer oceane* (1555), and an *Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles de l’Amérique* by Jean-Baptiste du Tertre (1559). Still, one book written in French with which Belon may have been familiar was published prior to the 1540s containing “histoire naturelle” in its title: an anonymous *Secret de l’histoire naturelle contenant les merveilles et choses mémorables du monde et signamment les choses monstrueuses qui sont*. A compilation of
(estranges poissons marins), pointedly looks forward to the description and illustration of one particular species: the dolphin. Furthermore, the dolphin and its companions are observed by (observee par) Pierre Belon, an original and significant way of “authorizing” his book by which Belon sets himself apart from other authors of the period. Finally, the title page is illustrated not by the printer Regnaud Chaudière's colophon as one might expect, but by the coat of arms of the Cardinal Odet de Coligny-Chastillon, to whom the book is dedicated.

Part one of L’Histoire naturelle is dedicated to a “narration de la nature du dauphin” (HN, f26r). Through a combination of fables, anecdotal hear-say, and physical and behavioral features of the dolphin which the author claims to have observed for himself and confirmed with his authoritative predecessors, we are treated to a varied and prismatic picture of the natural and anthropological curiosities gleaned from medieval and ancient sources, it is based on a late 14th century French manuscript. Twelve editions appeared in Paris and Lyon between 1504 and 1534 (Friedman and Figg 2000, p. 545-546), at least one of which was published by Jean Kerver, son of Thielman Kerver and brother of Jacques (Moreau, III, n. 350). Jean Céard devotes a few pages to this intriguing text, noting in particular its indebtedness to Pliny as “grand pourvoyeur de merveilles” (Céard 1996, pp. 60-71).

237 To Belon and his contemporaries, the term poisson could denote any animal considered aquatic in a broad sense. Even those animals which live on the banks of a body of water, or which spend part of their lives in water such as amphibians (turtles, crocodiles, hippopotami, chameleons) were included in Belon’s books on fish. Estrange may take the moral coloring of the English “strange” or “extraordinary” but should here be taken to mean “exotic” or “foreign,” closer to the modern French “étranger”, an adjective which was only begin to enjoy widespread use before the 17th century (indeed, La Fontaine could still write of “nations étranges” in 1693).

238 Though of course his OS contains the idea of observation in the title itself, most of Belon’s books are not introduced like this. The only other Belonian publication I’ve seen introduced as being “observez par Pierre Belon” is a compilation of images published in 1557 under the title Portraits d’oyseaux, animaux, serpents, herbes, arbres, hommes & femmes, d’Arabie & d’Egypte, observez par P. Belon du Mans. The ambiguity of observez/observee in either case should be noted. In the case of the HN, is the book itself, “L’Histoire naturelle,” overseen, or does it convey Belon’s raw observations of “natural history”? In the case of the Portraits, are the portraits “observez”, and hence overseen, or does the book simply contain the “animaux […] observez par P. Belon”? With this authorial innovation, Belon compels us to become involved in a critical natural history, negotiating between objects in nature and the cultural forms we give them in text and image.

239 cf. Les Medailleurs français du XVIe siècle au milieu du XVIIe, Vol. 1, p. 529. Regnaud Chaudière’s colophon is visible on the title pages of his books published around the same time, such as Charles de Boville’s Géométrie Practique (1551). In our book, he has relegated his colophon to the last page. Might this be indicative of a greater freedom granted to Belon in designing his book on the dolphin?
dolphin drawing as much from literary, scientific and local mythologies as from the author's own first-hand experiences. In the first part, Belon dwells on both the literary and natural history (*histoire*) of the dolphin, weaving them into a story in which his reader is compelled to hunt or chase (*pourochasser*) and ultimately uncover the dolphin's true identity. Then follows the shorter part two, treating the dolphin's “parties interieures” (that is to say, its internal anatomy) as compared to its closest relatives. Significantly, Belon focuses much of his attention on the animal's generative organs, and in particular the womb, as though his natural history were working from his and his reader's prior knowledge of it, through a natural historical first part progressively zeroing in on its object through myth, behavior, external appearance and finally image and identification, to an ultimate exploration of its generation.

In conclusion, he characterizes the contents of this second part as what was learned by a live audience attending one of his dissections of the dolphin.

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241 “Après que j'ay longtemps pourchassé toute l'histoire de ce qui se doict dire du Daulphin...” (26v). For Belon, the “history” or *histoire* of the dolphin, and indeed any object of nature, is as much a story of inquiry as its result. In this, he follows Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* and his Greek predecessors for whom ἱστορία meant “inquiry” as much as it did the knowledge resulting from inquiry. Belon's highly asymmetric use of the word in the first part of his book (22 instances versus 2 in part two), gives a sense of both the heterogeneity of the elements he brings to bear in his “history” of the dolphin, and a drive towards synthesis.

242 One could well consider Belon's scientific procedure as an exercise of *copia* or “generative rhetoric” in reverse (see Terence Cave, *op. cit.*, p. 3-34), whereby from the copious *genera* of the sea he strives to get at their principle of generation (analogous to rhetorical *synonymy*). The procedure however is a physical quest as much as a rhetorical question, for the answer of natural generation resides only at each natural object's “lieu de naissance,” (eg. *HN*, “Preface,” a3r; *OS*, “Epistre,” a3v, “Preface,” e1v), or, in other words, at the “lieu qui l’a produict” (*HN*, 19v).

243 By composing his mosaic of natural historical and emblematic knowledge about the dolphin into “the animal itself” at the center of his book, only to piece it apart again in his anatomical presentation, Belon follows an epistemological program laid out in the second chapter of his *Histoire des Oyseaux*. “Comme les cieux ont leurs
The distribution of illustrations in *L’Histoire naturelle* is surprisingly lopsided. It is in the first part of the book, concerned with the (re)identification of the dolphin, that we encounter the majority of its illustrations, not, as one might expect, in the second part focused on the “spectacle” of dissection. These illustrations in the first part represent, apart from the dolphin itself, various fish often mistaken for the dolphin, as well as two cetaceans that are said to resemble it in form as well as character: the orca (*l’ourde*) and the porpoise (*le marsouin*)\(^{244}\). Also included, and preceding the images “retirées du naturel,” are two Greek figurative renditions of the dolphin. Included in the second part of the book are an image of the uterus of a porpoise and its embryo, the skull of a dolphin, and, curiously – in a gesture that seems to mimic a theatrical *divertissement* following the dolphin's final “dissection” – two woodcuts pertaining to the hippopotamus and one of the chambered nautilus, an animal considered to be worthy of wonder in Belon's time for its ability to rig and run with its own sails.\(^{245}\)

Belon does not write his *Histoire naturelle* to give us everything one can read about the dolphin, as though he were building a commonplace book. In many ways, Conrad Gessner will do in 1558 what Belon declines to do in 1551: gather all of the textual references with respect to the dolphin which are to be found from ancient and contemporary texts, irrespective of any

\(^{244}\) Along with the whale, they will be grouped with the dolphin in the first chapter, and zoological category, of Belon's *ND*: “Des plus grands poissons appelez Cetacees”.

\(^{245}\) The nautilus was a frequent resident of “cabinets de curiosité” (Park and Daston 1998, p. 155)
contradiction between his sources. Belon, for his part, ardently descries the futile work of textual compilation:

> Voila donc comment les modernes qui ont cheminé par les pas des antiques, qui se sont mis a traicter de la nature des animalus qu'ils n'ont pas veu, n'en peuvent dire sinon ce qu'ils en ont trouué es liures des autres. Dont plusieurs pour le iourd'huy ont faict des ramas de toutes choses mal a propos, en prenant indifferemment des auteurs, tant de ceuls qui en ont menti, comme des aultres qui en ont escript a la verité. (HN, 4v)

While the testimony of ancient sources is not to be ignored, it is only personal observation, for Belon, or *autopsia* – “voir pour soi même” – that may ultimately separate the wheat from the chaff: “ceuls qui en ont menti” from the others “qui en ont escript a la verité”. Indeed even ancient authorities could be compilers of others’ observations, as Belon is quick to suggest in his preface. Yet this is not all. In order to observe the dolphin personally, one must first learn to identify it. This is the critical, new problem which Belon’s first book poses and sets out to

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246 Gessner’s entry on the dolphin (under *delphinus*) is by far the longest of his monumental work on aquatic animals, the fourth volume of *Historia animalium* (1558), over three times longer than *balaena*. Much of its contents are explicitly gleaned from Belon. See Kusukawa, “The sources of Gessner’s pictures for the *Historia animalium*,” Annals of Science, 67:3, 303-328, p. 310. For Gessner and the commonplace as rhetorical and mnemonic device, see Nelles 2009, *Reading and Memory in the Universal Library*, and Moss 1996, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*, esp. p. 239.

247 In this, he looks ahead to Montaigne’s opprobrium of those writers who jumble together vain “pastissages de lieux communs” (III.12).

248 The polemic opposition between those that adventurously go and “see for themselves” and those who, like arm-chair naturalists, only glean their knowledge from the sweat off the brows of others, was to become ever fiercer following the years after Belon’s publication of *HN*. The “rabelaisian” André Thevet and his bookish adversary, François de Belleforest was to be one particularly colorful example. Cf. F. Lestringant, *Sous la leçon des vents*, pp. 7-12. On the renewed drive for “autopsia” after the model of Galen by the botanists of the 1540s, see Kusukawa 1997.

249 “Combien que entre les auteurs Grecs, Aristote, Porphyre, & Elian aient escript plusieurs livres de la nature des animaux [...] : & que Pline entre les Latins, les ait indifferemment quasi tous recueillis ca, & la, tant des dessus dicts, que de plusieurs autres auteurs, qui les auoient observer par long usage...” (*HN*, f3r) The insinuation is that the Latins, having degenerated the Greeks’ pristine observations, have, with Pliny at their head, passed down compilations which have likely been corrupted by a supplement: those anonymous “autres auteurs”. Belon’s fellow humanists have thus far only exacerbated the confusion. It is up to Belon’s French *Histoire naturelle* to bring the state of affairs back to their pre-latinate origins.
resolve, offering a case study as illustration for his more extensive work to come. Without proper dissection of *verba* and *res*, what the compilers write, affirms Belon “n'est que redicte, qui n'ha rien d'asseurance ferme & stable. Et pour en montrer une pour exemple, ie prendray le Dauphin [...].” Hence, Belon’s *HN* is an intentionally destabilizing book arguing that other natural histories are smoke and mirrors while the book he offers is a cradle from which, through a novel marriage of text and image, the scientific concept may properly be born.

Belon’s first case study is also meant to be his greatest *tour de force*: The dolphin is by far the most dramatic marine animal – and probably the most dramatic animal of all – which Belon could attempt to (re)identify. For, as the naturalist is quick to remind his reader, the dolphin is by reputation “un poisson qui tient le sceptre en la mer”, and possesses “le second lieu es armoiries en France” (*HN*, f.4v). Indeed, the *dauphin* is also the *Daulphin*, the king’s eldest son and heir to the throne

250 At the time this was François II, who was to succeed his father, Henri II, in 1560 for only a matter of months before his untimely death.


and rectitude. Since Aristotle and Pliny, moreover, the dolphin earned a reputation for being *philanthropic* (the Greeks nick-named the dolphin “philanthropos”), and Plutarch writes in *De sollertia animalium* that “its affection for men renders” the dolphin “dear to the gods; for it is the only creature who loves man for his own sake.” Belon’s readers would have been familiar with the well-known Ovidian story of Arion who was saved from murderous pirates by a dolphin (or a school of dolphins). And Athenaeus had written a moving *fait divers*, variously told throughout antiquity – and *mutatis mutandis* still told today, of the bond between a dolphin and a young boy which would have been familiar to Belon and his readers. The dolphin was thus a mercurial animal, a kind of mediator or intercessor between man and the gods. The symbol-rich Arion myth demonstrates the dolphin’s early role as a psychopomp.

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254 As Belon himself points out (*HN*, f6r). Erasmus too writes of the dolphin’s “goodwill towards mankind” (*Adagia*, II.i.1: *Festina Lente*).


256 As first related by Herodotus (*Histories* I.23-24; op. cit, pp. 11-12), and popularized by Ovid, *Fasti* (Bk. II, Feb. 3; op. cit, pp. 29-30) and Plutarch, *Septem Sapientium Conivium*, (i.e. “Banquet of the Seven Sages,” 17-18). Erasmus alludes to the Arion myth in his *Adagia* (III.vii.1), affirming that “the dolphins’ love for man is generally acknowledged”. Rabelais makes hilarious reference to Arion in the tempest episode when Panurge vainly prays for “quelque dauphin pour me saulver en terre comme un beau petit Arion” (*QL*, ch. 21).

257 One has only to think the famous Hollywood tear-jerker *Free Willy* (1993) and the popular television series spun off from it.

258 Belon tells us that the Mediterranean cultures which he visited preserved this story and others about the dolphin’s philanthropic behavior “comme s’il n’y avoit pas un mois qu’elles en ont esté faictes.” (*HN*, f25r) Cf. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, XIII, 85 (op. cit, p. 967). The basic story is of a boy (named Dionysius, in Athenaeus’ account) who became the object of affection of a dolphin which invited the boy to swim on its back and return safely to shore at will. Similar accounts are elaborated in Gellius (*Attic Nights*, VI, 8) and Pliny (*Historia Naturalis*, IX, 8). Belon recalls this archetypal story to his readers in *HN*, f25r-v.
linking the insecure world of the here-and-now with the permanence of the hereafter\textsuperscript{259}. Nor had the dolphin lost its reputation, in Belon’s time, as the salvation of beleaguered sailors and fishermen caught in storms unforeseen. In any case, the dolphin was the one animal who had the reputation of being most intimate with humans, while retaining something of the divine and everlasting. This perceived fraternity with humankind was attributed by Oppian to the legend that dolphins were human, once upon a time: “for indeed they were aforetime men [...] but they exchanged the land for the sea and put on the form of fishes.” For the second-century Greek poet (whom Belon credits as a source\textsuperscript{260}), “diviner than the Dolphin is nothing yet created.”\textsuperscript{261}

Many of Belon’s readers would also have come across the ubiquitous \textit{Festina Lente} ("make haste slowly") emblem – to which the naturalist makes lengthy reference in the book \textit{(HN, f.12r-v)} – figuring a dolphin wrapped around an anchor. The motto and emblem were first adopted by Vespasian (though the Renaissance had assumed it belonged first to Octavian Augustus), and variously recycled throughout the sixteenth-century in both France and Italy\textsuperscript{262}. Further, since every symbol has its underbelly, the dolphin's brotherly love of men was

\textsuperscript{259} Chevalier 1969, p. 342. As Belon points out, the dolphin was sometimes called \textit{Pompilus}, “car il accompagne volontier les navires.” \textit{(HN, f26v)} See also Bosio 1632, p. 645.

\textsuperscript{260} \textit{HN}, f.3r. Belon was most likely familiar with Oppian through the Aldine edition (1517) which included a Latin translation by Laurentius Lippius. The Lippius translation was later republished by Adrien Turnèbe (Turnebus) under the title \textit{De Piscatu libri V} (Paris: Guillaume Morel, 1555).

\textsuperscript{261} \textit{Halieutica}, Loeb Classical Library, 1928, pp. 269-271.

\textsuperscript{262} Readers of Belon would have come across the emblem from any number of sources, the most celebrated however being undoubtedly Erasmus' \textit{Adagia} (II.i.1). It appears in Andrea Alciati’s books in several emblems, and as the great Venitian printer Aldus Manutius’ colophon after 1499, inspired no doubt by its ubiquitous presence in the \textit{Hypnerotomachia Poliphili}. Rabelais too makes reference to it in the \textit{Quart Livre} (in the \textit{Brief declaration} under the entry for \textit{Hieroglyphes}) himself pointing back too Manutius' greatest edition. For the rich history of this emblem in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we refer to Edgar Wind, \textit{Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance}, p. 97-112.
sometimes associated with Eros, and in particular, erotic love of boys\(^{263}\): Arion then is assimilated to Cupid, the dolphin to Venus.\(^{264}\)

Surely one of the most important facets of the dolphin for Belon and his contemporaries is as a symbol for Christ and the resurrection, a fact which, significantly, is not directly alluded to by the naturalist, though here too, his readers would have been familiar with this potent (and potentially controversial) symbolism of the sea-mammal\(^{265}\). Charged with this symbolism, the secular *Festina lente* emblem takes on a new religious significance, with its dolphin and anchor representing Christ (dolphin) and the Church (anchor)\(^{266}\), or Christ and the Christian martyr’s fortitude in the hope and grace of their redeemer\(^{267}\). Intriguingly, the fish (and at their head, the “kingly dolphin”\(^{268}\)) took on its full significance for Christians during the time of

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\(^{263}\) Erasmus alludes to this, perhaps: “the dolphin is exceptionally fond of man (some say of boys in particular)...” (Adagia, II.i.1, *Festina Lente*), and “delphino lascivior” (*De Copia*, 1548, p. 80) is a topos that hinges on the lusty, playful dolphin; see also in Plutarch the typical story of a boy, object of a dolphin’s “gentleness and kindness ... so extraordinary that it might be said to amount to amorous love.” (*De soll. animal.*; op. cit., p. 691).

\(^{264}\) “Comme elle naquit en la mer, Aphrodite (Vénus) est également souvent représentée avec des dauphins.” (M. Cazenave, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190); cf. Ovid, *Fasti* II.81-82, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

\(^{265}\) Paolo Aringhi, for instance, in his *Roma subterranea novissima* (Rome, 1651) gives meticulous descriptions of fish utilized in Roman catacombs (cf. II, 288; II, 327), as well as an account of the dolphin as Christian symbol (“*Delphinus*”, II, cap. 39). His work expanded upon and translated the postumously published *Roma sotteranea* of Antonio Bosio (Roma : G. Facciotti, 1632). Dolphins, who “s’inalzano sopra l’acque, e non stanno giacendo nell’arena profonda del mare” are particularly apt sea creatures to symbolize the Christian soul yearning for its saviour (ibid., p. 645).

\(^{266}\) A Christian ecclesiastical review founded at the turn of the twentieth century adopted the *Festina lente* emblem as their colophon, noting: “In the days of the Catacombs the figure of the dolphin represented Christ, that of the anchor signified the Church.” *The Dolphin: American Ecclesiastical Review*, March, 1901, p. 1.

\(^{267}\) “The Dolphin in Christian Symbolism,” *American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 2, 1890, pp. 118-120. The resemblance of the anchor to the Greek miniscule letter *omega* (ω) (cf. C. Errard, *L’Art Byzantin*, vol. 3, p. 32-33) and of the dolphin or fish to the letter *alpha* (α) seems another way in which the *Festina lente* emblem could be construed by Christian tradition as an apt symbol of their salvation in Christ (the *alpha* and *omega*). This is my speculation, however, as I have not come across any confirmation in my primary or secondary sources.

\(^{268}\) Oppian 1928, *Halieutica*, p. 269.
Roman persecution, a fact that likely held weight for Protestant humanists of Belon’s time:


Christians referred to themselves as “little fish”, pisciculi, who follow Christ the ichtys. But Christ as Fish did not just derive from a happy anagram. Indeed, St Augustine boiled down into a quippy phrase – *Piscis assus est Christus passus* (“The roasted Fish is the crucified Christ”) – what was perhaps at the origin of the fish-symbol for early Christians: The king Fish, ichthys or dolphin specifically recalled to the Christian mind Christ’s suffering and the Christian’s salvation via the Holy Supper and the Eucharist. The dolphin, therefore, can be construed not only as a broad symbol standing in for Christ or Christians (the ichthys and His pisciculi), but also, like bread and wine, as a specifically Eucharistic symbol, and one of the earliest. This perhaps explains why for Christians, the *Festina lente* emblem could also be intended “as a symbol of Christ upon the cross”.

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269 With whom Belon came into frequent contact during the course of his training and especially during his time at Wittenburg (1540-41), where no less a personality as Martin Luther was still residing at the time (Glardon, op. cit., p. xv). Delaunay asserts that Belon “fait la connaissance de Luther” at Wittenburg during his soujourn there, which indeed appears to be the case if we may believe Belon’s own testimony to Charles IX (Belon and Barsi 2001, *Cronique*, pp. 104, 106): See Paul Delaunay, *Un Adversaire de la Reforme: Les idees religieuses de Pierre Belon, du Mans*, (Laval : Imprimerie-Librairie Goupil, 1922), p. 3.

270 Michel Legrain, “Poisson,” in *Dictionnaire de la Bible et du Christianisme*, p. 455. Tertullian (*De baptismo*, I.3) is the first to mention the acrostich symbolically equating Christ to a fish.


Finally, the dolphin is associated with water and transfiguration. The dolphin is of the water as the eagle is of the air, and water has always been the element of change. Ovid has Bacchus metamorphose the Tyrrhenian pirates that tied him up into dolphins “playing like dancers, frolicking about in fun, wide nostrils taking in the sea to flow it out again.” Following this story, Christian mythology makes of the dolphin a symbol not only of transformation and metamorphosis, but of conversion: the pirates are repentant sinners finally returned to their element, and, saving sailors in need, are thenceforth committed to doing good. Many if not all of the dolphin symbolism evoked here is explicitly present in the text. Belon makes direct reference to the dolphins reputed speed, its gregariousness, its exceptional intelligence and its humanitarian behavior. The Christian symbolism, on the other hand, while not explicitly alluded to, glides throughout right below the surface.

With this rich symbolic baggage mobilized by the dolphin in Belon’s time, it is certainly no surprise that the naturalist laments his countrymen’s disgraceful ignorance of the dolphin itself. And rectifying this deplorable error on their part was surely a splashy, if not polemic, way...

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275 Erasmus, Adagia, II.1.1: “As much as eagles are the kings of aery birds, [...] by so much are the dolphins leaders among fishes.”
276 As Bachelard explains, “water is a type of destiny that is no longer simply the vain destiny of fleeting images and a never-ending dream but an essential destiny that endlessly changes the substance of being. [...] Water is truly the transitory element.” (Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter, op. cit, p. 6)
277 Metaphorphoses, III, v. 527 ff. The story had already been recounted in the seventh Homeric hymn dedicated to Dionysos (vv. 32-58). Belon alludes to the Ovidian episode in HN, f13r.
278 P. Grimal, “Dionysos” in Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine, p. 127; also see Chevalier 1969, p. 342, who cites Grimal and makes the link to Christian mythology. The idea dates from the early Church fathers: cf. Morey 1910 (pp. 407-409) who gives a particular example from Origen in which the convert is symbolically represented as a fish hooked by Peter the apostle.
of introducing what was to be his vast work in natural history. For the appellation “daulphin” compelled any number of ideas, but never the right one. The result was a plethora of misrepresentations

... en peincture & es armoiries, & es monnoyes tant d’or que d’argent, ou il est faulsement representé. Si est ce pourtant, que qui demanderoit a tous les pescheurs qui sont en la grande mer occidentale se ils cognoissent quelque poisson nommé Daulphin, tous assureeroient que non. (HN, f.9v-10r)

Thus, the author and his country folk recognize the “dolphin” well enough in its iconographic representations, but their fellow fishermen have never actually seen what they take to be a “dolphin”, those, that is, who ply their trade in the Atlantic, “la grande mer occidentale”. Their counterparts in the Mediterranean, Belon will make clear, have never lost sight or name of the dolphin. Worse still, the res ipsa, the dolphin itself does in fact make its way to local fish markets, Belon attests, yet no one recognizes this disinherited prince of the sea (in fact, Belon claims on several occasions that the dolphin is the most common “fish” of fish markets, a rather glaring case of hyperbole279). Instead, any fish but the dolphin seems to be granted the scepter it rightfully deserves: the title of Daulphin. We are taken through a gallery of usurpers: not only its next of kin, the porpoise and orca, but also the sturgeon, the tuna, and the attilus (Accipenser attilus), among others. As a result, Belon could confront his reader with this disconcerting paradox in the book's opening lines:

Il n'est animal plus vulgaire, ne plus commun en la memoire des hommes, qu'est le Daulphin: & ... toutefois il ne s'est trouvé homme qui le cognoisse... (HN, f.3v)

279 See HN, 5r; Belon later asserts that the porpoise is more abundant than its counterpart, the dolphin (HN, 14v).
In two parts and 68 chapters of *L’histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins*, the ultimate purpose the author sets for himself is to uncover for the reader the “true nature” of the dolphin, striving to move from the world of the symbolic to the tangible “real world”. To achieve this, the author will provide as the geometrical centerpiece of the book an exact visual rendition of his chosen species, framed by a textual description of its exterior and interior anatomy. Belon outlines his program in the first chapter to his *Histoire naturelle*:

> Ce que ie pretens faire, n'est autre chose, sinon que ie veuil enseigner la vraie perspective du Daulphin, & aussi en bailler la peincture, laissant toutes prolixitez inutiles, mais au surplus n'oubliant rien de quoy ie me soye peu souvenir des notes qui luy conviennent singulierement: a fin que ayant mis & expose toutes les parties exterieurs & interieures, selon que ie les ay observees en diverses contrees du monde, un chacun se puisse persuader, que ie n'aye rien escript, chose que moy mesme ne l'aye veue. (HN, f.4v-5r)

Let us pause for a moment to consider this rich excerpt in detail in which the naturalist is in effect laying out for us the “grandes lignes” of his goal and methodology. Belon quickly distinguishes what he calls “la vraie perspective du Daulphin” and the “peincture” of it which he will, eventually, extend or “bailler” to the reader. The distinction appears surprising at first. If we possess the “vraie perspective du Dauphin” can we not, therefore, recognize it? Conversely, if we are handed the “peincture” of the dolphin, do we not then know it? No, for these two manners of vision are in essence distinct and complementary, loosely analogous to the difference between *looking (for)* and *seeing*. What Belon shall attempt is to “sign” us towards (*enseigner*) a final rediscovery of the dolphin, teaching us to *search* before we *see*. Like an early-modern road movie plotted in text and image, the reader is made to follow “road signs” and
organize himself in relation to them to finally gain a new perspective. Only then will he be able to re-cognize what was always already there cradled in the book’s center: the “true” representation of the dolphin. Belon’s final sentence in this book proposal almost gives away the game: it is up to the reader to persuade himself (se persuader) of the truth. Self-persuasion, however, is urged not of course as an act of delusion but as the careful work of disillusionment. It is a work which, guided by the book, but independent of it, we are meant to perform upon ourselves in order to see “well”\textsuperscript{280}. And self-persuasion will finally bring us to adjust ourselves along the lines of a “vraie perspective” which – like a revelation of word made flesh – will eventually transform mere “escript” into “chose veue”.\textsuperscript{281}

Before we turn in greater detail to Belon’s articulation of text and image in his construction of scientific evidence, let us consider how, within the broader strategy of its construction, Belon’s Histoire naturelle sets up a “perspectival object” cradled in its center. For, the guiding lines of Belon’s textual “perspective” of the dolphin towards a central, visual “peincture” shares much with Guy Rosolato’s psychoanalytical concept. “The perspectival object,” Rosolato posits, may be:

“\ldots detect[ed] in any material or mental object where focalization in/on a vanishing point is elaborated in relation to a specific organization, an area in which a question, an opening, or a mystery is concentrated in the very space where a proliferation of cover-ups or disguises is being simultaneously constructed. It is thus a question of localized

\textsuperscript{280} As Montaigne will insist, “Il n’importe pas seulement qu’on voye la chose, mais comment on la voye,” (I.14, p. )

\textsuperscript{281} Belon stresses this same “self-persuasion” in the final sentence of his Preface (as well as that of the Epistre in OS) : “Oultre plus afin que […] aient lieu de pouuoir prouver que j’ai mis la vraye peincture des Dauphins a la clarté des hommes, un chacun se persuade de les auoir a la verité.” (HN, f3v) Despite the difficult syntax of the sentence, Belon’s meaning seems clear. While, akin to a prophet descending from the mountains, he illuminates a general truth to the people, it is up to each reader individually to work towards a personal understanding, faced with the news that his book brings. This “supplement” (Oul{tre plus...}), as it were, is what may transform the “vraye peincture des Dauphins” into a means of beholding them in truth (les avoir a la verité).
manifestation of a limit, of an interface between the visible and the invisible, or, in a more general sense, between the known and the unknown.”

Elaborating upon Rosolato’s, Mitchell Greenberg emphasizes the spatial and psychological positioning enacted upon the viewer/reader by the perspectival object. For, it is “a visual or discursive device that, rather like the geometrical focal point in Renaissance painting, fixes the viewer in a certain position, allowing a vision informed by precisely what is not visible, what is kept by this one view unseeable and unknowable. It is, however, the unseen, that informs by its very absence the power and fascination of what is perceived, and believed.” As Greenberg further reminds us, the perspectival object garners its power and fascination from the primal unseeable and unknowable fantasy of the “maternal womb.” It is precisely this archetypal visual fantasy that is embedded in the very structure of Belon’s Histoire naturelle, and indeed, in the choice of his first scientific “discovery”: that of recovering and uncovering the dolphin’s true nature and identity. For, the dolphin, it would not be lost on Belon, by its very name evokes birth and nature’s own prolific matrix. “Dolphin,” from the Greek δελφίς (delphis), has


283 op. cit., 87.

Fig. 4.3. The orca “giving birth” at the end of book one. *Histoire naturelle*, f.32v. Source: Harvard University, MCZ, Ernst Mayr Library (http://dx.doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.5751)
as a cognate the Greek word for “womb,” δελφύς (delphus), most likely because the dolphin is, as first recorded by Aristotle, a special kind of “fish”: one possessing a womb (what we would today designate as a marine mammal). Belon confirms the importance of this etymology, and the consequent choice of his exemplary discovery, by concluding the first part of his Histoire naturelle with the striking image of an orca giving birth, its calf and matrix still tied to the mother by an umbilical cord (fig. 4.3). The dolphin image at the book’s center is dramatically articulated around a text which looks forward to and then away from it, presented as the moment and place – the event – of truth, in which the reader is compelled to participate. The image’s dramatic placement, furthermore, intentionally mimics the eventual discovery in nature of what Belon calls a species’ “lieu de naissance”: that special place in nature which provides for a species, in which it is properly born and thrives.

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285 In a popularization of Belon which we shall discuss at more length below (La Nature et propriété des poissons, op. cit.), the dolphin is characterized as the one and only sea animal which gives live birth to its young (f.A4v). Though neither Belon nor his contemporary Guillaume Rondelet would have agreed with this specialization of the dolphin, it does illustrate the importance of the anthropomorphic dolphin in the popular imagination as the only sea creature possessing a womb.

286 eg. HN, “Preface,” a3r; OS, “Epistre,” a3v, “Preface,” e1v, or, in other words, at the “lieu qui l’a produict” (HN, 19v). With this fundamental concept of a species’ proper birthplace or “lieu de naissance”, Belon stresses, more than any other sixteenth-century naturalist, the importance of environmental factors for a species’ proper generation and well-being. Greek natural history offered, by way of Aristotle and his student Theophrastus, a closely-related concept – the oikeios topos or “favorable place” of a given species – and Belon’s “lieu de naissance” looks ahead to modern ecology’s concept of the ecological “niche” of a given species. J. D. Hughes, “Theophrastus as Ecologist,” Environmental Review, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 296-306. For Hippocrates, a thing’s nature or physis, much like Belon’s “lieu de naissance”, is the place of its constitution, its “natural or original place or condition”. W. A. Heidel, “Πέρι Φύσεως. A Study of the Conception of Nature among the Pre-Socratics.” Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 45(4), 79-133, p. 104.

287 This dramatic “history” of the dolphin formally resembles the descriptive template of sixteenth-century botanists which had crystallized by the 1550s with the work of Valerius Cordus and Rembert Dodoens. Like Belon and his orca matrix, the routine description of a plant culminated in its roots. Valerius Cordus in his Historia plantarum (written in 1545 but not published by Gessner until 1561) “began with the plant’s stem or trunk, and branches if it had any; after that he moved to leaves and flowers. The root came last, as if the plant had been observed in situ for a season and then at uprooted.” (Ogilvie 2003, pp. 29-49, p. 35) The botanist’s observation of a plant in situ, mimicked by Cordus’s and Dodoens’s method of description, recalls Belon’s own quest for each species’ “lieu de naissance”. Indeed the resemblance of Belon’s fetal matrix to a radicle network is undeniable.
What makes the dolphin’s visual representation a “concentrated point of attention,” other than its privileged placement and its etymological undertones? What makes the book itself, in its careful articulation of text and image, a “rapprochement entre le visible et l’invisible, entre le connu et l’inconnu”\textsuperscript{288}, as Rosolato describes the perspectival object? Broadly speaking, the dramatic arc of the book moves from confusion to clarity, from ignorance to enlightenment. For, as we have discussed, Belon insists that no one of his readers could properly identify the dolphin before delving into his book. By the time they have emerged, however, his readers will have virtually witnessed its dissection, subjectively moving in such a way from the “unknown” to the “known”, objectively, from the “visible” to the “invisible”.

We must, however, dig a little deeper to arrive at the deeper psychological dimension of how Belon sets up a potent visual and discursive interface between known and unknown, visible and invisible. The answer lies in the culinary taboo which his French reader is implicitly guilty of infringing. In the first few chapters of the \textit{HN}, Belon’s attention is turned, not yet to identifying the dolphin, but in meticulously going through the various cultures he has come into contact with, representing the three monotheistic traditions, and observing that each finds anathema the consumption of dolphin meat. The French alone, he argues, are not only remiss in their inability to correctly identify the dolphin when it is present at their local marketplace, but, worse still, are guilty of a sacred taboo according to those who follow the monotheistic traditions around the Mediterranean basin. The title of his third chapter says it all: “Que le Daulphin soit souverain es repas des Francois es iours maigres, mais ils ne pensent pas que soit luy, d’autant qu’il a usurpé le nom d’un autre.” (\textit{HN}, 5r) Chapters 4 to 9 follow where Belon

\textsuperscript{288} Rosolato 1993, p. 30.
evokes the “grande veneration” in which “Mahometistes”, “Iuifs”, those of “la religion Latine” specifically residing in Italy, and those who “suivent la religion Grecque”, all hold the dolphin. Though the French esteem dolphin meat (without correctly placing it) as a most-prized delicacy, “les estrangiers ne pourront lire ceste clausule sans s’en esmerveiller, veu mesmement que toutes les nations du levant estiment une chose cruelle, & a euls abominable, d’outrager un Daulphin, & par consequent ils s’abstiennent du tout d’en manger.” (HN, 5v) Belon is setting up a highly-dramatic tension from the outset of his narrative of discovery, one which implants a threat of castration in any eventual (re)cognition. Scientific discovery is homologous to the archetypal tragic outcomes of Oedipus Rex and, in a more culinary vein, of the Ovidian tragédie sanglante of Tereus and Philomela. Belon is clearly aware of the psychological stakes he is setting when he conflates, with cutting irony, his reader’s bodily and cognitive appetites for the object of knowledge at hand:

Et maintenant que j’ay proposé luy rendre son nom ancien, sachant bien que c’est haute entreprise, que de vouloir destruire un nom ia long temps usurpé, a fin de ne troubler l’esprit de ceuls qui pour le commencement pourront trouver que cela soit trop dur, i’ay cherché les moyens pour le rendre plus facile a leur digestion. (HN, 8r)

From the outset, then, Belon compels his reader to look ahead to the moment of discovery concretized in the central image of the dolphin, making of the image a concentrated and affectively-charged reference point throughout the book even before its eventual revelation. Whether or not his reader has actually tasted dolphin meat before discovering its true identity does not alter the curiosity and fascination for the outcome of his scientific discovery which Belon sets up from the beginning. “L’object de perspective est la cause, dans son fondement
sexuel, du désir,” Rosolato writes. And indeed, Belon’s dolphin, by virtue of the foundational culinary taboo which it represents, is at the same time an impetus of desires both carnal and cognitive, and the chastisement of that desire, if it gets too close.

The dramatic tension set up by Belon between his text and image has important consequences for the epistemological status of the image itself within the presentation of his natural history. The central image of the dolphin represents an interface between what is visible and invisible, known and unknown, a tension which is generalizable to all of Belon’s images, though the dolphin should be considered a foundational and exemplary case. Most of Belon’s images throughout his entire work represent the object or animal under consideration in the text preceding them. The images almost always follow rather than introduce the text which enumerates their external characteristics or marques distinguishing them from other animals. In this the dolphin is no exception. Belon concludes his remarks distinguishing the dolphin from its near relatives – and from those distantly-related fish which “usurped” the name of dolphin in the minds of some of his more misguided readers – with the dolphin picture. Only following this visual conclusion will he begin his virtual dissection of the dolphin in the second part. The picture, consequently, acts as a kind of liminal site of information, both tautological in its visual summary of text that preceded it and a kind of cipher, or visual signifier signifying only the unknown (as Rosolato writes of the perspectival object\(^{289}\): the dolphin in flesh and blood “retiré du naturel”. On the one hand, the image puts an end to what would otherwise be an infinite attempt to distinguish the dolphin “par le menu” from each and every

\(^{289}\) “On peut donc avancer que l’objet de perspective est appréhendé comme signifiant de l’inconnu, c’est-a-dire dont le signifié resterait en suspens, ou s’abolirait en n’étant que l’inconnu.” (Rosolato 1993, p. 33)
one of its relatives, if not every animal which, at some point, was undeservedly baptized with
the noble name. Belon went through nearly a dozen of these species which resembled the
dolphin in some way or had been grossly confused with it. The tuna for instance, “encor qu’il
soit de grande corpulence,” and may thus be taken to be the dolphin, “& qu’il ait la queue en
lune, il est toutefois different au Dauphin,” and the subsequent image will “prove” the
naturalist’s assertion when the reader compares it to that of the dolphin within the book. The
same goes for the other fish mistakenly reputed to be the legendary Dauphin. But
distinguishing the dolphin from every possible usurper of its identity – not only its near relatives
– is a potentially infinite endeavor. Hence, “laisant toutes prolixitez inutiles” Belon closes his
textual exercise with an image. As he concludes for the “Merops” in the OS, so he could write
for each and every one of his images: “afin d’en oster l’erreur, i’ay proposé en bailler la vraye
peincture.” The image both curtails any further textual errancy and exorcises the reader’s
eventual error: it is a “moment of truth”.

And yet, as stated earlier, Belon’s images are ciphers and point to the unknown and the
invisible. What each of these images finally represents for the reader is only what its
represented species is not. We are invited to compare the dolphin to what preceded it in the
text, to what it is not, for instance, the tuna (“Ton,” f14r), nor the sea bream (“Bremme
de mer,” f13v), nor the dragonet (“Lyra,” f15r), nor the sturgeon (“Esturgeon,” f13v), to name a
few. As Belon writes of the “Merops” picture, the central dolphin is there, finally, to “oster
l’erreur”, not to establish truth as one establishes an axiom. It is clear that the placement of the
dolphin picture, and indeed every other picture in Belon which, as per usual, follows a
descriptive text, is fundamental to its epistemological status. For, in this way, the reader
charges it with the known and the unknown. On the one hand, the picture repeats those distinctions made in the text which preceded it, and on the other, it stops short their potentially infinite regression, looking ahead to further work of distinction and identification to be done *ad vivum*, with the living thing itself at its “lieu de naissance”.

Finally, the picture is charged with the culinary taboo proleptically introducing it, and in this way too represents an interface between known and unknown, visible and invisible. For, prior to the event of the perspectival object, the reader potentially “knows too much” in his carnal relations with the dolphin: he is, by association at least with his fellow Frenchmen, guilty of eating a sacred, indeed *philanthropic* animal: an act no less cruel, it would appear, than cannibalism. Yet he also remains in a paradoxical state of innocence: not knowing the proper name and origin of what it is that he eats, the dolphin remains in a cognitive sense invisible to him. The perspectival object effects a reversal of these two modalities of knowledge. It rejects carnal knowledge of the thing itself – indeed risking indigestion in the luxurious reader – banning such abhorrent knowledge to the unknown, and brings its visual and textual representation, its identity, to the fore. This reversal turns about the interdict of luxuriousness and improper desire which Belon sets up from the beginning. As Rosolato writes of the perspectival object, the interface between visible and invisible, between known and unknown, “se fait très spécialement à propos du sexe : non pas seulement pour des raisons d’interdit culturel, mais parce que la vue, qui est source illimitée d’informations, reste prise dans une *distance* par rapport à un contact corporel, au toucher, à l’expérience sexuelle elle-même, éprouvée *avec l’autre sexe*, dans le mouvement du désir.”

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290 Rosolato 1993, p. 30 (emphasis by the author).
The dolphin image becomes accordingly an exemplary representational moment, organizing the psychological mode of appropriation of Belon’s objects of knowledge for the reader. The visual representations provided carry all of the force and power of nature herself, and the dolphin image symbolically stands in as the very matrix or womb of nature herself: the “lieu de naissance” at which the reader may recognize the sought-after object of nature. As a perspectival object, the visual representation of the dolphin is psychologically charged as an object of knowledge to behold visually but which continues to withhold – by its very nature as naturalistic visual representation – a strong tactile and gustatory taboo.\(^{291}\)

The sensory cues with which the image in natural history is often correlated could be studied across Belon’s oeuvre and into the printed books of other sixteenth-century natural historians. In such a way one could draw inferences about the intended reception of the natural science book as an object in the second half of the sixteenth century\(^{292}\). Belon’s own texts become less potently indexed by bodily cues as it is in the propaedeutic \textit{HN}, but they are still very much there. We might cite one particularly oedipal example in the \textit{Histoire des oyseaux} in which the

\(^{291}\) As Tom Conley writes of the perspectival object in general, so we could apply to Belon’s dolphin and animal pictures at large, that “it figures a concentrated point of attention that captures what a subject chooses to see, simply because in it resides what cannot, because of its paradoxical evidence and accessibility, be seen.” (Conley 2006, p. xxxviii)

\(^{292}\) See epilogue for further research directions and primary source material which could continue the lines drawn in this dissertation.
Fig. 4.4. Le Butor “qui essaye tousjours à creuer les yeux”. HO, p. 192. Source: The Getty Research Institute (http://dx.doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.78886)
text invests an image of the “butor” (or “bittern”) with a particularly eye-gouging power (fig. 4.4). For, the aptly name “butor” (already an insult, as Belon informs us, in his time) is distinguished by a brutish behavior: “Le naturel du Butor”, as the sidenote of the page indicates, is to “essaye[r] tousiours à creuer les yeux”, a trait of which we read at the moment of apprehending the image. In the light of the butor, an ocular threat chastising criminal tactility is suggested again by the “corlieu” (or “whimbril”). For we are made to consider its image directly following a tactical detail regarding its “rostrum longum & acutum” (fig. 4.5), a feature which had initiated the bird’s description – namely, its “bec tourné en faucille, beaucoup voulé, ayant un pied et demi de long” – and distinguished it among all of its near relatives. We shall consider other methods by which Belon urges his reader to bring his body, as it were, to the reading table in order to come into contact with the objects of knowledge presented, all the while disciplining his reader to approach naturalia in a critical, self-conscious way. Pictures in the book are thereby given a unprecedented power which Belon’s textual “perspective” attempts to bring under control. In another image of the HO, the very name of the animal at play attempts to bracket its visual representation (fig. 4.6). The “proper” name and object of knowledge “Guepier” (or “European bee-eater”) measures the picture off like two points of a compass. At the same time the powerful matrix of the “peincture [...] retiré[e] du naturel”, invests the proper name from within, giving birth, as it were to the object of knowledge.

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293 Belon continues: “Nous n’en connaissons aucun autre, qui ait le bec si long que cestuy là” (p. 204). For other “tactical” examples in the HO where pictures of birds are presented with an immediate allusion to beaks or claws, see the “Aigle Royal” (p. 91), “petite Aigle noire” (p. 93), “Grande pie griesche” (p. 127), “Moyen duc” (p. 138).

294 HN, f.21r

295 For further examples of bird pictures directly adjacent to their proper names in the article, see “Aigle de mer” (p. 96), “Vautour” (p. 98).
Fig. 4.5. The “corlieu” or whimbril with its parti-coloured “rostrum longum & acutum”. HO, p. 205. Source: The Getty Research Institute (http://dx.doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.78886)
Fig. 4.6. The “Guepier”. *HO*, p. 225. Source: The Getty Research Institute (http://dx.doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.78886)
Belon’s illustrated natural histories for all the taboo with which he invests them – or indeed perhaps by virtue of these very same taboos – continued to possess a powerful imaginative pull on some of his readers. The pursuit of natural history, we may understand from one particularly important example, is, for Belon’s readers, conceived of as a pursuit for a new, natural and pristine reacquaintance with the objects of nature: a return, indeed to nature itself and its “lieux de naissance”. Thus, for one posthumous editor of Belon the book is presented as nothing less than a sensuous, full-bodied reconnection with the most secret wonders of nature. The “imprimeur”, in her letter first sets up an epistemological tension worthy of what we have seen Jean Martin to effect in his own address to the reader:

S’il y a quelque chose d’admirable en l’univers, après la contemplation de l’homme (pour l’usage & service du quel toutes autres choses furent creees) certainement c’est la consideration des Animaux, & specialement de ceux desquels la nature est plus estrange, & la facon de vivre plus esloignee de noz sens, comme des Poissons, & autres Monstres aquatiques, lesquels estans cachez aux profunditez de Mers, & quasi enterrez aux tenebreux abysmes des lacs & fleuues, deçoient (ainsi que le Philosophe escrit) les plus curieux recercheurs de leurs mœurs & conditions [...]

The matter proposed for bookish exposition are nothing less than those remotest objects of knowledge, buried in the darkest corners of the natural world, and hence farthest from our

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297 *Epistre au lecteur*, f.Aiir-Aiiir (my emphasis). The passage is lifted almost verbatim from Boiastuau’s *Histoires prodigieuses*, XVII, published ten years prior. See Boaistuau, f.54r-v.
Fig. 4.7a. L’Esturgeon in the Jean Bonfons edition. Source: Harvard University, Houghton Library (*FC5 B4186 D570n)

Fig. 4.7b. L’Esturgeon in the HN, f.13v. Source: Harvard University, MCZ, Ernst Mayr Library (http://dx.doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.5751)
Fig. 4.8a. La Balene in the Jean Bonfons edition. Source: Harvard University, Houghton Library (*FC5 B4186 D570n)

Fig. 4.8b. La Balene in Guillaume Rondelet. *L’Histoire entière des poissons* (Lyon: Bonhomme, 1558), p. 354. Source: Harvard University, Houghton Library (F 5405.54.16*)
senses. Within the matrix of the book, however the printer offers no less a task for herself than to “quasi enfanter & exprimer au vif [la] vraye forme & figure” of these same secrets. The newly cut prints for the book seem to accentuate this fantasy of the book as birthplace of the secrets of nature. For the parade of marine animals is led by the dolphin whom the author claims is the only marine animal to give live birth; and its prints are rather unremarkable copies of Belon (fig. 4.7) and Rondelet (fig. 4.8) with the peculiarity that most appear to hover over the surface of the sea, secreted to the light so to speak, from its abysmal depths. The fantasy of “birthing” the objects of nature into the cradle of the book is mirrored by a re-birth of the reader himself: For, the secret fish of the sea,

poulez quelquefois de l’impetuosité des ondes, ou agitez de certains gestes & autres passions particulières, rauissent tellement celuy qui les contemple de bon œil, qu’il désireroit volontiers pour quelque espace de temps estre transformé en leur espece, ou quasi se precipiteroit en l’element ou ils font leur demeure, afin d’en receuoir quelque plus libre & parfaicte cognoissance.

Birthing nature in the book is mirrored by the fantasy of the reader’s re-birth, as he beholds – and indeed becomes – the object in a mutual moment of “parfaicte cognoissance” (connaissance).

While he may have sympathized with the printer’s enthusiasm, Belon would most likely have disagreed with the invitation of the book to fashion its reader into a “natural historical Narcissus”\(^\text{298}\). Indeed, the formatting of this posthumous edition, in which Belon would not have been directly involved, suggests the separation between the two visions for the book as vehicle of natural historical knowledge and experience. Visibly touched by Belon’s “reinvention”

\(^{298}\) Williams 2011, p. 41.
Fig. 4.9. The appearance “soudaine” of the “anguille” following the “dauphin”. *La nature et propriété des poissons*, f.A5r. Source: Harvard University, Houghton Library (*FC5 B4186 DS70n*)
of the dolphin in the *HN*, following her address to the reader the printer opens her pocket-size sextodecimo with the same exemplary animal. But the entry in the book returns to the same emblematic structure which Belon’s articulation of text and image had attempted if not to dismantle, at least to disrupt. We might, however still discern remnants of Belon’s disarticulation of the emblem in the correlation between the dolphin and the sea creature following it: the “anguille” or eel, a chthonic animal of the mud and depths as rehearsed by the subsequent textual description. Its visual representation, alone, appears on the last page of the dolphin entry which concludes with the claim that the dolphin tooth, like an amulet, “pendue & liee au col de la personne oste les paours soudaines”, both provoking and protecting the reader from fear of the lone *anguille*, divested of the textual explication after a page-turn (fig. 4.9). The emblem structure in which a short title – in this instance the “proper name” of the animal – is followed by a visual representation which in turn is followed by a textual explication, is consolidated further in another edition of Belon, the *Portraits d’oyseaux, animaux, serpens, [...] observerez par Pierre Belon*. Unlike the Bonfons edition, the *Portraits* was published in Belon’s lifetime, though it too was designed independent of him, the initiative of the printer Guillaume.

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299 Because of its lack of fins and scales, the eel could stand in for the Christian who did not look for salvation at the surface of the sea, but wallowed in the depths and the mud. cf. “[...] debeat satis agere, ut non in profundis jaceat aquarium, sicut sunt isti pisces, qui dicuntur non habere pinpas, neque squamas. Haec namque eorum natura perbibetur, ut in imis semper, et circa ipsum coenum demorentur: sicut sunt anguillae, et huic similia, quae non possunt ascendere ad aquae summitatem, neque ad eius superiora parvenire.” Origen, *In Leviticum Homilium VII*. [“That is shown in the fact that, if anyone is put in these waters and in the sea of this life and placed in the waves of the age, then he ought to do enough that he may not be cast own into the depths of the waters as are those fish which are said “not to have fins or scales.” For their nature produces these so that they always delay in the lowest part and around the mire itself, just as eels and those similar to it are those which cannot ascend to the top of the water nor reach its heights.” (trans. Barkley 2010, p. 151)]

300 *Portraits d’oyseaux, animaux, serpens, herbes, arbres, hommes et femmes, d’Arabie & Egypte observerez par P. Belon, Le tout enrichy de quatrains [...]* (Paris: Cavellat, 1557)
Fig. 4.10. The emblematic structure of *Portraits* (Paris: Cavellat, 1557). The dramatic struggle between the serpent and the eagle would surely have reminded the reader of Aesop’s fable of the same name. Source: Harvard University, MCZ, Ernst Mayr Library (Spec. Coll. MCZ 159).
Cavellat who would have wished to capitalize on the woodblocks in his possession\(^\text{301}\). In any event, the book bears the products of nature reinscribed in the more “digestible” form of the emblem, each entry summarized by a tersely chiseled quatrain, the whole entry fitting snugly on a single page (fig. 4.10).

A reader such as “la veuve Bonfons” would have likely picked up on the tacit Christian message we alluded to in our analysis of the cultural dolphin, an animal rich in symbolic undertones. The fantasy of swimming without travail through the depths of the sea was not just the fantasy of a hunter of natural knowledge, but perhaps first and foremost a well-worn Christian allegory\(^\text{302}\). We recall that the dolphin could symbolize Christ as “king of fish” and each sea-going creature – especially those closest to the surface of the sea – another *imitator Christi*. Belon himself attributes to the dolphin certain traits not borne out in reality, but with strong Biblical resonances. For instance, “ses dents font de compte faict cent soixante en tout […] quarante en chasque costé de la maschouere” (*HN*, f.28r), and “la veuve Bonfons” picks up on the number forty when she gives the dolphin a lifespan of 140 years on average (f.A4r)\(^\text{303}\). Let

\(^{301}\) For this “picture book” and others of its kind which popularized the work of natural historians such as Belon, Salviani and Gesner, see H.-J. Martin, pp. 266-267.

\(^{302}\) “Dichiara queste conditioni Origene; ponendo la differenze tra pesci mondi, permessi ; e gl’immondi, prohibitì nella sacra Scrittura ; cioè che questi non hanno le pinne ò ale ; e perciò stanno sempre nel loto, e nel profondo, non potendo ascendere alla sommità dell’acque, come quelli che hanno le dette pinne, e le squame ; e l’applica all’anima, che lascia il loto dell’Infedeltà, & aiutata dalle ale, e gratia di Dio vien’in alto, & è presa nella rete della fede [...]” (Bosio 1632, p. 673)

\(^{303}\) The number forty returns many times in the Old and New Testament. God caused it to rain for forty days and forty nights (Genesis 7:12), Moses spends 40 years in the desert (Acts 7:30) and was on Mont Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights (Exodus 24:18). In the New Testament, Jesus was tempted for 40 days and 40 nights (Matthew 4:2) and there were 40 days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3). Rabelais, for one, will rely on his reader’s knowledge of the Bible when he makes of his giants mock-biblical heros: “Il vous convient doncques noter que, au commencement du monde (je parle de loing, il y a plus de *quarante quarantaines de nuyctz* [...]” (*Pantagruel*, ch. 1, my emphasis); “Gargantua, en son aage de quattre cens quatre vingtz quarante et quattre ans engendra son fils Pantagruel” (*Pantagruel*, ch. 2).

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us recall, too, that fishermen in contact with the dolphin treat it with religious reverence. For according to Belon, if they accidentally catch a dolphin in their nets, they just as soon “le remettent en la mer, avec parolles de saincteté, en disant des prieres” (HN, f.7v). And, buried in Belon’s textual presentation, we may discern that the dolphin is an evangelical messenger of the Christian spirit. For those who have come into contact with the dolphin

ont dict auoir experimenté que le Daulphin soit misericordieuls, & qu’il faille l’aimer, pource que le Daulphin aime ceuls qui sont tombez en la mer, de la mesme amour comme si ceuls qui sont tombez les auoient aimez auant qu’ils y tombassent. (HN, f6r)

In this Christian allegory, we can discern the same psychological dynamic as we saw in regards to the perspectival object at the book’s center. For at the heart of his reader’s moral and cognitive reorientation in regards to the works of nature lies a moral and psychological “fall” in which he must first come to realize his criminal ignorance. Indeed as Belon laments in the Nature et diversité four years later, some are so criminal in their relation to their environment that they could use a good push overboard:

Ou les uns sont vigilants, et addonnent leurs esprits a la contemplation des plus hautains ouvrages de la nature, comprenant l’espece des substances incorporees, en leur idees : Les autres au contraire sont si paresseux, & de lourd entendement, qu’ils se sentent molestez de prendre garde aux choses sensibles, qui leur sont journellement devant les yeux. (ND, f.A4r)

Can we hear Belon’s conflation of gustatory and ocular knowledge as a reflection on the meaning of the Eucharist? Is it licit to understand the apprehension of the book – and in particular the pictures within them – as somehow homologous to Belon’s theological opinions on the Mass, whatever they might be? The question, which I wish only to suggest here as a
coda, is a thorny one. In his words above, Belon does allow us to put in parallel those transcendent souls who would “incorporate” (“incorporees”) the “hautains ouvrages de nature”, sublimating them into ideas, to those who never extricate themselves from their bestial life, inert and lethargic like the snail or turtle of the Songe. These last are blind to those objects of knowledge “journellement devant leurs yeux” and we are left to assume that they know them solely by touch and taste, like those well-heeled consumers of dolphin meat who know not what they do. With these words, Belon appears to confirm one’s suspicion that buried within his first Histoire naturelle is a reflection upon the Christian communion. For Belon’s chosen species\(^{304}\) as we saw was consumed unknowingly; and, according to Protestant polemicists, those following the Roman Rite claimed to consume the flesh and blood of Christ in barbarous ignorance of Christ Himself\(^{305}\). Was Belon, like many traveling humanists of the 1530s and 1540s, a Protestant sympathizer at one point? It seems likely, given his associations. The Cardinal Odet de Châtillon-Coligny, brother of the great Huguenot leader Gaspard de Coligny, was Belon’s patron for his first book and would go on to abjure the Roman Catholic Church, joining forces with his family and the Huguenot faction in 1561. Belon himself writes sympathetically of his associations with Martin Luther in his unpublished Cronique, evoking him as the founder of a reformed practice which was not as radically austere as the French

\(^{304}\) Let us note here that the term species (or in French espèce) would have had potent theological connotations for a sixteenth-century reader. For, species is the Scholastic terminology for the bread and wine as containers of the body and blood of Christ. As Jean Calvin laments, “Les Théologiens scolastiques [...] concèdent que Jésus Christ n’est point enclos au pain et au vin localement, ne d’une façon corporelle : mais ils forgent une façon nouvelle [...] ils enseignent de chercher Jésus Christ en l’espèce du pain, qu’ils appellent.” (Institution, IV.17.13, p. 171, and passim; my emphasis)

Huguenots (whom he dismissively terms Hurbecs in his Croniques) would have it\textsuperscript{306}. But Belon was first and foremost a political dependent, funded not only by the Coligny’s for a time (of whom he will continue to write fondly in publications following the HN\textsuperscript{307}), but also by the Montmorency\textsuperscript{308} and the great Cardinal de Tournon\textsuperscript{309}. By the time Belon was writing the Croniques in 1561-1562 – at the time of the Colloque de Poissy (which he attended\textsuperscript{310}) and while Ronsard was penning his militant Élégie sur les troubles d’Amboise – the political winds had shifted strongly and it was time to pick sides. He took advantage of the platform offered by the Cronique to disown those heresies\textsuperscript{311} with which he had come into contact back home, his own “lieu de naissance”\textsuperscript{312}. Well aware of the dolphin’s biblical undertones and Eucharistic symbolism however, one can imagine that a decade prior to the redaction of his Cronique, a frequent guest at the Cardinal de Châtillon’s dinner table\textsuperscript{313}, Belon could still choose to render all the more potent his call for a critical and self-conscious approach to natural history and the pictures which convey them by embedding within his Histoire naturelle the epistemological controversy of the host.

\textsuperscript{306} “Et vrayment, s’ils suivoient ce qu’autrefois Martin Luther a enseigné, ils ferroient capitulation d’en eriger ; car mesmesment qui cheminera par le pais du duché de Saxonie encor de ceste heure trouvera les mesmes croix de bois et de pierre renouvelées par les carrefours comme à la mode ancienne.” (Croniques, p. 106, n. 78) See also p. 104, n. 72; p. 160, n. 237; p. 167, n. 257. Belon paid Luther several visits at his home where he claims to have beheld a number of Christian icons (p. 106).

\textsuperscript{307} Les remonstrances sur le defaut du labovr & culture des plantes, & de la coignoissance d’icelles (Paris : Cavellat, 1558), f.54v. Belon also dedicates his AQ and ND to the Cardinal de Chastillon in 1553 and 1555 respectively.

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{309} To whom his OS is dedicated. Belon served the Cardinal de Tournon on diplomatic tours in Germany for Francis I (see Belon and Barsi 2001, p. 17; 28 ff.)

\textsuperscript{310} Belon and Barsi 2001, Cronique, pp. 107-109.

\textsuperscript{311} “Donc moy, qui en l’an 1532 parvins en la basse Bretagne, ce fut souvenance de longue main aiant este nourry entre personnes francoises si outtrees d’heresie qu’a peine on en puisse trouver sa pareille.” (Cronique, p. 55).

\textsuperscript{312} “La Soulletiere (qui est le lieu de nostre naissance).” OS, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{313} HN, f.A2r.
Conclusions

Pierre Belon’s *Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins* is a meticulously plotted text which methodically and dramatically unveils its natural object – the dolphin – in text and image. In the span of only 55 folio pages the naturalist succeeds in completely upsetting his reader’s expectations. Not only is the reader’s knowledge of the dolphin turned upside-down – exchanging an intimate knowledge which Belon marks as an abomination for a more austere and unexpected visual representation – he is challenged, at the same time, in his approach to reading natural history and learning from the book. Belon does not offer an open-and-shut case in the presentation of his natural objects. The reader cannot hope to correctly “know” the dolphin within the book alone, just as he cannot hope to properly know it if he does not begin first by reading Belon’s book. The *HN* is Belon’s *Deffense et Illustration* of a new way of doing and presenting natural history that engages the reader and implicates him in the continual search for knowledge of the natural world. His *Histoire naturelle* is presented not only as a case in natural history but also, and most importantly in *natural* history: in a practice of science which Belon would deem more aligned with the forces of nature, transporting oneself to a natural object’s “lieu de naissance,” and allowing oneself to be moved to nausea or disorientation in a dramatic movement from ignorance to recognition. Belon’s is a natural science which strives to teach a natural approach to its object as much as the object itself.

This as we have seen has consequences for the structure of the book. Belon and his editor make key choices to effect an adventure of knowledge for the reader forcing him to
come face-to-face with an effectively criminal ignorance. Text and image are arranged in such a way as to invest the image with a patina of truth, the image drawing as it does on textual “evidence” which precedes it. But the image also looks ahead to more comparisons with natural objects *ad vivum*, always reminding the reader that its object’s “lieu de naissance” is enmeshed in both the cradle of the book and nature itself. Text and image conspire to make a perspectival object out of the dolphin, investing it with a desire for knowledge, and heavily-laden with taboos revolving around touch, taste and sexuality which both draw us into and cut us off from the static image.

In the following chapter, we will focus our investigation of text and image in Belon to gain a better sense of how the two interact in an aesthetic of knowledge and discovery, all the while widening our scope to include excerpts from later books the naturalist published in the 1550s. Taking as a point of comparison the *Hortus Sanitatis*, an early incunabular work of natural history, we will explore the implications carried by this new natural aesthetics demonstrating how radically Belon’s presentation of objects of knowledge in all of his works altered the experience of natural history in the book. In particular, we will continue to underline the importance in Belon of a kind of *chiaroscuro* approach to his presentation of knowledge in text and image. The conclusion may surprise when one considers the deliberate naturalism of his illustrations. However combined with the text, Belon undermines the idea that his text and image may in fact definitively comprehend any piece of natural knowledge. Greek fishermen, Belon had observed approvingly in the course of his travels, whenever a dolphin found itself “prins en leur filets, […] leur donnent la liberté” (HN, 22v, my emphasis). This they do with reverence as well as compassion for these animals for whom “il seroit plus tolerable
vivre longtemps en l’air estant sur terre sans auoir mal, que d’estre detenu[s] en la mer sans prendre haleine”. Indeed, along with “touts autres poissons qui ont poulmons”, “Les Daulphins qu’on ha prins es rets, demeurent suffoquez par faute d’air, car ils ne peuvent vivre sans respirer” (HN, 26r). The naturalist’s approach to his natural history is much the same as his Greek fishermen friends’ approach to the philanthropic dolphin. It’s precisely when text and image catch their object of knowledge in a suffocating net that we must return to its “lieu de naissance” and resume asking those destabilizing questions that shall set it free again.
Chapter 5:

Observing the Objects of Nature in Belon’s *Histoire naturelle* (1551) and *Observations de plusieurs singularitez* (1553)

“No one had come to make anything of this,
To move it, name it, shape it a symbol;
The huge creatures were their own depth [...]”
-- Elizabeth Jennings, *The Animals’ Arrival*

Introduction: Belon’s “Observation” of Natural History

The word *observer* and its lexical relatives come up often in Belon’s works. In the *Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins*, we may count some eleven instances in the first part of the book and in the *Observations de plusieurs singuaritez et choses memorables* not only is “observations” announced as the first word of the title, an abbreviated version of it is displayed on the top of every page spread as the “Premier Livre des Singula. / Obseruees par P. Belon” (“Second...”, “Tiers...”), and terms such as *observer, observation*, etc., crop up on almost every page. We have already turned our attention to the title page of the *HN* (fig. 4.2) where Belon signs his text, unusually, as “obseruee par Pierre Belon”, a formula echoed in the page headers of the *OS*. Yet a search into library catalogues shows that once again, as with the *Histoire*
naturelle of 1551, Belon’s Observations is making pointed use of a term which had not yet appeared in French titles.

What were the connotations of observer and observation for a sixteenth-century reader? Cotgrave in his Dictionarie of 1611 offers as English synonyms for observer: “to observe, keepe, hold; heed, esteeme, regard; watch, marke, espie, advise,” thus tracing a semantic field closer to the ancient meaning of observare: “observer, respecter, se conformer à” (Gaffiot). Rabelais, for one, will hew closely to this sense of the word. The Tiers Livre, obsessed as it is with observational practices of all sorts, applies the term more often than any of the other four books, usually with ritual and religious connotations. Thus, for example, Rabelais writes of “foy & observation de[s] saints commandemens [de Dieu]”314 echoed by Belon’s own allusion to “les Iuifs [...] observateurs des commandemens de Moyse” (HN, f.6v). And throughout Belon’s own Cronique we encounter various “observateurs de religion”315. Semantically, Belon’s use of observer thus had epistemological, as well as ritualistic resonance. His Histoire naturelle is “observee” not only in the sense of an empirical practice but also in that it involves a new-found respect and reverence towards the object of knowledge. We saw this dramatized in the structure of Belon’s first book and its epistemology of the image.

Though “Observations” was not a term which found its way into French titles before Belon’s 1553 Observations de plusieurs singularitez, it was precisely during the middle of the sixteenth-century that philologists writing in Latin began publishing their own Observationes.

314 Tiers Livre, ch. 30.
315 Cronique, pp. 77, 140 and passim.
Katherine Park\textsuperscript{316} and Giana Pomata\textsuperscript{317} have pointed out that the term \textit{observationes} was originally used in medieval astrometeorology to designate annotations written in the margins of another text. Not unlike the marginalia found in Dorothea Stichel’s annotated copy of the \textit{Hypnerotomachia Poliphili}, these “observationes” sought to illuminate particularly difficult passages. From textually dependent marginalia, however, \textit{observationes} were promoted by the sixteenth-century to the titles of independently printed texts. Thus philologists such as Etienne Dolet would write notes on the plays of Terence, the \textit{Observationes in Terentii comoedias} (Lyon, 1540), or Fernando Núñez de Guzmán would illuminate obscure passages of Pliny in \textit{Observationes in loca obscura historiae naturae C. Plinii} (Antwerp, 1547). These philologists, who proudly called themselves “observatores” practiced not only a descriptive but a \textit{prescriptive} methodology. Their work did not merely entail gathering up textual material but more importantly involved a quasi-religious attention to procedure and detail. Thus one philologist could write of the \textit{observatores}:

\textit{Observatores} do not amass their materials cursorily and, so to speak, by chance, without discriminating between authors, like the \textit{lexicographi} do. \textit{Observatores}, in contrast, [...] restrict themselves to the work of the ancients, and of the most approved men [...]. They collect their \textit{observationes} from things most carefully read and considered, and they credit them to their diverse authors.\textsuperscript{318}


\textsuperscript{318} \textit{Nizolius sive linguae Latinae thesaurus} (Venice, 1551), preface. Cited in Pomata 2011, p. 51.
In this carefully selective philological practice, we may hear an echo of Belon’s own disciplined methodology in his approach to the natural history of the dolphin when, in an opening passage of his *HN*, he assures us that

ie me suis mis en deliberation de descrire amplement toute l’histoire qui luy convient [au Daulphin], suivant une particuliére observation de toutes ses parties, tant extérieures que interieures : descriptant fidellement toutes choses qui doibuent estre librement descriptes, sans y adiouster ne diminuer chose que Nature ne luy ait donné [...]. (*HN*, f.4r, my emphasis)

With the resonance of “fidellement” and “doibuent”, the “particuliére observation” to which Belon subjects his object of investigation also implies a “faithfulness” to its nature and “duty” to keep it free (“librement”) of superfluous detail. In his *Histoire naturelle* “observee,” therefore, Belon is not only offering a description of what he has observed, but a *prescription* through text and image of the rules of observation. His book, as we shall read and continue to analyze it below, is presented not only as a *diegesis* or narration of the history of natural objects but a *mimesis* or presentation of their proper discovery.

As Giana Pomata has shown\(^{319}\), the emergence of *observatio* as a new epistemic genre in the sixteenth-century had far-reaching implications. Not only were *observationes* widely published by philologists beginning in the middle decades of the sixteenth-century, their rule-bound methods had a broad sociological impact, foundational of a “republic of letters”. And *Observationes* were by no means confined to philology. Already prevalent in medicine in the late fifteenth-century, they offered empirical information on a case-by-case basis, often

spurning or ignoring theoretical framework based on ancient authority. Thus at the beginning of the sixteenth-century we can find recipes against the plague in Henricus Auerbach’s *Saluberrimae adversus pestilentiam observationes* (1519) or, at the end, a thoroughly-experienced midwife’s personal observations on the proper care of women in labor in Louis Bourgeois’ highly-successful *Observations diverses* (1609)\(^{320}\). *Observationes*, moreover were tied to astronomical observations, themselves often motivated by medical interests. As in the case of medical *observationes*, the accent was placed in these works on *phenomena*, or *apparentia* such as comets in Peter Apian’s *Observationes cometarum quinque* (1540). The terms *observer*, *observation*, along with the neo-Skeptic terms *phenomena* and *apparentia*, point to an insistence on empirical knowledge and “focused and repeated observation”. Hence, Belon assures his reader he has not only encountered the dolphin once; rather: “[s]es parties exterieres & interieures, […] ie les ay obseruees en diverses contrees du monde” (*HN*, f.4v). Not unlike an astronomer building his knowledge of a celestial object through repeated observations of its revolutions, Belon offers natural knowledge built up through repeated direct experience (*autopsia*).

Our task in the present chapter will be to understand some of the implications for Belon’s natural history of this new insistence on empirical knowledge. What does it mean for Belon to “observe” the objects of natural history? What does it mean for him to hover, as it were, in the margins of his text and there continually “observe” (in Cotgrave’s sense, perhaps, \(^{320}\) See *Observations diverses sur la stérilité, perte de fruit, fécondité, accouchements, et maladies des femmes, et enfants nouveaux-nés* (Paris: Côte-Femmes, 1992), with a preface by Françoise Olive. Bourgeois’ treatise represents the first French medical text published by a practicing midwife. The two titles and the texts they introduce continue to demonstrate the mutability of a cognitive category, *observation*. While Auerbach’s book provides “most healthy advise” [*saluberrimae observationes*] to protect the medical practitioner from the plague, Bourgeois offers her advise to protect and bring aid to patients in the course of a wide range of possible births.
of espie) our own reading and viewing of his *Histoire naturelle*? And what finally, are the implications for the natural history student of the sixteenth-century who wishes to encounter and learn about the objects of natural history through Belon’s text and image? How is he to be formed as an observator of natural history? We have already traced the perspectival object in Belon which makes of the image both a concentrated locus of information and a call towards the unknown. In this chapter we will argue that Belon’s books set themselves up not only as a vehicle of ready-made knowledge about the natural world, but also and firstly as a phenomenological field in which the reader may “encounter” the objects of natural history and form his own knowledge of them. We will take a step back to better understand what Belon was up against by studying one particular example of an early-modern attempt at totalizing the knowledge of natural history – the *Hortus Sanitatis* – first published in Mainz then numerous times and in numerous translations in France, Italy, Germany and England. In such a book, text and image mirror each other closely in a symbolic, hierarchical world. And yet, while symbolism prevails in the *Hortus*’ chapters on the animal world, its early part on plants already shows fissures on the page in this otherwise close-knit system of similitudes, wherever visual representations of natural objects are made to sit uncomfortably with accompanying textual authority. Belon’s first book may be seen in the light of early natural history as a radical

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321 Alexandre Koyré’s work, founded upon “the conviction of the unity of human thought, partcularly in its highest forms,” (Koyré 1973, pp. 11-12) paints a broad picture of the “scientific and philosophical revolution [...] as bringing forth the destruction of the Cosmos, that is, the disappearance [...] of the conception of the world as a finite, closed, and hierarchically ordered whole [...], and its replacement by an indefinite and even infinite universe [...] bound together by the identity of its fundamental components and laws [...]” (Koyré 1991 [1957], p. 2) Though natural history, as performed in the book, will structurally follow Koyré’s narrative in its fracturing of a “closed world” into an “indefinite or even infinite universe”, it shall not discard, “all considerations based on value-concepts, such as perfection, harmony, meaning and aim” (ibid.). To the contrary, the fragmentation of the natural world is in many ways accompanied by a heightened search for meaning, instantiated in Belon’s new mythos plotted in his *Histoire naturelle*. For the role of “heuristic fiction” in sixteenth-century astronomy and cosmology, see Fernand Hallyn, *The Poetic Structure of the World*, esp. pp. 7-31.
departure from the totalizing trend of the *Hortus* books which offered more and more woodcut images at the expense of accuracy, to a book aesthetic which imitated an empirical “observance” of detail, urging his readers to follow him in the practice through text and image. As with the *observatores* who set up their “republic of letters” and medical practitioners or astronomers who were both sharing their observations and at the same time implicitly setting down prescriptions, Belon’s “observations” are an attempt to found a community of French natural historians. His readers are not merely peddled the spectacle of nature as Gessner laments of Roman emperors and as Belon blames his own contemporary monarchs who traffic in animals as symbols of power. Such a spectacle only results – on the page, on maps, and coats of arms – in monsters of the imagination “contrefaits à plaisir” (*HN*, 15v, 21r). Instead, Belon will have to establish a common language in which a community of French natural historians could trade, coining species in the book. His readers are compelled to discover for themselves the truth of his and other representations of objects in nature, “pour en savoir la verite, & pour apprendre a discerner les vrayes [especes] des faultes” (*OS*, 23v). Through the consensus sought by a rhetorical articulation of text and image, Belon’s natural history ultimately seeks to establish a new, “pristine” French language in which a community of natural history *observatores* may trade.

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322 See ch. 3, *supra*. 
5.1 Illustrious Predecessors: The *Hortus Sanitatis* (1491) and the *Jardin de Santé* (1539)

Belon is the first to have included images in a natural history dedicated to fish; he is, however, not the first to have represented marine life in the woodcut illustrations of a book. One of the most successful illustrated texts on *naturalia* of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth-centuries was the *Hortus Sanitatis*, first printed (and perhaps composed) by Jacob Meydenbach in Mainz in 1491. The herbal is itself a translation and extension of an earlier vernacular work entitled the *Gart der Gesundheit* (or “Garden of Health”), attributed, at least in part, to Johannes de Cuba. While the majority of the *Hortus Sanitatis* is devoted to plants – following its predecessor which was exclusively devoted to them – it also touches on land animals, fish and birds, as well as minerals, finally concluding with the diagnostic properties of urine. As this last part confirms, and its title announces, the *Hortus Sanitatis* is a compendium of medicinal material (*materia medica*). Accordingly, each alphabetically-arranged entry or “chapter” presents not only the distinctive external features of the plant, animal or mineral in question, but also its potential healing properties under a separate heading entitled “Operationes”.

Editions that followed Meydenbach’s *Hortus Sanitatis*, such as that of Johann Prüss of ca. 1497 or Philippe le Noir’s French translation of 1539, include thorough indices not only covering each class of natural objects (plants, terrestrial animals, birds, fish and minerals) but also providing

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323 See Arber 1986, pp. 22-37. The authorship of early herbals is frequently unclear, and the lack of any obvious title has been the source of considerable bibliographic confusion. The *Gart der Gesundheit*, first published in 1485 from the press of Peter Schöffer in Mainz has been variously identified as the “smaller” or “German” *Hortus* to distinguish it from the *Hortus Sanitatis* (“major”), based on the *Gart*, though in many ways a new work, and published in Latin a few years later. The “minor” *Hortus* is significantly smaller than the “major” in length – 435 chapters to the “major”’s 1066 – and, often, in size, published primarily in quarto, to the “major”’s folio size. For further bibliographic details of early editions of the *Gart der Gesundheit* and *Hortus Sanitatis* we refer to Arnold C. Klebs, “Herbals of the 15th Century,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 11 (1917) pp. 83-92, and 12 (1918), pp. 41-57 and E.K. Shaffer, *The Garden of health; an account of two herbals: the Gart der Gesundheit and the Hortus Sanitatis* (San Francisco, 1957).
an index of symptoms – a “registre pour plus facile invention des maladies et leurs remedes” — keyed to the text for the patient’s convenience. Thus a reader could look up a home remedy “pour empescher alopecie cest a dire que les cheueulx ne cheent” (12 loci in the herbal book), “pour provocquer et faire courir les menstrues et fleurs aux femmes” (57 loci), or simply “pour guerir la douleur de la teste” (17 loci), an affliction one user was moved to personally illuminate (fig. 5.1)....

Fig. 5.1. Doodling in the Jardin de Santé (Paris: Philippe le Noir, 1539).
Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University (Typ 515.39.455)

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325 Separate indices are put in place for animal and mineral-derived remedies.
The *Hortus Sanitatis* would assuredly have passed under Belon’s eyes at some point, in particular during his training in botany and pharmacology under the tutelage of Valerius Cordus with whom he herborized “par toutes les contrées d’Allemagne”\(^{326}\). But if Belon had consulted the book in France or during his time in Germany, it was certainly not as a field guide to be taken along on an herborizing trip, given the sheer heft of the volume. The figures in the *Hortus Sanitatis* evidence a tendency toward cognitive organization of textual information. Rather than encouraging the viewer to set out and hunt for a specimen of the plant depicted, images would appear to confirm and condense the information provided in their accompanying article. As an impactful conclusion to its chapter, for instance, the narcissus plant’s mythological origins are rehearsed:

“Narcissus fabulose nomen impositum habeta quodam puero, cuius membra in hunc florem transierunt qui et nomen narcisci in appellacione custodit. et decus pulchritudinis in candore retinet foliorum.” (chap. 307)

“As the fable goes, the name of the Narcissus plant derives from that of a young boy whose limbs were transformed into this flower. And this herb now claims the honor of beauty in the whiteness of its flowers.” (my translation)

Meanwhile, the picture of the plant which heads the entry accordingly represents the ghostly face and torso of two boys peering out of their respective flowers, the limbs of whom have presumably already been transformed into the petals of the Narcissus plant (fig. 5.2). Of course no botanist would have expected to see Narcissus emerging from his eponymous flower in the field, but his rather theatrical appearance in the plant’s picture must have helped retain the

\(^{326}\) *Remonstrances*, op. cit., f.36v. For Belon’s early training in Germany, see esp. Delaunay 1926, pp. 5-8, and Glardon, *Oyseaux*, p. xv.
viewer’s attention, associating with its name and properties a striking detail which could serve as a kind of mnemonic mortar to the whole. Other visual representations of plants feature marvelous associated properties such as, for instance, the fatal quality of the “hauser” or “bauser” tree where we see two men lying supine in the sleep of death (fig. 5.3), confirming the text where we may read, “spes eius sub cuius umbra periclant dormientes”\textsuperscript{327} (chap. 221). And the “incensaria” plant has the particular feature that “folia habent formam aliqualiter cordis nascentia” [“their leaves take something of the shape of hearts as they sprout”], a particularity

\textsuperscript{327} “soubz lumbre duquel ceux qui y dorment sont peris et meurent” (\textit{Jardin de Santé}, f102v).
Fig. 5.3. Hauser tree. *Hortus Sanitatis* (Strassburg: Prüss, ca. 1497)
Source: Smithsonian Libraries (http://dx.doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.61747)

Fig. 5.4. Incensaria. *Hortus Sanitatis* (Meydenbach: Mainz, 1491). Source: Countway Library, Harvard University (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HMS.COUNT:1163089)
strikingly illustrated in one colored copy by four emblematic hearts which the illuminator, naturally enough, elected to paint red (fig. 5.4). Other arresting details could be cited, such as the male and female “mandragora” with its roots in the shape of a nude man and woman (chaps. 276, 277), a small rabbit hopping out from underneath the aptly named “pallacium leporis” (or “palace of the rabbit”), resin bleeding out of three gaping wounds in the bark of a tree (chap. 298), or the charming picture of “tereniabin” a kind of “rosee cheant du ciel [...] en certains castelles et receptacles”\(^3\), ornamented in the *Hortus Sanitatis* with stars falling atop the grasping twigs of a tree (fig. 5.5). With the exception perhaps of the *incensaria*, few of these features would have served as means of identification in the field: their primary function was likely to aid the reader in recalling associated information about the plant. A given picture in the *Hortus Sanitatis* could be characterized then, not as naturalistic renditions of the plant it represents, but as an “active image” or *imago agens*\(^4\).

Still, one ought not make too much of these visual particularities lest we conclude that early herbals could not have had their practical uses. Indeed they form an exceptional, if remarkable subset among a great number of quite convincingly naturalistic woodcut illustrations (fig. 5.6). In fact, the stated intention of the book’s anonymous patron, as delineated in the paratextual material, was to “compile a book in which should be contained the virtue of many herbs and other created things *together with their true colours and form*”.

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\(^3\) *Jardin de Santé*, f.220r.

\(^4\) “a stark representation of some unique characteristic [...] suggests a function to help recall memory in the manner of a striking mnemonic picture, or an ‘active image’ (*imago agens*). Such mnemonic pictures could certainly help the reader to identify the name, origin, form, and use of a plant without having to venture outdoors with a weighty tome.” (Kusukawa 2012, p. 18)
When he could not come into contact with a particular plant known only by reputation from ancient sources as they “did not grow here in German lands, so that I could not draw them with their true colours and form, except from hearsay”, he set off to the Near East – as will Pierre Belon a few years later – with “a painter of ready wit, and cunning and subtle of hand” \(^{330}\). Taking a broader point of view of the woodcut series in the *Hortus*, we may readily ascertain that few (if any) repeats occur. Not every chapter is illustrated, moreover, reflecting an earnest attempt to offer visual representations exclusively of those plants which the patron and his artist have chanced to come across. Belon will remember this circumspection when he writes,  

\(^{330}\) translated in Arber 1986, pp. 23-26 (my emphasis). The forward, originally published in the *Gart der Gesundheit*, is translated, with only minor differences, and reprinted in every edition of the *Hortus Sanitatis* that I have come across, including the *Jardin de Santé*. 

Fig. 5.5. Tereniabin. *Hortus Sanitatis* (Mainz: Meydenbach, 1491).
Those plants which are illustrated are often caricatures of their original, exaggerating some external characteristics and downplaying or ignoring others altogether. The illustrations are not presented with an eye for accidental detail (such an aesthetic will have to wait for Brunfels’ *Vivae Icones*) but are, on the contrary, very often simplified by virtue, for instance, of artificially-imposed symmetries (fig. 5.6). Belon will remember the draw and rhetorical force of aesthetic simplicity when he advertises his “vraies peinctures des Daulphins [...] ausquelles ie n’ay rien adiousté d’artifice, ne diminué, non plus qu’on y a trouué” (*HN*, f.a2v), a simplicity which he insists is in keeping with the external nature of the dolphin itself, for “nature l’auoit fabriqué, sans luy auoir donné beaucoup d’ornements de beaulté” (*HN*, f.16r). This simplifying aesthetic could perhaps have been inspired from the earliest printed herbal, the *Herbarius* of
Fig. 5.6. An example of imposed symmetry, a prevalent artifact in the *Hortus Sanitatis*. (Mainz: Meydenbach, 1491).
pseudo-Apuleius, where plants and their virtues are represented on the page within a neat, emblematic structure (fig. 5.7). Though commentators occasionally enjoy making sport of this early printed effort and its woodcut series (“so spaced out as to appear hallucinogenic [!]”331) it is not unlikely that the *Herbarius’* abstract visual representations were also mnemonic condensations of accompanying textual material. Drawing from these earlier abstractions, the woodcut series of the *Hortus Sanitatis* represents a compromise between empirical evidence

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331 Anna Pavord, *The Naming of Names*, p. 150.
gathered by its author and associated artist, and a desire to visually represent essential properties of each plant – whether they be pharmaceutical uses or external characteristics – in a simple and striking way.

Certain prints of later editions of the *Hortus Santitatis* suggest that visual representations could also serve as a locus of work and play. Thus, in its article on the *incensaria*, the *Jardin de la Santé* mistranslates its predecessor, writing that “les feuilles quand elles naissent ont aucunement la forme de cordes”, misconstruing *cordis* as the ablative of *chorda* (“cord”) rather than the genetive of *cor*, “heart”. Yet the text continues to correlate reasonably well with the image, for it seems the translator chose to highlight the salient tendrils sprouting from the *incensaria* over the hearts embedded within its leaves (fig. 5.8). The narcissus moreover, in the *Jardin de Santé* has taken on a more naturalistic aspect, having lost its two Narcissi and gained a prominent feature mentioned early on in the article: an onion bulb from which it derives its nauseating second name, “bulbo vomiferus [...] cest a dire oignon vomifere”332. While, the image of “panis porcinus”, or *cyclamen* is a locus of contention which attempts to resolve ambiguities in the text. In the *Hortus Sanitatis* we read “ciclamen folia similia plante [...] edera” and that “habet virgam [...] sine foliis”, translated directly (and correctly) in the *Jardin de Santé* as “ciclamen a les feuilles semblables a la plante [...] edera” while “la verge [...] est sans feuilles”. It seems the French book’s designers, wishing to hew closer to the text, disagreed with the visual representation of the cyclamen in the *Hortus Sanitatis* where edera- or ivy-like leaves sprout from its stalk. Instead they divested it of leaves

332 The choice is at the expense of differentiation with other plants, however, for the book’s designers chose to duplicate the original print from the *Hortus Sanitatis* of “raphanus” (chap. 386) thereby passing it off as “narcissus” and “raphanus.”
Fig. 5.8. Incensaria. Mistranslation resulting in a new correlation between text and image. *Jardin de Santé* (Paris: Philippe Le Noir, 1539).

entirely (though cyclamen does grow leaves close to the soil), and accorded to the depicted cyclamen its “racine noire et ronde et depressee au meillieu”, as described in the text, rather than the non-descript root of the earlier version. Finally, a particularly curious example suggests a form of conscious play on the designers’ part. The *tilia* is

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333 Other examples suggest that Philippe Le Noir did cut corners where he could in his redesigning of the *Hortus*. Repeats in the woodcut series exist where they did not in Meydenbach’s *Hortus*. The *azedar* (chap. 54), the *citronier* (chap. 125), the *cormier* (chap. 138), the *mala persica* or peach (chap. 141) and the *nabach* (chap. 308) for
“ainsi appelle pource qu’il est utile a l’usage de ceulx qui taillent et sculpent ymages ou autres vaisseaulx tant en splendeur que legierete. Et est cestuy genre darbre de matiere treslegiere / utile et propre pour tailler et sculpturer ou grauer.” (Jardin de Santé, f.221r)

The early Hortus Sanitatis had depicted the tilia or lime tree as a rather primitive visual form, choosing, if anything, to accentuate the characteristic knots it is said to possess (“materies dura atque nodosa”) while the ancient use of its bark as victory crowns is perhaps suggested by the palm-frond-like shoots at the base of the tree (fig. 5.9a). But nothing in the text could prepare us for the curious owl-like birds perched on the tree’s corona in the Jardin de Santé (fig. 5.9b). Except perhaps that the lime tree – nature’s matrix from which much of the art of wood sculpting and engraving was made possible – could also symbolize the artist’s inventive fancy (f.221r). This particular woodcut engraving, already present in an earlier edition of the Hortus Sanitatis from Strasbourg, not only portrays the natural specimen but suggests a conscious imbrication of human creative work within the natural works of God. Pierre Belon however, following Leonhart Fuchs, will push back forcefully against the foregrounding of artistic whimsy.

example are all illustrated with a woodcut depicting a tree with large leaves and even larger fruits. Each visual representation had distinguished the trees in the Hortus of 1491. Other repeats may be cited (cf. chaps. 67, 286; chaps. 84, 292) in the Jardin which were distinguished in Meydenbach.

334 “il a lescorce et cuyr tresdelyee / de laquelle anciennement on faisoit couronnes et honneur aux anciens” (Jardin de Santé, f.221r)

335 The word play works slightly differently in German. The lime or linden tree, according to Hieronymus Bock, is called thus because it is soft (“lind”) and malleable. For the use of limewood in sculpting, particularly favored in southern Germany, see Baxandall, The Limewood sculptors of Renaissance Germany, op. cit., esp pp. 27-31.


337 Other woodcuts demonstrate this willingness to highlight culture over nature, for “the Hortus had another notable feature, it was fashion-conscious. While depictions of plants, beasts, and minerals remained much the same over the centuries, costumes and styles underwent constant change. The Mainz 1491 edition showed clothing typical of 15th-century Germany, but the edition that came from a Strassburg printshop showed all

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persons in the genre scenes wearing proper Alsatian dress. In the Venetian edition, Italian garments are worn in woodcuts that are otherwise alike.” (Anderson 1977, p. 109)
As a highly-successful amalgamation of textual botanical information, translated in several languages (French, English, German, and Dutch), published countless times, and accompanied by hundreds of illustrations, the *Hortus Sanitatis* in one or more of its incarnations would have doubtlessly crossed Belon’s path at some point during his career. The herbal upon which the *Hortus Santitatis* is based was first written in German, as we have seen, and only included a portion on plants, mostly endemic to northern Europe. With larger woodcut images and a smaller in-quarto format, the earlier *Gart der Gesundheit* could represent greater detail while opening botanical knowledge to a more popular German-speaking audience wishing to seek for themselves the goods and natural remedies that the plant world around them had to offer, instead of having recourse to expensive doctors and pharmacists. Future “gardens of health” such as the *Hortus Sanitatis* of Meydenbach and the *Jardin de Santé* printed by Philippe le Noir in Paris drew from the earlier *Gart der Gesundheit* tradition while greatly expanding its contents to include animals, minerals and indices of symptoms keyed to the text. The woodcut series was accordingly expanded though, presumably to cut costs, pictures were significantly reduced in size compared to surrounding text and, in the *Jardin de Santé*, some were repeated two or more times. As a result, the objective of the book was of a totalizing view upon nature and its operability, at the expense however of detail and accuracy. While the reader could feel confident that his or her bodily symptoms were comprehensively tied to the simples of nature represented in these virtual “gardens”, actual identification of the simples themselves could prove problematic. The woodcut series is a locus of some evolution, as we have seen, where tension between a

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338 Anderson 1977.
symbolizing gesture and a naturalizing aesthetic is played out. Pierre Belon will remember the
stated intentions of the author and his patron who claim to have herborized not only in
Germany but to have roamed about the Near East and Mediterranean in order to seek out the
correct forms and colors of the plants they represent. He will similarly remember the tension
such work brings about between authoritative text and visual representation “tirée de nature”.
Most of all, perhaps, he will scorn the popular, totalizing efforts of early sixteenth-century
natural history, efforts which attempted to visualize and incorporate all of nature’s simples into
a well-frayed garden, when, in his first publication, he radically cuts down his reader’s vision of
nature from the global perspective of *homo operator*, to the local perspective of one who
finally “sees” the imminently familiar natural object for the very first time.

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If Pierre Belon might have profitably used the *Gart der Gesundheit* or its Latin and French
successors, taking stock of its articulation of text and image, he would assuredly have paged
past the copious chapters on the plant world to the *Hortus*’ supplementary portions on animals
and minerals; and, he was clearly unimpressed. The *Hortus* and its vernacular iterations were
popular by virtue not only of their potential as a complete pharmaceutical recipe book, but by
their fabulous representations of animals and, in particular, of marine life\(^{339}\). For a modern
reader, the cornucopia of sea creatures in the *Hortus* and the *Jardin* is truly surprising, and their
visual representations no less so. This is Pliny territory, and the *Hortus*’ attributions to

\(^{339}\) “Many of the translations [of the *Hortus Sanitatis*] include the tracts on zoology and minerals only, since those
sections were far and away the most popular with the nonmedical public.” (Anderson 1977, p. 107). See also Pinon
1995, pp. 62-63 for a synopsis of zoology in the *Hortus Sanitatis* in the context of other zoological works of the
early-modern period.
the Roman merchant of marvels are everywhere. We find eels (*anguilla*), starfish (*stella*), sturgeon (*sturio*) and salmon (*salmo*) rubbing shoulders with Scyllas, Sirens and Nereids. The “equus marinus” looks like an equine creature with a fish tail appended to it, the “lepus marinus” are scaly rabbits frolicking over the surface of the sea, and the “leo marinus” would have had heraldic associations to a contemporary reader for, other than its scales, it strikes the pose of the “lion rampant” struck upon coins of the Habsburg empire or drawn upon the coat of arms of Lyon (fig. 5.10). We can already hear Belon lamenting these overly-literal visual representations only twelve years after the publication of the *Jardin*. Just because a sea creature has taken on a particular name, does not mean it takes on that name’s terrestrial associations: “Qui est celui qui ne cognoisse bien le Lieure terrestre? quelle similitude ha il auec
le marin?” he cries. But as opposed to the thorough-going botanical part of the Jardin, developed at least with the declared intention of comparing textual material to the real thing, we have entered, within these supplementary parts, a universe of symbol and mythology. The natural world at large has not yet infringed upon the closed, text-based order of the Hortus Sanitatis in its pages on sea life. Belon will prefer to leave like an open question those chapters on birds and fish for which he could not draw a picture, not having identified nor encountered them in the flesh, contrary to “quelques modernes [qui] ont fait des animaux, peints à discretion sans les avoir onc veuz” (HO, f.a*4r). Images here merely condense text, drawing together select properties of each animal in the most striking and memorable way possible. Thus merman and mermaid-like dolphins are represented with eyes on their back and a

Fig. 5.11. Delphin. Hortus Sanitatis (Mainz: Meydenbach, 1491) Source: Countway Library, Harvard University (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HMS.COUNT:1163089)

340 HN, f.16v.
toothed mouth on their front following the tradition of Aristotle and Pliny\textsuperscript{341}, the only sea creatures in the \textit{Hortus}, moreover, with a recognizable hand gesturing to the reader in a sign of friendship, for, as the text declares at the outset, “delphinus frater hominis” (fig. 5.11). Most of all, an iconographic representation like the “leo marinus” would have irked Belon especially. “Les Princes modernes”, he declares rather audaciously, “faisant engrauer les Dauphins en leurs monnoyes, ou bien peindre en leu[r]s armoyries” have not taken care to follow nature in so doing (\textit{HN}, f.15v). The natural historian must not defer to those “effigies” of the natural world coined by the imprimatur of contemporary monarchs. Instead, like those ancient princes who “ont estez si curieus de faire retirer les vraies effigies des choses qu’ils auoient proposé faire engrauer en leurs medalles” (\textit{HN}, f.2r), Belon and his books of natural history offer a space in which the natural kingdom may be coined anew.

The decades between 1530 and 1550 saw an explosion in new herbals featuring images of plants \textit{ad vivum}. Natural plant histories such as Leonhart Fuchs’ \textit{De historia stirpium} (1542) and Otto Brunfels’ \textit{Vivae eicones} (1530) competed to produce the most accurate and complete images of plants to date\textsuperscript{342}. This dramatic shift in emphasis from text to image had not yet informed natural histories of animals, mostly because herbals were of greater and more

\textsuperscript{341} “Les dauphins ont les yeulx au dos & leur bouche en la partie opposite dont ilz ne prennent point bien leur proye pour la distortion de la bouche de la partie des yeulx. Et de ce quilz tournent leur bouche vers le ciel & les yeulx vers terre afin quilz ensuyuent leur proye.” (\textit{Jardin de Santé}, f.93v) The textual sources for this external property and behavior of the dolphin are Aristotle \textit{De historia animalium}, VIII.4 and Pliny, \textit{Historia naturalis}, IX.7. Belon cites Pliny verbatim in Latin in order to parse the word “ventrem” which, he implies, has caused confusion (\textit{HN}, f.23r-v). While Pliny means to say that the dolphin’s mouth is placed so deep in its beak as to reach its stomach, others have interpreted the text as to mean that its mouth is placed in the middle of its belly. Belon surely has the \textit{Hortus Sanitatis}, and its visual (mis)representation of Pliny’s text, in mind.

\textsuperscript{342} cf. Arber 1986, pp. 52-78; Anderson 1977, pp. 121-147; Pavord, op. cit., pp. 161-204. I refer to Kusukawa (1997; 2012) for the articulation of text and naturalistic images in the construction of evidence in early-modern herbals, as well as medical books such as Vesalius’ \textit{De fabrica} beginning in the 1540s.
immediate interest to the medical practitioner – not to mention the practical difficulties in coming across exotic animals such as the dolphin to draw from nature. Thus, pictures of marine life in books were scarce beyond reprintings of the *Hortus Sanitatis* during the first three decades of the century. And yet visual representations of marine life were certainly not rare: in medieval maps already, oceans teem with often fanciful sea creatures. One would perhaps not consider maps to be a plausible source of information about natural history, and yet Olaus Magnus’ *Carta Marina* of northern Europe, representing the lands of Scandinavia replete with wondrous fauna, would indicate otherwise. Following his peregrinations through Scandinavia, the exiled Swedish priest published his map under the aegis of the Venetian Doge, keying its natural and ethnographic objects not only to an extensive legend on the map itself, but also to a booklet published separately. The penultimate chapter of the *Historia* identifies the map’s various sea-monsters, with an account of their most salient moral and physical attributes. A few sea creatures may be recognized as incorporations of the *Hortus Sanitatis* tradition: the hybrid “vacca marina”, for instance, the peculiar owl-faced “ziphius” and the “prister” capsizing a ship (fig. 5.12), all of which Belon will write about in his *AQ* and *ND*, striving to divest them of their more fanciful attributes, and pointedly unaccompanied by images. Ten years after the *Carta’s*

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343 For a concise history of the development of the woodcut image in the natural history book during the thirty-year period from 1530-1560, we refer to H.-J. Martin (2000), *La Naissance du livre moderne*, pp. 253-261.

344 See Chet Van Duzer, *Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps*, esp. pp. 64-69, for the dolphin in fifteenth-century maps. The oldest surviving globe, designed by Martin Behaim, features numerous sea creatures – including dolphins – which illuminate the science of natural history from ancient sources such as Pliny as well as contemporary ones such as the *Hortus Sanitatis*. (ibid., p. 68-69)

345 *Opera breve, la quale demontra, e dechiara, ouero da il modo facile de intendere la charta, ouer del le terre frigidissime di Settentrione...* (Venice: Giouan Thomaso, 1539); also published in German in the same year. The *Opera breve* was later expanded into a veritable celebration of Scandinavian culture and myth in the *Historia de gentibvs septentrionalibvs...* (Rome: apvd Ioannem Mariam de Viottis Parmensem, 1555). See Karrow, *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth Century and their Maps*, op. cit., pp. 362-366.
first printing, nevertheless, Sebastian Münster will incorporate Olaus Magnus' monsters into his

*Cosmographiae universalis* (Basel, 1550) in a chart of maritime *mirabilia*, and Münster's

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 5.12. Prister or Physeter. *Hortus Sanitatis* (Mainz: Meydenbach, 1491). Source: Countway Library, Harvard University (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HMS.COUNT:1163089)

will be only too happy to slide his marine monster digest of the *Carta Marina* into his own

*Prodigiorvm ac ostentorvm chronicon* (Basel, 1557). Both evidently take the Swede's manual in compatriot, Conrad Lycosthenes good faith. It is telling of the changes which Belon's *HN*

inaugurate the year following Münster's first Latin publication of the *Cosmographia* that Gessner chastises Olaus' map for the “audacious” exaggerations in his depictions of the whale (*balena*)

346. All the same, Gessner, though lending little faith to the figures and admonishing his

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346 e.g. “Reprehendenda est eius audacia, qui Sueuiae (Sueciae vel Scandiae) icturam edidit...” (lib. IV, p. 137); In an earlier volume, as he singles out the *Carta marina* as a source of some of his borrowings necessitating caution on the reader’s part (without discarding them outright), Gessner also notes in passing the fabulous invention of at least one Belonian beast: “Paucissima prorsus ficta sunt, ut solus (opinor) equus Neptuni fabulosus, ex Bellonii libro. Quaedam forte neque omnino vere facta, neque prorsus tamen conficta, ut quae ex Olai Magni Tabula Septentrionali mutuati sumus : quorum fides penes authorem esto.” (“Very few [of my borrowings] are completely
readers to do the same, does not blush to regale them with copies of Olaus’ wonders of the sea! In fact, the marine life churning Olaus’ seas will continue to enjoy a healthy reputation yet, taken up again by Guillaume Rondelet and Ambroise Paré, and by Abraham Ortelius in his Islandia (1590), printed in later editions of the Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, and surrounded by sea cows, pristers and ziphius among others – while the shape of Iceland itself is not unreminiscent of Pierre Belon’s serpent aellé (OS, f.133v) 

5.2 Pierre Belon’s (Re)invention of Natural History in Text and Image

Against the backdrop of these historical precedents, Belon’s program will stand out in greater relief. Let us consider the stated role of images in his first natural history, set out in the forward to his patron, the Cardinal of Châtillon:

le me suis mis en debvoir, de vous rendre les vraies peintures des Daulphins, retirees tant du naturel que de l'antique, auxquelles ie n'ay rien adiousté d'artifice, ne diminué, non plus qu'on y a trouué: afin de les vous presenter mais non sans vous en faire demonstration... (HN, 2v)

fictitious, perhaps only, as I believe, the fabulous horse of Neptune from Belon’s book. A few are perhaps not true, nor entirely made up, such as the ones we borrowed from Olaus Magnus’ Tabula Septentrionalis. Let their veracity be the author’s responsibility.”), Historia animalium, lib. I, b2v.

347 Gessner, op. cit., IV, p. 137-139, and further on in his article on various maritime giants (De Cetis diversis), pp. 245-249.

348 For the fortunes, through the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, of Olaus Magnus’ Carta Marina as well as its sources in antiquity and medieval bestiaries, see Joseph Nigg’s seductive Sea Monsters: A Voyage Around the World’s Most Beguiling Map (Chicago, 2013).

349 The point is echoed again later: “...ayant mon principal point pour but qui est de bailler la vraye peinture du Daulphin comme nature l'a produict, sans luy adjouster note ou merque qui soit artificielle, ou diminuer...” (HN, 14r-v)
The “vraies peintures” gifted to the cardinal are the highlight of Belon's offering, while the accompanying description, at least in the forward, appears almost as an afterthought (“...mais non sans vous en faire demonstration”). The role Belon will lend his pictures in a presentation of natural history is already traced by this short passage. For the naturalist working from textual cues, travel to the eastern Mediterranean in an effort to draw from nature is also travel into an ancient, “pristine” Greek past. In fact, the first two images which he offers his readers are pointedly not representations “ad vivum” – not yet – but figures of dolphins “retirees [...] de l'antique”. The first is of a dolphin its arched back familiar from Hellenistic pottery and mosaic work (fig. 5.1), while the second is of a Greek coin from Syracuse, discovered, Belon declares, in the collection of Jean Grolier (1479-1565), treasurer to Francis I (fig. 5.1a). Here, we see engraved on the reverse of the coin, two dolphins orbiting around a central star, and depicted again with arched back. On the obverse side is an anonymous face rendered in profile. The placement of these prints is significant: Belon's – and his reader's – hunt for the dolphin within nature is initiated by the most trustworthy clue, namely Greek artifacts “les plus antiques, [...] les mieuls elaboureees” (HN, 12v). When towards the end of the first part the “naif portraict” of the dolphin emerges at last, nature and antiquity are simultaneously rediscovered.

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351 Belon was unable to identify the coin as Syracusan, though Grolier correctly informed him it was “une tresantique medaille [...] Grecque”. At least one coin like it exists in the Harvard Museum collections (fig. 5.13b). According to its catalog entry, the helmeted head in profile is that of Athena – goddess of wisdom and military defense – a fitting godhead for Belon's project of a French natural history.
Belon’s “art” is to allow as little art as possible and the Syracusan coins, “beaucoup obseruees que les Latines”\(^{352}\), provide for him an exemplar of aesthetic restraint. For not only must nature be observed, so must its representation on coins or otherwise. Accordingly,"

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\(^{352}\) my emphasis.
the naturalist prohibits his illustrator from adding ornaments or subtracting salient features of the species reproduced in his drawings, while his text will follow a similar information aesthetic: “Il faut nécessairement que les merques escriptes conuiennent avec la chose qu’on descript.” (OS, f.1v). How is Belon’s declared aesthetic of restraint instantiated in the book? A cursory look at his illustrations does indeed suggest a remarkably rigorous naturalism. We immediately recognize a few species: the hammerhead shark, the tuna, and of course the dolphin. Though unfamiliar with its name, we feel we could identify the *paon de mer* if placed side-by-side with its finely-tuned image (fig. 5.15). Belon’s fish are generally figured in an abstract, entirely decontextualized space. They are rarely seen to skim the sea surface as do the marine animals of the *Hortus Sanitatis*. And they are liberated from the thick borders with which the *Jardin de Santé* had hemmed them in. Each “species” lies on the surface of the page.

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Belon mentions an illustrator on two occasions: “Maistre François Perier” (28v, 43v). We are told that Perier is responsible for the illustrations, “retiré du naturel et contrefaict au vif”, of the dolphin and the orca. The orca image suggests a careful control of the pictoral procedure. Belon has his female orca arranged with the fetus and placenta found in her womb placed outside. Though he does not tell us explicitly that he is present during the illustration, one easily imagines that Belon at least verified the results. As Glardon writes of Belon’s later œuvre: “On devine Belon derrière les artistes, leur indiquant les attitudes à donner aux oiseaux.” (Glardon, *Oyseaux*, p. xxxix) Incidentally, Belon gets a new artist, “maistre Pierre Goudet Parisien, peintre vrayment ingenieux,” to illustrate his 1555 magnum opus on birds (*op. cit.*., Au lecteur, a4r ; quoted in H.-J. Martin 2000, p. 257).
like a specimen presented at the marketplace or upon the dissection table. Occupying little more than a third of the page on average, illustrations are neatly tailored by text above and below, displayed effectively so as to “contenter l'oeil de la chose absente, quasi comme si elle estoit presente” (*HO, a*4r).

The indulgence Belon expresses in gratifying his reader's sense of sight will, naturally, only go so far. Pictures appeal to the senses – first among them the sense of sight – while text

Fig. 5.15. The Paon de mer. *Histoire naturelle...*, f.18r.
remains a spiritual matter, since “les escrits contentent l'esprit, & font bonne memoire”\textsuperscript{354}. As a sensual space, however, an unruly attention to pleasure on both the artist’s and the viewer’s side leads inexorably to false representations. For, as Belon writes of the Habsburg eagle:

...comme les peinctres sont curieuls de monstre leur artifice, & de faire mieuls apparoir les traicts de la peincture, aussi ont ils adiousté quelques ornements a cest Aigle pour la faire mieuls complaire a la veue, attendu mesmement que les peinctres s'estudient de bien remplir le champ de couleurs. (HN, 16r)\textsuperscript{355}

The artist is forbidden to sign his name, as it were, with a colorful flourish. Instead, the marks of artifice or “traicts de peincture” ought to be as unremarkable as possible\textsuperscript{356}. Those self-promoting artists who “s'estudient de bien remplir le champ de couleurs” indulge in a dangerous narcissistic delight in surface effects, seducing the viewer and ultimately obscuring the original model only to bring themselves to the fore. By contrast, brushing away illusory effects such as shadows or an excessively broad color palette meant getting to the “natural form” of the object at the expense of an artistic idiom. As Leonhart Fuchs, in the preface to his *De historia stirpium*, had already asserted in regards to his plant illustrations almost a decade before Belon, “we have purposefully and deliberately avoided the obliteration of the natural

\textsuperscript{354} This is an important reconsideration of the importance of images in text of natural history and philosophy. Whereas the commonplace notion of an image as an organizational aid to memory had earlier been widespread, Belon ignores this tradition in favor of a sensual naturalism.

\textsuperscript{355} As the dolphin is visible “es cartes marines” of the period so the “Aigle de l’Empire” (HN, ibid.), the coat of arms of Hapsburg Spain which Belon depicts here, adorned countless maps such as a bird’s-eye view of Augsburg by Jörg Seld (1521), Henrich Zell’s map of the German lands (ca. 1544), and Pierre Apian’s *Charta Cosmographica* (fold map in *Cosmographia*, Antwerp, 1544; 28v-29r). See Woodward (ed.). *History of Cartography*, Vol. 3, pp. 1204, 1210; and Shirley, R. *The Mapping of the World: Early Printed World Maps*, 1472-1700, pp. 51-52.

\textsuperscript{356} As Peter Parshall observes with respect to the sixteenth-century image as witness to material fact, “it was desirable for the testimony of a witness to be transparent, in principle without trace of signature or sign of personal intervention. In this respect the mirror of nature pointed logically to a denial of authorship.” We can see this reflected not only in Belon’s stated exigencies imposed upon his illustrator, but in his own posturing as observer and author of (his) natural history. P. Parshall, “Imago Contrafacta: Images and Facts in the Northern Renaissance.” *Art History*, 16(4), p. 567.
form of the plants by shadows, and other less necessary things, by which delineators try to win artistic glory.”  

The artistic hand for Fuchs and Belon must selflessly – and paradoxically – withdraw if nature’s true form is to properly transpire upon the page.

The artist’s name is not the only one that ought not “sign” the picture; neither in fact should the name of the model itself. Belon presents several fish species (the Paon de mer, the Cytharus, the Lyra...) too often imagined and drawn up, he laments, so as to express their terrestrial namesakes (the peacock, the zither, the lyre...), and seeks to disabuse his reader with their “vrayes portraicts”. The AQ will offer many more examples: the Aureille de mer, the Foye de mer, and... the genital marin, none indeed which bear any visual echo of their names. “Qui est celui qui ne sache cognoiire l’Ours de la terre?”, he exclaims (of the lobster), “& touttefois qui luy mostreroit l’Ours de la mer, il auroi t beau songer avant qu’il devinast son nom...” (HN, 16v). Belon's pictures, out of context, would therefore have us dream up names ad libitum, because animals bear little to no affinity with their names. Any a priori readability of images will have to be rejected accordingly, whether the sign read be the artist's hand or the animal's name. Images, it would appear, are properly the place of sense before signification.

Let us consider one remarkable example to illustrate this rejection of legibility in Belon's images. The chameleon, since Pliny, was esteemed to possess marvelous attributes. Its ability to change the color of its exterior was as astonishing as its alleged diet on air alone. Some had taken it to express horse-like features (by the affinity of its Latin name with that of the camel.

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and giraffe). Meydenbach renders the image of his equine *Cameleon* legible, inserted alphabetically between other horse-like creatures, the *Camelus* (camel) and the *Camelopardus* (giraffe). Andrea Alciati, whose book of emblems was widely-diffused throughout the sixteenth-century and well into the seventeenth, writes verses on the chameleon's aptitude for representing those shifty courtiers who switch sides on a dime, feeding off the changing winds. The illustrated chameleon in his *Emblematum liber* closely follows Pliny's patch-work description of the animal (fig. 5.16):

“*Its figure and size are that of a lizard, only that its legs are straight and longer. Its sides unite under its belly, as in fishes, and its spine projects in a similar manner. Its muzzle is not unlike the snout of a small hog* [...]”

Alciati’s image is legible in the same sense as Meydenbach dolphin in the way it visualizes text (in this instance, an intertext). Belon’s reader, on the contrary, must have been astonished to see his naturalistic chameleon (*AQ*, 57; *ND*, 51) after those of Meydenbach and the ubiquitous Alciati (fig. 5.17). None of these textual references persist in Belon’s chameleon of 1553/55. Proper images of *naturalia* ought not to be “legible”.

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358 In the *Quart Livre* (ch. 2), Rabelais’ equine *Tarande* boasts the ability to adjust its color based on the surrounding environment, and is assimilated to the chameleon, “une espèce de Lizart tant admirable, que Democritus a fait un livre entier de sa figure, anatomie, vertus, & propriété en Magie”.

359 Shakespeare will remember this moralization of the chameleon, turning it neatly on its head: “*King*: How fares our cousin Hamlet? / *Hamlet*: Excellent, i’ faith; of chameleon’s dish: I eat the air, promise-crammed; / you cannot feed capons so.” (*Hamlet*, III.iii.57-59)


361 Belon’s representation of the chameleon in 1553 marks a turning-point in the fortunes of this animal in emblem and natural history books. However, it is remarkable that Belon’s image was not accepted without reservation by later illustrators, especially in future editions of Alciati where the moral traits of the animal held fast. While, for instance, a seventeenth-century Paduan edition of Alciati (*Emblemata... apud Pet. Paulum Tozzium*, 1618; p. 104) clearly draws from Belon’s naturalistic gesture, the Genevois de Tournes edition of 1615 (*Les emblemes de M. André Alciat*, p. 127) returns to a hybrid form drawn in Rouillé (*Emblemes d’Alciat*, 1549 and 1550) itself related to
the chameleon in the first French translation of the Emblemata liber: Le Livret des emblemes... (Wechel, 1536, M7v). To complicate matters further, the chameleon in the French Livret is one of only two redrawn prints (the remainder of the series is taken straight from Alciati 1534). It introduces some distinctly more naturalistic traits of the chameleon not seen in 1534 but apparent in Belon 1553: the chameleon’s joints, the shape of its head, etc. Already by 1536, therefore, almost twenty years before Belon, we witness an impulse to natural depiction in the emblem book, especially of endemic “marvels” like the chameleon, native to the Mediterranean basin. See Ashworth 1991, pp. 121-123 and Ashworth 1984.
In Belon’s book on the dolphin, we are assured at every turn of the “truth” of the illustrations which punctuate it. Nowhere is the truth-value of text given such heavy emphasis. A particularity of Belon in 1551 where he is writing his “deffense et illustration” of a natural historical program in its infancy, when Charles Estienne publishes the ND in 1555, the title page no longer emphasizes the truth of the pictures conveyed by the book. To be sure, they remain a key element to Belon’s representation of nature in the ND (as in nearly all of Belon’s works following 1551), but the title page suggests that pictorial discipline (au plus près...) rather than logical truth characterizes the pictures in the book. How does Belon reconcile these two interpretations of the natural history illustration? In 1551, he called attention to the truth of his images starting with the title-page (vraie peincture), then continuing into the epistolary forward (vraye peinctures des Dauphins), the Preface (vrais portraicts... vrayes peinctures), and so on. He introduced further illustrations with the pronouncements: “Vray Portaict d’un Dauphin courbé” (11r), “Vray portraict du Dauphin retiré d’une antique medaille” (12v), “La vraie peincture de l’Esturgeon” (13v), “Le vray portraict du Dauphin” (38v), and “Le naif portraict de Citharus” (18v). This last caption reminds the reader that truth-value is to be located in nature: a true rendition is a native one, captured “au lieu d’experience” (OS, f.6v). Replicating a species in its native form resumes the two imperatives for generating pictures of natural

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362 Belon will not permanently forsake the characterization of his images as “true” after 1551. Especially in contentious examples where a foreign name, often Greek, is tied with a plurality of animals, he stresses the “truth” of his illustration to identify the “true” animal by its contested name. Cf. the “Pourtraict du Merops, qu’on pourroit bien nommer en François Guespier” (OS, 1554, 10v)

363 “Je le di comme celuy qui s’est trouvé au lieu d’experience”, Belon writes of a harrowing encounter with pirates. Elsewhere, the truth-value of a picture similarly rests upon Belon’s conveniently “finding himself” in its referent’s natural abode: “d’autant que me suis trouvé en lieu commode d’en recouurer la naïve peinture, ie l’ay cy fait mettre en ce lieu pourtraict au naturel.” (OS, f.14v)
objects: They should be “naïf” in the sense of being native to the model, taking care not to add to or subtract from what is seen, and of “art naïf”, according to which the artist may not bring to bear any undue imagination or misplaced reasoning through visualization of text. Both artist and object thus work together to produce a true native portrait, “contrefaict au vif” (HN, f.a2r, f.28v).

The picture, then is not only a sign of objective truth for Belon, it is also an instantiation of method. On several occasions, Belon affirms having encountered animals which he had initially failed to identify. So much the better, he implies, for names have a prejudicial effect on our understanding of natural objects. Thus, he narrates a personal experience with the orca:

Je l’auoye descript ignorant son nom ancien: & n’ay rien adiousté depuis en la description, sinon ce nom Orca: afin que si ie failloye en la nommant de ce nom ancien, sa description demeure entiere, pour celuy auquel il appartiendra. (HN, 32r)

Names have an uncanny ability to slip off its object like a garment in Belon, and the dolphin is a wonderful symbol of this slippery relationship between verba and res: “le Daulphin reste en toutes qualitez en son entier, excepté qu’on luy a mué son nom” (HN, 5v). Though objects remain the same, names will alter from one epoch to the next, and from one people to the next. The dolphin itself is archetypal of Ovidian metamorphosis in which attributes evolve, though the subject remain intact: “quand au Daulphin, il reste tousiours en son entier, & encore qu’on n’ait continué a le nommer Daulphin, & qu’il ait emprunté le nom d’vn autre” (HN, 8v).

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365 The incommensurability of the name and its referent will occupy Montaigne in the opening pages of De la gloire: “le nom [...] est une piece estrangere joincte à la chose” (II.16; 655). As Pascale Barthe affirms, this incommensurability is fundamental to Belon’s methodology: “la langue, la connaissance, le temps qui deforment les mots et qui donc permettent au sens de s’effriter, tout fluctue chez le botaniste... ” (Barthe 2013, p. 25).
This travesty of the dolphin is rendered remarkably physical in Belon’s description of its “peau totalement lubrique & glissante” (*HN*, 27v), keeping it in perpetual motion.  

Meydenbach’s *Hortus* is organized by a correspondence of text and intertext. Each alphabetical entry is headed with the name of the given plant or animal. Each property and use of the *naturalia* in question is underwritten by a cited authority. As a result the *Hortus Sanitatis* establishes a system in which names are the linchpin from which a textual network is cast out and returned. Turning this system on its head, Belon places the name under the sign of contingency, investing the image with a truth-value underwritten by nature. The constellation of names hovering over his *naturalia*, could in principle be reshuffled:

> Tout ainsi si en mes poissons ou oyseaux, i’en avois nommé quelqu’un d’une appellation antique, & qui fust due a un autre: toutefois son pourtraict & description luy demeurerent assurees, n’y ayant a changer que le nom, entendu que toute la difficulté est seulement mise, a ne prendre l’un pour l’autre. (*ND*, a5r)

Belon had claimed to identify the orca only after having first described it in words and depicted it in a drawing. The declared “naïveté” with which he approached his natural object assured a faithful rendering in text and image. In 1553/55 now, Belon highlights how this methodology implies a crucial *caveat lector* at the heart of his natural history, for names and things are forever liable to slip over one another and he does not pretend to irrevocably match text and image. While his ingenuous method for gathering textual and visual information is meant to guarantee their truth, the name which might finally provide a cognitive cement remains forever

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366 “Les Daulphins sont tousiours en perpetuel mouuement, en sorte qu’ils ne arrestent iamais en une place” (*HN*, 24v)

367 With *homo* as the only exception, significantly given pride of place at the head of the section on terrestrial animals.
a matter of guesswork tacitly involving the cooperation of his readers. “L’auteur s’excuse de n’auoir moyen ne aide, sinon de sa coniecture,” coyly writes Cavellat of Belon’s efforts. Throwing a wrench between image and text, Cavellat compels the reader to participate in Belon’s game of Lotto where both text and pictures “retirees au vif” shuffle and overlap over a meandering course. Even within Cavellat’s epitomizing edition in which each page appears to resemble the face of a playing card, the reader is nevertheless advised to compare and contrast a network of textual and visual information, for “la nature de chasque espece se rapporte & compare à l’autre.” The name, on the other hand, hovering precariously over the picture and textual description no longer ties the reader to textual authority or preconceived iconography. “Je ne pretends, sous l’ombre de ce titre, foreclore un autre qui pourra faire mieux, ains l’inciter a son devoir,” writes Belon at the outset of his Observations. Titles, names, the identities of things are mere “shadows” compelling the reader to continue his duty of triangulation between text, picture and nature.

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368 Portraits..., f.15v.
369 ibid., f.a1v.
370 my emphasis.
5.3 The Coin and the Medallion in Belon’s Representation of Natural History

In the preceding chapter, we argued that Belon availed himself of the charged name of the dolphin as a first step in a dramatic staging of its rediscovery. So far in this chapter, we see how Belon appears in the same breath to deny the name any absolute truth in itself, authorizing only what he has observed and transmitted as naively as possible in text and image. How are these two seemingly contradictory terms reconciled? Belon proposes a special object to work and think with: the coin.

![Image of a coin with dolphins]

Fig. 5.18. Tarantino coin with legendary king Taras riding his dolphin, c.600-480 BC. Source: Harvard Art Museums, Ref.: FB 8a; Vlasto 64.

The coin as currency is contingent upon a consensus of its value and a dynamic of exchange, thus defining an economic community. Let us recall that Belon begins his (re)invention of the dolphin’s nature with a print of the Syracusan coin on one face of which is represented two dolphins “naivement representez”. The Tarantini of Apulia, Belon similarly observes, had minted a coin featuring their foundational king Taras whisked away by a dolphin.
These Greek coins are representational ideals in that they conjoin narration – the history or *fabula* associated with the dolphin – with imaginary form in lines, shapes, color and contours. They are, furthermore, underwritten by Greek science for Belon, a pristine knowledge characterized by the proper use of scientific names. Narration, figure and proper name – *delphinus* – constitute an ideal, pristine representation. Such an object to think with, and tend towards, remains, nevertheless, an ideal. Belon’s Greek coins were fashioned in a quasi prelapsarian moment in the history of science when the ideal prince – reminiscent of Plato’s philosopher-king of the *Republic* – demanded a rigorous, unpoetic correspondence from his “plus excellents ouvriers” whom he sent to the four corners of the world, if need be, “pour chercher les choses dont ils vouloient avoir le portrait contrefaict au vif.” (*HN*, f.a2r)

Greek coins are significantly referred to by Belon as “medailles” (though he well knew they were used as currency) while the contemporary equivalent is merely “monnoies modernes” (*HN*, f.a2r). In fact, the epistemological ideal of the “antique medalle” bears a striking resemblance to that of the “médaille historique” stamped for Henri IV as studied by Louis Marin. In Belon’s medal, as in the former, “apparaît le chiasme de deux modalités de la représentation:

l’une *symbolique*, ou elle se construit en agençant les signes du langage, les termes et les phrases dans le discours, l’autre *imaginaire*, ou elle se montre en donnant à voir les

371 “les Tarentins long temps avant la grandeur des Romains auoyent desia faict grauer les Daulphins en leurs monnoyes, en memoire de Taras fils de Neptune lequel on feinct auoir esté mué par les autres dieux en vn Daulphin. De la vient que Taras fils de Neptune soit portraict sur vn Daulphin, en la maniere de ceuls qui sont acheual, tenants le Daulphin bridé, le conduisant la ou il veult.” (*HN*, 12v) While Belon does not provide a woodcut image of this coin, one can confirm that such coins did exist: the Harvard Art Museums hold a few in their collections. The emblem furthermore persists to this day on the coat of arms of Taranto, upon which king Taras continues to ride his dolphin.

372 *HN*, f.a2r, f.12v, f.13r, and *passim*. 
lignes et les couleurs que les lignes enferment, les figures et les mouvements dont elles sont composées dans le tableau.  

Natural history, as it is plotted in Belon strives to reach for this epistemological ideal in which the picture may be invested with all of the preceding “signes du langage, les termes et les phrases dans le discours”. It is, as in Marin’s analysis, a political as well as epistemological balancing act. For, the objective of the royal medal is “to establish and found, in a permanence of memory, the prince’s glory”\(^\text{374}\), while Belon’s Greek “medalle” offers a permanent effigy of the dolphin in all of its elegantly natural simplicity. With the “medalle”, as in Le Brun’s reading of Poussin’s \textit{La Manne}, as observed by Marin, “all of the parts of the picture are subordinated to the exact legibility of the story the picture is telling”\(^\text{375}\). With such a medal, in Belon’s natural history, “la voix de Daulphin, qui reste imprimee dans la mémoire des hommes”\(^\text{376}\) may finally be visible, ever present and close at hand.

Yet Belon’s natural history is one which has fallen from the grace of such antique medals and can only strive towards their epistemological ideal, an ideal in which the name is – like the prince’s reputation in the “medaille historique” – now and forever at the tip of one’s tongue. The medal is per necessity struck from gold, the perfections of which – both visual\(^\text{377}\)

\(^{373}\) Marin 1981, \textit{Le portrait du roi}, p. 147 (my emphasis).


\(^{375}\) ibid., p. 125.

\(^{376}\) \textit{HN}, f.9v.

\(^{377}\) “la splendeur [de l’or […] encore qu’il soit manié de mains sales, n’est pas soudain contaminé, mais tousjours demeure clair & beau en sa couleur naturelle.” (\textit{OS}, f.47r)
and material\textsuperscript{378} – Belon sings in the \textit{Observations}. Considering that gold, if ingested, is said to be accompanied by the most agreeable benefits\textsuperscript{379}, it is apparent that Belon’s antique medal of pristine science serves as a fantasy of introjection\textsuperscript{380}. But infamous “guerisseurs” have gotten between the medal and its proper use, artificiously using it as a fetichistic object:

\begin{quote}
L’ombre de sa vertu, quelques trompeurs ont eu occasion d’en faire de tresgrands abbus : lesquels trompeurs, voulants avoir un nom plus excellent que de medecin, se sont faict appelier guerisseurs : faignants avoir trouvé quelques vertu nouvelle en l’or : & l’ont faict mascher en doubles ducats par quelques ieunes enfans, les nourrissants à leur mode : se faisoient reseruer la saliue pour faire user aux malades... (\textit{OS}, f.47r)
\end{quote}

Diverting the inherent value of the gold ducat these impostors of medicine and natural history give gold a bad name. From apparent and permanent value – “vertu” – once properly interjected by Greek pristine science, gold devolves into its mere shadow (“ombre”) at the improper touch of these latter-day Midases.

Gold, at present, is not only misused; it is also misrepresented. For, Belon laments, it has been given “tant de divers noms en Europe” not because of any inherent impurity, but because of “l’infidelité de ceulx qui sont cause de le mesler” (\textit{OS}, f.45r). The sixteenth-century economy was based on a motley collection of metal alloys of various denominations and imposed values.

In 1540s France alone, dozens of royal ordinances were issued, authorizing the minting of

\textsuperscript{378} “toutes les choses [...] estants subiectes à alterations, se muent & corrompent pour peu de choses, [...] mais l’or est incorruptible, qui n’est point subiect à telles mutations, & tousiours tant que le monde sera, aussi sera il permanent.” (\textit{OS}, f.49v)

\textsuperscript{379} “L’or mangé en quelque sorte que ce soit, entier, ou en limure, ou en fueille, ne peut nuire a la vie, comme font les autres metaux: mais plutost conforte grandement le cœur, & la vertu vitalle.” (\textit{OS}, f.47r)

certain new coins, adjusting the relative value of others, and abolishing the rest. In many of these ordinances, pages upon pages of woodcut illustrations of coins (especes) depict both the obverse and reverse ostensibly to help the reader identify a coin at hand. A coin was thus defined by its name (Nobles Henri, Testons, Angelot, Salut, Ducatz de Venise...), by its relative value, and by its distinguishing physical characteristics which were – like those of Belon’s own especes – called “marques”. The accelerated publication of these decrees points to an international economy which was fluctuating too quickly for the sovereign’s fiats. In such a context, currency speculators, counterfeiters and coin-scratchers all benefited from and perpetuated the numismatic babble depicted in Belon’s Observations. The name “or” has been worn into a welter of names, for:

Les orfeures & les monnoyeurs luy attribuent diuers noms, le mettants en estime de plus hault pris l’un que l’autre, don’t l’un est dit or de ducat, l’autre or d’escu, l’autre or de maille, l’autre or de pistolet, le faisant valoire vingt caratz, l’autre dixhuict, & ainsi des autres, tant du plus que du moins. Mais telz nom & dignitez ont prins leur naissance en diuers pays, ou il y a esté adulteré, sophistiqué, falsifié par l’infidelité de ceulx qui l’ont meslé & multiplié avec autres meslanges de metaulx de moindre valeur, & moins purs qu’il n’est. (OS, f.45r)

Belon is describing here the chaotic world of international finance in Europe at the time in which money of account and actual coins did not coincide. To be sure, there existed a unit of

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382 cf. Ordonnances sur le fait des monnoyes, estat, & regle des officiers d’icelles : avec le pourtraict de toutes les especes de monnoye que le roy veult & entend auoir cours en son royaume. (Jean Dalier: Paris, 1540), f.a5v, f.b4r, f.c2r, and passim.
account – the livre\textsuperscript{383} – but coins were not permanently fixed to its standard. Rather, on the basis of princely edicts from every territory, a plethora of coins could and did fluctuate in alloy, weight, and declared value – “loy, poix & pris”\textsuperscript{384}. One day a “ducat”, an “écu” or a “pistole” could be struck with so many carats gold, the next with more or less, causing immediate shifting of hoards across borders or manipulation and counterfeiting of coins\textsuperscript{385}. Thus, of “noz monnoyes & autres ausquelles entendons donner cours en notre royaume” Francis I’s edict of 1540 vainly attempts to “faire cesser toutes occasions de les billionner, difformer, & transporter, ainsi que nous auons entendu auoir esté faict par aucuns marchans delaissans la vraye negociation & commerce necessaire entre les hommes […]”\textsuperscript{386}. With each new princely edict, imposing new values and inserting new coins into circulation while taking others out, there necessarily crop up new merchants taking advantage of new imbalances in value\textsuperscript{387}.

While merchants might profit from and thus perpetuate the financial confusion, they are also constrained by the shifting market forces in which they practice, as contemporaries such as Jean Bodin had remarked\textsuperscript{388}. Indeed, Belon rivals with merchants without malice in his *Observations*. Like him, they are led to crisscross foreign countries, but with a single goal in mind, pressured as they are by the prevailing winds of finance, for:

\textsuperscript{383} Though two different units of account – the livre *parisiis* and the livre *tournois* – did exist side by side until Louis XIV abolished the former in 1667.

\textsuperscript{384} *Ordonnances…*, f.A2r.


\textsuperscript{386} *Ordonnances…*, ibid.

\textsuperscript{387} As Jean Bodin will observe in his *République*: “Les ordonnances de chacun Prince ont bien pourveu que l’or et l’argent ne fust transporté aux estrangers sous grandes peines: mais il est impossible de les executer, qu’il n’en soit emporté beaucoup et par mer et par terre. Et quand ores on garderoit si bien qui n’en sortist rien du tout, si est-ce que les subjects auront tousjours beau moyen de billonner, difformer, alterer et fondre les monnoyes blanches et rouges, s’il y a diversité de loy […]” (VI.3, Bodin and Turchetti 2013, p. 133)

\textsuperscript{388} Febvre 1977, p. 104.
“le trafic d’un marchand, lequel combien qu’il ait fait plusieurs voyages en Indie, & Terre neufue, neantmoins n’ayant autre but que bien employer son argent en achet de marchandise, ne se soucie d’acquerir infinies singularitez qu’un homme curieux pourroit observer.” (OS, f.1r-v)

Belon, on the other hand, can wander off the beaten trail, indifferent to what he might find. Instead of blaming merchants, however, Belon traces the confusion of names in financial speculation across European borders and up the ladder to the princes themselves, since “telz nom & dignitez ont prins leur naissance en diuers pays”. The ironic use of “nom” and “dignitez” and Belon’s sibilant “prins” (“prince”) tacitly accuses foreign princes from “divers pays” of abusing their authority by ascribing arbitrary value to their currency. Turkish unity symbolized by “l’argent du Grand Seigneur” meanwhile is offered as a foil to European multiplicity, for “Le Grand Turc a faict expressement commander que l’or & l’argent de Siderocapsa soit purifié et raffiné fidelement” (OS, f.46v). Having expressly traveled to the “lieu de naissance” of Turkish ducats, the mine of Siderocapsa, in order to investigate if gold acquired its “divers noms en Europe [...] en sa minière”, Belon discovers instead that “son impureté ne procede que de l’infidelité de ceux qui sont cause de le mesler” (OS, f.45r, my emphasis) – namely, the prince.

“Le Prince,” asserts Jean Bodin, “ne peut alterer le pied des monnoyes, au prejudice des sujets : et moins encore des estrangers, qui traictent avec luy [...] sans encourir l’infamie de faux monnoyeur.”389 The crime of trading in currency one knows to be false falls squarely on the shoulders of the monarch. Equally, Belon holds princes responsible for peddling in false iconography of natural objects. Their coats-of-arms, like their coins, though invested with their

389 Bodin and Turchetti 2013, pp. 117-118.
authority, trade in falsehood and artifice. Like coins, however, artifice underwritten by the prince does not prevent his people from trading in his symbolic currency. Belon writes of the “voix du Daulphin” that “[elle] reste imprimée en la mémoire des hommes de laquelle touts se souuiennent, & le scauent nommer & cognoistre en peinture & es armoiries, & es monnoyes tant d’or que d’argent”. Like with coins, then, rich and poor alike lose with this kind of artificial currency: “il n’y a rien qui plus travaille le povre peuple que de falsifier les monnoyes [...] combien que les riches et povres [...] en reçoivent perte et dommage incroyable”\textsuperscript{390}. In such a climate, the practice of science, for Belon, cannot be a matter of accumulating knowledge, “nommer & cognoistre”, but of separating the natural from the artificious. Belon’s natural historians

en prenant singuliere delectation à entendre les choses naturelles, voulants s’assurer de la naifue perfection des legitimes, se sont mis à speculer & discerner le vray du faulx : tellement que si un homme en contrefaisant artificiellement une pierre precieuse, un metal, ou autre telle chose, [...] si est-ce que la viuacité de l’esprit ingenieux ne cesse de la contempler, examiner et experimenter, jusques à ce qu’il ait entendu si elle est faulse & adulterine, ou vraye & legitime. (OS, f.4r).

The “name” is no longer the linchpin of natural history practice for Belon: he and his readers are. The natural historian is “singular” in his desire (“singuliere delectation”) to know the “singularitez” of nature, which respond in their naïve state to his vivacious and inventive spirit (“la vivacité de l’esprit ingenieux”). He travels between the object to think with of his own invention – narratives, pictures, histories – in the space of the book, and the object of knowledge in nature.

\textsuperscript{390} ibid., p. 117.
“Pristine” Greek science was neatly represented by the “antique medalle” in which natural knowledge is figured in “living and present memory”\textsuperscript{391}. The ancient Greeks, in Belon’s history of science, would have never lost contact with the dolphin so that their moral and scientific relationship to it was properly and succinctly encapsulated in the simple form – or “naïve perfection” – of the medallion. And any text upon the Syracusan coin is notably absent (fig. 5.14): no need for names, for the ancient Greeks would have naturally identified “d’une voix commune”\textsuperscript{392} what they saw stamped upon the medal, underwritten by the goddess Athena upon its obverse side. Belon, however, operates in a “fallen” natural science. When he offers his first clue in our epistemological hunt to rediscover the dolphin, he provides a telling caption, invoking a dizzying representational mise-en-abysme; for the picture we get is but a “figure retiree d’une antique peincture d’une statue contrefaicte aupres du naturel” (\textit{HN}, f.11r)! Still, at this first step, we may discern a glimmer of the “vraye & legitime”, which will lead us to the full light of the dolphin’s “reinvention” in the book. By contrast, “monnoyes modernes” demonstrate the pitfalls in the practice of natural history. They are struck such that one side shows the false figure of an object of nature, while the other underwrites them with the profile of the prince. Nor is the prince’s profile sufficient, for his name usually circumscribes the coin and further marks indicate the goldsmith who struck them\textsuperscript{393}. We are only too happy, Belon laments, to trade in such artificious alloys of authority and imagination. But for all of their

\textsuperscript{391} \textit{Portrait of the King}, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{392} \textit{HN}, f.9r,

\textsuperscript{393} One such coin shows the bust of Francis I in profile circumscribed by the stamped words “FRANCISCVS · DEI · GRATIA · FRANCORVM · REX” and the obverse side with the coat-of-arms of the Dauphiné region complete with its fleur de lys and dolphins. H. Hoffmann, \textit{Les monnaies royales de France depuis Hugues Capet jusqu’à Louis XVI}, Paris, 1878, n. 80.
apparent radiance and the stamp of the sovereign’s name, the prince’s coins peddle in debased metals. “O quels estranges poissons marins!” exclaims Belon histrionically as he beholds the marine monsters on maps such as the *Carta Marina*. Ancient Greeks had fully ingested their cognitive currency so that their medallion would have been worth intoning “d’une commune voix”. But, all Belon can afford the multiplicity of animals in the *Hortus* is an empty, lyric O.

Fig. 5.19. The dolphin icon decried by Belon on the *Gros delphinal* of Charles V.

394 “les orfevres, pour donner à l’ouvrage d’or plus de beauté et de fermeté, et à moindre frais, font l’alliage de cuivre pur quand ils peuvent, qui est beaucoup plus leger que l’argent, qui rend l’or blase et pale de couleur, et le cuivre retient la couleur plus jaune et plus vive.” (Bodin and Turchetti 2013, p. 119)

Conclusions: Coining Species Anew

The *Histoire naturelle* “observée par” Pierre Belon and his *Observations sur plusieurs singularitez et choses memorables*... set themselves up as “observatories” of natural history. The reader is no longer positioned, faced with the titillating monsters of the *Hortus Sanitatis* and the *Carta Marina*, as an efficient operator of the objects of nature. The dolphin, for one, amiably waving to the reader from the page of the *Hortus*, responded faithfully to its text which was itself underwritten by Pliny, Aristotle, Isidore de Seville and other ancient authorities. Though each marine animal in the *Hortus* could be qualified as an “estrange poisson”, there is nothing uncanny or disorienting about their depiction. Few readers could have claimed to have seen within its element the “vacca marina”, the “prister” or the “ziphius” with its owl-shaped face, but their illustrations in the *Hortus* and on the *Carta Marina* turned them into familiar, recognizable icons. Belon, turning to the “ziphius”, for example, places these pleasing monsters squarely on our lap and upon our tables. For the “ziphius”, for him, is the sword-fish, “Heron de mer” or “pesce spada” depending on the fishmarket he happens to be visiting. And though the tuna, pursued by its predator, “la craint autant comme une ouaille pourroit faire le loup,” the “ziphius” neglects to indulge us in fabled naval combat: “quand a moy, ie ne trouve si grande durete en son espée, que ie ne voulusse accorder a ce qu’on dit qu’il puisse percer les aix du fond des navires pour le faire effondrer.” If it ever puts us at risk, it’s an inglorious, gastro-intestinal one arising from the human artifice of shady commerce, for, “pource qu’il n’est d’excellent manger, les poissoniers les vendent pour Thon”. Nevertheless, an observant naturalist will always find the hidden clue: “touttefois on le peutz recoignistre ha ses escailles

396 *ND*, pp. 102-103.
qu’il a cachees entre deux membranes”. These articles in which Belon reintroduces erstwhile familiar monsters such as the storied “ziphius” are especially uncanny. For while he equates them with fish which commonly find their way into commerce and upon our tables, he also pointedly refuses to provide their expected representation. Where before a perfect correspondence in the book between text and image was enjoyed, Belon iconoclastically eclipses the one with the other. A lack of visual representation exiles us from natural knowledge while the text only begins to chart a way back.

In Belon’s Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins, as with his later Nature et diversité des poissons, the “vives images” Belon does provide effectively render his fish “estranges” again. Lacking borders, pictures seem to liberate their objects, presenting the specimen upon the page as if on the dining table or the marketplace stand. Even text does not hem in the woodcut series – as it will in later editions such as the translations of Belon by Charles de l’Ecluse into Latin – and in some cases certain specimen, such as the lizard dubbed une “Cordule”, look as though they have paused in mid-scurry over an otherwise blank page (ND, p. 43). Though to our eyes such pictures look familiar, their objects recognizable, for Belon and his readers they represented a fundamental epistemological rupture in the closely-knit world of books such as the Hortus Sanitatis. Though Belon rarely indulged his readers in the display of “monsters”, one could argue that for this very reason, every one of his specimen were monsters in a special sense. Offering no “meaning” in themselves, they admonish the reader to beware of the fissures between text, image and the natural world. While no textual description could properly “capture” the picture it tends towards, no picture could hope to completely render a particular species in every external and internal detail. “The huge
creatures,” as Elizabeth Jennings writes in her poem *The Animals’ Arrival*, “were their own depth”.

As a result, Belon’s “observed” books of natural history in text and image compel his readers to observe the objects of nature along with him. Rather than readerly “operators” of the goods of nature caught in a fishnet of text and image, we become *observatores* of natural phenomena, encountering the objects in the book without (yet) making sense of them. While the sea animals of the *Hortus Sanitatis* were iconographically familiar, Belon insists on empirical familiarity based on repeated observation and comparison, and on the exchange of empirical knowledge within a network of trusted observers of nature. As readers we are trained to confront natural objects as *observatores*, witnessing some for the first time, while reacquainting ourselves with others that we thought we had known all along. Accordingly, Belon sets up singular encounters as his reader is made to follow him through a phenomenological field. The “Strepsicheros”, for one, is offered pointedly “car il n’y a personne qui en ait encore rien dit” (*OS*, f.16r) as is the Cotyledon which “encor n’a esté mis en painture” (*OS*, f.52r). To be sure, any experience in the book will necessarily prove different from Belon’s; what we glean in our journey through the book will have been distinct from what another reader gathered. But this, Belon’s articulation of text and image implies, is precisely the point, since:

“Si plusieurs mesmement d’une compagnie cheminent ensemble par quelque pays estrange, à grand’peine en trouvera lon deux qui s’adonnent à observer une mesme chose : car l’un sera enclin a noter ceci, & l’autre cela, ioinct qu’il n’est homme, tant soit diligent, qui puisse suffisamment examiner toutes choses par le menu...” (*OS*, f.1v)
Belon’s book accordingly provides his readers with a series of “observations” set up in such a way as to compel an experience and work of discovery, and to welcome a singularly subjective apprehension of knowledge.

In the Greek medallion, Belon discerned an epistemological ideal in which an ancient community of *observatores* could behold “in present and living memory” the name and figure of the dolphin in all of its natural simplicity. Devoid of superfluous characters, the medallion condensed pristine knowledge of the natural world like a Horapollonian hieroglyph. From its viewer and manipulator, the medallion would have compelled the name of the dolphin and a fully introjected understanding of its nature. For Belon, however, it stands in as a symbol of fallen knowledge of the natural world, and, at the same time, the first trace towards a proper “reinvention” of the objects of nature in text and image. Medallions may represent a perfect synthesis of knowledge, in which “raconter l’histoire du roi dans un récit, c’est la faire voir. Montrer l’histoire du roi dans son icône, c’est la faire raconter.”

In his own time, however, Belon laments the intrusion of “monstres contrefaits à plaisir” upon the prince’s “monnoies modernes” and in his coats-of-arms, authorized, often explicitly, by the prince’s own name. In so doing he provides a potent metaphor of natural knowledge ensnared in the iconography of books such as the *Hortus Sanitatis*, and underwritten by textual authorities such as Pliny and Aristotle, but entirely cut off from the empirical practice these same authorities had encouraged. As in the monetary ordinance from the monarch, Belon avails himself of the book’s authority to coin his new “species” of animals. Presenting text – in which his animals’ distinguishing “marques” are described – and punctuating images, Belon’s readers observe and

remark upon two sides of the same coin. Some pictures of natural objects even provide the obverse and reverse side of a single animal species, such as the sea turtle (ND, pp. 46-47), and the “Renard de mer” (HN, f.46r). But Belon refuses to identify definitively his textual and visual representations with their referents, while the monarch unilaterally identifies his “especes” (Nobles Henri, Testons, Angelot,...). Instead, the space of the book strives to offer objects to think with, compelling readers to “contempler, examiner et experimenter” in an open-ended observational practice within and beyond the book. With each species Belon coins anew, he offers the subjective space of a “heuristic fiction” only nominally titled by a name, and open (“sous l’ombre de ce titre”) to each reader’s work of reinvention.

398 The expression is Fernand Hallyn’s. See supra n.8.
Conclusions

Tom Conley and Henri Zerner, with the efforts of Houghton Library’s Susan Halpert, put together a course on image and text in sixteenth-century France some years ago which first got me thinking about the powerful relationship between text and image in the book-object. I fondly remember our rapt little group as we huddled over each book perched around the seminar table in their respective cradles, and I can’t help but be reminded of this rag-tag bunch from the title-page of a pirated edition of Rabelais:
The class offered an opportunity not only to inspect the contents of a book, but, like the bespectacled reader in the middle, to pick them up and handle them too. And - without those little cotton gloves that many libraries insist on having you wear. Even Poliphile seemed to invite this kind of bare-knuckled engagement when in the opening woodcut of the *Songe de Poliphile*, we could see him daintily holding a pair of gloves with a naked hand (fig. 1.4). Unless we turned to the Venetian book upon which the *Songe* is based, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. There Poliphile, his hand seemingly implanted into the tree before him, could invite even more delirious fantasies of stepping into the book’s woodcut representations or extracting the objects its woodcuts represent (fig. 1.2). In any event, long hours at the Houghton, starting with that first course with Tom and Henri, got me thinking about how the Renaissance text is not only, or not simply, a moveable type to be picked up and transferred into our modern editions. Our Rabelaisian friends, to return to them, remind us that the text first came from the material support of early editions. The bespectacled middle-man of the image might remind a graduate student of the many long hours spent reading for his or her general exams, but the close huddle of his audience and the pint of beer to the right do not permit us to forget the tactile and gustatory fantasies which the early-modern book could represent.

It was with the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and its French translation the *Songe de Poliphile* that I became interested in the epistemological role of touch and tactility. In the adventures of their hero, as in the deployment of text and image, the books stage the discovery of knowledge as a necessarily embodied phenomenon. One woodcut illustration, emblematic of
the relationship of touch and the body to knowledge, comes out of Alciati’s *Emblematum libellus* (fig. 6.1). The picture shows a galleon under full sail with three men upon its deck, one of whom reaches out a fingertip to delicately touch the antenna of a snail. The accompanying text only partially explains the situation:

> Small as a snail, scorning the impetus of wind and oars, the remora can by itself stop a ship from moving; so some trivial reason holds back in mid-course people who through intellect and ability are on their way to the stars: for example, a worrying law-suit, or that desire for prostitutes which entices young men away from their good studies.  

The emblem is basically a lesson on the intellectual virtues of attention and the dangers of distraction. Sail through the hundred books on your generals list and you’ll reach the stars, but woe betide you if you tarry. What is of particular interest to me however is the unusual choice of the illustrator. Nothing in the text demands the curious contact between sailor and snail. In fact earlier and later editions of Alciati’s popular book felt it sufficient to depict the essentials: a ship under full sail and oars, perhaps the remora fish itself, whose legendary clutch could stop a boat cold. Weschel’s illustrator includes the remora fish too peeking out from under the hull of the boat. But its presence suggests – as does the weighty anchor at its prow – that the ship is *already* immobilized. The sailor’s gesture is supplementary. While the emblem ought to demonstrate that the body’s inert mass can only lead to idleness in one’s intellectual pursuits, this extra detail suggests that tactility and bodily awareness play a fundamental role in the discovery of new knowledge. An interruption in the straight course of one’s intellectual pursuits provides the opportunity to locally explore and make contact with an exotic other.

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399 With minor adjustments, the translation is from Glasgow University Emblem Website: http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/emblem.php?id=A34b049. Consulted May 14, 2015.
Fig. 6.1. Andrea Alciato. *Emblematum libellus*, Paris: Weschel, 1534. Source: Glasgow University Emblem Website: http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/
The books I’ve studied deploy a certain “aesthetics of discovery” which make ample use of this kind of dynamic. My work has consisted in studying the ways in which the book-object not only conveys scientific knowledge of the time, but forces the reader to interrupt their reading and explore the book’s text and images as if they were objects in their own right. The book-object, I contend, strives to imitate the process and experience of scientific discovery for the early-modern reader. To this end, touch, appetition, and bodily awareness become as important as sight and critical reasoning in the approach and apprehension of knowledge in the book-object. This “aesthetics of discovery” is implicit in the careful articulation of text and image.

The first half of my work has dealt with two books, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and the *Songe de Poliphile*. The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* – whose title can be translated as “The Strife of Love in a Dream” – was published in Venice in 1499 by the great humanist publisher Aldus Manutius and may have been written by a certain Francesco Colonna. However, without getting into the on-going debate about who wrote the *Hypnerotomachia* – and there are many candidates, from Alberti, to Ficino, to Manutius himself – the only thing we know for sure about the so-called “Francesco Colonna” is that his name is spelt out in the historiated initials which begin every chapter. Each initial, taken together, spells out in acrostitch the gist of the story itself: “POLIAM FRATER FRANCISCVS COLVMNA PERAMAVIT”, or “Father Francesco Colonna thoroughly loved Polia”. The *Hypnerotomachia* tells of the love-quest in a dream of its hero Poliphile for his long-lost Polia. Poliphile eventually meets his Polia again only to awaken at the very end of the book and lose her anew. Essentially a book about attention and distraction, Poliphile, while pursuing his quest for love, is constantly side-tracked as he comes across a
variety of architectural marvels, described minutely in the text and illustrated in the images of the book. His name in fact is emblematic of this hesitation between attention and distraction. When at one point, Poliphile is dallying with five scantily-clad nymphs who represent the five senses, and one of them asks “Dimmi giovane che nome e il tuo?” he frankly replies “Poliphilo”. Pressing him further she asks, “Et come chiamase la tua chara amorosa?” When Poliphile reveals his beloved’s name, Polia, she declares “Ohe io arbirava che il tuo nome indicasse molto amante, Ma quello che al presente io sento, vole dire, Amico di Polia”¹⁰⁰. Attentive to his spiritual Polia, Poliphile is nevertheless also a lover of many things, and liable to get distracted along the way.

And distracted he does get. Not only by nymphs in baths, but mostly by architectural marvels. There are sculptures of various kinds. Here the sculpture of a winged horse representing generation, there an elephant with an obelisk on its back which later inspired Bernini, and elsewhere a great pyramidal structure which we get to see up close in another woodcut. Every time Poliphile comes across a new structure his adventure of discovery ties vision with a keen sense of bodily awareness which is perhaps best emblematized in a bas-relief sculpture he comes across (fig 1.8). The so-called hieroglyph is interpreted to him as “a lady wreathed with a serpent, sitting on only one buttock and lifting the opposite leg. On the side of which she was sitting, she held a pair of wings in her hand, and in the other, a tortoise.” Poliphile is told that the sculpture represents the famous Renaissance dictum Festina Lente, or “Hasten Slowly”, and that its elements are an injunction to “Control speed by sitting, and slowness by rising”. What he is not told is that the tortoise is a symbol for touch as well as

¹⁰⁰ HP, e6r.
inertia, while the wings stand in for the eagle, a symbol of vision as well as speed. Poliphile must learn to negotiate vision with touch, learning to discover things through a dynamic combination of the two. On the frontispiece to the *Songe de Poliphile*, we can discern these same two symbols of touch and sight. On top, the eagle heads, disembodied, represent a kind of spiritualized, immobilized vision bringing to mind Isidore de Seville who writes of the eagle “borne at great height on immobile wings, over the sea”. At the bottom, we find two corresponding turtles which, while they represent both touch and lasciviousness in the Renaissance, are nevertheless seen here to be foundational to an aesthetics of discovery.

How does Poliphile’s dynamic aesthetics of discovery get translated into the book-object and the experience of reading? In the first page spread after the front matter, the material book is tied to bodily and imaginative process through the activation of reading. As the lovelorn Poliphile recounts his tormented night’s sleep, his eyelids or “rubente palpebre” falling over reddened eyes, our reading sinks to the bottom of the verso page. His dream vision, meanwhile, which shall continue until the end of the book begins abruptly at the top of the facing recto page. Raising up our own eyelids to a new leaf, we read, in translation: “It appeared to me that I was in a spacious plain, all verdant, represented with myriad flowers variously depicted and adorned. And despite a gentle breeze there was a certain silence.” As our bodily wakefulness precipitates to the bottom of the page, so our imaginative vision opens up at the top, bringing to mind the frontispiece we just saw. The page, meanwhile – note the catchword “parve” – is offered as a phenomenological field where text and image literally appear.
parte de essere in una spaziosa planità, la quale tutta uirente, & di multipli fiori avaramente dipinta, molto adorna & representaua. E cump benigna aura iuia era uno certo silenio. Ne ancora alle promptissime ore chiede di audire strepito ne alcuna formata uoce perueniuia. Ma cump gratissi radii del Sole passaua el temperato tempo.

Nel qual modo a cump timidæe de istas rei, cump ciascun aura di ciascun delle leggende romanzo.
Finally, when an object is described in text, the accompanying image does not appear as a mere summary of what preceded, but requires the reader’s active imagination to complete. In a particular example, late in the story, Poliphile is about to embark on a ship steered by cupid for the island of Cythera. In a typically long-winded description the sailboat is minutely detailed, but when the image finally appears, only its bare bones are offered on display. “Cusi era”, the book declares, – “it was thus” – and so it seems, but only after the reader/viewer has worked upon the blank spaces in the image, drawing from the corresponding text to imaginatively invent the object at hand:

Fig. 6.3. Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, f.s6r. Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University (Typ Inc 5574)
In the first half of our study, I explored the *Hypnerotomachia* and the *Songe de Poliphile* and I hope I’ve shown two things. One, how these books demand a fully embodied approach to themselves. And two, how the books exploit material interruptions to motivate a renewed exploration of their contents. These two characteristics of a book-bound aesthetics of discovery can also be found in sixteenth-century books of natural history. This was the subject of the second half of my thesis where I studied the work of the early-modern natural historian, Pierre Belon. In what follows, I’d like to offer some final thoughts and concluding remarks about Belon.

When Pierre Belon produced his several books on natural history in the 1550s, the driving force behind the study of natural history was still medicine. Plants and animals were termed *materia medica* after Galen and Dioscorides and books like the *Jardin de la Santé*, published in Paris in 1538, organized the works of nature according to the symptoms they were said to mitigate. Now, the principal goal of early-modern medicine was to identify the plants in their surroundings with Latin and Greek names. This was essential, since information about a plant’s therapeutic qualities was gleaned from Latin and Greek sources. With Belon and several of his contemporaries, this identification was problematized for the first time.

In the course of what he calls his “lointaines peregrinations” through the Mediterranean basin, Belon discovered two fundamental things which disrupted the textually-based humanist practice of natural science. One, many exotic animals – the hippopotamus, the giraffe, the chameleon, even the dolphin – which were thought to be properly represented visually following ancient textual sources, when encountered and identified by locals abroad, actually
appeared completely different. And two, even plants and animals endemic to France could be misidentified. Belon uses as a case in point the common herb thyme “propre aux potages et dedieé a la cuisine”. Because French thyme looked different than what he found in Greece, it must not be thyme at all, at least not the kind “dont les Ancients usaient dans leurs medicaments.” Thus Belon not only discovered or rediscovered exotic naturalia on foreign shores, he rendered the flora and fauna of his own country “estrange”. In so doing, he rendered problematic his readers’ physical relationship towards the natural objects represented in his books.

The most astonishing example he gives is the centerpiece of his first book, *L’Histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins*, published in 1551. Rather than an exhaustive natural history on marine life however, the *Histoire naturelle* is dedicated to a discovery, or rediscovery, of the dolphin. The dolphin, Belon laments, has been extravagantly misrepresented by mapmakers in their fanciful ornamentations, and under the aegis of princes. As a result, in France, all sorts of fish have been misidentified and paraded as the dolphin often for the edification of princes and the public. Yet Belon tells us, “il n’est point veu de poissons plus commun par les poissonneries qu’est le Daulphin.” The dolphin has been there all along, unbeknownst to us, under our eyes and even on our plates. Plotting a book which may not be “facile a la digestion” for some of his readers, Belon uncovers the true dolphin like a tragic case of mistaken identity.

Belon’s mobilization of the body as a means of knowledge and ignorance has important consequences for the book. For one thing, the bodies of animals represented in Belon’s pictures
often require extra work on the reader/viewer’s part. The lobster depicted in Belon’s OS (fig. 6.4), is not entirely contained by the book, while the ichneumon’s tail extends beyond the margins too, and must be extrapolated (fig. 6.5)\textsuperscript{401}. Other animals appear threatening like the sea snake depicted in \textit{L’Histoire naturelle} “en raseau,” Belon writes “car autrement ie n’eusse sceu exprimer sa longueur” (fig. 6.6). The reader must come to grips with Belon’s images if he wishes to unpack the natural object’s true proportions. Birds in his \textit{Histoire des oyseaux}, meanwhile, are frequently coloured incorrectly by illuminators. Belon admonishes his readers in the forward to reconstruct the animal themselves using textual and visual cues.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure6.4.png}
\caption{\textit{Observations de plusieurs singularitez…} (Paris : Corrozet, 1554). Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University (*FC5 B4186 553oba).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{401} See Ashworth 1985 for the confusion this missing detail caused all the way until Buffon.
Fig. 6.5. De Aquatilibus (Paris: Charles Estienne, 1553). Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University (F 5405.53*).
While pictures are places of local exploration in the book, they also serve as interruptions in the text. These book-bound interruptions help Belon simulate cognitive disorientations, or reorientations, which he sees as characteristic of true scientific exploration. Leaving France, he writes, with a number of plant names and descriptions in hand, “j’osay entreprendre les aller chercher au loing par les pays estranges, n’esperant autre recompense pour mes peines que de les voir en vigueur”. But soon, his innate curiosity distracts him from his humanistic research: “Car en les cherchant & reconnoissant, plusieurs autres choses
d’abondant se sont offertes a moy.”  

402 Search and discovery in the world of natural history is predicated on the willingness to get side-tracked. Comparing himself to merchants, Belon writes: “combiem qu’il ait fait plusieurs voyages en Indie, & Terre neuve, neantmoins n’ayant autre but que bien employer son argent en achet de marchandise, ne se soucie d’acquerir infinies singularitez qu’un homme curieux pourroit bien observer.”  

403 Like Alciati’s sailor left in wake of the merchant vessels on the horizon, Belon’s curious observer is surprised and side-tracked by the exotic other. In the interstices between text and image, Belon’s books aim to simulate this open-ended mode of exploration.

My thesis has focused on what may seem like wildly different texts, yet they have permitted me to ask and begin answering the question of how early-modern readers were expected to approach and build upon the material presented to them in the book. A multi-sensory approach is fundamental to these books which seem to demand the reader’s fully embodied participation in a construction of scientific knowledge. Doing science in the sixteenth-century was nothing like we know of it today. The age of experiment of Galileo and Boyle remained far upon the horizon. And yet my project (inevitably ongoing although presently coming to a necessary end) has convinced me that the scientific experiment to come is also already here, in the book. For experience and experiment were words very close in meaning throughout the sixteenth-century. And French still has only one word for the two: experimenter. The early-modern book, I have aimed to show, is a proto-typical space of scientific experiment through readerly experience. In future research, I hope to extend my

402 OS, “Preface”.  
403 OS, f.1r-v.
findings to other texts, pushing disciplinary and chronological boundaries, in order better to trace the early-modern period’s book-bound aesthetics of discovery.
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